

ANTH 455: Religion and Globalization in East Asia
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Imagined Identities:
The Tibetan Government-in-exile and the Western Vision of Tibet

by Emily Kruger

I recently had an encounter with the Dalai Lama. I did not seek him out by going to a retreat or a high-profile talk, but instead found him nestled between Coldplay and Damien Rice on an iTunes play list. The selection was the audio version of his best-selling book, “The Art of Happiness” and the locale was a friend’s music collection, accessed through music sharing on Yale wireless. The event meant little at the time, but in researching Tibet and its history with the Western world, I realized that encountering the Dalai Lama in iTunes on a virtual network reveals much about Tibet’s unique place in the Western imagination and how the Tibetan government-in-exile has used this imagined Tibet and Western methods to popularize Tibetan Buddhism and strengthen its claims to Tibetan independence. Tibet has played an unusual role in the Western psyche for centuries. We have seen this isolated region, tucked away far in the snow-capped mountains of Asia, as mysterious and familiar—impenetrable and pristine, and yet embodying all the ancient wisdom and religious significance that we have lost in our material and modern world. Through both historical and mystical constructions, we have built up the vision of Shangri-la and sought any scraps of information that supported our vision. With the Chinese invasion of Tibet and the subsequent flight of the Dalai Lama and thousands of Tibetans in 1959, the West finally could observe and interact with those Tibetans in exile and seek to learn “the art of happiness” and other snippets of ancient

knowledge that we have forgotten. As I have suggested, the Dalai Lama and others in the Tibetan government-in-exile (TGIE) have not passively received the Western visions of Tibet, however. The TGIE, in their efforts to gain Tibet independence, have courted Western interest by exploiting the Western imagination about Tibet and Tibetan Buddhism and have molded the Tibetan communities-in-exile to fit this imagined image. These actions have contributed to divergence between Tibetans in exile and those in Tibet and ultimately weakened the TGIE's case for a unified Tibetan state.

In this paper, I will examine the history and current image of Tibet in the Western imagination, discuss the ways in which the TGIE exploits this vision, and finally attempt to prove that the TGIE's actions have damaged their fight for sovereignty and formed a cultural rift between the Tibetans under the TGIE and those under the People's Republic of China (PRC).

History of Tibet in the Western Imagination

Early Records of Mystical Tibet

Before discussing the TGIE's use of the West's vision of Tibet, we must first briefly cover the historical underpinnings of this vision and define what "Tibet" means in the Western imagination today.

Stories of the mystical lands of central Asia were first told in Europe centuries ago. Some scholars trace the first imaginings of Tibet to medieval maps and their descriptions, which placed both strange creatures, like gold-digging ants, and lost colonies of Christians, in the shadowy regions of central Asia. Marco Polo made brief mention of Tibet, but only through retelling tales of the Mongols, which brimmed with similar feelings of mystery and great riches within the mountainous terrain of Tibet. The

first Westerner successfully to cross into Tibet was a young Jesuit named De Andrade in 1624. De Andrade was on a mission to find those fellow Christian communities that were rumored to lie somewhere in near Asia. With his mission in mind, De Andrade found intriguing parallels between the Catholic Church and the religious practices of the lamas with whom he stayed. His accounts of the lama “priests” with their vows of celibacy and poverty, the extreme piety of the Tibetan people, and ceremonies involving holy water that could be likened to baptism, all were highly sensational and devoured in Europe upon his return. Much of his findings were later questioned by other missionaries, who found none of the “Catholic” ceremonies De Andrade documented, perhaps because of contact with other sects of Tibetan Buddhism (Kaschewsky 2001:6). These later accounts had little impact on the Western imagination of Tibet, however—the groundwork for European “tibetophila” was already in place.

Tibetophilia, according to research conducted by Hugues Didier, is founded on two poles: “...on the one hand, Tibet is the least accessible, most mysterious and most foreign country of Asia; on the other hand, Tibet is paradoxically the only Asian culture with whom Europeans can identify so much that they seem surprisingly intimate and related” (Kaschewsky 2001:6-7). From just our brief overview of early Western imagination about Tibet, we can see Didier’s description at work. The early lore surrounding the Tibetan region seen in medieval records, in Marco Polo’s recounted tales, and in the late entry of Europeans into the area created a feeling of mystery surrounding Tibet, while De Andrade’s accounts revealed a deep, religious connection of the Tibetan people to the Catholic church. Tibet, therefore, became seen as the

“inanimate unknown” or the “foreign brother”—a counterpart that was both captivating in its mystery and comforting in its familiarity.

British Colonialism and Tibetan Nationalism

This mystical construction of Tibet is the first key component of the West’s vision of Tibet. The second part of this vision is a historical construction—one where the idea of Tibet as a nation is established. This historical construction, as argued by McKay (2001:67-85), largely was created by the British officers who served in Tibet between 1904 and 1947. Although Tibet was never fully colonized by the British, British officials from their Indian government lived in Lhasa and interacted with the Tibetan elite starting in the late nineteenth century. The connection of the British officials with the Tibetan elite and the motives behind their actions regarding Tibet are complex, but for the purposes of this paper can be distilled down to a single political motive: to maintain Tibet as a buffer region between India and the growing powers in China and in Russia. Earlier images from Western missionaries in the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries had presented the Tibetan government in Lhasa as corrupt and the people as dirty and sexually promiscuous, but this image was quickly erased under the manipulations of the British officers in Tibet and replaced with descriptions of the “Tibetan government and society as decent, virtuous, and of value to the world at large” (McKay 2001: 71). In order to solidify and protect their projected vision of Tibet, British officers closely monitored and limited the entry of European travelers into the area. The information disseminated by the British cadres then could be molded into an image that suited the interests of British India and the imperial government. This deliberate suppression of alternative perspectives about Tibet allowed the British officers’ view to emerge as the

only authority about Tibet and to color the media and the academic study of Tibet ever since. The British officers' image of Tibet was also more amenable to the West's earlier visions (such as that of De Andrade) and as a result was lapped up by the public and quickly spread throughout the European media by force of its own appeal.

In addition to bolstering a positive image of Tibet and its ruling class, the British officers, under a cadre named Charles Bell, sought to create an image of Tibetan unity and statehood to strengthen the perception of Tibet as a buffer state. Bell encouraged the Tibetan elite to adopt the symbols and characteristics of an independent state. Tibet, therefore, soon had its own flag, currency and stamps, defined its borders, and with British assistance, reorganized its economy and government bureaucracy and strengthened its military. To encourage nationalism, a Tibetan football team with its own colors was organized, and children at athletic competitions would win a picture of the Dalai Lama, rather than money or some other prize (McKay 2001:77-78). These attempts at unity had few tangible results among the Tibetan people, but had a sizable impact in Europe, where the area of Tibet controlled from Lhasa was considered at the most as an independent region and at the least as an area and people who were culturally distinct from China. Therefore, the British monopoly on the Tibetan image led to the creation of the modern, historical vision of Tibet as a culturally and politically unique region. This construction, as we will see, has influenced the TGIE's approach to shaping a Tibetan state as well as facilitated the Western acceptance of Tibet's distinction from PRC.

