

Tibetan Buddhism and Han Chinese: Superscribing New Meaning on the Tibetan Tradition in Modern Greater China



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Abstract

This thesis seeks to explore the manner in which Han practitioners are receiving and practicing Tibetan Buddhism in Greater China – specifically in mainland China, Hong Kong and Taiwan. It seeks to answer the fundamental question of how Tibetan Buddhism is becoming relevant to contemporary Chinese society, and how it is being superscribed with meaning by different actors to achieve this relevance. My analysis is based on ethnographic research carried out in Beijing, Yunnan Province, Hong Kong and Taiwan.

Tibetan Buddhism has become increasingly popular in Greater China among middle-class Han Chinese, particularly over the past decade or so. As its popularity increases, it has inevitably had to adapt to the cultural contexts of Greater China. Lay Han practitioners and the Tibetan religious elite are adapting Tibetan Buddhism by hybridising it with both Chinese traditions and ‘rational’ discourses of modernity, the latter of which have been shaped by the respective socio-cultural and political circumstances of the three main locations investigated in this thesis.

This thesis specifically examines the way in which both lay Han practitioners and the Tibetan religious elite have incorporated into the Tibetan tradition in Greater China a Chinese god, Confucian values and ideas, pragmatic attitudes toward religion, and Chinese ghost beliefs. It also examines how traditional Tibetan beliefs and ideas in certain instances are being incorporated into discourses of modernity. Both cases of hybridisation, however, it is argued, are ultimately influenced by modernising processes. This thesis is particularly concerned with three main ‘rational’ discourses of modernity which informants appropriated in their adaptation of Tibetan Buddhism – Chinese Marxism on the mainland, the Christian education system in Hong Kong, and Humanistic Buddhism (*renjian fojiao*) in Taiwan. Yet, even as informants appropriated such discourses, they also used the ‘rationalism’ of these discourses to undermine them.

My theoretical framework is thus primarily based on a critical understanding of hybridity theory, which does not celebrate hybridisation, but examines the contestation and negotiation that occurs as Han practitioners and the Tibetan religious elite seek an appropriate ‘fit’ for the Tibetan tradition within Chinese society. Using Mayfair Yang’s analysis of the ‘colonisation of consciousness’ in mainland China, I extend this analysis

to include the populations of Hong Kong and Taiwan as being subject to a similar 'colonisation'. At the same time, these subalterns and those on the mainland 'talk back' by creatively using the aforementioned discourses, sometimes for purposes other than that for which they were originally intended, and at other times to directly undermine them.

Ultimately, I argue that a critical understanding of hybridity as an interpenetrative process of negotiation and contestation is pertinent to breaking down popular essentialisms surrounding Tibetan Buddhism, and to understanding the largely apolitical spread of Tibetan Buddhism in Greater China. Moreover, such a critical understanding also serves to de-essentialise whole-scale notions of 'secularisation', 'modernisation', and 'globalisation' within the Greater China context.

Declaration

This thesis contains only sole-authored work, some of which has been published and/or prepared for publication under sole authorship. The bibliographical details of the work and where it appears in the thesis are outlined below.

Esler, J, 'Transcendence and the Mundane at the Edge of the Middle Kingdom: Protestantised and Pragmatic Tibetan Buddhism in Hong Kong', in Kim, D.W., *Religious Transformation in Modern Asia: A Transnational Movement*, Brill, forthcoming. This article is based on Chapter Five of this thesis.

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Table of Contents

Abstract		ii-iii
Declaration		iv
Acknowledgements		v-vi
List of Photographs		viii
Chapter One	Introduction	1-46
Chapter Two	Symbols, Religion and the Hybrid in Greater China: Han Tibetan Buddhist Contestation and Negotiation within the Discourses of the Dominant	47-72
Chapter Three	Guan Gong and the Karmapa Lama: Superscribing New Meaning on the Chinese ‘God of War’	73-110
Chapter Four	The Confucian Revival and Tibetan Buddhism: Negotiating the Place of the ‘Transcendent’ within the ‘Worldly’	111-143
Chapter Five	Transcendence and the Mundane at the Edge of the Middle Kingdom: Pragmatism, Protestantism and Tibetan Buddhism in Hong Kong	144-183
Chapter Six	Environmental Protection, Mass Tourism and Sacred Knowledge: Local Tibetan Deities and Spirits in a Multilayered Tibetan Landscape	184-225
Chapter Seven	Chinese Ghosts and Milarepa: Contemporary Tibetan Buddhist Teaching on ‘Deathlessness’ and Implications for Popular Chinese Ghost Beliefs	226-266
Chapter Eight	Conclusion	267-290
Glossary of Chinese Terms		291-294
Bibliography		295-315

List of Photographs and Tables

All of the photographs reproduced in this thesis were taken by the author.

Table 1:	Informant Profiles	32
Photo 1:	<i>Fang sheng</i> (life release) in mainland China	43
Photo 2:	Temple statue of Guan Gong	76
Photo 3:	Portrait of Guan Gong on household door	77
Photo 4:	Statue of Guan Gong at Karma Kagyu centre	79
Photo 5:	Guan Gong altar near a fishing village in Hong Kong	80
Photo 6:	<i>Cai Shen</i> hall at Daoist temple in Beijing	86
Photo 7:	Statue of Confucius	120
Photo 8:	<i>Cai Shen</i> statue at base of Tibetan stupa	157
Photo 9:	Green Tara Puja, Hong Kong	163
Photo 10:	Walkway around lake near Songtsen Ling Monastery	200
Photo 11:	Kawagebo Mountain Range	215
Photo 12:	View of Shangrila Town from Songtsen Ling Monastery	223
Photo 13:	Ma On Shan Retreat in Hong Kong with Mingyur Rinpoche	229
Photo 14:	Tombs in Shangrila	234
Photo 15:	Tombs in Shangrila	234
Photo 16:	Puja in Taiwan with Rinpoche from Ladakh	266

Chapter One

Introduction

This thesis seeks to explore the manner in which Han practitioners are receiving and practicing Tibetan Buddhism in Greater China – specifically in mainland China, Hong Kong and Taiwan. It seeks to answer the fundamental question of how Tibetan Buddhism is becoming relevant to contemporary Chinese society, and how Tibetan Buddhism is being superscribed with meaning by different actors in order to achieve this relevance. In the West, Tibetan Buddhism has become one of the most dominant schools in recent decades,¹ which is largely due to the success of charismatic figures such as the Dalai Lama and more recently the Seventeenth Gyalwang Karmapa (Ogyen Trinley Dorje²) and others such as Yongey Mingyur Rinpoche, in presenting its message in compassionate and apparently scientific ways. Their message continues to find resonance in the West, where there is increasing disillusionment with the violence of war, consumerism and materialism, and a questioning of theistic beliefs within certain circles. Another factor fuelling the growth of Tibetan Buddhism in the West is the ongoing plight of the Tibetans; they are seen as pure and innocent, and their homeland as a kind of ‘Shangrila’ being pillaged by the Chinese.

As this thesis seeks to demonstrate, the reception and practice of Tibetan Buddhism among Han Chinese both parallels and diverges from the way in which it has been received and practiced in the West. Historically there has been a much longer

¹ According to Lopez, in the last decade of the twentieth century and the first decade of the twenty-first, Tibetan Buddhism has become the ‘primary referent of the term Buddhism in the phrase ‘Buddhism and Science’, instead of Theravada or Zen as previously. As Lopez observes, this is a radical shift in popular Western perspective, which only a century earlier held Tibetan Buddhism as the ‘most corrupt and least authentic form of Buddhism’, a deviation from the original teachings of the Buddha, which was labelled ‘Lamaism’ instead of Buddhism. See Lopez, D.S. Jr., *Buddhism and Science: A Guide for the Perplexed*, Chicago, University of Chicago Press, 2008, pp. 29-30.

² There is controversy over who is the ‘authentic’ Karmapa, as there are two men assuming this role. Ogyen Trinley Dorje is recognised as the Seventeenth Karmapa by the Dalai Lama and many of the Tibetan religious elite, and is one of the few incarnate lamas also officially recognised by the Chinese government in conjunction with the Dalai Lama’s recognition. In addition, he has a greater number of followers than his rival, Trinley Thaye Dorje. The latter, however, is recognised by the 14th Shamar Rinpoche, the highest lama in the Karma Kagyu lineage after the lineage head himself. See [karmapa.org](http://www.karmapa.org), ‘The Karmapa: Historical meetings and important events in the life of the Seventeenth Karmapa Trinley Thaye Dorje’, http://www.karmapa.org/news/index_news.htm [accessed 04/11/2013].

connection between the Chinese and Tibetan Buddhism than between Westerners and Tibetan Buddhism, stretching back to the Tang dynasty (618-907) when the Tibetan king Songtsen Gampo married the Chinese princess Wencheng, a devout Buddhist who is believed to have converted him to Buddhism. The patron-priest relationship between different high lamas (such as the Dalai Lamas) and khans/emperors (such as Qianlong (1711-1799)), used to legitimate both the khan's/emperor's rule and the lamas' spiritual authority, has roots in the thirteenth century, first initiated between Koden Khan (Genghis Khan's grandson) and Sakya Pandita.³ Up to the Republican era (1912-1949) local heads of government invited Tibetan incarnate lamas (*tulkus*) to perform rituals for the protection of China during the war against Japan, and Chinese monks studied under the guidance of Tibetan masters in key Tibetan monasteries.⁴ Yet it has not been until recently, particularly in the last decade or so, that Tibetan Buddhism has become so widely popular amongst middle-class lay Han Chinese.⁵

Recent Han interest in Tibetan Buddhism in general on the mainland appears to derive from an 'internal orientalism', directed at exoticising the ethnic Other – in this case, the Tibetans. Within this popular view, the Tibetans become part of a pure, mystical landscape for the Han majority to explore and in which to escape from the materialist drudgery of urban life. Such a view certainly has similarities to 'Shangrilaist' portrayals of Tibet in Western imagining and draws in part from it, yet is perhaps closer to the fascination of the White American majority with Native American spirituality during the back-to-the land movement in the 1960s and 70s. Han practitioners often share this recent popular Chinese view of Tibet and Tibetans, and even broaden its scope as a kind of 'reverse acculturation' that undermines long-held Chinese perceptions of Tibetans as backward and uncivilised, by ascribing to their supposed 'backward' and 'uncivilised' nature a pure spirituality detached from worldly pursuits. Such a view is also reinforced by Tibetan religious leaders, both within China and in exile, and has been supported recently, as Kolas observes, by tourism entrepreneurs who seek to break from ethnic

³ Davidson, R.M., *Tibetan Tantric Buddhism in the Renaissance: Rebirth of Tibetan Culture*, New York, Columbia University Press, New York, 2005, p. 22.

⁴ For more on Tibetan Buddhism in the Chinese context during the Republican era, see Tuttle, G, *Tibetan Buddhism in the Making of Modern China*, New York, Columbia University Press, 2005.

⁵ There has been a longer standing interest in Tibetan Buddhism among lay Chinese in Hong Kong and Taiwan in the second half of the twentieth century, yet it has increased dramatically in the last two decades or so. In Taiwan, this is due in part to the Dalai Lama's visits to the island in the 1990s, and in both locations to the globalisation of Tibetan Buddhism.

stereotypes and ‘play up’ more positive images of ethnic minorities.⁶ Moreover, this ‘reverse acculturation’ has been further supported by Tibetan, Han and other ethnic authors writing about their encounters with Tibetan culture and/or the revival of Tibetan culture.⁷

Apart from this ‘Shangrilaist’/‘internal orientalist’ view, Tibetan Buddhism is also perceived by Han practitioners and Tibetan religious leaders as being relevant to Chinese society on a more ‘concrete’ level. As explored in the chapters of this thesis, Tibetan Buddhism may variously be interpreted to accommodate the CPC’s propagation of a ‘Harmonious Society’ (*hexie shehui*); it can offer immediate, practical benefits such as prosperity and long life; and it can provide a ‘deep ecology’ to solve the grave environmental problems that China and the world are facing. On a more personal level, it provides practitioners with power to conquer the ‘ghosts’ (real or imagined) of their minds, thereby enabling them to live and ultimately die without fear. Thus, it succeeds at answering problems and concerns of both a ‘traditional’ and ‘modern’ nature, which often blend together as seen in the recent propagation of Confucian political philosophy by the CPC under former Party Secretary and President Hu Jintao.

Two Rising Stars

In order to examine how Tibetan Buddhism is becoming relevant to contemporary Greater China, this thesis examines how its world-transcending path is being balanced by Han practitioners and their Tibetan teachers with the abovementioned mundane concerns. To explore the way in which Tibetan Buddhism is both engaging in Greater Chinese society at a practical level, while maintaining its ultimate transcendence of it, this thesis focuses on two rising stars of Tibetan Buddhism and their presentation of the tradition to Han practitioners – the Seventeenth Gyalwang Karmapa, head of the Karma Kagyu school, and Yongey Mingyur Rinpoche, a meditation master and holder of the Nyingma-Karma Kagyu lineage. This thesis begins, in Chapter Three, with the recent incorporation of Guan Gong, the so-called ‘Chinese god of war’, into the Karma Kagyu school of Tibetan Buddhism as a protector deity, under the guidance of the Karmapa in 2005. This move appears to resonate well with the Karmapa’s wider aim of making Tibetan Buddhism a more active, socially engaged tradition.

⁶ Kolas, A, *Tourism and Tibetan Culture in Transition: A Place Called Shangrila*, London, Routledge, 2008, p. 103.

⁷ Ying, LH, ‘Vital Margins: Frontier Poetics and Landscapes of Ethnic Identity’, in Yeh, E.T., & Coggins, C (eds.), *Mapping Shangrila: Contested Landscapes in the Sino-Tibetan Borderlands*, Seattle, University of Washington Press, 2014.

Guan Gong, a god of ‘popular’ Chinese religion⁸ and Daoism, and a protector of Chinese Buddhist temples, is believed to be the embodiment of the character Guan Yu from the Warring States’ period (around 403-481 BC to 221 BC), popularised in Luo Guanzhong’s fourteenth-century novel, *The Romance of the Three Kingdoms*. In the novel he is portrayed as a martial action figure, wielding an impressive sword (*guan dao*), fearless when combating his enemies and those of his sworn brothers Liu Bei and Zheng Fei, and defiant at his martyrdom. He appears to symbolise the Karmapa’s wider presentation of Tibetan Buddhism not only to the Chinese, but to the world at large, as one of engagement with, rather than detachment from the world. The Karmapa often says that it is not enough to simply talk about compassion, but that Tibetan Buddhists must actively *be* compassionate in society. Thus, he himself hands out blankets to the poor in Bodhgaya, India during cold winters, and plants trees and organises conferences on the environment for Tibetan Buddhist monastics.⁹ As an example for other monastics to follow, he has also become a vegetarian, something which is still not that common among the wider Tibetan Buddhist monastic community.¹⁰

His recent book, *The Heart is Noble: Changing the World from the Inside Out*, is representative of this vision for an active, world-engaging Tibetan Buddhism. The book is based on a dialogue he had with sixteen American college students who were invited to Dharamsala in May 2011, to discuss with the Karmapa the Buddhist perspective on issues largely related to twenty-first century problems – environmental protection, consumerism, food ethics, gender issues, and so forth. His message of action in the world is thus two-pronged; he actively seeks to address a young, modern audience which is less inclined towards ‘traditional’ religiosity with a message that reduces the mythological elements of Tibetan Buddhism and answers problems specific to the twenty-first century, while at the same time employing the figure of Guan Gong to reach certain Chinese followers who may be more inclined towards ‘traditional’ interpretations of religion. Yet his Guan Gong is far from traditional.

⁸ I set the word ‘popular’ in parenthesis throughout the thesis when referring to less canonical forms of religion due to the overlap between this and supposed ‘elite’ religious practice. Thus both ‘popular’ and ‘elite’ are used for convenience in this thesis to describe the degree of canonisation of different forms of religion.

⁹ See ‘Second Conference on Environmental Protection for Kagyu Monasteries and Centers’, <http://www.kagyuoffice.org/2009.conference.environment.html> [accessed 29/04/2013].

¹⁰ HH The Karmapa Ugyen Trinley Dorje, & Burkhar, N.T., & Finnegan, D.D. (trans.), Derris, K, & Finnegan, D.D. (eds.), *The Heart Is Noble: Changing the World from the Inside Out*, Boston, Shambhala, 2013, p. 97.

As part of his ‘action plan’ for Tibetan Buddhism in the twenty-first century, the Karmapa has superscribed on Guan Gong various attributes that both build on his current appeal for Han followers, and add to his character as a figure relevant to issues specific to the twenty-first century – environmental protection and corporate greed and corruption in particular. As explored in Chapter Three, the various superscriptions which Guan Gong has received, both throughout Chinese history and under the Karmapa, are representative of the themes explored in the various chapters of this thesis. Thus, this thesis takes Guan Gong as a kind of ‘blue print’ for examining how Tibetan Buddhism in general is being superscribed with meaning by both the Tibetan religious elite, such as the Karmapa, and by Han practitioners, making it both relevant for Chinese society as a whole, as well as a more individuated practice. In addition, Guan Gong serves as a symbolic reference point in this thesis for the way in which Han practitioners and the Tibetan religious elite are negotiating a space for Tibetan Buddhism between the ‘transcendent’ and ‘worldly’. This is symbolised, for instance, in the manner in which Guan Gong has been superscribed by many Han practitioners as a bodhisattva, while almost all Tibetan religious leaders believe he is a worldly, non-enlightened protector.

In contrast to the younger Karmapa, Mingyur Rinpoche focuses on teaching meditation to Chinese and Westerners. Unlike the Karmapa, who has spent the majority of his young adult life between a monastery, meeting and teaching engagements, conferences and ritual ceremonies, Mingyur Rinpoche is a meditation master, who has spent many years in meditation retreats, and tens of thousands of hours in meditation practice. At the age of seventeen, he became the youngest known retreat master in the history of Tibetan Buddhism, and in this role completed nearly seven years of formal retreat.¹¹ Now in his late 30s, Mingyur Rinpoche has recently started out on another three-year retreat.¹² Between these years of retreat, he has passed on his insights to followers worldwide. His aim appears to be the transformation of individuals who will in turn transform others through the compassionate worldview gained through meditation.

In order to make Tibetan Buddhist meditation accessible to those not familiar with meditation, he presents practical methods to meditate that are simple and can be

¹¹ Yongey Mingyur Rinpoche, & Swanson, E, *The Joy of Living: Unlocking the Secret and Science of Happiness*, New York, Harmony, 2007, p. 5.

¹² ‘Mingyur Rinpoche’s Farewell to the Tergar Community When Entering Retreat’, <http://tergar.org/resources/letter-from-yongey-mingyur-rinpoche-before-entering-retreat/> [accessed 03/11/2013]

followed by anyone, anywhere. In addition, he presents meditation as a key to happiness, a claim apparently supported by scientific evidence. In his popular books, *The Joy of Living: Unlocking the Secret and Science of Happiness* and *Joyful Wisdom: Embracing Change and Finding Freedom*,¹³ there is little mention of direct action concerning the environment, global hunger, and so on. Instead, he presents a Tibetan Buddhism for inner cultivation. Yet, as with the Karmapa's message, he also presents Tibetan Buddhism in a 'scientific' manner. However, unlike the Karmapa, he does not use Chinese traditional beliefs in his presentation of Tibetan Buddhism to Chinese followers, other than in a metaphorical context (such as his reference to Chinese ghosts, explored in Chapter Seven¹⁴).

His is a more or less 'rationalist', demythologised portrayal of Tibetan Buddhism, likely due to his childhood and recent contact with the late Francisco Varela, a renowned Chilean neuroscientist, and other leading scientists. In 2002, Mingyur Rinpoche, together with other advanced meditators, underwent neurological tests conducted by world-renowned neuroscientists Antoine Lutz¹⁵ and Richard Davidson, at the Waisman Laboratory in Madison, Wisconsin. fMRI technology was used to capture moment-by-moment images of changing levels of activity in different areas of the brain, and EEG equipment was used to measure tiny electrical impulses that occur when brain cells communicate. Results apparently revealed that brain activity associated with such attributes as empathy/altruism and concentration was vastly different among advanced meditators, compared to meditators trained in the same techniques for a week.¹⁶ These and other results obtained from these tests are seen by followers to support Mingyur Rinpoche's assessment of meditation as a 'science of happiness'. Just as Buddhist teachings claim that one can eliminate 'mental habits conducive to unhappiness', this 'pliability' of mind is seen to be confirmed by neuroscience, which shows how neuronal plasticity allows old neuronal connections to be replaced with new ones through repeated experience.¹⁷

Thus, while both the Karmapa and Mingyur Rinpoche use skilful means (Sansk – *upāya*, Mand – *fangbian*) to present a 'rational' and variously 'scientific' Tibetan Buddhism to

¹³ Yongey Mingyur Rinpoche & Swanson, E, *Joyful Wisdom: Embracing Change and Finding Freedom*, New York, Harmony, 2009.

¹⁴ As explored in Chapter Seven, while Mingyur Rinpoche uses ghosts within a metaphorical context, he also believes *pretas* (hungry ghosts), if not Chinese ghosts of 'popular' belief, exist.

¹⁵ A student of Francisco Varela.

¹⁶ Yongey Mingyur Rinpoche, & Swanson, E, 2007, pp.3-4.

¹⁷ *Ibid*, p. 35.

Han followers, they go about it in a different way – one re-presenting certain ‘traditional’ Chinese beliefs together with ‘modern’ ideas as part of a global ‘action plan’ – and the other an apparently scientifically-proven means to achieving happiness both for oneself and others. In a general sense then, the former presents Tibetan Buddhism as socially engaged, while the latter presents it as somewhat transcendent, tailored to the individuated experience of the practitioner. Just as the Buddha is believed to have used different means to teach different individuals the dharma according to their karmic predispositions (84,000 means, according to traditional accounts), these two leaders are seeking to make the message of Tibetan Buddhism relevant to the societies in which they are engaged through different, yet not entirely separate means.

As will become apparent throughout this thesis, the messages of the Karmapa and Mingyur Rinpoche and corresponding inclinations of Han practitioners towards the mundane aspects or ‘transcendence’ of Tibetan Buddhism are not entirely separate. In some ways, for example, they both emphasise the social engagement of Tibetan Buddhism; the Karmapa simply makes this message of more immediate importance. Mingyur Rinpoche provides more individuated advice through meditation techniques, with the intent that they will change one’s view of reality, so that one’s engagement with others will be more constructive. In his books, he does mention the wider problems of the world in passing, such as world hunger, the violence of war, global warming, and so forth, yet quickly brings the reader back to his/her own life and the lives of his/her family, friends and colleagues suffering from divorce, physical and mental illness, unemployment, and so forth.¹⁸ Yet, while Mingyur Rinpoche mainly focuses on these problems ‘closer to home’, he sees the solution of these as part of the ultimate solution for the world, as ‘[j]ust by changing our perspective, [we] can not only alter [our] own experience, [we] can also change the world.’¹⁹ Social engagement is thus one outcome of these meditation techniques, yet within a more gradual, interpersonal and less pressing context than as presented in the Karmapa’s message.

Similarly, the Karmapa is also not simply focused on social engagement. The title of his book, *The Heart is Noble: Changing the World from the Inside Out*, conveys that change in the world only comes about by a deeper, inner change within the individual. Because the problem of greed, for example, is not being addressed in consumerist society, the earth’s resources are continually being depleted, pollution is increasing, and

¹⁸ Mingyur Rinpoche, & Swanson, E, 2007, p. 172.

¹⁹ Ibid, p. 175.

global warming is threatening our existence. Thus, like Mingyur Rinpoche, the Karmapa is emphasising age-old Buddhist teaching on the suffering caused by attachment, and the liberation that non-attachment brings.

While both the Karmapa and Mingyur Rinpoche are based in India (and the latter sometimes in Nepal), their influence nevertheless penetrates the space of Han practitioners on both the mainland as well as in other parts of Greater China. There are many avenues for their and other exiled leaders' teachings (such as those of Sogyal Rinpoche and the Dalai Lama) to make inroads into the mainland, through the internet and pirated copies of books and DVD's from Taiwan, for example. As Smyer-Yü notes, *The Tibetan Book of Living and Dying*, by Sogyal Rinpoche – an exiled Nyingma lama who is very popular in the West – has become a Buddhist bestseller in China.²⁰ Other leaders outside mainland China who are considered less politically-sensitive, such as the popular Bhutanese lama and filmmaker/writer Dzongsar Jamyang Khyentse Rinpoche, have recently been given much more direct access to a mainland Chinese audience. Dzongsar Jamyang Khyentse Rinpoche gave dharma talks on March 15 and 16, 2007, at the Overseas Exchange Centre of Peking University, marking, as Smyer-Yü observes, a significant step forward for Tibetan Buddhism's entrance into mainstream China.²¹ However, the Tibetan Buddhism that Dzongsar Jamyang Khyentse Rinpoche imparted to his audience in Beijing, Smyer-Yü argues, 'has little resemblance to traditional forms of Tibetan Buddhism', and instead resembles modern Buddhism from the West.²² The influence of this transnational Tibetan Buddhism was evident among mainland practitioners as well as those in Hong Kong and Taiwan. For example, many mainland informants had read books by Dzongsar Jamyang Khyentse Rinpoche, Sogyal Rinpoche, the Dalai Lama, and Yongey Mingyur Rinpoche, and followed the activities and teachings of the current Karmapa in exile. They also absorbed material produced by Taiwanese monks, as well as Western practitioners of Tibetan Buddhism, while at the same time following the teachings of their root lamas from Qinghai, Sichuan, Diqing, and other Tibetan areas in China.²³

²⁰ Smyer-Yü, D, *The Spread of Tibetan Buddhism in China: Charisma, Money, Enlightenment*, London, Routledge, 2012, p. 185.

²¹ Ibid.

²² Ibid.

²³ Practitioners in Hong Kong, Taiwan, and mainland China have more direct access to the teachings of Mingyur Rinpoche than to the Karmapa Lama's teachings, as the former, due to his affiliation which is considered apolitical by the Chinese government, has been free to travel to Hong Kong and Taiwan to give public teachings. Practitioners from the mainland, Taiwan, and other parts of the Chinese world such as Malaysia and Singapore travelled to hear him speak in Hong Kong in April 2011, for example. The

While the message of the Karmapa and Mingyur Rinpoche are tied into a Buddhist modernism which they share with the abovementioned influencers of transnational Tibetan Buddhism, there are clear indications that they do not fully embrace all elements of Western modernity. Instead, they assume a position as – what McMahan terms – ‘indigenous modernities’, who ‘selectively embrace many elements of western modernity but are not fully assimilated to it’, who ‘may have a keen interest in science but still revere the relics of the Buddha’, who ‘may advocate liberal democracy but still insist on the certain traditional forms of hierarchical authority within the sangha’, and whose teachings ‘combine Buddhist and western ideas and practices into complex hybrids that strategically adopt, reject, and transform elements of both modernity and tradition.’²⁴ For example, Mingyur Rinpoche, while giving a ‘scientific’ explanation as to why meditation helps people achieve happiness, also interjects certain miraculous stories into his presentation, sometimes with the purpose of imparting an underlying moral message without taking the factuality of these stories seriously. At other times, however, it is clear that he himself believes in the factuality of various miraculous accounts, such as post-mortem miracles achieved by great Tibetan masters. Mingyur Rinpoche’s and the Karmapa’s presentation of Tibetan Buddhism as both ‘scientific’ and ‘miraculous’ is of course not unique to these two leaders. The Dalai Lama is renowned for facilitating a dialogue between science and Buddhism, represented recently in his book *The Universe in a Single Atom: The Convergence of Science and Spirituality*.²⁵ In light of this overlap of ‘tradition’ and ‘modernity’ within the presentation of Tibetan Buddhism to Westerners and Han Chinese²⁶ – as McMahan observes, and as will become apparent in this thesis – we need to move beyond classical stereotypes of these terms.

McMahan notes that a classical definition of ‘tradition’ presents the term as ‘characterized by hierarchical social differentiation, cultural homogeneity, tacit acceptance of a mythological worldview, unquestioning acquiescence to religious

Karmapa Ogyen Trinley Dorje, on the other hand, has not been allowed to travel to Hong Kong or Taiwan, due to the political implications of such visits. Therefore, practitioners in Greater China must visit him in India. Nevertheless, he has a very wide following, both in mainland China and in Hong Kong and Taiwan.

²⁴ McMahan, D.L., *The Making of Buddhist Modernism*, New York, Oxford University Press, 2009, p. 42.

²⁵ HH The Fourteenth Dalai Lama Tenzin Gyatso, *The Universe in a Single Atom: The Convergence of Science and Spirituality*, New York, Three Rivers Press, 2006.

²⁶ As Lopez observes, such Tibetan Buddhist leaders as the Dalai Lama who present a demythologised Tibetan Buddhism to the West are not representative of all Tibetan Buddhist leaders. Many others follow a more traditional understanding of Tibetan Buddhism. This traditionalism can be attributed, in part, to the awareness among Tibetans in exile of the importance of preserving their culture, which is under threat in their homeland. See Lopez, D.S. Jr., 2008, p. 247.

authority, thoroughgoing capitulation to social norms, and little individual freedom.’ ‘Modernity’, on the other hand, ‘is seen as a condition of liberation from the bonds of tradition and the collective. In this condition, individuals can critically reflect on the ‘givens’ of culture and religion and choose which to accept or reject.’²⁷ McMahan observes – in contrast to this view – that tradition has never been so rigid; there has been much more room for self-reflection and individual choice than is presented in this classical definition. Buddhism, for instance, ‘is peppered with individuals who have broken out of their traditional roles, reforming and revitalizing their traditions and developing novel doctrines and practices.’²⁸ Similarly, the idea of the modern individual dislodging him/herself from the domination of the group and living according to ‘the reflexive organization of the self’ rather than ‘extrinsic moral precepts’,²⁹ does not do justice to the influence of culture and subculture on behaviour and self-identity.³⁰ Thus, throughout this thesis I have employed the terms ‘traditional’ and ‘modern’ most often in parenthesis – as convenient designations whose meaning is however not ‘given’.

In sum, both the Karmapa and Mingyur Rinpoche are presenting a ‘rational’ Tibetan Buddhism that satisfies the longing of many Han Chinese for a spiritual tradition that provides a life philosophy, is apparently supported by ‘science’, and has practical benefits for Chinese society and the world at large. At the same time, this ‘rational’ Tibetan Buddhism is interjected with varying degrees of ‘supernatural’ elements, which appeal to a number of Han Chinese despite the fact that many of them would consider themselves to be otherwise ‘rational’ individuals.

‘Rational’ Discourses

Building on the ‘blue print’ of Guan Gong and the message of social engagement and transcendence symbolised in the Karmapa and Mingyur Rinpoche respectively, this thesis examines the way in which Han practitioners viewed their faith as predominantly engaged in the world and/or transcendent of it. In particular, this thesis examines how various background discourses of modernity which purport to propagate a ‘rationalist’ approach to religion are being appropriated by Han practitioners and/or the Tibetan religious elite, as a standard against which Tibetan Buddhism is measured, or above which it transcends. The ‘rational’ discourses I explore in particular in this thesis are

²⁷ McMahan, D.L., pp. 57-58.

²⁸ Ibid, p. 58.

²⁹ Giddens, A, 1990, cited in *ibid*.

³⁰ McMahan, D.L., p. 58.

Chinese Marxism on the mainland, the Christian education system in Hong Kong, and Humanistic Buddhism (*renjian fojiao*) in Taiwan.

Evidently there are other ‘rational’ discourses in each of these locations, but these three will be the focus in this thesis, given the degree to which they influenced the perspectives of informants. At the same time, Romantic ideas with apparent origins in the West have been adapted by a number of informants to the Greater China context to contend with these ‘rational’ discourses, or at least mitigate elements of these discourses that may further disenchant a world they wish to reenchant. The apparent influence of Romanticism in this regard is of interest to this thesis, as is a home-grown ‘reverse acculturation’ which is transforming long-held negative Han stereotypes of Tibetans into overtly positive stereotypes. Thus, Han informants, like their Western Buddhist counterparts, formulate their perspective on Tibetan Buddhism between ‘rationalist’, scientific and Romantic positions.

Hybridity theory is used as my basis for analysing the ‘inbetweenness’ of informants as they negotiated and contested the above ‘rationalist’ discourses, even as they appropriated them at the same time. Given the origins of cultural hybridity theory in postcolonial studies, I will provide a defence for its use in this thesis concerning Greater China in Chapter Two. Suffice it to say here that while there are obvious differences between postcolonial India, for example, and mainland China, the latter of which has never been subjected to total colonisation under foreign powers, there are parallels between Indian colonial subjects in relation to the British colonisers and ‘internally’ colonised Chinese subjects in relation to the powers that be. As Mayfair Yang and others have argued, mainland China’s torturous modernisation resulting from a selective adoption of Enlightenment values has led to a kind of ‘colonisation of consciousness’, and has set a standard by which Chinese religiosities are judged.³¹ Similarly, although the former British colony of Hong Kong has not been subjected to such an iconoclastic attack on religion, there remains, I argue, a similar ‘colonisation of consciousness’ among individuals educated under the Christian education system there, which according to Liu tends to push ‘the anti-local religion tradition, aided by the prevalence of Christian organisations in Hong Kong’s school system’.³² In Taiwan, democratisation

³¹ Yang, MM, ‘Postcoloniality and Religiosity in Modern China: The Disenchantments of Sovereignty’, *Theory, Culture and Society*, vol. 28, no. 2, 2011, p. 7.

³² Liu, TS, ‘A Nameless but Active Religion: An Anthropologist’s View of Local Religion in Hong Kong and Macau’, *The China Quarterly*, no. 174, Religion in China Today, 2003, p. 390.

and liberalisation during the 1980's and 1990's has led to a highly pluralistic religious environment. Yet a 'rational' approach to religion is generally held among a large portion of the Taiwanese public, arguably inherited from pre-1980 Republican (*Guomindang*) rule; a world-affirming political Confucianism from the same period; Japanese modernisation efforts from 1895 to 1945; and Western ideas appropriated through Taiwanese-American ties. Humanistic Buddhism (*renjian fojiao*³³), rooted in the modernising efforts of the Zhejiang Republican-era monk, Taixu (1890-1947), has grown as a major form of Taiwanese Buddhism within this context, taking as its focus the establishment of a pure land on Earth, with less emphasis on the afterlife and 'funerary Buddhism' practices. Within Humanistic Buddhist circles, 'popular' Chinese beliefs in such gods as Mazu and Guan Gong, and practices such as geomancy, phrenology and fortune-telling are generally considered 'superstition' (*mixin*), which are seen to detract from the 'core' message of Buddhism.³⁴ Thus, in all three locations, there can be said to be varying degrees of a 'colonisation of consciousness' among a large number of the general public, who variously label 'popular' Chinese religious practices as 'superstition' (although they may engage in such practices themselves³⁵), and seek out 'authentic' religion, if any at all.

While Han informants drew from the above discourses, they also employed them for purposes other than that which they were originally intended for, and undermined them by employing the same standards for determining a 'rational' and/or 'scientific' belief system to give Tibetan Buddhism the upper hand. For example, Chinese Marxism was criticised for its scientific approach to labelling various religious traditions 'superstitious', and accounts of the miraculous within the Tibetan tradition were retold to affirm the superiority of the latter. By retelling these 'supernatural' events, and producing 'evidence' such as power-bearing relics to affirm these accounts, such informants sought to show that Tibetan Buddhism is 'beyond science' and the

The result of such thinking was apparent in an interview I conducted with a Daoist priest at a temple in Hong Kong. During the interview the priest stated that foreigners should not look down on Chinese religious traditions, and then proceeded to show me a Chinese compass and talked about the trigrams in the *Yi Jing* as being an early form of computer code. While I tried to assure him that I did not look down on Daoist or other Chinese traditions, but was interested in understanding more about these traditions, it was apparent that a long-standing perception inherited from the colonial context of certain Chinese religious traditions as 'superstition' has continued.

³³ Coined by his disciple Yinshun (1906-2005), in favour over Taixu's earlier '*rensheng fojiao*' (Human Buddhism).

³⁴ Chandler, S, *Establishing a Pure Land on Earth: The Foguang Buddhist Perspective on Modernization and Globalization*, Honolulu, University of Hawaii Press, 2004, p. 141.

³⁵ Liu notes that although 'popular' Chinese religious practices in Hong Kong are generally labelled 'superstitious', many people who follow such practices also label them as such, in part perhaps for want of a better word. See Liu, TS, p. 373.

scientific categorisations of Chinese Marxism. At the same time, at the ‘worldly level’, it was also presented as more compatible with science than the aforementioned dominant ‘rational’ discourses. This process of drawing from a dominant discourse yet ultimately undermining it was prevalent in all three locations, especially in mainland China where the discourse of the state has been, and continues to be so influential in the lives of Chinese citizens. While the adaptation of, and resistance to dominant discourses through a process of ‘mimicry’ may not be as evident as among Indians in colonial India, there is nevertheless a subtle form of resistance in the way informants undermined these discourses, and in the very fact – at least in mainland China – that they have chosen Tibetan Buddhism as their preferred spiritual tradition.

An In-between Tradition

Tibetan Buddhism is on the periphery of the mainland Han Chinese religious market. That is, its practice among Han practitioners is not officially approved, nor is it a mainstream tradition such as Pure Land Chinese Buddhism or Protestant Christianity. It is mainly practiced by a select group of middle-class Han Chinese such as intellectuals, writers and artists, as well as entrepreneurs, journalists, and even CPC Party members. Its impact on Han Chinese of lower socio-economic status is minimal.³⁶ In relation to official recognition, Han practice of Tibetan Buddhism is neither ‘above ground’ nor ‘underground’; that is, it is neither outlawed by authorities as is Falun Gong, nor is it looked upon with favour because of the perceived threat of political allegiance with Tibetan ‘separatists’.³⁷ Fenggang Yang classifies the mainland Chinese religious market as red, black, or grey. According to his model, religious traditions in the red category are government-approved patriotic organisations such as the Three-Self Patriotic Church and the Buddhist Association of China. Religious groups within the black religious market are outlawed by the government, such as Falun Gong, which is labelled an ‘evil cult’ (*xiejiao*). Perhaps the majority of religious groups and traditions in China, however, belong to the grey religious market, which is neither officially recognised nor

³⁶ By ‘middle-class’ I am not only referring to income, but to ‘cultural capital’ as well. While most middle-class Han Chinese informants had a fairly high income, others had a lower income yet possessed a similar standard of education and cultural knowledge. For example, some had the luxury of a high-end apartment in Beijing to which they invited their guru to teach small groups of followers, while some artists were struggling to make ends meet in a village outside Beijing. Yet both had a similar educational background and cultural knowledge.

³⁷ Fears of such ‘separatism’ could have contributed to the crackdown on the Larung Gar Buddhist Academy in Serthar, Sichuan Province, in 2001, due to the large number of Han practitioners residing there. See Smyer-Yü, D, 2012, p. 2.

outlawed. Tibetan Buddhism as it is practiced among Han Chinese on the mainland fits into this category.³⁸

It seems the very act of choosing this ‘grey’ religious tradition is itself a kind of resistance to a dominant secular government and society. Tibetan Buddhism offers a radically different approach to that of seeing life in materialist terms. Instead of encouraging people to look to external circumstances such as prosperity for happiness, it claims that only by looking inwards to the mind can a deep and lasting happiness be found. As opposed to a potentially inequitable, selfish approach to development (*fazhan*), it proposes that people should seek the wellbeing of others as well as themselves. Instead of looking to political leaders for inspiration, practitioners develop an intimate relationship with their guru, who is visualised as being inseparable from the practitioner, and is thus an abiding presence with the practitioner, even when he/she is separated from the guru by geographical distance.

In addition to being neither officially approved nor officially condemned, and offering a radical alternative to secular Chinese society, the lifestyle of Han practitioners on the mainland is also neither ‘here nor there’. A growing number live between their urban home and the Tibetan areas, or have relocated to the Tibetan areas indefinitely, often as artists or writers, or as full-time students of their guru. Some may even take up some aspects of what they consider to be the Tibetan way of life, and may even believe they were Tibetans in a past life. For such practitioners, the lure of Tibetan spirituality has partly drawn them out of their own cultural setting through a process that might be termed ‘reverse acculturation’ – similar to the way in which White Americans were drawn to and sought to appropriate Native American spirituality within the ‘back-to-the-land’ movement.³⁹ Yet Han practitioners are always connected to their urban home somehow, and are always in contact – in some form or another – with its culture. At the same time, as some informants pointed out, they want to ‘make the rest of China like Tibet’. In this view, urban China becomes superimposed with the projections of ‘Tibetanised’ Han practitioners, lessening the cultural and geographical distance between urban China and Tibet. In all instances above then, the theory of hybridity which explores this ‘inbetweenness’ is relevant.

³⁸ For Yang’s model of a red, black and grey religious market in China, see Yang, FG, ‘The Red, Black, and Gray Markets of Religion in China,’ *The Sociological Quarterly*, vol. 47, 2006, pp. 93-122.

³⁹ For more on the White American appropriation of Native American spirituality, see Niezen, R, *Spirit Wars: Native North American Religions in the Age of Nation-Building*, Berkeley, University of California Press, 2000, p. 7.

As Nedervene Pieterse and other theorists have argued, however, in order to explore issues of power and the sometimes tortured paths to cultural mixing, we should employ a critical theory of hybridity, and not just describe or celebrate cultural mixing. This thesis presents such a critical approach to the themes in each chapter. As stated above, there is a constant overlap of dominant ‘rational’ discourses with Tibetan Buddhism in all three locations, and there is no clear-cut distinction between various binaries explored throughout the thesis, such as rationalism/superstition or immanent/transcendent. Rather, Han practitioners and Tibetan religious leaders *negotiate* and *contest* a space between such categories, a space which, because of its hybrid nature, never solidifies into something stable and unfluctuating. As explored in Chapter Two, because of the parallel fluidity of hybridity theory itself, it has faced considerable criticism. A defence for its use in this thesis will be elaborated in Chapter Two; suffice it to say here that it is a useful theory for this thesis due to its ability to break down the essentialist, polarised position that Tibetan Buddhism, Tibet and Tibetans assume in the West, among Tibetans in exile, and in China, and to critically explore the resulting ‘inbetweenness’ which is negotiated and contested.

In the West, there is much support for Tibetan independence, or at least more autonomy as proposed by the Dalai Lama. Within the Western pro-Tibetan independence movement, pre-1951 Tibet is portrayed as a peaceful, equitable ‘Shangrila’, Tibetans as innocent victims of Chinese brutality, and Tibetan Buddhism as proof of their collective peaceful spirituality.⁴⁰ Such a view both draws from and is reproduced by Tibetans in exile, particularly the Tibetan Government in Exile. CPC White Papers and other propaganda, on the other hand, portray pre-1951 Tibet as a ‘hell on earth’, where all manner of medieval torture and feudal slavery was the norm; Tibetans in such accounts are traditionally portrayed as backward, dirty, animalistic, and in need of Han assistance to improve their ‘quality’ as younger, sometimes ‘disobedient’ brothers and sisters of the wider Chinese patriarchal family;⁴¹ Tibetan Buddhism is tolerated with suspicion,

⁴⁰ Take, for one of many examples concerning Western interpretations of Tibetan Buddhism Garfinkle’s following comment about the spiritual freedom of the Tibetans before Communist rule:

...several thousand years of living independently, in geographic isolation, in political separation, in a cultural vacuum, and in religious self-expression had already set them [the Tibetans] free...
See Garfinkle, P, *Buddha or Bust: In Search of Truth, Meaning, Happiness, and the Man Who Found Them All*, New York, Harmony, 2007, p. 274.

⁴¹ As Kymlicka and He observe, based on the Confucian doctrine of five relations, ‘minorities are seen as younger brothers, sometimes as occasionally disobedient ones. Confucian obedience involves minority groups conforming to Confucian norms, maintaining unity, and correct relations.’ See He, BG, ‘Minority

but is thoroughly subjected to patriotic education campaigns, and many monastics have been forced, following the unrest across the Tibetan Plateau in 2008, to sign a document denouncing the Dalai Lama (or alternatively de-robe). Mao's theory of class being the central issue keeping Tibetans from progress has been replaced, since Deng Xiaoping's reign, with an emphasis on economic development as the solution to Tibetan discontentment. Believing that religion will eventually fade away and Tibetans will become increasingly secularised, little serious attention is given to the importance of Buddhism as a marker of cultural identity; economic development is cited as the key to solving Sino-Tibetan tensions, with the ultimate goal of true 'ethnic unity' (*minzu tuanjie*). The recent 'Harmonious Society' policy implemented under former Party Secretary and President Hu Jintao outlined in Chapter Four, was tied into this goal of 'ethnic unity', even as restrictions were placed on Tibetan practice of religion, and even seemingly apolitical activities such as Tibetan-led initiatives for protecting the environment.⁴²

This thesis seeks to move away from the above political and popular polarisations of Sino-Tibetan relations, and to employ a critical theory of hybridity to show how the 'inbetweenness' of Han practitioners – particularly on the mainland – reveals a space between the essentialist nature of these polarisations. While ongoing negotiation between the Tibetan Government in Exile and the CPC is of vital importance and the plight of the Tibetans should not be ignored as population transfer, religious patriotic campaigns, and various human rights' violations continue, this thesis explores instead the quiet transformation of an increasing number of middle-class Han Chinese citizens who practice Tibetan Buddhism,⁴³ while also demonstrating how such practitioners are

Rights with Chinese Characteristics', in Kymlicka, W, & He, BG (eds.), *Multiculturalism in Asia*, Oxford, Oxford University Press, 2005, p. 57.

⁴² For more on the crackdowns on Tibetan-led environmental protection initiatives following the unrest of 2008, see Yeh, E.T., 'The Rise and Fall of the Green Tibetan: Contingent Collaborations and the Vicissitudes of Harmony', in Yeh, E.T., & Coggins, C (eds.).

⁴³ I am unable to provide even approximate estimates of the number of Han practitioners in mainland China. I have heard unconfirmed estimates of 100,000 or more but have no way of verifying this number. Needless to say, Han practitioners of Tibetan Buddhism on the mainland generally keep a low profile, and may simply register as 'Buddhists' in national religious censuses. Estimates of the number of Buddhists *per se* in mainland China vary; according to the State Bureau of Religious Affairs, the number of Buddhists in China was 100 million in 1997. According to Professor Liu Zhongyu, that number had more than tripled by 2009. See Zhang, XY, 'Buddhism in China', http://www.chinatoday.com.cn/ctenglish/se/txt/2009-06/19/content_203310.htm [accessed 25/11/2013]. This estimate seems an exaggeration, given that 'Buddhism' can refer to a wide range of syncretic 'popular' practices that differ greatly from more canonical forms of Buddhism. Other official estimates range from about 100 million to 200 million.

Estimates of the number of Han Tibetan Buddhist practitioners in Taiwan are as high as half a million, but as Zablocki notes, this is probably an exaggeration. See Zablocki, A, 'The Taiwanese Connection:

subtly undermining the dominant political framework on the mainland, and the ‘rational’ discourses which uphold this framework. While mainland Han practitioners often feel great sympathy for the Tibetans and admire the Dalai Lama, they do not necessarily share their aspirations for independence or even ‘true autonomy’.⁴⁴ Instead, they are often in search of a spiritual tradition to alleviate their personal sufferings and find meaning in the ‘spiritual vacuum’ created by an atheist, materialist ideology.

Han practitioners greatly admire their personal or root gurus, with whom they often have an intimate relationship and who are an integral part of their daily meditation practices. A number of Han informants also spoke highly of lay Tibetans as ‘innocent’ and ‘pure’, who, having found the ‘pearl of great price’ – for which they prostrate themselves hundreds of miles during pilgrimage – do not hold wealth and prosperity in high regard. While traditional CPC rhetoric speaks of a backward, feudal pre-1951 Tibet, Han practitioners may see this ‘backwardness’ as part of an untouched, spiritually-permeated culture. While the CPC prescribes economic and ‘scientific development’ (*kexue fazhan*) as the key to making the Tibetans happy, Han practitioners may see them as already being happy because they are supposedly unattached to material wealth, and Han ‘progress’ as potentially exploitative of, and destructive to Tibetan culture. While the CPC sees in Tibetan Buddhist leaders potential threats to stability, Han practitioners perceive them as the embodiment of wisdom and compassion. In sum, Tibet is a symbol for a number of Han practitioners of what all of China could be. As one practitioner stated and others inferred, ‘we want to make the rest of China like Tibet’. Such practitioners are not referring to change in the political arena, but to a spiritualisation of Chinese society at all levels, to the point where all citizens of China have a fundamental change in the way they view and treat others.

Politics, Piety, and Patronage in Transnational Tibetan Buddhism’, in Kapstein, M.T., *Buddhism Between Tibet and China*, Wisdom Publications, 2009, a, p. 384.

It is likewise difficult to estimate the number of practitioners in Hong Kong, as they are likely to simply register as ‘Buddhists’ in territory-wide censuses (and indeed this may be the only categorisation available in such censuses, as is likely the case on the mainland). There are around thirty Tibetan Buddhist centres in Hong Kong advertised on the internet. If we estimate that there are roughly one hundred members (formal and informal) associated with each centre, then there would only be 3000 practicing Tibetan Buddhists in Hong Kong. From observation of large-scale Tibetan Buddhist events to which Rinpoches are invited to speak, it seems there are many more than this (although not all those in attendance at such events would be Tibetan Buddhists, or perhaps even Buddhists). There are also many practitioners who move between Tibetan and other Buddhist centres, and there are a number who have no affiliation with any centre yet consider themselves to be Tibetan Buddhists (several of my informants fit this category).

⁴⁴ The greatest support for Tibetan independence in Greater China among Han practitioners seems to be in Taiwan. However, few informants reverted to political matters in Taiwan, apart from the occasional comment about the ongoing destruction of Tibetan culture and religion. In Hong Kong, practitioners were even less inclined to revert to political matters.

While the above ‘de-polarisation’ of Sino-Tibetan relations as embodied in the views of Han practitioners may create further polarisations that are neither completely endorsed by either the Chinese or Western/exiled Tibetan sides, they do represent a ‘third space’ that offers an alternative to the CPC’s version of the Sino-Tibetan situation and Western/exiled-Tibetan accounts. Han practitioners generally take an apolitical stance on the Sino-Tibetan conflict. Rather than being aligned to either side, they pay ‘allegiance’ to an alternative worldview of interdependence, as propagated in Tibetan Buddhism. Many seek out Tibetan gurus, and even relocate to Tibetan Buddhist institutes such as the remote Larung Buddhist Academy in Serthar County, Garzê (Mand – Ganzi) Tibetan Autonomous Prefecture, Sichuan Province – often following a personal crisis. Some even quit their jobs and leave their families to search for an end to this suffering. Few, if any, make such important decisions based on any kind of political allegiance to the Tibetan cause. If they join the thousands of Tibetan and Han practitioners at the Academy to suffer the rigours of high altitude and plummeting winter temperatures, it is because they believe their Tibetan gurus hold the answers to life and death.

Through Buddhist doctrine on dependent origination (often translated as ‘interdependence’ in modern terms) they come to see that there is no inherent difference between Tibetans and Han – they are foremost human beings on one planet without borders. This is not to say that ethnicities and borders do not exist in a relative sense, but that the deeper interdependency of everything makes such distinctions rather shallow. They share the aspiration to end suffering, and they believe that by being close to their gurus and the pure land of Tibet, they can begin to achieve this. As part of this view, they also may share a different approach to development (*fazhan*) than the one being employed at present both in China and the world at large. In particular, they may support such Tibetan Buddhist movements as the anti-slaughter movement (and related vegetarianism movement), initiated by such Tibetan leaders as the late Khenpo Jigme Phuntsok, founder of the Larung Buddhist Academy in Sichuan.⁴⁵

⁴⁵ For more on the anti-slaughter movement initiated by Khenpo Jigme Phuntsok, see Gaerrang (Kabzung), ‘The Alternative to Development on the Tibetan Plateau: Preliminary Research on the Anti-Slaughter Movement’, *Revue d’Etudes Tibétaines*, no. 21, 2011, pp. 31-43.

As Gaerrang notes, this movement ‘contests the idea of this-worldly economic improvement that as Deng put it ‘[economic] development is the first principle’ (*fazhan cai shi yingdaoli*)’. See Ibid, p. 39. Many Tibetan herders following this movement have given up selling their yaks, or reduced the number of yaks sold to Hui minority slaughter houses after hearing about and viewing (on screen) the brutal manner in which herds are slaughtered. See *ibid*.

From the Tibetan side, lamas and monks are increasingly engaging the wider urban Han community outside Tibetan areas in a largely apolitical manner. Many lamas and monks travel to urban Chinese centres such as Beijing, Shanghai and Guangzhou to attract Han followers and raise revenue for building or repairing monasteries and temples. They also provide spiritual teaching for Han practitioners when visiting these urban centres. As Smyer-Yü observes, there are an increasing number of charlatans among young Tibetan monastics who seek fame and prosperity for themselves while peddling the dharma to naïve Han devotees in urban Chinese centres. This is a growing concern for Tibetan religious leaders, who worry about the potentially damaging consequences resulting from this ‘religious commercialisation’, for their reputation and that of the Tibetan Buddhist tradition as a whole.⁴⁶ However, those who genuinely seek to pass on the teachings to Chinese citizens all over China are acting on the Dalai Lama’s appeal to Tibetans to reach out to the Chinese with the dharma. He has also called on all Chinese and particularly ‘Chinese spiritual brothers and sisters’, in light of a common Tibetan and Chinese Mahayana Buddhist inheritance, to call for an end to the brutal treatment of Tibetans at the hands of the CPC, particularly following the March 2008 riots.⁴⁷ Obviously there is a political message here, yet it is interesting that the Dalai Lama and other Tibetan religious leaders inside China are recognising the potential for genuine peace between the two peoples based on their common Buddhist heritage. Of course, this common heritage is also cause for the CPC to reiterate its propaganda that Tibet has always been an integral part of China. Yet this common inheritance need not directly support a political agenda, as is seen in the case of the Larung Buddhist Academy, founded by the late Khenpo Jigme Phuntsok.

Khenpo Jigme Phuntsok (1933-2004), one of the most admired Nyingma lamas in recent times who had a large following of both Tibetan and Han practitioners, established the academy in 1980 in response to the declining quality of Tibetan monastic education following the Cultural Revolution. He managed to maintain a largely politically neutral position by establishing an academy instead of rebuilding or starting a monastery, providing informal membership for practitioners, having the academy certified by the Panchen Lama in 1987, and declining annual subsidies from

⁴⁶ See Smyer-Yü, D, 2012, p. 113.

⁴⁷ See HH The Fourteenth Dalai Lama Tenzin Gyatso, ‘An Appeal to All Chinese Spiritual Brothers and Sisters’, <http://www.dalailama.com/messages/tibet/appeal-to-all-chinese> [accessed 24/04/2013]

the government.⁴⁸ Early on, in 1987, he led over ten thousand Tibetan monks on a pilgrimage to Mt Wutai in Shanxi Province;⁴⁹ when he returned to Serthar, Chinese devotees followed him back to his academy and began to grow in number. He clearly reached out to the Chinese as the Dalai Lama has encouraged all Tibetans to do, although he may not have expected them to follow him back to Serthar, or that others would follow.⁵⁰ While he appears to have largely avoided politics, and tried to keep the Larung Buddhist Academy out of the political arena, in 2001 a work team descended on the institute, arresting several leaders and ordering Han practitioners to return home. Buildings were demolished and pilgrims ordered to leave. Since then, it has been rebuilt and is once again flourishing,⁵¹ although Han practitioners may face restrictions on the length of their stay.

The case of the Larung Buddhist Academy appears to reveal the apolitical nature of Han interest in Tibetan Buddhism and the apolitical propagation of Tibetan Buddhism by the religious elite, as well as the perceived threat of Han practitioners siding with ‘splittest’ elements among the Tibetans. The Han practitioners who go there appear to be seeking answers to suffering and an alternative lifestyle to the apparent hedonistic consumerism prevalent in the rest of China. The Tibetan religious elite at the academy seem to recognise this, as Khenpo Sonam Darje stated when confronting a cadre from the State Administration for Religious Affairs about the removal of Han practitioners from the academy in 2001.

⁴⁸ See Germano, D, ‘Re-membering the Dismembered Body of Tibet: Contemporary Tibetan Visionary Movements in the People’s Republic of China’, in Goldstein, M.C., & Kapstein, M.T. (eds.), *Buddhism in Contemporary Tibet: Religious Revival and Cultural Identity*, Berkeley, University of California Press, 1998, p. 63.

As Germano observes, Khenpo Jigme Phuntsok held several political positions at the Tibetan research office in Beijing, the Buddhist Association in Sertha, and in Ganzi. Moreover, his relationship with the district government at Sertha was close, and he sometimes performed the traditional role as lama in mediating political disputes. However, he came under government suspicion when he refused to sign a certification for the government’s Panchen Lama candidate, and when an associate was apparently found with literature promoting Tibetan independence (and subsequently jailed and tortured). According to Germano, because of these supposed political incitements, Khenpo Jigme Phuntsok was limited as of 1996 in engaging in religious activities outside his own institute. See *ibid*, pp. 63-64.

According to Germano, Khenpo Jigme Phuntsok was also believed to be an incarnation of Gesar, the Tibetan epic hero who many Tibetans believe will return as a messianic figure to save Tibet and Buddhism. Thus, although Khenpo Jigme Phuntsok managed to largely avoid politics, his apparent connection to the figure of Gesar inevitably politicised his position to an extent. See *ibid*, pp. 77-80.

⁴⁹ See Smyer-Yü, D, 2012, p. 1.

⁵⁰ *Ibid*.

⁵¹ *Ibid*, p. 2.

Now, those Han Chinese monks who are law-abiding and studying Tibetan Buddhism are not allowed to stay here. How can you let gamblers, prostitutes, and hooligans take over the land of Tibet?⁵²

There may be some resentment amongst certain Tibetan monks and nuns even at the academy that an increasing number of Han practitioners are arriving to study there, given the wider tensions between Han and Tibetans.⁵³ Yet if Sonam Darje's statement is anything to go by, they would prefer that Han with an interest in Tibetan culture and religion come to the region rather than those who have little or no consideration for Tibetan culture, and are only interested in making money, importing values contrary to Tibetan Buddhist ethics, and/or treating Tibetan culture as a commodity (as is sometimes the case amongst Han tourists and 'Tibetan drifters' (*zang piao*)⁵⁴). Thus, the Tibetan religious elite, in spite of what they may feel about Tibetan independence or 'true autonomy', want to share their spiritual culture with Han Chinese, and thereby preserve their way of life, as well as transform greater Chinese society.⁵⁵

Universal yet Particularistic

At the same time, while Tibetan Buddhism generally breaks down barriers between Han and Tibetan practitioners by promoting the doctrine of dependent origination, it would be a mistake to think of Tibetan Buddhism as a universal, homogenising force. As

⁵² Darje, S, 2002, p. 715, cited in Smyer-Yü, D, 2012, p. 132.

⁵³ A glimpse of this apparent tension at the academy is mentioned in a short news article from USA Today. See MacLeod, C, 'In China, Tensions Rising over Buddhism's Quiet Resurgence', *USA Today*, Nov. 1, 2011, <http://usatoday30.usatoday.com/news/religion/story/2011-11-01/tibetan-buddhism-china-communist-tension/51034604/1> [accessed 25/05/2013]

⁵⁴ 'Tibetan Drifters' (*zang piao*) is a new term in mainland China describing Han sojourners who live hippie-type lifestyles, drifting about the Tibetan areas without a set agenda. Most do not appear to be Tibetan Buddhists, but instead may dabble in Buddhism and perhaps drugs as they roam about. Lhasa, according to a recent newspaper article in the South China Morning Post, has become for Tibetan Drifters what Goa is to Westerners. Woesser, a Tibetan writer, has criticised the behaviour of Tibetan Drifters, stating that they lay about sunbathing, drinking and smoking and snuggling up to each other while watching pilgrims outside the Jokhang temple in Lhasa, and intermittently go and prostrate before the temple with Tibetan pilgrims as if it is some kind of game or popular amusement. See Gardner, D, 'The Road to Enlightenment', *South China Morning Post*, Aug. 15, 2012, <http://www.scmp.com/article/985339/road-enlightenment> [accessed 25/04/2013].

⁵⁵ This transformation of greater Chinese society is likely seen by the Tibetan religious elite in terms of creating harmony between the Han majority and the Tibetans, rather than unity (as implied in the state's often-used term '*minzu tuanjie*' (ethnic unity)). Tibetan religious leaders such as the late Khenpo Jigme Phuntsok may talk of harmony amongst nationalities (*minzu*), but not necessarily unity, as implied in *minzu tuanjie*. According to Gayley, Khenpo Jigme Phuntsok asked Tibetans to 'unite as a nationality in common values and collective action for the greater good of Tibetans'. Within this context, Gayley notes, Khenpo Jigme Phuntsok has recognised the need for harmony between nationalities, while 'unity is prescribed for Tibetans alone.'

See Gayley, H, 'The Ethics of Cultural Survival: A Buddhist Vision of Progress in Mkhan Po 'Jigs Phun's Heart Advice to Tibetans for the 21st Century', in Tuttle, G (ed.), *Mapping the Modern in Tibet*, International Institute for Tibetan and Buddhist Studies GmbH, 2011, p. 448.

Lopez notes, ‘those who would account for the adaptability of Buddhism by recourse to some facile claim that Buddhism has always been antiessentialist run the risk of allowing Buddhism to be everything, and nothing – it is neither’.⁵⁶ As it expands into the Han Chinese cultural setting, Tibetan Buddhism must change and adapt, as it has done in the West, and as the Vajrayana tradition did when Padmasambhava established it in Tibet in the eighth century. Padmasambhava is believed to have subdued and bound local Tibetan deities and spirits to oath as protectors of the dharma, and some even rose to the level of enlightened protectors within the Tibetan Buddhist pantheon. In addition to what Katherine Buffetrille terms the ‘Buddhification’ of Tibetan mountain cults,⁵⁷ various Bon rituals and beliefs were adapted according to Buddhist interpretation (and vice versa).

In the same way, Tibetan Buddhism must adapt to the lifestyles and beliefs of modern Han Chinese in order to become relevant. As Smyer-Yü has observed, such adaptation may be achieved through the engagement of renowned lamas with the discourse of Marxism.⁵⁸ Or it may be achieved through providing simple meditation techniques largely free of ritual (as seen in the teachings of Mingyur Rinpoche) for practitioners in Hong Kong who face long working hours. In the case of mainland China, in order to produce a Tibetan Buddhism that is relevant for practice there, both the Tibetan religious elite and Han practitioners must appropriate new cultural elements from each other, including those elements obtained through transnational links with the Tibetan religious elite in exile and Chinese Buddhist movements in Taiwan. In Hong Kong and Taiwan, there is a similar drawing on Chinese Buddhist culture and both interregional and transnational Tibetan ties. Yet, because there are such a variety of ‘skilful means’ (arising from these interregional and transnational ties) which can be employed by the Tibetan religious elite to make Tibetan Buddhism relevant for Han practitioners, there is

⁵⁶ See Lopez, D.S. Jr., 2008, p. 216.

⁵⁷ See Buffetrille, K, ‘Reflections on Pilgrimages to Sacred Mountains, Lakes and Caves’, in McKay, A (ed.), *Pilgrimage in Tibet*, Richmond, Curzon Press, 1998.

⁵⁸ Smyer-Yü observes that ‘Marxism is the focal point of Tibetan Buddhist teachers’ public discourse on religion [on the mainland]’. See Smyer-Yü, 2012, p. 141. The systematic responses of these teachers to Marxist claims about religion is outlined in Dorzhi Rinpoche’s book *Wisdom Arising from Compassion* (1998), cited in Smyer-Yü:

1. Buddhism opposes blind faith but advocates the faith of knowledge and wisdom.
2. The goal of Buddhist faith is not necessarily to enter paradise after death.
3. Buddhism fundamentally negates the existence of a creator which rules over the universe.
4. The philosophy of Buddhism is not completely idealistic but is realistic as well.
5. Buddhism is not indifferent to social realities.
6. Buddhist ethics do not serve the morals of the ruling class.
7. Buddhism does not oppose science.

See Dozhi Rinpoche, 1998, outlined in *ibid*.

also much room for manoeuvring on the part of Han practitioners as they find the right ‘fit’ for Tibetan Buddhism in their lives.

In sum, this thesis seeks to demonstrate that Tibetan Buddhism is becoming specific to the cultural environment of Greater China, while providing a message that goes to the heart of suffering, which is consummate in death. As Mingyur Rinpoche said at a series of talks he delivered in Hong Kong in April, 2011,⁵⁹ ‘everyone can be Buddhist because everyone dies.’ Everyone faces suffering and death, and therefore everyone can benefit from the Tibetan Buddhist approach to death, the moment which is seen as the greatest opportunity for liberation from samsaric existence. Yet Tibetan Buddhism is not a universal, ‘one-size-fits-all’ philosophy. It is a religious system that promotes certain practices as more optimal than others for obtaining enlightenment, a system which is believed to embody the wisdom of Shakyamuni and all previous buddhas, which has been passed down in unbroken lineage through Indian and later Tibetan masters. Although all belief systems that promote compassion and non-attachment to worldly things can be considered longer routes towards enlightenment (such as Theravada Buddhism), the methods of the Tibetan Buddhist tradition, as presented in its various schools, are seen as the fastest and most effective routes to enlightenment.

Similarly, Tibetan Buddhism – especially under the Gelug school – is not a spiritual tradition detached from temporal power. It was and still is rooted in the politics of the Tibetan Government, now in exile. In pre-1959, and especially pre-1951 Tibet, the Dalai Lama oversaw, and was the embodiment of a dual system of religion and politics (Tib –*Cho-sid-nyi*), in which a large number of monks occupied temporal positions. Violence was also not absent in ‘old’ Tibet, and there did not exist a happy, borderless ecumenicalism as is often imagined in popular Western accounts. At different junctures in Tibetan history, Tibetan warriors were feared for their ferocity in invading and subduing their neighbours. Monastics were not entirely exempt from violence either, as seen in the assassination of the Tibetan emperor Langdarma (838-841) by the Buddhist monk, Lhalung Pelgyi Dorje of Yerpa, who carried out this killing based on the Mahayanist idea that he would save him from a lower rebirth, given Langdarma’s apparent ongoing persecution of Buddhism in Tibet.⁶⁰

⁵⁹ The talks were titled ‘Encounters with Happiness’, and took place at Queen Elizabeth Stadium, Wan Chai, Hong Kong on April 13-15, 2011.

⁶⁰ Davidson, R.M., p. 66.

Thus, the contemporary message, popular among Westerners and Chinese followers, of Tibetan Buddhism being an all-encompassing belief system free of political connections and the violence of politics is not quite accurate. While it is true that violence in particular generally contradicts the message of compassion for all sentient beings,⁶¹ and the merging of religion and politics and the keeping of borders are but ‘conventional truths’ – overlaying the ultimate truth that kingdoms, governments and borders do not inherently exist – these factors nevertheless point to the fact that Tibetan Buddhism is specific to a location and a people. It is not a ‘floating’ philosophy detached from these.

Just as Tibetan Buddhism in its Tibetan context is rooted to a place and a people, its adaptation to the socio-cultural and political conditions of Greater China makes it a tradition specific to the relative environment of Han Chinese, while bringing the absolute message that all sentient beings have the potential to achieve buddhahood/buddha-nature is present in all sentient beings, and that we should cherish each one as he/she is believed to be our mother in a past life. It is this latter message that is obviously propagated by the Tibetan religious elite as ultimately taking precedence over the former. As the Dalai Lama often says, ‘I am Tibetan before I am Dalai Lama, and I am human before I am Tibetan.’ Sharing sentience with others comes first, followed by the distinctions of conditioned categories.

Just as Tibetan Buddhism is universal yet particularistic in all its cultural adaptations, hybridity theory, it is argued in Chapter Two, can also be seen in a similar way. Of course the parallels between the adaptation of Tibetan Buddhism to different cultural settings and hybridity theory are not self-evident; yet drawing such parallels may serve

⁶¹ Rare cases of violence among monastics were perhaps due, in part, to the lack of education among a large number of monks in the large monasteries. As Goldstein observes, at the three main monasteries near Lhasa – Sera, Drepung, and Ganden (known as the ‘Three Seats’) – monks were basically divided into two groups: ‘readers’ and those who were not. The majority were of the latter group, who worked for the monastery or lived off daily distributions and tea provided by the monastery. They were not involved in scholarly or meditative work. In addition, according to Goldstein, as many as 10 to 15 percent of monks at these monasteries were ‘fighting monks’ (*dobdos*), constituting a force that dwarfed the pre-1913 Tibetan army. See *ibid*, pp. 24-26.

Violence is also not entirely prohibited in Buddhism, as long as the intention of the perpetrator is for the ultimate benefit of the victim. For example, according to the *Upayakausalya Sutra*, the Buddha killed a man who intended to kill five hundred people, and was willing to suffer in hell because of it. See Schroeder, J.W., *Skillful Means: The Heart of Buddhist Compassion*, Honolulu, University of Hawaii Press, 2001, p. 14.

Similarly, the Dalai Lama has stated that he promotes non-violence because it is the wisest decision at present, given the impossibility of succeeding in negotiations with the Chinese through acts of violence. However, he also has stated that violence itself is not condemned in Buddhism, as long as the intention is for the ultimate good of all sentient beings (for example in warfare against a violent regime, if such warfare is carried out with compassion for the enemy rather than hatred). See Sautman, B, ‘Vegetarian Between Meals’: The Dalai Lama, War, and Violence’, *Positions*, vol. 18, no. 1, 2010, p. 102.

as a useful way of conceptualising the thesis as a whole, rather than as two separate parts discussing religious doctrine on the one hand and theories of sociology on the other. In Chapter Two it is proposed that, in order to avoid the problem of hybridity theory becoming a meaningless term – given that every religion and culture is already hybrid – we should take the cultures, religious ideas and ideologies discussed throughout this thesis as relative constructs, in order to understand the processes of appropriation, negotiation and contestation that the thesis seeks to explore. At the same time, we can acknowledge that the ‘ultimate truth’ is that everything is hybrid, without having to discard discussion of hybridity and thereby inhibit our understanding of how the theory breaks down essentialisms. As discussed earlier, it is for its ability to de-essentialise a highly essentialised topic that hybridity theory has been used in this thesis.

Having explored the overarching themes and theory presented in this thesis, as well as the wider context within which discussion in this thesis takes place, below I provide a brief outline of the chapters that follow.

Chapter Outline

Chapter Two

Chapter Two briefly outlines the strengths and weaknesses of hybridity theory, and seeks to demonstrate that it is the most appropriate theory for examining Han-Tibetan cultural mixing through the medium of Tibetan Buddhism. This is only the case, it is argued, if a critical form of hybridity is used, which examines the appropriation, negotiation and contestation that necessarily takes place with all religious hybridisation. On one level there are the interpretations of the Tibetan religious elite, both within and outside of Greater China, and on the other, the interpretations of Han practitioners. And both sides ‘tap into’ and draw from dominant ‘rational’ discourses, even while these discourses are used for other purposes and at times undermined by these actors. Thus, it is argued, there exists to varying degrees in all three locations a ‘colonisation of consciousness’, yet this ‘colonisation’ is by no means total, as those who are subjugated to this ‘colonisation’ do ‘talk back’. Of particular interest to this chapter is Mayfair Yang’s use of postcolonial studies within the contemporary Chinese context to explore this view of ‘colonisation’, and how informants, despite their subjugated position to the

discourse of the state (on the mainland) and to other ‘rational’ discourses (in Greater China in general), have agency to ‘speak’ and use these dominant discourses creatively.

To guide the theoretical discussion of Chapter Two and the themes of the thesis, I also explore the notion of ‘superscription’, as used by Duara in his article on Guandi⁶² (the late dynastic title for Guan Gong, the so-called ‘Chinese god of war’). Just as Duara explores, in a historical context, the various superscriptions that Guan Gong received from both the dynastic elite and the common people, Chapter Three explores the contemporary superscriptions layered upon Guan Gong under the Gyalwang Karmapa, and how these are being appropriated, negotiated and contested by both the Tibetan religious elite and Han practitioners. Just as Guan Gong has received these historic and contemporary superscriptions through different actors, Tibetan Buddhism has also been superscribed with meaning by Han practitioners and the Tibetan religious elite, which is intertwined with dominant ‘rational’ discourses. And as in the case of Guan Gong, whose figure meant different things for the dynastic elite and the common folk, this meaning is negotiated and contested. Thus, Chapter Two argues that the critical approach to hybridity employed in this thesis does not reveal a one-way penetrative process, but that power comes from both above and below and is negotiated and contested in the middle.

Chapter Three

Building on a critical understanding of hybridity, Chapter Three sets up the symbolic ‘blueprint’ for chapters to follow – Guan Gong. The figure of Guan Gong encompasses many aspects of Chinese traditional culture, and has also assumed new superscriptions under the current Gyalwang Karmapa. The incorporation of Guan Gong into Tibetan Buddhism under the Karmapa in 2005 can be seen as representative of the wider manner in which Tibetan Buddhism is becoming hybridised with ‘traditional’ Chinese ideas and beliefs, and is addressing issues specific to twenty-first century China (and ultimately the world). The hybridisation of Tibetan Buddhism with traditional and contemporary Chinese ideas and beliefs which the incorporation of Guan Gong into the Karma Kagyu school of Tibetan Buddhism reflects, are explored under the following themes in subsequent chapters: Confucianism, pragmatic religion, environmental protection, and ghosts. Of particular importance to this chapter is the Taiwanese Buddhist Master Hai Dao’s address in 2005 on Taiwanese television, at which he presented what is

⁶² Duara, P, ‘Superscribing Symbols: The Myth of Guandi, Chinese God of War’, *The Journal of Asian Studies*, vol. 47, no. 4, 1988, pp. 778-795.

apparently the Karmapa's vision of Guan Gong's role in Tibetan Buddhism, contemporary Chinese society and the world, which both draws on historical superscriptions layered upon this Chinese god and expands them within the context of twenty-first century problems.

Chapter Four

Chapter Four explores the manner in which Confucianism is understood – particularly among mainland practitioners – to be compatible/incompatible with Tibetan Buddhism. Just as Guan Gong was 'Confucianised', particularly during the late Qing dynasty – and his status even rose to equal that of the sage himself – Tibetan Buddhism among certain Han practitioners is also being layered with certain Confucian superscriptions. This is occurring on the mainland within the context of the CPC's recent (re)deployment of the Confucian political ideology of 'Harmonious Society' (*hexie shehui*), and within the context of continued historical arguments in China for and against Buddhist-Confucian syncretism. The CPC has been instrumental in encouraging and aiding the Confucian revival, in large part it seems to maintain stability amid growing problems, and to retain its legitimacy amongst the people. This chapter examines how mainland informants in particular have reacted to this revival, in relation to the CPC's recent political ideology. It also explores how informants are carrying forward or rejecting historical arguments made by Chinese Buddhists and Confucians concerning Buddhist-Confucian syncretism. It seeks to demonstrate how such informants integrate Confucianism (in its 'traditional' or recent political forms) into Tibetan Buddhism or keep them separate. Also of importance to this chapter are wider themes of the social engagement of Tibetan Buddhism in Chinese society or its detachment from society, as reflected in the perspectives of informants concerning Confucianism and Tibetan Buddhism.

Chapter Five

Just as Guan Gong is believed to be a god of wealth (*cai shen*), in addition to his more ethereal image, Tibetan Buddhism is becoming relevant both for Han practitioners who seek worldly gains and those who seek transcendence from such pursuits. This chapter particularly focuses on whether, how, and to what degree practitioners in Hong Kong pursue wealth and other pragmatisms through their faith.

Due in part to the transient nature of the former British colonial entrepot, and to the various factors that have produced this transience, it is argued in this chapter that Hong

Kongers in general often have a very practical outlook on life, and that the many stresses they experience due to work, money and related issues are often carried over into the religious sphere, where religion may play a part in solving the practical needs of devotees. It is argued in this chapter that this practical outlook has had some influence on the practice of certain Hong Kong informants. On the other hand, various factors have influenced other informants to move away from this pragmatic approach. This chapter looks at how the modernised Christian education system in Hong Kong has influenced this latter sample of informants to adopt a ‘Protestantised’ form of Tibetan Buddhism, free of ‘superstitious’ practices such as petitioning deities for wealth, health and so forth.

Chapter Six

Chapter Six examines the contemporary superscriptions that local Tibetan deities and spirits are being layered with by Han and Tibetan practitioners in Diqing Tibetan Autonomous Prefecture and Han practitioners in Beijing. Just as Guan Gong has been promoted as a protector of the environment by the Karmapa (by way of Master Hai Dao in Taiwan), these entities – as understood by certain informants – are becoming archetypes for environmental protection throughout China, and by extension, the world. They are seen as protectors of the pristine Tibetan landscape, while to varying degrees their characteristics as fierce protectors of the dharma, their locale and local inhabitants are becoming lost within the discourse of environmental protection. A number of Tibetans and ‘Tibetanised’ Han practitioners are, however, resisting the assimilation of localised forms of ‘sacred knowledge’ into the discourse of environmental protection. In both cases, however, there is never a clear break between the ‘traditional’ and ‘modern’ roles of these entities, as the two often overlap. In addition to exploring how local Tibetan deities and spirits are being universalised and globalised to a degree, and in other instances are retaining their local characteristics, this chapter also explores how Han practitioners themselves – depending on their interaction with local forms of Tibetan culture – are becoming ‘Tibetanised’ to a degree, even as some Tibetans are becoming more like their Han counterparts, and in some cases, practitioners of Buddhism in the West.

Chapter Seven

While Chapter Three opens with an introduction to the ethereal Guan Gong, Chapter Seven ends the main body of the thesis with a look at the opposite end of the spectrum,

over which Guan Gong is believed to have power – ghosts. Like Guan Gong, the Tibetan religious elite are believed to have power over such beings, yet fear of ghosts is still prevalent in Chinese society in general, and for some practitioners, there remains a psychological impact from past ghost encounters that prevents them from moving on from this fear.

Fear of ghosts is present in both Chinese and Tibetan cultures, while the Tibetan religious elite urge both lay Tibetans and Han practitioners alike to move on from this fear. For Han practitioners from a ‘popular’ religious background, the belief that a ghost is a continuation of the self, and the associated belief that ancestor spirits continue their relationship with descendents, seems to feed their fear of ghosts. Mingyur Rinpoche and other Tibetan religious elite spreading Tibetan Buddhism to Han Chinese emphasise that it is better not to believe in ghosts than to believe – that is, to not believe they inherently exist, and to lose fear accordingly. As explored in this chapter, there are certain parallels between Mingyur Rinpoche’s message and that found in CPC publications, the latter having long emphasised that belief in ghosts is superstitious. Yet despite the message of Mingyur Rinpoche and the CPC’s views on ghosts, an ongoing fear of ghosts among some informants reveals the deeply-rooted nature of ghost belief in Chinese society. Ultimately, this chapter seeks to show that Tibetan Buddhism is perceived by practitioners to be superior to any worldly ideologies because it is seen to help one conquer the ultimate ‘ghost’ – death.

Methodology

At this point it should be stressed that this thesis cannot possibly account for the reception and practice of Tibetan Buddhism among all Han practitioners in the three main locations it examines. Nor can it account for all the differences and similarities between the reception and practice of Tibetan Buddhism within these locations. In mainland China I have mainly focused on middle-class writers, artists and managers of small businesses (backpacker accommodation, vegetarian restaurants and Tibetan Buddhist artefact shops in particular), some of whom have left their urban environment to live outside the city. Others live in an urban centre but frequently leave for the Tibetan areas for spiritual instruction, while others remain permanently in their urban environment. In Hong Kong and Taiwan, most informants were middleclass office workers. Among those excluded from the picture are wealthy entrepreneurs and those of

a lower socio-economic status, as well as smaller groups such as celebrities and CPC Party members, due to restrictions of access and/or political sensitivity. Apart from the majority Han component of informants, another major component consisted of Tibetan lamas and monks, while remaining informants were Bhutanese and Mongol lamas and monks, lay Tibetan practitioners and some Bai and Naxi minority lay practitioners and novice monks. When referring to non-Tibetan lay Chinese practitioners in general, I have usually employed the term ‘Han’ as a ‘default’ classification, while using ethnic classifications when examining the opinions or ideas of specific lay practitioners. I acknowledge this is a less than satisfactory method of referring to my informants, yet the alternative ‘Chinese’ label is too broad a category, given that ethnic Tibetans within China are also Chinese citizens. When referring to monks and lamas, I generally use the term ‘Tibetan Buddhist’, and at other times specific ethnic classifications where relevant.

Informants from all schools of Tibetan Buddhism are represented in the thesis, including the Gelug, Nyingma, Kagyu, and Shakya schools. The majority of informants interviewed in mainland China followed the Nyingma tradition, while a large number there also followed the Karma Kagyu tradition (headed by the Seventeenth Karmapa Lama, Ogyen Trinley Dorje). A number of practitioners in Gyalthang followed the Gelug school (headed by the Dalai Lama in exile), likely due to the historical influence of this school in the region, while a small number in all mainland locations followed the Shakya tradition. The majority of informants in Hong Kong followed the Karma Kagyu tradition, while a number also followed the Nyingma and Gelug traditions, as well as a synthesis of the Nyingma-Karma Kagyu traditions (under Yongey Mingyur Rinpoche). The majority of informants in Taiwan were likewise followers of the Karma Kagyu tradition, while a number followed the Nyingma and Gelug traditions, and a small number followed the Shakya tradition. Apart from practitioners of Tibetan Buddhism, I have also briefly mentioned several Chinese Buddhist practitioners and one Christian-Buddhist⁶³ to provide contrast to practitioners of Tibetan Buddhism, as well as to demonstrate some of the similar trends in religious practice in wider Chinese society.

Informants in different locations came to Tibetan Buddhism from varying religious and/or ideological backgrounds. Han informants in Beijing and Diqing Tibetan Autonomous Prefecture were often atheists/agnostics prior to turning to Tibetan Buddhism, and some were previously committed to propagating Chinese Marxist

⁶³ This is how he defined his own religiosity.

ideology. Other mainland Han informants were previously Chinese Buddhists (either practitioners or devotees of ‘popular’ Chinese Buddhism) or followers of Baha’i, and one was previously a Christian. Tibetan informants in Diqing were all of Buddhist background, but had likewise been strongly influenced by Chinese Marxist ideology through their formal education. Hong Kong informants were variously from a ‘popular’ Chinese religious, Christian (Catholic or Protestant), Daoist, or New Age background, while some were formerly atheists/agnostics. Informants in Taiwan were often from a Chinese Buddhist, Daoist, or ‘popular’ Chinese religious background, while some were previously atheists/agnostics, and one was previously a Catholic.

The years Han informants had practiced Tibetan Buddhism varied from one month to more than fifteen years, which depended on many factors; on the mainland the level of restrictions placed on Tibetan teachers and religion in general delayed the first encounters of some informants with Tibetan Buddhism, and their subsequent practice. In Hong Kong and Taiwan, where Tibetan Buddhist teachers have experienced greater freedom, there were a number of long-term practitioners, while there were also many who had been influenced by the recent growth of Buddhism in these two locations, and especially by the teachings of visiting Tibetan religious leaders (the Dalai Lama visited Taiwan several times from the late 1990s and into the first decade of the 2000s, for example). Tibetan informants, on the other hand, described themselves as Buddhists ‘from birth’, yet many in Diqing Tibetan Autonomous Prefecture had only studied and seriously practiced Tibetan Buddhism after the beginning of Reform and Opening Up (*Gaige Kaifang*) (late 1970s onwards).

The age of informants ranged from eighteen to over eighty, with most informants being between thirty-five and fifty-five.

The table below shows a breakdown of the affiliation, ethnicity, age, gender, profession, and religious background of informants, and the years they had practiced Tibetan Buddhism (where information is available). While most of the informants are represented below, I have left out most of those whom I did not formally interview.

