

**AN ETHNOGRAPHIC STUDY OF “THE EASTERN MARCH OF TIBETAN BUDDHISM” IN  
SHENYANG, NORTHEASTERN CHINA**

**by**

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An Ethnographic Study of “The Eastern March of Tibetan Buddhism” in Shenyang,  
Northeastern China

Abstract

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This dissertation addresses a new and important social-cultural-religious phenomenon in Sino-Tibetan history that is commonly referred to as the “Eastern March of Tibetan Buddhism” (zangmi dongjin), namely, the surprising spread of Tibetan Buddhism and Tibetan Buddhist monasticism out of Tibet to Han Chinese (ethnic Chinese) areas in Eastern China since the 1980s, and especially after the year 2000. To explain this phenomenon from the perspective of the Tibetan Buddhism’s missionary organizations, we could say they successfully carried out a series of measures to deal with and overcome issues arising from two major realms: the realm of Chinese politics and the realm of modernization’s influence on the Chinese people’s cultural lives. On the one hand, the missionary organizations managed to navigate across the precarious waters of contemporary Chinese politics; on the other hand, they adapted to the current Chinese cultural ideological environment by producing a quality religious product that catered to the special needs of religious “customers” who grew up and received education under the influence of modernization.

## **CHAPTER ONE**

### **Introduction**

#### **I. Outline**

This dissertation addresses a new and important social-cultural-religious phenomenon in Sino-Tibetan history that is commonly referred to as the “Eastern March of Tibetan Buddhism” (zangmi dongjin), namely, the surprising spread of Tibetan Buddhism and Tibetan Buddhist monasticism out of Tibet to Han Chinese (ethnic Chinese) areas in contemporary China since the 1980s, and especially after the year 2000 (see Wei 2010; Wang 2014).

Pre-1959 Tibet, namely, traditional Tibetan society, was especially famous for its predominant ideology and practice of “mass monasticism”, that is, “an emphasis on recruiting and sustaining very large numbers of celibate monks for their entire lives” (Goldstein 2010). For example, according to one study, about 14% of Tibetans in 1958 were lifelong celibate monks and nuns; also, two great monasteries which are located just a few miles outside of Lhasa, Drepung and Sera, a together had approximately 16,000 monks in 1952 (see Ma 1995; Goldstein 1998; Goldstein 2010).

However, after the 1959 Tibetan Uprising, and especially after the year 1966 when Mao Zedong initiated the devastating Cultural Revolution, Tibetan Buddhism in Tibet in

particular, and later on all the religions in China, suffered heavy attacks from the Chinese state and were finally destroyed. As scholars have pointed out, during this period, Tibetan Buddhist practices were banned, Tibetan Buddhist organizations were disbanded, and many Tibetan Buddhist monasteries were even physically demolished. As a result, for at least ten years from the late 1960s to the late 1970s, “religion, in essence, ceased to exist in the People's Republic of China.” (Goldstein 1998)

The recovery of Tibetan Buddhism began in the early 1980s, after Deng Xiaoping assumed the status of “paramount leader.” Deng, through Hu Yaobang, the CCP First Secretary, allowed religion to be practiced again: the old monasticism was gradually restored, although in much reduced numbers, and the reopened monasteries were even permitted to recruit new monks. The revival of Tibetan Buddhism has grown particularly fast after the year 2000 and Tibetan Buddhism has not only achieved a revival in the traditional Tibetan areas, but also has begun an unexpected and still poorly understood expansion into traditionally ethnic Chinese areas far to the east of Tibet proper. The prosperous Tibetan Buddhist organizations are now highly active in the Chinese areas, where they actively help mandarin-fluent Tibetan Lamas and monks visit Eastern China, compete with the Chinese Buddhist organizations for Chinese followers and monks, as well as launch large-scale projects to build or rebuild new monasteries in the Han Chinese regions.

This rather successful religious diffusion of Tibetan Buddhism among Chinese population is particularly perplexing given the fact that it is taking place in a series of almost impossible situations; that is, it has occurred despite a number of unfavorable circumstances that should have suffocated the growth of Tibetan Buddhism among the Chinese in the first place. These factors include: (1) traditionally, a deep-rooted non-religious Chinese cultural mentality that differs significantly for most of the Chinese history in the past over two millennia from that of any other major cultural traditions such as Western civilization, Indian civilization, or Muslim civilization, and consistently promotes secular lifestyles, morals, and values—and in particular, promotes a centralized secular political authority as opposed to any other authority forms—at the cost of the possible religious counterparts; (2) contemporarily, an atheist political regime that is controlled by the Chinese Communist Party (CCP) that is ideologically hostile to religion and practically wary of any organized religious groups; (3) the considerable and even growing tensions between Tibetan Buddhists and some Chinese Buddhists, who regard Tibetan Buddhism as both a theologically impure sect and an aggressive religious invader competing with them for Chinese followers, (4) the rapid explosion of a consumerist and materialist society among ethnic Chinese—sometimes called the "Eden of wild capitalism" by scholars—where the traditional religious piety has been substantially eroded and replaced by materialism, (5) a rising Chinese nationalism, which has led many Chinese people to consider the Tibetan people a "unruly," "backward," or "superstitious" nationality that is opposing China externally through the Dalai Lama and internally through demonstrations, riots, and more recently

self-immolations (see Goldstein 1998; Yang 2006; Nadeau 2012; Abraham 2015; Yushan 2016), and conclusively, (6) one of the most formidable historic trends that drives the human history and shapes the common fate of human, the waves of modernization, whose intellectual origins dated back to the Era of Enlightenment, which always held that the modern epoch should be the time to replace the darkness of religion and superstition with the light of science and reason. Nevertheless, despite such impediments, a remarkable spread of Tibetan Buddhism has occurred and is still occurring, and represents a major new development in the history of Buddhism in general and Tibetan Buddhism in particular, and also, of course, illustrates a new developing stage of Sino-Tibetan relations, the of the life experiences of the multi-ethnic populations across Inner-East Asia, and the unfolding of the “Weltgeist,” the Hegelian-like World-spirit, in modern human history.

As a result, one research question arises: how does Tibetan Buddhism, which as a religious presence exists in a society and culture usually at three key dimensions, namely religious doctrines and ideas, the individual followers, and organizational entities, manage to overcome the obstacles from a Chinese social and cultural background, especially against the six aforementioned political, economic, religious, ethnic/national hindrances, and accomplish a remarkable successful spread outside of Tibet proper into the Chinese communities towards the east? That is, how is the surprising social and cultural phenomenon “Eastern March of Tibetan Buddhism” possible in a 1990s-2010s China, since Tibetan Buddhism, at its origin, was born in a social and cultural soil that is

radically different from that of the Chinese-speaking world? The answer, based on the findings of the dissertation's research, consists of the following vis-à-vis each of the six unfavorable factors.

(1) For much of Chinese history the mainstream ideologies dominating China's political, cultural, and intellectual life have been largely secular (see Liang 1922; Cai 1936).

However, in spite of the powerful Confucian notion that the secular state should prevent any religion from competing with it for the central authority of the nation (see Han 819), there are still niches left in contemporary China's social and cultural systems where certain populations maintain a demand for religion. In these, Tibetan Buddhism has been grasping this opportunity, successfully make use of its unique and rich theoretical and philosophical resources to fend off possible religious competitors such as Taoism, Christianity, or even Chinese Buddhism, and win a considerable amount of followers. Furthermore, Tibetan Buddhism, at the levels of either an individual follower such as a lama, monk, or layperson, or an organizational group level such as monastery or any other missionary organization, is actively and successfully adapting itself to the native ideologies underlying Chinese mentalities, one of which is the ideology for a centralized political authority (see Chapter Five).

(2) In post-1949 China, the CCP, loyal to its Marxist legacy of an anti-religion atheism that was heavily influenced by the European Enlightenment, inherited Marx's famous assertion that "religion is the opium of the masses." Therefore, the CCP's policies

consistently and objectively restricted and reduced religion's impact on China's population. This policy affected not just the ethnic Chinese areas, but also the ethnic minorities areas, for example, by establishing an official educational system in which every student was required to take "thoughts and politics-education classes" (ch. sixiang zhengzhi ke) for a training called "scientific atheism" (ch. kexue wushen lun). However, despite this, at the level of monastic and missionary groups, Tibetan Buddhism has successfully sought connections with the state-owned universities, research institutes, and other academic organizations within the public education system, to attempt to look for resources that can help it reconcile the tension between Buddhist doctrines and ideas and the CCP-endorsed academic discourses that the advocates of "scientific atheism" ultimately resort to. Moreover, at the level of individual followers, Tibetan Buddhism may take advantage of the failure of the CCP-controlled official educational system to indoctrinate Chinese students with Marxism and atheism, to expand its influence, as suggested by the life histories of some ethnic Chinese followers who finally become Tibetan Buddhist monks (see Chapter Four).

(3) India-originated Buddhism, by way of Central Asia, entered China in as early as the 1<sup>st</sup> century A.D.. In the following five to six centuries, multiple sects of Sinicized Buddhism with distinctive Buddhist theories and practices, as exemplified by, among others, the Tiantai School, the Huayan School, the Zen School, and the Pure Land sect, came into being and formed the major tradition of Buddhism's presence in the Chinese-speaking areas of East Asia and beyond. During the following centuries, Chinese Buddhism, as the

native form of Buddhism was therefore congenial to ethnic Chinese people's cultural habits, so unquestionably satisfied native Chinese communities' religious needs for much of their history. However, Tibetan Buddhism, although initially being an outsider to the Chinese cultural world, grasped the opportunity of China's ongoing process of modernization, and managed to provide religious goods and services that are well-suited to contemporary Chinese followers' new religious needs in the early 21<sup>st</sup> century. As a result, many of the traditional sects of Chinese Buddhism find they are unable to offer the religious goods and services with comparable quality (see Chapter Four).

(4) As the result of the development of a Weberian modernity—or, from Marx's perspective, the sociological consequence of capitalism—the tendency of materialism and the trend of secularization are deepening and expanding further in today's China. Under such circumstances, the basic principles of any religions, including Tibetan Buddhism, must face serious challenges. However, on the other hand, the advent of modern capitalism also introduced into China modern technologies, modern management principles, and modern individualism. That is, to Tibetan Buddhism, modernity serves as both a challenge and an opportunity. For example, Tibetan Buddhism in contemporary China may make use of modern management principles to improve the operation of their missionary organization; or, modern individualism may play a positive role in supporting interested Chinese people becoming Tibetan Buddhists (See Chapter Two and Four).

(5) It seems to be a commonplace and logical speculation that the ongoing rise of fervent Chinese nationalism, whose origin dates back to at least the late 19<sup>th</sup> century and is rapidly undergoing substantial revival after Mao's communist internationalism went out of favor after his death, would lead to a tension between the two ethnic groups and therefore bring obvious difficulties that would hinder Tibetan Buddhism's Chinese spread. However, the reality is much more complex and nuanced than expected. Depending on specific contexts, on the one hand, the nationalism-based concept, "Chinese Nation" (ch. zhonghua minzu), in fact has multiple versions. One of the versions incorporates both the dominant ethnic group in the country, namely the Han Chinese, and the de facto subordinate ethnic minorities regarding actual political/economic/cultural powers, including the Tibetans, into the same and commonly shared "imagined community." This version of "Chinese Nation" in fact played a positive role in introducing Tibetan Buddhism to the interested Chinese followers. Moreover, even another version of Chinese nationalism that adopts a narrower definition of "Chinese nation" that asserts that only the Han Chinese people are the true owners of the country, may still accidentally produce favorable conditions that help to familiarize some Chinese Buddhists with Tibetan Buddhism under certain circumstances (see Chapter Three).

(6) The Enlightenment-inspired modernity cultivated the general historical trends to restrict the power of religion and to promote the authority of science. However, from the hindsight of history, one of the major inclinations underlying the mindset of

Enlightenment, the motto “Dare to know” and “Have courage to use your own reason” as capsulated by Kant, namely an advocacy for an individual use of personal reason, may unexpectedly complicate reason/science’s takeover of religion regarding social authority. The reason lies in the fact that logically an individual with freedom of choice guided solely by their own personal reason has the right to choose either science or religion. In fact, this experience of “individual freedom of choice guided by personal reason facing multiple options” constitutes a recurring theme of the life histories of many Han Chinese-turned Tibetan Buddhists’. This also represents one of the major differences that distinguishes the experiences and presence of Tibetan Buddhism in Chinese communities in the early 21<sup>st</sup> century, from those of Tibetan Buddhism traditionally in Tibet proper before the mid-to-late 20<sup>th</sup> century (see Chapter Four).

In conclusion, Tibetan Buddhism’s missionary success in ethnic Chinese communities in modern China lies in, on the one hand, its active adaptation to the deep-rooted and stable structural factors underlying Chinese society, including those of the ideological structure for a centralized political authority. On the other hand, it depended on the successful adoption of certain social and cultural elements brought by modernity, especially, the organizational structure of a Weberian bureaucracy for monastic and other missionary organizations, the political discourse of nationalism based on the modern nation-state as an “imagined community,” and the advocacy for individual reason on freedom of choice that serves as one key philosophical foundation of modern individualism.

Therefore, the following four chapters—from Chapter Two to Chapter Five—together address the dissertation’s research question with regard to the six unfavorable conditions mentioned above.

Chapter Two, “Charismatic Personality plus Weberian Bureaucracy: Tibetan Buddhism’s Adaption to Modernity in the Form of ‘Bureaucratic Monasticism,’” addresses the organizational and institutional foundation of Tibetan Buddhism’s impressive spread in Eastern China. The chapter points out that successful missionary organizations of Tibetan Buddhism, such as the Xiaba Lama’s missionary system (see below), may choose to adopt resources from both the traditional and the modern in order to advance their missionary work in Han Chinese areas. In the case of the Xiaba system, first of all, the system preserved Tibetan Buddhism’s traditional institution of a charismatic lama as the leader, and meanwhile, the system actively practiced modern principles for organizational management, noticeably, by borrowing certain elements from a version of Weberian bureaucracy. That is, the Xiaba system tried to combine the tradition of charismatic leadership with the modern management of a bureaucratic organizational structure—to which the chapter coins the term “Bureaucratic Monasticism” to refer to this. As a result, the missionary system managed to collect sufficient political, financial, and human resources, making the Beita-centered religious community (see below) an icon of the “The Eastern March of Tibetan Buddhism.”

Chapter Three, “Tibetan Buddhism facing Chinese Nationalism: An Unlikely Supporter,” addresses the complicated and nuanced relationship between an increasingly important social and cultural phenomenon in contemporary China—the rising Chinese nationalism since the 1980s—and the spread of Tibetan Buddhism in Han Chinese communities. The chapter points out that as Chinese nationalism has multi-variants and the individuals may interpret China from diverse perspective, in certain contexts, Chinese nationalism may even contribute positively to Tibetan Buddhism’s spread among Han Chinese populations.

Chapter Four, “Becoming a Tibetan Buddhist—on the Three-Stage Choices in the Life History of the Chinese Followers of Tibetan Buddhism in Contemporary China,” addresses how Tibetan Buddhism got accepted by Chinese society and culture from the viewpoint of the individual followers. Based on the life histories of Han Chinese followers of Tibetan Buddhism, the chapter points out Chinese modernization actually played a positive role in helping the individuals approach and accept Tibetan Buddhism. In particular, on the one hand, rapid modernization led to rapid development of China’s economy and technology, which provided material resources for the Han Chinese people who attempted to try to experience exotic ways of life, including that of Tibetan Buddhism. On the other hand, the West-originated modernization also imported a variety of modern West’s ideologies into Chinese society and culture; especially, the introduce of modern individualism which could serve as crucial ideological support for many Han Chinese followers whose choice of a Tibetan Buddhist way of life contradicted

sharply with the cultural expectations and norms of China's traditional social structures, particularly those of the Chinese family.

Chapter Five, "Tibetan Buddhism and the Ideology for a Centralized Political Authority," addresses Tibetan Buddhism's contemporary interaction with a the CCP-supported ideology that emphasizes establishing and maintaining a politics-oriented geographic, ethnic, and religious order under China's political center. This ideology, although has its deep historical root in Chinese culture, is accepted and used by CCP to encourage an inclination that gives preference to China as a community forcibly unified by a strong political center, whose indisputable authority always prevails even at the cost of the interests of the individual parts of the community. As a result, religion is expected to serve politics, and ethnic and religious groups are expected to obey the political center. Given the considerable power and influence of this ideology even today, for any religious organizations who want to do missionary work in China, they have to at least formally support this ideology. Tibetan Buddhism, in the case of the Xiaba Lama's missionary system, therefore, did a good job on it.

## **II. Literature Review**

### **(1) The literature on Tibetan Buddhism's spread in the West**

The rapid spread of Tibetan Buddhism to the West following the flight to exile of the Dalai Lama in 1959, has received a lot of attention from researchers in many fields, and there is a sizable and still growing corpus of academic research on different aspects of this phenomenon. This research has contributed to developing important perspectives from which to scrutinize Tibetan Buddhism's evolving complex relationship with modern Western society. However, the on-going diffusion of Tibetan Buddhism into Han Chinese areas represents a very different situation: When Tibetan Buddhism was spreading to the West, it was coming to areas that were politically, economically, and culturally tolerant to the spread of Tibetan Buddhism; in contrast, when Tibetan Buddhism entered Eastern China, the recipient environment it had to face was far harsher.

This research on the spread of Tibetan Buddhism in the West has dealt mainly with three themes. First, the research explored the role played by certain aspects of Western ideologies as well as certain aspects of the culture underlying Western tradition in constructing favorable cultural images of Tibetan Buddhism and thus facilitating the spread of Tibetan Buddhism in the West (Bishop 1993; Lopez 1998). However, because of the difference of the historical traditions between the West and China, Tibetan Buddhism, as mentioned earlier, has had to face radically different ideologies and cultures when it attempted to spread in contemporary Chinese society. Consequently, it is of critical importance to undertake detailed investigation regarding how Tibetan Buddhism interacted with the much more unfavorable socio-cultural environment it

encountered in ethnic Chinese areas. Studies of this have not been covered by the established scholarship to date.

Secondly, this research discussed how historical movements in the West such as the spiritualist movement in late 19th century or the countercultural movement in 1960s and 1970s affected the reception of Tibetan Buddhism in the West (Bell 1998; Lopez 1998; Baumann 2002; Seager 2002). However, since these kinds of movements, which were deeply ensconced in certain cultural or political situations of Western history, did not have counterparts in China, this literature offers at best a limited perspective to further our understanding of how Tibetan Buddhism has and is spreading in the non-Western world.

Thirdly, this research studied Tibetan Buddhism's reactions to "modernity" in the Western sense. The corpus of literature on modernity dealt with two topics. On the one hand, it delved into how the adherents of Tibetan Buddhism successfully made use of both their traditional theological or ritual resources as well as the prevalent modern political or cultural discourses to increase its popularity among the modern Western populations (Bell 1998; Lavine 1998; Coleman 2001; Matthews 2002; Wallace 2002; Cozort 2003; Kay 2004; McMahan 2008; Jacoby et al. 2012; McMahan 2012; McMahan 2015). On the other hand, the literature examined how Tibetan Buddhist lamas or monks managed to carry out effective commodification strategies to adapt the traditional religious organization to the modern consumerist society (Lopez 1998; Muller

2001). However, if we acknowledge that modernity unfolds actually in multiple forms across diverse cultures all over the world (Gaonkar 2001), these researches' narrower definition of modernity—that is, their reduction of modernity into its contemporary Western version—risks failing to give a comprehensive picture of what the true dynamics around Tibetan Buddhism and modernity, which, furthermore, reveals the necessity to incorporate the long-time underrepresented materials of the areas outside the Western world into the currently available scholarship, as this project, which will concentrate on the religious diffusion across Inner-East Asia, aims to fulfill.

## (2) The literature on Tibetan Buddhism's spread within China

A small corpus of academic research on Tibetan Buddhism's spread among Chinese populations in contemporary China exists and has provided valuable data on this phenomenon, but there is still a substantial gap in our understanding of this. These previous studies fall into two categories. First, there are shorter journal articles dealing with specific themes such as Tibetan Buddhism's relationship with Chinese politics (Kapstein 2004; Makley 2010; Zhang 2012), or Tibetan lamas' interaction with Chinese lay followers (Jones 2011; Caple 2015), or the historical events around Tibetan Buddhism's activities in Chinese areas (Bianchi 2014). However, due to the limited length of journal articles, none of these has provided a comprehensive and coherent in-depth discussion of how Tibetan Buddhism's "eastern march" has occurred, or how Tibetan Buddhist monasteries within Chinese areas function internally with Chinese monks,

Tibetans monks, and lay Chinese followers, as well as externally with the surrounding non-Tibetan Buddhist lay communities and the governmental bureaucracy.

In addition to these articles, there are also two book-length studies. One of them focuses on the spread of the Nyingma sect of Tibetan Buddhism among Chinese populations in early 21st century. In this study, the data mainly derives from interviews with Chinese adherents of Tibetan Buddhism in China and abroad to show that the spread of Tibetan Buddhism is primarily a global phenomenon rather than a local one (Yu 2011). The other study is a dissertation based on brief visits to several areas to collect data using survey type methods. It argues the case that Chinese Tibetan Buddhists in different areas, e.g. Hong Kong, Taiwan and Yunnan Province, incorporate different cultural elements such as the Catholic idea of what religion is in their understanding of Tibetan Buddhism (Esler 2013). While all of these studies have added valuable information about this topic, in-depth ethnographic research of Tibetan Buddhist monasticism in ethnic Chinese areas is sorely missing from the literature. Consequently, it is the goal of this project to conduct the first in-depth ethnographic case study of a thriving Tibetan Buddhist monastery in Eastern China together with its surrounding lay community.

### **III. Research Sites and Methods**

#### **(1) Multiple data sources**

This ethnographic research study collected most data from multiple sources in a Tibetan Buddhist community that consists of two Tibetan Buddhist monasteries that were recently established in the traditional Han Chinese-dominated areas of Northeast China—the Beita Monastery and the Zhengjie Monastery, as well as a Buddhist Studies Research Center co-established with a research university in China’s capital city, Beijing. The three organizations, together form a well-functioned system for the missionary work of Tibetan Buddhism in Eastern China, where the Han Chinese people form the ethnic majority. The missionary system is headed by an ethnic Tibetan incarnate lama of the Gelug (Yellow Hat) sect, the Xiaba Lama (for a more detailed biography of the lama, see Chapter Two). The lama’s base and home monastery is the Matong Monastery, located in the traditional Tibetan area of Litang county, Sichuan province, western China. Considering that some of the monks who now reside in the two newly (re)built monasteries in eastern China were previously ordained in the Matong Monastery, as in the earliest years the religious resources of the new eastern monasteries remained to be strengthened, the research also cites certain information from the Matong Monastery source. In addition, when necessary, the research utilizes historical materials that could provide necessary cultural and historical background for the current study, as well as any relevant online publications. However, the majority of the data for this study came from the ethnographic fieldwork carried out in the lama’s three-entity missionary system of eastern China. The following is a brief introduction of the lama’s three major missionary organizations.

(2) A missionary system: the Beita Monastery, the Zhengjie Monastery, and the Buddhist Studies Center in Beijing

In the midst of conquering the Mongol tribes, the Manchu local regime of Jin gradually accepted Tibetan Buddhism as the major religion of the royal family. In 1636, the ruler of Jin, Huangtaiji, crowned himself as an emperor in the then capital city Shenyang, and changed the regime's name from Jin to Qing, this marking the formal founding of the Qing empire, which eventually took over the Ming empire's territory and authority and replaced the Ming dynasty as the last imperial dynasty in China's history. In 1643, the emperor Huangtaiji issued an order to establish four Tibetan Buddhist monasteries near the four sides of the capital city Shenyang: the Beita monastery in the north, the Dongta monastery in the east, the Xita monastery in the west, and the Nanta monastery in the south. All four, together with two other buildings near the city's center, Shisheng monastery and Mahakala Temple, formed a Tibetan Buddhist mandala (ch. tancheng) that is, a geometric configuration of religious symbols of Tibetan Buddhism. By this design, the emperor tried to invoke Tibetan Buddhism's mysterious power to protect the empire's capital city, the empire itself, and ultimately the emperor himself (see Wang 2010). The Beita monastery, therefore, was actually part of the larger Tibetan Buddhist complex directly owned and run by the imperial court in Qing's capital city Shenyang. The construction of the Beita monastery was finished two years later, in 1645.

After the Qing dynasty's collapse in 1911-1912, the Beita monastery lost the state's financial support. Moreover, following the PRC's founding in 1949, the monastery was especially in sharp decline. As a result, in 1959, only two monks still lived in Beita and they were not able to maintain the daily operation of the monastery (see Dai 1994). As a result, finally, the local government took over the monastery in 1959 and from then onward, for the next over forty years until 2002, the Beita monastery ceased to be a living religious site and existed only in its hollow shell as a public park, museum, or "cultural heritage" site (ch. wenwu). (see Li 2019)

In the 1990s, the local government of Shenyang launched a project to restore the original Beita monastery as a site of "religious activities" (ch. zongjiao huodong changsuo) of Tibetan Buddhism, and was actively looking for eligible Tibetan lamas as possible candidates to serve as the abbot to head the monastery. After an examination, a Tibetan lama from Sichuan province, Xiaba, was found politically reliable and was chosen as the abbot in 2002. (see Li 2019) The lama was a famous scholar-monk and an expert in Buddhist theology in the Gelug tradition of Tibetan Buddhism, which was the Tibetan Buddhist sect that for centuries held the highest political and religious authority in Tibet, until 1959 when the 14th Dalai Lama fled to India after an abortive uprising in Lhasa (see Goldstein 2019). As of 2019, the Beita monastery remained the only Tibetan Buddhist monastery located in a Han Chinese-majority area of China that was headed by an ethnic Tibetan lama.

The Xiaba lama already had a large number of ethnic Chinese followers in Eastern China before he came to the Beita monastery in 2002. To further facilitate his missionary work among the Chinese followers and also other ethnic minorities in China such as the Mongols and Manchus, the lama later established more organizations in the traditionally Chinese-dominated areas. Especially, since 2006, the lama owned another Tibetan Buddhist monastery, the Zhengjie monastery in Daqing, Heilongjiang province. Moreover, he headed a Buddhist studies center that was co-founded and co-run by him and a state-owned prestigious public research university in Beijing. In 2011, the three together formed the lama's missionary system in Eastern China (see Li 2019).

Regarding the Zhengjie monastery, the original Zhengjie monastery was one of the most important Tibetan Buddhist monasteries in the traditionally Mongol areas of Manchuria. It had huge religious influence, and by 1793 during the reign of the Qing Emperor Qianlong, its buildings had already achieved a considerable size. However, during the CCP's cultural revolution (1966-1976), the monastery was totally destroyed (see Wang 2017: 387-390). In early 2000s, the local government was seeking to rebuild the monastery, and in a situation similar to that of the Beita monastery's restoration project, they also chose the Xiaba lama to head the rebuilt Zhengjie monastery (see Li 2019).

Regarding the Buddhist center, it was co-organized with Renmin University of China, a top-five university in China, and its headquarters was affiliated with the religious studies

department of the university. It had branch units at both the Beita monastery and the Zhengjie monastery.

Finally some words on the close relations between the two rebuilt eastern monasteries of the missionary system—namely the Beita Monastery and the Zhengjie Monastery in Northeast China on the one hand, and the lama's home monastery, Matong Monastery in Litang, Sichuan province on the other hand, regarding the location of the monk candidates' ordination ritual. During the early years when the lama started to establish the missionary system in eastern China, there were not enough monks permanently living in the Beita Monastery and the Zhengjie Monastery. Especially, as the buildings of the two newly rebuilt monasteries were in construction for many years, if the number of the attendees for any religious rituals exceeded a certain number, there would not be even enough space left for people to eat food. As a result, in those years, it was not convenient for the lama to hold the ritual of ordination for monk candidates in the Beita Monastery and the Zhengjie Monastery, and the Chinese monk candidates were usually ordained in the Matong Monastery, Litang, and then sent back to the Beita Monastery and Zhengjie Monastery. However, some prospective Chinese monk candidate could still receive ordainment in the Beita Monastery or the Zhengjie Monastery in those years. According to one interviewee, for example, there was at least one Chinese monk candidate who was ordained in the Beita Monastery, Shenyang, around 2002 to 2003. In the case of that monk, however, because at that time the physical condition of the Beita Monastery was not good and there had been no full-time Tibetan language teacher in

the Beita Monastery yet, that Chinese monk finally left and went to the Labrang Monastery in Qinghai in order to learn Tibetan.

Later, as the size of the religious communities of the Beita Monastery and the Zhengjie Monastery gradually expanded, more Chinese monk candidates were ordained in the Beita Monastery and the Zhengjie Monastery. However, many Chinese monk candidates still went to the Matong Monastery to receive ordainment. Some of them even didn't want to immediately return to the Beita Monastery or the Zhengjie Monastery after the ordination ritual because they wanted to stay in the Tibetan area longer to learn Tibetan language. One Chinese monk mentioned:

*The interviewer:*

*So you were ordained in the Matong Monastery, Litang.*

*The interviewee:*

*Yes... So I was ordained there in a Tibetan area. After the ritual of ordination, I made a request to the lama: I wanted to stay longer in the Tibetan area to learn Tibetan language. I didn't want to return to the Han Chinese area... The reason why I wanted to become a monk was that I wanted to have more free time to read Tibetan Buddhist books. However, if I returned to the monastery (in Han Chinese area) I would have to do*

*specific works, such as helping the lama to organize Dharma gatherings, etc., and there were so many such works... The lama approved my request. So I stayed in the Matong Monastery, Litang, for another two months before I finally returned to the Zhengjie Monastery...*

## **CHAPTER TWO**

### **Charismatic Personality plus Weberian Bureaucracy: Tibetan Buddhism's Adaption to Modernity in the Form of "Bureaucratic Monasticism"**

#### **I. Introduction**

In traditional Tibet, Tibetan Buddhism was a well-established presence: the doctrines of Tibetan Buddhism had remained the Tibetan-speaking world's dominant ideology for hundreds of years until 1959 when the Chinese Communist Party (CCP) completely controlled Tibet proper. During this period, the monasteries of Tibetan Buddhism had not only acquired a well-esteemed religious authority, but also established themselves as a powerful material force in Tibet's political, economic, or even military life. By contrast, the society and culture of early 21<sup>st</sup> century China, in which the Tibetan Buddhist missionary organizations are accomplishing impressive success in the ongoing movement of "The Eastern March of Tibetan Buddhism", constitute an environment that cannot be more different than that of the pre-1959 Tibet. Beside an old but still alive Chinese political tradition in which the secular state is always so strong that the formation of either a state-church rivalry like that of the Medieval Europe or a theocracy like that of pre-1959 Tibet is almost impossible. China in the post-Mao era has been undergoing rapid modernization and westernization processes that have and are profoundly changing the Chinese people's social and cultural life. In particular, despite leaving the former political structure largely unchanged, the CCP re-introduced and

endorsed modern capitalist mechanisms into China from the West, to the extent that a type of state capitalism has become the organizing logic of the entire society, which also gradually modernizes or even westernizes ordinary people's way of thinking. Under such circumstances, to compete with possible religious rivals for religious resources such as new followers, Tibetan Buddhism must set up competent missionary organizations that are active, efficient, and effective in the competition of the Chinese religious market place, and that's exactly what the Tibetan Buddhist leaders who are successful in spreading Tibetan Buddhism in Eastern China have been doing.

This chapter, illustrates this by a case study that focuses on the Xiaba Lama's missionary system that, as mentioned previously, comprises three organizations—two newly built monasteries and one Buddhist studies center co-established with a university. It will argue that, 1) on the one hand, for doing a successful missionary work, Tibetan Buddhism may preserve certain elements from Tibetan Buddhism's cultural tradition that can still play a positive role in the present situation, namely, the religious leader's charismatic personality in attracting followers; 2) on the other hand, Tibetan Buddhism can successfully adapt itself to the modernization process at the organizational level by carrying out the principles of modern bureaucracy for structuring its missionary organizations. In particular, some monasteries have adopted certain major bureaucratic characteristics of modern capitalism that the famous sociologist Max Weber once discovered and summarized. As a result, these Tibetan Buddhist organizations have achieved a well-functioned missionary system in the form of what the chapter calls

“bureaucratic monasticism” that manages to incorporate elements from both the traditional and the modern.

Given the political, economic, and cultural environment of contemporary China, internally, this Bureaucratic Monasticism tries to maintain a sizable and harmonious multi-ethnic community consisting of monks, nuns, and lay followers, while outside, it aims to build a well-connected network with important external entities such as the government, the major financial sources, the layperson followers, and the state-owned research and educational system in CCP-controlled contemporary China.

The arrangement of the sections of this chapter is as follows:

In the second section, the chapter explains how by preserving one of the Tibetan Buddhism’s former traditions, the institution of leadership by charismatic incarnate lamas, Tibetan Buddhism has been able to effectively advance its missionary work in ethnic Chinese areas, as illustrated by the success of the Xiaba Lama.

In the third section, this chapter concentrates on how the operation of the Xiaba Lama’s missionary organizations can largely embody many of the bureaucratic characteristics or principles of modern capitalism that were first recognized and conceptualized by Max Weber, and creatively integrate those modern elements into the traditional system.

In the fourth section, the chapter describes the accomplishments of the bureaucratic missionary system headed by the Xiaba Lama as it not only organizes a sizable religious community internally, but also establishes strong connections with the key political, economic, and cultural players under China's political ecology externally.

In the fifth section, in conclusion, the paper briefly comments on the Xiaba organization's unique combination of traditional Tibetan Buddhism's charismatic leadership with a version of the Weberian organizational structure of modern capitalism, in an attempt to raise the possibility for coining a new concept, "bureaucratic monasticism", whose practice played a key role in contributing to Tibetan Buddhism's impressive spread among ethnic Chinese communities.

## **II. Preserving the Tradition: The Incarnate lama's Charismatic Leadership**

The head of the religious community, the Xiaba Lama, is undoubtedly both a religious leader and an organizational leader with the typical charismatic personality that plays a considerable role in recruiting a large and growing number of devoted followers of multi-ethnic backgrounds. In particular, he has been able to recruit many Chinese who received high-level degrees from China's elite research universities. The lama's charisma is the result of at least three key factors: his unique personal experience of acquiring religious education in India, his close relationship with the CCP-controlled Chinese political system, and his prowess in Tibetan Buddhist theology and philosophy which

won him fame as a knowledgeable scholar monk in many Tibetan Buddhists' circles in eastern China. This section, therefore, will first address the three major sources of the lama's charisma, and then present materials regarding the life history of two of the core members of the lama's religious community in order to illustrate how the lama's charisma can contribute to his attractiveness to highly educated Chinese followers.

### **1. Three major sources of the charisma**

#### **(1) Personal experience of acquiring religious recognition and training from Dharamsala**

According to anthropologist and Tibetologist Melvyn Goldstein, the Tibetan incarnation system institutionalized charisma. That is, since a lama is an incarnation, he is able to inherit charisma from the last lama(s) of his line. As a result, even though a young boy is just recognized as an incarnation of a lama's line, he is believed by the followers to have inherited the mystical powers of the last lama(s) and therefore will be revered by them immediately. In the case of the important incarnation lineages within the Gelug sect, it is the Dalai Lama who has the ultimate power to recognize the current reincarnation. Thus, to acquire the Dalai Lama's formal recognition serves as the fundamental condition for a lama candidate to receive the "inherited charisma" (Goldstein 2023) of the incarnation system, and this point can be illustrated by the Xiaba Lama's biography.

A religious studies professor at a prestigious Chinese university who maintained close cooperation with the Xiaba Lama for over a decade, once mentioned the lama's unique personal experience of receiving a Tibetan Buddhist education. According to him, the lama was born in Litang, a Tibetan town located in the western part of Sichuan province. When he was young, he initially started to study Tibetan Buddhist classics under his maternal uncle who was previously a Tibetan Buddhist monk. Later, when he was older, the lama left his hometown, crossed the national border between China and India, and finally arrived in Dharamsala where he received formal education in Tibetan Buddhist theology and philosophy following the renowned Tibetan scholar monks and lamas in exile in India. In particular, the current Dalai Lama officially recognized him as the incarnation of the 4<sup>th</sup> Xiaba Lama in the Gelug tradition.

