GREEN TIBETANS: A BRIEF SOCIAL HISTORY*

by

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In the literature written about Tibetan life in exile one frequently finds references which link the pre-diaspora past with the present. Such statements or phrases often serve as a sort of polemical or analytical framework for accounts. They range from the essentialisms promoted by nationalists on the one hand through to more critical attempts to reflect upon and account for social change on the other. In the popular literature (both Tibetan and Western) the relationship between past and present is often represented in terms of "unbroken continuity," "maintenance of ancient traditions," and the like. On the other hand, in the scholarly literature we read of "continuity and change," or the innovative uses and "adaptations" of "traditional culture" to a new or modern context. The present account will resort to no such statements or claims because it deals with an aspect of Tibetan exilic life which is unprecedented and entirely a feature of the contemporary world system: the representation of reflexive, politicized notions of culture and identity which are dependent upon the globalized production of institutions and the flow of cultural resources made possible through the onslaught of modernity. The "Green Tibetans" of my title refers to just one example of new representations pertaining to cultural identity recently produced within this newly emerging context by Tibetans in exile. The appearance of such identities over the last decade, and their acceptance or elaboration by increasingly cosmopolitan Tibetans in South Asia, the United States, China, Switzerland and elsewhere is a clear indication of the analytical perspective we must adopt towards this small diaspora community: fundamentally, it now has to be viewed in terms of the cultural dynamics of deterritorialization, one of the central forces shaping the contemporary world (cf. Appadurai 1991).

Representations as Social Facts

The appellation "green" is commonly in use nowadays to designate certain groups, institutions and social movements identified with such things as ecological awareness, environmentalism, and the protection and preservation of nature. My use of Green Tibetans in the present discussion refers specifically to a set of essentialist representations of Tibetan peoples, their culture and lifestyle which depicts them as being in harmony with nature, non-exploitative of the natural world and its resources, and consciously sensitive to the complex ecological processes inherent in the physical environment. Religious identity figures prominently in these images, with Buddhism and less frequently the indigenous "folk traditions" being attributed as the source of a Green Tibetan culture. However, Bon, the other major Tibetan religion, does not feature in the narratives describing Green Tibetans. Although these representations were produced by a very small circle of persons in exile, they claim to represent all Tibetans across space and time.

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Within the course of less than a decade such images have been disseminated successfully around the globe.

It is not my present interest to attempt to verify or negate the validity of the actual claims made about Green Tibetan Buddhist cultural identity in the materials I will analyze. However, some comparison with alternative sources of information from other cultures is necessary for determining the styles and strategies used within the general "green" movement. Having said this, let me state at the outset that I am interested in treating particular representations as "social facts." Representations are socially produced in particular historical and political circumstances; they have a history or "genealogy," to use Foucault's term. Representations are generated and used to negotiate human existence, and even though they do not have a life of their own, they are part of life in society. In these senses representations are "real." For this reason, they can be thought of and treated as social facts (cf. Rabinow 1986). Herein I will briefly consider why a specific set of Green Tibetan representations suddenly came into being when it did, and what sort of context enabled their production. I will also address aspects of representational content and deployment.

**What are Green Tibetans Like?**

During the past decade invoking the image of Green Tibetan identity has virtually become an obligatory aspect of presenting the Tibet issue in popular world media and in pro-Tibetan political literature, but especially in a range of publications issued by the Tibetan Government-in-Exile (hereafter GIE) in Dharamsala, India. This last fact is hardly surprising since the image of Green Tibetans was largely created in Dharamsala and has continued to be disseminated from there to the rest of the world. This is an issue to which I shall return below. But first, what are these Green Tibetans like? Opening the morning paper recently in Berlin I was informed in the following manner of a Tibet where,

Buddhist faith dominated everyday life...Plants, animals and "inanimate" nature were as important and valuable as human beings to the Tibetans. The Tibetans always tried to preserve the ecological balance upon which they felt they depended, so forests were not allowed to be cut and animals were not allowed to be killed. Since we [Tibetans] have lived like that for many centuries it has become difficult for us to distinguish between religious practice and concern for the environment. (Anon. 1995: 3; my translation from the German)

This excerpt contains most of the fundamental elements found in other statements concerning Green Tibetan identity, although every account expands upon them in different ways. For example, some stress the preeminence in space and time of Green Tibetans:

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1 Serious critical scholarship concerning both Buddhist and Tibetan attitudes and practices relating to the natural environment has only recently appeared. For instance, on philosophical issues see Harris (1991, 1994), on claims about Tibetan environmental behaviour see Huber (1991) and on ethics see Schmithausen (1991). See also Kapleau (1983: 46-51) on whaling in Buddhist Japan, a related article on Buddhist China by Yi-Fu Tuan (1971) and essays in the volume edited by Bruun and Kalland (1995). Beyond the level of general (and often sympathetic) surveys few detailed critical studies of Tibetan cultural ecology have been attempted, but see Goldstein and Beall (1990), Stevens (1993) and Huber (forthcoming) for exceptions.