Table 1: Informant Profiles

Location: Beijing

Affiliation	Ethnicity	Age	Gender	Profession	Religious Background	Years Practicing
Nyingmapa	Han	Early 40s	M	Writer	Atheist/agnostic	10
Nyingmapa	Tibetan	Early 40s	M	Lama	Tibetan Buddhist	NA
Nyingmapa	Han	Early 40s	M	Tibetan Artefact Shopkeeper	Chinese Buddhist	Not available
Nyingmapa	Han	Mid-30s	F	Tibetan Artefact Shopkeeper	Not available	Not available
Gelugpa	Mongolian	Early 40s	M	Monk	Tibetan Buddhist	NA
Nyingmapa	Han	Late 40s	M	Sub-Editor	Atheist/agnostic	2 ½ months
Nyingmapa	Han	Late 20s	M	Law Student	Atheist/agnostic	1 month
Pure Land Buddhist	Han	Mid-40s	M	Monk	Not available	Not available
Pure Land Buddhist	Han	Mid-40s	M	Monk	Not available	Not available
Not available	Tibetan	Mid-20s	M	Monk	Tibetan Buddhist	NA
Not available	Han	Early 40s	F	Not available	Not available	Not available
Karma Kagyu	Tibetan	Mid-40s	M	Lama	Tibetan Buddhist	NA
Nyingmapa	Han	Mid-40s	M	Writer	Atheist/agnostic	3 years
Nyingmapa	Mongolian	Early 40s to early 50s	M	Artist	Chinese Buddhist	5 years
Nyingmapa	Han	Early 40s	M	Artist	Atheist; Baha'i	4 years
Karma Kagyu	Han	Mid-50s	M	Artist	Atheist; Chinese Buddhist	11 years

Nyingmapa	Han	Early 40s	F	Artist	Atheist	2 years
Nyingmapa	Han	Early 40s	M	Artist	'Popular' Chinese Buddhist	3 years
Nyingmapa	Han	60s	F	Housewife	Nominal Christian	1 year
NA	Han	Early 60s	M	Professor of religious phenomenology	NA	NA

Location: Gyalthang

Affiliation	Ethnicity	Age	Gender	Profession	Religious Background	Years Practicing
Gelugpa	Tibetan	70s	M	Lama	Tibetan Buddhist	NA
Not available	Tibetan	Mid-40s	M	Entrepreneur	Tibetan Buddhist	NA
Gelugpa	Tibetan	Late 40s	M	Lama	Tibetan Buddhist	NA
Gelugpa	Tibetan	Mid-50s	M	Lama	Tibetan Buddhist	NA
Gelugpa	Han	Early 50s	F	Hostel manager	Atheist/agnostic	15 years
Gelugpa	Tibetan	Early 40s	M	Journalist	Tibetan Buddhist	NA
Gelugpa	Tibetan	Early 40s	M	Journalist	Tibetan Buddhist	NA
Gelugpa	Tibetan	Mid-20s	F	Graduate student	Tibetan Buddhist	NA
Gelugpa	Tibetan	Early 40s	M	Director of thangka painting and Tibetan cultural centre	Tibetan Buddhist	NA
Shakyapa	Tibetan	Late 30s	M	Monk and documentary maker	Tibetan Buddhist	NA
Gelugpa	Han-Mongolian	Early 40s	M	Thangka painting student	Atheist/agnostic	10+ years
Nyingmapa	Tibetan	27	M	Thangka painting student	Tibetan Buddhist	NA

Gelugpa	Tibetan	Early 40s	M	Writer	Tibetan Buddhist	NA
Nyingmapa	Han	45	F	Hostel manager	Atheist/agnostic	4 years

Location: Dechen

Affiliation	Ethnicity	Age	Gender	Profession	Religious Background	Years Practicing
Gelugpa	Tibetan	Mid-40s	M	Stay-home monk	Tibetan Buddhist	13 years
Gelugpa	Tibetan	Late 40s	M	Stay-home monk	Tibetan Buddhist	13 years

Location: Lijiang

Affiliation	Ethnicity	Age	Gender	Profession	Religious Background	Years Practicing
Gelugpa	Naxi	Late 40s	M	Vegetarian restaurant manger	Atheist/agnostic	5 years
Karma Kagyu	Naxi	23	M	Monk	Tibetan Buddhist	NA
Karma Kagyu	Naxi	Early 20s	M	Stay-home monk	Chinese Buddhist	8 years
Karma Kagyu	Tibetan	Mid-40s	M	Lama	Tibetan Buddhist	NA

Location: Hong Kong

Affiliation	Ethnicity	Age	Gender	Profession	Religious Background	Years Practicing
Karma Kagyu	Bhutanese	Mid-50s	M	Lama	Tibetan Buddhist	NA
Karma Kagyu	Tibetan	Early 60s	M	Lama	Tibetan Buddhist	NA
Nyingmapa	Tibetan	Early 70s	M	Lama	Tibetan Buddhist	NA
Karma Kagyu	Han	55	F	Housewife	'Popular' Chinese Buddhist	12 years
Karma Kagyu	Han	Mid-50s	M	Office worker	Catholic; no belief	2-3 years
Nyingma-	Han	Early-	M	Office worker	Catholic	Not

Karma Kagyu		30s				available
Nyingma-Karma Kagyu	Han	Early-30s	F	University Lecturer	Protestant	3 years
Karma Kagyu	Han	Early 40s	F	Office worker	'Popular' Chinese religion	Not available
Karma Kagyu	Nepalese Tibetan	Late 30s	M	Lama	Tibetan Buddhist	NA
Karma Kagyu	Bhutanese	Early 40s	M	Lama	Tibetan Buddhist	NA
Karma Kagyu	Han	Late 40s	M	Office worker	Catholic; Daoist; New-Age	Not available
Nyingmapa	Han	Mid-forties	M	Office worker	Catholic education – non-religious	15 years
Nyingmapa	Han	Early 40s	M	Office worker	Not available	10 years
Not available	Han	Mid-40s	M	Gongfu Master and teacher	Not available	Not available
Nyingmapa	Han	Mid-30s	F	Office worker	'Popular' Chinese religion	Not available
Nyingmapa	Han	Mid-20s	M	University Student	Daoist	'Several years'
No affiliation (Chinese-Tibetan Buddhist)	Han	Mid-50s	M	Shop keeper	Chinese Buddhist	Not available
Christian-Buddhist	Han	Mid-50s	M	Security Guard	Atheist/agnostic; Christian	Not available
Chinese Buddhist	Han	Mid-50s	F	Housewife	Chinese Buddhist	Not available
Chinese Buddhist	Han	80s	M	Chan Master	Chinese Buddhist	NA
Not available	Han	Mid-40s	M	Visiting Professor of Tibetan Buddhism	Not available	Not available

Location: Taiwan

Affiliation	Ethnicity	Age	Gender	Profession	Religious Background	Years Practicing
Karma Kagyu	Tibetan	Mid-40s	M	Rinpoche	Tibetan Buddhist	NA
Chinese Buddhist attending Tibetan Buddhist centre	Han	Mid-40s	M	Office worker	Chinese Buddhist	5 years (at Tibetan Buddhist centre)
Karma Kagyu	Han	Mid-40s	M	Pilot	Chinese Buddhist	3 years
Karma Kagyu	Han	Mid-40s	M	Lama	Not available	10 years
Nyingmapa	Han	60s	M	Dentist	Chinese Buddhist	35 years
Nyingmapa	Han	Mid-30s	M	Government Officer	'Popular' Chinese religion	Not available
Karma Kagyu	Han	Mid-40s	F	Insurance officer	Daoist?	10 years
Nyingmapa	Han	Mid-40s	F	Full time practitioner	Catholic	7 years
Shakyapa	Tibetan	Mid-40s	M	Director of Dalai Lama's Office in Taipei	Tibetan Buddhist	NA
Not available	Han	Mid-40s	M	Office worker	'Popular' Chinese religion	Not available
Nyingmapa	Han	40	F	Not available	Daoist	Not available
Nyingmapa	Han	Mid-30s	F	Not available	Chinese Buddhist	Not available
Nyingmapa	Han	Early 50s	M	Khenpo	Tibetan Buddhist	NA
Karma Kagyu	Han	Mid-50s	M	Tibetan artefact shopkeeper	'Popular' Chinese religion	Not available
Nyingmapa	Han	Mid-40s	M	Office worker	Atheist/agnostic	Not available
Nyingmapa	Han	Mid-40s	M	Office worker	'Popular' Chinese religion	Not available

Nyingmapa	Han	Early 30s	M	Lama	Tibetan Buddhist	NA
Karma Kagyu	Han	71	M	Retired	Not available	45 years

My method of choosing the above informants differed in the three main locations, depending, for the most part, on political sensitivity. In Hong Kong, I directly contacted different Tibetan Buddhist meditation centres, explained my research project, and asked to interview the resident lamas/monks, which led to contact with Han practitioners and further subsequent interviews. Participation in different ritual ceremonies also enabled me to both observe various practices, and to meet with new informants whom I would speak with informally and/or interview formally. In Taiwan, I employed a similar method. In both Hong Kong and Taiwan, my contacts grew through key informants at each centre. Other methods of finding informants in Hong Kong involved randomly interviewing individuals who openly displayed an interest in Tibetan Buddhism – e.g. by displaying videos of Tibetan lamas giving empowerments outside their shops. In mainland China, most of my contacts were formed through a handful of key informants in Beijing and Gyalthang, who were Han and Tibetan writers and/or journalists. Therefore, many of their friends whom they introduced to me were likewise writers, artists, and/or journalists. However, they also introduced me to entrepreneurs such as managers of hostels and vegetarian restaurants.

I also used random methods of selection in mainland China, interviewing shop keepers at Tibetan artefact shops in Beijing and practitioners/Tibetan monks in the courtyards of Yonghegong Lama Temple in Beijing. Likewise, in Gyalthang, I sometimes randomly initiated conversations with Tibetans or Han at restaurants/coffee shops, which led to formal interviews. Thus, I used a ‘snowball’ research method, interviewing a wide base of informants from varying backgrounds to obtain a wide range of perspectives and ideas amongst Han and other ethnic practitioners concerning Tibetan Buddhism in Greater China. Through this wide base, I discovered recurring trends in the dominant age, affiliation, prior affiliation, and socio-economic status of informants (some of which is revealed in the table above), and related trends in the ways informants understood Tibetan Buddhism. While the above methods of locating practitioners allowed me to come in contact with a wide range of people, the types of informants interviewed in each location are sometimes similar, as a number of them were

‘handpicked’ by key informants. This thesis is therefore representative of clusters of practitioners in each location, and examines some of the similarities and differences between these clusters in each location. It cannot account for all practitioners in each location.

As part of this ‘snowballing’ method of research, I employed a standard set of questions during the interview process, which were altered from time to time to provide greater clarity, or were eliminated if they were not clearly understood by informants. While some of the questions were specific, others were deliberately ambiguous in order to elicit what the informant him/herself thought about a particular issue. Many of the questions directed at Tibetan religious leaders concerned their Han followers, while most of the questions for Han followers were about their own practice and understanding of Tibetan Buddhism. As the role that Guan Gong has assumed in the Karma Kagyu school of Tibetan Buddhism (explored in Chapter Three) became apparent, my questions quickly evolved around this god’s multifaceted representations of Chinese religious culture and new superscriptions which the Karmapa Lama has recently layered upon him. Thus, Han practitioners were questioned about their ideas concerning Guan Gong himself, the facets of Chinese culture which he represents, and the relationship of these to their faith. These facets included: Confucianism, ‘popular’ Chinese religious practices, environmental protection, and ghosts. Each of these facets of Chinese culture and their hybridisation with Tibetan Buddhism are ‘snapshots’ of the many ways in which Tibetan Buddhism is being adapted to become relevant to Chinese society. Due to the wide scope of these topics, this thesis is necessarily a condensed, preliminary exploration.

Apart from the limited scope of the socioeconomic background of practitioners represented in this thesis, as mentioned above, I have also focused my attention – outside of urban China – on a ‘Tibetan’ area that is not considered very ‘Tibetan’ even by local Tibetans themselves – Diqing Tibetan Autonomous Prefecture. This Prefecture is now famous for ecotourism, and has always been a melting pot of inter-ethnic trade and cultural exchange. For example, various Han traditions have become common among Tibetans in the area, such as burial practices involving exhumation, alongside Tibetan methods of body disposal (e.g. ‘sky burial’). Yet I believe for the very reason that this area is a meeting place of Han and Tibetan cultures that it is a suitable location to discuss cultural hybridity, particularly in relation to the recent in-pouring of Han tourists/‘pilgrims’, the growing discourse of environmental protection under eco-/mass-

tourism schemes, and the interaction of these with local religion. Diqing is also a suitable location for exploring some of the ways in which Tibet and Tibetans are imagined among Han Chinese and Tibetans themselves, especially after the Diqing Prefectural government successfully won a bid to change the name of Zhongdian County to Shangri-la County (*Xianggelila*) in 2001. This name change and the subsequent ‘reconstruction’ of the old prefectural capital of Gyalthang (Mand – Zhongdian) was based on ‘evidence’ supporting the idea that the Shangri-la described in Hilton’s 1933 novel *Lost Horizon* was located here. Hilton’s novel describes a Tibetan monastery called Shangri-la, which is set in the peaceful and picturesque surroundings of the Valley of the Blue Moon. The keepers of this monastery (amongst whom is a ‘High Lama’ – a Capuchian monk from Luxembourg) who govern this valley also safeguard ‘civilisation’ from the looming threats of war.⁶⁴ ‘Evidence’ to support the idea that Zhongdian County was the location upon which Hilton based his novel was gathered by more than forty academics from Yunnan and other Chinese provinces. They concluded that Kawa Karpo Mountain in Dechen County (Mand – Deqin) (adjacent to Zhongdian County) was the same ‘Mount Karkel’ described in Hilton’s novel, and that the surrounding area matched his description of the Valley of the Blue Moon. Moreover, there were three rivers crisscrossing the region (the Nu, Mekong, and Golden Sand (*Jinsha*)), also described in Hilton’s novel, and an American transport plane had crashed in the area, which was showcased as evidence that the plane crash described in the novel did in fact occur in this area.⁶⁵ Given this popular Han and Tibetan imagining of Diqing Tibetan Autonomous Prefecture, and subsequent efforts to ‘preserve’ and enhance the image of the region as ‘Shangri-la’, I believe this region offers new insights – in relation to this imagining – into the practice of Tibetan Buddhism among Han and ethnic Tibetan practitioners living there that other Tibetan regions may not.

One may suggest that the Larung Buddhist Academy in Serthar County, Sichuan Province would be a more suitable place to investigate Han practice of Tibetan Buddhism – given the large number of Han practitioners of Tibetan Buddhism studying there – yet such an investigation may sacrifice the broader picture I have tried to explore in Diqing regarding the overlap of Tibetan Buddhism with the discourse of environmental protection (discussed in Chapter Six) and the related imagining of Han and Tibetans – particularly Han and ethnic Tibetan practitioners of Tibetan Buddhism –

⁶⁴ Kolas, A, p. 5.

⁶⁵ Ibid, p. 6.

concerning Tibet, Tibetans, and Tibetan Buddhism. On a more practical level, the investigation of Tibetan Buddhism among Han practitioners in mainland China in any context is a sensitive issue, and all the more so in the recently volatile environment of parts of Sichuan Province; Diqing Tibetan Autonomous Prefecture provided a less politically sensitive Tibetan area in which to carry out research. Moreover, the Han practitioners residing in Gyalthang had often studied for some time at the Larung Buddhist Academy or other Tibetan Buddhist monasteries in Sichuan or Qinghai, and therefore may represent some of the views of other Han practitioners at these institutes and monasteries.

I have chosen the three main locations explored in this thesis because of the considerable difference between their socio-cultural, religious, and political contexts. Both Hong Kong and Taiwan have been colonised, but by different forces with different modes of governance and associated religious and cultural ‘baggage’. The mainland has never been fully colonised, but its citizens have experienced a form of ‘colonisation of consciousness’ (which, as argued earlier, has also been experienced in a different context in Hong Kong and Taiwan), instilled through the Party. Thus, all three locations have undergone some form of colonisation, and in all three locations there is a process of appropriation of dominant discourses and at some point an effort towards undermining them – in this case through the medium of Tibetan Buddhism. At the same time, understanding the divergences between these locations is of importance in investigating how Tibetan Buddhism is adapting to the specific conditions of each location.

Moreover, the three locations offered a different set of informants with different ways of approaching and practicing Tibetan Buddhism. In Hong Kong for example, informants spent hours after work and on Sunday at their meditation centres, while on the mainland, informants spent a large part or the majority of their day engrossed in meditation and rituals. The results gained from interviewing and observing these two sets of informants were therefore quite different at times. The differences in the political situation of each location also produced somewhat different results. For example, some informants in Taiwan were less inclined to endorse the possibility of a Confucian-Tibetan Buddhist collaboration, sometimes seeing Confucianism as a means for control, likely drawn from their experience of state-led Confucianism in Taiwan prior to democratisation. A number of informants on the mainland, on the other hand, were more embracive of the Confucian-influenced ‘Harmonious Society’ propagated by the CPC, perhaps because it

is seen as less radical than previous CPC policies, and because it accords with a number of mainland practitioners' 'search for roots' in Chinese traditions.

Tibetan Buddhist monastic informants in all three locations were also from different places and ethnic origins. For example, in Hong Kong a number of lamas and monks were from Bhutan and the rest were Tibetans from India, while there appeared to be none from the Tibetan areas within mainland China due to travelling restrictions. In Taiwan, most were exiled Tibetans from India and Nepal, while a few were Han Chinese. On the mainland, the majority were from the Tibetan areas inside China. The exposure of these lamas and monks to different modernist discourses in each location, as well as the varying lifestyles and thought of Han practitioners in these locations has resulted in different methods for making Tibetan Buddhism relevant to these practitioners. Therefore, research results obtained from interviewing monks and lamas in each location varied to a degree. At the same time, most of the lamas and monks I interviewed in all three locations had been widely exposed to transnational Tibetan Buddhist movements, and often appropriated from these movements in their propagation of Tibetan Buddhism among Han practitioners. Han practitioners on the mainland were also able to access pirated books, DVDs, and other media which propagate the message of transnational Tibetan masters such as Mingyur Rinpoche, Sogyal Rinpoche, the Karmapa Lama, the Dalai Lama, and others.

While the investigation of the adaptation of Tibetan Buddhism to Greater China as opposed to only the mainland is of importance given the current interconnectivity of these three locations as well as their divergent socio-cultural, religious and political contexts, such a wide scope for investigation also means I have been unable to divide my attention evenly between these locations throughout the thesis. Given the fact that I represent the views of informants on the mainland in both Beijing and Yunnan Province (in particular, Diqing Tibetan Autonomous Prefecture) – and thus half of the informants represented in this thesis – I have found it necessary to represent the mainland to a greater extent than I have represented Taiwan and Hong Kong. However, I have devoted two chapters focusing more specifically on Taiwan and Hong Kong (Chapters Three and Five, respectively), and where possible, I have offered three-way or at least two-way comparisons between the three main locations.

My analysis is primarily based on interviews and observer-participation in Hong Kong, Taipei, Beijing, Gyalthang (Mand - *Zhongdian*, also called Shangrila (*Xianggelila*) as of

2001), and Deqin (Tib - *Dechen*) (the latter two are in Diqing Tibetan Autonomous Prefecture, Yunnan Province), with some focus on Lijiang (Lijiang City, Yunnan Province). A total of more than eighty, mainly formal interviews were conducted in these locations during six months of research from April to September, 2011. The time spent in the three main locations in which research was carried out (Hong Kong, Taiwan and the mainland) was roughly evenly divided between the mainland and Hong Kong, with a month less in Taiwan. While it would have been optimal to conduct research for an extended period of time, especially on the mainland and in Taiwan, visa restrictions and inadequate finance kept this from happening. However, I was able, through key contacts, to quickly establish ties with a wide and varied group of practitioners in each location, and thus carry out intensive rounds of interviews in a shorter period of time than would usually be required. Participation in religious activities included joining various pujas⁶⁶ and dharma talks at different meditation centres, private homes, or public venues, and participating in life releases (*fangsheng*⁶⁷).

The language used in ethnographic fieldwork was *Putonghua*⁶⁸ in mainland China and in Taiwan, and Cantonese/English in Hong Kong. While I am fairly proficient in both *Putonghua* and Cantonese, my wife who is fluent in both helped with translation. Where relevant, I have included pronunciation in both *Putonghua* and Cantonese. While being able to speak in Tibetan with Tibetan informants would have been ideal, most lamas and monks spoke *Putonghua* due to their contact with Han followers, and middle-class lay Tibetans used *Putonghua* in their work environments with their Han colleagues. *Putonghua* thus served as a suitable lingua franca in Diqing Tibetan Autonomous Prefecture as well.

Having outlined the methodology used in this thesis, below I provide a brief overview of some relevant literature to the topic of this thesis.

⁶⁶ Roughly translated as a ritual chanting/prayer ceremony.

⁶⁷ Animals such as fish and frogs intended for slaughter are bought by Buddhists who believe the act of releasing them into the wild is a source of merit.

⁶⁸ An abbreviated form of 'Mandarin' (i.e. 'Mand') is used throughout this thesis when reference is made to a word or phrase in *Putonghua* for convenience.



Photo 1: *Fangsheng* (life release) ceremony for frogs in mainland China.

Key Sources on Tibetan Buddhism in Greater China

Little academic research to date has focused on Tibetan Buddhism within contemporary Han communities, and thus the following list is succinct. The most recent and comprehensive investigation of Tibetan Buddhism among contemporary Han practitioners in mainland China, to my knowledge, is Dan Smyer-Yü's book, *The Spread of Tibetan Buddhism in China: Charisma, Money, Enlightenment*, released in 2012.⁶⁹ This book is especially focused on Tibetan Buddhist revivals in Sichuan and Qinghai Provinces, and examines the 'intricate entanglements of [these] Buddhist revivals with cultural identity, state ideology, and popular imagination of Tibetan Buddhist spirituality in contemporary China', and the 'broader sociocultural implications of such revivals'.⁷⁰ Smyer-Yü shows how the revival of Tibetan Buddhism in mainland China is closely connected to forces of globalisation, modernity, the politics of religion, indigenous identity reclamation, and the market economy.⁷¹

⁶⁹ Smyer-Yü, D, 2012.

⁷⁰ Book description, *ibid.*

⁷¹ *Ibid.*

There are thus certain parallels between Smyer-Yü's work and my own, yet they diverge at important points. Smyer-Yü focuses more on Han pilgrimage to the Tibetan areas, with less emphasis on the practice of Tibetan Buddhism amongst urban Han practitioners. This thesis, in comparison, focuses more equally on both urbanite Han practitioners and Han practitioners living in a Tibetan area, as opposed to pilgrims who stay for shorter periods. In contrast to Han pilgrims who may form 'enclaves' around their Tibetan masters as Smyer-Yü observes, Han practitioners *living* in the Tibetan areas seem to more often go alone and hence their experience of Tibetan culture and religion differs to an extent from that of pilgrims.

Moreover, Smyer-Yü's focus is on mainland China, while mine is also on Hong Kong and Taiwan and the somewhat different experiences of practitioners there compared to those on the mainland due to the different socio-cultural and political contexts of these respective locations. My work also differs from Smyer-Yü's in that this thesis focuses on the hybridisation of traditional Chinese cultural elements with Tibetan Buddhism, as well as the wider modernising context in which this hybridisation occurs, while Smyer-Yü's work focuses more on the latter. I argue that traditional Chinese ideas, beliefs and practices, even on the mainland, have not been completely smothered by 'rationalising' influences, and are still relevant for our understanding of Tibetan Buddhism in Greater China. Nevertheless, despite differences in analysis, the insights of Smyer-Yü's work are invaluable to this thesis, and I have drawn considerably from his work to complement my own.

The only other relatively recent work, to my knowledge, which mentions in passing the practice of Tibetan Buddhism among contemporary mainland Han Chinese practitioners is David Germano's chapter 'Re-membering the Dismembered Body of Tibet: Contemporary Tibetan Visionary Movements in the People's Republic of China' in *Buddhism in Contemporary Tibet: Religious Revival and Cultural Identity*, edited by Melvyn Goldstein and Matthew Kapstein.⁷² Germano makes passing reference to Chinese monks at the Larung Buddhist Academy, noting that some were considered to be highly accomplished practitioners, yet perceives that many Han monks studying there looked down upon lay Tibetans with 'an attitude of cultural superiority and separation'.⁷³ He does acknowledge, however, that the phenomenon of *Ter* (revealing

⁷²Goldstein, M.C., & Kapstein, M.T. (eds.), *Buddhism in Contemporary Tibet: Religious Revival and Cultural Identity*, Berkeley, University of California Press, 1998.

⁷³ Germano is specifically referring here to Chinese monks. See Germano, D, pp. 68 & 91.

sacred ‘treasure’ such as statues, ritual items and scriptures buried in the landscape of Tibet) as propagated by Khenpo Jigme Phuntsok attracted many Han followers, some of whom left Chinese traditional religious practices to study under him; Germano sees here a reversal in the ‘standard Han dismissal of ‘dirty, barbaric Tibetans’, [which] even raises the possibility of [Tibetan] cultural superiority, at least in some respects.’⁷⁴ Apart from these passing references, Germano makes no other comments about Han followers of Tibetan Buddhism.

To my knowledge there are no other major works on contemporary Han practice of Tibetan Buddhism on the mainland, although I have heard of several works in progress on Han pilgrimage to the Tibetan areas. Some work on Tibetan Buddhism in contemporary Taiwan has been published, such as Abraham Zablocki’s chapter ‘The Taiwanese Connection: Politics, Piety, and Patronage in Transnational Tibetan Buddhism’ in the 2009 book *Buddhism Between Tibet and China*, edited by Matthew Kapstein.⁷⁵ While most of this book is comprised of articles about the historical appropriation and adaptation of Tibetan Buddhism within the mainland Chinese context – beginning from the Tang Dynasty (618-907) and leading up to the early twentieth century – only Zablocki’s chapter focuses on the recent adaptation of Tibetan Buddhism to Chinese society in Taiwan, although the main focus of his chapter is on the 1997 visit by the Dalai Lama to the island and implications for Taiwanese-mainland relations, Tibetan Buddhism in Taiwan, and Taiwan’s input in both diasporic and Western Tibetan Buddhist communities. His chapter and the book are nevertheless valuable to this thesis for comparing the historical context of Tibetan Buddhism in China with the contemporary situation in Greater China.

Another major work on Tibetan Buddhism in Taiwan is Li Xiang Yao’s book *Tibetan Buddhism in Taiwan (Zangchuan Fojiao Zai Taiwan)*, published in 2007.⁷⁶ Yao’s work focuses on both the development of Tibetan Buddhism in Taiwan over a sixty-year period (up to the present) and the various problems practitioners and the Tibetan religious elite face in practicing and preaching the dharma on the island, respectively. Some of these problems are problems which are discussed in my own work. Practitioners are sometimes too busy; they may be more interested in practical benefits than the deeper truths of the Tibetan tradition; and they may also see tantric practices as

⁷⁴ Ibid, p. 91.

⁷⁵ Zablocki, A, 2009, a.

⁷⁶ Yao, LX, *Zangchuan Fojiao Zai Taiwan* (藏传佛教在台湾), 台北市 (Tai Bei shi), 东大 (Dong Da), 2007.

a ‘fast-track’ to enlightenment. The Tibetan religious elite, on the other hand, may face difficulty preaching the dharma due to the language barrier; difficulties in obtaining long-term residency visas; and competition from charlatan Tibetan masters or Han imposters, who taint the reputation of the Tibetan tradition. Some of the themes Yao explores in her work are particularly similar to those I explore in Chapter Five concerning the interests of a number of Hong Kong practitioners in fulfilling mundane concerns. In Chapter Five I have only focused on a two-way comparison between Hong Kong and mainland practitioners. Due to space and to the fact that Yao’s work already examines similar issues in Taiwan, I have not focused on Taiwan in Chapter Five.

There are other works by both Taiwanese and foreign researchers on Tibetan Buddhism in Taiwan, yet these mainly concern historical connections and/or deal with textual translations, hybrid forms of art and architecture, and so forth.⁷⁷

Another major work on Tibetan Buddhism in modern China is Gray Tuttle’s book *Tibetan Buddhists in the Making of Modern China*, which explores the role of Buddhism and Buddhist leaders in the making of the Chinese modern nation-state, and their role in developing and maintaining relations between Tibet and China during the Republican era (1912-1949) and up to the early years of the Communist regime. Tuttle’s examination of the role of Chinese monks in the spread of Tibetan Buddhism in China, and certain adaptations which they brought to the Tibetan tradition within the Chinese context provides interesting historical parallels and contrasts to the contemporary situation explored in this thesis. Tuttle’s work differs from my own in that – apart from looking at a different era – it examines the interests of monastic Chinese Buddhists in Tibetan Buddhism, rather than lay interests (although elsewhere he does examine the contribution of lay Han Chinese translators of Tibetan texts during the Republican and early Communist eras⁷⁸), which is the concern of my thesis. Moreover, his above book is focused on the political implications of Sino-Tibetan Buddhist relations, while I do not focus in much detail on politics.

⁷⁷ See for example some of the topics discussed at the conference ‘Tibetan Buddhism in France and in Taiwan: Tradition, Adaptation and Transformation’ held on May 14, 2013, at the Société Européenne pour l’Etude des Civilisations de l’Himalaya et de l’Asie Centrale, <http://seechac.org/en/miscellaneousevents/tibetan-buddhism-in-france-and-in-taiwan-tradition-adaptation-and-transformation/> [accessed 19/11/2013]

⁷⁸ Tuttle, G, ‘Translating Buddhism from Tibetan to Chinese in Early-Twentieth-Century China (1931-1951)’, in Kapstein, M.T. (ed.), 2009.

Chapter Two

Symbols, Religion and the Hybrid in Greater China: Han Tibetan Buddhist Contestation and Negotiation within the Discourses of the Dominant

Introduction

This chapter seeks to establish the theoretical framework of the thesis by examining a critical approach to hybridity theory and how the theory is used in this thesis. It begins with an overview of the theory, presenting some of its drawbacks, followed by a defence of the theory in response to these. It then looks at how we may use the theory of hybridity in Greater China, given its evolution from postcolonial studies, and the very different type of colonisation Greater China has experienced compared with colonial India, for example. It is suggested that Mayfair Yang's re-deployment of postcolonial theory for China may be relevant to the task at hand, in contrast to the usual Western-centric focus of postcolonial studies, by looking at how the Chinese elite – in mainland China in particular – enthusiastically adopted select Enlightenment values to promote an iconoclastic, top-down attack on Chinese traditions. The narrow utilisation of Enlightenment values in mainland China has had tremendous influence on the wider population and has led to a 'colonisation of consciousness', despite the fact that colonisation by the West has not taken place there in the way that it did in places such as India. This chapter seeks to expand Yang's understanding of a 'colonisation of consciousness' on the mainland to the contexts of Taiwan and Hong Kong, for reasons that will be explored later in this chapter. It further seeks to ask how Han Tibetan Buddhists, who are not exempt from this 'colonisation of consciousness', appropriate dominant 'rational' discourses of the state, an education system, or forms of Humanistic Buddhism, and still find a voice through a creative deployment of these discourses.

Following the defence of a critical theory of hybridity and its potential use in studying Greater China, the final section of this chapter shows how this theory is specifically employed to examine the topic of the thesis, and sets the scene for discussion in Chapter Three. This section explores Duara's model of the 'superscription of symbols' within the context of a critical theory of hybridity, and how we may employ it in discussing the

wider superscription of Tibetan Buddhism in Greater China. Duara argues that although symbols inevitably change according to historic circumstances, they carry a certain resonance for societies and individuals at different historic junctures, and thus retain their relevance because of this continuity. Inevitably, a hybrid layering of superscriptions evolves, within which symbols carry multiple meanings for different actors built on certain continuities, which are however contested and negotiated due to the different interests of those who appropriate these symbols. There is thus contestation over how symbols should be superscribed and by whom. Taking, as does Duara, the figure of Guandi (referred to by his popular appellation – Guan Gong – in this thesis) as the central symbol for discussion of the superscription of symbols, this chapter seeks to examine the similar manner in which Tibetan Buddhism is being superscribed by both Han practitioners and the Tibetan religious elite, and how these superscriptions are being contested and negotiated within the context of dominant ‘rational’ discourses in the three main locations under study.

Hybridity and Essentialism

Hybridity theory, which draws fundamentally from postcolonial studies and theories of the subaltern, is useful for breaking down the essentialist and normative nature of cultural identities that are presented as whole and complete, as well as ‘whole-scale’ theories into their components, and demonstrating that however homogenous and hegemonic certain processes seem (such as globalisation and modernisation), they are, without exception, hybrid. That is, they do not progress in a linear, penetrative manner; the exchange is multidirectional and interpenetrative. Hybridity theory is thus anti-establishment in so far as the establishment exaggerates cultural, racial, religious, and other differences between groups. Theorists such as Homi Bhabha use this theory to give voice to the subaltern who undermines dominant discourse, by positing a ‘third space’ which undercuts implicit and explicit forms of essentialism, by depriving ‘the imposed imperialist culture, not only of the authority that it has for so long imposed politically, often through violence, but even its own claims of authenticity.’⁷⁹

As briefly described in Chapter One, a critical hybridity theory is used in this thesis to de-essentialise the highly essentialised topics of Tibet, Tibetans and Tibetan Buddhism in Greater China and the world in general. While it is a valuable theory for its ability to

⁷⁹ Bhabha, H, cited in Young, R, *Hybridity in Theory, Culture and Race*, London, Routledge, 1995, p. 23.

undercut essentialism and to examine the fluctuating third space that emerges as a result, it is not an unproblematic theory by any means. Before continuing my analysis, the most serious of these problems are addressed below, followed by a discussion of ways in which these problems may be mitigated to a degree.

Racialised Origins

While hybridity theory criticises essentialism which gives rise to discrimination and the ‘boundary fetishism’ of nation-states, it is important to acknowledge that this late modern celebration of non-essentialist hybridity is very different from the manner in which it was understood within the context of the late eighteenth, and throughout much of the nineteenth century. The use of the term ‘hybrid’ during the mid-nineteenth century in particular – drawing on debates regarding the nature of race that emerged before the American Civil War⁸⁰ – referred to a mixture of species. Two species evidently cannot produce offspring, and if they do somehow manage to, their offspring will be infertile. Such a theory was applied to races – that the mixing of some races in particular would produce infertile offspring. This was built upon the idea that races had developed along different lines of evolution as separate species (the polygenist view) and were thus at different stages of evolution. The other, contemporary view (the monogenist view), was that all races had originated from one human couple, Adam and Eve, and were thus of one blood, but certain races had degenerated since Creation.⁸¹

The more radical forms of these theories, as Kraidy observes, arose in response to anxieties of greater hybridity, both racial and cultural, that was encroaching on the colonised and ‘civilised’ world. During the eighteenth century interracial contact was on the increase as a result of colonial conquest and the displacement of populations in Britain, France, and the US.⁸² Fear of ‘contamination’ and subsequent decline of ‘white power’ was increasing, and these theories arose, to a large extent, to demonise interracial marriages/relationships and their offspring as transgressions of nature and/or select interpretations of Biblical doctrine. Darwin’s theory of evolution, which did not specify whether the races had descended from one ancestor or from separate ancestors, also became the basis of racialised interpretations of degeneration or backwardness from the mid-nineteenth century on.⁸³ Others believed interracial mixing was important

⁸⁰ Young, R, pp. 8-9.

⁸¹ Ibid.

⁸² See Kraidy, M.M., ‘Hybridity in Cultural Globalization’, *Communication Theory*, vol. 12, no. 3, 2002, p. 319.

⁸³ Young, R, p. 13.

to slowly eradicate ‘backward’ races by assimilating them with the ‘progressive’ races, while some even believed the mixing of ‘white’ blood with that of an aboriginal population would produce greater fertility.⁸⁴ Accordingly, certain nation-states employed eugenics to slowly eliminate local indigenous populations, sometimes under the pretence of creating a ‘super race’, as was the case in Latin America.⁸⁵

Thus, while the theory of cultural hybridity, as it is employed by contemporary academics, is understood to be anti-establishment and anti-essentialising, its origins are rooted in policies of segregation, and/or assimilation. And it may (if not employed critically) celebrate mixing at the expense of minorities who seek greater separation from the majority to make their voices heard. This thesis does not deal with racial hybridity; instead the focus is on cultural hybridity. Therefore, the brief outline above will suffice as a critique of the origins of hybridity theory, and a brief response to this critique is provided shortly.

Elitist Detachment

In light of the way in which hybridity theory is often used to celebrate mixture without looking at the conflicting tensions that are a part of this mixing process, critics of hybridity theory argue that it is a theory for ‘the elite only’, a ‘confetti culture [which] ignores fundamental cleavages that exist on the ground.’⁸⁶ In other words, it tends to ignore the implications of power in the process of hybridisation, and celebrates mixing, without revealing the tensions or points of conflict which sometimes inform this process. Academics in ivory towers may discuss processes of hybridisation as if from a detached, unaffected position, but ‘on the ground’ people face forced assimilation, uprooting and resettlement with people of another culture with whom they have little in common, or with whom they may even have irreconcilable differences. Others facing persecution seek refuge in a new country where they are forced to learn another language, adapt to another culture and assume menial employment.⁸⁷

Hybridity thus suffers from the same problems as theories of cosmopolitanism. One who is a cosmopolitan supposedly can relate to many different cultures around the world because of one’s occupation (such as a businessman who travels widely) and

⁸⁴ Ibid, pp. 144 -145.

⁸⁵ Kraidy, M.M., p. 316.

⁸⁶ Nederveen Pieterse, J, 2001, cited in Engler, S, ‘Umbanda and Hybridity’, *Numen* 56, 2009, p. 552.

⁸⁷ Radhakrishnan, R., 1996, p. 174, cited in Kuortti, J, & Nyman, J (eds.), *Reconstructing Hybridity*, New York, Ropodi, 2007, p. 3.

connections with partners globally. To be cosmopolitan one must often be affluent, a position from which one can reflect upon one's own cosmopolitanism and how the world seems like a 'global village'. Critics of cosmopolitanism have argued, as they have against hybridity theory, that affluent, well-travelled individuals are vastly removed from those forced to uproot from their country and flee to the West where the fascination with a 'global village' is lost on them, as they struggle with cultural differences and related difficulties in finding work, new forms of marginalisation (often related to xenophobia), nostalgia for their home country, and numerous other problems.⁸⁸

Essentialist Non-Essentialism

Apart from its racially discriminatory roots, from which, according to Robert Young, it is fundamentally inseparable,⁸⁹ and its contemporary problem of understanding mixture as generally benign and desirable without taking into account some of the tortured paths of hybridity, another more fundamental problem is the way in which the theory of hybridity seems inescapably bound to the discourse of essentialism, even while it purports to de-essentialise. That is, while hybridity theory claims that everything is hybrid rather than essential, this claim is substantiated by assuming the ingredients being mixed are 'pure' themselves. In a truer form of hybridity, we would need to explore the *longue durée* of various traditions (if dealing with culture and/or religion), their interconnectivity with other traditions and political powers, and the agency of individuals with their own interpretations of these traditions (which would invariably be somewhat different from dominant interpretations), and so forth. And even then, we would be drawn back into further hybrid forms and would become entangled in a web of infinite 'impurity'. Thus, to make any sense of the process of mixing, we must posit the 'pure' as existing – a seemingly contradictory position to assume when advocating a theory about impurity.

There are other criticisms of hybridity theory (which are also often levelled against other related theories such as cosmopolitanism and multiculturalism), but I believe those represented above are the most serious challenges the theory must at least adequately respond to if it is to become useful for academic purposes. Below I provide some responses to the above criticisms.

⁸⁸ For more critique on Cosmopolitan theory see Calhoun, C., 'Cosmopolitanism in the modern social imaginary', *Daedalus*, vol. 137, no. 3, 2008, pp. 105-114.

⁸⁹ Young, R, p. 9.

Using ‘Digression’ against Essentialism

I believe, like Young, that we should not try to cover up the origins of hybridity theory, but must acknowledge its discriminatory past. At the same time, it seems unnecessarily restrictive to keep our definition of hybridity bound within its strictly biological use; such restriction proves detrimental when the main thrust of hybridity theory in contemporary academic circles is to undermine essentialist discourses, which have throughout history proven dangerous. And this undermining is achieved by employing the same ‘digressive’ nature of hybridity that it was perceived to embody in the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries – in a manner that undercuts the same type of dogmatic essentialism that proscribed racial mixing as digressive in the first place.

Using Tibetan Buddhist teaching for a moment (teaching that I propose – despite the link with hybridity theory that I am making here being entirely artificial and for analogical purposes only – makes the use of hybridity theory especially pertinent to understanding the interaction of Tibetan Buddhism with Chinese society), we may turn the discriminatory past of hybridity theory from ‘foe’ to ‘friend’. Tibetan Buddhist teaching encourages the practitioner to meditate every day upon death and to turn the inevitability of death and suffering to one’s own advantage, to become resolute in obtaining liberation from the cycle of death and rebirth, and to free others as well. It also encourages the practitioner to embrace an enemy’s hatred with compassion, and to turn that hatred into merit. And perhaps most symbolically useful for our analogy here – it is believed that local deities and spirits in Tibet were, rather than being destroyed, transformed by Guru Rinpoche (Padmasambhava – eighth century) into protectors of the dharma, some of which even became enlightened. In a similar way, the theories of polygenists, monogenists, and social Darwinians in regards to the ‘hybrid’ were indeed racially discriminatory, yet they are easily turned to our advantage.

In retrospect, we can see how the procreating mixed populations of the Caribbean and Latin America had already transgressed the ‘law’ that ‘species’ could not reproduce, thus making their offspring ‘mongrels’ (following the terminology employed at the time for mixed races, as opposed to mixed species) rather than ‘hybrids’.⁹⁰ As Nederveen Pieterse observes,

⁹⁰ To keep racialised theories of hybridity alive in light of evidence that ‘hybrids’ were able to reproduce, it was proposed that infertility lay dormant in ‘hybrid’ descendents until the fourth or fifth generation, after which it would reassert itself. Evidently there was no way to prove this theory without waiting for fourth or fifth generation descendents to be born and consequently attempt reproduction.

...the mestizo is the personification of the dialectics of empire and emancipation. No wonder that in the age of empire the mestizo was dreaded as a monster, an infertile hybrid, an impossibility: subversive of the foundations of empire and race. The mestizo is the living testimony of an attraction that is being repressed on both sides of the frontier. The mestizo is proof that East and West did meet and that there is humanity on either side.⁹¹

It is this transgressive nature of hybridity theory that I believe is useful for understanding how certain processes may both work in tandem with, as well as against, supposedly homogenising processes. For example, globalisation does not occur in a unidirectional way, absorbing and assimilating local cultures into a homogenous whole (sometimes referred to as ‘McDonaldisation’). Rather, it is reworked according to local conditions and then re-presented to the world. Similarly, as opposed to Giddens, I believe – along with Nederveen Pieterse – that modernity is not only a Western phenomenon that ‘Westernises’ the rest of the world; instead, local agents turn or ‘rework’⁹² the discourse of modernity to their own situations and deploy it for their own means.⁹³ Thus, hybridity theory, when understood in this way, can lead to a much clearer articulation of events than the ‘whole-scale’ theories of globalisation, modernisation, westernisation, and so forth. Not only does the West not take over local cultures and globalise its own culture throughout the world without contestation; nor is the ‘subaltern’ the only one ‘talking back’. The process of hybridity is a dialectical (albeit uneven) process that ‘breeds’ and ‘reproduces’ in an infinite number of ways.

As explored throughout the thesis, this transgressive nature of hybridity theory is useful in understanding the way in which seemingly irreconcilable ‘traditional’ Tibetan Buddhist ideas, beliefs and practices, and ‘rational’ discourses of modernity can be merged together, and how ‘this worldly’ Chinese beliefs, practices and ideologies can be amalgamated with the soteriological message of the Tibetan religious elite. Moreover, this transgressiveness reveals how transnational and global forces at work in the spread of Tibetan Buddhism in contemporary Greater China do not consume local understandings of Tibetan Buddhism, but instead are negotiated with the latter by Han

⁹¹ Nederveen Pieterse, J, 1989, pp. 360-1, cited in Nederveen Pieterse, J, ‘Hybridity, So What?’, *Theory, Culture & Society*, vol. 18, no. 2-3, 2001, p. 226.

⁹² As Nederveen Pieterse notes, Pred and Watts (1992) use the term ‘reworking modernity’, which gives greater agency to the actors involved. ‘Re-making’ is another similarly effective term. See Nederveen Pieterse, J, ‘Hybrid Modernities: Mélange Modernities in Asia’, *Sociological Analysis*, vol. 1, no. 3, 1998, p. 79.

⁹³ Nederveen Pieterse, J, *Globalization and Culture: Global Mélange*, Lanham, Rowman & Littlefield Publishers, 2009, p. 11.

practitioners and the Tibetan elite (and, as is explored in certain instances in this thesis – lay Tibetans and other ethnic minority Chinese) to form a contested third space.

Critical, Intercontextual Hybridity

In response to the second critique of hybridity theory mentioned above – that only academics and other advantaged elites can appreciate hybridity's anti-homogenous traits and celebrate the variety of difference it produces – I believe it is for this reason that we should critically examine the processes of hybridity within an intercontextual framework rather than simply celebrate the outcomes of these processes or smooth over their sometimes conflicting nature.⁹⁴ In order to adopt a more critical view of hybridity, we must explore the full range of variables available to us when examining broad ideas such as globalisation and modernisation, to avoid robbing subjects of agency, and at the same time to acknowledge that power from 'the top down', as well as horizontal power, does affect the way in which hybridisation plays out.⁹⁵ As Kraidy notes, an intercontextual theory of hybridity would focus on the 'mutually constitutive interplay and overlap of cultural, economic, and political forces' and would 'examine the relationship between structure and agency as a dialectical articulation whose results are not preordained.'⁹⁶

⁹⁴ It is the conflicting points of hybridity that Bhabha (in the postcolonial context in particular) believes we should examine:

The postcolonial perspective resists attempts at holistic forms of social explanation. I question the traditional liberal attempt to negotiate a coming together of minorities on the basis of what they have in common and what is consensual. In my writing, I've been arguing against the multiculturalist notion that you can put together harmoniously any number of cultures in a pretty mosaic. You cannot just solder together different cultural traditions to produce some brave new cultural totality. The current phase of economic and social history makes you aware of cultural difference not at the celebratory level of diversity but always at the point of conflict or crisis. See Bhabha, H, 'Art and National Identity: A Critics' Symposium', Interview with Brian Ballis, *Art in America*, 79.9 (Sept. 1991), p. 82, cited in Huddart, D, 'Hybridity and Cultural Rights: Inventing Global Citizenship', in Kuortti, J, & Nyman, J (eds.), *Reconstructing Hybridity: Post-Colonial Studies in Transition*, New York, Ropodi, 2007, p. 21.

⁹⁵ Garcia-Canclini, cited in Kraidy, M, recognises that it is important to understand horizontal power relations as well as vertical, often confrontational power relations in the processes of hybridisation:

The increase in processes of hybridization makes it evident that we understand very little about power if we only examine confrontations and vertical actions. Power would not function if it were exercised only by bourgeoisie over proletarians, whites over indigenous people, parents over children, the media over receivers. Since all these relations are interwoven with each other, each one achieves an effectiveness that it would never be able to by itself. See Garcia-Canclini, N, p. 259, cited in Kraidy, M.M., 2002, p. 333.

⁹⁶ Kraidy, M.M., p. 333.

I have attempted to employ these ideas of ‘mutually constitutive interplay and overlap’ and ‘dialectical articulation’ throughout the thesis in regards to the different themes at hand. Both lay practitioners and religious elite are the focus throughout the thesis, and their views are quoted in their own words as much as possible, to avoid silencing their voices with only my own observations. Taken into account throughout are the background ‘rationalist’ discourses of Chinese Marxism on the mainland, the Christian education system in Hong Kong, and Humanistic Buddhism (*renjian fojiao*) in Taiwan, which were both appropriated and undermined by informants.⁹⁷ The influence of ‘popular’ Chinese religion in all three locations is also acknowledged where relevant. Further, glocalisation (a global/local hybrid process) and translocalisation are explored in regards to the manner in which Tibetan Buddhism, as seen in the lives and views of some informants, has sometimes left Greater China, ventured overseas and returned to be mixed once more with local ideas and re-represented to the world (a process which may be termed ‘circularity’⁹⁸). Moreover, in each chapter, the historical context in which the themes are rooted is briefly explored or at least introduced, in order to contextualise the themes within the *longue durée*, rather than simply produce them from the present as floating ideas, beliefs and practices that can hybridise at will.

Thus, as opposed to the theory of liberalism, which would have us believe that individuals shape their own identities freely, without inhibition from culture,⁹⁹ the theory of hybridity as employed within this thesis makes it clear that individuals are intimately connected to place/s, to people/s, to culture/s, and thus to their collective historical context. There is essentially no such thing as the ‘atomised individual’, for – again borrowing from Buddhist theory – each individual is the sum of the five aggregates, or in purely scientific terms at the microscopic level – his/her atoms. If the individual is a dependent organism within him/herself, he/she is even more dependent on his/her environment, society, government, nation, and – especially in the present age – his/her world. And the sum of these dependencies through which the individual exists are based on the historical circumstances which have brought about their existence. Thus, those informants who identify themselves as Han Tibetan Buddhists in Greater China do so within a framework that they both actively construct, and have constructed

⁹⁷ These are the dominant discourses in these three locations from which informants drew. There is evidently an overlap of these discourses in certain instances in the three locations.

⁹⁸ Burke, P, *Cultural Hybridity*, Cambridge, Polity, 2009, p. 96.

⁹⁹ Hall, S, Interview with Werbner, P [online video], 2006, <http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=fBfPtRaGZPM> [accessed 21/10/2012].

for them. To understand the construction of this framework, as far as possible, this thesis takes all the aforementioned variables into consideration.

Theorising a 'Pure' Impurity

But how do we talk about an attack on essentialism without positing some form of initial 'purity' going into the hybrid mix? Obviously we cannot. Yet it appears imperative we temporarily do so for pragmatic, if not theoretical reasons. As Nederveen Pieterse notes, citing Zbigniew Brzezinski, cited in Hirsch (1995), from 167 to 175 million lives have been claimed by politically-motivated genocide in the twentieth century alone;¹⁰⁰ the worldviews created through attachment to essentialisms such as nationalism, monoculturalism and ethnocentrism are thus potentially lethal. As Nederveen Pieterse observes, this death toll consists largely of 'hybrids', whether of a racial, cultural or political nature.¹⁰¹ This has occurred/is occurring because 'in-betweens' are seen to be dangerously Other. Even as the world is globalising and nations and peoples are becoming more interconnected through travel and the internet, and thus less attached, perhaps, to the nation-state, there seems even greater need for nation-states to assert their separateness even while they seek interconnectivity with the rest of the world. Such assertiveness inevitably requires greater policing of national borders and borders within nation states that quarter-off citizens into this or that essentialist category and keep everyone under control. As Nederveen Pieterse notes, there is nothing unusual or new about hybridity; its seeming uniqueness only becomes apparent in contrast to the borders set up to control and prevent it.¹⁰² What is relatively new (especially from the nineteenth century on) is the 'compartmentalised' view of the world which has become increasingly popular at the present time.¹⁰³ The value of hybridity theory is its ability to undermine this view.

Yet, pragmatic concerns aside for the moment (which I believe are potentially of greater significance – given the innumerable tragedies which essentialist thinking has produced – than the theoretical stability of hybridity theory), from a theoretical point of view, is there any way we can keep hybridity theory from reverting to a 'universal soup' of meaningless? If we take hybridity theory to its ultimate conclusion – that everything is hybrid – the idea of hybridity itself loses meaning. To maintain at least a temporary

¹⁰⁰ Brzezinski, Z, quoted in Hirsch, H, 1995, cited in Nederveen Pieterse, J, 2001, p. 234.

¹⁰¹ Nederveen Pieterse, J, 2001, p. 234.

¹⁰² Ibid, p. 221.

¹⁰³ Ibid.

stability, Nederveen Pieterse argues that we must identify what type of hybridity we are talking about. A good starting point is determining whether one is discussing what Bakhtin refers to as ‘intentional’ or ‘organic’ hybridity. Young describes Bakhtin’s understanding of these two types of hybridity:

...an organic hybridity, which will tend towards fusion [is] in conflict with intentional hybridity, which enables a contestatory activity, a politicized setting of cultural differences against each other dialogically... For Bakhtin... the crucial effect of hybridization comes with the latter, political category, the moment where, within a single discourse, one voice is able to unmask the other. This is the point where authoritative discourse is undone. Authoritative discourse Bakhtin argues must be singular, it ‘is by its very nature incapable of being double-voiced; it cannot enter into hybrid constructions’... – or if it does, its single-voiced authority will immediately be undermined.¹⁰⁴

As Young notes, Bakhtin’s intentional hybridity is further transformed by Bhabha ‘into an active moment of challenge and resistance against a dominant cultural power’, and Bhabha

then translates this moment into a ‘hybrid displacing space’ which develops in the interaction between the indigenous and colonial culture which has the effect of depriving ‘the imposed imperialist culture, not only of the authority that it has for so long imposed politically, often through violence, but even its own claims of authenticity.’¹⁰⁵

Bhabha has further extended this idea in more recent work to ‘include forms of counter-authority, a ‘Third Space’ which intervenes to effect elements that are neither the One nor the Other but something else besides which contests the terms and territories of both.’¹⁰⁶ Throughout the thesis I mainly focus on intentional hybridity, especially as it is contextualised in the words of informants themselves, which serve as the main basis for analysis throughout, and how this intentional hybridity, following Bakhtin’s term, ‘unmasks’ the dominant by reversing its logic back in on itself. It is also similar to

¹⁰⁴ Bakhtin, M, 1981, cited in Young, R, p. 22.

¹⁰⁵ Young, R, p. 23

¹⁰⁶ Ibid.

Bhabha's example of this reversal of power by the hybrid in colonial India,¹⁰⁷ and to some extent to Bhabha's later work on a 'Third Space' mentioned above.

Thus, hybridity's value is not in some absolute reduction of all and every process and identity to original forms (which is impossible) and then proceeding to understand the mixing of these forms, but rather in examining the manner in which the dominant is undermined by the periphery. And perhaps part of the point of the theory of hybridity is to retain the idea of the intermixing of 'impurities' – which can only be seen as 'impure' when viewed against the 'pure' politics of essentialism – to strengthen its undermining nature. Kraidy, citing Derrida, believes the openness of hybridity, or its 'impurity', is one of its strengths as well as its weaknesses:

It is helpful to theorize hybridity as an undecidable (Derrida, 1972, p. 58), defined as 'that which no longer allows itself to be understood within...(binary) opposition, but which...inhabits it, resists it and disorganizes it, but *without ever* constituting a third term, without ever leaving room for a solution' (emphasis original).¹⁰⁸

Yet as Kraidy reminds us, this extreme openness of hybridity can make it 'vulnerable to appropriation by transnational capitalism.'¹⁰⁹ Thus, it is crucial to employ it within a critical theoretical context. Should it be employed thus, according to Kraidy, although some theorists may be uncomfortable with and reluctant to use it, hybridity theory helps us explore processes of mixing in ways that other theories cannot.

[T]here seems no credible substitute [for hybridity theory] to characterize the dual forces of globalization and localization, cohesion and dispersal, disjuncture and mixture, that capture transnational and transcultural dialectics.¹¹⁰

We cannot take ultimate essentialisms out of hybridity theory. But surely we can remove the edge of potentially dangerous essentialisms by relativising them using – as Kraidy argues – an 'intercontextual', critical view of hybridity, rooted within – as Nederveen Pieterse insists – the context of the *longue durée*. That is, we know that

¹⁰⁷ Bhabha relates how missionaries in India tried to explain the significance of Communion to vegetarian Hindus, but found that they took the idea of the ritual literally, perceiving the missionaries to believe that they were eating the actual body of Christ and drinking his blood. Thus, while the Hindus were variously perceived as 'savage' by the colonising British, the Hindus themselves, due to their miscomprehension of the ritual, came to perceive the colonisers as 'cannibalistic vampires'. See *ibid*, p. 162.

¹⁰⁸ Derrida, 1972, p. 58, cited in Kraidy, M.M., p. 332.

¹⁰⁹ Kraidy, M.M., p. 332.

¹¹⁰ *Ibid*.

nothing ultimately exists independently, including the components that make up the hybrid, but if we see these components as existing within a temporary, confined space, while recognising and acknowledging their own ultimate hybridity, there appears to be no reason why we cannot talk of de-essentialising potentially dangerous homogenising discourses. Using hybridity theory to undermine and deconstruct these discourses, which have wrought so much carnage in human history, is – as Nederveen Pieterse reiterates in response to Friedman’s objection to hybridity as ‘trivial’ – of utmost importance.¹¹¹

Postcolonial Theory within the Context of Greater China

While the above defence of a critical hybridity theory may justify its use per se, how do we employ it when discussing mainland China in particular, when the theory is so connected to postcolonial studies? Mainland China has never experienced the more encompassing processes of colonisation by Western powers as in India and in other colonial contexts. It may have been subject to unequal treaties at the height of its humiliation under foreign powers in the late Qing Dynasty (1614-1912), during which its coast was carved up and quartered off into centres of trade; but Han Chinese society never experienced the apparent totalising effects of colonisation as did the Indians under the British. Even in Hong Kong, due to the nature of the former colony as a trading post with China, the British showed little interest – especially at the foundation of the colony – in interfering in the lives of its Chinese citizens. This changed somewhat particularly after the mid-1940s, when a fear of Communist influence in Hong Kong spurred the colonial government to support the widespread establishment of Christian schools, hospitals, and various charity organisations, and thereby influence the ideas and beliefs

¹¹¹ Friedman, 1999, p. 249, cited in Nederveen Pieterse, J, 2001, p. 226.

Nederveen Pieterse makes the following argument against Friedman’s claim of hybridity theory as ‘trivial’:

The hieratic view was preoccupied with divine or sacred origins. The patriarchal view posited strong gender boundaries. The aristocratic view cultivated blue blood. The philological view saw language as the repository of the genius of people, as with Herder and the subsequent ‘Aryan’ thesis. The racial view involved a hierarchy of races. The Westphalian system locked sovereignty within territorial border. Next came the nation and chauvinism. All these views share a preoccupation with pure origins, strong boundaries, firm borders. The contemporary acknowledgment [among proponents of hybridity theory] of mixture in origins and lineages indicates a sea change in subjectivities and consciousness that correlates, of course, with sea changes in social structures and practices...To regard this as trivial is to misread history profoundly. See Nederveen Pieterse, J, 2001, pp. 226-227.

of Hong Kong citizens.¹¹² Yet, apart from these and other similar instances of indirect influence, the colonial government generally maintained a policy of minimal interference in Hong Kong citizens' lives.¹¹³ It should be noted here in passing that, as Chow observes, Hong Kong society may not be subject to British colonisation any longer, but it is arguably subject to a new form of 'colonisation' under mainland China. In the case of Hong Kong, Chow questions whether we can talk about 'a postcoloniality that is forced to return to a 'mother country,' itself as imperialistic as the previous colonizer?'"¹¹⁴ While Chow's question is certainly valid, I use postcolonial theory in this thesis in relation to Hong Kong to examine post-British colonisation, not post-colonisation per se. And as in all instances within which I use postcolonial theory for the three main locations under study, I am not referring to 'post' as in the past is 'over and done with'; rather, as has already been mentioned, and as is elaborated below, I seek to show how 'colonial' discourses in all instances continue to be employed even as they are contested and undermined. In the case of Taiwan, the island has been subjected to several forms of colonisation, beginning with the Dutch from 1624 to 1662, the Spanish from 1626 to 1642, and the Japanese from 1895 to 1945.¹¹⁵ Arguably, it was also a colony of the Ming dynasty from 1683 to 1895 and has been a colony of the Guomindang from 1945 to the present. The three locations under study have thus experienced some form of colonisation to a lesser or greater extent, yet not to the degree to which India was subjected to British colonisation.

¹¹² Leung, B, & Chan, SH, *Changing Church and State Relations in Hong Kong, 1950-2000*, Hong Kong, Hong Kong University Press, 2003, p. 26.

¹¹³ For an overview of the British Crown's relationship with the citizens of Hong Kong, see Tsang, S, *A Modern History of Hong Kong*, London, I.B. Tauris, 2004.

¹¹⁴ Ibid.

¹¹⁵ Some of the deepest changes to the Chinese religious landscape in Taiwan were carried out under Japanese colonisation of the island. Goossaert and Palmer outline three stages of colonial management of Chinese religion in Taiwan. From 1895 to 1915, a 'laissez-faire' approach to Chinese religion was followed, although it was seen as backward and 'superstitious' compared to 'rational' Japanese religions. At the same time the Japanese saw Chinese religion as valuable for maintaining stability, and hence it was not attacked in the same manner as on the mainland. This 'laissez-faire' approach took a turn following a 1915 revolt organised by a messianic spirit-writing cult, which led the Japanese to introduce stricter temple registration and police monitoring, as well as 'religious engineering' – repressing 'undesirable' practices and actively supporting forms of religion considered useful for building the type of colony they envisioned. After the war with China in 1937, much more repressive measures were taken against Chinese religion in Taiwan, due to Japanese suspicion regarding Taiwanese loyalty. Local temples were converted into Shinto shrines, property was seized, religious items were destroyed, and other measures were taken to subjugate local Chinese religion to Japanese rule. Although many of these temples and communities re-formed in post-1945 Taiwan, Goossaert and Palmer observe that the change brought about by Japanese colonisation resulted in the creation of new religious institutions and practices. See Goossaert, V, & Palmer, D.A., *The Religious Question in Modern China*, Chicago, University of Chicago Press, 2011, pp. 210-211.

As Yang notes, however – and whose model I will use as the basis for discussing hybridity in this thesis – ‘colonization does not merely rely on military, economic or political domination’, but instead can be a process of a ‘colonisation of consciousness.’¹¹⁶ Jean Comaroff and John Comaroff (1997) first used the phrase in their study of Protestantism in nineteenth-century colonial South Africa, in which they explored how Protestant missionaries strengthened European colonisation ‘not only by introducing new modes and objects of worship, but also new prosaic rhythms of everyday life, in clothing, sanitation, medicine, architecture and agriculture, which won over the natives to Western ‘civilization’.¹¹⁷ In a similar way, Yang argues, we can talk of a ‘colonisation of consciousness’ taking place among China’s modern elite and official classes, ‘with serious consequences for the religiously fuelled autonomy of Chinese grassroots society.’¹¹⁸

However, such an understanding, according to Yang, cannot come from current postcolonial studies. While postcolonial studies, out of which emerge theories about hybridity, is useful in criticising Western binaries that fed policies of colonial discrimination, Yang argues that ‘too often [postcolonial studies] simply presents traditional Third World cultures as the objects of Western colonial acquisition, administration and modernization,’ while ‘not enough attention is directed at their struggles to address their plight, their internal clash of discourses and strategies, and the dramatic social engineering projects of modernizing postcolonial states.’¹¹⁹ According to Yang, because of its ‘singular fixation on the West as both the origin and solution to the problems of the postcolonials’, postcolonial studies may end up re-centring the West even as it criticises it.¹²⁰ To counter this tendency, Yang argues for a new approach to postcolonial studies in China, in which we examine the enthusiastic adoption of elements of the Enlightenment by the Chinese elite to address the national crisis China faced in the early twentieth century, which led to ‘waves of cultural self-laceration, religious destruction and state campaigns of secularization.’¹²¹

Unlike in Europe, where, according to Michel Foucault, the understanding of the Enlightenment was ‘as a continuous critical reflection, an ethos of public reasoning and questioning of historically established truths that is grounded in the contemporary

¹¹⁶ Comaroff, J, & Comaroff, J, 1997, cited in Yang, MM, 2011, p. 7.

¹¹⁷ Yang, MM, p. 7.

¹¹⁸ Ibid.

¹¹⁹ Ibid, p. 8.

¹²⁰ Ibid.

¹²¹ Ibid, p. 10.

moment of limitations and possibilities',¹²² in China, according to Yang, the Enlightenment was adopted as a proven, universal 'given'.¹²³ In China the Enlightenment was not an internal, culturally transforming process, but a discourse imposed by the Chinese elite from outside, which portrayed the West as progressive and superior and Eastern cultures as 'backward' and in need of 'progress'.¹²⁴ Thus, native Chinese traditions had to be displaced and replaced with that which was 'superior'. This destruction was further aided, as Yang observes, by the fact that Enlightenment values were selectively and forcefully implemented, which meant that other Enlightenment values could not serve as a check for widespread destruction. For example, nationalism became the dominant answer to China's problems, while individual rights and those of kin groups and religious communities were brushed aside.¹²⁵

This selective imposition of Enlightenment values over and above Chinese traditional values produced social changes that 'were mandated in such a top-down, radical, iconoclastic and unilateral manner' that Yang believes we can talk of a 'self-colonisation' by Chinese urban elites and officials over the culture of rural and less educated people.¹²⁶ Moreover, and as will be described in parts of this thesis, we may speak of an 'internal Orientalism', under which the Han majority are seen as 'progressive' and the minorities as 'backwards'.¹²⁷ This 'self-colonisation' and 'internal Orientalism' sets up a simplistic binary of religion versus science, denying, according to Yang, the linkages between the history of Chinese science and medicine and various Chinese traditions, especially the innovations and self-cultivation methods of Daoism.¹²⁸ Moreover, the discourse of the Enlightenment, as it was appropriated for modern China's purposes, drew on the modern idea that religion is an obstacle to economic development, ignoring the connection between religion and economy in Chinese history.¹²⁹

As the project of modernisation in mainland China has taken place through a selective, external, top-down imposition of Enlightenment values and ideas, we need to look beyond conventional post-colonial theories of the West as creator and destroyer of the East's problems. As Yang argues, postcolonial studies needs to address how 'projects of

¹²² Foucault, M, 1984, cited in *ibid*, p. 11.

¹²³ Yang, MM, p. 11.

¹²⁴ *Ibid*.

¹²⁵ *Ibid*.

¹²⁶ *Ibid*.

¹²⁷ Gladney, 1994, Mueggler, 2001, & Shein, 1997, cited in *ibid*.

¹²⁸ Yang, MM, p. 15.

¹²⁹ *Ibid*.

Enlightenment, modernity and nation-state are taken up by natives themselves to repel and even surpass the colonizers, while unconsciously accepting and assimilating the very terms of Western hegemonic culture.’¹³⁰ Throughout this thesis, this is one reason for which I use a critical hybridity theory – to show how Han practitioners are undermining internalised discourses of modernity by employing the logic of these discourses themselves. Evidently this undermining of these discourses cannot be wholly attributed to an internal (i.e. regional) subversion confined to the respective locations investigated in this thesis, as informants in all three locations are obviously influenced by external ‘rational’ discourses coming from the West and local trans-regional/transnational sources; yet what may be described as an internal subversion is the way informants themselves drew on the three main ‘rational’ discourses mentioned above to achieve this subversion.

Below I relate how the theory of hybridity will be used in this thesis in relation to the evolution of myths and symbols, their layered meaning, and the contestation and negotiation of this meaning. It is argued that Tibetan Buddhism, like the figure of Guan Gong discussed below, has been layered with different meaning by multiple actors – a hybrid evolution of superscription that is contested and negotiated by Han practitioners and the Tibetan religious elite within the context of various dominant discourses.

Superscription of Symbols and Continuity with the Past

Myths and symbols, as Duara argues, are not only ‘layered and historically stratified’, but are ‘simultaneously continuous and discontinuous’.¹³¹ That is, their representations are not limited to a certain epoch, but are carried over to degrees throughout history, so that elements of these representations resonate over time in different periods and among different actors. Duara takes as his example the figure of Guandi to illustrate what he terms the ‘superscription of symbols’.¹³² Of particular interest to his argument that symbols are simultaneously continuous and discontinuous is his examination of two visions of Guandi – firstly under the Tiantai master Zhiyi in the sixth century and over a

¹³⁰ Ibid, p. 16.

¹³¹ Duara, P, 1988, p. 778.

¹³² Ibid, pp. 779-780.

millennium-and-a-half later in 1914 when President of the Republic, Yuan Shikai, ordered a temple to be built devoted to Guandi, Yuefei and twenty-four other heroes.¹³³

According to the former account, the spirit of Guan Yu appeared to Master Zhiyi at Yuquan Mountain, calling for the return of his head (Guan Yu was decapitated by his enemy Sun Quan). The master convinced Guan Yu of the logic of karmic theory, and he became a protector of temples from this time on. According to Duara, this account of Guan Yu's incorporation into Chinese Buddhism 'reflects a nervous clergy reeling from attacks by the Confucian establishment on the Buddhist faith as foreign and corrupt', and it thus sought to 'establish one of the great heroes of Chinese culture as a devout follower and protector.'¹³⁴ Under the latter vision, on the other hand, when the Commissioned General Yin Chang and commander of the Model Army Division went to the Guandi temple in 1915 with their officers and soldiers to take their military oaths, the purpose was to strengthen the fledgling Republican military and 'to forge new concepts of loyalty to the nation-state.'¹³⁵ At first glance, Duara observes, these accounts seem to have little in common. Yet they both elevate this hero and his role as guardian, and it is this commonality that 'gives the myth its legitimating power and gives [these two] historical groups a sense of identity as they undergo changes.'¹³⁶

As seen in the above example of Guandi's relevance to both a feeble, persecuted Buddhist church and a newly formed army whose future was uncertain, Duara argues that myths and symbols in general resonate throughout history because, 'unlike many other forms of social change, mythic and symbolic change tend not to be radically discontinuous; rather, change in this domain takes place in a way that sustains and is sustained by a dense historical context.'¹³⁷ Thus, while social groups and interests inevitably change, cultural symbols are able to provide them with continuity.¹³⁸ As discussed in Chapter One, this thesis takes as its base the same symbol examined by Duara – Guan Gong – and examines how his 'resurrection' under the current Karmapa both draws on Guan Gong's historic superscriptions and certain continuities present in new superscriptions absorbed from transnational and global influences. It also examines the superscriptions being layered upon this symbol by both the Tibetan religious elite and Han Tibetan Buddhist practitioners in Greater China. As described in Chapter One,

¹³³ Ibid, p. 779.

¹³⁴ Ibid.

¹³⁵ Ibid.

¹³⁶ Ibid.

¹³⁷ Ibid.

¹³⁸ Ibid, pp. 779-80.

the superscriptions of Guan Gong, both contemporary and historic, are taken as symbolic of the wider superscriptions Tibetan Buddhism in general is being layered with as it encounters both ‘traditional’ and ‘modern’ aspects of Greater Chinese society.

While the late Republican government and the CPC (during the Cultural Revolution in particular) tried to reduce or eliminate belief in Guan Gong along with other Chinese religious beliefs,¹³⁹ the Karmapa is ‘resurrecting’ him in an altered form and restoring his relevance to a number of Han Tibetan Buddhist practitioners.

Through the symbol of Guan Gong the relevance of certain Chinese religious beliefs and practices are being restored in certain instances, against the destructive background of the Cultural Revolution and other campaigns which sought their eradication. Guan Gong, under the Karmapa, thus symbolises continuity with the past – a bridge across the supposed gap forged by the most destructive aspects of modernisation. Yet this gap is not as spacious as it may seem. Despite appeals to ‘rationalise’, a number of Chinese on both the mainland and in Greater China still – using Adam Chau’s term – ‘do religion’.¹⁴⁰ For example, even self-professed ‘atheists’ may burn incense and/or paper money at *Cai Shen* temples during Chinese New Year.¹⁴¹ As with Chinese citizens in general, Han practitioners of Tibetan Buddhism do not emerge from an ‘atheist vacuum’; there is continuity with a religious past, which – although its contemporary legacy has been weakened – is somewhat reinvigorated through such actions as the superscription of Guan Gong by the Karmapa. Moreover, these Chinese traditions are further ‘authenticated’ or ‘purified’ through their contact with Tibetan Buddhism in general. For example, Chinese ghosts as depicted in ghost stories, previously regarded as ‘superstitious’ belief among some informants, were perceived as real by such informants after they followed Tibetan Buddhism; if Tibetan Buddhism talks of hungry

¹³⁹ During the Republican era, veneration of Guan Gong continued to be encouraged by the government for a time, due to his perceived inspiration of belief with ‘pure faith’ among the people. Worship of certain nature gods, Daoist gods ‘who encouraged the use of charms and magical texts’, and practices of ‘popular’ religion, on the other hand, were banned. What was considered ‘proper’ religion that helped society and steered away from these ‘superstitions’ was outlined in the official ‘Standards for Preserving and Abandoning Gods and Shrines’, produced in 1928. The Standards spoke of ‘superstition as an obstacle to progress’, and the superstitious nation as ‘the laughing stock of the scientific world’. See ZMFH, 1933, p. 807, & ZMFH, 1933, pp. 810-14, cited in Duara, P, ‘Knowledge and Power in the Discourse of Modernity: The Campaigns Against Popular Religion in Early Twentieth-Century China’, *The Journal of Asian Studies*, vol. 50, no. 1, 1991, p. 79.

¹⁴⁰ See Chau, AY, *Miraculous Response: Doing Popular Religion in Contemporary China*, Redwood City, Stanford University Press, 2005.

¹⁴¹ A devotee I spoke with at Yonghegong temple in Beijing, for example, said he is an ‘atheist’ but he often comes to the temple with various wishes and burns incense, as a wish he once made there was fulfilled.

ghosts (Sansk – *preta*, Man - *e gui*), they reasoned, why should the ghosts of Chinese stories be anything but real?

Contesting Symbolism

This continuity or partial continuity with the past is not uncontested, however. As mentioned, informants, to varying degrees, appropriated ‘rational’ discourses influenced by the Enlightenment to ‘place’ Tibetan Buddhism within their own personal experience and Chinese society at large. While elements of Chinese religious traditions were seen as somehow compatible with these rational discourses, others were jettisoned as ‘superstition’. For example, some informants saw Guan Gong as merely a ‘cultural relic’ with no significance for their lives or practice of Tibetan Buddhism. These were mostly followers of such modernist teachers as Mingyur Rinpoche, who, as described in Chapter One, is presenting a demythologised Tibetan Buddhism to both Westerners and Chinese followers. At the same time, however, such a view of Guan Gong did not detract from the legitimacy of the Karmapa, who was seen by such informants as being full of wisdom and his action of incorporating Guan Gong into Tibetan Buddhism as a skilful way of making Tibetan Buddhism relevant to ‘traditional’ Chinese practitioners. However, what such an example shows is that the superscription of Tibetan Buddhism within Greater China is not uncontested or negotiated. As Duara notes of any superscription of symbols:

Superscription...implies the presence of a lively arena where rival versions jostle, negotiate, and compete for position. In this process some of the meanings derived from the myth get lost, but by its very nature superscription does not erase other versions; at most it seeks to reconfigure the arena, attempting thus to establish its own dominance over the others. In this respect it is unlike most other arenas of contestation, where victory is absolute or potentially absolute. The obliteration of rival interpretations of a myth is self-defeating because a superscription depends on the symbolic resonances in the arena for its effectiveness. Just as a word in poetry draws its power from its many half-hidden associations, a myth at any one time represents a palimpsest of layered meanings from which the superscribed version draws its strength.¹⁴²

¹⁴² Ibid, pp. 779-780.

A number of informants perceived Guan Gong to be a bodhisattva (*pusa*) while almost all of the Tibetan religious elite saw him as a worldly, unenlightened protector. Some informants saw him as an exemplary figure of Buddhist teachings, while others saw him as a violent warrior whose statue has no place in Buddhist homes. One informant believed he was a god but has now ‘fallen’ back to the human level and therefore should not be worshiped; others felt he never was a god and is instead the product of ‘superstitious’ imagination. It seems that such contestation can only increase as the number of contending ideologies increase. While Guan Gong may be – as Duara notes – a god who is the most widely ‘representative of Chinese culture’ (Chinese culture of the Qing dynasty in particular),¹⁴³ he must now contend with the aforementioned ‘rational’ discourses, as well as new transnational superscriptions given by the Karmapa Lama in exile. Due to these contending discourses, and because he is to an extent a ‘resurrected’ symbol for mainland practitioners in particular, his position is now much more peripheral to Han practitioners who closely appropriate these ‘rational’ discourses, and to Tibetan Buddhism in general, which already entertains a vast pantheon of wrathful protector deities.

Like the symbol of Guan Gong, the other themes he represents in the chapters of this thesis have been or are somewhat peripheral to Tibetan Buddhism and/or modern Chinese society. For example, the Confucian revival seems to have had less impact on Han Tibetan Buddhist practitioners than followers of mainstream Chinese Buddhism. Similarly, ghost belief is not part of central teachings given by lamas to Han practitioners, and the CPC has long tried to eradicate (with limited success) ‘superstitious’ beliefs in ghosts. So why discuss themes that are not central to Tibetan Buddhist teaching as conveyed to Han practitioners and that are to varying degrees at the periphery of modern Chinese society? Part of the reason that I discuss these ‘peripheral’ issues is because they are being re-centred again to a degree by the ‘search for roots’ movement (*xungen*, which emerged around 1986), by the CPC’s use of Confucian political ideology, by the Tibetan religious elite’s use of certain Chinese traditions (such as Guan Gong in the case of the Karmapa) to make Tibetan Buddhism relevant to Han Chinese, and by other parties with their own interests in the revival of Chinese traditions. Another reason is because there has never been a clear break between these traditions of the ‘past’ and the ‘rational’ present, and various symbols clearly show this continuity (the figure of Confucius for example). I have also chosen to

¹⁴³ Ibid, p. 784.

discuss these ‘peripheral’ issues because of their ability to undermine the ‘central’, seemingly hegemonic discourses and doctrines that construct their de-centred place in both Tibetan Buddhism and/or Chinese society.

How is this undermining of the ‘central’ and ‘hegemonic’ accomplished through the continuity of the ‘peripheral’? Particularly on the mainland under the discourse of the CPC such subversion cannot take an overt course, but must instead be subtle. In regards to Tibetan Buddhist doctrine, on the other hand, this process of undermining the ‘central’ and ‘hegemonic’ was not intended but became apparent in the negotiation of Han practitioners between their own beliefs and those of the Tibetan religious elite regarding these ‘peripheral’ traditions. In all cases however, whether Han practitioners were contesting and/or negotiating these traditions within various ‘rational’ discourses or the teachings of the Tibetan religious elite, they appeared to strand the space between what Nederveen Pieterse describes as ‘assimilationist hybridity’ and a ‘destabilizing hybridity.’¹⁴⁴ The former, he explains, ‘leans over towards the centre, adopts the canon and mimics hegemony’, while at the other end of this ‘continuum of hybridities’, the latter ‘blurs the canon, reverses the current, subverts the centre.’¹⁴⁵ I argue, following Bhabha’s argument, that by ‘adopting the canon’ and ‘mimicking hegemony’, informants succeeded, in a subtle way, to ‘blur the canon’, ‘revert the current’ and ‘subvert the centre’. For example, by following Chinese Marxist ideology on what constitutes ‘religion’, ‘science’, and ‘superstition’, a number of mainland informants tried to show, by way of its own logic, how Chinese Marxism itself is a kind of ‘religion’, Tibetan Buddhism is ‘scientific’, and ‘superstition’ is a category wrongly used to consign anything not conforming to scientific Chinese Marxism to the basket of ‘feudalism’.

This negotiation and contestation of dominant ‘rational’ discourses among Han practitioners, is set out in each subsequent chapter following Chapter Three (which serves as the basis for discussion in subsequent chapters), exploring how Han and other ethnic practitioners, in relation to these dominant discourses, ‘adopt the canon’ and ‘mimic hegemony’, while also subtly ‘blurring the canon’, ‘reverting the current’ and ‘subverting the centre’. These dominant discourses, as outlined above, are Chinese Marxism on the mainland, the Christian education system in Hong Kong, and Humanistic Buddhism in Taiwan. It should be noted that Chinese Marxism, as explored

¹⁴⁴ Nederveen Pieterse, J, 2009, p. 79.

¹⁴⁵ Ibid.

in this thesis, has branched out under various guises: the recent ‘Harmonious Society’ ideology, the discourse of environmental protection, and the anti-superstition rhetoric against ghost beliefs, focus, respectively, on maintaining social stability, civilising minorities in Western China, and maintaining allegiance to the goal of a progressive socialist state.

Chapter Four examines how Han and other ethnic practitioners are negotiating the place of Tibetan Buddhism in relation to continued historic arguments concerning Buddhist-Confucian syncretism and the Confucian revival, which are now encompassed, to a degree, within the CPC’s promotion of Confucian political ideology. This chapter seeks to demonstrate how a number of practitioners accept certain elements or even most of the political ideology of ‘Harmonious Society’ and the version of Confucianism which is promoted under this ideology, even as they promote Tibetan Buddhism as the ultimate source of wisdom, compassion, and liberation, and the model from which the rest of China should learn. They sought to demonstrate, to varying degrees, how Tibetan Buddhism is ultimately ‘beyond the world’ and is therefore the optimal path for changing Chinese society, whereas ‘Harmonious Society’ and Confucian values would only enable superficial changes. Thus, informants both used the discourse of ‘Harmonious Society’ and the Confucian revival to discuss common values and moral outcomes of Confucianism and Tibetan Buddhism, while showing how the former falls short of changing society on a more profound level, while the latter not only changes society at a deeper level, but also provides salvation beyond the grave.

Chapter Two focuses on somewhat different negotiations and contestations concerning ‘traditional’ forms of Tibetan Buddhism and the Christian education system in Hong Kong, as well as a demythologised version of Tibetan Buddhism which ultimately has roots in the Protestantism of Buddhism in nineteenth-century Ceylon. Informants who were educated within the Christian education system in Hong Kong often used the same standards employed within this system for judging what are ‘rational’, ‘constructive’, and ‘true’ forms of Tibetan Buddhism, as opposed to religious beliefs and practices which are deemed ‘superstitious’, ‘subversive’ and ‘false’. At the same time, such informants, even as they accepted and employed the former categorisations to demonstrate what Tibetan Buddhism is not, they also undermined the modernised Christian tradition upon which these categorisations are built and in which these informants received their formal education. They did this by seeking to demonstrate how Tibetan Buddhism – as presented to them by modernised Tibetan teachers – is

superior to Christian doctrine, based on its theories of karma, existence, interdependence, and so forth.

Chapter Six demonstrates how Han and other practitioners in Diqing Tibetan Autonomous Prefecture and Beijing are both appropriating and resisting the discourse of environmental protection in China, a discourse which is thoroughly embedded in the Open Up the West (*Xibu dakaiifa*) campaign, and subsequent eco-/mass-tourism ventures in Diqing and other Tibetan areas. Inherent in the Open Up the West campaign is the state directive to make Tibetans better at business, and to equip them with the tools to sell their culture and landscape to tourists and other local and transnational entrepreneurs/investors. Within this discourse as it is employed by the state and NGOs which have been forced to follow the state's directives in order to continue working in the Tibetan areas, local forms of 'sacred knowledge' concerning humanity's connection with and use of the land are disempowered to a large extent. Thus, the presence and power of local Tibetan deities and spirits are no longer deemed important within this discourse, although they are paid lip service by local officials and tourism agencies in order to play up the 'sacredness' of the Tibetan landscape and Tibetan culture, in order to attract more tourists. Both Han and Tibetan informants employed the discourse of environmental protection to show how Tibetan Buddhism and overlapping mountain deity cults are compatible with this discourse, while a number also spiritualised the Tibetan landscape by defending the traditional roles of these deities and spirits, showing how their traditional roles could continue within this discourse, while the preservation of Tibetan culture to which these deities and spirits belong was of paramount importance. Thus, such informants diverted the goal of environmental protection from that of solely protecting the environment – and, within the entrepreneurial spirit of the Open Up the West campaign – ecotourism and mass-tourism – to that of preserving Tibetan culture, and, by implication, reverting long-held Han stereotypes of Tibetans as 'backward' and 'uncivilised'. Tibetan culture and associated 'sacred knowledge' concerning the landscape, according to such informants, is the answer to not only the environmental and spiritual problems of Tibet, but to the same problems in the rest of China as well.

Chapter Seven examines how Han informants in particular are negotiating and contesting the place of Chinese ghost beliefs within Tibetan Buddhism, in relation to the anti-superstition discourse of the state and demythologised accounts of Tibetan Buddhism as they are presented by such modernised teachers as Yongey Mingyur

Rinpoche. The state has long seen ghost beliefs as a hindrance to socialist progress, yet has failed to eradicate such beliefs, which are still widely prevalent in Chinese society. Mingyur Rinpoche likewise seeks to combat a fear of ghosts which a number of Han practitioners continue to hold onto. Such informants reject the CPC's insistence that ghosts do not exist, as they have apparently encountered ghosts themselves, or have heard convincing stories about ghost encounters. At the same time, they most often reject ghost stories which originate from 'popular' folk Chinese traditions. They accept Mingyur Rinpoche's message that they must overcome their fears of ghosts, yet for some this is difficult, as they continue to experience the psychological effects of these encounters. A number of informants, however, sought to show how Tibetan Buddhism, with its powerful lamas and lineages tied to the historical Buddha and all previous buddhas, is superior to all other ideologies because of its power to fight evil and the demonical, including the evil of the 'spectral state' which was perpetrated during the Cultural Revolution and other such campaigns. Thus, for such informants, despite state claims to the contrary, ghosts do exist, but, unlike the state which has no power over these entities and which is in fact a source for the existence of these entities, Tibetan masters are both able to subjugate these entities and to fight evil perpetrated by the state.

In all of the above instances, as outlined in the chapters of this thesis, the authority and claims of the 'coloniser of consciousness' to the 'authentic' truth is undermined by the inbetweenness of Han and other ethnic practitioners of Tibetan Buddhism in Greater China. They embody a fluctuating third space that draws on the discourses of the 'coloniser', yet take these discourses beyond their original parameters, blend them with a faith which such discourses were designed to undermine, and employ this combination to present their faith as superior and the central tenants of colonising discourses as inferior.

The above arguments regarding the superscription of symbols outlined by Duara, and the relevance of this model for the wider use of a critical hybridity theory in this thesis, set the scene for the discussion in Chapter Three, which examines in greater depth the multitude of superscriptions that the symbol of Guan Gong has been/is being layered with. These superscriptions have been layered upon Guan Gong both throughout Chinese history and are continuing to be layered upon him under the current Karmapa, Han practitioners and the Tibetan religious elite in general. Ultimately, Chapter Three seeks to show how the symbol of Guan Gong is representative of the wider

superscription of Tibetan Buddhism in Greater China, and how this superscription is contested and negotiated.

Chapter Three

Guan Gong and the Karmapa Lama: Superscribing New Meaning on the Chinese ‘God of War’

*Tell me who your hero is, and I'll know who you are.*¹⁴⁶

Introduction

This chapter, building on Duara’s model of the ‘superscription of symbols’ discussed in Chapter Two, examines the symbol of Guan Gong as the embodiment of various aspects of Chinese culture – both historic and contemporary – and how he has been superscribed with new meaning in subsequent historic periods. Of particular interest to this chapter are the recent superscriptions of Guan Gong under the Seventeenth Gyalwang Karmapa, Ogyen Trinle Dorje, who incorporated ‘the god of war’ into the Karma Kagyu school in 2005, following a vision in which Guan Gong apparently appeared to him. It is argued in this chapter that historic superscriptions of Guan Gong have not been replaced by the Karmapa’s new superscriptions, but have been expanded in a universal Tibetan Buddhist message of both engagement in the world and ultimate transcendence of it – a message that is empowered by drawing on certain resonances with these historic superscriptions of Guan Gong.

This chapter concludes with an examination of Han practitioners’ understanding of the place of Guan Gong in Tibetan Buddhism/Chinese tradition, in relation to the Karmapa’s incorporation of the Chinese god into the Karma Kagyu school and their own ‘pre-conversion’ beliefs. In sum, as discussed in Chapter One and Chapter Two – given the wide representation of Han Chinese culture that Guan Gong embodies, and the recent interaction of this culture with Tibetan Buddhism – this chapter takes Guan Gong as the ‘blueprint’ for other chapters to follow. Below a brief outline is provided summarising the multiple levels of evolution that the symbol of Guan Gong has

¹⁴⁶ Wright, A.F., ‘Traditional Heroes in Chinese Popular Fiction’, in *The Confucian Persuasion*, Redwood City, Stanford University Press, 1960, p. 150.

undergone, followed by a more thematic and detailed treatment of this evolution in the following section – and a look at the significance of this evolution for this thesis.