Theosophism and “Thibetan” Buddhism

At the same time that the British were establishing contact with Tibet and creating alliances with the Tibetan elite, a European religious movement with no actual

connection to Tibet was launching Tibetan Buddhism into the popular media and making Eastern religion accessible to the average Westerner. The Theosophical society began in NY in 1875 and started a movement “to collect and diffuse knowledge of the laws which govern the universe” (Campbell 1980:28). One of its most important contributions within the scope of this paper was its successful delivery of Eastern philosophy *en masse* to the Western audience. Theosophism, through its interest in Eastern religion, distilled and disseminated the ideas of Buddhism to a greater extent than had ever been accomplished at that point in history. Also important to the spread of “Tibet” in the West were the imaginings of Madame Helena Petrovna Blavatsky, one of the influential leaders of this movement. Madame Blavatsky brought Tibet to popular attention by claiming to have spent time in Tibet (albeit in a spirit form), had a Tibetan “mahatma” as one of her spiritual advisors (also a fictitious creation) and self-identified as a “Thibetan Buddhist.” Although there were no real Tibetans involved in the Theosophist movement, Madame Blavatsky’s veneration of them and her powerful place within the Theosophist movement brought Tibet and Tibetan Buddhism into the vocabulary of the average European. As Pederson (2001: 157) notes, “if Tibetans were absent at Blavatsky’s time, she was in many ways responsible for their appearance a century later.” Theosophism, therefore, played a vital role in familiarizing the West with Eastern philosophy and cementing Tibet as a place of spirituality and mystique in the Western imagination.

The Western Vision of Tibet

From this brief history, we can now define and expound upon two main aspects of the West’s vision of Tibet that are operative today—Tibet’s religiosity and its distinction, if not its sovereignty, from China. The idea of Tibetan religiosity centers around two

themes: Tibetan Buddhism and its impact on shaping the Tibetan people and leadership, and Tibet as a repository for ancient wisdom, which the modern world has forgotten. The West's ideas about the role of Tibetan Buddhism in Tibetan life is neatly summed up by Moodey (1978:28) in the following depiction, "To these concepts of the supernatural and its myriad denizens, the Tibetans respond with a depth of devotion shown in allocation of effort, time, and wealth, that has made Tibetan society and culture the classic example of religion-oriented living." This statement encompasses the Western belief that all Tibetans are profoundly religious and spend most of their time in meditation and worship. This idea is mirrored by a popular saying from the early twentieth century, that the Tibetans, with their homes in the mountains were so close to the clouds, made them pre-dispositioned to prayer. Stemming from the Tibetans' perceived depth of religious devotion is the idea that the lives of Tibetans reflect Buddhist teachings. As a result, the West imagines that peacefulness, egalitarianism, gender equality, and ecological sensitivity are all essential parts of Tibetan culture. As Donald Lopez (1998: 8-9), a renowned Tibetan scholar noted, somewhat tongue-in-cheek, we believe all Tibetans voluntarily obey the karma to the extent that violence and pettiness are nil and a police force is wholly unnecessary. Therefore, we imagine the Tibetans as a pious, devout religious community, whose lives center around their Buddhist practice and living in accordance to its teachings.

The second part of our concept of religiosity is seeing Tibet as the last stronghold of ancient wisdom. This idea relates closely to the first concept of religiosity, because we believe that, by living their religious principles, Tibetans have managed to maintain the "correct way to live." Also related to this concept of "ancient wisdom," are the inaccessibility of Tibet and its resulting lack of interaction with Western technology or

development. Because they have not modernized or significantly changed their religious practice for hundreds of years, the Tibetans must have remained untainted and pristine. Their ideas, too, are then assumed to be untainted by modern ideas like ambition or greed, and maintain holism and connection with the natural world and with each other. A passage from Lopez's *Prisoners of Shangri-la* encapsulates this Western belief,

It is Tibet that will regenerate the West by showing us, prophetically, what we can be by showing us what it had been, it is Tibet that can save the West, cynical and materialist, for itself. Tibet is seen as a cure for an ever-dissolving Western civilization, restoring its spirit (Lopez 1998:202).

Therefore we believe that Tibetans through their isolation and with the aid of Tibetan Buddhism have managed to hold onto the keys to life which the West has lost, including "The Art of Happiness," "The Meaning of Life (from a Buddhist perspective)," "The Path to Bliss," "The Path to Enlightenment," and "Joy of Living and Dying in Peace," as various titles of books by the Dalai Lama advertise. Lopez (1998: 8) summarizes these two aspects of religiosity and the resulting assumptions: "Tibetan Buddhism ...represents an ideal that once existed on the planet in high Tibet, a land free from strife, ruled by a benevolent Dalai Lama, his people devoted to the dharma and (we have recently learned) the preservation of the environment and the rights of women." Tibet, through its religiosity, has upheld the perfect society and, if we are willing to listen, will perhaps re-teach us their ancient wisdom.

The second aspect of the West's vision of Tibet is linked to the British historical constructions that we have already discussed—the idea of Tibet as a separate entity from China. This separation is somewhat defined through cultural differences, but today is primarily described and propagated as a set of dichotomies between China and Tibet. An analysis of the Chinese-Tibetan conflict, "China's Strategic Vulnerability" emphasizes

the Western idea about this dichotomy, "...the idea of China as vulnerable through Tibet has purchase on the popular Western imagination, because the Chinese Communist Party system is thought to be inherently self-destructive, while spiritually based Tibetan separatism is seen as inherently virtuous (Sautman 2005: 87)." This passage argues that Westerners believe that the "Chinese Communists," as the Western ideological opponent, contain all the components that will lead to their downfall; among other things, being communist defines them as atheist, amoral (or even immoral), oppressive of individual rights, environmentally destructive, and prone to violence. The Tibetans, on the other hand, will ultimately succeed in their struggle against the Chinese, because they are "the good guys" – religion-centered, tolerant, egalitarian, "Green," and pacifist. In addition to these opposing value sets, the Chinese/Tibetan dichotomies are further understood as modern/ancient, materialistic/spiritual, and other/familiar. We can see that many of the ideas arising from Tibetan Buddhism discussed in the previous section are contributing to these perceived dichotomies, "the inherent virtues" of Tibetan society versus the lack of virtue among the Chinese communists. These dichotomies build upon the historical construction given by the British cadres and allow the West to perceive China and Tibet as fundamentally different regions. Since the Chinese invasion and occupation of Tibet, these dichotomies have also helped Tibet's cause, because Westerners, even if they do not fully support Tibetan sovereignty, at least recognize Tibet as special and separate from China in some innate way.

