

“LITTLE TIBET” WITH “LITTLE MECCA”: RELIGION, ETHNICITY AND
SOCIAL CHANGE ON THE SINO-TIBETAN BORDERLAND (CHINA)

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This dissertation examines the complexity of religious and ethnic diversity in the context of contemporary China. Based on my two years of ethnographic fieldwork in Taktsang Lhamo (Ch: *Langmusi*) of southern Gansu province, I investigate the ethnic and religious revival since the Chinese political relaxation in the 1980s in two local communities: one is the salient Tibetan Buddhist revival represented by the rebuilding of the local monastery, the revitalization of religious and folk ceremonies, and the rising attention from the tourists; the other is the almost invisible Islamic revival among the Chinese Muslims (Hui) who have inhabited in this Tibetan land for centuries. Distinctive when compared to their Tibetan counterpart, the most noticeable phenomenon in the local Hui revival is a revitalization of Hui entrepreneurship, which is represented by the dominant Hui restaurants, shops, hotels, and bus lines. As I show in my dissertation both the Tibetan monastic ceremonies and Hui entrepreneurship are the intrinsic part of local ethnoreligious revival. Moreover these seemingly unrelated phenomena are in fact closely related and reflect the modern Chinese nation-building as well as the influences from an increasingly globalized and government directed Chinese market.

The Chinese policy change since the 1980s and the transition to the market-oriented economy have made the local ethnic and religious revival possible but also more complicated. Against the backdrop of the transition from a former frontier of two

empires to the modern nation state, I show how various contemporary events and historic memories have been uniquely experienced by two local ethnic communities. I then further analyze the political economic basis of this ethnoreligious revival, which demonstrates the dynamics of religion and ethnicity in the cultural complexity of a multi-ethnic nation-state on the one hand, and the role of nation-state and the global consumerism as a new form of civilizing agent and governmentality on the other. Finally, I argue that identifying the process of social production in complex and conflicting phenomena like this unsettles those conventionally defined ethnic, religious, and national boundaries through which I explore the conceptual limits of such theoretical concepts as modernity, post/colonialism and trans/nationalism.

BIOGRAPHICAL SKETCH

Yinong Zhang was born in Beijing, China. He received his bachelor of arts degree in political economy from Sichuan University (Chengdu, China) in 1991. Upon graduation he took up a job in an IT company during which he had traveled extensively in western China. He had worked as a freelance writer and photographer for several years until he decided to go back to school. In 1995 he successfully passed the Chinese National Entrance Examination for graduate school and enrolled in a master of arts program in Tibetan language and history at the Central University of Nationalities (Beijing, China). He began his Ph.D. studies in anthropology at Cornell University in 1999. After finishing all course work and a five-month pre-dissertation fieldwork, he received a master of arts degree in anthropology in 2003. From 2003 to 2005 he had conducted his dissertation fieldwork in Taktsang Lhamo (Langmusi) of southern Gansu province in western China. His primary research examines the complexities of religion and ethnicity in the contemporary multi-ethnic state of China. He is particularly interested in ethnic and religious interaction on the Sino-Tibetan borderland against the backdrop of the Chinese political and economic reform since the 1980s.

To the people of Taktsang Lhamo

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My study at Cornell over these years has been primarily funded by Cornell Sage Fellowship and anthropology department TA assistantship. I also received fellowship from Cornell East Asia Program for a semester long stay at Taktsang Lhamo as my pre-dissertation fieldwork. Both East Asia Program and Mario Einaudi Center for International Studies at Cornell University have supported my project with travel grants. My dissertation fieldwork was funded by the Individual Research Grant for dissertation fieldwork from the Wenner-Gren Foundation for Anthropological Research.

I feel most indebted to the people in Taktsang Lhamo who have helped me in various ways—some may not even realize that—and yet I do not feel comfortable listing their names here. This is not just because of the trouble it might bring to their life. The diversity of hospitality I have received in Taktsang Lhamo helps me to understand better both the complex local relationships and diverse need in return. For these reasons and my academic resistance to the conventional categorization of local people as Tibetan, Hui, and Chinese, I dedicate this work to the people of Taktsang Lhamo.

Family and friends are the foundation of my life. My parents Zhang Chuanzhao and Wang Aiwen, my brother Zhang Fan have supported me at every point of my life. Even when my choices did not make much sense to them they still gave me their wholehearted support with complete confidence on me. Yu Li and his family have hosted me in his Xiangheli house every time I passed by Chengdu. Nyima Tashi has witnessed my whole academic journey in Tibetan Studies. His friendship and understanding have once and again given me the confidence to continue my research on Tibetan related studies. Other friends from Beijing, Chengdu, Guangzhou, Xi'an, Lhasa, and Lanzhou have helped my numerous trips to Tibetan regions throughout

these years. I would also like to thank my parents-in-law Jean-René and Martine who have generously taken us for several summer vacations. I have learned so many things from another perspective on religion and history in different places of Europe. These beautiful vacations with *un pastis bien frais* gave me invaluable breaks from my writing as well as new inspirations to go through the last and difficult part of my dissertation journey.

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LIST OF ABBREVIATIONS

- ABGK Aba Zangzu Zizhizhou Gaikuang Bianxiezhu [Aba Tibetan Prefecture Survey Editorial]
- ABLD Sichuan Sheng Bianjizhu [Society and History Survey Committee Sichuan Group]
- ABZJ Aba Zhou Zongjiaoju Fojiao Xiehui [Aba Prefecture Religious Bureau Buddhist Association]
- ABZX Aba Zhou Zhengxie Wenshi Ziliao Weiyuanhui [Aba Prefecture Political Consultative Historical Material Committee]
- CCP Zhongguo Gongchandang [Chinese Communist Party]
- CUN Zhongyang Minzu Daxue [Central University of Nationalities]
- GDOW Xibu Dakaifa [Great Development of the West]
- GMYS Gansu Minzu Yanjiusuo [Gansu Minority Research Institute]
- GNZX Zhongguo Renmin Zhengzhi Xieshang Huiyi Gannan Zangzu Zizhizhou Weiyuanhui Wenshi Ziliao Yanjiu Weiyuanhui [China Political Consultative Gannan Historical Material Research Committee]
- GSRK Gansu Sheng Renkou Pucha Bangongshi [Gansu Province Census Office]
- GSTS Gansu Sheng Tushuguan [Gansu Provincial Library]
- GYSL Gansu Yisilan Jiao Xiehui [Gansu Islamic Association]
- GZDF Gannan Zangzu Zizhizhou Difang Shizhi Bianzhuan Weiyuanhui [Gannan Tibetan Autonomous Prefecture Local History Editorial Board]
- HZJS Huizui Jianshi Bianxiezhu [History of Hui editorials]
- KTGS bZhugs sGar Ki rTi'i Byes Pa Graw tShang [Exile Kirti monastery]
- LTXZ Lintan Xian Zhi Bianzhuan Weiyuanhui [Lintan County Gazetteer Committee]

- LXZZ Linxia Zhou Zhi Bianzuan Weiyuanhui [Linxia Prefecture History Editorial Board]
- NUF Zhongyang Tongzhanbu [National United Front]
- RGDF Ruo'ergai Xian Difangzhi Bianzuan Weiyuanhui [Ruo'ergai County Local History Editorial Board]
- RGJY Ruo'ergai Xian Jiaoyu Ju [Ruo'ergai County Educational Bureau]
- RGWS Ruo'ergai Xian Wei Xian Zhengxie [Ruo'ergai County CCP and Political Consultative]
- ZGGL Zhongguo Gonglu Jiaotong Shi Bianshen Weiyuanhui [China Road and Transportation History Editorial Board]

NOTES ON TRANSCRIPTION AND TRANSLITERATION

One of the most complex things in this project is the use of language. Local Tibetans speak a dialect of Tibetan (Amdo) that is virtually unintelligible to the Tibetan speakers from Central Tibet (Lhasa). Educated monks in the monastery can understand or speak the Lhasa dialect. When some locals chose to learn Chinese, most of them started with either Gansu or Sichuan dialect instead of Mandarin due to its local importance. The local Chinese Muslims (Hui) are all fluent Tibetan (Amdo) speakers. While at home or inside their own community Hui speak a Chinese dialect (Gansu) that is very hard, if not unintelligible, to most Mandarin Chinese speakers. Furthermore, the Gansu dialect commonly used in the Hui communities in northwestern China has borrowed many words from Arabic and Persian over the centuries, which makes it even harder for anyone outside the Hui community to understand even their daily conversation. While Mandarin Chinese is now the lingua franca in this ethnic borderland, its paramount position has constantly been challenged in the everyday life by this enormous linguistic diversity.

This dissertation is based on my ethnographic fieldwork conducted through a mix of all these languages and dialects. It is therefore even more problematic when it comes to transcribing those names and dialogues in text according to their proper use and original language—a reality that is often left ambiguous in everyday life yet could easily escalate to a political debate of any level. My principle in transcription is to preserve the actual or original use. When it is a mixed use of two languages/dialects, I present both at the first time and then leave it later in the language that is most commonly used by locals. I use the Wylie system to transcribe Tibetan names and dialogues in either Amdo or Lhasa dialect accordingly. That means, for example, Lhasa dialect speakers may find it quite different in an original Amdo dialogue.

Similarly I use *pinyin* system to transcribe Chinese names and dialogues in accordance with Mandarin, Sichuan and Gansu dialects. Thus Chinese speakers may find a slight difference according to different dialects used in the original dialogue. All transcribed names and dialogues are italicized and are identified as “Tib:” for Tibetan, “Ch:” for Chinese, and “Ar:” for Arabic.

Transliteration in this dissertation is based on the original use of language or dialect. Even with the commonly accepted Wylie system there is still no unified spelling system to transliterate Tibetan terms phonetically, without taking dialect difference into consideration. I choose to use the transliteration that is either common to most English speakers (i.e., Tulku for *sbrul sku*) or close to the original pronunciation (i.e., Geke in Amdo dialect for *dge skos*) and give the standard transcription at the same time. These transliterations are capitalized with the initial letter but not italicized. Chinese names and phrases are spelled through *pinyin* system according its original use. In case of mixed use of different languages or dialects—i.e., Chinese names given to the original Tibetan names, Chinese terms borrowed in Tibetan dialogue, or different Tibetan names used in the same context—all different names are listed and a further explanation is given on the use and implication of these terms in different languages as well as in its specific context. Thereafter terms in each language are chosen according to its proper context. All names of the characters in this dissertation are pseudonyms.

PREFACE

STUDYING AND TRAVELING ACROSS THE BORDERS: A JOURNEY TO “NO PLACE”

Tibet and China: From the US

Once I was traveling in Tibet with an American student who asked me very frankly if I, as a Chinese, have had any special access or privileges to conduct my research in Tibet. Although I was already studying in the US at that time, it was not until that moment that I started to feel the resonance of some other questions that I had been asked before.

You can learn Tibetan in China?
How did you do your fieldwork (in Tibet)?
Were they (Tibetans) afraid of you (Chinese)?
Do you (as a Chinese) also need an official permission (to work in Tibet)?
...

All these questions have to do with the stereotypical ideas of Tibet and China, which cast a clear suspicion on a Han Chinese’s credibility in a Sino-Tibetan related question. As a Chinese scholar doing researches related to Tibet, first in China and then in the US, my academic career itself is a border crossing experience, which I call a journey to “no place.” I first had this feeling of “no place” after I arrived in the US and made my initial contact with the Tibetan exile community in Ithaca. Although I had extensive experience with Tibetan communities in China, my immediate feeling was that I—a Han Chinese from China—simply could not be positioned anywhere so as to have normal communication with Tibetans. Even my appearance in the Tibetan community already seemed awkward, if not threatening to some Tibetans and their deeply held ideas and ways of being.