Evolution of a Symbol – From the Warring States Period to the Seventeenth Karmapa

Guan Gong,¹⁴⁷ often called the ‘god of war’, is a popular Chinese god based on the Warring States (c. 475-221 BC) general Guan Yu, who is revered in Greater China and in overseas Chinese communities. He is in fact more than simply a ‘god of war’, and has, since the time of the Warring States Period, been superscribed with numerous roles by emperors, religious figures, and commoners. Under dynastic rule, emperors bestowed upon him different titles, as they did upon other deities. Guan Gong first received the title ‘*Gong*’ (duke) in 1102 AD,¹⁴⁸ and later ‘*Wang*’ (prince/king) in the transition from the Northern Song (960-1127) to the Southern Song (1127-1279) dynasties,¹⁴⁹ and received the title ‘*Di*’ under the late Ming (1368-1644),¹⁵⁰ thus creating a certain affinity between his and the emperor’s figure (the latter of whom held the same title¹⁵¹). Through these and numerous other successively grander titles, Guan Gong ‘transcended a particular territorial identity and symbolized the relationship of the village with the outside – with wider categories such as the state, empire and national culture.’¹⁵² By 1652 Guan Gong received the highest honour at the Qing court, where he was bestowed with the title ‘The Loyal, Righteous, Divine, Grand God of War’, and held this title until almost the beginning of the twentieth century.¹⁵³

The above titles of Guan Gong correlated to the purposes for which different emperors needed his assistance. Under the state cult of the late Qing dynasty, for example, the elite praised his Confucian characteristics of loyalty and righteousness, while playing down his more individualistic, rash characteristics exemplary of the swordsman figure. For the common people Guan Gong has been a central figure in dramas and stories, and

¹⁴⁷ Guan Gong is also commonly known by his other titles ‘Guandi’ (received during the Ming dynasty) and ‘Guan Yu’ (his title as a commander and one of Liu Bei’s sworn brothers during the Warring States Period (a. 475-221 BC)). I use ‘Guan Gong’ most often, as this seems to be the most common title among lay people in China, and was the title used by informants. Where reference is made to his historical or Ming/post-Ming dynastic character, ‘Guan Yu’ and ‘Guandi’ are used respectively.

¹⁴⁸ Chamberlain, J, *Chinese Gods: An Introduction to Chinese Folk Religion*, New York, Long Island Publishers, 1983, p. 62

¹⁴⁹ Duara, 1998, p. 783.

¹⁵⁰ Chamberlain, J, p. 55.

¹⁵¹ Duara, P, 1988, p. 786.

¹⁵² Ibid.

¹⁵³ Yang, W, ‘From History to Fiction – the Popular Image of Kuan Yü’, revision of paper delivered at the 25th Annual Meeting of the Association for Asian Studies, Chicago, April 1, 1973, p. 78.

has been worshiped as a supernatural hero and sage, as well as a god of wealth, protection, literature, and others. His temples, which dotted the Qing Empire, were popular, and were often conflated with existing Confucian or other temples, such as the Five Emperor temples.¹⁵⁴ Thus both the lay and the elite worshiped together at Confucian-cum-Guandi temples (*Wen-wu miao*), both drawing their own meanings from his figure as an object of martial prowess and supernatural power and/or as the embodiment of Confucian values. For shamans and mediums he was a guiding spirit who possessed or controlled them to write out individual messages for followers, as well as scriptures.¹⁵⁵ As these examples show, and as will be explored in this chapter, the superscriptions of both the dynastic elite and the common folk layered upon Guan Gong often overlapped, and depended on certain historic resonances to be successful among both groups (as explored in Chapter Two). And while the above extravagant titles superscribed on Guan Gong by various emperors may seem an obvious pretence to maintain authority – and thus distinct from superscriptions emerging from among the common folk – Hansen argues that officials also believed in the power of the deities upon whom they bestowed such titles, and that they were harnessing this power on behalf of the government.¹⁵⁶

¹⁵⁴ Szonyi, M, 'The Illusion of Standardising the Gods: The Cult of the Five Emperors in Late Imperial China', *The Journal of Asian Studies*, vol. 56, no. 1, 1997, p. 128.

As noted by Duara, citing Feuchtwang, merchants who wished to 'convert their wealth into status' and become part of the literati class would contribute to the building of temples dedicated to both Confucius and Guandi, often called *Wen-mu miao*. See Feuchtwang, S, 1977, cited in Duara, 1988, p. 785.

¹⁵⁵ This practice still continues in Hong Kong and Taiwan, although in the former spirit-writing has largely given way to divination sticks. For more on this topic, see Graeme Lang's and Lars Ragvald's article, 'Spirit-writing and the development of Chinese cults', in Richard Warms, James F. Garber, and Jon McGee (eds.), *Sacred Realms: Essays in Religion, Belief, and Society*, Oxford, Oxford University Press, 2004, pp. 23-33.

¹⁵⁶ Hansen, V, *Popular Deities and Social Change in the Southern Song Period (1127-1276)*, PhD Thesis, University of Pennsylvania, 1987, p. 128.



Photo 2: A Statue of Guan Gong in a Chinese temple, Hong Kong.

Apart from the above roles among the elite and commoners, Guan Gong was – and continues to be within certain circles – an important figure in Buddhism and Daoism. According to the Chinese Buddhist account, Guan Gong’s spirit appeared to the sixth-century Tiantai master Zhiyi when he was meditating on Mount Yuquan, the former calling for his head (Guan Gong, according to *The Romance of the Three Kingdoms*, had been decapitated by his enemy, Sun Quan). Master Zhiyi explained to him, according to karmic retribution, that his fate was the result of the many decapitations he himself had carried out. Convinced by the master’s reasoning, Guan Gong took refuge and worked from that time on for the cause of the dharma. He is believed to have protected the inhabitants of the mountain, built a monastery for Master Zhiyi, and was ‘enlisted’ by the master as a protector of Buddhist temples.¹⁵⁷ For this reason, his statue stands, together with *Wei To* (Sansk – *Skanda*) – the protector of the dharma – as a protector of Buddhist religion at the door of Chinese Buddhist temples.¹⁵⁸ His title in Chinese Buddhism is *Qielan Pusa*, or Sangharama Bodhisattva, a title which seemingly

¹⁵⁷ Inoue, I, 1941, cited in Duara, P, 1988, p. 779.

¹⁵⁸ See ‘Popular Deities of Chinese Buddhism’, http://www.buddhanet.net/pdf_file/ancientsgrfx.pdf, p. 29 [accessed 13/08/2012].

gives him elevated status despite his being posted outside the doors of temples.¹⁵⁹ He is also protector of Guanyin, a very prominent bodhisattva in Chinese Buddhism. As a Daoist god Guan Gong also assumes a prominent role as a protector. He is most commonly remembered for helping Master Zhang defeat a demon leader of the Miao tribes at Salt Lake, and during the Song dynasty (960-1279) a Daoist temple to Guan Gong was built there.¹⁶⁰

Today, particularly in Hong Kong and Taiwan, Guan Gong remains a central figure of veneration, both at the ‘popular’ religious level and variously within more distinctly (i.e. ‘elite’/canonical) Chinese Buddhist and Daoist circles. Triad groups and police stations in Hong Kong regard him as a patron deity, and many businesses and private households display his statue for prosperity,¹⁶¹ protection from malevolent ghosts, help with studies, and other needs. In non-religious popular culture, too, he has resurged as a central figure of martial arts novels (*wuxia xiaoshuo*), video games and movies. The martial arts novels of Hong Kong-based novelist Jin Yong, which include the character of Guan Gong, have been particularly successful, both in Hong Kong and Taiwan and on the mainland, and have even been included in college curricula.¹⁶² Thus Guan Gong appeals to both the younger generation as a cult hero within martial arts literature and media, and to many who follow ‘popular’ Chinese religion or Buddhism, Confucianism or Daoism, as a sage, god, *junzi*, protector and/or bodhisattva.

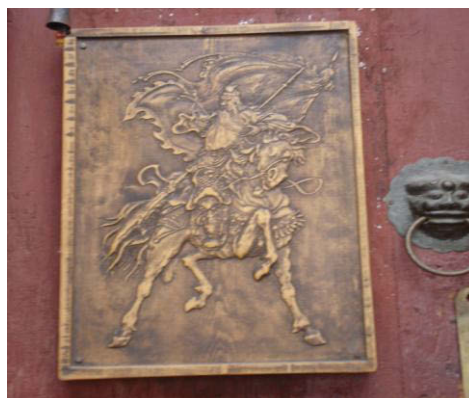


Photo 3: A portrait of Guan Gong outside the front door of a house in Lijiang.

¹⁵⁹ As explored later in this chapter, the term *pusa* (bodhisattva) may not always be used in a literal sense within ‘popular’ Chinese religion, often being conflated with *shen* (‘god’).

¹⁶⁰ Inoue, I, 1941, & Johnson, R.F., 1921, cited in Duara, P, 1988, p. 781.

¹⁶¹ Ross notes that one of the legends which helped spread the popularity of Guan Gong among businessmen relates how Guan Yu, when captured by Chao Chao, kept careful records of his expenses and returned the exact amount when freed. Businessmen thus believe he is not only able to increase one’s wealth, but dispense wealth justly and generously. See Ross, GV, ‘Kuan Yü in Drama: Translations and Critical Discussion of Two Yüan Plays’, PhD Thesis, The University of Texas at Austin, 1976, p. 24.

¹⁶² Hamm, JC, *Paper Swordsmen: Jin Yong and the Modern Chinese Martial Arts Novel*, Honolulu, University of Hawaii Press, 2005, p. 2.

Most recently, Guan Gong has been incorporated into Tibetan Buddhism, or at least the Karma Kagyu school, under the guidance of the lineage head, the Seventeenth Gyalwang Karmapa. The Karmapa incorporated the Chinese god as a protector deity in 2005, and every Chinese New Year a puja for Guan Gong is broadcast on Taiwanese television, conducted by Master Hai Dao from Taiwan. This decision was made after Guan Gong apparently appeared to the Karmapa in a vision, thereby letting him know of his presence and power. This is not the first time Guan Gong has appeared in the Tibetan cultural sphere, as there is a temple built in Lhasa for him (the only Chinese-style temple in the town), constructed in 1793 by Qing soldiers, to commemorate the Qing defeat of the invading Gorkhas from Nepal, and Guan Gong's apparent help with this defeat.¹⁶³ As Yeh notes, both mixed Han-Tibetans (whose Han ancestors were likely Qing soldiers) and Tibetans worship at the temple – the former venerating Guan Gong and the latter Gesar¹⁶⁴ (a Tibetan warrior hero who features in popular Tibetan ballads and the epic tale of Gesar of Ling, and is especially venerated within the Nyingma school as an emanation of Avalokiteshvara, Manjushri and Guru Rinpoche (Padmasambhava)). Whatever role Guan Gong played in Tibet in the past, the Karmapa's incorporation of Guan Gong may be the first time in the contemporary period that the Tibetan Buddhist religious elite have incorporated a Chinese god into the Tibetan tradition.¹⁶⁵ Yet as per Master Hai Dao's speech in 2005, during which an 'inauguration' ceremony for the Chinese god took place, Guan Gong's new role as protector of the Karma Kagyu school is far from a simple continuation of his historic roles in Chinese society. Master Hai Dao spoke, as apparently conveyed to him by the Karmapa, of Guan Gong being not only a patron deity of merchants or defence forces. Rather, he is spoken of – either explicitly or by implication of his allegiance to the Karmapa – as taking on far more universal roles – fighting corruption, both in China

¹⁶³ For more on this topic and the *Lubu* (mixed Han-Tibetan) and other ethnic communities in Lhasa, see Emily Yeh's article 'Living Together in Lhasa', paper at Workshop on Communities in Interaction for Convivial Exchange, [publication details anonymous], 2008.

¹⁶⁴ *Ibid.*, p. 60.

¹⁶⁵ Under Emperor Kangxi (reigned 1661-1672) of the Qing Dynasty Guan Gong was fairly important within Tibetan Buddhism, being portrayed among the Tibetan Buddhist deities at Yonghegong Temple in Beijing. See Di Cosmo, N, 'Manchu shamanic ceremonies at the Qing court', in McDermott, J.P. (ed.), *State and Court Ritual in China*, Cambridge, Cambridge University Press, 1999, p. 373. However, this seems to have been Emperor Kangxi's doing rather than that of the Tibetan religious elite.

and around the world; protecting the environment for this and future generations; and ‘doing the business’ of spreading universal peace and compassion.¹⁶⁶

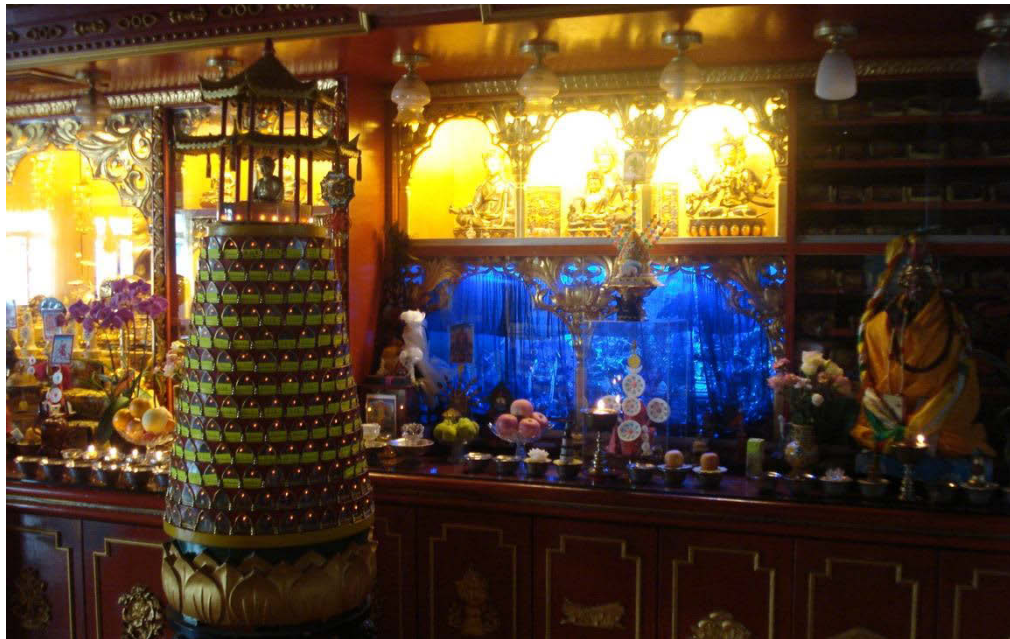


Photo 4: A Statue of Guan Gong, to the right of the altar wrapped in orange robes, accompanies Tibetan Buddhist deities in a Karma Kagyu meditation centre in Hong Kong.

Under the Karmapa, through the medium of Hai Dao, Guan Gong is represented as a universal embodiment of solutions to some of the most pressing issues of the twenty-first century, both in China and the world. Thus Guan Gong, already a multivalent figure of Chinese tradition, reaches beyond the confines of his locale under the guidance of the Karmapa. The Karmapa has superscribed upon the figure of Guan Gong new meaning, perhaps drawn from the figure of Gesar, and most certainly drawn from the universal, soteriological message of Tibetan Buddhism and the manner in which the Karmapa wants to make that message relevant to a modern world. Yet with this superscription, the old layers of meaning already superscribed upon the figure of Guan Gong have not been lost, but remain part of his hybrid identity, layered beneath this most recent of superscriptions.

¹⁶⁶ ‘Karmapa and Protector Guan Gong’, [accessed 13/11/2011]



Photo 5: A makeshift altar to Guan Gong near a fishing village in Hong Kong.

As Duara notes, Guan Gong is perhaps the most ‘Chinese’ of all Chinese gods, as he carries meaning for so many groups and peoples within Chinese society. The Karmapa’s move to incorporate him into the Karma Kagyu school seems therefore a very strategic one. Yet not all of my informants were interested in Guan Gong in the first place, before coming to Tibetan Buddhism. While some had a renewed interest in him after turning to Tibetan Buddhism, others felt the Karmapa was simply acting in goodwill to promote understanding between Chinese and Tibetans, or using the myth of Guan Gong as a conventional truth to attract more Chinese to Tibetan Buddhism. Guan Gong, for these informants, was already relegated to folk history and culture, and held little significance for them. They were more interested in the ‘core’ elements of Tibetan Buddhism, and did not want to be distracted by ‘side’ additions. Thus a ‘rational’ discourse had all but eliminated interest in ‘folk’ beliefs for such informants. For others, Guan Gong is equivalent in status to, or the same as Gesar, and is thus seen as a powerful bodhisattva or at least worldly protector.

Guan Gong’s incorporation into Tibetan Buddhism under the Karmapa and the subsequent negotiation and contestation that is taking place in relation to this symbol is representative of the crux and themes of this thesis. The multivalent facets of Chinese

traditional ideas and beliefs which Guan Gong represents – namely: supernatural heroism (this chapter), Confucian values (Chapter Four), pragmatic religious beliefs (Chapter Five), and the demonical (Chapter Seven) – and the interception of these ideas and beliefs with Tibetan Buddhism, are discussed in this thesis, as interpreted by Han and Tibetan informants¹⁶⁷ in Greater China. In addition, the modernisation and associated translocalisation/transnationalisation/globalisation¹⁶⁸ of Tibetan Buddhism within the Chinese context – reflected in the universalising superscriptions of Guan Gong under the Karmapa – will be examined. This is particularly explored in Chapter Six, which looks at the changing perceptions of Tibetan and Han practitioners to the character of local Tibetan deities and spirits within the context of a local/national/transnational and global discourse on environmental protection.

The layers of meaning that Guan Gong has assumed throughout Chinese history and under the current Karmapa thus tell us more than simply about the nature of a single Chinese god. They reflect the wider adaptation of Tibetan Buddhism to Han Chinese society, both in a ‘traditional’ and ‘modern’ sense. Below, the ‘traditional’ superscriptions of Guan Gong are further explored, to demonstrate how the ‘modern’ adaptation of Guan Gong under the Karmapa (explored in the next section) draws on certain resonances found within these historic superscriptions.

Guan Gong in Chinese History

The symbol of Guan Gong has served multiple groups, both religious and ‘secular’, sometimes simultaneously, over the past two millennia. A striking example of this is retold by Duara. He notes the difference between the incorporation of Guan Yu into Chinese Buddhism as a protector deity under the Tiantai master Zhiyi (538-597 AD) in the sixth century and the veneration of Guandi during Yuan Shikai’s (1859-1916) Republican government. The former was a trying time for Buddhism in China, when it was under attack by the dominant Confucians and was labelled as ‘foreign’ and ‘corrupt’.¹⁶⁹ The incorporation of Guan Yu, whose cult had risen to fame all over China by the sixth century, was likely due, at least in part, to the desire of the Buddhist elite to secure a surer footing among the people. The veneration of Guandi under Yuan Shikai,

¹⁶⁷ With the addition of a few informants of Bai, Naxi, Mongol, Bhutanese and Han-Mongol ethnicity.

¹⁶⁸ As outlined in Chapter Two, these processes are not taken as unidirectional in this thesis, but are seen as being ‘reworked’ by actors according to local conditions.

¹⁶⁹ Duara, P, 1988, p. 779.

symbolised in 1914 by the creation of a temple of military heroes devoted to Guandi and other war heroes, was likely carried out to bolster loyalty to the emerging nation-state.¹⁷⁰

Thus, as Duara notes, the figure of Guan Gong is a good example of the way in which ‘cultural symbols are able to lend continuity at one level to changing social groups and interests even as the symbols themselves undergo transformations.’¹⁷¹ This kind of symbolic evolution Duara terms the ‘superscription of symbols’.¹⁷² By definition, as Duara notes, superscription does not erase old images and conceptions of a myth or symbolic figure, but adds or ‘rediscovers’ new elements or gives to existing elements a new slant. Thus, unlike most other forms of contestation, victory of one or another version is never absolute, although at times one may appear to dominate the other within certain circles. Moreover, it is self-defeating when rival interpretations of a myth are obliterated, because ‘a superscription depends on the symbolic resonances in the [interpretive] arena for its effectiveness’, and draws its strength from the multilayered meanings represented in a myth.¹⁷³

The figure of Guan Gong has been superscribed by all levels of Chinese society over the past two millennia. For the ordinary people, the ‘reckless, rebellious power’ of Guan Gong, rather than his Confucian virtue has attracted them.¹⁷⁴ As told in the *Records of the Three Kingdoms* (*San Guo Zhi*) by Chen Shou in the third century, and to a lesser extent in the later vernacular novel *Romance of The Three Kingdoms* (*San Guo Yan Yi*) by Luo Guanzhong, Guan Yu at times is rash, explosive and unreasoning.¹⁷⁵ In the *Romance* he stands at nine feet tall, brandishes his impressive *guandao* (martial arts sword), and decapitates victims at will. When he is finally captured and faces decapitation by Sun Quan, he is indignant and unafraid of death.¹⁷⁶ As Yang notes, the human shortcomings of Guan Yu portrayed by Chen Shou in the *Records of the Three*

¹⁷⁰ Ibid.

As Szonyi notes, during both the late Qing Dynasty and Republican era, the title and image of Guandi served as a ‘shield’ for the cult of the Five Rulers, whose devotees could claim temples as those of ‘the god of war’, thus sparing them any interference from officials. Under the Republican’s campaign to eliminate superstition, many Five Emperor temples were renamed Guandi temples, and ‘because the official and gentry all worshipped Guandi, further trouble could be avoided.’ See Doolittle, 1865, cited in Szonyi, M, pp. 128 & 127.

¹⁷¹ Duara, P, 1988, p. 780.

¹⁷² Ibid.

¹⁷³ Ibid.

¹⁷⁴ See Manson, R, *Democracy’s Dharma: Religious Renaissance and Political Development in Taiwan*, Berkeley, University of California Press, 2007, p. 117

¹⁷⁵ See Yang, W, p. 69.

¹⁷⁶ See Luo Guanzhong, & Brewitt-Taylor, C (trans.), *Romance of the Three Kingdoms: San Kuo Chih Yen-I*, North Clarendon, Charles E. Tuttle Company, 1959.

Kingdoms are far fewer in the *Romance of the Three Kingdoms*, where Guan Yu's supernatural powers and abilities are on display.¹⁷⁷ In the few surviving Yuan Dynasty *zaju* plays it is evident Guan Gong became a popular hero without his shortcomings as portrayed in the *Records*.¹⁷⁸

He thus came to be seen as a god, a martial arts swordsman, and a sage displaying not only Confucian values (as ascribed to him particularly by the Confucian elite) but world-transcending power. As Duara and Ruhlmann note, however, this popular belief in Guan Gong as a supernatural being did not simply originate from the masses and end there. Rather, officialdom in successive dynasties fed on and built upon this popular belief, in part by granting superlative titles to Guan Gong.¹⁷⁹ Both the elite and the lay believed the various titles granted to gods by the emperor made them ever-more efficacious and powerful. Temples and other institutions would thus vie for their gods to be recognised and receive imperial titles from the emperor.¹⁸⁰

Whatever refined accounts there were of Guan Gong imparted to the illiterate masses by the elite – based on ‘formal works’ and ‘anecdotes and parables’ – the stories of the teahouses, and those told in the marketplaces by ‘storytellers, puppeteers and singing girls’¹⁸¹ produced versions of Guan Gong's exploits which emphasised his physical strength, military prowess and somewhat ‘redneck’ behaviour, rather than refined, gentlemanly characteristics praised by the Confucian elite. As Ruhlmann notes, swordsmen-heroes in popular fiction were often known for their ‘outspoken bluntness and a volcanic temper’ and for being ‘obtuse, guileless, childish, belligerent, tempestuous, irascible, devoid of manners, and completely uninhibited.’¹⁸² According to Ruhlmann, they were loved by the masses because they are honest and straightforward, unlike devious officials, and do not cheat or take what is not theirs. They are ‘down to earth’, displaying loyalty to friends, as well as generosity, among other traits agreeable with the commoner.¹⁸³

¹⁷⁷ Duara, P, 1988, p. 781.

¹⁷⁸ Yang, W, p. 70.

¹⁷⁹ See Duara, P, 1988, p. 782, & Ruhlmann, R, ‘Traditional Heroes in Chinese Popular Fiction’, in Wright, A.F. (ed.), p. 173.

¹⁸⁰ See Hansen, V, p. 128.

¹⁸¹ Ruhlmann, R, p. 142.

¹⁸² *Ibid*, p. 167.

¹⁸³ *Ibid*, p. 168.

Some intellectuals who were against the injustice and dishonesty of officialdom praised the ideal of the ‘wandering knight’ to a degree. For example, Sima Qian felt that ‘though their actions may not conform to perfect righteousness, yet they are always true to their word’. See Sima Qian, cited in Hamm, JC, p. 12. While he acknowledges that these ‘wandering knights’ are sometimes perpetrators of violence and even

The Confucian elite naturally saw many of the traits of the ‘heroic code of honor’ as being ‘detrimental to respect for family ties and authority.’¹⁸⁴ But, according to Ruhlmann, they also knew that such stories were already deeply-rooted in the popular imagination, and allowing this outlet for venting frustrations was advantageous. And besides, some of the values expressed in the stories were in accord with those of the Confucian elite. The elite thus allowed these stories to continue to be retold, while at the same time trying to slant them according to their own Confucian inklings.¹⁸⁵ For example, the loyalty displayed by Guan Yu to Liu Bei and Zhang Fei (his sworn brothers in the *Romance of the Three Kingdoms*) was interpreted as exemplary of loyalty to the emperor and officialdom, and both hagiographies and stelae written and inscribed in his honour reflected this.¹⁸⁶ Thus the virtues of loyalty and righteousness were ‘played up’ to the highest levels, while the recklessness of the unrefined Guan Gong receded from the official state cult.¹⁸⁷

Apart from his honesty and ‘no-nonsense’ character admired by the common people, he also represented for the masses a messiah-type figure that upheld the destitute, poor and suppressed. This was particular the case in the Song (960-1279) and Yuan (1271-1368) dynasties when ‘people were distressed by centuries of misery, military defeat, and wounded pride’.¹⁸⁸ The hero Guan Gong, as Ruhlmann notes of all heroes, ‘thrills the imagination because he proves what so many respectable citizens secretly doubt, that virtue ultimately triumphs over vice.’¹⁸⁹ In such dire circumstances as experienced by the common people during the Song and Yuan dynasties, the vacuum left unfilled by elite ideology was filled by such heroes as Guan Gong. They saw in the character and actions of Guan Gong what they themselves wanted to be and achieve in the face of helplessness. At the same time, he represented the hope of the military and thus of the empire/nation during times of war, right down to the Republican era.

Thus the storytelling and drama among the masses which exalted Guan Gong’s heroic status also fed on his ever-increasing popularity within the official cult. As miracles were experienced by both the masses (in the eradication of epidemics for example) and

murder, he does not focus on this aspect in his narrative, praising instead ‘their reputations and acts of magnanimity’. See *ibid.* Official histories which followed Sima Qian’s work, however, heavily criticised the figure of the ‘wandering knight’. See *ibid.*

¹⁸⁴ Ruhlmann, R, p. 173.

¹⁸⁵ *Ibid.*

¹⁸⁶ *Ibid.*, & Duara, P, 1988, p. 786.

¹⁸⁷ Ruhlmann, R, p. 173.

¹⁸⁸ *Ibid.*, p. 152.

¹⁸⁹ *Ibid.*, p. 152.

the elite (during military battles for example) which were attributed to Guan Gong, his rank rose to higher levels.¹⁹⁰ During the Qing dynasty thousands of temples were either constructed for him or temples devoted to other gods were converted into Guandi temples, and during the struggle against the Taipings (1856) he was decreed as being equal to Confucius. Further, from Kangxi's (1654-1722) time onward, scholars compiled hagiographies telling of Guan Gong's loyalty to Liu Bei during a time when he would have been tempted to establish his own kingdom as others during the Warring States Period had done.¹⁹¹ Officials were evidently as in need of this hero as were the common people, if for purposes of consolidation of an empire and later a nation rather than to lift them out of suppression. Because both the elite and masses were in need of him, and required the support of the other for their respective purposes, neither an entirely Confucian nor popular version of Guan Gong existed in either camp.

Because Guan Gong retained, particularly within 'popular' belief, the unrefined characteristics of the swordsman hero apart from Confucian values superscribed by the elite, we are able, through his character, to gain 'vivid insights into the hopes, the desires, the hates and affections of innumerable generations.'¹⁹² To know a hero is to know both the commoner and the elite, because so much of a people's culture and identity are reflected in the hero figure, and the many facets of culture he/she embodies enable us to understand better the nature of the relationship between the elite and masses, and the ways in which culture is used to position oneself within society, and most recently, within the nation/party-state. As will be explored in Chapter Four in regards to Confucianism, at times culture can be used, as it was in the case of Guan Gong particularly during the late Qing period, by the state for greater stability. Yet the masses may not be entirely satisfied with an 'earth-bound' ideology, and instead look for a 'world-transcending' hero or religion which lifts them out of present troubles and offers hope beyond the grave. As explored in Chapter Four, this is the perception of a number of Han practitioners regarding Tibetan Buddhism in comparison to state-backed Confucian political ideology.

While Guan Gong was venerated as an exemplary character of Confucian values and a god of war, at times of economic prosperity he was especially popular as a god of wealth (*cai shen*), particularly among the merchants, for whom he became a patron

¹⁹⁰ Ibid, p. 174.

¹⁹¹ Ibid.

¹⁹² Ibid, p. 176.

saint.¹⁹³ Despite the fact that the Confucian elite did not condone what they considered to be the crass pursuit of material wealth among the merchants, and therefore did not look favourably upon the interpretation of Guan Gong as a god of wealth, as Duara notes, one of the most patronised temples in Beijing among officials of the Ming was the Yuecheng temple, where Guan Gong was worshiped as a god of wealth.¹⁹⁴ It seems such patronage was due to practical rather than religious reasons. If officialdom was seen to be patronising the Yuecheng temple, the cult of Guandi would spread further and with greater rapidity, consolidating the masses. Thus, while the popularity of Guan Gong as a god of wealth during the Ming (1368-1644) and Qing (1644-1911) periods was never entirely condoned by the Confucian elite, there was greater accommodation of merchants and merchant wealth within Confucian discourse during this period.¹⁹⁵



Photo 6: A renovated *Cai Shen* hall at a Daoist temple in Beijing containing a wide variety of *Cai Shen* statues.

As the economy and trade links expanded during these periods, merchants travelled increasingly further, leading to weakened kinship ties. Merchants and other individuals at the margins of society (such as vagrants and bandits) who no longer relied on kinship

¹⁹³ Manson, R, pp. 112-113.

¹⁹⁴ Duara, P, 1988, p.783.

¹⁹⁵ Von Glahn, R, *The Sinister Way: The Divine and the Demonic in Chinese Religious Culture*, Berkeley, University of California Press, 2004, p. 245.

ties for solidarity found unity through other avenues, such as patron saints, especially Guan Gong. Such collective veneration of patron saints by unrelated individuals led to the spread of their cult throughout China, and produced an ‘ethic of trust’ among a ‘society of strangers’.¹⁹⁶ Thus, with the strengthening and spread of the economy during the Ming and Qing dynasties, the cult of Guan Gong – patron of the merchants and other individuals without a community – was eventually strengthened and spread amongst the wider population, and he became not only a god inspiring trust and loyalty, but the ‘very source of wealth.’¹⁹⁷ The interest in pragmatic religion – as exemplified by the Guan Gong cult in regards to wealth – within contemporary Han Tibetan Buddhist circles, will be examined in Chapter Five. There the justifications among Hong Kong informants in particular for the pursuit of practical benefits from Tibetan Buddhism will be examined – justifications which appear to be rooted in ‘popular’ Chinese religion stemming from belief in such gods as Guan Gong, and from Tibetan Buddhist theory, as well as the general drive for wealth and other practicalities within the market economy of Hong Kong.

Apart from embodying Confucian values, uniting the masses, consolidating the dynastic and later Republican armies, drawing together merchants and other ‘floating’ individuals from all regions of China and thereby becoming a god of wealth, and capturing popular imagination as a messiah-type figure and supernatural swordsman and sage, Guan Gong has been and continues to be seen by many as a protector against malevolent forces – ‘the most potent aide in evoking spirits and exorcizing devils’.¹⁹⁸ He is at times portrayed, in various accounts, as being in charge of hoards of ghosts and lesser spirits who are at his command. In Chinese ghost stories, such as ‘The City God Gets Drunk’, written by Yuan Mei (1716-1798), in *Censored by Confucius*, Guan Gong has a City God penalized for punishing an innocent scholar (Shen Fengyu) while drunk, and kills the mischievous secretary who reversed the characters of Shen Fengyu’s name so they appeared as those of a pirate, getting him in trouble. Moreover, although Shen dies of his wounds from the beating meted out by the City God, he is given a good rebirth at Guan Gong’s command.¹⁹⁹ Guan Gong, because of his elevated, ethereal status, is in control of all those under his jurisdiction, including City Gods and harm-

¹⁹⁶ Huang, HJ, 1968, cited in Duara, P, 1988, p. 782.

¹⁹⁷ Ibid & Von Glahn, R, p. 245.

¹⁹⁸ Ruhlmann, R, p. 174.

¹⁹⁹ Yuan Mei, ‘The City God Gets Drunk’, in Louie, K, & Edwards, L (eds. & trans.), *Censored by Confucius: Ghost Stories by Yuan Mei*, London, M.E. Sharp, 1996, pp. 78-80.

bringing ghosts.²⁰⁰ Moreover, at least as is portrayed in this story, he is believed to have power even over one's rebirth.

Because of his power over harmful ghosts, and even over what may be considered the most frightful 'ghost' – death – Guan Gong's statue is placed within many 'traditional' Chinese homes, particularly in Hong Kong and Taiwan, to protect the family against such forces. For very similar reasons, he is placed at the door of Chinese Buddhist temples to protect the premises and the Buddhist religion from all harmful forces and influences. Moreover, he is considered a protector of Guanyin, the Chinese Buddhist version of Avalokiteshvara, bodhisattva of compassion, and is variously referred to as a bodhisattva himself, as will shortly be examined among Han Tibetan Buddhist informants. As will be explored in Chapter Seven, he thus reflects the general discourse of the modern Tibetan Buddhist religious elite which 'wars' against the fear produced by ghosts within popular Chinese culture – and the fear of death from which these ghosts stem – with the fearless antidote of the bodhisattva.

Guan Gong, as briefly examined above, embodies a wide variety of binary opposites, both sides of which seek to pull away from the other, yet which constantly overlap. Some of these binary opposites embodied in the character of Guan Gong, and examined throughout the thesis include the following categories: worldly/transcendent, material/spiritual, ethereal/demonical, and elite/lay. In addition is the local/transnational category, examined particularly in Chapter Six, in relation to the perception of Han and Tibetan practitioners regarding the position of local Tibetan deities within or in juxtaposition to the discourse of environmental protection. This last binary is reflective of the general modernisation, transnationalisation and globalisation of Tibetan Buddhism, as seen again in the character of Guan Gong as interpreted by the Karmapa, and discussed in detail below.

²⁰⁰ Ter Haar notes that Guan Gong's power over the demonical in folk belief draws on the fact that he himself is considered to have been a demon enlisted to fight other demons:

An important dimension of demonological healing is the summoning of anti-demonic armies, in which certain demons are enlisted to combat the rest of the demonic population... Demons such as the formidable general Guan Yu are enlisted as 'divine general' (*shenjiang*) assisted by 'divine soldiers' (*shenbing*) to combat the demons. These divine generals and soldiers form divine armies but never betray their demonic origins and still require bloody meat sacrifice. The ritual specialists conclude blood covenants with them by drinking the liquor mixed with the actual blood of a cockerel or another animal.

See Ter Haar, B.J., 'China's Inner Demons: The Political Impact of the Demonological Paradigm', *China Information*, vol. 11, no. 54, 1996, pp. 58-59.

The Karmapa's incorporation of Guan Gong

The current Seventeenth Gyalwang Karmapa, following a vision in which Guan Gong apparently appeared to him, has recognised him as a dharma protector, and has requested that every year a puja be held for him in Taiwan on public television.²⁰¹ The Karmapa Lama himself also holds pujas for Guan Gong as a protector deity of Tsurphu monastery (the home monastery of the Karmapa in Tibet)²⁰² and the Karma Kagyu lineage. According to Master Hai Dao, head of Buddhist Life Mission (*Sheng Ming Xie Hui*)²⁰³ in Taiwan, Guan Gong is now perceived by the Karmapa as a major protector of Buddhism, the world, and even himself.²⁰⁴ During Hai Dao's address in 2005 regarding the Karmapa's and his own views on Guan Gong, Hai Dao spoke of Guan Gong as embodying the same compassion as the Karmapa, seeking to help others even at the risk of his own life. Guan Gong helped the oppressed, pursuing righteousness and never betraying his loyalty to the just cause of Liu Bei, just as the Karmapa is committed to his bodhicitta vows of helping all people around the world.²⁰⁵

During Master Hai Dao's address, a Tibetan warrior's headdress and armour were displayed as one piece hanging next to a large painting of Guan Gong on the wall behind Master Hai Dao. Hai Dao explained that he first saw the empty armour at the Karmapa's residence in India, and commented that it looked like the armour Guan Gong is portrayed as wearing. The Karmapa told him it was symbolic of Guan Gong. According to Hai Dao, it hangs empty next to Guan Gong's painting, symbolising that the Karmapa himself was the presence within the armour, who, like Guan Gong, has great compassion for all suffering people, and wishes to protect the world and its environment (including mountains, forests, waterways and all living creatures).²⁰⁶

Hai Dao went on to tell his own story of how Guan Gong miraculously helped direct him towards Buddhism and his chosen career as a Buddhist cleric (*chujiaoren*).²⁰⁷

²⁰¹ CASOTAC TV, 'Karmapa and Protector Guan Gong', <http://www.casotac.com/Webvod.htm> [accessed 13/11/2011]

²⁰² 'Guan Gong Puja', <http://karmapasupporters.wordpress.com/2011/03/08/guang-gong-puja/> [accessed 13/11/2011]

²⁰³ CASOTAC TV, 'The Karmapa Speaks of the Chinese God of War', <http://www.casotac.com/CASonline%20Articles/04072010.html>, 2010 [accessed 13/11/2011]

²⁰⁴ 'Karmapa and Protector Guan Gong', [accessed 13/11/ 2011]

²⁰⁵ Ibid.

²⁰⁶ Ibid.

²⁰⁷ Hai Dao related how before turning to Buddhism he felt lost, and wondered about the meaning of life. He went to a Daoist temple to seek advice from Guan Gong using divination sticks (*qiu qian*). Six times in a row he received the same divination stick, which revealed a message that whatever he had done up to

According to Hai Dao, Guan Gong is the most popular deity in Chinese belief, with the largest number of temples devoted to him in China, and is the ‘busiest of the gods in heaven’, working for equality in a quickly-developing world, threatening those who conduct themselves unethically in business. Hai Dao’s hope, like the Karmapa, is that modern Chinese business people can learn from the model set by Guan Gong to not exchange righteousness for the temptations of riches and fame.²⁰⁸ The Karmapa, Hai Dao stated, puts great emphasis on the promotion of ethical development, and protecting instead of ‘robbing’ the Earth’s resources, and so forth, which is reflective of Guan Gong’s altruism.²⁰⁹ According to Hai Dao, Guan Gong is a bodhisattva, having taken vows under the founder of the Tiantai school, Master Zhiyi (538-597 AD). Under Zhiyi he began in earnest to pursue the path of a bodhisattva, helping him to construct a monastery in seven days, and protecting Buddhist monasteries and Buddhism in general from this point on.²¹⁰ Now Guan Gong, embodied within and protecting the Karmapa, is at the head of efforts, or as Hai Dao worded it, the ‘business’, to ‘convert’ the world to compassion.²¹¹

Hai Dao related how he himself was cured by the Karmapa when he fell ill during one of his visits to meet the Karmapa in India. It is the wish of the Karmapa, he stated, to take away the illnesses of all people. When he asked the Karmapa how to gain such compassion for others, the Karmapa said it was simple – each one needs to do the ‘business’ of Buddhism, taking upon oneself others’ burdens, and taking responsibility for others besides oneself. According to Hai Dao, the Karmapa was questioned by a reporter upon arriving in India after escaping from Tibet what his role in India would be. The Karmapa replied that he wishes to protect his people’s culture, and moreover to

this point in his life was meaningless and void of any real existence. Moreover, the message revealed that he would find a man beside a river and that man would show him the meaning of life. Later he went to mainland China and visited several Guan Gong temples, and felt admiration and awe for Guan Gong wherever he saw his statue. Upon returning to Taiwan he went to a Daoist temple and asked the priest there who was ‘the man beside the river’ that the divination stick had referred to. The priest replied that it was Shakyamuni. This led Hai Dao to believe that he was destined to become a monk. However, he was married and had a child, and therefore returned to the temple to ask Guan Gong what to do. He prayed to Guan Gong ‘my son is your offspring and my wife is one of your generation.’ His wife’s family had long been involved in the construction of Guan Gong temples – hence Hai Dao’s reference here to his wife’s connection to Guan Gong. Upon reflection, Hai Dao also realised that both his wife’s and his own family had a long connection with Guan Gong; he thus prayed that Guan Gong would continue to protect him as a monk. Upon meeting the Karmapa for the first time, Hai Dao was surprised to hear that Guan Gong had appeared to the Karmapa in a vision, and this revelation further strengthened Hai Dao’s belief that Guan Gong was protecting him throughout his life as a monk and that his power is real.

See *ibid.*

²⁰⁸ *Ibid.*

²⁰⁹ *Ibid.*

²¹⁰ *Ibid.*

²¹¹ *Ibid.*

help and protect all beings and the natural environment; he would be to all people whatever they needed. Thus, Hai Dao said, the Karmapa is like Guan Gong, having the same altruistic qualities, a trust in others, a priority for righteousness over greed, and so forth, doing the ‘business’ of Buddhism in a manner that only a bodhisattva can.²¹²

While this address by Master Hai Dao demonstrates one aspect of cross-cultural exchange between the Tibetan and Chinese religious elite, at times it is not entirely clear which elements were part of the Karmapa’s original message to Hai Dao, and which originated from Hai Dao himself. Only the introduction and conclusion of the address seemed to be directly from the Karmapa, while a large portion of the address was about Hai Dao’s own personal experience with Guan Gong and the history of Guan Gong, from his incarnation as the Dragon King, to his earthly existence as Guan Yu, to taking refuge (*guiyi*) under Master Zhiyi during the sixth century. While he, as do many Chinese Buddhists, considers Guan Gong to have become a bodhisattva (Sangharama bodhisattva, or *Qielan pusa* in Chinese), after taking refuge under Master Zhiyi, it is not clear whether the Karmapa also considers him to be a bodhisattva. While the Karmapa conducts pujas for him as a protector of Tsurphu monastery and the Karma Kagyu lineage, and thus believes he is a dharma protector, it is never evident that he believes he is an enlightened protector.

Bodhisattvas, according to Mahayana Buddhist theory, can be fully enlightened or on their way to full enlightenment, being at one of five stages on the path towards that goal.²¹³ Guan Gong, being a protector of Buddhist temples and monasteries, would only be an ordinary dharma protector, according to definitions of ordinary dharma protectors given in Choegon Rinpoche’s teachings.²¹⁴ Such protectors are those who have much power, who have been taught bodhicitta and Vajrayana teachings by great masters such as Guru Rinpoche (Padmasambhava), and use their powers to ‘protect temples, Vajrayana teachings and help dharma practitioners.’²¹⁵ Some were previously evil

²¹² Ibid.

²¹³ These stages are: *Sambharamarga* (the path of equipment), *Prayogamarga* (the path of training), *Darshanamarga* (the path of seeing), *Bhavanamarga* (the path of intense contemplation), and *Vimuktimarga* (the path of freedom). See Geshe Rabten, ‘The Five Paths and Ten Levels’, <http://www.abuddhistlibrary.com/Buddhism/A%20-%20Tibetan%20Buddhism/Authors/Geshe%20Rabten/The%20Bodhisattva%20Paths%20and%20Levels/The%20Bodhisattva%20Paths%20and%20Levels.htm> [accessed 13/11/2011].

²¹⁴ Kyabje Drukpa Choegon Rinpoche, ‘Cloudless Clarity vol. 1’, <http://www.drukpachoegon.info/rinpoche-teachings/pdf--text.aspx> [accessed 13/11/2011]

²¹⁵ Ibid

spirits and ghosts, who were then tamed and bound by oath by Guru Rinpoche, and became dharma protectors.²¹⁶ However, Choegon Rinpoche adds that sometimes bodhisattvas also manifest in the form of dharma protectors. This latter group of bodhisattvas are higher level dharma protectors such as Mahakala, a fully enlightened bodhisattva.²¹⁷ As Guan Gong continues to protect temples and monasteries (a role usually for ordinary dharma protectors) and Buddhism in general – his statue being placed at the doors of Chinese Buddhist temples and his character depicted at the bottom of the Chinese pantheon of gods in paintings – it is likely he is perceived as a lower level bodhisattva in certain Chinese Buddhist circles according to the above interpretation.

Whatever the case, Guan Gong does fit into Tibetan Buddhism as a bodhisattva-type entity, especially within the vision of the Karmapa. In the address summarised above, Hai Dao presents the Karmapa’s grand vision of Guan Gong as an entity fighting corruption, protecting the earth’s resources, fighting the exploitation and inequality induced by modernisation, ‘doing the business’ of lifting up the downtrodden, ill and weak, and displaying the compassion and altruism of a bodhisattva. In this address we see the Karmapa and Guan Gong merge almost as one, with references being made simultaneously to both at times, and Hai Dao states at one point that Guan Gong can enter the Karmapa’s body and protect both him and the world.²¹⁸ Whether Master Hai Dao’s address is the exact words of the Karmapa or not, this conflation of the Karmapa and the martial figure of Guan Gong is certainly representative of the Karmapa’s message of an active, engaged Tibetan Buddhism in the twenty-first century. The Karmapa has often stated that is not enough to talk about compassion, but that we must actively *be* compassionate in society. This message is made clear in his recent book, mentioned in Chapter One – *The Heart is Noble: Changing the World from the Inside Out* – which is based on a dialogue he had with sixteen American college students who went to Dharamsala to meet him and discuss various contemporary issues within a Buddhist context. The purpose of the book, in accordance with how the Karmapa wants to portray the message of Tibetan Buddhism to a modern, global audience, is presented in the preface:

²¹⁶ Ibid

²¹⁷ Ibid

²¹⁸ Ibid.

In keeping with the Karmapa's wish to take as the starting point what the students wanted to hear from Buddhism, rather than what Buddhism had to say about them...an informal survey [was sent out] to a large number of [the coordinator's] students, asking what they would most like to learn from a Buddhist spiritual leader.²¹⁹

In response, the Karmapa Lama provided answers to what these students 'wanted to hear from Buddhism', and likely what the modern world in general wants to hear from Buddhism. Among the messages he conveys to the students in the book, one of the most important is that of being active in the world to change its problems, rather than withdrawing in quiet meditation.

...for those of us who feel a deep commitment to changing a particular system, or contributing to shaping our world for the better...while there may be exceptions when we choose to move outside of a system, this often amounts to little more than running away...In order to bring change, though it may be difficult, working within the system can have a far greater effect.²²⁰

The parallels between the Karmapa's 'action plan' for Tibetan Buddhism and the active hero figure of Guan Gong may be further seen in the Karmapa's following statement in the book, which draws inspiration from the heroic figure of the bodhisattva:

The amount of work that needs to be undertaken is great, and we bear an enormous responsibility. The future of the world really does depend on this. We cannot wait for others to act. Who is the hero who can save the world? It is you. It is every one of us. If you accept this challenge, that would be truly heroic. You would be an altruistic hero...every one of us already has access to the tools we need in order to put change in motion. And we all need to use these tools together, because this job is too big for any one hero...We can all become heroes in pioneering a new course that leads away from a global culture based mainly on buying and selling more stuff. The first step is to educate ourselves so we understand clearly why we need to change course. To answer the call to change

²¹⁹ Editor's Preface, in HH The Karmapa Ogyen Trinley Dorje, 2013, p. x.

²²⁰ Ibid, pp. 15-16.

a habitual culture of consumption we need to understand the role and nature of greed.²²¹

The Karmapa has gone about putting these words into action by organising conferences on the environment (particularly targeted at monastics),²²² handing out blankets to the poor in Bodhgaya during the winter,²²³ and promoting vegetarianism by becoming vegetarian himself,²²⁴ among other efforts. Further, rather than simply talk about environmental protection at the conferences he organised, the monks and nuns present spread out into the surrounding neighbourhood following one conference to pick up rubbish from the local river.²²⁵ As a result of these conferences, environmental measures have also been taken at numerous Karma Kagyu monasteries and other institutes throughout India and Nepal to make them more environmentally friendly.²²⁶

Hence, if we take the address of Master Hai Dao, which at times conflates Guan Gong and the Karmapa, within the context of the Karmapa's wider plans for Tibetan Buddhism at the present time, we can see how Guan Gong fits into this plan as a bodhisattva-type being, actively fighting corruption, greed, a consumerist culture, and resulting environmental destruction across the globe. The Karmapa's message in Master Hai Dao's address presents Guan Gong as an emissary who can encourage universal compassion and answer pressing concerns of the twenty-first century in both Chinese society and the rest of the world. Already-present virtues found in the Chinese Guan Gong, such as loyalty, honesty, trust and righteousness become universal virtues which he puts to use 'as one of the busiest gods in heaven', tackling environmental destruction, exploitation, unequal development, and so forth, all the while protecting the righteous.

In a sense, the Karmapa (through Hai Dao in this instance) has continued where the late Qing Dynasty (and to a lesser extent, the Republican regime) left off. Official superscription of Guan Gong's character ended more or less with the late Qing Dynasty, when titles ceased to be imparted to gods. The official Republican veneration of Guan

²²¹ See *ibid*, pp. 56-57.

²²² The first conference was held in March, 2009. See 'Second Conference on Environmental Protection for Kagyu Monasteries and Centers', <http://www.kagyuoffice.org/2009.conference.environment.html> [accessed 29/04/2013].

²²³ HH The Karmapa Ogyen Trinley Dorje, p. 123.

²²⁴ *Ibid*, p. 97.

²²⁵ 'Questions, discussion and Testing', <http://www.kagyuoffice.org/2009.conference.environment.html> [accessed 29/04/2013].

²²⁶ The Karmapa Lama's environmental guidelines for Karma Kagyu Tibetan Buddhist institutes in India and Nepal are outlined in his booklet *Guidelines for Karma Kagyu Buddhist Monasteries, Centers and Community*. See 'The Morning Session', *ibid*.

Gong under Yuan Shikai appeared to be more of a commemoration of heroes in general, with fewer supernatural qualities attributed to him.²²⁷ Under the CPC Guan Gong has been removed even further from state ideology, and in his place a ‘rational’ Confucius has recently been promoted within the Party’s ideology of ‘Harmonious Society’ (*hexie shehui* – explored in Chapter Four). China is no longer at war and therefore no longer needs a ‘god of war’, but rather a figure who can bring social harmony to a nation experiencing the less-becoming side of economic development and modernisation, such as inequality and exploitation. Moreover, it needs, according to the CPC, to shed its ‘superstitions’ and get some ‘rationality’, so that a Chinese Marxist state may finally develop in a true sense. Yet for those Chinese who need answers to the big questions of life and death, as well as help here and now, the supernatural still seems to be in high demand.

For some Han informants this demand cannot be met with alternative Chinese traditions, which are seen as too ‘earth-bound’. For example, mainstream Chan (Zen) and Pureland Buddhism were seen by some to have lost their ‘authenticity’ and efficacy, due to dynastic, Republican, and most recently Chinese Marxist influence in religious affairs. Adding to this ‘inauthenticity’, these traditions have long been syncretised with Confucian and Daoist beliefs, and the claims of some masters regarding their lineage histories are perceived to be of disrepute. While most informants felt that Chan and Tibetan traditions are essentially ‘the same’, in that they both are a path to enlightenment, a number were wary of so-called Chan ‘masters’, as they said that several had recently been exposed in the media spotlight as frauds. Informants also felt that one must be careful when choosing a Tibetan guru, but that it is easier to prove his/her authenticity by checking his/her lineage history, visiting his/her monastery in person, and preferably observing him/her for a period of time (traditionally at least three years). Thus, what Party ideology and apparently ‘inauthentic’ strands of religion cannot provide, Tibetan Buddhism can provide. As a professor of religious phenomenology in Beijing told me:

²²⁷ As Nedostup observes, during the Republican era, some, even of high rank (such as the 57th Army Command), requested that official sacrifices to Guandi, Yue Fei, and other gods be made – based on the continuation of the dynastic-era process of submitting names to the emperor for ‘shrine honors or government sponsorship’. These requests during the Republican era, however, were rejected. According to Nedostup, ‘what such people did not comprehend was that in the KMT universe, the new meanings of Confucius, Guandi, and other cultural heroes were surely not to exist with older ones – instead, nationalistic symbolic meaning was predicated on removing these figures completely from the realm of cosmic ritual.’ See Nedostup, R, *Superstitious Regimes: Religion and the Politics of Chinese Modernity*, Cambridge, Harvard University Press, 2009, p. 267-268.

Most Chinese believe in the humanistic ideology of the state. Others attend state-sanctioned religious organisations. Some, however, seek ‘authentic’ religion elsewhere. It’s like a market. When a manufacturer stops producing a certain product, the customer looks elsewhere (Field notes, 07/06/2011).

The Karmapa’s vision of Guan Gong appears to draw upon this trust among Han practitioners in Tibetan Buddhism as ‘authentic’ and ‘powerful’ within the religious market. The Karmapa, being the head of the Karma Kagyu school and lineage, is vested with power and authenticity. His Chinese emissary, Guan Gong, is thus authenticated, and takes on the role of a guide shepherding the masses towards enlightenment, while protecting, providing for material needs, and answering other ‘this-worldly’ requests. Guan Gong is the ‘archetype’, so to speak, of the transcendent made manifest in the world through ‘skilful means’. When Master Hai Dao relayed the apparent message of the Karmapa that Guan Gong is interested in promoting trust among people and fighting corruption and inequality, and is ready to sacrifice all self-interest for others, he brought this message of ‘authenticity’ home strongly. There is perceived to be no fraudulence in this emissary, only righteousness and altruism.

Returning to a comparison of state ideology and Tibetan Buddhism, we find that the two worldviews – that of transcendent compassion and wisdom for working toward enlightenment and ultimate freedom from samsara, and that of social ethics for the harmony needed for nation-building – diverge considerably. Similarly, as discussed earlier regarding the interpretation of Guan Gong within a folk and Confucian worldview during dynastic times, the supernatural does not readily converge with the humanistic. This is not to say that the literati and ruling dynastic elite did not necessarily believe in the supernatural, but they ‘played it down’ and often ‘rationalised’ the unexplainable.²²⁸ Even all the superlative titles conferred upon Guan Gong by emperors still confined him to the rules and regulations for conferring titles on gods, and ensured that religiosity, at least at the official level, was always kept within the

²²⁸ This is seen in ghost stories written by Ming and Qing scholars, compiled in a Communist propaganda booklet in 1961 – *Stories About Not Being Afraid of Ghosts (Bu Pa Gui de Gushi)* – discussed in Chapter Seven of this thesis. Many if not all the authors of these stories, as admitted in the introduction to the booklet, did believe in the existence of ghosts, but scoffed at the fear with which common folk approached these entities, and at other times their wild imaginations which caused them to see things that were not there. See Anonymous, *Stories About Not Being Afraid of Ghosts*, The Institute of Literature of the Chinese Academy of Sciences, Foreign Languages Press, Peking, 1961.

sphere of the political. If the supernatural was ‘played down’ by the elite in dynastic times, it is rejected outright in official CPC ideology. Yet, as seen in the historical superscriptions of Guan Gong, certain virtues can be agreed upon by both the ‘supernaturalists’²²⁹ and the ‘rationalists’. While the bodhisattva’s altruism evidently goes further than a mutual respect for fellow human beings based on ‘cultural ethics’, both perspectives nevertheless agree mutual respect is necessary – within the former perspective to lay the foundation for higher practices of altruism, and within the latter to lay foundations for a stable society to become ever-more prosperous. However, the bodhisattva’s ideal and the ideal of a ‘Harmonious Society’ must necessarily part when the former apparently reaches the stage where all attachment to this life, and even the body, are severed. For the spiritual seeker seeking such liberation, an ideology on social harmony cannot suffice.

The Karmapa’s Guan Gong meets the practitioner of Tibetan Buddhism ‘halfway’ – he is a very practical god, working powerfully on ‘this-worldly’ matters as well as helping people on the road to enlightenment. He does not neglect social justice in favour of solitary meditation. He responds to needs both ancient and new. He therefore does everything and more than what is encompassed in the CPC’s recent policy of ‘Harmonious Society’. He is in all these respects similar to the supernatural Tibetan hero Gesar, of whom Master Hai Dao makes no mention, but whom a number of informants conflated with Guan Gong. Such conflation is not new. Under Emperor Kangxi (1654-1722) the cult of Guan Gong was promoted, in part, in an effort to incorporate the Gesar character – who was popular in Central Asia (particularly Tibet) – and thereby unite various ethnicities within his empire.²³⁰ While Hai Dao does not mention Gesar, the two characters have much in common, especially when considered within Hai Dao’s presentation of Guan Gong under the Karmapa’s guidance.

According to the epic of Gesar of Ling, Gesar drove out neighbouring kings who wished to upset the stability of the Tibetan Empire, and unified the various parts of Tibet. These kings are believed to have been demons that Gesar pacified to bring peace,

²²⁹ I use the term ‘supernatural’ lightly here, as a traditional Chinese worldview consisted of a great deal of overlap between the ‘supernatural’ and the natural. Unlike the Judeo-Christian worldview in which there is a sharper division between the divine and profane, the spirit world intermingles with the non-spirit world freely in Chinese tradition. This stems from ideas about rebirth, karma, yin-yang cosmology and the accompanying idea of ‘sympathetic resonance’.

²³⁰ Kornman, R, A Comparative Study of the Buddhist version of the ‘Epic of Gesar of Ling’, PhD Thesis, Princeton University, 1995, p. 25.

stability and unity in Tibet, and to further ground Buddhist doctrine and rule within the empire.²³¹ He successfully carried out this campaign because, according to Buddhist interpretation, he is an emanation of Avalokiteshvara, Manjushri and Guru Rinpoche (Padmasambhava). He is therefore considered a fully enlightened bodhisattva, who employed ‘skilful means’ to rid Tibet of evil influence and propagate and protect the dharma. The themes of uniting an empire, protecting religion, and exorcising evil can be seen in both the Gesar epic and the story of Guan Gong. Importantly, Nyingma lamas related to me that Gesar is not only the hero of Tibet, but, being a bodhisattva, is the hero of the whole world, a messiah-type figure that fights for the cause of the dharma universally. Both Gesar and the Karmapa’s Guan Gong therefore merge in this universal role as well.

The Karmapa, through Hai Dao, has brought the Chinese people an expanded vision of Guan Gong as never seen before.²³² Within this vision, Chinese and Tibetan cultural traditions converge. Yet they do so within a transnational/global context, and within the context of state and other ‘rationalist’ discourses. Informants obviously drew from this amalgam to varying degrees when conveying their perceptions of Guan Gong’s – and more generally – Tibetan Buddhism’s place in their lives, within the nation/party-state and within the world. Their perceptions thus often conveyed contestation and negotiation of the ideas of both religious and ‘secular’ powers. All informants who were aware of the Karmapa’s incorporation of Guan Gong felt this move reflected his wisdom. Some had a renewed interest in the character of Guan Gong because of this decision, and came to understand his ‘rightful’ place in Buddhism. Most believed the decision would increase interest among Chinese people in Tibetan Buddhism, and therefore felt it was a decision which made good use of ‘skilful means’ to teach the people through a figure with which they were already well acquainted. Some had not heard of the Karmapa’s decision but felt it was a wise move, as ‘all deities can fit in Tibetan Buddhism.’

²³¹ See Samuel, G, ‘The Epic and Nationalism in Tibet’, in Penny, B (ed.), *Religion and Biography in China and Tibet*, Richmond, Curzon Press, 2002.

²³² Besides his merging of Tibetan and Han cultures through the incorporation of Guan Gong into the Karma Kagyu school, the Karmapa has further proposed to merge these cultures through Buddhism by constructing a ‘Han-Tibetan’ monastery for 3,000 monks, presumably in Taiwan. Further, according to Hai Dao, the Karmapa himself has said he feels very much at home when in Taiwan, as if he was from Taiwan in a past life. See ‘Karmapa and Protector Guan Gong’, [accessed 13/11/ 2011].

For still others, while they believed that the Karmapa's decision was indeed a wise use of 'skilful means', they felt that Guan Gong has long been irrelevant to them, and may not even exist outside popular imagination. Such informants believed that, just as the Tibetan religious elite in Tibet had used 'skilful means' by employing exorcist rites and other rituals 'borrowed from the Bon tradition' to meet the Tibetan masses at their own level, so too is the Karmapa seeking to meet the Chinese masses at their own level. 'Magical' rituals may not work and Guan Gong may not be a god, but 'if one believes they are real then they are real', and the outcome of this use of 'skilful means' is still the strengthening of Tibetan Buddhism and the spread of the dharma. These informant perceptions will be examined, respectfully, in the remainder of this chapter.

Guan Gong as Gesar, bodhisattva, worldly protector, and 'cultural relic'

Many Han informants stated that Guan Gong and Gesar are either one in the same, share very similar characteristics and therefore essentially play the same role, or even that one is an incarnation/emanation of the other. Some Han informants, particularly those of the Nyingma school, felt Gesar can essentially replace Guan Gong, as he is seen to embody the same warlike characteristics and similarly functions as a protector. This perception could be due, in part, to the imagery portrayed in Nyingma texts, such as in prayers to Gesar, in which his protection and help on the spiritual path are sought. These texts depict a Tibetan warrior figure, and are chanted together with earthy ritual music in Nyingma centres adorned with thangka paintings depicting Gesar. Rather than simply describing actual warfare, however, both puja texts and the Gesar epic portray Gesar in Buddhist terms,²³³ as a bodhisattva destroying ignorance and removing obstacles for practitioners. For example, the following section of a Nyingma Gesar prayer contextualises Gesar's position as both an emanation of Avalokiteshvara, Manjushri and Padmasambhava, and the embodiment of a protector warrior, able to remove obstacles to both worldly pursuits and practice of the dharma:

Because of this prayer [,] Emanation of Chagdo, Chenrezig [Avalokiteshvara],
Jampa Yang [Jampeyang or Manjushri] and Pema Sambhava [Padmasambhava],
the king of enemy defying warriors
Sit on the pure flower of my mind
Bless me to achieve all my wishes.

²³³ Some versions of the epic are, however, more 'Buddhicised' than others.

The enemies and obstacles of all good dharma and worldly activity, be removed at their root just by thinking of them.

....

[To Gesar's] Horse²³⁴ [and] all his helpers – to them we pray and offer so that all our wishes will be fulfilled by themselves.²³⁵

This notion of 'compassionate warriorship' is also emphasized in Shambhala training, a synthesis of Nyingma, Kagyu, Bon and other teachings propagated by the late Chogyam Trungpa Rinpoche (1939-1987) in the West. Shambhala training draws largely from the Gesar tradition. According to Sakyong Mipham Rinpoche, discussing Shambhala training:

Gesar is our family ancestor...Gesar of Ling [is] one of the greatest enlightenment warrior-buddhas in Tibet...He is a very prominent teacher, just like Padmasambhava. In fact, he's said to be an embodiment of Padmasambhava. He is sometimes known as drala or werma, a being who overcomes aggression, the sense of poverty that exists in people's minds. We can invoke his buddha activity, his compassionate warriorship, in order to bring a sense of confidence and inspiration...Gesar is a good example of a Shambhala warrior because he's a vajrayana buddha, Guru Rinpoche, and at the same time the king of Shambhala...Warriorship is courage – being able to offer our life, our ego, our attachment, for the benefit of others...In terms of how his or her activity relates to a bigger picture, the bodhisattva is thinking much bigger than the ordinary person. Warriors going to battle also think much bigger. No longer fearing death, they can act in a courageous way. Their vast vision gives them tremendous courage. A person who has no fear is not reckless or suicidal; they've expanded their mind, so they're not held down in the same way somebody else is. They express a sense of tremendous confidence through their presence, and it brings fear into those of the setting-sun world, those who are still bound by self-absorption. The Bodhicharyavatara – The Way of the Bodhisattva – expresses the commitment to working tirelessly over as many lifetimes as it takes. That's

²³⁴ Gesar's horse is believed to be an emanation of Hayagriva, a central Yidam (meditational) deity.

²³⁵ Palyul Nyingmapa Centre, *Green Tara Puja* text, Hong Kong, pp. 9-10.

warriorship: 'I will work courageously and tirelessly forever for the benefit of others...' ²³⁶

We can see from such descriptions why Han practitioners of Tibetan Buddhism who are well acquainted with Guan Gong would conflate him with Gesar. Both embody the ideal warrior, fighting evil with fearless courage; both seek righteousness, justice and peace; and both wish to unite their respective kingdoms (or in the case of Guan Gong, the prospective kingdom of General Liu Bei). Indeed, based on these and other similarities, ²³⁷ early foreign researchers observing the Chinese folk practice of building temples to Gesar, offering him joss sticks, confusing him with different gods and mistaking him for 'the Sacred King Guan Yu', ²³⁸ concluded in their comparison of the Gesar epic and *Romance of the Three Kingdoms* that Gesar and Guan Gong were different versions of one character. ²³⁹ However, Ren Naiqiang and Han Rulin, leading Tibetologists during the 1940s, concluded in their research, which was supported by R.A. Stein's later research, that Gesar and Guan Gong had separate origins. ²⁴⁰

In essence, for a number of practitioners, Guan Gong is Gesar because Gesar both embodies and perfects Guan Gong, in the same way that Tibetan Buddhism embodies much of the virtue and morality of Chinese traditions, while enriching them at a whole new level. This was expressed by a Nyingma practitioner in Hong Kong.

Gesar, in my opinion, is another form of Guan Gong. Some people may keep Guan Gong's statue at home, but not us, as we think Gesar is the same (Field notes, 15/05/2011).

A student in Hong Kong, also a Nyingma practitioner, while not being quite as sure, followed a similar line.

Guan Gong and Gesar are maybe the same. Buddha has many emanations. Gesar is also an incarnation of Guru Rinpoche (Field notes 22/05/2011).

²³⁶ Sakyong Mipham Rinpoche, 'The Teaching of Shambhala', in Midal, F (ed.), *Recalling Chogyam Trungpa*, Boston, Shambhala Publications, 2005, pp. 332-334.

²³⁷ According to Li, the sound of their names is also somewhat similar. See Li, LR, 'History and the Tibetan Epic Gesar' in *Oral Tradition*, vol. 16, no. 2, 2001, p. 320.

²³⁸ Han, RL, 1990, cited in *ibid*, p. 321.

²³⁹ *Ibid*.

²⁴⁰ *Ibid*.

The above informant, while not completely sure whether Guan Gong and Gesar are the same, is knowledgeable of the fact that Gesar is considered an incarnation of Guru Rinpoche (Padmasambhava). Thus if Guan Gong is Gesar, he necessarily is also an emanation of Guru Rinpoche. Such a view becomes rather confusing when one considers Padmasambhava (Guru Rinpoche) lived during the eighth century, while Guan Gong lived during the Warring States Period (c. 403-221 BC), which begs the question ‘whom was an emanation of whom?’ It is doubtful this and other Han Tibetan Buddhists would have Guru Rinpoche emanating from Guan Gong, the former being the ultimate embodiment of spiritual attainment and one of the most central figures of Tibetan Buddhism (who established the Vajrayana tradition to Tibet), while the latter is still located at the door of Chinese Buddhist temples. The answer may be that ‘buddhas have many emanations’, and thus can be in all places at all times, not holding historic time, location or culture to be an obstacle. Whatever the case, implying Guan Gong is an emanation of Guru Rinpoche puts the Chinese warrior on a very high plane indeed. Another Nyingma informant in Hong Kong was more confident about the unity of Guan Gong and Gesar.

Guan Gong is a protector of Tibetan Buddhism. He is an emanation of Gesar (Field notes, 19/05/2011).

An informant in Beijing who followed the Nyingma tradition and spent several years as a writer in Tibet, spoke of the Guandi temple in Lhasa, and his belief that Guan Gong and Gesar are the same.

There is a sacred hill [*bla-ri*] in Lhasa near the Potala with a temple at the top for Guan Gong. But actually I feel he is the same as Gesar (Field notes, 09/06/2011).

This writer knew of the distinctions Tibetan and Han patronisers of the temple make between the two characters, but he deliberately conflates them.²⁴¹ It is not clear whether he believes they are the same character or whether they share common characteristics and therefore should be considered the same. What is clear is that his hybridisation of the two characters is intentional. Such belief in Guan Gong as being identical with, or the same as Gesar, may draw inspiration from the Karmapa’s incorporation of Guan Gong into the Karma Kagyu school. By converging the two characters, practitioners

²⁴¹ Yeh notes that Tibetans go to this temple (*Gesar Lakhang* in Tibetan and *Guandi Miao* in Chinese) to worship Gesar, while mixed Han-Tibetans (*Lubu*) worship Guan Gong. See Yeh, E.T., 2008, p. 60.

have no need to shed their belief in Guan Gong. Because both characters are seen to be working towards the enlightenment and benefit of others, this conflation fits with the Karmapa's vision perfectly, and strengthens the collaboration of the two cultures.

While the above informants implied the bodhisattvahood of Guan Gong by conflating him with Gesar, and thus perhaps drawing strength from and in turn strengthening the Karmapa's universal vision, other informants spoke more directly of Guan Gong as being a bodhisattva. An artist in a village outside Beijing who followed the Nyingma tradition, while himself not having any statues of Guan Gong, held him in high regard. Unlike the above informants, however, he did not conflate Guan Gong with Gesar.

I don't have any 'Han' deities such as Guan Gong on my altar. But I believe Guan Gong is a bodhisattva. At a temple at the Larung Buddhist Academy in Serthar in Sichuan Province there is a special shrine for Gesar, who is also a bodhisattva as well as a protector (Field notes, 12/06/2011).

This informant saw the bodhisattva-attributes of both characters while not conflating them. A couple from the same village, also following the Nyingma tradition, believed the incorporation of Guan Gong into Tibetan Buddhism to be a positive move, as they believe he is a bodhisattva.

Guan Gong is a bodhisattva, so there's no problem including him. He is also a *deva* (Chinese – *shen*) in the highest of the six levels of existence. As long as you show kindness and have compassion you will become a god, and there is no problem worshipping them. Shakyamuni lived 2500 years ago; Confucius before that; Laozi lived before him. Every belief has its place and time (Field notes, 14/06/2011).

Here the term 'bodhisattva' (*pusa*) might be used as it is in 'popular' Chinese tradition, as a loose category for any ethereal being – that is, *shen* (god). As Yao and Zhao note, *pusa* is used as a generic term for gods in many parts of China.²⁴² Thus these informants,

²⁴² Yao, X, & Zhao, Y, *Chinese Religion: A Contextual Approach*, London, Continuum, 2010, p. 158. Cohen provides further contextualisation for the differences between these terms. He observes that although a god was (and is) commonly referred to as a bodhisattva (*pusa*) in Chinese religious circles, this title 'cannot be taken too literally', as 'the gods of the popular pantheon were not bodhisattvas' – in contrast to bodhisattvas, 'their mission was not to lead mortals to salvation, but rather to protect and regulate society, of which they the gods were in fact a part.' See Cohen, ML, 'Souls and Salvation:

seemingly drawing from this lack of distinction, believed Guan Gong is a bodhisattva *deva*, and implied that anyone can become a *deva* if one leads a good life. The implication is that he is in fact only a *deva*, but we may alternatively label him a bodhisattva. He fits into Tibetan Buddhism as both, because ‘every belief has its place and time’, each being a different revelation of the dharma. Another Han Nyingma practitioner in Gyalthang believed Guan Gong is a bodhisattva, but distinguished between him and the bodhisattva he protects, Guanyin.

Guan Gong is both a bodhisattva and a protector deity. But usually Buddhists don’t keep him in their houses, especially if there are children present, as he holds a sword and was a military leader who killed others. Although he stands for righteousness, Buddhism is against killing, so he is usually found in police stations or in other places where his help is needed. We generally keep Guanyin instead, who is more tranquil and brings peace. But Daoists keep his statue in their homes. (Field notes, 16/07/2011).

This informant, while acknowledging that Guan Gong is a bodhisattva, believes his violent past keeps him from being placed in most Buddhist houses. While she regards Guan Gong as a bodhisattva, she speaks mainly of his militant characteristics. She also touches upon his righteousness but attributes to Guanyin the more ‘typical’ bodhisattva virtues. For all intents and purposes then, the bodhisattva title she attributes to Guan Gong is equivalent to simply a non-enlightened or only semi-enlightened *deva* (*shen*).

Most Tibetan lama informants, perhaps adhering to the terms *deva* and bodhisattva more strictly, believed Guan Gong is a non-enlightened protector rather than a bodhisattva. A Karma Kagyu incarnate lama (*tulku*) in Lijiang stated the following in regards to Guan Gong:

Belief in Guan Gong helps people be more loyal to each other, and to authority, such as one’s guru, and encourages bravery. Guan Gong is a protector, not a bodhisattva, because he killed many people, so he is not really righteous. Gesar, while he has a similar warrior-like image, is not the same. Gesar helped the Tibetan empire expand greatly. He is an incarnation of the Buddha, and because of him Tibet prospered and religion became firmly established there. So he is a bodhisattva. The difference between Gesar and Guan Gong is that the former

Conflicting Themes in Chinese Popular Religion’, in Watson, J.L., & Rawski, E.S. (eds.), *Death Ritual in Late Imperial and Modern China*, Berkeley, University of California Press, 1988.

suppressed many evil spirits and spread Buddhism in Tibet [while the latter simply killed others]. What Gesar did helped other people to believe in Buddhism, so he is a bodhisattva (Field notes, 20/07/2011).

It appears that the above *tulku* does not know of, or does not follow the account of Guan Gong's enlightenment under the Tiantai Master Zhiyi in the sixth century. He refers only to Guan Gong's military campaigns during his earthly existence before he was recognised as a god/bodhisattva. For him, Guan Gong is a worldly protector rather than an enlightened bodhisattva. A Karma Kagyu Rinpoche in Taipei also believed Guan Gong to be a worldly protector, incorporated by the Karmapa to accommodate Taiwanese who already venerate him.

The Karmapa included Guan Gong as a protector, and some [practitioners] pray to him here in Taiwan...Most Taiwanese in general pray to Guan Gong, and so they are already devoted to him. But Tibetan Buddhism doesn't allow people to pray to worldly deities, so the Karmapa wrote a puja for him in Tibetan, and Master Hai Dao was asked to perform this puja for him every Chinese New Year...He is not a[n] [enlightened] deity but a local protector, to whom people can pray for protection and better health (Field notes, 05/08/2011).

According to this Rinpoche, Guan Gong was 'authenticated' by the Karmapa, but only within a protector role. This seems somewhat less grand than the Karmapa's apparent vision of Guan Gong according to Master Hai Dao's address. The reasons for this apparent difference in perception regarding the roles of Guan Gong are beyond the scope of this thesis, but what the above statements by two renowned Tibetan Buddhist leaders show is that the beliefs of Han practitioners do not always concur with those of the religious elite.²⁴³ With the convergence of such figures as Guan Gong and the various facets of Chinese culture which he embodies with Tibetan Buddhism, there appears to be more creative interpretation employed by practitioners as to how this convergence plays out. Guan Gong, while being of central importance to traditional Chinese beliefs, is a relatively peripheral figure in Tibetan Buddhism even after the Karmapa's incorporation. That is, he may be seen as a type of emissary, or as a bodhisattva, but the major Tibetan rituals and pujas are for the central Vajrayana bodhisattvas/buddhas. Guan Gong, whatever his new elevation under the Karmapa, is

²⁴³ One Khenpo in Beijing did believe Guan Gong is both a bodhisattva and a protector, but he was the only Tibetan master to relate this belief.

still situated at the side of the altar or on the other side of the room in Karma Kagyu centres.²⁴⁴

Yet while Guan Gong may be neither ‘here nor there’ according to the perspectives of the Tibetan Buddhist elite, he is of little relevance for some Han Tibetan Buddhist practitioners who never really had much interest or belief in him in the first place. Although such practitioners viewed the Karmapa’s decision as positive, they saw Guan Gong’s deification in dynastic China as stemming from folk imagination; he holds little relevance for their own lives and beliefs. This was expressed by an informant in Hong Kong from a nominal Protestant background who followed Mingyur Rinpoche.

I think the purpose of the Karmapa’s decision was to connect the ‘energy’ of Tibetan Buddhism with that of Chinese tradition. Tibetan Buddhism in general may incorporate local deities to bring their energy together as one. But I think Guan Gong was mainly incorporated for the sake of mainland Chinese. Apart from triads and police, we don’t really follow him here (Field notes, 23/04/2011).

This informant, a doctorate holder working as a part-time university lecturer, constantly ‘rationalised’ many aspects of her faith, as will be examined further in Chapter Five. She follows Mingyur Rinpoche, head of Tergar International and the subgroup, Tergar Asia, based in Hong Kong. Mingyur Rinpoche presents the message of Tibetan Buddhism in a very accessible manner for young, ‘modern’ Han Chinese – free of ‘superstitious’ elements and with practical meditation techniques for fast-paced modern life.²⁴⁵ It is unsurprising, therefore, that this practitioner – due in part to her Christian education and the ‘superstitious-free’ teachings of Mingyur Rinpoche – would not believe in Guan Gong. Needless to say, Guan Gong is not only followed by police and triads in Hong Kong, and he is probably more widely popular in Taiwan, not on the mainland. For such informants, the elements of Chinese tradition which are finding convergence with Tibetan Buddhism among other Han practitioners are viewed as peripheral and their immediate impact on their beliefs negligible.

²⁴⁴ Personal observation at Karma Kagyu centres in Hong Kong.

²⁴⁵ Belief in Guan Gong and other ‘superstitious’ elements are absent not only from Mingyur Rinpoche’s teachings; they are also removed from the modernised teachings of the Chinese Buddhist religious elite. For example, Taiwanese Master Xingyun of Buddha Light Mountain (*Foguangshan*) views ‘popular’ religious belief in Guan Gong and Mazu as ‘superstition’ (*mixin*). Yet, similar to the views of some of my informants, he sees such belief as positive if it gives people hope and helps them live more moral lives. At the same time, such belief often leads towards extravagance, which wastes resources and time. See Chandler, S, p. 141.

Some informants, mainly those who had not heard of the Karmapa's decision, were more adamant that Guan Gong is simply a folk god, who does not have any real place in Buddhism. The most adamant of these views was expressed by a Hong Kong informant, who was a former Catholic-turned-Daoist-turned-New Age Buddhist-turned-Tibetan Buddhist follower of the Karma Kagyu school.

If we look at Daoism in its original form as it started out with Laozi and Chuangzi, it was very good. They emphasised emptiness and meditation. But then it became flooded with different gods that are just the creation of human minds – *Tin Hau* (Mand - *Tian Hou*)...*Bak Dai* (*Bai Di*) – they're all just made up gods that don't exist. There are intermediary gods apart from the 'God' of all creation – that is, the original source of the universe – but these are not the gods you see in Daoist temples. The only ones in the temples that are real are the Three Pure Ones (Cant – *Saamqing*, Mand – *Sanqing*), who are actually representations of principles rather than physical gods, and Guanyin. But Guanyin is actually Buddhist. Guan Gong was a god, but now he's been reincarnated as a human, so people who pray to him are wasting their time. He shouldn't be put in temples (Field notes, 14/05/2011).

When I mentioned the Karmapa's incorporation of Guan Gong into the Karma Kagyu school, he was surprised, and said that perhaps the Karmapa had done this as a means of reaching out to more Chinese people, while not actually believing in him himself. He further claimed that 'stories' about the lower realms of hell are only told by lamas to urge lay people to follow the dharma, while no one is actually reincarnated in such states of existence.²⁴⁶ Here again the claim of 'skilful means' is employed to explain an apparent contradiction in the manner in which the informant believes, as opposed to the

²⁴⁶ The conclusion of this informant may well draw on the modernist 'psychologisation' of the realms of rebirth in Tibetan Buddhism by various Tibetan religious leaders who have taken Tibetan Buddhism to the West, such as Chogyam Trungpa Rinpoche. He says the following about the realms of rebirth:

The realms are predominantly emotional attitudes towards ourselves and our surroundings – reinforced by conceptualizations and rationalizations. As human beings we may, during the course of a day, experience the emotions of all of the realms, from the pride of the god realm to the hatred and paranoia of the hell realm. Nonetheless, a person's psychology is usually firmly rooted in one realm. This realm provides us with a style of confusion, a way of entertaining and occupying ourselves so as not to have to face our fundamental uncertainty, our ultimate fear that we may not exist. See Trungpa, C, 1976, p. 24, cited in McMahan, D.L., pp. 45-46.

McMahan notes that 'connecting the six realms with specific emotions or states of mind to be overcome has solid groundings in Buddhist textual traditions', but the 'presentation of their significance as primarily or even exclusively psychological is uniquely modern.' See *ibid*.

religious elite. It appears this informant has stripped Tibetan Buddhism of all excess ‘superstition’, refining it somewhat to a version he termed ‘very scientific’.

In stark comparison to the above two informants, others who had previously relegated Guan Gong to ‘folk belief’, had a renewed interest in him following the Karmapa’s incorporation. For example, a Taiwanese pilot for China Airlines in Taipei who followed the Karma Kagyu tradition said the following:

I have always had admiration for Guan Gong as a kind of martial arts hero. But I always thought he was a god of folk tradition, and never paid much serious attention to his religious side. But through the Karmapa I have ‘rediscovered’ him. Now I understand that he is a protector of Guanyin (Field notes, 10/08/2011).

For this practitioner, what was previously ‘irrational’ became ‘rational’ and ‘authenticated’ under the Karmapa. We could read here that Tibetan Buddhism in such instances has brought back a trust in religion in general, the latter of which has become increasingly ‘rationalised’ and stripped of ‘superstition’ in all Chinese societies. On the other hand, Tibetan Buddhism was described by this informant as being ‘scientific’. He related that he had met the twelfth Tai Situ Rinpoche while in India, who had told him things about aeronautics that he himself as a pilot was unaware of, and expounded upon things about which he was knowledgeable with precision. Thus he was deeply impressed by not only Tai Situ’s knowledge of spiritual things, but things ‘of the world’. In light of such reverence for *tulkus* such as Tai Situ Rinpoche and the Karmapa, when the latter says Guan Gong is of importance, it is believed without question. In the process, Chinese traditions once ‘lost’ re-emerge in the practitioner’s worldview.

Indeed, all practitioners – whatever superscription they layered upon the Karmapa’s superscriptions of Guan Gong – believed his incorporation to be of benefit to at least some, and to be a positive move in at least bringing together Han and Tibetan people under the medium of Tibetan Buddhism (or Buddhism in general), and spreading the dharma. This was the view of a Tibetan graduate student in Gyalthang expressed by many other informants.

I haven't heard of the Karmapa's integration of Guan Gong. But there's no problem including him. Anything that is beneficial [to the spread of the dharma] and does not harm is acceptable (Field notes, 04/07/2011).

In sum, the above views by (mostly) Han informants show that some have taken the Karmapa's decision 'at face value', believing Guan Gong to be powerful, either as a bodhisattva *deva* or simply a *deva*, either on his own or conflated with the character of Gesar. At least one informant 'rationalised' him as a kind of 'energy' rather than a god, and another removed him entirely from not only Tibetan Buddhism, but religion altogether. Still others, such as the Taiwanese pilot, found a renewed interest in Guan Gong by learning more about him from the Karmapa's teachings, and had a renewed interest in Chinese traditions in general. Most Tibetan lama and monk informants, for their part, generally perceived Guan Gong as a worldly rather than enlightened protector. The relatively peripheral role of Guan Gong in Tibetan Buddhism meant that both the religious elite and lay practitioners could employ their own creativity somewhat in their understanding of his character.

Conclusion

Guan Gong is a receptacle upon which has been projected the hopes and aspirations of the common people, and the designs of the dynastic elite during dynastic times. He was the hero that the common people admired, a messiah sage who saved them here and perhaps even hereafter. Under Qing dynastic rule and the early Republican state, he became a Confucianised god loyal to the ruling elite, and the unifying force of the military in its various campaigns. He was and is thus representative of so much of traditional Chinese culture, and the negotiation between the ideals of the elite and the commoner. When we enter the Karmapa's vision of Guan Gong over these ideals of a Confucian sage, a provider for practical 'this-worldly' needs, and a supernatural exorciser of malevolent ghosts and ultimately death, his symbol morphs yet again. Now he becomes the universal Guan Gong, emulating Confucian virtues, providing for practical needs, and exorcising ghosts (whether real or imagined) all over the world. Yet he does all these things with the commitment of a bodhisattva. He not only emulates, provides and exorcises, but does so with an altruistic outlook. Not caring for himself, he

works ‘as one of the busiest gods in heaven’ tirelessly for the benefit of others, much as Gesar is believed to work.

Yet not all Han Tibetan Buddhists see Guan Gong as a universalised bodhisattva, and feel he is no longer relevant for their lives or practice. The Tibetan religious elite also contest that he is a bodhisattva. Other Han informants felt that he is indeed a bodhisattva and protector, while others previously did not believe in him, but their faith in him was renewed following the Karmapa’s incorporation of the Chinese god. Thus, the historic superscriptions of Guan Gong continue to find resonance, together with the contestation between the elite and the lay, and internally within these groups themselves. The superscriptions layered upon his character are numerous and diverse, as are the superscriptions of the ‘traditional’ Chinese ideas and beliefs he represents when they converge with Tibetan Buddhism, as explored throughout this thesis. Added to this complex layering of meaning by lay, religious elite, state and other ‘rational’ discourses is the global state of Tibetan Buddhism, and the global issues it faces (which have been brought into focus at the local, translocal and/or transnational level). The chapters that follow aim to unravel some of this complexity by exploring specific aspects of Han beliefs, ideas and practices, both ‘traditional’ and ‘modern’, which have been merged with Tibetan Buddhism by practitioners and the religious elite.