The Tibetan traditional heritage, which is known to be over three thousand years old, can be distinguished as one of [sic] foremost traditions of the world in which the [sic] humankind and its natural environment have persistently remained in perfect harmony. (Yuthok 1992: 1)

Others feel compelled to demonstrate that Green Tibetans have a systematic and reflexive "ecological" consciousness akin to that developed recently in modern scientific thought. Moreover, this consciousness is one which Tibetans have applied to large-scale regional ecosystems for quite some time:

[W]e Tibetans have always been aware of the interdependent nature of this world. We know that our large country, with its diverse flora and fauna, its primal forest cover, and above all the many great rivers which rise in Tibet, is a source of life to an area many times larger that Tibet itself. For most of Asia, Tibet's environment has always been of crucial importance. And so for centuries Tibet's ecosystem was kept in balance and alive out of a common concern for all humanity. (Atisha 1991: 9)

While Buddhism is invariably included as the basis of Green Tibetan culture and identity, and is linked directly with everything from consumption habits (Tenzin Gyatso 1990: 80) and mining policy (Geshe Damdul Natugyal 1994: 29) to modern science, other secondary factors are sometimes cited. For instance, the Dalai Lama often espouses a simple form of circular logic to elucidate an environmental determinism in which Green Tibetans are seen as a product of the essentially "unique" natural world of the Tibetan plateau (Tenzin Gyatso 1990: 87; cf. Rowell 1990a: 11). In a more recent development, one which is occurring in Dharamsala alongside the official rehabilitation of interest in Tibetan "folk religion" after decades of indifference, "ancient customs" are now also cited as factors necessary for the development of ecological awareness. Thus, in the introduction to a recent work titled Bod kyi gna' bo'i zhing 'brog lam lugs [The Ways of Farmers and Nomads of Ancient Tibet], we find the GIE editors stressing the importance of older lifeways precisely because "There is a specific connection between the customs of ancient Tibet and contemporary environmental protection."6

The critical (or cynical) observer may be tempted to readily dismiss much of the content of Green Tibetan representations as anachronistic, exaggerated, romanticized, inaccurate, and so on.

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3 Such a far-fetched statement is nicely countered by a more realistic one from the Dalai Lama: "Most people in the distant marches of Tibet had never been to Lhasa, or even perhaps met anyone who had been there. From year to year they tilled the earth and bred their yaks and other animals, and neither heard nor saw what happened in the world beyond their own horizon" (Tenzin Gyatso 1990: 87). See also the critique in Räther (1994: 673).

4 For example, "Both science and the teachings of the Buddha tell us of the fundamental unity of all things. This understanding is crucial if we are to take positive and decisive action on the pressing global concern with the environment" (Tenzin Gyatso 1990: 81). On the modern Buddhist equation of science and Buddhism in the context of Green Buddhist representations, see the comments in Harris (1991: 110-111).

5 With, of course, the exception of spirit mediumship and other forms directly challenging the Lamaist monopoly over claims of access to alternative realities and powers.

6 Bod kyi gna' bo'i rig gzhung dang deng kyi khor yug srung skyobs dbar 'brei ba gang zhi g yod pa (Bya-dur bSod-nams bZang-po 1994: gleng-brdzod). This work is also of interest as it was written by a Bonpo who is an official representative of Bon in the exile parliament following the rehabilitation of the position of the Bonpos in Dharamsala. Perhaps it signals the future inclusion of Bon in Green Tibetan identity images? To date Yuthok (1992), who was apparently quite disillusioned with some of the specifically "Buddhist" Green Tibetan identity projects in Dharamsala (to be discussed below), has been the only Tibetan writer to even mention Bon in relation to the Green Tibetan image.
However, Green Tibetan images now circulate both globally and within the Tibetan exile community, apparently accepted on face value by many who consume them. They thus deserve our serious attention as a focus of critical enquiry because of the social currency they have attained.

While the particular features of Green Tibetan images may be interesting in and of themselves, Green Tibetans belong, in fact, to a general class of identity representations which have become commonplace throughout the world. Green Tibetans now take their place in a long list of ecologically aware, environmentally sensitive and so-called in-harmony-with-nature identities promoted by and on behalf of a wide range of non-Western populations (e.g., Amazon forest peoples, Polynesians, Australian Aborigines, native North Americans, etc.), many of whom were formerly colonized and oppressed. In addition, a number of these groups are now ethnic minorities within larger states or maintain particular religious identities. Such essential "green" identities are far less common in modern, industrialized or post-industrial nation-states whose populations cannot so readily be linked to nature by living materially simple lifestyles in uncultivated environments. However, in the modern world, local and transnational commercial or industrial groups, political parties and politicians, world religions and many other social movements are all actively cultivating and disseminating specific green identities. With the formation of a strong global environmentalist Zeitgeist during the 1980s and 1990s, promoting a green identity is no longer just a signal of concern about a commitment to care for nature. It also has much to do with strategic positioning for social, economic and political advantages, as well as competition for scarce resources within the contemporary world system. Not surprisingly, green identities are now frequently contested. It is against the background of this broader development of the global "greening" of identities that we can begin to trace some of the important factors leading to the appearance of Green Tibetans.

How did Tibetans become Green?

