A Thorn in the Dragon's Side

Tibetan Buddhist Culture in China
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The present conflicted situation and its origins and discover what it has to tell us of the uneasy balance between religious freedom and religious restriction in contemporary China.

POLITICAL AND CULTURAL TIBET

"Tibet," as we use the term in English, is an ambiguous designation. It refers both to a political entity and to the entire territory inhabited by ethnic Tibetans and bound together not by political union but by commonalities of language, history, and cultural tradition. These two Tibetans are not now, and indeed seldom have been, geographically congruent. The ambiguity of Tibet may be explained in part historically: During some periods in Tibet's earlier history and under the regime of the fifth Dalai Lama, founded in 1645, political Tibet did correspond closely with the Tibetan cultural area, the vast region known in Tibetan as 'the three provinces' (dri la mun). Since then, the fifth Dalai Lama's successors and their regents have insisted in principle upon the legitimacy of their authority throughout this whole area. But less than a half-century after the "Great Fifth"'s death, in 1682, large parts of the eastern Tibetan provinces of Andro and Kham were incorporated by the growing Mongol empire into administrative units apart from Tibet, and they thus came under the jurisdiction of local provincial officials appointed in Beijing and not by the Lhasa government. When the thirteenth Dalai Lama declared his independence, following the fall of the Mandchus in 1911, he therefore effectively held sway in central and western Tibet but not throughout the eastern regions of the Tibetan cultural sphere. Despite efforts by his government to consolidate its authority in these areas, which resulted in some fluctuation of the borders, the Chinese Republic, who came to power in 1912, never entirely relinquished their hold over them (nor, indeed, their claim to Tibet as a whole). When the People's Republic of China (PRC) was founded in October 1949, the realm constituting the independent Tibetan policy governed from Lhasa corresponded territorially to what is today the Tibet Autonomous Region (TAR). The eastern Tibetan populations of Andro and Kham for the most part inhabited not Tibet but preferencias belonging to the Chinese provinces of Qinghai, Gansu, Sichuan, and Yunnan.

The people of these eastern Tibetan regions traditionally related to the central Tibetan regime in a number of ways. For the most part, they revered the Dalai Lama and regarded Lhasa and its shrines as the center of their spiritual and cultural world. Pilgrimage to Lhasa was an impor-
tast practice for them, and virtually all Tibetans desired to visit the sacred city at some point in their lives. Certainly there were numerous easterners—particularly among the adherents of the Gelugpa sect, with which the Dalai Lama was affiliated and which therefore dominated the political life of central Tibet—who believed the Dalai Lama to be their rightful political leader and who favored some form of political union with central Tibet. Nevertheless, the immediate political allegiance of most was to local Tibetan princes and chiefdoms, who enjoyed a high degree of autonomy under both the Manchus and the Republicans. The people of Amdo and Khams were proud of their own independent traditions, and sometimes also of their alliances with Chinese governmental authorities, who were often thought to further their local autonomy: the ruler of the principality of Nagchen, for instance, styled himself Nagchen Chagna Gyelpo, the “king of Nagchen in Qinghai.”

There is reason to believe that eastern Tibetan populations, in accord with their traditions of local rule, sometimes also enjoyed less rigidly hierarchical social relations than did the populations of political Tibet. One manifestation may have been somewhat greater scope for economic enterprise among eastern Tibetan entrepreneurs. (It seems true, at the very least, that traditional Tibet’s greatest merchant families were won by eastern Tibetan trading families. Some eastern Tibetans have been able to draw on this commercial history to achieve a relatively high degree of success in Tibetan exile communities.) Tribal patrilineal affiliation formed the fundamental organizational structures in the east, whereas the division of land and people into aristocratic and monastic estates was more characteristic of the central Tibetan polity. In their expressions of self-identity, eastern Tibetans tended to portray themselves as belonging to strong and free confederations of warriors, in contrast with central Tibetans, whom they saw as weak and subject to the whims of their lords.

The political and economic variation of the Tibetan world was complemented by a measure of religious diversity as well. Though the 17th century consolidation of Tibetan rule by the fifth Dalai Lama was accompanied by some effort to mandate adherence to the Gelugpa sect, to whose hierarchy the Dalai Lama belonged, this effort was generally less thoroughgoing in the eastern Tibetan regions than in central Tibet, and the older Tibetan religious orders accordingly were more prominent here than they were in the center. The Karma pa, for example, a line of very important branch of the Kagyu pa order, had been prominent in central Tibetan affairs from the thirteenth century onward. Though their authority was much diminished in the central regions following the rise of the Dalai Lamas, they continued to enjoy extensive, and even growing, prestige—down to our time—among Tibetans throughout the entire district of Khams that now belong to Sichuan and Yunnan. This has had significant ramifications in recent years, with the division of the central Tibetan religious leadership during the 1960s and 1970s, it was the young seventeenth Karmapa—who hailed from far-eastern Tibet (specifically, western Sichuan) and whose investiture was widely supported by religious Tibetans in the east—who emerged as the most revered figure in central Tibetan religious life following the deaths of the Panchen Lamas in 1989. (The implications of the Karmapa’s flight to India in 1959 will be considered in detail below.)

During the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries, new centers of religious learning and art developed in some parts of eastern Tibet, with patronage from local rulers, traders, and chiefs. Examples include the huge Gelukpa monastery of Labrang (Ch. Labulengsi), in Gansu Province, and the monasteries and priories of the formerly independent principality of Derge, in Sichuan. For the non-Gelukpa orders especially, the newly founded monastic colleges in the east came to function as the primary centers of religious education and scholarship, though the great Gelukpa institutions of the Lhasa region continued to attract large numbers of eastern Tibetan monks as well. In some parts of eastern Tibet, the extent of monasticism was truly staggering: in present-day Amdo (Ch. Ama) County (Tib. Rago-bzis-drong), for example, in 1911 at least 25 percent of the entire population (or roughly half of the males) were monks living in monasteries. This number was no doubt somewhat inflated, owing to the presence of large numbers of monks from neighboring districts who had joined one or another of Amdo’s famous monastic communities. Nevertheless, it does reflect the great importance that monastic Buddhism had assumed in the culture and economy of eastern Tibet, as it had throughout the Tibetan world and Mongolia more generally.

RELIGION IN TIBETAN LIFE

The institutional heart of Tibetan Buddhism is the monastery. Mass monasticism was encouraged in traditional Tibetan society, particularly after the consolidation of political power by the fifth Dalai Lama. This was justified ideologically by the notion that the monk was in an especially privileged position to avoid evil and to achieve merit, so that by maximizing monasticism the maximum merit accrued to Tibetan society as a whole and especially to those individuals and families who most contributed to the
monastic system by dedicating sons to the religious life and wealth to support religious activities. Nomadic groups in the east often felt this to be a particularly urgent matter, for the merit earned by supporting good monks and their monasteries was believed to counterbalance some extent the burden of sin that one acquired through actions prohibited by the system of religious ethics, especially the slaughter of animals, which were nevertheless unavoidable in a nomadic livelihood.13 Though worldly life was thought to be inevitably entangled in various evils, a family could still better itself spiritually by committing some sons to the clergy. And if those sons achieved religious distinction, this could sometimes also impact favorably upon the status of the family concerned. This outlook helped to sustain the large or small monasteries and shrines of various kinds that were to be found in nearly every locale.

In practical terms, the monastery fostered a concentration of cultural resources, serving as a center for education and the cultivation of the arts (though in most cases only a minority of the monks participated in these pursuits). Significantly, too, the monastery absorbed surplus labor. Whenever the rate of fertility outpaced the expansion of economic activity—and there is reason to believe that this was a regular tendency throughout much of the Tibetan world—monasticism provided a socially valued alternative to production.14 For religious girls and women, nunneries also existed, though men appear to have been less numerous than monks and seldom had access to resources for more than a rudimentary education.15 However, it is also true that more men than monks continued to live with their families, contributing to household work while also pursuing their devotions. The apparent numerical discrepancy between the male and female religious, therefore, may be due in part to the fact that relatively fewer religious women lived in specifically religious institutions.

The religious life of Tibet embraced a wide range of ritual practices whose origins and purposes were diverse. Among them were the important rituals of the central Tibetan state and of the local Tibetan polities, such as those concerned with the state oracles and protective deities, which had developed over the course of centuries as secular rites of national or regional significance. On the other end of the scale, daily observances, such as the offering of the fragrant smoke of burner juniper to the gods and spirits of the local environment, were and continue to be performed in virtually every Tibetan household. Rituals of these and other types have long been incorporated within the Buddhist religion in Tibet and have been formulated over the centuries to accord, more or less, with Buddhist doctrinal norms. The importance of religious ritual for the maintenance of health, prosperity, and peace in this life, and for securing a positive course of rebirth in the next, ensured that many types of religious specialists enjoyed an essential and honored place in traditional Tibetan society.