The Tibetan Government-in-Exile and the Chinese-Tibetan Sovereignty Debate

The People's Liberation Army of the Chinese Communist Party began its invasion of the traditional, or perhaps more accurately the cultural boundaries, of Tibet in

1949. The Tibetan government under the Dalai Lama, which had jurisdiction over the area now labeled the “Tibetan Autonomous Region” declared that it was under attack in 1955, and the government and several thousand Tibetans fled to India in 1959. This invasion, the flight of the Dalai Lama’s government, and the subsequent resistance and revolts in Tibet under Chinese rule brought the question of Tibetan independence into the international spotlight for the first time (Sperling 2004: 15-16). As mentioned in the previous section, Tibet was already seen as distinct from China, but the question of sovereignty did not have a place in this definition. Since its flight from Tibet, the TGIE has consistently maintained that Tibet was an independent from PRC before of the invasion and actively petition the UN for recognition as state. The following statement was published by TGIE in 1993, “At the time of its invasion by the troops of the People’s Liberation Army of China in 1949, Tibet was an independent state in fact and law. The military invasion constituted an aggression on a sovereign state and a violation of international law” (quoted in Sperling 2004: 15). The PRC counter, “For more than 700 years the central government of China has continuously exercised sovereignty over Tibet and Tibet has never been an independent state” (quoted in Sperling 2004:15). The truth of this debate over sovereignty is not entirely clear, nor is it truly important to this paper. The way in which the TGIE has chosen to pitch themselves and their people in order to gain independence, however, is central to our argument, providing key evidence for the TGIE’s exploitation of the West’s imagined Tibet.

Exploitation of the Western Imagination of Tibet

TGIE and Discourse with the West

The question of history and official boundaries of the “Tibetan state” lies at the center of the Chinese-Tibetan sovereignty debate. In an effort to gain and keep international attention, however, TGIE has focused on the special place of Tibet and Tibetan Buddhism in the Western imagination and focused away from the political aspects of their right to sovereignty. Their hope, presumably, is to gain sympathy and popular support for their independence from Westerners and, through this pressure, political support from Western governments. The TGIE also tries to maintain a presence in UN discourse, though, again, with a rhetoric of human rights and ecological preservation instead of a discussion of their right to sovereignty.

The TGIE’s strongest appeal to the Western imagination is through the concept of religiosity discussed earlier in this paper. Tibetan Buddhism, the attributes of pacifism, equality, women’s rights, and environmental protection that the West has linked to the religion, and the perception of “Tibetan wisdom” through its religion constitute the primary areas of exploitation. Both TGIE and the Tibetan people are taken as “a collective embodiment of religiosity or as the only society or state apart from the Vatican to be entirely religious” (Barnett 1994 :276). This construction overlooks that Tibetan Buddhism is only one religion of the Tibetan people; the country also has a considerable elements of Islam and Bön (a shamanistic Tibetan folk religion), as well as some people who subscribe to an atheist-Communist ideology (Barnett 1994: 281). In addition, Tibetan Buddhism itself has numerous major and minor sects that disagree on theology and practice (Hopkins 2001: 257). The Dalai Lama and many of the Tibetan refugees are part of the Gelug sect, and therefore only represent one segment of a highly fractious religious climate. Despite this, the TGIE has taken over as the voice representing all sects

of Tibetan Buddhism and all aspects of Tibetan culture, choosing to smooth over the differences in Tibet in order to cater to the Western imagination. Through the examples of advertising Tibetan pacifism, spreading Tibetan Buddhism's "ancient wisdom," and "celebritizing" the Dalai Lama, the following sections will demonstrate the role of the TGIE in exploiting the Western vision of Tibet. This evidence of the TGIE's courtship of Western interest will then advise our examination of the political damage and cultural divergence these actions have caused.

Tibetan Pacifism

One of the most commonly touted descriptors of the Tibetan people is their innately peaceful nature, a pacifism that arises from their adherence to the Buddhist ideal of *ahimsa* (nonviolence). The Dalai Lama repeatedly makes statements that attest to Tibetan's pacifism and general happiness and peace before Chinese invasion, including that "under the kings and Dalai Lamas . . . peace and happiness prevailed in Tibet," that "before 1950, Tibet was completely a land of peace," and that "Tibetan culture [is] based on peaceful relations" (Sautman 2005: 97). These statements are not only deliberately meant play to the Western imagination, but they are also in some respects simply false. Tibetans, including Dalai Lamas and monks, have often fought both enemies and each other over the course of Tibetan history. Thus, equally important to the advertisement of pacifism is the omission of any history of Tibetan violence, ancient or modern. TGIE and their publications do not document the revolts, bombings, and outbreaks of violence against the Chinese in Tibet, though some reports claim many of these acts of violence were encouraged or supported by the TGIE (Sautman 2005:98-100). Clearly with today's climate of anti-terrorism, the TGIE does not want Tibetans to be associated with these

acts, many of which would be characterized as terrorism if they took place another region, such as the Middle East. The TGIE would prefer Tibet to be valorized, like South Africa and India, for passive resistance, rather than lumped into the category of an “ordinary” nationalist war, like that of ETA or Tamil Tigers. By being pacifist, Tibetans also further the dichotomies between themselves and China, who demonstrably responds with violence to adversity. For all these reasons, Tibet’s ancient history and modern acts of resistance are glazed over. These facts do not mean that the Dalai Lama and Tibetans in general do not value peace or these other reputed attributes of Tibetan culture, but the facts are clearly ignored by TGIE in order to participate in Western fantasy-making about Tibet.

Like pacifism, other supposedly innate characteristics of Tibetan culture—gender equality, ecological preservation and egalitarianism—also break down with a close look at Tibetan ancient and modern history. Briefly, women have never had equal status to men (though perhaps a somewhat better status than in other Asian countries), ecological preservation is linked more to lack of an industrial economy in the pre-1949 Tibet than to an inherent ecological consciousness, and Tibet’s social structure was highly stratified and most closely comparable to the medieval feudal system prior to the PLA invasion (Lopez 1997:22). Like the advertisement of nonviolence, the presence of these values is stressed in public statements and publications by the TGIE, while the actual history is obscured, in order to shape Tibet to the vision held by Westerners.

Tibetan Wisdom and Westernizing Tibetan Buddhism

Tibetans-in-exile have also taken on the role of teacher in response to Western demands to hear Tibet’s “ancient wisdom.” The scope of Tibetans as teachers is really

quite large: Tibetans have written or advised countless books with subjects ranging from Buddhism and “New Age” spirituality to psychology and health to physics and science. Tibetans lead meditation retreats and teach relaxation techniques. The Dalai Lama himself has authored 38 books, according to his website, and travels the world delivering lectures about spirituality and Buddhism. Snow Lions Publications, the largest press devoted to Tibetan Buddhism, publishes over 150 titles on Tibet and also capitalizes on the Western desire to identify with Tibetan Buddhism by selling videos, audiotapes, Buddha statues, Tibetan Buddhism ritual items like rosaries, lajras, and bells, t-shirts, posters, and post-cards (Lopez 1998: 160). Evidently, the demand for Tibetan wisdom is very high among certain segments of the West, and Tibetans are more than happy to comply with this demand; the role as teacher allows the TGIE to control the image of Tibetan Buddhism presented to Western audiences and support the imagined values of the Tibetan people.