Ithaca is a place well known for its Tibetan characteristics—a well established

Tibetan exile community, the well-known Snow Lion publishing house, and most of all, the Namgyal Monastery which traces its origin back to the Potala Palace (Lhasa), the Dalai Lama's private monastery before the Chinese takeover of Tibet. After I came to Ithaca, I visited the Namgyal Monastery and met the resident Tibetan monks and some local Tibetans. Immediately after I was introduced as a Chinese student with studies related to Tibet and who spoke Tibetan, I felt reactions of both surprise and uneasiness from the monks and others. Subsequent discussions seemed strained for all of us. They did not last for long either as I was not a practicing Buddhist, which is the main subject in this monastic institute.

Fortunately one monk in the monastery, who was exceptionally open-minded and friendly to me, took me to local Tibetan community events several times. On March 10th (the Tibetan Uprising Day) he took me to the local Tibetan celebration of this important date. As I greeted—in Tibetan—the Tibetan community leader of the event, he greeted me back with “kushola” (Tib: *sku-zhogs*)—the Tibetan honorific addressing for monks. He took me naturally for a Tibetan monk who escaped from China, since I was a new face and came with a Tibetan monk. After my Tibetan monk friend revealed my Chinese identity, it caused intense awkwardness for this Tibetan man, literally struck silent for one minute without a word.

Another time this monk friend introduced me to another young Tibetan monk originally from the Kham Tibetan area in China. He had just escaped from years of torture in a Chinese prison and arrived in the US after a short stay in Dharamsala. As I asked about his personal experiences I could feel that he got more and more emotional talking about everything Chinese. Finally he burst into tears, which made me feel that my appearance as a Han Chinese brought back all his traumatic memories at once.

After several awkward experiences like these, I wondered how my Tibetan monk friend, unlike his fellow Tibetans, could accept me rather easily. He smiled at

me and answered, “You look to me more like a Tibetan than a Chinese—in fact you look like a Tibetan monk.” Coincidentally, this is exactly the same explanation that I heard from my other Tibetan monk friends in Taktsang Lhamo years later when I did my fieldwork in China. In both cases the Tibetan monks who did accept my appearance could do so by consciously erasing my Chinese identity (at least from their point of view) and reconstructing a new acceptable identity for me in a Tibetan context. This dilemma of a Chinese identity (both ethnically Han and citizen of the People’s Republic of China) in a Tibetan context certainly epitomizes the long-term polemical debate on the so-called “Tibet question.”

Tibet and China: From China

In fact I started this journey to “no place” when I took up my first job in 1991. Just graduated from university, I was working for a financial accounting software company—now an IT giant in China. At that time, the company divided its nationwide business into ten geographical districts most of which consist of two or three provinces. Each district was typically assigned two or three representatives whose job involved frequent traveling to the corresponding areas. There was only one exception, the “eighth district,” as it was called, which included seven provinces—Inner Mongolia, Ningxia, Xinjiang, Gansu, Qinghai, Shaanxi, and Tibet—covering nearly half of the geographical area of the Chinese map. Big as it was, this “eighth district” was considered the least productive among all the districts in terms of annual sale records because these regions are mostly ethnic minority areas, which are believed to be poor and backward. Thus not only did the company put little effort and investment in it—and with little expectation of revenue from it, but being assigned to work in the “eighth district” was considered the least desirable position in the company, if not a punishment, because of the allegedly “hardship” (Ch: *jianku*) of traveling there. When

I joined the company, the previous “eighth district” representative was finally able to get out after having been promoted to another district. It was naturally my turn as a newcomer to fill in his spot—with all my colleagues’ sympathetic words, that after some time I would get promoted in the same way.

Before I took my first business trip to Lhasa, many of my friends and my family were very concerned about this trip suggesting that I should stay as briefly as possible since the sanitary conditions are very bad in Tibet and the high plateau environment is very harmful for human health with the serious effect being sterility, as I was told by a doctor friend. Meanwhile everyone asked me to bring back some souvenirs since it was still rare to find someone around traveling to Tibet at that time. The souvenirs I was asked to bring back were mostly “Tibetan” and not commonly seen in Chinese market—from little skull-shaped rotary chains, Tibetan incense, to yak horns, Tibetan antelope horns, bone trumpets (Tib: *rkang gling*) etc. One even asked me jokingly to bring a “snow lion flag” (the Chinese name for the Tibetan national flag) of which I had never heard at that time.

My job in Lhasa was to train a group of about 30 local cadres from different local government bureaus to use the financial accounting software produced by the company. This group was composed of both Tibetan and Chinese students. As the course proceeded I noticed the class gradually and clearly divided into two separate groups—one Tibetan and one Chinese—with a different language spoken in each group. Moreover, each group discussed different topics and had different interests. The topics typical in the Tibetan group were:

It is so nice today we should go to do our laundry by the Lhasa River this afternoon.

...

You also know Tashi? He’s my buddy. Let’s meet after the class in the sweet-tea house at the corner of Barkhor.

...

In the Chinese group, the predominant, if not unitary, concern was focused upon moving back to the *neidi* (“inland”, or Han centered Chinese cities), or *neidiao*.

Do you know Xiao Li has moved back to Chengdu recently?
Really? That’s fast! He must have some powerful *guanxi* (relations).
Are you also trying to move?
Yes, but I don’t have any good *guanxi* and don’t know if I can make it.
...

For those Han Chinese who did not come through the “Helping Tibet” (Ch: *yuanzang*) project on a term contract, moving back to *neidi* could be a life-long struggle under the Chinese population control system of household registration (Ch: *hukou*) and working unit (Ch: *danwei*).

Yuanzang, or “Helping Tibet,” is both the name for a long-term government project and a powerful discourse in the Chinese public. This Chinese government invention, which began in the 1950s, has sent Han Chinese government employees (Ch: *ganbu*, or cadres) from major Chinese cities to work in Tibet for either a short term (typically three to eight years) or life-long. While this *yuanzang* experience for some could be just a temporary and necessary step to go higher in their political career, for most others it means a voluntary sacrifice, a forced exile, or even exclusion from the mainstream Han Chinese society. The most profound social impact of this project has been to stigmatize Tibet describing it as desperately in need of help to move out of poverty and ignorance and that only the Chinese people and government have the ability and willingness to help them do so.

Tibet and China: From the Border

Most of my friends and my family were surprised when I quit my job to study the Tibetan language. Indeed it was not so much quitting a well-paid job and become a no salary student that they could not understand, but was instead my choice of

studying Tibetan language that made them feel that I was going nowhere. They saw no future for me aside from going *yuanzang* as a voluntary sacrifice. When I was finally accepted in the doctoral program in the US, many friends and colleagues joked to me that I was recruited by the Dalai clique and its western supporters. Only later did I learn the serious implication of this joke. The common knowledge on Tibet has been contextualized with drastic disjuncture in China and the West making it nearly impossible to go across this unbridgeable gap.

What seems to be a light joke from my friends is nevertheless part of an atmosphere that is so pervasive and deeply rooted in both the Chinese public consensus and the official paradigm. I first encountered the serious consequence of this illusive atmosphere when I applied my Chinese passport to go to study in the US. Whereas a normal application process generally took two weeks to one month at that time, I was told that my case had received a “careful” treatment because of the combination of the nature of my studies and my destination. After more than eight months, I still did not receive an official approval or rejection until a PSB (Public Security Bureau) officer told me privately that they could not issue me a passport based on my application materials, neither an official rejection. However he suggested that if I could file another application with a different reason—tourist or business but not study—they would consider it. Doing so would mean they would have no responsibilities in case of any negative consequences. So finally after almost one year I got my passport as a “tourist” even though this distinction is irrelevant for travel.

If the passport incident was just a warning of the danger to cross the unbridgeable gap, I had experienced the reality of crossing the border when I came back to Tibet from Nepal through the land border at Zhangmu (Tib: *'gram*).

After a whole day trekking and waiting on the Nepali side, I finally arrived at the Chinese border in summer day of 2001—only to find that the gate was closed. I

was told that there was “No passing through after 7pm”. Just when I was wondering what to do, two PLA border soldiers came to me and listened to my explanation. One of them, an ethnic Tibetan, told me in a friendly manner that they could make an exception to let me through. But they had to do a routine check of my bags first. I was very grateful for their kindness and kept on thanking them for this.

They checked my passport first and I noticed that once they saw my US visas their attitude started to be different and more alert. The Tibetan soldier asked me what I did in America. Obviously not quite satisfied with my answer of being a student, he continued to search my backpack in the manner of checking for drug traffic. I felt no unease until they found in my bag the Tibetan-English brochure that I had casually picked up in a Tibetan school in Kathmandu.

The two soldiers became very serious. They called over three more soldiers to continue checking my backpack. After another round of rummaging through my two backpacks, everything inside was taken out and put on the table. They started to go through each item until another finding shocked them—a photo of the Dalai Lama in my diary book which I had placed there years ago and even forgotten its existence.

I began to feel like a drug smuggler who had just been caught. I realized that I could get into some serious trouble with these two things in this situation. As I thought the Tibetan soldier seemed to be friendly to me at first, I tried to explain to him that I didn’t do this on purpose and I did not know these things are forbidden here. It shocked me to see how he reacted to my plea with almost a punch on my nose and a yell. “Didn’t you know that you have made such a huge mistake (Ch: *nameda de cuowu*)?! And now you want to escape your responsibility (Ch: *taobi zeren*)?!” Then he pointed to the photo of the Dalai Lama and pressed on towards me almost spitting on my face: “Do you know who he is? He is a *fenlie fenzi* (splittist)! He is the head of the Dalai clique!” Despite my terror at that moment, I somehow still found a bit ironic

when he spouted his Chinese propaganda terms with an obvious Tibetan accent. I spent the night in a PLA-owned hostel but my bags and passport remained in their office.

The next morning I was led to an interrogation room where a senior officer, the highest political commander at this PLA border station, was already waiting with his assistants. The appearance of a high-ranking officer usually suggests the seriousness of the case. The plain concrete walls had one line of a Chinese slogan that said “(if you confess with) frankness (it would) lead you to leniency (justice), (if you hold back with) resistance (it would) lead you to stern (justice)” (Ch: *tan bai cong kuan kang ju cong yan*).

They started with yet another check of my backpacks and finding nothing new. The Chinese officer started to ask me questions while his Tibetan assistant began to read through my diary. He confirmed that it was because of the Dalai Lama photo and the Tibetan boarding school brochure I had been detained. Both are considered “illegal propaganda” (Ch: *feifa xuanchuanpin*) and cannot be brought into China—although I actually brought the photo into China through Beijing. The interrogation lasted for almost a whole day but I was finally released based on my “potentiality” and “attitude.”

Research Across the Borders

This dissertation designed to reflect the complexity of the contemporary Sino-Tibetan situation. While religion and ethnicity are central in my field research and dissertation, the situation in contemporary Tibet/China have been driven by social, political, and economic forces on multiple levels—local, national, and international. A neutral or value-free observation in the ideal anthropological tradition is not really possible under this circumstance. On the contrary, my own status as a Chinese

researcher on Tibet with both a Chinese and US educational background has provided me a unique perspective but yet “no place” with which to approach this complexity. I have gradually learned how not to take such richly and complexly developed notions as ethnicity or religion for granted. My experience of being given/denied multiple identities and of being challenged in various circumstances across borders has largely shaped my views without which this dissertation could not have been accomplished.

As an ethnographer I have been working in the interstices of nation, ethnic groups, and economic development. This is the position I think best for my research and for the structuring of my dissertation. More importantly, it is how this position has been taken by the locals and how they in turn have established a status for me in the local context—an identity independent of my will—that heavily influenced my research (see chapter 1). This dissertation is thereby the result of multiple forces and shows multiple direction of current situation. Moreover the unfolding meaning of even contradictory phenomena continuously negates the essentialized notions of Tibet/Tibetan, China/Chinese, or ethnic minorities such as Hui. By focusing on the complex meaning and dynamic adaptation of religion and ethnicity in a fast changing Chinese society I attempt to explore the limits and flexibility of different borders from the perspective of “no place.”