Most monasteries entered the monastery as children and did so at the wish of their parents. Such children were granted the essential vows of the Buddhist novitiate and became eligible to receive full ordination only in later adolescence. Rudimentary knowledge of the alphabet seems to have been relatively widespread among monks and nuns, though the numbers able or inclined to pursue a higher education in Buddhist philosophy, or in such disciplines as medicine, art, or astrology, were few. The majority of the monka participated, when possible, in prayer services sponsored by lay patrons, who offered tea, butter, grain, and cash to the assembled congregation. Monks also pursued economic or administrative activities required for their own support or for that of the monastic community. They therefore were regularly involved in commerce and in various trades. Larger monasteries had their own complex bureaucracies, in which some officers were filled according to merit and ability, and others were occupied by monks (incarnates), groomed for the task since childhood.16

Some monasteries housed colleges where advanced studies could be pursued by those motivated to do so. Aspulant mons-scholars sometimes traveled for months across the whole of the Tibetan world to enter an especially famous college, such as the Gelukpa Gomang College of Drigung Monastery, near Lhasa, or the Nyinmatap Shisimba College of Drolchen Monastery, near Derge, in modern Sichuan. Besides the economic and ritual functions of the monastery, therefore, almost the entire apparatus of Tibetan formal education was concentrated within the monasteries as well. Literacy in traditional Tibet was a predominately religious affair, and so, not surprisingly, the clerical services of trained monks were required by the old Lhasa government and by the administrations of the eastern Tibetan principalities as well.17

**TIBETAN BUDDHISM UNDER THE EARLY PEOPLE'S REPUBLIC**

As seen above, the monastic institution was central to the formation of Tibetan culture, and the monastic hierarchy, culminating in the Dalai Lama, was the focal point of cultural authority, both within and outside the territory ruled from Lhasa. Despite the very broad Tibetan consensus along these lines, there were nevertheless many variations in the ways in which particular individuals and communities positioned themselves in relation
MATTHEW F. KAPSTEIN

A THORN IN THE DRAGON'S SIDE

Sherab's attempt to find a common ground between the policies of the CCP and the interests of Tibetan Buddhism came to represent in some measure the room among educated Tibetan clergy during the 1950s. Both the Dalai Lama and the Panchen Lama embraced the hopeful idea that Mao Zedong's revolution had room for their religion and indeed, that the ethical concern of Mahayana Buddhism for universal well-being—which, though widely preached in theory, was imperfectly actualized in traditional society—would be realized by theawning socialist order.10 Such hopes, of course, were naive, and it seems likely that Sherab recognized this early on; besides his praise for Mao in the letter quoted above, one detects a distinct element of fear for what will befall the religious establishment should they fail to toe the line.

During the late 1950s, the promise of a harmonious relationship between Chinese Communism and Tibetan Buddhism progressively came undone. The difference of circumstances prevailing between political Tibet and the eastern Tibetan districts incorporated into Chinese provincial units was of crucial importance here. In political Tibet, Mao had insisted on a policy of gradualism, convincing many Tibetans that China would desist from forcibly overturning Tibet's traditional ways. In the east, on the other hand, provincial authorities were already aggressively pursuing policies of communization, which provoked a chain of violent reactions, culminating in the formation of the "Four Rivers, Six Races" (Chu Ruh, Ganga Drug) guerrilla movement. As the monasteries were considered to be among the centers of resistance to the implementation of Communist programs and also to be giving shelter to the rebels, they became increasingly prone to direct attack, and in 1959, a number of eastern Tibetan monasteries were actually subjected to aerial bombardment. These circumstances were deeply shocking to Tibetan sensibilities and led to the flight of large numbers of easterners, both monks and laity, to central Tibet.11

It has been estimated that by the start of the Tibetan New Year in early 1959, some fifty thousand refugees from Kham and Amdo were camping in and around the capital. For many of these people, the gradualist policy pursued by the CCP in central Tibet was seen as a mere sham; their harsh experiences in the east had demonstrated the true nature of Chinese Communism in its policies toward Tibetan society and toward religion in particular. Their reports of the fighting in the east contributed directly to the volatility that was then building in Lhasa. With the events surrounding the so-called Lhasa Uprising of 1959 and the subsequent flight of the Dalai Lama to India, the steadily worsening relations between the
libraries destroyed or plundered. Tens of thousands of monks and nuns were forced to undergo "reeducation," and many perished under extraordinarily harsh conditions or suffered prolonged maltreatment in prison. The religious institutions of Tibet's old society were annulled, and few could have imagined that they would ever return. Tibet had been dragged, kicking and screaming, into one version of modernity.

A Revival and Its Vicissitudes

The conclusion of the Cultural Revolution in 1976 and the subsequent consolidation of power within the CCP by Deng Xiaoping two years later brought great changes to cultural and religious affairs throughout China. It was now generally recognized that the uncontrolled assaults on traditional cultural values and institutions had done more harm than good—it represented what the official jargon characterized as a "leftist deviation"—and that some measure of restoration in these spheres was warranted. However, it was not the case that any and all such activity was to be immediately sanctioned anew. In some cultural fields—for instance, in the study of local history—it was clear to all that renewal was essential for the contemporary social sciences, as well as for reasons of cultural preservation, and this was accordingly given sufficiently broad encouragement to usher in a veritable "local history movement." In other pursuits, especially in the religious sphere, where ideological differences between the traditional religions and the CCP could not be readily ignored, liberalization of cultural policy proceeded with greater caution. Though there were many regional differences in the manner in which new policy directives were carried out, cultural revival in Tibet unfolded within the same general parameters as did it in the rest of China. During the late 1970s and early 1980s, Tibetans—who had witnessed the destruction of their monasteries, religious artworks, and libraries, the exile of many leading authorities in areas of both religious and secular culture, and the persecution of most such persons who had remained behind—found themselves pondering both the wreckage of their civilization and the prospects for renewal that Dengist reform seemed to promise.

It was the visit to Tibet in 1980 by Party Secretary Hui Xiaobang that clearly signaled that a cultural revival was now possible. He was reported to have been genuinely appalled by conditions in the TAR in all spheres and urged that sweeping reforms be enacted. At the same time, a cautious series of contacts between Beijing and the representatives of the Dalai Lama raised hopes that the Chinese leadership was eager to find a basis for re-
oscillation with the exiled Tibetan leader. In tandem with this opening, China also began to permit some Tibetans to visit relatives and places of Buddhist pilgrimage in Nepal and India, and Tibetans living abroad, including some religious leaders, were allowed to visit their original home for the first time in over two decades. Renewed contacts between Tibetans in China and the exile community directly encouraged the restoration of aspects of traditional religious culture, and exiles who had the means to do so contributed financial as well as moral incentives. Once more, this was particularly true in eastern Tibet, where beginning in the early 1980s, important religious leaders living abroad were sometimes able to become directly involved in the restoration of their communities. (The central Tibetan religious leadership in exile, by contrast, was severely constrained in this regard.) In addition, older Tibetan religious leaders who had remained in China and had survived the Cultural Revolution were now being rehabilitated and in some cases permitted to resume their religious activities. Foremost among them was the Panchen Lama, who used his regained prestige and influence to support the religious revival to the extent possible.

Besides these developments, the post-Cultural Revolution evolution of Chinese law offered further grounds for hope. The Chinese constitution promulgated in 1982 discussed freedom of faith in its thirty-sixth article. I cite the text here according to the official Tibetan-language version:

> Citizens of the People’s Republic of China have freedom of religious faith. It is not permitted for any state office, social organization, or private individual whatsoever to coerce a citizen by force to have religious faith or not to have religious faith. It is not permitted to discriminate against a citizen who has religious faith or a citizen who does not have religious faith.
>
> The basis for state promotion of regular religious activity is this: it is forbidden for anyone, on the basis of a religion, to destroy social relations or to harm the physical health of a citizen or to obstruct the educational programs of the state. Religious associations and religious work must not be subject to foreign influence.

Of course, the mere fact that the constitution offered a qualified legal protection for religious faith was no guarantee that freedom of religious practice would be respected. Earlier Chinese constitutions had done the

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Fig. 7.2. A revival begins: pilgrims picnicking at Gaden Monastery in 1981 (Photo by Matthew T. Kapstein)

same, and as we have seen above, Tibetan religious leaders during the 1970s believed that they enjoyed similar protections. Nevertheless, in this case, additional reinforcement was offered by the CCP’s proclamation, also in 1982, of Document 19, said to have been drafted by Hu Yaobang.