Central to the search for Tibetan wisdom, of course, is Tibetan Buddhism itself. Many of the 800,000 converted American Buddhists consider themselves Tibetan Buddhist, and the number of Buddhists in the West has been increasing dramatically in the last three decades (Baumann 2007: 194-5). The large numbers of Western “spiritual seekers” involved in the New Age movement also are very receptive to the teachings of Tibetan Buddhism. All these people look to the Dalai Lama as their spiritual teacher. In response to this interest, the Dalai Lama and other religious elite have crafted a version of Tibetan Buddhism that is sanitized, simplified, and attractive to the modern Western mindset. A book entitled “Tibetan Wisdom for Western Life,” nicely captures the needs of many Westerners interested in Tibetan Buddhism in its self-description, “...by applying their knowledge of timeless principles of Eastern spiritual practices to the

challenges of stressed out and overworked Western culture...[the authors] offer a unique blend of practices designed to sharpen the mind and calm the soul without slowing down” (Arpaia and Lobsang 1999: backcover). The Dalai Lama adds to this conception of Western needs in the book’s forward, “ I...offer my prayers that readers who employ these [mediation] techniques will indeed be successful in increasing as sense of peace and happiness in their own lives, and thereby contributing to a greater peace and happiness in their own lives” (Arpaia and Lobsang 1999: viii). The excerpts from this book and the Dalai Lama’s forward show that Tibetan Buddhism, or the wisdom from Tibetan Buddhism, for many Westerners holds the secrets to find “a sense of peace and happiness” in the face of a busy and consumption-driven life.

This simple message contains little of the real practice of Tibetan Buddhism. Among other things, Tibetan Buddhism is pervaded by an unusual fixation with death and various deities relating to death, as well as the typical Buddhist concerns about improving their next life. The practice of the average Tibetan believer is also extremely focused on appeasing various gods, who can often be wrathful or at least testy, and gaining good fortune from those that are benevolent (Lopez 1997: 5-15). Most books written to the Western audience, of course, ignore these aspects of the religion, instead choosing a message that few could find objectionable, like that of “Tibetan Wisdom for Western Life” or the Dalai Lama’s “The Art of Happiness.” P. Jeffrey Hopkins, former translator of the Dalai Lama’s speeches and books explains, “I think he worked very hard to fashion a message, not just for Buddhists, and not just religious people, but for all people (quoted in Niebuhr 1999).” Similarly, absent from the Dalai Lama’s popular teachings is his stance on homosexuality, contraception, or various “alternative” forms of

sexual intercourse; the Dalai Lama is said to hold views that resemble that of the late Pope John Paul II on these topics, but does not widely advertise this to his Western believers because of their highly liberal demographic (Neuhaus 2003: 69). Finally, in addition to simplifying and censoring Tibetan Buddhism, the Dalai Lama also encourages all who subscribe to Tibetan Buddhism to make “Tibet activism” as part of their religious practice (Sautman 2005:101). This pronouncement directly connects the practice of Tibetan Buddhism to the advocacy of Tibetan independence, though the two only need be connected in the minds of the Tibetans-in-exile. Although these examples and information only represent a small part of the huge scope of Tibetan Buddhism and its Westernized form, they show the conscious work of the authors under the watchful eye of the TGIE to maintain a message that both appeals to a Western audience and fits their conceptions of Tibet and its religion.

The Dalai Lama

The Dalai Lama, himself, especially since the 1980s, has proven to be central to the “Tibetan Cause,” as his increasing celebrity brings the idea of Tibet and its struggle for independence to more Westerners. Winner of the Nobel Peace prize in 1989, the Dalai Lama is probably one of the most well-known and well-respected religious leaders among politicians and the general public alike. Considered by many Americans to be “a sort of Buddhist equivalent to the Roman Catholic Pope” (Niebuhr 1999) he regularly draws crowds of over 65,000 admirers to his public talks. However, in 1979, the Dalai Lama was not yet a celebrity, and approached Richard Neuhaus, a well-known Catholic evangelist, if he could “help bring Tibet’s plight to public attention” (Neuhaus 2003:69). With this as his goal and the Western imagination about Tibet on his side, the Dalai Lama

quickly became extraordinarily popular, now becoming, in the words of Neuhaus (2003: 69), “The Dalai Lama, Inc., surrounded by movie stars and other celebrities basking in what they had turned into a designer spirituality of Hollywood’s version of Tibetan Buddhism”. Richard Gere, a convert to Tibetan Buddhism since meeting the Dalai Lama has called him, “one of the great beings to ever walk this planet” (quoted in Neuhaus 2003: 70). While movie stars may not have been the Dalai Lama’s target audience, their association with him has only increased the buzz around Tibetan Buddhism. Riding on this celebrity, the Dalai Lama has written dozens of books, including bestsellers like “The Art of Happiness,” mentioned in the opening of this paper. He also has endorsed countless other books, like our “Tibetan Buddhism for Western Life,” which helps the publisher by increasing book sales and benefits the Dalai Lama by creating publicity for Tibet (Neuhaus 2003:69). Because of his high profile, nearly every Western government has received the Dalai Lama and spoken with him about Tibet’s situation, and the Dalai Lama is pointed to as “the contact person for Tibet” in diplomatic talks that these nations hold with China (Barnett 1994: 299-303). His popularity, wildly successful books, and influential presence among many politicians have helped keep Tibet on the international agenda, as has the general marketing of Tibetan pacifism, ancient wisdom, and westernized Tibetan Buddhism. Despite this relative success, all the publicity has been generated through an exploitation of Western imagination about Tibet, rather than through direct discussions of Tibet’s actual situation and Tibet’s case for independence, which, as we will see, has serious consequences for TGIE’s ultimate goal of Tibetan independence and statehood.

TGIE and Shaping the Tibetan Communities-in-Exile

Before our discussion of damage and divergence, we must first introduce the Tibetan communities-in-exile and the TGIE's influence over them. Tibetan communities-in-exile span the globe from India to Europe to North America and contain some 150,000 refugees (Houston and Wright 2003: 220). In the Western view, these exiled Tibetans are perceived as completely out of place in modern society. As Paine (2004: 18) explains, "Tibetan Buddhism...[and the Tibetan people] stand planted at opposite ends of the spectrum: there in an underpopulated, ancient, untamed landscape and here in contemporary overcrowded, man-made environments." Because the West perceives Tibetans to have been uprooted and cast down in the midst of modern society, these communities offer the opportunity for the Tibet-fascinated West to observe a sample of the last remaining religion-centered, ancient culture. Cognizant of these communities' importance as living representations of Tibet, TGIE has attempted, with varied success, to mold the refugees into the Western model of a Tibetan and to maintain the appearance of Tibetan unity.