CHAPTER 1

INTRODUCTION

March 2nd 1999 was the fifteenth day of the Chinese New Year in the Chinese lunar calendar. This calendar is widely used in most of the Amdo Tibetan region.¹ Thus it is also the fifteenth day of the Tibetan New Year—the most exciting day of the two-week long Tibetan New Year celebration of Monlam Chenmo.² At night there would be an annual monastic exhibition of butter-made flowers and Buddhist figures,³ illuminated by lamps, in the two Tibetan monasteries in the Sino-Tibetan border town of Taktsang Lhamo, known as Langmusi in Chinese.⁴

The Druchu River⁵ bisects this small mountain valley town, which falls into the two adjacent provinces of Sichuan and Gansu in western China. Surrounded by clusters of Tibetan villages, two large Tibetan monastery complexes on each side of the river mark the local landscape unambiguously with their Tibetan authority. With the celebration of Monlam Chenmo in both monasteries, this quiet little mountain valley suddenly became crowded and filled with a sea of colorfully dressed Tibetan nomads and peasants who arrived in overflowing trucks and tractors from the

¹ The ethnic Tibetan area was traditionally constituted by three different regions—Central Tibet, Kham, and Amdo—that are distinct from each other geographically linguistically and culturally (Goldstein 1998; Aldenderfer and Zhang 2004). See Figure 4. Amdo is also sometimes referred to by its geographical location, as Northeastern Tibet. Tibetan monastic rituals and folk festivals in Amdo have been observed through Chinese lunar calendar, instead of the Tibetan calendar which has been used exclusively in Central Tibet. See, e.g., the *lurol* (Tib: *glu rol*) festival which is held at the end of the sixth Chinese lunar month in Rebgong, Qinghai province (Buffetrille 2002) (Epstein and Peng 1998); the folk singing festival *La ye* also at this time; and *Khri ka lha rtse*, a five day celebration of a local Tibetan protective deity, which also happens according to the Chinese lunar calendar (Anton-Luca 2002).

² Tib: *smon lam chen mo*, or Great Prayer Festival. See more discussions on Monlam Chenmo in chapter 4.

³ Tib: *bco lnga mchod pa*, or *me tog mchod pa*, see also chapter 4.

⁴ Tib: *stag tshang lha mo*, Ch: *langmusi* or *namo*, see more explanations on this name and place later in this chapter. See also Figures 1-4 for geographical location.

⁵ Tib: *'brug-chu*, Ch: *bailong jiang* or the White Dragon River.

surrounding pastoral or agricultural areas. This colorful sea of Tibetan pilgrims, along with thousands of Tibetan monks performing elaborate religious rituals in the two monasteries, have also attracted more and more metropolitan Chinese tourists—most of them amateur artists, journalists, or backpackers—to this once remote borderland. At the same time the small local community of Chinese Muslim (Ch: *Hui*, *Huihui*, or *Huizu*) residents, who owned most of the hotels, restaurants, and shops in town, began their business season with the arrival of all these Tibetan pilgrims and Chinese tourists.

The day after was a mass exodus day. With the end of ceremonies in the monasteries, Tibetan pilgrims started to leave with a white ceremonial scarf (Tib: *kha bdags*) and a colorful silk tie (Tib: *srung mdud*, or “protective amulet”) around everyone’s neck which were blessed during the ceremony. Some also tied them to the reflection mirrors of their trucks and tractors for a safe trip back home. The end of the ceremony and departure of Tibetan pilgrims also meant closure for the visit of the Chinese tourists. They gathered in the Hui restaurants exchanging their exciting experiences while waiting for the next bus to get out of town. Taktsang Lhamo went back to its normal life.

Three weeks after this Tibetan ceremony, March 28th seemed to be just another quiet day in Taktsang Lhamo. The first call of *Allahu Akbar*⁶ from the top of the mosque minaret broke the dawn of the morning and announced a Muslim day in this Tibetan land. It was the tenth day of the twelfth month according to the Islamic calendar—the traditional Muslim festival day of *Guerbang* (Ar: *‘Id al-Adha*, or “feast of sacrifice”). Having had a half-day fast (Ch: *kongzhai*) since the night before, hundreds of local Hui people—men, women, children—dressed up in their new clothes for their first prayer of *Guerbang* before the day breaks. The mosque prayer

⁶ Arabic, lit., “God is great”, used as a common call for a Muslim communal praying (Gladney 1991: 396).

hall—that hosts only men during routine Friday prayers (Ch: *zhuma*)—was separated by a curtain making a special place for women on this special day. The prayer hall was soon full and those who arrived late had to kneel down on the carpet outside.

The green minaret of the local Muslim mosque is right down the slope at the bottom of the valley and lies between the two Tibetan monasteries. Beside the conspicuously erect minaret, the mosque also includes a Chinese style mansion that serves as a prayer hall with a courtyard for community gatherings. In the courtyard, a large blackboard recorded everyone's name in the community and indicated the amount of money s/he has contributed to the mosque for this year's *Guerbang*. Most of the Hui businesses in town were closed for the day. The town was quiet except for the intermittent praying from mosque. Late in the afternoon after one day of praying, the Hui community came out of the prayer hall and gathered along tables placed in the mosque courtyard. They were waiting for the last part of this annual ceremony—an abundant feast of meat—before they went back home. In contrast to the Tibetan New Year celebration this Hui festival is hardly known to the outsiders, let alone any visitors.

This dissertation is an ethnographic account of religious revival and ethnic reconstruction on the Sino-Tibetan borderland during the age of “reform and opening-up” (Ch: *gaige kaifang*) in China. In this cultural borderland the ethno-religious revival has occurred simultaneously in two local communities: Tibetan, the local majority population, and Chinese Muslim, or Hui, the local minority community.⁷ As

⁷ See chapter 3 for my discussion on the majority and minority relations in Taktsang Lhamo. In 1953 the Gansu part of the Taktsang Lhamo was set up as a *xiang* level administrative unit and named Langmusi. The Chinese statistics resource (GZDF 1999) shows that in the early 1950s the Tibetan population in Langmusi was 691, Muslim Hui 55, and Han Chinese 44. In 1990 the total population in Langmusi was 3,161. However, the way these data were collected in the official Chinese survey does not always reflect the actual population, particularly when dealing with certain cases such as minority populations, floating populations or monk populations. For example, monks living in the monasteries often represent a large population percentage in places like Taktsang Lhamo. But the official Chinese census only counts monks according to their originally registered residence places (Ch: *hukou suozaidi*). Therefore the majority of the monk population in the local monastery who does not have an

such, the local ethnoreligious revival includes a strikingly visible part of Tibetan Buddhist revival—the one that usually attracts most of the outside attention, both Chinese and Western—and an almost invisible part of Hui Islamic revival that is usually confined inside its own community but which nevertheless occurs side by side with its Tibetan counterpart.

The general revival of religion and culture in China usually refers to the recovery of religious and cultural institutions or activities—destroyed on a massive scale during the Chinese Cultural Revolution (1966-76)—after the 1980s. Brought on by a major shift of Chinese Communist Party (hereafter CCP) policy since 1978, this recovery started in China proper through an intellectual reflection on Chinese culture and identity in early 1980s.⁸ Later, when broader and deeper research had been done in this area, it has become apparent that religious and cultural revivals have also taken place in widely various geographic regions and among different ethnic groups.⁹ Generally aligning my work with these studies, I intend to contextualize the understanding of religion and ethnicity in two specific conditions—a geographic

official residential status will not be counted in the local population, where they actually live. Another problem is the separated administration of Taktsang Lhamo in Sichuan and Gansu versus the actual cross-border living condition, which results in much confusion in these official data.

According to my fieldwork data, the total residential population in Taktsang Lhamo as of 2003-2005 was around 6,000 including both Gansu and Sichuan villages and the monastic population. Besides the Tibetan lay people as the majority population, Muslim Hui population is around 1,968 (with 1496 belong to the Sichuan mosque and 472 belong to the Gansu mosque). Resident monks (including the unofficially affiliated child monks) in the two monasteries were about 1,080 (with 720 in the Kirti monastery and 360 in the Serchi monastery). The Han Chinese population in town is mostly migrant workers (Ch: *mingong*) from Sichuan or Gansu arriving since the 1980s. Most of them come for a short term (1-3 years) as construction workers or small vendors in residence only during the summer season when most work can be done. Some of them work long term (5-10 years) such as those in the restaurant business. This part of the population is difficult to calculate and I roughly estimate it as 100-200 in the low working season (winter) and 300-500 in the high working season (summer).

⁸ These cultural reflections include for example the “cultural fever” (Ch: *wenhua re*) or “finding root literature” (Ch: *xungen wenxue*) (Zhang 1997).

⁹ For example, the revival of religious pilgrimage, rituals, and monastic education in ethnic Tibetan areas (Goldstein and Kapstein 1998), Muslim mosques built in central China (Jaschok and Shui 2000), the Islamic resurgence in northwestern China (Gladney 1991), and the reconstruction of a Confucian temple in a frontier Chinese village (Jing 1996).

borderland where two different religions and ethnic groups coexist, and a specific era of Chinese post-socialist reform.

By focusing on two ethnoreligious revivals in this borderland, I challenge such conventional conceptions as a timelessly traditional Tibetan society with an unquestionable core of “Tibetanness” vis-à-vis a monolithic Chinese culture and Han ethnicity. I intend to extend the concept of borderland from a static geographical area of a middle ground where different ethnic groups encounter and coexist, to a dynamic process shaped by different forces in different times with a constantly shifting meaning. As such, this seemingly remote borderland is neither just a backwater in the hinterland of fast growing China, nor simply an exotic object in the new Chinese cultural market. Rather it is a ground for a contest among different motivations, desires, ethnic visions, and constructions of landscape.

As crucial identity markers for both Tibetan and Hui, religion and ethnicity have played a vital role in the reconstruction of their identities as well as in their new visions of local place in a post-socialist Chinese state. The two communities have revived each tradition simultaneously with reference to the broader political economic context of the Chinese state as well as to global influences. Indeed it is both their competing interests and their reference to each other within the same post-socialist Chinese context that have provided a new common ground for the two communities—either competition or negotiation—upon which they have struggled to reconstruct their own spaces and identities in an era of Chinese reform and social change.

1.1 Tibetan Studies, Minority Studies and Chinese Studies

Broadly defined within Chinese studies, the main subject of this dissertation can be linked to two specific topics: Tibetan studies and ethnic minority studies in China. Given the polemical debate on the so-called “Tibet question” powered by two

opposing nationalist projects from Beijing and Dharamsala, one immediate underlying question is the feasibility and credibility of a study like this. That is to say, to what extent can we relate “Tibetan studies” to “minority studies in China” (indeed to any kind of Chinese-related studies in that sense)? Or can we do that at all? Indeed these two polarized discourses have been claimed in such a self-evident manner that much previous scholarship has grounded their arguments on either of the two projects without any critical analysis.¹⁰ The polarization of the “Tibetan question” led by the two political agendas not only leaves little, if any, spaces in between, but it also leads directly to increasing difficulties and dilemmas in all Tibetan related studies.¹¹ In his recent work on Sino-Tibetan relations through a historical perspective of Buddhism, Gray Tuttle (2005) observed that Western scholarship on Tibetan related studies has made surprisingly rare use of the widely available Chinese language resources related to Tibet and even less has attempted to make a linkage between the two. It seems that studying Chinese language or using Chinese resources in Tibetan studies is considered to be academically uninteresting or unimportant, or simply not credible due to the underlying political rivalry. This dilemma in Tibetan studies has been critically challenged by a new generation of scholarship on Tibetan studies and related subjects.¹² During recent years even Tibetan studies itself has become a study subject

¹⁰ This is particularly true in much of the Tibetan scholarship. In China this means that “Tibetan studies, or Tibetology, have always been an internal sub-study in a unified multiethnic Chinese nation” (Wang, et al. 2003) which assumes the legitimacy of Chinese encompassment of Tibet both politically and culturally. In the West, on the contrary, most Tibetan scholarship takes the opposing view for granted, which parallels social and historical traditions between China and Tibet. Here I mean to critique a nationalist assumption in these works that has not been critically evaluated, e.g. (Smith 1996; Shakabpa 1967).