Chapter Four

The Confucian Revival and Tibetan Buddhism: Negotiating Religious Syncretism and Rivalry

Introduction

This chapter examines how Tibetan Buddhism is perceived particularly among mainland Han practitioners²⁴⁷ within the context of the recent Confucian revival – either as a socially-transformative tradition which matches Confucianism on the ‘human level’, and/or as a world-transcending tradition.²⁴⁸ It examines these perspectives in light of historical interactions between Chinese Buddhism and Confucianism, and between Tibetan Buddhism and Confucianism, to demonstrate the continuity of these perspectives with, or departure from, long-held arguments for and against Buddhist-Confucian syncretism. At the same time, this chapter seeks to demonstrate how such historical arguments are now contained, to an extent, within the parameters of the Confucian political ideology of ‘Harmonious Society’ (*hexie shehui*), promoted under former Party Secretary and President Hu Jintao. The CPC has sought to regain legitimacy amid growing problems, ranging from disparity between rich and poor to corruption within the Party, and has gone about this by portraying its governance as being ‘people first’ (*yiren weiben*) and in line with the Confucian political philosophy of ‘harmonious society’.

As the Karmapa has ‘skilfully’ incorporated Guan Gong and his Confucian superscriptions into Tibetan Buddhism, the CPC has used its own set of ‘skilful means’ to incorporate Confucius into its political ideology. The Karmapa’s incorporation of Guan Gong could be seen as one way to help Chinese people who follow ‘popular’ Chinese religion and/or certain strands of Confucianism/Buddhism/Daoism – who may

²⁴⁷ Other informants represented in this chapter are Tibetan, Bai, Mongol and Han-Mongol.

²⁴⁸ Ultimately, even the designations of samsara and nirvana are believed to be empty, according to Nagarjuna’s (c. 150-250 AD) teaching on emptiness. He says that, because both samsara and nirvana, like everything else, are empty of inherent existence, there is ‘not the slightest difference between the two’. See MMK 25: 19-20, cited in McMahan, D.L., p. 156.

The designation of these two categories in Tibetan Buddhist doctrine is thus a conventional rather than an absolute truth. In light of Nagarjuna’s teaching on the emptiness of samsara and nirvana (referred to in this chapter and thesis with corresponding binaries such as mundane/transcendent and this-worldly/other-worldly), this chapter and thesis are referring to informants’ conventional rather than absolute separation of the two.

already believe in this Chinese god – understand important concepts of Tibetan Buddhism, and draw them to study the dharma in depth.²⁴⁹ The CPC, on the other hand, needs Confucius to maintain stability and mitigate the aforementioned troubles China is facing.

As the Karmapa is using ‘skilful means’ to retain and expand the Confucian attributes of Guan Gong to draw a Chinese audience to deeper truths, and the CPC is ‘skilfully’ using Confucius for its own political ends – so too are certain Han and other ethnic practitioners in Greater China layering Tibetan Buddhism with a new Confucian superscription. A number of mainland informants viewed Tibetan Buddhism as both a socially-transformative tradition ‘skilfully’ compatible with Confucianism on the ‘human level’, as well as ‘world-transcending’. Yet there was a divide between those who felt Tibetan Buddhism is compatible with Confucian thinking – including interpretations of such thinking within the recent political philosophy of ‘Harmonious Society’ – and those who believed Tibetan Buddhism is ‘beyond the world’ and not compatible with ‘worldly’ ideologies or Confucian-influenced traditions. It is argued in this chapter that those who simultaneously were searching for their Chinese cultural roots and practising Tibetan Buddhism were more likely to see Buddhist-Confucian syncretism as legitimate, whereas those who sought to break with their traditional roots and thereby guard the purity of Tibetan Buddhism and its transcendent message, were unlikely to view such syncretism as legitimate or desirable.

Both views, as mentioned above, are in many ways a continuation of historical syncretism and rivalry between Confucian and Buddhist traditions, both in China and Tibet. They are also born out of current Confucian and Buddhist cooperation and divergence within the context of the recent Confucian revival.²⁵⁰ The following section

²⁴⁹ Such use of ‘skilful means’ in the history of Tibetan, Chinese and all schools of Buddhism was common. For example, as Overmyer observes concerning Chinese Buddhism, Mahayana Buddhist philosophy denounced ‘conventional piety’ because it advocated earning salvation through good deeds, which ‘miss[ed] the point of Buddhism, the attainment of an enlightened and selfless perspective.’ Yet, because Chinese Buddhist leaders wanted to convey the Buddhist message in a way that common people could understand, they used (and continue to use) ‘conventional ritual and ethical teachings’. However, this message conveyed through ‘skilful means’ was considered by intellectuals to be ‘transitional and temporary’, as they believed that common folk would advance to higher teachings. Instead, ‘it has been the mainstream of popular [Chinese] Buddhism for centuries.’

See Overmyer, D.L., ‘Values in Chinese Sectarian Literature: Ming and Ch’ing Pao-chüan’, in Johnson, D., & Nathan, A.J., & Rawski, E.S. (eds.), p. 236.

²⁵⁰ Confucianism as it is represented in this chapter may appear to be entirely notional at times, yet that is how the tradition is being portrayed by the CPC, and how it is variously perceived amongst the middle-class, including a number of informants in this chapter. I deliberately did not define Confucianism for the informants, but simply asked how they perceive Confucianism in relation to their faith; the fact that their ideas vary about what Confucianism is, reflects the multifaceted aspects of the tradition within

is concerned with the historical context of Confucian-Buddhist interaction, and the next section with the contemporary context.

The Historical Context

Tibetan Buddhism and Confucianism share similarities on the ‘conventional’ level, yet ultimately diverge, as Nietupski summarises:

Confucian thinkers were unable to detach themselves from the world; they had to work through the world because their faith in the perfectibility of human nature through self-effort demanded they do so...Tibetan Buddhist ethical teachings, and especially those on conventional reality and karma, resonate well with Chinese ideologies. However, Tibetan Buddhism, while certainly interested in skilful action in this world, simultaneously [seeks] a related yet transcendent objective that [goes] beyond the dominant Chinese frame of reference.²⁵¹

The degree of convergence and divergence between Buddhist and Confucian traditions has, however, been contested throughout Chinese, and to some extent, Tibetan, religious history. At various junctures in Chinese history different emperors favoured and propagated either of these traditions or Daoism, depending on the political climate and/or their spiritual inclinations. For example, Emperor Wu of the Liang dynasty thought Buddhism was more sophisticated and universal in outlook than Confucianism,²⁵² and reformulated such Confucian ideas as filial piety into universal concepts according to Buddhist theories of merit and karma, which extended to all sentient beings.²⁵³ At the same time he claimed that Buddhism dealt with the inner world of the mind and Confucianism with the outer, while both are essentially the same.²⁵⁴

Stricter readings of Mahayana Buddhist philosophy by some intellectuals, however, criticised conventional piety, because of its ego-centred idea of earning one’s own salvation by doing good deeds, rather than ‘the attainment of an enlightened and selfless

contemporary China. Thus, their definitions of Confucianism may locate the tradition within a ‘Buddhicised’ framework, as was the case in Chinese and to some extent Tibetan history; conversely, they may define Confucianism as a set of ethics; alternatively, they may see Confucianism as the basis for ‘higher’ Buddhist learning; and/or in combination with these definitions, they may see Confucianism as the basis for a ‘harmonious society’ in line with the CPC’s recent propagation of this ideology.

²⁵¹ Nietupski, P, ‘The Reverend Chinese (Gyanakpa tsang) at Labrang Monastery’, in Kapstein, M.T. (ed.), 2009, p. 192.

²⁵² Janousch, A, ‘The emperor as bodhisattva: the bodhisattva ordination and ritual assemblies of Emperor Wu of the Liang Dynasty’ in McDermott, J (ed.), 1999, p. 147.

²⁵³ Ibid.

²⁵⁴ Ibid, p. 148.

perspective'.²⁵⁵ Likewise, certain literati who followed either of these traditions sought to propagate one above the other, even as they appropriated from the other. Hui Yuan (334-416), for example, one of the literati trained in the Confucian classics who turned to Buddhism, referred to Confucianism, Daoism and all other schools following his conversion, as 'but chaff compared to Buddhism'.²⁵⁶ At the other end, there were those such as Han Yu (786-824) who wished to rid China of foreign Buddhist influence and to return to the teachings of the sages.²⁵⁷ Such advocates of Confucianism were most often active and outspoken against Buddhism during social and political change. For example, during the Song dynasty, Confucian reformers rallied against what they perceived to be the 'otherworldliness' and 'antisocial values' of Buddhism.²⁵⁸ Yet, at the same time, as Wright notes, these reformers also appropriated from Buddhism, which, according to Wright, ultimately led to a decline of Buddhist philosophy in China.²⁵⁹

Despite this rivalry, the two traditions, along with Daoism, have been thoroughly syncretised. As Yu notes, long before the syncretisation of the Three Teachings during the late Ming, these traditions could not have succeeded in China without each other.²⁶⁰ Examples of syncretisation from the early period of Buddhist-Confucian interaction included equating terms for filial piety with those related to Indian Buddhist morality,²⁶¹ emitting or radically changing Indian Buddhist passages, expressions, or ideas considered offensive to Confucian morality;²⁶² and showing how Buddhist ideas and values were in accord with Confucian and Daoist ideas and values.²⁶³ For example, the figure of the bodhisattva underwent 'Confucianisation' during the Song period; Fan Zhongyan (989 to 1052) described the Confucian scholar as 'one who is first in worrying about the world's troubles and last in enjoying its pleasures', a notion which 'cast in secular Chinese terms the Bodhisattva ideal of giving self for others'.²⁶⁴ This 'Confucianisation' of Buddhism and Buddhist appropriation of Confucianism helped Chinese governments to employ Buddhism in their foreign policy from the Sui (581-

²⁵⁵ Overmyer, D.L., 'Values in Chinese Sectarian Literature: Ming and Ch'ing Pao-chuan', in Johnson, D, & Nathan, A.J., & Rawski, E.S. (eds.), *Popular Culture in Late Imperial China*, Berkeley, University of California Press, 1987, p. 236.

²⁵⁶ Wright, A, *Buddhism in Chinese History*, Redwood City, Stanford University Press, 1959, p. 46.

²⁵⁷ *Ibid*, p. 88.

²⁵⁸ *Ibid*, p. 89.

²⁵⁹ *Ibid*, p. 90.

²⁶⁰ Yu, CF, *The Renewal of Buddhism in China – Chu-hung and the Late Ming Synthesis*, New York, Columbia University Press, 1981, p. 1.

²⁶¹ Wright, p. 35.

²⁶² *Ibid*, pp. 36-37.

²⁶³ *Ibid*, pp. 38-39.

²⁶⁴ *Ibid*, p. 93.

619) and Tang (618-907) dynasties, during the Manchu dynasty (during which time ‘Lamaism’ became central in dealing with Tibetan, Mongolian and other Central Asian societies), and through to Mao Zedong’s use of Buddhism when dealing with other Asian nations.²⁶⁵

The period of greatest syncretisation occurred, however, during the late Ming, when Buddhism was revitalised after two hundred years in the shadows through the efforts of prominent monks, such as Zhu Hong (1535-1613). Zhu Hong and other monks brought about a renewal of Buddhism at both the lay and monastic levels by adopting practical cultivation methods over doctrinal specialisation, which set the stage for developments in Buddhism during the Qing and Republican periods.²⁶⁶ Zhu Hong’s teachings, for example, emphasised civic virtue and filial piety as it did compassion and wisdom.²⁶⁷ At the same time, while he saw filial piety as ordinary compassion, he thought Buddhist compassion for all sentient beings was superior.²⁶⁸

Even as Zhu Hong syncretised Confucian and Buddhist teachings, however, he was also concerned with the way in which monks dabbled in the ‘three genteel pursuits of the literati’ – calligraphy, poetry and the art of letter writing, at the expense of their ultimate pursuit of Buddhist enlightenment.²⁶⁹ He thus emphasised that Buddhism should first mingle with wider society and then withdraw from it in order to retain its transcendent and transforming message.²⁷⁰ He was likewise concerned with the way in which the Chan tradition had become overly intellectual, a kind of ‘fabrication of sophistries’ influenced by Confucianism.²⁷¹

Tibetan Buddhism, unlike Chinese Buddhism, was largely outside the sphere of Confucian influence. However, while Tibetan Buddhist encounters with Confucianism have only been intermittent, such encounters have left their print on Tibetan religious ideas and practice to this day. For example, Mgon Po Skyabs ‘rewrote’ the history of China in 1736 through a Mahayanist lens by redeploying arguments circulating in China about the relationship between Buddhism, Confucianism, and Daoism. He borrowed the metaphor created by the lay Chinese Li Shiqian (523 to 588) which compared

²⁶⁵ Ibid, p. 119.

²⁶⁶ Yu, p. 2.

²⁶⁷ Ibid, p. 6.

²⁶⁸ Ibid, p. 71.

²⁶⁹ Ibid, p. 182.

²⁷⁰ Ibid.

²⁷¹ Ibid, p. 81.

Confucianism with the stars, Daoism with the moon and Buddhism with the sun,²⁷² and redeployed it to emphasise the degree of luminosity which each of these bodies emit, rather than their indispensability in relation to each other, which was Li Shiqian's intended emphasis.²⁷³ Thus, he compared Buddhism to the luminosity of the sun, Daoism to that of the moon, and Confucianism to that of the stars. At the same time, however, authors such as Mgon Po Skyabs emphasised that the latter two traditions were taught by Manjushri to the Chinese 'through his skill in means and compassion'.²⁷⁴ Further, he held the view that the tradition of Yao and Shun, who were Confucian models of good leadership, embodied the love and compassion expressed in Buddhism,²⁷⁵ and that different Emperors of China were Chakravartin kings (those who rule by the Law of the Buddha), and/or emanations of Manjushri.²⁷⁶

Apart from their understanding of Confucianism gained through this Tibetan rewriting of Chinese history, Tibetans, both monastic and lay, also encountered a 'Tibetanised' Confucius through gTo-rituals used for exorcism. Kong tse 'phrul gyi rgyal po is a central figure in these rituals, who is evoked to provide 'magical healing' and drive out spirits.²⁷⁷ This figure, according to the gTo-rituals and Sino-Tibetan divination is Confucius, who has been transformed in this Tibetan ritual from a philosopher who avoided talk of the supernatural, into a 'king of magic', which is arguably the meaning of 'phrul gyi rgyal po.²⁷⁸

Other Tibetan scholars, however, distanced Kong tse 'phral rgyal from Tibetan Buddhism, such as Thu'u bkwan Blo bzang chos kyi nyi ma (1737-1802) of the Gelug school, who declared that his character was invented.²⁷⁹ Elsewhere, at Yonghegong lama temple in Beijing, Kong tse 'phrul rgyal was incorporated into a ritual which focuses on Confucius as the main deity of worship.²⁸⁰ Within the ritual text, Confucius is represented as an incarnation of Manjushri, and affirms his association with Sino-Tibetan divination.²⁸¹ Thus, as Lin notes, the Tibetans have in this and other instances,

²⁷² Mala, G, 'A Mahayanist Rewriting of the History of China by Mgon Po Skyabs in the Rgya Nag chos 'Byung', in Cuevas, B.J., & Schaeffer, K.R. (eds.), *Power, Politics, and the Reinvention of Tradition – PIATS 2003, Proceedings of the Tenth Seminar of the IATS, 2003*, pp. 150-151.

²⁷³ Ibid, p. 152.

²⁷⁴ Ibid, p. 154.

²⁷⁵ Ibid, p. 162.

²⁷⁶ Ibid, p. 163.

²⁷⁷ Lin, SY, 'The Tibetan Image of Confucius', *Revue d'Etudes Tibetaïnes*, 12, p. 105.

²⁷⁸ Ibid.

²⁷⁹ Ibid, p. 127.

²⁸⁰ Ibid, p. 128.

²⁸¹ Ibid.

incorporated Confucius into Tibetan Buddhism as a symbolic representation of wisdom, embodied in the bodhisattva figure, much as the Chinese have venerated and worshiped Confucius in their own traditions.²⁸²

The Contemporary Mobilisation of Confucianism

In comparison somewhat to this Buddhist-Confucian religious syncretisation, Confucianism in contemporary China, or rather Confucian culture, has become, as Kang notes, ‘an all-inclusive system’ of knowledge, ethical values, political philosophy, and a tool for international affairs.²⁸³ Kang further notes that this movement is led by the middleclass, who are ‘highly educated, wealthy, open-minded, passionate and powerful’, and it is therefore not a revolutionary movement led by the oppressed.²⁸⁴ In many ways, this movement in mainland China is tied, to a greater or lesser extent, with the recent efforts of the CPC under Hu Jintao to promote, from 2004 onwards, an ideology of ‘Harmonious Society’ (*hexie shehui*) based on Confucian political philosophy. Inherent in this movement is a search for a Chinese response to Western democracy, and a tradition which is uniquely Chinese to achieve this response.

This movement is in many ways a continuation of the search for a ‘Chinese spirit’ to strengthen China which began with the collapse of the Qing Dynasty in the nineteenth century.²⁸⁵ However, while the New Confucians promoted Confucian political philosophy to strengthen China against foreign powers, Confucianism had largely lost its status in Chinese society by this time, and many Chinese intellectuals turned to Buddhism as the new holder of cultural capital.²⁸⁶ Yet both of these ‘Chinese’ traditions evidently lost favour under Communist rule and were only revived in the late 1970s and through to the present time.²⁸⁷

Buddhism was promoted in 1983 by BAC President Zhao Puchu as an ‘academic study’ (*xueshu yanjiu*) and, by ‘participating actively in building socialist spiritual civilization’, Buddhism gained legitimacy, which enabled collaboration between Buddhists and lay

²⁸² Ibid, pp. 128-129.

²⁸³ Kang, XG, ‘A Study of the Renaissance of Traditional Confucian Culture in Contemporary China’, in Yang, FG, & Tamney, J.B. (eds.), *Confucianism and Spiritual Traditions in Modern China and Beyond*, Leiden, Koninklijke Brill NV, 2012, p. 52.

²⁸⁴ Ibid, p. 56.

²⁸⁵ Ashiwa, Y, & Wank, D, *Making Religion Making the State: the Politics of Religion in Modern China*, Redwood City, Stanford University Press, 2009, p. 49.

²⁸⁶ Ji, Z, in Chau, A.Y. (ed.), *Religious Revitalization and Innovation in Contemporary China*, London, Routledge, 2010, p. 37.

²⁸⁷ Ibid, p. 38.

scholars.²⁸⁸ Thus, Buddhism as a practice in scholarship rather than only in religiosity, and a building tool of ‘Chineseness’ and the Party-State, has, like the recent revival of Confucianism, enabled in part its success in contemporary China.

Today, the CPC has, under Hu Jintao’s guidance, adapted Confucian political philosophy as the path by which it envisions a ‘Harmonious Society’, a concept which became popular during a time of increasing social unrest in the first decade of the 2000s and into the second. It has built and deployed this concept through a wide variety of means and Party-backed institutions.²⁸⁹ At the same time, Buddhism has been promoted by the government as a means of contributing to this ‘Harmonious Society’, and has variously been used as a regional diplomatic tool in strengthening ties between the mainland, Taiwan, and Hong Kong, through the exchange of Buddhist relics for example, and the spreading of the message of ‘Harmonious Society’ and ‘Harmonious World’ at Buddhist forums supported by government bodies.²⁹⁰ Hu Jintao first promoted the idea of a ‘Harmonious Society’ (*hexie shehui*) in his speech at the Sixteenth Chinese Communist Party Congress on September 19, 2004.²⁹¹ Since then the phrase has been used repeatedly by officials, newspapers, and netizens all over China. Hu Jintao inherited numerous problems when he came to power, such as a widening income gap between urban and rural areas, widespread corruption within the Party, increasing protests amongst various sectors of the population, environmental degradation, and a loss of faith amongst the general population in the legitimacy of the CPC. He and the Party sought to thoroughly inculcate the idea of ‘Harmonious Society’ into the thinking of China’s citizens, in large part it seems to portray the Chinese

²⁸⁸ Ibid.

²⁸⁹ Kang, XG, pp. 45-46.

²⁹⁰ Ji has noted that some Buddhists and Buddhist sympathisers in China believe the state-backed promotion of Buddhism as ‘culture’ – as ‘an alternative vision of the politicized definition of religion in China’ – has helped ‘liberate’ Buddhism and Buddhism studies from traditional Marxist condemnations of religion. Others, however, have argued that the tradition’s vitality has lapsed due to this cultural and scholarly appropriation of Buddhism. See Ji, Z, p. 46.

Evidence of this appropriation could be seen at the World Buddhist Forums organised by the Buddhist Association of China (BAC) and the Religious Culture Communication Association, the first of which was held in Hangzhou and Zhoushan, Zhejiang. As Ji notes, the forum echoed Hu Jintao’s ‘harmony theory’ by promoting the theme ‘a harmonious world begins in the mind’ (*hexie shijie, cong xin kaishi*). See *ibid*, pp. 42-44.

The Third World Buddhist Forum in April 2012, the first to be held in Hong Kong, promoted a similar message of ‘Harmonious Society and Peaceful World’, and seemed to strategically assert the Party’s control over both Hong Kong and Tibet, with the Panchen Lama leaving the mainland for the first time to promote the message of harmony. See ‘World Buddhist Forum opens in HK, Panchen Lama speaks on Dharma’, April 26, 2012, http://news.xinhuanet.com/english/china/2012-04/26/c_131552981.htm [accessed 19/12/2012].

²⁹¹ Sun, A, ‘The Revival of Confucian Rites in Contemporary China’, in Yang, FG, & Tamney, J.B. (eds.) *Confucianism and Spiritual Traditions in Modern China and Beyond*, Leiden, Koninklijke Brill NV, 2012, p. 314.

leadership as benevolent and for the people, and thus concerned with seriously addressing these issues.

Building upon the idea of creating a ‘Harmonious Society’ within the framework of ‘Scientific Development’ (*kexue fazhan*), Hu Jintao emphasised the need for a ‘people first’ (*yiren weiben*) approach to governance. The Cultural Revolution and socioeconomic changes after Reform and Opening Up (*Gaige Kaifang*) have arguably caused a ‘spiritual gap’ to emerge, and a growing number have turned to religion and/or Chinese traditional culture to fill this gap. The CPC, in order to seize upon this renewed interest in culture and steer it in the ‘right’ direction (i.e. away from ‘superstition’ and towards the ‘rational’), has encouraged a wide-scale revival of Confucianism.²⁹² The CPC has mobilised Confucianism selectively, emphasising elements of Confucian culture that will create a greater sense of nationalism and allegiance to the Party, while eliminating elements that may call its authority into question. Thus, as Kang has observed, the Confucian revival is different to other movements because the ‘government is the main participant in and supporter of the [Confucian] movement, with a direct interest in its outcome.’²⁹³

Accordingly, Kang observes, the CPC has mobilised this selective Confucian revival through such institutions as the National People’s Congress, the People’s Political Consultation Conference, the Communist Youth League, Central China Television (CCTV) and various Communist Party organs.²⁹⁴ At the same time there has been considerable exchange between government and civil groups.²⁹⁵ Kang observes that this use of different avenues to promote the Confucian revival is part of the CPC’s overall strategy to ‘mobilize all positive resources’, which come from ‘both the government and civil society, and from domestic and overseas sources.’²⁹⁶ The Party’s input in the Confucian revival is thus broad and deep.

²⁹² See Kang, XG, ‘A Study of the Renaissance of Traditional Confucian Culture in Contemporary China’, in *ibid.*

²⁹³ *Ibid.*, pp. 45-46.

Goossaert and Palmer argue, however, that, contrary to the widespread impression that the revival of Confucian institutes and practices on the mainland emerged due to a growing cultural nationalism, many of these were in fact ‘grassroots educational movements’ which ‘did not have direct links to state politics and academic discussions, and did not necessarily share their culturally nationalist ideas.’ Activists who were supportive of Confucian education were more interested in the ‘moral and intellectual qualities of its future generations’. At the same time, the ‘ritual and devotional elements’ of such Confucian movements were generally very limited and often ‘absent altogether’. See Goossaert, V, & Palmer, D.A., p. 345.

²⁹⁴ Kang, XG, pp. 45-46.

²⁹⁵ *Ibid.*

²⁹⁶ *Ibid.*, p. 51.



Photo 7: Confucius statue at the Yuen Yuen Institute, a modernised *San Jiao* (Three Teachings) temple/institute in Hong Kong that promotes the harmonising of the Confucian, Daoist and Buddhist traditions.

At every step, the CPC has set out to establish itself as the people's 'patriarch'. Yet, those elements of the Confucian tradition which do not support or even subvert its authority have been removed from or reformed within this propagation. For example, the hierarchical nature of Confucian relations which gave rise to concepts such as *da ren* ('big person', i.e. the *junzi* or 'perfected gentleman') and *xiao ren* (little person, i.e. an individual with petty concerns); the intimate connection between humanity, Heaven and Earth; gender inequality – and other concepts belonging to the 'feudal' age – have been jettisoned or radically reformed.²⁹⁷ Almost consistently, the notion of Confucianism as a religion has been rejected, and the tradition is instead portrayed as 'rational', providing insight into proper governance and the proper place and duties of citizens under this governance. Thus, the Confucian tradition, within the CPC's vision, has evolved from what Tu Weiming refers to as an 'anthropocosmic' view,²⁹⁸ into one which is

²⁹⁷ Tamney notes how other elements of Confucianism which are seen to inhibit economic development have been criticised by political leaders. These include 'the low prestige of entrepreneurs and the idealization of the 'gentleman' [*junzi*] 'as well as the traditional preference for studying the arts rather than science.' In addition, other 'obstacles to change' which would cause China to fall behind economically must be changed such as 'the emphasis on a status-quo oriented state and the use of past dynasties as a political model; the 'canonization of tradition'; fatalistic references to fate and heaven; and an educational system that emphasizes memorization rather than creativity and individual initiative.' See Tamney, J.B, 'The Resilience of Confucianism in Chinese Societies', in Yang, FG, & Tamney, J.B. (eds.), p. 109.

²⁹⁸ See Tu, WM, 'Confucian Spirituality in Contemporary China', in *ibid.*

anthropocentric. That is, humanity is no longer seen as being part of an interdependent relationship with nature and the wider cosmos; rather, humanity is in control of nature and its resources, which must be put to use for humanity's benefit, and/or must be protected as long as economic growth does not suffer.²⁹⁹ Confucianism under the CPC has thus come to represent the politics of nationalism, a 'cultural heritage' to strengthen Chinese identity, and a symbol of 'rationalism' that will lead China to greater economic strength.

Many Chinese citizens, however, are increasingly sceptical of Hu Jintao's and the CPC's 'Harmonious Society', and some have referred to his rule as the 'stability preservation decade,'³⁰⁰ reflected in the Chinese media by the interchange of the phrase 'harmonious society' with the phrase *weiwen*, or 'stability preservation', which Gang observes peaked ahead of 'harmonious society' in 2009.³⁰¹ Inherent in the phrase *weiwen* is the idea that social instability must be avoided at all costs, which is expressed in another phrase popular within the Party, '*wending yadao yiqie*' or 'stability above everything else.'³⁰² Such scepticism has come in the wake of some of the heavy-handed measures which the CPC has taken to suppress opposition to its rule, such as arrests of pro-democracy artists, the clamping down on unrest in Tibet and Xinjiang, and so forth. 'Harmonious Society', for a growing number, has come to represent efforts by the CPC to cover up and smooth over misgivings among the general public. As Yeh and Coggins, note, for example, in their recent work on Tibetan environmentalist movements (examined in Chapter Six), following the demonstrations across the Tibetan Plateau in 2008, there have been increasing restrictions on the activities of Tibetan environmentalist NGOs; transnational funding and support for these NGOs has been disallowed, and many of these NGOs have been forced to cease operations. Some key Tibetan leaders of Tibetan-initiated environmental movements have also been detained and/or sent to labour camps on trumped-up charges. All of this happened even as Hu Jintao intensified his propagation of 'Harmonious Society'.³⁰³ Yeh and Coggins argue

²⁹⁹ As Tucker observes regarding the anthropocentric/anthropocosmic nature of Confucianism and Daoism, while the former 'tends to be more human centred' and the later more 'nature centred', 'neither tradition...succumbs to the problem of egocentric anthropocentrism or radical individualism such as has been characteristic of certain movements in the modern West.' See Tucker, M.E., 'Ecological Themes in Taoism and Confucianism', in Tucker, M.E., & Grim, J.A. (eds.), *Worldviews and Ecology: Religion, Philosophy, and the Environment*, Maryknoll, Orbis Books, 1994, p. 157.

³⁰⁰ Gang, Q, 'Preserving Stability', Journalism and Media Studies Centre, Hong Kong, The University of Hong Kong, <http://cmp.hku.hk/2012/09/14/27074/> [accessed 24/09/2012]

³⁰¹ Ibid.

³⁰² Ibid.

³⁰³ Yeh, E.T., in Yeh, E.T., & Coggins, C (eds.), pp. 274-276. Yeh follows the story of one Tibetan lama named Rinchen Samdrup, who initiated his own environmental NGO with the aim of protecting both

that the situation has in fact deteriorated for ethnic minorities after the propagation of ‘Harmonious Society’, as the goal of this ideology is to flatten out the differences between the Han majority and ethnic minorities, and to create a homogenous allegiance to ‘harmony’ (i.e. ethnic unity – *minzu tuanjie*).³⁰⁴

On the other hand, the fact that (Han) Chinese citizens are benefiting from the Confucian revival to an extent is at least due in part to the CPC’s investment in this revival and a subsequent more relaxed attitude to various expressions of this revival. Yu Dan’s CCTV program on *The Analects*; educational initiatives at schools such as the ‘children read the classics’ (*shao er dujing*); and corporate and tertiary courses on Confucian ethics and the Classics are experiencing widespread dissemination. Books, multimedia, and websites promoting Confucianism produced by Taiwanese-based, as well as mainland Buddhist and Confucian groups, are readily available and accessible all over China. Thus, while a number of Han citizens may reject the CPC’s use of Confucian political philosophy to promote what they see as ‘social control’, they often accept the ‘soft culture’ enabled, in part, by the CPC’s recent stance toward such culture.

Above I have provided a brief outline of the historical and contemporary contexts in which Confucianism and Buddhism have interacted, both within a religious framework as well as a political one. The sections below examine the way in which informants merged or separated these traditions in light of these historical and contemporary interactions, and within the context of their faith.

Tibetan culture and the environment. While he initially made much progress and his NGO facilitated interethnic cooperation to protect the environment and Tibetan culture, he was detained in August 2009, together with his brother Chie Namgyal, following the 2008 demonstrations across the Tibetan Plateau. His brother was sentenced without trial to twenty-one months in labour camp for ‘illegally compil[ing] three discs of audio-visual materials on the ecology, environment, natural resources and religion of Chamdo Prefecture’, for illegal possession and distribution of material from the ‘Dalai clique abroad’ and for ‘supplying photographs and material for the illegal publication ‘Forbidden Mountain, Prohibiting Hunting’. He was also accused of assisting his brother in his application to register their environmental NGO. While in detention he is reported to have been repeatedly tortured and beaten, leaving him unable to walk or eat without assistance. Rinchen, meanwhile, was held without trial or being officially charged for almost a year, after which he was sentenced to five years in prison for apparently posting an article which indirectly mentioned the Dalai Lama’s Nobel Peace Prize. Rinchen’s other younger brother, Karma Samdrup, a renowned environmentalist, was sentenced to fifteen years in 2010 for attempting to help free his brothers from detention. As Yeh notes, none of the apparent ‘illegal’ activities for which these men were charged are in fact illegal in China, yet because of the political environment which existed in China following the 2008 demonstrations, many Tibetan leaders such as Rinchen and his brothers were simply deemed guilty. See *ibid*.

³⁰⁴ See *ibid* and Coggins, C, ‘Animate Landscapes: Nature Conservation and the Production of Agropastoral Sacred Space in Shangrila’ in Yeh, E.T., & Coggins, C (eds.).

Searching for Roots: Case Samples

Informants influenced by Taiwanese scholar-monks who have encouraged the merging of Confucian and Buddhist traditions – such as Jingkong and Nan Huaijin – believed Tibetan Buddhism is compatible with a revived Confucianism. One Han informant in Beijing, a writer in his forties who follows the Nyingma tradition, reflected this trend.

Under the ‘Communist era’ Confucianism was destroyed, and I was told it was poison...But then I saw a documentary from Taiwan explaining why Confucius appeared when he did – to stop war; his theories were formulated to help people. So I feel this concern for others in Confucianism is like Buddhist Compassion. Jingkong, a Taiwanese master, also discusses Confucian theories in his books. Thus I believe my actions are informed by both Buddhist and Confucian theories (Field notes, 09/06/2011).

As Fisher notes, Jingkong’s books are among the most widely read by mainland Buddhists, made available through Jingkong’s Buddhist Education Foundation (*Fotuo Jiaoyu Jijinhui*).³⁰⁵ This informant endorsed Jingkong’s idea, taken from Confucian theory, of the sage rising at the right moment, embodying an appropriate way of being, and providing not only philosophical teachings but pragmatic help in time of need. This is seen, for example, in the story of Suiren Shi who emerged at a time when people in China lived like wild beasts and ate uncooked food; to meet the needs of the time, he invented a way to make fire to cook food.³⁰⁶ This and other sages were in harmony with the ‘spirit of their times’ and have been immortalised in Chinese history.³⁰⁷ It is in this context that this informant views Confucius as a great sage who emerged at the right time in Chinese history to bring peace to China.

This informant embodied, in many ways, a yearning to return to Chinese traditional thought and practice, both in a Buddhist and ‘Confucianised’ Buddhist context. He said that he had originally viewed Chan and Tibetan Buddhism as being distinct and quite separate, but now feels they are similar in many respects. He related that he chose to follow Tibetan Buddhism originally because it reinvigorated his longing for the beautiful poetry that the Chan tradition had once produced; he spoke of the transcendent qualities of Tibetan Buddhist poetry that continues to emerge from the pure

³⁰⁵ Fisher, G, ‘Morality Books and the regrowth of lay Buddhism in China’, in Chau, A.Y. (ed.), *Religion in Contemporary China: Revitalization and Innovation*, London, Routledge, 2011, p. 57.

³⁰⁶ Wei, T, *An Exposition of the I-Ching or Book of Changes*, Hong Kong, Dai Nippon, 1970, p. 151.

³⁰⁷ *ibid*, p. 152.

environment of the Tibetan areas, whereas such poetry has ceased to exist within Chan institutions, as the 'religious environment' in which they are located has been 'destroyed'. In order to illustrate the purity of the Tibetan areas as opposed to other parts of China and the relationship between this purity and inspired poetry, he told me about a friend who had been writing poetry in a Tibetan area in Yunnan, which he took back to Beijing to show his friends. They couldn't believe how beautiful the poetry was; this informant related that the purity of this poetry was the result of the pure environment in which it was written. In other words, there was a karmic connection between the environment itself and the written word. This almost reverent regard for the written word has strong ties to the historic Confucian tradition of the literati, both within and outside the monastic setting in China.

Further, this informant said that he is attracted to the ongoing debate system within certain Tibetan Buddhist traditions, which has, according to him, been lacking in contemporary Chan Buddhism since 1911. It appears, therefore, that he longs for both the Confucian literary arts and sophisticated scholarly debate that were so prevalent in Chinese Buddhism, particularly from the late Ming synthesis onwards, yet which have been 'destroyed' during the Cultural Revolution. Apart from Chan classics and Jingkong's works, this informant had also read other classics by the Qing dynasty literati. His interest in the scholarly aspects of both Tibetan Buddhism and Chinese traditions is likely related to the fact that he himself is a writer searching for his roots, who has spent four years travelling in the Tibetan areas working for a geographic magazine while also studying Tibetan Buddhism. In his dress and appearance, too, he embodies the merging of Tibetan Buddhist and Confucian traditions; he wears Tibetan *mala* (Buddhist prayer beads) around his wrists and an amulet around his neck, has a clean shaven head like a monk, and also sports a Confucian-style beard which he contemplatively strokes between thumb and fingers as he discusses Buddhism and various Chinese traditions. In short, he is a practitioner who seeks both a referent point for the 'this worldly' aspects of Chinese culture which have been 'lost', as well as a transcendent theory which is interrelated to, yet above the dominant Confucian framework. Tibetan Buddhism provides him with both.

Other mainland informants, like the above informant, had studied works by Jingkong and Nan Huaijin, yet, unlike the above informant, would mix the teachings of these Taiwanese Buddhist masters with recent mainland official discourse on 'Harmonious

Society’. For example, one Han informant, an owner of a Tibetan Buddhist artefacts shop in Beijing, and a follower of the Nyingma school stated:

Buddhism emphasises harmony. The country now is talking about harmony, so they match. There is a book called ‘Harmony Saves Crises’ (*Hexie Zheng Jiu Weiji*) [by Jingkong]...This book shows that both [Buddhism and the contemporary discourse on harmony] can be combined (Field notes, 05/06/2011).

According to this informant, the importance of Confucianism is rooted in its emphasis on harmony, which Buddhism also emphasises, and because this common emphasis has been promoted by Buddhist masters such as Jingkong and Nan Huai Jin, the two traditions at this level are seen to be in line with the current political vision of ‘Harmonious Society’. This informant similarly ‘rationalised’ and brought other elements of her faith down to the human level, where, like Confucian teaching, it could benefit society in a practical way. For example, she explained devotion to Dzambhala, the Tibetan ‘god of wealth’, as symbolic of a practitioner’s aspirations to obtain the ‘riches’ of the dharma, rather than actual wealth. Further, she was wary of various ‘magical’ claims made by some about Tibetan Buddhist relics/ritual implements and their power to heal or influence life circumstances. She said she had taken empowered pills and herbs given to her by her lama when she was sick, but ‘hadn’t felt anything special’. Instead, she felt that having a positive attitude during this time and realising the inevitability of suffering had been of greater help. Thus, in a similar manner to which Confucian literati tended to avoid discussion of the supernatural and instead emphasised the benefit of ritual for perfecting oneself within the world, this informant likewise deemphasised the ‘magical’ elements of Tibetan Buddhism and sought to demonstrate its practical approach to dealing with mundane issues.

A number of mainland informants also saw Confucianism as a basis upon which Buddhism can thrive, as, according to them, it was the foundation upon which Buddhism was established when it was introduced to China. A middle-aged artist from a village outside Beijing who follows the Karma Kagyu school emphasised this idea:

Why did Buddhism spread so fast and become accepted in China? Because Buddha also taught filial piety. He taught that if you don’t respect your parents, you won’t treat your friends well; if you don’t treat your friends well, you won’t love your society and your country; without all of these, you will not have compassion for others. Further, although some in China denounced Buddhism

for its monasticism in place of familial values, Buddhist monks and nuns, like Confucian sages, withdrew from the world first and then came out of retreat to preach to people and help them (Field notes, 13/06/2011).

The above informant drew on historical Chinese Buddhist arguments mentioned in the introduction of this chapter, about Buddhism both being in agreement with and supportive of filial values, as well as world-engaging and at the same time withdrawn from the world. This artist, like the writer mentioned above, wished to return to the values and traditions of a time past, when Confucian and Buddhist thought permeated Chinese society. He had previously followed Chinese Buddhism from 1989 to 2000, but then turned to Tibetan Buddhism. He said that he was disillusioned with Communism after the Tiananmen Square incident, for which he was placed under ‘house arrest’ at his university campus for some time for his involvement in the protest. At this time he was an atheist, but during his detention he was allowed to visit a Chinese Buddhist temple next to the campus, where he took an interest in Buddhism and eventually ‘converted’ (*guiyi*). Therefore, it was his encounter with the inhumane force of state-led ideology that allowed him to see, in stark contrast, Buddhist compassion and the filial values of Confucianism upon which Buddhist principles first flourished in China.

Another couple in their early forties from the same village who followed the Nyingma school, similarly saw Confucianism and Confucian values as the basis upon which Buddhism had flourished in China. Moreover, they saw Confucianism and Daoism as the continuing reference point through which current Tibetan Buddhist masters are making Tibetan Buddhism understandable in wider contemporary China. The wife said:

When Tibetan Buddhism spread in China recently, Confucianism was already rooted in Chinese society. To help Chinese followers understand Tibetan Buddhism more clearly, Tibetan masters used Confucian and Daoist terms; for example, the term for ‘compassion’ in Buddhism carries the same meaning as similar Confucian terms (Field notes, 14/06/2011).

The wife previously held no belief before turning to Tibetan Buddhism, and was in fact quite antagonistic towards the ‘superstitious’ stories about wolf and other nature spirits which she had encountered in her north eastern hometown. She regarded Tibetan Buddhism, on the other hand, as a highly philosophical and ‘rational’ tradition which had certain similarities with the traditions of Confucianism and philosophical Daoism. She said that Laozi and Confucius had appeared before Buddha at the right time, to help

the people of China at different junctures in history, and that both of them were emanations of the Buddha. Thus, she brought the somewhat 'foreign' tradition of Tibetan Buddhism within the Chinese cultural sphere by making it part of a continuum beginning with Laozi and Confucius, and ending with Buddha.

Others similarly viewed Confucianism as a cultural value system inherited from Chinese history, which was unfairly attacked during China's painful modernisation, and which many were regretful they were unable to explore in greater depth. One Han informant, an artist in his mid-forties from the same aforementioned village who followed the Nyingma tradition, stated the following:

In my generation we didn't study much about Confucianism (just the basics through my parents). We were just taught Communist Maoism. If they included Confucianism [more thoroughly?] in the education system there would be much benefit. This could help build a foundation for Buddhism to come back. When I was young I was influenced by, and followed atheism. Now I feel that was a big mistake (Field notes, 12/06/2011).

Like the aforementioned artist who followed the Karma Kagyu school, the informant above was also a fervent atheist and follower of Marxist ideology before turning to Tibetan Buddhism. He has also sought to find a way back to the values and traditions of pre-Communist China, and he found conditions to aid his search in the same small village, where he could engage in meditation from the early hours of the morning, throughout the day and up till the time he went to bed. Between meditation and chanting mantras, he reads different books by Tibetan masters, while intermittently painting and writing poetry. At the same time, while pursuing ultimate liberation and engaging in 'genteel' Confucian pursuits, he talked about miraculous stories concerning various Tibetan masters which would generally fall outside the hesitant Confucian approach to the supernatural and miraculous, as well as state denunciation of such.

The views of this and other informants represented above reflected a common trend among informants; they felt they had lost a valuable part of their cultural heritage when Confucianism was 'destroyed' during the Cultural Revolution, and this heritage could have provided them with the foundation to study Buddhism earlier. In a sense, the move towards Tibetan Buddhism, for some, was also a move 'back' towards their own Chinese traditions which they felt they had lost. Thus, a somewhat 'foreign' cultural tradition had brought them back to their own cultural heritage due to the perceived

parallel moral values encompassed in both, based in part on continued historic arguments for Buddhist-Confucian syncretism. In the broad scheme of things, then, Tibetan Buddhism provided some informants with a strengthened sense of Chinese national identity, by turning them from atheism towards the foundations of their culture. A Han-Mongol artist in Gyalthang in his early forties who followed the Gelug school reflected such nationalist sentiment.

Nowadays it is important to study the principles of Confucianism such as respect for family and elders, and so on. After the Cultural Revolution many things were destroyed, but now Western influence is increasing and is destroying the soul of Chinese culture [again]. Foreigners come and learn from important Buddhist scriptures but China only gets cheap movies and a 'plastic' modernity in return (Field notes, 10/07/2011).

For this informant the West is stripping China of its civility and deeper Buddhist teachings. The only way to return to the 'soul' of Chinese culture is to reintroduce that which has been lost as far as is possible. A good start would be some form of common decency stemming from Confucianism, and ultimately Buddhism in its full form. This informant had lived in Canada for many years and held a Canadian passport, but said he had no interest in returning to Canada. Instead, he has been studying both thangka painting and Buddhist scriptures under a Tibetan master in Gyalthang and intends to stay on indefinitely. He had previously considered following the Chan tradition upon returning to China, but found that there was too much corruption amongst Chan 'masters' in contemporary China, and it was exceedingly difficult to find a 'genuine' master to teach him. Thus, he searched elsewhere and found the authenticity he needed in Tibetan Buddhism. He felt that the happiness he now experiences is incomparable to the emptiness and hurt he experienced in Canada, where he endured many difficulties with his stepmother's interference in his and his family's affairs. Now back in China, and especially as a practitioner, he has found answers to, and alleviation from his suffering, in a space free of hedonistic materialism which he sees as dominating the West.

The above informants are exemplary of those who spoke of the destruction of the Confucian tradition under the Cultural Revolution, and the regret at not having been able to study this foundational element of their culture and ultimately Buddhism. They have, however, gone about rediscovering Confucian culture through works produced by

Taiwanese Buddhist monks who combine Buddhist and Confucian traditions. Some have also been influenced to an extent by the recent use of Confucian political ideology on the mainland, which they variously combine with the theories of these Taiwanese monks. Moreover, they may exhibit a strong sense of Chinese nationalism based on the perception that current ‘Western’ influence is destructive for Chinese cultural traditions. Tibetan Buddhism, having certain parallels with Confucianism, has, together with the Confucian revival, brought them back to their own culture, instilling within them an urgent need to preserve these ‘Eastern’ traditions against ‘Western’ destruction.

The understanding of the above informants concerning the interaction between Confucian and Buddhist traditions has many parallels in Chinese Buddhist history, as mentioned in the introduction. For example, the idea that filial piety was preached by the Buddha mentioned by one informant above is thoroughly embedded in Chinese Buddhist traditions. At the same time, understanding of this Confucian and Buddhist interaction is informed by the modernist trans-regional teachings of Taiwanese monks, and variously by the CPC’s ideology of ‘Harmonious Society’.

Many such informants on the mainland spoke of four general concerns under the broader topic of ‘Harmonious Society’, all of which are concerns of the state as Chinese leaders shift towards an apparently ‘people-first’ approach to government. These concerns were corruption, environmental protection, social stability, and civility. The ‘Scientific Development Concept’ (*kexue fazhan guan*) is being propagated as the means by which a harmonious society can be achieved and these concerns addressed.³⁰⁸ Hu Jintao in 2004 stated that the main objectives of this concept are ‘putting people first, [and] coordinated, comprehensive, and sustainable [development]’.³⁰⁹ While economic development is still the top priority, the eleventh five-year plan (2006-2010) of the CPC seriously sought to address issues of distribution and sustainability.³¹⁰ A number of practitioners, whose views are explored in the cases represented below, also saw Tibetan Buddhism as being able to work in parallel with this ideology of ‘Harmonious Society’.

One way in which some informants saw Tibetan Buddhism as having parallels with the wide-reaching scope of the ideology of ‘Harmonious Society’ was its apparent emphasis

³⁰⁸ Chan, KM, ‘Harmonious Society’, *International Encyclopaedia of Civil Society*, London, Springer, 2009, p. 821.

³⁰⁹ Hu, 2004, cited in *ibid*.

³¹⁰ Fan, 2006, cited in *ibid*.

on environmental protection. The government is obviously looking to tackle China's grave environmental problems, through such projects as reforestation and land reclamation (explored in Chapter Six). A Confucian/Buddhist concept of being in harmony with nature was recognised by a number of informants as valuable in supporting such projects. For example, a Han-Mongol practitioner (mentioned earlier) living in Gyalthang, where there is a strong focus on ecotourism which has become the main source of income for the local government, drew together the relationship between the current political emphasis on 'Harmonious Society' and the Confucian/Buddhist revival, and the implication of this relationship for the environment:

Even senior officers in the Chinese government are influenced by Confucianism subconsciously. Now there is an emphasis on harmony. Buddhism and Confucianism are therefore matched. Confucianism emphasises order and discipline. Buddhism builds up spirituality and that which is inside...I heard someone say if every Chinese person lived like Americans the world would end soon. Buddhism helps to protect resources [by encouraging a sustainable way of living] (Field notes, 10/07/2011).

This informant believed Confucianism, being already imbedded 'subconsciously' in the Chinese psyche, can provide the practical stability needed for harmony, through order and discipline, while Buddhism can work within the individual. This would produce an outward movement of this inner spiritual cultivation towards society at large, and would reinforce the social stability created by Confucianism, as well as a truly interdependent harmony not based on distinctions between self and other. This Confucian/Buddhist cooperative effort could help counter the 'American' way of life which is causing environmental damage disproportionate to the size of America's population. Such a view has parallels – as in the case of Emperor Wu of Liang for example (referred to at the beginning of this chapter) – with historical Chinese ideas about Confucianism providing social order and norms for social hierarchy, while Buddhism deals with the inner world; according to this view, neither was considered to be mutually distinct from the other, but complementary.

On the other hand, this idea of Buddhism and Confucianism acting as deterrents to environmental destruction, is reflective of the current popular belief on the mainland and in Taiwan regarding a 'spiritualised environment'; natural disasters are seen to stem from the 'pollution' of immorality, and the environment is improved 'through the

purification of the mind and the elimination of mass consumerism’.³¹¹ In the wider scheme of things, such thinking also fits with the government’s view of ‘scientific development’ in relation to the harmonising of economic growth with environmental protection.

This and other informants thus saw in this potential cooperative effort a national resistance to the increasingly pervasive ‘Western’ way of life – both in regards to ecological and cultural matters – and ultimately a strengthened Chinese national identity stemming from this ‘Chinese’ cultural mix. In regards to both protecting Chinese values against the West, as well as returning to such values in their pre-Communist state, some informants also saw in Tibetan Buddhism the basis upon which traditional Chinese civil ethics could be revived, in conjunction with the Confucian revival. One of the chief directives of the ‘Harmonious Society’ policy has been to re-instil within Chinese citizens higher standards of morality, which the government sees as dangerously lagging in the current context. For example, in September 2001, the CPC released a publication titled ‘Guidelines for Establishing Moral Rules for Chinese Citizens’.³¹² This publication pointed out the moral shortcomings of Chinese citizens, including: ‘moral disorder, money worship, gluttony, extreme individualism, and selfishness, as well as blurred boundaries between right and wrong, kindness and malice, and beauty and ugliness.’³¹³ In order to halt or at least slow this trend, the Party has encouraged the study of the Classics and other Confucian traditions to create conditions at the grassroots level conducive to a ‘Harmonious Society’. Evidently, this directive has been implemented with the goal of maintaining social stability, or what some have termed ‘harmony at all costs’,³¹⁴ as noted earlier.

In any case, a number of informants were supportive of a greater emphasis on civility within Chinese society, sometimes making comments that almost mirrored the Party’s recent emphasis on this issue. This could reflect their general support for Hu Jintao’s and the CPC’s softer approach to Chinese traditional values, or it could reflect the tension within which my research was conducted in 2011, when the ‘Jasmine Revolution’ in the Middle East had sparked fears of a similar revolution in China, and

³¹¹ Lang, G, & Lu, YF, ‘Religion and Environmentalism in Chinese Societies’, in Yang, FG, & Lang, G (eds.), *Social Scientific Studies of Religion in China: Methodology, Theories, and Findings*, 2011, Leiden: Koninklijke Brill NV, p. 262.

³¹² Kang, p. 46.

³¹³ Ibid.

³¹⁴ Gang, Q, ‘Preserving Stability’, Journalism and Media Studies Centre, The University of Hong Kong, 2009.

led to subsequent rising control on religious institutions and followers. Therefore, the comments of informants concerning Tibetan Buddhism and civility (and related ideas of social stability) in Chinese society should be understood in light of this tension, while not ignoring the genuine concern of such practitioners for the decline of social values in contemporary China.

A Gelug Mongol monk in Beijing at Yonghegong temple, for example, emphasised the need for greater respect for elders, which both Confucianism and Buddhism promote.

Confucianism is about respecting seniors, which works well with Buddhism. Buddhism doesn't emphasise filial piety, but compassion for everyone. Nowadays people don't really respect seniors, so these two theories can help [change this trend] (Field notes, 08/06/2011).

This monk, like a number of Tibetan Buddhist leaders I interviewed, practices within a heavily monitored institute in the heart of the Chinese capital. It is unsurprising therefore that his reflection on Tibetan Buddhism was very much in line with the government's perspective on religion contributing to a harmonious society by promoting 'love of country' (*ai guo*) in conjunction with 'love of religion' (*ai jiao*). This is reflected in his idea that Buddhism can provide the stability that China needs:

Tibetan Buddhism is quite suitable, because this country is now emphasising social harmony. Not only Tibetan Buddhism, but Buddhism in general, can help bring this about. Buddhism emphasises spreading the dharma to everyone in the world. With its peaceful message, it is the most suitable theory for China (Field notes, 08/06/2011).

At the same time, his former comments and wider reflections upon the state of civil ethics in contemporary China show his concern for the direction in which Chinese society is heading, and his view that Confucian theories of filial piety, combined with Buddhist compassion, can contribute to true harmony.

Other informants even went so far as to say that Tibetan Buddhism (or Buddhism in general) would naturally lead to better civil relations among citizens and between citizens and the government, so that conventional laws would be unnecessary for maintaining harmony, and, by implication, stability. This was related by a Tibetan journalist in Gyalthang.

There is nothing in Buddhism which is not compatible with modern Chinese society. Hu Jintao has emphasised harmony, and Buddhism emphasises harmony. If every government were to follow Buddhism, there would be no need for laws because they can all be found in Buddhism (Field notes, 02/07/2011).

Evidence of this overlap of Confucian civic values with Tibetan Buddhism and possible political implications, is also seen in the distribution of short booklets containing essential Confucian values within Tibetan Buddhist temples. Among such booklets, one of the most common is *Dizi gui* (*Standards for Being a Good Pupil and Child*), a small, Qing dynasty booklet used to teach children and young adults about proper conduct based on Confucian teaching. As Sun notes, there are also articles, books, and lectures for an adult audience drawn from *Dizi gui*, to guide them in a ‘more rigorous and upright moral life.’³¹⁵ Moreover, Chinese Buddhists are promoting *Dizi gui* within a Buddhist context, as a ‘technique of self-development – a handbook or codes for learning how to behave in an appropriately moral way’.³¹⁶ While such booklets are more common in Chinese Buddhist institutes, many Tibetan temples and monasteries I visited in Gyalthang and Lijiang stock copies of *Dizi gui*, although it is questionable how many Tibetan monks read them. According to several informants, *Dizi gui* is one of the booklets also taught at the Larung Buddhist Academy at Serthar, in the Garzê Tibetan Autonomous Prefecture of Sichuan Province. There it is apparently taught in the Tibetan language using Tibetan ideas to explain Confucian values and education to younger monks.

While such booklets seem to be the work of Chinese Buddhist organisations, their widespread distribution in Tibetan areas and temples/monasteries does suggest a nationwide effort to instil Confucian ethics among minorities as well as the Han population. While I have not investigated this trend in any detail, such distribution and teaching of *Dizi gui* may be part of a Han-led initiative to propagate a homogenous set of ethics in order to create greater unity or a ‘harmonious society’ among China’s diverse population. On the other hand, one could view such trends as somewhat reflective of past Confucian-Tibetan Buddhist interaction, briefly examined at the beginning of this chapter. However, unlike the historical circumstances described earlier, which gave rise to a syncretic retelling and rewriting of Chinese history by the Tibetans, copies of *Dizi*

³¹⁵ Sun, A, ‘The Revival of Confucian Rites in Contemporary China’, in Yang, FG, & Tamney, J.B. (eds.), 2012, p. 325.

³¹⁶ Ibid.

gui are produced by the Chinese population and sit alongside strictly Tibetan Buddhist works in Tibetan temples; there appears to be little syncretic mixing of Confucian and Tibetan Buddhist traditions within this context. However, if the claims of some Han informants who have visited and stayed in the Larung Buddhist Academy are accurate, Tibetans, and perhaps Chinese disciples at the Academy, may be receiving a ‘Tibetanised’ account of Confucian ethics taught in such booklets as *Dizi gui*.

The above case samples have outlined the way in which Tibetan Buddhism is being worked into a collaborative Buddhist/Confucian front – on the heels of the Confucian revival – to tackle some of China’s current problems which are of concern to the Party as well as many Chinese citizens. This front draws on an array of sources, including the CPC’s ideology of ‘Harmonious Society’; the Buddhist/Confucian message of Taiwanese monks; and a return-to-roots sentiment which has arisen due to the destruction of the Cultural Revolution, the socioeconomic changes of Reform and Opening Up, and/or the ongoing encroachment of the West.

Beyond Confucianism, beyond the world: Case Samples

In comparison to the above informants, others sought to distance Tibetan Buddhism from Confucianism and the Confucian revival, and thus had a different understanding of Tibetan Buddhism’s relevance for contemporary Chinese society. In many respects, the second group of informants which I examine below lend continuance to the old argument in both Chinese and Tibetan societies that the dharma is supreme above all traditions, even though other traditions may be established in different societies by bodhisattvas who compassionately meet the needs of these societies with different gradients of the ultimate dharma. This group of informants reflect in some ways the views of puritan Tibetan Buddhist religious figures such as the Gelug scholar Thu’u bkwan Blo bzang chos kyi nyi ma (1737-1802), mentioned in the introduction, who saw the Tibetan appropriation of Confucius as an invented tradition. They similarly see no room for syncretising Confucian and Tibetan Buddhist ideas and doctrines. However, their puritan notion of Tibetan Buddhism is also drawn from the idea of Tibet as ‘Shangrila’, which has long been promoted in the West, and recently in China with the physical and symbolic reconstruction of Gyalthang as Shangrila, a ‘mini Tibet’ to which thousands of Chinese tourists flock every year. Although Han and other non-Tibetan ethnic practitioners in and around Gyalthang are certainly distinct in many ways from

the Chinese tourists who flock to the town, they have also been influenced by the idea of Tibet as ‘Shangrila’, a place where both the physical and spiritual environment is still largely unpolluted by modern values, and hence a place where pure religion in its untainted form both permeates this environment and naturally emerges from it. Linked with this notion of Tibet as ‘Shangrila’, is a view which reverses long-held Han stereotypes of Tibetans as ‘backward’, and sets them up as the ultimate embodiment of spirituality, as further discussed below.

The informants represented in this section felt that Tibetan Buddhism had the potential to make great contributions to Chinese society, but it could only do so by changing individuals – not by being synthesised with Confucianism and/or incorporated into official discourses of ‘Harmonious Society’ and ‘Scientific Development’. Their ‘Shangrilaist’ perspective of Tibetan Buddhism, Tibet, and Tibetans seems to draw in part from what Taylor refers to as ‘Romantic expressivism’, a domain of modernity which ‘encompasses the literary, artistic, and philosophical movement that arose in part as a critique of the increasing rationalization, mechanization and desacralization of the western world brought about by industrialism and the scientific revolution’.³¹⁷ Like Buddhist modernists who inherited this spirit of the Romantic movement – the American Transcendentalists, Theosophists, the Beat poets and the counterculturalists of the 1960s³¹⁸ – Han and other non-Tibetan minority practitioners who follow this trend are often writers, artists and others who seek what may be termed ‘alternative lifestyles’; they have ‘escaped’ urban society to live in rural China, and resist conformity to societal norms, which is often expressed through their work and faith. They seek to return to nature, specifically the Tibetan landscape, which they see as imbued with purity and sacredness, and to reenchant a disenchanted world.³¹⁹

At the same time, their views, while drawing in part from this ‘Shangrilaist’ understanding, have also developed according to specific conditions in China resulting from the Cultural Revolution and socioeconomic changes of Reform and Opening Up (*Gaige Kaifang*), which have led to disenchantment with mainstream culture among certain sectors of the population. There is a desire particularly among a number of Han to find that which is missing in ‘rational’ Han society – a deep spirituality from which emerges the perceived purity, innocence and – perhaps above all – contentment of

³¹⁷ Taylor, cited in McMahan, D.L., p. 11.

³¹⁸ Ibid.

³¹⁹ Ibid, p. 12.

Tibetans who are still largely mired in supposed ‘backwardness’. Such a view reverses commonly held Han stereotypes of Tibetans as ‘uncivilised’, ‘barbaric’, ‘lazy’, ‘dirty’, ‘ignorant’, ‘superstitious’, and so forth, and even sets Tibetans up as spiritually superior to ‘progressive’ Han. The aforementioned negative stereotypes of Tibetans, as Yeh notes, arose from the few representations of Tibetans available to Han Chinese from the 1950s to the 1980s, such as the film *The Serf (Nongnu)* from the 1960s, representations which continue to influence Han impressions of Tibetans to an extent.³²⁰ This perspective began to overlap with another representation of Tibetans as the ‘erotic minority’ during the early 1980s when Han interest turned to imagining ethnic minorities in general in such a light.³²¹ Yeh notes that by the late 1990s ‘multiple and somewhat contradictory’ Han ideas about Tibetans coexisted; Tibetans were seen as being grateful to the ‘older Han’ brother for aiding them in their development; they were seen as backward and barbaric; and they were seen as primitive and also erotic. However, another view emerged from amongst these: Tibetans as keepers of an ‘ancient spiritual and ecological wisdom’ and ‘symbols of a simpler, purer time’.³²² This latter perspective, Yeh notes, can be attributed to the influence of ‘leisure culture,’³²³ tourism as a development strategy in Tibet, the rise of Chinese backpacker culture, and the search for and resurgence of religion, particularly among residents of wealthy coastal cities.’³²⁴ The below informants, many of whom reside in or near Gyalthang, are representative of this latter perspective, and embody the aforementioned factors which have enabled the emergence of this perspective. For example, many have, at some point, engaged in the leisure culture, ecotourism, and backpacker culture that has come to be associated with Gyalthang. At the same time, they are serious practitioners who have moved to Gyalthang in search of an authentic religious tradition which they believe holds answers to their sufferings.

Thus, for such informants, they found in Tibetan Buddhism something that was largely ‘foreign’ and ‘otherly’ to their experience of both modern and traditional mainstream Han culture. Although many of the informants whom I examined in the above section were also artists and writers who had escaped to the countryside, they did so with the dual purpose of returning to their Chinese roots – found in traditions such as Confucianism and Confucian-influenced traditions such as Chan – and to practice

³²⁰ Yeh, E.T., in Yeh, E.T., & Coggins, C (eds.), p. 265.

³²¹ Ibid.

³²² Ibid.

³²³ Wang, 2001, cited in *ibid.*

³²⁴ Yu, 2012, cited in *ibid.*

Tibetan Buddhism; Tibetan Buddhism was seen to help them in this pursuit as well as set them on the path to ultimate liberation. The informants represented in this section, on the other hand, wholly embraced the ‘foreignness’ and ‘other-worldliness’ of Tibetan Buddhism, and broke, in many respects, with the historical synthesis between Confucianism and Buddhism that took place in both Chinese and Tibetan societies, outlined at the beginning of this chapter.

For example, one Han informant, a middle-aged follower of the Gelug school, who owns a hostel and lives just outside Gyalthang held the view, as did a number of other Han practitioners living in Gyalthang, that Tibetan Buddhism should be distanced from mundane society, Confucianism, and Confucian-influenced Chinese Buddhism.

Tibetan Buddhism cannot be relevant [for society] unless society changes. The world is too ‘worldly’, and people are too materialistic. This must change (Field notes, 01/07/2011).

She felt at the present time Chinese society and the world in general are not prepared for such a transcendent theory because they are too attached to materialistic pursuits. She felt that such attachment is indicative that we are living in ‘degenerate times’; her master has told her that perhaps in 100 years Buddhist discipline will disappear. In light of such predictions, she sees the opportunity to study under her master as precious, and shows little interest in pursuing ‘worldly’ things. The approach which this informant takes to Tibetan Buddhism is reflective of the manner in which she first encountered the tradition. She told me how she had visited Yonghegong temple in Beijing several years ago; she distinctly recalled the moment when she first saw the statue of Tsongkhapa in the temple and broke down, crying uncontrollably. One of the lamas at the temple asked her what was wrong, but she couldn’t stop crying and keep her hands from trembling. He encouraged her to prostrate to the statue, and she did so, repeatedly. She said she felt a strong karmic connection to Tsongkhapa because of this experience, and she subsequently went in search of a Tibetan master to learn the teachings of the Gelug school, founded by Tsongkhapa. She finally found her master by ‘miraculous’ means, and began her own short meditation retreats in her Beijing apartment, locking herself in for two weeks at a time and focusing exclusively on the teachings her master had provided. Finally she outgrew this form of retreat, and decided it was time to go to her master’s monastery and engage in serious, long-term retreats. However, even as she was making this decision to seriously commit to her master, her younger brother suddenly

died. She said this moment was bitter-sweet, in that she had lost her brother, but at the same time she had finally found her true master; she had experienced deep suffering, but at the same time understood from this experience the need to escape the cycle of suffering, which would only continue if she held back from committing to her spiritual path.

Thus, she has sought to break free of all conventional constraints present in Chinese society, such as Confucian theories and other ‘worldly’ ideologies. Instead of engaging in the ‘genteel’ Confucian practices of writing, calligraphy, and so forth, she regularly engages in Tibetan yogic exercises and Tibetan meditation as taught within the Gelug school. In many, although not all respects, she is similar to many practitioners in the West, who see Tibetan Buddhism as being transcendent of society and its values. She is also similar to many Western women practitioners of her age who are also single and often divorced, who are also looking for meaning beyond the disappointments of the conventional world, and find this meaning in their Tibetan gurus.

Other informants living in close proximity to Diqing Tibetan Autonomous Prefecture, and hence within the sphere of Tibetan Buddhist influence, were even more adamant that Confucianism should not be syncretised with Tibetan Buddhism. For example, a Bai minority ‘stay-home monk’ (*zai jia heshang*) in Lijiang who followed the Karma Kagyu school, emphatically expressed the irreconcilable differences between Confucianism and Tibetan Buddhism.

Tibetan Buddhism doesn’t believe in (*xiangxin*) Confucian influence. Confucianism constrains people. Tibetan Buddhism is ‘outside the box’, while Confucianism is inside it (Field notes, 19/07/2011).

This informant was from a Chinese Buddhist family, but as a young teenager he left the Chinese tradition in favour of Tibetan Buddhism. He described Chinese Buddhism as ‘a great wall’ barring one’s path to enlightenment with its endless rules drawn from Confucianism. He attributed the slowness of obtaining enlightenment within Chinese Buddhism to its many rules and rigidity, while he believes Tibetan Buddhism provides a ‘fast course’ to enlightenment, if not within this life, then at least within fewer lives than is promised within Chinese Buddhism. He currently studies under a famous incarnate lama (*tulku*) in Lijiang, and spends his time, when not studying, at the local Tibetan Buddhist temple in the old city, chatting with his Naxi monk friend who resides at the temple. Interestingly, this temple is itself an amalgam of Confucian, Daoist, Chinese

and Tibetan Buddhist influence. Outside the front door of the temple sits a statue of the potbellied Putai; on the door and inside the temple hangs Chinese calligraphy of the character *fu* for fortune or good luck; and on an adjacent altar to the main temple sit three large statues of the masters of the ‘Three Teachings’ – Buddha, Confucius, and Laozi. This is reflective of the religious crossroads which Lijiang has historically been, and the subsequent syncretic nature of Bai and Naxi forms of Buddhism. Yet, the above informant, brought up within this syncretic environment, has opted for a puritan form of Tibetan Buddhism outside the sphere of Chinese cultural influence.

Other informants who – like the first aforementioned informant living in Gyalthang, had experienced personal suffering on a deep level and sought to escape this by all means possible, and, like the second informant mentioned above, were surrounded by Chinese cultural influences yet sought to rise above them – were also present in the village outside Beijing which was mentioned in the section above. For example, an artist who followed the Nyingma school and lived in the village reflected in many ways the concerns of the late Ming monk Zhu Hong, outlined earlier in this chapter, while taking his ideas further, to completely divorce Tibetan Buddhism from Confucian practices and ideas.

I don’t like to merge Confucianism and Buddhism, because cultural elements can affect your practice of Tibetan Buddhism. Confucianism is on the human level, so I don’t want to mix this with Tibetan Buddhism, which is on a higher level. I also try to avoid mixing Buddhism with art as such practice can make Buddhism too materialistic (13/06/2011).

Thus, this informant sees Confucian cultural interests in the written word and other artistic expressions as necessarily separate from the practice of Tibetan Buddhism. He therefore is a unique example among the other informants mentioned in the previous section who lived in the same village, all of whom, like this informant, are artists and/or writers. Unlike the others, who freely incorporate their spirituality into their art and writing, he keeps these aspects of his life separate. Perhaps his effort to do so is related to the personal demons he struggled with before turning to Tibetan Buddhism. He related how he was formerly a heavily dependent alcoholic, and used to get drunk every day, often passing out in his yard. When he was drunk, he would paint, but all he managed to paint were dark and depressing pictures with themes centred on meaningless objects, such as cigarette butts. One day a Tibetan lama visited the village,

and he went to hear his teaching. He soon took refuge (*guiyi*) under this lama, and quit drinking altogether. Now, even though his lama only visits occasionally due to distance and travelling restrictions, he said that he is content, and this is reflected in the positive images he paints of his dog and nature. Thus, while he was exposed to Chinese religious traditions (he related that he used to attend a local Chinese Buddhist temple before his lama arrived in the village), only the teaching of his Tibetan lama offered him release from the demon of drink. Hence, he sees in the Tibetan Buddhist teaching of the Nyingma school a liberating path that cannot be found in or mixed with ‘this worldly’ Chinese traditions or artistic expressions of these traditions.

Other reasons given by these and other informants for their separation of Tibetan Buddhism from Confucianism and Confucian-influenced traditions included the hierarchy of relationships set up in Confucian theory, which is against the Mahayanist idea of compassion for all; the rigidity and rules of such traditions compared to the apparent flexibility of Tibetan Buddhism; and the hierarchical distance maintained between Confucian-influenced Chinese Buddhist clergy and lay followers, while Tibetan Buddhist masters were seen as highly personable.

For example, a postgraduate informant in Hong Kong, formerly a nominal Protestant who follows a synthesis of Nyingma-Karma Kagyu traditions, whose husband follows Chan Buddhism, found her husband’s tradition to be too restrictive.

I think Chan Buddhism involves too much chanting, and has so many regulations. It is very rigid. You must be a vegetarian and you cannot eat garlic, shallots, and other types of food. You cannot smile too broadly or laugh too much. So it is very restrictive (Field notes, 24/04/2012).

Informants in all three locations were also attracted by the charisma and warmth of Tibetan monks and lamas, as opposed to the hierarchical distance some felt when in the presence of Chinese Buddhist monks or masters. A middle-aged informant in Hong Kong who has been following the Karma Kagyu tradition for twelve years said:

I think people are attracted by the compassion and genuine character of the lamas. For example, when we went to Bodhgaya in India to attend an empowerment ceremony given by the Karmapa, several lamas came out to meet us at the train station to lead us to the site. You would never find this in Chinese Buddhism. In Chinese Buddhism, it is expected that the lay people will always

help the monks and do favours for them. In Tibetan Buddhism, the lamas are more humble and reach down to our level to help us (Field notes, 17/04/2011).

In contrast to this personable Tibetan Buddhism, Smyer-Yü notes how Tibetan monastic authority possesses ‘absolute power in its home environment’.³²⁵ Thus, such informants somewhat exaggerated the differences between Tibetan Buddhism and Chinese traditions, based on their encounter with modernised Tibetan masters who have adjusted their approach to suit the needs of urban Chinese practitioners.

Although there was little direct expression of discontentment concerning the recent political redeployment of Confucian political philosophy in mainland China, a number of informants in Taiwan saw Tibetan Buddhism and Confucianism as incompatible due to the political uses of Confucianism in the recent past and up to the present. One Taiwanese man in his sixties who followed the Karma Kagyu school, for example, referred to Confucianism as a tool for political control, whereas Tibetan Buddhism emphasises equality. Such criticism of the Confucian tradition likely draws on the recent pre-democracy, government-led propagation of Confucian political philosophy in Taiwan to maintain social stability and to quieten resistance to the National Party’s monopoly of power in Taiwan.³²⁶ Such government-led initiatives have now largely given way to civil revivals of the Confucian tradition in Taiwan, yet these events likely remain fresh in the minds of some Taiwanese, particularly those of the older generation who have been exposed to the less becoming side of these initiatives.

In sum, for the above informants, Tibetan Buddhism is too pure – almost outside space and time itself – to be used in conjunction with an anthropocentric Confucianism. The purity of Tibetan Buddhism they attributed in part to the purity of the Tibetan landscape and its people. While Tibetans have typically been attributed negative stereotypes by Han, such informants emphasised Tibetans’ ability to be happy despite their poverty – due to the fact that they have found the ‘pearl of great price’, far superior in value to any Han ‘progress’.

In addition to notions of purity drawn from both a ‘Shangrilaist’ romanticism and ‘reverse-acculturation’, these Han and non-Tibetan Chinese minority informants were

³²⁵ Smyer-Yü, D, 2012, p. 123.

³²⁶ See Madsen, R, ‘Secular State and Religious Society in Mainland China and Taiwan’, in Yang, FG, & Lang, G (eds.), *Social Scientific Studies of Religion in China: Methodology, Theories, and Findings*, Leiden, Brill, 2011.

also drawn to Tibetan Buddhism due to personal life crises as related above. Some had become very successful, but found their success unfulfilling when a tragedy occurred, or when multiple problems plagued them. A hostel owner living in Gyalthang from Guangzhou, for example, had become so wealthy that she quit her job and ‘enjoyed’ life, but her marriage suffered and ended in divorce. Not long after this she encountered a Tibetan master and followed him. As related above, other informants similarly found release from their suffering in Tibetan Buddhism, and hence sought to leave the world behind.

Conclusion

The two groups of informants represented in this chapter embody in many ways the historical arguments for and against Confucian and Buddhist syncretism in both Chinese and Tibetan history. The former group could be seen to represent, for example, a continuation of the late Ming synthesis under such monks as Zhu Hong, as well as the rewriting of Chinese history concerning Confucius within certain Tibetan Buddhist circles. Like Zhu Hong, they see the value of the Confucian arts and Confucian thought which have parallels in Tibetan Buddhism; on the other hand, like Mgon po skyabs they seek to show the ultimate superiority of Tibetan Buddhism, and variously reconfigure a largely anthropocentric Confucianism within the ‘magical’, otherworldly framework of Tibetan Buddhism.

The latter group, on the other hand, may be seen to represent the more apprehensive side of Zhu Hong and other reformers, who were concerned with the strong focus of Chinese Buddhist monks on the Confucian arts at the expense of seeking ultimate liberation from cyclic existence. Similarly, this latter group may be seen to represent a continuum of the puritan ideas of the Gelug scholar Thu’u bkwan Blo bzang chos kyi nyi ma, who, as mentioned at the beginning of this chapter, saw the place of Kong tse in Tibetan Buddhism as invented and inauthentic; likewise, this latter group perceive Tibetan Buddhism as the only form of authentic, pure religion which cannot be tainted by inauthentic and world-bound traditions.

At the same time, the above arguments for and against religious synthesis, at least among mainland practitioners, are thoroughly influenced by and ultimately located within the parameters of state discourse in contemporary China. The multifaceted nature

of the arguments of these two groups is further complicated by the trans-regional influence of Taiwanese Buddhist monks, the long-held notion of Tibet as ‘Shangrila’ in the West, and, related to this notion – home-grown ideas of Tibet and Tibetans that reverse negative Han depictions, which may be termed ‘reverse acculturation’.

Chapter Five

Transcendence and the Mundane at the Edge of the Middle Kingdom: Pragmatism, Protestantism and Tibetan Buddhism in Hong Kong

Introduction

This chapter explores the manner in which Han Tibetan Buddhist practitioners, particularly in Hong Kong, are negotiating a pursuit of pragmatic, ‘this-worldly’ ends with soteriological aims, through the medium of their faith. As explored in the previous chapter, Tibetan Buddhism may be seen as socially-engaged – transforming mainstream society in a similar manner to which Confucianism and Confucian-influenced traditions have recently influenced the mainland population – and/or as a practice which is ‘above’ society. Similarly, this chapter examines how Tibetan Buddhism has become, for some informants in Hong Kong, a ‘rational’, ‘Protestantised’ (i.e. de-ritualised and demythologised) tradition, removed from the ‘superstitious’ practices of ‘folk’ Buddhists who ‘hug the feet of the Buddha’, while for others it is both a transcendent and ‘this-worldly’ tradition, which answers the needs of the practitioner on both accounts.

This chapter argues that, by contrast to a ‘rational’ modernist perspective concerning Tibetan Buddhism which largely divorces it from worldly pursuits, the Tibetan religious elite (both within the monastic and wandering yogi/yogini traditions) have always employed rituals to answer the practical needs of Tibetan followers – for everything from preventing snakebite to giving birth to a son. This chapter explores the manner in which Han practitioners in Hong Kong are negotiating their practice of Tibetan Buddhism between this and a ‘rational’ perspective, and takes into account variables which have influenced practitioners to be more inclined towards one or another of these perspectives. The variables explored in this chapter include the general pragmatic nature of Hong Kong society; Tibetan Buddhist teaching emphasising the importance of selfless intention when seeking ‘worldly’ things; ‘popular’ Chinese religious practice; and the Christian education system in the territory. The first of these is briefly

introduced below, to provide context for a closer examination of the latter three variables in following sections.

Hong Kong has long been stereotypically portrayed, particularly by northern mainland Chinese, as a materialistic ‘cultural desert’, or as not being ‘authentically’ Chinese, because of British colonial influence and the focus on materialism there. This is seen, for example, in the work of some of the South-bound Authors (*Nanlai zuojia*), who were mainlanders previously based in Shanghai who arrived in Hong Kong during the Sino-Japanese War. They carried with them a ‘Central Plains syndrome’³²⁷ – expressed in Mao Dun’s condemnation of Hong Kong as a ‘cultural desert’, ‘whose lights are a poor substitute for the veiled stars of the ‘heavenly’ motherland.’³²⁸ Such condemnation, while not always as explicit, continues within certain circles on the mainland. For example, a Marxist critic of the Hong Kong-based martial arts novelist, Jin Yong (whose work is very popular in mainland China as well as in Hong Kong, Taiwan and overseas Chinese communities), severely criticised him, stating at one point that a Zhejiang writer who has not been among Chinese his whole life (that is, mainland Chinese) cannot produce something authentically Chinese.³²⁹

Evidently Hong Kong is not the ‘cultural desert’ some mainlanders have portrayed it to be. The idea that it is not ‘authentically’ Chinese also begs the question of whether the mainland itself can claim authenticity in this regard, given the massive destruction of traditional Chinese culture during the Cultural Revolution and other campaigns, when Hong Kong was a safe haven for Chinese culture and propagators of that culture who fled the mainland. Even within the colonial education curriculum, traditional Confucian culture, Chinese literature and history were taught, albeit with a certain agenda to avoid discussing contemporary Communist ideas from the mainland.³³⁰ Moreover, Hong

³²⁷ This ‘syndrome’ was part of a ‘modernizing project of state-building, linguistic unity, and anti-imperialist autonomy’, which was linked with ‘contempt [for] all cultures in the periphery of the mainland.’ See Hamm, J.C., p. 42.

³²⁸ Poshek Fu, 2000, pp. 207-208, cited in *ibid*, p. 42. As Hamm notes, after the chaos of the 1930s and 40s on mainland China, Hong Kong became, rather than a ‘railway station’ for people in transit, a ‘lifeboat’ ‘in which an exile population might find itself drifting indefinitely.’ See *ibid*, p. 50.

³²⁹ *Ibid*, pp. 253-255

Hamm notes that stereotypes of the south as being the origin of ‘commercial and entertainment-oriented forms of culture suspected of neglecting or explicitly violating art’s proper moral and social responsibilities’ has roots in the May Fourth generation and ‘much further back in Chinese history.’ See *ibid*, p. 255.

³³⁰ Kuah-Pearce, KE, & Fong, YC, ‘Identity and Sense of Belonging in Post-Colonial Education in Hong Kong’, Curriculum Development Institute, Hong Kong SAR, 2010, p. 434.

This promotion of ‘Confucian and traditional Chinese canons’, as opposed to contemporary developments on the mainland, was part of the colonial government’s plan to maintain a ‘depoliticised and

Kong and Taiwan have been very influential in re-introducing Chinese religious traditions and culture to the mainland since Reform and Opening Up (*Gaige Kaifang*).³³¹

At the same time, however, Hong Kong has been subject to conditions which have produced a somewhat pragmatic, materialistic cultural environment. One factor influencing this situation is the transient nature of the territory. Chinese who came to Hong Kong when the colony was first established came as merchants, labourers, or as asylum seekers escaping trouble at home³³² – few came to stay. While some did make Hong Kong home during the early years of its establishment, the major upheavals during the Sino-Japanese war and later the establishment of the PRC saw many more remain in Hong Kong permanently, as a flood of mainland immigrants poured into the territory.³³³ However, due in part to an increase in political tensions with Beijing in recent years, and/or to better employment/education opportunities overseas, a number have decided to emigrate.³³⁴ This transience, as well as Hong Kong's role as a major entrepot where 'laissez faire capitalism' has contributed to its title as the 'freest economy in the world'³³⁵ – has led to a culture which promotes what some have termed a 'fetishism of material wealth'.³³⁶

decontextualised' curriculum design which avoided 'content concerned with contemporary China, the local context or any 'sensitive' topics.' See Morris & Chan, 1997, p. 249, cited in *ibid*, p. 434.

³³¹ Chen Huanzhang, for example, who failed to realise his goal of making Confucianism the national religion in mainland China during the 1910s, left for Hong Kong, where he set up the Confucian Association, which has campaigned since the 1970s to have Confucianism recognised as a sixth major religion in the territory. Goossaert and Palmer observe that, following the 1997 retrocession, many inter-religious meetings and official functions now include a Confucian representative. Moreover, the 'practical and political as well as social experiments in Confucian modern religiosity' which have taken place in Hong Kong have greatly influenced the revival of religious Confucianism in the PRC since the late 1990s. See Goossaert, V, & Palmer, D.A., p. 207.

³³² Tsang, S, *A Modern History of Hong Kong*, London, I.B. Tauris, 2004, p. 46.

³³³ *Ibid*, p. 180.

³³⁴ A report by the Hong Kong Transition Project in May 2006 showed that 44% of respondents would leave Hong Kong if the political situation worsened. See The Hong Kong Transition Project, commissioned by the National Democratic Institute for International Affairs, 'Parties, Policies and Political Reform in Hong Kong', May 2006, pp. 7-8, <http://hktp.hkbu.edu.hk/NDI/NDIReport.pdf> [accessed 17/07/2013].

³³⁵ See Lau, S, 'Hong Kong's status as world's freest economy threatened by Singapore, says Heritage Foundation', *South China Morning Post*, Tuesday Jan 14, 2014, <http://www.scmp.com/business/economy/article/1405318/hong-kongs-status-worlds-freest-economy-threatened-singapore-says?page=all> [accessed 28/10/2014].

³³⁶ Lau, SK, & Liu, ZJ, *Society and Politics in Hong Kong*, Hong Kong, The Chinese University of Hong Kong, 1984, pp. 69-70.

Lau and Liu argue that Hong Kongers are more obsessive about accumulating and growing material wealth than citizens of other societies.

The obsession with material goods constitutes the most significant motive force in the people's working, and even non-working, behaviour. Material values are the major criterion used to evaluate the worth of things and people; and its application to the assessment of objects which in

This ‘material fetishism’ may be attributed to several factors ultimately related to this transience, including the lack of the people’s say in politics – focusing on material pursuits may divert their frustrations away from the political situation over which they have little control; accumulating wealth provides a ‘backup’ if the political situation worsens, which can be taken overseas to resettle elsewhere; wealth has long been a status symbol in Hong Kong, and wealthy tycoons often wield much power – the traditional Confucian distaste for crass materialism has had less influence in Hong Kong due to the large number of merchants that originally made up the population and the large number of business people who continue to come and go from the territory;³³⁷ and materialism is related to the wider interest in popular culture and trends in Hong Kong – an interest which seems to stem in part from the apparent lack of a unifying culture.³³⁸

other societies are usually considered to be beyond monetary calculation is a startling phenomenon in Hong Kong. As such, money as a medium of exchange enjoys a degree of universality unmatched by any advanced industrial societies in the world; or, for that matter, by all traditional societies. In Hong Kong, the social status hierarchy can easily be converted into a hierarchy of material wealth; attesting hence to the unidimensional nature of stratification in the society. In short, material values reign supreme in Hong Kong.
See *ibid.*, pp. 68-69.

Lau and Liu argue that this ‘infatuation for money’ among Cantonese derives from the commercialisation that Guangdong experienced even before its encounter with the West in the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries. Due to this long exposure to commercialisation, according to Lau and Liu, Cantonese have developed ‘commercial shrewdness which has drawn both envy and contempt from people of other parts of China.’ See *ibid.*, p. 69.

Lau and Liu wrote the above in the early 1980s; evidently much has changed in almost three decades, and therefore we should take their exposition as only partially applicable to the current situation.

³³⁷ *Ibid.*

This does not mean that there has been no Confucian influence in Hong Kong. The wealthy Chinese compradors from the early days of the establishment of the colony, for example, who acted as mediators between the British and Chinese, purchased official ranks from the Chinese government and engaged in charitable work in their community in much the same manner as *junzi* or exemplary Confucians were supposed to do.

See Tsang, S, 2004, pp. 63-64.

³³⁸ Chan argues that, due to the lack of a ‘unifying cultural foundation’, ‘popular culture in Hong Kong must play the role, set the agenda, of ‘culture’ per se.’ This is because, Chan argues, popular culture in Hong Kong ‘is decidedly...the primary sphere of consciousness and sentiment where the concerns, anxieties, and foreboding of society as a whole find their expression.’

See Chan, H.M., 1994, pp. 447 & 449, cited in Evans, G, & Tam, M (eds.), Introduction, *Hong Kong: The Anthropology of a Chinese Metropolis*, Richmond, Curzon Books, 1997, p. 8.

This apparent lack of a unifying culture may stem in part from the feeling of being in between East and West, and the difficulty in ‘carving out a space’ between former British colonialism and current Chinese authoritarianism.

See Chow, R, ‘Between Colonizers: Hong Kong’s Postcolonial Self-Writing in the 1990s’, in *Diaspora: A Journal of Transnational Studies*, vol. 2, no. 2, 1992, p. 158.