After studying in India for years, the lama decided to go back to his hometown, even though he faced a series of difficulties. For example, he had not obtained a Chinese passport, so he had to apply for it in India and go through all the paperwork and procedures when physically living in India. Eventually, the lama managed to return to Litang to formally serve as the 4<sup>th</sup> Xiaba Lama at the Matong Monastery, Litang. Consequently, what is really interesting regarding his title as the current Xiaba Lama is that his such status is officially **recognized** by both the Dalai Lama and the CCP government. Considering that in most cases, as with the current Panchen Lama, the Dalai Lama and the CCP often recognized different people as the lama, the Xiaba Lama's success of winning the dual recognition is especially valued. And therefore, given the

Dalai Lama's unrivaled religious authority in all of Tibetan Buddhism as well as the fact that almost all of the most important lamas and scholar monks reside in today's India, acquiring the Dalai Lama's official recognition as the incarnation and receiving Buddhist education from Dharamsala undoubtedly contributed to the Xiaba Lama's future religious charisma.

## (2) Close relationship with CCP-controlled Chinese government

The lama has demonstrated an impressive capacity to deal with the complicated interactions between Tibetan Buddhism and the CCP government, which results in his good and close relationship with not only the general political system but also some key CCP political figures. Since in China it is the CCP who dominates every aspect of the Chinese people's political, economic, and culture life, maintaining a good relationship with the Party is crucial for any religious leaders if they want their religious charisma to really work. The lama's active involvement with China's politics can be illustrated by his short biography that everyone can get access to by visiting The Buddhist Association of China's official website:

*The 4<sup>th</sup> Xiaba Lama's name is Jiangyangkezhu. He was born on October 6<sup>th</sup>, 1968, in Litang... In October, 1995, the government formally recognized him as the 4<sup>th</sup> Xiaba Lama...*

*The Xiaba Lama once went to the Three Great Monastery of Lhasa, the Tashilhunpo Monastery, the Kumbum Monastery, the Labrang Monastery, to study Tibetan Buddhism... Also, he once went to the Peking University to study in a graduate program of the Religious Studies Department at the Peking University...*

*The Xiaba Lama once served as the Deputy Governor of the People's Government of Litang County, and the Vice Chairman of the People's Political Consultative Conference of Litang County. He currently serves as the Deputy Secretary General of the Buddhist Association of Sichuan Province, the Council Member of the Religious Association of China, the Member of the People's Political Consultative Conference of Ganzi Tibetan Autonomous Prefecture, the Deputy Director of the People's Congress of Litang County, the Abbot of the Litang Monastery, the Abbot of the Beita Monastery, and the Abbot of the Zhengjie Monastery...*

(3) Fame as a knowledgeable scholar and an articulate teacher of Tibetan Buddhist theories

In interviews, almost every ethnic Chinese monk in the lama's monasteries and every ethnic Chinese layperson who works or studies in the lama's missionary system full time, pointed out that the lama's impressive knowledge of Buddhist theory played a key role in initially arousing their interests in Tibetan Buddhism and finally turning them into devoted followers of the lama. Some of them even said the lama was the only ethnic

Tibetan Buddhist monk they had ever met who could explain clearly complex Tibetan Buddhist philosophical concepts to Chinese-speaking people in fluent and plain Chinese language. That is, first of all, the lama is well versed in Tibetan Buddhist philosophy. Moreover, the lama has managed to master mandarin and achieved a near-native language ability. According to one source, in the 1990s-2000s, in order to improve his Chinese, both in the form of oral mandarin and much more formal and complex forms of written mandarin, the lama personally hired one Chinese professor who just retired from the department of Chinese literature at a major university in Liaoning province to give him private language tutoring classes. During the study the retired Chinese professor even taught the lama to read a classic work of ancient Chinese literature, *Records of the Grand Historian* (ch. shiji), written by one of the greatest Chinese writer and historian Sima Qian. In this way, the lama gradually acquired the ability of not only speaking, but also writing, formal and elegant Chinese language.

As the next section offers examples from the interviewees' life history, here it is sufficient to cite an excerpt from the lama's official short biography that lists his extensive teaching and research experiences on Buddhist theology and philosophy.

...(The lama) began to teach Tibetan Buddhism to his ethnic Chinese and Mongolian disciples in 1992. He spent most time to teach the fundamental classics such as *The Great Treatise on the Stages of the Path to Enlightenment* (ch. puti daocidi guanglun) and *The Great Treatise on the Stages of the Path to Tantric Buddhism* (ch. mizong daocidi

*guanglun)... He published Buddhist studies papers such as “A Brief Introduction to The Ornament of Clear Realization” (ch. mile xianguan zhuangyanlun jianyao”, and “A Brief Introduction to The Fundamental Wisdom of the Middle Way” (ch. zhongguanlun jianyao), and “An Introduction to Buddhism.” He also published many research papers on Tibetan ethnic culture (ch. zang minzu wenhua)...*

*Since 2002, for the three seasons of spring, summer, and fall each year, the Xiaba Lama holds Dharma gatherings in the Beita Monastery in Shenyang...where he teaches in Chinese language the Buddhist classics like the Heart Sutra, the Infinite Life Sutra (ch. wuliang shou jing), and A Guide to the Bodhisattva's Way of Life (ch. ru pusaxing lun)...*

## **2. The lama’s charismatic personality for attracting highly educated Chinese followers**

Since the lama began to teach Tibetan Buddhist classics and spread Tibetan Buddhism among the ethnic Chinese Buddhists’ communities in the 1990s, lots of ethnic Chinese people have come to visit his religious lectures and attend his religious rituals. Many of the devoted followers later became core members of the lama’s missionary system. Some of these work or study full time as laypersons in the related missionary organizations, while others even get formally ordained as monks or nuns and stay in the lama’s monasteries in eastern China. Regarding those who are able to serve as core figures in the missionary system, they are usually highly educated and almost all have attended college receiving a bachelor’s degree in either physics, chemistry, biology, or in

a field in the social sciences or humanities. Several of them even have received master's degrees or a PhD degree from one of the top two universities in China. Therefore, understandably, to attract these kinds of people as followers, the lama is expected to show certain characteristics of charisma. In particular, the lama's knowledge of Buddhist philosophy actually impressed the educated followers. The following examples come from the life history interviews given by ethnic Chinese who become ordained monks under the lama.

One interviewee, pointed out he always believed an ideal tutor should be someone who is knowledgeable in Buddhist theology:

*When I was a college student, I once seriously considered to become a monk. But at that time, as a young man, I always thought I should not try to realize this idea until I could find someone who is "advanced enough" (ch. gou gaoji) for me to follow... This being "advanced enough" means, the religious tutor should be, for example, knowledgeable enough on Buddhist theology... It's common for a young man to have lots of dreams, which is similar to, say, if you can choose a girlfriend, you of course want to choose a super-star celebrity...*

Another interviewee confirmed the lama is such an ideal tutor, under whom guidance he started to have serious interest towards Tibetan Buddhism:

*...On that day my friend and I visited the monastery and we happened to meet the lama for the first time ... We asked the lama two questions that made a deep impression on me..*

*The first question was: if the nature of any phenomena in the world is Emptiness, that is, being related to all kinds of causes and conditions, then, why is the nature of the Unconditioned Phenomena (ch. wuwei fa) also Emptiness? My friend asked this question. The second question was...about the “sixteen defining activities of the Four Noble Truths” (ch. sidi shiliu xingxiang). For the second noble truth, it contains the four implications of the “cause of suffering” (ch. yin), “gathering” (ch. ji), “continuation” (ch. sheng), and “conditions” (ch. yuan). If so, what is the difference between the “continuation” and the “conditions”? We asked the two questions... Hearing our questions, the lama was very happy. For the first question, the lama gave us a wonderful answer that we had never heard before; he answered that even though the Unconditioned Phenomena does not have a cause, it still arises as the result of conditions; its existence depends on the Conditioned Phenomena (ch. youwei fa). This answer by him was actually based on the theory of the famous Indian Buddhist scholar Chandrakirti, but at that time we had not heard of this kind of answer from any other people. In the past my friend asked lots of people about this question, but none of them gave him an answer as cogent as his. Only the answer given by the lama made sense to us. Because of this answer by the lama, we suddenly started to have huge confidence on the lama.*

Another interviewee gave a short summary of the lama's charismatic personality based on his understanding:

*The lama is, based on my knowledge, the only Tibetan person who is able to explain clearly the complex Tibetan Buddhist philosophical theories to Chinese people in the Chinese language, which is really admirable... On the days not long after I became an ordained monk, for a while, I was in Chengdu and worked under the lama doing some translating work... It was the lama who did the translation and I assisted him in looking for relevant materials. I found that the lama seems to have inexhaustible energy. He worked extremely carefully and tried to achieve a perfect result. Also, he is extremely smart. For example, facing a difficult issue, he can immediately recognize the key point of the issue. That is my personal perception.*

That is, at the level of individual, the lama's personal charisma undoubtedly helps to recruit more followers for his monasteries as well as expand his missionary system in eastern China. However, that is only half of the story. Furthermore, at the level of group/organization, a successful adaption to modern capitalism, such as a successful practice of the Weberian bureaucracy, is at least equally important for Tibetan Buddhism's widescale spread in a modernizing China. This is the topic of the next section.

### **III. Adapting to Modernity: Carrying Out the Major Principles of a Weberian**

#### **Bureaucracy**

Max Weber, one of the founding fathers of modern sociology in particular and social science in general, once argued, “bureaucracy constitutes the most efficient and (formally) rational way in which human activity can be organized.” Consequently, bureaucracy is one of the defining characteristics of modernity, and “it is indispensable to the modern world.” (see Swedberg and Agevall 2005: 19) In his magnum opus *Economy and Society*, Weber lists six key features that characterize the organizing principles of a bureaucracy as follows.

First, a bureaucracy “covers a fixed area of activity, which is governed by rules.” That is, the operation of an bureaucracy should be rule-based, which means in principle the operation should be relatively independent from the unstable factors such as a leader’s personal whims.

Second, a bureaucracy “is organized as a hierarchy.” That is, one such organization should have an orderly-arranged hierarchical structure in which the power and duty of each of the units of the organization should be clearly defined and thus the roles of both the superiors and the subordinates should be mutually understandable to each other.

Third, the action of a bureaucracy “is based on written documents (preserved as files).”

That is, the rules the bureaucracy’s operation should be explicitly based as text.

Fourth, for the staff members of a bureaucracy, “expert training is needed, especially for some.” That is, there should be a consideration and requirement for specialized skills or expertise in recruiting and appointing the member for a specialized position in the organization.

Fifth, in a bureaucracy, “officials devote their full activity to their work.” That is, each of the members of the organization is expected to work full time for fulfilling his or her duties for a certain position. This can be illustrated by the mandatory observation of a strict schedule for job duties that is required by the organization.

Sixth, in a bureaucracy, “the management of the office follows general rules which can be learned.” For example, the member for a certain position of the organization should be replaceable as the skill or technique required by the position can also be learned by other candidates.

The Tibetan Buddhist organizations that are successful in doing missionary works in eastern China, such as the Beita and Zhengjie monasteries of the Xiaba Lama, can be seen to have partly adapted to the modern trend of a Weberian bureaucracy. As a result, the operation of the Xiaba Lama’s organizations incorporated certain elements from the

six principles of an ideal bureaucracy. That is, the entire missionary system looked like a hybrid system that combines both the traditional resources such as an institution of charismatic religious leadership, and the modern resources, such as the organizational principle and management structure influenced by modern capitalism, which is to be shown below.

### 1. Largely rule-based operation

In the case of the Zhengjie Monastery, almost every monk is organized to serve in a position for the daily operation of the monastery. Namely, almost each of them has work to do for the monastery every day. One monk, who oversaw the monastery's restaurant, shared his work experience with me in an interview.

He talked about how the religious leader, the Xiaba Lama, doesn't personally intervene in the monastery's daily management:

*The management of the monastery is public and transparent. The lama is the abbot of the monastery and is also the Legal Representative of the Legal Person of the monastery. But the lama does not directly participate in the daily operation and management of the monastery. The lama provides the general guidelines and directions, but it is we the disciples who do the specific management. The lama mentioned the advantage of such a management design is that the followers can always keep their respect for the lama,*

*because all the people, including the lama, are still human, so it is inevitable that in dealing with the specific daily matters people will make mistakes and if the lama was in direct charge of the daily management, once he made a mistake, it could affect the followers' confidence in him, which will have a negative influence on the followers' religious practice and the relationship between the lama and the followers...*

As a result, it is a bureaucracy that the monks collectively run and that follows a standard procedure to maintain the daily operation of the monastery:

*Each director or head of the units of the monastery has clear duties, powers, and responsibilities, just like that found in a business company. For example, in the case of the restaurant I oversee, the duty include providing breakfast, lunch, and dinner for all the monks every day; and during the period when there is a large-scale Dharma Gathering in which a large number of laypersons visit the monastery, it should provide breakfast, lunch, and dinner for both the monks and the visitors. It should also follow a standard procedure in buying food ingredients every day and operating the storeroom for preserving the food ingredients. There is also a series of regulations and policies for me to observe in overseeing the restaurant. All of the relevant regulations and policies have already been established. All of the procedures are standard... (And, as the one in charge of the restaurant), I am answerable to the directors of the Department of External Affairs. For example, if I request funds that exceed 6,000 yuan, I need to get the signatures of two deputy directors besides my own signature; and if I request funding*

*that less than 6,000 yuan, I need to get the signature of one deputy director, besides my own signature... So there are checks and balances between the powers of the directors. The procedure is very standard.*

The monk also told me the framework of the operation of the monastery was elaborated and written on a physical document that was kept by the monastery:

*As of now, the monastery has established a standard framework for its daily management. After the election of the directors and heads of the units this time, the framework that determines the rights and duties of the directors and heads as well as the cooperation between them has become clearer. Now the boundaries regarding the rights and duties of different positions are very clear. There is now a standard procedure regarding how to communicate and cooperate between them. ...If you are interested in this matter, you can go to interview the director of the Office of the monastery, as he has the document on which the management framework of the monastery is written.*

The presence of this document demonstrates that there are written rules guiding the operation of the monastery, which fulfills the third characteristic of a Weberian bureaucracy.

The monk thought the reason why the lama could create this rational and modern operational principle for the monastery lies in his experience studying and working in the Chinese areas that have been undergoing modernization:

*The lama created the framework, regulations, and policies... For the Tibetan Buddhist monasteries, no matter whether they are in Tibetan areas or in Chinese areas, this kind of arrangement for the framework, regulations, and policies, is very modern. The lama studied for three years in the Department of Philosophy at Peking University and he has lived in Chinese areas for a long time... He knows very well what modern civilization is and the institutions present in the Chinese areas. He has a deep knowledge of them, which goes far beyond just speaking good Chinese language.*

## 2. A hierarchical structure

The hierarchical structure of both monasteries is clear, as the following example from Beita Monastery illustrates.

In Beita Monastery, all of its units fall into three levels according to their positions in the hierarchical system:

(1) The first level: Democratic Management Committee (ch. minzhu guanli weiyuanhui; abbreviated as DMC below) that is the senior governing body of the monastery; this unit occupies the highest level of the system, serving as the decision-making organ.

(2) The second level: Dharma-matter Department (ch. fawuzu), Iron-club Monk (ch. tiebang lama), Reception Department (ch. ketang), all of the three are answerable to the DMC; these units occupy the middle level of the system, serving as the hubs bridging the decision-making organ above and the grass-root organs below.

(3) The third level: the units further fall into two groups.

(a) Those directly answerable to the DMC include the Editing Center (ch. bianji zhongxin), the Library (ch. yuelanshi), the Office of Financial Affairs (ch. caiwuchu), the Restaurant (ch. zhaitang), the Tibetan Studies Program and the Translating Program (ch. zangwenban yu fanyizu).

(b) The Reception Department is in direct charge of several organs, including the Authentic Dharma Distribution Department (ch. zhengfaliutongchu), the Construction Department (ch. jijianzu), the Funeral Department (ch. wangshengtang), the Incense Department (ch. xiangzu), the (butter) Lamp Department (ch. dengzu), the Merit Department (ch. gongdezu), the Monastery-owned Store (ch. liutongchu), the Security Department (ch. baoanshi), and the staff of each Hall (ch. gedian). These organs are

roughly on a similar level in the hierarchy as the library, restaurant, etc., as both groups are responsible for directly addressing specific tasks and work at the grass-root level.

The following (Figure 1) is the organizational chart of the monastery.

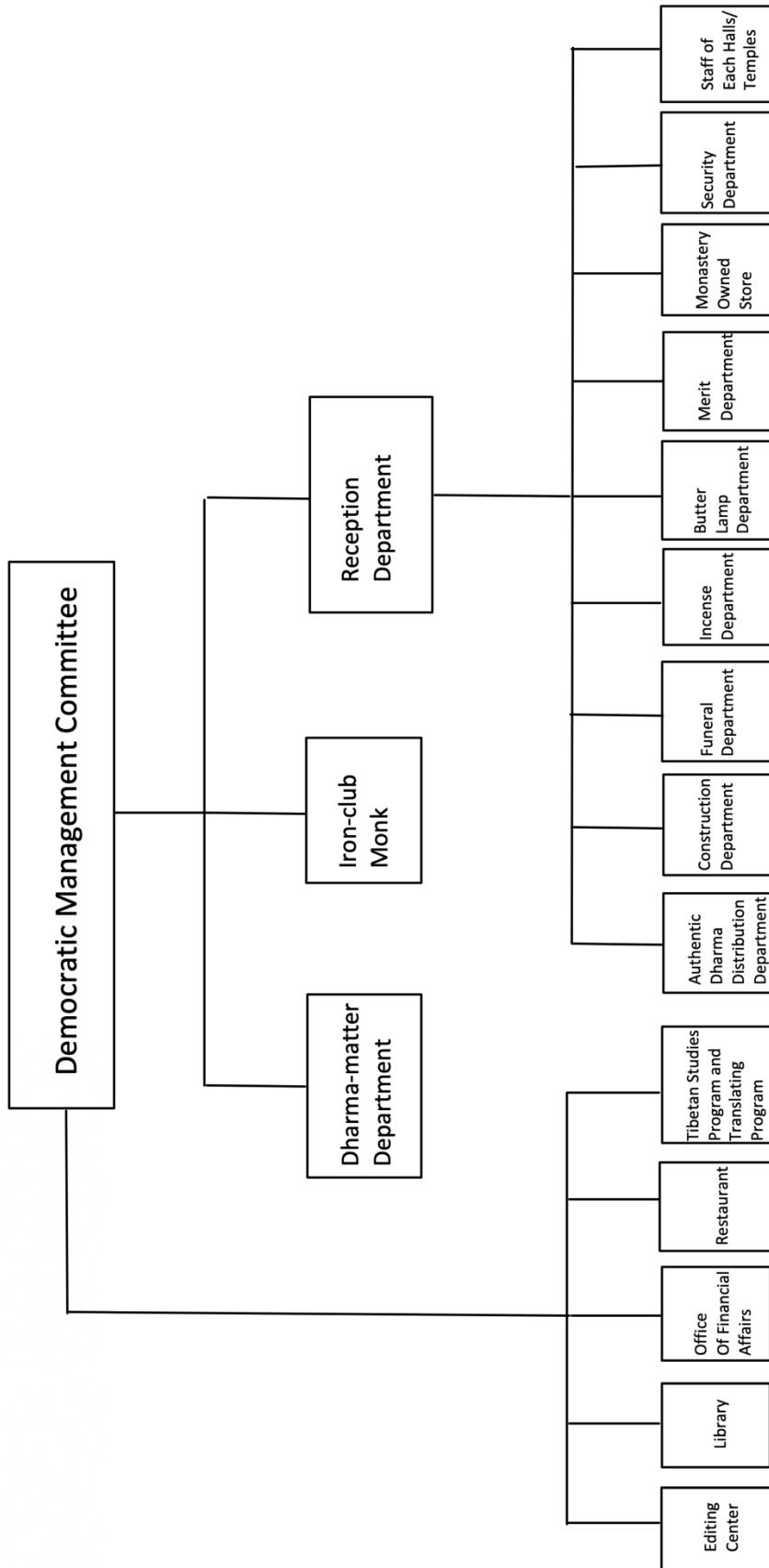


Figure 1

The function and membership of each department or program are explained below:

A. Democratic Management Committee. It is on top of the organizational structure of the monastery and its function is to make the final decisions on any major issue with regard to the operation of the monastery. It is headed by a director (ch. zhuren), and consists of two secretaries, as well as other staff members such as drivers.

The position of the director is different from that of the Dharma Chair (ch. fatai) whose holder is the only incarnate lama in the monastery. The director, as the official head of the bureaucracy of the monastery, is in charge of all of the major activities of monastic life in the community. However, the director does not hold the highest religious authority, which belongs to the lama. As the Dharma Chair, the lama's official functions are to conduct large-scale rituals during Dharma gatherings every few months, and to teach Buddhist theology to the monks and lay followers in the religious community. Or, as the internal document of the Beita Monastery confirmed, the official relationship between the monastery and the lama is that "the Democratic Management Committee hires the Dharma Chair to come to the monastery each year to conduct the gatherings of religious rituals" (ch. guanweihui pinqing fatai lai meinian zhuchi fahui). However, even though the lama does not formally play any role in the daily administrative affairs, everyone in the Beita Monastery knows that he holds the final say regarding the major events of the monastery. That is, given the double leadership structure with the lama as

the charismatic religious leader side by side with a DMC director as the administrative head of the bureaucracy, DMC itself serves as an example for the hybrid characteristic of the entire missionary system that combines both traditional elements and modern ones.

The membership of the various committees is decided by the monastery itself, rather than appointed by the government, though the key member(s) of the committee, such as the director of Beita, may also play some role in the government. For example, the current holder of the director position, the monk Cilai, who is the younger brother of the lama, also serves as one member of the standing committee of the Political Consultative Conference of the local government and also is the vice head of the Buddhist Association of Shenyang City (ch. shi foxie). On how this part it is different from the Tibetan Buddhist monasteries in Tibet, one monk mentioned:

*All the committee members are ordained monks of the monastery. On this point we are different from those monasteries in Tibet where they had to be watchful about many issues (so the government determined the democratic management committee membership).. But here, since it is in Interior China (ch. neidi), we will not get involved in some very serious political issues, so all the members are monks of our own monastery... In the committee, no one was appointed by the state bureau of religious affairs (ch. zongjiao ju).*

B. Dharma-matter Department is responsible for dealing with religious issues. In particular it is in charge of organizing religious activities such as holding a “Dharma Gathering” (ch. fahui), that is, a large scale gathering of religious rituals for the lay followers, and organizing a Buddhist chanting session (ch. nianlong) for the monks, and deciding how to use the religious instruments (ch. faqi) for a ritual, or for launching any missionary activities such as giving theological classes, one of which is the “weekend series lectures (on Buddhist theology)” (ch. zhoumo jiangtang) that are held for the lay followers of Tibetan Buddhism who visit the monastery during the weekend. Monks hold the leading positions in the department and they are assisted by lay persons who work either full-time or part-time in the department.

C. Iron-club (disciplinary) Monk. This position is in charge of monastic discipline. For example, if a monk needs to ask for a leave, he has to go to the Iron-club Monk and make the request. In addition to discipline related issues, if the monastery wanted to dispatch some monks to do certain work, it is the Iron-club Monk who selected the monks to implement the task. One senior monk serves as the holder of the position.

D. Reception Department. It is mainly responsible for two sorts of work. On the one hand, it is responsible for dealing with matters from outside the monastery. For example, each day the department arranged for two monks to sit in the reception room of the monastery to meet any visitors who have interest in Tibetan Buddhism. On the other hand, it is in charge of all kinds of daily work for maintaining the operation of the

monastery such as cleaning work, construction work, fire prevention work, etc. The staff members of the department consist of monks holding the leading positions and lay persons working as the monks' assistants.

Among all the departments or positions under the DMC, three of them, the Dharma-matter Department, the Iron-club Monk, and the Reception Department, are the most important and powerful, and are sometimes referred to as the "big three" by some monks. One monk in an interview, specifically emphasized the importance of the "big three":

*...for example, for each of us, if we want to leave the monastery to do some stuff, we need to report it to the Iron-club monk; if monk Cicheng [the director of the DMC] wanted to organize the laymen to do a Buddhist chanting, he should report it to the Dharma-matter Department to make the specific arrangements such as how to set up the equipment at a certain location; and regarding issues such as replacing a broken item or making arrangements to welcome a visitor, one has to go to contact the Reception Department...*

E. Editing Center. It is responsible for editing and publishing the works of the lama and maintaining the website of the monastery. The staff members consisted of both monks and lay persons.

F. Library. It is open for free to both the monks and for laypersons working or studying in the monastery, as well as for any visitors from outside, no matter whether they are Buddhists or not. The books in the library range over a number of diverse fields from Buddhist theology, world history, and Western philosophy, to classic literature works that may or may not have any relationship with Buddhism. The staff members consist mainly of lay persons.

G. Office of Financial Affairs. Its function is to do the financial work of the monastery. The staff members consist of monks and lay persons.

H. Restaurant. It offers free breakfast, lunch, and dinner for all the monks as well as all the laypersons who study or work in the monastery, either full time or part time. In addition to the members directly affiliated with the monastery, regular visitors from outside the monastery could also get free food. The restaurant is directly under the charge of the director of the DMC, who is responsible for hiring the workers to run the restaurant.

I. Tibetan Studies Program and Translating Program. Its main function is to educate both interested monks in the monastery and lay persons who study in the monastery either full time or part time to be professional translators of Tibetan Buddhist literature. Their current projects are chiefly about translating major Tibetan Buddhist classics from

Tibetan to Chinese. The teachers and students in this program consisted of both monks and lay persons.

The aforementioned five departments or programs are directly under the direction of the DMC, which occupies roughly the same level in the hierarchy with the following nine units that are under the Reception Department.

J. Authentic Dharma Distribution Department. Its function is to distribute Buddhist publications or Buddhist objects for free to the interested visitors. The staff members consist mostly of laymen.

K. Construction Department. It is responsible for maintenance and construction related work. It mainly consists of lay persons.

L. Funeral Department. It is responsible for making and placing memorial tablets [ch. paiwei] in one building within the monastery for the relatives of the lay followers who pay money for the tablets. The staff members are mostly lay persons.

M. Incense Department. Its work is to distribute free incense to interested visitors. The staff members are largely lay persons.

N. Butter Lamp Department. It is responsible for operating the butter lamp house in the monastery where the interested lay visitors can pay for lighting butter lamps in their names. In Tibetan Buddhist practice, this is a way to accumulate good merit. The staff members are largely lay persons.

O. Merit Department. It is responsible for doing the registration work for the interested laypersons who pay money to request the monastery to hold certain Buddhist rituals for them. However, it doesn't have the power to actually organize the rituals. That task is the responsibility of both the Dharma-matter Department that makes the arrangements and plan, and the Iron-club Monk who selects and dispatches the monks to chant the appropriate prayers. The staff members are mostly lay persons.

P. Monastery-owned Store. Its work is to sell Buddhism-related publications or objects to visitors. The staff members are mostly lay followers.

Q. Security Department. Its function is to do security work. The staff members are lay persons.

R. Staff of each Hall/Temple. In the monastery there are several buildings or Buddhist Halls or Temples where Buddhist statues are worshiped, and each of these buildings have staff members who are responsible for cleaning, security and other work. Most of these are lay followers, except for those in one Buddhist Hall where two monks are

assigned there and, at the request of interested visitors, can do divination for them after they pay some money.

### 3. Written rules for the operation.

The material discussed in the 1<sup>st</sup> section above already addresses this point.

### 4. Specially trained workers for specialized positions

In both monasteries, almost every monk is mobilized to fill a certain position and take work responsibility for the monastery. Consequently, almost all the monastic members are involved in maintaining the operation of the monasteries. A middle-aged ethnic-Chinese monk who had no religious beliefs when he was young and just became a Tibetan Buddhist ordained monk several years earlier, once said in an interview: before becoming an ordained monk, he imagined monastic life would be that everyone does his own religious practice and nothing else, but later he found that the life in the monastery was almost like that of an employee in a business company outside. For example, he worked five and a half days each week in the monastery's book editing center. He went to his office in the morning and left in the afternoon, and following a strict schedule every day. He even needed to record the time he arrived at work on a special machine each day. The monks, therefore, are expected to work for the monasteries according to their own expertise. Basically, the ethnic Tibetan monks on one side and the non-Tibetan

monks, which comprise Chinese, Manchu, Mongolian and others on the other side, are expected to take different jobs as they usually have different expertise. The Tibetan monks are largely responsible for religious affairs while the non-Tibetan ones do work such as building connections for the monastic community with the surrounding Chinese communities.

In the Beita Monastery, when recruiting prospective Tibetan monks, the most important qualifying requirement is that they need to exhibit a strong background in practicing Buddhist rituals because their monastic job is to perform and attend rituals that the monastery's patrons' fund each morning. In particular, the expectation is that competent candidates should be able to chant relevant Buddhist scriptures and mantras wholly by memory. In general, Beita's Tibetan monks fall onto two groups: the younger ones and the older ones. Regarding the first group, all the younger ones currently living in the Beita previously were junior monks of the Matong Monastery, the Tibetan lama's home monastery located in the Tibetan area of Litang in Sichuan province. They must have first passed all the exams regarding reciting scriptures at the Matong Monastery before coming here. For the other older Tibetan monks from other Tibetan-area monasteries, the criterion is similar. They must have first finished the exams at the local monasteries where they previously stayed, and then they got the opportunity for being recommended to be a monk of the Beita Monastery.

In addition to the religious competence for chanting important Buddhist scriptures and mantras, sometimes other personal capacities can also help interested Tibetan monks to be able to come to Beita. For example, if they are good at editing Tibetan texts, teaching Tibetan language, or are exceptionally knowledgeable in Buddhist theology, after the Beita Monastery's examination, their application for moving to the Beita monastery may also be approved; or the monastery may itself invite some accomplished monks to join Beita. For example, the monastery currently has four Tibetan monks who got the degree of Geshe in India under the current Dalai Lama; two of them are bilingual and can directly teach theological classes to followers in Chinese language.

In the Zhengjie Monastery, the mechanism of recruiting Tibetan monks largely parallels that of Beita Monastery. Moreover, the Zhengjie monastery formally established a program to recruit Tibetan scholar monks to study Chinese language and to work full time as translators in the Zhengjie monastery. One Tibetan scholar monk who once studied in Lhasa and in Yushu (in Qinghai Province) told what he experienced to get admitted into this program.

*I heard from others about the Zhengjie Monastery and wanted to come here. But at that time I had not finished my study of the Five Great Treatises (ch. wubu dalun) of Tibetan Buddhism. To get admitted to Zhengjie Monastery, the monks must pass an exam that is based on the Five Great Treatises... So I worked hard to prepare for the exam. I studied the Treatises by myself and also studied them with teachers. In 2016, in June, ...I went to*

*Kangding to take the exam which lasted for many hours. I passed it and then I came here in August... The Xiaba Lama and four to five monks who held the Geshe degree, organized and oversaw that exam... There were 40-50 monks going to Kangding to take the exam, from which 21 monks passed it.*

By contrast, the recruitment of the non-Tibetan monks follows a slightly different logic. According to one Chinese monk, the monastery decides to accept them because they can help the monastery to fulfill certain functions that the current Tibetan monks are not able to do. For example, some of them hold a post-graduate degree in Buddhist philosophy or in Tibetan studies from prestigious Universities in China and they are now serving positions to help the monastery establish more connections with academics both inside China and abroad.

## 5. Full activity for work

Max Weber elaborates “full activity” as an important characteristic of modern bureaucracy in his *Economy and Society*:

*When the office is fully developed, official activity demands the full working capacity of the official, irrespective of the fact that the length of his obligatory working hours in the bureau may be limited. In the normal case, this too is only the product of a long*

*development, in the public as well as in the private office. Formerly the normal state of affairs was the reverse: Official business was discharged as a secondary activity.*

On the one hand, since the Beita monastery and the Zhengjie monastery are Tibetan Buddhist monasteries, it is not realistic to expect that in this context, the “official activity demands the full working capacity of the official,” at least not as “full” as that of the workers working in a secular institution such as a company. However, on the other hand, both monasteries do distribute specific and clearly defined working responsibilities or duties to almost every monk living in the monastic community, to the extent that, at least from the perspective of the monasteries, those responsibilities or duties should not be “discharged as a secondary activity.” That is, the major parts of the monastic populations’ daily activities are mostly guided or shaped by the requirements given by the monasteries to the individual monks; namely, almost everyone is mobilized to serve the community. The following two sections list this kind of daily activities for both monasteries.

(1) The monks’ daily activities that follow the requirements of the Beita Monastery:

A. The collective religious activities required by the monastery every day

The Beita monastery required the monks to attend certain collective religious activities every day, as one monk commented:

*(Regarding the monks' daily activities) ...in monasteries in Han Chinese areas, they usually have mandatory collective religious activities like morning chanting session and evening chanting sessions. For our monastery (which is a Tibetan Buddhist monastery located in a Han Chinese region), in order to accommodate the religious needs of Chinese Buddhists, we have the collective evening chanting session (that requires everyone to attend), yet we don't have the collective morning chanting session (that requires all the monks including both the Tibetan monks and other non-Tibetan ones to attend).*

Most of the monks permanently living within the Beita Monastery—rather than the visiting monks who study here for several months or years, or the nuns who are disciples of the lama yet live outside the monastery—usually adhere to the following schedule.

(a) 9:00am to about 10:30am

At 9:00am each day, the monastery required the Tibetan monks to gather at the West Hall (ch. xipeidian) in front of the Main Hall of the monastery to chant scriptures, prayers and mantras (ch. nianjing) as the major Buddhist service (ch. foshi) offered by the Beita Monastery to the lay followers. Before the main ritual of chanting, the monks also undertake a ritual of Great-Might-Virtue Diamond Buddha (ch. dawei de jingang) that serves as the pre-ritual of the Buddhist service. According to the monks interviewed, the

activities from 9:00am to 10:30am functions as the counterpart of the Morning-chanting Session (ch. zaoke) in the monasteries of Chinese Buddhism.

The language used in the Buddhist service is Tibetan. The non-Tibetan monks, including Chinese, Manchurian and Mongolian monks whose first language is not Tibetan, are not required to attend it. However, if on one day some Tibetan monks ask for a leave or go to other tasks arranged by monastery and the total number of the monks therefore is too low, the monastery may also ask those Chinese, Manchurian and Mongolian monks, if they are available, to join in the chanting. Or, on some days, if there are lots of patrons or lay followers present at the Buddhist service, to the extent that the amount of the visitors greatly dwarfed that of the Tibetan monks, the Chinese, Manchurian and Mongolian monks will also be asked to attend the ritual.

(b) 11:30am to about 12:30pm

Most of the monks attend the Lunch-and-chanting Session (ch. Guozhai) at the monastery restaurant around each noon. This session includes lunch and a brief chanting session of Buddhist scriptures, prayers and mantras after the lunch.

(c) 5:00pm to about 6:15pm

The monastery requires all of the monks in the monastery to attend the Dinner-and-Chanting Session, or the Evening Session (ch wanke) in the monastery's restaurant,

beginning at 5:00pm each day, unless the monk requests a leave from the Iron-club Monk of the monastery and gets approved. All the monks have the dinner together first, and then start to chant scriptures, prayers and mantras for about 40 to 60 minutes. The language used in the chanting session is Tibetan. For the non-Tibetan monks, though they may not be able to speak Tibetan, because most of the texts used in the session are available in Chinese translation, so they can follow the Tibetan monks while chanting in Chinese from the same texts. The scriptures, prayers and mantras they chant include the “Guru Offering” (ch. shangshi gong), the “Burning Incense Offering” (ch. shaoxiang gong), and several others.

#### B. Individual monks’ activities arranged by the monastery

The monastery usually assigns certain specific work or positions to the individual monks; however, there is a difference between the Tibetan monks and the non-Tibetan monks with respect to this.

##### (A) Tibetan monks

For the Tibetan monks, in addition to attending the collective Buddhist prayer chanting session held each morning or undertaking the administrative duties as members of certain departments or programs of the monastery, they may need to take turns to be responsible for three kinds of ritual work.

First, in Tibetan Buddhism, there is a tradition that the lama or monks do divination (ch. dagua) for interested followers to foretell what will happen in this or their future life, with the help of the supernatural power of certain Tibetan Buddhist deities. Especially, there is a female deity called the “Good-fortune Heaven Goddess” (ch. jixiang tianmu), who is believed to possess special power to help Buddhist diviners give accurate prophecies to interested visitors. The Beita Monastery has set up a shrine for this goddess in the Hall of Dharma Protecting-deities (ch. hufa dian), and arranges for at least one Tibetan monk to sit in the hall next to the shrine. Lay followers can come there and pay a certain amount of money to the monk as an offerings to the Goddess, and then the monk will do the divination for them.