The heart of the Tibetan diaspora, McLeod Ganj, in Dharamsala India, is home to the Dalai Lama, TGIE, 7 major NGOs related to Tibetan independence and human rights, and over 10,000 Tibetans (Houston and Wright 2003: 223). Under the direct jurisdiction of TGIE, this Tibetan community is the most tightly controlled and shaped exile settlement, which makes it the best community to observe the TGIE's goals in action. Much of the examination of the McLeod Ganj community is applicable to the other settlements as well. Therefore, the following analysis is meant to offer an overall image of TGIE ambitions within the exiled communities, rather than simply an overview of a single settlement. The TGIE's primary goal within the exile community has been to

create a nationalist imagination among the Tibetan refugees that depicts Tibet as an ancient land with important traditions and ways of life that the community must preserve. Many of the nationalist Because Tibetan refugees come from a wide geographic area, often with distinct cultural and religious practices, the TGIE is able to mandate the most “authentic” and “appropriate” version of Tibetan culture with values and traditions of their making. The McLeod Ganj community is built around these newly defined Tibetan Buddhist morals and invented nationalist traditions that help solidify the idea of a Tibetan state and capture the Western imagination. This molding of the Tibetan communities-in-exile, as it changes the refugees’ conception of Tibet and themselves, also creates divergence, as we will soon discuss.

The TGIE has defined Tibetan Buddhism as the official religion of the exiled community with the Dalai Lama as its “ecumenical head,” and under it has stressed the values marketed to the West as the key components of Buddhist morality (Houston and Wright 2003: 223). The Dalai Lama has stressed nonviolence in the communities, saying, “Violence is against human nature and out of date” (cited in Sautman 2005: 98). He states that he wishes the struggle against China to be rooted in pacifism, though he often cites strategic rather than moral reasons for this, such as a concern for Tibetan lives or that “foreigners equate nonviolence with a general beneficence” (cited in Sautman 2005: 98). At the Dalai Lama’s urging, this value seems to have engrained itself in the Tibetan community. As one Tibetan man explained, “I’ll try to maintain and propagate the religious tradition, which [demonstrates] our non-violence, *ahimsa*” (Klieger 2002:148). Other fieldwork done in Tibetan exile settlements have found similar avowals of commitment to non-violence among refugees. Although *ahimsa* is an established value of

Buddhism, the high levels of subscription to this value among the Tibetan refugees suggest that the TGIE's stress on non-violence has elevated its importance within the exile communities. Another value, egalitarianism, has been implemented through the TGIE land-distribution policy in McLeod Ganj, which allotted plots equally to all refugees when the exile community was settled, removing the former class stratifications that were prevalent in Tibet (Goldstein 1978: 406). As part of this value set, gender equality has become important as well, though more pressure falls to women than to men to maintain an appropriately "Tibetan" lifestyle. TGIE advocates certain forms of marriage and sexual relationships for reasons that they link to gender equality but that also happen to suit Western ideas of sexual morality. Polyandry and polygamy were traditionally practiced in Tibet, but in exile monogamy is the preferred marital pattern, and "love, respect, and understanding between the spouses" (Miller 1978: 387) is held up as the ideal. At present, polygamy or polyandry is only practiced among the older generations, who already had their spouses at the time of their flight from Tibet, and among so-called "newly arrived" Tibetan refugees (Grent 2002:114).

In recent years, TGIE has also begun to disseminate other central values from the Western vision of Tibet to the communities through Tibetan language publications. As Toni Huber (2001:368) writes, "Tibet refugees were themselves initially not the intended consumers of these [Westernized] identities. Yet, they have increasingly become exposed to them as they now appear more frequently in the government-in-exile-controlled Tibetan-language media...environmentalist, peace-loving, and gender-equal Tibetan identities." The adsorption of these Western ideals extends to the imagined image of Tibet itself. As one young man described, "In my mind I give a very turquoise sea, with

clean air, green park, with a snowy mountains and all. Like something equal to heaven, which I haven't been but my parents keep talking about such things since my childhood (Klieger 2002:147).” This statement reveals that some in the Tibetan community in exile, in both young and older generations, now subscribe to a Westernized “Shangri-la” vision of Tibet.

Along with internalizing the newly defined Tibetan religiosity and values, Tibetan refugees are expected to maintain their refugee status and remain authentically Tibetan. In McLeod Ganj, this means that Tibetans are not supposed to accept Indian citizenship (Goldstein 1978:414). In India and several other countries with Tibetan settlements, this restriction is a hardship because it limits the types of work and opportunities available to the refugees, but it also ties the refugees closely to their exile communities because of the economic and social advantages there. As a result, work in government-controlled agriculture and traditional Tibetan handcraft manufacturing provides the livelihood for most Tibetans in Dharamsala (Goldstein 1978: 414-7; Anand 2001:20-21). In addition to citizenship, the TGIE also controls social interactions. Residents of McLeod Ganj are not to associate with Indians outside of business relationships, and endogamy is strictly upheld. Fieldwork in the area has also shown that members of the community are under extreme pressure to present Tibetans “accurately.” Dressing too “modern,” having non-Tibetan friends, acting counter to “tradition” are all frowned upon. This social pressure keeps Tibetans in line with TGIE goals, as well as further ties them to the community (Houston and Wright 2003:225). A young man interviewed during fieldwork by Klieger (2002:147) espouses this feeling:

Yeah, there will be a lot of people from the outside who will be looking into the Tibetan community. They have lots of concerns on us—if these people are doing

something for our country, then of course it is important to be a perfect citizen, a perfect Tibetan, with a Tibetan identity. I think this is very important.

This young Tibetan's comment depicts the widely held feeling among the exiled community that they are under the scrutiny of the world, and therefore must act to embody their culture and its values.

The idea of Tibetan unity and nationalism is also very important to the TGIE construction of identity within the exiled communities, building upon the national identity began during British colonialism. As Houston and Wright (2005: 220) state, "The Dalai Lama, in concert with institutions that he helped create, sustains narratives of flight and solidarity. Exiles hear from him that they are unified and thus create ways of being so." In McLeod Ganj, children are taught in Tibetan schools, where they learn to read and write Tibetan and study a revised Tibetan history in which Tibetan statehood is stressed and other values, like the peaceful nature of the Tibetan people, are underscored (Goldstein 1978: 402-3). Tibetan children also begin each day with singing the national anthem (composed while in exile) and a prayer song written by the Dalai Lama (Goldstein 1978: 413).