Though religion is of course incompatible with the Communist ideology of atheism, Document 19 made it clear that this warranted a prohibition on the practice of religion by Party members, but that otherwise, freedom of belief was genuinely to be protected. In view of such policy directives and of the many remarkable and rapid changes taking place under Deng’s leadership, a dramatic revival of Tibetan Buddhism now ensued.

This revival in fact took many different forms. At its most basic level, it meant that ordinary believers could now engage publicly once more in a variety of devotional and ritual activities: performing prostrations and circumambulations, making offerings, and saying prayers at temples and other sacred sites; erecting prayer flags and stone walls with prayers carved upon them, copying and distributing prayer books and religious icons. The small number of temples and monasteries that had survived the Cultural Revolution in more or less usable condition began to be refurbished and reopened, and efforts were made to rebuild some that had been
destroyed. In some cases, it was even possible to secure aid from the government or some payment in compensation for the damage that had earlier been done. As the monasteries reopened, the small numbers of aged monks who remained were joined by numerous young new recruits, some entering the order in a wave of religious enthusiasm and others, following tradition, sent by their families. The restoration of religious festivals and pilgrimages was also a development welcomed by both monks and laypeople.38

Religious revival unfolded in tandem with, and in relation to, a number of other developments in the increasingly open cultural scene. Of particular importance in this regard were Tibetan-language publications, education, and cultural-relics preservation. The provincial governments that controlled eastern Tibet for the most part also began to accept a more liberal view of traditional Tibetan culture, and in these regions, in particular, religious revival activities proceeded rapidly and on an astonishingly large scale. Later, we shall turn to examine aspects of the revival in the east in greater detail.

The revival of Buddhism among Tibetans, as with religious revival in other parts of China, was an unwelcome surprise within some quarters in the CCP. Though the policy of liberalization was encouraged by Hua Yaobang and those most closely associated with him, many believed that after decades of communism, few would be interested in religion any longer. The liberalization was intended to provide an opportunity for the last vestiges of superstitions beliefs to quietly wither away. It came as a shock, therefore, to discover that religion could still appeal to large numbers of people, and, above all, to large numbers of the young. When I first began to visit Tibet, in 1984, Chinese cadres posted in Lhasa often commented to me that they had to conclude that there was something genuinely defective about the Tibetans that caused them to embrace the irrational beliefs that supposedly had long since ceased to dominate their society! (Being stationed in Tibet, of course, they were perhaps unaware that analogous "mutations" were expressing themselves among Muslims, Christians, Buddhists, and Daoists throughout China.)

The revival of Tibetan Buddhism that began over two decades ago has continued to the present, but it has nevertheless been marked by repeated tensions with the Chinese political leadership, especially in the TAR. Most dramatically, a series of demonstrations in support of the exiled Dalai Lama, staged by monks in Lhasa beginning in 1987, led to a show trial culminating in the declaration of a state of emergency in 1989.8 Since that time, the government's view of the Dalai Lama has steadily hardened, and after a period in which the expression of purely religious devotion to him was tolerated, any explicit manifestation of loyalty to him is now treated as fundamentally political in nature.

In 1989, the highest-ranking Buddhist hierarchy who had remained in Tibet after 1959, the Panchen Lama, died suddenly, and his passing led to new disputes between Chinese authorities and the partisans of the Dalai Lama. This received worldwide attention when, on 14 May 1992, the Dalai Lama and the Tibetan government-in-exile announced the discovery of the young incarnation Panchen in Tibet. The Chinese responded hardly: the acting abbot of Tashi Lhünpo Monastery, Chadrel Rinpoche, was placed under house arrest in Chengdu, Sichuan, and Gedun Choekyi Nyima, the young boy who had been recognized as the Panchen Lama by the Dalai Lama, was detained with his family. Shortly thereafter, his recognition was rejected by the Chinese government, and a lottery was held on 28 November 1995 to choose a new Panchen Lama from among several officially approved candidates. For his role in the affair, Chadrel Rinpoche was imprisoned without recognizable due process; meanwhile, the precise circumstances of the boy he had championed as the Dalai Lama's candidate remain uncertain and have become a topic of much rumor. Both the case of Chadrel Rinpoche and that of Gedun Choekyi Nyima are among those that are of particular concern to the human-rights community.39

The Dalai Lama remains of course the best-known symbol of Tibetan aspirations in the world at large and also for Tibetans themselves. One result of religious revival in post-Cultural Revolution Tibet was an outpouring of new felt devotion to him, manifest frequently in the distribution and display of his images. During the late 1980s and early 1990s, photographs of the Dalai Lama were ubiquitous and could be seen in temples, homes, shops and markets. In reaction to the Panchen Lama affair, the Party launched a campaign in April 1995 to remove such images from view, particularly from public and otherwise high-prestige venues such as schools and the homes and offices of Tibetan officials. A protest riot was reported to have broken out at Garden Monastery, which resulted in some deaths, many arrests, and new restrictions placed upon the monastery. Nevertheless, the campaign directed against the Dalai Lama has continued unabated, and by the summer of 2000, it was reported that even the homes of ordinary villagers in some districts had been searched for offending images and publications. Outside of the TAR, too, the Dalai Lama's likeness is now rarely displayed. Devotion to him continues to be evident primarily in such unpretentious practices as the recitation of prayers on behalf of his health and longevity.40
There has been other fallout from the Panchen Lama affair as well. Because the Dalai Lama's recognition is believed to be crucial for the legitimation of a new Panchen, few of the Tibetan Buddhist clergy in China have wished to affirm the legitimacy of the child enthroned with government approval. But at the same time, the government has sought to secure its position among Tibetan Buddhist believers by insisting that leading monks do make their acquiescence in this matter public and clear. The ensuing conflict is widely thought to have contributed to the decision of two of the leading hierarchs remaining in China to leave the country: the Agya Rinpoche, abbot of Sambumbi Monastery in Qinghai, in 1998, and the seventeenth Karmapa, at the end of 1999. In response, the CCP has moved to limit contact between Tibetan Buddhists in China and Lamas living abroad, so that even some who have regularly visited their home monasteries throughout the past two decades now find themselves subject to increased restrictions.

The government has also sought to promote a following for their Panchen among ordinary monks and believers, widely distributing his photographs and glowing reports of his good character and educational progress. Nevertheless, popular opinion is universally cynical. As a monk in Gantze (Sichuan) told me, "For all we care, they can dress up a monkey in lama's robes and enthrone him. But they can't make us feel faith." In fact, throughout my travels in Sichuan in the summer of 2000, I was told of the mass distribution to the monks of Tibetan New Year's cards bearing the likeness of the government's Panchen. "On New Year's we were given these cards, and by the very next day, they were all in the trash," one of the recipients told me.

Given all this, I was astonished to discover that in some of the Gelugpa monasteries in Sichuan that I visited, the monks were proudly sporting pins with photos of the state-recognized Panchen. Closer inspection, however, revealed that some clever individual had manufactured them using the face of Gomden Choekyi Nyima, the Dalai Lama's candidate, superimposed upon one of the government Panchen's ubiquitous official photographs. From a few yards' distance, one therefore had the impression that the monks were expressing their support of the government's position in this affair, whereas the opposite was in fact true. There now appears to be a certain agreement that public protests of the type we saw during the late 1980s are pointless and invite only repression; religious dissent now takes subtler forms. The deceptive Panchen Lama pin serves as an excellent metaphor for the general condition of Tibetan Buddhism in China at present—depending upon one's perspective, a single set of facts can often be read in opposite ways.

Religion and Contemporary Education

I wish to turn now to survey a number of topics that have grown out of my observations during research visits in 1998 and 2000. These include Tibetan religion in its relation to contemporary education, apparent discrepancies between religious affairs in the TAR and in the eastern Tibetan districts, and aspects of the representation of Tibetan religion in contemporary Chinese culture.

Policies and programs bearing upon Tibetan affairs during the post-Cultural Revolution era have been set by a series of "work forums."

One of the projects undertaken under directives from the first, and especially the second, forum was a thoroughgoing overhaul of Tibetan-language texts for instruction at the primary and middle-school levels. Though it is not true, as has sometimes been reported, that Tibetan-language instruction had been entirely prohibited during the Cultural Revolution, it was clear enough by the early 1980s that educational development in Tibet as a whole had been neglected and that available instructional materials were inadequate and out of date. In response, a new educational consortium among the "five autonomous regions and provinces" (Tib. jang ngang sheng chen bing yig) with Tibetan populations—the TAR, Qinghai, Gansu, Sichuan, and Yunnan—embarked upon an ambitious effort to create suitable textbooks not only for learning written Tibetan but for the whole range of required classes, including science, math, civics, geography, history, and art. For the middle-school textbooks, in particular, this demanded a remarkable effort to standardize a largely new vocabulary for subjects such as algebra, trigonometry, calculus, chemistry, biology, and physics. The publication of the resulting second-forum textbooks during the 1990s marked a signal achievement in the renewal of Tibetan as vehicle for culture and learning in contemporary China.