The second kind of work is called “zhuangzang” in Chinese, The literal translation of this is “to stuff precious stuff into (a statue of a deity)” or “to stuff organs into (a statue of a deity).” Buddhists believe that the statue of Buddha, Bodhisattva, or other deities they worship will not receive the holy power of the Buddha, the Bodhisattva or the deity that the statue represents unless senior Buddhist practitioners—in Tibetan Buddhism, usually lamas or senior monks—conduct the following two rituals for the statues. Therefore, for lay followers, in order to build a shrine in their own houses, they may come to the monastery-owned store to buy a Buddha statue, together with some gemstones and precious metals such as gold or silver, as well as other sacred items, and pay some fee to request the monks in the monastery to hold a ritual to stuff these precious articles into

the statue. So, each day the Beita Monastery arranges at least one Tibetan monk to sit in the Reception Hall of the monastery to meet the lay followers' need for this ritual.

The third kind of work is called “kaiguang” in Chinese, whose literal translation can be the ritual “to open it to light”, or simply, the ritual of “consecration”. During this process, the monks usually chant scriptures, prayers and mantras to appeal to the deities, inviting them to grant their power and use the statues as its receptacles. It is usually held along with the ritual of statue-stuffing. To carry out this function for the local religious community, the monastery also arranges for at least one monk in the Reception Hall.

The Tibetan monks working for either of the above three ritual tasks are required to stay at the arranged chapel from 9:00am to 3:30pm each day, with a break in the middle at around noon for a lunch and a short rest up to 30 minutes.

(B) Non-Tibetan monks, i.e., Chinese monks, Manchu monks, and some others

In the Beita Monastery, two departments or programs play a crucial role in Tibetan Buddhism's spread in the Chinese-speaking communities in China: the Editing Center and the Program of Tibetan Studies and Translating (abbreviated as TST program). Most of the Chinese and Manchu monks of the monastery maintain a close relationship with the origin and operation of these two departments. Currently, the monastery generally appoints Chinese monks as the major members of the two departments and does not

require them to attend many other regular religious activities of the monastery along with the Tibetan monks. Their daily activities, therefore, are different from those of the monastic majority at the Beita monastery.

For the non-Tibetan monks working at the Editing Center, they usually follow a daily schedule closer to that of the non-religious white-collar workers in companies than to that of regular monks in Tibetan Buddhist monasteries. Each weekday from Monday to Friday, from 9am to 5pm, except during large-scale Dharma Gatherings or the holiday of Chinese New Year, they are supposed to stay in the office to do work such as editing Buddhism-related publications, designing pamphlets and other materials to advertise the Beita Monastery, operate the official website of the monastery, run the online store and social media accounts owned by the monastery, communicate with the companies the monastery hires to manufacture certain Buddhist objects like incense, et cetera. What is really interesting is that all the monks, nuns, and the lay persons working at the Editing Center are required to punch in and punch out on a card reader each day to verify their attendance in the office.

One monk working at the Editing Center described his daily work:

*Since our monastery does not have a collective morning chanting session, we (the non-Tibetan monks) are free to decide by ourselves when to get up from bed each day. For me, I usually go to bed very late, so I get up the next day also relative late so I usually miss the breakfast provided by our restaurant in the morning. After getting up and*

*beginning my daily work...which consists of being in charge of three groups of work (for the monastery). The first group is to give classes for the Tibetan study program. For this I need to teach three courses each semester. So, if in the morning I have a class to teach, I will go to give a lecture. If there is no class, I will deal with the work of the Editing Center, that is a department of the monastery responsible for printing Tibetan Buddhist scriptures, doing advertisement stuff for the monastery, maintaining the operation of our online store that sells all kinds of Buddhist items, maintaining the social media of the monastery like our Wechat website, designing and printing posters for our monastery's Dharma gatherings and others. So, in the morning, I may go to the office of the Editing Center. In addition, I am also in charge of the monastery-owned store, so sometimes I may also go to the office of the store. Basically, I am very busy each day.*

The non-Tibetan monks who only teach at the TST program usually have an even more flexible timetable each day. Their classes may be scheduled within the following time slots: 9:00am to 11:00am, 1:00pm to 3:00pm, 3:00pm to 5:00pm, so except those times, the monks are generally free to decide what to do themselves. During this free time, they may read books, write papers, translate Tibetan Buddhist works, or prepare for the lectures they need to deliver the next day.

One monk, who is in charge of the TST program, explained their regular daily activities.

*We who are working at the TST program live a life quite similar to the students at a secular university. Each morning after getting up from bed, we of course will first of all have breakfast, and then we can return and do whatever we want to do, like chanting some Buddhist scriptures or read the books for the class. We are not required to attend the collective Morning-chant Session, in which the Tibetan monks need to do.... If we have classes scheduled in the morning, they will be between 9:00 am and 11:00 am... In the afternoon, the classes usually last from 1:00 pm to 3:00 pm, or from 3:00 pm to 5:00 pm. It is not necessarily the case that the classes will cover all of the time slots all day long so if we do not have classes at a time slot, we can use the time to read books ourselves. Then, from 5:15 pm to sometime over 6:00 pm, it is the time for the Evening-chant Session that requires all the monks in the monastery to attend, so we also need to attend that... Then in the evening, we are free to do what we want...*

That is, the major daily activities of the non-Tibetan monks also revolved around the schedule arranged by the monastery, even though they could get plenty of free time most of the days. Or, in Max Weber's language again, "official activity demands the full working capacity of the official."

## (2) The monks' daily activities at the Zhengjie Monastery

The Zhengjie Monastery and the Beita Monastery share one lama as their respective Dharma Chairs so the religious and other daily activities conducted by the lama in both

monasteries are basically the same. Regarding the monks' daily activities, they are also generally similar but there are some small differences. The Zhengjie monks' activities fall into two categories.

#### A. During the Dharma Assemblies

Each year, especially from April to June, the lama frequently comes to Zhengjie and stays there for days or weeks to give a series of lectures on Buddhist theology and to conduct religious gatherings, which together are called "Dharma Assemblies" (ch. fahui). During this time, in the morning, all the monks are required to attend the Morning Chanting Session. Because the monastic population contains both Chinese-speaking monks (Chinese and Mongolian monks) and Tibetan-speaking monks (Tibetan monks), two groups of morning chanting sessions are held separately according to the language they use. One monk explained this as follows:

*For the morning (prayer) chanting session, we (the non-Tibetan monks) use Chinese... For the Tibetan monks, because their Chinese language is not good enough, they don't attend our morning chanting session; rather, for them, they attend a chanting session in Tibetan language that aims to benefit the lay followers who are donors for our monastery.*

At noon, all the monks are required to attend a Group Lunch (ch. guozhai). During the lunch, the monks sit together to chant Buddhist scriptures, prayers and mantras are meant “to transfer merit to other sentient beings” (ch. huixiang). In addition, there is a collective ritual every monk should do that is named the ritual of “carrying a bowl” (ch. tuobo). This involves carrying their bowls and walking together around the main hall of the monastery once each noon. This walking-together-while-carrying-a-bowl activity is mandatory for all monks even though someone isn’t going to eat lunch. According to one interviewee, one monk was trying to lose weight for some time so he actually skipped every lunch; however, he still had to join the others and do the “carrying bowl” ritual.

Then, in the afternoon, all the monks are expected to attend the lama’s lectures and rituals.

Finally, in the evening, the collective Evening Chanting is held. It is scheduled after finishing dinner. It is an important activity and the monastery requires all the monks to attend both during the Dharma Assembly period and other times.

In addition, during the days of the large-scale religious gatherings, almost every monk of the monastery is given certain administrative work. For example, a monk who was in charge of the depot of the monastery introduced his work responsibilities:

*During the assemblies, every monk was given a position in charge of certain work. For me, I am in charge of the storage depot of the monastery... I am responsible for keeping the important religious instruments and other items that are used during the Dharma assemblies, including the clothes for the religious rituals, as well as things such as bedding sets that the visitors can borrow during their stay when an assembly is held... Some visiting monks from other monasteries may need bowls when they come, so they can borrow bowls from our depot; after the assembly finishes and when they leave, they had to return the bowls to us.*

#### B. During the days without Dharma Assemblies

During the days when the lama doesn't stay in Zhengjie, the monks follow a timetable with several changes. First, in the morning, while the Tibetan monks must attend the Group Chanting (ch. jiti niansong), the Chinese and Mongolian/Manchu monks are not asked to do so, and they can use the time for other personal activities. Also, there are no theological lectures and tantric rituals in the afternoon. However, the monastery offers a diversity of classes for the monks. Some of the classes, especially those on Tibetan Buddhism's discipline, are mandatory. Others, such as language-learning classes, are largely voluntary. For example, for Chinese-speaking monks who want to improve their Tibetan language, there are classes on learning Tibetan. Similarly, for those who want to improve their Chinese language, especially for the 20 or so visiting Tibetan monks with a Geshe degree who come to the Zhengjie in order to learn Chinese, there are Chinese

classes. Additionally, there are classes on Buddhist theology, that also attract many monks.

#### **IV. A Well-functioned Missionary System as the Result of the Charismatic Leadership of the Lama plus a Weberian-type Bureaucracy**

The combination of one traditional factor, the incarnate lama's charismatic personality, with one modern factor, the newly introduced mechanism of a Weberian-type bureaucracy, results in a quite successful and well-functioning missionary system comprising two Tibetan Buddhist monasteries located in the Chinese-dominated eastern China, as well as a Buddhist studies center that is co-operating with a prestigious state-owned research university in Beijing. That is, on the one hand, inside the system, the lama had successfully established a relatively sizable and harmonious multi-ethnic and monk-centered religious community consisting of monks, nuns, and lay followers in eastern China; and on the other hand, externally, the lama has managed to build a well-connected network maintaining close connections with four key institutions or groups outside: the government, the major financial sources, the layperson followers, and the CCP-controlled research and educational system. The following two sections address the system's internal environment and the external connections.

1. Internally: a multi-ethnic community in which the Chinese and Tibetan monks have a friendly relationship and get along with each other

## (1) A multi-ethnic community

### A. The Beita Monastery

There are about 40 ordained monks and nuns in the religious community centered on the Beita Monastery. Among them, the over 30 monks living in the monastery are regarded as the core members of the sangha (ch. sengtuan), the literal translation based on the Chinese term is the Group of Monks). In addition, there are also several visiting monks from other monasteries who come to Beita Monastery to study full-time, as well as several nuns who are disciples of the lama, yet are not regarded as part of the sangha organization. Both of these live in apartments outside the monastery that are owned or rented by the monastery.

For the over 30 monks living inside the monastery, about three fourths are ethnic Tibetans, most of whom came from the Tibetan areas in either Sichuan or Qinghai, and the rest are Chinese, Manchurian or Mongolian monks. For the visiting monks and nuns living outside the monastery, all of them are ethnic Chinese.

Almost all the 30 core monks serve as the leading officials whose positions maintain the operation of the monastery. In addition, they also lead the almost one hundred lay persons who study and/or work in the monastery full-time or part-time.

## B. The Zhengjie Monastery

In the Zhengjie Monastery, as of 2019, there were over 70 monks: about 50 of whom were permanent monks while the rest were visiting monks.

Among the 50 monks who live in the monastery permanently, two of them are Mongolian and for the rest, there are about the same number of Tibetan as Chinese monks.

In addition, there are over 20 visiting Tibetan monks who came to the Zhengjie to learn Chinese. Almost all these visiting monks had acquired the degree of Geshe in monasteries in Tibetan areas of both China and India.

Similar to the arrangement at Beita monastery, almost every monk who permanently lives in the Zhengjie monastery takes a leading position, overseeing the lay persons who study and/or working in the monastery full-time or part-time.

(2) A good relationship between the monks of different ethnic backgrounds

The Tibetan Buddhist community of the Beita Monastery and the Zhengjie Monastery is surrounded by the vast Chinese areas where the Han people are the ethnic majority. In

this case, it is an interesting topic to explore how the Han Chinese monks viewed their fellow Tibetan monks who live in and share one same space and work together; that is, what is the Chinese monks' perceptions towards the Tibetan monks. I once asked many Chinese monks to give their understanding of the cultural and ethnic difference between the Chinese and the Tibetans, and found that all of them held positive and favorable views of Tibetan people. The following opinions expressed by one Chinese interviewee is quite typical:

*The interviewer:*

*Do you think is there any difference between the Chinese people and the Tibetan people?  
If any?*

*The interviewee:*

*Regarding the difference... I can answer the question in this way: the difference between the Chinese and the Tibetans, is somewhat comparable to the difference between the (Chinese) southerners and the (Chinese) northerners (laughs).*

*The interviewer:*

*Can you say more to elaborate it?*

*The interviewee:*

*I mean, the Tibetan people are much more candid and frank than us Chinese people, and they don't like hiding their ideas. They are also very hospitable... They are more straightforward. In addition, there is one difference on which all of us Chinese monks here agree with each other... Do you know when they (the Tibetan monks) were young, which kind of books or materials they read or studied? For example, for the Tibetan monks, when they were kids, when they were herding sheep for their families for example, which kind of stories did their parents tell them? The stories from Buddhist books. The stories about karma and morality, etc.. By contrast, for us Han Chinese people, which kind of stories did we read or hear when we were young? The stories from books like Romance of the Three Kingdoms (ch. sanguo yanyi), or Chronicles of the Eastern Zhou Kingdoms (ch. dongzhou lieguo zhi), etc.. (translator's note: these books are classical Chinese historical fictions, focusing on topics about machinations, conspiracies, plots, intrigues, and realpolitik based on ancient Chinese history). As a result, if you want to compare the Tibetan people and the Chinese people, you could easily find some difference... When facing a problem, their perspective could be totally different from our perspective...*

That is, after the monks of the two ethnic backgrounds interacted together socially for a while, the Chinese monks gave the Tibetan monks a high praise, which can show that they had got along with each other and likely formed friendships.

2 Externally: there is a well-connected network of connections with important institutions or groups that has strong connections with the CCP-controlled government, the major financial sources supporting the lama's missionary system, the lay followers, and the state-owned research and education system.

(1) The political connection with the CCP government

The lama's unique personal political background, as discussed above, already serves as evidence for his close connection with the CCP government.

(2) The financial connection with major patrons

The system has strong financial support from both wealthy businessmen and ordinary lay followers. The following two sections address the financial sources supporting the religious communities of both monasteries.

A. The financial sources of the Beita Monastery

The monastery gets financial support for three levels: the monastery as a whole, the individual monks, and some special departments or programs of the monastery. The CCP government does not supply funding for the monastery. However, as a government-approved religious organization, it enjoys tax-free status for its religious activities.

(A) The monastery. There are four major financial sources for the monastery as a whole. First, the most important one is from doing Buddhist rituals or holding Buddhist gatherings (ch. foshi) for the interested lay followers. For example, each day in the morning, the Tibetan monks are organized to gather at a Buddhist Hall in the monastery to hold rituals and chant prayers ), which is believed to be able to bring good karma to mankind in general and specifically to people whose names are mentioned as sponsors of the prayer chanting that day. Consequently, the interested laymen can pay a fee to the monastery to place their names on the chanting sponsor list.

Second, the monastery can make a profit by selling Buddhist publications and Buddhist objects in the monastery-run store. For example, it is quite common for a lay follower to have a Buddhist shrine in his or her bedroom, which is composed of at least one statue of the Buddha statue and many other worshipping objects such as a small incense burner to accompany the statue, and he or she can buy all of these materials in the store.

Third, in each of the main Buddhist Halls there is a small box, called the “merit box” (ch. gongde xiang), into which the visitors can put cash as an offering. This action is based on

the Buddhist idea that to donate money to Buddhist organizations or Buddhist monks can accumulate good karma or merit for the donator.

Fourth, the monastery has an online bank account publicized on their website. In order to bring merits to themselves, lay followers may transfer money to this account as a donation to the monastery. According to monks interviewed, money collected from the abovementioned four sources is enough to cover the daily operations of the monastery.

(B) The individual monks. The monks in the monastery directly get financial support from three sources. First, every month the monastery gives each monk a certain allowance that is called “danfei” in Chinese. This monthly allowance given to the monks is a quite popular practice in most of the Buddhist monasteries in Chinese areas and almost all of them give a certain amount of money to their monks or nuns. In the case of Beita Monastery, that amount is 1,200 to 1,300 yuan each month. Second, the individual monks can directly receive donations from lay followers, which is called “senggong” in Chinese, literally meaning “donation to the monk”, and therefore could be translated as alms. The monks of the Beita Monastery can get the alms by doing at least two activities: each day during lunch or dinner the lay followers may enter the restaurant and place the money on the small table in front of each monk; also, during large-scale Buddhist rituals or the Dharma gatherings each month, the interested visitors can leave a certain amount of money in front of the monks present. The amount ranges from one or several yuan to hundreds of yuan each person for each monk. In addition, the local bureau of religious

affairs, a branch of the local government, also provides money to give each of the monks in the monastery medical insurance.

(C) Some special departments or programs of the monastery. Certain departments may rely on additional donations from lay followers in addition to the funding from the monastery; that is, some lay followers may donate money targeting certain programs. For example, some of them regularly give money to the Tibetan Studies and Tibetan Translation Program, since according to Buddhist ideas, translating and spreading Buddhist classics or to help the translation and spreading work brings merit to the translators and patrons. For the same reason, lay followers may also offer financial support to the Editing Program whose function is to edit and publish the lama's theological lectures and works, and therefore spread the Buddhist doctrine. Another example is the monastery's restaurant, to which many lay followers regularly send food ingredients such as rice, flour, vegetables, eggs, or cooking oil for free.

#### B. The financial sources of the Zhengjie Monastery

Similar to the financial sources of the Beita Monastery, the Zhengjie Monastery usually receives no financial support from the government, and also, it has a tax-free status for its regular religious activities.

In Zhengjie, the most important financial source comes from a few major donors who are super wealthy businessmen. Their donations alone are more than enough to support the daily operation of the monastery in addition to some ongoing construction projects to build new buildings for the monastery. As of 2019, the fixed assets of Zhengjie monastery amounted to over 120,000,000 Chinese yuan. On top of those big patrons, more than 100 long-time smaller donors also contribute considerable funding to the monastic population. Each of these people, who come from all different walks of life, regularly donate 1,000-3,000, and more, Chinese yuan each month to the monastery. Given their number, the total amount of money from this source can add up to dozens of thousand Chinese yuan each month, which also serve as an important financial source of the monastery.

Besides these donations in the form of cash, the monastery as a whole may also get material support in other forms. For instance, the restaurant often receives donations in the form of food ingredients such as rice, wheat flour, chicken eggs, vegetables and oil, directly from the followers of the lama and other visitors to the monastery.

For individual monks, there are basically two sources of income. The first one is the offerings (alms) collected from the lay-follower attendees of important religious gatherings, when the lama usually stays in the Zhengjie for days or even weeks to conduct Buddhist rituals in person. Given the close relationship between the Beita monastery and the Zhengjie monastery as both of them share one incarnate lama as

their respective Dharma Chair, the monks of the Zhengjie also frequently visit the Beita to attend the Buddhist gathering there, thereby getting more opportunities to receive offerings (alms).

Additionally, the monastery formally provides all of its permanent monks an allowance of 1,300 per month. According to one interviewee from Zhengjie, this number is higher than the average amount allowance given to monks by most Tibetan Buddhist monasteries in China.

### (3) The religious connection with lay followers

The religious community establishes strong religious connection with lay followers. On the one hand, the lama and senior monks may maintain close personal relationship with their most devoted lay disciples and followers. On the other hand, at the monastery level, each year, both monasteries will organize large-scale Tibetan Buddhist rituals or “Dharma Gatherings” that are open and free to all the visitors. For example, in the Beita Monastery, in recent years the lama usually conducted the following 11 large-scale rituals annually..

#### A. The Ritual of “Suppressing Demons and Erasing Calamities by Four-hundred Offerings” (ch. sibaigong fumo xiaozai yigui)

From the perspective of Buddhism, one reason people have problems in their life or encounter difficulties is that demons (ch. mo) of innumerable kinds cause different troubles for them. For example, there are four demons who especially make people suffer: the demon of aggregates who afflicts human beings through the basic elements that aggregate to form the personality of a human being, the demon of ill-desires who tempts human beings, the demon of death who destroys people's lives, and the demon of the heaven's son who disturbs and obstructs the religious practice of Buddhists.

Given this, in accordance with Buddhist theory, the practitioners can either appeal to the Buddha and rely on his power to suppress the demons to solve the problems, or he can give offerings directly to the demons to appease them to solve the problems; or they can do both. This ritual is designed on the basis of this theory and involves the lama, on behalf of the Buddhists who request and pay for the ritual, on the one hand, chanting Buddhist prayers to communicate with the supernatural powers, and on the other hand, offering a variety of offerings to the demons, with the aim of appeasing and finally driving the evil beings away.

The Beita Monastery's official introduction to this ritual is as follows.

*By invoking the empowering power (ch. jiachili) of the Buddha, this ritual conjures up the four demons (the demon of aggregates (ch. yunmo), the demon of ill desires [ch. fannaomo], the demon of death [ch. simo], the demon of the heaven's son (ch. tianzimo);*

*the demon is the king of the sixth heaven in the world of desire), and offers to them the four hundred offerings of bright lamps, of Torma (ch. duoma; they are ritual offerings made of a mixture of butter and flour that is offered to supernatural beings in Tibetan Buddhist rituals), of flour dough (ch. fentuan), and of Tsampa dough (ch. zhitoumiantuan), so as to [appease] and send away those demons to help the donors erase calamities and solve troubles.*

#### B. The Medicine Master Buddha (ch. yaoshifo; sk. Bhaisajyaguru) Ritual of Erasing Calamities and Prolonging Lives

From the Buddhist perspective, on the one hand, the demons can bring sufferings to not only people but also sentient beings in general; on the other hand, the sentient beings' behaviors themselves—in fact, including both the physically done behaviors and the words said and even the ideas only produced and existing in the mind—can also create either good or bad karma for the sentient beings. As a result, while the good karma can lead to happiness and wellbeing for the sentient beings, the bad karma will afflict them with hindrances and setbacks. For example, a person's past bad behaviors, words, or just ideas, including both those committed in this life and those finished in previous lives, may affect his or her life, bring illnesses or even shorten his or her expected longevity. Based on this understanding, the Buddhist doctrine believes that during a ritual or by chanting prayers and mantras to communicate with the Buddha(s) and by presenting appropriate offerings to him, the Buddha can make use of his incredible powers to help

the practitioners reduce or even liquidate all of the bad karma that may give them illnesses and therefore prolong their life in this world. According to Buddhism, the Buddha who is especially responsible for fulfilling this function is the one called the Medicine Master Buddhas; and strictly speaking, there are eight Buddhas sharing the title of “Medicine Master”. The official introduction to the ritual is as follows.

*By chanting the Medicine Master Sutra and mantra, and giving to the Eight Buddhas of Medicine Master (ch. yaoshibafo)—Good-name Buddha (ch. shanmingchengrulai), Gem Buddha (ch. zhenbaorulai), Gold-color Buddha (ch. jinserulai), No-worry-name Buddha (ch. wuyoumingrulai), Dharma-praise Buddha (ch. fazanrulai), Presenting-wisdom Buddha (ch. xianzhirulai), Medicine-master Buddha (ch. yaoshirulai), Sakyamuni Buddha (ch. shijiamounirulai)—one hundred Water Offering (ch. shuigong), one hundred Lamp Offering (ch. denggong), one hundred Nectar Offering (ch. ganlushangong), the prayers wish to get the empowerment of the Eight Buddhas of Medicine Master on the three ways through which karma is generated—the bodily actions, the speech, and the thought, so as to help the donors erase the bad karmas that are the causes of illnesses since the beginningless past (ch. wushijieyilai) to this life, in order to cure illnesses, erase calamities, and prolong lives. This ritual is one extraordinary wonderful method.*

C. The Green Tara Four-Manzha Offering (ch. lvdumu simanzhagong)

In Tibetan Buddhism, certain deities, either a Buddha or some other gods, are believed to hold supernatural power that can help patrons to succeed in a specialized section of worldly life; for example, some deities can bring wealth to the lay followers and improve their careers. One female deity, the Green Tara, is regarded as one of these gods.

*The Green Tara is a female Bodhisattva (ch. fomu) with great kindness and great pity (ch. dadidabei) who saves people from suffering and disasters (ch. jiukujiunan). This offering can help the donors erase calamities and disasters, suppress demons and avoid obstacles, earn more money, increase merit and prolong lives, bring happiness and fortune. Especially, if the donors piously and genuinely request help from Tara, she can help you achieve success in your career.*

#### D. The Ritual of White Tara for Longevity (ch. baidumu changshouyigui)

In contrast to the Green Tara who can help the followers accumulate wealth and achieve career success, another female deity in the Tibetan Buddhist pantheon, the White Tara, is believed to hold the special power to improve the followers' health and to prolong their life. In particular, as the official introduction points out, the ritual to worship the White Tara and to invoke her supernatural power exclusively belongs to the Gelug tradition of Tibetan Buddhism.

*The white Tara can help the donors increase fortune, wealth, and longevity. Especially, the white Tara is the most extraordinary Main Object of Veneration (ch. benzun) for increasing longevity... ..The ritual can help patients suffering from severe illnesses and donors increase their lives. In addition to invoking the empowerment for longevity from the Three Treasures—the Buddha, the Dharma, and the Sangha, the ritual can also make use of the achievements and powers of the beings all over the universe who have the capacity of stopping aging and attain longevity—and especially, make use of the Five Great Powers that constitute the human body (earth, water, fire, wind, and space)—so as to improve health, eradicate any illness, and attain longevity. This ritual is a really an extraordinary and wonderful method only preserved and transmitted orally within the Gelug lineages. It has an unrivaled capacity for empowerment of its followers.*

#### E. The Great-Power-Virtue Jingang ritual for Dead People (ch. daweidajingang chaoduyigui)

According to Buddhist theory, people's karma created in the current life not only may bring either good fortunes or troubles to this life, but also can influence their next life after death; that is, even though a person is dead, the karma he or she made before in previous lives will still accompany him or her to lead to certain consequences, which, for instance, may determine which life form he or she will take in the next life—such as, to become a god in heaven or born as a human again if sufficient good karmas has been gathered, or to become a fly or a bug or even a prisoner in hell if the majority of the

karma is bad. Under this circumstance, Tibetan Buddhism creates specialized rituals to appeal to the Buddhist deities, and to resort to their powers to help the dead people's souls get rid of the bad karma that still haunts them, and if possible, to send them directly to one of Buddhist heavens called "Western Pure Land". One of those rituals is called "Great-Power-Virtue Jingang ritual", in which the power of the deity, the Great-Power-Virtue Jingang, is especially called on.

*This ritual makes use of the powers of the Three Treasures—the Buddha, the Dharma, and the Sangha, especially the empowerments from the Five-direction Buddhas (ch. wufangfo) and the tremendous powers of the bodily action, speech and thought of the Great-Power-Virtue Jingang (the wrathful manifestation of the Bodhisattva Manjusri), to suppress demons and erase bad karma (ch. xiaoye) for the spirits of the dead and send them to the Western Pure Land (ch. xifangjieleshijie). This ritual is one extraordinary method to help the spirits erase all the bad karma of bodily action, speech and thought that they have created since the beginningless past (ch. wushijieyilai), and get rid of the evil destiny (ch. tuoliedao), and also attain the Western Pure Land.*

F. The Great Offering to the Pishamen Heavenly King of Wealth (ch. pishamencaibaotianwang)

One of the most important financial sources of not only the Tibetan Buddhist community centered on the Beita Monastery, but also arguably all of the Buddhist and

Taoist communities in China, is the donation made by wealthy businessmen. They donate money to the religious organizations mostly for the sake of their businesses and as a result, to cater to their needs, those religious groups also introduced religious services that are believed to be capable of communicating with the deities and requesting them to help the patrons increase wealth. There are several rituals held by the Beita Monastery offering such a function, and this one belongs to one of them.

*This Dharma Protecting deity is one manifestation of the Buddha. He is both the god of wealth and a Dharma protecting god. By giving offerings to him, chanting prayers and mantras to him, praying to him, praising him, and making pious requests to him, it can have the effect of increasing fortune; especially, it has a particular effect of helping businessmen make money.*

#### G. The ritual for the Dharma Protecting Deity of the Yanmo King (ch. yanmowang)

In Buddhism, Taoism, and the folk religions in China, there are diverse and sometimes mutually contradicting explanations regarding the origin, the role, and the power of the super popular deity “Yanmo King”. However, in spite of complicated theological concepts affiliated with this deity that is offered by different religions, in the popular belief of the Chinese, the Yanmo King is generally believed to be the deity governing the land of the dead and also the one in charge of the demons from the dark world. That is, traditionally in Chinese culture, this deity is regarded as being directly relevant to people’s life and is

therefore highly respected and feared. Corresponding to this widespread belief that is deeply rooted across traditional Chinese communities, the Beita monastery also has a ritual particularly devoted to this deity.

*This Dharma protecting deity is one manifestation of the Manjusri. By giving offerings to him, praising him, chanting to him, and praying to him, the ritual can prevent any demons of the three realms of samsara from causing trouble to you, and can have an extraordinary effect to help people cure illness, solve disasters and obstacles, increase wealth, and improve careers.*

#### H. The Great Offering to the Good-fortune Heaven Goddess (ch. jixiangtianmu)

With regard to the deities of Tibetan Buddhism, there are two concepts frequently used. One is “Dharma protecting deity” (ch. hufa), which refers to the deities whose work it is to protect either the doctrine (Dharma) of Buddhism or the Buddhist followers. The other concept is “manifestation”, which means that a Buddha or a Bodhisattva can take diverse forms in order to help the sentient beings according to different circumstances, and each of the forms is one manifestation of the Buddha or a Bodhisattva. Sometimes the Buddhas or Bodhisattvas may choose to manifest themselves in a quite fearsome and terrifying appearance to show the might of Buddhism, which is called “a wrathful manifestation” of the deity. This ritual below can fulfill the regular functions of the

rituals of the sort such as erasing disaster or increasing wealth; and furthermore, its effectiveness is believed to be especially fast, and this distinguishes it from other rituals.

*The Good-fortune Heaven Goddess is one of the most important Dharma protecting deities; she is one wrathful manifestations of the Bodhisattva of Wondrous Sound (ch. miaoyinfomu). By giving offerings to her, chanting prayers and mantras to her, and praying for requesting empowerment from her, this ritual can help the donors erase disaster, suppress demons, avoid obstacles, increase good fortune, wealth, and longevity, and improve one's career. One strength of the ritual is that it can provide an especially fast effect.*

I. The Demon-suppressing Ritual for the Lion-face Diamond Sky-going Goddess (ch. shizimianjingangkongxingmu)

In Tibetan Buddhism, there is a group of female deities called "Sky-going Goddess" (dakini). For one of them, the Lion-face Diamond Sky-going Goddess, in addition to the regular capacities that benefit the Buddhist followers, she is believed to be able to solve troubles caused by lawsuits.

*The Lion-face Diamond Sky-going Goddess is the most outstanding one among all Sky-going Goddesses; she can help people improve their careers and erase disasters. This ritual can help the patron relieve worry and anger, avoid nightmares and troubles such*

*as that brought by lawsuits, suppress all kinds of evil curses made by spirits or demons, erase the bad ideas produced by bad karma, avoid portents, suppress demon-causing obstacles, and attain the state that everything goes well.*

#### J. The Great Offering to the Six-armed Mahakala (ch. liubimahagaladagong)

In the rituals of Tibetan Buddhism, Buddhists request the Buddhist deities to help them achieve certain goals, which include either those of worldly issues such as making money or those of beyond-worldly issues such as attaining nirvana by chanting prayers and mantras as a way of communication. When communicating with the deities, the requesters usually should praise them, pray to them, and give offerings to them; especially, in the following ritual, the requesters are required to confess all of their wrongdoings in front of them, including both bad behaviors committed by the followers in this life and those in previous lives.

*The deity of Six-arm Mahakala is a manifestation of Avalokitesvara. Considering that sentient beings are afflicted by demons and therefore it is difficult for them to get salvation, the Bodhisattva manifests himself in the form of Mahakala as a Main Object of Veneration for Suppressing Demons (ch. fumobenzun), who internally holds a super compassion towards the sentient beings and externally exhibits an unrivaled appearance of might. Therefore, he is at the same time one guru, one Main Object of Veneration, and the major Dharma-protecting deity of the Gelug sect. During the Great Offering, the*

*ritual requests the Six-arm Mahakala and his entourage to be present. Facing the deities, the patrons should piously confess about all of the bad behaviors they have committed from the beginningless past. Meanwhile, the ritual gives all the offerings including the inner offering, the external offering and the tantric offering. Also, by chanting, praying, and praising, the ritual requests the deity to erase disaster, avoid obstacles, solve troubles, increase good fortune, wealth, longevity, and improve careers.*

K. The Great Demon-suppressing Ritual of Prajnaparamita (ch. boreboluomiduo fumodayigui; Prajnaparamita means “perfection of wisdom”)

Similar to the first ritual introduced above, this ritual also follows the pattern that the ritual conductor directly communicates with the demons or evil spirits and then sends them away, preventing them from harming the Buddhist patrons. One difference is that the first ritual drives the evil beings out of the Buddhist community by invoking the power of the Buddha, and this one accomplishes it by the power of an important Buddhist classic, *the Heart Sutra of Prajnaparamita*.

*By doing the complete ritual of Heart Sutra of Prajnaparamita, the ritual invites the demons and other evil beings from the Three Realms (heaven, earth, and underground) that caused the donors all kinds of obstacles, troubles, and disasters, to be present, and gives Duoma and other offerings to them. Then, by means of the power of the Heart Sutra, the ritual sends them out of the world making them go far away from the donors*

*and therefore protecting the happiness of the family of the donors. This ritual is able to invoke an extraordinary empowerment and is especially effective for erasing calamities and suppressing demons.*

This popular ritual covers five topics to help the donors or the dead family members, relatives or friends of the donors to, 1) erase troubles, 2) prolong life, 3) increase wealth, 4) boost careers, and 5) go to the Western Pure Land after death. Most of the rituals are for worldly needs rather than spiritual pursuits leading to enlightenment.

The logic of doing these rituals seems to be somewhat similar to that of a commodity in a market economy. The donors pay money to the clergy, and then the clergy sell the religious services to the donors. However, there is also one crucial difference based on the religious followers' emic perspective: the relation between the donors and the monks is believed to have an additional dimension of "being pious and being compassionate" beyond merely the economic dimension. That is, money alone is not enough for getting the service. On the one hand, with regard to the patrons who pay the money, they have to be in principle pious members of the religious community and confess their wrongdoings in front the Buddhist deities. On the other hand, with regard to the monks who offer the service, also in principle they do it out of a moral dimension of being compassionate. Given that, the logic of the religious exchange here is not completely reducible to that of a purely market based relationship that is based on the principle of commodity economy.

(4) The multi-dimensional connection with the state-owned education and research system

The lama himself personally studied at Peking University for three years in a graduate program co-organized by the CCP government's religious affairs units and the education ones, as discussed in the sections above. In addition, the lama co-established a Buddhist studies center with the Renmin (People's) University of China, which is a prestigious research university with a nickname "The CCP's Second Party School" (ch. dier dangxiao), as it is among the earliest higher education institutions the CCP directly founded in the 1930s. The following two sections address the research center's organizational structure and their academic activities.

A. The organizational structure and the major financial sources of the Buddhist Studies center at the Renmin University of China

The lama co-founded this research center with the Renmin University of China in 2011. The mission of the center according to their official publication is as follows:

*"To Observe the Constitution, the law, and the regulations of the People's Republic of China; to make use of the resources from academia, Buddhist communities, and industry; to create an innovative, inclusive, open-minded high-level organization for academic*

*studies and communications which is equipped with world-class equipment, is able to recruit internationally first-rate researchers, is able to pursue world-class research, is able to produce first-rate academic publications, and is capable of a significant influence both academically and socially. It is also able; to enrich and to develop the fundamental theories of Buddhist studies and religious studies and to offer intellectual support for the academic development of global Buddhism and for the improvement of the spiritual civilization of human beings.”*

The center is headed by a director, a co-director, and a vice director. The director is in charge of the daily operations of the center. One professor at the university serves as the director and the lama serves as the co-director.

The highest decision-making body of the center is called the “Academic Committee” (ch. xueshu weiyuanhui) and that is headed by the director and the co-director as the two chairmen of the committee. The committee consists of nine members, four of whom are monks or nuns from the two monasteries, while the rest are professors from the university.

The center has set up an office for conducting the daily work which is located in one university-owned building. According to the official charter, the center is a research organization directly under the Renmin University and therefore the university is responsible for allocating offices and other equipment for the center.