There is no doubt that the Green Tibetan identity came about by way of a complex of intersecting social forces and discourses mediated through the agency of a variety of individuals and institutions. While I do not claim to present anything resembling a complete picture of this process, I will nevertheless provide some evidence indicative of what was involved in the greening process. Further, I will relate this to two main conclusions. First, it can be demonstrated that a great deal of the impetus and cultural resources required for the appearance of Green Tibetans came from outside the Tibetan community in exile. Second, the widely distributed Green Tibetan image, which claims to represent all Tibetans, can be traced back to a few institutions and a very small circle of individuals that constitute a part of the exiled Tibetan political, religious and intellectual elite in Dharamsala. The elite of Dharamsala did not only generate the images in question, but they also continue to manipulate and disseminate them.

Green Tibetans had their genesis in the mid-1980s, with 1985-1986 being particularly crucial years. However, the development of certain important preconditions for this birth reaches back into the 1960s. First, during the early days of environmentalism in the late 1960s, "premodern" or indigenous peoples with materially simple cultures began to be represented as "ecological." The earliest example is probably the "ecological Indian" of North America (Martin 1978: 157). Second, and more importantly, there was also a creative linking of religion with the idea of ecological crisis. This connection was first made forcefully by Lynn White Jr. in 1967. In his well-received article, White (1967) proposed, among other things, that the Judaico-Christian religious tradition allowed for the exploitation of nature. With particular reference to Zen Buddhism, he then contrasted the Judeo-Christian position with the more positive attitudes towards the environment fostered by Asian religions. In an important article Poul Pedersen (1995) has given us a
summary of this "classic in the environmentalist literature with a global audience" and the foundation it provided for the later formation of what he aptly calls the "religious environmentalist paradigm," which spread so thoroughly during the last two decades to many parts of the world, including Asia. It is within this general framework that some early Western environmentalist thinkers became specifically interested in connecting Buddhism with ecology (e.g. Kvaloy 1987; Schumacher 1973; Spretnak 1986). Some environmentalists also transmitted these ideas to Asia where they were in any case beginning to circulate gradually among a limited group of Asian intellectuals, for example in India, as a result of "countercultural drift" to the subcontinent from the late 1960s onwards.

We know for certain that the elite of the Tibetan community in exile received inspiration from this direction, although its arrival appears to have been rather late in comparison to other Buddhist societies in South Asia, or at least it was not publicly responded to until the mid- to late 1980s. Before turning to look at some of these influences it is worth noting an interesting polemic built into various Green Tibetan statements which appears specifically intended to excuse the relative lateness of the appearance of environmental concern. For example, some writers state that their Tibetan "culture" was so environmentalist already that it was a given aspect of life. Thus, "For the same reason, the contemporary Tibetan scholars also did not find it necessary to produce exclusive works on the subject" (Yuthok 1992: 4). Such statements raise interesting and complex questions. For instance, can there be a discreet, modern conception of "nature" (as invoked in Green Tibetan narratives) before a coherent concept of "culture" exists? In other words, we must assume that exiled Tibetans first had to learn (from the West and in the context of modernity) to objectify their "unique culture" before they could think about their "unique nature." This, then, would allow them to later begin casting themselves reflexively as "natural-born" environmentalists. Thinking along these lines can help explain the rather late "greening" of Tibetan exile identity, although the issues it raises merit an in-depth discussion which I can not attempt herein (although cf. comments by Calkowski 1991; Huber and Pedersen forthcoming; Pedersen 1995).

In specific relation to His Holiness the Dalai Lama, who is generally acknowledged (and with good reason) as the leading light of all liberal developments in the Tibetan diaspora and as a well-known religious environmental advocate since the late 1980s, it was recently stated by one of his cabinet ministers that "The Dalai Lama was interested in the environment long before it became a popular issue." This statement may well be correct, but we are presented with a very different picture when we turn to look for evidence of this in the Dalai Lama's prodigious literary output and recorded public statements since the beginning of the exile in 1960. The Dalai Lama had published at least seven full-length books prior to 1985, but none of them makes any specific mention of environmental issues, Buddhism and nature or ecology. Similarly, in his pub-

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8 Press statement by the then Tibetan GIE Minister for Information and International Affairs, Kalon Tashi Wangdi (reported in Anon. 1992).

9 An interesting minor exception is found in his first autobiography of 1962, My Land My People, in which he talks about the teachings of Buddhism and Tibetan life at length. On the issue of mining and the Chinese in Tibet, he states "Our country is certainly rich in minerals. We never exploited them because we had not enough desire for worldly riches" (Tenzin Gyatso 1983: 224). This contrasts markedly with the current (i.e., post-1986) Green Tibetan image, which repeatedly insists that mining was not practiced in Tibet precisely because of specific religious beliefs
lished collected public statements to Tibetans, press interviews and articles which cover a great many subjects and issues of all kinds, there is not a single mention of any topic related to Green Tibetans until the year 1986 (Tenzin Gyatso 1984, 1986). The reason for stressing this point here is not to imply any criticism of the Dalai Lama, but rather because it provides us with a solid date for the appearance of Green Tibetan representations, and one which is confirmed by other Tibetan media operating in the diaspora. The widely read Tibetan language newspaper *Shes bya*, the official organ of the exile government, for example, carried no articles on Buddhism and ecology or Tibetan environmentalism before 1986. After that year they began to grow steadily in both frequency and length. The same can be said of the English language *Tibetan Bulletin*, which is also published by the GIE, as well as the more independent *Tibetan Review*. Also relevant to the appearance of Green Tibetans in the exile community's print media during the period was the appearance of a number of Tibetan neologisms to help convey the new concepts of modern ecology and environmentalism.