As might be expected, traditional Tibetan religion and subjects closely associated with religion are not among the topics prominently discussed in the new texts. Nevertheless, neither are they avoided altogether. In the elective senior-middle-language and literature texts, topics relating to Tibetan religious traditions are indeed represented. In one of these we find, for instance, a survey of key points in the system of logic that forms the basis for the practice of Buddhist monastic philosophical debate. Con-
sider the manner in which this branch of Buddhist learning is introduced here to Tibetan high schools:

Concerning the science of logic: there are many texts on the science of logic written by non-Buddhists of the noble land (Aryadeva, a traditional Sanskrit designation for India as the Buddhist holy land). Moreover, the great Buddhist scholar Dignaga composed the Compendium of Logic, and Master Dharmakirti the Seven Logical Tractates. There are many commentaries upon them, which the great translators and scholars have rendered into Tibetan and which now form about twenty volumes in the Tanjur (the canon of Indian Buddhist commentaries translated into Tibetan).

As for the commentaries on their meaning, by Tibetan authors, there are many texts authored by scholars of all the sectarian traditions, such as the Doctrinal Mirror, by Selpa Pandita in... The reason for analyzing the science of logic, that is, the science of inference, is this: provisionally, it contributes to the agility of intelligence, so that the intellect enters [new subjects] clearly and quickly, making it easy to understand the textbooks studied. Ultimately, when you investigate the underlying nature of outer objects and of the mind within, you are not like those who accept foolishness, but on the basis of your intelligence, you come to understand the real nature of outer and inner matters."

Even more striking is an account of the hardships endured by the eleventh-century poet-saint Milarepa during his apprenticeship to his guru, Marpa. This might have seemed a fine opportunity to depict traditional religious discipline and the injustices of the old Tibetan society. However, the text’s authors adhere closely to the traditional story line, which accentuates the virtues of the disciple’s faith and determination and the tantric master Marpa’s compassion and skill in using harsh discipline to bring about Milarepa’s spiritual rebirth. (The fact that tantrism is even mentioned, let alone positively valued, in a high-school text is in itself quite remarkable.)

Taken by themselves, the second-forum textbooks may therefore be seen as a hopeful sign that Tibetan-language education in China is being developed along lines that will ensure that Tibetan high-school graduates, at least, will be able both to use their native language for modern pursuits and at the same time to enjoy a wide range of traditional cultural resources, including, to some extent, the rich textual traditions of Tibetan Buddhism. Clearly, the educators involved in carrying out the second-forum program...
To begin with, there are some very strong prejudices, articulated by both Chinese and Tibetans, regarding the value of Tibetan at the present time. The Chinese headmistress of a Lhasa grade school whom I interviewed in 1958, for instance, categorically affirmed what officials in Beijing have often stated to me, namely, that the Tibetan language is, by its very nature, unsuited to be a language of modern science, technology, and commerce. Of course, there was a time not long ago when many people would have said the same thing of Chinese! This is not an exclusively Chinese prejudice, however, and one meets many Tibetans in China who affirm it as well.43 The conviction leads many, regardless of their ethnic background, to believe that the education of Tibetan children should now be conducted in Chinese to the fullest extent possible. For contemporary Tibetan parents and students, this is generally reinforced by the feeling that, regardless of linguistic considerations, it is an undeniable matter of fact that Chinese is the language needed to succeed in China today. The questions raised in this context in some respects resemble those raised wherever bilingualism has become a contested issue in education. Whatever the pedagogical arguments in this case, however, it is clear that in Lhasa, as in larger towns throughout the eastern Tibetan districts outside the TAR, many and perhaps most Tibetan students are being educated primarily or exclusively in Chinese. In some cases, one notes a reticence (or perhaps an inability) among younger Tibetans to use their native language at all.

Thus, despite the best efforts of the second-forum educators to effect some measure of accord between traditional educational values and modern educational needs, in actual practice, their program has enjoyed only restricted success. In some families, the new Tibetan textbooks have been privately purchased and are being used for supplemental lessons at home. Some Tibetans I have interviewed expressly favor this approach because it provides a means for their children to maintain something of their Tibetan identity, even while growing up in a rapidly sinicizing public culture, as exemplified at school. Not all families, however, have the means or the determination to do this, and many of the second-forum texts have, in any case fallen out of print or are unavailable in local bookshops. All in all, maintaining and improving Tibetan-language education has proven to be a difficult uphill struggle.

At the same time, religion has become involved in education in other ways. Because the monastery was traditionally the educational center of the Tibetan world, and because in many regions public education is still only poorly developed, if at all, the monasteries in some cases have begun to take up the slack. This is particularly evident, once more, outside of the TAR. Indeed, throughout eastern Tibet it is possible to speak of a "shes-drung (monastic college)" movement.

**THE BUDDHIST REVIVAL IN EASTERN TIBET**

Earlier, we noted one of the historical discrepancies between central and eastern Tibet. The division of the Tibetan world into five distinct provincial units has resulted, in the sphere of religion at least, in a broad distinction between the TAR and the eastern Tibetan regions that are contained within the four Chinese provinces of Qinghai, Gansu, Sichuan, and Yunnan. Agitation in favor of the Dalai Lama has been most persistent in the TAR,44 and accordingly, it is the TAR that has been subject to the greatest degree of scrutiny and control. But there are other pertinent differences as well: whereas Tibet is effectively ruled from Beijing, by an administration that has included many figures who are not from the TAR and often not Tibetans, the Tibetan administration in the eastern provinces, being conducted largely at lower levels of government (chiefly at county and prefectural levels), often appears to have a more genuinely local character.45 Hence, although general principles of policy are of course common to the TAR and other Tibetan regions, their interpretation and application tend nevertheless to vary regionally. One result has been that religious and cultural matters reflect a greater degree of local discretion in the east, and officials in these parts sometimes have been content to pursue a far more moderate path than in the TAR.46 In the early 1960s, the discrepancy between the TAR and the eastern Tibetan regions was already evident in Tibetan publishing: whereas the official publishing house (chiefly the various dkar-chamden, or "ethnic publishing houses") in the TAR shed away from purely religious matters at that time, as well as from modern literature that might be considered too daring, editors in Qinghai, Gansu, and Sichuan permitted far greater leeway in both genre and content. This difference in the application of recently liberalized publishing policy—marketed conservation in the TAR versus a relatively liberal approach in the east—has continued to characterize cultural and religious affairs overall.47 In the field of monastic education, the most remarkable developments in eastern Tibet during the 1960s and 1970s were no doubt the re-establishment of the monastic colleges of Labrang in Gansu and the foundation of the Higher Buddhist Studies Institute by Khenpo Jigme
in Serra County, Sichuan. These centers have been studied elsewhere, so I will offer only a few remarks about them here.

Labrang, founded early in the eighteenth century, was long renowned as the greatest center of Gelukpa learning and hierarchical authority in far northeastern Tibet and, given its strategic location, played an important role in relations among Tibetans, Mongols, and Chinese governments from the Qing dynasty onwards (and among the often-warring Buddhist and Muslim tribal groups of Qinghai and Gansu, such as the Mongoyal (Turan and Salar). Its elaborate college system included six specialized faculties, teaching not only the standard Buddhist doctrinal topics (chiefly logic, metaphysics, and the monastic code) but medicine and astrology as well. During the 1980s, the monastic order devoted to revive these programs, and by 1990, when I first visited, the provincial government had accepted Labrang’s *gala*—its highest academic degree—as equivalent to a doctorate (Ch. *zhushu*). Indeed, when I visited the Muslim Madrasah in Lhasa the same year, one of the complaints I heard was that whereas the Buddhists were permitted to grant doctoral degrees, the highest recognized Muslim degree was considered equivalent only to a master’s (Ch. *zishu*). Labrang continues to attract large numbers of aspirants today and is no doubt the finest Gelukpa educational institution in China.