In addition to the education of children, TGIE has helped create "transnational national narratives" through strategies such as invented traditions (Houston and Wright 2003: 219). One such tradition is the March 10th commemoration of the 87,000 Tibetans killed in the 1959 uprising in Tibet, aptly called Tibetan Uprising Day. The ceremony involves a statement from the Dalai Lama, renditions of Tibetan folk dances, and, again, the singing of Tibet's national anthem. In Houston and Wright's argument (2003:222), this ceremony defines Tibetans as in opposition to the Chinese occupiers in Tibet and strengthens the discourse of Tibetan nationalism. Other examples of newly created

holidays include the Dalai Lama's Birthday (June 6), Democracy Day of Tibet (September 2), and commemoration of the awarding of the Nobel Peace Prize to the Dalai Lama (December 10) (Anand 2001:26).

However, in their pursuit of unity through nationalism, the TGIE has destroyed regional identities that had served as the important basis for individual definition before the 1959 flight into exile. As Lopez (1998: 197) writes, "[t]here was strong identification with local mountains and valleys and their deities, with local lamas, monasteries, and chieftains, with local (and mutually unintelligible) dialects." However, in Houston and Wright's fieldwork (2003:222) with Tibetan refugees, they claim their interviewees (who varied by class, age, sex, marital status, etc.) "...often rehearsed the rhetoric of a singular Tibetan identity, comprised of language, religion and cultural expressions." They follow this with an account from Topden, a Tibetan émigré in Boston:

In pre-1959, politically, the Tibetans, even the Tibetan government, treated Kham and Amdo as separate regions ... So, at that time, the people visiting Lhasa from Kham and Amdo they used to say, 'I'm going to Tibet,' not realizing that they are also Tibetans, right? So, therefore this regionalism was very, very conspicuous but when we came into exile ... people slowly forgot those things and the younger generation was brought up in an atmosphere when we are only taught Tibet, not Kham, Amdo, Utsang. So, therefore now the Tibetans are more integrated and consolidated and unified than it was in 1959. So, I think this is one of the most important work[s] done by His Holiness in the Tibetan history (2003 :222).

Here, we can see that TGIE's rhetoric of unity has made an impact on Tibetans in exile, even those who live far from the literal jurisdiction of the Dalai Lama. In the minds of the refugees, all the traditional regions of Tibetan culture or ethnicities have been redefined as "Tibet," binding the community together geographically and culturally.

Finally, the TGIE controls ideas of unity through censoring and limiting of alternative ideology. Tibetan-language materials that do not uphold the official position

of the TGIE are censored from Tibetan communities. In addition, the Dalai Lama has said, “I am against the establishment of any institution which might directly or indirectly promote conflicts amongst our people or tend to foster sectional or local interests at the expense of the national interest, for our primary purpose must always be that we should be one unified people” (Houston and Wright 2003: 223). Therefore, the information about Tibet available in the communities-in-exile, especially those in Asia, is closely controlled by the TGIE and any dissident groups are quickly quelled. This helps to further the nationalist agenda and to maintain the idea of a unified Tibet, both within these communities and in the Western imagination.

Further fieldwork by Houston and Wright (2003: 223-226) illustrates that other Tibetan communities, at the TGIE’s encouragement, also try to maintain “authentic” Tibetan culture and feelings of loyalty to the Tibetan state. Houston and Wright propose that there are “...two distinct trends visible in many Tibetan exile communities. First, Tibetans often form enclaves separate from native populations to sustain and maintain cultural difference and integrity. Secondly, sacred spaces and Buddhist icons, such as stupas, not only serve religious purposes but also function as places for establishing social networks, enacting Tibetan identities and fostering cultural empowerment...the threat of cultural extermination causes Tibetans to re-imagine themselves as united and pan-Buddhist, which paves over Tibet’s fractious religious and regional past” (Houston and Wright 2003: 223). Thus, TGIE has managed to spread the idea of a single, culturally homogenous Tibet has spread throughout the communities in exile. Through these examples, we can see that the unified Tibetan Buddhist culture and values, narratives of nationalism, and invented traditions have helped to pull Tibetan refugees

together, both within communities and across communities. At the same time, this unified Tibetan ideology has also served to solidify the central political goal of Tibetan independence and to maintain the TGIE's agenda of advertising Tibetan unity to the Western world.

Consequences of TGIE's Actions

Disempowerment

The TGIE's decision to play into the West's vision of Tibet, as outlined in the previous section, "Exploitation of the Western Imagination of Tibet," has in many ways lead to great success in Western popular culture and in political attention. Despite the huge popularity of Tibet and Tibetan Buddhism, many scholars have criticized the TGIE's decision to use this route, however, claiming that it hurts the Tibetan bid for independence. Lopez's thesis in *Prisoners of Shangri-la* is one prominent example of such criticism. Of these arguments, I find the most compelling reason for criticism of the TGIE's policies is that courting of the Western imagination has lead directly to an political argument of "violated specialness," which undermines the idea of Tibet as an independent state.

As Barnett (1994:273) argues in his article of the same name, "violated specialness" indicates a shift in Western political discourse about Tibet to center around "an idea of specialness, uniqueness, distinctiveness, or excellence that has been threatened, violated, or abused." The TGIE, through its use of the Western imagination, has thrown itself on this diplomatic path, winning the espousal of this stance by many Western governments and UN recognition of Tibet as a violated religious zone—the first successful Tibetan submission to the UN since 1971 when PRC joined the UN (Houston

and Wright 2002: 276). Since the adoption “violated specialness” rhetoric in the 1980’s, the Dalai Lama has used the term “Tibet’s unique culture” in nearly every speech, advertising the need to preserve Tibet and its people from the homogenizing force of the Chinese Communists. Many Western politicians seem to stand behind this rendition of the Tibetan cause as well. As a US politician generically proclaimed in 1999, “The world has witnessed the sad and also total destruction of Tibet’s unique culture and religion, and has done precious little to end the extraordinary repression” (quoted in Houston and Wright 2003: 275). Statements such as this one are frequently made by Western leaders to demonstrate their belief in the Tibetan cause to their constituency. If the idea of “violated specialness” seems to win support across the Western popular and political world, the question, then, is what is the problem with it?

The difficulty with “violated specialness” is that it defines Tibet as a “helpless,” even as its “specialness” is championed. Within this argument, the advancing modernization and industrialization brought by the Chinese is considered “the rape of Tibet and its special state of purity and isolation” (Barnett 1994: 274). Tibet and its people, therefore, are innocent victims of this aggression. This conception has three major problems for the TGIE’s bid for Tibetan independence.

The first problem is that “violated specialness” sets aside Tibet as a place that should not participate in the modern world. The often vilified “-izations” -- globalization, modernization, and industrialization—though they would surely alter traditional patterns of life, are also an effective and established way to bring a higher standards of living to the 88% of Tibetans living at subsistence level in the rough countryside of the Tibetan Plateau. Were the TGIE to ever regain control in Tibet, there would be some pressure to

retain the “purity” of the region by resisting the forces of globalization and modernization, even though they would help improve the living conditions of many in Tibet. The TGIE’s ability to function as a “modern state” would also be compromised by this construction of Tibet, as the third problem will build upon.