¹¹ By this I mean that those who try to craft a space in between find themselves being rejected by both sides. For example, by writing his book on modern Tibetan history, Tsering Shakya (1999) was considered a “traitor” by many Tibetan nationalists. At the same time he was also condemned as a “splittist” in Chinese official discourse (Hu 1999) In very much the same manner as many other works like (Walt van Praag 1987) or (Shakabpa 1967), despite their notable differences.

¹² To list some recent publications (Tuttle 2005; Stevenson 2005; Kolås and Thowsen 2005; Schrempf 2002; Upton 1999; Makley 1999).

under the scholarly investigation, both in China and in the west (Lopez 1998; Wang, et al. 2003).

Studies on ethnic minority groups in China have been flourishing both in China and beyond, particularly during the last decade.¹³ What makes ethnic minority groups in China a fascinating subject is certainly more than the simple fact that this official 8% of the population in China, around 100 million people, inhabits more than half of the national territory. The immense cultural diversity under a seemingly unified multiethnic Chinese state illuminates many contemporary issues related to culture and society, nation and nationalism, hybridity and subalternity, center and periphery, and colonialism and post-colonialism. Most of the studies on these ethnic minority groups have viewed China as either a direct resisting object upon which an alternative version of history or identity has been constructed (Mueggler 2001; Bovingdon 2002) or an agent of a “civilizing project” which has engaged in a transformation of its subjects (Harrell 1995a). As a result one may come up with quite contradictory images of China: either a de-mythicized Chinese nation-state constituted by many “other Chinas” (Litzinger 2000) or a rather universalized China with many “smaller constellations and mountains of interesting facts” (Blum 2002).

One prominent question in studying the ethnic minorities is whether China can be treated as a monolithic cultural entity and Han can be treated as a single racial category. This echoes the new generation of Tibetan scholarship that questions the

¹³ Minority studies in China took form in very different way from that in the west. For a general review on that in China, see (Guldin 1994). See (Blum and Jensen 2002) for a study on China through the perspectives of different marginalized groups. Studies on specific minority groups include, for example, Dai (Hansen 1999), Hui (Gladney 1991; Lipman 1997; Gillette 2000), Tibetan (Goldstein and Kapstein 1998; Kolås and Thowsen 2005), Yao (Litzinger 2000), Miao (Schein 2000), Zhuang (Kaup 2000), Yi (Harrell 2001b; Mueggler 2001), Mongolian (Bulag 2002; Williams 2002), Uyghur (Bovingdon 2002; Smith 2002) etc. For other non-ethnic marginalized people, see for example, Chinese immigrant workers in the city (Honig 1992; Zhang 2001), an ethnically and linguistically non-Han people but officially not a minority group (Friedman 2004), culturally, geographically or economically marginalized Chinese community (Jing 1996; Liu 2000).

fundamental legitimacy of the two opposing nationalist projects.¹⁴ Here, the interdisciplinary scholarship on nation and nationalism provides us with a useful tool to reconsider the conundrum of China and its ethnic minorities.¹⁵ Drawing upon the theories of both ethnic minority cultures in China and the contemporary Chinese nationalism, I question the dualistic view of modern Tibetan culture in China as either a ruin of Chinese cultural and material modernity or a colonial Chinese appearance with an impenetrable Tibetan core. I ask questions such as: Have Tibetan culture and Tibetan society been as important as other ethnic minority groups in the modern Chinese nation-building process? How did the Chinese state and its policy contribute to the construction and reconstruction of ethnic minorities in China? What are the dynamics between ethnic minority groups (such as Tibetan and Hui) and the Chinese state? It is through the critique of modern nation-building and nationalism that my study intends to communicate between Tibetan studies, minority studies and Chinese studies. By situating subject of my study—Tibetan and Hui communities—in a cultural borderland, this dissertation joins this new scholarship on China to challenge the static notion of religion and ethnicity in the radical changing society of China.

I consider this dissertation to be a borderland study from different aspects. Not only is the area I am focusing on a geographical and ethnic borderland both in pre-nation state period and in modern Chinese nation, but I have also challenged different boundaries between the so-called Tibetan studies, ethnic minority studies, and Chinese studies. In addition, my own position—as a Han Chinese researcher on Tibet getting a Ph.D. from an American university—is itself a borderland experience that challenges many conventional conceptions. Thus it is also my intention to integrate my own

¹⁴ For a critique of nation building in case of China and Tibet, see, e.g., (Duara 1995; Upton 1999; Makley 1999; Blum and Jensen 2002; Tuttle 2005).

¹⁵ Besides the classic theory on nation and nationalism (Gellner 1983; Anderson 1983; Hobsbawm 1990), there has been a growing critique on nationalism particularly in the context of China, see (Duara 1995; Fiskesjö 2006) .

position, situation, and dilemma into a more comprehensive borderland perspective which both challenges and enriches the areas of Tibetan studies, minority studies and Chinese studies. Despite my effort to re/interpret these categories with my personal experience, it is less intended to follow the line of a postmodern critique with an anthropologist's confession of "writing culture" (Clifford and Marcus 1986), but rather to illuminate and transcend the many dichotomies and dilemmas in the studies of China and related issues (e.g. the Sino-Tibetan dilemma, minorities vs. Han dichotomies). Through my personal experience, which I consider itself a "border experience," I introduce the evolution of my research subject in this dissertation—cultural encounters in a borderland.

1.2 A Chinese Experience of Minority Studies

In 1995 I joined a Master's program in Tibetan language and history at the Central University of Nationalities (Ch: *zhongyang minzu xueyuan*, hereafter CUN) in Beijing.¹⁶ Since attending CUN, I have been frequently approached with the same first question: "Are you a *shaoshu minzu* ("ethnic minority" or "minority nationalities")?" Not quite satisfied with my simple answer of "no," there are usually more questions such as: "How come a Han Chinese is studying in a minority university? Isn't that (only) for those minorities? What can you (a Han Chinese) study in a *minority* university? What is the use (for a Han Chinese) of learning a minority language?" Despite the fact that there has never been any policy that prevents Han Chinese students from going to these minority universities, the Chinese public stereotype of ethnic minorities and minority institutions reflects the hegemonic state terminology

¹⁶ There is a study of CUN itself as a site where the ethnic minority subjects and their identities have been shaped through education (Clothey 2004a; Clothey 2004b).

that is related to the creation of ethnic minorities as new social categories after the founding of the People's Republic of China.¹⁷

Founded in 1951, the CUN was initially created as primarily a training school, rather than a research institution, for ethnic minority cadres nationwide. The creation of minority academic institutions reflected the political symbolism of the new socialist China at that time. As a central minority institution that symbolizes the unity of all national minorities under the central leadership of CCP, CUN has since its inception included all the officially recognized ethnic minorities from all over China—compared to other provincial or regional minority institutions which usually include only the ethnic minorities represented in its own region.

While *minzu* is simply a neologism borrowed from Japanese in the early 20th century as an equivalent to the modern western notion of “nation” or “nationality,” the term *shaoshu minzu* is heavily loaded with the CCP ideology after 1949. In the beginning of the People's Republic, anthropology as a discipline was abolished in China as a “bourgeois residue.” Many aspects of anthropology, including the studies of ethnic groups, were in practice redistributed to some other state sanctioned disciplines and thus were maintained as archaeology and ethnology (Ch: *minzu xue* lit., “study of nationalities”). In 1952 a national campaign was launched to re-arrange all the universities and their departments in order to clean up the stain left by the bourgeois ideology and to transform them into a new socialist academy. It was during this time that all the minority-related programs and departments along with minority

¹⁷Even after I came to the US, this question has been constantly brought up to me by both Chinese students and Chinese scholars who are studying or teaching in the US institutions. The natural coming up of this question underlines the stereotypical idea of the “ethnic minority” and “minority studies” in China as well as the long-term hegemonic CCP discourse that has created this public stereotype.

research scholars were moved into the newly founded minority institutions all over China, including the CUN.¹⁸

The CCP policy on ethnic minorities in China is far from simply a colonial one. Both the Communist government and its predecessor the Republican government have struggled hard with the question of ethnic minorities and their proper position in the building of modern China.¹⁹ Many recent scholarly works have revisited the first national project of “ethnic identification” (Ch: *minzu shibie*) after the founding of the PRC.²⁰ From these works we can see that the CCP government has chosen neither a completely liberal policy—one that grants sovereignty to those non-Han ethnic minorities—nor a heavy handed policy to create a unified citizenship by forced assimilation. Instead, they have actively acknowledged, if not encouraged, the ethnic differences and have further managed these differences into a new national scheme.²¹ It was also through this ethnic identification project that the CCP government encountered both the complexity of ethnic diversity and limitation of the “scientific Marxism” or the Soviet theory of ethnology.²² As a result a more flexible and sometimes improvised interpretation of those guiding theories was applied on the

¹⁸ There used to be a Tibetan language program in the Oriental language department of Beijing University before 1949. After the re-arrangement it was separated from Beijing University to join with the newly established Tibetan language program in the CUN. Many scholars in this program such as Yu Daoquan were also re-assigned to CUN at that time. The political symbolism of this re-arrangement was as significant as the academic strengthening of the Tibetan studies later in the PRC.

¹⁹ Magnus Fiskesjö has discussed in details the ethnic policy during the Republican period (Fiskesjö 2006). For other discussions on the Chinese politics towards ethnic minorities during the Republic period, see, e.g., (Goodman 1983) (Schein 2000).

²⁰ For more details and studies on the ethnic identification project, see (Fei 1981; Harrell 1995c; Litzinger 2000: 3-8; Tapp 2002). See also a special issue on the *minzu shibie* (ethnic classification) project in *China Information* July 2004, vol.XVIII, No. 2.

²¹ Fiskesjö (2006) argues that this CCP management of ethnic difference is in fact a continuation from the unfulfilled Republican policy. It can be seen as a modern Chinese nation building policy that carries the imperial legacy.

²² The Marxist ethnic theory then was mostly associated with the Stalinist guideline with four criteria of the nationalities and the Morgan-Engels’ model of social evolutionism, see (Guldin 1994). It was reported that more than 400 ethnic groups had initially applied (or the ethnographers did on their behalf) to be recognized as *shaoshu minzu* by the central government in the beginning of “ethnic identification” (Fei 1981). I thank Magnus Fiskesjö for pointing out this to me.

practical level. Based on these ethnographers' reports, the CCP government eventually granted 56 groups *minzu* status including the majority Han which together make up a *Zhonghua minzu* (Chinese nationality). Where those 56 ethnic groups lived then became the national territory of the new People's Republic of China. Through this interaction of recognizing and being recognized, the problems of these ethnic differences, though far from resolved, have nevertheless been effectively regulated in China. Ideologically it was rendered under a new discourse of multiethnic Chinese nation-state and a Han majority that was created as politically and culturally more advanced than the minorities.

1.3 Moving to the Borderland: Names and Their Discontent

I arrived at Taktsang Lhamo the first time during the Monlam Chenmo (Tibetan New Year) period in 1999. My basic intention was to investigate some places in Amdo for my later research purposes. After several years of experiences in central Tibet, I was immediately struck by the Amdo difference in many respects—language, food, dress, monastic system, and more. My Tibetan robe has got me more attention than other Chinese tourists.²³ Some curious local Tibetans approached me on the street to check out if I was really a Tibetan. My newly adopted Amdo Tibetan dialect with a

²³ During my several stays in this area, I (and later my wife) have always dressed in Tibetan garb. This is first because our robes were the first gifts from a local Tibetan friend. It was important to wear it both as an acceptance of the friendship and as an introduction to the local—at least the Tibetan—community. Another reason is more to the practical end. Being at an altitude of 3,300 meters high, the climate in this region is cold and windy with a long winter season, usually from October to May. A thick Tibetan robe serves as a must for every Tibetan in this region even during the summer as it could get cold even snow or hailstorm at any time (Ekvall 1939; Ekvall 1964). Since the beginning I have been fully aware of the attention I could get with a Tibetan robe and an obviously not local face, accent, or anything else. As an anthropologist, I am always very skeptical as to how “local” an anthropologist can actually become simply by dressing locally or even speaking the local language—not to mention my own position as a Han Chinese with an American background doing research in Tibet. On the practical level dressing in Tibetan robe has given me both advantages and disadvantages throughout my stay, which I will spell out more in the later chapters.