This has become a problem of sorts, however, for traditionally, only those whose monasteries were directly affiliated with Labrang pursued their higher studies there. For scholars at many of the other Gelukpa centers in eastern Tibet, it would have been inappropriate to enroll at Labrang; instead, enrollment at one or another of the major monasteries in central Tibet would have been the proper path to follow. However, the political situation in the TAR and the related failure of the Lhasa monasteries to establish viable educational programs on a significant scale have meant that for many of the brightest young Gelukpa monks in Kham and Amdo, the only alternative is to find some means to travel to India to continue their studies. The hierarchy of Labrang, which wishes neither to be seen as usurping the traditional role of the central Tibetan colleges, its historical superiority in the order, nor to become involved in current Tibetan political contests, has therefore sought to distance itself from Gelukpa affairs elsewhere.

The Buddhist Studies Institute in Serra, a remote Tibetan county in Sichuan, bordering on Qinghai, emerged in the 1990s as one of the most dynamic centers for the study of Buddhist philosophy and meditation, not just in Tibetan regions but in China overall. During the summer of
2000, when I passed nearby, there were 9,000 residents, including several hundred Han Buddhists from China’s eastern provinces. Khempo Jikphun’s reputation as a charismatic, visionary teacher, one who has reached out to embrace all of China’s Buddhist communities, has, together with knowledge of his efforts to establish Buddhist education at a high level, spread throughout China, and his followers now constitute a virtually identifiable movement. In accordance with the traditions of the Nyingmapa order, with which Khempo Jikphun is affiliated, those who complete the institute’s curriculum receive the degree of lama (literally, preceptor).

The restoration of Buddhist teaching activities on a significant scale, as represented both by Lhahab and by the institute at Serta, has done much to inspire a widespread Buddhist educational movement in eastern Tibet. Most important, however, is that these and other major centers have produced a new generation of educated Buddhist clergymen—geshe and lamas—who have begun to teach in their own right throughout the eastern districts. At the same time, too, other, smaller religious establishments have also begun to produce new teachers. In the course of my travels in July 2000 and October 2001, I was able to visit more than a dozen such establishments, as well as two secular schools established by religious leaders on behalf of the lay community, located in the Ama and Ganza Autonomous Prefectures (AAP and GAP) of Sichuan Province. A few examples will illustrate some of the diversity among current religiously motivated educational projects.

Soon after I arrived at the county seat of Barkham in July 2000, Tibetan acquaintances told me enthusiastically of the development of a monastic school at the meditation cave of Vairocan, a famous pilgrimage site located about fifteen kilometers from the town. Established by Aku Dorlo, a lama originally from Mowa (modern Hongyu County), who is widely respected for his learning and strict adherence to the code of monastic discipline, the small school and retreat center hosts a community of some thirty dedicated disciples who have come for training in Buddhist philosophy and contemplative practice. After hiking up the wooded trail to the cave, I found that it was sufficiently expansive for a small temple and the lama’s personal residence to have been built within its mouth. Its walls were decorated with colorfully painted reliefs depicting the renowned saints of Indian and Tibetan Buddhism, and prominently posted at the entrance was a list of the texts students are expected to master as part of the curriculum, including the classics of the Indian Mahayana and the works of famed Tibetan teachers. A num-
the best Nyungmapa scholars would enroll to complete their studies of advanced subjects in Buddhist doctrine and philosophy. In the course of its revival, however, it soon emerged that while there was indeed a continuity among Nyungmapa adherents who wished to enter Shriima with such higher studies in mind, there were also large numbers of families in the surrounding area who wanted to send their young children to Drokchen to be cared for and educated. At present, Shriima has roughly four hundred students, more than half of whom are such children, in need of primary schooling. Necessarily, its doblo has assumed a rather different character from Aku Doelo’s much smaller establishment.

Drokchen Monastery has become involved in primary education in large part because the mostly nomadic families who send their children there do not have ready access to other schools. Indeed, this is the case throughout much of eastern Tibet and helps to account for an important dimension of the doblo movement. At monasteries like Drokchen, where religious leaders have recognized that primary education is now an essential task for their communities overall, the monastic schools have slowly attempted to adapt to these circumstances. At Drokchen, for instance, it is acknowledged that many of the children now in the monastery will not continue a religious vocation throughout their lives. The monastery’s leaders believe that these children should receive an education that will serve them well if and when they leave monastic life and indeed, that those who remain monks will benefit as well by studying some of the subjects that are parts of the compulsory curriculum for Chinese schools. Hence, in addition to their prayers, Tibetan grammar, and Malayana Buddhist ethics and metaphysics, the novices at Drokchen now also have lessons in math and Chinese.

The dorms near Barcham and at Drokchen represent the primary poles around which religious education in eastern Tibet now revolves, on the one hand focusing strictly upon the needs and interests of advanced Buddhist scholars, and on the other, becoming more actively engaged in general education. Indeed, in some cases, eastern Tibetan religious leaders have fully embraced the latter course and have founded schools whose pupils are ordinary children, not even novice monks. At Lhagang, for example, a young and progressive Nyungmapa tilkha has established a boarding school for orphaned nomad children. And at Dhargyay Monastery, near Gause, drawing on Gause’s famous tradition as a center of painting and sculpture, founded is art school for local youth that in recent years has begun to offer general vocational training. Given the evident commitment of many eastern Tibetan clergymen to Tibetan edu-

A Thorn in the Dragon’s Side

cation overall, it is not unimaginable that should sufficiently liberal conditions be allowed to develop and to prevail, a loosely organized Buddhist parochial-school system might flourish in eastern Tibet. It remains questionable, however, whether or not the local and provincial governments would permit such developments to proceed unabated.

Whatever the future holds in store, some patterns may be observed that help us to understand why currently there are some eastern Tibetan religious communities that seem to enjoy relatively liberal conditions while others are far more restricted. I shall attempt to characterize these here in terms of a small number of fundamental oppositions, but the reader must bear in mind that the real-world conditions prevailing in any given community cannot be predicted directly from any one of these oppositions alone. Indeed, there may be some cases that prove to be entirely exceptional, and which reflect solely the vagaries of local circumstance.

The conditions prevailing in “Tibet outside the TAR” suggest that when it comes to Tibetan religious and cultural revival, distance from Lhasa is a valuable asset. Lhasa, as the traditional center for Tibetan religion and politics, remains an important focus of pilgrimage but also an important focus of national sentiment; hence, conditions there can be especially volatile. Demonstrations for Tibetan freedom occurred in many parts of the Tibetan world during the 1980s and 1990s, and they were harshly suppressed, but the ones in Lhasa were particularly heated and became internationally known. For this reason, Lhasa’s place in contemporary China is that of a city subject to especially close scrutiny. Religious activity, owing to the manner in which it has been tied to political activity in and around Lhasa, is a matter of special sensitivity there. One factor that has anchored the religious in eastern Tibet, therefore, is the simple fact that their activities are greatly removed from Lhasa.

The tensions that inform the scene in Lhasa, however, are recapitulated to one degree or another in the larger towns throughout the Tibetan world. Shigatse (Ta-l), Derge (Sichuan), Ganne (Sichuan), Xiehe (the location of Labrang Monastery, in Ganne), and Aha County (Sichuan), among many others, all have had—and Shigatse, by virtue of its special ties to the Panchen Lama, certainly continues to have—the potential for religion and politics to blend together in an explosive brew. As a result, even in the eastern Tibetan districts, religious centers in close proximity to the towns are frequently more constrained than are their rural counterparts.

A second point of relevance is highlighted by the saying “Small is beautiful.” Though there are a number of large monastic communities that have succeeded in achieving remarkable success in recent years, small-
middle-sized institutions seem often to enjoy greater freedom from close supervision. Despite this, given the traditional ethos of mass monasticism, many larger monasteries have wished to return to their former size, even while recognizing that this might create new difficulties for them. The Ganez Monastery, for instance, is now allowed by the government to have 600 resident monks but in fact had only 400 when I visited in 2000. It may appear that this is a relatively positive situation, for the local government has clearly left some scope for growth, and this contrasts favorably with the circumstances one regularly encounters in the TAR, where the numbers permitted are often far lower than the numbers actually in residence. Still, some monks at Ganez complained to me about the numerical restriction, saying that before 1959, there were 4,000 monks in their community, and so 1,000 it should still be.

Moreover, absolute numbers are not by themselves the crucial matter. In some cases involving religious communities in remote districts, removed from important towns, the numbers of residents are astonishingly large. The Institute at Sera, as we have seen, was until very recently a case in point. What does seem to be crucial in such instances, however, is that a low profile is maintained and that political activism is scrupulously avoided. A small number of dissenting monks surely do more to arouse official interest (and wrath) than does a large cohort of unemotional students and meditators.