How then did Dharamsala get prompted to become green by the mid-1980s? One preliminary motivating factor was certainly the reports of ecological damage in Tibet under Chinese occupation, which began appearing with loosening restrictions of access to Tibet during the late 1970s. Fact finding delegations from Dharamsala were permitted to visit Tibet in 1979, 1980 (twice), 1982 and 1985. I was in Dharamsala at the time of the early delegations and clearly remember that the news their members carried back about the disappearance of indigenous wildlife stocks in particular shocked and saddened many people in the exile community. At first, Tibetan exile groups and their supporters just reproduced such reports of environmental catastrophe as further evidence of Chinese mismanagement in Tibet. Even up until 1986 the reports were still not being linked in any way to the politicized Green Tibetan image (e.g. Tibetan Young Buddhist Association 1986: 25-6; Wangyal 1986). I have heard privately voiced suggestions from both Tibetan exiled intellectuals and Western scholars that the Tibetan GIE in Dharamsala was advised by various well-meaning foreign supporters to become "green" at that particular time as that would greatly add to international sympathy for their cause. This is especially true when coupled with the reports of ecological damage in Tibet under Chinese occupation.

### 1985-1986: Dharamsala's Early Green Years

By far the most important single factor in "greening" Tibetans was the beginning of participation by the Dharamsala elite in institutions designed to promote the religious environmentalist paradigm, and their exposure to all the new cultural resources and global networking this offered. The first of such events that I am aware of took place in 1985. First, there was Tibetan attendance at one of the early international ecology and religion conferences. During October 1985

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10 But *Shes bya* reported other local "environmental" stories very occasionally before Green Tibetans appeared. For example, in early 1986 (no.4, p.26) there was an article concerning rubbish around the environs of the Buddhist reliquary shrines visited by Tibetan pilgrims at Bodh Gayā.

11 See, for example, rang-byung kham s = "nature"; rang-byung khor-yug s = "natural environment"; rang-bzhin 'byung-khams = "natural environment"; rang-byung kham s-kyi thon-khungs = "natural resources"; kham s sprung-skoy b = "nature "conservation"; khor-yug sprung-skoy b = "environmental protection"; snod-bcud rten-'byung = "ecology" (cf. to the traditional idea of snod-bcud: phyi snod kyi 'jig rten dang bcud kyi sens can); and even e-ko-lo-jil = "ecology." Compare these to the English entries (where they exist) in the English-Tibetan dictionaries by Chophel (1985), Dhomthog (1988) and Goldstein and Narkyid (1984).

12 To my present knowledge Tibetan exiles did not participate in the earlier World Council of Churches programs on science and religion, humanity and nature in the late 1970s, which involved Theravada Buddhists from Sri Lanka.
a meeting of various religious and political representatives was convened near New York to discuss human survival issues (with conservation, nature protection, etc., high on the agenda). The Global Forum of Spiritual and Parliamentary Leaders on Human Survival was founded at the conference. The Dalai Lama sent his clerical representative Doboom Tulkhu to this foundation meeting (Anon. 1993b). Later in 1988 both of them attended the first major international meeting organized by the Global Forum, the Global Survival Conference held at Oxford on April 11th-15th (Side 1988: 2-3).

More importantly, in October 1985 a meeting was held between an international team and representatives of the Tibetan GIE in order to initiate a joint project whose preliminary "research stage" was to be called Buddhist Perception of Nature: A New Perspective for Conservation. The project was funded by the World Wildlife Fund's (hereafter WWF) U.S. and Hong Kong branches and the New York Zoological Society. It was to be coordinated by Hong Kong based journalist and activist Nancy Nash, herself a former WWF consultant. Nash claims she was originally inspired to establish the Buddhist Perception of Nature project by the general philosophy of the Dalai Lama, whom she first met in 1979.\(^{13}\) The Dalai Lama himself endorsed the project when it was finally established. The Asian members of the project team included both Thais and Tibetans, with research to take place both in Bangkok and Dharamsala respectively. The Tibetan side was directed by the Council for Religious and Cultural Affairs and the Information Office of the GIE, with involvement by both clerical and secular political representatives.\(^{14}\) A follow-up meeting was to take place a year later in October 1986.

The aims of the Buddhist Perception of Nature project, as recorded by the Tibetan exile media at the time, were: "...comprehensive study and assembly of traditional Buddhist literature regarding human independence [sic] with the responsibilities to the earth and living things; design and production of efficient teaching tools; and use of the material in Buddhist-influenced communities to achieve better conservation of nature" (Anon. 1985: 9). Their success in fulfilling these specific aims is now difficult to judge, although the chief Tibetan scholar for the project later remarked "after a year's intensive research through the Buddhist sources on environment protection...[the group]...finally found a single stanza worth quoting from a Sutra...[and...]...To be accurate, this single stanza was also quoted out of the context" (Yuthok 1992: 6). The resulting publication of the project, a short booklet titled *Tree of Life. Buddhism and Protection of Nature*, included hardly any published Tibetan input, although the whole text was also reproduced in Tibetan and Thai translations.