This claim amongst the above commentators concerning the lack of a unifying culture in Hong Kong society has been challenged somewhat recently with widespread pro-democracy demonstrations from late September 2014, which are ongoing at the time of writing. Tens of thousands of Hong Kongers have united under pro-democracy groups calling themselves ‘Occupy Central’ and ‘Scholarism’ (among others), to defy what they see as Beijing’s broken promises concerning full universal suffrage in 2017. On the other hand, there is a rift between supporters of democracy and those who do not support democracy in Hong Kong, as seen in the attacks on student protestors by rival groups during the demonstrations. Hence the unity of Hong Kong’s population is an ongoing negotiation of identity and belonging – to

While the claim that Hong Kong society is addicted to ‘material fetishism’ may be somewhat of an exaggeration, very broadly speaking, Hong Kongers in general do appear to hold a very pragmatic outlook on life. At least part of the reason for this pragmatism, apart from the early exposure of Cantonese society to commercialisation, may be due to the transient nature of the territory. Another reason (connected to the first) could be Hong Kong’s position as an entrepot which depends upon industries that support the business and service sectors; most people must develop a career within these sectors to survive. Because of this focus there is less room for people to pursue alternative, less ‘practical’ professions.³³⁹ The pragmatic nature of Hong Kong society is also reflected in the religious sphere – most prominently perhaps within the ‘popular’ religious sphere. In Hong Kong, ‘popular’ religion (referred to as a ‘nameless religion’ by one scholar³⁴⁰) has largely been dispersed and confined to a family affair in the urban environment, without a hegemonic socio-religious framework to organise it (as was the case under the state cult of the Chinese empire for example).³⁴¹ Thus, people who go to Chinese temples in the territory often have practical personal or familial requests for wealth, health, success in studies, harmonious relationships and so forth. The focus is more centred on individuated, practical needs than the communal and soteriological.³⁴²

China, the West, in between, or separate from these. For more on coverage of the demonstrations, see ‘Occupy Central’, *South China Morning Post*, http://www.scmp.com/topics/occupy-central?utm_source=Google&utm_medium=cpc&utm_content=AU&utm_campaign=OC [accessed 17/10/2014].

³³⁹ The events of recent pro-democracy demonstrations in Hong Kong from late September 2014 have created an unprecedented space for creativity and artistic expression, as protestors have occupied central locations in the city, blocking off traffic. Within this occupied space, protestors have painted, made sculptures, paper crèche designs, and many other types of artwork. Under normal circumstances, however, there is little space for street art, some forms of which are illegal in Hong Kong. For more on the sudden creativity among young Hong Kongers which has emerged from the protests, see Chow, Vivienne, ‘Arts scene takes cue from Occupy movement’, *South China Morning Post*, Monday 27 October, 2014, <http://www.scmp.com/news/hong-kong/article/1625288/arts-scene-takes-cue-occupy-movement> [accessed 27/10/2014].

³⁴⁰ Liu, TS, 2003, no. 174, pp. 373-394.

³⁴¹ In the villages of the New Territories and at certain temples established by relative new comers to Hong Kong, such as *Wong Tai Sin*, ‘popular’ religion is much more organised and communal. Most Hong Kongers, however, practice ‘popular’ religion at home, such as ancestor veneration and worship of various household gods. Some, especially among the older generation, may also visit local temples individually, or pray in the direction of a temple when passing by. Both young and old may also seek advice from temple priests through divination sticks (*kau chim*) and make offerings at the temples.

³⁴² As Goossaert and Palmer observe, various forms of ‘popular’ religion in Hong Kong, such as spirit medium cults, operate like private businesses with services offered for a wide range of practical needs. Moreover, gods who previously only catered for select problems have ‘evolved into generalists who... cater to all needs’. Goossaert and Palmer note that there has always been a market for religious and ritual services in China, but under the modern market economy, particularly in Taiwan and Hong Kong, local communal connections have been weakened, making it necessary for temples to compete for clients over a wider geographic territory than previously was the case. See Goossaert, V, & Palmer, D.A., pp. 265-266.

This keen sense of pragmatism present in ‘popular’ Chinese religion in Hong Kong tends to extend to the religious sphere in general. As one informant in Hong Kong noted, ‘Hong Kongers follow whichever religion will solve their problems’. This is true of a number of informants in Hong Kong, who were attracted to Tibetan Buddhism for both its power to solve their ‘worldly’ problems as well as its soteriological message. Such an approach to Tibetan Buddhism was very different to that of practitioners interviewed on the mainland, all of whom distanced themselves from devotees who follow ‘popular’ Buddhism for worldly gain. Evidently my research cannot account for the very wide scope of Han practitioners on the mainland, yet it does seem to suggest that the environment of Hong Kong, the lifestyles of a large number of Hong Kong practitioners, and the ‘popular’ religious background of certain practitioners, may result in greater practical interest in Tibetan Buddhism in the territory, while certain practitioners on the mainland who are more ‘removed’ from society due to their lifestyles and professions may have less interest in fulfilling mundane needs.

Mainland informants were often writers, artists, and owners of hostels or their own small businesses, who had escaped urban life to spend more time in meditation and religious practice in a rural setting (and variously to return to their cultural roots, as explored in Chapter Four), or remained in an urban environment but had more time for practice due to the nature of their professions. Informants in Hong Kong, on the other hand, were almost exclusively office workers, who worked long hours and used their ‘spare time’ for religious practice. As Smyer-Yü notes of practitioners on the mainland, a growing number have quit their office jobs to open small businesses (often selling Buddhist-related items) or even go to live in the monastery of their Tibetan master. These practitioners often follow the practice of Dzogchen (Man – *Dayuanman*), which, as Smyer-Yü observes, requires years of diligent and intensive practice to obtain results; those who practice Dzogchen while balancing an office job often take years to even master the preliminaries.³⁴³ It is argued in this chapter that few practitioners in Hong Kong have this option available to them within Hong Kong itself, and hence balance their religious practice around work and life circumstances rather than the other way round. Inevitably, then, the many practicalities of work and life, and the stress these produce, are brought into the religious arena as well.

However, although religion may be utilised to serve practical needs, there are also reminders everywhere in Hong Kong that people seek to break from this vicious cycle

³⁴³ Smyer-Yü, D, 2012, pp. 121-122.

of pragmatism – and this is often expressed through religion. Out of seemingly nowhere one may spot a Tibetan Buddhist nun roaming the streets; a suited man turning a prayer wheel and uttering mantras in public; a shop keeper demonstrating the latest gadgets from the mainland while a video of a Tibetan lama giving an empowerment ceremony plays outside his shop; a large neon-lit cross on top of a building with the words ‘Jesus is Lord’ displayed in Chinese on either side of it; a packed auditorium at Queen Elizabeth Stadium to listen to the Tibetan Buddhist meditation master, Mingyur Rinpoche; and an equally packed auditorium to hear Ryuho Okawa – the founder and head of Happy Science, a new Japanese religion. Hong Kong is a transient place where pursuit of wealth is a central focus; yet, partly because of the intensity of this focus, people seek spiritual outlets.

One major spiritual outlet which offsets, to an extent, the focus on pragmatic pursuits within the religious sphere, is a modernised form of Christianity, which has deeply influenced the religious make-up of the former colony. Protestant and Catholic schools, hospitals, charities and other institutions were established under the British, and the Chinese Christian community in Hong Kong remains substantial (about 10% of the population³⁴⁴). Many of the educated elite, including many of Hong Kong’s leaders, have received a Christian education.³⁴⁵ Many youngsters who pass through the Christian education system have inevitably learned, either implicitly or explicitly, that ‘popular’ Chinese religious traditions are ‘superstitious’ and ‘idolatrous’, and that seeking practical things through them is futile (as briefly outlined later in this chapter). Those who accept this interpretation of ‘popular’ religion may be less inclined to follow religion for ‘mundane’ outcomes. Of course, Christians do seek to address a whole range of practical problems; they simply go about it by praying to one God instead of many, and generally do not employ divination, soothsaying and other practices considered contrary to God’s law. Moreover, Christianity puts more emphasis on ‘storing up treasure in heaven’ than worrying about ‘worldly’ things. It is this latter emphasis in Christianity that seems to congeal with the ultimate message of liberation through enlightenment in Tibetan Buddhism; therefore the soteriological content of the latter appeals to those who have been exposed to the former.

³⁴⁴ Hong Kong Government, 2010 Yearbook – Religion, retrieved from <http://www.yearbook.gov.hk/2010/en/pdf/E18.pdf> [accessed 17/01/2013]

³⁴⁵ For example, Martin Lee, founding chairman of the Democratic Party, and former Chief Executive Donald Tsang, were educated at Catholic schools. Leung and Chan note that in 1999 some 75% of the territory’s leading officials were graduates of Christian schools. See Leung, B, & Chan, SH, 2003, p. 32.

This is the argument made in this chapter, in regards to Tibetan Buddhist practitioners in Hong Kong who received a Protestant/Catholic education.³⁴⁶ At the same time, this ‘rational’ approach to religion among such informants was variously used to challenge the Christian education system itself and to ‘prove’ the superiority of Tibetan Buddhism. This process of using the ‘rational’ discourse of modern Christianity to support the claim that Tibetan Buddhism is as ‘rational’ as or even more rational than the former resonates with Homi Bhabha’s theory of ‘mimicry’, as outlined in Chapter Two.³⁴⁷

However, for Tibetan Buddhists, as will be argued, it is not only a matter of what is more or less ‘rational’ when it comes to pursuing pragmatic ends through their faith, but what is seen as most optimal for obtaining liberation from cyclic existence, both for themselves and ultimately for others. In order to explore the tension which sometimes exists between carrying out one’s bodhicitta vows as a practitioner, and at the same time meeting one’s worldly needs or desires, a brief overview of Tibetan Buddhism’s relation to the mundane within Tibetan society is outlined below. Following this, an overview of the pragmatic nature of Chinese religion in general is provided, while the third section below examines the influence of the Christian education system in Hong Kong. These three sections will serve as a backdrop for discussing the views of informants later in the chapter, and demonstrating how they have been influenced by one or more of these variables.

Tibetan Buddhism and the Mundane

Tibetan Buddhism, across all schools in both the monastic and wandering yogi/yogini traditions, while being more concerned with soteriological aims, also places considerable emphasis on influencing the mundane through the use of ‘supernatural power’ (Sansk – *siddhi*, Man – *shentong*), which is believed to arise from deep meditative concentration.³⁴⁸ Apart from working towards the ultimate goal of

³⁴⁶ Cheng notes the widespread influence of Christianity in the lives of a number of students in Hong Kong, in addition to Confucian-parental and liberal-civic influences. See Cheng, R HM, Cheng, R HM, ‘Moral Education in Hong Kong: Confucian-parental, Christian-religious and Liberal-civic Influences’, *Journal of Moral Education*, vol. 33, no. 4, 2004, pp. 533-551.

³⁴⁷ For more on mimicry, see Bhabha, H, ‘Of Mimicry and Man: The Ambivalence of Colonial Discourse’, *Discipleship: A Special Issue on Psychoanalysis*, vol. 28, 1984, pp.125-133.

³⁴⁸ Stein notes that, while the Gelug tradition is typically perceived to be more philosophical, and the other traditions (Kagyü, Nyingma, and Shakya) are seen as being more inclined towards meditation and psychic experiences, the reformers Atisha and Tsongkhapa (founders of the Gelug tradition), emphasised the importance of both the Madhyamika teachings on sudden enlightenment or purification, and the Yogacara teachings on the gradual path to enlightenment, and hence the importance of both meditation

buddhahood, yogis cultivate such powers ‘to increase wealth and life span, pacify inauspiciousness and destroy enemies’,³⁴⁹ in addition to influencing many other aspects of the mundane. Adepts who develop such powers are called *mahasiddhas* (Tib - *tul shug*).³⁵⁰ Because such an adept is believed to be able to see the nature of the reality of things, he/she is believed to be able to influence the material world in ways that less accomplished practitioners cannot. Mipham Jamyang Namgyal Gyamtso (1846–1912), for example, a great Nyingma philosopher, was also proficient in divination, magic and sorcery, and wrote a handbook containing a wide range of ‘magical’ rites, for everything from protection against wild animals to causing rainfall.³⁵¹

While many modernist Buddhist interpretations seek to distance Tibetan Buddhism from such ‘magic’ and/or to reinterpret it as an inferior approach to the dharma, David Snellgrove points out that the religious Tibetan elite have consistently shown an interest in both mundane and soteriological aims. Snellgrove insists, after referring to mantras as ‘spells’, that:

...whether one likes it or not, the greater part of the Tantras are concerned precisely with vulgar magic, because this is what most people were interested in then....When exactly the same terms are used throughout a particular religious tradition, by the majority who are interested in magic and by the minority who are interested in higher states of spiritualised realisation, it is very difficult to separate the two, especially when so many of the more famous practitioners

and tantric ritual. See Stein, R.A., & Diver, J.E. S (trans.), *Tibetan Civilization*, Faber and Faber, London, 1972, p. 165.

Stein further argues that even Atisha and Tsongkhapa – who sought to return to the ‘purity’ of what they perceived as the Buddha’s teaching prior to the divergent practices and teachings introduced by the ‘old’ schools (the Nyingma school in particular) – also studied and accepted the idea that supernatural powers can be obtained as a ‘by-product’ of meditation, which could be used to perform miracles, protect religion, and ‘benefit beings’ in general. See *ibid*, p. 171.

³⁴⁹ Lopez, D.S. Jnr., Introduction, *Religions of Tibet in Practice*, Princeton, Princeton University Press, 1997, p. 14.

The ‘destruction of enemies’ could be interpreted both symbolically and literally. For example, it could refer to destroying obstacles to practicing the dharma, or it could refer to literally slaying someone. In the latter case, only an accomplished master, in theory, should employ his power for such ends, as he is able to guide the consciousness of the victim to a higher rebirth. Such ‘mercy killings’ were rare, and the logic given for such action was based on the belief that the victim would have accrued more negative karma the longer he/she lived, and thus would be reborn in one of the hells. Thus, slaying such an individual was in fact seen as an act of compassion.

³⁵⁰ *Ibid*.

³⁵¹ See Cuevas, B, ‘The ‘Calf’s Nipple’ (Be’u bum) of Ju Mipam (‘Ju Mi pham): A Handbook of Tibetan Ritual Magic’, in Cabezón, J (ed.), in *Tibetan Ritual*, Oxford, Oxford University Press, 2010, pp.167-168 & pp.175-178.

seem to have been interested in both mundane as well as supramundane 'successes' (*siddhi*)...³⁵²

Snellgrove further argues that, while some claim that 'inferior' Tantras are concerned with solving mundane issues while 'superior' Tantras focus on purely religious objectives, that 'all Tantras are interested in precisely the same objectives, whether supramundane or mundane', and that 'from the earliest times the acquisition of miraculous powers...was closely associated with the realisation of enlightenment.'³⁵³

At the lay level in particular, Tibetans often visit monks or lamas with practical requests such as blessings for their business or protection for their families. During an interview with a master at the Ganden Sumtseling monastery in Gyalthang, for example, a lay Tibetan arrived to request a ritual for protection while driving, as his car had been hit by a drunk driver that week. The master found a suitable mantra and chanted this while placing his *mala* (Buddhist prayer beads) on the lay Tibetan's head. Similarly, a Rinpoche in Taipei from Ladakh said nomad Tibetans come to him in Ladakh with such requests as winning court cases.³⁵⁴ Thus Tibetan Buddhist practice, while certainly being focused on the transcendent particularly at the 'elite' level, also maintains a related emphasis on 'skilful means' to make that transcendent message relevant to people of all levels of understanding. The success of lamas and monks, as well as wandering yogis/yoginis in addressing 'worldly' concerns legitimises their powerful spiritual tradition. Indeed, because of this perceived power, Tibetan lamas were invited by Chinese government officials during the Republican era to perform rituals for the protection and prosperity of China during the war with Japan.³⁵⁵

However, while Tibetan masters are believed to be able to wield such power, they constantly warn practitioners not to seek benefit for themselves when taking part in religious activities. Pabongka Rinpoche, for example, who gave a discourse on the Lamrim teachings to Tibetan monks, nuns and lay people at Chuzang Hermitage near

³⁵² Snellgrove, D, *Indo-Tibetan Buddhism: Indian Buddhists and their Tibetan Successors*, Vol. 1, Boston, Shambhala, 1987, pp. 142-143.

³⁵³ *Ibid*, pp. 235-236.

³⁵⁴ He said that those who request such things from him do not clearly understand the concept of karma.

³⁵⁵ For a comprehensive examination of the role of Tibetan Buddhism in China during the Republican era, see Tuttle, G, 2005.

Lhasa in 1921,³⁵⁶ admonished them not to seek any special powers or benefits from teachings, making offerings, and other religious activity.

When you attend other teachings...you may think you will receive the power to subdue evil spirits by reciting [a] mantra...or you may think you will subdue sicknesses...achieve wealth, acquire power, etc. Others, no matter how many teachings they have received, treat Dharma as if it were...capital to start a business; they then go to places like Mongolia to peddle the Dharma. Such people accumulate enormous, grave sins...To exploit such teachings for worldly ends is equal to forcing a king off his throne and making him sweep the floor...if you seem to have any of these above-mentioned bad motives, get rid of them...³⁵⁷

Pabongka Rinpoche admonishes monastics in attendance that they should have no wishes for worldly recognition for their teachings, but must only give them for the benefit of others.

If you hope, ‘I wonder if I’ll get any offerings’; or ‘I wonder if I will be famous, and so on, because I’ll have many disciples’; or ‘I wonder if I will gain a reputation of being a scholar, and so on’ – then your teachings, instead of benefiting, will be most harmful. Your merits will even decline. You must at least teach compassionately for the benefit of your disciples, even disregarding any karmic effects you are supposed to receive from the act of teaching...³⁵⁸

Pagongka Rinpoche reminds his audience that one must constantly check one’s motives when performing religious activities; even the subtlest degree of self-interest can be detrimental rather than beneficial.

[If] every offering we make is done out of a desire for fame, self-advancement and so on – we slip back into the eight worldly concerns. Those who are a bit better make offerings with the motive of simply wanting a long life or merely to be free of illness. Even when we are giving offerings to the Sangha out of our deep respect we mainly wish that people will not say we did it in the hope of

³⁵⁶ This was later compiled into a book in Tibetan by Trijang Rinpoche titled *Liberation in the Palm of Your Hand*. The English version is: Pabongka Rinpoche, Trijang Rinpoche (ed.), & Richards, M (trans.), *Liberation in the Palm of Your Hand: A Concise Discourse on the Path to Enlightenment*, Somerville, Wisdom Publications, 1991.

³⁵⁷ Ibid, p. 19.

³⁵⁸ Ibid, p. 94.

receiving merit...Let alone being motivated by the eight worldly concerns of this life, do not even be motivated for the sake of a high rebirth, of definite excellence [of liberation] [*sic*], and so on.³⁵⁹

Pabongka Rinpoche and most other current Tibetan Buddhist leaders do not psychologise or symbolise the powers one can cultivate to subdue demons, heal illnesses, and so forth, at least when addressing a Tibetan audience. Nor do they deny that lay practitioners can increase their karmic merit and receive worldly benefits by practicing the dharma. However, they constantly emphasise that religious practice must be done only for the benefit of all sentient beings, without the subtlest thought of self-interest or gain.³⁶⁰

Samuel has examined the divergent yet parallel and often overlapping ‘worldly’ and ‘world-transcending’ goals of Tibetan Buddhism in its *bodhi* and pragmatic orientations. The former is concerned with working towards awakening, while the latter is concerned with protection from evil forces and obtaining better life-circumstances.³⁶¹ In contrast, as McMahan notes, Buddhist modernism almost always ‘precludes’ pragmatic concerns;³⁶² this was not the case amongst all informants, as examined in this chapter. Many believed that Tibetan masters possess powers to affect the physical world. However, informants differed as to whether they themselves would seek to ‘tap’ the power of Tibetan masters for mundane benefits. One factor influencing the pursuit of such benefits among informants was their background as devotees of ‘popular’ Chinese religion, the pragmatic framework of which is outlined briefly below.

Practical Chinese religion and the Market Economy

Chinese religion, especially at the ‘popular’ level (but also variously at the ‘elite’ level), has long been pragmatically oriented. Gods, buddhas, bodhisattvas, spirits and ancestors are petitioned for long life, prosperity, familial harmony, and so forth, often through the

³⁵⁹ Ibid, p. 117.

³⁶⁰ Tsongkhapa’s famous work *The Great Treatises on the Path to Enlightenment* also constantly emphasised the need for Buddhist leaders to provide teachings without alternative motives. He says that ‘one must give teachings without any thought of one’s own comfort whatsoever’ and only with the thought that ‘May I myself and all living beings achieve buddhahood’. See Tsongkhapa, & Cutler, J.W.C., & Newland, G (eds.), *The Great Treatises on the Path to Enlightenment*, Volume 1, New York, Snow Lion Publications, 2000, p. 65.

³⁶¹ Samuel, G, 1993, cited in McMahan, D.L., p. 258.

³⁶² McMahan, D.L., p. 258.

mediation of Daoist, Buddhist, and ‘popular’ religious priests/monastics, as well as spirit mediums. Gods were promoted or demoted based on their perceived efficacy in answering petitions, both of the common folk and officialdom. Those gods who proved efficacious were granted ever-superlative titles by the emperor and officials, as discussed concerning Guan Gong in Chapter Three. Those gods who failed to live up to their responsibilities in answering devotee’s requests, or were perceived to bring harm instead of good, could receive ‘corporal punishment’ by being dispelled from their temples, flogged and even smashed to pieces.³⁶³ Similarly, devotees may still leave the temple of an inefficacious god to ruins.

Today in Hong Kong and Taiwan in particular, lay devotees of all ages seek advice from Daoist priests on important life decisions such as dating, marriage, career choices, investment plans, and so forth, through the interpretation of divination sticks (Cant – *kau chim*, Man – *qiu qian*) or wooden blocks (Cant – *gao bui*, Man – *jiao bei*). At Yonghegong Lama Temple in Beijing throngs of local Chinese tourists burn incense and make their requests known to the bodhisattvas, and if available, Tibetan monks/lamas in the courtyard of the temple.³⁶⁴ In all three locations *Cai Shen*, the god of wealth, is popular, and at *Cai Shen* temples thousands of worshippers burn copious amounts of paper money at Chinese New Year. The general emphasis on money-making in all three locations, following the increase in prosperity made possible by respective ‘economic miracles’, seems to go hand-in-hand with the current popular perceptions of the cult of *Cai Shen*.³⁶⁵

Of course, the Chinese gods of wealth are not traditionally perceived to just provide cash ‘handouts’ at will to devotees. One must be generous to others, keep harmonious relations with one’s family, and perform various meritorious acts to be blessed by the

³⁶³ See Shyrock, J, 1931, p. 97, cited in Wolf, A.F., ‘Gods, Ghosts and Ancestors’, in *Religion and Ritual in Chinese Society*, Redwood City, Stanford University Press, 1974, p. 143.

³⁶⁴ Tibetan lamas at Yonghegong visit rather than reside there, largely, it seems, to recruit new Chinese followers and raise revenue to build their monasteries/temples in Tibetan areas. Resident lamas and monks at the temple are almost all of Mongolian ethnicity.

As at many temples in Beijing, hundreds of charms for long life, happiness, wealth, harmonious relationships, and so forth adorn fences enclosing the trees in the courtyard of Yonghegong temple. In the temple’s souvenir shops, moreover, all manner of charms for everything from curing illness to ‘striking it rich’ are on sale.

³⁶⁵ This can be seen by the number of ‘non-religious’ Chinese who evoke *Cai Shen*, even on the mainland. According to a survey regarding the beliefs of mainland Han Chinese in 2005, 21.6% of respondents said they had prayed to the God of Wealth, despite the fact that most were not religious (it may be argued that within Chinese society ‘doing religion’ takes prominence, as opposed to *being* religious). See Yao & Baham, 2007, cited in Yao, X, & Zhao, Y, p.1.

gods of wealth.³⁶⁶ At least, this was how the gods of wealth were perceived from the late Ming dynasty (1368-1644) onwards, among guild merchants who needed ‘legitimate’ patron saints that neither encouraged self-indulgence nor the parsimony of the Confucian gentry.³⁶⁷ Guan Gong fits the image of a somewhat ‘refined’ martial (as opposed to civil) god of wealth. He embodies certain Confucian characteristics that justify, to an extent, his popular image as a god of wealth. Accordingly, the cult of Guan Gong as a *Cai Shen* was reluctantly accepted by officialdom, and, as Duara notes, a temple in the Yuecheng area of Beijing where he was worshiped as a god of wealth was patronized by the Ming government, due to the rapid spread of the cult during this period.³⁶⁸



Photo 8: A Chinese *Cai Shen* (God of Wealth) statue set at the base of a Tibetan stupa amidst Tibetan mantras at Songtsen Ling Monastery, Gyalthang.

³⁶⁶ Von Glahn observes that during the eighteenth century the gods of wealth underwent a fundamental transformation, largely due to patronage of ‘urban shopkeepers and wealthy merchants’, ‘who began to develop a bourgeois ethic of collective entrepreneurship and solidarity’. This ‘ethic of collective consciousness’ promoted ‘moral integrity, wise investment of money, and philanthropy as superior to the ‘straitlaced parsimony’ of both the sanctimonious Confucian and abstemious miser’. The actions of ‘good deeds and magnanimity toward others’ was seen as the source of fortune, ‘for oneself and one’s descendants.’ In addition, of fundamental importance to this ‘ethic of moral temperance’ was ‘self-reliance, hard work, and individual entrepreneurship’. See Von Glahn, R, p. 244.

³⁶⁷ Von Glahn argues that devotees of the Five Gods of Wealth (*Wulu Caishen*) were ‘unbashedly devoted to the pursuit of material gain’, but they ‘sanitised’ the cult by constructing theories on the origins of the gods which attributed to them Confucian virtues. See *ibid*, p. 246.

The cult of *Wulu Caishen*, Von Glahn argues, emerged from the more sinister cult of *Wutong*. *Wutong* were demonical beings who provided devotees with wealth, but in return brought disastrous consequences on the devotee and his/her family. By the eighteenth century, following the ‘sanitised’ transformation of the *Wulu Caishen*, temples to the god of wealth were widespread in Jiangnan, and were approved by local officials. See *ibid*.

³⁶⁸ When Guan Gong received his imperial rank in 1615, it was bestowed at this temple. See Huang, HJ, 1968, & Inoue, I, 1941, cited in Duara, P, 1988, p. 783.

Among the common folk, ‘popular’ religion fully endorsed the use of money within a system that Gates refers to as ‘petty capitalism’.³⁶⁹ As Gates and Von Glahn note, in ‘popular’ Chinese/Daoist religious belief one is lent all of life’s wealth by the gods from the celestial treasury before birth. While alive, one may request an increase in wealth from the gods, but this must be paid back many times over in spirit money throughout one’s life. At death one will inevitably still be in debt to the gods, and will carry this debt into the next world. For this reason, family members burn extra spirit money at funerals to cover the deceased’s debt and expenses in the afterlife, as far as is possible. Money returned to the celestial treasury then recirculates and ‘expand[s] itself through further capitalist transactions with human souls.’³⁷⁰ Throughout life, lay people may ‘bargain’ with the gods, making small offerings, and promising larger ones if their requests are met.³⁷¹ Thus the Gods charge interest and people are free to haggle with them for a better deal. Through these multiple exchanges of wealth before birth, during life, and after death, one’s whole existence is encompassed by the lending, investment, exchange and bargaining associated with money.

The emphasis on the importance of pursuing money through Chinese religion is thus certainly not a new phenomenon corresponding to the current market economy. It has its origins at least in the Song dynasty (960-1279),³⁷² although it was during the Qing dynasty (1644-1912), from the eighteenth century onwards, that a standard image of the gods of wealth emerged, one ‘which human beings could easily manipulate’ and which became a ‘euhemeristic embodiment of domestic and public virtues’, in opposition to the diabolical gods of wealth of earlier periods who controlled, and brought disastrous consequences to the lives of devotees in exchange for wealth.³⁷³ In addition to the positive image attributed to the accumulation of wealth particularly from the eighteenth century onwards, the central drive to make money under the current market economy has surely given new impetus to devotees to seek greater wealth by way of the gods.

³⁶⁹ Gates, H, *China’s Motor: A Thousand Years of Petty Capitalism*, Ithaca, Cornell University Press, 1997.

³⁷⁰ Ibid, p. 175. See also Von Glahn, R, p. 233.

³⁷¹ Wolf, A, p. 162.

³⁷² According to Hansen, ‘the new commercial expertise of the gods is the one area where one can see direct evidence of change in views about the gods in the Song.’ See Hansen, VL, p. 64.

³⁷³ See Von Glahn, R, p. 253. As Von Glahn observes, the earlier *Wutong* cult from which the *Wulu Caishen* (Five Gods of Wealth) cult evolved, likely emerged in an environment of anxiety about making and not losing money. For the common folk, money was made not ‘by living virtuously or through prudent investment and planning – instead money was believed to be under the control of malicious and notoriously unreliable supernatural forces’. This conception of money arose, in Von Glahn’s understanding, out of the ‘economic insecurities’ of the sixteenth century, while the stability of the market economy in the eighteenth century gave rise to a more positive conception of money and wealth. See *ibid*, p. 251.

As outlined above, a pragmatic approach to religion in general has been the focus of many devotees of ‘popular’ Chinese religion; as examined later, such a focus amongst a number of Tibetan Buddhist practitioners in Hong Kong who were previously devotees of such religion, continues to overlap with their ultimate pursuit of enlightenment. Others who had received a Protestant/Catholic education, on the other hand, held different ideas concerning ‘popular’ Chinese religion and subsequent mundane pursuits through religion. A brief outline of the underlying ideas propagated within the Christian education system in Hong Kong is provided below to demonstrate how these ideas have influenced the views of informants educated within this system.

Christian Educational Influence in Hong Kong

Christian schools, hospitals and other institutions were given preferential treatment under the British colonial government, especially in post-war Hong Kong from the mid-1940s to the 1970s, while less support was given to secular, Buddhist and other religious schools and institutions. While the colonial government’s main focus was on trade with China in the pre-war period, from the mid-1940s onward in particular (and especially during the 1950s and 1960s) – due in part to the perceived threat of local allegiance to the Communists (as well as to cater for the flood of immigrants arriving from the mainland during this period), it encouraged the rapid establishment of many new Christian schools and institutions.³⁷⁴ Following the return of Hong Kong to the mainland in 1997, there has been a steady increase in the number of non-religious and other religious schools (e.g. Buddhist and Daoist), and Shi Jiao Guang – Chairperson of the Hong Kong Buddhist Association – expressed his belief that closer ties with the mainland would provide greater freedom for Buddhist schools and institutions.³⁷⁵ Nevertheless, there remain a dominant number of well-established Christian schools that continue to influence the perceptions of students towards Chinese religious traditions. Few of my informants who attended Christian schools considered themselves

³⁷⁴ Head Anglican Bishop Ronald Hall believed a Christian school curriculum was essential to counter the emergence of a curriculum influenced by Communism. He wrote a letter on September 16, 1950, to the Secretary of the Board of Education, expressing his belief that ‘only religion [could] resist Communism’, while a secular education would ‘produce an atheistic proletariat as prepared ground for Communism sowing.’ He thus expressed his wish that the Catholic Church would increase its efforts and ‘strengthen and enlarge their primary school work.’ According to Chan, the colonial regime may have distanced itself from Chinese religious organisations during the 1950s and 1960s due to concern about Communist infiltration of these organisations. Whatever the case, Chinese religious organisations had less influence in education and social services than Christian churches. See Chan, S, ‘Rethinking Folk Religion in Hong Kong: Social Capital, Civic Community and the State’, paper presented at the Annual Conference of Pacific Neighbourhood Consortium, Jan 13-20, 2001 at the City University of Hong Kong, pp. 10-11.

³⁷⁵ Ibid, pp. 11-12.

to have been practising Catholics or Protestants, yet the ideas established by their school curriculum served as a source from which they drew as they positioned their perspectives as Tibetan Buddhists.

The deeply-rooted Christian education system in Hong Kong has imparted to students a modern, 'Protestantised' understanding of religion and its place in society. Religious and Ethics studies in particular emphasises the social engagement of religion. Despite religious education being optional according to the Advanced Supplementary Level Ethics and Religious Studies program implemented in 1994, Cheng notes that moral and religious education are closely related, especially in the religious schools, which make up more than half of the publicly funded schools in Hong Kong.³⁷⁶ Religious schools 'draw their moral sources from religious faith', and Christianity is presented within Christian schools as the most prominent model to emulate.³⁷⁷

While Christian education remains prominent, it often assumes a modernised, 'rational' form. Less emphasis is put on the miraculous, and when it is mentioned, it is often portrayed as metaphorical of a 'core' message that is applicable to modern society. Moreover, distinctions are generally made between constructive religion and false sects.³⁷⁸ Such practices as idolatry, divination and fortune telling within the context of the Old Testament are criticised as deviant forms of religion contrary to God's law. Due in part to the influence of this curriculum, which according to Liu, tends to push 'the anti-local religion tradition, aided by the prevalence of Christian organisations in Hong Kong's school system', the educated elite tend to 'ignore the existence of local religion.'³⁷⁹

While I do not see direct evidence of Liu's claim in the Religious and Ethics studies curriculum that I have viewed, there is perhaps an implied message which could be

³⁷⁶ Cheng, R HM, 'Moral Education in HK: Confucian-parental, Christian-religious and liberal-civic influences', *Journal of Moral Education*, vol. 33, no. 4, 2004, p. 542.

³⁷⁷ Ibid.

³⁷⁸ See for example NSS Ethics and Religious Studies Curriculum Support Materials, Religious Tradition, Module 2: Christianity, 'Signs of the Coming of the Kingdom', <http://www.edb.gov.hk/attachment/en/curriculum-development/kla/pshe/references-and-resources/ethics-and-religious-studies/topic%204.pdf> [accessed 05/10/2013].

Within recent years, however, following the controversy surrounding the religious freedom of Falun Gong in Hong Kong, Christian leaders have found it necessary to negotiate the terms of what constitutes a cult as opposed to 'genuine' religion, in light of attempts by Beijing to ban Falun Gong in the territory as well as on the mainland. Christian leaders became worried that key phrases (such as 'mind control') in the proposed law to ban Falun Gong would also lead to suppression of Christianity in the territory. See Nedilsky, LV, 'The Anticult Initiative and Hong Kong Christianity's Turn from Religious Privilege', *China Information*, vol. 22, no. 3, 2008, pp. 423-449.

³⁷⁹ Liu, TS, 2003, p. 390.

understood as detrimental to ‘popular’ Chinese religious practice. Take for example a standard lesson plan used in Christianity studies on the topic of ‘The Faith of the Old Testament’. In one part it discusses the Sinai Covenant that God made with the Israelites through Moses. The Israelites broke the covenant by worshipping idols, which caused them to lose battles against their enemies.³⁸⁰ These were similar to the false gods of the Egyptians, whom God had delivered the Israelites from. According to the lesson plan, the ten plagues God sent upon the Egyptians may have been directed against key Egyptian nature and anthropomorphic gods.³⁸¹ God’s ultimate judgement was against Pharaoh himself, who held the title of ‘giver of life’, which only belonged to God and not a man. God’s justice was displayed in the ten plagues he sent on the Egyptians, in response to their maltreatment of his people, which came about as a result of the Egyptians’ delusional religious practices in which nature and anthropomorphic gods substituted the one true God. As the lesson plan progresses, parallels are drawn between the modern context of what constitutes ‘justice’ and the Ten Commandments God gave to the Israelites, to show how the Israelites broke God’s commandments, which led to societal problems. They broke them by worshipping pagan gods, practising divination and witchcraft, and consulting fortune tellers and spiritual media, among other transgressions.³⁸² Others worshipped both God and pagan gods, and even the priests of God performed divination for profit.³⁸³ This ‘syncretic religion’ displeased God and he sent prophets to warn people to repent, but they did not heed them.³⁸⁴

In such examples, we see how ‘true’, constructive, just and humane religion should be as compared to how idolatry, paganism and ‘syncretic religion’ fall short of this standard. A normative view of how religion should be – beneficial for society and non-superstitious – is provided to show how Christianity in particular sets the standard. Although such teaching does not directly condemn modern-day ‘idolatry’ in Hong Kong, and only refers to these practices as sinful in the context of the Old Testament, it is not difficult to see how students could draw comparisons with similar ‘idolatrous’ practices such as bowing to anthropomorphic gods and practising divination at local Chinese temples. As religious tolerance is strongly emphasised in all aspects of Hong Kong

³⁸⁰ NSS Ethics and Religious Studies Curriculum Support Materials, Religious Tradition, Module 2: Christianity Topic 1 – Textual Background (The Faith of the Old Testament), <http://www.edb.gov.hk/attachment/en/curriculum-development/kla/pshe/references-and-resources/ethics-and-religious-studies/topic%201.pdf> [accessed 05/10/2013], 1.

³⁸¹ Ibid, p. 19.

³⁸² Ibid, p. 67.

³⁸³ Ibid, p. 68.

³⁸⁴ Ibid.

education, it is unlikely such students would criticise these practices, but they may reject them as ‘superstitious’ and/or ‘idolatrous’.³⁸⁵

While practitioners educated in Christian schools tended to demythologise, psychologise and rationalise various aspects of Tibetan Buddhism drawing on a normative view of ‘genuine’ religion similar to that outlined in the above lesson plan, they also set Tibetan Buddhism up as superior to Christianity using the same discourse. For example, they emphasised that Tibetan Buddhism (or Buddhism in general) has no judge who brings retribution to humanity; humanity brings retribution on itself according to the laws of karmic cause and effect. Thus one has no need to petition gods (or a single God) for salvation as salvation is within, and one is not at the mercy of a wrathful God. Such a perspective draws on views similar to those presented in the above lesson plan, while taking their logic to an ‘agnostic’ conclusion.

As mentioned earlier, such informants displayed what Homi Bhabha terms ‘mimicry’,³⁸⁶ which echoes somewhat the adaptation of a ‘Protestantised’ Buddhism in Ceylon, where Buddhists borrowed from a modern, ‘rationalised’ Protestantism to make Buddhism more socially-engaged, less ritually-oriented, less hierarchical, and more focused on individual salvation. These developments were then used to subvert the agenda of the colonisers by arguing against the missionaries using logic inherent in their attack on Buddhism.³⁸⁷ Moreover, it was ‘these already modernised interpretations [formulated in Ceylon] that impressed the first wave of Europeans and Americans enough for them to take Buddhism seriously’.³⁸⁸

Above I have explored in brief the conditions which have given rise to a practical approach to religiosity in Hong Kong, as well as a move away by others towards the more soteriological aspects of religion. Below I examine some case samples which demonstrate both trends.

³⁸⁵ The influence of modernised Protestantism in Hong Kong in distinguishing ‘superstition’ from ‘genuine’ religious practice has parallels in the history of the development of modern mainland China. As Nedostup observes, from the late Qing reform movement onward, the fixing of the boundaries of *zongjiao* (religion) according to modern Protestant definitions of religion became essential for state-sponsored modernisation. Christian and Buddhist publications (the latter emulating the former in many ways) contributed heavily to ‘the identification and cataloguing of superstitious practices’. Moreover, the theories of ‘evolutionary-minded’ theologians such as Allan Menzies were drawn upon in certain publications to show how ‘primitive’ religions had evolved along a scale of progress ending in Christianity. See Nedostup, R, 2009, pp. 9-13.

³⁸⁶ Bhabha, H, cited in *ibid*, p. 70.

³⁸⁷ *Ibid*.

³⁸⁸ *Ibid*.



Photo 9: A Green Tara Puja at a Karma Kagyu centre in Hong Kong.

Mundane Pursuits in Hong Kong: Case Samples

A number of informants in Hong Kong would request rituals from lamas for protection when travelling on pilgrimage to India, or a ‘change of luck’ when their life-circumstances were not agreeable. Some would carry paintings or pictures of protector deities when travelling, and a number believed in the protective and healing powers of amulets (Tibetan – *ghau*) containing mantras/prayers blessed by a great master, or the hair, pieces of clothing and other physical elements of a Rinpoche. Many had pills given to them by their master, although perceptions about the degree of efficacy these were believed to possess in curing illness varied between informants. A number also kept *she li zi*³⁸⁹ (bead-like relics) gathered after the cremation of a Rinpoche and distributed to them by their guru. These were believed to hold great power, and could even be consumed in case of a medical emergency.³⁹⁰

Wealth was an important practical pursuit of some Hong Kong informants. At one centre in Hong Kong a Yellow Dzambhala puja was held once a month, and many

³⁸⁹ Sansk – *Sharira*

³⁹⁰ Evidently a number of mainland and Taiwanese informants also possessed such items and held similar beliefs about their efficacy. Here I am referring to Hong Kong informants as their perspectives are the focus of this section.

practitioners attended, despite the fact that it was held in the middle of the working week, and many had come straight from work or studies. One informant at this centre, while he did not want to name or judge anyone attending, believed perhaps ‘fifty percent’ of them were there to receive material blessings (to ‘win the lottery’ or ‘get rich’) through the rituals; in his view, such thinking is ‘superficial and not mature’. Another informant at the same centre, whom I had interviewed on a separate occasion, later attended a talk on the same day by Ryuho Okawa, the head of Happy Science,³⁹¹ who was in Hong Kong to promote his group, which places considerable emphasis on a prosperity doctrine. I do not want to suggest that those informants with mundane, in addition to transcendent interests, were any less serious about their faith than those who did not have such interests, but simply wish to examine the reasons for these two approaches.

For some Hong Kong informants, Tibetan Buddhism’s emphasis on both the ‘spiritual and practical’ was one attraction that caused them to favour this tradition over Chinese Buddhism. One informant, ‘Mindy’, in her forties, who followed the Karma Kagyu tradition, stated:

In Chinese Buddhism³⁹² there is only a focus on emptiness, but Tibetan Buddhism focuses both on the material and spiritual – wealth, prosperity, health...At our centre there are fortune gods (Yellow, Black, White, Red and Green Dzambhala), but in Chinese Buddhism they seldom talk about material things. So I go to pujas and donate money. I have many wishes but no schedule, and give everything to ‘God’. I’m not really a typical Buddhist. But if you ask for something, it should be for everyone, so you need to be careful how you ask (Field notes, 01/5/2011).

This informant, as she noted, was not a ‘typical Buddhist’, as she had been informed in her views to some degree by a Hindu friend, and because of this influence accepted ‘all religions and gods and goddesses’, and said she is ‘more spiritual than religious’. She believes ‘everything has life’, including apparently inanimate objects such as stones and leaves, as the electrons and neutrons within the atoms of which they are made up are in constant motion; hence her idea that ‘everything can be enlightened’, which is also an Eastern Buddhist idea. At the same time, she finds Tibetan Buddhism to be ‘more open’ than Chinese Buddhism, as it apparently portrays the female body in a positive light, as seen in statues and paintings of dakinis and female consorts of various masters which

³⁹¹ Happy Science is a new religion that originated in Japan in the 1980s.

³⁹² Here she was making reference to Chan Buddhism, not ‘popular’ belief.

reveal their unclad bodies; Chinese Buddhism on the other hand, according to this informant, largely portrays the feminine in a more restrictive way (Guan Yin for example is fully clothed), and requires the separation of male and female practitioners during different ritual ceremonies.³⁹³ As a child she had followed ‘popular’ Chinese religion, worshiping various gods and sacrificing pigs, chickens, and other animals on important occasions to receive mundane benefits. Then her aunt became a nun, and introduced her to ‘authentic Buddhism’. It was following her move towards Chinese Buddhism that she was influenced by Hinduism, and, when finding that the deities at the current Tibetan Buddhist centre she attends were similar to Hindu deities, and the teaching and visualisation practices helpful, she began attending.

She is perhaps representative of many Hong Kongers who, according to her, ‘go wherever help can be found’. For her, this help comes through the lamas at the centre who reach down to her level to provide her not only with spiritual insight, but, apparently unlike Chinese masters, answers to practical needs through different rituals. It seems that her childhood background as a follower of ‘popular’ Chinese religion, which focused on various ‘bargaining’ techniques to obtain mundane benefits, has led her to seek out the most efficacious tradition to solve her material as well as spiritual needs. Moreover, coupled with this older form of ‘capitalist’ exchange, the materialist drive of the environment of Hong Kong has also likely influenced her desire to fulfil these material needs, in exchange for which she donates money.³⁹⁴ At the same time, she emphasised that one should be careful about how one ‘asked for’ mundane benefits – i.e. one should check one’s intentions first – an idea which is drawn from Mahayana Buddhist doctrine, and constantly reiterated by Tibetan Buddhist leaders, as outlined earlier.

Many lamas I interviewed in Hong Kong said they had numerous lay Chinese coming to them to request blessings or rituals for mundane concerns such as business, marital and health problems. The lamas said they help where they can, but quite a few lay people who come with such requests leave disappointed when they realise the problem cannot be fixed immediately, or results are not to their satisfaction. One Bhutanese lama of the

³⁹³ Outside of modernist Western Tibetan Buddhist circles, monks and nuns are also separated.

³⁹⁴ A number of the Tibetan Buddhist centres in Hong Kong have *ping on deng* (Mand – *ping an deng*) (‘peace lanterns’, a canonical-shaped lantern found in Chinese temples, inset with small plates containing the image of the Buddha and the donor’s name, which is lit by electric light bulbs and rotates), and/or a wall where the names of donors are displayed. While a practitioner must continually check his/her motivations for donating money to his/her centre, it is quite possible, as with Chinese temples, that such donation gives them at least recognition as contributing members of their respective centres. See Gates, H, 1996, p. 235 for more on the practice of donating money within Chinese temples in Taiwan.

Karma Kagyu school noted that many Chinese come with expectations that rituals will produce quick results.

Many Chinese have a mindset of ‘incense and results’ – they put the incense out in the evening and expect the problem to be fixed by morning.³⁹⁵ Such people do not understand that their current circumstances are caused by their karma in a past life. We try to explain this to them, and those who want to learn more may stay on. Some believe their problems will be fixed in time if they continue coming and taking part in rituals, but eventually they may leave if their problems persist. Others who come to understand that their karma is the cause of their suffering will continue to come back and study Tibetan Buddhism in greater depth (Field notes, 03/5/2011).

While there certainly may be those who are simply opportunistic and leave when their needs are not met, as Mindy and the following informant show, there are also those who have tried other traditions and found them wanting both in regards to spiritual and mundane fulfilment, and have settled with Tibetan Buddhism. These informants saw Tibetan Buddhism as being powerful and ‘skilful’. ‘Wilson’, a practitioner in his forties who attends the Karma Kagyu centre run by the above lama and who had formerly been a Catholic, then a Daoist, then a member of a New Age Buddhist group, and finally a Tibetan Buddhist, was quite convinced that Tibetan Buddhism was ‘the real deal’. According to him, its powerful esoteric practices can help one achieve the highest levels of realisation while the deepest Chan meditation practices, although helping one achieve a high level, would not take one beyond medium levels of realisation. He continuously referred to Tibetan Buddhism as being ‘very scientific’ and it appears that for this reason, masters who practice it at the highest level can manipulate the material world to produce agreeable results. He said:

The efficacy of all religions is dependent on several factors. Around 70% depends on the source of power (i.e. who is the guru); 5% on the concept of the religion [?]; and maybe 25% on the skill employed. The esoteric skill [‘skilful

³⁹⁵ This rather ‘mechanical’ understanding of ‘performing’ religion and obtaining results may stem from popular religious ideas present in such literature as *The Ledgers of Merit and Demerit*, written in late dynastic China. As Yü notes regarding the system of merit and demerit promoted in such literature, as soon as one had finished doing a promised good deed, the wish was believed to become true; the process was ‘automatic, even mechanical’. See Yü, C.F., p. 113.

means'] employed in Tibetan Buddhism, drawing on the source of its power³⁹⁶ and using correct concepts in regards to the self and existence, is superior to other traditions (Field notes, 14/05/2011).

Thus, for this informant, while all religions are at their root about 'union with the source of the universe', Tibetan Buddhist masters can 'tap' that source and employ it in the mundane world most effectively. Moreover, he believes deities such as *Mahakala*,³⁹⁷ a major protector deity of all schools of Tibetan Buddhism, may help one to even win the lottery, although this is certainly 'rare', and depends very much on one's karma and intentions. The religious background of this informant is very similar to Mindy in some ways, whose ideas were explored above; like Mindy, Wilson had dabbled in other Eastern traditions such as Daoism, and accepted all religious traditions within a pan-religious framework while stratifying them according to both their 'spiritual' and 'practical' efficacy, which is typical of both 'polytheistic' Eastern traditions as well as New Ageism, which both he and Mindy appear to draw from to an extent. Again, like Mindy, he believes devotion to major Tibetan deities such as *Mahakala* can result in quick (indeed, immediate) gains such as winning the lottery; again, this seems to reflect both the materialist drive for money in Hong Kong ('gambling' on the lottery, horse racing, and arguably the Hong Kong stock market is a favourite past time of many Hong Kongers, as well as actual gambling in nearby Macau) and inclinations toward mundane pursuits in Daoism, which this informant previously followed. While he had also previously been a Catholic, this was the first of the religious traditions away from which, according to him, he progressively advanced towards higher states of realisation, ending with Tibetan Buddhism, and hence any influence from Catholicism had long receded from his religious experience. The most powerful tradition, on all accounts, was,

³⁹⁶ Ultimately this would be the deity of which the advanced guru becomes an embodiment. Beyer provides an apt description of the connection between this 'source of power' and the 'skill' derived from it:

The aim of all contemplative manipulation is the power to control the mind, the breath, the universe. Power is the key, and the source of power is the deity; just as the yogin may use his vivid visualization as a simulacrum for events, he uses it as a simulacrum for knowledge. To create and become the deity is to 'own' the deity in one's person, to be master even of the deity's enlightenment. And it is, finally, only as a ramification of this divine power – built up through constant contemplative feedback, growing in each contemplative period – that the yogin is able to control the appearances of all his realities; he must first be a god to act with the power of a god, for only the deity has the understanding of reality which grants omnipotence...To control the mind and body is to own the world.

See Beyer, S, *The Cult of Tara: Magic and Ritual in Tibet*, Berkeley, University of California Press, 1978, p. 94.

³⁹⁷ Cant – *Dai Hak Tin*, Mand – *Da Hei Tian*

according him, his current faith, from which he could benefit both spiritually and practically. At the same time, like Mindy, he also emphasised that one must constantly check one's intentions, and that only if one's karma is 'ripe' will one win the lottery. As noted above, such an emphasis on intention and karma is drawn from Tibetan Buddhist and Mahayana Buddhist doctrine in general.

Other informants in Hong Kong were not so much interested in material gain as they were in solving other practical problems, such as those related to work. 'Thomas', a long-term Nyingma practitioner who had been educated in a Catholic school, and was in his mid- to late-forties, was constantly plagued by 'political infighting' at work and every time I met him his eyes were puffy and his face haggard. His boss constantly yelled at him, and he was very busy travelling frequently between Hong Kong and the mainland. He said that this political infighting at work, the pressure from his boss, and travelling back and forth between the mainland has left him feeling exhausted, and he would like to just go one day without such pressure. He also related that his work does not allow him much time for studying Tibetan Buddhist 'theory'; he is only able to find enough time to attend ritual ceremonies at the Nyingma centre he visits on some evenings and on Sunday. He said he thinks that many practitioners at the centre face the same issues, while, as related earlier, he suggested that perhaps 'fifty percent' of these practitioners attend the centre hoping to improve their material position by 'winning the lottery' and 'getting rich', an attitude which he finds to be 'superficial' and 'not mature'. On the other hand, he related that he feels that he himself is trapped in his own pursuits of obtaining better life circumstances related to his unfortunate circumstances at work, and that, while he wishes to focus on 'the next life', he finds this exceedingly difficult given the pressures with which he is faced on a daily basis. He said he would like to have more opportunities to escape Hong Kong and visit Buddhist pilgrimage sites, in order to free his mind from pragmatic needs with which he is currently consumed. He moreover related that such pilgrimage would be good for all practitioners at the centre, to likewise expand their minds beyond their own narrow pursuits.

Thomas felt his misfortune was due to 'bad luck' caused by his karma, and he had asked his lama to perform rituals to 'change his luck'.³⁹⁸ A ritual for 'changing one's luck' is

³⁹⁸ He acknowledged that these rituals only work if he has created enough merit for the benefits of karma in a past life to 'blossom' in this life.

also present in ‘popular’ Chinese religion and Daoism,³⁹⁹ and it is possible Thomas was carrying forward the Chinese understanding of fate and luck into his belief in Tibetan Buddhism. He therefore did not fit the general trend I found among other informants who had attended a Catholic/Protestant school, who tended to reject the ‘magic’ of Tibetan Buddhism. However, Thomas had from a young age rejected his Catholic education, replaced now by what he sees as a more ‘rational’ tradition, which teaches self reliance for salvation based on one’s own karma rather than supernatural intervention. He related that, even while at school, he had questioned teachers and the school priest about the truth of biblical doctrine, concerning, for example, the story of Noah’s flood. While he rejected such biblical teaching as a student, he now finds justification in Tibetan Buddhist doctrine for why this teaching is ‘false’. According to him, the story of Noah’s flood is unjust, as it appears all of humanity save Noah’s family suffered a collective punishment at the hands of a wrathful God, rather than due to their individual karma. A theory of collective karmic retribution does exist in Buddhism; for example, the invasion/‘liberation’ of Tibet has been interpreted by the Tibetan religious elite as the result of Tibetans’ collective negative karma. What is interesting here is that this informant sought to use the theory of karma to show how the judgement of God may be ‘unjust’, while one’s own actions are a sure test of consequences in this life. Moreover, he insisted that the various practical rituals he requests from his guru are not magic; his guru does not in fact have supernatural power (like the God of Christianity), but instead is able to ‘locate’ Thomas’s positive karma in a past life and cause it to ‘blossom’ in his current life, through the help of various rituals. He moreover spoke of various masters being able to levitate, not through magical means, but due to the side benefits of deep meditative concentration, which he likened to ‘tuning into the right frequency’, which is imperceptible to those who have not attained such insight. Thomas also admitted that he only attended a Catholic school because it was the closest school to his house, and, according to Hong Kong law, one must attend a school in the vicinity of one’s neighbourhood. Further, he has married a Chinese Buddhist, who completed all her schooling at a Buddhist school (and now attends the centre with him), and who has influenced his ideas to an extent.

Apart from requesting rituals to ‘change his luck’, Thomas also requested his lama recite the mantra of *Mahakala* over him and his wife for protection before embarking on

³⁹⁹ A similar rite to change fate is performed in popular Chinese tradition, in which ‘little paper figures of astrological significance are burnt along with large amounts of spirit money.’ See Gates, H, ‘Money for the Gods’, *Modern China*, vol. 13, no.3, 1987, p. 268.

pilgrimage to Bodhgaya in India, and hence they did not take out travel insurance. For him, the ‘magical’ power of the lamas is very real and influential in the mundane aspects of this life. I later watched a video from his centre filmed in Hong Kong, of an empowerment given by a visiting Nyingma Rinpoche. Thomas was bowing lower than others waiting in line to be touched on the head by the master, holding his *khata*⁴⁰⁰ high above his head, almost in trepidation as he received the touch to the crown of his head. It seemed he expected and perhaps ‘felt’ power pass through his body as the Rinpoche’s hand made contact with his head.

Thomas was one of the longest-believing informants I interviewed in Hong Kong, having attended the current centre for fifteen years. His initial curiosity in Tibetan Buddhism began when a friend introduced him to the centre he now attends, saying that he would find help with his job and other problems, in addition to a deep philosophy. While pragmatic interests were not what caused him to stay on, they were what initially drew him.

‘Rachel’, a Karma Kagyu practitioner in her early-fifties, had also followed Tibetan Buddhism as a very serious practitioner for around twelve years, and believed in the power of various religious implements empowered by her master.

If we are sick, the master may loan us a text to recite at home...These texts cannot be taken without permission from the master, as they will not be effective otherwise...I also consume empowered pills for blessings and illness. When travelling, some practitioners may take with them a picture of their lama, or Green Tara, or the Buddha. It doesn’t matter which you take as long as you trust the image has power to protect you. As long as you have faith, it will work (Field notes, 17/04/2011).

Rachel came from a ‘popular’ Buddhist background, which, as noted, places considerable emphasis on the mundane efficacy of various deities and bodhisattvas. It is not surprising then, that this informant would believe quite firmly in the power of Tibetan masters and higher beings to act in the mundane world. However, she distanced herself from the material focus of ‘popular’ Chinese religion, and was very focused on striving towards the goal of rebirth in Amitabha’s Pure Land.

⁴⁰⁰ *Khata* are Tibetan silk scarfs exchanged when greeting.

At the beginning I approached Tibetan Buddhism for a ‘smooth life’. But after several years I wanted to transcend this world and be reborn in the Pure Land. That is my goal. I am not interested in making money or improving my living standard. These things are not important because they will all be gone one day anyway (Field notes, 17/04/2012).

Thus those who were interested in mundane benefits were not always interested in material increase. Rachel, like Mindy, mentioned earlier, was first attracted to Tibetan Buddhism by the power of the lamas. When she met her lama the first time and spoke to him she felt he could ‘read her mind’, and thus felt Tibetan Buddhism was ‘something real.’ Clairvoyance is one of the signs that a master has gained a high level of meditative concentration, and several informants believed highly accomplished lamas possess this and other ‘supernatural powers’.⁴⁰¹ The Bhutanese Karma Kagyu lama mentioned earlier acknowledged that an excessive focus on such power among Chinese is still a ‘problem’ in Hong Kong.

There are still quite a few Chinese who perceive lamas as some kind of ‘super heroes’ with magical powers. In certain *Sadhanas* there are references to powerful, wrathful deities, and some Chinese may think lamas have this same power, but this is a misconception. Many also come for Dzambhala to increase wealth...Westerners are more serious practitioners I think. Asian people have some ‘blind’ faith. Westerners want to understand Tibetan Buddhism logically, while Chinese may come from a tradition of ‘incense and results’, and rely on empowered physical implements (Field notes, 03/05/2011).

The perceptions of this lama reflect an influence of Buddhist modernism, which often portrays the ‘original’ dharma as taught by the Buddha as ‘scientific’ and ‘rational’, free of later ‘superstitious’ rites and rituals. He further perceives a Western interpretation of Buddhism as ‘logical’ and more in line with the dharma taught by the Buddha, while the East is ‘superstitious’, having added its own ‘irrational’ cultural accretions since the

⁴⁰¹ Mand – *shentong*, Cant – *suntong*. Smyer-Yü has noted that *shentong*, meaning something equivalent to ‘supernatural magic’, is the Chinese term used when translating the Tibetan equivalent, *mngon-hi*, which means ‘lucid revelation of knowledge, past, present, and future based on Buddha-like wisdom’ (Khenpo Losang, cited in Smyer-Yü). Thus the term *shentong* ‘leaves out most of the theological content of *mngon-hi*, and gives the impression Tibetan masters can beat Chinese qigong masters by turning butter frogs into real frogs, etc.’ As Smyer-Yü observes, from the perspective of soteriological Tibetan Buddhism, this is a ‘theological illusion’. See Smyer-Yü, D, *The Tibetan Buddhist Revival and the Politics of Religion in the PRC*, PhD Thesis, University of California, 2006, p. 191.

historical Buddha.⁴⁰² Yet he acknowledged that Tibetan Buddhism does emphasise the acquisition of mundane powers upon reaching higher spiritual attainment. He spoke of Milarepa⁴⁰³ being able to fly, not because of some magical power he had obtained from a higher source, but because he had achieved the highest levels of meditative concentration, which gave rise to a ‘feeling of lightness’ and ‘quality of mind’. When he flew his mind was ‘outside of this world’ – he had transcended all attachment and thus his body was able to achieve what normal people could not. He thus believed such powers are real; his concern, however, was that Han devotees or even practitioners can become more focused on this power instead of working towards enlightenment.

What the above Hong Kong practitioners demonstrate is that everyday concerns are carried over into their faith. They may bring their concerns about wealth, work and so forth to their guru and attend meditation centres either in the evenings after work or on Sunday. During this brief respite, it is hard to imagine that they could completely withdraw from the many pressures and activities of the busy city. ‘Anxiety’, as one anthropologist noted in regards to Hong Kong society, ‘is endemic. Thus there is a market for alternative methods [to ‘secular power-centres’] of pursuing security and advantage. Gambling is one and religion is another.’⁴⁰⁴ Most of the above Han informants also came from a ‘popular’ religious background, and there appears to be continuity between the pragmatic nature of their former beliefs and their practice of Tibetan Buddhism. The section below examines how some practitioners in Hong Kong seek to rise above and detach themselves from this mundane anxiety, and the variables which have influenced this attitude.

Pursuit of Transcendence in Hong Kong: Case Samples

A number of lamas in Hong Kong said that, while there are still many lay Han practitioners who come to them for practical needs, they had seen a general shift in the past decade or so. They felt that in recent years there has been a decline in this tendency

⁴⁰² His overly positive reflection on Buddhism in the West may have been due to the fact that he was speaking with me, a foreign academic, and hence he may have wished to portray Tibetan Buddhism as ‘rational’ and non-superstitious.

⁴⁰³ Milarepa (c. 1052 – c.1135) is highly regarded as Tibet’s most famous yogi. Originally responsible for the deaths of many of his relatives whom he killed using sorcery – in vengeance for taking his and his mother’s inheritance promised to them by his father – he later repented of these deeds and wholly sought the dharma, accomplishing the highest levels of realisation.

⁴⁰⁴ Lang, G, ‘Sacred Power in the Metropolis: Shrines and Temples in Hong Kong’, in Evans, G, & Tam, M (eds.), p. 242.

towards ‘opportunism’, and a greater interest in studying Tibetan Buddhism in depth. As the lama quoted above in Hong Kong noted:

Those that stay on are often serious practitioners. Few come just to bow to statues. They want to find deeper meaning in life. They chant mantras a thousand times and prostrate one-hundred-thousand times – they’re hard working despite very tight time constraints, and like to achieve (Field notes 3/05/2011).

Another Bhutanese Karma Kagyu lama from another centre agreed that the trend is changing.

Twenty years ago people would come to me with all types of needs. This continues but now there are more who come to the centre with a real interest to learn as well (Field notes, 16/04/2011).

This shift could be due in part to the increased influence of Buddhism in general in Hong Kong following retrocession in 1997. The increased activities of the Hong Kong Buddhist Association as well as more academic interest in Buddhism⁴⁰⁵ has likely added to this trend, and caused an increasing number of Hong Kongers to follow a more demythologised, philosophical form of Buddhism. Some, as they have understood the teachings of Buddhism better, have left Catholicism or Protestantism, in which they received their primary and/or secondary school, and perhaps even tertiary education. A considerable number of informants were of this group. Informants with such a background were more inclined to ‘rationalise’ their faith in Tibetan Buddhism and to treat interest in the ‘magic’ of Tibetan Buddhism as naïve and ‘superstitious’.

‘Agatha’, who was previously a nominal Protestant educated in a Protestant school, reflected this trend. She now follows Mingyur Rinpoche, a master from Nepal of the Karma Kagyu and Nyingma traditions, who uses novel techniques to make meditation easily understood, and simplifies/reduces rituals to make Tibetan Buddhism more approachable for people who may not be interested in ‘traditional’ forms of religiosity. She said:

I think lamas used ‘magical power’ as ‘convenient method’ – in old Tibet many people were uneducated, so these lamas had to show them they had power.

⁴⁰⁵ For example, the Centre of Buddhist Studies at the University of Hong Kong was founded in 2000. See The University of Hong Kong, Centre of Buddhist Studies, ‘Message from the Director’, http://www.buddhism.hku.hk/director_message.htm [accessed 28/05/2012].

Many lay Tibetans were superstitious and believed local deities performed magic, etc. The lamas, in light of this belief, performed rituals to overcome ‘evil forces’. But actually, [from a ‘rational’ point of view] if you put yourself first and enlarge your ego you will experience obstacles including illness. So [Mingyur] Rinpoche teaches a ‘no worries’ approach, which helps you relax and reduces stress, which leads to a healthier lifestyle...

In regards to wearing protective amulets (Tib – *ghau*), a common practice amongst Tibetans and various followers of Tibetan Buddhism outside Tibet, she similarly employed a ‘rationalist’ interpretation.

I have a necklace with a part of the robe of my former Rinpoche. This is to help me remember, I think, to focus on this Rinpoche and his teachings. As far as I know it’s not for protection. Some people at our centre have *ghau* [amulets]. These can contain part of the guru’s robe, and sometimes the guru’s hair (I think). This is for blessing and carries some positive energy. I think it may not help, but the Buddha has 84,000 ways [of teaching the dharma]. Meditation is the realisation of emptiness and so it is the most important (Field notes, 29/04/2011).

Agatha, as demonstrated in her response above, follows a ‘Protestantised’ form of Tibetan Buddhism. ‘Magical’ rituals performed for lay Tibetans who believe in nonexistent local Tibetan deities are seen as an aspect of conventional truth, which more aware individuals who have a deeper understanding of Tibetan Buddhism have risen above. The malevolent forces faced by lay Tibetans which Tibetan lamas and monks apparently overcome through ritual, are equally overcome by the ‘no worries’ approach of Mingyur Rinpoche. Thus, one ‘side benefit’ of Tibetan Buddhism is a relaxed, healthier lifestyle. Needless to say, this is a common reason many health-conscious Westerners meditate, while many would not consider themselves religious. Further, Agatha interprets amulets and other physical implements symbolically, which she sees as carrying some ambiguous ‘positive energy’. She also gives meditation preferential treatment as the core of Tibetan Buddhism. In contrast, most Tibetan monastics traditionally did not meditate, but rather took part in ritual or studied philosophy (and many novice monks did not even do that⁴⁰⁶).

⁴⁰⁶ As Goldstein observes of Drepung monastery near Lhasa which housed around ten thousand monastics, not all monks were involved in meditation, or studying theology and philosophy. Goldstein notes that

In addition to Agatha's Protestant upbringing, another major factor which has influenced her 'Protestantisation' of Tibetan Buddhism is the way in which Mingyur Rinpoche is conveying the message of Tibetan Buddhism as a 'science of happiness'.⁴⁰⁷ As mentioned in Chapter One, in 2002 Mingyur Rinpoche, together with other advanced meditators, underwent neurological tests conducted by world-renowned neuroscientists, who used fMRI technology and EEG equipment to study the effects of meditation on the brain.⁴⁰⁸ Such empirical studies are seen to lend more credibility, for many practitioners, to the 'scientific' nature of meditation, and Buddhism in general. As McMahan notes, such experiments go 'well beyond the vagaries of earlier attempts to ally Buddhism and science on the basis of 'natural laws', or 'causality'.⁴⁰⁹

Agatha, with this 'scientific baggage', provides an interesting comparison to the first informant, Mindy (in the previous section), who said Chinese Buddhism was not attractive to her *because* it was only focused on emptiness, while Tibetan Buddhism was attractive because it focused on the 'practical' as well as the 'spiritual'. For Agatha the mundane powers of lamas are probably just for appearance sake, to give 'uneducated, superstitious' lay Tibetans at least some form of the dharma, and to divert their faith away from 'false' local deities. Interestingly, Agatha had attended other Tibetan Buddhist centres, including the one attended by Mindy, which she found to be 'scary', with its many statues and traditional approach to teaching. According to her, Mingyur Rinpoche can connect with the young people in Hong Kong better because of his 'minimalist' approach to ritual and deity evocation, and so on. She had previously attended a retreat led by another Rinpoche prior to 'discovering' Mingyur Rinpoche. During the retreat she had gone to sleep. In contrast, during the retreats she attended at which Mingyur Rinpoche taught she was very focused and had learned a great deal.

The different variables which seem to have influenced the approach of these informants to Tibetan Buddhism are fairly obvious. Mindy is from a 'popular' religious background. She had been influenced by three religious traditions ('popular' religion, Chinese Buddhism and Hinduism – i.e. 'Eastern' traditions), and attends a fairly 'traditional'

those who studied theology and philosophy at Drepung only amounted to about 10 % of the total monk population. The vast majority of monks did not engage in formal study. 'Many', Goldstein observes, 'could not read much more than one or two prayer books, and some, in fact, were functionally illiterate, having memorized only a few basic prayers.' See Goldstein, M.C., 'The Revival of Monastic Life in Drepung Monastery', in Goldstein, M.C., & Kapstein, M.T., p. 21.

⁴⁰⁷ This view is represented in his books *The Joy of Living: Unlocking the Secret and Science of Happiness*, Harmony, 2007, & *Joyful Wisdom: Embracing Change and Finding Freedom*, New York, Harmony, 2009. Both books were co-written and edited by Swanson, E.

⁴⁰⁸ Yongey Mingyur Rinpoche & Swanson, E, 2007, pp. 3-4.

⁴⁰⁹ McMahan, D.L., p. 204.

Tibetan Buddhist centre.⁴¹⁰ Agatha, on the other hand, is from a nominal Protestant background and had attended a Protestant school. She has a PhD, works part-time as a university lecturer, and is a member of Tergar Asia, a sub-group of Mingyur Rinpoche's Tergar International, which, as noted, is very 'progressive'. Under these circumstances, it is not surprising that the latter should draw on the 'rational' education she received in a 'Western-style' Christian school and university when relating her experience of Tibetan Buddhism, while the former draws on her 'traditional'/'Eastern religious' experience of religion.

Agatha was not unaware that Tibetan Buddhism had gone through significant changes while being 'translated' into a form that was applicable to young, 'Protestantised' Hong Kongers as herself. She said that Tibetan Buddhism, as it has been propagated by Mingyur Rinpoche and others, has 'modernised its whole curriculum and teaching', and has become more personalised and 'friendly'. Further, Tantric teaching, she acknowledged, while previously being transmitted individually to the disciples of great masters, has now been made available via the public teaching of masters who propagate Tibetan Buddhism in the West and elsewhere. She said she sees no inauthenticity in this adaption, as 'Buddhism has many forms like cups of tea'; the Dalai Lama and Mingyur Rinpoche, she noted, want to 'dialogue with science' and thereby 'make the old Buddhist language speak in a scientific language'. She sees such adaptation as helpful for practitioners like her, as it explains in terms she can understand why she was unhappy before turning to Tibetan Buddhism and the key to happiness which she has now found. She related that before meeting Mingyur Rinpoche, she saw 'everything as 'real': her poor relationship with her husband (who left her for some time and apparently cheated on her); her difficulty in finding work after graduating from her PhD program; her father's disappointment in her inability to find work, and his pride in his son who had made a lot of money through his business; and numerous other difficulties. After meeting Mingyur Rinpoche and hearing his teaching, she realised that all of her suffering was due to the 'constraints of [her] own aspirations'. She now realises that her father and mother, while following 'mainstream' definitions of success, are in fact not very happy. Neither is her brother happy despite his 'success', and she now is less 'possessive' (in her own words) of her husband and only wishes that he will realise that pursuing extra-marital relations will not bring him happiness but suffering instead. Thus, Tibetan Buddhism as it is presented by teachers such as Mingyur Rinpoche as a 'science

⁴¹⁰ It is 'traditional' in the sense that the centre has a large number of statues, the interior design is similar to what one finds in a Tibetan temple, and doctrine is taught with fewer modernisms.

of happiness' is much more applicable to her situation than a traditional, 'magical' form of the tradition which is still extant in the Tibetan cultural sphere.

Although informants such as Agatha did not believe in the 'magic' of Tibetan Buddhism, they respected the Tibetan religious elite's use of 'convenient method' to make the dharma understood more easily to those who do. 'Henry', a middle-aged Karma Kagyu practitioner of Catholic background who attends a centre which is more 'traditional' than the Tergar centre which Agatha attends, while acknowledging his guru's belief in the healing properties of empowered pills, did not himself believe.

If we are sick, our lama tells us go to see a doctor first. Then perhaps he will give us some empowered pills, but I usually don't take them. Maybe my faith is not enough. It really depends on your faith. Perhaps they don't really work. It's kind of like magic to me. For me philosophy for everyday life is more important, but I respect the lamas' tradition and therefore accept these pills and other such items (Field notes, 17/04/2011).

Henry said he has two gurus, one who is a Bhutanese lama, and another who is a Chinese lama who used to follow Chinese Buddhism. He related that his Chinese guru helps him understand the 'theoretical' philosophy of Tibetan Buddhism, which he finds to be highly applicable to his life, while the Bhutanese lama transmits teachings on a more personable, 'heart-to-heart' level. Thus, while he respects both teachers, the former provides more concrete teaching applicable to everyday life, while the latter with whom he feels a close connection, nevertheless brings with him certain traditions specific to the Tibetan cultural sphere of influence which are not applicable to his own life.

Many such informants often symbolically interpreted empowered pills, amulets, ritual implements and so forth as embodying concepts or principles that aid with inner cultivation only, while they have little if any external benefits. 'Daniel', a Karma Kagyu-Nyingma practitioner aged mid- to late-twenties, who follows Mingyur Rinpoche comes from a Catholic background and was closely involved in his church as a child, related the following in regards to empowered amulets:

To me, amulets are reminders to be aware of the teachings of the Buddha...to get up when we fall, to live in the present moment, to do well in the present

moment, to forget about the depression, sadness and frustration of the past, and to know that happiness is right here and now. They are about achieving wisdom, buddhahood, getting back to our original nature in order to be free from sufferings, and treating others with care and loving kindness (Field notes, 07/05/2011).

The ‘depression, sadness, and frustration of the past’ which Daniel spoke of was related to his negative experience at the Catholic church he attended as a child. He said that his father had forced him to attend and actively take part in church activities. He did not elaborate on details of the difficulties he faced while at the church, yet he emphasised that in comparison he is now much happier that he is following Mingyur Rinpoche. At the same time, the many years that he spent at this church and within a Catholic family and school seem to have influenced his highly ‘rational’ portrayal of Tibetan Buddhism as solely a key to happiness and ultimate enlightenment. Others of similar age and backgrounds replied in much the same manner as Daniel. They believed such amulets or pills were constant ‘reminders’ of their guru and faith, but they probably cannot influence the mundane. This solely symbolic interpretation concerning empowered ritual items would be alien to most Tibetans, who believe they have real power to heal, make them prosper, provide protection, and so on. While they could simultaneously be interpreted symbolically – especially by the Tibetan religious elite – Daniel’s modernist interpretation would differ substantially from that of most ‘traditional’ Tibetan lamas and monks as well.

Having explored above the perceptions of a range of practitioners in Hong Kong from various backgrounds regarding the mundane and transcendent, below I summarise the divergent and parallel perceptions of mainland Han informants for comparison.

Transcendence and ‘Magic’ on the Mainland

Devotees of religion on the mainland often buy into the same pragmatic worldview as those in Hong Kong. Han Tibetan Buddhists there are also not exempt from such a worldview. Smyer-Yü observes that among mainland Han devotees of Tibetan Buddhism there is generally a strong focus on the ‘here and now’. For example, he

observes at a certain *powa* rite⁴¹¹ that Han participants prayed to return in their next lives with more wealth, the same partner, fame, and so forth.⁴¹² As Smyer-Yü notes, the *powa* rite in this circumstance was transformed into ‘a medium for wishful thinking’, which ‘reflects the material reality of contemporary China, in which consumption is the highest marker of status.’⁴¹³

Such pragmatic interest in Tibetan Buddhism is not only confined to *devotees*; mainland *practitioners* may also display such interest, while perhaps not in such a ‘crude’ manner.⁴¹⁴ Smyer-Yü notes, for example, that ‘communitas’ of Chinese pilgrims in Tibetan areas often ‘initiate a structure of hierarchy’ around a particular Tibetan *tulku*, ‘based on material contributions to the monastery’.⁴¹⁵ Some are even accused of ‘buying’ the right to be closer to the *tulku*, thereby supposedly gaining spiritual merit, which can lead to bitterness and jealousy among practitioners.⁴¹⁶ Certain devotees are also attracted to Tibetan religious figures who claim to be able to increase wealth.⁴¹⁷ However, my informants on the mainland distanced themselves from such pursuits, perhaps due to the fact that they were all practitioners, rather than devotees, and they went to the Tibetan areas or other rural areas alone, rather than in groups – thereby eliminating the rivalry Smyer-Yü observes amongst ‘communitas’ of Chinese pilgrims. Moreover, many sought ‘alternative’ lifestyles to the business of urban life (as noted earlier), which meant they were less interested in material pursuits.

⁴¹¹ *Powa* is a rite carried out to prepare the consciousness for transference from this life to the next. The participant visualises his/her consciousness leaving the crown of the head and entering the Pure Land. As meditation and visualisation become intense, a small opening of the fontanel occurs and this area becomes sensitive to touch. A stalk of kusa grass is then pushed into this hole. See Guenther, H.V., cited in Kapstein, M.T., ‘The Pilgrimage of Rebirth Reborn: The 1992 Celebration of the Drigung Powa Chenmo’, in Goldstein, M.C., & Kapstein, M.T. (eds.), pp. 98-99.

⁴¹² See Smyer-Yü, D, 2006, pp.188-89.

⁴¹³ See *ibid*, pp. 189-90.

⁴¹⁴ I follow Fisher’s definition of Buddhist ‘practitioners’ and ‘devotees’; he uses the term ‘lay practitioner’ to ‘refer to non-monastic temple-goers who self-identify as ‘practicing the law [dharma] of Buddhism’ (*xiuxing fofa*)’, or a ‘specific salvatory path defined within a moral and cosmological framework articulated by lay Buddhist teachings that extends to all aspects of a practitioner’s everyday life and identity’; such lay practitioners, Fisher notes, have also formally converted by taking refuge in the three jewels of the dharma (*guiyi sanbao*) with a monk or nun who becomes their teacher. Fisher further notes that while other scholars have referred to lay practitioners as ‘devotees’, he uses the term ‘devotee’ to refer to those who have ‘devotional relationships’ with buddhas and bodhisattvas and burn incense or make other offerings to them. Devotees, Fisher notes, may or may not identify as practicing Buddhists. See Fisher, G, ‘Morality Books and the regrowth of lay Buddhism in China’, in Chau, A.Y. (ed.), 2010, p. 76.

⁴¹⁵ See Smyer-Yü, D, 2012, p. 89.

⁴¹⁶ *Ibid*, p. 90.

⁴¹⁷ Smyer-Yü gives the example of Guru Gyagong, a Living Buddha from Kham, who was claimed to be a ‘Buddha of Wealth Gods’ online in 2002. See *ibid*, pp. 111-112.

Informants on the mainland often ‘rationalised’ their faith in a similar manner to the way in which Hong Kong informants influenced by a Christian education system often did. On the mainland, however, all had received an ‘atheist’ education, and most had formerly been committed atheists. Others were from a ‘popular’ Buddhist background, yet had been inculcated with Chinese Marxist ideology. In the same manner in which informants with a Catholic/Protestant background in Hong Kong rejected Christianity while using its logic to distance themselves from ‘popular’ religion and at the same time ‘prove’ the validity of Tibetan Buddhism, mainland informants often rejected Chinese Marxism as ‘scientistic’ rather than scientific, while Tibetan Buddhism was variously perceived as ‘scientific’ or even ‘more scientific than science’. According to a number of these informants, all pursuit for self-gain through Tibetan Buddhism is ‘superstitious’. The dharma, they insisted, should not be used like ‘gambling chips’ to better one’s life-circumstances. Instead, genuine practitioners should take their bodhicitta vows seriously, wishing only for the liberation of all beings and oneself from cyclic existence.

Like those from a Protestant/Catholic background in Hong Kong, they employed a symbolic interpretation of what otherwise may be termed ‘superstitious’ within Tibetan Buddhism. Dzambhala, the ‘Tibetan god of wealth’, for example, was spoken of as being representative of our own ‘poverty’ in the dharma, and our need for the ‘riches’ of the dharma to practice greater generosity towards others.⁴¹⁸ Informants on the mainland, it seems, were thus drawn towards the more soteriological (or *bodhi*) orientation of Tibetan Buddhism than the practical because of their ‘rational’ background and/or their lifestyle choices and/or the manner in which Tibetan Buddhism was ‘rationally’ represented to them by their gurus.⁴¹⁹

Most felt that great Tibetan masters are able to affect the natural world through their understanding of ‘the nature of the reality of things’, but one should not abuse such power for one’s own gain. For example, one informant insisted that tantric charms, when empowered and employed by an accomplished Tibetan master, do really work.

⁴¹⁸ As McMahan notes, within Tibetan Buddhist philosophical thought on the qualities of mind, there has always been a simultaneous ‘double’ interpretation of bodhisattvas, demons, dharma protectors, the six realms of existence, and so forth as both symbolic and real, yet only in modern times (particularly in the West) has a solely psychological explanation become the dominant representation among Buddhist modernisers. As McMahan observes, the ‘elite Tibetan symbolic internalization of unseen beings’ is different to the ‘Western psychologization’ of them, as the former ‘admits the correlation between, for instance, demons as external beings and internal negative psychological states but does not reduce the former to the latter’, while a psychological explanation of the same does. See McMahan, D.L., p. 258.

⁴¹⁹ Such gurus likely propagate Tibetan Buddhism as ‘rational’ and ‘non-superstitious’ because of the long-held and ongoing official belief that religion is the ‘opium of the people’ and will eventually decline and give way to a ‘progressive’ socialism.

Unlike conventional science, such physical implements are an embodiment of the guru himself, and thus get to the root of one's problem (an illness, for example) more effectively than scientific solutions. He emphasised that Chinese Marxism is a religion just like Buddhism, and requires faith just as faith is required to believe in the power of one's guru.⁴²⁰ Again, it is evident how such informants 'mimicked' Chinese Marxist rhetoric in regards to what constitutes 'science', 'superstition', 'religion', and 'heterodox beliefs', in order to destabilise such rhetoric itself.

Conclusion

The practical nature of Hong Kong society gives rise to a multitude of anxieties. Making money and retaining it (without losing it on the recently volatile stock market in which so many Hong Kongers invest); spending time with one's spouse/and or family in the face of often unreasonable overtime; keeping harmonious relationships with one's colleagues with whom one often spends more time than with one's own family; and retaining one's mental and physical health amidst all such anxieties creates a great amount of stress for many Hong Kongers. Social networks, gambling and other outlets may release some of this pressure. But these diversions may fail to address problems. Power is needed and religions such as Tibetan Buddhism, considered by a number of Chinese to be especially 'potent', may help. Some may seek out lamas to only help with mundane issues. These we may call 'devotees'. Others may genuinely seek out both the soteriological and mundane, to varying degrees. These we may call 'practitioners', who, as argued in this chapter, may come from a 'popular' Chinese religious background. Other practitioners may show no apparent interest in the mundane and only seek the soteriological, who, as I have argued above, have often received a Christian education and were sometimes former Protestants/Catholics themselves. Practitioners who fit this

⁴²⁰ This understanding of Tibetan Buddhism being 'scientific' and in some ways beyond science likely draws on the presentation of Tibetan Buddhism by the Tibetan religious elite in exile, as well as the recent presentation of Tibetan lamas within China of Tibetan Buddhism in relation to Chinese Marxism. The Dalai Lama believes the Marxist approach to religion in general is 'scientistic' rather than scientific. In his recent book, *The Universe in a Single Atom: The Convergence of Science and Spirituality*, he says the following about Marxist thought regarding religion:

[In the view of Marxism] science is perceived as having disproved many of the claims of religion, such as the existence of God, grace, and the eternal soul – and within this conceptual framework, anything that is not proven or affirmed by science is somehow either false or insignificant. Such views are effectively philosophical assumptions that reflect their holders' metaphysical prejudices.

See HH The Fourteenth Dalai Lama Tenzin Gyatso, 2006, p. 38.

latter trend, rather than petitioning bodhisattvas, buddhas or lamas for help with their mundane problems, more often adjusted their way of viewing these problems, in much the same way as Mingyur Rinpoche and other Tibetan teachers have taught them.

As has been argued in this chapter, those practitioners who seek to fulfil mundane needs as well as pursue soteriological aims are not necessarily less serious about their practice than those who seek only the latter. Rather, the practitioner's intentions determine his/her level of realisation, and intentions are something research evidently cannot examine. Whatever the case, space for contemplation in Hong Kong and other urban centres is squeezed into an ever-constricted corner. For those with an 'escape route', particularly on the mainland, practice is less restricted and work is less a central part of their lives. Many in Hong Kong, however, must try to balance their busy lives and their faith.

Aware of the severe limitations of Hong Kongers for a contemplative lifestyle, Mingyur Rinpoche has introduced innovative methods to help practitioners maintain 'equanimity of mind' while keeping busy. For example, at a series of talks in Hong Kong in April 2011 titled 'Encounters with Happiness', Mingyur Rinpoche asked the assembly at one point to assume meditation posture and close their eyes while he played a recording of overlapping bird calls. He then asked the audience to pick out only one of the many birdcalls and to focus on that while not paying attention to the others. Through this simple practice, he said, one could begin to tame the 'monkey mind' and maintain 'one-pointed' focus. With further development, one could live a busy life and still maintain a space for contemplation. This and similar approaches to meditation have much appeal in Hong Kong, and may lessen the desire to search for fulfilment of mundane needs through Tibetan Buddhism, as anxieties may dissipate somewhat with continuous practice.

For many practicing mainland informants, escape from a consumerist-centred life was viable. For one wealthy Han informant in Gyalthang (mentioned in Chapter Four) who owns a hostel, her 'escape' began in her Beijing apartment, in which she locked herself for several weeks to meditate. She soon 'outgrew' this and joined her master in Qinghai for a more serious retreat at his monastery. Now she is settled in a small village outside Gyalthang. Her wealth thus gave her access to both time and an elite Tibetan teacher. For artists with lesser means and/or who wish to be close to the capital without the busy lifestyle, a village outside Beijing provides quiet and ample time for practice, and far

cheaper rent than the more commercial 798 art district in Beijing. While some of these informants lacked capital, they had the luxury of time, and they used this for soteriological pursuits.

This chapter has shown how Tibetan Buddhism has been received and practiced differently by individuals from widely different backgrounds, who variously draw on different ‘anti-superstition’ discourses. Yet the ‘superstition’ of Chinese traditions – or at least some of their ‘opportunistic’ practices such as divination, petitioning gods, burning spirit money, and so forth – have, to an extent, prospered together with the market economy in Greater China. Tibetan Buddhism, with its emphasis on ‘supernatural power’ (Sansk – *siddhi*, Chin – *shentong*) in addition to transcendent wisdom, can effectively appeal to both those caught up with practical concerns, and to those who wish to escape them. It is a religion which suits the Beijing artist and the Hong Kong office worker equally.⁴²¹

⁴²¹ It should be noted that this chapter is a preliminary exploration of this topic. A wider study may explore the way in which the ‘rationalism’ of the current modern Christian discourse in Hong Kong is being negotiated with the incoming ‘rationalism’ of Chinese Marxism, and how the former is adapting accordingly. For example, how is ‘heterodoxy’ interpreted in light of tensions over such groups as Falun Gong, which Beijing has sought to ban in Hong Kong, while Christian leaders there have opposed this ban, in order to protect freedom of religious practice in general? For more on this topic, as mentioned earlier, see Nedilsky, L.V., ‘The Anticult Initiative and Hong Kong Christianity’s Turn from Religious Privilege’, *China Information*, vol. 22, no. 3, 2008, pp. 423-449.