Lhasa accent led to even more curiosity. Many local Tibetans later referred to me as the “guy who speaks Tibetan language.”²⁴

My final choice of Taktsang Lhamo as my field site was based on many different reasons—some were theoretical interests and personal experiences while others were simply local conditions that offered real possibilities for research. In the course of approaching the historical, geographical, and cultural complexity of this borderland, I have found many geographical names, Tibetan or Chinese, deserving some clarification, including the very name of “Tibet.”

In contemporary writings the word “Tibet” often refers to different geographical, ethnographic, or political concepts by different authors in different disciplines. The “premodern Tibet”, as Geoffrey Samuel (1993) calls it, refers to the Tibetan world before the Chinese annexation in 1950s, which was constituted by three major provinces—U-tsang (Central Tibet), Kham (Eastern Tibet), Amdo (Northeastern Tibet)—as well as some small vassals, tribes, or other population centers along the Himalayas (including much of today’s Ladakh, Sikkhim, Mustang, and Bhutan).²⁵ Linked through mainly cultural, economic, and especially religious relations in a pre-nation-state fashion, the administrative or political relationships among these units has always been a source of polemics in the modern nation-state context. Like every empire in the world, Tibetan central power also expanded and contracted through out its history.²⁶ Although the Tibetan power center in Lhasa has ruled “political Tibet”—mostly U-tsang in the traditional cultural geographical setting, or Tibet Autonomous Region (TAR) in today’s PRC—it was nevertheless only one of

²⁴ In local Amdo dialect, *bod skyad*, or “Tibetan language”, refers unambiguously to only the Lhasa dialect. It is clearly different from the “language” (*skyad*) or the “Amdo language” (*a mdo skyad*) which is the language of local people.

²⁵ For a description of these different regions and their “premodern” history, see (Samuel 1993).

²⁶ During the Tibetan empire period (7th-9th century), the Tibetan army successfully controlled much of today’s Tibetan cultural world (Beckwith 1987). Many contemporary disputes on Tibetan political history originate from the period after the Tibetan empire collapsed.

the many “modal states” (Samuel 1990; Samuel 1993) or “galactic polities” (Tambiah 1976; Tambiah 1985) in the premodern Tibetan world. Melvyn Goldstein (1998) uses the term “political Tibet” to describe a Lhasa-centered central Tibet represented by religio-political power (Tib: *chos srid gnyis ’brel*) of the Dalai Lama since the 17th century. As a contrast he has used the term “ethnographic Tibet” to represent much the same range as Samuel’s “premodern Tibet” but has changed the defining criteria from a temporal standard to that of ethnicity and culture.²⁷

The Chinese annexation of Tibet in 1951 has rendered the major portion of “premodern Tibet” into the contemporary Chinese state. It has since been separated from the rest of the Tibetan cultural world. While many scholars still refer to Tibet with its traditional division and former integrity, this major entity of Tibet in China has been fragmented and re-organized according to the new Chinese system. In China, the word *Xizang* (Chinese equivalent of “Tibet”) conveys only a geographical concept of the current TAR, an administrative equivalence to a Chinese province, which covers the former “political Tibet” or U-tsang. Interestingly, despite the adversarial stand on Tibet between the Chinese government and the Tibetan government in exile, Central Tibet (or TAR in China)—its language, tradition, political status, etc.—has been used by both sides as the authentic representative of “Tibet.” Central Tibetan tradition is thus represented as the standard “Tibetan culture,” a representation with which more than half of the Tibetan population who lives outside the TAR would not naturally agree. According to an independent survey, not only is the Tibetan area outside TAR much larger than the TAR proper, but the Tibetan population living outside TAR is also larger than that living in the TAR (Marshall and Cooke 1997). The Tibetan areas outside of the TAR have long been the frontier of Central Tibet and

²⁷ Hugh Richardson first used “political Tibet” and “ethnographic Tibet” to describe the political and cultural geography on the Tibetan plateau (Richardson 1984). See also (Goldstein and Kapstein 1998).

also the border zone between ethnic China and ethnic Tibet. These ethnic Tibetan areas outside the TAR have now fallen into four other Chinese provinces—Qinghai, Gansu, Sichuan, and Yunnan—in which, although Tibetan territory and population have been assigned as autonomous prefectures or counties, they constitute only a small part on the provincial level.

The geographical vastness, cultural diversity, and complexity of political and historical development in the Sino-Tibetan borderland make it both an exciting and a challenging choice for my research subject and fieldwork site. Coming from training in Tibetan literature and history, I have always been attracted to religion and ethnicity in Tibetan culture from both historical and contemporary perspectives. During my Master's studies in the Central University of Nationalities in Beijing I first became interested in the history of western Tibet. I was particularly interested in the Tibetan encounters with Christian missionaries in western Tibet and the subsequent fall of the Guge kingdom during the 17th century.²⁸ It was through this that I was directed to a Chinese translation of Robert Ekvall's 1952 novel—maybe more precisely an anthropological account of Amdo Tibetan life in the 1930-40s.²⁹ However what struck me immediately in this book was not his exotic adventures in Amdo Tibetan life but rather an enormous confusion of names and maps.³⁰ Until I finally got the original English version, I realized that the Chinese and Tibetan transliterations of the names in this book were hardly comprehensible because they were not translated through either the Chinese Mandarin Pinyin system—the standard Chinese alphabetical system used

²⁸ See (Martin and Bentor 1997) for a comprehensive list of Tibetan historical literature on western Tibet. See (Wu 1992) for an account of early Christian missionizing attempts in western Tibet. Also see my review of Namkha Norbu's book on the history of *Zhangzhung* in western Tibet (Zhang 2000).

²⁹ (Ekvall 1952). Born in an American missionary family in northwestern China, Ekvall had been a Christian missionary himself and had been living for many years among the nomad Tibetans on the Sino-Tibetan borderland before 1949.

³⁰ In fact the Chinese version of Ekvall's book was translated as a fiction instead of any biographical account. I am convinced that the Chinese translator himself might not even know the actual place he has translated since the principle name of the place Taktsang Lhamo was translated into a random Chinese name instead of the official Chinese name Langmusi (Liu 1992).

only after 1949, or the Tibetan Wylie system—the standard Tibetan alphabetical system proposed by Tibetologist Turrell Wylie in the 1950s.³¹ This has made it very difficult to trace the original names, not to mention all the changes of names or places that happened after 1950s. Ekvall was born in China and Chinese was the first language he adopted.³² After he started to develop missionary work in Tibetan areas during the 1930s-40s, he studied Tibetan and eventually stayed among nomad Tibetans for many years. Later he was trained as a cultural anthropologist in Chicago and his novels were more ethnographic than fictional, which means all the names of the people and places in the books have a real model. Yet I still could barely relate any of the place names that appeared in his book to anywhere on a contemporary Chinese map. Even the map he provided on the front page of his book could hardly match the corresponding part on contemporary map of Gansu and Sichuan.

The Republican period (1911-1949) was the transitional period from the former Qing Empire to a modern nation-state. It was also the beginning of Chinese nation-building process. One of the major changes during this period was the demarcation of national and provincial borders. Although the Gansu and Sichuan provinces had already been set up officially by the (Republican) Chinese government, the actual borders of these provinces faded in this wild Tibetan frontier where few Chinese had ever entered.

Taktsang Lhamo—Tib: *stagtshang lhamo*, lit. “Tiger’s Cave Goddess”, locals usually refer to it as Lhamo—is the Tibetan name of this region traditionally part of Amdo. Before the 1950s, it had been mostly inhabited by Tibetan nomad tribes (Tib: *tsho ba*) centered on two Tibetan monasteries—Kirti Monastery (Tib: *kirti dgonpa*)

³¹ I should mention, however, that his later works, i.e. (Ekvall 1964), did comply with the Wylie system (Wylie 1959).

³² The information hereafter about Ekvall’s biography comes from the online archival material from Wheaton College, <http://www.wheaton.edu/bgc/archives/GUIDES/092.htm#602>.

and Serchi Monastery (Tib: *serkhri dgonpa*), both belong to the Yellow, or Gelugpa sect. There was a small Muslim community with two mosques in this Tibetan village. Chinese Muslims, or Hui as they are called today, had been living in the Sino-Tibetan borderland as business traders since the late Chinese imperial period of the 19th century. While Taktsang Lhamo nowadays serves as an important middle stop on the Sichuan-Gansu highway between Chengdu and Lanzhou, travelers before 1950s had to make a big detour through northern Sichuan and southeastern Gansu just to avoid passing through this region. This vast borderland region, represented as a huge blank part on the map, was considered to be a dangerously wild land that was virtually unknown to the Chinese world at the time.³³ Meanwhile it was also an uncharted field that had been excitedly imagined by the new Chinese nation builders but yet to be incorporated in the newly constructed Chinese nation-state. This task of national incorporation was finally accomplished by the CCP government in the 1950s. After the CCP takeover, this region has been administratively re-organized on the new Chinese map as part of Gansu, Sichuan and Qinghai, with many places re-named in Chinese.³⁴

It was not until much later when I first came across the small Sino-Tibetan town of *Langmusi* on the border of Gansu and Sichuan that I suddenly noticed that the local Tibetans referred to this place as Lhamo, a name that had been so familiar in my mind through reading all of Ekvall's books.

³³ See (ZGGL 1987) for a list of road maps before 1949 and also a history of road construction between Gansu and Sichuan. With the rise of nationalist consciousness in Republican China, Chinese officials and intellectuals had traveled in this "virgin land" and called for a nationalist attention to this uncharted field. Yu Xiangwen, a pioneer Chinese scholar in this region in the late 1930s, expressed a deep concern about how "ignorant we have been of this borderland before" (Yu 1947). Another Republican official, Ma Hetian, who was traveling in Labrang region north of this area during the same period of time, traced the ethnic origins of Hui Muslims in the region and local place names back to certain Chinese historical sources (Ma 1947). See also (Fan 1938) for a Chinese journalist's report to this area.

³⁴ This renaming of places includes not only Tibetan names but also many Chinese names as well. Many of the classical Chinese names have been replaced by modern, simplified Chinese names.

After the People's Republic of China was founded in 1949, it took many more years for the CCP to actually take control of many areas now officially part of the Chinese national territory. When Taktsang Lhamo was officially “liberated” in 1953, it was immediately separated into two parts: one in Gansu and one in Sichuan, with one monastery and one mosque in each province. The Gannan Tibetan Autonomous Prefecture (GTAP) (Ch: *gannan zangzu zizhizhou*, a Chinese administrative unit under the Gansu province) officially incorporated the Gansu part of Taktsang Lhamo and renamed it *Langmusi* (Ch: *Langmu temple*)—a Chinese transliteration of the Tibetan name Lhamo (GZDF 1999). With the Great Leap Forward campaign in 1958, *Langmusi* was renamed as “Great Leap Forward People's Commune” (Ch: *yuejin renmin gongshe*). In 1961, the Great Leap Forward came to an end and the name of *Langmusi* was renamed “Long March Township” (Ch: *changzheng xiang*). During the Cultural Revolution period *Langmusi* was again changed into “*Langmusi* Revolutionary Committee” (Ch: *langmusi geming weiyuanhui*). It has only returned to the name *Langmusi* as the seat of township (Ch: *xiang*) administration since 1983.

Simultaneously, on the Sichuan side there has also been a parallel process of name changing. In 1954 the Sichuan part of Taktsang Lhamo was officially included in *Ruo'ergai* (Tib: *mdzod-dge*) county (Ch: *xian*, a Chinese administrative unit) as a district called *Namo*—another Chinese transliteration of the Tibetan name Lhamo (RGDF 1996). In 1958 the *Namo* district was renamed “Red Star Township” (Ch: *hongxing xiang*) in order to fit in with the Great Leap Forward campaign. Since then the seat of the township was moved out and the Sichuan part of Taktsang Lhamo was turned into two People's Communes (Ch: *renmin gongshe*) in 1960. In 1983 People's Communes became two villages (Ch: *cun*) of the *Namo* district that was resumed after the Cultural Revolution. Since the Chinese maps show only place names (in Chinese) down to the *xiang* level, today Taktsang Lhamo is only represented through the name

of Langmusi on the Gansu side. Most people have come to know this place by the name Langmusi as a town in Gansu province since it is the only name that appears on the Chinese map.