A further opposition of importance here is that between the Gelukpa and non-Gelukpa orders of Tibetan Buddhism. Though the Dalai Lama is revered by virtually all religious Tibetans, he belongs to a preeminent incarnation line of the Gelukpa order and thus enjoys a special position within the Gelukpa hierarchy. Owing to this, it is virtually impossible for Gelukpa monks to minimize or to disguise their allegiance and devotion to the Dalai Lama, though monks of the other orders can often remain diffident on this score. For similar reasons, Gelukpa monks tend to be more demonstrative of their support for Dharma’s position in the Panchen Lama affair—this was illustrated above with reference to the intentionally deceptive buttons sported by some of the monks I met. It comes as no surprise, therefore, to learn that political-education campaigns have been especially intensive in the larger Gelukpa monasteries and that accordingly, the discontent of the Gelukpa clergy is more overt. Once more, however, it must be emphasized that this is not an absolute point of division: Gelukpa monks and monasteries have sometimes found viable accommodations with the state—Labrang is perhaps the best example—and

members of the other orders have at times come into conflict with political authority as well.

The last variable I wish to mention turns on relations with the Tibetan community at large. Since the early 1990s, when contacts were renewed between exiles and their native homes, the revival of some monasteries has depended to a very great degree on such connections. Direct financial aid from the outside is not all that is at stake here; the return visit of a renowned lama now living abroad will often galvanize local devotion and donations to the monastery with which he is affiliated. The knowledge, on the part of both monks and lay believers, that they are connected to an institution that derives its spiritual prestige from a known living master, whether at home or abroad, can do much to reinforce their motivation and sense of purpose. In general, once more, the discrepancy between the TAR and the other Tibetan districts is apparent: monasteries that have been able to sustain strong connections with their leadership in exile seem to be far more numerous outside of the TAR.

The manner in which the oppositions noted here influence the freedoms or restrictions felt in particular communities varies considerably. Local conditions in general play some role in this regard, as do the ad hoc decisions of local officials and the savvy of the local religious leadership. Though provincial and prefectural governments exercise a large measure of authority in this regard, the determination of the number of residents permitted at a given monastery, permission for or refusal of an exile lama’s visit, the duration of such a visit if it is permitted, restrictions placed on the visiting teacher’s activities—these and more are frequently within the purview of prefectural or county officials, and inconsistencies from one district to the next are therefore by no means unknown.
that the music blaring from loudspeakers in the background was sung by
the Tibetan pop star Jamyang Drolma and that drifting through the laug-
ter and foam in China’s capital and following each verse sung in Chinese,
her refrain was the Tibetan Buddhist mantra of compassion: “Om mani-
padme hum.” On calling the attention of one of my companions at a beer
stall to the music, he immediately signaled his recognition: “It’s that
Tibetan singer, isn’t it? She’s really good!”

Besides Jamyang Drolma, there are other Tibetan artists who have suc-
ceeded in breaking into mainstream Chinese media in recent years.
Dechen Wangmo can often be seen in her popular music-video perform-
ance “Wo shi Xizangge haiye” (“I am a child of Tibet”). The travel-brochure
imagery of the video suggests a nostalgic and idealized Tibet, a Tibet now
also frequently depicted in beer and beverage ads, where images of gla-
cial purity suggest, perhaps, both a paradise and a frontier to east-coast
Chinese viewers, for whom both snow and vast, open spaces often belong
only in dreams. If the “shangri-laification” of Tibet is a cultural phenom-
emon that is sufficiently advanced in the West as to have drawn decon-
structive criticism, it is a phenomenon just now beginning in China.

Besides purity, the Tibet of the contemporary Chinese imagination—
like other places of the imagination that are at once both dangerous and
alluring—conveys also associations of uncanny powers, whether erotic,
thumintriguing, or spiritual. Sex shops in China’s cities and towns promi-
nently display a male potency-enhancing product called Vajra Divinity
Oil (Jingang Shen You), sold in colorful packages adorned with a pho-
tograph of the Potala Palace in Lhasa, above which is superimposed, incon-
gruously, a blood couple in steamy embrace. Current fascination with
Tibetan Buddhism and especially tantrism is in evidence in the bookshops
as well: popular introductions to Tibetan religion, colorful picture books
filled with images of Tibetan thangka paintings, and some serious schol-
arship, including Chinese translations of Tibetan Buddhist texts, have all
become notably plentiful. Recent televised documentaries, such as one
about the Chastdo region of the TAR, seen on a Chengdu station, now
rarely depict not only Tibetan scenery and folklore but also Tibetan Bud-
dhism devotional practice, in an idealized manner that would have been
unimaginable just a decade ago.

Corresponding with all of this is a remarkable upsurge of involvement
in Tibetan spirituality on the part of Chinese seekers, who in many respects
resemble their counterparts among the Westerners who flocked to attend the
教ings of lamas in Europe and the Americas. To some degree, they rep-
resent a general interest in Tibetan Buddhism that one now finds expressed

Fig. 76. Buddhism sells: a billboard advertisement for China Telecom featuring
three young monks showing off their cell phones (Photo by Matthew T. Kapstein)
in Chinese communities throughout the world, but most especially in Southeast Asia, Hong Kong, and Taiwan. That is to say, in precisely those communities that interact most intensively with the Chinese mainland overall. Chinese Buddhist pilgrims from these places are now counted among the most frequent visitors to the Tao (or, of course, together with large numbers of nonreligious Chinese tourists of various stripes). And during my journeys in eastern Tibet, I met Chinese students of Buddhism at many of the monasteries I visited. Though the majority were of college age, not all were young by any means. At one Nyinyangpuk center, for instance, I enjoyed a tutorial conversation with the chairman of a major academic department at one of China’s most prestigious east-coast universities, who had come to seek the resident lama’s guidance in meditation.

Whatever official representations of Tibetan and Tibetan culture may be, some Chinese are now encountering Tibet in other terms—whether through advertising and media or owing to their own interest and inclination. Ironically, therefore—despite all the trials Tibetans have faced and continue to face in attempting to secure the survival of their culture in China—Tibetan culture has begun to emerge in some respects as part of Chinese culture overall. This may yet prove to be an ephemeral and relatively unimportant development, but it is a trend that has the potential to affect (for better or for worse) China’s policies toward Tibetan religion and culture in the future.

CONCLUSION

What general lessons can we draw from the foregoing observations? Given the extraordinary dynamism of contemporary China, which is subject to an unprecedented current of economic and cultural forces, one hesitates to draw any firm conclusions at all. Nevertheless, I think that a few points clearly warrant my touching on them.

Despite the view of some in the CCP that religion was effectively supplanted by socialism and persisted only among the most backward, the cultural role of religion has continued or even expanded in many communities in China. That Tibetan nomads and yuppies from the eastern cities may be found assembling together to receive lama’s blessings speaks miles for the broad sweep of newfound religiosity in China. This is not to say, of course, that all are similarly motivated. Whereas the recent upsurge of consumerism has many young Tibetans, like their Chinese counterparts, more interested in the latest model SUV players than in their religion, the reverse may also be true—more than once did I find modern gadgetry used to play prayer services, not rock. And the east-coast Chinese professionals who now, on pilgrimage, sometimes rub shoulders with people from the eastern province of Kham are not, after all, traditional believers; rather, they are the first beneficiaries of the prosperity ushered in by Dengist reform.

In part, one is impressed that there has been a genuine, though halting, progress of religious freedom in China (particularly if one’s time frame extends back to the period of the Cultural Revolution and just after). Tibetan monks, traditional lay devotees, and young Chinese enthusiasts are all enjoying a degree of liberty and openness in their spiritual lives that would have been unimaginable just two decades ago. This is not to say, however, that China is, by any measure, a place of religious freedom as we conceive of it. Nor is it to deny the plentiful evidence of tightening control of Tibetan Buddhism throughout the 1990s, particularly following the contested recognition of the Panchen Lama. The twin phenomena of increasing freedom and continuing repression in China’s religious life may appear paradoxical, but in some respects, this only mirrors deeper paradoxes at the heart of China’s ongoing experiment with economic opening and reform under a Communist regime.

It is clear that the relationship of the CCP to the developments within Tibetan Buddhism that I have described here remains an uneasy one. If some within the Party have been at times prepared to adopt a liberal stand-point, holding in effect that it serves no purpose to make trouble with believers unless believers make trouble first, there are also those who regard the new rise of religion to be inherently problematic. Thus, over and against the relatively liberal environment for Tibetan religion in Sichuan, one also hears the Party leadership in that province declaring that Tibetans have been devoting too much of their energy and resources to their religion and that this is felt to be wasteful. On occasion, too, there are official interventions that appear to compromise religious liberties that elsewhere would be considered unacceptable. In the often conflicting reports regarding attempts by the government to limit the size of Khampo Tsephel’s institute in Serta, for instance, one of the constant themes heard is that the presence there of large numbers of east-coast Chinese disciples is regarded as a matter of special concern.