In theory, the center consists of three main bodies: (i) the headquarters at the Renmin University of China whose main task includes publishing academic works related to Tibetan Buddhism and organizing conferences on Tibetan Buddhist studies; (ii) a branch at the Beita Monastery whose main task includes teaching Chinese students the Tibetan language and to translate Buddhist works from Tibetan into Chinese; (iv) a branch “Daqing Institute of Buddhist Studies” at the Zhengjie Monastery whose main task is to teach Chinese language to the visiting Tibetan monks who have a Geshe degree. In fact, the Buddhist translation program at the Beita and the Buddhist institute at the Zhengjie are actually parts of their own monastery departments, yet nominally, they are meanwhile maintaining a formal affiliation relationship with the center’s headquarters at the Renmin University.

The translation program at the Beita monastery was initially founded in 2009 by the lama himself, with the goal of recruiting and training Chinese followers to translate Tibetan Buddhist works from Tibetan into Chinese, and finally publishing those translations in mainland China in order to further spread Tibetan Buddhist theology among Chinese communities. In the early years of the program, its organization and structure were relatively flexible and informal: it was open to the general public and to whoever was interested in Tibetan Buddhism. Hence, students were admitted no matter what their qualifications in Buddhist knowledge and education level were. The faculty members were temporary and the lama might invite senior Tibetan scholar monks to

teach Tibetan language, lay Chinese followers who were competent in Indo-Tibetan Buddhist studies to teach Sanskrit, and he himself might also give classes if needed. As a consequence, the curriculum was largely unsystematic. However, as time went on, and especially as the fame of the program gradually grew among China's Tibetan Buddhist communities, it developed into a much more rigidly organized translation and education program focusing on teaching Tibetan language and Buddhist theory, with the ultimate academic goal of translating and publishing all of the major works of the central figures of the Gelug school such as the founder Je Tsongkhapa and his two main disciples, Gyaltsab Je and Khedrup Je, in Chinese language. As of the late 2010s, the program has established itself as a complete and well-functioning unit for missionary work particularly targeted to the more educated Chinese public with an interest in Tibetan Buddhism. It has two branches that serve as two departments of the Beita Monastery.

The first branch is called the "Tibetan Studies Program and Translating Program" (ch. zangwenban yu fanyizu). It is equipped with five full-time faculty members, three of whom are monks while the other two are lay practitioners. Four of them hold a master's or a PhD degree in Buddhist studies or South Asian studies from elite universities of either China or the United States, such as Peking University and Columbia University. In addition, several Tibetan monks who received a Geshe degree from the Tibetan-in-exile community in Dharamsala in India and currently reside in Beita, also give classes in the program regularly. The program enrolls students each year, with a size in recent years of up to ten in each grade. All of the prospective students have to first pass an entrance

exam on their knowledge of basic Buddhist concepts, of ancient Chinese language (reading and writing), and of English (reading), since some of the courses use English textbooks. As a consequence, almost all of the recently admitted students have at least a bachelor's degree from college. For each student, the official study length is two years, with a possibility to extend to three or more years on a case-by-case basis. The students do not pay tuition and the monastery offers free apartments that are located in the adjacent neighborhood around the monastery; they also receive a monthly allowance to cover their living expenses. The program has been designed as a highly advanced curriculum. According to the director of the program, the level of the courses is similar to that of the best graduate programs in Tibetan Buddhist studies in the world. The director also claimed that all of the qualified graduates of the program, can choose to stay there to do translation work full time, with the monastery officially employing them and giving them a formal job title of "contracted translator at the Buddhist Center of the Renmin University of China". The second branch is called "Editing Center." Its main task is to edit and publish the materials finished by the Tibetan Studies Program and Translating Program, as well as the lama's writings and lectures. In addition to several Beita monks and nuns leading the center, it also hires over ten full time employees, most of whom are lay followers of Tibetan Buddhism who got their college degrees from public universities in China.

In Zhengjie, the center established a branch called "Daqing Institute of the International Center for Buddhist Studies, RUC" in 2017. The institute hosts at least two major

programs. One of them is called “Chinese language training school” (ch. hanyuwen peixunban), which teaches Tibetan monks—both the permanent monks of the monastery and the visiting Tibetan monks who usually hold a Geshe degree and come to the Zhengjie to study—courses such as those of general Chinese language, of theological doctrines and terms of Chinese Buddhism, and of policies and laws of the Chinese government. The length of the training program is around 4 years. The size of the class for the program is about 12 students. The aim of the program is to help Tibetan Buddhist monks translate Buddhist texts into Chinese that are important in Tibetan Buddhism yet don’t exist in Chinese Buddhism. It is also to translate into Tibetan the texts that are important in Chinese Buddhism yet don’t exist in Tibetan Buddhism. The other program is similar to the Tibetan Studies Program and Translating Program of Beita, yet with a smaller size as to the faculty members and the students. Also, the classes it offers are also not as high-level as those provided by its counterpart at Beita. One interviewee who serves as one of the faculty members once compared the two programs of the monasteries saying: the Zhengjie program inclines to recruit students who have not yet acquired a solid background in Tibetan language and Buddhist theory, namely those beginners in Tibetan Buddhism studies, while the Beita one inclines to only admit those who have already mastered basic Tibetan language and Buddhist theology; as a result, in recent years the Beita one only selects prospective students from the Zhengjie program students who have received certain amount of Tibetan Buddhist training.

According to the official publications of the center, the major financial source of the center comes from the Zhengjie Monastery. For example, the “Chronicle of Major Events” (ch. dashiji) records that in 2011, the Zhengjie Monastery offered 2,000,000 yuan to the center; and from 2012 on, each year the monastery will offer at least 1,000,000 to the center. Since financially the Zhengjie is mainly supported by a few wealthy businessmen in China, the financial source is actually private funding from the Chinese followers of the lama.

#### B. The academic activities of the Buddhist studies center at the Renmin University of China

Those activities fall into four categories.

(i) Publishing books, holding conferences, and giving lectures on the theory and practice of Tibetan Buddhism

The official ideology of the China’s ruling CCP party and therefore the CCP-controlled government, is Marxism-Leninism, whose atheist position dominantly sets the tone for the organizational and educational principles of the state-owned research and education, including those of the academic bodies within the system studying religion. However, given religion’s influence on human history, even the atheist politicians acknowledge the usefulness of the study of religion with regard to the study of society

and culture in general. On December 30<sup>th</sup> 1963, the then Chinese supreme leader Mao Zedong issued a short comment titled “Strengthen the Study of the Issue of Religion” (ch. jiaqiang zongjiao wenti de yanjiu), which served as the founding guideline to set up the religious studies programs within China’s colleges and research institutes in the next decades. In this document Mao mentioned:

*...the three major world religions (Christianity, Islam, Buddhism), have considerable influences among a vast number of population even now, however, we don’t have knowledge of them. Currently in China, there is not even one research institute led by Marxists, and there is no publication that is qualified [from the perspective of Marxism]. ...If we are not able to critically examine religion (ch. shenxue; the literal translation is theology), we will not be able to write a good history of philosophy, and the same situation applies for writing a history of literature or a world history...*

This excerpt explicitly encapsulates the CCP’s official position towards religion and religious studies: religion is bad; but since it is influential, we should have research program to study it and when studying it, we should criticize it from a Marxist point of view. Under this circumstance, it is not uncommon for Chinese universities to give religion classes and to organize academic conferences on religious studies, or, for university publishing houses to publish modern translations or exegeses of religious classics, as long as those are done in the name of a scientific inquiry of the objective knowledge of religion. As a result, the borderline between a religious/missionary activity

and a purely academic/scientific activity becomes sometimes porous and flexible, since translating an ancient religious text can offer direct material for scientific study, and inviting a monk to have a talk on Buddhist philosophy is also somewhat indistinguishable from a lecture on Eastern philosophy study in general.

In this context, the center published books focusing on the theory and practice of Tibetan Buddhism, and some of those were Chinese translations of ancient classics of Tibetan Buddhism. For example, On May 30, 2012 the center signed an agreement with Chinese Social Science Publishing House to publish the Chinese translation of “The Great Treatise on the Stages of the Path to Enlightenment, annotated by four commentators”, and the Chinese translation of “A Great Exegesis of Ratnagotravibhāga” (ch. baoxinglun dashu). Both of the ancient texts occupied a privileged status in the history of the theology of the Gelug school of Tibetan Buddhism, the sectarian tradition the lama comes from.

Some of the other books are collections of research papers on theological concepts of Tibetan Buddhism. For example, books titled “Collected Papers of International Buddhist Studies” revolving around discussions and commentaries of Buddhist terms such as meditation, mind of enlightenment, and Buddha-nature, all edited by the lama and the center, were published by the Chinese Social Science Publishing House in the years following the founding of the center.

The center also holds conferences on an academic discussion of Buddhist philosophy. Some of the most important include: in November 2012, the center held “the Academic Conference on Buddhist Meditation and the 2nd Buddhist Conference of International Buddhist Studies”; in October 2013, the center held the 3rd conference of international Buddhist studies, “A Colloquium on Thoughts and Practice of Buddhist Discipline”; in November 2014, the center held the 4th conference of international Buddhist studies, “A Colloquium on the Theory and Practice of the Mind of Enlightenment”; in October 2015, the center held the 5th conference of international Buddhist studies, “A Colloquium on the Thoughts of the Buddha-Nature”; in October 2016, the center held the 6th conference for international Buddhist studies, “a colloquium on the thoughts of the Buddhist Cause and Effect”; in July 2017, the center and the Zhengjie Monastery co-held the 7th conference of international Buddhist studies, “A Colloquium on the Thoughts of Mind and the Functions of the Mind” (ch. xinyuxinsuo sixiang yanjiu), at the Zhengjie.

Finally, the center directly invites Tibetan Buddhists to give talks on Tibetan Buddhist doctrine. For the lama, he gave at least 7 formal lectures around the time of the founding of the center in 2011 and in the following years. These include:) in November 2010 (pre-founding), the lama gave a lecture titled “The Spirit of Tibetan Buddhism—A Comparison between Indian Buddhism and Chinese Buddhism”; in November 2011, the lama gave a talk titled “The education system of the Gelug School of Tibetan Buddhism”; in April 2013, he gave a lecture titled “Knowing the Kindness, Feeling the Kindness, and Repaying the Kindness: to View the Life from the Position of Buddhism”; in November

2013, he gave a talk titled “The Wisdom of Buddhism”; in 2014, the lama gave a talk titled “Buddhism and the Cultural Revival of China”; in October 2015, he gave a talk titled “Buddhism from the Perspective of Communication and Mutual Understanding”; in October 2016, he gave a talk on “A Great Treatise of the Stages of the Path to the Enlightenment” at the center.

In addition to the lama, the center has also invited other scholar monks in the tradition of Tibetan Buddhism to give talks. Especially, several monks in the lama’s missionary system who also serve as members of the “Academic Committee” of the center, came often to the university to give lectures on Tibetan Buddhism philosophy. For example, in December 2016, the monk Yundan gave a talk “A study of the Mind-study (ch. xinleixue) of Tibetan Buddhism”; as well as a talk “On the Buddhist practice based on the Stages of the Path to the Enlightenment, exemplified by the Gelug School”; from November to December 2017, the monk Badan gave a series of lectures titled “An introduction to The Ornament of Clear Realization (ch. xianguan zhuangyanlun)”.

(ii) Organizing academic activities with the intention of underlining the positive influences on society by religion in general, which include, but are not restricted to, those of Buddhism or Tibetan Buddhism.

As mentioned above, Mao Zedong’s comment that the CCP-controlled research institutions should establish some religious studies programs in order to “critically

examine religion” was the official principle guiding the founding of China’s academic organizations for religion research. According to this instruction, those state universities and institutions should expose and criticize the negative influence exerted by religion on society and the people, which is in line with the atheist doctrines of Marxism, Leninism, and Maoism, such as Karl Marx’s famous statement, “religion is the opium of the people”. However, what is really interesting, however, is that decades after Mao’s instruction, the religious studies entities within China’s higher education system are gradually deviating from their own founding principle and are developing a multiple-dimensional relationship with the religious communities not only in China but also abroad, to the extent that sometimes both sides maintain a mutually cooperative interaction in which the academic tries to convey a positive image of religion to the general public, or even to the government.

The specific reasons and the detailed process behind and around this transition of the state-owned academy’s attitude towards religion is complicated and at this point it is sufficient to point out that one of the most important factors lies in the religious community’s financial support and other forms of donation to the academics as this considerably affects the minds of a fair number of scholars who are working in CCP’s research institutions. One of the senior researchers who worked in a top social science research institute and experienced the whole history, once outlined the process that was initiated following the end of the Cultural Revolution:

*After “Reform and Opening-up” was launched, collaborating with the Institute of World Religions, the department of philosophy at the Peking University set up a curricula on religious studies, which later on developed into a major of religious studies. Then, as the department of philosophy formally got the [additional] title “department of religious studies”, this trend [of establishing a department of religious studies] became popular all over the country, and the nature [of this kind of program] also changed a lot. [That is, the program] which should have focused on studying the knowledge of religion objectively, to a considerable degree, has been transformed into a site offering opportunities for people doing religious missionary work. The initial reason [for this transformation] may be quite simple: echoing the new direction of the state, which under certain permission, the new policy encouraged the research institutions to look for financial support from outside the state as the sole funding source. If so, for the discipline of philosophy, how can it acquire funding from outside the state? The simplest idea is to collect donation from the religious community. As a result, this kind of “getting food from religion” (ch. chijiao; literal translation is “eat religion”) became one of the important income sources of some university departments and research institutions. The general situation [with regard to religions] is as follows: for Buddhism and Taoism, the academics got financial support mostly from the Buddhist and Taoist monasteries in either mainland China or Taiwan; for Christianity, the academics got the resources mainly from a variety of missionary systems abroad.*

Under such circumstances, a large number of researchers working in state-run universities and institutions are quite willing to produce an image of religion that is inclined to shed light on religion's positive influence on the general sectors of society and culture. If we assume that in the current historical stage in China those parts of the Chinese academic and Chinese religious communities have been forming some de facto ally relationships, we could find that many of those religion scholars often embrace a pattern of praising whichever religion is that scholar's research field. For instance, if their research interest is the Protestant church's history or theology, they usually prefer leaving their approval exclusively for Protestantism. Similarly, if their research interest is Taoism and Chinese folk beliefs, you may not expect that they give a high regard for Christianity or Islam, among others. Of course, it is not that all of the scholars tow the "religion-as-research-field" line. In this case, the center actually holds activities to offer different religions and religious scholars opportunities to reveal the positive social and cultural impacts of diverse religions that are not restricted to those of Buddhism or Tibetan Buddhism.

Those activities revolve around how the religions in China can contribute to the improvement of Chinese society's welfare in both the material aspects and the moral and spiritual aspects, especially by playing a role in social philanthropy. Some major examples include:

In July 2011, the center organized a conference in Fuzhou city, Fujian province, which over 100 people attended and they published 85 papers. The general theme of the conference was “Spiritual capital and social philanthropy”, under which there were six sub-topics, and five of the six were devoted to the discussion on how religion can actively and positively engage with China’s economic, moral, and cultural developments and exert a constructive effect on them. The five sub-topics were: 1) the spiritual capital and social capital of entrepreneurs, which referred to how the successful entrepreneurs’ religious beliefs boosted their careers; 2) religious belief’s influence on social voluntary services; 3) religious belief’s influence on citizens’ moral constructions; 4) religious organizations’ involvement with social philanthropy; 5) the religious communication and social identity between mainland China and Taiwan. In addition to these topics, another interesting point is that along with the religious studies organizations affiliated with China’s universities, a Buddhism-background research institute and a Christianity-influenced research center were also co-organizers of the conference.

In November 2012, the center held a conference themed as “Buddhism and philanthropy”. There were three major organizers: the Renmin University, the Peking University, and a Buddhism-background Taiwanese university, Tzu Chi University.

In May 2013, the center held a conference with the theme “Social service and the localization of religion”, and one of the central topics was “the theory and practice of

Christianity and other religions' engagements with social service." The center and two Christian associations co-organized the meeting.

In May 2014, the center co-organized a conference with philanthropic organizations and religious associations, with the theme "religion and social welfare." The lama attended the meeting and gave a talk.

In November 2015, the center held a conference on "Christianity and modern China's moral construction", in which over 50 attendees published 23 papers. The meeting concluded that "Christianity, which has become part of China's culture, exerts a massive and historic influence on modern China's moral construction." Especially, the organizer pointed out, "the ideas advocated by Christianity, such as being tolerant and loving each other, serve as positive resources for moral construction and since modern times, Christian organizations played the vanguard role for China's undertakings of women's liberation, cultural education, and public health... some Christian businessmen practice Protestant ethics in market economy, and devote to cultivating a market economy with personal belief and moral principles."

(iii) Setting up scholarships and awards for students and professors who do research on religion and prominent scholars who published important monographies on religious studies

As discussed above, parts of the religious communities in China and parts of the Chinese academics are forming an actual alliance through which both can obtain what is best for their respective interests. For the religious groups, first, the academic establishments can help them get access to a formal approach to spread publications legally; in addition, the discourse produced by the academic and scientific communities that praises and advertises religion can grant considerable symbolic capital to the religious organizations, especially considering the post-1949 history during which the Chinese government often equated religion with ignorance and superstition as opposed to reason and science. On the other hand, with regard to the university or institute scholars, almost like a reward for their help in popularizing religious texts and defending religion's value in modern society, they may directly receive funding or other material benefits from the religious groups, usually in the form of setting up scholarships or awards. And besides making use of the resources from religious donations, the academics can organize more conferences, invite more scholars to travel and give talks so as to further facilitate research communications and strengthen scientific cooperation among the researchers' communities.

Since its initiation in 2010, the center has established diverse scholarship programs to fund students and professors in religious studies and to help them do research or visit top universities abroad. For example, in the years 2011-2012 those programs included the following.

On May 30<sup>th</sup> 2011, one of the lama's monasteries, the Zhengjie Monastery, signed an agreement with the Renmin University, endowing the center with funding to create a fund called "the Fund of International Buddhist Studies at the Renmin University of China" (ch. zhongguo renmin daxue guoji foxue jijin). According to the agreement, for the following ten years, the Zhengjie Monastery would donate 1,000,000-2,000,000 Chinese yuan to the center each year.

On September 21<sup>st</sup> 2011, one Buddhist foundation based in Tianjin signed an agreement with the center, making an endowment to establish "Cixinlizhi Scholarship". According to the agreement, in the following ten years, the Buddhist foundation would donate 50,000 Chinese yuan to the center each year, to sponsor students to do research.

In December 2011, the center awarded "Huayan Excellent Work Prize for Religious Studies" to the authors/translators of two books, and awarded the "Hongyuan Excellent Work Prize for Religious Studies" to the authors of two monographs.

On April 18<sup>th</sup> 2012, one Buddhist monastery based in Shanxi province signed an agreement with the center, setting up a scholarship "Liuliguangming Academic Fund". According to the agreement, the monastery would donate 100,000 Chinese yuan to the center each year for the following ten years.

On May 16<sup>th</sup> 2012, one Buddhist organization based in Beijing signed an agreement with the center, establishing “Hongyuan Research Fund at the Renmin University of China”. According to the agreement, the Buddhist group would donate to the center 50,000 Chinese yuan each year, in the following ten years.

(iv) Organizing research conferences and inviting researcher to give talks or classes

On top of distributing financial supports directly to the researchers in religious studies, the resources from the religious communities in China can also contribute to the academia’s efforts to organize more conferences and invite more scholars both domestically and overseas to join in academic dialogues and communications so as to form a larger researchers’ community beyond the obstacles of regional and national borders. Some examples of these activities drawn from the early years after the establishment of the center, include the following.

On November 14<sup>th</sup> 2011, the center held an international conference themed “Classics-translating and the spread of religion—the first international conference in Buddhist studies”, which over 400 scholars from both China and abroad attended.

From May 14<sup>th</sup> to 23<sup>rd</sup> 2012, the center invited one religious studies professor from a state university in the United States to give a series of lectures, with the title “The

Buddhist doctrine and research methodology—on the study of the history of Chinese Buddhism”.

On August 31<sup>st</sup> 2012, the center held a meeting, inviting experts in the study of Tibetan Buddhism and Chinese Buddhism to review the newly published Chinese translation of “The Great Treatise on the Stages of the Path to Enlightenment, annotated by four commentators”, and the Chinese translation of “A Great Exegesis of Ratnagotravibhāga” (ch. baoxinglun dashu).

From November 23<sup>rd</sup> to 25<sup>th</sup> 2012, the center organized an international conference “An academic seminar on the idea of meditation—the second international conference in Buddhist studies”, which over 50 domestic and foreign scholars attended.

In June 2013, the center invited a religious studies professor from a state university in the United States to give a mini-semester course on religion and geography, as part of a larger program to sponsor international scholars to come to the center to give talks or classes.

## **V. Conclusion: Bureaucratic Monasticism and the Success of Tibetan Buddhism**

This chapter argues that the Xiaba Lama’s missionary system embodies the concept of “bureaucratic monasticism”, whose practice in the ethnic Han Chinese communities of

Eastern China played a positive role in the missionary system's success in spreading Tibetan Buddhism outside of traditional Tibetan areas.

The concept "bureaucratic monasticism" consists of two dimensions. First, it preserves a key resource from the tradition of Tibetan Buddhism: the institution of a Tibetan Buddhist lama's leadership within the monasticism with the lama being a charismatic religious leader. Second, it incorporates certain elements from modern capitalism: a modified version of a Weberian bureaucratic structure for modern organizations. That is, bureaucratic monasticism creatively combines the traditional charismatic personality of the lama, with parts of the major principles of a Weberian Bureaucracy, hence Tibetan Buddhism's successful adaption to not only modernization but also an ethnic Han Chinese environment where Tibetan Buddhism's missionary work is supposed to encounter a series of obstacles.

Among those obstacles, two of them are especially relevant to this chapter's research question. First, for most of the Chinese history and for most of the Chinese communities, Tibetan Buddhism was or still remains a total outsider. In traditional Tibetan areas, Tibetan Buddhism was the dominant religious ideology and even today still serves as the basic cultural background in which ordinary Tibetan people's life unfolds—namely, its presence in Tibetan religious and cultural life is almost naturally justified. However, in Han Chinese areas, it is Confucianism, Communism, and to a less extent Chinese Buddhism as well as Taoism/Chinese folk religions, that traditionally occupy the central

place of most Chinese people's religious or culture life. That is to say, facing the Chinese customers in a religious market, Tibetan Buddhism had to first of all justify itself; it was expected to convince the locals that its religious product is superior to those provided by its religious competitors. For example, the religious consumers may ask: Tibetan Buddhism versus Chinese Buddhism, which one should I choose?

The second major obstacle was the rapid modernization that has occurred in Chinese areas and can bring new challenges for Tibetan Buddhism. Especially, as an increasingly modernized educational system is firmly established in the economically more developed Eastern China, where most of the Chinese kids grow up in an atmosphere where religion is simply forgotten and brushed aside as the remains of a superstitious past. As a result, for any religious organizations who want to recruit followers in most Chinese communities, they are likely facing a population that is largely indifferent to any religion. However, on this part, the situation is quite different in most Tibetan areas even today: following their religious tradition, many Tibetan parents are still willing to send one of their sons to a local Tibetan Buddhist monastery (see Chapter Four), which is something totally unimaginable in the eyes of most Chinese families.

Bureaucratic monasticism, however, with the two dimensions explained above, can help a Tibetan Buddhism's missionary organization overcome the two aforementioned obstacles effectively. First, a charismatic Tibetan lama can play a decisive role in convincing a Chinese follower to convert his religious belief from Chinese Buddhism to

Tibetan Buddhism (see Chapter Four also). Second, a missionary organization modeled on a Weberian bureaucracy—in Weber’s eyes, modern bureaucracy is the most rational organizational form in a modernized world—can efficiently target and collect sufficient financial support from the limited-sized religious community, precisely respond to the followers’ wide and specific religious needs, and carefully build a strong and multi-dimensional connection with CCP China’s higher educational system, so as to benefit from crucial symbolic capital that can only be harvested via the missionary organization’s close relationship with the state-owned academia.

## **CHAPTER THREE**

### **Tibetan Buddhism facing Chinese Nationalism: An Unlikely Supporter**

#### **I. Introduction**

Beset by a series of internal and external political and military crises, China's Qing dynasty collapsed in 1912. Following its demise, during 1912-1913, the Lhasa government expelled all of the Qing's officials and troops from Tibet. In the next almost four decades, Tibetan remained a de facto independent state, until in 1951, the then Tibet government, whose troops were defeated by Chinese Communist Party's (CCP) People's Liberation Army in its easternmost province, had to sign the important but controversial document, the "Seventeen Point Agreement for the Liberation of Tibet", with the CCP government in Beijing. From then on, Tibet formally became part of the current People's Republic of China (PRC). Towards this historical event, two "diametrically opposing views of Tibet's political status vis-a-vis China" coexist: one laments CCP's invasion and conquest of a formerly independent country, while the other one acclaims CCP's success and accomplishment for "the reintegration of Tibet with the 'motherland'." (Goldstein 1989: xix)

Given this historical background, it seems quite counterintuitive to put forward the following argument: far from a seemingly self-evident and commonsensical idea that the rise of Chinese nationalism holds a negative position and tries to obstruct the Chinese

people's interest in and pursuit of Tibetan Buddhism as their religious belief, in fact, the actual interaction between the two is much more complicated, multi-faceted, and nuanced than most people would think. That is, even though Chinese nationalism can function as an ideological obstacle against Tibetan Buddhism's spread in some contexts, under other circumstances, certain versions of Chinese nationalism can play a positive role in contributing to Tibetan Buddhism's spread among Chinese followers. In these cases, Tibetan Buddhism, at both the level of religious leaders and ordinary followers, may either choose to actively and intentionally take advantage of, or unknowingly adapt itself to, the relevant versions of Chinese nationalism which actually facilitate the expanding influence of Tibetan Buddhism in contemporary China.

Since this chapter is not the place to comprehensively evaluate the relations between the expanding Tibetan Buddhism and the rising Chinese nationalism in contemporary China, as it only serves the research aim for answering "how is the religious phenomenon, "the eastern march of Tibetan Buddhism," even possible in a Chinese context in the 21<sup>st</sup> century, the chapter only addresses the circumstances under which certain versions of Chinese nationalism work as favorable factors for Tibetan Buddhism in the case of the religious communities revolving around the Beita monastery. As a result, this chapter's specific argument is: In the public realm of state politics, the recent rise of Chinese nationalism may hold a positive position towards China's Tibetan Buddhism that Tibetan Buddhism can actively take advantage of to justify its fresh presence in ethnic Chinese areas. Furthermore, in the private realm of individual

followers' life histories, Chinese nationalism may directly facilitate its spread in certain cases, which Tibetan Buddhism can also benefit from.

## **II. In certain contexts of the public realm of state politics, Chinese nationalism served as an ideological support for the spread of Tibetan Buddhism**

This section examines the role of Chinese nationalism in the public realms of the governmental discourses and religious communities. First, the section distinguishes two versions of Chinese nationalism: a version of a narrower sense based on a Han Chinese identity at the expense of that of ethnic minorities; and the other version of an expanded sense based on a concept, the “Chinese nation.” Then, the section points out, the latter version based on “Chinese nation” contributes to the formation of a key concept, a “unified Buddhist identity” covering both Tibetan Buddhism and Chinese Buddhism. As a result, on the one hand, the public governmental discourses can invoke both notions of a Chinese nation and a unified Buddhist identity to endorse Tibetan Buddhism's Chinese spread; on the other hand, the religious communities of Tibetan Buddhism can also invoke them to justify their presence in Chinese areas.

### **1. Two versions of Chinese nationalism**

It is crucial to understand that in mainland China, Chinese nationalism takes different forms with slightly different meanings. Among these, two versions of Chinese nationalism are the most popular.

The first version of Chinese nationalism is based on a concept of the ethnic Han Chinese people who are the ethnic majority in the PRC. This version of nationalism dates back to at least the 19<sup>th</sup> century Qing dynasty when China was a multi-ethnic empire in which the ruling ethnic minority, the Manchus, held the highest political authority over any other ethnic groups within its territory including the Tibetans, the Mongolians, the Hui, and notably the ethnic majority Han Chinese people. As the Qing government weakened, an anti-Manchu and Han Chinese-centered nationalistic fervor gradually grew that was influenced by both the western-imported ideas of modern nationalism and a certain interpretation of the native Confucian tradition. During the late 19<sup>th</sup> and early 20<sup>th</sup> century, revolutionaries led by Sun Yat-sen, who later created the Chinese Nationalist Party or Kuomintang (KMT) that controlled China until 1949, put forward slogans such as “Expel the Tartars, restore China, establish a republic, and equalize land distribution” (ch. quchu dalu, huiifu zhonghua, jianli minguo, pingjun diquan). This represented a famous example of this version of Chinese nationalism. In doing so, they hoped to win the ethnic majority Han Chinese people’s support to overthrow the reign of the Manchus whom they disparaged as “the Tartars”, and to establish an ethnically Chinese-owned republic, as the “restored China”. (see Sun 1905, Pi 1994, Guo 2019). In the next years, this Han Chinese-centered nationalism was sometimes criticized by the

Sun-led revolutionaries themselves, as well as by the later CCP government, due to its strong inclination of chauvinism and racism, but this kind of ideology that claims only Han Chinese people are the true “owners” of China, still remains quite alive in some circles even today.

Also in early 20<sup>th</sup> century, a second version of Chinese nationalism began to form. In 1901-1902, the renowned political activist and philologist Liang Qichao, proposed a new concept of a “Chinese nation”, “zhonghua minzu”, to cover the residents of various ethnic backgrounds who traditionally lived within the territory of the Qing empire. In other words, , Liang created the term “the Chinese” to refer to a larger group of people beyond just that of just “the Han Chinese”. In this way, Liang’s theoretical effort was highly relevant to the practical consideration for the ruling political and cultural elites to justify a modern model of China as a western-styled “nation state”, and according to his definition, the “Chinese nation” is more of a nation state in the political sense, rather than of an ethnic group or nationality in the regular sense. (see Ren 2021)

As Sun’s revolutionaries and the later the KMT gradually took power, they realized the first version of nationalism could incite nationalistic conflict and violence between the ethnic majority and the minorities, which would threaten their regime. As a result, Sun took the lead to abandon the Han Chinese-centered nationalism and started to accept a concept of China that is compatible with the second version of Chinese nationalism, in which words like China and Chinese acquired an expanded meaning. On January 1<sup>st</sup>

1912, Sun formally took office as the Provisional President (ch. linshi dazongtong) of the newly established Republic of China and in the “Declaration of the Provisional President” (ch. linshi dazongtong xuanyanshu), Sun pointed out the Republic of China is “unifying the areas of the Han Chinese, Manchus, Mongolians, Hui, and Tibetans into one country, namely, and unifying the Han Chinese, Manchus, Mongolians, Hui, and Tibetans into one people, which is called national unity.” (see Yujiro 2004). The KMT’s Republic of China’s successor, the CCP’s People’s Republic of China, is also a country where a variety of ethnic groups reside, and the CCP-run government similarly accepted the second version of Chinese nationalism that advocates the concept of a “Chinese nation” defined in the expanded sense (see National People’s Congress 1954) in order to maintain ideological support for their central political authority that governs a wide range of ethnic minorities’ regions. As a result, from the early 20<sup>th</sup> century to date, the second version of Chinese nationalism always enjoyed at least an officially dominant status on the state and governmental levels. In contrast, the first version of Chinese nationalism mentioned above, has basically lacked such state support and therefore largely exists in the private, not the official, realm.

Another factor accounting for the acceptance and endorsement of the one nation ideology by the KMT and CCP is that this ideology not only was useful for dealing with internal ethnic relations in a multi-ethnic country, but also for the construction of an image of “Other” versus “Us. That is, both governments attempted to establish an identity of a “Chinese nation” that included every ethnic group within the territory in

contrast to the dangerous, invasive, and aggressive foreigners and foreign influences that allegedly threaten the security, sovereignty, and proud tradition of the “Us”. For instance, both accepted the historical narrative of “one century of national humiliation” as the guiding narrative framework in writing a modern Chinese history (see Callahan 2004). This narrative claims that China, which was a multi-ethnic country and with a glorious tradition in the past, started to suffer repeated foreign invasions since 1839 when the Opium War between Britain and the Qing Dynasty broke out leading to a series of disasters caused by Britain, France, Russia, the U.S., Japan, and other foreign invaders. This situation lasted for almost one century, until in the 1940s, when either the KMT government abolished the unequal treaties with western powers in 1943, or the CCP government established the PRC in 1949, depending on which version you like, the disastrous century of almost one hundred years of humiliation at the hands of foreign bullies finally ended. In this way, when the central governments felt the need either to distract domestic criticism away from themselves and towards the outside world, or, to rally domestic support to deal with pressures from the outside enemies or at least opponents, they were quite ready to take advantage of the second version nationalism as a useful ideological tool to attain their political goals.

In conclusion, the second version of Chinese nationalism, as a contemporary ideology consists of multiple discourses, among which two are especially relevant here. The first states that all of China’s ethnic groups, including Han Chinese people as well as the minorities, serve as the common owners of the country, and all of them belong to the

“Chinese nation.” As a logical corollary, the traditional culture of each of the ethnic groups, at least “the positive part” of the traditional culture, is integral to the common tradition of a Chinese nation and shares the status of being a cultural treasure of the Chinese nation as a whole. The second implies the statement that, as a member of the Chinese nation, it naturally shares the common goals and destiny with the whole nation, for example, to contribute to the “great rejuvenation of the Chinese nation” so that China can again be a worthy and respectable member of the international community, or even more, a powerful participant of the ruthless global power struggle that resembles a Hobbesian state of nature. Both of the discourses left their impressions on Tibetan Buddhism’s impressive expansion of influence among the Chinese-dominated communities of Eastern China in recent decades.

## 2. The construction of a unified Buddhist identity under the “Chinese nation”: “China’s Buddhism” beyond “Chinese Buddhism”/“Han Chinese Buddhism”

(1) In PRC nowadays, at least for the government and academia, it is widely accepted that Buddhism has three major branches, two of which are called Tibetan Buddhism (ch. zangchuan fojiao) and Chinese Buddhism/Han Chinese Buddhism (ch. hanchuan fojiao). However, this is a relatively recent consensus. As late as the 1980s, there were still papers published in state-owned academic journals that debated if it is necessary for the Chinese-speaking communities to drop the term “Lamaism” (ch. lamajiao), which Chinese people traditionally used to refer to today’s Tibetan Buddhism (see Shangfeng

1986, Sangde 1987). The advocates of the traditional term Lamaism argued there have been almost 1,000 years of history for the Han Chinese people (ch. neidi) using “Lamaism” to refer to Tibetan Buddhism, so it has become an established reality and there is no need to change the habit. However, opponents of this responded that the name Lamaism has a negative and even derogatory connotation against Tibetan Buddhism and it can cause Chinese communities to misunderstand that Tibetan Buddhism does not belong to “true” Buddhism and therefore is a fake Buddhism. So insisting on keeping this term will hurt Tibetan people’s religious and national feeling, and will further threaten China’s national unity. It is not clear if debates like these had a direct influence on the CCP government’s policy-making, but it was noticed that a leading scholar who was the CCP’s top academic authority on religious studies for decades, intentionally replaced “Lamaism” with “Tibetan Buddhism” in his later works in the 1980s, e.g., *A History of China’s Buddhism* (ch. zhongguo fojiao shi; see Ren 1985, Wang 2009), and the official documents issued by the Chinese government’s organs for religious affairs used “Tibetan Buddhism” as the standard term.

That usage differs from some former governments such as the Qing Dynasty (see Lopez 1998: 16), as well as some Chinese Buddhist circles who are still quite hostile towards Tibetan Buddhism even now. However, the current CCP government and its state-owned academics unequivocally support substituting “Tibetan Buddhism” for “Lamaism.” This usage by the CCP has two underlying significances: A) the government endorses that there is a kind of unified Buddhist identity that covers both Tibetan Buddhism and

Chinese Buddhism; namely, both are “true” Buddhism; and B) both Tibetan Buddhism and Chinese Buddhism belong to a larger tradition called “China’s Buddhism”. From this perspective, the “unified Buddhist identity” is a religious identity affiliated with a larger one, which is regarded as a unified Buddhist identity under the “Chinese nation.” As a result, this discourse distinguishes between two terms whose difference may get lost in their English translations: Chinese Buddhism/Han Chinese Buddhism (ch. hanchuan fojiao) versus China’s Buddhism (ch. zhongguo fojiao). The former refers to the Buddhist tradition that originated in Buddhism’s spread into China during the Eastern Han dynasty (25–220 AD) and is largely based on Chinese-language scriptures. In contrast, Tibetan Buddhism originated in Buddhism’s spread into Tibet during the Tibetan empire (618–842 AD) and is largely based on Tibetan-language scriptures. China’s Buddhism, on the other hand, is based on a modern discourse-constructed concept, the “Chinese nation”, which covers both Chinese Buddhism and Tibetan Buddhism.