The provincial separation of Taktsang Lhamo along with the new Chinese naming has had a profound impact in many respects. Langmusi (lit. “Lang mu temple, or monastery”) has been used in different contexts by different people to address different things—e.g., geographical region of Taktsang Lhamo, either of the two Tibetan monasteries and later even the Muslim mosque. Regular electricity has reached this region in 2000 and replaced the former local hydropower station that could only supply five hours of unstable electricity everyday. Since this regular electricity comes from Liujiaxia, one of the biggest national hydropower stations located in Gansu, it served the Gansu part of Langmusi. Because of the provincial administrative separation the regular electricity did not extend to the Sichuan side, which is practically just across the street, until almost two years later. Similarly, most of the local infrastructure—postal service, telephone service, hospital, etc.—is set up on the Gansu side by the Gansu administration. These facilities have served to reinforce the new creation of Langmusi as a remote and backward ethnic borderland in the fringe of China and at the same have diminished the traditional geographical and cultural conception of Taktsang Lhamo. More profoundly, the road construction from Lanzhou, the capital city of Gansu, to Langmusi which was finished in 2004 completely changed the formerly equal access of Langmusi from Sichuan and Gansu. Tourist buses from Lanzhou now take a smooth ride of only seven to eight hours to arrive at Langmusi—compared to a two-day rough ride from Chengdu with a mandatory stay overnight on the way, similar to the Gansu side before this road was constructed.³⁵

³⁵ See more discussion of this road construction in chapter 6.

Since I conceive of this borderland as constructed by many different forces during different periods of time, I choose to use different names throughout this dissertation—Taktsang Lhamo, Langmusi, Namu, Kirti, Serchi, Langmu Mosque—to represent different constructive forces behind the use of each specific name. For example, I use Langmusi mostly to represent the Gansu administrative part of Taktsang Lhamo and Namu to represent the Sichuan administrative part. The name Taktsang Lhamo implies a traditional integrity in an Amdo Tibetan world. It represents both a geographical concept that goes beyond Gansu and Sichuan administrative parts today and also a cultural concept that has lost its original social and political context and thus only exists in local language and memories today. Every constructive force in this borderland is a vital part of the local landscape. Therefore I intend to use different names to partly reflect the immense complexity that goes beyond many geographical and ideological borders.

The politicization of the “Tibet question” has resulted in the politicization of almost everything related to Tibet, including the place names. In contemporary Tibet, both scholars and tourists have to strike the balance between using a traditional Tibetan name to refer to a Tibetan place or to use a new Chinese name instead. It is at once a matter of political correctness in terms of retaining traditional Tibetan cultural integrity—thus accepting or resisting the Chinese cultural colonization—and a matter of practicality.³⁶ I treat places and ethnic groups, particularly in this culturally diversified borderland, as dynamically constructed categories with changing meanings under different circumstances and times by different peoples. My use of Taktsang

³⁶ When I traveled for the first time to the *Ruo'ergai* county in Sichuan by bus, I met two Dutch men who had a hard time explaining to the Chinese driver the place name they wanted to go. As they did not speak Chinese they told the driver the place name on their guidebook—*mDzod dge*, an English transliteration from the Tibetan pronunciation. Since it does not quite match the Chinese transliteration of the place *Ruo er gai*, the Chinese driver simply could not understand no matter how they explained. I also noticed similar cases happened in other Tibetan places.

Lhamo is first a way to address the geographical and ethnic inclusiveness of the region and peoples under investigation. It is also my intention to use Taktsang Lhamo as a categorical contrast to all the lately constructed names and concepts (i.e. Langmusi), which, I argue later, make up part of the new landscape and layer of meanings in this borderland.

The first explicit choice I had to make on these different names was when I moved to this borderland to do long-term anthropological research. I had no choice but to pick one side—Sichuan or Gansu—in order to go through the “top-down” administrative processes to set my foot in my field site. When I chose to get in from the Sichuan side, I realized that I was expected by my host to have not just a “Tibetan” project but a “Sichuan Tibetan” project. Therefore despite the fact that my field site Taktsang Lhamo is practically administrated by Gansu, I chose to use all the names on the Sichuan side, i.e., Ruo’ergai County, Namu village—instead of GTAP and Langmusi—which makes it part of Sichuan and thus make it possible for me go through all the levels of administrations from Chengdu to Ruo’ergai and finally arrive at Namu/Langmusi/Taktsang Lhamo.

1.4 “Little Tibet” With “Little Mecca”: Importance of Locality and Theory

This dissertation comes out of anthropological fieldwork that can be termed classic—long-term participant observation based primarily in one location. As indicated by many scholars, however, this traditional sense of culture and community—defined as a group of people sharing common identity bounded to a geographical place—has long been problematic in many circumstances especially in areas like borderlands, multiethnic regions, postcolonial hybridity, and in the course of social cultural change (Gupta and Ferguson 1992). What characterizes Taktsang Lhamo as a borderland is not only its geographical location on the edge of the Tibetan

plateau but also an immense ethnic, regional, and religious diversity. In this sense, my study of Taktsang Lhamo as a borderland joins the challenge to the conventional concept of a bounded culture and community.

For Robert Ekvall or other pre-1949 travelers to this region, this place was no doubt “Tibet” since Tibetans were obviously the majority population and all the major powers—social, economic and political—were in the hands of Tibetans, either monastic or lay.³⁷ The Chinese Muslim Hui community was no more than some visible or invisible aliens in this Tibetan land. Fifty years later Chinese and foreign tourists (including myself at first) came to Taktsang Lhamo and they were also looking for some authentic Tibetan experiences in a Chinese backwater. As described in a Chinese tourist brochure, Taktsang Lhamo is “the last piece of pure land in Tibetan regions” (Ch: *zangqu zuihou yi pian jingtu*). It is advertised as both a “modernity-free” land not yet touched by Chinese modernization/colonialism and also a backwater that is to be transformed in the new national project called Great Development of the West (Ch: *xibu da kaifa*, hereafter GDOW).³⁸ With the Chinese government introduction of the Gannan Tibetan Autonomous Prefecture, this region has been officially labeled “China’s little Tibet, Gansu’s backyard garden” (Ch: *Zhongguo de xiao Xizang, Gansu de hou huayuan*). This name, given by the government, has been widely displayed and propagated as slogans in many public places—streets, government buildings, tourist spots—all over the Gannan cities as well as on many official publications and websites.³⁹ The Chinese government logic of advertising the pristine nature of an otherwise underdeveloped backwater is officially called “culture makes the stage and economy sings the opera [on it]” (Ch:

³⁷ This is evident through many of Ekvall’s books, i.e. (Ekvall 1938; Ekvall 1952; Ekvall 1979).

³⁸ The national project to develop the western part of China has been launched in 1999 by the Chinese government with the aim to develop all the “poor and backward” regions. For more on this project see a special issue of *China Quarterly* 2004, vol.178. See (Sines 2002; Goodman 2004).

³⁹ See, e.g., Gannan Prefecture Commercial Investment Website <http://www.gnzzsw.com/index.asp>.

wenhua datai, jingji changxi). That means culture or tradition is not more than a showcase, which is only useful so long as it helps developing the local economy. For Chinese or foreign tourists, this “little Tibet” not only guarantees an authentic Tibetan experience but also provides an alternative for those who can not go to the real “Tibet” that is said to have already been transformed—thus contaminated—by Chinese modernization/colonialism.⁴⁰

This “little Tibet”, however, also has another face—that of Islam. Gannan has long been the home of Chinese Muslim Hui and a major Islamic center in northwest China. Ever since the Chinese Tang dynasty (8th century) Arab traders have been roaming over the western part of China through the Silk Road. Many Muslims have established themselves in this part of China with their distinct religious traditions that have kept them distinct from both the Confucian dominated Han Chinese society and Tibetan Buddhist society. At the fringe of the Chinese empire, Gannan had been developed as regional centers for the Muslim population, Islamic culture, and Hui trading in northwest China (Gladney 1991; Lipman 1997). At the same time it was also the ethnic borderland between Confucian Chinese society and Tibetan Buddhist society. This cultural and ethnic encounter has for centuries resulted in cohabitation, conversion, and war. The history of Hui in northwestern China, as Jonathan Lipman has cogently argued, proves that it is both theoretically conceivable and practically meaningful to lead a life as both a Muslim and a Chinese at the same time.⁴¹ Since late imperial China (Qing dynasty) this region became known as “China’s little Mecca.”

⁴⁰ Since the Chinese government has introduced many development projects in TAR, it is said that today’s Lhasa, or other places in TAR, has become too “Chinese.” With the absence of Dalai Lama and other traditional Tibetan authorities, Lhasa starts to lose its “Tibetan” appeal. I often heard this idea from Chinese and Western tourists, mostly backpackers, who came to Taksang Lhamo looking for an alternative Tibetan experience. It also prominently appears in guidebooks such as Lonely Planet or its Chinese equivalents when it describes the attractiveness of borderland Tibetan areas such as Langmusi.

⁴¹ See (Lipman 1996). There are also many other works on the integration of Confucian into Islamic tradition in the Hui society (Lipman 1997; Ben-Dor Benite 2005).

Not only have the new Islamic sects and teachings been flourishing in this region, but many Hui elites have become influential both locally and nation-wide.⁴² Today, with the ethnoreligious revival of the Islamic tradition and thousands of newly rebuilt mosques since the 1980s, Gannan as a culturally inherited “little Mecca” shows another face of the government’s invention of “little Tibet.”⁴³

Previous scholarship on China has considered this place the periphery of the periphery—geographical, economic, cultural, and political—of the former Chinese empire. G. William Skinner, when constructing his regional system theory, was right to point out that a strict rural-urban dichotomy was not a feature of the traditional Chinese economic or conceptual landscape (Skinner 1977). Yet as this regional system theory is based primarily on southwest China—a major frontier region of China, it is curious to see no influence from any marginalized groups or societies, particularly non-Han ethnic groups, which have interacted economically and culturally with the neighboring Chinese society for centuries. Many recent scholarly works have pointed out this shortcoming by looking through the borderland or minority perspective.⁴⁴

Following this line, I started my work from Taktsang Lhamo as a borderland that has two faces of “little Tibet” and “little Mecca.”⁴⁵ It was not until the later phase of my fieldwork that I realized many difficulties in my research did not come from the

⁴² In his pioneer study on Muslim Hui people in northwest China, Jonathan Lipman has made the first comprehensive study on Hui history in northwest China (Lipman 1997). Dru Gladney’s later studies have touched upon many contemporary Hui issues in China such as religious resurgence and ethnic nationalism (Gladney 1991; Gladney 1998b; Gladney 1999).

⁴³ Gannan, officially a Tibetan autonomous prefecture, also has many Hui autonomous regions or counties where the Hui population is often the local majority. See (Gladney 1991: 47-58) for a further description of the orders and branches of Islam in Linxia.

⁴⁴ See, e.g., (Lipman 1997; Mueggler 2001).