Chapter Six

Environmental Protection, Mass Tourism and Sacred Knowledge: Local Tibetan Deities and Spirits in a Multilayered Tibetan Landscape

Introduction

Chapter Three explored the multiple layers of meaning that Guan Gong, the Chinese ‘god of war’, has assumed under the guidance of those with the power ‘to name’, both throughout history and up to his incorporation into Tibetan Buddhism under the current Karmapa. According to Hai Dao, one prominent role that Guan Gong has recently been superscribed with by the Karmapa – and a role which the Karmapa himself is said to assume – is that of protecting the world and its natural environment.⁴²² According to Hai Dao, the Karmapa has said that his role is to protect people, other sentients and the forests, waterways and mountains – in short, the world at large.⁴²³ Both the Karmapa and Guan Gong are thus seen as protectors on multiple levels – including that of protecting the environment. This ‘environmental superscription’, apparently conveyed to Hai Dao by the Karmapa, is likely connected with the Karmapa’s wider promotion of environmental protection, as seen in recent initiatives such as organising conferences on the environment for Tibetan monastics, and the implementation of environmental programs at Karma Kagyu monasteries and centres.⁴²⁴ This promotion of environmental protection is likely rooted in the earlier efforts of Tibetans in exile to propagate a ‘green Tibetan’ image, which Huber observes became popular from the mid-1980s onwards, due in part to fact-finding reports carried out by delegations from Dharamsala to Tibet from 1979 to 1985, which revealed ecological damage caused by Chinese occupation.⁴²⁵

⁴²² See ‘Karmapa and Protector Guan Gong’, [accessed 13/11/2011]

⁴²³ See *ibid.*

⁴²⁴ See ‘Second Conference on Environmental Protection for Kagyu Monasteries and Centers’, <http://www.kagyuoffice.org/2009.conference.environment.html> [accessed 10/05/2013]

Most recently the Karmapa launched the Fifth Khoryug Conference on Environmental Protection for Tibetan Buddhist Monasteries and Nunneries in the Himalayas, which commenced on Nov 8, 2013. See ‘5th Khoryug Conference on Environmental Protection Begins’, <http://kagyuoffice.org/5th-khoryug-conference-on-environmental-protection-begins/> [accessed 24/11/2013].

⁴²⁵ Huber, T, ‘Green Tibetans: A Brief Social History’, in Korum, F.J. (ed.), *Tibetan Culture in the Diaspora*, Verlag der österreichischen Akademie der Wissenschaften, 1997, p. 107.

Under the Chinese state there is a different type of ‘green Tibetan’ discourse, which, in opposition to the account given by Tibetans in exile, portrays Tibetans as recipients of a ‘green science’ and technical knowhow for preserving the Tibetan landscape. No longer are they ‘passively adapted’ to the landscape as in ‘old’ Tibet but are in control of its preservation. At the same time, ‘sacred’ Tibetan knowledge is paid lip service by officials in places such as Diqing Tibetan Autonomous Prefecture, as these entities are useful for their efforts to portray the area as a ‘lost Shangrila’ which these ‘gods’ have preserved in pristine condition. For transnational and local environmental NGOs, the promotion of mountain cults, together with an overlapping Tibetan Buddhism is important for their environmental conservancy efforts. Tibetan religious leaders have been ‘recruited’ by such NGOs to help educate locals about the importance of protecting the environment.

On the other hand, as Yeh and Coggins have noted, Tibetans have not simply been worked into the environmentalist paradigm in China, but have actively established their own NGOs and environmental programs, with the dual purpose of preserving their culture and protecting the environment.⁴²⁶ Moreover, prior to 2008 in particular, Tibetan activists collaborated with Han environmentalists to spread the idea that Tibetan culture naturally supports protection of the environment, and may even serve as a model for environmental initiatives elsewhere in China.⁴²⁷ However, according to Yeh, after the demonstrations across the Tibetan Plateau in 2008, and following a nation-wide Han Chinese backlash, restrictions on Tibetan NGOs and their contact with outsiders (especially Western donors and partner NGOs) stifled their activities, causing them to cease operations.⁴²⁸ Those who wished to continue their efforts to protect Tibetan culture and the environment were forced to change their model from one promoting environmental protection based in their culture to an entrepreneurial model in which Tibetan culture and the Tibetan environment were commoditised.⁴²⁹

Han and Tibetan informants represented in this chapter were also caught up with the discourse of environmental protection, having been influenced by local, translocal and transnational environmental movements. Yet there were differences in the ways informants viewed the role of local Tibetan deities and spirits in relation to this

⁴²⁶ Yeh, E.T., in Yeh, E.T., & Coggins, C (eds.), p. 270.

⁴²⁷ Ibid, p. 266.

⁴²⁸ Ibid, p. 273.

⁴²⁹ Ibid, p. 274.

discourse. As with the figure of Guan Gong, these entities have assumed multiple layers of meaning, and so has the Tibetan landscape which they ‘map out’ and ‘animate’. The manner in which Han and ethnic Tibetan Buddhist practitioners are taking part in this ‘layering’, ‘mapping’ and ‘animating’ is the focus of this chapter; the basic question this chapter seeks to ask is ‘to what degree are these practitioners incorporating local Tibetan deities and spirits into the discourse of environmental protection or keeping them separate as part of a more traditional, ‘sacred knowledge’?’ And what are the implications for the ways in which Tibetan Buddhism in general is subsequently understood by these practitioners? To understand the wider scope of the ‘green Tibetan’ discourses from which informants drew in discussing and appropriating Tibetan ‘ecological wisdom’, below I first briefly examine how such a discourse has been shaped by Tibetans in exile. Following the section below, I examine the ‘green Tibetan’ discourse within China.

‘Green Tibetans’ in Exile

According to Huber, the biggest factor influencing the portrayal of Tibetans as ‘green’ within the exile community was the participation of Tibetan leaders from Dharamsala in institutions which promoted the ‘religious environmentalist paradigm’.⁴³⁰ For example, representatives of the Tibetan Government in Exile (TGiE from here) participated in a project funded by the World Wildlife Fund (WWF from here) and the New York Zoological society in 1985 called ‘Buddhist Perception of Nature: A New Perspective for Conservation’.⁴³¹ Through this project, Huber observes that the TGiE was not only exposed ‘to the religious environmentalist paradigm in institutional operation’ but was also brought ‘firmly within the orbit of the WWF, the world’s largest private conservation organization.’⁴³² Further participation with WWF and other organisations on projects/conferences focused on religion and ecology have continued to contribute to the Tibetan elite’s promotion of Tibetans as ‘green’.⁴³³

⁴³⁰ Huber, T, p. 109.

⁴³¹ Ibid.

⁴³² Ibid.

⁴³³ As Huber observes, the evolving image of ‘green Tibetans’ can be seen in the change of focus of the Dalai Lama’s publications from the mid-1980’s onward. Prior to 1985 none of his seven published books made any mention of ecology-related matters, and only beginning in 1986 do his publications and those of other Tibetan organisations in exile begin to include this topic. See *ibid.*, pp. 107-108.

The rhetoric of ‘green Tibetans’ in exile portrays them as being attuned to the environment, and as having preserved ‘old’ Tibet in accordance with their belief in the interdependence of all beings, which led to hunting bans, minimal construction near holy sites, and so forth. In addition to the ‘ecological wisdom’ perceived to be inherent in Tibetan Buddhism, the ‘ancient customs’ of Tibetan folk tradition – long neglected by the elite in Dharamsala – are now being rehabilitated and praised as part of the Tibetans’ ecological way of life that helped preserve the environment of ‘old’ Tibet.⁴³⁴ Editors of one TGiE publication have, for example, stressed the importance of these old ways of living because ‘[t]here is a specific connection between the customs of ancient Tibet and contemporary environmental protection.’⁴³⁵

The rhetoric of this ‘ecological wisdom’ draws support from descriptions of pre-1959 Tibet made by European explorers, while leaving out any information in such accounts that is contradictory to the portrayal of Tibetans living in harmony with nature. For example, a description by Leonard Clark in the 1940s of the abundance of wildlife in East Tibet, and his subsequent statement that ‘[t]his must be one of the last unspoiled big-game paradises’⁴³⁶ is given as evidence that Tibetans respected nature. However, as Huber observes, earlier in the same book Clark noted how his party travelling through East Tibet had spooked herds of wild sheep, which he believed would be ‘eliminated’ by Tibetans, as evidenced by the sighting of ‘hundreds if not thousands of old sheep skulls’ they passed en route.⁴³⁷ Based on his observations, Clark noted that Tibetans ‘have no conception of game preservation.’⁴³⁸

Rather than focusing on such negative depictions, the Tibetan elite in exile contrast ‘old’ Tibet with ‘new’ Tibet, the latter of which they see as being pillaged of its natural resources and having undergone extensive environmental destruction. The Karmapa’s environmentally friendly Guan Gong thus may be seen, by implication of the exiled Tibetans’ ‘green’ discourse, as being transformed from a local Chinese deity into a force outside the Chinese state’s control, who asserts himself as an emissary of the ‘green Tibetans’, against the perceived destruction of nature carried out by the Chinese state. He is also a god who protects nature on a global scale, representing a global ‘green’

⁴³⁴ Ibid, p. 105.

⁴³⁵ *Bya-dur bSod-nams bZang-po*, 1994: *gleng-brdzod*, cited in *ibid*.

⁴³⁶ Clark, L, 1955, p. 283, cited in Huber, T, p. 113.

⁴³⁷ Ibid, p. 154, cited in Huber, T, p. 114.

⁴³⁸ Ibid.

Tibetan message, which portrays the protection of Tibet as essential for the protection of the entire world. He thus fits with the Karmapa's own aspiration to protect the world; the latter has stated that he would transform his own body into a protective tent covering the world if he could.⁴³⁹ This seems to draw on/strengthen the notion of Tibetans always being concerned with the fate of the world's environment. Some Tibetans in exile, for example, have related this message as follows.

[W]e Tibetans have always been aware of the interdependent nature of this world. We know that our large country, with its diverse flora and fauna, its primal forest cover, and above all the many great rivers which rise in Tibet, is a source of life to an area many times larger than [*sic*] Tibet itself. For most of Asia, Tibet's environment has always been of crucial importance. And so for centuries Tibet's ecosystem was kept in balance and alive out of a common concern for all humanity.⁴⁴⁰

'Green Tibetans' in China

Within China, the contestation between the state and religion's 'ecological wisdom' is no longer always as stark as it may be represented by Tibetans in exile. As Anon, cited in Huber observes, China is representing a different type of 'green Tibetan' – enlightened by 'modern Chinese government policy initiatives and controls'.⁴⁴¹ Long gone is Mao's war on nature and the mindlessness of the Great Leap Forward, which saw massive deforestation to fuel backyard furnaces to catch up with steel production in the West. No longer are songs popular which praise the human conquest of nature in defiance of the Jade Emperor and the Dragon King.⁴⁴² Since massive flooding of the Yangtze River in 1998 due to over-logging led to the deaths of over 3000 people and caused an estimated 12 billion US dollars in property damage, and the state launched its

⁴³⁹ 'Gyalwang Karmapa's Closing Remarks', <http://www.kagyuoffice.org/2009.conference.environment.html> [accessed 03/08/2013].

⁴⁴⁰ Atisha, T.P., 1991, p. 9, cited in Huber, T, p. 105.

⁴⁴¹ Anonymous, *Das Schatzhaus wird geplündert*, *Der Tagesspiegel*, 1994, cited in Huber, T, p. 113.

⁴⁴² The lyrics of a popular song in 1958, for example, were as follows:

In heaven, there is no Jade Emperor
On earth, there is no Dragon King
I am the Jade Emperor, I am the Dragon King
I order the three mountains and five peaks;
Make way, here I come!

Cited in Shapiro, J, *Mao's War Against Nature: Politics and the Environment in Revolutionary China*, Cambridge University Press, 2001, p. 67.

Open up the West campaign (*xibu da kaifa*), there has been a dramatic increase in environmental projects in China.⁴⁴³ Among them are the Natural Forest Protection Program (NFPP) and the Sloping Land Conversion Program (SLCP) (to revert cultivated land back to forestation).⁴⁴⁴ The SLCP, as Yeh notes, is the ‘largest land retirement program in the world, [which called] for the conversion of 14.67 million hectares of cropland...as well as [the] afforesting [of] 17.33 million hectares of ‘wasteland’ by 2010’.⁴⁴⁵

A ban on logging was enforced in northwest Yunnan Province in 1998, and timber production in places such as Diqing Tibetan Autonomist Prefecture, which used to be the main source of revenue for local governments, has given way to ecotourism.⁴⁴⁶ Both government agencies and NGOs have invested heavily in conservancy projects in Northwest Yunnan Province, which is often described as a ‘biodiversity hotspot’. For example, The Nature Conservancy (TNC from here) and the Yunnan Provincial Government have collaborated on the ‘Yunnan Great Rivers Project’, with the goal of establishing a system of national parks on ‘6.5 million acres of environmentally sensitive land’.⁴⁴⁷ Other transnational conservation groups with which the Diqing authorities have cooperated include the Global Environmental Facility (GEF) and WWF.⁴⁴⁸ There are also local NGOs such as Shambala Folk Nature Reserve and the Kawagebo Culture Society (*Kawagebo Wenhua Shehui*) which are working ‘to preserve Tibetan culture, to protect nature and to maintain the balance of the existing ecosystem’.⁴⁴⁹ The Kawagebo Culture Society received funds from the Critical Ecosystem Partnership Fund (CEPF), and has worked with TNC, government officials,

⁴⁴³ Evidently environmental projects in China were underway before 1998, but from 1998 onwards the number of environmental projects increased rapidly.

⁴⁴⁴ Yeh, E, ‘Greening Western China: a Critical View’, *Geoforum* vol. 40, 2009, a, p. 886.

⁴⁴⁵ Bennett 2008, Zhang et al. 2008, cited in *ibid*.

⁴⁴⁶ Kolas, A, p. 22.

⁴⁴⁷ TNC, <http://nature.org>, cited in Kolas, A, pp.22-23

According to TNC’s website, the organisation has made the following contributions towards encouraging and furthering the cause of environmental conservation in Diqing: it has worked with Chinese government partners ‘to gather additional information on threats to Shangri-La’s biodiversity and begin designing a long-term monitoring plan for the area’; it has launched ‘an alternative energy program’, replacing wood-fueled energy with biogas and solar heaters; and together with the Diqing Prefecture Government, has sponsored the first ‘Conference on Tibetan Traditional Culture and Biodiversity Conservation’ in Shangri-la. See TNC, ‘What the Conservancy Has Done/Is Doing’, <http://www.nature.org/ourinitiatives/regions/asiaandthepacific/china/placesweprotect/shangri-la-gorge.xml> [accessed 18/02/2012].

⁴⁴⁸ Diqing authorities, together with these three organisations, have worked to include the ‘Three Parallel Rivers of Yunnan Protected Areas’ in the UNESCO list of World Heritage Sites. See Kolas, A, p. 23.

⁴⁴⁹ Kolas, A, p. 22.

schools and religious leaders to promote local Tibetan culture, and thereby combat threats to the ecosystem especially around Kawa Karpo Mountain.⁴⁵⁰

While the above efforts to protect the environment in Diqing Tibetan Autonomous Prefecture are connected with transnational and state projects, the Tibetans have not merely appropriated transnational and state discourses on environmental protection; as mentioned earlier, there have been numerous Tibetan-led initiatives across the Tibetan Plateau to protect the environment (such as those of the abovementioned Kawagebo Culture Society, for example). These initiatives are often based on Tibetan ideas concerning the animated Tibetan landscape, believed to be inhabited by innumerable entities. For example, Yeh examines the role of a prominent Tibetan environmental and cultural activist who successfully persuaded his fellow villagers – by making reference to the retribution of local territorial deities against those who damage their abodes – to replant trees felled during the Cultural Revolution, to clean up garbage around the villages, and to enforce hunting regulations, among other initiatives.⁴⁵¹ Not only did these initiatives prove highly successful within the immediate surroundings of the village, but were showcased at major environmental conferences in other parts of China, where they were used to convince Han participants that Tibetan culture possesses ‘ecological wisdom’ which is not only beneficial for Tibetan society, but could also serve as a model for greater sustainability in other parts of China.⁴⁵² Thus, such Tibetan-led initiatives have helped reverse Han stereotypes of Tibetans as ‘backward’ and ‘uncivilised’, and have even created an image of Tibetan culture as desirable amongst a number of Han, as explored briefly in Chapter Four.⁴⁵³

As Yeh notes, such Tibetan initiatives often have as their central focus the protection of Tibetan culture, while protection of the environment comes second. At the same time, the former is variously equated with the latter in order to effectively propagate the preservation of Tibetan culture to non-Tibetans.⁴⁵⁴ After 2008, however, many Tibetans who formerly promoted their culture as the foundation of their environmental work have been forced to change to an entrepreneurial model, selling their ‘culture’ and the

⁴⁵⁰ Joliffe, B, ‘Buddhist Leaders Protect Woodlands’, 30 January 2005, http://www.cepf.net/news/top_stories/Pages/jan302005_buddhist_woodlands.aspx [accessed 09/02/2012].

⁴⁵¹ Yeh, E.T., 2014, in Yeh, E.T., & Coggins, C, p. 256.

⁴⁵² Ibid.

⁴⁵³ Ibid, p. 266.

⁴⁵⁴ Ibid, p. 257.

environment for profit.⁴⁵⁵ At the same time, despite this commoditisation of Tibetan culture, a number of Tibetans continue to negotiate the preservation and propagation of their culture within this new model, as briefly explored later in this chapter.

Above I have described some of the ways in which ‘green Tibetan’ discourses are being expressed within contemporary China and the Tibetan community in exile. These discourses are variously being used to channel the potential for environmental protection that Tibetan Buddhism and overlapping mountain cults apparently possess. To better understand the way perceptions of local Tibetan deities and spirits are changing in relation to these discourses, below I examine ‘traditional’ Tibetan perspectives concerning these entities and their relationship to the Tibetan landscape and people.

Local Deities and Spirits in Tibetan Society

Local Tibetan deities and spirits are considered to be intimately connected with the landscape, with each other, and with the local population. Mountain deities can be those of the local territory (*yul lha*), or more immediately local, such as *gzhi bdag* (‘owners of the base’).⁴⁵⁶ These sacred mountains are considered to be warrior gods, and are designated with terms meaning ‘chief’ of ‘king’ (*btsan* or *rgyal*).⁴⁵⁷ In cases where a mountain over which a *yul lha* has jurisdiction is ‘Buddhicised’ and transformed into a holy mountain (*gnas ri*), the *yul lha* may become depersonalised and deterritorialised, so that this entity can be worshipped by anyone and meet the requests of any devotee, as opposed to being confined to interaction with and meeting the mundane concerns of local inhabitants. In addition, the *yul lha* may be transformed from a mundane deity (*jig rten pa’i srung ma* – ‘a protector who belongs to the phenomenal world’) into a transcendental one (*jig rten las das pa’i srung ma* – ‘a protector who has passed beyond the phenomenal world’).⁴⁵⁸ Apart from mountain deities, there are also believed to be various demons which abide in rocks, forests, ditches and other formations, which

⁴⁵⁵ Ibid, p. 274.

⁴⁵⁶ Blondeau, A.M., & Steinkeller, E., ‘The Cult of Mountain Deities and its Political Significance’, in Karmay, S.G. (ed.), *The Arrow and the Spindle: Studies in History, Myths, Rituals and Beliefs in Tibet*, Portland, Mandala Publications, 1998, p. 432.

⁴⁵⁷ Stein, R.A., & Diver, J.E. S (trans.), *Tibetan Civilization*, London, Faber and Faber, 1972, p. 203.

⁴⁵⁸ Buffetrille, K, ‘Reflections on Pilgrimages to Sacred Mountains, Lakes and Caves’, in McKay, A (ed.), *Pilgrimage in Tibet*, Richmond, Curzon, 1998, pp. 23-24.

can cause harm to humans.⁴⁵⁹ The atmosphere is believed to contain spirits which appear as warriors that attack travellers, while another class of spirits (*klu*) dwell below the earth and in water bodies such as rivers and lakes, and cause disease in humans and livestock. All such local entities can generally be divided into those in the heavens (*lha*), those in the space between heaven and earth (*gnyan*), and those in or under the ground (*klu*).⁴⁶⁰

It should be noted that when referring to ‘local Tibetan deities and spirits’ throughout this chapter I have deliberately used such an ambiguous categorisation rather than specific designations such as *yul lha*, *gzhi bdag*, or *klu*, as it is with this ambiguity that I questioned informants about their ideas concerning these entities, in order to explore how informants themselves viewed these local entities – either through an all-encompassing ‘Buddhicised’ perspective or through a more local Tibetan perspective in which certain *yul lha*, *gzhi bdag*, and other entities overlap with a strictly Buddhist worldview, while others remain separate. This overlap is certainly present at Kawa Karpo (near Dechen in Diqing Tibetan Autonomous Prefecture); Kawa Karpo is believed to be both a warrior god, as well as one of the eight *gnas ri* (‘abode mountains’) of Tibetan Buddhism, who was converted from a demon (*gnyan*) into a dharma protector by Padmasambhava in the eighth century.⁴⁶¹ Surrounding Kawa Karpo, however, are hundreds of other sacred mountains classified as *gzhi bdag* and *yul lha*, which pre-date Buddhist cultural influence in the Diqing region, and are affiliated with groups of villages, individual villages, and individual households.⁴⁶² These deities, to whom belong all the lands surrounding their mountain abodes, are believed to have retreated to the mountains, to leave the arable lands to human inhabitants, while the human inhabitants are expected, in return, to treat their abodes with respect.⁴⁶³ Unlike the *gnas ri* such as Kawa Karpo, *gzhi bdag* are not pilgrimage destinations, and instead ‘compose a less literary, more oral, and yet universal Tibetan territorial practice’.⁴⁶⁴ Coggins notes that the importance of these mountains within the Tibetan cultural sphere,

⁴⁵⁹ Lopez, D.S. Jr., 1997, p. 8.

Classes of demons include *btsan* (‘rock spirits’), *sa bdag* (‘lords of the earth’), and *ma mo* (‘demonesses’), among many others. See *ibid*.

⁴⁶⁰ Blondeau, A.M., & Steinkeller, E., p. 441

Most mountain spirits are *gnyan* and *klu*. See Smyer-Yü, D, 2012, p. 58.

⁴⁶¹ Yeh, E.T., & Coggins, C (eds.), Introduction, p. 4.

⁴⁶² Abe 1997, Coggins and Hutchinson 2006, & Huber 1999b, in Coggins, C, ‘Animate Landscapes: Nature Conservation and the Production of Agropastoral Sacred Space in Shangrila’, in Yeh, E.T., & Coggins, C (eds.), p. 218.

⁴⁶³ *Ibid*, p. 218.

⁴⁶⁴ *Ibid*, pp. 218-219.

as well as for environmental protection, is demonstrated by the fact that while most of the Zhongdian basin suffered wide deforestation during the logging of the 1970s and 1990s, *gzhi bdag* and *yul lha* mountain forests were largely left untouched.⁴⁶⁵

Mountain deities are believed to be interrelated through familial relationships at the village or regional level.⁴⁶⁶ For example, Kawa Karpo is often portrayed superimposed on a photograph of the mountain with his family members (other mountain deities in the same range).⁴⁶⁷ As well as being interrelated to each other, local mountain deities are also considered to be closely connected with the history of the Tibetan people. The ‘soul of the body’ of Tibetan kings is believed to have been assimilated with mountain spirits (*gnyan*), and this is why the names of local deities are often preceded by *sku bla* (soul of the body).⁴⁶⁸ In the first king’s divine genealogy, the mountain deity ‘O-lde gung-rgyal is considered to be one of the king’s four ancestral brothers, and is regarded as the father of all local deities on earth, including the nine great mountain deities of Tibet.⁴⁶⁹ Among these is the *sku bla* Yar-lha Sham-po, who is the ancestral deity of the Tibetan royal dynasty.⁴⁷⁰ Each tribe of Tibet is believed to be the creation of the gods, and the founders of the tribal states are generally considered to be children of local deities.⁴⁷¹ Further, mountain deities are often regarded as the primary ancestors of the local population, hence the familial designations of *a myes* (grandfather) and *a pha* (father) or *sku bla*.⁴⁷²

Such deities and spirits are evoked by lay Tibetans for a range of pragmatic purposes,⁴⁷³ such as pregnancy, prosperity, better crop yields, healing, and so forth. In the case of

⁴⁶⁵ Ibid, p. 219.

⁴⁶⁶ Blondeau, A.M., & Steinkeller, E., p. 432

⁴⁶⁷ These include his consort, son and dog. See Guo, 2000 & Morell, 2002, cited in Anderson, D.M., Salick, J, Moseley, R, & Xiaokun, O, ‘Conserving the Sacred Medicine Mountains: a vegetation analysis of Tibetan sacred sites in Northwest Yunnan’, in *Biodiversity and Conservation*, vol. 14, 2005, p. 3068.

⁴⁶⁸ Karmay, S.G., ‘The Local Deities and the Juniper Tree: a Ritual for Purification (bsang)’, in Karmay, S.G. (ed.), *The Arrow and the Spindle: Studies in History, Myths, Rituals and Beliefs in Tibet*, Portland, Mandala Publications, 1998, a, p. 387.

⁴⁶⁹ As Karmay notes, the four brothers (through their consorts) produced all types of spirits and gods. For example, 1) the god of the uphill (*mtho la rtsas*), 2) that of the downhill (*dma ‘gru rtsas*), 3) that of the local territory (*yul lha*), 4) that of the summit of the castle (i.e. the house rooftop), 5) the one who is outside, 6) the one who is inside, 7) the one at the entrance, 8) the field god, 9) the water god, 10) the ground god, 11) the interior god (of the father), 12) the interior goddess (of the mother), and 13) the god of the son. See Karma, S.G., in *ibid*, 1998, b, p. 298.

⁴⁷⁰ Ibid.

⁴⁷¹ Lopez, D.S Jnr., 1997, p. 50.

⁴⁷² Karmay, S.G., 1998, a, p. 388.

⁴⁷³ According to Smyer-Yü, *ngyan* and *klu* are those most popularly evoked, particularly in relation to rainfall, floods, droughts, hail and snowstorms. They may also be evoked in waging wars. See Smyer-Yü, D, 2012, p. 58.

sacred sites (*gnas*) of ‘higher’ enlightened deities such as Kawa Karpo (one of the nine primordial mountain deities of Tibet), there may be overlapping ‘spiritual’ and ‘practical’ concerns. Pilgrims circumambulate the mountain to purify themselves of negative karma, while, as Kolas notes, some local women may visit Pamani cave at Kawa Karpo if they are having difficulty becoming pregnant.⁴⁷⁴ In addition to evoking local deities and spirits for practical concerns, individuals, families and communities also entrust their souls (*bla*)⁴⁷⁵ to certain sites where local entities dwell,⁴⁷⁶ such as sacred mountains known as *bla ri* (‘spirit’ or ‘soul’ mountains) or to lakes (*bla mtsho*) or trees (*bla shing*).⁴⁷⁷ This interconnectivity between people and the environment means causing harm to a *bla ri* or to another site to which people have ‘entrusted their souls’ may bring calamity in the form of mental and physical illness, hail- and thunderstorms, avalanches, earthquakes, and other disasters. ‘Soul-entrusted sites’ are therefore shown great respect and various rituals may be performed at these and other sites to maintain a good relationship with the abiding entities sharing the same space.⁴⁷⁸

Some acts which may provoke the wrath of local deities and spirits could be those directly related to disturbance of the natural environment such as digging into the side of a *bla ri* without seeking permission from the resident deity, cutting down trees in which *klu* dwell, and polluting water sources. However, there are many other aspects of human activity not directly related to damage of the natural environment which are

⁴⁷⁴ Kolas, A, p. 55.

As Cabezón notes, the distinction between mundane and supramundane deities is not always clear in Tibetan tradition, and some deities may be ‘half-wisdom and half-mundane’. See Ignacio-Cabezón, J, Introduction, p.6.

Huber also explores the overlapping roles and identities of local mountain deities in his book, *The Cult of Pure Crystal Mountain: Popular Pilgrimage and Visionary Landscape in Southeast Tibet*. He notes:

The older mountain gods and goddesses were incorporated into the expanding pantheons on two, frequently overlapping levels: into higher Tantric initiatory categories as chosen meditational deities or as members of their retinues; and into service roles as ‘defenders of religion’ or their local minions...In some cases this assimilation process came to designate [*gnas ri*] as sites for Tantric practice, for worship of the defenders of religion, and for their local cults simultaneously. See Huber, T, cited in Lindahl, J, ‘The Ritual Veneration of Mongolia’s Mountains’, in Ignacio-Cabezón (ed.), J, p. 235.

⁴⁷⁵ In Tibetan tradition there are two kinds of ‘soul’ – that which is often translated as ‘mind’ or ‘consciousness’ (*nam-zhes*) and that often translated as ‘soul’ (*bla*). Unlike the Western conception of the ‘soul’ that departs at death, in Tibetan belief the *bla* moves freely outside the body while one is alive. See Smyer-Yü, D, 2012, p.58.

⁴⁷⁶ Ibid, p. 53

⁴⁷⁷ Gerke, B, ‘Engaging the Subtle Body: Re-approaching bla rituals in the Himalayas’, in *Soundings in Tibetan Medicine*, Brill, 2007, p. 197. See also Armbrrecht, A, ‘Sacred Geography on the Cultural Borders of Tibet’, in Blondeau, A.M, *Tibetan Mountain Deities, Their cults and representations: papers presented at a panel of the 7th seminar of the International Association for Tibetan Studies*, Graz, 1995, p. 119.

⁴⁷⁸ Kolas, A, p.60

considered offensive to the local deities and spirits, such as incest and murder.⁴⁷⁹ Whether in direct relation to the environment or to the human population, such offenses leave ‘pollution’ (*grib*, *sdig sgrib*, or *dme*⁴⁸⁰) within the mind and body of the perpetrator/s, and cause the deities and the environment to become ‘defiled’ (*phog pa*, ‘*bags pa*).⁴⁸¹ This idea of ‘polluting’ oneself by negative actions, and the subsequent purification rituals required to cleanse oneself,⁴⁸² is in accord with both the ‘autochthonous world view in which spirit forces share the local environment with human beings, [and] also with the formal causal theories of karma and morality accepted by Bon and Buddhism.’⁴⁸³ When a spirit responds to such offensive actions, by creating a hailstorm for example,⁴⁸⁴ yogis may employ rituals and mantras which remind the spirit of its place as bound by oath to protect the dharma, which are intended to dispel the threatening clouds, and reinforce the mutuality of the relationship between human inhabitants and spirits.⁴⁸⁵

As mentioned, mountain cults and their associated ‘land-based’ deities and spirits overlap with later Buddhist practices associated with monasticism and pilgrimage, as seen at mountain pilgrimage sites (*gnas ri*).⁴⁸⁶ *Gnas ri* are mountains where holy men meditated, and are believed to sometimes have left their foot- or handprints in stone, or to have performed other great acts such as defeating Bonpo masters. For example, Guru Rinpoche is believed to have meditated in a cave at Kawa Karpo, causing the deity of the valley (*rong brtsan*) who inhabited Kawa Karpo to become a Buddhist deity.⁴⁸⁷ These sites subsequently were conceived of as a mandala consisting of translocal tantric deities, under which are subsumed all local deities in a wider Buddhist pantheon.⁴⁸⁸ This intertwining of what Buffetrille terms ‘place-centred’ mountain cults and the ‘person-centred’ sacredness of scholastic Buddhism’ became inseparable, and attracted lay

⁴⁷⁹ There are believed to be nine types of impurity which ‘pollute’ both humans and the local deities and spirits. These are: 1) homicide, fratricide (*dme*), 2) birth of a child just after the death of his father (*mug*), 3) incest (*nal*), 4) filthiness (*btsog*), 5) imprecations (*than*), 6) inauspicious signs (*btsog ngan*), 7) possession by the *byur* spirit, 8) impurity due to death of a spouse (*yug*), and 9) pollution of the heart (*thob mkhon*). See Karmay, S.G., 1998, a, pp. 384-385.

⁴⁸⁰ The latter refers to impurity resulting from murder, especially within a family or clan. See *ibid*, p.383.

⁴⁸¹ *Ibid*.

⁴⁸² Purification rituals are constantly performed, because one never knows when an ‘unfavourable deed’ is committed against oneself and one’s deities, thus incurring ‘pollution’. See *ibid*.

⁴⁸³ Huber, T, ‘Ritual Revival and Innovation at Bird Cemetery Mountain’, in Huber, T (ed.), *Amdo Tibetans in Transition*, Leiden, Brill, 2002, pp. 124-125

⁴⁸⁴ Smyer-Yü notes that the formation of weather patterns are determined by *klu*, and hail may be caused by *mamo*, which are lesser spirits. See Smyer-Yü, D, 2012, p. 66.

⁴⁸⁵ *Ibid*, pp. 68-69.

⁴⁸⁶ Kolas, A, p.40.

⁴⁸⁷ *Ibid*.

⁴⁸⁸ Lindahl, J.R., in Cabezon, J.I. (ed.), p. 235.

people to monasteries and to *tulkus* (incarnate lamas) largely for pragmatic purposes, to receive names and dates, divinations, cures, amulets and so forth.⁴⁸⁹ As Smyer-Yü notes, the charisma of *tulkus* is very much dependent upon the ‘charisma’ of the Tibetan landscape itself, which is animated with spirits and deities, with whom *tulkus* are believed to be able to communicate and over whom they may have certain subjugating powers.⁴⁹⁰

Above I have briefly outlined a traditional understanding of local Tibetan deities and spirits which contrasts somewhat to the aforementioned contemporary ‘green Tibetan’ discourses propagated by transnational NGOs and the Chinese state. Below I examine how this traditional understanding, particularly in Diqing Tibetan Autonomous Prefecture, is being both propagated and subtly sidelined through the discourse of environmental protection and mass-/eco-tourism.

Propagation and Suppression of ‘Sacred Knowledge’

As with the Tibetans in exile, local religious groups throughout China have recently contributed to environmental protection, through, among other means, promoting various gods such as Laozi as protectors of the environment.⁴⁹¹ Sometimes, however, the rhetoric of ‘green gods’ blatantly overlaps with plans to exploit natural resources for mass tourism. As Kolas observes, for example, Diqing officials need Shangrila (Gyalthang) to be green and pristine, a place where ‘man is in harmony with nature’, a paradise protected by gods.⁴⁹² Yet this official rhetoric of ‘gods and nature’ is obviously part of a packaged ‘lost Shangrila’ to which they wish to attract tourists. They pay lip service to such gods and ‘sacred knowledge’, and by extension to local villagers living within the territory of such gods, but in reality, as Litzinger and Zinda have observed, they treat nature as a ‘consumable’, to be packaged and branded for mass ‘ecotourism’.⁴⁹³

⁴⁸⁹ Kolas, A, p.41.

⁴⁹⁰ Smyer-Yü, D, 2012, p. 71.

⁴⁹¹ Lang, G, & Lang, YF, ‘Religion and Environmentalism in Chinese Societies’, in Yang, F, & L, G (eds.), p. 259.

⁴⁹² Kolas, A, p. 52.

⁴⁹³ See Litzinger, R, ‘The Mobilization of ‘Nature’: Perspectives from North-west Yunnan’, *The China Quarterly*, vol. 178, 2004, pp. 488-504, & Zinda, J.A., ‘Hazards of Collaboration: Local State Co-optation of New Protected-Area Model in Southwest China’, *Society & Natural Resources*, vol. 25, no. 4, 2012, pp. 389-399, & Zinda, J.A., ‘Making National Parks in Yunnan: Shifts and Struggles within the Ecological State’, in Yeh, E & Coggins, C (eds.).

As Zinda notes, while TNC proposed that local residents at such sacred sites as Kawa Karpo could be involved in contributing their ‘sacred knowledge’ to the development of national parks, and made a report in 2008 together with the Southwest Forestry College in Kunming on how such contribution could be implemented, the Tourism Services Company disregarded the report.⁴⁹⁴ Rather than including local villagers in decision making processes and taking heed of their ‘sacred knowledge’ and TNC’s proposed ‘back country’ tourism, the Diqing Tourism Bureau has sidelined villagers and opened the national parks to mass tourism.⁴⁹⁵ Local villagers, with their low level of education, have become recipients of annual compensation, or have received menial jobs at the national parks, such as cleaning up rubbish left by tourists.⁴⁹⁶ Mass tourism thus serves as a wedge between local villagers and their ‘sacred knowledge’, rendering villagers more or less powerless.

In such cases Tibetans have, according to Yeh, been portrayed by authorities as living in a state of ‘passive adaptation’ with the landscape, and thus being incapable of harnessing the full productivity of the land. They are therefore in need of ‘civilising’ science and technology to realise such productivity. Yet when, due to destruction caused by old state initiatives, Tibetans use the land for purposes not suited to environmental conservation, they are portrayed as incapable of protecting the land, and hence in need again of Han knowledge about environmental conservancy to save them from their destructive ways.⁴⁹⁷ While villagers at Diqing national parks have not been physically barred from entering the parks, and in fact are encouraged to continue living there and practicing their ‘traditional’ ways, to serve as part of the ethnic-tourist experience, the managers of the parks and the local government seem to view villagers

⁴⁹⁴ Zinda, J.A., 2012, pp. 394-395

⁴⁹⁵ The chief of the Diqing Tourism Bureau has summed up the local state’s perspective on national parks as follows:

Based on the successful experience of establishing Pudacuo National Park, Diqing will rapidly promote and boldly explore national park construction, management methods and standards, as well as innovative tourism development and management methods, to make national parks become a key pillar of the Shangri-la tourism brand. See Liu, 2009, p. 1, cited in *ibid*, p. 393.

⁴⁹⁶ A mere 2.5% of the massive revenue earned by park management. See Zinda, J.A., 2012, p. 395. However, as Zinda observes, authorities at *Pudocuo* national park do provide subsidy for higher education for resident children and there has been some improvement in village infrastructure. See *ibid*. Other villagers, such as those at Mingyong village at the foot of Kawa Karpo, offer mule rides, soft drinks and snacks to tourists. When I visited in 2011, villagers were also collecting a 10 Yuan ‘environmental fee’ once tourists had paid the expensive entrance fee to park management at the gate.

⁴⁹⁷ Yeh, E.T., ‘From Wasteland to Wetland? Nature and Nation in China’s Tibet’, *Environmental History*, vol. 14, no. 1, 2009, b, pp.104 & 122.

as uneducated and ‘backward’, with little helpful knowledge to contribute towards managing a national park.

‘Sacred knowledge’, meanwhile, continues to be promoted alongside ecotourism by such transnational NGOs as TNC, WWF and the Shangri-la Institute for Sustainable Communities, founded by WWF China, which has cooperated with the local government, and has ‘recruited’ lamas and a ‘living Buddha’ to their cause of promoting environmental conservancy.⁴⁹⁸ However, while the participation of religious leaders in the promotion of environmental protection has had some positive impact, mass tourism continues to be the central focus for the local government and tourist agencies. Yet both those who promote mass tourism and those who promote true ecotourism may ultimately follow a similar thread in regards to their approach to ‘sacred knowledge’; local Tibetan deities and spirits are utilised, it seems, within the agenda of environmental protectionism. Whether this utilisation is under the banner of a ‘Shangri-laist’ fantasy of an untainted landscape or actual environmental conservancy, it nevertheless minimises or even eliminates the traditional roles of these entities as fierce protectors of religion, who cause the local population to prosper and flourish, and who are intimately connected with the Tibetan people. They instead become instrumental in promoting the new causes of mass tourism and/or environmental protection.

On the other hand, certain Tibetan environmental activists continue to negotiate the position of local deities and spirits within the framework of ecotourism, as powerful entities in their own right. Chris Coggins explores such negotiation between what he terms ‘agropastoral sacred space’ and nature conservation in Diqing. He examines how one activist established the Hamagu Village Center for the Protection of Indigenous Ecology and Culture in 2002 to 2003, and propagated his environmental activities through the ‘ecological wisdom’ of Tibetan culture, without subjugating this culture to the discourse of modern environmental protection or mass tourism. For example, after telling Coggins about recent accidents and a tragic death related to the cutting down of trees in a *gzhi dag*’s territory, he stated that there was no need for the government to invest in ecological protection, as it is built into Tibetan culture.⁴⁹⁹ At the same time, as Coggins notes, such activists are aware that ‘Tibetan geopiety is not a panacea for

⁴⁹⁸ WWF China, ‘Shangri-la Sustainable Community Initiative’, http://wwf.panda.org/who_we_are/wwf_offices/china/index.cfm?uProjectID=CN0084 [accessed 06/12/2012].

⁴⁹⁹ Coggins, C, in Yeh, E.T., & Coggins, C (eds.), p. 213.

sustainable ecological development’, which is demonstrated through their community development plans such as those at Hamugu, which ‘involve a complex array of active management strategies intended to enforce community compliance and counter the demands and pressures of rapacious development projects, even those operating under the rubric of ‘ecotourism’ (*shengtai luyou*).⁵⁰⁰ Thus, according to Coggins, animate landscapes and geopiety continue to mark out a space between ‘Tibetan’ and ‘Han’, and between a disenchanting world and a sacred indigenous space,⁵⁰¹ due to the ‘deeply political and territorial power of animate landscapes and the flexibility of animist cosmology’.⁵⁰²

While Coggin’s assertion that Tibetan ‘geopiety’ continues to be promoted by Tibetans alongside environmental and ecotourism projects without being subsumed under them, not all Tibetans in Diqing or elsewhere continue to believe in the entities which animate the landscape. As explored in this chapter, there are Tibetans in Diqing who believe such entities are nonexistent, and that belief in them takes away from the core values of Tibetan Buddhism; for such informants, these entities have become entirely symbolic, although this symbolism may be useful for protecting the environment in Tibetan areas. While the majority of Tibetans do endorse beliefs concerning such entities, a number seem to have been influenced to a greater degree by scientific rationalism, as it is propagated in China and/or the West.

Perhaps one danger, I would argue, with the grouping together of ‘sacred knowledge’ and environmental conservancy amongst transnational NGOs and Tibetans who no longer believe in these entities, is that local deities and spirits may come to be perceived in much the same way as they are seen by officials and tourist agencies. If seen in such a way, do these entities simply become part of another government-led campaign? And if so, do they continue to lose power, particularly over young Tibetans living in towns in Diqing, many of whom have been educated under the state curriculum, which adamantly states that belief in such entities is ‘superstitious’? If they are already considered non-existent by these Tibetans, and become but part of a ‘modernising’ program for environmental protection, how do they retain their sacredness, and what are the implications for preservation of the environment? Further, how do outsiders, including – as this thesis is particularly concerned with this group – Han Tibetan

⁵⁰⁰ Ibid.

⁵⁰¹ Ibid.

⁵⁰² Ibid, p. 214.

Buddhist practitioners – perceive these local deities and spirits within or separate from the discourse of environmental protection with which the whole Chinese nation is caught up? The section below will seek to address these questions by examining several case samples.



Photo 10: A raised walkway built around the lake in front of Songtsen Ling Monastery for both pilgrims and tourists to circumambulate without damaging the wetland.

Case Samples

This section examines the experiences of six Han and Tibetan practitioners, the former living in either Gyalthang or Beijing, and the latter living in Gyalthang and Dechen. These informants are largely representative of the more than forty informants interviewed in Diqing Tibetan Autonomous Prefecture and Beijing, many of whom were caught up with the idea of environmental protection and the ‘ecological wisdom’ of Tibetan Buddhism. I have selected for this chapter informants living, or having lived both in proximity to the Tibetan landscape and in Beijing, to demonstrate their different understanding of the place of local deities and spirits within Tibetan Buddhism – as fierce protectors of religion tied closely to the Tibetan landscape and the Tibetan people, or as protectors of the environment, or, to varying degrees, as both.

It is tentatively argued in this section that the experiences of Han practitioners with local Tibetan deities and spirits are indicative of the wider interconnectivity/distance these practitioners felt towards the Tibetan population and landscape as a whole. Generally speaking, my findings seem to reveal that the closer Han practitioners *live*⁵⁰³ to the Tibetan landscape, the more ‘sacredly animated’ their description of it in local terms, and the more intensely such practitioners feel a ‘psychological’ connection to Tibetan culture and people – both lay and religious. The further Han practitioners (who have not lived in Tibetan areas before) are from the Tibetan landscape, the weaker their connection to lay Tibetans (their only connection to Tibetans being with their master visiting town from time to time), and the more universalised/globalised their description of the Tibetan landscape and the entities believed to inhabit it. For this latter group of Han practitioners, local Tibetan deities and spirits have become part of the nationwide and global rhetoric of environmental protection, which they ‘spiritualise’ to convey environmental destruction as a result of humanity’s collective negative karma. For such Han practitioners, these beings are archetypal, deterritorialised examples of how Chinese and world citizens should protect the environment; Tibet’s environment is pristine because these deities and spirits have protected it – humanity should protect the environment elsewhere in the same way. For those practitioners living in close proximity to the Tibetan landscape, the local deities and spirits may retain certain aspects of their traditional roles as fierce protectors of religion, as powerful beings in control of the forces of nature, and as providers of benefits to local inhabitants.

Tibetan practitioners are also examined below, to provide a comparison with the perceptions of Han practitioners concerning local deities and spirits, and by extension the landscape and humanity’s connection with it. Interestingly, while some Han practitioners wanted to return to a ‘primordial’ Tibetan landscape and culture, some Tibetans sought to become more ‘modern’ and ‘scientific’. Such Tibetans variously saw belief in these entities as being in contradiction with their pursuit of a ‘rational’ worldview, and designated them to the category of ‘superstition’, or – following the now popular rhetoric in Diqing – as protectors of the environment. And while some Han practitioners sought to connect with the ‘primordial’, ‘backward’ Tibetan who is in fact seen by such practitioners as the embodiment of egolessness and ‘ecological wisdom’ – as opposed to the ‘progressive’ Han who is ‘egotistical’ and seeks to ‘civilise’ nature

⁵⁰³ As opposed to travelling to Tibetan areas on pilgrimage, which, as will be examined later, can lead to quite a different experience of Tibetan culture and religion.

rather than learn from it – most Tibetans wanted their people to be more educated and more prosperous, although not at the expense of their religious beliefs. Many felt a keen sense of being seen as ‘backward’, ‘uneducated’, ‘dirty’, ‘lazy’, and ‘bad at business’ – stereotypes long imposed upon them by the Han⁵⁰⁴ – and wished to ‘progress’ from this.

On the other hand, many Tibetan and Han informants also felt that Tibetans are happier than Han, despite their ‘backwardness’ and poverty, and they attributed this happiness to their religious worldview. In terms of spirituality, Tibetans were thus seen as superior to the materially-oriented Han. Building upon this sense of spiritual superiority and the desire to protect Tibetan cultural identity which is connected to such spirituality, some Tibetan informants emphasised that local deities and spirits cannot be reduced to the rhetoric of environmental protection. Their relationship with the Tibetan people was seen by such informants as a reciprocal one, in which – as one informant noted – ‘people give meaning to the mountain[s] and the mountain[s] give meaning to the people’.

The ‘sacred ground’ of the local deities and spirits in Diqing has been ‘mapped out’ by different actors and ideologies, and this has inevitably influenced the ideas of Tibetans and Han practitioners about these entities. Kolas observes that Diqing was ‘stamped’ with Communism and the landscape ‘mapped’ with place names that replaced ‘indigenous constructions’.⁵⁰⁵ For example, administrative villages were named with popular Communist Party slogans such as ‘peace’ and ‘unite’, and others became featureless figures on a map, such as ‘village one’, ‘village two’ and so on,⁵⁰⁶ and thus ‘compartmentalised’ into a ‘de-sacralised’, ‘de-animated’ landscape. Everywhere there are reminders of this past in Gyalthang, which overlap with current religious revival and mass-/eco-tourist ventures. For example, there is a memorial to fallen soldiers near the new centre of town⁵⁰⁷ and a large museum dedicated to the ‘peaceful liberation’ of Gyalthang in the old town, which houses an exhibition of wax model PLA soldiers making their way across swamps and mountains during the Long March. Just up the hill, looking down on the museum, is Guishan temple, where both locals and tourists go to

⁵⁰⁴ The nationality identification project during the 1950s and 1960s, referred to as China’s socialist ‘civilizing project’ by Harrell (1995), has, according to Harrell, produced a ‘stigmatized identity’ among Tibetans which has given them ‘a sense of themselves as backward, uncivilized, dirty, [and] stupid.’ See Harrell, S, 1995, p. 6, cited in Smyer-Yü, D, 2012, p. 159.

⁵⁰⁵ Kolas, A, p. 47.

⁵⁰⁶ Ibid.

⁵⁰⁷ Ibid, p. 48.

pray and turn the newly installed gigantic prayer wheel outside the temple. Opposite the museum and down the hill to the right from the temple is a large building with a Tibetan painting exhibition on the second floor. Here a Tibetan guide asks tourists to have a look ‘free of charge’, explaining the ‘scientific’ diagrams of human development and anatomy, as well as various medicinal herbs. He then leads tourists to ‘lamas’ behind closed curtains, who examine one’s palms and prescribe herbal medicine valued at over seven hundred Yuan to cure one’s ailment.

These three buildings, I argue, are reflective of the multilayered landscape of Diqing, which is named and given meaning by multiple actors. The museum reflects the still-present yet slightly faded Communist ‘stamp’ upon the landscape. The temple reflects the place of Tibetan Buddhism and its retinue of local deities and spirits, both contesting the state and environmental NGOs while being appropriated by them for eco-/mass-tourism ventures. The building housing the Tibetan paintings and overpriced ‘lama specialists’ reflects the drive to present Tibetan culture as ‘scientific’ and ‘ecologically attuned’, in large part for the entrepreneur’s pocket.

The following section seeks to examine where in this multilayered landscape of Communist/Chinese Marxist ideology, Tibetan Buddhism/mountain cults, environmental conservancy and mass-/eco-tourism the local deities and spirits are placed, and how they are ‘named’. The experiences of the informants given below, drawing on their background details, their transnational and translocal movements, the manner in which they ‘converted’ to Tibetan Buddhism and their proximity to the geographical location of Tibet, will hopefully provide a more nuanced approach to understanding the interaction between Tibetan Buddhism and the discourse of environmental protection in China, and how this interaction is developing through transnational, translocal, and global networks.

Generally speaking, the experiences of the informants below are set out with an agnostic perspective regarding local deities and spirits at the beginning, and moving towards a more religiously-oriented perspective at the end. These experiences also generally progress from a universalised and variously globalised understanding of these deities and spirits within the discourse of environmental protection, towards a more local, ‘traditional’ Tibetan understanding of these entities and their roles.

Circulated Experience

Tashi

‘Tashi’ is a self-professed ‘atheist’ Tibetan monk of the Shakyas school from Yushu who was visiting Gyalthang at the time of my research.⁵⁰⁸ Now in his thirties, he became a monk at fifteen, and without taking vows, went to stay at his local monastery. Later he attended a two-year English training program at Normal University in Qinghai, shortly after which he took his vows to become an officially ordained monk. Around this time he began shooting documentaries about Tibet, which he saw as a way of preserving his people’s culture. He soon found that his skills were not ‘fine-tuned’ enough, however, and went to America to study documentary-making professionally. There, as he mixed with mostly ‘secular’ friends at college, the ‘atheist thoughts’ which began forming in Yushu ‘found a place’ in his mind, and he came to know how to ‘categorise’ himself. In Yushu he had been ‘a monk amongst monks’, and he admired monastics greatly, but he had found the lengthy chanting and some of the ritual ‘was not useful’ for him. He asked his father why he chants ‘*Om Mani Padme Hum*’ and circumambulates religious sites; he replied that he did not know exactly why, but he will gain merit from these actions. For Tashi, while he respects his father, this was not how he felt Buddhism should be.

Buddha said if you want to follow Buddhism you must examine it first – otherwise your belief is just superstition. Buddhism for me is daily living. It helps me to calm myself when anxious, and interact better with those around me...Buddhism is an attitude, which shapes our view of the world differently than what we are accustomed to...it’s an every-moment practice, not just in monasteries and temples (Field notes, 07/07/2011).

When he moved to America, he became a ‘monk amongst normal people’, and doubts that had arisen in his mind in Yushu solidified in this environment. Although he had many lay friends in Yushu at college, in America he didn’t have any contact with a monastic community or other monks. He related that he had felt, before leaving for America, that ‘the outside world’ couldn’t influence him, but he found that it did, both strengthening doubts he had in Yushu and reshaping some of his beliefs. For example,

⁵⁰⁸ He said he does not discuss his ‘atheism’ with other Tibetans, especially fellow monks, as they would consider him a ‘traitor’ to his religion and culture. He feels there are very few Tibetan monks like him, and he is therefore not representative in any way of Tibetan monks and their beliefs.

he felt Western Buddhism, with its greater emphasis on meditation than rituals and ‘superstition’, is perhaps closer to Shakyamuni’s teachings than some of the ‘superstitious’ beliefs of some Tibetans.⁵⁰⁹

In relation to local deities and spirits, he felt they may or may not exist (he wasn’t willing to take a firm position; he also said that maybe the invisible realms of the six levels of existence – gods, demigods, hungry ghosts and hell beings – may not really exist). Whether they do or do not exist is of little importance to him. He feels if they exist in people’s minds environmental protection will be promoted, which is a positive aspect of such belief. As to whether local deities and spirits can be seen as primarily environmental protectors rather than protectors of Buddhism, he related that a lama had told him that about 1,700 years ago, certain thangkas⁵¹⁰ reflected themes of environmental protection.⁵¹¹ Great masters had thus thought about environmental protection and had incorporated it into their paintings. However, later on, people solely focused on the deities in thangka paintings. In any case, he believes ‘things are constantly changing’ and that attributing different roles to these entities is not detrimental to Buddhism. However, a number of residents in Yushu, including his own parents, who have followed Bon⁵¹² or have been heavily influenced by Bon, also worship mountain deities that have not been enlightened, and put them ahead of the Three Jewels.⁵¹³ This he believes is wrong, as these ‘gods’, if they exist, are still like us, caught in samsaric existence, and therefore cannot help us towards enlightenment.⁵¹⁴ However, his sister, who is a teacher of philosophy, has persuaded both of their parents to stop worshipping non-enlightened deities.

Thus, for this informant, belief in local deities and spirits (particularly the unenlightened kind) can be considered a kind of ‘superstition’ if they are worshipped above the Three

⁵⁰⁹ However, he said the situation is changing back in Yushu, as there are a high ratio of monastics to lay, and lamas frequently organise talks for lay Tibetans in venues outside the monasteries.

⁵¹⁰ Paintings with religious themes painted on silk.

⁵¹¹ A *tulku* in Lijiang also said that Guru Rinpoche bound local spirits to oath, because he wanted them to protect villages, and to give villagers good harvests. Thus, he believes that the idea of protection of Buddhism and the environment go hand in hand, as ‘Buddhism is a natural science.’ He said wherever one goes in Tibet one will find that none of the sacred mountains or lakes are polluted.

⁵¹² There are considered to be two major Bon traditions: a pre-Buddhist indigenous system of beliefs which ‘still remain strong as agents of social and religious organisation, particularly where Tibetan culture ties with traditional society have not disintegrated’, and ‘Svastika Bon’ which is a reorganisation of earlier Bon ideas and practices according to Buddhist philosophy and institutional frameworks. See Karmay, S.G., ‘The Origin Myths of the First King of Tibet as Revealed in the Can Inga’, in Karmay, S.G. (ed.), *The Arrow and the Spindle: Studies in History, Myths, Rituals and Beliefs in Tibet*, Portland, Mandala Publications, 1998, b, pp. 89-90.

⁵¹³ Buddha, Dharma, Sangha.

⁵¹⁴ He is evidently referring here to unenlightened mountain deities.

Jewels. For him, the movement of more people from the influence of Bon to Buddhism is a positive one, as people are moving away from ‘superstition’ on the first steps towards enlightenment. Yet at the same time he finds that Buddhism itself is still mixed with ‘superstitious’ elements, such as blind faith, and questions fundamental elements of Buddhism such as the six realms of existence. Interestingly, he does not consider the mixing of environmentalism with local deities and spirits (whether enlightened or unenlightened) to be of any concern, as they may not exist anyway, the repercussions of such mixing are positive for the environment, and it may bring enough ‘rationality’ to belief in such entities that people will cease from worshipping them above the Three Jewels. In a way, the manner in which he relates to these local deities and spirits is reflective of the transitions, appropriations, translations and self-reflexivity which he has experienced and/or employed in his own life.

Tashi’s ‘identity space’ has changed several times from ‘monk amongst monks’ at his monastery in Yushu to ‘monk amongst lay and religious people’ at his college in Yushu, and then ‘monk amongst ‘secular’ people’ in America, and back to ‘monk amongst lay and religious people’ in Yushu/Gyalthang. With him he has carried, in some form, the ‘identity space’ of the local deities and spirits. As a young monk, he perceived them to be protectors of the dharma, and later as objects of criticism when worshipped above the Three Jewels by his parents. Later still they came to be seen as entities which may or may not exist, but which can be seen as protectors of the environment if such belief will promote environmental protection. Therefore, his thinking about their ‘space’ seems to have been influenced by several ideologies and beliefs.

Under Chinese Marxist ideology, all mountain deity cults have been considered ‘superstitious’, and mountain cult beliefs and practices were at one time banned by the state.⁵¹⁵ It could be that such state rhetoric has influenced Tashi’s own response to ‘superstitious’ folk beliefs and his conception of local deities and spirits. When he moved to America he encountered Western ‘rationalism’ and possibly the efforts of environmental protection groups there to conserve the environment by (re)deploying the

⁵¹⁵ Kolas, A, p. 44

There is ongoing negotiation between Tibetan lay practice of rituals associated with *ghzi bdag* and other sacred sites and state notions of orthodoxy. Makley, for example, examines how mediums (*lhawa*) of local *ghzi bdag* deities in Amdo Rebgong have been looked upon with disfavour by the authorities, and now only perform their rituals for tourists. The loss of their role as medium is also due to the urbanisation of this community, which has done away with the need for village-level mediums. See Makley, C.E., ‘The Amoral Other: State-Led Development and Mountain Deity Cults Among Tibetans in Amdo Rebgong’, in Yeh, E.T., & Coggins, C (eds.).

‘deep ecology’ of Native American cultures. In fact, the perceived ‘deep ecology’ of Native American worldviews and other indigenous groups around the world has been pointed out by international conservationists as a reason to preserve mountain cults in Diqing.⁵¹⁶ As Kolas notes, the local government also wishes to portray Shangrila County as a utopia where ‘man and nature exist in harmony’, and to achieve this goal it needs a pristine environment, hence the need for reforestation and environmental protection, and the rhetoric of local gods protecting this paradise.⁵¹⁷ Thus, Tashi’s belief that local Tibetan deities and spirits can assume the role of environmental protectors could have been influenced by both American environmental protectionism and Chinese state-led environmental protectionism, and the ideologies they encompass.

Moreover, by relating the story of ancient thangkas portraying environmental protection, he draws back on the Buddhist historic tradition both to justify the reasons for why we need environmental protection today, and to reiterate that Buddhism has in fact always been ‘eco-friendly’. Interestingly, the lama who informed Tashi of these environmentally-themed thangkas is a returnee from India. It is quite possible, then, that this returnee lama has been influenced by the aforementioned rhetoric of ‘green Tibetans’ among the Tibetan elite in exile. The appropriation of modern ideas into Tibetan Buddhism and the re-introduction of this modern Tibetan Buddhism to its place of origin is described by Smyer-Yü in his research. His focus is on how Tibetan masters are appropriating the language of science and Chinese Marxism to combat state labels of Tibetan Buddhism as ‘backward’ and ‘superstitious’, and to present Tibetan Buddhism as a scientific belief compatible with modern socialism.⁵¹⁸ Such a process of appropriation and reintroduction could be termed ‘circularity’,⁵¹⁹ which can describe the manner in which an outside idea (in this case, environmental protection) is worked into a religious belief system, on the basis that it has always supposedly belonged within that religious belief system. This hybrid ‘package’ may then be reintroduced to the place of origin of the belief system. The translocalisation, transnationalisation and globalisation

⁵¹⁶ Anderson, D, & Salick, J, & Moseley, R, & Ou, XK, p. 3066.

On the similarities between Navajo and Tibetan worldviews in relation to land-based entities see also Smyer-Yü, D, 2012, p. 59.

⁵¹⁷ Kolas, p. 44. Kolas notes how local Tibetan cadres and businessmen in Gyalthang spoke to her of developing religion according to modernity, and leaving behind ‘superstitious’ practices. They spoke of developing Shangrila County into ‘Shambhala’, but as a Socialist paradise, which is a stage in socialist historical development, following ‘slave society’ and feudalism. In accordance with this ‘Shambhala concept’, environmental protection has played a prominent role, and by implication, so have local deities and spirits, although they have become enveloped within the discourse of environmental protection rather than actively working on their own. See *ibid*, pp. 80, & 115-117.

⁵¹⁸ Smyer-Yü, D, 2012, p. 144.

⁵¹⁹ Burke, P, p. 96.

of Tibetan Buddhism is making such ‘circularity’ possible, and even necessary, for its survival and growth in modern China.⁵²⁰

This ‘circularity’, however, does not produce a new belief system which is ‘cut and dry’. It can create ambivalence and uncertainty over how to reinterpret elements of one’s hybrid faith. Accordingly, the believer’s identity may be rather ambivalent, and blurred at times where the ‘old’ and ‘new’ self converge. Tashi could not quite ‘place’ the local deities and spirits within his acquired ‘rational’ Buddhism, as objects of ‘superstition’ or as environmental protectors, as existent or non-existent. This is reflective too of the ambivalence of his identity as a Tibetan monk. On the one hand he is ‘atheist’, yet he is a Buddhist monk, and although he has found a way to ‘categorise’ himself through his experience in America, he is constantly trying to reconcile the two.

Mediated Experience

Lin

‘Lin’ is a Han practitioner of the Nyingma school and an artist in her early forties, who lives together with her husband in a village outside Beijing. They make very little from their paintings, and business has been slow. However, they find much meaning in their faith, and host their root lama whenever he comes to stay in the village. Lin had been to Tibet prior to ‘conversion’ and was very impressed by the faith of Tibetan pilgrims, prostrating the length of their journey to Lhasa. Lin and her husband also have much confidence in the ‘supernatural’ power of great Tibetan Buddhist masters. They showed me two bead-like relics (Mand - *she li zi*, Sanskt - *sharira*),⁵²¹ given to them by their root lama, which are contained in a miniature plastic stupa which they keep on their private altar. A third, smaller bead had appeared next to the other two, which they believed was miraculous, as they never opened the stupa, and the other two had remained the same size as when they received them from their lama. The third was also

⁵²⁰ This process of ‘circularity’ is evident in the spread of Tibetan Buddhism globally. For example, as Bhushan and Zablocki observe, Taiwanese nuns have been instrumental in reintroducing full ordination lineage for nuns in Sri Lanka, where it had been lost since the eleventh century. Western feminist Tibetan Buddhists have similarly been influential in raising the position of Tibetan women within their communities by providing them with opportunities to study and practice Buddhism in ways which were historically limited primarily to men. Another example of this ‘circularity’ is the way ‘American-inflected Zen’ has returned to Japan, where it is taught by Japanese teachers who have spent lived in the West or by Western roshis. See Bhushan, N, & Zablocki, A, in Bhushan, N, & Garfield, J.L., & Zablocki, A (eds.), *TransBuddhism: Transmission, Translation, and Transformation* (eds.), Amherst, University of Massachusetts Press, 2009, p. 2.

⁵²¹ *Sharira* are tiny pearl- or crystal-like balls, which are believed to be the sacred remnants of a great master’s body upon cremation. These remnants are indicative of his/her high spiritual attainment, and can be consumed when one is ill, although most informants said they would only do so as a last resort.

perfectly round like the other two and didn't seem to show any signs of having broken off from one of the larger ones.⁵²²

Other parts of her conversation, however, were less focused on the miraculous and more on the 'rational'. Lin is from north-east China, and grew up in forested country near icy lakes and rivers. She remembers all the 'superstitious', haunting stories told in her village about spirits in rivers, lakes, trees, and wolves. She felt, even when she was young, that these stories were 'fake' (*jia de*), and were the result of fear-fuelled imagination. However, she does believe the local deities and spirits of Tibet exist. She perceives their role as both protectors of the environment and humanity, and believes they are in need of our protection as well.

Each protector protects the environment. Everything we have is from the environment, so we need to cherish and protect it. The local areas need the protection of local deities. Nowadays we [society] focus on environmental protection but still see many natural disasters. In some ways it's because of our sin, which damages the environment. We need to protect the local deities and be protected by them (Field notes, 14/06/2011).

The above comment seems to imply a two-pronged approach to the position of local deities and spirits. On the one hand they protect the environment and are in need of our protection because we are dependent on the environment for survival. On the other hand, despite our best efforts at protecting the environment, there are still natural disasters caused by our sin (or negative karma). Therefore we must both protect the local deities and spirits and improve our own inner morality to avert their wrath. At first glance, this understanding of local deities and spirits appears quite similar to that of many Tibetans. To avoid angering these local entities Tibetans should not incur pollution (*grib*), either by damaging the abodes of these entities, or by committing socially unacceptable acts such as murder.

However, many other acts which seem to have no relationship to Buddhist moral law or environmental protection are also forbidden, and here the parallels between Lin's ideas

⁵²² *Sharira* are believed by many Buddhists to take on a life of their own – becoming larger, multiplying, providing healing powers, and so forth, because they are believed to be an actual embodiment of the deceased master himself from whose body they were taken upon cremation.

and traditional Tibetan ideas about these local entities end. For example, one act which is considered offensive to the local deities in Tibetan areas is discarding a human placenta above the soil after childbirth. It must be taken outside the fields, and buried far away so the blood of the placenta does not ‘pollute’ the land, causing disfavour with the deities, who may keep the crops from growing if offended.⁵²³ Lin’s belief in a ‘spiritualised’ environment seems to stem instead from a popular contemporary belief in both Taiwan and mainland China that the environment has a reciprocal relationship with humanity and suffers when humans indulge in immoral acts, reaping their negative karmic results. As Lang and Lang note, this idea of a ‘spiritualised’ environment propagates the idea that natural disasters stem from ‘polluted’ spirituality and that the environment is improved ‘through the purification of the mind and the elimination of mass consumerism’.⁵²⁴

Moreover, Lin sees the local deities and spirits of Tibet as somewhat passive, weak entities, as kinds of ‘extras’ who were ‘added on’ to Buddhism after Guru Rinpoche arrived in Tibet.

In Buddhism there were already many protector deities from India; there was no need for additional protector deities, but Guru Rinpoche took the local deities and spirits in because they were like orphans (Fieldnotes, 14/06/2011).

This is quite different to Tibetan accounts, in which the local deities and spirits are fierce, powerful beings, sometimes appearing as huge yaks, eagles or snakes the size of mountains, with flashing eyes and hideous appearances, attempting to block the path of Guru Rinpoche to Tibet in the eighth century. The reason Guru Rinpoche was invited to Tibet by king Tri Song Detsen, according to Tibetan tradition, was because these local entities were causing havoc for a struggling Buddhism there, and Guru Rinpoche was believed to be the only master powerful enough to subdue them.⁵²⁵ While he is believed to have subdued them and bound them to oath to protect Buddhism, his subjugation was

⁵²³ Chertow, J.M., ‘Embodying the Nation: Childbirth in Contemporary Tibet’, in Barnett, R., & Schwartz, R.D., *Tibetan Modernities: Notes from the Field on Cultural and Social Change*, 2008, Proceedings from the Tenth Seminar of the IATS, vol. 11, 2003, p.158.

⁵²⁴ Lang, G., & Lang, YF, ‘Religion and Environmentalism in Chinese Societies’, in Yang, FG, & Lang, G. (eds.), p. 262.

⁵²⁵ Yarlha Shompo is believed to have appeared as a yak the size of a mountain and caused floods and epidemics when Trisong Detsen tried to propagate Buddhism in Tibet, and Nyanchen Thanglha appeared as a giant snake when Guru Rinpoche encountered him. When Guru Rinpoche was invited to Tibet by the king, he is believed to have subdued these major deities, and transformed them into dharmapalas (dharma protectors). See Smyer-Yü, D, 2012, p. 54, & Blondeau, A.M., & Steinkeller, E, pp. 445-446.

not total, and the behaviour of many such entities remains unpredictable. While those among them that are unenlightened (the majority) are to be looked upon with compassion as sentient beings like their human counterparts – caught in cyclic existence despite their supernatural powers – they are surely less pitiable than ‘orphans’,⁵²⁶ and are certainly more central for local Tibetans than ‘add-ons’ to the already numerous Indic protector deities. For Tibetans, as mentioned earlier, these entities are closely related to them, from the first king down to present local communities.

The manner in which Lin spoke of these ‘local’ deities and spirits was almost totally detached from Tibet, its people and history, and was more global in appeal. She made reference to several recent natural disasters across the globe, before commenting about the need for environmental protection in conjunction with a higher sense of morality. Therefore, her reflection on the role of ‘local’ deities and spirits was generalised into a global response, influenced by her ‘mediated experience’⁵²⁷ of recent disasters worldwide. That is, through the media she learned of these disasters, brought them into our conversation, and drew ‘local’ Tibetan deities and spirits into this wider arena. She seemed to imply that local deities and spirits exist everywhere, protecting their environments and human inhabitants wherever they are.

However, as mentioned earlier, she does not believe in the stories of local spirits in her home town. This is likely due to the fact that her youth was influenced by the ‘anti-superstition’ rhetoric which survived the aftermath of the Cultural Revolution, which particularly impacted shamanic communities, whose practices were especially frowned upon by the state.⁵²⁸ Now, however, she has found a faith which does not just pertain to be supernatural but is the ‘real deal’. Therefore, the local deities and spirits incorporated

⁵²⁶ Using the term ‘orphan’ may be drawn from the Chinese understanding of hungry ghosts as orphans, as is seen in the Hungry Ghost Festival in China, believed to be a gathering for ‘orphaned’ souls. Tibetans, according to the elder brother of the Dalai Lama, Thubten Jigme Norbu, also refer to the majority of mountain deities and spirits as ‘hungry ghosts’. See Tricycle Magazine, ‘An Interview with Thubten Jigme Norbu’, <http://www.tricycle.com/special-section/an-interview-with-thubten-jigme-norbu> [accessed 07/12/2012].

⁵²⁷ See Giddens, A, *Modernity and Self-Identity: Self and Society in the Late Modern Age*, Redwood City, Stanford University Press, 1991, pp. 26-27

⁵²⁸ As Ashiwa and Wank note, shamanism has ‘none of the characteristics of religion’ as identified by the state and is officially banned. However, activities connected to popular beliefs having ‘historical’ and ‘cultural’ value are allowed as long as their performance is more ‘cultural’ than ‘religious’. See Ashiwa, Y, & Wank, D, *Making Religion Making the State: the Politics of Religion in Modern China*, Redwood City, Stanford University Press, 2009, p. 59.

For more on the relationship between the Chinese state and medium and other ‘shamanic’ practices, see Paper, J.D., *The Spirits are Drunk: Comparative Approaches to Chinese Religion*, Albany, State University of New York Press, 1995.

into Tibetan Buddhism – unlike shamanic-influenced stories of the same⁵²⁹ – are real rather than imagined, and such archetypal beings exist the world over. These archetypes are uniform and universal rather than local. The vivid history, rituals, terrifying descriptions and interconnectivity with the local Tibetan population that they embody blurs into the background while the prominence of what they supposedly stand for – environmental protection – comes to the fore.

Eco-sublime Experience

Zhang

Another practitioner, ‘Zhang’, had a considerably different experience of Tibetan Buddhism to that of Lin. He is a mixed Han-Mongol practitioner studying Buddhism and living in Gyalthang, where he is helping his root lama to translate his teachings into Chinese. Zhang has ridden a bicycle from Chengdu to Lhasa, and on to Mt Kailash, and his knowledge of Tibet, Tibetan culture and religion is quite extensive. He plans to remain in Gyalthang to continue his studies indefinitely. He holds a Canadian passport, yet has no intention of returning to Canada, as he has been greatly moved by the ‘purity’ of the Tibetan people, their faith, and their landscape, and feels Western society is deeply delusional. His own background is ‘complicated’, and he suffered much from his parents’ ‘rocky’ marriage. This caused him to search for answers to suffering, and Tibetan Buddhism provided him with answers.

In the local area, Zhang has travelled to Mount Kawa Karpo, where he said he felt the mountain deity’s ‘energy’. He added that he wishes to make pilgrimage to different holy mountains in the Tibetan areas. While he believes these local entities are protectors of Buddhism, and have assumed this position since they were bound to oath under Guru Rinpoche, he spoke far more about their embodiment of an ‘ecological wisdom’ – primordially connected to the pristine landscape they protect.

Every piece of grass [on the Tibetan landscape] is holy, which matches Buddhism with the concept of environmental protection. Many mountains have been designated [by lamas] as holy mountains to better protect the environment...I felt more surprised than disappointed upon arriving in the Tibetan areas. The environment here is better maintained than what I read in

⁵²⁹ Geoffrey Samuels (1993), and other scholars, have commented on the ‘shamanic’ nature of aspects of Tibetan Buddhism. Here I am referring to the perspective of the informant, not to an academic debate about whether Tibetan Buddhism is ‘shamanic’ or not.

books, but some parts of the environment have been destroyed...I believe the land here is sacred, as the seven rivers originate from this area. The plateau also rises above the surrounding land, and the scenery is amazing (Field notes, 09/07/2011).

Such an approach to the landscape of Tibet is similar to that described by Smyer-Yü among Han pilgrims to the Tibetan areas.⁵³⁰ Both among Han pilgrims and within popular imagination in the West, Tibetan Buddhism is often seen as an ‘eco-sublime’⁵³¹ religion or spirituality which is – as Smyer-Yü puts it – ‘earth-inspired’.⁵³² That is, Tibetan Buddhism draws very much on the ‘charisma’ of the Tibetan landscape, which is imbued with such charisma due to the deities and spirits inhabiting it, as well as the charisma of *tulkus*, who embody both their lineage and a kinship with the local entities within the landscape.⁵³³

Tibet is also seen by this informant as a ‘holy land’ for geographical as well as more explicitly spiritual reasons. Buddhism is seen to naturally stem from and merge with the Tibetan landscape. Part of the reason for the Tibetan landscape being holy, according to Zhang, is that the seven rivers originate from it, the plateau is elevated above surrounding landscape and the view is amazing. In this pure environment pure religion can blend with and further purify its host habitat. For Zhang then, the local deities and spirits are very much real and ‘feed off’ and give back to the purity of the Tibetan landscape. They are an embodiment of the purity of Tibetan Buddhism, and pilgrimage to their mountain abodes provides a channel for their pure ‘energy’ to transmit to the pilgrim.

‘Earthy’ Experience

Wang

Unlike Zhang, ‘Wang’ lives in Beijing, far from the Tibetan landscape. He was a reporter for a geographic magazine, living in the TAR and surrounding Tibetan areas for

⁵³⁰ Smyer-Yü describes the emotional experience of Han pilgrims upon arriving in Tibetan areas – they may fall on their knees, kiss the ground, and sob uncontrollably. See Smyer-Yü, D, 2012, p. 74.

⁵³¹ I borrow this term from Smyer-Yü’s work, which is borrowed from Rozelle, L, 2006.

⁵³² According to Smyer-Yü, it is no coincidence that Tibetan Buddhism is gaining popularity in and outside of China, as ‘nowhere else on earth could a religion and its native environment compete with Tibet’s magnificent landscape and the religion-oriented humanism in it.’ He believes Tibetan Buddhism is thus ‘more than just a form of Buddhism. It is an earth-inspired religion. It resonates with worldwide environmental movements and the return of once suppressed land-based religions.’ He believes it is therefore crucial to understand the ‘religiosity of the Tibetan landscape [to understand] the origins of the heightened popular imagination of Tibet.’ See Smyer-Yü, D, 2012, p. 191.

⁵³³ Ibid, p. 73

four years. He too was impressed by the ‘purity’ and ‘innocence’ of the Tibetan people and their landscape. However, unlike pilgrims seeking a lama, he was first attracted to Tibetan culture by common Tibetans and the ‘simplicity’ of their approach to life, particularly those in rural areas ‘uncorrupted’ by Han-influenced urban life. This led him to take an interest in Tibetan Buddhism and eventually to seek out a lama in Lhasa to teach him.

Wang often visited monasteries and temples and was impressed by the statues housed within depicting the local deities where he said he could feel their power and presence. One night he was in a temple that was built for a local mountain deity by a Nyingma lama, who had also constructed an adjacent temple for Guru Rinpoche.⁵³⁴ It rained the night Wang was there, and he was in awe of the powerful presence he felt emitting from the local deity statues as he waited for the rain to stop. Later that night he dreamt about one of the mountain deities, and this convinced him that they exist and have real power.⁵³⁵ He went on to say that the environment of Tibetan areas is more pure than that of urban centres in greater China, and that we should work towards protecting the environment of Tibet rather than disturbing local deities by causing environmental damage. Unlike other urban practitioners who have not lived in the Tibetan areas, he also had a good knowledge of the names of regional Tibetan deities and the areas to which they belong and protect.

While Wang’s case is similar to that of Zhang, there are significant differences between them and between Wang’s and Lin’s case. Wang, unlike most pilgrims, did not set out to look for a lama. He just ‘happened’ to be posted in the TAR and later in other Tibetan regions as a reporter. His first encounters with Tibetan society were with lay Tibetans, and his initial experience was more ‘earthy’ than transcendental. Thus, initially, perhaps

⁵³⁴ These two temples, according to Wang, were constructed following advice from a certain ‘dharma king’ (*fa wang*), who believed it was only appropriate for the lama to construct another proposed temple after these two had been erected.

⁵³⁵ Smyer-Yü relates a similar story told by a veteran Han pilgrim about his emotional experience with the Tibetan landscape in a Nyingma monastery in Kham:

I can’t tell you how my soul deeply repented and prayed on the summit 5,400 meters above sea level. For a long, long time, I stared into the vast space around me with my mouth wide open. Waves of tears welled up in my eyes and blocked the dazzling light deflected from snow and ice. That moment of solitude seemed to enable me to clutch a corner of the garments of the celestial beings residing in these endless mountains. The face of the highland expresses itself according to how your mood looks upon it. If you are relaxed, you’ll see a rainbow rising from the mountain across the valley, children and goats will rush to you with joyful sounds... Everything here seems familiar to me and plucks the strings of my heart.

See Zhao, 2003, cited in Smyer-Yü, D, 2012, pp. 82-82.

only out of interest as a writer reporting on Tibetan culture, he learned the names and characteristics of the local deities and spirits, but only felt their power and presence when experienced in the context of a practicing Tibetan Buddhist. While Lin and Zhang both described the local deities' and spirits' roles as protectors of the environment, and ascribed to them a 'faceless' energy (more so in the case of Lin, for whom all came under one 'nameless' category, while Zhang, having lived in Gyalthang for some time, at least named Kawagebo⁵³⁶), Wang spoke of their statues and named them, thus giving them form, place and a specific identity. The 'local' characteristics of these deities were retained, together with their power, while this power was understood as both that which protects these temples and Buddhism, and that which protects the environment of Tibet in general.



Photo 11: Part of the Kawagebo Mountain Range, Dechen County, Diqing Tibetan Autonomous Prefecture.

Rebirth Experience

Fei

The experience of another Han practitioner, 'Fei', was more religiously-oriented with little connection to the discourse of environmental protection. Fei is a hostel owner from

⁵³⁶ Also called Kawa Karpo.

Guangzhou living in Gyalthang. Middle-aged and divorced, she once worked for a multi-million dollar company in Guangzhou, before becoming so wealthy she quit her job and ‘enjoyed’ life, shopping and playing majhong, while a nanny was hired to look after her son. She soon found this lifestyle meaningless, however, and became depressed. Her marriage suffered and she filed for divorce. She then travelled about China, including to Gyalthang, where she met an incarnate lama, took refuge (*guiyi*),⁵³⁷ and ended up staying. She now runs both a hostel in Gyalthang and an orphanage in a nearby town.

Before taking refuge, she went on pilgrimage with two friends to Tibet in 2003 to visit various monasteries, as well as sacred mountains. One of the mountains she visited was Everest (Tib - *Qomolangma*). They were 50 kilometres from the foot of the mountain and there was heavy snowfall. The Tibetan driver said they probably wouldn’t see the top of the mountain. However, when they were about 20 kilometres from the mountain, they turned several corners and suddenly Everest appeared before them. They were amazed it should suddenly appear so clearly from amongst the clouds, and she felt there was truly some powerful presence there. Every year now she goes to Yubeng to visit Kawa Karpo, and ‘feels the blessings’ of her lama when she is there. She also said that every Tibetan must circumambulate Mt Kawa Karpo at least once in his/her life, and Kawa Karpo in return provides protection for these pilgrims. She said those from Yushu who had circumambulated Kawa Karpo at least once had been spared during the Yushu earthquake, while those who had not perished. It is a sacred mountain, and is one of only two recognised as such by the Chinese government where climbing is banned.⁵³⁸ In 1991 a Sino-Japanese team of climbers perished while trying to climb it. She sees this as evidence that these local deities are able to defend their territory and should not be disturbed by human activity.⁵³⁹

Like Wang, she refers to the power and influential presence of these entities in Tibetans’ lives, yet makes no direct reference to environmental protection. For her, the abodes of local enlightened deities are pilgrimage sites where the blessings of her lama can be made manifest, and making pilgrimage there can create a kind of ‘kinship’ between

⁵³⁷ ‘Taking refuge’ or *guiyi* in Chinese refers to a practicing Buddhist’s pledge to take refuge in the Buddha, Dharma and Sangha.

⁵³⁸ The other is Mt Kailash.

⁵³⁹ As she and a *tulku* whom I interviewed in Lijiang mentioned, if anyone should conquer Kawa Karpo by reaching the peak, he will lose some of his power and the site its sacredness.

oneself and the protector deity, so that even natural disasters will not harm one. Disturbing these sites can evoke the wrath of the deity. It is possible Fei's more 'traditional' interpretation is due to her intimate feelings of connectedness with the Tibetan people. She believes she was a Tibetan nomad in her past life, as she 'felt at home' immediately upon arriving in Tibetan areas, and especially among Tibetan nomads. Based on this belief, some of her ritual actions, outlook on life and lifestyle choices seem to be influenced accordingly. For example, on various Tibetan auspicious days of the month and during religious festivals she burns *tsamba*⁵⁴⁰ and juniper branches (instead of Chinese incense) outside her house, like Tibetans. She also claims to have lost interest in money and material possessions, and related how she told a visiting television reporter that she does not feel disappointed if no one donates money to the orphanage she is running; nor does she feel excited or surprised if someone donates five million Yuan. On a more superficial level, she even showers less often. For her, as for a number of other informants, 'Tibetanness' is about the purity of detachment from material interests. While this may well be a stereotypical view of Tibetans, her feeling of deep connection to the Tibetan people because of her belief that she was a Tibetan in a past life, and her subsequent acting out of this 'Tibetanness', provides interesting insight into the psychological effects experienced by some Han Tibetan Buddhists living amongst, and being part of, Tibetan communities.⁵⁴¹

Certainly pilgrimage to the Tibetan regions has a major impact on the way in which Han perceive and practice Tibetan Buddhism.⁵⁴² However, no study, to my knowledge, has been carried out on the impact of Tibetan religion on those Han living and working in the Tibetan areas. Only five of my Han informants had been or were living in a Tibetan area, and therefore no concrete distinctions can be drawn from these results. Yet a tentative observation may be made that those who live in Tibetan areas seem more

⁵⁴⁰ Roasted barley flour.

⁵⁴¹ Zablocki observes a similar phenomenon of self-'Tibetanisation' among Western practitioners. He notes:

The longing for a Tibetan body, or more precisely, the longing to discover that one's Western body is actually a vessel holding a Tibetan identity, reveals something of the symbolic potency that Tibetan-ness continues to hold for so many in the West. In this sense, the desire for a Tibetan identity appears like the desire for so many other forms of symbolic capital albeit that *tulku* status renders this capital in a unique way. See Zablocki, A, 2009, b, p. 53.

⁵⁴² Germano's chapter 'Re-membering the Dismembered Body of Tibet: Contemporary Tibetan Visionary Movements in the People's Republic of China' makes some mention of this phenomena. See Germano, D, in Kapstein, M.T., & Goldstein, M.C. (eds.). Smyer-Yü's more recent work, 2012, examines Chinese pilgrimage in much greater depth.

likely to engage closely with the Tibetan population and ‘local’ elements of their religion than those who remain for a short time. Interestingly, they may even adopt a more ‘traditional’ Tibetan worldview than some local Tibetans themselves, in their efforts to understand Tibetan religion and culture, as well as to shed their often troubled pasts (as examined in Chapter Four).

My observation was that Han who had lived, or were living in the Tibetan areas were highly respectful, and even reverent of, Tibetan lay culture and religion. For them, Tibetans had found ‘the pearl of great price’, for which they were willing to give up even their properties to go on pilgrimage or to meet with a great Tibetan master. Unlike Germano’s observation that many Han monks studying at the Larung Tibetan Buddhist Academy in Sichuan Province looked down upon lay Tibetans with ‘an attitude of cultural superiority and separation’,⁵⁴³ while only associating with *tulkus* and other high lamas, I found that Han informants – particularly those who had or were living in Tibetan areas – did not display such an attitude. Rather, those living in these areas had many lay Tibetan friends, and associated with them very well. Zhang, for example, is the only non-Tibetan studying thangka painting with Tibetan students, all of whom come from economically-disadvantaged backgrounds. He spends most of the day with them, eats with them, and goes out on excursions with them. The same is true of Wang, who keeps in contact with many of his lay Tibetan friends, now that he is back in Beijing.