This is illustrated by the congratulations of governmental officials at the founding ceremony of the Buddhist studies center mentioned in Chapter Two that was co-founded by a state-owned research university and the Xiaba Lama.

In 2011, the Xiaba lama and a prestigious national university in Beijing, Renmin University of China, co-founded a Buddhist studies center which was affiliated with the religious studies program of the university. As mentioned previously, the major activities of the research center included inviting scholars to translate into Chinese the important

Buddhist classics that survived in Tibetan Buddhism but had been lost or were never introduced in Chinese Buddhism, and to publish Tibetan Buddhism's famous texts for Chinese readers who were interested in Tibetan Buddhism. It also organized academic conferences to discuss key concepts and theories of Buddhist philosophy. The establishment of the center embodied Tibetan Buddhism's increasingly expanding influence in Chinese-speaking communities, not only among the religious followers for their personal belief, but also among the academic researchers for scientific interest. What is really interesting about the founding of the research center is that the university is a state-owned elite university in the PRC, and especially, it was one of the earliest higher educational institutions that was established directly by the CCP for training its cadres before its rise to power in 1949. Furthermore, during the founding ceremony of the center, two high-ranking officials of the Chinese government participated, one sending a letter to the center, and the other attending the ceremony in person and giving a speech to celebrate its founding. In the letter and the talk, the government invoked discourses such as a unified Buddhist identity under the "Chinese nation", "China's Buddhism", and the Chinese nation's common effort to win respect in the international community—that is, discourses deriving from the second version of Chinese nationalism—to endorse the establishment of the center.

(A) The letter

The congratulations letter was sent to the center by a former vice chairman of the National People's Congress of the PRC, who still served as the head of a series of central government-background organizations in 2011. A selected translation follows.

*Deeply Delve into the Precious Resource of Buddhism Culture—Congratulations on the Founding of the Buddhist Studies Center...*

*...Congratulation to the founding of the International Center for Buddhist Studies!...*

*Buddhism advocates the principles of compassion, wisdom, and equality, and supports the ideas of inclusiveness (ch. hehe), Middle Way (ch. zhongdao), and Perfect Interfusion (ch. yuanrong), and is a rich resource for the principle of peacefulness and the idea of harmony. Since entering China during late Han Dynasty, after constantly conflicting with, interacting with, and mutually learning with the innate cultures of earlier China, Buddhism and Chinese cultures finally formed a harmonious unity (ch. xianghuronghe). The formation of this unity is so rare a phenomenon in the history of alien cultures' communication that it looks like a miracle, which also reveals that Chinese culture has an enormous capacity of inclusiveness and charm. From then on, Buddhism has become an integral and important part of Chinese traditional culture and the spiritual value of Chinese culture has been deeply rooted in the culturally rich Chinese social structure, and has acquired considerable development and improvement. To this day, Buddhism is still flourishing and prospering, which is not only a symbolic representation of Chinese*

*culture, but also a precious wealth of human civilization, and it is continuously making new contributions to the people's peace and welfare all over the world.*

*...The Founding of the Buddhist Studies Center is an important step for building the transmission system of China's valuable cultures and expanding the cultural influence of Chinese culture...*

*Sincerely hope the Buddhist Studies Center establishes a creative, inclusive and open-minded high-level stage for academic studies and interactions, devotes itself to improving the mutual understanding between different sects within Buddhism as well as between Buddhism and other civilizations, delves into and spreads the valuable wealth of Buddhist culture, and helps more countries, more ethnic groups, and more civilizations learn, understand, recognize, and appreciate Chinese culture that includes Chinese Buddhist culture, and strengthens the attraction and influence of China's valuable traditional cultures, and contribute wisdom and resources to introducing Chinese culture to the world, accomplishing the rejuvenation of the Chinese nation, and maintaining a perpetual peace for the world.*

...

In this letter, it is worth noting that words like "Tibet" or "Tibetan Buddhism" were never used to congratulate the center. Rather, the letter presumed that there is only one

Buddhist tradition in China. For example, it said, “...since entering China during late Han Dynasty, after constantly conflicting with, interacting with, and mutually learning with the innate cultures of earlier China, Buddhism and Chinese cultures finally formed a harmonious unity...” However, this historical narrative applies more to the formation of Chinese Buddhism, rather than to the historical origin of Tibetan Buddhism. That is, the text avoids touching anything related to difference between the two Buddhist traditions, even though historically it was a big topic in China’s Buddhist communities. In this way, the text accepts the notion of a unified Buddhist identity, and especially, according to the text, it is now an identity of Buddhism that “has become an integral and important part of Chinese traditional culture and of the spiritual value of Chinese culture.” The historical Buddhism(s) has become “China’s Buddhism”.

Moreover, the text provides an interpretation for the significance of the center saying, “...The Founding of the Buddhist Studies Center is an important step for building the transmission system of China’s valuable cultures and expanding the cultural influence of Chinese culture... (I hope the center can) help more countries, more ethnic groups, more civilizations learn, understand, recognize, and appreciate Chinese culture that includes Chinese Buddhist culture, and strengthen the attraction and influence of China’s valuable traditional cultures, and contribute wisdom and resources to the introducing of Chinese culture to the world, and accomplish the rejuvenation of the Chinese nation...” That is, the establishment of the center belongs to a larger effort of the larger community—the “Chinese nation”—to expand the influence of Chinese

culture to the foreign countries in the world. It is also particularly a project serving the CCP's grand goal of "accomplishing the rejuvenation of the Chinese nation", which, in CCP's context, was set against the historical narrative of the "one century of humiliation," the almost 100 years when China was repeatedly invaded by foreign powers (see Xi 2012).

(B) The speech

In 2011, the State Bureau for Religious Affairs (ch. guojia zongjiao shiwuju) of the PRC's Central Government, was the highest-ranking governmental organ in charge of China's religious affairs. During the center's founding ceremony, the deputy head of the Administration came to celebrate and gave a formal talk that offered congratulations. A selected translation follows.

*Create the New Glory for Chinese Culture—A Speech at the Founding Ceremony of the Buddhist Studies Center*

*...I am very happy to have received the invitation to come to attend the founding ceremony of the center...and the first meeting of the International Buddhist Conference (ch. guoji foxue luntan). I humbly, as the representative of the State Bureau for Religious Affairs, and as the Head of the Bureau..., would like to send our warmest congratulations*

*to the founding of the center and the start of the first meeting of the International Buddhist Conference!*

*As a cultural phenomenon, Buddhism has left a deep influence on world civilizations. After coming to China two thousand years ago, Buddhism has rooted itself deeply among the Chinese people, dissolved itself into the cultural blood of the Chinese nation (ch. zhonghua minzu), and has become an integral part of Chinese traditional culture. In the process of modernization, the three branches of China's Buddhism-- Chinese Buddhism, Tibetan Buddhism, and Southern Buddhism (translator's note: it refers to Theravada Buddhism), maintain a healthy relationship in which they learn from each other, make progress with each other, and contribute together to China's construction of a Harmonious Society and world's peace. Our Chinese culture, including China's Buddhism, is both the foundation on which we get our well-deserved place among other powerful nations in the world (ch. zili yu shijie minzu zhilin), and one precious resource from which we can make contributions to the whole human species.*

...

*...The General Secretary Hu Jintao pointed out, "based on the foundation of promoting the excellent parts of Chinese traditional culture, [we should] create the new glory for Chinese culture."*

The guiding logic of this speech is almost the same as that of the previous letter. Both invoke the discourse of a unified Buddhist identity of “China’s Buddhism”, a unified Buddhist culture of the “Chinese nation”, and of a unified effort for all of the members of the unified Chinese community, who culturally compete with the foreign powers, in order that we, the Chinese nation, can eventually “get our well-deserved place among other powerful nations in the world”—that is, to accomplish the rejuvenation of the Chinese nation, creating “the new glory for Chinese culture.”

### 3. The second version of Chinese nationalism in the public realm: the religious community of Tibetan Buddhism

As shown above, the CCP government actively promoted the second version of Chinese nationalism to emphasize notions such as a unified religious community including Tibetan Buddhism and Chinese Buddhism under the banner of “China’s Buddhism,” a unified cultural tradition sharing Tibetan culture, Han Chinese culture and many other ethnic cultures, and a unified national community orienting their common effort towards winning “our well-deserved place among other powerful nations in the world.” To indoctrinate the people with this ideology, the government regularly conducted meetings to propagate the CCP’s religious and ethnic policies and ordered the Tibetan Buddhist lamas and monks who held leading roles in local religious communities to attend the meetings. Sometimes, in these meetings, the government directly asked these local Tibetan Buddhist leaders to give talks to present their understanding and to

confirm their acceptance of the CCP's policies. For example, In one meeting of this kind that over 170 CCP and government officials, religious leaders, and monks attended (see Hu 2018), the government once asked two famous Tibetan Buddhist leaders in today's China, the Xiaba Lama of the Gelug sect and Khenpo Sodargye of the Nyingma sect, with four other Tibetan Buddhist leaders, to attend in person and give talks on the theme: "Insisting on Chinalization (ch. zhongguohua) and Realizing the Chinese Dream Together—A Seminar on Making Tibetan Buddhism Compatible with Socialist Society" (ch. jianchi zhongguohua, tongyuan zhongguomeng—zangchuan fojiao yu shehuizhuyi shehui xiangshiyi yantaohui). The term "zhonghuahua" that was used by the government here could be translated by the regular term "Sinicization", which means the acculturation process of Han Chinese culture among neighboring ethnic groups; however, because in this context what the CCP government was attempting to do was to propagate to the Tibetan Buddhist attendees the expanded-sense version of Chinese nationalism rather than the first version of it, a more appropriate solution has to be to coin a neologism "Chinalization." In addition, the government's usage of the term "Chinalization" by itself is also a perfect example of the functioning of the second version of Chinese nationalism that includes all the non-Han ethnic groups and their cultures in the Chinese state.

Under this circumstance, the local religious community of Tibetan Buddhism choose to actively echo the government's language in public. In fact we can almost say they actually used the ideology of the expanded-sense Chinese nationalism to justify Tibetan

Buddhism's Chinese presence and Tibetan Buddhism's increasingly growing influence among Chinese communities in Eastern China. This is illustrated well by the Xiaba lama's public lecture in Beijing in 2013. A selected translation follows.

*...Our Chinese nation has a rich culture because we have 56 ethnic groups, and each of them has its own unique culture...*

*...Buddhism entered China about 2,100 years ago. In particular, Mahayana Buddhism spread to Han Chinese areas very early... ...Buddhism's spread gave each of us, the Chinese people, the notions on good and evil and right and wrong, as well as injected many Buddhist ideas into our values. At present, no matter whom, the Han Chinese, the Tibetans, the Mongols, or the Manchus, in their innermost worldviews, values, ethics, and morals, there are many Buddhist ideas... I think, for us Chinese people, Buddhist culture belongs to the core part of the Chinese culture...*

*Therefore, in this sense, the study or understanding of Buddhist culture is not just a matter of religious belief; rather, it also matters for the issue about whether we on earth need to inherit and spread our great traditional culture. That is to say, it matters about whether we love this country, and whether we love this nation. If we love this country, this nation, our parents and our ancestors, and if we hope to inherit and spread our thousands-of-year -old civilization that descends to us generations after generations,*

*each of us should have some basic knowledge about Buddhism, Taoism, and Confucianism...*

*In recent years our country has developed very fast, and has an increasingly growing influence all over the world. Our country's economic capacity, according to some people, has exceeded that of the United States. Of course, we tell ourselves that we are still far away from our goal. However, it is not enough that we have a powerful economy; we also need to have a powerful culture (ch. wenhua de jueqi). Therefore, I think, for most of us in China, (to know) Buddhism, Confucianism, and Taoism, is not just an issue of religious belief. Rather, it is an issue about inheriting and spreading the traditional culture of our nation...*

All of the key discourses of the second version of Chinese nationalism, including a unified Buddhist identity under the Chinese nation, a unified Chinese community consisting of diverse ethnic groups and cultures, and a unified effort for the community members to face the challenge from the outside world of foreign powers, are active in this text. As a result, to believe or at least have a basic knowledge of Buddhism, including that of Tibetan Buddhism, is elevated to the high ground of loving “this country, this nation, our parents and our ancestors.”

**III. In certain contexts in the private realm, Chinese nationalism played a positive role in introducing Tibetan Buddhism to ethnic Chinese followers based on the individuals' life histories.**

As discussed above, over the past one plus centuries, at least two versions of Chinese nationalism were among the most popular. The first one centers on the concept of the Han Chinese people, while the second version centers on an expended definition of the Chinese nation. Although there is no evidence for either the government or the religious community, that in matters of the public sphere the first version had any positive effect on Tibetan Buddhism's presence and spread in Han Chinese areas, the second version, at least in some contexts, provided an ideological justification for a presence and the spread of Tibetan Buddhism in Han Chinese areas. This was illustrated previously by certain official discourses and some formal and public events. Furthermore, according to many Chinese followers' life histories, Chinese nationalism could first arouse some personal interest in traditional Chinese culture, and this led many followers towards Chinese Buddhism. Then, the concept of a unified identity of general Buddhism across both Chinese Buddhism and Tibetan Buddhism, could have helped the followers eventually accept Tibetan Buddhism. Under such circumstances, it doesn't matter whether the first version of Chinese nationalism or the second version of Chinese nationalism finally prevailed, as long as Chinese nationalism led the followers to Buddhism in the first place.

During my fieldwork in the Beita monastery and the Zhengjie monastery from 2016 to 2019, I had formal and informal interviews with over 40 monks, nuns, or lay followers who studied, worked, and lived in the monasteries' properties. Among the 40 interviewees, over half of them (over 20 interviewees) were younger (under the age 50), highly educated (with at least a bachelor's degree from college), and ethnically non-Tibetan (mostly Chinese but also Manchu/Mongol) people who played a more leading role in the religious community, compared to the rest of the members who were usually older, poorer, or didn't have a college education background. Especially, during interview, almost every one of the younger, highly educated and non-Tibetan followers of Tibetan Buddhism mentioned once the influence of certain elements of Chinese nationalism on their final conversion to Tibetan Buddhism. Therefore, this chapter selects four cases from the over 20 interviewees as the major material for the following life history analysis.

### 1. Interviewee one

This interviewee was an ethnic Chinese follower of Tibetan Buddhism who was ordained as a Tibetan Buddhist monk under the Xiaba lama. He mentioned he was first interested in reading books on traditional Chinese culture, including those on Taoism, Confucianism, and Chinese Buddhism. Later, in order to understand Chinese Buddhist classics, he visited a local Buddhist monastery to attend their lectures. As the monastery provided extensive Buddhist learning materials across major Buddhist traditions,

including both Chinese Buddhism and Tibetan Buddhism, during his study, he was gradually attracted to Tibetan Buddhism.

...

*The interviewer:*

*...Can you tell me how you encountered Buddhism in your life?...*

*The interviewee:*

*...In the beginning I was a person who disliked Buddhism... I thought the monks all looked dumb and uneducated... In the beginning I thought I was a person who was quite westernized... After graduation from college, though I had no interest in Buddhism, I started to read books on traditional Chinese culture. The reason why I started to read those books on traditional Chinese culture might be that I began to rebel against my earlier self when I identified myself as being westernized. At that time, I was obsessed with books of ancient Chinese philosophy, especially Tao Te Ching and Zhuangzi. I was also interested in ancient Confucian books. Meantime, I also started to read books on Chinese Buddhism, such as the Chinese version of the Diamond Sutra. However, even though I enjoyed reading the Buddhist books, I felt those books were very difficult. It happened that at that time I had a colleague whose mother was a frequent visitor to the*

*Duobaojiang Monastery (translator's note: it was a Buddhist monastery whose monastic members were ethnic Chinese; however, it provided extensive learning resources on both Chinese Buddhism and Tibetan Buddhism). That colleague suggested to me that I follow his mother to visit that monastery (so I could look for help there from the monks to understand the difficult Buddhist works). Then I visited the monastery and gradually know more about Tibetan Buddhism...*

That is, his initial interest towards Tibetan Buddhism was the result of his earlier interest in Chinese Buddhism, which, furthermore, was the result of his even earlier interest in books of traditional Chinese philosophy, including Taoism, Confucianism, and Chinese Buddhism. Moreover, what is interesting is that the interviewee emphasized his later self's "rebel" against his earlier self; that is, he contrasted his earlier self when he admired modern western culture (identifying himself as being "westernized") while despising traditional Chinese culture (thinking Chinese monks looked "dumb and uneducated"), with his later self for which he began to read books such as Tao Te Ching and Zhuangzi. Namely, the Chinese nationalism he accepted also incorporated the dimension of "Us versus Other": a harmonious community with the three major cultural traditions of ancient China—Taoism, Confucianism, and Buddhism, against a hostile external world in which modern western culture is aggressively expanding its sphere of influence.

## 2. Interviewee two

The interviewee was a Chinese lay follower of Tibetan Buddhism who studied and worked full time in the Beita monastery, and lived in the monastery's property. Like the last interviewee, his general life history shares a similar five-stage pattern: (1) at first, as a kid, he had no clear religious belief, as most of his family members were indifferent to religion, likely due to the CCP's elimination of religion in many ethnic Han Chinese communities; (2) during the time around his college years, he became attracted to traditional Chinese culture, and especially, he defined Chinese culture against a definition of western culture; (3) then, as Chinese Buddhism was regarded as being a major part of traditional Chinese culture, he read some books about Chinese Buddhism by himself; (4) then, as his interest in Chinese Buddhism grew, he approached some experts to acquire more systematic knowledge of Buddhism; (5) after comparing the theory and practice of the major Buddhist traditions, he eventually became a Tibetan Buddhist rather than a Chinese Buddhist. This interview, moreover, shows how China's state, for example the state-controlled higher educational system, was also deeply involved with certain elements of the five-stage pattern summarized above, such as "how to define Chinese culture as 'Us' against the 'Other'—especially Western culture".

...

*The interviewer:*

*...When did you encounter Buddhism for the first time?*

*The interviewee:*

*I didn't encounter Buddhism until I was around 20 years old. When I was 20, I was a college student. At that time, I was a sophomore, and it was during the spring semester, when I attended an elective course: An Introduction to Chinese Traditional Philosophy. At that time, I was particularly interested in Chinese traditional culture, so I selected this course. The professor focused on the three major philosophical traditions of Chinese culture: Confucianism, Buddhism, and Taoism. I was immediately hooked by the course. Then, after that semester, I looked for more books to study this topic. My interest in traditional Chinese philosophy was so strong that in the fourth year of college, I decided to apply for a master's program in Chinese philosophy, rather than the field of my major in college.*

*The interviewer:*

*What was your major in college?*

*The interviewee:*

*I had a bachelor's degree in chemistry.*

...

*The interviewer:*

*...Does that mean that before the second year in college you never had any connection with Buddhism?*

*The interviewee:*

*...In the first year of college, I bought one book of Buddhism's popular stories, and also one book about Tao Te Ching, both of which are related to Chinese traditional culture. Meantime, I also bought books about western philosophy...*

*The interviewer:*

*When you were a kid, did you have any family members or relatives or friends who had Buddhist beliefs?*

*The interviewee:*

*No. None of them had any relationship with Buddhism.*

*The interviewer:*

*That is to say, your first formal encounter with Buddhism was the course you took as a sophomore in college?*

*The interviewee:*

*Yes.*

*The interviewer:*

*Why did you want to select that course, since it was just an elective course?*

*The interviewee:*

*Because at that time I began to have interest in Chinese traditional culture. I wanted to know more about China's traditional thought, namely, Confucianism, Buddhism, and Taoism. Chinese philosophy is a tradition...teaching you how to live your life, and how to live in the world, and even some mysterious experience. Therefore, it is fundamentally different from the western tradition that focuses solely on the intellectual realm... I wanted to know more about Chinese philosophy and thus I selected that course...*

*The interviewer:*

*What happened next?*

*The interviewee:*

*After taking that class, I found I was attracted to traditional Chinese philosophy. I liked the class and the professor so much that in the next several semesters I attended many of his other lectures. I was heavily influenced by him. Later, even after I got admitted into the graduate program in Chinese philosophy at another university, and even now, I still maintain close connection with him.*

*The interviewer:*

*Did that professor have religious beliefs?*

*The interviewee:*

*Yes. He was a lay follower of Buddhism... One of his major religious tutors was a Tibetan Buddhist lama. In my third year of college, this lama once visited the professor and lived*

*in the house of that professor. So I attended the lama's Buddhist ritual that was held in the professor's house, and formally became a Buddhist.*

*The interviewer:*

*That is to say, that professor was a follower of Tibetan Buddhism?*

*The interviewee:*

*He was a follower of both Tibetan Buddhism and Chinese Buddhism. His religious tutors included both Tibetan Buddhist monks and Chinese Buddhist monks.*

*The interviewer:*

*That is, the professor had both Tibetan Buddhist tutors and Chinese Buddhist tutors. At that time, it happened that one of his tutors of Tibetan Buddhism came to visit him and held the ritual in his house, and since you were also there, you became a Buddhist under a Tibetan Buddhist monk.*

*The interviewee:*

*Yes.*

*The interviewer:*

*If so, can I say that, if at that time it happened that a monk of Chinese Buddhism, rather than a monk of Tibetan Buddhism, had come to visit your professor, you would also have attended the ritual and become a Buddhist under a monk of Chinese Buddhism?*

*The interviewee:*

*Probably yes...*

That is, in this case, the interviewee further familiarized himself with the concept of a “unified Buddhist identity under the Chinese nation”, in the classroom of China’s public higher educational system.

### 3. Interviewee three

The interviewee was a lay follower of Tibetan Buddhism who studied and worked full time in the Beita monastery and lived in an apartment owned by the monastery.

Following almost the same pattern as the last two interviewees, this interviewee initially had no clear religious belief when he was young; however, he was passionate towards

Chinese traditional culture. Finally, his interest in ancient Chinese philosophy eventually led him to choosing Tibetan Buddhism as his personal religious belief.

...

*The interviewee:*

*(Before he knew anything about Buddhism) ...In addition to the regular daily work, you could have spare time and you could use the time to read books that you liked. At that time, I didn't go and get Buddhist books to read directly. I had no interest in religion at all. I even felt that those people who had religious beliefs were quite weird. At first, I started to read books on Chinese history. Then, I read books on Confucian culture as well as books on Taoist culture, such as Laozi's Tao Te Ching. After reading these, I felt that I was very attracted to Chinese traditional culture, because it is rich and profound (ch. diyun). Later, I thought that people always say that Chinese traditional culture consists of "Three Teachings and Nine Occupations" (ch. jiuliu sanjiao), so there are "three teachings." You see, for the books by Confucian, even though I didn't read very many, I still read some and I felt they were good. For the ideas of Taoism, I also felt the books were good. Later I thought that since people say there are three teachings, I should also read books on Buddhism. So I looked for books in the entire library (of his workplace), to see if they had books on Buddhism. Finally, I found two books. But they were not very theoretical or professional books; they were just popular books. They talked about which*

*attitude or position a person should have to live their life or deal with problems in life...*

*At that time, I felt that Buddhism has some interesting things to say. In this way, during the time when I worked there, I had a very good impression of Buddhism.*

*The interviewer:*

*In other words, at that time, you were interested in Chinese traditional culture and wanted to know more about Confucianism, Taoism, and Buddhism.*

*The interviewee:*

*Yes.*

*The interviewer:*

*Why in the end did you chose Buddhism out of the three?*

*The interviewee:*

*I felt that Buddhism deals with the questions in a more thorough manner. I thought Buddhism has more profound thoughts...*

...

*The interviewer:*

*In general, we usually think that Buddhism is part of Chinese traditional culture, and especially that, Chinese Buddhism belongs to Chinese traditional culture. Do you think that Tibetan Buddhism is also a part of Chinese traditional culture?*

*The interviewee:*

*I think Tibetan Buddhism also belongs to China's culture, because the ethnic Tibetan people belong to China.*

*The interviewer:*

*Do you think Tibetan Buddhism belongs to Chinese traditional culture?*

*The interviewee:*

*I think it belongs to Chinese traditional culture.*

...

*The interviewer:*

*But it came from India, didn't it?*

*The interviewee:*

*Yes, it came from India. But in China, it has already laid its roots and sprouted (ch. shenggen faya). It has experienced over two thousand years in China...*

*The interviewer:*

*What about Christianity?*

*The interviewee:*

*Christianity is anyway a western culture. It has a close relationship with the West. So I don't think Christianity is a part of Chinese traditional culture.*

*The interviewer:*

*What about Marxism?*

*The interviewee:*

*I don't think so.*

*The interviewer:*

*But now aren't people saying that Marxism has become Chinalized (ch. zhongguo hua)?*

*The interviewee:*

*Yes, our Party (the CCP) always thinks so...*

*The interviewer:*

*What is your opinion?*

*The interviewee:*

*I think that both Christianity and Marxism belong to western culture...*

*...*

*The interviewer:*

*But Tibetan Buddhism has had a close relationship with us the Han Chinese people for only about one hundred years or so. What is your opinion about it?*

*The interviewee:*

*I think Tibetan Buddhism is anyway a part of China's Buddhism (ch. zhongguo de fojiao), because both the Tibetans and we the Han Chinese belong to China.*

...

It is especially interesting that even though in today's China it is very politically incorrect to claim something like "Marxism has not become Chinalized" or even "both Christianity and Marxism belong to Western/European culture," as that is blatantly at odds with CCP's official ideology, yet this interviewee still had the courage to say so. Nonetheless, though most of the interviewees usually dealt with such sensitive political topics quite carefully, by avoiding directly giving their personal opinions on questions such as "what is the relationship between Chinese culture and Marxism," almost everyone with whom either I interviewed formally or talked informally during my fieldwork from 2016 to

2019, except just several people, claimed they believed Buddhism in general, including both Chinese Buddhism and Tibetan Buddhism, belongs to traditional Chinese culture.

#### 4. Interviewee four

This interviewee was an ethnic Han Chinese follower who was ordained as a Tibetan Buddhist monk by the Xiaba lama. Similar to the last interviewees, he had no religious belief at all when he was young, and none of his family members had any religious beliefs when he was growing up; furthermore, his father was a CCP member. One of the reasons why this interview is comparatively special but equally revealing is that the interviewee consciously distinguished traditional Han Chinese culture from Tibetan culture, and claimed he preferred the former to the latter, even though at the same time he identified himself as a Tibetan Buddhist monk, adopted a Tibetan monk's name, performed Tibetan Buddhist rituals every day, and wore Tibetan Buddhist robes just like the ethnic Tibetan monks living in the same Tibetan Buddhist monastery. However, despite his position of strong Han Chinese nationalism—possibly even following the first version of Chinese nationalism—from the perspective of life course, Chinese nationalism still contributed positively to his final choice of Tibetan Buddhism as his personal religion. This seemingly counterintuitive argument pivots on the same two points illustrated by the first three interviewees above: first, their strong interest in Chinese traditional culture led them approach Buddhism (usually Chinese Buddhism) for the first time in their lives; second, the notion of a “unified Buddhist identity covering both

Chinese Buddhism and Tibetan Buddhism” facilitated their eventual conversion to Tibetan Buddhism.

...

*The interviewee:*

*...I think taking this path (ch. zhetiaolu; it means becoming a Tibetan Buddhist monk and living in a Tibetan Buddhist monastery), is relatively compatible with my hope, inclination, and life goals. As you can see, the design of my room... has a style of Chinese traditional culture. You can consider...in modern society, especially at that time (when he attended the ritual to be an ordained monk) which was different from the recent times, there were only two groups of people whose life styles were closest to that of a traditional way of life: the Buddhist monks and the Taoist monks.*

*The interviewer:*

*Yes.*

*The interviewee:*

*Yes. So this consideration played a role...*

*The interviewer:*

*You mentioned two possible options back in that time. One was to be a Buddhist monk, and the other one a Taoist monk. Did you have a knowledge of Taoism?*

*The interviewee:*

*I only had a limited knowledge of Taoism. The number of Taoist groups and Taoist practitioners was relatively small. At that time, in addition to Buddhist classics, I also read some Taoist ones, but...I think Buddhism is the one closest to the truth...*

...

*The interviewer:*

*There is one point which you just mentioned: your strong interest in Chinese traditional culture helped you approach Buddhism*

*The interviewee:*

*Yes.*

*The interviewer:*

*There is no question that Chinese Buddhism is a part of Chinese traditional culture, but what about Tibetan Buddhism?*

*The interviewee:*

*At that time, I didn't have any clear understanding of what Tibetan Buddhism is. The only impressions I had of Tibetan Buddhism back then was from Louis Cha Leung-yung's novels (ch. jinyong; translator's note: Jin Yong, was a popular Hong Kong novelist, famous for his novels on Chinese traditional "martial arts and chivalry" topics that were usually set in a historical background of imperial China), and the figures of Tibetan Buddhist backgrounds in his novels are usually villains. But later, due to the internet, I started to have a serious understanding of Tibetan Buddhism. In addition, for me at that time, the mysterious elements of Tibetan Buddhism attracted me. For example, there is a tradition of reincarnation in Tibetan Buddhism... There is an old saying: the monks from a foreign area will get more respect (ch. wailai de heshang hao nianjing). You may feel that a thing from a foreign land will hold more mysterious power. Furthermore, the most fundamental reason why I chose Tibetan Buddhism rather than Chinese Buddhism at that time, was that, for Chinese Buddhism in the Interior Land (ch. neidi; translator's note: it refers to Han Chinese-majority areas), because it suffered too many political*

*movements in history, as a result, many of the parts of a living tradition had been lost. Many of the texts of the Chinese Buddhist classics survived. Also, during the years of the Republic of China, many old classics of Chinese Buddhism were retrieved and sent back to China from Japan...but the problem is that...for example, if you want to be a carpenter, you need to find a teacher who can teach you face-to-face, and it is impossible to learn carpentry just by reading books... Regarding those parts of a living tradition, Tibetan Buddhism keeps more of them than Chinese Buddhism does...*

...

*The interviewer:*

*...Do you think you are a nationalist?*

*The interviewee:*

*I don't know in serious research works what is the exact definition of nationalism?*

*The interviewer:*

*For example, the attitude that, for us, we are Buddhists, so we represent Chinese culture; for you, Christianity and western cultures, you all should get out of China.*

*The interviewee:*

*I think if defined this way, this position is too extreme. It's just a matter of personal choice. It's okay that if you think they satisfy your needs you accept the belief. However, the history nonetheless determines the future. Buddhism entered China very early, so it has become a part of Chinese culture. Christianity entered China relatively late, so it has not become a part of the culture of the Chinese nation—or, in other words, it has not become part of the mainstream of the culture of the 9,600,000 square-kilometers territory (translator's note: it refers to China, as since the elementary school China's kids are usually taught China has an area of 9,600,000 square kilometers)... Just like...if you read some Chinese history, you can always find there are a Buddhist monk and a Taoist monk staying there. Even though during the Tang dynasty some branches of Christianity once entered China...but...as a Chinese person, for the stories in your history, such as novels Romance of the Three Kingdoms (ch. sanguo yanyi) and the Journey to the West (ch. xiyou ji), (there are Buddhist and Taoist elements), but you will never find a story with Christian elements that became your strong cultural background...*

*The interviewer:*

*Okay, now we come to the last question for the interview. I know that you have been to the Tibetan area before, since you were ordained as a monk in a monastery there. In*

*your opinion, what is the difference between Chinese culture and Tibetan culture. Also, which parts of Tibetan culture impress you most?*

*The interviewee:*

*You are talking about “culture”?*

*The interviewer:*

*Yes. You can give me just your own personal opinion.*

*The interviewee:*

*If so, I can tell you I am a person who believes Han Chinese culture is the best culture (laugh). You can recognize this point by just having a look at the design, the furniture, and the decoration of my room. You see, I use the traditional Chinese calligraphy and the traditional Chinese paintings to decorate my room, for example. I mean: I believe Tibetan Buddhism out of pure religious reason, not because I like Tibetan culture in general. For instance, from the perspective of arts and aesthetics, I prefer Han Chinese culture to Tibetan culture. For example, in Tibetan arts, they like very colorful designs, but the Han Chinese arts value a totally different style.*

*The interviewer:*

*Does it mean that, only in the case of religion, you follow Tibet's religion?*

*The interviewee:*

*I choose Tibetan Buddhism because it is more of a living tradition than Chinese Buddhism. But I should say, though I am a follower of Tibetan Buddhism, I am never a follower of Tibetan people's general customs (ch. zangzu minsu)...*

*The interviewer:*

*So you mean you choose Tibetan Buddhism rather than Chinese Buddhism because Tibetan Buddhism is closer to the truth?*

*The interviewee:*

*In fact, it is Buddhism that is closer to truth. Because Tibetan Buddhism preserves more parts of the living tradition than Chinese Buddhism, I am attracted to Tibetan Buddhism. Chinese Buddhism is equally close to truth, like Tibetan Buddhism; however, since Chinese Buddhism suffered lots of political movements in Chinese history, many of the parts of living tradition of Chinese Buddhism, were tragically lost...*

*The interviewer:*

*Does it mean that, you like only Tibetan religion, but not the other aspects of Tibetan society and culture?*

*The interviewee:*

*It is a quite simple issue. You also know that, for example, borrowing a term from Marxism, we can say that the level of “productive forces” (ch. sheng chan li) of Tibet is actually very low. Right?*

*The interviewer:*

*Yes.*

*The interviewee:*

*In addition to that, the economic level of Tibet is not developed, we all know that the natural environment of Tibet is also very harsh. It is a simple fact. Nowadays, many people, including both Chinese and westerners, in my own words, are going towards either of two extreme positions. The first extreme position is that they unrealistically*

*idealize Tibet, and the second extreme position is that they unrealistically demonize Tibet. Many people regard the pre-1959 Tibet as a “Shangri-La”. However, if you are a true Buddhist, you will understand easily: as long as there are people, there are problems; as a result, since the pre-1959 Tibet was a society consisting of people, of course they had problems. The pre-1959 Tibet was not a heaven. However, on the other hand, different from what many people here think now, the pre-1959 Tibet was not a hell, either... Tibet is just a human society where the level of productive forces is not as advanced as Chinese society. It is simply a fact. Tibetan society has its problems, just like Chinese society also its problems...*

*The interviewer:*

*I know nothing about arts. You just mentioned you prefer Han Chinese arts to Tibetan arts. Can you please say more about it?*

*The interviewee:*

*In Tibetan arts, they have “solid color” (ch. chun se), but they don’t have “intermediate color” (ch Zhongjian se)... However, in Han Chinese culture, Chinese painting theory believes even black ink can have five different colors (ch. mofen wucai). You may protest that the color of black ink is just black, but traditional Chinese painting can use black ink to create a variety of intermediate colors and transitional colors...*

*The interviewer:*

*It sounds so interesting. Anyway, the design of your room is of a traditional Han Chinese style.*

*The interviewee:*

*Yes. Because I like this style.*

*The interviewer:*

*Did you acquire the knowledge of traditional Chinese arts as a kid?*

*The interviewee:*

*I always liked traditional Chinese culture. Since traditional Chinese arts belong to traditional Chinese culture, I gradually wanted to know more about traditional Chinese arts...*

*...*

*The interviewer:*

*This summer I come here to do my pilot fieldwork and I have interviewed over twenty people so far. I prepared many questions...one of which is to explore the possibility whether the Han Chinese people's initial interest in Tibetan religion can lead to their expanded interest in Tibetan culture in general.*

*The interviewee:*

*Of course, many Han Chinese people's interest in Tibetan religion finally led to their interest in Tibetan culture in general. This is a popular inclination and many people were doing something like it...*

*The interviewer:*

*Before I came here, I thought this could be the case. However, based on my interview with you today, I feel that you are strongly opposing this inclination...*

*The interviewee:*

*I am not opposing the inclination. I only mean everyone can have their choice. However, as adults, we should have distinguished these different things clearly. I can rephrase*

*what I mean this way. For instance, as Tibetan Buddhists, we are supposed to focus on the Buddhist doctrines. In the history of Tibetan Buddhism, there was a female Tibetan Buddhist guru (ch. zushi). She even had sons. In this case, we may learn Buddhist doctrines from her, but, should we also learn from her how to raise kids? Of course not. That is to say, we should always pay attention to how to distinguish these different things... I believe we should distinguish them clearly, but many people, I have to say, fail to do it...*

*The interviewer:*

*I was trying to answer the question that, is there a Tibetanization of ethnic Han Chinese people going on here? Today I can say: it is a complicated question, because there exist various and diverse cases even among the Han Chinese followers of Tibetan Buddhism.*

*The interviewee:*

*Yes. I agree with you. For most of the people who fail to think clearly about those issues, they may naturally follow that inclination...*

In conclusion, to formulate the basic logics of their conversions to Tibetan Buddhism (Figure 2):

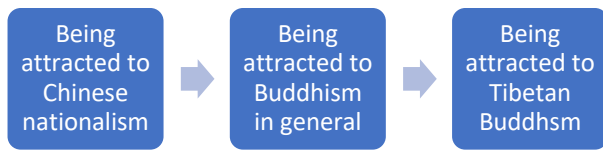


Figure 2

Two points are worth emphasizing regarding the three-phase process above. First of all, as shown in the process, a passionate interest towards traditional Chinese culture, as the result of the rising Chinese nationalism since the end of the Cultural Revolution, initiated the whole process which finally led to the followers' choice of Tibetan Buddhism as their personal religious belief. In fact, for all of the interviewees I interviewed with during the fieldwork from 2016 to 2019, almost everyone, except several interviewees whose family members had already had some knowledge of Buddhism, told me it was their initial interest in traditional Chinese culture—which means the “authentic Chinese culture before the invasion of modern Western culture” in their eyes—that helped them approach Buddhism in the first place. Furthermore, the concept of an “unified Buddhist identity” covering both Tibetan Buddhism and Chinese Buddhism, played a key role bridging the second and the third phases by providing an ideological support.