⁴⁵ I thank my wife Isabelle Auffret who first brought this insight to me in the beginning of my fieldwork. As a foreigner who had no previous experience with either Tibetan or Hui, she was not subscribed to either side and thus immediately observed the important yet nearly invisible role of Hui community in this Tibetan land.

predicted “sensitive situation” of either Tibetan or minority issues in China.⁴⁶ But it was rather my increasing interest in doing research simultaneously with both Tibetan and Muslim Hui communities that had put me in “no place.” In order to work in a local community it is important to have a locally recognized identity that would give me access of communication to various people. In my case, despite the fact that more and more people—both Tibetans and Hui—started to know me and accepted my “residential status” during my two years there, I found it was becoming increasingly difficult to work simultaneously with the two communities. Apparently this arises from the complex relations, including tension, between the two local communities, which stems from a complex local history especially during the violent transition from a frontier in the empire era to a marginalized borderland in a multiethnic Chinese nation.⁴⁷ My interest in both communities and religions has put me in an unbridgeable gap between the two groups that was caught by their past and contemporary changes. My initial affiliation with the “Tibetan camp”—i.e., presenting myself as a Tibetan language student, introduced through my Tibetan monk friend, wearing a Tibetan robe, etc.—so naturally gave me a vision of a perfect “Tibetan landscape” that for a long time I did not even noticed the importance (or even the very existence) of the local Hui community, except some business owners. After I started to get in touch with the Hui community, I found it very difficult to get closer to individuals or the community as I constantly felt excluded as an outsider (Ch: *kafei*, or Ar: *kafir*, lit. “non-believer”) with either my formal Han Chinese identity or my new “Tibetan identity.”⁴⁸

⁴⁶ In fact once I got the affiliation with Sichuan University and came back to Taktsang Lhamo with their introductory letter, I found that the local PSB had no interests at all in what I was actually doing with my fieldwork.

⁴⁷ See more discussion on this topic in the next chapter.

⁴⁸ Although local Hui never used this derogatory term on me (or local Tibetans), it is through many daily practices that a non-Muslim is naturally excluded from the Hui. For example, they can give me a gift or invite me for food at their home but will never accept anything from me, let alone food. See

At the same time, my going to the Hui community upset and puzzled many of my Tibetan friends, particularly monks. They felt that by going to the Hui mosque and talking to Hui people I was both betraying their friendship and defiling my new “Tibetan identity” they had given me.⁴⁹ Meanwhile they also wondered why on earth I wanted to do that—as my monk friend asked me: “if you are staying in a Tibetan land, why do you want to go to a Hui mosque (Tib: *khyod bod sa stod na he he dgon ba vgro don gang red*)?” In fact this was also the question from the Hui community, though it was put in a slightly different way.⁵⁰ Both the Tibetan and Hui communities here are more used to the fact that Chinese or foreigners (sometimes government officials) come to Taktsang Lhamo for a “Tibetan experience”—visiting Tibetan monasteries, experiencing Tibetan culture, taking pictures of Tibetan monks or nomads. While enjoying their “authentic Tibetan experience,” they use the material facilities provided by Hui—coming by a bus run by a local Hui family, eating in Muslim restaurants and staying in Hui family hotels. My work was confusing to them since it did not go with this locally recognized cultural and economic norm.⁵¹ Sometimes I even ask myself this question. What if I focus on just one group, instead of both, and do a monographic research on it? What do I get—and by the same token,

(Cesaro 2000; Gillette 2000) for more examples on food and identity among Hui in Xi’an or Uyghur in Xinjiang. In the traditional Tibetan context, Tibetan Buddhists (Tib: *nang pa*, lit., “insiders”) also excluded non-Buddhist (Tib: *phyi pa*, lit., “outsiders”)—usually Bon-po, the pre-Buddhist shamanism in Tibet. However as I found out, this mutual exclusion of Tibetan and Hui had nevertheless been coined into the local political and social structure until it was completely refigured after the Chinese post-socialist reform in 1980s. See next chapter for more details.

⁴⁹ By new “Tibetan identity” I mean that I was studying Tibetan language, wearing Tibetan robe, was called by my Tibetan name, and was thus treated by my Tibetan friends with most of the local norms that apply to Tibetans.

⁵⁰ Until later in my fieldwork, I heard that in the beginning of my stay here most of the Hui community thought I was a teacher brought here by the Tibetan monastery to teach them Chinese or English language. After I explained to more and more people that I was doing my own research on Tibetan and Hui community here, it did not clear the confusion. On the contrary they were more confused in terms of the nature of my research, as compared to language teaching which might be easier to understand.

⁵¹ For the same reason, whenever we took photos from Chinese tourists coming here or even Hui residents here, we usually encountered their extreme uneasiness or curiosity. The assumed nature of a majority, unexotic people has excluded anyone in this default category from a reflection inwardly while gazing at “others.”

miss—if I focus on one ethnic group exclusively or even one aspect of the group, i.e. religion, education, etc., instead of the social and ethnic inclusion/exclusion against the backdrop of Chinese social economic changes? What do local people make of the ethnic tension or exclusion today? How do they make this ethnic borderland a meaningful and inhabitable place for them?

Many recent studies on ethnic minorities in China have touched upon these questions from different perspectives. In their consistent effort of seeking the emic view, anthropologists have long challenged the “grand discourse” on their subjects—the so-called “top-down” approach. These studies demonstrate that ethnic minority peoples living in a multinational state like China have led a meaningful life with a meaningful identity (at least to themselves) despite the fact that their minority status has been mainly constructed as an ethnic “other” by the state. In this spirit some of these works have chosen an indigenous point of view—that is, a “bottom-up” approach at the micro-level situation. They show how people themselves have made their lives meaningful and their place inhabitable. Instead of simply being passively and misleadingly represented by the state, these marginalized peoples have never been mere victims deprived of their own agency. On the contrary, they have taken advantage of everyday life practice—such as through ritual, language, religion, and even food—as means of resistance. Against these localized stories, the state is considered as a threatening power to be resisted, but “not as a system of institutions, a network of power relations, or a history of policies and programs, but as an aspect of the ‘social imaginary’” (Mueggler 2001).

Scholars in this group reflect on the concepts such as China or Chinese and question the notion of a “cultural wholeness”—to the extent that their ethnographic researches would contribute as an organic part. Dru Gladney (2004) argues that the very notion of China or Chinese culture should be located by “dislocating” it. That is

to say, the very notion of “Chineseness” can and should only be defined through “the liminal others,” i.e., the ethnic minority peoples, who have always been situated between the Chinese and the non-Chinese (Gladney 2004). Stevan Harrell (1995) has framed this dynamic process of the state-people interaction as a “civilizing project,” which is defined as an unequal interaction between a civilizing center with its claim of a superior civilization and periphery peoples whose civilizations are set on a lower level and thus need to be raised by the more progressed civilizing center.⁵² By emphasizing the mutual ways of impact, this scholarship shows that modern nation state has actively constructed this new category of ethnic minorities in the service of nation-building—a process that minority peoples themselves have also been involved either consciously, actively or not. Therefore this dynamic process can only make sense by looking at both sides of the process and from a locally informed perspective.

In light of these studies, my research on Tibetan and Hui communities in Taktsang Lhamo as “little Tibet” with “little Mecca” pinpoints both the flexibility and exclusivity of such notions as religion and ethnicity and leads to a fresh look at the Tibetan studies, minority studies in China and Chinese studies. The increasing academic interest in nation and nationalism, ethnicity and identity has fueled the studies on ethnic minorities in China and also led us to give a critical thought on some important conceptions such as nation-building, colonialism, subaltern, and hybridity.⁵³ The very meaning of religion and ethnicity (as well as many other boundary related

⁵² I will come to this theory again at the end of this dissertation (Harrell 1995c).

⁵³ The rising theory of nation and nationalism (Anderson 1983; Gellner 1983), against the primordial view (Shils 1957; Geertz 1973) and the constructionist approach of ethnicity (Barth 1969; Hobsbawm and Ranger 1983), provides a more complex context for ethnicity by putting in a more important new participant—the nation state. Many scholars have since taken serious consideration of the role of nation and nation-building in the modern formation of ethnic identity (Keyes 2002). See, e.g., Prasenjit Duara’s treatment of modern Chinese history through the discourse of nation-building (Duara 1995), or Dru Gladney’s account of modern Hui identity formation in a Chinese nation-state (Gladney 2004). As a result, frontier has become a transitional zone or middle ground (Giersch 2001; Spenden 2002), ethnic identity has become hyphenated (Lipman 1996), and center-periphery structure has become “multiple cores and multiple peripheries” (Lipman 1997).

concepts) has constantly been under challenge and negotiation due to the interactive nature of everyday life in this ethnic borderland. My primary interest in ethnoreligious revival in China has been both enriched and complicated through the unfolding process of two religious revivals in the same context of rapid Chinese social change.⁵⁴ I particularly emphasize the complexity of these issues in which different layers of temporality have been caught separately in different times and spaces yet have also dialogically encountered each other across time and space.⁵⁵ “Identities do not always emerge antithetically to the old,” as Dru Gladney (1994) suggested, “new identities may surface, old ones may be reinvented, and each will be in constant dialogue with each other.” It is indeed the inventive nature of these dialogic encounters that makes any single theory or approach—no matter how powerful it might sound—looks weak in front of this complexity.

1.5 Subaltern Studies and Other Studies—With a Chapter Overview

In a discussion of the polemics in Tibetan studies, Peter Hansen (2003) argued that the polarization, especially the politicization, of the Tibetan studies has “reduced the space available for scholarship that is not explicitly framed as political advocacy.”⁵⁶ While I completely agree with this argument on the Tibetan studies

⁵⁴ My previous experience in Tibetan areas taught me that if I want to conduct long-term fieldwork in any ethnic minority areas, as a Han Chinese researcher in an American university, there would be no less trouble than any other Western-based researchers. In order to get an official affiliation I have to demonstrate that I am doing a (at least potentially) “harmless” research—one that will not bring up the dissent among the local ethnic minority peoples and stay away from any potential anti-Chinese (or pro-Tibetan independence) stand—as much as any western researcher has to demonstrate their friendliness towards China and the harmless nature of their research to the state ideology. Those who are doing political research, especially something related to sensitive issues, just have to get around it with different strategies, i.e. (Bovingdon 2002). Personal communications with Gardner Bovingdon.

⁵⁵ Bakhtin has famously termed these layers of temporality “chronotope” (Bakhtin 1981). Anthropologist Stan Mumford has applied Bakhtin’s theoretical model of dialogic interaction in his studies on an ethnic and religious encounter between the Tibetan lama and Gurung Shaman in Nepal (Mumford 1989).

⁵⁶ This polemical debate was exemplified by a forum debate on Donald Lopez’s (1998) book in a discussion panel on the annual meeting of American Academy of Religion—which later appeared as a

situation, his later call for “subaltern studies for Tibet” as a solution for this current dilemma is more debatable.

The “subaltern studies” movement started in the 1980s from a group of Indian scholars who mostly worked on colonial and post-colonial Indian history (Guha and Spivak 1988, Spivak, 1988). Through resistance to the grand discourse of colonialism and colonial scholarship, this subaltern studies group sought to reevaluate the colonial structure by rescuing the “subaltern” histories—a voice that had been left out, if not subjugated, previously in the colonial and nationalist discourse. As it developed, many scholarly works in this group pointed out that the simple dichotomy of the colonial power and the colonized subject not only jeopardizes our understanding of colonialism but it also poses problems for the understanding of the pre-colonial empire and post-colonial state. To resolve this disjuncture that resulted from a dualistic treatment of power and resistance, they proposed to look at the multiple process of reproduction in a colonial or post-colonial structure from a subaltern perspective.⁵⁷

Ethnic minority scholarship in China has, in a similar fashion, sought to recover the marginalized voices through different perspectives such as contemporary literature, re/writing history, and religious and cultural revivals.⁵⁸ In addition to the official ethnic minority groups, non-official ethnic groups as well as other

2001 issue of *Journal of American Academy of Religion* (Germano 2001; Hansen 2003; Lopez 2001; Shakya 2001; Thurman 2001).

⁵⁷ For example, Ranajit Guha defined a colonial state as constituted by two contradictory, but nevertheless co-existent, paradigms: one that is contemporary, liberal, modern—the colonizer; and the other that is pre-colonial, pre-capitalist, traditional—the colonized (Guha 1997). This dualistic treatment of the colonial power and colonized others was later revised by addressing the multiple process of reproduction to point out the fundamental “tensions of empire” (Cooper and Stoler 1997).