Besides the questions pertaining to religious freedom per se, the reassessment of religion in Tibetan communities raises other pertinent issues. One of these is a question central to sociologist Richard Madsen’s recent work on China’s Catholic communities, how, he asks, might contemporary Chinese religious communities contribute to the formation of civil soci-
ety in China. Reflected here is a preoccupation on the part of many who study the liberalization of authoritarian regimes with the emergence of new forms of association thought to be consistent with and supportive of further liberalization and eventual democratization. Civil society, manifest particularly in the growth of local, nongovernmental aid organizations, is the paradigmatic exemplification of these new forms of association. Of course, it remains questionable whether any phenomenon that we would wish unreservedly to characterize as belonging to civil society has so far emerged in China. And in the Tibetan regions, which are among China's most politically and economically backward, the prospects for civil society are particularly poor. Nevertheless, the question helps us to discern an additional point of interest in some of the developments we have surveyed above.

In the TAR, where religious affairs seem largely bifurcated between institutions that are thoroughly controlled or monitored by the government and local agents (or organizational collectives of such agents) that function either in explicit or tacit opposition to political authority, it appears that the Buddhist revival contributes little to the formation of civil society and has only a meager potential to do so. There has been virtually no scope in the TAR for more or less independent religious institution building of a type that would contribute to progressive developments within contemporary Tibetan society. Moreover, given the traditional Tibetan Buddhist insistence upon the unalterable brightness of most worldly life and monasticism as an almost exclusive remedy for that condition, purely traditional ways of thought provide few resources for tackling the problems that aid organizations in contemporary society must address.

In the east, however, religious revival has so far advanced under sufficient liberal conditions (at least, when compared to the TAR) that a new generation of enterprising and forward-looking clergy have been able to begin to address communal needs for welfare and education. Where this has occurred, with the exception of the Dunghang, the orphanage at Lhasa, or the primary-school facilities of the Drepung Monastery, there is the emerging promise of a form of institution building that is reasonably independent from, though at the same time constructively related to, the official administration. Under such circumstances, the advancement of Buddhist religious institutions does appear potentially to support the formation of civil associations. Whether the potential we note here will be realized in the coming years, however, cannot as yet be determined. Indications that some within the present CCP leadership

NOTES

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1. For an example of this perspective, see Powers, Introductory in Tibetan Buddhism, 18: “Due to the diaspora of the Tibetan people brought about by the invasion and occupation of Tibet by China, today Tibetan religion and culture are being spread all over the world, and increasing numbers of people in the West consider themselves to be adherents of Tibetan Buddhism. Million more have been reading books and articles by Tibetan teachers, with the result that Tibetan culture is attracting unprecedented attention outside its homeland at the same time that it is being systematically eradicated in the land of its origin.”

2. See, for example, “Conradie Li’s Buddhist Speech.” A new ruler, the Dalai Lama was the upholder, [16] says, he betrayed the motherland and fled abroad. Since then he has been engaged in activities aimed at splitting the motherland and has served as a tool of the international anti-China forces. What the Dalai Lama has done in the Tibet Pandemon Lama incident has proved once again that he has neither given up his old dream of becoming the ‘king of Tibet’, nor changed his ethnic separatist stance in defiance of the central government. Hence the… [12] billion Chinese people including the masses of Tibetan compatriots will by no means let the Dalai Lama get away with his scheme.”

3. The most recent published official figures I have at my disposal are those given in Lai religion, p. 5. Here, it must be noted that for all forms of Buddhism in China, there are at present 13,000 monasteries and 700,000 monks. The breakdown that follows, however, supports somewhat lower figures: Chinese Buddhism is said to account for over 5,000 temples and 50,000 monks and nuns. “Lamins,” used here to designate the Buddhism practiced by Tibetans, Mongols, Turks, Uyghurs, Naxi, Pumi, and Miao, accounts for 10,000 monks and nuns, more than 300 “living Buddhas” (Th. rilbu, Ch. 里布), and 3,000 laymen. In addition, there are about 9,000 Trizhawa monk- and nun-forming temples and 1,400 temples among the Dal and other ethnic groups in southern China. In other words, this yields a total of approximately 150,000 monks and nuns and at least 9,000 temples and monasteries. Whatever the basis for these published figures, my own observations suggest that there are now likely to be over 100,000 monks and nuns in eastern Tibet, registering the TAR. The basis for my assessment is as follows: Lhasang Monastery in Ganyin Prefecture (Ganziz) and in branch monasteries in Ganziz, Abo (Sichuan), and the adjacent counties of southeastern Qinghai have 20,000 monks. The Lamazong monasteries of Abo Prefecture (Sichuan) and Darog and Gabin Counties (Qinghai) have 25,000 monks. Khenpo Jigme Rinpoche’s Higher Buddhist Studies Institute in Serta County (Sichuan) had 9,000 monks and nuns in residence in
July 2000. At the same time, Lhasa Monastery and its branches in Serta had 3,500 monks, of whom as many as 2,000 were then studying at Khampu (Shipchchen’s) monasteries. These figures, all of which came from sources I regarded as highly reliable, yield a total of 35,400 monks and nuns. But this represents only a minority of the eastern Tibetan monasteries and monastic systems. Other than Labrang and its affiliates, it includes none of the eastern Tibetan Gelpa groups, nor any major centers at Kumbum (Qogqul) and Lhasa (Shigatse). Nor does it include any of the monasteries of the Sakya or Kagyu orders, or of the Sera religion. Among the Nyengagpas, it omits Konka, Drünkchen, Zhekden, and Degek Monasteries and their numerous affiliated monasteries. Hence, it includes the entire widespread Ngakpa monastic system with the exception of Shanka, which is affiliated with Nyingma. Approximations supplied by local officials and monastic leaders suggest that the monasteries and monastic systems just mentioned would add 40,000-50,000 to the total number of monks and nuns, and there are many monasteries that still are not included in these groupings.

In sum, I am inclined to hold that the official figure of 120,000 Tibetan Buddhist monks and nuns given in Le religion in 1997 may well be reasonably close and is not the product of a deliberate attempt to buff up the numbers for propaganda purposes. It is notable, moreover, that the official figures firmly support the general impression that monastic revival has proceeded much farther among Tibetans and other adherents of Tibetan Buddhism in China than among other Buddhist groups.

Relevant reports include Asia Watch Committee, Human Rights Tibet: Tibetan Information Network and Human Rights Watch/Asia, Cutting off the Serpent’s Head: Human Rights Watch/Asia, China: State Control, chap. 8; Spiegel, Tibet since 1990, and Marshall, Rolling.

3. The three provinces are Xizang (central Tibet), corresponding to the present TAR, excepting its easternmost counties; Amdo, embracing Qogqul, Gannan, and Tsamtho Prefectures in Gansu and Aba Prefecture in Sichuan, and Kham, including the remaining Tibetan districts of Sichuan, Yunnan, and the eastern parts of the TAR. (Note that in this grouping, the western Tibetan districts of Ngari and adjacent areas are partly included in Xizang, though they are not properly speaking, parts of central Tibet.)

4. The finest study of this period in Sino-Tibetan relations remains Peneh, China and Tibet.

5. For the perspective of an official of the old Tibetan government on the shifting political status of the eastern Tibetan regions, see Shalpaka, Tibet, chaps. 9 and 10. Goldsmith, History of Modern Tibet, 191-97, 209-211, illustrates the factor of border fluctuations in Khampa. See also the remarks of Shalpa, Dangpo in the Land of Snows, 119.

6. Ethnographic data on Khampa and Amdo are surveyed in Samuel, Critical Shifts, chaps. 4 and 5. Note: there are substantial populations in these regions who were adherents of Tibetan Buddhism but were not ethnically Tibetan. Examples include the Mongol and Mongow (Naxi peoples of Qogqul and at least some among the Yi of Sichuan. To speak only of Tibetans in the present context, as I do here, is therefore to some degree a simplification.

7. This is not to say, of course, that eastern Tibetan society was indeed egalitarian. Local hierarchies, both political and religious, played important roles here as well. The impression remains, however, that stratification was far less rigid than it was within the central Tibetan estate system.

8. The religious changes mandated by the fifth Dalai Lama’s regime have yet to be studied in depth. A pointer of departure may be found in Dung-dkar Blo-brang ‘Phobtsan lama, D’ai dzam-rol mo gyur-lung; but also see, e.g., 97-122.

9. According to information supplied to me by the Aba County Religious Affairs Bureau in August 1992, there were 7,500 monks in the total 1991 population of 25,000. At the time of my visit, there was estimated to be 5,500 monks in a total of 50,000, or approximately 11 percent of the males.