#### **IV. Conclusion: Tibetan Buddhism's Adaptation to Chinese nationalism**

There have been a number of studies addressing the relationship between Tibetan Buddhism and nationalism, and in particular, the interaction between Tibetan Buddhism and Tibetan nationalism; that is, how the belief in Tibetan Buddhism influences the formation of Tibetan identity as a nationality in the modern sense.

However, few studies in the literature ever noticed the complex and nuanced relationship between Tibetan Buddhism and Chinese nationalism. In fact, based on the dissertation fieldwork, there are at least three patterns regarding their relationship.

First, Chinese nationalism can provide a positive position that contributes to Tibetan Buddhism's spread, as elaborated in this chapter.

Second, Chinese nationalism may hold a negative position that tries to limit Tibetan Buddhism's influence. One of the most telling examples of this pattern is a 2016 debate on translating the *Lotus Sutra*, which is a core religious classic of Chinese Buddhism, between the Khenpo Sordagye, a famous Nyingma monk, and a group of Han Chinese Buddhists who harshly criticized the rapid expansion of Tibetan Buddhism in Chinese Buddhism's traditional sphere of influence in recent years by frequently invoking the first version of Chinese nationalism.

Thirdly, there is a neutral position that intentionally keeps a distance between the religious issues and the ethnic/national issues. According to this position, realizing and

practicing the separation between a religion and the ethnic/national background in which the religion was born, is supposed to be important.

Nevertheless, different interpretations of the unbelievably influential yet unavoidably malleable concepts such as Chinese people, Chinese nation, or Chinese nationalism, do materialize to cause radically different consequences for the spread of Tibetan Buddhism. As a result, Tibetan Buddhism, depending on different perspectives, is regarded as either a same-origin religion of an ethnic minority within the same family of “Chinese nation”, or a foreign religion of a neighboring but different nationality with an independent cultural tradition. Facing this circumstance, Tibetan Buddhism strives to take advantage of the flexible hermeneutics of those concepts to facilitate its expansion, and it does it successfully.

## **CHAPTER FOUR**

### **Becoming a Tibetan Buddhist—on the Three-Stage Choices in the Life History of the Chinese Followers of Tibetan Buddhism in Contemporary China**

#### **I. Introduction**

##### **(I) Outline**

One of the major phenomena following the so-called “The Eastern March of Tibetan Buddhism,” namely, the rapid spread of Tibetan Buddhism in Chinese communities in Eastern China since the 1980s-1990s, is a growing number of ethnic Chinese people, who became followers of Tibetan Buddhism at a certain point later in their life although they initially grew up in a background without any direct cultural influence from Tibet. On the one hand, many of the ethnic Chinese people who are Tibetan Buddhists are just lay followers; that is, they may visit a Tibetan Buddhist monastery regularly, or even study/work/live in the monastery full-time, but they still appear to be ordinary Chinese people at first glance. However, there are also a considerable group of Chinese followers who went through the religious ritual of ordination—or in Buddhist terms, “took refuge in Buddhism” (ch. *guiyi*), cut their hair, put on the robe of Tibetan Buddhist monks/nuns, received a Tibetan name from his or her lama, and made the serious decision to live the rest of their life in a Tibetan Buddhist monastic community. Because they frequently visited monasteries located around the Tibetan plateau, some of those ethnic Chinese

who are ordained monks/nuns can speak okay Tibetan and have somewhat tanned skin. As a result, without being told in advance, untrained eyes may find it sort of difficult to tell them apart from their fellow monks/nuns of ethnic Tibetan origin.

The research aim of this chapter is to explore, based on their life histories, how the core individuals of Chinese followers of Tibetan Buddhism, including both the laypersons who study/work/life in a Tibetan Buddhist institution full time, and the ordained monks/nuns, from out of a totally non-Tibetan background (and in many cases, also out of a totally non-religious background), gradually got attracted to Tibetan Buddhism, adopted the lifestyle of a Tibetan Buddhist, and eventually acquired the self-identity of a Tibetan Buddhist. The argument that will be presented is that this is a process of inverted acculturation (see the conclusion section and the conclusion chapter of the dissertation), revolving around a relatively free exercising of personal choices that are pivoted at three stages (see below) in their life course and that has a deep relationship with the ongoing modernization that has and is occurring across Inner-East Asia. On the one hand, modernization has considerably accelerated economic development and technological advance, which served as the material foundation of the individuals' personal choice towards diverse cultural/religious options. And on the other hand, the western-influenced modernization helped to introduce modern individualism into contemporary China, which functioned as an ideological support that could encourage the individual to freely pursue their own cultural/religious goals, often at odds with and

against the powerful pressures rooted in China's traditional social structure, especially, those from the individuals' parents and family.

In brief, the modernization that occurred across Inner-Eastern Asia, and that involves at least two dimensions—a material foundation of economic and technological development together with an ideological support of individualism with freedom of personal choice, has contributed to the inverted acculturation process through which the Chinese people accept Tibetan religion. The chapter elaborates this process of cultural influence between ethnic groups following the storyline of the Chinese followers' life histories that commonly depend on three key moments:

First, the moment when the Chinese followers decided to choose to be a religious person, instead of living an agnostic or atheist life like most of the Chinese people in today's China.

Second, the moment when the Chinese followers decided to choose Tibetan Buddhism as their personal belief, rather than other possible options such as Christianity, Taoism/folk religions, or Chinese Buddhism—China's native version of Buddhism.

Third, the moment when the Chinese followers decided to study/work/live in a Tibetan Buddhist's monastic community full time, sometimes as a layperson and mainly as a clergyperson; that is, to choose a way of life that is radically different from most of the

Buddhists in contemporary China, whom, for example, only visit a monastery occasionally when they feel the need to go there.

The chapter's next section explains in detail the role played by the modernization process—embodied especially in (1) the spread of modern individualism and (2) the economic and technological developments as the result of modernization as they influenced the Chinese followers' personal choices at each of the three key moments of their life history that ultimately lead to their conversion to Tibetan Buddhism. In particular, the Chinese followers' (largely self-unaware) embrace of modern individualism helped them navigate when they had to face multiple pressures from their parents and family who usually held an unfavorable position against religion. In addition, the advance of the modern economic and communications technology in contemporary China provided the Chinese followers the necessary and sufficient opportunities and thought resources to give them access to a variety of religious options and diverse ways of life beyond the limited amount found in traditional China.

Finally, some words on the sampling issue of the study. The Xiaba lama's missionary system in the Han Chinese areas of Eastern China, that consisted of two monasteries and one Buddhist studies center, involved possibly tens of thousands ethnic Han Chinese followers all over the Chinese-speaking world (During one religious ritual held in the Beita monastery in 2019, I once talked to a Chinese family who had immigrated to Canada many years ago but still regularly visited the Beita monastery every year). For

the entire large group of followers, their demographic backgrounds were super diverse regarding age, education, income level, and place of birth. However, even though the total amount of the lama's Chinese followers was staggering, only a small group of them actually played an organizing and more leading role for the entire missionary community. According to my observation, this group of core members included around 20-30 ethnic Chinese monks, nuns, and lay followers who worked in the monasteries full time. In particular, they were relatively young (below 50 years old), had a college education background, and were born in urban areas of Eastern China. As a result, considering the significant role played by the 20-30 core members in establishing, maintaining, and expanding the lama's missionary system in Chinese-speaking areas, I had formal, structured and multiple-times interviews with all of them. The result was: all the interviews showed the influence of certain elements of modernization on the interviewee's final decision to become a Tibetan Buddhist. Therefore, the chapter selects the most representative cases from the over 20 interviewees for the following life history-based analysis in the next section.

## **(II) Broader Theoretical Significance**

The study has direct theoretical significance for the anthropology/sociology of religion's century-old discussions of the complex relationship between modernity and religion, examining religion's fate in a modernizing world. In addition, the study has theoretical potential for an elaboration of the anthropological concept of "inverted acculturation",

which the conclusion section addresses briefly and the conclusion chapter of the dissertation addresses in more details.

One popular answer to the question of what is religion's fate in a modernizing world, is given by the proponents of the "secularization theory." It argues that in a world that is undergoing rapid modernization, religion will be in decline. Peter L. Berger, arguably the most influential sociologist of religion, famously put forward this idea in his early work *The Sacred Canopy: Elements of a Sociological Theory of Religion* in 1967. One of the major arguments of this book can be summarized as the following: before the time of modernization, religion provided people with a universal theoretical framework that could give explanations on almost everything in people's life, a framework like a "sacred canopy" that can cover every corner of the whole human existence; however, as modernization began, this powerful "sacred canopy" gradually collapsed; people turned to a variety of options for the explanations of the issues in their life, moving away from the previously dominant theoretical framework given by religion. Hence the decline of religion and the beginning of the process of secularization in modern world.

This study agrees in part with the theory of the collapse of a "sacred canopy", which can be rephrased as follows: before the time of modernization, there existed a universal theoretical framework that could give explanations on almost everything in people's life, a framework like a "sacred canopy" that can cover every corner of the whole human existence; however, as modernization began, this powerful "sacred canopy" gradually

collapsed and people turned to a variety of options for the explanations of the issues in their life, moving away from the previously dominant theoretical framework. However, this formerly prevalent theoretical framework was not necessarily given by religion.

Peter Berger's theory arises from the cultural background of European civilization, or the unique historical trajectory of the Western world. In medieval Europe, the Roman Catholic church dominated almost every aspect of social life, that is, Christianity provided the people of western Europe with a "sacred canopy". However, following the Renaissance, the Enlightenment, and industrialization, a modernizing Western society gradually got rid of the monopoly of the Christian church over the sectors of social life. In this context of modernization, many people turned to diverse lifestyles influenced by modern sciences and arts away from those dictated by religious doctrines, which understandably could lead to a Bergerian process of secularization in theory, namely, the decline of religion in the West. But with respect to Chinese culture, religion was never a mainstream or dominant ideology in the manner that Christianity once was in Western Europe and North America. Correspondingly, in Chinese history, none of the religious organizations had ever acquired a political, economic or cultural status that could remotely resemble the one that was once occupied by the medieval Catholic church. Rather, in China, two essential non-religious or even anti-religious ideological systems, Confucianism and Maoist Communism, served as the mainstream ideology in ancient China and pre-1980s China—namely, they functioned as the "sacred canopy" of certain historical periods of Chinese society. Under such circumstances, a modernization-

initiated collapse of the “sacred canopy” of either Confucianism and Maoist Communism, gave Chinese individuals a newfound interest in ways of life that they hadn’t tried, including that of religion, and in some contexts, as shown in this study, that meant becoming a follower of Tibetan Buddhism. Therefore, modernization may not necessarily lead to secularization, in the sense of religion’s unavoidable decline in a modernized environment; rather, a modernizing society and culture that can provide individuals with more freedom and resources to fulfill their individualist pursuits of diverse lifestyles and may instead lead to, or at least partly contribute to, religion’s surprising success in the time of modernity.

## **II. The Followers’ Personal Choices Made at Three Key Moments of Life History**

There is usually an important difference between the followers of Tibetan Buddhism in ethnic Chinese areas and those in traditional Tibet. In Tibetan areas even today, as some interviewees pointed out (see below), many of the young people became monks not out of their own choice: their families have the traditional religious belief in Tibetan Buddhism, and their parents may send them to a monastery to be a monk. In contrast, in the ethnic Chinese areas of Eastern China, as most families don’t have any religious background, the Chinese followers make the personal decision by themselves to choose to become a monk/nun, usually out of a variety of options.

The life histories of the Chinese followers who worked or studied in a monastic community full time, either as an ordained monk or nun, or as a lay follower, revealed three key moments regarding making the personal choice of accepting religion in general and Buddhism in particular. The three moments are:

The first moment: they chose to be a religious person, rather than taking other options such as being an atheist or agnostic like the majority of Chinese people choose.

The second moment: they chose to be a follower of Tibetan Buddhism, rather than taking other options such as Christianity or Chinese Buddhism.

The third moment: they chose to be an ordained monk or nun.

In this section, the relevant life history materials are examined along the timeline of these three key moments.

**(I) The first moment: the individual's decision to be a religious person instead of following the non-religious lifestyles of their family and most people in China**

1. The influence of economic development and technological advancement following the “reform and opening-up” policy

On this issue, the life history of an ethnic Chinese follower of the Tibetan lama who became a lay Buddhist in his early 20s and finally became an ordained Tibetan Buddhist monk years later, can provide a perfect example.

*Interviewee:*

*...In my family, (before I became Buddhist), no family member was ever a follower of any religion. They never encountered any religion in their life.*

*Interviewer:*

*Do you have family members who are CCP members?*

*Interviewee:*

*My father is a CCP member... For them, the world beyond this secular life just doesn't matter. They only care about matters of this world. As for whether there exists an afterlife after this life, they just have no interest in this kind of question... I didn't have a clear religious belief until I was in college... I read many books related to Buddhism... During middle school I bought Taiwanese cartoonist Tsai Chih Chung's graphical works on Buddhism, such as the one on the Platform Sutra... Later when I attended high school, the books by the Taiwanese Buddhist scholar Nan Huai-Chin became popular. I read lots*

*of books by Nan Huai-Chin and loved them so much because he was the only author I found then who could explain complicated theory with lots of fun... Now if you ask me if I still think Nan Huai-Chin's books are that good, I will answer no because his books have many errors. But at that time, for a high school kid, his books on Buddhism really opened a new horizon to me. At that time I also read many other popular books on philosophy, history, and aesthetics, but I found those by Nan Huai-Chin attracted me the most... I felt that I suddenly had learned lots of new knowledge and new terms. So, from then on, I started to have strong interests in religion in general and Buddhism in particular...*

*During college I thought I should be a Buddhist. But at that time I didn't attend the formal ritual to become a Buddhist, because as a young man who had a college education, I once talked to some local Chinese Buddhist monks but found that I knew even more Buddhist theory than them... So I didn't go to their monastery to attend the ritual to formally become a Buddhist... At that time (late 1990s), it happened to be a time when Tibetan Buddhism started to become popular in China, namely the so-called "Tibetan Buddhist Fervor" (ch. zangchuan re). Also, it was the same period when the Internet started to become popular in China... At that time, without broadband, we used dial-up Internet access for internet surfing... There were lots of online forums. I found a big forum called "Happiness Garden" (ch. lequ yuan), which ceased to exist many years ago. Many Buddhist forums were affiliated with this major forum, such as "Lotus Boat of the Internet Sea" (ch. wanghai lianzhou), "Great Perfection" (ch. da yuanman), and others. I often read posts from these online Buddhist forums. I found lots of interesting*

*information from those forums, including many related to Tibetan Buddhism. I didn't have deep knowledge of Tibetan Buddhist until I visited those forums...*

*Interviewer:*

*At that time, when you started to read the Buddhist books and visit the online Buddhist forums, did you do these things along with your friends so that you could communicate with each other? Or did you do these things alone?*

*Interviewee:*

*I did these things alone... Here in Northeast China, the cultural atmosphere was not as strong as that in many other regions of China, so less people here liked reading such big books of humanities... I graduated from college in 2002, the same year when the Beita Monastery was reopened and the religious activities were restored... Even though my house was physically very close to the Beita Monastery, I initially knew very little about it. I got the information that the Beita Monastery would reopen in 2002 from the online Buddhist forums. I communicated with people from the forums and some told me this information. I was surprised that my house was so close to the monastery and communicated more with them. Then we gradually became acquainted with each other. It happened that two of them were followers of the Xiaba Lama. So, we became friends. At that time, to formally reopen the Beita Monastery, they organized a ritual. Before the*

*formal ritual, via the two friends, I personally met the Xiaba Lama. Then, I formally became a lay Buddhist follower under the lama in 2002...*

The People's Republic of China remained a largely economically poor and technologically backward country until Deng Xiaoping launched the Chinese economic reforms, the famous "reform and opening-up", after the end of the Cultural Revolution in late 1970s. This initiated a rapid modernization of Chinese society in the following decades. As a result, from the 1980s on, China gradually opened its domestic market and introduced advanced cultural and technological products from the more developed and modernized countries and areas, such as the US, Europe, Japan, and Taiwan. Noticeably, in the life history above, the interviewee emphasized two factors that played a key role in turning him from a non-religious person into a follower of Buddhism, and these two are both the direct result of China's economic and technological modernization. First, it was his experience during the 1990s when he was a student, when he avidly read publications on Buddhism that were written by popular Taiwanese authors. This was not even imaginable during the earlier years of Maoist China when religion was regarded as an opiate and Taiwan was viewed as a rotting capitalist economy. The second factor was his use of the Internet that was just introduced into China in the 1990s. According to his narrative, he would not even have known the information that the Beita Monastery was about to reopen under the charge of the Tibetan lama without his previous experience in spending lots of time in visiting the online Buddhist forums.

2. The influence of modern individualism that helped the followers combat the pressure from traditional China's family-centered social and cultural structure

According to the life history of the interviewed ethnic Chinese followers of Tibetan Buddhism who lived in a monastic community full time, the most intense conflict between the personal choice of an individual and the pressure imposed from the individual's parents/family, usually occurred around the third moment, that is, when either the followers told their family they wanted to be an ordained monk/nun, or, they said they had decided to work/study in a monastery full time. However, for some of the interviewees, even during the first moment when they had just made the decision to be a religious person, their family might already express some reservations or concerns. Here is one example. From the life history of an ethnic Chinese follower who became a lay Buddhist in his teenage years and eventually became an ordained Tibetan Buddhist monk in his 20s.

*Interviewee:*

*...Many people once asked me the same question: is it the case that your family always had a belief in Buddhism (so you later also become a Buddhist)? However, the answer is a clear "no." My family can be called "the family of a communist party's revolutionary cadre" (ch. geming ganbu jiating). As a result, my family members and relatives always viewed me as "a kid who was hopelessly useless" (ch. wandan huo) since my childhood.*

*Interviewer:*

*What did they mean by the term “a kid who was hopelessly useless”?*

*Interviewee:*

*They regard it unreasonably ridiculous that I, as a kid born and raised in a progressive CCP cadre family, is even interested in the backward “feudal superstitious stuff” such as Buddhism... On the one hand, I am the youngest kid of the (extended) family—my mother is the youngest child of the family, and I am the youngest grandchild of the family. So, my family members and relatives might not hold a very high expectation from me; so I might be a little bit spoiled. As a result, even though they didn’t really like my personal choice, they finally let it be. On the other hand, I am always very interested in philosophy since my childhood. My family happened to have a very large library of books like many CCP cadres’ families, and there were many philosophy-related books there. Most of those books were about Marxist philosophy, but I also found books on Buddhist philosophy... I loved the books on Buddhist philosophy. Since then, I frequently visited the Chinese Buddhist monasteries that were close to my house; I went to them every weekend. That was when I attended elementary school. At that time, my family members and relatives viewed me as quite weird as most of the kids of my age had life goal to become a scientist or something like that, but regarding my personal interest in*

*Buddhism, they viewed it as hopeless and useless, and it was like that I had chosen to take a dark road (laugh).*

*Interviewer:*

*Did all these happen when you attend elementary school? You looked for the Buddhist books to read by yourselves and visited the local Chinese Buddhist monasteries at that time?*

*Interviewee:*

*Yes... That was the beginning when I started to have an interest in Buddhism. But I formally become a lay Buddhist much later. I didn't attend the ritual of "taking refuge in Buddhism" (ch. guiyi) until I was in the 2<sup>nd</sup> year of middle school, even though I began to have interest in Buddhism when I was in the 4<sup>th</sup> or 5<sup>th</sup> year of elementary school. At that time, before attending the ritual, I was extremely serious; I treated it as a great event in my life. I thought I should not attend it until I considered it and prepared myself on all aspects thoroughly. Finally, in 2001, when I was in the 2<sup>nd</sup> year of middle school, I went to a local Chinese Buddhist monastery to attend the ritual there and formally became a lay Buddhist...*

It is obvious that this interviewee chose to become a religious person against not only his family's will, but also the standard social expectations imposed on young people by the general Chinese society. What drove his personal belief towards Buddhism was just his own pure intellectual interest in Buddhist philosophy, rather than any specific social or economic considerations that were previously common in traditional Tibetan society where many poor Tibetan families sent their sons to monasteries in order to give them an economically more acceptable life. That is, in this case, it was the modern individualism that was compatible with the wealthier modern Chinese society, that played a role in helping the interviewee choose a religious life.

**(II) The second moment: the individual's choice to be a Tibetan Buddhist, rather than a Christian, a Taoist/folk religion follower, or a Chinese Buddhist**

1. An economically wealthier and culturally more modernized Chinese society that provides the interested people with diverse religious options

One interviewee, who, as an ethnic Chinese person whose family had no religious background, became a lay Buddhist in his early 20s and later an ordained Tibetan Buddhist monk in his late 20s, talked about his personal experience from the teenage years when he had interest in Christianity and Chinese Buddhism, to his late 20s when he attended the ordination conducted by a Tibetan Buddhist lama. His life history unfolded almost like an experience of a casual customer shopping in a religious market,

where he looked around, tried different religious goods including Christianity, Hinduism, Chinese Buddhism, and Tibetan Buddhism, and after comparing them, finally, he found the religious product provided by Tibetan Buddhism could give him the best user experience, so he chose to become a Tibetan Buddhist. That is totally different from a traditional society where the individuals had so few options of religion that they usually had to follow their family or local community's religious tradition. Here, a Chinese society that was undergoing rapid modernization, both economically and culturally, was able to provide for its members more diverse personal choices that may involve more exotic lifestyles.

*Interviewer:*

*...The question is, can you please tell me when did you first encountered Buddhism, namely, to give a brief introduction of your life history since childhood?*

*Interviewee:*

*I encountered Buddhism for the first time quite late... In my family, there was no one who believed in Buddhism... I didn't have a formal encounter with Buddhism until I attended college... My hometown is next to China's border with Russia, where there is almost zero religious atmosphere... During the time when I did the College Entrance Exam of China, I needed to fill out a form to select several majors I was interested in for the college*

application. I randomly wrote down several majors, one of which was religious studies, because I vaguely felt that it might be fun. During the summer break before I went to college, my family and I did a tourist trip to Russia. We visited Moscow and Saint Petersburg. During the trip I got the information that I was admitted to the program of religious studies at the university, so I paid special attention to the Christian churches in Russia. At that time, I had the idea that it would be lots of fun to be a priest of the Eastern Orthodox Church. Later, I attended college and started to study in the undergraduate program of religious studies. I took the classes on world religions and felt that there existed major differences between the diverse religions in the world. During the summer break before the second year of college, I did sociological fieldwork in Harbin, the capital city of Heilongjiang province. In Harbin, there is a street that is quite interesting. On that street, within less than 50 meters, there are three churches: a Protestant church, a Roman Catholic church, and an Eastern Orthodox church. I, along with several classmates, took our questionnaires and visited the churches to do the sociological survey... Based on our research, I felt that regarding the followers of the three churches, those of the Catholic church had, relatively, the highest level of education. However, I also felt that I personally could not believe some of the basic doctrines of Christianity... Especially, I was not satisfied with Christianity's answers to questions like, why evil exists under God?, or, what is the relationship between people's free will and the all-mighty God? Later, I also found that the doctrines of Hinduism also raised similar questions. My first formal encounter with Buddhism was in my second year of college when I took classes on Buddhist philosophy. As a sophomore I also met several

*classmates who were Buddhist followers... We became friends and organized a book-reading group of Buddhist philosophy... I can tell you, many years later, every one of the people who attended the small book-reading group in that year became Buddhist monks... From hindsight, I can say I didn't get the access to the core doctrines of Buddhism until I attended the reading group, because even though as students of religious studies we had many classes on Buddhism, our official textbooks were still written in a way to study Buddhism from the perspective of Marxism; that is, they studied Buddhism in order to criticize Buddhism, which I didn't like... The experience of attending the reading group was very important to me: I started to have interest in Buddhism somewhat. However, I didn't become a Buddhist; I had not totally come to believe in Buddhism. Then, in 2008, during the summer break, I participated in another stint of fieldwork on the sociology of religion to do research based on the theories put forward by a US sociologist Rodney Stark... We planned to visit three monasteries: the first one was the Duobaojiang Monastery that is a Chinese Buddhist monastery that is influenced by the Gelug sect of Tibetan Buddhism; ...the second one was the Dabei Monastery that belongs to Chinese Buddhism; ...the third one was the Beita Monastery. Why did we choose to visit the Beita Monastery? Because the Beita Monastery was the only monastery in China that is in an ethnic Han Chinese area and is headed by a Tibetan Buddhist lama...*

*The Interviewer:*

*What happened during your fieldwork that summer?*

*The interviewee:*

*We arrived in the Beita monastery... It happened that on the day when we came here the lama was also here, so we met the lama and asked him two questions on Buddhist philosophy, regarding which I have very strong impression... The first question was: if the nature of any phenomena in the world is Emptiness, that is, being related to all kinds of causes and conditions, then, why is the nature of the Unconditioned Phenomena (ch. wuwei fa) also Emptiness? ...At that time, the lama had been coming to ethnic Chinese areas to spread Tibetan Buddhism for about six years, but I don't think anyone once asked him such a question on Buddhism philosophy. Most of the questions he received were like: my child is suffering a weird illness, so what should I do? So, after hearing our questions, the lama was very happy... On our side, for the questions we asked, we previously had also asked many people, but no one had given us a cogent answer... However this time, the lama gave us perfect answers... As a result, we started to have great confidence in the lama... But at that time, I hadn't had the idea to become a Buddhist. I hadn't made the decision whether I really want to be a follower of Buddhism. So, what was the event that eventually caused me to become a Buddhist? At that time...I read two books written by the lama, and in these books the lama talked about the methods to increase people's wisdom: if people can practice the Tibetan Buddhist mystical powers (ch. famen) of the White Manjushri (ch. bai wenshu) and the Yellow*

*Manjushri (ch. huang wenshu), they can increase their wisdom; especially, practicing the Tibetan Buddhist mystical power of White Manjushri can increase people's memory capacity. At that time, I was actively preparing for going to the US for graduate school, and I was preparing for the GRE (Graduate Record Examinations) test and the TOEFL (Test of English as a Foreign Language) test. Then I thought: I need to memorize many English words for the tests, and since practicing the mystical power can help me increase memory capacity so I can memorize more English words within a shorter time, so why not request the mystical power from the lama? However, a non-Buddhist person is not eligible to receiving the mystical power, so in order to get the mystical power, I needed to first become a Buddhist. As a result, I attended the ritual of Taking Refuge in Buddhism under the lama and became a lay Buddhist...*

*The Interviewer:*

*You mentioned in that summer when you visited the Beita monastery for the first time, and you also visited monasteries of Chinese Buddhism...*

*The Interviewee:*

*I also visited the (Chinese Buddhism's) Dabei monastery that summer... Because the Dabei monastery is not very far from the Beita monastery. So after staying in the Beita monastery for about one week, we decided to visit the Dabei monastery. However, our*

*visit to the Dabei monastery is a terrible memory for me. In the Dabei monastery, they strictly forbade the lay followers to study Buddhist philosophy. They didn't allow you to read books of Buddhist philosophy. Also, if you visited the Dabei monastery and wanted to be a volunteer there, they just asked you to do physical work for the monastery. Especially, the physical work they asked you to do was not some ordinary work; rather, it was building houses, which demanded heavy labor. When we visited there, the volunteers working at the Dabei monastery slept for only four hours each night, from 10:00pm to 2:00am. Then, in the morning, the volunteers were asked to do meditation for a while, and then to go to a hall to do chanting. Then, at noon, they had lunch, which was the only meal they could get in one day. Then, in the evening, they were asked to do chanting again. In addition to these activities, the volunteers had to do the physical work all day long: they carried sand, brick, and other construction materials, and built houses for the monastery. But there was one problem: am I that kind of person who is strong enough to do the heavy-load construction work? Of course not. I wouldn't even dare to live in a house I built myself (laughs). As a result, after staying in the Dabei monastery as a volunteer for only one day, we fled... We immediately escaped to the Beita monastery. Seeing the lama, we told him what we had just experienced in the Dabei monastery. After hearing our complaints, the lama burst out laughing, saying: "you see, you know a lot about Buddhist philosophy, but your knowledge of this has no use in a construction site." ...The Dabei monastery put special emphasis on Buddhist discipline, but in my opinion, their emphasis was too extreme. In addition, that monastery had an inclination to ignore Buddhist philosophy and theory, which is a problem.*

In a more traditional society, many people, following their families' tradition, joined the society's mainstream religion usually out of necessity rather than out of freedom of choice. For example, if the mainstream religion controls most of the economic resources in the society, to give their children more opportunity for upward mobility, many parents of poor families had to send them to the religion; or, if the dominant religious institution monopolized the major political powers in the society, the individuals had to become a member of that religion if they want to get a career in political life. In contrast, in a more modernized society, the situation is completely different. On the one hand, as the result of secularization, religious institutions usually lose their political power; on the other hand, as modernization facilitates economic development, technological advancement, and cultural diversification, people can acquire economic and cultural success without any involvement with any institutionalized religion. As a result, in most of cases, an interested individual becomes a follower of a certain religion, not because he or she has to, but because he or she likes to, and often out of pure intellectual interest. The life history of the interviewee above illustrates this point clearly. Examining his life course, he encountered a variety of religious traditions before he formally became a follower of Tibetan Buddhism. That is, he faced diverse religious options and finally chose one out of his own personal preference. He examined six different religious traditions:

(1) Eastern Orthodox church of Christianity. He physically visited their churches both in Russia and Northeast China, and once expressed an interest in the lifestyle of the priests. However, he could not accept their doctrine.

(2) Protestant church of Christianity. He physically visited the churches and studied Christian philosophy in college, but he also couldn't accept its doctrine.

(3) Roman Catholic church of Christianity. He physically visited the churches and studied Christian philosophy in college, but he again couldn't accept the doctrine, although he found many of its followers in certain areas of Northeast China had a relatively higher level of education.

(4) Hinduism. He took a class on the philosophy of Hinduism but couldn't accept the core doctrine.

(5) Chinese Buddhism. He took class on Chinese Buddhism in college and once visited and lived in a famous Chinese Buddhist monastery of Northern China, but he couldn't accept, in his own words, their "inclination to ignore Buddhist philosophy and theory."

(6) Tibetan Buddhism. According to the interviewee's narrative, a Gelug Tibetan lama, who as a famous scholar monk, was well versed in Buddhist theory and solved his long-time questions on Buddhist philosophy, played a key role in attracting him toward

Tibetan Buddhism. That is, his initial interest in Tibetan Buddhism was *purely* intellectual: he didn't have, for instance, any real-life economic or political burden from his family that forced him to become a follower of Tibetan Buddhism. In particular, he mentioned that the direct cause that pushed him to become a religious person and to attend the ritual to formally become a lay follower of Tibetan Buddhism was that at that time he was planning to go to the US for graduate school and was therefore preparing for the GRE and TOEFL tests and in order to get a high score on the exams, he wanted to invoke the mystical power of tantric Buddhism to strengthen his memory capacity. As a highly educated person (he later got a PhD from a top university in China and became a key assistant to the lama), there was no necessity for him (or many people like him in the Beita community) to follow Tibetan Buddhism or any religion if he didn't personally want to. Diverse and colorful options leading to multiple life trajectories, religious or non-religious, domestic or abroad, were all available to him. All these can only happen in a society where, at the macro level, the educational, economic, and cultural systems are undergoing considerable modernization, and at the micro level, the rise of modern individualism, is increasingly gaining recognition.

2. Against the religious traditions of their family and/or local community, the individuals became Tibetan Buddhists

(1) Case one

The following interviewee was an ethnic Chinese person who became a lay follower of Tibetan Buddhism in his early 20s and then an ordained monk under the Xiaba lama in his mid 20s. His family and the small village where he was born and raised, had a strong tradition of Chinese folk religions and Taoism, and the larger area in which his hometown is located is one of the Chinese Buddhism's traditional centers in southern China.

*Interviewer:*

*Can I know where you are from?*

*Interviewee:*

*I am from Quanzhou, Fujian province.*

*Interviewer:*

*Is Fujian one of the centers of Chinese Buddhism? Are many people there Chinese Buddhists?*

*Interviewee:*

*Yes, in the areas around Fujian province and Zhejiang province, Chinese Buddhism is pretty popular.*

*Interviewer:*

*But why did you become a follower of Tibetan Buddhism?*

*Interviewee:*

*Because I began my serious study of Buddhism via Tibetan Buddhism. The other possible reasons include, for example, Chinese Buddhism just asks you to chant "Amituofo"... In Chinese Buddhism's monasteries, they provide few lectures on Buddhist theory (ch. jiangfa)... In these monasteries, in addition to asking you to chant Buddhist scriptures during the Morning Session and the Evening Session (ch. zaowan ke), they have no lectures on Buddhist theory. I encountered Buddhism for the first time at around 20 years of age... I studied Buddhism via the Internet. In the beginning, I visited Chinese Buddhism's websites... I watched a series of Buddhist lectures given by a Taiwanese monk, Monk Haitao... I came to Beita because one friend introduced me to come here... One monk, who is a Chinese Buddhist monk, suggested to me that I search online for a website called "Buddhist Treasure" (ch. foxue baozang; that is the name of the Xiaba lama's website). I found it and I liked the content of the website... After watching the*

*online lectures given by the lama, I especially like his teaching. Tibetan Buddhism has an especially strong explanation on Buddhist theory and doctrine...*

*Interviewer:*

*...Is it the case that you became a Buddhist under the influence of your family members or neighbors or friends?*

*Interviewee:*

*No one in my family believed in Buddhism. Even in the village (where I was born and raised) if you try to look for a Buddhist, you will find none... I became a Buddhist just due to some things that were unexpected and accidental... Before I became a Buddhist, I didn't have a high opinion of Buddhism. I thought that Buddhist monks were frauds who got money by deception (laughs)...*

*Interviewer:*

*So you encountered Buddhism for the first time via the Internet?*

*Interviewee:*

Yes.

*Interviewer:*

*What is the name of the website via which you started to study Buddhism online?*

*Interviewee:*

*It is called "China's Buddhism."*

*Interviewer:*

*Were there any specific articles or Buddhist monks in that time, that attracted you to Buddhism?*

*Interviewee:*

*I like some articles on China's traditional culture... These articles taught you how to behave morally, how to maintain a good relationship with your parents, and so on. I didn't expect I could find such teachings on a Buddhist website. Later, I started to study Buddhist scriptures via the website... My hometown, the small village where I was from, belongs to Southern Fujian, an area called "Minnan." In that area, Chinese folk religions*

*are super widespread and popular. In my village, many people believe in a variety of divinities from the diverse Chinese folk religions. But for their practice of worshipping those divinities, I didn't like it and thought of it as being superstitious. But I believe Buddhism is different from them... I believe Buddhist doctrine is the closest to truth...*

As a young man who was born in Minnan where Chinese folk religions, Taoism, and Chinese Buddhism always maintained a strong presence, if he became interested in religious life, the direct available religious options should have been those of the religions above. However, via the Internet and the friends he made online, he read and watched a variety of materials regarding Buddhism which were far beyond what the limited horizon of the local community could have provided to him. Then, based on what he read and watched, he made comparisons between Chinese folk religions/Taoism, Chinese Buddhism and Tibetan Buddhism. In his opinion, on the one hand, Chinese folk religions/Taoism have so many things that are too “superstitious,” and on the other hand, Chinese Buddhism nowadays problematically ignores the significance of Buddhist theory. Therefore, he chose Tibetan Buddhism as his personal belief. That is, during the entire process of looking for and comparing diverse religious traditions, his own religious interest served as the only criterion he ever resorted to, no matter the collective traditions that his family or the local community used to hold.