The second problem is the distinctly non-political nature of the idea, “violated specialness.” Just as no one can object to the Westernized version of Tibetan Buddhism, neither can anyone disagree that Tibet’s unique culture should be preserved. The missing part of this construction is a plan for action. Politicians can agree with their constituents whole-heartedly that Tibetan culture is special and something should be done to save it, while not proposing any solutions. Since the US shift in trade policy with China in 1994, the adoption of “violated specialness” has worked well, because it allows the US both to object to the destruction of Tibet’s “unique culture” and to assure China that there is no “stick” in these objections. The TGIE and Tibetan refugees are then left in exile with no real movement toward independence or statehood, even though their advertisement of “violated specialness” and their catering to the Western imagination has gotten the attention and support they had hoped it would.

The third and most serious problem with “violated specialness” for the TGIE is that the image of Tibet and its government as innocents and as victims causes disempowerment. As American Buddhist Robert Thurman puts it, “the Tibetans are the baby seals of the human rights movement” (quoted in DeVoss 1997). This statement embodies the idea that Tibetan people, like baby animals, are helpless and defenseless, unable to protect themselves from the human rights abuses and so need the “adult,” powerful West to intercede and insure their survival. Even more alarmingly, the Tibetans

in this construction are, in fact, endangered species-- not rational beings at all. This state of victimhood and innocence depicts the Tibetan exiles and TGIE as a group that cannot fend for themselves. Western politicians and advocates must fight to preserve their “unique culture” for them, and stop the violation of this special, endangered ethnic group. This victimized image disempowers the TGIE, and, in turn, inadvertently portrays them as incapable of self-governance.

As these examples demonstrate, the emergence of “violated specialness” as the major political and social stance on Tibet has not helped advance the struggle for Tibetan independence. Instead, this construction in many ways has hurt the Tibetan cause by limiting the options for Tibetan development, by giving politicians an option for gracious inaction, and by depicting the TGIE as powerless and thus incapable of self-rule. Courting the Western imagination, therefore, has not furthered the Tibetan struggle for sovereignty, only elevated its revered place within the Western imagination. Furthermore, the previously discussed influence of the TGIE over the beliefs and actions of the communities-in-exile has altered the self-conception of Tibetan refugees. As the next section will examine, these changes have led to divergence between the exiled communities and those still in Tibet, further undermining the goal of a united Tibetan state.

Divergence

The TGIE’s construction of unified Tibetan communities-in-exile and the creation of Tibetan nationalism has helped to substantiate Tibet’s place in the Western imagination but also has contributed to divergence between the Tibetan communities-in-exile and the Tibetans under Chinese-occupation. The creation of a unified Tibetan front

in the communities-in-exile, as discussed previously, has flattened out the regional cultural and religious differences among the exiled Tibetans and formed the collective idea of “one Tibet.” Among the vast majority of Tibetans remaining in Tibet, however, this unity and pan-Buddhist identity has not been created, and regional divisions still are an essential part of cultural and religious life. As Huber (2001: 358) points out, “...although such images [of a unified Tibetan self-image] circulate in the exile community and are now globally disseminated, they are also limited; they enjoy virtually no currency among the more than 95% of ethnic Tibetans living within the present claimed boundaries of political China” as they are “largely the creation of a political and intellectual elite in exile.” Although much of the Tibetan culture practiced in the exiled communities is a recent creation, the exiled community maintains a widely held belief “that Tibetan culture in diaspora is more authentic than one prevalent in Chinese controlled Tibet” (Anand 2001: 21). This belief of cultural purity has led to a feeling of divergence from and superiority to the Tibetan communities in Tibet. The rift forming between the exiled Tibetans and the Tibetans in Tibet can be seen in the reactions of exiled Tibetans to new refugees. Houston and Wright discovered during their fieldwork that many Tibetans-in-exile believe the mind-set of the “newly arrived” (*gsar 'byor*) differs from those used to life in exile. Karma, an upper-class woman born in exile, explained, “the newly arrived have contended with Chinese indoctrination and the harsh realities of life in an occupied country.” She complains that the *gsar 'byor* are “very crude” and “willing to pull out their knives and stab you!” (Houston and Wright 2003: 226). This observation is supported in fieldwork by Nellie Grent (2002: 112-114), who notes that the newly arrived generally maintain regional affiliations and dress, speak

Chinese and a non-Lhasa dialect of Tibetan, and behave differently than the established émigré community. Grent (2003:113) records that “long-timers” describe the *gsar 'byor* as “rough, uneducated, dirty, not modern.” Emily Yeh (2002: 243) adds that *gsar 'byor* are looked down upon by the established Tibetan community and called *kacha* (Hindi for “raw”)—“a reference to their unfashionable clothing, haircuts, and musical taste.” as well as subsuming “connotations ranging from ‘ignorant’ to ‘bad smelling’ to ‘someone who enjoys picking fights.’” She also notes that the various types of refugees—primarily the long-timers and the newly arrived-- form groups that are “quite important in shaping aesthetic sensibilities as well as who forms friendships and other social relationships with whom” (232). Thus, the Tibetans-in-exile, through their adoption of the TGIE’s “authentic” Tibetan image and their absorption of Westernized discourses of morality and statehood, have diverged from their old opinions and lifestyles, making “real” Tibetans seem foreign and threatening. Furthermore, the “newly arrived” form their own social communities upon arrival in refugee settlements, because they are discriminated against and not readily accepted into the folds of the established communities. This evidence seems to illustrate that if the TGIE and exiled Tibetans were to receive independence and could return to Tibet, they would likely have considerable difficulties re-joining their old communities there. The idea of being more authentically Tibetan could also lead to self-segregation of the former refugees or the formation of a new elite class based on this assumed cultural superiority.

Even as the Tibetans-in-exile and the TGIE are recreating what it means to be “authentically” Tibetan, Tibetans in Tibet are changing as well under Chinese occupation. These changes roughly fall into the categories of CCP propaganda and

Chinese education, religious restraints and secular Tibetan identities, development, and Sinofication. From the beginning of Chinese occupation, the CCP's goal has been to eradicate any vestiges of "old" or "feudal" Tibetan society and to replace it with its own ideals and ideology. In the early 1950's, the agenda for Tibet, as laid out in both the Common Programme and the 17-point Agreement, involved the transformation of social and economic conditions, with a lesser emphasis on language, culture and religion. The Chinese executed these goals partially through prolific propaganda. Tibetan monks were made to translate Marxist literature and other socialist staples into Tibetan, while traditional literature and art that didn't support the CCP agenda was suppressed. Tibetan schools began to teach in Mandarin Chinese, and socialist ideology became a routine part of the curriculum (Maconi 2002:169). Although these socialist initiatives have diminished somewhat today, schools in Tibet still teach entirely in Chinese and promote the "Chinese-version" of Tibetan liberation as the official history of the China-Tibet conflict (Maconi 2002 172). In addition, an entire Tibetan generation has grown up in the era of socialist optimism, and many Tibetans, who joined the PLA or were especially impacted by socialist ideology, still are attracted to its egalitarian principles and believe in its validity.