There were, however, other significant "results" to come out of the project. Not only did participation in Buddhist Perception of Nature give the Tibetan GIE full exposure to the religious environmentalist paradigm in institutional operation, it also brought Dharamsala firmly within the orbit of the WWF, the world's largest private conservation organization. Through this connection the GIE was invited to join a newly formed global network in 1986. Pedersen has de-

\(^{13}\) See Davies (1987: 31), where the exact statement from which she took her inspiration is recorded. Note that it contains no references to ecology, the environment, nature or Buddhism.

\(^{14}\) A list of those involved in 1986 was reported in Shes bya (Anon. 1986: 15): Deputy Minister of Education rGya-ri Blo-gros rGyal-mtshan, the Publicity Secretary bSod-nams sTobs-rgyas, Assistant Private Secretary bStan-'dzin Chos-rgyal, Junior Secretary for Religious Affairs g.Yu-thog Karma dGe-legs (a monk), Nancy Nash, Chatsumarn Kabilsingh (lecturer in religion and philosophy, Thammasat University, Bangkok, collaborator in Buddhist Perception of Nature project) and Sirajit Waramontari (Board of Trustees Wildlife Fund Thailand, collaborator in Buddhist Perception of Nature project). Bruce Bunting, director of WWF (U.S.) Asia Program, was also present for the initial meetings (Anon. 1985: 9).
scribed this network as "the most wideranging alliance between conservation and religion." I will have more to say about this shortly.

The green build-up that had begun in 1985 carried on through 1986. On June 5th, 1986 the Dalai Lama produced his landmark statement, "An Ethical Approach to Environmental Protectionism," to commemorate World Environment Day and the special theme for the year, "Peace and the Environment." The appearance and wide circulation of this short (one page) statement helped put the Dalai Lama "on the map," as it were, as a global religious-environmental advocate. Its reprinting (often at the beginning) in many volumes concerning Tibet and the environment or Buddhism and ecology came to serve as a sort of legitimation device, one which has only recently started to be replaced with his elegant Green Tibetan poem "The Sheltering Tree of Interdependence".

From September 2nd-4th, 1986 the conference "Ecology and Principles for Sustainable Development" was held in Leh, Ladakh. It was hosted by the Ladakh Project and the Ladakh Ecological Development Group, whose members had already begun to creatively link Tibetan Buddhism and ecology prior to interest generated in Dharamsala. After the meeting the Dalai Lama, who did not attend, wrote a strong message of support (dated November 12th, 1986) for the project which is published as the frontispiece of the group's proceedings volume (and ahead of a similar message by the Indian Prime Minister of the day, Rajiv Gandhi). One section of the conference concerned Ecology and Buddhism, with a paper by the Ladakhi scholar and Buddhist eco-philosopher, Tashi Rabgyas, titled "Ecology and the Buddhist World View." In this work (and elsewhere) he emphasizes the importance of the Buddhist theory of interdependence (which he refers to as rten-'brel) for ecology, and quotes from the Tibetan Gelugpa reformer Tsongkhapa as well as other Buddhist texts (Tashi Rabgyas 1986). The works of Tashi Rabgyas are significant because they appear to be one of the first modern efforts to systematically relate Buddhist teachings to ecology by a native Tibetan Buddhist. Exactly what influence his works may have had upon the Dharamsala elite is impossible to say, although one could note that the Buddhist components of most Green Tibetan statements place stress on the doctrine of interdependence.

The Tibetan community in exile-WWF global connection became activated again on September 29, 1986, when there was a special interfaith ceremony held at Assisi, Italy to mark the 25th anniversary of the WWF. At this huge meeting representatives from different world relig-

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15 On which, see his account (1995: 270-71). An impression of the potential network of related organizations, institutions and individuals opened up to the Tibetan GIE through their participation in Buddhist Perception of Nature is found listed on the Acknowledgments page of Tree of Life (see Davies 1987).

16 The statement was reprinted at the beginning of one of the first published collections of studies on Buddhism and ecology, Buddhist Perspectives on the Ecocrisis (ed. Sandell 1987), and as the first chapter of another early book on Buddhism and nature, Tree of Life. Buddhism and Protection of Nature (ed. Davies 1987). An edited version of it also appeared quoted in the Buddhist position statement in the Assisi Declarations (World Wildlife Fund 1986), and it was further reprinted in Tibetan, English and various other European languages; e.g. see International Campaign for Tibet (1990: 57), Department of Information and International Relations (1992: v) and Tenzin Gyatso (1994: 1-2). The statement's fundamental appeal is that it is universal in character, and does not refer to Buddhism or Tibetans in any way; those specific identity references were to start appearing in 1987.

17 It has recently appeared at the beginning of Tibet Environment & Development News, 1 (1994) and in Tenzin Gyatso (1994: 57-63). The poem is quite evocative in the original Tibetan (a significant point considering its Tibetan readers), but it has unfortunately lost its fine literary quality in the published English translations.