(2) Case two

For some other followers whose family had certain religious backgrounds, if their family held a negative position towards Tibetan Buddhism, there might arise some tension between an individual's personal interest in Tibetan Buddhism and the family's inclination to maintain their religious tradition. Under such circumstances, the individual had to explicitly resist the pressure from their family to choose to become a follower of Tibetan Buddhism.

The following interviewee was a female ethnic Chinese lay follower of Tibetan Buddhism who stayed in the monastery to study Tibetan Buddhism full time; she also worked for the monastery and lived in the monastery's property. Her family had the religious belief of Chinese Buddhism and didn't support her idea of studying, working, and living in a Tibetan Buddhist monastery full time.

*Interviewer:*

*When you visited the Beita monastery for the first time, did you come here just to have a look for fun, or to seriously do some religious stuff?*

*Interviewee:*

*I had already had religious belief in Buddhism. However, I was a follower of Chinese Buddhism, rather than Tibetan Buddhism. I used to have a good friend who had the*

*religious belief of Tibetan Buddhism. At that time, I wanted to buy him a gift, so I came to the Beita monastery to have a look at the Buddhist ritual items here. Since then, I started to have interest in Tibetan Buddhism...*

*Interviewer:*

*What was your first impression of Tibetan Buddhism when visiting the Beita monastery?*

*Interviewee:*

*The lay followers volunteering to work for the monastery (who met me) were all very nice to me. I asked many questions about the Buddhist ritual items since I was not familiar with them, and they patiently answered all my questions and I liked the friendly and warm atmosphere in the monastery... Since then I frequently visited the monastery during weekends, as at that time I was still working in a company during workdays. I also started to be a part-time volunteer for the monastery...*

*Interviewer:*

*Can you say something about how you encountered Buddhism in your life and eventually made the decision to study in the monastery full time?*

*Interviewee:*

*I think, first of all, my family's religious background played a role on my religious life. My grandmother was a lay follower of (Chinese) Buddhism, so was my father. Since childhood, following my family members, I visited many temples and monasteries, and there were many temples and monasteries near my hometown. But at that time I just followed the older family members to visit the temples and monasteries, I didn't have a clear idea of it... Later, I attended college. The library of my college had lots of books on religion, and I spent lots of time reading them. Some of the books were about Buddhist folklores and stories, and I liked them very much...*

*Interviewer:*

*Which college did you attend?*

*Interviewee:*

*...(not clear) University of Engineering Science and Technology.*

*Interviewer:*

*What was your major in college?*

*Interviewee:*

*The full name is Architectural and Facilities Engineering, with a focus on heating, ventilation, and air conditioning.*

*Interviewer:*

*Why did you choose such a college and major, since you were interested in Buddhism?*

*Interviewee:*

*...I made such a decision because at that time, a degree in this major could help me find a good job easily after graduation, as the construction industry was flourishing at that time...*

*Interviewer:*

*That is to say, you and your family always had the religious belief of Chinese Buddhism, and you read many books on Buddhist folklores and stories during college years. Then, after graduation you worked for a construction company.*

*Interviewee:*

*Yes.*

*Interviewer:*

*Then, after working for the company for several years, you quit that job and started to study in the Beita monastery full time?*

*Interviewee:*

*Yes.*

*Interviewer:*

*Are you the only child in your family?*

*Interviewee:*

*Yes.*

*Interviewer:*

*In this case, since you currently work in the monastery full time, are your family members and relatives happy about this?*

*Interviewee:*

*No (laughs).*

*Interviewer:*

*Can you please say more about it?*

*Interviewee:*

*...My family has the religious belief of Buddhism. However, my parents have poor health. As a result, some of my relatives (challenged my family's religious belief), asking: you see, you are all Buddhists, but why do you have such poor health (and your Buddhist divinities don't help you get cured of the illness)? But even though they were questioned by them, my parents still supported my decision to study Buddhism...*

*Interviewer:*

*That is to say, your parents actually supported your Buddhist belief?*

*Interviewee:*

*Yes, but they didn't allow me to be a nun. They told me, it is okay to study (Chinese) Buddhism, but it is not okay to be a nun, because I am the only child in the family.*

*Interviewer:*

*What happened after you visited the Beita monastery for the first time?*

*Interviewee:*

*Later, I came to the Beita monastery to study Tibetan Buddhism. However, they didn't understand my idea to study Tibetan Buddhism here. They said, why do you want to study Tibetan Buddhism? They knew very little about Tibetan Buddhism, so they opposed my decision. It was not only my parents who opposed my idea, but also my relatives. They said, you, as a young and good girl, why not just work in the construction company and live a normal life? Why did you make such a weird decision to stay in the Beita monastery?*

*Interviewer:*

*What did you say to them to explain your idea?*

*Interviewee:*

*I told them that I feel so good to stay in the monastery, and there are such and such good things in the monastery. I told them the teachers teaching us Buddhist philosophy in the monastery all graduated from top universities in China, and the monastery can help us students to find a job (as translators of Buddhist books from Tibetan into Chinese). I told them I am having a good and happy life in the monastery, so they don't need to be worried about me. They found I was so adamant about it, that they had to stop lecturing me. They answered that they know they are not able to control me, since I am not that kind of people who will change their mind easily. They understood that they are not able to persuade me. So they just stopped...*

*...*

*Interviewer:*

*You mentioned that some of your families members, your parents, told you it is okay to study Chinese Buddhism but not okay to study Tibetan Buddhism...*

*Interviewee:*

*They knew very little about Tibetan Buddhism.*

*Interviewer:*

*Why didn't they like Tibetan Buddhism?*

*Interviewee:*

*Many Chinese Buddhists misunderstand Tibetan Buddhism. For example, some frauds, pretending they are Tibetan Buddhists, did some sham stuff for money or sex. These shams lead to some people's misunderstanding of Tibetan Buddhism. (My family members and relatives) were worried that, I, as a single young girl, might encounter danger while living in a monastery; they asked me, what if I am deceived by someone in the monastery? Once, they even doubted that the reason why I always stay in the monastery is that I am deceived by an illegal organization for a pyramid scheme (ch. chuanxiao). They were extremely worried about me at that time. At last, in order to prove that I am safe and good in the monastery, I asked one of my cousins to come with me to see the monastery (as a witness); I also asked her to have a look at the apartment the monastery allocated to me to live in. Until she returned (to explain what she saw to my family members and relatives), their doubt was not gone... Their main concern was*

*my safety... I am in Shenyang, because I made the decision to (leave my hometown) to come to Shenyang by myself (ch. ziji chuang). My family didn't provide me with any resources regarding my decision to come to Shenyang. No matter my previous searching for jobs in Shenyang or my current staying in the monastery, these were solely based on my own decision.*

There are at least two points worth noticing in this interview.

First, it is clear that the interviewee chose to study, work, and live in a monastery full time not because she had to, but simply because she wanted to. That is, even though in her life she had multiple opportunities to pursue diverse life trajectories by herself, she, out of pure personal interest in a religious life, rather than any realistic consideration for economic necessity, for instance, she gave up a lucrative job position in the secular world and turned to becoming a full-time student and worker in a Tibetan Buddhist monastery.

Second, she made the choice to be a full-time participant in a Tibetan Buddhist community against the pressure from her family members and relatives. On the one hand, as followers of Chinese Buddhism who held a negative position on Tibetan Buddhism, her parents didn't like certain doctrines and practices of Tibetan Buddhism. On the other hand, given certain misunderstandings surrounding Tibetan Buddhism nowadays in China, as well as the general Chinese culture's natural estrangement with

institutionalized religion, both her parents and her relatives once strongly opposed the interviewee's decision to quit her promising job and join a religious community. However, the interviewee pointed out unequivocally to her family members that because it was her own life, she had the freedom to choose what she likes in her life independently.

Additionally, there is an interesting detail mentioned by this interviewee: her parents later were somewhat okay that she studied in the monastery, as long as she remained a lay follower, rather than to become a nun. In fact, almost every ethnic Chinese monk or nun of the Beita community with whom I had interviews, told me stories about how his or her family once tried everything they could do to prevent him or her from being ordained. That is, the struggle between "the individual" and "the family" often gets its most intense presence in the cases of the ordained monks and nuns, which is the topic of the next section.

### **(III) The third moment: the individual's choice to be an ordained monk or nun of Tibetan Buddhism**

#### **1. Against the family's wish, the individual became a monk/nun**

Unlike any other major civilizations in the world, in China's history, religion seldom occupied a central place in most people's daily life. That is, any of China's religious

organizations or religious ideologies, politically, socially, or culturally, rarely achieved a status that is even remotely comparable to Roman Catholic church's dominance of medieval Europe, Islam's influence over Muslim world, Hinduism's influence on Indian history, or the Gelug sect's political and cultural authority in pre-1950s Tibet. Rather, the two dominant ideological systems in Chinese history, both Confucianism and Maoist Marxism-Leninism, are essentially secular theoretical systems of political/social philosophy or ethics, rather than those of ideologies resorting to supernatural beings or power. As a result, in modern Chinese society, most people are inclined to maintain a rather estranged relationship with institutionalized religion.

Furthermore, one of the core doctrines of Confucianism is the emphasis of "xiao," which is usually translated as "filial piety" in English-speaking world, meaning that every decent person should place "giving a great respect for their parents" at the center of their moral responsibility. In particular, Mencius, whose status in Confucian thinkers is second only to Confucius, once famously declared: "There are several kinds of wrongdoings of unfilial piety, and having no offspring is the most severe one of them" (ch. buxiao yousan, wuhou weida). In Chinese society and history, this idea by Mencius is usually accepted by the general public as one of the unchallengeable ethical principles. However, on the other hand, the Gelug tradition requires that to be a Gelugpa monk, the person should strictly lead a celibate life. As a result, in the eyes of ordinary Chinese people, to be an ordained monk or nun would be something almost unimaginable. Under such circumstances, most Chinese parents understandably fiercely oppose their

children's decision to become a monk/nun, since the life of a celibate means that the person has to give up a family and a spouse, and therefore, would fail to fulfil his or her basic moral responsibility of practicing filial piety. In this case, all of the Han Chinese monks or nuns are making a tremendous commitment to their religious belief against their families' wish.

The following interviewee became a lay follower of Tibetan Buddhism in his mid-20s and then an ordained monk under the Xiaba lama in early 30s. His detailed life history, on the one hand, covers all the three moments discussed in this chapter—becoming a religious person, becoming a lay Tibetan Buddhist, and becoming a monk, and on the other hand, perfectly embodies modernity's influence on his life trajectory—first, a gradually modernized society providing him diverse life options, and also, a rising modern individualism providing him support during his conflict with his family. Therefore, his story is worth a longer presentation.

*Interviewer:*

*Can you tell the story about when did you first encountered Buddhism, and what happened later? That is, can you give a brief introduction to your life history?*

*Interviewee:*

*In the beginning, I might be a person who didn't like Buddhism. When I was young I didn't have a positive idea about Buddhism. At that time I thought that the monks all look quite dumb and uneducated (laughs)... Overall I didn't have any formal encounter with Buddhism as a child, since in most Chinese areas you could seldom see a monk and none of my family members was Buddhist... So my negative position against Buddhism might largely come from some TV series that poked fun at Buddhism... At that time, I was a person who was quite Westernized. I held a contempt not only for Buddhism, but also for the entire Chinese culture. Rather, I admired Western culture quite a lot... Then, I went to college, majoring in Food Science and Engineering... During my college years, I had a little bit of an encounter with Buddhism: once in a bookstore, I happened to find a book, "Buddhist Logic," written by a Russian scholar Fyodor Shcherbatskoy, and I thought Buddhist logic is quite awesome. Then after I graduated from college... I found a job in a company of international trade in a city near my hometown. At that time, it is not the case that I became immediately interested in Buddhism. I began to read books on Chinese culture. Perhaps I was rebelling against my earlier self (when I was quite Westernized). At that time, I was especially obsessive with Taoist books like Laozi (Tao Te Ching) and Zhuangzi, as well as some Confucian books. During the same time I also began to read Buddhist books like the Diamond Sutra, and I liked them. However, I felt that I could not totally understand the books. It happened that the mother of one of my colleagues at that time was a lay follower of Buddhism at the Duobaojiang Monastery, which is a Chinese Buddhist monastery that accepts Tibetan Buddhist influence. His mother invited me to visit the monastery during weekends, and I liked it. Since then, I*

*gradually knew more about Buddhism... At the time, when I visited the monastery, I was greatly surprised. The monks there were knowledgeable and looked super smart. That changed my mind: monks can also be so smart! (laughs)... In 2006 I formally became a lay follower of Buddhism...*

*At that time I was working for a company doing international trade, but I had zero interest in that job... A friend suggested to me that I quit the job and apply for graduate school for Buddhist studies... My parents thought it would be okay. So after I applied I got admitted into the master's program in (Chinese) Buddhist studies at a top university... In studying in this program, I gradually found my new interest: I was inclined to study Buddhist philology, but at that time there was no faculty member there who specialized in the philological approach of Buddhist studies...as a result, if I wanted to stay in the department for their PhD program, I would have to write a dissertation on Chinese Buddhism, but I didn't have an interest in Chinese Buddhism... I thought it would be more meaningful to study the important Indian Buddhist works that Chinese Buddhism hadn't translated, rather than to study what Chinese Buddhism has already knew.*

*As a graduate student of the university, I began to seriously consider becoming a monk. After graduation from the master's program, on one day, (without communicating with my parents about my plan to be a monk beforehand) I made the decision on my own to go to western Sichuan. I went to the Dazang Monastery, a Tibetan Buddhist monastery in Maerkang county, Ngawa Tibetan Autonomous Prefecture, because I heard that one*

*famous Tibetan lama, Qizhu Rinpoche, was there... Also, from one online Buddhist forum, I got the news that a scholar monk who had just got his Geshe degree from India, had returned to China and stayed in that monastery and I really wanted to meet him... I met the monk there...he could not speak Chinese, but he had a Chinese interpreter. So via the interpreter, the monk taught me some Tibetan Buddhist doctrines; I had great confidence and trust in that monk. So I directly told him my idea that I want to be a monk under the ritual you conduct. The monk answered he thought it is okay; however, he needed some time to prepare for the ritual, and also, in that time, there were some ethnic Tibetan children who would also be ordained as monks under his ritual. So the monk suggested to me that I wait for about one month and then attend the ordainment along with the Tibetan kids. I agreed. As Ngawa prefecture is not far away from (the ethnic Tibetan areas of) Gansu and Qinghai, I spent the one month travelling there; I visited Labrang Monastery and Kumbum Monastery, and many other great monasteries in Qinghai. However, in the one-month time when I was waiting to attend the ordainment, my mother, who was unbelievably smart, made use of my cellphone tracking data and finally caught me at the Dazang Monastery. At that moment when she caught me, I had already bought all the clothing and stuff that Tibetan monks wear. (laughs) As a result, my attempt to attend the ordainment failed and she took me home...At that time, the Geshe monk respected my mother's ideas, and he suggested I should study Tibetan Buddhism as a lay follower rather than as a monk...*

*The day before my mother took me home, the Geshe monk talked with both my mother and me... My mother also had a good impression of the monk. I told the monk I still wanted to visit him in the future and the monk answered okay, but he reiterated I should respect my mother's views and be a lay follower, rather than a monk. (laughs)...*

*...After going back home with my mother, I had to look for a job again... Finally, I found a job in a local government office responsible for writing local history... I found the job super boring... I considered going to visit Dazang Monastery again. Then, one day, from an online Buddhist website, I got the information that the Beita Monastery was recruiting students to study Tibetan language. At that time, I had already had the idea to translate Tibetan Buddhist classics into Chinese...because I found Chinese Buddhism lacks the translations of many important Buddhist works while Tibetan Buddhism has them... So in 2012 I quit the job and came to the Beita Monastery... In the beginning, I studied Tibetan language and Buddhist theory as a full-time student (lay follower of Tibetan Buddhism) here... In 2014 I became a monk...*

*Interviewer:*

*...You mentioned that after graduating from the master's program, you went to western Sichuan alone, with the aim to be ordained at the Dazang Monastery there.*

*Interviewee:*

Yes.

*Interviewer:*

*Can you say more about it? Were there certain factors that helped you make the decision to go there for ordainment? I think that to suddenly make such a decision (to be a monk), should be something that is really big for a person. Can you please say more about what really happened in those years?*

*Interviewee:*

*...In fact, during the years as a master's student, I had already had the idea to be monk... But the problem is, in Chinese areas, the parents usually do something to prevent you from becoming a monk; if the monastery notices that your parents don't want you to be a monk, they will not accept you. So, at that time, if I found a monastery near my hometown and went there to become a monk, I thought, my parents could easily catch me and take me home... As a result, I changed my plan: I would go to a monastery that is far away from my hometown and if so, I thought, they would not find me. But I didn't expect (even though I went to Sichuan) my mother would still catch me (laughs)...*

*Interviewer:*

*How did your mother find you in Sichuan?*

*Interviewee:*

*It seems that she looked for my whereabouts by checking the information sent by my cellphone... I still haven't figured out how she did it. According to my mother...she said, based on the information she collected, she thought, (to be a monk) I might be looking for a Tibetan monk who can speak Chinese; with this idea, she searched online, found several monasteries whose Tibetan lamas could speak Chinese, and decided to check them one by one... In the second monastery she checked, she found me...*

*Interviewer:*

*...You formally became a monk in 2014 in Beita monastery after studying Tibetan Buddhism here as a full-time student for a while. This time, what was your family's reaction?*

*Interviewee:*

*I attended the ritual first and notified them later (about the fact that I had already become a monk). Then they had to accept it...but (I know) they were very unhappy for a*

*long time... One friend once told me, "although your parents say they are okay with your decision to be a monk, in fact they don't want to accept it, so you should spend a long time to talk with them, to try to make them feel better."*

*Interviewer:*

*That is to say, even now, you are still talking with them to try to make them feel better?*

*Interviewee:*

*Yes... There is one point I want to say a bit more about. With regards to a person becoming a monk, it is totally different between Tibetan areas and Chinese areas. In Chinese areas, it is usually the case that the person made great efforts himself to overcome lots of difficulties in order to be a monk, because his family usually opposed it. However, in Tibetan areas, it is usually the case that the little kids were sent to a monastery by their family at an age when they didn't really understand what was going on... At that time (when I visited the monastery in Sichuan) I even saw some of the kids who didn't want to be monks, and tried to hide somewhere in the monastery before the ritual...*

This is a summary of the interviewee's life history:

Just like most of the Chinese monks or nuns in the Beita community, this interviewee's family had no religious beliefs. Given this background, the individual's initial interest in religion such as Taoism and Buddhism, were consequences of his pure intellectual interest in books. He had read a variety of publications that were previously banned in pre-1980s China, including books written by foreign or ancient Chinese "feudalist" authors. This experience of going against his family's non-religious background, finally led to his choice of Tibetan Buddhism from other options as his personal belief. Meanwhile, he received a college education in engineering, found a job in an international-trade company, got a master's degree from a top five university in China, and again found a job in local government. However, none of these lifestyles satisfied him: those were simply not what he liked. To pursue his true dream, he visited a Tibetan monastery in a remote area of western Sichuan, where he had a great time following a Dharamsala-educated Tibetan monk who had recently returned to China from India. At the same time, his family looked for him and managed to catch him in Sichuan, which frustrated his plan to "leave the family" (ch. chujia)—the literal translation of the Chinese term for "becoming a monk/nun". However, he didn't change his mind; he tried again several years later and eventually he found the Beita community via the Internet and to his final satisfaction, he successfully became a monk this time, and began to live the lifestyle he had dreamed of for a long time.

That is: the entire storyline revolves around a concept of "self," an individual arising from and going against its surrounding collective structures, especially, that of family.

Additionally, the story would not be even possible in pre-modernized China, where there was almost no marketized cultural industry, relatively free international travel, or modern communication technology.

2. Against the mainstream society's social and cultural expectations, the individual became a monk/nun

As religion rarely became a mainstream ideology in Chinese history, and correspondingly, religious organization seldom controlled any of Chinese society's major political, economic, or cultural resources, it has always been regarded as a controversial action if an individual abandons his secular career and turns to the life of a monk or nun. By contrast, the mainstream society's social and cultural expectations mostly focus on an individual's secular success in the non-religious world; that is, if an individual chooses to make a career that is closely involved with institutionalized religion, the people around him may find it hard to understand. Regarding this, stories like that of Julien Sorel, the protagonist of *The Red and the Black*, written by the French novelist Stendhal, could never happen in a Chinese culture's context, nor could the cases in traditional Tibetan society where it was a common practice that children from poor families were sent to Buddhist monasteries for a better material life. As a result, if an individual tries to become a monk in contemporary China, in addition to facing the pressures from his family, he also must deal with the pressures resulting from his deviation from the

general social norm to the extent that he may even feel the individual's decision to choose a monastic life was stigmatized by the mainstream society.

The following interviewee didn't have any interest in religion until his late 20s, when he began to seriously read Buddhist books. He became a lay follower of Tibetan Buddhism in his early 30s. He attended the ritual and was ordained as monk under the Xiaba lama in his mid 30s. Before his ordainment, he had an extraordinarily successful career as a senior manager in several major restaurant-management corporations and investment companies of northeast China. His life history illustrates perfectly the tension between the individual's personal pursuit and the popular secular values held by most of the general public.

*The interviewer:*

*...Did you read any books on Buddhism in high school?*

*The interviewee:*

*No. Even in college I rejected to read these kinds of books, because I thought I was a student in a science-based major so I should make judgements based on my own reason. During college years...and in my high school years, many classmates and friends and I...once went to tourist sites...where there were many Buddhist temples or monasteries...*

*Some of my classmates and friends burned incense sticks and prayed before the Buddha statues, hoping the Buddha could help them get a high score in school's exams. They also asked me to do these with them, but I rejected it. I thought I should rely on my own reason and capacity to achieve success. I didn't think I should rely on the Buddha, and I didn't believe the Buddha really exists... I didn't believe all that stuff, and I only believed in myself... Many people held an agnostic attitude; they thought that although they were not sure whether the Buddha really exists, as it cost very little expense to burn incense sticks and pray, why not have a try? But I still said no. I am a person believing in reason: even though this stuff costed very little, if you could not persuade me by reason that these actions are reasonable, I absolutely would not do these things. ...I would never believe anything that cannot be proved by reason, logic, and science...*

*The interviewer:*

*...Did you have any family members who were Buddhists? Did you have any encounter with Buddhism when you were young?*

*The interviewee:*

*...Even the information that I have become a monk, I didn't tell my parents. My parents don't know that I have become a monk even now. (Among my family members) only my sister and my brother-in-law know I am a monk now... You know...that Chinese people*

*usually hold a negative attitude against being a monk. Chinese people usually think that a person will not become a monk unless he is so poor that he has to join a monastery; or a person has to become a monk because he can't find a girl to marry him; or a person becomes a monk because he is such a loser in society that he has no other choice to make a living and so on. However, I think I decided to become a monk because of my own belief and pursuit... Even now I can still feel the pressures from the secular values: for example, I didn't get married, I didn't have kids, I didn't leave money to my family, and I didn't leave a house to my family—for all these tasks, I accomplished none of them...*

*The interviewer:*

*...After graduation from college, how many years did you work?*

*The interviewee:*

*...I worked for over 10 years... I majored in management in college. I had great ambitions when I was young, and I liked reading bibliographies of successful businessmen, like the Hong Kong billionaire Li Ka-Shing... I dreamed of becoming a wealthy man in the future... When I graduated from college, as our major was management, many of my classmates went to work for state-owned companies, because at that time the economic system of Northeast China still had elements of a planned economy. One of these state-owned*

*companies wanted to recruit me. However, I didn't like the system of planned economies. Rather, I wanted to venture into the world to pursue my own life outside the system... Also at that time many young people tried to work for the government, and I had opportunities to do this kind of jobs, but since it was not the life I liked, I gave up those opportunities... My goals then were very clear: I should work hard by myself to enlarge my horizon and enrich my experience; I would use the following ten years as a period of calmly and carefully studying; then, ten years later, I would be my own boss to do things I like myself... Ten years passed, however, I became a follower of Buddhism...*

*The interviewer:*

*...That is, you didn't become a lay Buddhist until in 2008. Was there anything that happened around that time that contributed to your decision to become a Buddhist?*

*The interviewee:*

*...I realized that I should not continue the similar life trajectories that were taken by my previous bosses or my father... (At that time in the companies I worked for) I served as a chief negotiation specialist to negotiate with business partners for large-scale investment... Because I had talent in this business, the bosses of the big companies I once worked with, many of whom were billionaires, all liked me and trusted me... I established good personal relationships with them, and could witness their lives closely... I found that*

*in the eyes of most people, those super wealthy and powerful businessmen looked the typical “successful guys” in all aspects; however, in my eyes, they led a problematic life: I thought they spent heavy expenses on their life, but harvested very little. For example, they had to trade their normal family life and their own health for the accumulation of wealth... In the eyes of most people surrounding them, they were extremely successful; while I felt that in their deepest heart, they were not happy...*

*...Last year we had a high-school-classmate reunion. Some of my former classmates asked me whether I regreted the decision I made to be a monk. I answered absolutely no. No matter what the end of the life path (of choosing to be a monk) could be, I feel happy about my decision. As for another life path of living a non-religious life, I am totally capable of playing the game... My previous colleagues all acknowledged my capacity in the business (of management and investment)... (When I was working in the management or investment companies) every time when I told my boss that I wanted to change jobs for a better-paid position in another company, the boss would be unhappy and wanted me to stay...*

This interviewee's life history covers many interesting topics, especially the following two.

First, the interviewee's self-portrait since his school years gives an almost textbook-like illustration of what modern individualism looks like in most people's eyes. According to a

popular online dictionary, the Google Dictionary, individualism is defined as “the habit or principle of being independent and self-reliant.” The interviewee emphasized that as a high school and college student, he only believed in himself and his own reason.

However, after graduation from college, he didn’t like the regular career path embraced by most of his classmates during a time when China was transforming itself away from a planned economy—that is, to join the Chinese government’s official political or economy system. Rather, he wanted to “venture into the world” in pursuit of his own dream.

Then, after successfully working as a senior manager for several management and investment companies, he rejected this kind of popular lifestyle which he deemed as being “not happy” and finally became a monk in a Tibetan Buddhist monastery. And when his former classmates asked him if he regretted his decision to give up his promising jobs in business world, he answered “absolutely no”, since in the monastery he eventually found the lifestyle he really liked.

Second, the interviewee indicated that there existed a great tension between the popular secular values that were generally accepted by most members of Chinese society, and the religious values that consciously and robustly reject the former. On the one hand, the mainstream society valued material enjoyment and a secular career for materialist success; in this context, a young member of society was expected to follow a conformist life path and to live an economically productive life that fit into a larger system and therefore was useful to the system. That is to say, the young person is expected by the society to happily serve as one of the innumerable small cogs

comfortably embedded in the social machine. While on the other hand, the religious values, particularly those held by the monastic communities, stress the problems in the mainstream lifestyles. However, those anti-materialist values, widely deemed outdated or even weird and unacceptable, were largely marginalized by the majority and laughed at by the masses, until, for example, an individual, following a serious consideration of the issues by himself, made his own decision to pursue an individualist life choice.

### **III. Conclusion: Tibetan Buddhism's Success in the Background of China's Modernization**

The dissertation's core research question : how could Tibetan Buddhism, originally the traditional religion of the Tibetan people, an ethnic minority who occupied a disadvantaged political, economic, and cultural status for a long time, successfully expand its influence among Han Chinese people who remained the dominant ethnic group in China with regard to its monopoly of political, economic, and cultural powers/resources, to the extent that a growing number of Chinese have become lay followers and even ordained monks/nuns of Tibetan Buddhism? The previous chapters answered this question from their own perspectives, such as Tibetan Buddhism's adoption of a "Bureaucracy Monasticism" in organizational structure, or its savvy interaction with a rising Chinese nationalism. This chapter, which is based on materials from the life histories of the lama's Chinese followers', argues that China's modernization played an important role in the "inverted acculturation" process in which the individuals

of Chinese origin became Tibetan Buddhism's lay followers or ordained monks/nuns. On the one hand, modernization contributed to China's economic development and technological advancement, which provided a solid material foundation for individuals' diverse options regarding their life choices, while on the other hand, modernization contributed to the popularity of modern individualism, which functioned as an ideological support for individuals' freedom of choice towards diverse religious/non-religious lifestyles. That is, at the level of individual life history, Tibetan Buddhism's success among Chinese communities also benefited from a version of modernization that facilitated social and economic development as well as promoted the culture of modern individualism.

In the end, an open question arises: In those Chinese communities of Tibetan Buddhism in the early 21<sup>st</sup> century, why did these cases of inverted acculturation occur, that is, why did the members of a politically, economically, and militarily dominant ethnic group voluntarily accept the culture of a subordinate ethnic minority, which is a situation that is relatively rare in human history happen? Based on the life history materials analyzed in this chapter, one possible answer could be that only in a modernizing society in which more and more people are inclined to agree that diverse values and different lifestyles can co-exist, and that individuals' choices of their personal values and lifestyles should be respected, can these cases of inverted acculturation take place. To further solve this question, nevertheless, more research remains to be done in the future.

## **CHAPTER FIVE**

### **Tibetan Buddhism and the Ideology for a Centralized Political Authority**

#### **I. A CCP-Supported Chinese Ideology that Promoted a Centralized Political Authority**

In Chinese culture there is a deep-rooted ideological structure underlying China's political practices, cultural mentality, and social life. This ideological structure creates an image that is the model for an ideal society. This ideal society is a centralized and unified community under a political center that controls every religious, ethnic, and geographic group within the community. In this ideal society, the political logic prevails over all other realms of social life, e.g., religious life. According to this ideology, the individual is always a part of a larger group and does not hold any inherent meaning or significance on his or her own.

This ideology has its root in a much older tradition that dates back to at least the Zhou dynasty (1046 BC-256 BC) and one of Confucianism's "Five Classics", the "Shijing" or Classic of Poetry, that was alleged to have been compiled and edited by Confucius himself and contained the theory and practice of the "Great Unification" or "Great Unity" (ch. dayitong; for the term, see Schafer 1990 and Loewe 1994). However, after taking over China's political authority after 1949, the ruling CCP also accepted certain elements from that ideology and actively took advantage of the ideology to strengthen its rule over the diverse geographic areas, ethnic groups, and religious traditions within

the border of the PRC. As a result, in order to acquire and maintain a legal presence in China or even to expand its influence out of Tibet, Tibetan Buddhism, initially as an ethnic minority's traditional religion that originated in one of the frontier regions of the PRC, likely would face certain pressure from the ideology. Or, on the other hand, in certain contexts, Tibetan Buddhism might be able to actively make use of the ideology to create favorable conditions for its spread in Han Chinese areas of Eastern China. The Xiaba lama's missionary system, to a certain extent, managed to cite certain elements from the CCP-backed ideology to help pave the way for its expansion.

## **II. Tibetan Buddhism's Echoing the CCP-Supported Ideology for a Centralized Political Authority in Contemporary China at Two Levels: the Organizational and the Individual**

### **1. The level of organization/group**

All the Tibetan Buddhist entities, the monastery, the stupa, the Buddhist studies center, and the missionary organization, in one obvious sense, are sites of religious activities and their identity is purely religious. However, in another sense, understanding the nature/identity of the Tibetan Buddhist organizations in Chinese areas had to involve much more complex answers. As a result, in order to justify their existence, the Xiaba Lama opted to adapt to the existing political ideology for a centralized political authority

and made an effort to incorporate additional elements into its identity, which is illustrated by the following three cases.

(1) Accepting the government's domination over religion by acquiring the status of being a government-recognized "Religious Activity Site" (ch. zongjiao huodong changsuo)

The ideology requires that the community under the unified political center should be essentially a "political community", in the sense that the political logic should dominate that of any other social realm. In other words, the state should dominate the church. In this context, the relatively large-scale and successful Tibetan Buddhist groups basically choose to accept the government's domination over religion by actively acquiring the status of being a government-recognized "Religious Activity Site."

As mentioned, since the Beita Monastery is clearly a monastery of Tibetan Buddhism, it is a "religious activity site"; that is, the religious community's self-identification should qualify that it is a "religious activity site." However, that was not the case in China because the CCP government only granted legal status to the "Five Major Religions" (ch. wuda zongjiao): Protestantism, Catholicism, Islam, Taoism, and Buddhism. Furthermore, if one religious organization from the "Five Major Religions" wants to establish a physical and permanent site for religious activity, e.g., building a church, a monastery, or a mosque, it alone does not have the power to do so. Instead, it has to first secure approval from the government. According to "The Administrative Regulations on

Religious Activity Sites” (ch. zongjiao huodong changsuo guanli tiaoli), which is a national-wide regulation issued by China’s central government in 1994, “to establish a religious activity site, registration is required”, and “the requirements for registration are made by the Department for Religious Affairs of the State Council”. The regulations also state that “the department for religious affairs of a county-level or higher level local government has the right to supervise the implementation of this regulation...”

Therefore, the local government of the area in which the religious group’s site for religious activity is located, holds the power to decide if a religious activity site is legally a “religious activity site.”

Given such a political environment, different Tibetan Buddhist organizations may choose different approaches to deal with the governmental policy. Some lamas or famous monks who came to Chinese areas of Eastern China from either Tibet or even India to do missionary work, did not acquire the status of a government-recognized “Religious Activity Site” for their missionary groups. Therefore, they had to conduct religious activities such as holding Tibetan Buddhist rituals or ordaining Tibetan Buddhist monks in private houses or apartments that were owned or rented by their Chinese followers. This, of course, severely limited the religious influence of those lamas and monks, even though many of them were famous and competent scholar-monks who had returned to China after getting the Geshe degree under the current Dalai Lama in Dharamsala. One Chinese follower who worked full time in a Tibetan Buddhist monastery explained how

the Tibetan Buddhist missionary groups encountered major difficulties if they were unable to acquire the legal status:

*...The legal status is critically important. Without the status you are unable to expand your missionary organization; and even worse, your group may be banned if you have growing religious influence... There is a famous monk with the degree of Geshe... He returned to China from India and could speak good Chinese. In recent years he was quite active in doing missionary work in Han Chinese areas. However, his missionary activities were largely semi-underground, for example, doing them in the private houses or apartments owned by his Chinese followers. He was even arrested by local authority once. It was quite embarrassing. The local police noticed his activities because a nearby Han Chinese Buddhist group reported him to the local police... Last year, some friends and I went to an Eastern coastal city and visited the monk who was then conducting religious activities in a condo owned by one of his local followers. Since the condo is in a large building of a populous neighborhood, his missionary group had to be extremely careful and took some necessary measures. We visited him for many days and on one day, when we were climbing the staircase leading to the condo where he was staying, suddenly a neighbor next door came out, asking us: are you the people who are interested in buying a property here and are doing a house tour? How much does the current owner ask you for the price? We were taken aback and felt confused after hearing the neighbor's words because at that moment no one told us anything about the property-buying stuff. So we responded clumsily and quickly left. Only later did we get to*

*know that, in case the neighbors of the building felt suspicious and reported them to the local authorities again because within a short period of time a lot of strangers would be visiting the condo when the monk organized religious rituals, the monk's group beforehand distributed to the neighbors the false information that they were advertising the condo and planning to sell it so on the following days probably many interested people would do house tours for the condo; as a result, on that day, one of the neighbors who was interested in real estate information, came out to talk to us when he suddenly heard many strangers were gathering in the building...*

In contrast to these lamas and monks whose missionary organizations lacked a legal status as a “religious activity site,” others managed to acquire that status for their groups and established large-scale and permanent monasteries, such as the two headed by the Xiaba Lama. Both the Beita Monastery and the Zhengjie Monastery hang the tablets showing their government-approved status as “religious activity site” in high visible locations. The writing on the tablets states on the top line “religious activity site”; on the middle line, it states the full name of the monastery, and on the bottom line, it says “overseen by State Administration for Religious Affairs.” What is interesting is that in both monasteries the tablets were placed at a central place in the community facing the square where the monks hold the weekly Chinese National Flag-raising ceremony. In Beita, the tablet is on the main entrance gate of the monastery and in front of the gate there is a small square in which two flag poles are erected: on the right it is the pole for the national flag of the PRC, which is higher, while on the left it is the pole for the

Buddhist flag, which is lower. In Zhengjie, the tablet is hung next to the door of the main hall of the monastery. In front of the hall, there is a larger square, where the location of the two flag poles is exactly the same as in Beita: on the right, a giant Five-starred Red Flag presides over the six-color Buddhist flag, as well as the entire monastic community whose legality is certified via a shining golden-color metal tablet exhibited at the community's central place.