One reason for this difference could be due to the fact that Han living in Tibetan areas often go alone, and if they are to fit into their new environment, they must interact more directly with ‘everyday’ Tibetans. Han pilgrims, on the other hand, as Smyer-Yü notes, almost never travel alone, preferring to travel in groups.⁵⁴⁴ The collective nature of Han pilgrimage could thus create Han ‘enclaves’,⁵⁴⁵ that are more separate from the lay Tibetan population. This is not the place to elaborate upon a discussion of this topic, but simply to point out that understanding Han feelings of closeness or distance to both lay

⁵⁴³ Germano is specifically referring here to Chinese monks. He notes, however, that the phenomenon of *Ter* (revealing sacred ‘treasure’ such as statues, ritual items and scriptures buried in the landscape of Tibet) in relation to Khenpo Jikphun (a Nyingma master who established the Buddhist academy at Serthar in Sichuan) attracted many Chinese followers, some of whom left Chinese traditional religious practices to study under Khenpo Jikphun. Germano sees here a reversal in the ‘standard Han dismissal of ‘dirty, barbaric Tibetans’, [which] even raises the possibility of [Tibetan] cultural superiority, at least in some respects.’ See Germano, D, pp. 68 & 91.

⁵⁴⁴ Smyer-Yü, D, 2012, p. 86.

⁵⁴⁵ Or *communitas* as Smyer-Yü calls them. See *ibid*.

and monastic religious Tibetan culture may be better served by not only investigating Han pilgrimage but Han settlement in Tibetan areas.⁵⁴⁶

Revival Experience

Tsering

‘Tsering’ is a Tibetan ‘stay-home monk’ (Mand - *zai jia heshang*) in Dechen. He lived in Kunming for many years, working for a law firm, where, in his words, he became ‘more Chinese than Tibetan’. All his colleagues were Chinese, he spoke Chinese all the time, and he read Chinese rather than Tibetan literature, including Jin Yong’s⁵⁴⁷ work, which, according to Tsering, referred to Tibetan culture as ‘backward’ and the cause of slow economic growth in the Tibetan areas. Tsering began to ‘internalise’ this rhetoric, and came to see his own people as ‘backward’, and still has such thoughts whenever he thinks about the poverty and lack of education among Tibetans. However, upon returning to Dechen for a month, he met a lama at the local monastery who re-introduced him to Buddhism and his own culture, and gave him a sense of pride in his culture and heritage. Tsering began to take an interest in Buddhism, and studied hard to learn to read and write Tibetan. After ‘re-finding’ his ‘Tibetanness’, Tsering quit his job in Kunming and moved back to Dechen permanently, where he is now a ‘stay-home monk’ and the owner of an internet café, which he uses as a base to teach Tibetan Buddhism to people all over China through online forums.

Tsering emphasised both the traditional role of local deities and spirits, as well as the compatibility of this traditional view with environmental protection. He quoted a song about Kawa Karpo from a nearby village which he said proves this compatibility.

You are the mountain god protecting the entire world and the mountain. You have no need of a hairpiece because snow adorns you; you have no need of a covering for your body because the forest dresses you; you have no need of

⁵⁴⁶ The movement of Han into Tibetan areas is obviously seen by many as a contentious issue. Han are generally seen, in the West and among Tibetans in exile, as ‘drowning’ the Tibetans in everything Chinese, and a ‘cultural genocide’ is perceived to be taking place. This is certainly a major concern for Tibetans and Western observers. Yet, as cases presented in this chapter, and perhaps others in a wider study may show, there is also a degree of ‘Tibetanisation’ or ‘reverse acculturation’ occurring among some Han living in these areas, especially those following, or interested in Tibetan Buddhism.

⁵⁴⁷ Jin Yong, as mentioned in Chapter Five, is a martial arts novelist who is very popular throughout the Chinese world, including in Hong Kong, Taiwan and the mainland.

accessories on your feet because the streams flow below you (Field notes, 11/07/2011).

He added:

Kawagebo is called grandfather in this area. He is a part of our family (Field notes, 11/07/2011).

He noted that TNC had recently recorded the names and locations of various mountain deities around Dechen to raise awareness of the importance of environmental protection. He himself is on the committee of the Kawagebo Culture Society (*Kawagebo Wenhua Shehui*), which emphasises, in conjunction with TNC, the need to protect the environment by way of preserving mountain cults. However, he emphasised, more so than other informants, that we cannot simply reduce the mountain deities to environmental protectors.

If we say they [environmental protectionists] have to protect the mountain, it makes the mountain deity weak. He has no need for our protection. The mountain deity has the ability to protect us and we have the ability to protect him only to a limited extent – so it is an equal relationship. In Buddhism all things are equal. The mountain gives meaning to the people and the people give meaning to the mountain. It is an equal transaction. When Guru Rinpoche came here only the Kawa Karpo range was converted to protect Buddhism, according to the texts. If you do something wrong against Buddhism, Kawagebo will punish you.⁵⁴⁸ This idea helps people to maintain morality as well as protect the environment (Field notes, 11/07/2011).

Tsering thus believes that, despite the general compatibility of mountain cult beliefs with environmental protection, the inherent anthropocentric nature of environmental protection (i.e. the environment is passively at the hands of humanity's effectiveness to protect or destroy it) is incompatible with traditional Tibetan beliefs, which emphasise humanity's vulnerability in the face of the power of these deities and spirits. He

⁵⁴⁸ This reciprocal relationship between Tibetan inhabitants and local deities and spirits is well-illustrated in a story related to me by a returnee lama from India in Gyalthang. According to him, during the Cultural Revolution the rivers and streams dried out in Tibet because the mountain deities and spirits had left, together with Buddhism. When the lamas returned and chanted, the rain returned, together with these beings. He added that if you cry out in the right place in a certain manner, the surrounding mountain deities will hear you and cause rain to fall. This lama believed the attack on Buddhism and the protectors of Buddhism caused the local deities and spirits to leave and the land to become parched. Now that Buddhism is being revived, along with overlapping mountain cults, the favour of the local deities and spirits has returned and they can be evoked for rain and other purposes.

emphasises that if people do not perceive an interconnectedness between environmental protection and the belief in local deities and spirits as powerful entities in their own right which are family, protectors of their own territory, and protectors of Buddhism who reward and punish people, people may lose sight of environmental protection altogether. Thus, Tsering, like other writers producing material for the Kawagebo Culture Society, seek to reconfigure ‘the concept of centre versus margin, replacing a criterion measured by political and economic strength with one defined by spiritual authority’.⁵⁴⁹ In order to achieve this, such writers are preserving folk songs and poetry, not only to preserve Tibetan culture in Dechen, but to save the nation ‘through the spirit of that tradition’, in opposition to modernity shaped by globalisation and the West.⁵⁵⁰ Tsering actively goes about ‘saving the nation’ by providing weekly online Tibetan Buddhist teaching and Tibetan cultural knowledge throughout China at his internet café.

The efforts of Tsering and other Tibetans working for such groups as the Kawagebo Culture Society are invaluable in light of ongoing environmental destruction in Diqing Tibetan Autonomous Prefecture, a considerable amount of which is being caused by Tibetans. At least, this was my experience when carrying out research there; for example, while travelling back to Gyalthang from Dechen by bus, a Tibetan girl in front of me threw a plastic bag full of food scraps out the window, as well as other rubbish as the journey progressed. Two Tibetan boys sitting behind me threw several plastic bottles out the window, the Tibetan driver littered the roadside with numerous aluminium cans, and even a monk sitting next to him discarded a plastic bottle out the window. This is just one among many examples of environmental pollution I witnessed while in the Dechen/Gyalthang area, a considerable amount of which seemed to be caused by Tibetans.⁵⁵¹

I related this to the head of the Dalai Lama’s office in Taipei, a Tibetan from Qinghai who is knowledgeable about local Tibetan deities and related beliefs. He said this is a modern phenomenon, which did not occur when he was growing up in Qinghai:

⁵⁴⁹ Ying, LH, ‘Vital Margins: Frontier Poetics and Landscapes of Ethnic Identity’, in Yeh, E.T., & Coggins, C, p. 39.

⁵⁵⁰ Ibid, p. 40.

⁵⁵¹ One of Kolas’s Tibetan informants complained about rubbish generated by tourists at Kawa Karpo, stating that ‘the tourists don’t understand what this place means, the holiness of the place [*defang [sic] de shen sheng xing*].’ See Kolas, A, p. 75. I also witnessed a large amount of rubbish overflowing from the rubbish baskets en route from Mingyong up to the observation point part way up Mount Kawa Karpo. There appears to be both an issue with littering and the logistics of carting away rubbish already disposed of in rubbish baskets and bins.

When we left Qinghai for India, we took some soil with us which we may eat in small quantities when we are ill. We believe *Guan Yin* is our teacher, and that even the soil is blessed by her.⁵⁵² Just as the Jews believe they are the chosen people and Israel is the Holy Land, so we also believe that our land is blessed and inhabited by deities and spirits, and that we are a blessed people. Because of this, Tibetans traditionally do not cut down trees – only their branches – because trees are inhabited by spirits. There must be a good reason why you need to cut down a whole tree. When I was young we didn't pour washing powder into the river once we had finished washing our clothes, but threw it away on the bank of the river to avoid contaminating the water and offending the *klu* (water spirits). You could drink the water it was so clean. Now with modernisation it's not the same and Tibetans throw rubbish everywhere.⁵⁵³ (Field notes, 19/08/2011).

As Tsering emphasised, while environmental protection is the 'side product' rather than the focus of mountain cults and beliefs in various spirits, the decline in belief in these entities and their connectedness with the environment may be producing indifference among an increasing number of Tibetans in Diqing towards environmental protection. This is despite recent government and environmental NGO efforts to reforest large areas of Diqing, and promote at least some form of environmental conservancy. Mass tourism, as promoted by the local government and tourism agencies, may not be helping such efforts, and perhaps instead leads to a drive amongst Tibetans to make money at the expense of traditional beliefs.⁵⁵⁴

⁵⁵² Here he is referring to Chenrezig, the Tibetan name for Avalokiteshvara, the Bodhisattva of compassion. However, because the interview was in Chinese he used the Chinese equivalent, as well as the related sex (Chenrezig in the Tibetan tradition is male instead of female as in Chinese tradition).

⁵⁵³ An old yogi-medicine man gives a similar account in Smyer-Yü's account of environmental destruction which has occurred since the establishment of the PRC in Rachekyi Village. He describes bountiful wildlife, including large animals that are no longer seen, thick forest and so forth which existed before the late 1950's. See Smyer-Yü, D, 2012, p. 62.

⁵⁵⁴ Such Tibetan entrepreneurship at the expense of traditional sacred beliefs may be praised by local government officials, as is the case in Jiuzhaigou, Nanping County, where, according to Peng, there has been a decline in Tibetan pilgrimage as tourism has developed in the area. Peng notes that this decline 'has been exalted [by officials of the Religious Bureau of Nanping County] as a positive sign, suggesting that locals have developed a clear sense of market economy in the development of tourism, and that they are more 'open' to the outside world'. In the opinion of these officials, Tibetans in Jiuzhaigou have thus been positively affected by 'advanced' Han culture, and this decline in pilgrimage activities is 'evidence' that the Marxian idea that 'superstition will vanish as economy grows' is accurate. See Peng, WB, 'Tibetan Pilgrimage in the Process of Social Change: The Case of Jiuzhaigou', in McKay, A (ed.), 1998, p. 198.



Photo 12: A view of Gyalthang Town and surroundings from the renovated Songtsen Ling Monastery on the outskirts of town.

However, some young Tibetan academics and students like Tsering are realising the importance of preserving mountain deity cults. One Tibetan graduate informant in Gyalthang studying Tibetan culture had written a paper on the local deities at *Balagezong*, a canyon/mountain park on the Yunnan-Sichuan border. She said that while some Tibetans are becoming aware of the need for environmental protection because of government-backed promotion of environmental conservancy, there is another movement in Gyalthang developing through online forums and blogs, where local Tibetans are learning about their own culture through Tibetans in more rural areas, which apparently have not been so drastically altered by modernisation. She and other informants frequently referred to Tibetan culture in Gyalthang as ‘impure’, as the town has been influenced by Han, Naxi and other cultures to the point that Tibetan culture has been ‘watered down’, and can only re-emerge through the input of outside Tibetans.

While the work of such students and academics is invaluable for promoting Tibetan culture, it remains to be seen how much impact it will have on the general Tibetan population in Diqing. Environmental education initiatives, run in conjunction with such

NGOs as the Shangri-la Institute for Sustainable Communities, set up by WWF-China, which seeks to educate young Tibetans in Diqing and even nationwide through the Environmental Educators' Initiative (EEI),⁵⁵⁵ may well impact the views of young local Tibetans towards the environment. Yet, as Shapiro observes, '[a]ny citizen support for environmental policy measures, even that based on compelling scientific information about the human impact on the earth's infrastructure will have a more solid foundation if it draws on a cultural philosophy or an environmental ethic.'⁵⁵⁶ This is demonstrated by Tsering's attitude towards both the preservation of mountain cults within a 'traditional' Tibetan understanding and the modern discourse of environmental protection.

Conclusion

The experiences of the above informants reveal the ways in which traditional Tibetan knowledge of animated landscapes is understood and experienced by different actors, in much the same ways as Tibetan Buddhism in general is understood and experienced differently in Tibet, wider China, and the West. Just as local deities were interpreted by the above informants through – respectively – a scientific rationalist lens; the global rhetoric of environmental protection; an eco-religious framework; a notion of primordial purity derived from the animated landscape; a self-identification with Tibetan culture through belief in reincarnation; and the revival of Tibetan culture, Tibetan Buddhism has likewise evolved as it has spread out to the world, returned to its place of origin, and has been revived through both traditional Tibetan and modernist input (often appropriated from wider China or transnational influences).

Just as Tibetan Buddhism is constantly being subject to adaptation, traditional Tibetan knowledge of animated landscapes likewise no longer stands alone; there are too many competing discourses seeking to counter and/or appropriate this knowledge for other ends. As examined above, mass tourism seems to be the main focus of the Diqing government and tourist organisations. Environmental protection is the central focus of many transnational and local NGOs working in Diqing. For both of these parties 'sacred knowledge' is useful in what it can do to promote their respective agendas, whether it be true ecotourism or simply mass tourism in the guise of ecotourism. While *tulkus* and

⁵⁵⁵ Shangri-la Institute for Sustainable Communities, 'About Shangri-la Institute', <http://waterschool.cn/about-us/> [accessed 07/12/2012].

⁵⁵⁶ Shapiro, J, p. 212.

other lamas in the area do appear to be making some impact in both preserving Tibetan culture and protecting the environment,⁵⁵⁷ participation by Tibetan religious leaders in environmental education seems ‘only a small fraction’ of the wider environmental projects being conducted in the area,⁵⁵⁸ due in part to restrictions imposed on Tibetan-led environmental initiatives following the events of 2008. ‘Sacred knowledge’ is thus often added to an already ‘full’ discourse on environmental protection, without making as much impact as it might if such knowledge was understood on its own terms.

⁵⁵⁷ Some local lamas and monks, have, for example, encouraged villagers not to cut down trees in the vicinity of national parks, based on Buddhist teachings of interdependence and the sacredness of such sites; at sites such as Kawa Karpo Mountain a ‘sacred line’ (*ri vgag*) has been maintained which designates a protected, sacred area within which people must not log. See Anderson, D, & Salick, J, & Moseley, R, & Ou, XK, 2005, p. 3069.

Tibetan religious leaders have also cooperated with WWF China on the Shangri-la Sustainable Community Initiative to produce several publications on ‘nature resource conservation and Buddhism’ and ‘nature and Buddhism’, which have been distributed to local villagers in and around nature reserves. See Shangri-la Institute for Sustainable Communities, ‘About Shangri-la Institute’, <http://waterschool.cn/about-us/> [accessed 08/12/2012] & WWF, ‘Conservation Programs/Environmental Protection’, http://www.wwfchina.org/english/sub_loca.php?loca=12&sub=93 [accessed 08/12/2012] One such publication, *An Ecological View of Tibetan Buddhism*, has even been used as a resource at Tibet University. See *ibid*, & Yang, F, & Lang, G, p. 257.

⁵⁵⁸ *Ibid*.

Chapter Seven

Chinese Ghosts and Milarepa: Contemporary Tibetan Buddhist Teaching on ‘Deathlessness’ and Implications for Popular Chinese Ghost Beliefs

Introduction

The main body of this thesis opened with an exploration of the ‘ethereal’ Guan Gong within contemporary Tibetan Buddhism in Greater China; this Chapter concludes the main body with an examination of the opposite end of the spectrum, over which Guan Gong is believed to have subjugating powers – the demonic.⁵⁵⁹ This chapter explores ‘elite’ and ‘popular’ beliefs concerning ghosts among the Tibetan religious elite and lay Han Tibetan Buddhist practitioners.⁵⁶⁰ It examines how certain Tibetan masters such as Yongey Mingyur Rinpoche are presenting a ‘rational’ Tibetan Buddhism to Han practitioners, which places less emphasis on actual ghosts, and more emphasis on exorcising ‘the ghost of one’s heart’ (i.e. delusional thinking towards existence and death). At the same time, Mingyur Rinpoche and others do not deny the existence of ghosts, but emphasise that they are to be pitied rather than feared. The real malevolent demon, they insist, is the false notion of a truly existent self. By understanding there is no inherently existent self, and losing attachments accordingly, fear naturally dissipates, along with all of its embodiments, including death. Mingyur Rinpoche teaches the ‘deathlessness’ of death and non-attachment to the body – a message powerfully conveyed in the wider Tibetan cultural context of death rituals such as ‘sky burial’, in which the entire body is broken up and fed to vultures.

⁵⁵⁹ Guan Gong, although considered a ‘divine general’ (*shenjiang*) who is assisted by ‘divine soldiers’ (*shenbing*) to combat hoards of demons, is himself considered to be an especially powerful demon according to some accounts. According to Ter Haar, such ‘divine generals and soldiers form divine armies but never betray their demonic origins and still require bloody meat sacrifice.’ See Ter Haar, B.J., ‘China’s Inner Demons: The Political Impact of the Demonological Paradigm’, *China Information*, vol. 11, no. 54, 1996, p. 58.

Evidently such meat sacrifice is not practiced in Chinese Buddhist circles.

⁵⁶⁰ I use quotation marks here for the words ‘elite’ and ‘popular’, as the perceived distinction between these two categories is largely drawn from a modernist Buddhist understanding. The demarcation between these two categories in traditional Tibetan society – as in other traditional Asian societies – is not as clear.

This message contrasts sharply with traditional ‘popular’ Chinese/Confucian/Daoist understandings of ghosts and ancestors, and associated funerary rites. In Han traditional funerary practices the body is usually preserved, finely clothed, and buried.⁵⁶¹ Ancestor veneration follows, and, if the descendent is wealthy enough, this may continue for several generations. Such behaviour is related, in part, to an anxiety present in many cultures, of the unattended dead haunting the living, as well as the hope that descendents will be blessed by the ancestors. There are many parallels, for example, between ‘popular’ Han perceptions of death and the soul/spirit, and ‘popular’ Tibetan perceptions about the same, which overlap with canonical Buddhist teaching (as explored later in this chapter). However, it is both a canonical and somewhat demythologised Tibetan Buddhism, extricated from ‘popular’ beliefs, that certain Tibetan elite convey to Han practitioners. Yet despite this demythologised teaching ‘popular’ Han ghost beliefs continue to find a place within the worldview of a number of Han practitioners.

Below is outlined the teaching of modernist Tibetan religious elite such as Yongey Mingyur Rinpoche regarding ghost belief among Han practitioners. In contrast somewhat to this teaching, the next section examines some parallels and differences between traditional Han and Tibetan concepts of ghosts, the general fear of ghosts among both lay Han and Tibetans, and the specific anxiety concerning ancestors (particularly unattended ancestors) mainly among Han. The next section explores the parallels between the message of the Tibetan religious elite such as Mingyur Rinpoche about ‘exorcising’ the ‘ghost of the heart’ and ridding oneself of ‘superstition’, and the CPC’s ongoing anti-superstition rhetoric. The convergence of the views of certain Tibetan religious elite and the CPC regarding ‘superstitious’ ghost beliefs will be examined in this section, as well as their vastly different vision in rejecting such ‘superstition’. The final section of this chapter will explore ghost encounters of both Han and Tibetan informants, and their responses to the Tibetan religious elite and Chinese Marxist approach to ghost beliefs. Ultimately this chapter seeks to show how

⁵⁶¹ Particularly during the Five Dynasties Period, however, cremation became a popular method of body disposal, due mainly to socio-political turmoil. People were constantly on the move and as a result many died away from home. Cremation and carrying the ashes under these circumstances was considered more appropriate than burying the dead in a foreign land and being unable to attend to their grave. Cremation continued to be practiced widely in the Song Dynasty (960-1279). See Han, C, ‘Cremation and Body Burning in Five Dynasties China’, University of Toronto & The Chinese University of Hong Kong, <http://www.cuhk.edu.hk/ics/journal/articles/v55p001.pdf> [accessed 16/11/2013], 2003, p. 14. Other types of corpse burning in China were burning of an enemy, burning of the diseased, and suicidal burning. See *ibid*, p. 7.

Tibetan Buddhism's response to the fear that ghosts symbolise – death – is the most important aspect of its adaptation to contemporary Greater China.

Mingyur Rinpoche and Chinese Ghosts

As the Karmapa has incorporated the 'higher' being of Guan Gong into Tibetan Buddhism, he and others such as Mingyur Rinpoche are also dealing with the other end of the spectrum – the demonical – and are 'exorcising' the fear of ghosts to which a number of Han practitioners are still attached. Mingyur Rinpoche has called practitioners and potential practitioners to 'move on' from their fear of ghosts, and that it is 'better not to believe in ghosts than to believe'. This does not mean he does not believe in the existence of ghosts or is discouraging practitioners from believing they exist; rather, he teaches practitioners to let go of their fear of ghosts, whether actual or manifestations of paranoia, mental illness and so forth. Only when the 'ghost of one's heart' – that is, one's fear of obstacles in life and ultimately death – is let go can a practitioner reach higher levels of spiritual attainment. To this end, he talks of the 'deathlessness' of death, that 'there's no dying to be done, only clear light'.⁵⁶²

But it is evident he has also encountered a fear of actual ghosts in Han Chinese culture, and is referring to them rather than only 'ghosts of the heart' (*xin mo/xin gui*). This was most apparent during a talk he gave at Queen Elizabeth Stadium in Hong Kong,⁵⁶³ where he was discussing fear and anxiety and how to deal with these. He asked the audience to imagine they were walking through the jungle when suddenly they encountered a tiger. At this point he stopped, realising that an urban Chinese audience would not be able to relate to an analogy involving a fear of tigers,⁵⁶⁴ and asked his Chinese translator what Hong Kongers feared most. 'Ghosts' was the answer, and so Mingyur Rinpoche continued his analogy using ghosts as the focus. He used this analogy to demonstrate how a fear of ghosts and a fear of death is based on the same delusion, and spoke about preparing for death, stating that 'the main practice of religion

⁵⁶² 'Clear light' here refers to ultimate reality which most are believed to experience briefly after death, while highly practiced individuals may remain in this state continuously. 'Clear light' is said to be experienced by yogic practitioners at the highest levels of the completion stage of meditation. Brief moments of this 'very subtle radiance' are believed to be experienced during orgasm, sneezing, fainting, and just before and after dreaming. See Cuevas, B.J., *The Hidden History of the Tibetan Book of the Dead*, Oxford, Oxford University Press 2006, p. 63, & Thurman, R A.F. (trans.), *The Tibetan Book of the Dead: Liberation through Understanding in the Between*, New York, Bantam Books, 1994, p. 131.

⁵⁶³ He spoke over three evenings at this event, titled 'Encounters with Happiness', from April 13-15, 2011.

⁵⁶⁴ Mingyur Rinpoche is from Nepal and is sometimes based in India – in both locations there are still a number of tigers left in the wild.

is concerned with death. Ignoring death produces fear; learning about death brings peace.’ He then discussed Tibetan Buddhist ways for preparing for death with confidence, including ‘dying meditation’ where one sits for three days meditating prior to death. Thus, he stated, ‘for Buddhists, death is an opportunity’ rather than something to be feared, because there is death in life and life in death; it is simply a change from one state to another and therefore death is as empty of existence as all phenomena. Because of this, he said, death is not cultural, and ‘everyone can be Buddhist because everyone dies.’

Later, at a retreat in Ma On Shan, he once again raised the topic of ghosts, asking the audience how many believed in ghosts. More than half of those present raised their hands. A little under half raised their hands when asked who did not believe in ghosts. Others remained undecided. He proceeded, ‘if you believe in ghosts it is good. If you are undecided it is also good. But it is better if you do not believe in ghosts.’ This ties in with his teaching about happiness; that all are seeking happiness whether they know it or not. All beliefs and all actions are directly or indirectly connected to the pursuit of happiness, yet the more optimal path towards obtaining happiness is not to fear ghosts.



Photo 13: Retreat at Ma On Shan, Hong Kong, where Yongey Mingyur Rinpoche Spoke (April 2011).

As this ‘exorcism’ takes place, Han practitioners are generally accepting of such teaching. Many informants had come to pity rather than fear ghosts. This may be due in part to the general increase in the influence of Chinese Buddhism in all three of the main locations under study, which evidently emphasises compassion for hungry ghosts and ultimately even the most malevolent beings,⁵⁶⁵ and – within certain modernist circles – psychologises and/or symbolises them as examples of how attachment causes misery rather than happiness, in this life as much as the next.⁵⁶⁶ Others, however, seemingly influenced by ‘popular’ cultural concepts long embedded in Han culture, such as unattended ancestor ghosts, malevolent spirits, and a general mistrust of outsiders,⁵⁶⁷ seem to hold onto this fear somewhat. Several informants experienced ghost encounters, ranging from those ‘closest to home’ (i.e. family ghosts) to those ‘furthest’ away and foreign (unidentified forces without human characteristics). Experiences of ghost possession, spirit writing, illness caused by deceased relatives and other unpleasant or frightful occurrences connected to the spirit world were retold by Han informants.

Such fear of ghosts and all manner of malevolent beings is also common among lay Tibetans and novice monks. In pre-Buddhist Tibet, following the onset of belief in a second world after death, the dead ‘became noxious or mischievous in desire to recover their own life-power or destroy that of the living.’⁵⁶⁸ Ancestral spirits (*mtshun*) were hostile to the living, and practices arose for containing the dead by closing them off in tombs.⁵⁶⁹ This belief in malevolent spirits of the dead produced anxiety, as did the notions of the soul (*bla*) being able to wander away from the body and be captured by demonic forces. To alleviate such fears, ritual specialists conducted rituals to ‘shepherd the soul’ (*bla-’gugs*) or ‘recapture it by means of a ransom’ (*bla-glud*), ‘summon its return’ (*bla-’bod*), and ‘guarantee its safe passage’ (*lam-bstan*).⁵⁷⁰ In order to become relevant to Tibetan culture, concepts associated with these pre-Buddhist beliefs about

⁵⁶⁵ As do all Buddhist traditions.

⁵⁶⁶ The difference between a traditional Chinese Buddhist understanding of ghosts and a modernist interpretation was apparent during an interview I conducted with a senior Chan master in Hong Kong, with the help of a lay assistant. The master was adamant that ghosts exist, as he said he has seen them. The assistant, following the interview, said he could put me in contact with other Chinese Buddhist monastics that follow a less traditional approach to Buddhism, and may have an alternative view on the subject.

⁵⁶⁷ This mistrust and even fear of outsiders can be seen in the way ‘barbarian’ tribes on the borderlands between China and other civilisations were portrayed as uncivilised, backward, untrustworthy and even animalistic.

⁵⁶⁸ Cuevas, B.J., 2006, pp. 31-32.

⁵⁶⁹ Ibid, p. 32.

⁵⁷⁰ Ibid.

the soul were incorporated into Buddhist death rituals. The concepts of the wandering soul (*bla-'khyams-pa*), its ritual ransom (*glud*) and its guidance (*lam-bstan*) were some of those incorporated.⁵⁷¹

In Buddhist Tibetan society, there continues to be fear particularly among lay Tibetans during the period immediately following death, of evil spirits taking hold of, and reviving the corpse as a zombie (*ro-langs*). To prevent such attacks the corpse is watched day and night, and offering rites are performed to keep demons (*bdud-gdon*) away from the corpse.⁵⁷² Further, without correct rituals conducted by monks and lamas to guide the consciousness through the *bardo* (the intermediate state between death and rebirth) there is fear that one will take birth as a malevolent spirit which can cause trouble for the living. There is also fear of lamas who forsake their bodhicitta vows through such destructive emotions as anger, causing them to become especially powerful, vengeful spirits (*gyalpo*) after death.⁵⁷³ There are many parallels between such anxiety and that in Chinese 'popular' belief associated with the soul and its potential for malevolence.⁵⁷⁴

Thus, Tibetan Buddhist beliefs and practices, especially at the lay, but also at the 'elite' level, do not divide the living from the dead as sharply as they seem to within the modernist teaching of such leaders as Mingyur Rinpoche. In all traditional Buddhist societies, as Cuevas and Stone observe, no matter how sharp a break between the living and the dead Buddhist doctrine may emphasise, 'the Buddhist dead are seldom really 'dead'.⁵⁷⁵ The realm of the dead is accessible to special individuals who 'are able to mediate between the two realms, by either journeying to the realm of the dead or otherwise making contact with the deceased and relaying their messages to those left behind.'⁵⁷⁶ Such inter-realm 'travel' provides accounts of the afterlife, and 'proof' of recompense for good and evil deeds and thus [reinforcement for] Buddhist ethical

⁵⁷¹ Ibid, p. 36.

⁵⁷² Ibid, p. 70.

⁵⁷³ Samuel, G, *Civilized Shamans: Buddhism in Tibetan Societies*, Washington, DC, Smithsonian, 1995, p. 162.

⁵⁷⁴ Ahern observed a rite based on similar beliefs in Taiwan. A string was tied around the deceased's wrist, and people attending the funeral held the string with folded paper money to avoid contamination. A Daoist priest then cut the string between each person, and these pieces of string, together with the paper money, were placed in a basket, taken away from the ancestor hall and burned to ashes. This symbolised the separation between the living and the dead, and the wish that the dead will keep away from the living and not return to make trouble. There is also fear that the corpse will transform into a dangerous and powerful monster (Tawainese - *iao-kuai*) during coffining. See Ahern, E.M., *The Cult of the Dead in a Chinese Village*, Redwood City, Stanford University Press, 1975, pp. 171-172.

⁵⁷⁵ Cuevas, B.J., & Stone, J.I. (eds.), Introduction, *The Buddhist Dead: Practices, Discourses, Representations*, Honolulu, University of Hawaii Press, Kuroda Institute, 2007, p. 20.

⁵⁷⁶ Ibid.

norms.⁵⁷⁷ Further, the physical remains of what Cuevas and Stone term the ‘remarkable dead’ (i.e. accomplished Buddhist masters, as opposed to the ‘ordinary dead’), in the form of relics (Sansk – *śarīra*, Mand – *shī li*), are another connection between the Buddhist living and dead. These relics are believed to be an actual embodiment of the individual who has been cremated, and are believed to be able to multiply, grow, answer prayers, and even move by themselves.⁵⁷⁸ They thus defy the ‘inertness and decay’ which ordinary corpses are subject to, and provide continuity between the living and dead.⁵⁷⁹

The Buddhist dead are further connected to the living through the overlap of ‘elite’ and ‘popular’ beliefs and practices concerning death. Such an overlap is present in all traditional Buddhist societies in Asia, as is an overlap of strictly Buddhist and ‘indigenous belief structures’.⁵⁸⁰ Tibetan Buddhism is no exception. As Cuevas and Stone note, it encompasses ‘the many contradictory logics’ that death brings together, such as the ‘tension between strict readings of karmic causality, according to which the individual’s own acts are solely determinative of his or her post-mortem fate’, and ‘belief in the power of ritual action’, conducted by others on the behalf of the deceased ‘to eradicate the person’s misdeeds and guide him or her to a superior rebirth’.⁵⁸¹ Moreover, although filial piety and family involvement in the workings of karma on the fate of the deceased have received less attention in Tibetan society than Han society,⁵⁸² Kapstein has observed that some ideas regarding filial piety which were carried over into Tang-dynasty Tibetan literature (if not religious practices) resonated well with indigenous Tibetan ideas on familial connections to the dead.⁵⁸³

⁵⁷⁷ Ibid.

⁵⁷⁸ Ibid, p. 11.

⁵⁷⁹ Ibid.

⁵⁸⁰ Blum, M, cited in *ibid*, p. 9.

⁵⁸¹ Cuevas, B.J., & Stone, J.I., p. 8.

⁵⁸² As Wright notes, before Buddhism arrived in China, ‘divine retribution was believed to fall on families.’ With the introduction of Buddhism came belief in karmic causation, which emphasised individual action and individual karmic retribution. These two views were eventually hybridised into the idea that ‘divine retribution works on a family basis and through a chain of lives’, a view which remained strong since the Song dynasty. See Wright, A.F., p. 105.

⁵⁸³ This is conveyed in Tibetan versions of the story of *Mulian in Hell from the Transformation Text*, which replace Mulian with Gesar and other Tibetan figures in different versions. In the Epic of Ling Gesar, in a widely circulated version of the *Dominion of Hell* from around the late eighteenth to the early nineteenth century, Gesar is shown to be responsible for his mother being in hell, because of all the warriors he killed during his military campaigns. In order to free his mother, he must first free all of these beings. Thus, in contradiction to a strictly Buddhist interpretation of karmic retribution, this popular Tibetan account portrays Gesar’s karmic history as the cause of his mother’s suffering, instead of her own. See Kapstein, M.T., ‘Mulian in the Land of Snows and King Gesar in Hell: A Chinese Tale of Parental Death in Its Tibetan Transformations’, in Cuevas, B.J., & Stone, J.I. (eds.), 2007, p. 347.

Generally speaking, however, Tibetan Buddhist tradition places much less emphasis on the importance of ancestors compared to Han society.⁵⁸⁴ For example, there is no festival such as the Chinese Ghost festival in Tibetan society, which focuses on repaying the kindness of one's deceased parents and ancestors. According to Kapstein, the only festivals in Tibetan society that have certain similarities with the Ghost festival are the annual Tibetan Yoghurt Festival (*zho ston*) and the Festival of the Descent from the Heavens (*lha babs dus chen*).⁵⁸⁵ The former marks the end of the monks' summer retreat, and, like the Chinese Ghost Festival, seeks to appease the demonic realm during the period of interaction between monastics and the lay population following the retreat.⁵⁸⁶ This festival, however, 'has none of the explicit concern for the salvation of deceased parents and lineal ancestors that is central to its Chinese counterpart.'⁵⁸⁷ Likewise, the Festival of the Descent from the Heavens does not focus on the salvation of parents 'condemned to internal abodes', but instead 'commemorates the Buddha's mission to teach his late mother in heaven and his subsequent return to the human

Kapstein believes that the tales of Mulian 'resonated well with Tibetan anxieties regarding the manner in which the merit and demerit of descendants may affect the status of ancestors', and within a 'moral cosmology' in which 'the sins of the children are visited upon the parents.' See *ibid*, pp. 362-363.

⁵⁸⁴ Chinese Buddhism in many instances thoroughly incorporated Chinese familial religion, and vice versa. Teiser notes, for example, how the spread of the ghost festival in medieval China

'signal[ed] the movement of the Buddhist monkhood into the very heart of family religion. Monks were not simply accessories to the continued health of the kinship group; their role was nothing less than essential for the well-being of the family. One way in which Buddhism was domesticated in China... was through the inclusion of monks as an essential party in the cycle of exchange linking ancestors and descendants. See Teiser, S, *The Ghost Festival in Medieval China*, Princeton, Princeton University Press, 1988, p. 197.

⁵⁸⁵ Kapstein, M.T., in Cuevas, B.J., & Stone, J.I. (eds.), p. 347.

⁵⁸⁶ *Ibid*.

⁵⁸⁷ *Ibid*, p. 348.

This concern for the salvation of deceased parents and ancestors is explicitly expressed in such Chinese Buddhist works as the Filial Piety Sutra, which is believed to be based on teaching the Buddha gave to his disciple Ananda after bowing to a pile of bones, which he said could have belonged to his ancestors or parents in past lives. He goes on to explain the ways in which our parents, especially our mothers, have given us everything and endured everything for our benefit. Thus, we must repay this kindness by being filial to them and to different family members. The Buddha provides instructions how to fulfil one's filial duties, by writing out this sutra on behalf of deceased parents and reciting it; repenting of wrong doing on their behalf; making offerings to the enlightened ones; holding the 'precepts of pure eating'; cultivating blessings; and other duties on their behalf. Fulfilling such duties will result in salvation; failing to fulfil such duties will result in being reborn in one of the hells. Moreover, the greater the number of copies one prints of this sutra, the greater the rewards promised, with the greatest being an assurance that 'all Buddhas will forever protect such people with their kindness and their parents can be reborn in the heavens to enjoy all kinds of happiness, leaving behind the sufferings of the hells.' 'The Filial Piety Sutra: The Buddha Speaks about the Deep Kindness of Parents and the Difficulty in Repaying it', <http://www.buddhanet.net/e-learning/filial-sutra.htm> [accessed 22/10/2014].

world.⁵⁸⁸ Yet despite the emphasis on ancestor veneration largely being absent from Tibetan Buddhist society, there are funerary and mortuary rites performed by, or with the aid of family members, which may ‘elevate the status of the ordinary dead, eradicating their sins and enabling their relocation to a Buddha land or other superior realm.’⁵⁸⁹ One is never utterly alone and without help in death, even beyond the 49 days in the *bardo* between death and the next life.



Photos 14 and 15: Exhumation is practiced among both Han and Tibetan in Gyalthang. Such graves are common outside the town, sometimes inscribed in both Chinese and Tibetan. Those who cannot afford such an elaborate tombstone may simply be buried under a mound of earth.

⁵⁸⁸ Kapstein, M.T., in Cuevas, B.J., & Stone, J.I. (eds.), p. 348.

⁵⁸⁹ Ibid, p. 12.

Yet the message conveyed by Tibetan religious elite reaching out to Han Chinese (such as Mingyur Rinpoche), is one which generally focuses on losing attachment to this life and embracing death. This severance of attachment conveyed by the Tibetan religious elite is aptly symbolised by Tibetan death rituals, particularly in the disposal of the body. Although merit transference and certain other practices are similar in both Tibetan and Han traditions, the conventional methods of disposing the body in these traditions could not be more different. Han traditional disposal of the body often involves washing and clothing it and preparing an expensive coffin,⁵⁹⁰ and, among other rituals, burning large amounts of spirit money and other paper possessions. In parts of South China, once the flesh has rotted away, bones are collected and stored in a clay jar.⁵⁹¹ In many traditional Tibetan disposal methods, although the body is washed prior to disposal, it is later completely eliminated. ‘Sky burial’ involves slicing the flesh, which is completely devoured by vultures. The bones are then crushed into powder. The brain may be extracted from the skull, kneaded with the powdered bones and shaped into miniature deities or stupas. The skull, unless requested by a lama or the family, may also be crushed into powder.⁵⁹² Nothing remains (apart from the miniature sculptures, which are placed in ‘pure locations’, such as trees, caves and streams⁵⁹³), and the giving of one’s own body to the vultures is considered a final act of compassion. Other forms of disposal are water burial (fish feed on the body until nothing remains⁵⁹⁴), cliff burial (bodies are put in wooden boxes high up on cliffs for birds to eat), and – usually for Rinpoches – cremation (only *sharira* remain to be collected by the faithful⁵⁹⁵). Such

⁵⁹⁰ Watson, J, ‘Funeral Specialists in Cantonese Society; Pollution, Performance, and Social Hierarchy’, in Watson, J, & Rawski, E (eds.), p. 110.

⁵⁹¹ Ibid, p. 113.

Ahern notes the obligation Taiwanese informants felt for collecting and preserving the bones of ancestors. She writes:

The picking up of the bones of the dead is said to be an unquestioned duty owed to the dead. Their plight is viewed compassionately; without help from the living they would cease to exist altogether. See Ahern, E.M., p. 204.

As Kapstein observes, as cited earlier, the practice of returning the bones of a loved one to the home of the deceased is also a common Tibetan practice. See Kapstein, M.T., in in Cuevas, B.J., & Stone, J.I. (eds.), p. 356.

⁵⁹² Cuevas, B.J., 2006, p. 72.

⁵⁹³ Ibid.

⁵⁹⁴ This form of disposal is usually reserved for those who have experienced a violent death, or for pregnant women, barren women, or lepers. See *ibid*, p. 70.

⁵⁹⁵ Burial is traditionally only practiced in Tibet for those who have died of a contagious disease or at a young age. However, in Gyalthang, burial is practiced both amongst Han and Tibetans, as well as other minorities in the town. Tibetan informants in Gyalthang were not so much concerned with the manner of disposal of the body, but rather that monastics were present to guide their consciousness into a higher realm of existence, or at least prevent it from descending into lower realms. They all stated that once the consciousness leaves the body, the body is of no importance.

forms of disposal, while perhaps having a practical as well as spiritual origin (i.e. sanitary concerns, scarce resources, etc.), are potent symbols of Mingyur Rinpoche's and other Tibetan elite's teaching about moving on from attachment, even to one's own body, and from the fear associated with death.⁵⁹⁶ They stand in stark contrast to 'popular' traditional Chinese beliefs about preserving the body, which is transformed into a spirit body in the underworld,⁵⁹⁷ as well as the ongoing obligation of descendants to visit graves, keep them clean and provide appropriate sacrifices.

In order to examine the cultural context within which Mingyur Rinpoche and other Tibetan religious elite are 'exorcising' fear of ghosts, and ultimately the associated fear of death, the section below will discuss the differences and similarities between traditional Han and Tibetan concepts of ghosts.

Traditional Han and Tibetan Concepts of Ghosts

Both Chinese and Tibetan demonologies portray malevolent and demonic beings that haunt lonely places and inhabit mountains, lakes, trees and so forth. Many of these beings have been assimilated with Indian Buddhist entities of similar character. For example, the *nagas* of India – serpent deities – were merged with the Tibetan *klu* (aquatic and subterranean spirits) and the Chinese dragon (*long*).⁵⁹⁸ The Chinese fox spirit, a very common entity in Chinese ghost stories which is often portrayed as a trickster-type sexual predator, was likely assimilated with ideas about cemetery-

⁵⁹⁶ Pabongka Rinpoche, in *Liberation in the Palm of Your Hand*, emphasises the importance of meditating on death in order to urge oneself to fervently practice the dharma. He quotes from *Engaging in the Deeds of Bodhisattvas*:

Go into charnel grounds: Other people's skeletons and my own body [a]re subject to decay.
When will I see they are the same?

See Pabongka Rinpoche, & Trijang Rinpoche (ed.), & Richards, M (trans.), p. 320.

⁵⁹⁷ During a funeral overseen by a Daoist priest, the priest recites an incantation which instructs the 'cloudsouls' of the deceased to reunite with the body. Through this rite, 'the whole person is then readied for continued existence in the heavens or for rebirth after a certain number of years, depending on the merits of the deceased.' See Bokenkamp, S, *Ancestors and Anxiety: Daoism and the Birth of Rebirth in China*, Berkeley, University of California Press, 2007, p. 189.

Yü notes the connection between current funerary practices to preserve the body intact and beliefs in ancient China about the immortality of the soul. People in the Han dynasty went to great lengths to preserve the body after death, a practice which, as Yü notes, has similarities with Egyptian practices based on the idea that the soul could not survive much longer without preserving the body. See Yü, YS, 'O Soul Come Back!' A Study in the Changing Conceptions of the Soul and Afterlife in Pre-Buddhist China', *Harvard Journal of Asiatic Studies*, vol. 47, 2, 1987, p. 380.

⁵⁹⁸ Strickmann, M, *Chinese Magical Medicine*, Redwood City, Stanford University Press, 2002, p. 64, & Cabezón, J, p. 4.

haunting jackals coming out of India.⁵⁹⁹ A whole range of other entities in both Tibetan and Chinese beliefs were merged with Indian counterparts and associated beliefs. As Strickmann notes, after the first millennium of Buddhism in China, it became exceedingly difficult to determine those entities which were of indigenous Chinese origin and those which came from Indian traditions.⁶⁰⁰ The same blurring of distinction could be seen in Tibet, where at different junctures in Tibetan history, there was an emphasis within certain Tibetan Buddhist schools on the superiority of any belief coming out of India. Thus, both Chinese and Tibetans were introduced to a new or assimilative set of frightful spirits as well as a frightful image of Buddhist hells where one could spend aeons enduring all manner of torture. They were also introduced, through dharma-teaching masters, to the antidote for molestation by such beings, and to falling to lower levels of existence.⁶⁰¹

However, unlike in Tibet, where pre-Buddhist ancestral cults largely gave way to the practices and beliefs of Vajrayana Buddhism, Chinese Buddhism, particularly at the popular level, incorporated a deeply-rooted practice of ancestor veneration. Syncretic⁶⁰² Chinese beliefs arose concerning the passing of the soul into the next life, which encompassed both pre-Buddhist and Buddhist ideas about the afterlife. Reincarnation, for example, became the responsibility of the tenth and last yamen-court in hell (*diyu*),⁶⁰³ and ancestor veneration was assimilated with the Buddhist doctrine on transmigration. This assimilation is seen in the Chinese Ghost Festival, where offerings are made to please the ancestors and to appease ghosts.⁶⁰⁴ As Teiser notes, although such ritual performance seems contradictory, ‘it would appear that the rituals of the ghost festival embrace not an illicit pairing of opposites but a continuum defined by ghosts at one end and by ancestors at the other.’⁶⁰⁵ Through the offerings made, the ‘dead’, that class of beings whose vitality is disturbing but never in doubt, are moved

⁵⁹⁹ Strickmann, M, pp. 262-264.

⁶⁰⁰ Ibid, p. 68.

⁶⁰¹ Strickmann, M, p. 68.

⁶⁰² I use the term ‘syncretic’ loosely here. As Sharf has pointed out, the idea of ‘syncretism’, in relation to the mixing of Buddhism with other traditions, is often employed based on the assumption that there were fully-fledged religious systems prior to the introduction of Buddhism. For example, scholars have often referred to the ‘syncretic’ mixtures of Daoism-Buddhism, Shintoism-Buddhism and Bon-Buddhism. However, all of these traditions postdate the introduction of Buddhism, and only became defined as separate traditions when Buddhism appeared on the scene. Further, they have borrowed heavily from Buddhist doctrine, rituals, iconography and institutions. See Sharf, R, *Coming to Terms with Chinese Buddhism: A Reading of the Treasure Store Treatise*, Honolulu, University of Hawaii Press, 2002, p. 16.

⁶⁰³ See Cohen, M, ‘Souls and Salvation: Conflicting Themes in Chinese Popular Religion’, in Watson, J.L., & Rawski, E.S. (eds.), p. 192.

⁶⁰⁴ Teiser, S.F., *The Ghost Festival in Medieval China*, Princeton, Princeton University Press, 1988, p. 219.

⁶⁰⁵ Ibid.

from the threatening category of ghost to the honoured position of ancestor.’⁶⁰⁶ Ghosts are dangerous because they are ‘a species in transition’, and have not yet been assigned their next rebirth.⁶⁰⁷ Ancestors, on the other hand, are the dead who are incorporated back into the community ‘after they have joined the group of ancestors stretching back seven generations.’⁶⁰⁸ They have ‘completed the journey from life, through death, to rebirth and are welcomed back into the family as its immortal progenitors, creators and maintainers of the values necessary to sustain the life of the kinship group.’⁶⁰⁹

However, although ‘syncretic’ beliefs concerning ancestor veneration and the Buddhist doctrine of transmigration mitigated some contradictions, ties with the family and the continuance of an immortal soul that ancestor veneration ultimately promotes appears problematic to the Buddhist notion of *anātman* (no self). The debate on the immortality of the soul, between gentlemen who opposed or supported Buddhism in the sixth and first half of the seventh centuries, reveals the differences between the pre-Buddhist Chinese conception of the soul and the Buddhist idea of ‘no-self’. As Liebenthal notes, the only concept of the soul discussed in early Buddhism was that of the *ātman* (self) ‘and its substitutes defined as that entity which lasts during transmigration’;⁶¹⁰ the concept was rejected as heresy in Indian Buddhism. The *ātman*, as Liebenthal notes, was seen by the Chinese to be replaced by the concept of *vijñāna* (consciousness), despite the fact that *vijñāna* was not considered a soul in India. Although the distinction between ‘soul’ and *vijñāna* is apparent to anyone with knowledge of even fundamental Buddhist texts, those not acquainted with these theories believed there must be some entity transmigrating, and added the character for ‘soul’ (*shen*) to the Sanskrit *vijñāna*, which was wrongly translated *shi* (识), and the transmigrating entity became known as ‘*vijñāna*-soul’ (*shen shi*, 神识).⁶¹¹

Thus while Chinese folklore conceived of Buddhist *pretas* (‘hungry ghosts’) as actual souls suffering because of their misdeeds, Liebenthal insists, according to Buddhist theory, that these beings are not souls. They cannot be souls because ‘they are...fully

⁶⁰⁶ Ibid.

⁶⁰⁷ Ibid.

⁶⁰⁸ Ibid, p. 220

⁶⁰⁹ Ibid, pp. 220-221.

⁶¹⁰ Liebenthal, W, ‘The Immortality of the Soul in Chinese Thought’, *Monumenta Nipponica*, vol. 8, no. ½, 1952, p. 337.

⁶¹¹ Ibid.

Even the consciousness (*vijñāna*) is considered impermanent in Buddhist doctrine, and the goal is to eliminate its working. See Stcherbatsky, T, *The Soul Theory of the Buddhists*, Delhi, Bharatiya Vidya Prakashan, 1976, p. 2.

developed persons with body and soul as mortal as human beings are’, and thus they ‘do not last during transmigration, but constitute a state into which one is incarnated.’⁶¹² A *preta* is not the soul of a person, as is a ghost, and thus cannot manifest in another body as do the fox-spirits of Chinese folklore. According to Liebenthal, all the beings which appear in Chinese ghost stories, ‘though sent by karma or a karmic judge’, are ‘Chinese spirits whatever garments they wear.’⁶¹³ They derive from *shen-ming* or *shen* (or *gui*⁶¹⁴), ‘not from any Indian Buddhist type of soul.’⁶¹⁵

As Yü observes, this fusion of the Chinese notion of ghosts with the doctrine of transmigration gave rise to a belief in purgatory and ‘the necessity of performing religious rites that could help the wandering, suffering ghost to achieve early salvation.’⁶¹⁶ Such ritual action, based on the notion of an immortal soul, is directly in contradiction to the Buddhist rejection of the existence of a soul.⁶¹⁷ Thus, according to Yü, while the practice of ‘soul masses’ which was included in traditional Chinese funeral rites, served to ‘strengthen the Confucian value of family cohesion, it did violence to the integrity of Buddhist doctrine.’⁶¹⁸

This idea of the continuation of a self-identity is a central source for feelings of anxiety related to the deceased. One common anxiety for Han is whether the deceased will remember them or not. As Bokenkamp notes, there was a common concern among Han that the deceased would ‘go off to Paradise and somehow forget them’,⁶¹⁹ and thus become more distant and unhelpful to their descendants, or even harmful.⁶²⁰ Ancestors, while often portrayed as benevolent, can also cause trouble from beyond the grave for descendants if they are not cared for with appropriate sacrifice, if their graves or tablets are not kept in order, if descendants behave against their wishes, or sometimes for no reason other than some ancestors are ‘mean’.⁶²¹ Reprisals may come in the form of

⁶¹² Liebenthal, W, p. 337.

⁶¹³ Ibid.

⁶¹⁴ By the fifth century people had ceased to distinguish between the terms *shen*, *shenming*, and *gui*. See *ibid.*

⁶¹⁵ Ibid. As Liebenthal notes, *vijñāna* (bhava), the third member in the chain of causation, is not a soul, but the ‘five constituents of a person (*pañcaskandha*) which are partly material and partly not’, or a ‘Karma-clot’...an assemblage of causes and conditions which have not yet born fruit.’ See *ibid.*, p. 336.

⁶¹⁶ Yü, C.F., p. 143.

⁶¹⁷ Ibid.

⁶¹⁸ Ibid.

⁶¹⁹ Bokenkamp, S, p. 46.

⁶²⁰ Ibid, p. 51.

⁶²¹ Ahern, E, p. 184. Ahern’s research was carried out in Taiwan, and may not be representative of Chinese understanding of ancestors in all Chinese societies.

illness, death of children, lack of familial harmony and so forth.⁶²² Anxiety is especially keen, however, in the first few days following death, when one could be ‘contaminated’ by ‘pollution’ associated with the *po* souls⁶²³ still hanging around the body.⁶²⁴

Those deceased whose descendants do not care for them or who have suffered violent, untimely deaths are particularly feared. They are outside normal familial relations, and society itself, and are thus potentially dangerous. Several informants related this fear. For example, a Christian-Buddhist⁶²⁵ informant (not Tibetan Buddhist) in Hong Kong said there had been a fire at the present location upon which the Wan Chai Jockey Club is built, where he works as a security guard. Many people were killed, and now, according to him, there is a mass grave of unburied bodies whose ghosts may cause trouble. As evidence for the presence of ghosts there, he said that a tank full of water at the site dried up in one day (i.e. the ghosts drank the water).⁶²⁶ As they have not been ritually taken care of, they are outsiders who are potentially harmful. Similarly, a Chinese Buddhist mother who attended the 2011 celebration of Buddha’s Birthday at the Hong Kong Convention and Exhibition Centre showed me several amulets she had bought at the event, which she was going to send to her daughter studying in Canada to protect her against ‘Canadian ghosts’, which she believed may cause trouble for her daughter as Canadians do not employ Buddhist death rituals.

It is this anxiety of the unknown, the different and the outsider which the ghost so strongly represents in Han Chinese culture. This is well demonstrated by Philip Kuhn’s book *Soulstealers: The Chinese Sorcery Scare of 1768*.⁶²⁷ At a time when China’s

⁶²² During the third century, anxiety influenced by dislocation due to war likely influenced the belief that the unfed dead would join forces with the subterranean demon hordes, and cause all kinds of problems such as disease amongst the living. Moreover, the unfed dead could bring complaints before the subterranean bureaucracy about being abandoned by family members, which could result in reprisals against offending members. See Bokenkamp, S, pp. 56-57.

⁶²³ There are generally considered to be seven *po* souls and three *hun* souls within the body. The former are earthly *yin* souls which go into the grave with the body, while the latter are *yang* souls of the ancestral tablet. See Cohen, M, p. 182.

⁶²⁴ Watson’s informants in a Cantonese village in the New Territories describe death pollution as ‘killing airs’ (Cant - *saat hei*, Mand – *sha qi*), which are believed to be released at the moment of death, like an ‘invisible cloud’. These airs contaminate everyone and everything in the vicinity of the corpse, and thus village men especially avoid touching the corpse, for fear that their male essence (*yang*) will be depleted. Corpse handlers in this village had become outcasts, and were believed to be in danger of contracting leprosy, syphilis and other diseases. See Watson, J.L., ‘Funeral Specialists in Cantonese Society; Pollution, Performance, and Social Hierarchy’, in Watson, J.L., & Rawski, E.S. (eds.), 1988, p. 113.

⁶²⁵ He related that he follows both faiths.

⁶²⁶ This same informant told of being attacked by a ghost near some graves where he once practiced *gongfu* with his friends. His friends advised him not to practice there as there might be ghosts hanging around. He laughed and boasted that he would kick any ghost that attacked him. Soon after he fell ill and became very weak for several weeks.

⁶²⁷ Kuhn, P, *Soulstealers: The Chinese Sorcery Scare of 1768*, Cambridge, Harvard University Press, 1990.

economy was rapidly growing and village networks subsequently expanding, the difference between poor rural areas and wealthier urban areas became more pronounced. Urban dwellers began to become wary of outside drifters, particularly beggars, beggar-monks and masons, who were suspected of stealing the souls of individuals by cutting the tip of their cues or casting spells on them using charms.⁶²⁸ Mass hysteria spread rapidly along the increasingly integrated village networks to twelve provinces, and resulted in the arrest, torture and even killing of those suspected of involvement in sorcery.⁶²⁹

While obviously such ‘witch hunts’ have long since receded into the history books,⁶³⁰ fear of, or at least anxiety concerning the outsider and stranger still prevails in Han Chinese culture, and is most aptly embodied in the image of the ghost, and the Chinese word for ‘ghost’ – *gui* (Cant – *guai*). *Gui* can be used as a general classification for all manner of spirit-beings, including malevolent ones, such as demons, as well as the dead who are not ritually catered for.⁶³¹ The use of the word ‘*guai*’ in Cantonese society reveals this anxiety of, and distaste for the unknown and unfamiliar. This is seen, for example, in the colloquial terms ‘*guai lou*’ (ghost man, i.e. foreigner), *sui guai* (someone with a devilish character), *kong guai* (an insulting term for poor people), *yun guai* (a persistent, unwanted romantic interest), *si fat guai* (put politely, someone who curries favour with those in power to his own advantage), and *gu hon guai* (a stingy person), among many others. When one cannot recall something, the term ‘*mat guai*’ is often used, which literally translates as ‘what ghost’, and serves as a fill in for that which is forgotten or for that of which one is unsure. Thus, the foreign,⁶³² the evil, the lowly, the pesky, the conniving, the mean, and the uncertain, distant and forgotten are

⁶²⁸ Ibid, pp. 1 & 31.

⁶²⁹ Ibid, p. 41.

⁶³⁰ Unless, for different reasons, we understand the Cultural Revolution and even more recent campaigns on the mainland as ‘witch hunts’.

⁶³¹ One’s own ancestors can even be considered *gui*, although *shen* is more often used for the spirit of ancestors, as well as deities. See Poo, M, ‘The Concept of Ghost in Ancient Chinese Religion’, in Lagerwey, J (ed.), *Religion and Chinese Society: Ancient and Medieval China*, The Chinese University of Hong Kong & École française d’Extrême-Orient, 2004, pp. 176-177.

Strickmann notes the generic use of the word *gui*:

Though elite upper-class accounts of Chinese culture would have us believe that the only attitude ever manifested towards one’s own dead was solemn respect, the evidence shows otherwise. There is no basic terminological distinction between them and demons. In addition to being known as *wu* (thing), ghosts and demons alike are generally called *gui*, and the boundaries between the two groups seem to be quite fluid. See Strickmann, M, pp. 71-72.

⁶³² Although some Hong Kongers use the more politically correct ‘*ngoi guok yan*’ (foreigner) around foreign friends, the term ‘*guai lou*’ (ghost man) is not considered derogatory by either Chinese or most foreigners.

all reflected in Cantonese through the medium of *guai*. And mass hysteria about ghosts, while evidently not leading to any ‘witch hunts’, is not entirely absent from a modern Chinese society such as Hong Kong. For example, Grant Evans, in his article ‘Ghosts and the New Governor: The Anthropology of a Hong Kong Rumour’, writes about a rumour which rapidly spread around Hong Kong in November 1992 concerning the presence of ghosts in two television commercials.⁶³³

Such fear of ghosts and the unfamiliar is certainly not absent from Tibetan society, as mentioned above and in Chapter Six. Spirits are believed to inhabit mountain passes, rocks, rivers and lakes, trees and just about every feature of the Tibetan landscape, and many are believed to have unpredictable behaviour. As Tenzin Rinpoche notes, in even one corner of a room there are believed to be thousands of spirits.⁶³⁴ However, while all spirits could have been a human being in a past life (whether in their immediate past life or distant), according to a strictly Buddhist understanding of karma, death and rebirth they generally do not have an inherited personality from their past life, as they ‘inherit’ only a karmic imprint, not a soul in the ‘popular’ Chinese sense of the term.⁶³⁵

As mentioned earlier, there is the concept of a ‘soul’ or ‘life force’ (*bla*) in Tibetan tradition, which can wander away from the body even while one is alive, and which

⁶³³ One of the commercials showed mainland Chinese children, hands on each others’ shoulders, playing trains. The other showed mainland children playing a traffic light game. What seemed like light-hearted advertising soon became the centre of a ghost rumour. People believed one of the children in the line was a ghost, and that this ghost had caused the death of several of the other children, and the serious illness or disappearance of the others. ‘Evidence’ for the rumour was that she was ‘bleeding’ from the mouth, and the children’s feet appeared to not touch the ground when they moved (suggesting they had all been turned into ghosts).

The rumour lasted about a month, and was discussed in every media outlet, with everyone from professors at the Chinese University of Hong Kong to a famous *hei gong* (Man - *qi gong*) master discussing the advertisement and whether there were ghosts involved. Evans observes that these anxieties emerged just after Chris Patten’s speech on October 7 about the reunion of Hong Kong with the mainland. Hong Kongers were anxious about their freedoms and other implications of the reunion. The image of the mainland children, according to Evans, served as a receptacle for the projected fears of Hong Kongers about that which was unknown, unfamiliar and uncertain. See Evans, G, ‘Ghosts and the New Governor: The Anthropology of a Hong Kong Rumour’, in Evans, G & Tam, M, (eds).

While this rumour came and ‘went’ in the timeframe specified by the author of the article, there are still Hong Kongers whom I have spoken to that believe the children in the advertisement were indeed ghosts, and are still missing. As Evans notes, the children were all accounted for on Hong Kong television to quell the rumours. Evidently, those who continue to believe in the rumour either did not see the television program exposing the rumour, or choose not to believe it.

⁶³⁴ Tenzin Rinpoche does not portray these spirits as malevolent, however. In fact, he encourages the reader to recognise their connection with the place one is sharing with them, and to ‘befriend’ them. See Tenzin Rinpoche, *Healing with Form, Energy, and Light: The Five Elements in Tibetan Shamanism, Tantra, and Dzogchen*, Ithaca, Snow Lion Publications, 2002, p. 48.

⁶³⁵ Categories of Tibetan spirits were generally assimilated into the Buddhist category of ‘*pretas* who move through space’. As *pretas*, they are not shadows of their former lives, but beings in their own right, with only the karmic imprint of former lives. Some of these categories of Tibetan spirits are *tsen*, *gyalpo*, *shindre*, *jungpo*, *mamo*, and *theurang*. See Patrul Rinpoche, p. 75.

requires ritual attention to return to the body,⁶³⁶ and guidance through the *bardo* after death.⁶³⁷ Moreover, although the consciousness or ‘soul’ of most individuals is believed to take on a new life form after 49 days in the *bardo*, some may get stuck in this in-between, purgatory state and roam about as wandering ghosts.⁶³⁸ Yet, as one informant emphasised, the pre-Buddhist Tibetan concept of the ‘soul’ may serve as a metaphor to help Tibetans understand the concept of the consciousness. An independent soul cannot transmigrate according to a strict interpretation of Buddhist theory. Tibetan informants, lay or otherwise, felt this would be fundamentally antithetical to Buddhist teaching on the nature of ‘no self’. The Tibetan religious elite are likewise careful to only speak of consciousness (Tib - *rnams-shes*, Sansk – *vijñāna*) when discussing liberation or ‘transference’, which is in accord with the Buddhist denial of soul and personality.⁶³⁹ At the same time, they accept what are likely semi-indigenous ideas of one or more souls (*bla*) and the vital principle (*srog*), which they tie in together. Most often, however, *bla* is used to describe a soul that is a part of the body itself, especially the breath, while *srog* is linked to blood.⁶⁴⁰ According to such accounts, it is the consciousness (*rnams-shes*), not the ‘soul’ (*bla*) which is subject to the laws of karma, passes through the *bardo*, is judged in hell, and returns at rebirth.⁶⁴¹ There may indeed be Tibetan folk who are not educated about the nuances between a ‘soul’ and the ‘consciousness’, and therefore believe a soul survives transmigration in some form. Tibetan informants, however – perhaps due to their educated, middle-class background – spoke of ghosts more within a strictly Buddhist worldview.⁶⁴²

Some Tibetan spirits are predisposed to help people, especially those which have become enlightened, but many others are believed to be unpredictable and/or or malicious. Yet the idea of troublesome ancestors is not as prevalent within a Tibetan Buddhist understanding. In a traditional Chinese worldview, while the ghost of an

⁶³⁶ This idea of the soul being able to depart the body is also found in Chinese popular belief. The spiritual components of the body were believed by many to be plural, which could ‘forsake the person piecemeal at moments of illness, stress, or distractions, as they did totally at death.’ Rituals were required to ‘retrieve’ or ‘call back’ the soul into a receptacle of clothing. See Bokenkamp, S, pp. 66 & 69.

⁶³⁷ Cuevas, B.J., 2006, p. 32.

⁶³⁸ Sogyal Rinpoche, p. 295.

⁶³⁹ Stein, R.A., p. 226.

⁶⁴⁰ Ibid.

⁶⁴¹ Ibid, p. 227.

⁶⁴² As Cuevas observes, Tibetan beliefs and practices regarding death and the afterlife derived from two models. One was the Indo-Buddhist doctrines ‘drawn from both the philosophical and esoteric traditions, with emphasis on correct knowledge and psychophysical control of the dying process, post-mortem transition, and rebirth.’ The other was based on Tibetan beliefs about the ‘persistence and vulnerability of the soul (*bla*) and the pollution and potential danger of the corpse.’ The ‘*bardo* ritual’ (*bar do cho ga*) used for Tibetan Buddhist funerals, emerged around the late fourteenth and early fifteenth centuries, which were a hybridisation of these two models. See Cuevas, B.J., 2007, pp. 300-301.

ancestor that is not one's own can make trouble for the individual, one's own ancestors are potentially more dangerous should they be upset. Unlike in Han Chinese tradition, Tibetans do not repay 'debt' to their parents through ancestor worship, although rituals for transferring merit after death may be considered a type of filial repayment. And the concept of 'family karma' is not as strong as in Han society – i.e. that one receives punishment in this life or the next for the deeds of one's family in the past or present.⁶⁴³ According to a strictly Buddhist interpretation, all of life's suffering is caused by one's own individual karma and has no relation to the deeds or misdeeds of family.

Mingyur Rinpoche, the CPC, and Frightful Ghosts

The Tibetan religious elite teaching the dharma among Han, such as Mingyur Rinpoche, understand that certain 'superstitions' must be shed if practitioners are to progress spiritually. They acknowledge that some ordinary Tibetans are also 'superstitious', including novice monks. A lay Tibetan in Gyalthang spoke of being fearful of ghosts as a child monk, and he and his friends would recount ghost stories to scare each other. Looking back on his youth, he believes he was 'superstitious' and naïve. He recounted the story of Milarepa's encounter with the last and most fearful ghost – that of the heart. Milarepa, he said, told us 'if you have superstition' you will see ghosts. 'If you believe they exist they exist and if you do not believe they exist they do not.'⁶⁴⁴ This was reiterated by many informants, both Han and Tibetan. In other words, they exist like any sentient in the relative sense (i.e. as dependent beings), but do not exist in an absolute sense (i.e. as independent bodies). Yet if one 'has superstition' they appear to exist in an absolute sense and are truly frightening.

⁶⁴³ In the Chinese courts of the dead, the accused may be held responsible for wrongs committed by his/her family. Moreover, the accused can 'offload' this responsibility to family members he/she deems more directly responsible for the offence. Thus, illness or death among the living family might be tied to judgements of the deceased in the courts of the underworld, over which the living have no control. See Watson, R.S., 'Remembering the Dead: Graves and Politics in Southeastern China', in Watson, J.L., & Rawski, E.S. (eds.), p. 131.

⁶⁴⁴ Patrul Rinpoche retells the story of Milarepa's emancipation from all demons:

The Ogress of the Rock told Jetsun Milarepa:
If you don't know that demons come from your own mind,
There'll be other demons besides myself! I'm not going to leave just because you tell me to go.
and Jetsun Mila said:
Take a demon as a demon and it'll harm you;
Know a demon's in your mind and you'll be free of it;
Realize a demon to be empty and you'll destroy it. See Patrul Rinpoche, p. 304.

There are interesting parallels between the Tibetan elite's 'taming' the 'superstitious' mind, and the CPC's efforts to eradicate 'superstitious' ghost beliefs. Particularly interesting is a 1961 CPC publication – *Stories About Not Being Afraid of Ghosts (Bu Pa Gui de Gushi)*.⁶⁴⁵ This publication contains stories collected from Ming and Qing sources, written by the Confucian elite. The stories tell of brave men (mostly literati) who do not fear ghosts and prove the foolishness of those who do. Through their wit and intelligence, they scare away the ghosts, kill them, trap them, or, mistaking natural phenomena such as the wind for ghosts, become enlightened upon discovering it was all in their mind. It is plainly clear why the CPC should select such stories, and the introduction to the book makes it clear. Like the characters in the stories, we must free ourselves from the 'ghosts' of our mind – that is, our fears. These fears are those superstitions which have bound the Chinese people for millennia, and which have been proven fallible by science. 'There are no such things as ghosts', the introduction confidently states. Yet they appear real to those who are afraid. In the same manner, the author continues, we must fight the other ghosts or 'paper tigers' – imperialism, reactionism and revisionism, which breathe much hot air but are powerless against the forces of Communism.⁶⁴⁶

Evidently some of the content in this introduction would now hold little relevance. 'Imperialism' for one, seems hardly a 'ghost' any longer, or at least not in the same threatening sense in which it was once perceived. But 'superstition' is still a 'ghost' the CPC has failed to eradicate. Just as the Tibetan religious elite are finding, ghosts are still very real, frightful beings for a number of Han. Unlike the Tibetan religious elite, however, the CPC adamantly denies their existence. For a Buddhist, Tibetan or otherwise, the denial of the existence of ghosts altogether is rare, at least within a traditional Asian Buddhist context.⁶⁴⁷ Unless one reconfigures the six levels of cyclic

⁶⁴⁵ Anonymous, *Stories About Not Being Afraid of Ghosts*, 1961.

⁶⁴⁶ Ibid, p. 1. The book was published after the People's Daily (*Renmin Ribao*) released an article titled 'Comrade Mao Tse-tung on 'Imperialism and All Reactionaries Are Paper Tigers', in which Mao is quoted:

All reactionaries are paper tigers. In appearance, the reactionaries are terrifying, but in reality they are not so powerful. From a long-term point of view, it is not the reactionaries but the people who are really powerful. See *ibid*, p. 3.

⁶⁴⁷ Cuevas and Stone observe, however, within the modern period, that the doctrine of no self (*ānatman*) has been taken as the 'sole standard for judging what is authentically Buddhist.' Both Asian and Western Buddhist modernists have used this concept, since the late nineteenth and early twentieth century, as a 'symbolic opposition to Christian hegemony', and it has been used to dismiss 'the God of Western religion, along with the embarrassing ghosts and spirits of Buddhism's own 'superstitious' past'. See Cuevas, B.J., & Stone, J.I., p. 5.

existence as a symbolic or psychological ‘map’ of life and its sufferings (interpretations which are common within Buddhist modernism), it is hard to see how a Buddhist could deny the existence of ghosts. As many informants stated, ‘if gods exist, then ghosts must exist’. They represent the other end of the spectrum of existence, and the higher realms would make little sense without the lower. Moreover, they represent the depths to which one can fall through delusion, as opposed to heights one can reach (bodhisattvahood/buddhahood) with the right practice, and are vital as an example for humanity to steer clear of the same ignorance. Thus, many Han informants saw them as symbolic as well as actually existent, yet the power of symbolic representations was often drawn from a belief in their actual existence.

The CPC publication states that people in the past were unable to comprehend natural and social phenomena without science, and hence imagined all manner of beings that were not real.⁶⁴⁸ For Mingyur Rinpoche, they are real. Yet to perceive them as ‘really real’ – that is, as fully independent beings that can make trouble for anyone at will without any karmic cause⁶⁴⁹ – is a misconception. A daily devotional booklet distributed by Tergar Asia (a sub-group of Mingyur Rinpoche’s Tergar International) describes seven apparent obstructions in life, including that of demonic forces, and the correct way to perceive them.

When I’m plagued by god-like forces or demonic interference, I do not drive them out with rites and spells; the thing to chase away is the egoistic thinking built up on the idea of a self. This will turn those ranks of maras⁶⁵⁰ into your own special forces; when obstacles arise, sheer delight!⁶⁵¹

None of my Han informants, and only two Tibetan informants followed such a trend; most saw Buddhist ghosts as really existing.

⁶⁴⁸ The introduction to the publication explains the widespread belief in ghosts in Chinese society as follows:

When man was not yet able to comprehend natural and social phenomena in the light of science, he inevitably had all sorts of superstitions. The more so because the reactionary ruling classes fooled and frightened the people with ghosts and gods so as to strengthen their rule. See *Stories About Not Being Afraid of Ghosts*, 1961.

⁶⁴⁹ It is not uncommon for even non-religious Chinese to rhetorically question what action in their past life is causing them suffering in the present life. Yet there are also many instances where such people believe they are suffering unfairly (i.e. without any karmic cause).

⁶⁵⁰ *Maras* are a class of devils who bring disease. They were assimilated into the Chinese worldview as *mo*, a group rather than individual beings with ‘well-defined personalities and mythologies.’ From the fourth century on they also figured in Daoist scriptures as ‘devil-kings’. See Strickmann, M, p. 63. In Tibetan Buddhism *maras* were assimilated with *bdud*. While monks and lamas do employ rites for the exorcism of such beings, losing ‘egoistic thinking’ is often portrayed as the most effective method for

As throughout Mingyur Rinpoche's teachings, there is no denial here of the existence of 'god-like forces or demonic interference' – only the illusion that they and the self exist in the concrete way they appear to exist. In the same manner in which these ghosts exist – in an illusory manner – so it is with death.

When it's time to leave this body, this illusionary tangle, don't cause yourself anxiety and grief; the thing that you should train in and clear up for yourself – there's no such thing as dying to be done. It's just clear light, the mother, and child [,] clear light uniting; when mind forsakes the body, sheer delight!⁶⁵²

Here Mingyur Rinpoche parts sharply from the CPC's attack on superstition. For the latter, the 'ghosts' which they wish to destroy are those 'superstitions' which are keeping a true Chinese Marxist state from forming to its full potential. For the former, the ultimate 'ghost' that must be destroyed is the illusion of a self, the destruction of which will bring about a destruction of all other 'ghosts', including the most fearful of all – death.⁶⁵³

And it is the question of death which the CPC, for those who follow Tibetan Buddhism, cannot solve. When one is done fighting all the 'paper tigers' of this life, the finality of death comes to all, and to face that without fear is not an opportunity many would pass up. It is unsurprising, then, that Marxist books are of little interest to many Han these days. Instead spiritual books such as *The Tibetan Book of Living and Dying* (*Xizang Sheng Si Shu*), by Sogyal Rinpoche, are popular.⁶⁵⁴ Neither is it surprising that all my informants, save two,⁶⁵⁵ said they believe ghosts exist. The CPC has failed to convince most of them that ghosts are a figment of the imagination. On the other hand, such Tibetan teachers as Mingyur Rinpoche do not appear to have completely conquered the

dealing with such beings (whether real or psychological) by modernised monastics reaching out to both Western and Chinese societies.

⁶⁵¹ Tergar Asia, 'Seven Delights', *Daily Prayers*, p. 30.

⁶⁵² Ibid, p. 31.

⁶⁵³ Patrul Rinpoche explains the purpose of the rite of Chö (*gcod*), through which the obscuration of ghosts ('real' or imagined) is destroyed:

The so-called spirits to be destroyed in Chö are not anywhere outside. They are within us. All the hallucinations that we perceive in the form of spirits outside ourselves arise because we have not eradicated the conceit of believing an 'I' and a 'self'. As Machik says: The tangible demon, the intangible demon, the demon of exultation and the demon of conceit – [a]ll of them come down to the demon of conceit. See Patrul Rinpoche, p. 303.

⁶⁵⁴ As Smyer-Yü observes, Sogyal Rinpoche's *Tibetan Book of Living and Dying* continues to be a Buddhist bestseller in China. See Smyer-Yü, D, 2012, p. 185.

⁶⁵⁵ Interestingly, these two were Tibetan.

fear of ghosts among a number of Han practitioners, as explored among Han informants below.

Fear and its Antidote

The vast majority of informants, and all Han informants, believed ghosts exist. While acknowledging that belief in ghosts assumes only a marginal part of their faith, they felt that as a Buddhist one must believe ghosts exist. Yet, while all believed one should have compassion for, rather than fear ghosts (i.e. hungry ghosts or *pretas*), who wander about and suffer in utter misery, the stories told by some informants of their own encounters with the spirit world were somewhat frightening. Those told by Han informants were about ghosts ‘closest to home’ – i.e. family ghosts, or ancestors. Others were about alien, unidentifiable spirits or ‘forces’. As will be seen, the less related the stories were to the family, the less identifiable and stranger the ghosts become. Yet it is interesting that only in the following story, seemingly about a family ghost, does the ghost take any real action, while the others only appear frightening. This story was told by a Han Nyingma practitioner, an artist in his early forties in a village outside Beijing.

My relative died some time ago, and a family member invited a deity to the funeral. As I was sitting in my chair during the funeral, I felt some energy ‘freeze’ me and I couldn’t speak. I felt worse than if I was going to die. Everyone was moving around me and I couldn’t move. Later my uncle told me it was punishment for my wrong deeds and a warning to change my ways. I don’t know what this power was, but I think it may have been a ghost (Field notes, 14/06/2011).

This informant said he has always feared ghosts, and believed there are many types of ghosts. After coming to Tibetan Buddhism he understood these to belong to one of the six levels of existence. He now understands better that karmic consequences of wrongful actions can cause one to become a ghost in the next life. His master has taught him not to be afraid, yet he is still ‘psychologically impacted’ by them. This ‘psychological impact’ became most apparent at his relative’s funeral, a time during which, in Han traditional belief, the deceased’s potential for causing illness and other maladies for the family is especially potent. In this case, the informant was gripped by a paralytic fear that was ‘worse than death’. His Tibetan master has tried to teach him not

to fear ghosts, but such fear has long been imbedded within his mind, it seems, through the belief that family ghosts can check up on, and cause trouble for the family from beyond the grave. While this informant did not specifically mention his deceased relative as the culprit for his 'paralytic' state, it is quite possible, at his relative's funeral, that it was indeed his relative's ghost who caused him trouble.

This informant's wife, as mentioned in Chapter Six, did not believe in the many ghost stories from her northern hometown about lake and wolf spirits. She felt they were imaginative creations drawn from people's fear. When she became a Tibetan Buddhist, she believed in ghosts for the first time, but not as malevolent beings like her husband. She chided her husband somewhat for his 'superstition'.

Even if you are not Buddhist, ghosts will not harm you. If you don't have anything they can use, they will not harm you. Only if you owe them something there may be trouble (Field notes, 14/06/2011).

This couple provides an interesting example of the varying perspectives Han Tibetan Buddhist informants held before following Tibetan Buddhism, and the degree to which these perspectives were carried over into their new faith. On the one hand is the 'rational' wife, who follows much the same rhetoric as expressed in the CPC's publication mentioned earlier – that ghosts are the product of people's imagination projected onto their surrounding environment. On the other hand is the 'superstitious' husband, who previously followed 'popular' or 'folk' Buddhism, for whom ghosts are fearful beings, especially those of the family, to whom one owes a multitude of obligations.

Other informants experienced the psychological impact of family ghosts, but not in such a malevolent way as the above informant. For example, a shop owner in Beijing, a Nyingma practitioner in her early forties, related the following encounter with her deceased aunty.

One night I met my deceased aunty. She came to me and walked with me on a street alongside which were old-style, single-storey buildings. Some people were walking fast, others slow, and I felt scared (Field notes, 08/06/2011).

She did not elaborate on this account, but rather continued soon after to describe 'wandering ghosts' (i.e. hungry ghosts) as those who suffer much, and cannot drink water as it will transform into something terrible like blood or puss, and rice may

become something inedible like stone or fire. They suffer and are not harmful beings, she concluded, and thus require our compassion and pity. Again, the family ghost in her story, while not causing illness as in the previous informant's story, does cause her to fear, or at least draws her into a fearful setting, seemingly in the past, where people walk around her like wandering ghosts. Here there appears to be an overlap of popular Han belief in family ghosts with the Buddhist notion of the hungry ghost (*preta*). The former gives recognition to the appearance and character of the deceased, so that the informant recognises the ghost as her aunty. The latter may exist amongst us, but they are largely void of the characteristics of their former life. They may have bloated stomachs with tiny heads and even tinier mouths with which they cannot eat, among a host of other distorted characteristics.⁶⁵⁶ They are thus beyond human recognition and to the untrained mind they appear to be without personal histories.⁶⁵⁷ While hungry ghosts are not to be feared, according to this informant, family ghosts may well bring with them a certain fear. The hungry ghost is so far away and distant from the happenings of this informant's life, while deceased family members may be all too close for comfort.

It is interesting that the above informant, apart from her discussion of ghosts, spoke of Tibetan Buddhism in a largely demythologised manner. For example, as related in Chapter Four, she said that while she had been administered blessed pills and herbs by her Tibetan master, she hadn't experienced any 'magical' healing when she was ill; instead, she said when one is sick one should simply 'endure it' and take some natural remedies to recover. Likewise, she spoke of the Tibetan deity of wealth, Dzambhala, as being symbolic of the dharma and how we are in need of his 'riches' – i.e. virtues and immaterial truths. Thus, in these and other instances, she followed a demythologised Tibetan Buddhism for its mainly soteriological power, while still drawing on both ancestral and strictly Buddhist narratives about ghosts which fall outside this demythologised framework.

In other cases, informants' experience with ghosts was less personal, and did not involve family members, but a spiritual power that may or may not have been attributed to ghosts. Whatever the power was, however, it created a general sense of fear. A sub-

⁶⁵⁶ During the first half of the sixth century a comprehensive translation of *preta* lore into Chinese was undertaken. The work explained who becomes what *preta* due to which actions, and lists 36 types of *preta*. It is believed to be the most comprehensive work on *pretas* in Buddhist literature. See Strickmann, M, p. 66.

⁶⁵⁷ However, stories of masters meeting hungry ghosts in *preta* realms often reveal their histories, and they visibly embody the result of their negative karma – e.g. a bloated stomach with a tiny head and mouth, symbolising their unquenchable desire and greed in a past life.

editor of a magazine in Beijing, in his late forties who followed the Karma Kagyu tradition told the following story.

I have always believed in ghosts, not just after becoming a Tibetan Buddhist. I had an experience once in my village when I was twelve. The villagers used to put out plates of flour for spirit writing. Once I was playing around by myself, and used a chopstick to write in the flour. Suddenly I felt a power control my writing, holding my hand as I wrote. I can't explain what it was. There was some power, but I can't say for sure whether it was a ghost or not. All I know is it can't be explained scientifically (Field notes, 07/06/2011).

He continued that he does not know exactly where ghosts fit in Tibetan Buddhism, as his master has never talked about this. But he knows Chinese popular culture in general emphasises a tradition of malevolent ghosts. Many practitioners related that ghosts are not a central theme in the teachings of lamas passed down to Han practitioners, and their masters did not talk about them in any detail. It appears, then, in the absence of detailed discussion concerning the place of ghosts within Tibetan Buddhism, that Han informants may retain a belief in spirit-writing 'ghosts' (or unexplained spiritual powers) and family ghosts, alongside the more Buddhist notion of hungry ghosts. According to some informants, there are so many types of ghosts, demons, spirits, and all manner of malevolent beings that they leave the understanding of demonology to the lamas. Thus, there were few informants who spoke of a clear distinction between family ghosts or hungry ghosts or other spirits, and usually classified them all as *gui* (ghosts).⁶⁵⁸ In the absence of specific teaching on those ghosts which do not appear to fit in any Buddhist category, some fear remains.

The ambivalence which the above informant assigned to ghosts in general, and his uncertainty about whether to follow the experiences in his village – where rites such as spirit writing gave voice to the spirit world – or the 'scientific rationalism' which he has acquired, especially upon arriving in Beijing, seems to reflect his own ambivalent identity caught between two worlds. He is a sub-editor of a major geographic publication in Beijing, and frequents the Tibetan areas, where he met and began to follow his Tibetan master. He spends his time between urban Beijing and the rural Tibetan areas, and, while he sees Tibetan Buddhism primarily as a philosophy for living

⁶⁵⁸ They would not call their deceased relatives *gui*, but when asked if they had encounters with *gui*, they would always start by saying they had, and then proceed to talk of an encounter with a deceased family member.

and a way to alleviate suffering, he also remains open to the possibility of supernormal occurrences that are outside the 'rationalist' narrative of the state and demythologised accounts of religion.

A graduate law student at Peking University who followed the Nyingma tradition also told of an encounter with a ghost whose ambivalence defied classification and has left him with a fear of ghosts, even as a Tibetan Buddhist practitioner.

When I was seven or eight, I encountered a ghost. I saw a white shadow fly across the room towards me. This experience made me feel a little scared of ghosts, because their appearance is not usual. They are all part of the six levels of existence. Those that wander have many wishes unfulfilled (Field notes, 07/06/2011).

As with the sub-editor mentioned above, the being this informant encountered was featureless, although it was visible rather than invisible. Its power did not take control of him and it did not attack him. The only impact was a resounding fear of ghosts that still has not left him. For him, all categories of ghosts can fit in the 'hungry ghost' level of the six levels of existence, and those that wander share the same space as us without our knowledge.

That ghosts can be everywhere was acknowledged by almost all informants. Whether informants feared them or not, however, depended on the degree to which they emphasised the role of lamas as those with control over such forces. A middle-aged artist from a village outside Beijing who followed the Karma Kagyu tradition talked of the omnipresence of ghosts being matched by the omnipresence of Tibetan monks and lamas.

Ghosts exist because of fear. They are alive but do not have a body like us. Every particle contains 84,000 lives inside, and Shakyamuni Buddha could see them all. So everything and everyone can contain ghosts and all types of beings if you can see them. Illnesses, such as cancer and SARS, for example, are also evil spirits. But just as ghosts are everywhere, so is the Buddha. When Shakyamuni was fighting evil ghosts (*mo gui*) [*maras?*] they said they would be everywhere people are through their grandsons, great grandsons, and so on. Buddha said he would be everywhere they are and everywhere they are not.