Another impact of Chinese occupation in Tibet is the former repression of religious practice and the current promotion of secular and regional Tibetan identities. During the Cultural Revolution, Tibetan Buddhism was forbidden, old temples were destroyed, and old texts were burned, in the same way that tradition and religion were attacked throughout China. Religious suppression did not sit well with the Tibetan people, however, and caused a variety of uprisings during this time. The Chinese have

since scaled back these religious restrictions and now tolerate limited religious observance. Although it is difficult to say if this time of repression lessened Tibetan religiosity or not, but significant damage has been done both to Tibetan holy sites and to the Buddhist monastic structure. Along with a larger degree of religious freedom has come a more insidious method of instilling Tibetan secularism. According to Charles Ramble (1997: 381), the Chinese have actively encouraged “the emergence of an apparently secular framework for the expression of Tibetan identity.” This encouragement includes not only the standard Chinese techniques of promoting “traditional” dance and song routines bolstered by the economic benefits of tourism, but also includes the official approval of studies done on the shamanistic Bön practices and folklore. These traditional aspects of Tibetan culture are in many ways “anti-Buddhist” and therefore distance it from Tibetan Buddhism, which the Chinese government sees as promoting “splittist” tendencies. Bön also tends to be region specific, focusing on local deities and places of spiritual power –a tendency, which the Chinese government exploits to retain Tibetan regionalism. One example of this use of Bön to support secular and regional identity can be found in the government’s support of the Tale of Gesar. The Tale of Gesar is a Tibetan epic about a warrior-king, written at the height of Bön practice. The hero, Gesar, comes from Eastern Tibet, and the tale supposedly underscores the traditional tensions between Eastern and Central Tibetan people (Ramble 1997:382). The government’s support of Bön and its related regionally fractious elements help the Chinese to keep the Tibetans under control by reducing ideology of Tibetan unity and maintaining regionalism.

Finally, the divergence of the Tibetans in Tibet from the Tibetans-in-exile has been facilitated by their increasing Sinofication, a change which the exiled communities sense and with which the Chinese-Tibetans struggle. Emily Yeh relates the story of a China-raised and educated Tibetan woman who attended a party hosted by the Tibetan Association of Northern California with hopes of meeting Tibetans-in-exile there. Numerous encounters with the exiled Tibetans, however, all resulted in their judgment of her as Han Chinese, rather than Tibetan. She later “plaintively” asked Yeh,

I feel I am really Tibetan inside but all the other Tibetans think I am Chinese. How can I make myself more Tibetan?...She wondered if she could step outside her own body and meet herself, would she get that sense of Tibetan-ness which she felt to be her true essence, or would she see a Chinese woman as so many other Tibetans do? (2002: 229-230)

This woman, though she felt very Tibetan, because of her life and education in Chinese-occupied Tibet had “become Chinese” in the view of the exiled Tibetan people. Just as the “newly arrived” are characterized by their roughness, a slightly more educated Tibetan from occupied Tibet is seen as too Chinese in their dress, mannerisms, and tastes; even if they are racially Tibetan, their “authenticity” is lacking. Being identified as Chinese or at least Sinocized is apparently a relatively common problem among Chinese-educated Tibetans seeking to connect with the exile communities. A businessman interviewed by Yeh complains how even dressed in traditional Tibetan clothing and speaking Tibetan to exiles, they still characterize him as “a Han who was raised in Tibet” (2002: 234). Yeh argues that this characterization happens for two main reasons. First, and most obviously, going through the Chinese educational system and living in a region where Han Chinese increasingly play central social and economic roles, unconsciously assuming a certain amount of Chinese mannerisms is inevitable. More

importantly, however, are those Chinese habits that are consciously assumed. Tibetans, like other Chinese minorities, have a strong stigma attached to them by the Han Chinese. Considered uncivilized and dirty in their minority state, Tibetans who want to do well in school and career attempt to “pass” as Han Chinese. This trend is increasingly prevalent, making urban Tibetans in PRC “worry about children today who ‘grow up wanting to be Han’” (Yeh 2002: 237). Tibetan youth conscious constructing themselves as Han, not only creates divergence between the Chinese-raised Tibetans and exiled Tibetans, but it also makes it difficult to ever be accepted as authentically Tibetan by the exile community should the two groups be reunited

The evidence in the preceding paragraphs demonstrates that the Tibetans-in-exile and the Tibetans in Tibet are diverging. This divergence occurs through the differing educational systems and lifestyles, but most potently occurs through differing constructions of self. As the TGIE shapes a unified “authentic” Tibetan Buddhist identity, the CCP works to regionalize, secularize, and Sinocize their Tibetan population. The divergent communities significantly hamper the Tibetan bid for independence, both because of potential difficulties with reunification of the groups and because of lagging support for statehood within Tibet. As Sautman cites (2005:99), “Tibet is “a region that once seethed with separatist anger,” but that “long since gave up independence.”

Conclusion

This paper has attempted to show that the TGIE, by courting the Western imagination and recreating Tibetan identities in the communities-in-exile, has threatened the cause for Tibetan independence by adopting disempowering ideology and creating divergence between Tibetans-in-exile and Tibetans in Tibet. Many recent developments

support the claim that the cause for a Tibetan state has been damaged. The Dalai Lama in recent years has begun to advocate a “middle way” approach to the Tibet-China conflict, calling for a certain amount of self-governance that would help preserve Tibetan heritage, respect human rights and democratic freedoms, and protect the environment, but has dropped the demands for absolute sovereignty. Likewise, Western politicians have mellowed their stance on Tibet as China becomes an increasingly powerful economic force. Countries like India and the United Kingdom, which previously were neutral on the Tibetan cause, have recently stated that they do not challenge China’s claim to Tibet. At present, no country openly supports Tibetan independence, choosing instead to urge TGIE and PRC to reconcile in order to protect Tibet’s “unique culture.” Thus, neither Western powers nor the Tibetan government itself seek Tibetan independence to the degree they once did. The Tibetans-in-exile continue to be committed to independence at least in word, though many have accepted that they will not return to Tibet and instead seek to maintain Tibetan culture in their communities abroad. Popular interest in Tibet remains high in certain circles, but the capture of the Western imagination is the only prize the TGIE has won with its actions and policies. Across all fronts, the calls to “Free Tibet” have softened to a whisper, or, as one news article more starkly stated, the Tibet issue has become “little more than the fading stickers still found in youth hostels and on VW vans the world over” (Nachammai 2005) The failure of the TGIE to mobilize the West and gain autonomy to a greater or lesser degree must be attributed to the TGIE’s decision to woo the Western imagination and to avoid a more politicized agenda that would have depicted Tibet as a modern state. In the end, the TGIE’s actions will have left the Tibetans-in-exile with Western sympathy and admiration, but destroyed their claims

to sovereignty, instead constructing Tibetans as a community or as an ethnic group in the Western image.

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