18 He also composed a small booklet, titled rTen 'brel, in Tibetan (i.e., written Ladakhi) on the same topic. Aris (1990: 99) has also cited a 1984 Ladakhi publication which deals with environmental themes in a popular narrative form.
ions (Buddhism, Christianity, Hinduism, Judaism and Islam) were invited to make declarations on religion and nature both to their own adherents and to the rest of the world. A high ranking Tibetan exile cleric of the Gelugpa sect, Lungri Namgyal Rinpoche, the abbot of the Higher Tantric College (i.e., rGyud-stod Grwaštang) was sent to participate at Assisi by the Tibetan administration. He contributed a statement intended to represent the Buddhist point of view, incorporating quotes from the Dalai Lama. His statement was then published in the now well-known Assisi Declarations (World Wildlife Fund 1986: 3-7).

All these events and connections during 1985-1986 provided graphic examples to the GIE in Dharamsala of how a Buddhist identity could be powerfully linked to the major global discourses of our time, such as environmentalism. It also showed that the whole world was a potential audience for such messages. It is from this point onwards that a politicized identity became linked with what had mainly been talk about Buddhism and nature, but which then was transformed into talk about Green Tibetans. Proof of this soon appeared on September 21st, 1987, when the Dalai Lama announced his acclaimed Five Point Peace Plan for Tibet, for which he was awarded the Noble Peace Prize two years later. Point Four of the plan was specifically dedicated to environmental protection, and this itself was no surprise after all the documented hard evidence of environmental damage in Tibet under Chinese occupation. It was the appearance of Green Tibetans in the text of the fourth point that is of interest to my concerns here: "Tibetans have a great respect for all forms of life. This inherent feeling is enhanced by the Buddhist faith, which prohibits the harming of all sentient beings, whether human or animal. Prior to the Chinese invasion, Tibet was an unspoiled wilderness sanctuary in a unique natural environment" (International Campaign for Tibet 1990: 50). Green Tibetans were now in Dharamsala to stay.

Marketing Green Tibetans

The late 1980s witnessed the beginning of a series of elaborations on the Green Tibetan image. These began to appear in all the major print and electronic media controlled by the GIE and disseminated from Dharamsala. The same material was also distributed within its international network of supporting organizations. It is significant that many of the Green Tibetan texts in GIE literature appeared in English and other Western languages before they got translated and edited for later publication in Tibetan versions, indicating clearly the priority target audience. In 1992 the production and dissemination of all environmental materials became institutionalized with the establishment of the so-called Environment Desk (which became the Environment & Development Desk in 1994) within the GIE's Department of Information and International Relations (hereafter DIIR). The DIIR itself was formerly the Information Office which was involved in running the original Buddhist Perception of Nature project in 1985. The DIIR also be-

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19 Since the late 1980s Green Tibetan representations have appeared in the monthly Shes bya (in Tibetan), the bi-monthly Tibetan Bulletin (in English both as paper and electronic copy on the Internet, and also in French, Hindi and Marathi paper versions), all of which are produced by the Department of Information and International Relations of the GIE. Related materials have also appeared in English in other GIE organs, including The Tibet Journal, published quarterly by the Library of Tibetan Works and Archives and the annual Chö Yang, published by the Council of Religious and Cultural Affairs of His Holiness the Dalai Lama. In marked contrast to GIE media, that produced over the same period by the independent exile intellectual elite, in particular Zla gsar and the now popular dmang gtsos, contain virtually no relevant material.

20 The most significant exception to this is the handsome coffee table book My Tibet (see Tenzin Gyatso 1990) filled with evocative photographs by Galen Rowell and accompanying text by the Dalai Lama. To date this is the most impressive medium for conveying the Green Tibetan image, and one designed specifically to reach into the living-rooms of a wealthy Western readership.
gan publishing a series of books on environmental topics in 1992, first in English and later also in Tibetan, under the auspices of its newly created Environment Desk.21

When comparing this new material with the content of publications issued by the earlier Information Office, a radical turnaround in the image of the exile community projected by the GIE is quite apparent. The full-page photographs of Tibetans spraying pesticides around agricultural settlements or accounts of the large expenditures on deforestation for clearing settlement lands which appeared in GIE publications in the recent past22 are now completely unimaginable and have given way to photos of tree planting ceremonies and stories of strong Tibetan Buddhist resistance to pesticide use.

One striking feature of all the output of the new Environment & Development Desk is the high production standards of its publications compared to other exile media. When contrasting GIE publications with their Chinese government counterparts recently, Kevin Garratt (1995: 65-67) commented on the generally low or modest standards of GIE production compared to the high quality Chinese finish. He correctly concluded that this reflects the budget the two governments are willing (or able) to allocate to the marketing of their respective messages. Judging by the high quality paper, full color photos on glossy covers and the layouts of the Environment & Development Desk's booklets and journals, the GIE has clearly decided to allot a significant budget to market the environment issue along with Green Tibetans themselves. In passing, we might also note that green GIE productions are not printed on recycled paper, the use of which is a strong symbolic indicator of ecological commitment that has become almost obligatory in the production of environmentalist literature over the last decade.

As is the case with other globally contextualized green identity representations, there has also always been a significant input made by well-intentioned Western supporters and interested non-Tibetan parties in elaborating and spreading versions of Green Tibetanness as an integral part of an effort to fight both environmental degradation and Chinese colonial oppression in Tibet.23 Getting the Green Tibetan image to do its work within this politicized framework has required a number of strategies on the part of both its Tibetan and Western presenters. The most obvious of these, and one in play right from the outset, has been simultaneously constructing a negative, ecologically destructive Chinese "Other," something which has, of course, never been difficult in light of the supporting contemporary evidence. The political subtext here is that Green Tibetans should gain their independence because they would "obviously" do a better job of maintaining the environment than the Chinese have in the past.24

An interesting variation of the above theme recently promoted by the GIE are the green economic and development policies proposed as alternatives to those implemented by the Chinese


22 See, for example, Information Office of His Holiness the Dalai Lama (1981), plate between p.176-177, with the caption "Spraying insecticide in a maize field in south India." See also the text of pp. 155, 159, 169.