Now there are many monks and lamas who spread Buddhism and fight these evil powers (Field notes, 13/06/2011).

As mentioned in Chapter Four, this informant spoke of the injustice of the 1989 Tiananmen Square incident, for which he was confined to his university campus for some time. By coincidence there was a Buddhist temple adjacent to his campus, which he was allowed to visit, and where he took an interest in Buddhism and learned about the life of Shakyamuni. This religion and the story of Shakyamuni provided such a compassionate comparison to the brutality of the state in which he had believed for so long. He related that he had previously been a committed atheist and Communist, but now felt betrayed, and saw that what he himself had previously classified as ‘superstition’ was in fact the path to enlightenment, while state ideology was a source of darkness and ‘evil power.’ For this informant, there is nothing to fear because the antidote for him is more powerful and more infinitely omnipresent than the pervasive presence of multitudes of ghosts, including the ‘ghost’ of the ‘spectral’ state.

Another artist from the same village, a Nyingma practitioner in his early fifties, who had suffered from his own ‘personal ghost’ of alcohol addiction, agreed that ghosts can be everywhere and in everything, but the antidote of the dharma is more powerful.

I used to think belief in ghosts was superstitious, but now I know where they are. Some are in the heart. Some are those you cannot see. For example, drink is a type of ghost. It made my relationship with my wife very bad and caused many problems for my teeth. Ghosts reflect the troubles of the heart. They also exist in the six levels. We can’t see them, but humans have many limitations. A dog can hear much better than a person. In the same way, we may not see ghosts because this is beyond our ability but it doesn’t mean they don’t exist (Field notes, 13/06/2011).

As mentioned in Chapter Four, faith in his master and religion has helped him conquer the ‘ghost of the heart’ which held him captive through alcohol. For him, the master is omnipresent not only outside his body but within, and acts as an internal exorcising power removing obstacles and ‘ghosts of the heart’. This confidence stems from Tantric practice, in which one’s guru is considered a kind of ‘fourth jewel’; one takes refuge both in the Three Jewels (Buddha, Dharma, and Sangha) and one’s guru, whose mind

and being is visualised as becoming one with the practitioner.⁶⁵⁹ In Tibetan Buddhism, taking refuge in the Three Jewels is called ‘external Refuge’, while taking refuge in ‘the guru as the root of all blessing, the yidam⁶⁶⁰ as the root of all attainment, and the dakini⁶⁶¹ as the root of all activity’ is the internal form of refuge. The ‘secret form of Refuge’ involves taking refuge in one’s guru alone, who is perceived as ‘the embodiment of the Buddha, the Dharma, the Sangha, and the gurus, yidams, and dakinis, the embodiment of all these in one form, possessing all of their qualities.’⁶⁶² The student thus sees his/her guru as the Buddha, and seeks to emulate his/her speech, actions, thought, and so forth, so that he/she becomes inseparable from him/her. For those able to reach a clear visualisation of this process through meditation, the serene image of the guru resides within, freeing one of obscurations including ghosts.

Yet for others, ‘the ghost of the heart’ is not so easily exorcised, and provides breeding ground for other ghosts to appear and create obstacles for him/her, or, as related in the following story by a Bhutanese lama in Hong Kong, even possess him/her.

Quite a few practitioners at this centre believe in ghosts. One fourteen-year-old girl was brought to our centre possessed with a ghost for two years. We did many rituals to get rid of this ghost. Usually the ghost releases the possessed much quicker, but this case was complicated. We put the Buddha’s teachings [scriptures] on her head, chanted the [lineage] masters’ names and the names of the deities, and burned white sesame seeds, and she breathed in the smoke. Eventually it released her (Field notes, 03/05/2011).⁶⁶³

Perhaps in an effort to assure me, a Western inquirer, that Tibetan Buddhism is not ‘superstitious’, he added that this girl’s ‘possession’ could also be attributed to psychological problems rather than actual ghost possession. However, he acknowledged that lay Tibetans may also experience such encounters with ghosts, but they understand karma better and thus would not fear indiscriminate attacks against the living as Han

⁶⁵⁹ For an overview of guru yoga and the spiritual intimacy between guru and practitioner, see Patrul Rinpoche’s chapter, ‘Guru Yoga, entrance-way for blessings, the ultimate way to arouse the wisdom of realization’, in *The Words of My Perfect Teacher*, New York, Harper Collins, 1994.

⁶⁶⁰ Roughly translated ‘meditational deity’.

⁶⁶¹ Female tantric figures which are a manifestation of wisdom and enlightenment.

⁶⁶² Kalu Rinpoche, ‘Taking Refuge’, <http://www.kagyud.org/kagyulineage/buddhism/bec/bec04.php> [accessed 31/01/2013].

⁶⁶³ This is one of two accounts I heard from lamas/practitioners in Hong Kong about treatment for ghost possession.

apparently do.⁶⁶⁴ Even for lay Tibetans, ghost attacks are seen as repayment for their past lives' karma and not random acts of aggression. As opposed to popular Han fear of ghosts, the Tibetan religious elite (if not the lay) talk of being joyful at such attacks, because one's karmic debt is being repaid and less will remain in the following life. A stay-home Tibetan monk (*zai jia heshang*) in Dechen who followed the Gelug tradition (mentioned in Chapter Six) emphasised this point.

If we are really Buddha's sons we will be happy when we see ghosts/demons, as bad things help compensate what we have done in past lives. There are two ways to 'trick' ghosts [i.e. to frighten them away]: 1. To employ exorcist rituals, and 2. To feel happy when you see them. The first method is for the majority of Tibetans, while only a few practitioners at the highest levels can achieve the second method. Normal Tibetans chant Guru Rinpoche's mantra to make ghosts leave, while at a higher level one has compassion for all beings including ghosts. (Fieldnotes, 11/07/2011).

In the reasoning of karmic theory, all and everything that is going to happen to one in this life is largely sealed by one's own past actions, and accepting these events without fear is the solution to the malevolence of ghosts. Therefore, in light of this long karmic history that recedes infinitely into the past, one should 'let life happen as it happens' rather than being gripped by the fear of life's obstacles such as ghosts. Moreover, as Mingyur Rinpoche stresses, one should use these fears to one's own advantage, to realise that they are as empty as all thoughts which arise. He uses the example of the panic attacks he experienced as a child which he later employed in his practice to rid himself of this anxiety. This is very much in line with Tibetan Buddhist teaching on 'making one's foe a friend', which is clearly seen in the way the wrathful deities and fierce Tibetan spirits were transformed into protectors of the dharma and sworn by oath not to harm sentient beings, or even became enlightened.

⁶⁶⁴ Many Han informants said they had a vague understanding of karma before turning to Tibetan Buddhism, but their belief in karma became much stronger after they began practicing. For example, one informant noted that although both of his parents were Communists, his father would warn his aunty not to be too harsh when talking to her nephews or nieces, or she would bear the consequences in her next life. Such general belief in karma amongst Chinese is widespread because of Buddhist influence, as well as the ancient Chinese idea of 'sympathetic resonance', as explored in Sharf's book *Coming to Terms with Chinese Buddhism: A Reading of the Treasure Store Treatise*, Honolulu, University of Hawaii Press, 2002.

However, according to a Chinese Tibetologist I interviewed at the University of Hong Kong, karmic theory is generally much stronger amongst Tibetans, for whom it is not a vague notion of cause and effect, but the basis around which they shape all their ideas about birth, life, death and rebirth (Field notes, 05/04/2011).

Certainly this is the teaching the Tibetan religious elite wish Han practitioners to follow, and while many informants have followed this teaching to varying degrees, it seems difficult for some to completely break with a worldview in which anxiety of ghosts has been so strong. Interestingly, many informants stated that they believe now in the existence of ghosts more than they did before practicing, and this may include the various Chinese ghost categories from old stories, although not all feared them. A writer from Beijing in his mid-forties who followed the Nyingma tradition said the following about his renewed belief in ghosts due to Tibetan Buddhism.

I used to think belief in ghosts was superstitious. Now they are part of my belief. Before I didn't know what ghosts were but now I understand more. There are many different types of ghosts, as is recorded in different Chinese ghost stories in the famous *Liao Zhai Zhi Yi* (聊斋志异).⁶⁶⁵ The descriptions in these stories are too real to be made up. In Buddhism the way you think affects how you perceive ghosts. It also depends if the ghost owes you something. I have a feeling there are many types of ghosts, but I have never seen them (Field notes, 09/06/2011).

This informant had not encountered ghosts, but his belief in ghosts, including those from old Chinese ghost stories, solidified after turning to Tibetan Buddhism. The CPC's denial of the existence of ghosts using the stories mentioned earlier in its 1961 publication has not deterred this informant from finding his own stories by Pu Songling to 'prove' they do exist. Pu Songling was a writer during the early Qing dynasty (1644-1912) who, despite repeated efforts, failed to pass the official Qing examinations.⁶⁶⁶ His ghost stories could thus have been written in defiance of the official examination system and the literati in general, who often dismissed such stories as nonsense. He may have also kept a more open mind to the supernatural than some of the literati⁶⁶⁷ – hence the added difference between the stories selected by the CPC, and these by this informant. Yet this informant does not fear ghosts, whether they are of 'popular' Han or Tibetan Buddhist origin. During his travels in Tibet, as related in Chapter Six, this informant visited many of the local temples dedicated to various mountain gods, and said that he

⁶⁶⁵ This collection of ghost stories was written by Pu Songling in the early Qing Dynasty. The English translation is *Strange Stories from a Chinese Studio*, London, Penguin Classics, 2006.

⁶⁶⁶ Although Pu Songling never passed the official examination, his comprehensive collection of strange tales and his contribution to Chinese society was heralded after his death. Although he was poor and not part of the literati, he was a prolific writer. See Forward by Cass, V, in Songling, P, & Giles, H (trans.), *Strange Tales from a Chinese Studio: The Classic Collection of Eerie and Fantastic Chinese Stories of the Supernatural*, North Clarendon, Tuttle Publishing, 2010.

⁶⁶⁷ Ibid.

could feel their presence and believed these mountain gods actually exist. Therefore, despite his high education and wide exposure to Chinese Marxist claims that belief in ghosts is superstitious and a hindrance to ‘progress’ (he related that he was formerly committed to Marxist ideology), he buys into both Chinese, and to an extent, Tibetan traditional narratives about ghosts and the spirit world.

Others, particularly of a rural background, were more inclined to have believed in ghosts prior to their faith in Tibetan Buddhism, but now have an even stronger belief in their existence. This was the case for a Nyingma artist in his mid-forties in a village outside Beijing.

I believed in ghosts before following Tibetan Buddhism. I grew up in a village where it was normal to believe in ghosts, but now I believe even more strongly. I have never seen ghosts. They don’t have a body...My master doesn’t teach about ghosts (Field notes, 12/06/2011).

Above I have examined types of ghost experiences and/or perceptions of ghosts among Han practitioners, and where they perceive these to fit within Tibetan Buddhism. I have also examined how practitioners negotiated their beliefs with the ‘rationalism’ of the state and demythologised accounts of religion, and how some of them ultimately rejected this ‘rationalism’. The ambivalence of many of the above practitioners, caught between ghost beliefs and this ‘rationalism’, was due in part to their own experiences with ghosts, and to the fact that their Tibetan masters do not teach in detail about ghosts, which leaves a doctrinal gap which they can fill with their own understandings drawn from ‘popular’ Chinese traditions, combined with what they have learned from either Chinese or Tibetan Buddhist accounts.

This ambivalence is not confined to Han practitioners only; below I briefly examine the views of some Tibetan informants to provide contrast with the above Han informants, as well as to reveal some of the parallel negotiations that are taking place amongst both Han and Tibetan practitioners.

Impact of ‘Rationalism’ on Tibetan Ghost Beliefs

While all Han informants firmly believed in the existence of ghosts and thus defied CPC claims that they do not exist, two Tibetan informants showed signs of influence from Chinese Marxist ideology concerning ghosts. A lay Tibetan Buddhist in his forties

from Ganzi echoed almost identically the rhetoric propagated in the CPC's publication mentioned earlier (*Stories About Not Being Afraid of Ghosts*).

Ghosts are in your heart and of your heart [i.e. mind]. They don't exist externally. The six levels [of existence] are psychological stages [of life] and are part of a 'cultural heritage'. They don't exist in reality but help to warn us to live better lives. In my view 'non-violence' is not just about not killing, but doing no harm to society. Moreover, we need to know how to make harmony between different levels of society [using] the six levels [of existence as a guidepost]. There are many categories for ghosts in Tibetan culture as in Han culture, but I think these are just useful for helping us understand harmony with others and within our hearts...*People project their imagination onto the natural environment and create ghost stories* (Field notes, 28/06/2011 – emphasis added).⁶⁶⁸

For this informant, it appeared not to matter whether ghosts exist or not (he believed they do not, just as the six levels of existence do not); rather, their importance lies in their metaphorical power as symbols of what humanity can fall to in its ignorance. Likewise, descriptions of the six levels of existence portray the various advantages and disadvantages of being reborn in these realms (e.g. while one may even be reborn as a god, one may become so enthralled by the pleasures of 'godhood' that one becomes lazy to practice the dharma, thus causing one eventually to fall even to the hell realms), to show us that all sentient beings are caught in the cycle of suffering, and that the only way to escape is by rising above the delusion that causes this suffering. Real ghosts, for

⁶⁶⁸ Elsewhere, Tibetans have used more critical language to express their views concerning beliefs in spirits and other entities, and even the fundamental principles of Tibetan Buddhism. For example, one Tibetan writer in the Xining newspaper *Morning Conch* wrote an article titled 'Blood-Letting that will Overcome the Tumour of Ignorance: Against the Old Decaying Propensities', in which he stated the following:

The ancient religion of worldly deities which trusts in the guidance of the *lha*, *klus*, *gnyan*, *btsan*, etc. of this world; the belief in deities, mo-divination and astrology; the use of curses, hexes and spells; and the teachings of no-self and karma, etc. – such views by which the *lha* and *'dre* claim ownership of us – are the old propensities about which we are talking. Old propensities have formed a dense foundation for our every last action and the society in which we find ourselves today, our personal lives, and life in general. They have repeatedly cast darkness, which blocks the youth who have ideas. See Hartley, L, 'Inventing Modernity' in A Mdo: Views on the Role of Traditional Tibetan Culture in a Developing Society', in Huber, T (ed.), *Amdo Tibetans in Transition: Society and Culture in the Post-Mao Era*, PIATS 2000: Tibetan Studies: Proceedings of the Ninth Seminar of the International Association for Tibetan Studies, Leiden, Brill, 2000, pp. 19-20.

this informant, are produced when we lose sight of this picture, and divert to our own imaginings projected onto our environment.

The only other Tibetan to hold similar views was a self-professed ‘atheist monk’, mentioned in Chapter Six. He seems to have been influenced by both the ‘rationalist’ discourse of the West as he encountered it in America, and a similar yet more aggressive anti-superstitious discourse in China. Despite his self-acclaimed ‘atheism’, however, he seemed torn between two worlds. He made the following statement about his understanding of ghosts.

I don’t know if ghosts exist. I have never experienced them. We can see the animal and human realm, but the other realms we can’t, so I’m not sure. Milarepa said if you believe something exists it does, and if not, it doesn’t. Perhaps 60% of the six levels are psychological, and 40% reality. Ghosts are maybe an illusion. But you hear some stories that are hard to explain scientifically. For example, in my village there was a story about a man who went missing. His brother set out to look for him, and found him amongst some rocks, where a *btsan* [rock demon] was trying to catch him. His brother ran to protect him and became very ill. There are also those who die, travel through hell and come back with messages [Tibetan - *delok*]. That’s something I can’t explain (Field notes, 08/07/2011).

Although this informant was not quite as adamant as the aforementioned Tibetan informant that ghosts certainly do not exist, his message about ghosts and other ‘supernatural’ beings is essentially the same. Whether unexplainable spiritual beings exist is of little importance; it is far more important to work on reforming one’s mind and society, and seek liberation for others and oneself. He appears to wish to strip away the ‘superstitious’ and ‘magical’ and return to Shakaymuni’s teaching in its ‘original’ form. Thus, he continued, in relation to monks and lamas exorcising ‘ghosts’ into effigies, he believes such practices are not from Shakyamuni’s teachings, but may be the result of Guru Rinpoche’s adaptation of local cultural practices from either India or Tibet to spread the dharma. Later Buddhism, he noted, was influenced by many local Indian religions, as well as local Tibetan practices when it entered Tibet. He takes no issue with these adaptations, but seems to suggest that we, as increasingly ‘rational’ beings, may profit more from the ‘original’, ‘non-superstitious’ teachings of the Buddha than later adaptations meant for different people in a different stage of history.

Tibetan Buddhism seems the most traditional of the various Buddhist traditions, in that many teachers pass on the same traditional rituals, chanting, and literal interpretations (often simultaneously accompanied with symbolic interpretations).⁶⁶⁹ Yet some, such as this monk, are seeking to discover a more ‘back to basics’ form of Buddhism, stripped of ‘superstition’.⁶⁷⁰ It is interesting that no Han informants took such an approach; some even believed that apparent ‘superstitious’ Tibetan Buddhist practices are part of a higher form of wisdom that are only categorised as ‘superstitious’ by those with a limited understanding. For such informants, Tibetan Buddhism and all the tradition it entails represents the highest and most infallible form of Buddhism there is. This may be a case, as was discussed in Chapter Six, of the Tibetan seeking to become more ‘modern’, while the Han seeks to escape the modern by immersing him/herself in ‘tradition’ largely no longer available within his/her own society.

Most Tibetan informants, however, unlike those mentioned above, firmly believed in the existence of ghosts. A journalist from Ganzi related the following accounts of ghost encounters.

I once went to my friend’s house one night and drank, and went to sleep sitting upright. I woke at 2 am and saw something sitting beside me. I asked my friend about it the next day, but he said many people who come to his house have this experience...Another time my father’s house burned down when my father was two or three. Later my father’s father died, and then his mother. After their deaths, the local government wanted to build a school on the land where the house had been. My father agreed. Once the school was built, a teacher lived on the campus. She became very afraid, as she heard things rattling at night in the building. She moved out and stayed with a different family every night to avoid going back to sleep in the school. Finally the school invited a *tulku* to investigate, who discovered that the protector deity of the house hadn’t left, and he performed a ritual to return peace there (Field notes, 02/07/2011).

⁶⁶⁹ The Dalai Lama and other Tibetan religious elite who have reached out to the West have called into question the cosmology presented in the Buddhist scriptures, among other aspects of Buddhism which seem to contradict scientific findings. Other Tibetan religious elite who have less contact with Western practitioners, on the other hand, seem to hold to a more traditional Buddhist worldview.

⁶⁷⁰ This informant is the only monk I encountered who doubts the literal interpretation of such fundamental elements of Tibetan Buddhism. All other lamas and monks I spoke to said a symbolic interpretation of the six levels of existence is another way the model of cyclic existence can be interpreted, yet these levels also actually exist (that is, in a relative sense as all and everything ‘exists’).

In the first account above, the informant wakes up, apparently sees a ghost, and goes back to sleep as if nothing has happened. His friend the next day shrugs the appearance off, as something quite usual when guests come to his house. Although the next account conveys a sense of fear, the *tulku* brings the desired peace to both the protector deity and the teacher, so that fear is quickly abated. This informant went on to talk of his cousin who regularly sees ghosts and points them out to him quite casually, while he himself cannot see them. Fear is again absent from this account. This informant also pointed out the difference between fear-inducing Han ‘ghost culture’ and belief in hungry ghosts.

If there are deities there are also ghosts. Sometimes they come out to see if you are scared or braver than them. Buddhist texts don’t really emphasise a ‘ghost culture’, but talk of hungry ghosts. People may imagine different types of ghosts, but I think these images belong to folk culture. Hungry ghosts are those who have done evil in a previous life (Field notes, 02/07/2011).

Unlike the previous Tibetan informants mentioned above, this informant does not think a belief in hungry ghosts arises from an overworked imagination. Other ghost categories from ‘folk’ belief, however, could well arise from such delusion. He thus defies the CPC’s assertion that ghosts do not exist at all, and he or his family have directly experienced the ‘supernatural’ to ‘prove’ that this assertion is false. However, it is correct in regards to popularly imagined ghosts that haunt people without karmic connection to the individual.

Other Tibetan informants followed a similar line to the above practitioner, defying years of propaganda which denies the existence of ghosts and the supernatural in general. For some, such as one graduate student in Gyalthang, resistance to this propaganda seemed part of their efforts to strengthen their Tibetan identity. This graduate student said the following.

I don’t believe ghosts are just a perception of the mind, although I have never personally experienced them. In Chinese history textbooks, they may say ghosts are just a perception of the mind, but I don’t agree (Field notes 04/07/2011).

This is the same student mentioned in Chapter Six who sees the revival of Tibetan culture as taking place over the internet through blogs and forums run by Tibetans in locations where Tibetan culture is more ‘pure’ and less influenced by other minority

cultures/modernisation. For her, it seems the rejection of the ‘superstitious’ label is part of her wider efforts to resist assimilation by ‘regaining’ what it means to be ‘Tibetan’. Ironically, Gyalthang has long been at the crossroads of many ethnic cultures and religious traditions; her own family, she said, visits family tombs during the Qingming (‘Tomb Sweeping Day’) festival to burn paper money and worship their ancestors – a practice likely inherited from Han Chinese living in the area in the Qing dynasty. Thus, ‘regaining’ one’s Tibetan entity in such an environment may be more about constructing a new identity based on Tibetan culture outside the region. Nevertheless, such construction or reconstruction of identity may set one against state efforts to ‘rationalise’ its citizens.

Conclusion

Mingyur Rinpoche and other Tibetan religious elite are giving answers to the ultimate questions for Han practitioners where Chinese Marxist and other materialist ideologies are seen to have failed. Whether one approaches ghosts as actually existent beings or metaphors of one’s own fear, or both (as is taught by most if not all Tibetan religious elite), once these are conquered one is liberated. The ultimate ‘ghost’ is death, and the ultimate liberation from this ‘ghost’ is enlightenment, which is possible once one’s fear of death is vanquished. This is well demonstrated in the story of Milarepa, widely considered to be Tibet’s most famous yogi. Initially he feared death because of his use of sorcery to destroy those who stole his inheritance. After repenting of these actions and resolutely setting his mind on liberation, he is believed to have eventually reached the highest levels of spiritual practice, and no longer feared death, having destroyed the final ‘ghost of his heart’. This powerful story of Milarepa was often cited by many informants, both Han and Tibetan, as an example of how the ‘ghost of the heart’ needs to be destroyed above all other ghosts.

Many informants spoke of great uncertainty about, and fear towards death before practicing Tibetan Buddhism. One informant in Hong Kong said he roamed aimlessly about China at one stage, with no direction in his life and with many questions on his mind. He was especially fearful of death after his friends were killed in a plane crash, but now feels joy in life and more comfortable with death. Another informant in Hong Kong said that as a Chinese Buddhist she felt afraid of going to hell, but then she read

how Milarepa overcame all delusions and fear of death, and she now feels much more confident about facing death as a Tibetan Buddhist practitioner.

The CPC continues to rally citizens to abandon superstition, yet its substitutive worldview is one grounded in the building of a nation which, despite its accomplishments in the world economy and in improving the quality of life of many of its citizens, will leave one empty-handed at death. Similarly, materialist values in all three locations under study do not provide answers to the big questions. Mingyur Rinpoche was quick to employ an analogy using the stock market when in Hong Kong, to describe the antithesis to the practice of meditation – the stock market constantly changes, whereas buddha nature does not. Many, if not most Hong Kongers invest in the stock market, often for quick gains. Mingyur Rinpoche's message is that such investments will fluctuate and fail you. Even if you succeed on the stock market, such success will not be worth much at death.

Yet, despite Mingyur Rinpoche's and other Tibetan religious elite's presentation of a way to conquer ghosts, not all Han informants have managed to conquer their fear completely. While all believed that lamas have power to conquer all demonical forces, a number still carried psychological fear of deceased family members or spirit beings originating from 'popular' culture. The degree to which fear persists among Han informants seems indicative of the depth of the psychological impact informants felt from past experiences. Some Tibetan informants believed ghosts are figments of the imagination or that some may be imagined while others are real. Whatever the case, they too strongly believed that lamas are able to conquer ghosts (whether real or psychological) and death, and outmatch those who propagate materialist ideologies which cannot provide real answers. The superiority of Tibetan Buddhism in conquering both the unseen and seen is perhaps best summed up in the story below told by a Han-Mongol practitioner (mentioned in several preceding chapters), related to him by his root lama.

According to the story, a group of Red Guard soldiers in Tibet during the Cultural Revolution encountered terrifying ghosts. They dropped their rifles and ran away as the ghosts pursued them. These soldiers later met a lama, told him their story and sought advice. He told them 'if you believe ghosts exist they exist; if you do not believe they exist they do not.' They replied 'we have seen them and they do exist', and the lama

could not persuade them otherwise. They then opened fire on this lama, but the bullets exited his body without harming him.

In this story, Communist ideology, despite its insistence that ghosts do not exist, is proven wrong, and by the most committed of Communists. At the same time, the story shows up the inferiority of Communism to Tibetan Buddhism. The soldiers are so gripped by their fear that they see the ghosts in all their terrifying appearance, and won't be persuaded by the lama, who has overcome all fear of ghosts, and understands that they only appear terrifying if one's own mind is untamed. They, who have fought so passionately for what they believe, are unable to perceive these ghosts for what they really are, while the lama in his wisdom sees all levels of existence as equal and without distinction. This informant then drove home the point that Tibetan Buddhism is superior to Communism by relating how the lama was riddled with bullets by Communist soldiers yet was unharmed. Thus, when met with such supernatural power, Communist ideology, not ghosts, is full of 'hot air' and even its bullets have no sting. Evidently this informant was referring to modern China's most brutal historic period, and did not mention the current tensions for obvious reasons. Yet such stories continue to set lamas up as agents of power and wisdom which cannot be found in the Communism of the Red Guards or the continued anti-superstition discourse of the current regime.

Not only is Tibetan Buddhism seen to be 'magically' superior, but morally, sometimes in the face of mindless brutality. A lama in Gyalthang told a story about lamas begging Red Guard soldiers to beat them more so they could generate greater compassion. This story was told in response to a question I posed about whether it was not natural that high-level practitioners meditating in caves would achieve higher degrees of compassion than those harassed by urban life. He disagreed, retelling this story to demonstrate that when we are faced with the greatest adversity we may achieve even higher levels of compassion if we approach adversity with the right mind. Tibetan Buddhism is thus seen as the moral antidote to extremes of hate, anger and prejudice. Again, this story was drawn from the Cultural Revolution, and not from the current period, and obviously the wrongs committed during the Cultural Revolution are decried by the vast majority of Chinese society, including the government.

It has not been the aim of this thesis to examine the current human rights situation in Tibet, and indeed no informants made reference to the current political situation, apart from the occasional comment about the ongoing suffering of the Tibetans. Nevertheless,

these stories affirm for informants that, in the face of adversity, whether it is in the form of Red Guards of the Cultural Revolution or disagreeable circumstances resulting from modern urban life, Tibetan Buddhism provides responses that appear contrary to human nature.⁶⁷¹ Rather than striking back, it encourages one to perceive one's enemy as a close spiritual friend and even one's mother in a past life – teaching which cannot be found in any materialist ideology. According to my informants, one can be a good citizen of China, to be sure, without following Tibetan Buddhism – by working towards a harmonious society and building the country with respect towards one's fellow citizens and those in power (as demonstrated in Chapter Four). Yet in such stories of compassion as noted above, an end is found to all selfishness which breeds cycles of anger, hatred and prejudice. As is stated in *The Thirty-Seven Practices of Bodhisattvas*:

Even if others cut off one's head when one is utterly blameless, taking upon oneself all their negative deeds by the power of compassion is the bodhisattva's practice.⁶⁷²

From the perspective of those who are firmly committed to and believe in such an aspiration – and this commitment and belief runs deeper than haunting ghosts of the past – when one's own life is no longer held dear, what ghosts remain?⁶⁷³

⁶⁷¹ However, the Dalai Lama and other Tibetan religious elite have said that non-violence and compassion are in fact natural responses. Violence, hatred and anger, on the other hand, are a result of delusion, and are thus contrary to what is natural. This is why, according to the Dalai Lama, we are shocked by violence and it receives a place in headline news – because it is shockingly contrary to human nature. See HH The Fourteenth Dalai Lama Tenzin Gyatso, & Hopkins, J (trans., ed.), *How to See Yourself as You Really Are*, New York, Atria Books, 2006, p.12.

⁶⁷² Zangpo, N, *The Thirty-Seven Practices of Bodhisattvas*, [booklet, bibliographic information anonymous], p 28.

⁶⁷³ One meditative practice called *gcod*, involves visualising the offering of one's body parts to demons to be devoured. The purpose of this practice is to lose attachment to the body, and it is a powerful antidote to fears of ghosts and obstacles in life in general.



Photo 16: Puja at a Taoyuan (outside Taipei) Karma Kagyu centre in Taiwan. The Rinpoche (far right) was visiting from Ladakh, and frequently travels between Ladakh and Taiwan.

Chapter Eight

Conclusion

Introduction

All forms of religiosity must adapt to become relevant to new cultural settings. As Tibetan Buddhism has spread in Greater China in recent years, this adaptation has become increasingly creative, resulting in negotiation and contestation over how this adaptation plays out, and what constitutes an ‘authentic’ adaptation that does not alter the ‘core’ message of Tibetan Buddhism. The preservation of ‘authentic’ Tibetan religion and culture is likely to continue to be a key consideration among the Tibetan religious elite as Tibetan Buddhism further adapts to Greater China. As Zablocki has pointed out, there is some tension among the Tibetan religious elite over the degree to which Tibetan Buddhism should adapt to new cultural settings, and how much of its traditional elements should be retained. Zablocki observes that this tension is due in part to the fact that Tibetans are trying to preserve ‘the unbroken Tibetan lineage of authentic Buddhist insight’, perceived to be under threat due to Chinese occupation; on the other hand they know that their message will be better understood and received with certain adaptations, even as it is imagined that this ‘unbroken lineage’ is ‘independent of cultural values’.⁶⁷⁴ Thus transnational Tibetan Buddhist groups either alter certain forms to make Tibetan Buddhism relevant to new converts, or create ‘entirely new practices and institutions.’⁶⁷⁵

Zablocki and other authors, in their book on the global spread of Buddhism – *Transbuddhism: Transmission, Translation, Transformation* – question what the cultural adaptation of Buddhism means for its ‘authenticity’.⁶⁷⁶ Are these adaptations producing something so ‘otherly’ that they are seen, by ‘traditional’ Asian Buddhists, to threaten the essence of Buddhism, or do they stem from the apparent innovative nature of Buddhism? This thesis has sought to understand the creativity of the Tibetan religious elite and Han practitioners in adapting Tibetan Buddhism to contemporary Greater China, and the wide range of factors that are influencing this process. At the

⁶⁷⁴ Zablocki, A, 2009, b, pp. 43-44.

⁶⁷⁵ Ibid, p. 43.

⁶⁷⁶ Bhushan, N, & Zablocki, A, in *ibid*, pp. 5-10.

same time, these adaptations are not entirely new, often having precedents in both Tibetan and Chinese history. Therefore, speaking of ‘authenticity’ or ‘inauthenticity’ becomes a complicated matter. At times the adaptation of Tibetan Buddhism to different cultural settings in general has been initiated by renowned Tibetan religious figures such as the Fourteenth Dalai Lama and recently the Seventeenth Gyalwang Karmapa and Yongey Mingyur Rinpoche. If such adaptation is being initiated by these respected – and what followers consider ‘authenticated’ figures (by virtue of the fact that they are holders of ancient lineages and are seen as the incarnate embodiment of their predecessors) – can we, as sociologists, speak of these adaptations as ‘inauthentic’ due to their apparent departure from certain ‘traditional’ Tibetan Buddhist ideas and practices? If so, do we put ourselves in a position of authority while silencing the voices of those we are seeking to understand? This chapter concludes this thesis by asking these questions, without giving any definite answers, while at the same time exploring different ways to understand the ‘authentic’. In each chapter, informants negotiated and contested what they considered to be ‘authentic’ Tibetan Buddhism, in light of the relevant topics explored. This chapter reviews such negotiation and contestation, in parallel to the Karmapa’s socially-engaged version of the Tibetan tradition, and Mingyur Rinpoche’s focus on a transcendent Tibetan Buddhism.

The Karmapa, it has been argued, is presenting a socially-engaged Tibetan Buddhism to address problems of environmental degradation, poverty, gender inequality and so forth. Mingyur Rinpoche, on the other hand, is a meditation master, and has been more focused on presenting accessible, practical meditation techniques for believers and non-believers alike. At the same time, as outlined in Chapter One, the messages of the Karmapa and Mingyur Rinpoche and the corresponding inclinations of Han practitioners towards the ‘immanence’ or ‘transcendence’ of Tibetan Buddhism are not entirely separate – there is a certain amount of overlap on both accounts.

Below I briefly explore how much the adaptations of the Karmapa and Mingyur Rinpoche have apparently diverged from ‘traditional’ forms of Tibetan Buddhism, and how we as sociologists may more objectively question ‘authenticity’ in regards to Tibetan Buddhism’s adaptation to different cultural contexts in general. Following a brief overview of the Karmapa’s and Mingyur Rinpoche’s presentation of Tibetan Buddhism, I briefly outline the specific adaptations of the Tibetan tradition to Greater China that each chapter of this thesis has sought to explore (which have parallels with

the Karmapa's and Mingyur Rinpoche's overarching visions) – in both their 'mundane' and 'transcendent' aspects.

The Gyalwang Karmapa and Socially-engaged Tibetan Buddhism

The Gyalwang Karmapa has sought to adapt Tibetan Buddhism to suit the needs of devotees, practitioners, and those interested in Buddhism in general, which is evident in his presentation of Buddhism to a group of American college students in 2011, which was arranged in accordance with what *they* wanted to learn from Buddhism, as mentioned earlier in the thesis.

The Karmapa has sought to present an active, engaged Tibetan Buddhism, and has superscribed on the tradition – as he has superscribed on Guan Gong – new meaning which conveys this message. As he has outlined in his book in response to the students' and the wider world's concerns about environmental degradation, for example, he portrays Tibetan Buddhism as 'eco-friendly', and has himself initiated environmental programs at Karma Kagyu monasteries; he has become vegetarian and promoted vegetarianism amongst monastics; and he has organised conferences on environmental protection, among other initiatives. While he acknowledges that Himalayan monasteries do not traditionally teach environmental education, he advocates the idea that 'our compassion must encompass all that is inanimate as well as animate.'⁶⁷⁷ This idea seems to have no precedent in Tibetan Buddhism, which instead emphasises compassion for sentient beings only, and ultimately sees the world as a place from which one must be liberated.⁶⁷⁸ The Karmapa is similarly (re)inventive in his approach to the other topics presented in the book, such as gender equality, thereby making Tibetan Buddhism relevant to a wide set of societal issues specific to the twenty-first century.

The Karmapa's attempts to make Tibetan Buddhism more socially engaged, as revealed in his recent book, is reflective of the wider manner in which Tibetan Buddhism is

⁶⁷⁷ HH The Karmapa Ogyen Trinley Dorje, & Burkhar, N.T., & Finnegan, D.D. (trans.), & Derris, K, & Finnegan, D.D. (eds.), pp. 91-92.

⁶⁷⁸ Tibetan Buddhism, as explored in Chapter Six, does hold that inanimate objects are inhabited by various spirits and other sentient beings, but does not teach that the objects themselves are to be shown compassion. Unlike the Tibetan tradition, certain schools of East Asian Buddhism promote the idea that plants, trees and other apparently inanimate objects have buddha-nature. This thesis was put forward by Jizang (549-623) in the 6th century. See Blum, M, 'The Transcendentalist Ghost in EcoBuddhism', in Bhushan, N, & Garfield, J.L., & Zablocki, A (eds.), p. 217.

Yet according to Blum, although belief in certain gods 'who live in nature or who manifest certain aspects of nature, such as fire or wind' may give agency to such gods, 'there is nothing in any canonical Buddhist discourse, even in medieval Japan, that remotely suggests agency in nature as a whole.' See *ibid*, p. 232.

becoming relevant to contemporary Greater China, and the way in which Buddhism in general has been adapted to different cultural settings through social engagement. Such adaptation is often not without controversy, and may be contested by those who are concerned with retaining a focus on liberation from the world as opposed to a primary focus on engagement with the world. Parallels can be seen in the case of the Humanistic Taiwanese Buddhist group, *Foguangshan* (Buddha Light Mountain). At one point, this group opened its main monastery in Taiwan to visits from the public, making it into a place of recreation and tourism, while these activities were at the same time ‘given potent significance as Buddhist activities.’⁶⁷⁹ Some have accused Master Xingyun of desacralising Buddhism. Chandler points out however that one could argue *Foguangshan* has resacralised ‘particular instances of activities within putatively secular sectors’, thereby ‘transform[ing] the general understanding of those entire sectors in all their instances’.⁶⁸⁰ Other ways in which *Foguangshan*’s social engagement is expressed is through educative initiatives and the propagation of Confucian rites and ideas in line with Buddhist teachings and practices – topics which were explored in Chapter Four in relation to Tibetan Buddhism and the recent Confucian revival.

This engagement of Buddhism with society is similar, to some extent, to the Karmapa’s endeavours to make Tibetan Buddhism more socially engaged, and with the perspective of Han informants who believed Tibetan Buddhism is compatible with a revived Confucianism – and that this compatibility demonstrates its relevance for contemporary (mainland) Chinese society. With this engagement also comes contestation, in a similar manner to that with which *Foguangshan*’s engagement with lay and Confucian Taiwanese society has been contested. For some informants, as examined in Chapter Four, Tibetan Buddhism is seen as too pure and transcendent to be mixed with ‘worldly’ Confucianism and with society in general. They believed this mixing would devalue the ‘purity’ or ‘authenticity’ of Tibetan Buddhist practice, which is ultimately about liberation from cyclic existence. In discussing authenticity, however, can we claim that making Tibetan Buddhism more socially engaged – as the Karmapa is doing and a number of Han practitioners are doing in parallel with the Confucian revival – is causing the Tibetan tradition to somehow become ‘impure’ and ‘inauthentic’?

Tibetan Buddhism is taking on new forms of social engagement, but in a broad sense it has never been completely disengaged from society. Tibetan Buddhism went hand in

⁶⁷⁹ Chandler, S, 2004, p. 26.

⁶⁸⁰ Ibid.

hand with the politics of pre-1951 Tibet, as seen in the Tibetan term for the dual system of religion and politics (*Cho-sid-nyi*). Monasteries such as the ‘Three Seats’ (Drepung, Ganden, and Sera) held great power in pre-1959 (and particularly pre-1951) Tibet, and the Dalai Lama was considered both the spiritual and temporal leader of Tibetan society. Moreover, Tibetan Buddhist practice was never simply restricted to yogis/yoginis meditating in remote mountain caves; monks and lamas were often engaged in the lives of lay Tibetans at every level, from choosing a name at birth to conducting funerary rites at death, and providing a wide range of rituals to solve mundane problems in between. Even meditation, considered by many Westerners to be an individuated practice, was more often practiced among groups of monastics than by solitary meditators in caves.⁶⁸¹

Thus, it may be that the sole focus on a form of meditation suited to individuated practice that a number of Westerners and Han practitioners follow – where the practitioner and his/her faith are free from the constraints of society – in fact owes more to a ‘Shangrilaist’ notion of Tibetan Buddhism, influenced perhaps in part by Western Romantic expressivism and Transcendentalism, which place much emphasis on the idea of the individual resisting conformity to society and its constraints, to find truth in nature for him/herself.⁶⁸² Such practitioners have sought to escape urban China by moving to quieter, rural areas, such as Diqing Tibetan Autonomous Prefecture, and are often writers or artists. Like a number of Western practitioners of Buddhism, they feel a sense of what Max Weber called a ‘disenchantment of the world’, and attempt to find reenchantment.⁶⁸³

At the same time, these Han practitioners who seek a more individuated, less socially-engaged form of Tibetan Buddhism, especially in mainland China, may also be concerned that the social engagement of religion could spell Party involvement. It is unsurprising that such informants would want to keep their faith separate from such involvement, given the CPC’s record of religious suppression and/or control. Moreover, as mentioned above, another concern regarding social engagement may be the question of whether the Tibetan Buddhist message will become less liberating as a result of this engagement. The fundamental Mahayana Buddhist message is that the world is full of

⁶⁸¹ Lopez, D.S. Jnr., 2008, p. 191, & McMahan, D.L., p. 40.

⁶⁸² This type of individuated spiritual practice is perhaps most clearly seen in the case of Thoreau, one of the founders of American Transcendentalism, who shunned society and its attachments and sought to reconnect with nature. See Blum, M, in Bhushan, N, & Garfield, J.L., & Zablocki, A (eds.), p. 229.

⁶⁸³ McMahan, D.L., p. 12.

suffering and therefore one should seek liberation from cyclic existence, and lead others to liberation. The question such practitioners may be asking is how to keep this fundamental message at the core of their faith, without losing it to a surface-level improvement of society.⁶⁸⁴

Other writers and artists, however, as explored particularly in Chapter Four, see the social engagement of Tibetan Buddhism in Chinese society, in combination with a revived Confucianism, as positive. Their positive view of Buddhist-Confucian syncretism is tied to their ‘search for roots’ in the countryside, where they wish to both rediscover their own traditional Chinese cultural roots, as well as practice Tibetan Buddhism. For them, such Buddhist-Confucian syncretism provides an antidote to what they see as the increasing Westernisation of China, which has resulted in a more hedonistic, uncaring society.

Yongey Mingyur Rinpoche

The interests of the aforementioned practitioners following a less socially-engaged, more individuated Tibetan Buddhism are represented in another major figure of Tibetan Buddhism examined in this thesis – Yongey Mingyur Rinpoche. While the Karmapa has tended to emphasise the socially engaged aspects of modern Tibetan Buddhism, Mingyur Rinpoche has tended to emphasise practical meditation methods for believers and non-believers alike, methods which he seeks to demonstrate, through ‘scientific evidence’, are conducive to happiness. Swanson, in the preface to Mingyur Rinpoche’s book, *The Joy of Living: Unlocking the Secret and Science of Happiness* makes the intentions of the book clear:

[T]he deeper scientific parallels between Buddhism and science] are woven into a larger narrative, a more pragmatic introduction to the basic meditation practices Yongey Mingyur Rinpoche teaches so accessibly. This is, after all, a practical guide, a handbook for transforming life for the better...⁶⁸⁵

⁶⁸⁴ The deeper change Tibetan Buddhism apparently brings was cited as one reason a number of Taiwanese informants preferred it over Humanistic Buddhism. Humanistic Buddhists, on the other hand, remind people that Shakyamuni ‘was no god or spirit but a person born in this world, cultivated himself in this world, and attained enlightenment in this world.’ Therefore, ‘Buddhists should...model their practice on him and not devote so much time and energy to abstract discussions, performing rites on behalf of the deceased, or seeking a better rebirth in some far-off pure land.’ See Chandler, S, p. 44.

⁶⁸⁵ Yongey Mingyur Rinpoche, & Swanson, E (ed.), 2007, Preface, p. ix.

As discussed in this thesis, Mingyur Rinpoche has had a long-standing relationship with renowned scientists such as the late neuroscientist Francisco Valera, who was a close friend of his father. Having been exposed to scientists and science for many years, and having seen the way – according to him – science explains *why* Buddhist meditation helps people feel less anxious and lessens destructive emotions, whereas Buddhism explains *how* to practice meditation and thereby achieve these things, he sought a way to combine the two and present pragmatic steps for both believers and non-believers to achieve a happier life. Mingyur Rinpoche, has, accordingly, presented meditation techniques that are applicable to the stresses of modern life, both to improve one’s quality of life by altering one’s vision of reality to thereby transcend the mundane, as well as lead one to the ultimate soteriological message of liberation from cyclic existence. Here again a large part of the message is – as with the Karmapa’s adaption of Tibetan Buddhism to the twenty-first century – about what Tibetan Buddhism can do for the ‘rational’ West, and, as this thesis has explored, ‘rational’ Han Chinese interested in, or following Tibetan Buddhism. The difference between the approaches of the Karmapa and Mingyur Rinpoche, however, is most evident in the way they are making Tibetan Buddhism more immanent or transcendent, respectively. At the same time, the soteriological/transcendent content in Mingyur Rinpoche’s presentation is thoroughly penetrated by ‘mundane’ science, so that this transcendent message becomes ‘grounded’ in the immanent to an extent. A theme that comes across strongly in *The Joy of Living*, for example, is that Tibetan Buddhist meditation is scientifically proven to better one’s life here and now; questions concerning the afterlife are not explored in any detail.⁶⁸⁶

Moreover, ‘supernatural’ elements of Tibetan Buddhism, which are considered ‘proof’ of its transcendence in traditional Asian contexts, are similarly often sidelined. For example, Swanson, in his preface to *The Joy of Living* states the following in regards to Mingyur Rinpoche’s incarnate status:

⁶⁸⁶ Similarly, when Mingyur Rinpoche spoke in Hong Kong from April 13 to 15, 2011 at an event titled ‘Encounters with Happiness’, he did not go into any detail about the afterlife. At one point he was asked by the host what his views were on this topic, to which he replied, ‘I have not died, so I do not know.’ He went on to say that although he has not died, he believes, according to Tibetan Buddhist teaching that one will encounter a clear sky and clear light (i.e. the most subtle level of mind). Yet he did not go beyond this initial stage to describe what happens next in the *bardo* (the intermediate state between death and rebirth). Perhaps he felt such details would appear too mythological to his audience or that the Tibetan tradition would appear too fanciful in light of his Catholic co-speaker’s presentation of a rather modernised Catholicism.

Whether you choose to believe that the present Yongey Mingyur Rinpoche has carried the same broad range of practical and intellectual skills through successive incarnations or has mastered them through a truly exceptional degree of personal diligence is up to you...⁶⁸⁷

This message would surely sound quite odd to many Tibetans, for whom the *tulku* system and the idea of reincarnation in general is a central belief. Mingyur Rinpoche himself (as conveyed by Swanson) quite frequently refers to various Tibetan Buddhist ‘myths’ throughout the book with such phrases as ‘as the story goes’, or ‘[w]hether Milarepa actually used magic or some other means to kill his family can be debated.’⁶⁸⁸ It is evident he is targeting a ‘rational’ audience who he knows probably do not believe in magic or perhaps even fundamental Buddhist beliefs such as reincarnation.

At the same time, he also demonstrates in the book that he himself often believes in ‘miraculous’ stories about bygone Tibetan masters, adding contemporary ‘evidence’ to support these stories. For example, he makes reference to the Sixteenth Karmapa leaving footprints in solid rock, and bringing rain to drought-stricken areas of America’s southwest, causing a spring to appear on one occasion in a desert region.⁶⁸⁹ Mingyur Rinpoche thus does not deny the ‘magic’ or ‘miraculous’ in Tibetan Buddhism, but certainly makes belief in these elements optional. The emphasis instead is on how Tibetan Buddhism can offer practices to improve one’s wellbeing and the wellbeing of others, by transcending conventional ways of seeing the world, and that these practices are scientifically proven to work. This is made clear by the fact that *The Joy of Living* reserves most of the ‘magical’ aspects of Tibetan Buddhism for the final pages, while the bulk of the book is concerned with showing that Tibetan Buddhist practices are compatible with science. Not only are they shown to be compatible – at times it appears science almost takes precedence as a legitimating force for these practices, as seen in Mingyur Rinpoche’s following statement:

Modern science – specifically quantum physics and neuroscience – offers an approach to wisdom in terms that are at once more acceptable and more specifically demonstratable to people living in the twenty-first century than are the Buddhist insights into the nature of reality *gained through subjective analysis*. It not only helps to explain why the Buddhist practices work in terms

⁶⁸⁷ Yongey Mingyur Rinpoche, & Swanson, E (ed.), 2007, p. 3.

⁶⁸⁸ Ibid, p. 234.

⁶⁸⁹ Ibid, p. 246.

of *hard, scientific analysis*, but also provides fascinating insights into the Buddhist understanding of *dul-tren-cha-may*, the momentary phenomena that appear and disappear in an instant according to changes in causes and conditions. But we have to look deeper into the realm of science to discover some of these parallels.⁶⁹⁰ [Emphasis added]

Not only do these practices gain weight and become legitimised through science; Mingyur Rinpoche also endeavours to speak of the ‘magic’ of Tibetan Buddhism in scientific terms at times, and thereby lend it credibility. For example, when discussing mantra meditation in *The Joy of Living*, he acknowledges that the use of potent syllables ‘recited by enlightened masters for thousands of years’ to ‘clear away layers of mental obscuration’ and provide other benefits, may seem ‘too much like magic’. He thus suggests that ‘[i]t might be easier to think of mantric syllables as sound waves that perpetuate through space for thousands, perhaps millions, of years.’⁶⁹¹

Such a use of science to lend credibility to Tibetan Buddhist beliefs and practices was a common trend among informants. A number of informants saw Tibetan Buddhism as not only compatible with science, but as always being scientific from its inception two-thousand-five-hundred years ago, and even more ‘scientific-than-science’, perhaps due to the fact that they believed it contains insights that science only now is discovering, and/or due to the ‘supernatural’ feats masters are believed to be able to accomplish that defy scientific explanation. Similar trends are common of course among the wider modernist Buddhist community in Asia.⁶⁹²

Such adaptation of Buddhism to science, according to the logic that aspects of science were already present in Buddhism, begs the question of who should be the interpreter of what is an ‘authentic’ or ‘inauthentic’ adaptation of the Tibetan tradition. There do appear to be certain parallels between the methods of observation and deductive logic that inform scientific hypotheses and aspects of Buddhist meditation techniques which seek to examine the dependent nature of phenomena by way of observation and logical deduction. Studies on the effects of meditation on the brain and the nervous system also

⁶⁹⁰ Ibid, p. 75.

⁶⁹¹ Ibid, pp. 156-157.

⁶⁹² Chandler notes that Master Xingyun of *Foguangshan* in Taiwan, for example, does not see Buddhist modernism as something new but a ‘revitalization of the ancient, carrying on the great heritage of the buddhas and great worthies of the past through methods that will be accepted easily and willingly by modern people.’ Master Xingyun thus sees the modern revival of Buddhism not as an ‘inauthentic’ adaptation, but a ‘sloughing off of spurious tradition, and the adoption of those modern innovations that can aid in spreading the dharma’. See Shi, XG, 1995, p. 429, cited in Chandler, S, p. 70.

appear to provide valuable insights into neuroplasticity as well as human psychology. Such parallels have led the Tibetan religious elite and followers to refer to Tibetan Buddhism as a ‘science of the mind’, or, according to Mingyur Rinpoche, a ‘science of happiness’. At the same time, Buddhism, like all other religious traditions, has never simply been concerned with investigating the phenomenal world or improving humanity’s place within it – as mentioned, its fundamental purpose is liberation from cyclic existence. In examining what is ‘authentic’ Buddhism, it thus seems necessary to maintain a balance between representing the views of informants themselves and a critical perspective of these views – to both allow the voice of informants to be heard and understood within their own context, yet also within a wider, critical context. In this way, we as sociologists do not become advocates of what is ‘authentic’ as opposed to ‘inauthentic’ yet we are also able to take part in critical observation. This has been the aim of this thesis throughout.

Donald Lopez, in his book, *Buddhism and Science: A Guide For the Perplexed*,⁶⁹³ has taken a critical approach to the merging of Buddhism with science – particularly as presented in the Dalai Lama’s recent book, *The Universe in a Single Atom: The Convergence of Science and Spirituality*.⁶⁹⁴ Lopez passionately questions the effect of this convergence on the ‘core’ of Tibetan Buddhism, a position which I shortly argue has value, yet perhaps would be of greater value should such criticism be framed within the context of the Tibetan religious elite’s apparent intentions in seeking this convergence.

Nowhere in *The Universe in a Single Atom* does the term *nirvāṇa* appear. Rebirth is mentioned, but not the six places of rebirth; as gods, demigods, humans, animals, ghosts, and hell beings. Where are the deities who animate the landscape and the divine protectors whom the Dalai Lama consults when making a momentous decision? Where is the Buddha’s relentless disparagement of the cycle of rebirth, a world in which beings are so conditioned as to be susceptible to suffering in the next instant, a world with sufferings so vast and deep that when describing them the Dalai Lama will sometimes cover his head with his monk’s robe and weep? Where is the uncompromising assertion that this world is built by ignorance, a world that ultimately is not to be improved, but from which one must seek to escape, along with all other beings, with the

⁶⁹³ Lopez, D.S. Jnr., 2008.

⁶⁹⁴ HH The Fourteenth Dalai Lama Tenzin Gyatso, 2006.

urgency that a person whose hair is ablaze seeks to douse the flames? Where is the insistence that meditation is not intended to induce relaxation but rather a vital transformation of one's vision of reality? Is this Buddhism placed at risk by the compulsion to find convergences with Science, this Buddhism that makes the radical claim that it is possible to live in the world untainted by what are called the eight worldly concerns: gain and loss, fame and disgrace, praise and blame, happiness and sorrow? These are the teachings that the greatest Buddhist thinkers, figures such as Nagarjuna and Dharmakirti, accepted implicitly. These are the teachings that the Dalai Lama has offered with unrivalled eloquence for so long.⁶⁹⁵

While I concede that Lopez's point is valid to question whether the 'core' message of Buddhism becomes altered when convergences are sought with modern science and other aspects of modernity, I think it is equally important to appreciate what appear to be the wider intentions of the Tibetan religious elite in finding these convergences. Firstly, a number of the Tibetan religious elite may not see the meeting of science and Buddhism as a convergence, but rather a rediscovery of certain aspects of the former that have apparently always been present in the latter, as mentioned above. Secondly, and perhaps more importantly, the Tibetan religious elite are not only reaching out to potential converts; they are seeking to make applicable what they can in the message of Buddhism to individuals who may have no interest in Buddhism, and/or who may be sceptical about Buddhism (and perhaps religion in general). Speaking in such direct Buddhist terms as Lopez suggests above, may make the Buddhist message even less relevant for such sceptics. What will find resonance with non-Buddhists who may even be antagonistic towards religion may well be some of the issues explored in this thesis such as environmental protection, for example. In the Chinese context in particular, Tibetan Buddhism has appeal because it is perceived by a number of Han to be particularly potent in solving mundane concerns such as those related to wealth, health, long life and so forth, as explored in Chapter Five. It also has specific appeal for Han because of its ability to protect against the vengeful dead, as explored in Chapter Seven. By answering these and other concerns, the Tibetan religious elite are at least giving hope to such people, even if the full depth of the Buddhist message is not appreciated.

This was the line of thinking conveyed to me by many lamas and monks. They acknowledged that some Han may never really 'get' Tibetan Buddhism – they may

⁶⁹⁵ Lopez, D.S. Jnr., 2008, p. 152.

come with misconceptions of what Tibetan Buddhism can or cannot do for them, and may never grasp concepts of karma and so forth to their full extent, but these lamas and monks ‘do what they can’ to try to help them understand, and most importantly give them hope. A lama in Hong Kong related that many Han come to him with misconceptions that are hard to eradicate, but he said that if he is able to prevent someone from committing suicide, for example, by giving him/her hope, then the message that person has taken from Buddhism is beneficial. As mentioned above, Mingyur Rinpoche’s first best-selling book is not only for Buddhists. As Swanson points out at the beginning of *The Joy of Living*, this book is for those who may not want to ‘wade through scientific publications and [are] either sceptical or overwhelmed by the sheer volume of Buddhist books, [yet] nevertheless [yearn] for a practical means of achieving a lasting sense of personal well-being.’⁶⁹⁶ The Dalai Lama’s book, *The Universe in a Single Atom*, critiqued by Lopez above, is similar in many respects to Mingyur Rinpoche’s *The Joy of Living*, in that it is for non-Buddhists as well as Buddhists, and is particularly oriented towards sceptics and/or those without a deep knowledge of Buddhism. And in the end, if readers become convinced of both the scientific nature of Buddhism and its benefits to better humanity, they may be further drawn to the deeper truths of Buddhism.

These adaptations of Tibetan Buddhism to Greater China and to the West are of course preceded by numerous historic adaptations of Buddhism in general. As mentioned in the introduction to this thesis, Buddhism throughout its history in all Asian contexts has been full of innovators.⁶⁹⁷ Many schools of Buddhism, such as the ‘new Buddhist schools’ in Japan were at their inception questioned for their authenticity.⁶⁹⁸ Indeed, according to Bhushan and Zablocki, ‘the whole history of change in Buddhism can be read through the lens of continual struggle over issues of authenticity and appropriation’.⁶⁹⁹ In our era of transnational/global religiosity, moreover, what is ‘imported’ or ‘indigenous’, ‘inauthentic’ or ‘authentic’, becomes increasingly difficult to define.⁷⁰⁰ Bhushan and Zablocki observe that while we speak naturally of ‘Asian Buddhism’ as if they take place in Asia, and Western Buddhism as if it takes place in the West’, both of these categories ‘are thoroughly interpenetrating and have been

⁶⁹⁶ Yongey Mingyur Rinpoche & Swanson, E (ed.), 2007, p. 5.

⁶⁹⁷ McMahan, D.L., p. 58.

⁶⁹⁸ Bhushan, N., & Zablocki, A., p. 6.

⁶⁹⁹ Ibid.

⁷⁰⁰ Ibid, p. 8.

deteritorialized.⁷⁰¹ For example, many of the best-selling Buddhist books in Asia are translated into Asian languages from English, and use ‘Western idioms of expression, meaning, and interpretation’.⁷⁰²

The popularity of these texts was evident when talking with informants, many of whom possessed translations of Sogyal Rinpoche’s *The Tibetan Book of Living and Dying*, Mingyur Rinpoche’s *The Joy of Living* and *Joyful Wisdom*,⁷⁰³ as well as books about Western practitioners such as *Cave in the Snow*.⁷⁰⁴ Popular cafes in Beijing with an adjacent bookshop also often stock a large number of Buddhist books written by either Tibetans or Westerners which have first been written in English and then translated to Chinese. Such books often contain certain words or phrases in English that are difficult to translate to Chinese set in quotation marks, and which are then explained in Chinese.⁷⁰⁵ In addition to the circulation of translated texts, Western approaches to Buddhism are also being adapted by Asian Buddhist cultures. Garfield observes for example, that dharma centres in Asia may model their teachings on those of Western dharma centres and that Asian as well as Western pilgrims may attend such centres, the former seeking ‘a more modern religious pedagogy.’⁷⁰⁶

Returning to Lopez’s comments above, it seems necessary to question whether ‘core’ elements of Tibetan Buddhism are being betrayed by endeavours to find convergences with science, other aspects of modernity, and as this thesis has sought to explore, ‘traditional’ Chinese culture – as long as such questions are posed within the context of what appear to be the wider perspective and intentions of many of these teachers. At the same time, it is important to acknowledge that Buddhism has been full of innovations (acknowledged by Lopez himself in his aforementioned book), as can be seen in textual translation, for example.⁷⁰⁷ Yet, translation – whether textual or cultural – never creates something entirely new; it adapts existing forms to new conditions, based on the resonance of certain symbols, as explored in Chapter Two.

⁷⁰¹ Ibid.

⁷⁰² Ibid, p. 9.

⁷⁰³ Yonge Mingyur Rinpoche & Swanson, E (ed.), 2010.

⁷⁰⁴ Mackenzie, V, *Cave in the Snow: Tenzin Palmo’s Quest for Enlightenment*, London, Bloomsbury, 1999.

⁷⁰⁵ For example, Elizabeth Napper’s book *Dependent-Arising and Emptiness: A Tibetan Buddhist Interpretation of Madhyamika Philosophy Emphasizing the Compatibility of Emptiness and Conventional Phenomena*, Somerville, Wisdom Publications, 1989, is popular at such bookshops. The Chinese title is 藏传佛教中观哲学, published by China People’s University Press (中国人民大学出版社) as part of a religious studies series.

⁷⁰⁶ Garfield, J.L., ‘Translation as Transmission and Transformation’, in Bhushan, N, & Garfield, J.L., & Zablocki, A (eds.), p. 90.

⁷⁰⁷ Ibid, p. 100.

In questioning the ‘authentic’, perhaps the focus should be – from a sociological point of view – on how authenticity is contested and negotiated by various actors themselves in light of different adaptations, and how these adaptations differ to adaptations elsewhere, both in a historic and contemporary context. This has been the focus of this thesis. As opposed to putting forth my own views of what are ‘authentic’ or ‘inauthentic’ adaptations of Tibetan Buddhism within the Greater China context, I have let both the Tibetan religious elite and Han practitioners (among other ethnic practitioners in Greater China) speak for themselves about what they perceive to be ‘authentic’ adaptation. This thesis has merely facilitated their views and attempted to critically understand them within the wider context – both historic and contemporary – in which they were expressed. Below is a summary of the various adaptations of Tibetan Buddhism in Greater China explored throughout this thesis, each of which has implications for ideas about ‘authenticity’ under the wide categories of ‘transcendent’ and ‘immanent’ Tibetan Buddhism as it is presented by Mingyur Rinpoche and the Karmapa, respectively.

Tibetan Buddhist Adaptations to Greater China: A Summary

Due to the peripheral nature of the topics explored in this thesis to Tibetan Buddhist doctrine, there is more room for negotiation and contestation about their place in Tibetan Buddhism. Despite the peripheral nature of these topics, however, they point back to central Buddhist doctrinal points – and to the direction in which Tibetan Buddhism is heading in contemporary Greater China. Using Guan Gong as a symbolic representative in Chapter Three for the themes that followed, this thesis explored in subsequent chapters how Tibetan Buddhism is becoming relevant in different ways for practitioners in contemporary Greater China. Its relevance to Chinese society within the framework of the CPC’s ideology of ‘Harmonious Society’ and the related Confucian revival was explored in Chapter Four; its relevance for individual Hong Kongers seeking to fulfil pragmatic needs such as wealth, health, long life, and so forth, was explored in Chapter Five; its relevance for the important issue of environmental protection in China was explored in Chapter Six; and its relevance for addressing concerns about the unattended dead and ultimately life and death, was explored in Chapter Seven. Thus, Tibetan Buddhism, it could be argued, is seen by Han and other ethnic practitioners to be successfully addressing a wide range of issues that are

important for them, from those at the national level to those at the societal, environmental and psychological levels; the way in which Tibetan Buddhism addresses these issues effectively further authenticates this tradition for practitioners.

This thesis has demonstrated how these issues are being addressed through Tibetan Buddhism in light of both its transmission to practitioners through the Tibetan religious elite, and in light of certain dominant ‘rational’ discourses in mainland China, Hong Kong and Taiwan. As outlined above, the influence of two key figures among the Tibetan religious elite – the Gyalwang Karmapa and Yongey Mingyur Rinpoche – in the spread of Tibetan Buddhism in Greater China has been explored, as well as their different approaches to spreading the dharma. The influence of dominant, ‘rational’ discourses was also explored including that of Chinese Marxism on the mainland, the Christian education system in Hong Kong, and to some extent Humanistic Buddhism in Taiwan. These discourses have certain parallels with the Karmapa’s and Mingyur Rinpoche’s portrayal of a demythologised, ‘rational’ Tibetan Buddhism, yet obviously diverge from core tenants of Tibetan Buddhism, especially in the case of Chinese Marxism on the mainland, which denies the existence of anything supernatural. However, it was the parallel elements of these discourses with a modern Tibetan Buddhism that were deployed by informants to show how Tibetan Buddhism is a ‘rational’ tradition. At the same time, these discourses themselves were variously undermined by informants who mimicked them to ultimately demonstrate the greater ‘rationality’ of Tibetan Buddhism and even that it is ‘more-scientific-than-science’.

The influence of the state on the mainland, the Christian education system in Hong Kong, and Humanistic Buddhism in Taiwan were all contested to a greater extent than the influence of different Tibetan religious elite, even as these discourses were appropriated by practitioners. The influence of the Tibetan religious elite was thus strong among informants, who see them as the embodiment of wisdom, and see an intimate connection between themselves and their root lama, whom one visualises as inseparable from oneself. Yet, as with any religious adaptation, there is always contestation as a religious tradition is superscribed with new meaning by lay and clerical actors.

As argued in Chapter Two, following Duara’s analysis of the ‘superscription of symbols’, symbols constantly change, yet they carry certain resonances that are relevant for different generations and actors even as this change occurs. Symbols, like tradition,

are not fixed entities that pass from one generation to the next – and as explored in this thesis – from one culture to the next; they are constantly being reinterpreted. At the same time, symbols would not hold any meaning for different actors unless they carried a common resonance for these actors. This is demonstrated in the symbol of Guan Gong, who helped strengthen an ailing Buddhism in China reeling from attacks by the Confucian establishment during the sixth century, and whose symbol later helped unite the Republican government under Yuan Shikai. Despite the apparent discontinuity of the meaning of the symbol of Guan Gong in these instances, he served these different purposes because in both cases he was the ‘apotheosization of a hero and his role as guardian.’⁷⁰⁸

Similarly, Tibetan Buddhism is a symbol that finds resonance with Han practitioners, in part because of certain parallels between traditional Chinese and Tibetan cultures. As has been argued in this thesis, Han practitioners do not emerge from an ‘atheistic’ and/or ‘rationalist’ vacuum when they come to Tibetan Buddhism; certain Chinese traditional beliefs and practices, even on the mainland, are still embedded to some degree in Chinese society, and certain similarities between Chinese and Tibetan traditions make it easier to merge the former with the latter, and vice versa.

Yet the contemporary context in which the symbol of Tibetan Buddhism is adapting to these Chinese traditions means that it is inevitable that Tibetan Buddhism will become demythologised and ‘rationalised’ to an extent, as explored above concerning the Karmapa’s and Mingyur Rinpoche’s presentations of Tibetan Buddhism. Elements of Tibetan Buddhism that are less palatable to such a demythologised and ‘rationalised’ approach to religion are accordingly made to fit this approach by altering their context. This is seen, for example, in the way in which informants spoke of Tibetan Buddhism as being ‘more scientific than science’, and provided ‘evidence’ for this by citing examples of great Tibetan masters surviving the bullets of Red Guards, curing patients of terminal illnesses, emitting fire from their bodies at death, and so forth – all of which were not described as ‘magic’ but as ‘side’ accomplishments that these masters had achieved through the deepest states of meditative concentration. That is, they did not obtain such power from an outside source, but from what informants perceive to be ‘scientific’, systematic meditation techniques that allow one to go beyond the normal capacities of the human body. Thus, the ‘traditional’ is given precedence over the ‘rational’ by borrowing concepts from the latter, and improving it by merging it with the former.

⁷⁰⁸ Duara, P, 1988, p. 779.

The (re)interpretation of the symbol of Tibetan Buddhism is being carried out by both the Tibetan religious elite and lay practitioners, who are, to a degree, subject to what Mayfair Young has termed a ‘colonisation of consciousness’.⁷⁰⁹ On the mainland, this ‘colonisation’ has come about through the adaptation of a selective Enlightenment ‘rationalism’ to the context of mainland China, which saw religion as an impediment to progress. Although mainland China was never colonised by a foreign power, this adaptation of a selective, iconoclastic form of modernisation not only radically changed modern China’s traditional religious setting, but filtered down to its citizens, who have deliberately and/or subconsciously appropriated the discourse of the state.

A different kind of ‘colonisation of consciousness’, as explored in Chapter Two, and throughout the thesis, is present in Hong Kong and Taiwan. The Christian education system in Hong Kong is still influential in the curriculum of young Hong Kongers who attend Christian schools, and the understanding of Chinese religious traditions has accordingly been shaped to an extent through this education. In Taiwan, modernising efforts on the part of Taixu’s (1890-1947) most famous disciple, Venerable Yinshun (1906-2005), to make Chinese Buddhism relevant to the modern world, has also resulted in a new approach to certain ‘popular’ Chinese traditions among certain Chinese Buddhists – and as explored in brief in this thesis – certain Tibetan Buddhists on the island.⁷¹⁰ Evidently, this ‘colonisation of consciousness’ in these three locations has different depth; the influence of the state on the mainland seems to have had a greater impact on the thinking of practitioners there than the other discourses examined among practitioners in Hong Kong and Taiwan. Nevertheless, the manner in which a number of Hong Kong and Taiwanese practitioners demythologised and de-ritualised (i.e. ‘Protestantised’) their faith to an extent reveals that the impact of these ‘rational’ discourses in these locations is substantial.

I also argued in Chapter Two, and made clear throughout the thesis, that, while practitioners cannot speak without employing the discourse of the dominant to an extent, they do not speak exactly in the same manner as those in power using these dominant discourses. Neither do they use these discourses for the same ends as those in power.

⁷⁰⁹ Yang, MM, pp. 3-45.

⁷¹⁰ Humanistic Buddhist masters in Taiwan such as master Xingyun of *Foguangshan*, exemplify the ‘rational’ spirit inherited from Taixu. Xingyun sees folk religious belief in Mazu and Guan Gong, and popular customs such as geomancy, phrenology and fortune-telling as superstition (*mixin*). At the same time he thinks that these beliefs are beneficial if they offer people hope and lead them to live moral lives. See Chandler, S, p. 141.

Rather, they employ them creatively and often for different, even opposing ends. It is within this critical, interpenetrative view of cultural hybridisation that the theory of hybridity was used in this thesis – not to celebrate hybridity but to show how, when used in this way, it can undermine essentialisms. As argued in Chapter One and Two, such a theory is particularly pertinent to understanding the essentialised (in both the West and China, as well as among the Tibetan exile community) topics of Tibet, Tibetans and Tibetan Buddhism.

Following the theoretical analysis set up in Chapter Two, Chapter Three explored the many superscriptions that have been layered upon Guan Gong, the so-called ‘god of war’, whose relevance for different levels of historic and contemporary Chinese society is representative of the themes of subsequent chapters. Guan Gong was superscribed with meaning by both the elite and the common folk throughout Chinese history. The titles bestowed upon this god by the emperor instilled both this god and the emperor with power – the former having the power to defend the country and the latter the power to ‘name’ – that is, to bestow titles on gods and thereby maintain/expand jurisdiction over the empire. During the late Qing Dynasty, Guan Gong became ‘Confucianised’, as the ruling elite sought to shed certain unbecoming images superscribed on this god by the common folk, and utilise Guan Gong to unite the Qing Empire. This was accomplished, in part, by finding parallels between the figure of Guan Gong and local heroes in different parts of the empire, such as the Tibetan hero Gesar, and merging (or attempting to merge) them as one. However, popular images of Guan Gong as the people’s hero, a swordsman who conflicted somewhat with the refined image of the Confucian gentleman (*junzi*), a god of sworn brotherhoods and secret societies, a god of wealth, and so forth, continued to find a place among the common folk, and overlapped with the ‘Confucianised’ Guan Gong of the elite.

As Guan Gong has traversed borders in the twenty-first century to be incorporated into the Karma Kagyu school of Tibetan Buddhism under the Gyalwang Karmapa, his image has yet again been layered with new meaning. The power ‘to name’ is no longer in the hands of an emperor, and the CPC is now much more interested in what it sees as the ‘rational’ figure of Confucius and what he can do for the Chinese nation-state. This power has transferred to a well-respected figure of Tibetan Buddhism outside China, in exile in India. This power has been instilled in this god by the Karmapa and has been sent to Taiwan where such faithful students of the Karmapa as Master Hai Dao have further propagated the newly superscribed Guan Gong on the island. This power has

also been sent back to the mainland and to Hong Kong. Han practitioners, who already have their own conceptions and ideas about this god, are now appropriating and negotiating this symbolic power by reinterpreting Guan Gong's place within their faith. Those from a 'popular' Chinese/Buddhist/Daoist religious background seemed more likely to interpret the Karmapa's incorporation literally, while those who have been most strongly influenced by the aforementioned dominant 'rational' discourses in the three locations were more likely to symbolically interpret this incorporation as 'convenient method' which should not be taken too seriously by 'higher' level practitioners.

Whatever the case, the Karmapa's action was seen as reflecting his wisdom to make the message of Tibetan Buddhism relevant to Han society. Guan Gong, as argued in Chapter Three, is useful for the Karmapa on two accounts – to both make the message of Tibetan Buddhism relevant to Han followers who already believe in Guan Gong, and to portray Tibetan Buddhism as an active, socially-engaged religion among these and other Han followers, reflecting his wider plans for Tibetan Buddhism in the twenty-first century. Guan Gong, a martial action figure, thus appears an appropriate choice from among the Chinese gods to incorporate into Tibetan Buddhism, as he aptly embodies this active and energetic vision.

In the same way that Guan Gong is representing an active, socially-engaged Tibetan Buddhism under the Karmapa, Chapter Four explored how Tibetan Buddhism is engaging Han society in mainland China within the context of the CPC's recent ideology of 'Harmonious Society' (*hexie shehui*), the associated recent Confucian revival and continued historic arguments concerning Buddhist-Confucian syncretism. The 'Harmonious Society' ideology, based on Confucian political theory, was first mentioned by Hu Jintao in 2004,⁷¹¹ and has since become a popular topic within the media, among netizens, and through other outlets, including World Buddhist Forums. This ideology, in tandem with the 'Scientific Development Concept' (*kexue fazhan guan*), has been utilised to maintain stability and address a growing number of problems that the CPC is facing, such as the disparity between rich and poor, corruption, environmental degradation, and a decline in the legitimacy of the Party among the general population. A number of Han practitioners spoke of Tibetan Buddhism's relevance for Chinese society in light of its compatibility with this ideology and

⁷¹¹ Chan, KM, 'Harmonious Society', *International Encyclopaedia of Civil Society*, 2009, London, Springer, p. 821.

Confucianism in general. Such practitioners variously justified this compatibility through both the theories of Taiwanese Buddhist monks and the political ideology of the CPC, which they saw to accord to an extent with their ‘search for roots’ in Chinese traditional culture, while also practicing Tibetan Buddhism – a ‘foreign’ tradition which likewise aided them in this search, due to the perceived parallel moral values encompassed in both the Tibetan tradition and Chinese traditions such as Confucianism.

Others, however, drew on a ‘Shangrilaist’ interpretation of Tibetan Buddhism – which has roots in Romantic expressivism in the West – detaching it from its Tibetan cultural context and that of wider contemporary China, and presenting it as a kind of ‘floating’ philosophy, personalised to an individuated practice. Such informants also reversed long-held Han stereotypes of Tibetans as ‘backward’ and ‘uncivilised’ and presented Tibetan culture and religion as spiritually superior to Han ‘progress’. Only by retaining the same ‘pure’ detachment from society as Tibetans apparently embody, did they believe Tibetan Buddhism could make significant changes in the lives of individuals, which would ultimately lead to changes in society as well. Such practitioners had often sought to ‘tap into’ or discover this purity by escaping the ‘polluted’ (both physically and spiritually) setting of their urban environment and pursuing quieter lives either in a village outside urban Beijing, or in Tibetan areas such as Diqing Tibetan Autonomous Prefecture. These rural settings and their professions provided them with more time and a quiet lifestyle to engage in meditation and other religious activities. This latter group, it was argued, resisted what they saw as the state’s utilitarian use of Confucian culture, while the former group believed that wider China needs a spiritual tradition to work on the ‘worldly’ level as well as the soteriological; a revived Confucianism as presented by the CPC, in tandem with Tibetan Buddhism, was seen to help in this regard.

Chapter Five shifted focus from exploring the utilisation of Confucianism in contemporary China, and Han practitioners’ reaction to this utilisation, to an exploration of the views of lay Han practitioners regarding the ‘use’ of Tibetan Buddhism for pragmatic, mundane outcomes. Of particular interest to this chapter were the views of Hong Kong informants, a number of whom, as outlined in the chapter, may be more inclined to seek pragmatic outcomes from their faith than certain mainland practitioners, due to the nature of their professions, the generally pragmatic nature of Hong Kong society due to its transitoriness under the British and now under Chinese rule, and their ‘popular’ religious background. As was argued in this chapter, there are many similar beliefs and practices concerning improvement of life-circumstances in Tibetan

Buddhism and Chinese religious traditions, yet the Tibetan religious elite constantly emphasise the need to check one's intentions when seeking pragmatic outcomes from one's faith.

Others influenced by the modern Christian education system in Hong Kong and its generally 'rational' approach to 'popular' religion and the petitioning of gods for personal gain, often rejected the 'opportunistic' use of Tibetan Buddhism for one's own advantage. There was a 'Protestantised' Tibetan Buddhism, and they often followed Tibetan religious figures such as Mingyur Rinpoche, who, to a large extent, present a demythologised, 'rational' and 'scientific' Tibetan Buddhism to Han practitioners. Such practitioners found the 'traditional' teaching of other Tibetan religious leaders to be less helpful.

Chapter Six continued the general theme of 'worldly/mundane' in contrast to 'soteriological/transcendent' by examining the perspectives of Han and Tibetan informants in Beijing and/or Diqing Tibetan Autonomous Prefecture regarding local Tibetan deities and spirits. This chapter specifically examined how these entities are being worked into the discourse of environmental protection by different actors such as local authorities, environmental NGOs and practitioners, and how their traditional roles are changing. At the same time, however, they were not being transformed into entirely new entities by practitioners – rather, their traditional roles often overlapped with their newly allocated roles as environmental protectors while neither perspective was cancelled out by the other. The perceptions of informants regarding these entities, it was argued, are reflective of the background of the informants themselves who were represented in this chapter, and their translocal and transnational movements, as well as their distance from, or proximity to the Tibetan landscape.

This chapter also explored the origin of the perceived 'ecological wisdom' of Tibetan Buddhism and overlapping mountain cult beliefs, and how this perception has influenced informants regarding their understanding of local deities and spirits. The image of an ecological Tibetan Buddhism, it was argued, is derived from the recent propagation of 'green Tibetans', both in exile and within China in very different contexts. In exile Tibetans are portrayed as protectors of a pristine landscape which has undergone destructive changes due to Chinese occupation. Tibetan Buddhism and accompanying 'folk' traditions, the latter of which were previously ignored by the exiled elite, are propagated as embodying the 'ecological wisdom' of Tibetans who

lived in harmony with the land, in contrast to the Chinese regime which seeks to exploit it for its own gain. In official Chinese accounts, Tibetans are portrayed as benefactors of Han science and technology for preserving their environment and its wildlife. Tibetans in 'old' Tibet, according to these accounts, were 'passively adapted' to their environment, whereas under the Han they are able to both harness its productivity and preserve it from destruction. Tibetan-initiated environmental movements within China, on the other hand, may retain Tibetan 'sacred knowledge' about the landscape and the deities and spirits believed to inhabit it, and may see environmental protection as secondary to protection of Tibetan culture from which such beliefs stem.

Many Tibetans and Han practitioners in China have been influenced in some shape or form by either or all of these 'green Tibetan' discourses in exile and in China, and the discourse of environmental protection in general, and are variously seeking to merge mountain cult and overlapping Tibetan Buddhist beliefs with these. For the most part, Tibetan Buddhist beliefs and practices and overlapping mountain cult traditions are also being 'worked into' environmental protection projects by NGOs and/or government initiatives in Diqing Tibetan Autonomous Prefecture. Without more religiously-focused initiatives concerning environmental protection, which were more prevalent among local Tibetan NGOs prior to 2008, it was argued, 'sacred knowledge' may continue to be sidelined among the wider Tibetan population, and there may be less inclination among Tibetans to protect the environment. The new emphasis on the 'entrepreneurial Tibetan', which is being encouraged by the state and local authorities in place of sacred Tibetan knowledge concerning the landscape and its use, seems to be advancing this decline in environmental protection among a number of Tibetans.

Chapter Seven, following an examination of belief in deities and spirits in Chapter Six, continued this theme of the 'supernatural' in a somewhat different context by looking at the continuance of ghost beliefs among Han practitioners in Greater China. It was argued in Chapter Seven that ghost beliefs are still prevalent in Greater China and in many Chinese societies in general. This prevalence of ghost beliefs is due, it seems, to a belief in the continuance of a self after death, and hence to the ongoing connection between the living and their ancestors, and the associated fear this connection induces. Frightful ghosts in Chinese culture, it was argued, may be those 'closest to home' such as family ghosts, to whom one owes various obligations, and whom may cause harm if those obligations are not met. Malevolent ghosts may also be more distant and unrecognisable.

While there are certain parallels between Chinese and Tibetan ‘popular’ conceptualisations of malevolent ghosts, the Tibetan religious elite who are spreading Tibetan Buddhism to Han Chinese, such as Mingyur Rinpoche, are calling Han practitioners to move on from their fear of ghosts. As explored in the various ghost encounters of Han practitioners, however, there remains a psychological impact from such experiences that makes it difficult for them to heed this message entirely. All such practitioners have great faith in Tibetan masters, yet are torn between a deeply embedded Chinese fear of the dead and their ghosts, and the soteriological message of such teachers as Mingyur Rinpoche.

As argued in this chapter, the CPC has long tried to eradicate belief in ghosts among the Chinese population, with limited success, due to the embedded nature of this belief. Its 1961 publication, *Stories About Not Being Afraid of Ghosts, (Bu Pa Gui de Gushi)*⁷¹² despite certain dated views, is still largely representative of the CPC’s views on ghost beliefs. In this publication it is stated that ghosts do not exist, and are simply a product of people’s imagination. The publication is full of stories about Ming and Qing dynasty Confucian literati who expose the foolishness of ghost beliefs. Although these stories do not denounce belief in ghosts, and hence the CPC does not endorse these stories as supporting its own position entirely, they do apparently show how fear of these ‘imagined’ entities is unfounded, and how this fear is keeping China from reaching its ‘rational’ potential.

In a similar way, Mingyur Rinpoche and other Tibetan religious leaders, while they do believe in the existence of ghosts, are trying to eradicate this fear so that Han practitioners can advance to higher levels of spiritual attainment. In both cases, it is by having a ‘rational’ approach to this subject that Chinese citizens/Han practitioners can either build the Chinese nation-state or go beyond their present mundane concerns and work toward enlightenment, respectively. Thus, the views of the CPC and that of Mingyur Rinpoche and other Tibetan religious leaders on this topic evidently diverge, as their aim to ‘rationalise’ Chinese citizens/Han practitioners is clearly for a different purpose. The former wishes to transform citizens into faithful subjects of its socialist ideology, who will contribute to the nation-/Party-state; the latter want to instil fearlessness in practitioners so that throughout life and when death comes they will be confident in their faith.

⁷¹² Anonymous, *Stories About Not Being Afraid of Ghosts*, 1961.

For Han practitioners, even those who still harbour psychological fears of ghosts, their faith is in their Tibetan masters, whom they believe hold the answers to suffering and ultimately death; the materialist ideology of the CPC cannot provide such answers. For practitioners in Hong Kong and Taiwan, there is similar sentiment toward materialist ideologies there. Perhaps in this last chapter, therefore, the most important reason why Tibetan Buddhism is seen as relevant for contemporary Chinese society – to answer the problem of death – overshadows those explored in previous chapters.

In sum, the trends of the Tibetan Buddhist adaptation to Greater China explored in this thesis are similar in a number of ways to those in the West, while certain common ideas and practices in Chinese and Tibetan cultures – based, in part, on Sino-Tibetan historical religious interaction – have resulted in a more ‘Asian’ adaptation. Thus, although both are modernist adaptations of the Tibetan tradition, they diverge at points according to the socio-cultural and political conditions prevalent in Greater China and the West. As the adaptations of Tibetan Buddhism explored in each chapter of this thesis and those of the Karmapa and Mingyur Rinpoche show, the ‘core’ message beneath these many adaptations has not changed (according to the Tibetan religious elite and Han practitioners themselves); it has simply been layered with superscriptions that ‘skilfully’ direct it in one or another (or multiple) directions to meet the needs – or in Buddhist terms, the karmic dispositions – of practitioners, devotees or those interested in Buddhism in general.

Glossary of Chinese Terms

- Bai Dai* – 白帝
- Baizu* – 白族
- Balagezong* – 巴拉格宗
- Bu Pa Gui De Gushi* – 不怕鬼的故事
- Cai shen* – 财神
- Chu jia ren* – 出家人
- Da Hei Tian* – 大黑天
- Da ren* – 大人
- Dacheng* – 大乘
- Dayuanman* – 大圆满
- Dizi gui* – 弟子规
- Fangbian* – 方便
- Fang sheng* – 放生
- Foguangshan* – 佛光山
- Fotuo Jiaoyu Jijinhui* – 佛陀教育基金会
- Gaige Kaifang* – 改革开放
- Gongde* – 功德
- Guan Gong* – 关公
- Guanyin* – 观音
- Gui* – 鬼
- Guiyi* – 归依
- Hanchuan Fojiao* – 汉传佛教
- Hanzu* – 汉族
- Hexie shehui* – 和谐社会

Hexie Zheng Jiu Weiji – 和谐拯救危机

Huanbao – 环保

Jiao bei – 筊杯

Junzi – 君子

Kawagebo Wenhua Shehui – 卡瓦格博文化社会

Kexue fazhan guan – 科学发展观

Li – 礼

Liao Zhai Zhi Yi – 聊斋志异

Long – 龙

Mengzu – 蒙族

Minzu tuanjie – 民族团结

Mixin – 迷信

Mizhong – 密宗

Nanlai Zuojia – 南来作家

Naxizu – 纳西族

Ping an deng – 平安灯

Po – 魄

Pusa – 菩萨

Qielan Pusa – 且蓝菩萨

Qiu qian – 求签

Ren – 仁

San Guo Yan Yi – 三国演义

San Guo Zhi – 三国志

San Jiao – 三教

Sanqing – 三清

Shao er dujing – 少儿读经

She li zi – 舍利子
Shen – 神
Shen ming – 神明
Shen shi – 神识
Sheng Ming Xie Hui – 生命协会
Shentong – 神通
Tian Hou – 天后
Weiwen – 维稳
Wending yadao yiqie – 稳定压倒一切
Wen-wu miao – 文武庙
Wu lu cai shen – 五路财神
Wu Ming Fo Xue Yuan – 五明佛学院
Wuge tongchou – 五个统筹
Wutong – 五通
Wuxia xiaoshuo – 武侠小说
Xiao ren – 小人
Xiaocheng – 小乘
Xie jiao – 邪教
Xin gui – 心鬼
Xin mo – 心魔
Yi – 义
Yiren weiben – 以人为本
Zai jia heshang – 在家和尚
Zaju – 杂剧
Zangchuan Fojiao – 藏传佛教
Zangzu – 藏族

Zhong – 忠

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