(2) Adapting to the government's views on ethnic relationships and religious responsibility by actively participating in relevant political movements launched by the political authorities.

There are four main responsibilities that the government expects from ethnic groups and religious entities: (A) the various ethnic groups are supposed to unite under the political center and co-exist harmoniously with each other; religious groups should especially take the responsibility of serving the community; (B) the religious groups are expected to protect and defend the government, (C) the religious groups are expected to assist the government to eliminate undesirable elements threatening the community, and (D) the religious organizations are expected to help the individual members of the community live a happy life. In the case of the Zhengjie monastery, this is illustrated by a political movement the monastery actively participated in: the "National Campaign for Ethnic Unity and Progressiveness" (ch. quanguo minzu tuanjie jinbu chuangjian huodong). In fact, the Zhengjie monastery did such a good job in the political movement

that it won the title of honor as a “Model Monastery in the National Campaign for Ethnic Unity and Progressiveness” (ch. quanguo minzu tuanjie jinbu chuangjian huodong shifan simiao).

This “Campaign for Ethnic Unity and Progressiveness,” like many other CCP-organized movements, was an ideology-based political movement launched directly from the CCP’s highest power center to the grass-root level of Chinese society. Its implementation relied on the CCP’s hierarchical system that consists of organs such as the publicity departments of lower levels, as well as the relevant governmental branches of the CCP-run government such as the ethnic and religious affairs bureaus of local levels. Its direct goal was to acquaint the grass-root communities about the Party’s policies and the government’s laws on ethnic affairs, while the ultimate goal was to promote the CCP-approved official ideologies such as the unity of all ethnic groups living within the border of PRC. The basic approach was to organize competitions within the grass-root populations, through which the winners would be selected and granted titles of honor, such as that won by the Zhengjie Monastery, namely, “Model Monastery in the National Campaign for Ethnic Unity and Progressiveness.”

According to a 2014 document, “The National Ethnic Affairs Commission’s Implementation Suggestion on Launching and Spreading the Campaign for Ethnic Unity and Progressiveness into the governmental organs, companies, local communities, towns, schools, and monasteries” (ch. guojia minwei guanyu tuidong minzu tuojie jinbu

chuangjian huodong jin jiguan, qiye, shequ, xiangzhen, xuexiao, simiao de shishi yijian; abbreviated as “The Suggestion” below), to obtain the title, the participant monasteries needed to compete with each other to score high in an “Examination and Assessment” (ch. ceping) conducted by the government. The specific requirements for winning this title included three major criteria:

*A. Loving the nation and loving the religion, understanding the law and observing the law.*

*(The monastery should have) politically reliable, religiously competent, morally respected, and effective-in-critical-moment clergymen who can play a positive role in defending ethnic unity, religious harmony, and social stability.*

*(The monastery should) firmly hold the principle of loving the nation and loving the religion, observe the constitution and the relevant laws and regulations, resolutely struggle against the Dalai Lama’s group and the “Three evil forces” (ch. sangu shili; this refers to terrorism, separatism, and religious extremism), and actively boycott and resist the illegal religious activities and the intervening activities from outside of the nation’s border.*

*(The monastery should) use the opportunity of religious activities to introduce to the religious followers the government’s laws, regulations, and policies on ethnic and*

*religious affairs, improving their activeness for understanding the laws, observing the laws, and defending ethnic unity and social stability...*

*B. Contributing to social unity and stability, providing religious teachings that follow the government.*

*...*

*(The monastery should) help the government to spread the government's policies to the religious followers, encouraging them to make efforts to improve their material life via legal work...*

*(The monastery should) actively educate the religious followers to carry forward the Chinese Nationality's excellent tradition of "giving money to the poor and helping those in need", to launch charity activities to help the masses of every ethnic group who are in need.*

*C. Having a qualified management system to serve the society.*

*...(The monastery should) actively collaborate with the relevant governmental organs to timely and properly solve all kinds of conflicts and incidents, and collaborate with the*

*government to help the people having drug issues, serving sentences, and committing other wrongdoings...*

Therefore, the requirements from the document embody all of the four responsibilities the government expects from the ethnic groups and religious organizations.

For the first responsibility that “the various ethnic groups should unite under the political center and co-exist harmoniously with each other,” it is embodied in the language that “(The monastery should have) politically reliable, religiously competent, morally respected, and effective-in-critical-moment clergymen who can play a positive role in defending ethnic unity, religious harmony, and social stability...”

For the second responsibility that “religious groups should take the responsibility to serve, protect, and defend the government,” it is embodied in the language that “(The monastery should) use the opportunity of religious activities to introduce to the religious followers the government’s laws, regulations, and policies on ethnic and religious affairs, improving their activeness for understanding the laws, observing the laws, and defending ethnic unity and social stability...”

For the third responsibility that “religious groups should assist the government to eliminate the undesirable factors threatening the community,” it is embodied in the language that “(The monastery should) firmly hold the principle of loving the nation and

loving the religion, observe the constitution and the relevant laws and regulations, resolutely struggle against the Dalai Lama's group and the "Three evil forces" (ch. sangushili; it refers to terrorism, separatism, and religious extremism), and actively boycott and resist the illegal religious activities and the intervening activities from outside of the nation border..."

For the fourth responsibility that "religious groups should help the individual members of the community live a happy life," it is embodied in the language that "(The monastery should) introduce the government's policy of benefiting the people to the religious followers, encouraging them to make effort to improve their material life via legal work... actively educate the religious followers to carry forward the Chinese Nationality's excellent tradition of "giving money to the poor and helping those in need", to launch charity activities to help the masses of every ethnic group who are in need... actively collaborate with the relevant governmental organs to timely and properly solve all kinds of conflicts and incidents, and collaborate with the government to help the people having drug issues, serving sentences, and committing other wrongdoings..."

(3) Adapting to the government's ideology on religion's economic responsibilities for the political community by shaping itself as not only a religious organization but also a destination for attracting external investment and a site of tourism

The ideology for a centralized political authority requires the religious community to support the political authority. In the 21<sup>st</sup> century the PRC was incorporating more elements from the capitalist world system such as market mechanisms into its economic life, so as to have a productive but still controllable economy and this became the central political authority's major consideration (see Economist 2020). Under this circumstance, the relevant ideology required that the monastery help the local government acquire a good GDP figure. The Zhengjie Monastery adapted itself to the official discourse, accepted the responsibility for local economic development, and assumed more roles regarding the local community in addition to being just a religious organization. This can be illustrated by two cases: the investment-related consideration for restoring Zhengjie Monastery and the decision to gain the title of a "National AAAA-Level Tourist Attraction."

#### A. The economic considerations for rebuilding the Zhengjie Monastery

In a 2019 interview, a monk mentioned the origin of the Zhengjie monastery:

*In the 2000s in Daqing, since the county is traditionally a Mongolian autonomous area, the local government wanted to restore the monastery in the style of a Tibetan Buddhist one. During those years there had been lots of people who tried to take over the late Zhengjie Monastery, yet none of them succeeded. Some of the candidates later found the living conditions there so demanding that they could not bear it so they finally had to*

*leave. Some others were plainly frauds—since the local government had launched some lucrative policies to attract investors, after receiving offerings and money from followers in the name of rebuilding the monastery, they just disappeared. Later, after hearing that the lama did a good job in Shenyang, the local government made the decision to invite him to go to Daqing to lead the project of restoring the Zhengjie.*

This passage reveals an interesting detail: originally, the local government treated the restoration project as a program to attract investment, and to do so, they even “launched some lucrative policies to attract investors.” This story is also confirmed by another monk who disagreed with the local government’s commodification of the monastery in an interview in 2019:

*For the Zhengjie monastery, the local government previously wanted to make it an “AAAA-Level Tourist Attraction” in order to sell entrance tickets for visitors so as to produce profit, but the monastery rejected this plan of selling entrance tickets. The local government raised this possibility because at first, the land was granted by them to the lama in the name of “attracting business opportunities and investments from outside” (ch. Zhaoshang yinzi) and establishing a “tourist attraction” (ch. Jingqu); that is, the local government launched the re-establishment of the monastery with the aim of the economic development of the local area. However, the lama thought commodification contradicts the principles of Buddhism, so he rejected the plan of selling entrance tickets by the local government... There was a slogan “Religion helps the government to set a*

*stage for the local area, yet economy is the main actor on the stage” (ch. Zongjiao datai, jingji changxi)...*

#### B. Making the monastery a “National AAAA-Level Tourist Attraction”

Though the county government’s entrance ticket plan, which was mentioned by the interviewee above, did not finally work out, the local government and the lama did work together to prepare the monastery for the tourist-attraction evaluation and examination organized by the Heilongjiang provincial government, who granted the title of “AAAA-Level Tourist Attraction” to the monastery in late 2017. As a result, next to the main entrance of the Zhengjie Monastery, a vividly decorated tablet is erected introducing the monastery:

##### *A Brief Introduction to the Fuyu Zhengjie Monastery*

*Fuyu Zhengjie Monastery...was originally built in 1684. Its buildings were destroyed during the Cultural Revolution, but in 2006, the government of our county, in order to satisfy the normal religious life of the vast religious masses, rehabilitated and rebuilt the Fuyu Zhengjie monastery in a location different from where the historical one was located. It is the only Tibetan Buddhist monastery in Heilongjiang province. The rehabilitated and rebuilt monastery is located on the west side of the...village; with a*

*lake surrounding three sides of the monastery, it has picturesque scenery; it is 17 kilometers away from the county seat.*

*After construction that took eight years, Fuyu Zhengjie Monastery has a campus of almost 100,000 square meters...with an investment of over 200,000,000 yuan...It has parking lots with an area of 10,000 square meters, 22 street lights, hardened land surface with an area of 15,000 square meters, a lawn of 10,000 square meters, and it has planted 100 giant trees... At present, the monastery has almost finished the infrastructure construction. With the beautiful trees, elaborate buildings, comprehensive infrastructure, elegant environment, in addition to satisfying the normal religious life of the religious masses, the monastery has become a great success in the tourist industry of our county.*

*...In 2017, the monastery was granted the title of “National AAAA-Level Tourist Attraction” after the evaluation (by the government)...*

The details of the official introduction on the tablet erected by the monastery, as cited above, strictly match the governmental criteria set by a Chinese government document for evaluating the “AAAA-Level Tourist Attraction.” That is, taking into consideration both the investment-related consideration for restoring Zhengjie Monastery and the monastery’s decision to gain the title of a “National AAAA-Level Tourist Attraction, we can draw the conclusion that economic considerations were the most important direct

factor contributing to the restoration project. Basically, it was a way of “attracting business opportunities and investments from outside,” which is regarded as “the single-most crucial method to develop the local economy” by CCP officials who are in charge of economic work (see Huang 2020). This fits the once fashionable slogan, “Religion helps the government to set a stage for the local area, yet economy is the main actor of the stage” and eventually should increase the area’s GDP figures.

## 2. The level of the individual

The ideology for a centralized political authority, after integrating new elements brought by modernization, develops into a modern-day variant in the hands of the CCP. In this modern form, the ideology resorts to an image of the community as an ideal to model people’s political, ethnic, and religious life. The community model is a political community in the sense that political logic always outweighs other realms of social life. For instance, the political should determine the religious while the religious should serve the political community in its entirety. On the one hand, spatially, the political community is a centralized space in which every religious tradition, ethnic group, or geographic region is expected to be unified following the authority of the political center. On the other hand, historically, the current time, the present, is regarded as the center of the entire history. Especially, due to modernity, the community image in its current form has a clear-cut national border, which separates the insidious external world away from its harmoniously organized internal space, and especially, the identity

of the community is established and confirmed vis-a-vis the hostility, chaos, and danger of the world outside. The individual Tibetan Buddhists of the successful missionary organizations, exemplified by those led by the Xiaba Lama, actively adapted to the cultural images from ideology and incorporate many of the images into the expressions of their public positions. The following is an analysis of an important work by the lama himself: his inscription on the restoration projection of the Beita monastery that is inscribed on a giant stone tablet erected in the monastery.

When the Qing court built the historical Beita monastery in the 1640s, they erected a giant stone-made tablet with the inscription “The Account of the Construction of the Huguofalun Monastery under the Emperor’s Mandate.” Similarly, in the 2010s, several years after rebuilding the Beita monastery, the lama also erected an imposing stone-made tablet, on which his “The Inscription on the Rebuilding Merit Monument of the Nation-Protecting Dharma-Wheel Monastery of Shenyang” (ch. Shenyang huguo falunsi chongjian gongdebei) was carved. However, there is one major difference: in the 1640s, it was the emperor who issued the order to start the construction; that is, it was a governmental project and the inscription was composed by Qing officials; while in the 2010s, the lama who oversaw the reconstruction, though he had once served in the local government like many other influential Tibetan Buddhist lamas in Sichuan province, he headed the monastery in the name of a religious leader rather than a governmental official. In this sense, his inscription illustrates the voice of the local religious community. Below is a selected translation of the text.

*The Inscription on the Rebuilding Merit Monument of the Nation-Protecting Dharma-Wheel Monastery of Shenyang*

*The compassion and wisdom of the Buddha is outstanding, unrivaled, and beyond the worldly; the correct awakening of the Buddha, is like the ringing of a bell reaching every corner of the world.*

*However, how the people receive the Buddha's teaching, is subject to the specific historical situation*

*During the Golden Age of the Ming emperor and the Zhang emperor [of the East Han Dynasty], Buddhism advanced east into China.*

*In the prosperous years of Zhenguan [of the Tang Dynasty], a large number of brilliant monks accomplished the great achievements regarding the spreading of Buddhism.*

*Only after the ocean calms down and the water of the Yellow River becomes clear (translator's note: these words symbolize a traditional Chinese social ideal that the society accomplishes justice and prosperity) can the Dharma voice of the Buddha's teaching become audible.*

*When it was the Qing Dynasty, [the emperors] worshiped Buddhism so much, especially the Gelug sect.*

*The Taizong Huangtaiji as one of the founding emperors of the rising Qing Empire, established the Four-Stupa-Monasteries in the capital city Shengjing.*

*The northern one of the four monasteries was named after the Dharma Wheel which means to spread the true Dharma.*

*Protecting the state and giving peace to the people, the monastery gathered all kinds of good fortunes; both the officials and the civilians worshipped Buddhism in the monastery, and the emperor Qianlong paid his respect also.*

*Buddhist activities were flourishing greatly, and the monastery's reputation ranked top for a time.*

*However, in the following decades, the Qing Empire was in decline.*

*[Under that situation] the stupa and the monastery were abandoned, and the popularity of the true Dharma waned.*

*The country's prosperity did not return for a long time until today.*

*The previously abandoned industries all are reviving, like the sky's dark clouds were dissipated.*

*I am just a monk from a remote border area in the west. While I always think that even though the Chinese and the Tibetans are two ethnic groups, they should belong to one people; in order to serve myself to the undertaking of spreading Buddhism, I should devote all my life.*

*Feeling that the Buddhist followers are really sincere and pious, so withn the invitation of the Buddhist Association, I started to serve as the head of the Protecting-Nation Dharma-Wheel Monastery of Shenyang in the July 2002.*

*Thanks to the government's substantial help, the monastery is finally reopened.*

*Getting the clean donations from the donors, the buildings were eventually rebuilt.*

*[In rehabilitating the monastery] the Buddhists worked diligently to overcome difficulties all the time from the beginning on.*

*Finally the monastery's halls are restored, the Buddha statues repainted, the stupa renovated, and all are new both inside and outside...*

...

*...During the time when the stupa-monastery was reopened, I sincerely requested the tutors, the Buddha, and the Three Treasures to confer their empowerments on me. With respect, I wish the following:*

*For my motherland China, I wish the nation will flourish, and no natural disasters will fall on the country, and also that the political situation will be stable and in good order, and the agricultural production will work well, and there will be no war and the people can enjoy their life and work...*

...

*...During China's current Prosperity Epoch (ch. shengshi), and in the good time when the true Dharma is spreading again, I inscribe my words on the monument of solid rock, to show all these to the people in the future...*

This text consists of roughly two parts. The first part focuses on the history. On the one hand, the history of Buddhism's Chinese reception in general, while on the other hand, the history of the building and rebuilding of the Beita monastery in particular. In the

second part the author expresses his good wishes: first of all, good wishes to China, and then, to his followers and others.

On the religious dimension, the text adopts an interesting narrative framework to introduce Buddhism's spread in China. That is, even though historically, the denomination of Chinese Buddhism and that of Tibetan Buddhism came into being in the lands occupied by today's PRC through totally different paths, as the former one entered China during the Han dynasty via Central Asia while the latter one entered Tibet during the time of Tibetan empire and Tang dynasty crossing the Himalayas, the narrative framework ignores the difference and takes up the formative history of Chinese Buddhism as the only path to cover Buddhism's spread in China. That is, the ideology for a centralized political authority inclines to emphasize the universal, the unified, and the collective, rather than the particular, the separate, and the individual.

On the ethnic dimension, the text uses language such as "even though the Chinese and the Tibetan are two ethnic groups, they should belong to one people", and cites the cultural image of "motherland".

On the dimension that it is a political community in which the political logic always prevails and the religion must serve the political and the community, first, the text believes that China's political history determines Buddhism's religious history, or in its own words, "how the people receive the Buddha's teaching is subject to the specific

historical situations of”: during the golden times—or the Chinese term “shengshi”, literally “flourishing age”—that were traditionally prized and praised by Chinese historians, such as the years under the Ming emperor and the Zhang emperor of East Han dynasty, those under the Taizong emperor of the Tang dynasty, and the first half of the Qing’s rule that culminated in the years of Qianlong emperor, Buddhism flourished; however, in the period that roughly corresponds to the so-called “century of humiliation” in the Chinese collective memory, from mid-19<sup>th</sup> century to the mid-20<sup>th</sup> century, Buddhism also declined until today’s “Prosperity Epoch” under the CCP, when the Buddhist monastery is beautifully revived, and “the true Dharma is spreading again”. Next, in the second half of the text, the author wishes Buddhism would help the nation and protect the people, to the extent that: “the nation will flourish, no natural disaster will fall on the country, the political situation will be stable and in good order, the agricultural production will work well, there will be no war and the people can enjoy their life and work...”

Finally, on the historical dimension, the text claims the current CCP reign counts as another “Prosperity Epoch” or “Flourishing Age” of Chinese history, rivaling if not exceeding that of the Han dynasty, the Tang dynasty, and the Qing dynasty; that is, the very moment the author and the Buddhists live now occupies a significant status in the entire history, a present echoing the glorious past, and projecting a promising future—which basically follows the ruling Party’s rhetoric of the “Great Rejuvenation of the Chinese Nation”, of which the inscription’s readers were likely immediately aware.

#### **IV. Conclusion: Tibetan Buddhism's Successful Adaption to the Ideology for a Centralized Political Authority**

Tibetan Buddhism, as Tibet's dominant religious tradition, grew out of the native cultural soils of the historical India and Tibet, which for a long time maintained a rather limited communication with the cultural world of historical China. In the history of Sino-Tibetan relations, Tibetan Buddhism attracted some followers from the religious communities of China proper supported previously by several emperors of the Yuan Dynasty, the Ming Dynasty, and the Qing Dynasty, but it never really acquired a large number of ethnic Han Chinese followers from the grass-root local communities in any of the Chinese-dominated areas until the 20<sup>th</sup> century. In early 20<sup>th</sup> century, influenced by the short-lived Buddhist revival of Chinese Buddhism during the last years of the Qing Dynasty and the early years of the Republic of China, famous ethnic Chinese monks such as Master Fazun, organized Chinese Buddhists to enter Tibet to study Tibetan Buddhism. However, due to the later chaos as the result of the Chinese civil wars as well as World War II, it is hard to say if Tibetan Buddhism really exerted the profound religious and cultural influences towards the traditional Chinese Buddhist communities as much as those brought by the current and ongoing "The Eastern March of Tibetan Buddhism" that gradually began since the late 20<sup>th</sup> century. Meanwhile, the Chinese history from the 1990s on is also a period when lots of people, both the political elites and the masses, started to re-introduce the traditional cultural resources from the pre-Communist or

even pre-modern China to re-construct certain cultural identities. As a result, Chinese nationalism or even nativism has been stably rising in recent decades. Under such circumstances, some traditional Chinese ideologies resurfaced onto the conscious level of Chinese minds and produced a variety of discourses that can powerfully affect Chinese people's political, economic, and cultural life. Because of the considerable influence of the reawakened ideology for a religion that remains by and large an outsider to many local communities in the eyes of some Chinese people, it is reasonable that Tibetan Buddhism had to actively adapt itself if it wanted to accomplish impressive missionary work to spread Tibetan Buddhism across the areas east of Tibet. In fact, that is exactly what at least the most successful Tibetan Buddhist missionary groups have done and are still doing, as of now.

## **CHAPTER SIX**

### **Conclusion: The Social and Cultural Forces that Facilitated Tibetan Buddhism's Spread among Chinese Populations and the Study's Broader Theoretical Significance in the Case of "Inverted Acculturation"**

#### **I. Outline**

The conclusion addresses two issues. First, this chapter aims to provide an answer to the main research question of the dissertation: why and how has Tibetan Buddhism, as a traditional religion of an ethnic minority in contemporary China, been so successful in attracting ethnic non-Tibetan followers—especially Han Chinese people? Especially since this rapid spread of Tibetan Buddhism among Chinese populations happened against two noticeable unfavorable factors. On the one hand, politically, the ruling party of China, the CCP, always held an ideologically deep-rooted hostility against religion and consistently maintains a suspicion over the social activities and cultural influences of China's ethnic minorities such as the Tibetans, the Uyghurs, or the Mongols. And on the other hand, culturally, as China is undergoing a rapid process of modernization, the inclination of modern secularization which typically results in the decline of institutionalized religion in many developed countries such as those in Western Europe, can also pose a challenge to any religion that seeks to recruit followers among Chinese populations, many of whom had received western-style science-based modern education.

Second, this chapter examines the study's broader theoretical significance for anthropology and the social sciences in general with respect to the issue of what has been called "inverted acculturation". Acculturation is traditionally one of the core concepts anthropology, psychology, sociology, and others and refers to the diffusion of cultural traits from a dominant group to a subordinate group. However, this study finds that the direction of the cultural diffusion between the two ethnic groups can be inverted in certain contexts. For example, in the case of the religious community revolving around the Xiaba lama's missionary system in Chinese areas of Eastern China, the ethnic Han Chinese followers of Tibetan Buddhism, especially the ordained Chinese monks and nuns, acquired a Tibetan name, learned Tibetan language, wore Tibetan Buddhist clothes, and most importantly, adopted Tibetan Buddhism as their personal religious belief. That is to say, during the "Eastern March of Tibetan Buddhism," some Chinese people who are members of the politically, economically, and militarily more dominant ethnic group in China, accepted major cultural traits from the Tibetan Buddhist monks who are members of an ethnic minority that occupies a more subordinate political, economic and military status in China. Namely, what happened amid Tibetan Buddhism's Chinese spread was an inverted process of acculturation, hence the term "inverted acculturation" that was coined by anthropologist Melvyn Goldstein (Goldstein 2018).

## **II. The Dynamics Contributing to Tibetan Buddhism's Chinese Spread**

As has been seen in previous chapters, Tibetan Buddhism in the form of the Xiaba lama's missionary system, achieved remarkable success in its spread in Han Chinese areas of Eastern China. To explain this phenomenon from the perspective of the lama, we could say he successfully carried out a series of measures to deal with and overcome issues arising from two major realms: the realm of Chinese politics and the realm of modernization's influence on the Chinese people's cultural lives.

1. The lama managed to lead his missionary system to navigate across the precarious waters of contemporary Chinese politics

First of all, as seen in Chapter Five, the CCP inherited from traditional Chinese political ideologies an ideology that promotes a model for a centralized political authority that dominates every aspect of people's social lives, including the economic, the ethnic, the religious, etc. Under this ideology, the CCP demands all the religious organizations in the PRC to absolutely toe the line regarding the Party's political, economic, and social policies. For example, if a Tibetan Buddhist monastery wanted to maintain a legal presence in China it would always be required to regularly show its loyalty to the CCP and to explicitly support any of the CCP-controlled government's latest policies. Facing this kind of political environment from the CCP government, the lama was very sophisticated in handling the tricky relationships between the state and the church in

today's China, to succeed in maintaining not only Tibetan Buddhism's survival, but also its expansion into the Han Chinese-dominated areas outside of Tibet proper.

Furthermore, in recent years, a myriad of political discourses related to Chinese nationalism were gaining popularity among Chinese populations. In particular, as seen in Chapter Three, one of the versions of Chinese nationalism from the CCP government advocates a concept of a "Chinese nation" in an expanded sense. That is, according to the CCP, the official definition of the "Chinese nation" consists of "Fifty-six Ethnic Groups" (ch. wushiliu ge minzu), including the Tibetans, so the cultures of all these ethnic groups are regarded as part of "Chinese culture". Under this ideology, the lama cleverly used the concept of Chinese nation in the expanded sense to facilitate Tibetan Buddhism's spread within Chinese communities by emphasizing that according to this version of Chinese nationalism, Tibetan Buddhism is a cultural tradition from the Tibetan people and the Tibetan people are regarded as a part of the Chinese nation so to follow and practice Tibetan Buddhism should also be regarded as an action that shows love for the traditional culture of the Chinese nation. In other words, rather than being an alien religion of a non-Chinese ethnic group, the logic of this version of the CCP's concept of Chinese nationalism allowed the lama to proselytize Tibetan Buddhism as a part of greater Chinese culture in a way that fit in with the CCP's ideology and laws.

2. As seen in Chapter Two and Chapter Four, the lama adapted to the current Chinese cultural ideological environment by producing a quality religious product that catered to

the special needs of religious “customers” who grew up and received education under the influence of modernization.

Mao Zedong’s Great Proletarian Cultural Revolution nearly eradicated religion in China. It replaced Chinese traditional ethical-religious systems of Confucianism, Buddhism, and Taoism, and promoted a native version of Marxism-Leninism, namely Maoism, which in the later years of Mao’s rule almost functioned as a quasi-religious system that attempted to dictate meaning for every aspect of people’s social and cultural life. That is, late Maoism once served as the de facto “sacred canopy” (see Berger 1967) that aimed to set rules for all those living under the CCP’s government. However, despite this total domination, the search for answers concerning the meaning of life and death, and for what Tillich (1957) called the struggle for the “state of being ultimately concerned” never completely died following the CCP’s destruction of religious life in China. As a result, after Mao’s death and the end of the Cultural Revolution in late 1970s, religion began to experience a gradual revival. Moreover, for many in the younger generation who grew up and attended modern-style schools during the years of “Reform and Opening-up” and who also accepted the influence of modernization, it was the parts of religion that emphasized religious philosophy, systematic theory, and conceptual analysis, rather than just the parts which focused on rituals and mystical power, that especially appeared appealing. In this context, the lama’s missionary system perfectly echoed the followers’ religious needs in a modernizing China, which can be seen at two levels.

First, at the level of organization, as the CCP saw Tibetan Buddhism as a part of the greater Chinese culture, the lama established a series of programs to train Tibetan-Chinese translators to translate influential classics of Tibetan Buddhism into Chinese, and to collaborate with China's top research universities to organize academic conferences on Tibetan Buddhism's core philosophical concepts, and to publish scholarly works that examined traditional Tibetan Buddhist doctrines from the perspective of modern academic studies. In other words, to make Tibetan Buddhism that heretofore was not accessible as a part of China's religious culture to Chinese speakers, more easily available. As a result, the lama's works played a key role in further introducing Tibetan Buddhism to interested people who had received college education and held an intellectual interest in Tibetan Buddhism's theory and philosophy. In addition, the lama's group actively made use of modern communication technologies such as the Internet, to facilitate his missionary work. For instance, his monasteries established a famous website to post the lama's lectures, books, and papers online, which, according to many interviewees, introduced them to the serious study of Buddhist theology for the first time in their life.

Moreover, at the level of the individual, the lama himself developed a reputation as a knowledgeable and charismatic teacher who was expert at explaining to his Chinese audience the complex and difficult Tibetan Buddhist theories in a clear and accessible way in plain Chinese language. And by virtue of devoting time, effort and funds to

teaching a series of lectures in Chinese language that concentrated on the most important Tibetan Buddhist classics, he also helped attract followers. Many interviewees mentioned this same point to me, i.e., that the lama's in-depth knowledge of Tibetan Buddhist philosophy greatly impressed them, which distinguished that lama from many monks in the tradition of Chinese Buddhism. In the eyes of most of the interviewees, those Chinese Buddhist monks had a poor understanding of fundamental Buddhist logic and concepts. As a result, the Chinese interviewees claimed that their experiences of talking to the lama on Buddhist theology or attending the lama's theological lectures, eventually attracted them towards Tibetan Buddhism rather than Chinese Buddhism.

In other words, the lama effectively adapted the Yellow Hat tradition of Tibetan Buddhism to the dominant political and social environment in contemporary (post-Mao) China so as to both secure CCP/Government acceptance for his "missionary" activities and create a product that appeals to the new educated Chinese populace seeking answers to the great questions of life and death, without losing Tibetan Buddhism's authentic core religious message and identity,

### **III. A Theoretical Significance: The Concept of Inverted Acculturation**

1. Inverted acculturation refers to the process through which a politically, economically, and militarily dominant ethnic group adopts major socio-cultural complexes from a politically, economically, and militarily subordinate ethnic group

The core anthropological concept of acculturation, that is, the diffusion of cultural traits from a dominant group to a subordinate group, has been undergoing refinements over the past decades, as the unprecedented migration that is occurring around the world has come to provide the most common field of culture contact; for example, Hispanics in the United State, Turks in Germany and North Africans in France (see Schwartz et al., 2010). The study of acculturation has become increasingly important for researchers in various fields such as anthropology, sociology, and psychology and of course history (Guarnaccia et al., 2016). However, the vast majority of these studies treat acculturation as being unidirectional and therefore only focus on the one-way direction in which the numerically smaller, and/or politically less powerful ethnic groups are influenced by numerically larger, and/or politically more dominant ethnic groups (see Redfield et al., 1936; Spiro, 1955; Berry et al., 1989; Rudmin, 2009; Guarnaccia et al., 2016). For example, a large number of studies dealing with acculturation concentrate on how immigrants from the developing countries such as those in Latin America are assimilated into the Western societies such as that of the United States.

However, some scholars have attempted to reevaluate this tradition. They try to refine the concept of acculturation by questioning the unidirectional paradigm to show acculturation can also be bidirectional or reciprocal. Although the larger/more powerful ethnic groups usually dominate the smaller/less powerful ones and change them through acculturation, sometimes the smaller/less powerful can still influence the

larger/more powerful in some aspects of socio-cultural life (Barnett et al., 1954; Beals, 1962; Glazer and Moynihan, 1970; Teske and Nelson, 1974; Glazer, 1993; Brubaker, 2001; Portes et al., 2001; Abraido-Lanza et al., 2006; Sengstock, 2009; Guarnaccia et al., 2016; Cole, 2017). For example, these revisionist scholars have introduced the concept of “reciprocal acculturation” to describe the situations that where Latinos acculturate to American culture, yet American culture also borrows certain aspects from Latino culture such as Mexico food (see Abraido-Lanza et al., 2006).

However, still limited by the mainstream theoretical paradigm of acculturation, even these revisionist theoretical advances have not revealed the full extent to which acculturation can go from low to high or from the numerically smaller, politically less powerful ethnic groups to the larger, more powerful ethnic group, not just with respect to a few small traits such as eating a food such as tacos, but with respect to more important infusing cultural complexes from the subordinate group. To distinguish this from the smaller traits that are discussed in reciprocal acculturation, Professor Goldstein has coined the term “inverted acculturation” for situations where dominant groups adopt major socio-cultural/ideological complexes from the subordinate groups (Goldstein 2018). The unexpected process of cultural change following “The Eastern March of Tibetan Buddhism”, namely, the Chinese followers’ adopting of aspects of Tibetan lifestyle such as Tibetan language, Tibetan worldview, and most importantly Tibetan Buddhism, offers a perfect opportunity to explore the concept of inverted acculturation.

2. The major exemplary population embodying the process of inverted acculturation is the ethnic Han Chinese followers of Tibetan Buddhism who were ordained by Tibetan lamas as Tibetan Buddhist monks and nuns

In the contemporary world, the powerful trends of globalization and modernization render it not uncommon that people from all over the world may choose to communicate or adopt certain elements of foreign cultural forms from each other; some people even treat borrowing exotic aspects from a remote culture and incorporating them into their lifestyle as a fashion— for instance, the popularity of Japanese Zen Buddhism in many Western societies during the Counterculture movements of the 1960s. However, some Chinese followers of Tibetan Buddhism took their adoption of the Tibetan cultural elements so seriously that they even decided to have a complete reorganization of their previous lifestyles and totally abandoned their former self as a regular college student, company employee, government staff member, etc. Rather, they radically deviated from the regular lifepath of the general Chinese public nowadays and chose to become an ordained Tibetan Buddhist monk or nun living in a monastic community overseen by ethnic Tibetan lamas.

Moreover, rather than borrowing merely one or several elements from an alien cultural tradition, like what many self-proclaimed Zen Buddhist artists did in the 1960s, those ethnic Chinese monks and nuns accepted the entire lifestyle of an ordinary Tibetan

Buddhist clergyperson. They wore Tibetan monastic robes; they learned Tibetan language; they acquired a Tibetan name in place of their original Chinese name; and even, since they frequently visited Tibetan Buddhist monasteries in the Tibetan areas of Sichuan province, some of them gradually got a skin tone that was close to many ethnic Tibetan people who lived around Tibetan Plateau, to the extent that most visitors from outside might have had difficulty in telling them apart from their fellow Tibetan monks living in the same monastery by their physical appearance. And, most importantly, of course, they adopted one of the major cultural markers of the Tibetan people, namely Tibetan Buddhism. As a result, their whole life revolved around their religious belief in Tibetan Buddhism; they read Tibetan Buddhist works daily, they practiced Tibetan Buddhist rituals daily, and they took up the worldview, moral values, and ethical principles of Tibetan Buddhism as their fundamental guide for life.

3. One of the possible reasons why this inverted acculturation happened in the religious communities of the Chinese followers of Tibetan Buddhism is the modernization process raging on in contemporary China

It is likely that a variety of social and cultural factors contributed to the cases of inverted acculturation in China, and therefore more studies remain to be done to further thoroughly understand the social and cultural mechanisms behind the “Eastern March of Tibetan Buddhism” in China. However, for now, it is safe to say that at least one key reason why the members of a dominant ethnic group adopted major socio-cultural

complexes of a subordinate ethnic group, lies in that the modernization process that exerted a deep impact on Chinese society and helped make inverted acculturation possible.

On the one hand, the rapid economic and technological modernization that has occurred in contemporary Chinese society, has provided solid material resources for its members and allowed them to pursue diverse ways of life, far beyond the limited amount of careers or lifepath options a more traditional society could offer. For instance, before eventually becoming a follower of Tibetan Buddhism, many interviewees had lots of opportunities via tourist journeys or college classes, to get access to and familiarize themselves with a variety of different religious traditions. Moreover, many interviewees mentioned that their Internet surfing experiences played a remarkable role in broadening their horizons through websites and online forums that many religious organizations established. Through these they found a world of rich religious cultures that dwarfed the small religious communities that immediately surrounded them.

On the other hand, modernization also helped by importing diverse modern values and the ideas of multicultural backgrounds into China. As the ideological realm of contemporary Chinese society became increasingly more diverse, a growing number of social members inclined to hold a more tolerant position towards the individual's rights and freedoms for personal preference and individual choice. Especially, the introduction of modern individualism contributed greatly to many Chinese followers' decision to

become an ordained Tibetan Buddhist monk or nun, often against their parents' wishes and especially against the deep-rooted norms, values and cultural expectations of mainstream Chinese society. In these cases, according to the interviewees' life histories, modern individualism served as a significant ideological support when their pursuits of a Tibetan Buddhist way of life had to face pressures from China's powerful social and cultural structures, noticeably those from their family. That is, without the latest and increasing pluralist inclinations in Chinese society as the result of modernization, the inverted acculturation process through which Chinese youth and adults personally chose to become Tibetan monks or nuns would have been very difficult, if not almost impossible.

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