23 On this issue see the comments by Huber (1991), Lohmann (1993) and Lopez (1994).

24 All Tibetan-style Buddhist elites currently promoting Green Buddhist identities refer to an environmentally negative "Other," with attendant political subtexts. For the Bhutanese government and its supporters, it is Hindu Nepal, and, by extension, its own ethnic Nepali Hindu "Southern Bhutanese" population which it has troubles incorporating within its nationalist vision of an ethnic Bhutanese Buddhist state. For Ladakhi Buddhist nationalists it is the Muslim population of Ladakh and Kashmir from whom they would like to gain increased political and economic autonomy.
government in Tibet. Green Tibetans as a whole are strategically deployed as a kind of "foundation image" just before the main body of the long and detailed GIE alternative economy and development position paper (Department of Information and International Relations 1992: 28-29; cf. also Chapela 1992). Part of the political subtext of this document is that the now "green" Tibetan GIE in particular has the cultural authority to lead the vast majority of Tibetans still living in Tibet if independence were to be gained in the future. In order to publicly address and contest the same issues of economy, development and environment China has also recently represented its own very different "species" of Green Tibetans, one apparently "greened" by enlightened modern Chinese government policy initiatives and controls (Anon. 1994b),

Within this increasingly complex field Green Tibetans have come to serve competing agendas. These derive partly from features of the religious environmentalist paradigm, partly from the desire to present a "modern" image of Buddhism to the world and also from the polemics of the GIE political position. On the one hand, Green Tibetans are shown to have something akin to modern environmental knowledge and links, via Buddhism, to modern scientific ideas, as I have suggested above. On the other hand, we also find appeals to green "primitivism" (Ellen 1986; Sackett 1991) which have been a standard feature of environmentalist portrayals of non-Western peoples. The appeals have been designed to distance these people from the "evils" of modern society, its industrialized material culture and worldview, all of which are thought to be at the root of the environmental crisis. This latter end is sometimes achieved by invoking the Shangri-La image of a Tibetan society which was isolated, spiritually oriented and materially contented, an image which has long been a part of Western fantasies about Tibet.

In the process of creating such Green Tibetans, attempts at achieving any historical accuracy have been (perhaps intentionally) abandoned, and the suppression of all forms of negative evidence has become pervasive. It is worth giving a few typical examples here to demonstrate the audaciousness of this approach. In a recent effort to evoke Green Tibetan primitivism it was stated that "Tibet is mountainous and much of the terrain is very steep, so that many rivers have enormous drops in elevation. The potential hydroelectric power was never harnessed" (Atisha 1991: 14; emphasis added). Yet, as any educated Tibetan can tell you, hydroelectric power was established near Lhasa by the Tibetan government itself in 1924 in order to electrify the city (Dhondup 1984: 53-56). In fact, this development occurred much earlier in Tibet than in many other "pre-modern" parts of the world.

All Green Tibetan representations claim direct links between abstract religious values and positive environmental behaviour, which conforms to the norm established earlier by the religious environmentalist paradigm. In order to demonstrate the apparent results of religious values, highly positive descriptions of the Tibetan environment and Tibetan behavior from pre-1959 European travelogues are commonly quoted in the Green Tibetan sources. Many of the quotations are often recycled into multiple accounts, as has happened with one describing abundant wildlife in East Tibet during the 1940s taken from Leonard Clark's The Marching Wind, "...every few minutes we would spot a bear, a hunting wolf, herds of musk deer, kyangs, gazelles, bighorn sheep, or foxes. This must be one of the last unspoiled big-game paradises..." (1955: 283). In Green Tibetan accounts such quotes are presented without exception as representative descriptions of the pristine state of Tibet's natural environment which resulted from the Tibetan's "perfect harmony with nature," despite ample negative evidence in the same original sources. For example, some pages earlier in Clark's The Marching Wind we read of how his

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25 For quotations of this passage see Atisha (1991: 10), Department of Information and International Relations (1992: 28) and Rowell (1990b: 6).
travelling party in East Tibet had scared vast herds of wild sheep such that, "...the country was so spooked now that Tibetans and Ngoloks [hunting here] would have a hard time getting any. This might seem ungenerous; but when they locate such herds – as proved by the hundreds if not thousands of old sheep skulls we had passed en route – Tibetans practically eliminate them. Strangely, they have no conception of game preservation, which would ensure never-ending bags" (1955: 154), and further "...there were few wild yaks due to the importation of repeating rifles. Scattered over the plains and mountains of Tibet, we had already seen hundreds, if not thousands, of the enormous white skulls of wild yaks, the fate of the herds written in bone and horn, as was that of the American bison a century ago" (1955: 253-4).26 This is, unfortunately, merely one example among many.