10. Samuel, Critical Shifts, chap. 1, summarizes the current rather tenuous state of knowledge of post-esoteric levels of monasticism in the various Tibetan regions. For Tibet proper (the region now comprising the TAR), see also Goldstein, History of Modern Tibet, 137-52, s. n. 12.

11. See n. 10, above, and Goldstein and Kapstein, Buddhism in Contemporary Tibet, chap. 2.

12. Animal slaughter is often the subject of sermonsizing in eastern Tibetan religious literature and was clearly felt to pose a moral dilemma. See my remarks on this in Heber, Proceedings of the Ninth Symposium. During my travels in October 2000, I noticed that a recent sermon by Khenpos Jigmes that condemned the development of slaughterhouses in eastern Tibetan monastic diets was prominently posted at many monasteries.

13. The development of monasticism among the Sherpas, people of Nepal is a well-documented case in point. See especially Orner, Himal Buddha.


15. For an ethnography of a large traditional Tibetan monastery, see Li, Labong. Le fukchos carre was carried out in 1989-1994.


18. Welch, Buddhist Revival, 175, describes his early career in brief. "Early in 1979 the Nationalists invited Shokpo Jampa [Shokpo Gyatso], an eminent scholar, to lecture at five Chinese universities. This was the first time a Tibetan instructor had been provided for Chinese university students. Shokpo, like the Panchen and Noem-woa, was out of touch with Lhasa. Soon he too received a series of official letters." Shokpo’s troubles with Lhasa had been due to an editorial disagreement with the thirteenth Dalai Lama, who had appointed him editor-in-chief for a new Lhasa edition of the Tibetan Buddhist canon. Welch went on to observe: "I was also told that Shokpo Jampa . . . was never liked as a person nor great (i.e., by the Lhasa government). I myself have heard the Dalai Lama express deep respect for Shokpo as an eminent scholar whose only fault was that he had led him to make such remonstrations in the Trigpah, thus incurring the censure of the previous Dalai Lama. Despite Shokpo’s collaborations with the Nationalists and later with the Communists, 'no one had the right to say he was pro-Chinese'. Tibetan monks do not like to air their dirty linen in public, and Tibetan lamas in particular observe the rule that
MATTHEW T. KAPSTEIN

no monk should speak ill of another. Therefore, even more than in the case of
Chinese Buddhism, it is efficient for the outsider to get an accurate picture of frac-
tional struggles (197–207, 213).
23. See e.g. Richard B. Bernocchi, *The history of Shangrila: The discovery of the ancient, 470–77. Note that
some of the political terms used in this passage are directly transcribed from Chi-
inese, e.g. example, lihun bu (reactionary) (Ch. fushan) and lihe tu (policy) (Ch. shilue).
24. The Dalai Lama has continued to espouse a markedly generous view of Marx-
ist theory, as is reflected in a characteristic statement cited in *Avedon, In Exile*, 106: “Now, theoretically, Marxism also stands for the majority—the working class. This touches me, yet there is something wrong with its implementation in the
present Communist states.”
25. Shaluy, *Domago in the Land of Swans*, chap. 4–5, surveys the transforma-
tions of Tibetan relations with China during this period.
offers the fullest discussion of these matters to date, though it is occasion-
ally marred by a penchant for jaundiced hyperbole.)
27. Shaluy, *Domago in the Land of Swans*, chap. 12, surveys the Cultural Revo-
lution in Tibet. For personal testimonies, see Kaping, *Tibet*; and Goldstein, *Siebenmachen, and Turting, Struggle for Modern Tibet*.
28. Aspects of recent Chinese historiography are also studied in Unger, *Using the Past*.
31. Kunyao iron no chongao gos sotseu caged by hery bender after being taken to be
33. Four case studies documenting particular aspects of the religious revival in the
TAR, Sichuan, and Qinghai may be found in Goldstein and Kapstein, *Bud-
thism in Contemporary Tibet*.
34. For an analysis of these events, see Schwartz, *Circles of Power*.
35. On Chödrel Rimpoché’s death, see Hutton, *Shaluy*, 299–301. At present,
he is reported to be imprisoned in Sichuan Province near Danzuo (now
part of Chagye County). The fate of Gendun Choephel Nyima is unknown.
36. Nevertheless, in some parts of Sichuan, images of the Dalai Lama were return-
ing to public view during the summer and autumn of 2002.
37. It appears that the new, persuasive policy via the visits of lamas living abroad
was decided upon by a party meeting in May 2002.
38. The first and second Tibetan work forums are surveyed in Shaluy, *Domago in the Land of Swans*, 367–98. Their impromptu calls for education policy, in partic-
ular, are discussed in *Basu, Education in Tibet*, 71–74.
39. On the development of Tibetan education in the TAR, see *Basu, Education in Tibet*. Upon, “Schooling in Shangri-La,” captures the use of modern literature in

A THORN IN THE DRAGON’S SIDE

Tibetan education in parts of Sichuan. My knowledge of the textbooks developed
under the directives of the second work forum is due to research in Lhasa during the
summer of 1996, which allowed me to survey and collect these texts and to
interview educators and families about them.
40. Basu, *Education in Tibet*, 95–106, tells how religion has been a problematic
issue in primary-school curriculum development.
41. Shaluy, *Domago in the Land of Swans*, 367–98. In this section, I have es-
tered the same considerations that in the Tibetan language yields better results in
Tibetan schools, even where one of the main concerns is learning Chinese as a
second language, an issue that has been discussed in an article in *Nobes, Education in Tibet* who are quite insistent that instruction in the Tibetan language yields better results in
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second language, an issue that has been discussed in an article in *Nobes, Education in Tibet* who are quite insistent that instruction in the Tibetan language yields better results in
48. Eastern Tibetan Gelukpa monasteries generally were affiliated with specific colleges in the three great central Tibetan monastic series; in some cases, with Tashi Delpa, the Panchen Lama's monastery in Sogtse. Labrang and its branches, for instance, were themselves affiliated with the Gomang College of Drepung Monastery, so that even though Labrang was itself a diocesan and center of learning, many Labrang monks would traditionally travel to Lhasa to finish their studies at Gomang.

49. The late Qingtong Kargyu (d. 1995) compensated to some extent for Labrang's slowness by traveling widely throughout China, including Hong Kong, where he had a very wide network of disciples and patrons. He was one of the most beloved of Tibetan religious leaders remaining in China after 1919, and he survived to resume his activities after the Maoist era.

50. The figure of 9,310 came from monks working for the administration of the institute whom I interviewed in Barkam. I was unable to visit the institute itself, as the Sera road was washed out shortly before I arrived in the region in July 2002. During the autumn of 2002, rumors were circulating that the institute was being closed down by the authorities because it had grown unacceptably large. Inquiries directed to the Bureau of Religious Affairs in Beijing brought the response that these rumors were false and that there was no plan to shut the institute. However, my informant continued, the large size of the institute had aroused public health concerns—the water supply was considered inadequate, and there were no sewage facilities—so that some of the residents were encouraged to return to their homes for the winter. In 2002, it was widely reported that the authorities had in fact moved to limit the size of the institute to 1,000 residents and had burned the houses of those it had expelled. In particular, large numbers of nuns, as well as monks whose residence permits were from outside of Sichuan, were instructed to leave. Khenpo Japhale's health has reportedly been adversely affected by this turn of events, and during the summer of 2002, he was said to be convalescing in Barkam.

51. An example of a successful, smaller Buddhist college is the ladrang in Lhagang, founded by Khampa Chökyi Dro. There are now important ladrang, as well, at Sarkhor and Jyelha, in Sichuan, and at Darchung, in Qiangshui, among others.

52. The AAP and GAP together include most of Sichuan's ethnic Tibetan population. The counties of which the AAP is comprised include 22 of the southern parts of Amdo, the northeastern region of geographical and cultural Tibet that is now divided among Qinghai, Gansu, and Sichuan. The AAP also includes the region known in Tibetan as Gylemoong, an ethnic patchwork in which, until the Chinese revolution at least, Tibetan religion was the predominant cultural system. The GAP corresponds in large measure to the eastern reaches of the old Tibetan province of Kham and is home to many of the most famous centers of eastern Tibetan religion and culture, including Derge, with its renowned printing establishment and the great Sakya monastery of Gönchen; Drepung, the eastern seat of the Karmapa order; and four of the six major seats of the Nyingmapa order.

53. Pse-gor Vaincana, an eighth-century Tibetan translator, is one of the cultural heroes in the region: during a period of exile from central Tibet, the result of an altercation with one of the queen's, Vaincana is said to have traveled to Gye-