Those who have critically read a wide range of environmentalist literature will know that such distorted approaches as outlined above are commonplace. In some cases they might be excused because of deep and genuine sentiments to stop environmental destruction on the part of their authors. In the Tibetan GIE case there is certainly (and tragically) enough contemporary evidence of ecological damage in Tibet to employ in its international appeals without needing to invent a particular Green Tibetan past. Such a past is required not because of environmental concerns (although it can be used to address them) but to construct a modern politicized and globally valid Tibetan identity. The sometimes distorted strategies for such a process are firmly established in Dharamsala, and as Heather Stoddard recently reminded us, within the ambit of the Tibetan GIE "The positive role of critical historiography in the forging of national consciousness is not yet tolerated" (1994: 152).27 Jamyang Norbu's contemporary example of the GIE's representation of "Peaceful Tibetans" by rewriting history to fit the "preferred peace-loving image of Tibet as a Shangri-la" (1994: 198, 195-6) is another case of modern Tibetan identity tailored to current international discourse (nonviolence, world peace, etc.), which parallels Green Tibetans in many respects.

It would be a distortion on our part to view Green Tibetans as a completely specious tradition. However, to ask whether Green Tibetans are "myth or reality" is a distraction from a more important analytical insight. Instead, we should recognize the Green Tibetan image as the modern, reflexive and politicized identity that it is. We should also view it as an assertive expression of cultural creativity from Tibetan agents now operating successfully in a new global context, using the vast possibilities offered by the cultural resources of modernity.

Do Green Tibetans Have a Future?

There is every indication that Green Tibetans are here to stay, at least as long as environmentalism strongly influences transnational discourse. After working with younger Tibetan exiles recently it has struck me how much a part of their present self-image the green identity has started to become, especially compared to the impressions gained only a decade ago. Others have noted this too. Before the advent of Green Tibetans, Margaret Nowak already thoughtfully observed that this generation was "Brought up deliberately to put their Tibetan national identity ahead of regional or sectarian considerations and schooled by the global village in the tactics and

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27 The problems of critical historiography and censorship for Tibetan intellectuals is well-known in both exile and Western scholarly circles. At a more popular level in the exile community, a parallel and related phenomenon is also encountered in a range of attitudes which observers have variously discussed as "neopuritanism" (Nowak 1984), cultural propriety and cultural censorship (Calkowski 1991) or in terms of a keen sense of image management (Klieger 1992; Schrader 1990).
workings of effective international power ploys today" (1984: 150). Such an upbringing has come to fruition, according to Dawa Norbu, as "It is this new generation that under the Dalai Lama's influence, is projecting democracy, human rights and environmentalism as constitutive of the new Tibetan identity" (1994: 38). Research by Heinz Räther (1994) has revealed the relative "environmentalist" fluency attained recently by more senior members of the Dharamsala political and intellectual elite as well.

By way of an ending I would like to cite two specific examples of the ingenious re-presentations of Tibetan traditions currently taking place in the context of Green Tibetanness, and which are offered to the rest of the world as an aid for troubled environmental times. The setting for the first was a large Tibetan Buddhist ritual event recently staged in a remote mountain valley in Bhutan. The area is said to be a beyül (sbras-yul) or "sacred hidden land resembling a sort of paradise on earth accessible only to the faithful," according to the Tibetan and Bhutanese tradition. The presiding lama, Dzongsar Jamyang Khentse, is reported to have explained to all present at the time that "...the main purpose of a Beyul was conservation of natural resources." He pointed out that the main difference between the mundane world and Beyul life is that while the former live lavishly, the latter follow subsistence living. They farm and grow just enough to survive, and there is no commerce at all. "In this way, the concept of Beyul should be popularized, even in the West, to conserve the environment" (Tenzin Rigden 1994: 2).

My second example is an advertisement published in an American newsletter with an international readership. The ad concerns the marketing of certain Tibetan ritual vases that are constructed and empowered by exiled lamas then deposited outdoors to help bring about various desired positive effects: "The Earth Treasure Vase (sa-bcun-m [sic] bum-pa) is meant to bless and empower the earth where it is placed. It is a way of putting positive mind energy into the natural environment. The secret nature of the Vase is the increase of goodness and the elimination of evil... In this time of environmental crisis we need whatever help we can find to bless and empower ourselves and the earth for future life and nourishment for all sentient beings" (Anon. 1993a). According to the sales pitch in the text, these traditional environmental aids are now available to modern users for a "donation" of only US$45.

Whatever we may think about their effectiveness or otherwise, the offer of such green traditions is an assertion by some modern Tibetan peoples that their own "unique culture" is a valid and even important one for the contemporary world, rather than merely a curious product of a bygone age.

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28 In the Tibetan textual accounts of beyül the agriculture in such "hidden lands" is usually described with crops that require no cultivation but grow by themselves, or as having a full range of grains and legumes as might be found on the plains of India rather than the high Himalaya, or yielding barley with phenomenal nutrient values, and so on. Agricultural tools are either hidden in these places, or guides instruct one to carry them in at the time of entry; see, for instance, Brauen-Dolma (1985: 249) and Reinhard (1978: 23-26).

29 Namkhai Norbu's interesting explanation (in Tibetan and English) of this tradition as it existed in pre-modern Tibet is recorded in Tucci (1966: 157-162, 187-8).
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