⁵⁸ In his recent work, Dru Gladney (2004) actively proposed a subaltern perspective in the study of marginalized others in China. See also, e.g., a recent issue of *Manoa* on a description of modern Tibetan writers in China and their writings (Shakya 2000). In particular, this issue talks about the controversial Tibetan writer Don Grub Gya who committed suicide in his early 30s. His writings are well known for the critical attitude to both Chinese colonialism and traditional Tibetan conservatism. For other modern ethno-history writing, see (Harrell 1995b) for the case of Yi, which has involved the native minority scholars as the main actors of their own history writing. On religious and cultural revival see, e.g. (Goldstein and Kapstein 1998) for an account in ethnic Tibetan area.

marginalized groups have also been explored to question the monolithic assumption of the Han or Chinese society.⁵⁹ In a more recent study on the multiethnic borderland in southwestern China, Stevan Harrell argued that not only the Han Chinese living in minority areas—what he called “majority minority”—are generally poorer than those living in the urban areas, but their situation is “no better or worse than their minority neighbors” (Harrell 2001c). More research has pointed out the possible problem for such a “minority studies” framework that presupposes the Han versus minorities as dualistically existing categories. Such concerns have been addressed through recent works on such subjects as ethnic Han people in minority regions (Hansen 2005).

In both cases above, the subaltern studies group and the ethnic minority studies group, the problem I see lies in an uncritical attachment of an ideological label of “the subaltern” to any arbitrarily categorized ethnic groups (or other marginalized groups in the same sense).⁶⁰ The question Hansen asked—why is there no subaltern studies for Tibet—can not be answered by simply re/naming the Tibetans (or similarly other minority or marginalized groups) as the “colonized” or “subaltern” and Tibetan studies (or minority studies) as “subaltern studies.”⁶¹ What poses a problem to the subaltern studies, namely the dualistic treatment of power and resistance, also exists here. To avoid this, many scholars have approached their subjects through a perspective in

⁵⁹ For an example of a non-official ethnic group, see Sara Friedman’s research on Hui women in Fujian (Friedman 2004); for examples of other marginalized group, see Li Zhang’s research on immigrant workers in Beijing (Zhang 2001). Early in the 1930s, Owen Lattimore has mentioned a “refugee colonization” in Manchuria (northeastern frontier of China), in which the so-called “Chinese colonialist” were less pioneers or frontiers in the Western sense than some desperate refugees escaping from war or famine in Han centered Chinese areas (Lattimore 1935). I thank Magnus Fiskesjö for this information.

⁶⁰ In China this arbitrary categorization of ethnic minorities have been studied extensively, particularly through a revisit of the “ethnic classification” project of the early 1950s. See footnote 20 in this chapter.

⁶¹ The temptation of looking for the “subalterns” is so enticing, particularly in the case of Tibetan studies, that the persistent longing for Shangri-la or other essentialization of Tibetanness can be disguised even in a critique to itself. See, e.g. the debate on Donald Lopez’s (1998) book by Robert Thurman (2001), David Germano (2001), and Tsering Shakya (2001). As Hansen (2003) argued, the debate “demonstrated the extent to which nationalism polices the boundaries of Tibet as an authorized subject of study.” Charlene Makley (1999) has also pointed out the nature of an essentialized “Tibetanness” disguised in a seemingly nuanced treatment of religious revival in Tibetan society.

which both power and resistance have been embodied. In a recent case study on the current relation between Tibetan nomads and the Chinese state, Fernanda Pirie (2005) shows the nuance of this power resistance scenario in which, she argued “[r]ather than uniformly accepting or resisting the power of the government, the [Tibetan] nomads have developed ways of using it for their own purpose” (Pirie 2005b). Arguing against the dominant/resistant model, she concludes that the Tibetan nomads reaction to the Chinese state power should be treated along with its historical trajectory of their social organization and cultural ideas.

The case of ethnic encounters in a borderland like Taktsang Lhamo not only blurs the boundaries between the so-called “colonizer” and “colonized,” but also problematizes the very existence of such a binary structure with an enormous complexity of local history and ethnic interaction—what Lipman (1997) has termed “the multivalence of subalterity.” My study shows that to simply label the ethnic minority with the “subaltern” or “colonized” is both unhelpful and potentially misleading in either Tibetan or other minority related studies. In the following chapters I try to approach this complexity from a dialogic perspective. Chapter 2 shows the ethnic interaction in this borderland region against the multiple versions of the narratives on the local history. I particular emphasize the transition from the empire to the modern nation state which, I argue, is crucial in the modern creation of ethnic and religious categories. Chapter 3 focuses on the revitalization of ethnic and religious practices in Taktsang Lhamo after the Chinese Cultural Revolution. By exploring the reconstruction process of a local Tibetan monastery and a Hui mosque, I demonstrate an increasingly complicated ethnic and religious situation due to the change of social and political context. Chapter 4 uses some specific cases in the religious revival to illuminate the reconstruction of place in the ethnic borderland. Chapter 5 emphasizes the personal experiences and materialistic changes in Taktsang

Lhamo that reflect a change on the collective imagination of the nation. Chapter 6 explains the political economic basis of the local ethnic religious revival and reveals an intrinsic paradox between tradition and change among the local Tibetans and Hui vis-à-vis the Chinese state. Chapter 7 concludes this dissertation with a reflection on some theoretical issues through a borderland perspective.

CHAPTER 2

TIBETAN MONASTERIES AND HUI TRADERS ON THE SINO-TIBETAN FRONTIER: FROM EMPIRE TO NATION

Although China geographically covers three time zones, there is only one official time—Beijing time—throughout the country. This means the further westward one goes in the country, the later the day starts particularly during the winter season. When I caught the morning bus to Gannan in the West Lanzhou Bus Station in Gansu, the sky was still dark and full of stars. As a frontier province in northwest China, Gansu has not only the ethnic border with Tibet and Uyghur Muslim province of Xinjiang, but it is also well-known itself as a cultural meeting ground—the crossroad of different cultural worlds: Tibetan, Muslim, Mongolian, and Chinese, etc.—and a land of ethnic interaction as well as ethnic conflict (Lipman 1997; Nietupski 1999).

After an hour out of Lanzhou, the day started to brighten enough for me to see the dry eroded loess of the mountain hills outside the window—a typical natural landscape in this part of China. As the bus started to pass through some towns, the landscape started to be filled with minarets of mosques and Muslim Hui people on the street symbolized by men's white hats and women's veils. This part of Gansu has been a main Islamic center in northwest China since the eighth century and is now the home of more than one million Chinese Muslim people officially identified as Huizu (Hui nationality) in the People's Republic of China.⁶²

⁶² According to the Gansu 2000 census (GSRK 2002), Hui population in Gansu was the second largest in China next to Ningxia Hui Autonomous Region and counts about 1/9 of the total Hui population in China. For the history of Hui in northwest China and the modern creation of an ethnic Hui identity see (Lipman 1997; Gladney 1998a).

My destination for the day was Hezuo (Tib: *gtsod*)—the capital of Gannan Tibetan Autonomous Prefecture and also the transportation hub for this region. Hezuo is about 300 km southwest of Lanzhou and six-hour bus ride. At an altitude of 2,800m, the former pasture town of Hezuo was made the capital of the prefecture in 1956, whereas the capital before was set up in Xiahe (Tib: *bsang chu*), the seat of the great Tibetan monastery of Labrang.⁶³ To reach my final destination Langmusi, the Gansu part of Taktsang Lhamo, I had to wait for the only bus leaving the next morning. Although Langmusi was only another 160 km southwest down to the Gansu-Sichuan border, it took more than eight hours by bus as the paved road from Lanzhou ended in Hezuo and became a dirt path meandering through the high mountains on the eastern fringe of the Tibetan plateau.⁶⁴ The next day the bus finally arrived the nearest point to Langmusi where it stopped at a bridge. Just by the side of the bridge, a small mountain path led to the valley town of Langmusi five kilometers distant. A tricycle motor tractor, known to the locals as *Lantuo*, waited there the same time everyday to give the arriving bus riders a 15 minute bumpy ride to Langmusi in the open air for one *yuan* (\$0.12) per person.

This chapter has to do with the history of this borderland. Although I had a previous training in Tibetan language and history, I went to Taktsang Lhamo with an original proposal to study the contemporary ethnoreligious revival and to investigate social memory through a practice-oriented approach.⁶⁵ My hypothesis was that memory is constituted not only as individually conceived histories that are buried in peoples' minds, but also as forms of social practice that are deeply embedded in a broad social and political context. By the same token, I approached the history of this

⁶³ Due the predominant influence of Labrang monastery in the regional history, some have argued that the change of local capital to Hezuo is the CCP strategy for counterbalancing Tibetan monastic power in Labrang.

⁶⁴ This was ended with the construction of Lanzhou-Langmusi highway in 2004.

⁶⁵ For example, (Bourdieu 1990; Comaroff 1985; Ortner 1989).

borderland not just through a search in the classical literatures. I intended to collect different narratives and representations on the history of this ethnic borderland. What I found out turned out to be overwhelmingly complicated—and also more interesting—than I expected, particularly when they are contextualized in the transition from the former empire (i.e., Manchu Qing dynasty) to the modern Chinese nation state (Republican and later Communist). In the pre-nation state era this ethnic borderland was the frontier where two empires—Tibetan Gelugpa power centered in Lhasa and Manchu Qing centered in Beijing—faded into each other. The transition to a modern Chinese nation since the beginning of the 20th century has drastically changed the political and economic structure of the region as well as the local peoples' perceptions of themselves and their homeland.

2.1 Tiger's Cave on the Tibetan Frontier

The reason this place is called Taktsang Lhamo is because, a long time ago, the place of this monastery had a mountain cave where a mother tiger and her five cubs inhabited. Today this Tiger's Cave (Tib: *stak tshang*) is still there and many nomad people come to worship this cave. The so-called Lhamo comes from the Dalai Lama's protective deity (Tib: *dbal ldan lha mo*) whose mouth called out the name Lhamo as one of the sacred sites in northern Tibet. Thus a combination of these two names makes the name of this place—Taktsang Lhamo.

Zorge Nyima⁶⁶

Taktsang Lhamo is known for its two Tibetan monasteries—Kirti monastery and Serchi monastery. When I first arrived, the town center of Langmusi was just one

⁶⁶ The quotation here is my translation of a monastery print version of Zorge Nyima's famous work on local history. Zorge Nyima (?~1990) was a renowned Tibetan monk teacher from Kirti monastery. He is vividly remembered and greatly respected by the local monks as an erudite local historian. His book (Nyima 1985), though only a monastery print, has been a popular read among the monks and also been cited as a major source of local history, particularly the Kirti monastery lineage. I was also told by the monks that this book was banned by the government although I found nothing inside that could be interpreted as challenging Chinese authority.

dirt street at the bottom of the valley about half a kilometer long flanked by two lines of red brick houses, some of which were run by the local Hui as shops and restaurants. At the end of this street the path is separated into two directions: one goes into the Sichuan side of the town leading to Kirti monastery and the Tiger's Cave, the other stays in Gansu leading up to the Serchi monastery on the slope.

Despite the fame of the two monasteries, it is in fact this legendary Tiger's Cave that makes this place famous and also the first reason for the pilgrims to come to Taktsang Lhamo. Even tourists these days are guided through this pilgrimage route. The cave not only gave this place its name but it has also been worshipped, along with the two monasteries, as an important part of the local sacred landscape. Both the cave and the Druchu River source by its side have been included as sacred sites on the circumambulation path around the Kirti monastery.⁶⁷

The Sichuan side of the town (Ch: *namo*) consists of three clearly separated quarters: a Tibetan village called Dongkha (Tib: *dong kha*), a Hui village called Gyago (Ch: *huimin cun*, Tib: *rgya sgo*) in Tibetan, and the Kirti monastery (see Figure 3). Dongkha has about 110 households, all of which are Tibetan, and Gyago has about 90 households, all of which are Hui. The Druchu River which originates from the valley of the Tiger's Cave first goes past the Kirti monastery on the upper part before it descends to the Gansu town of Langmusi.

On my way to this cave I met Tashi, a Kirti monastery monk of my age who later became my good friend and informant. We accompanied each other as he was

⁶⁷ Circumambulation (Tib: *skor ra*) is a common Tibetan religious practice which is performed by numerous circuits around the empowered sacred site as a daily form of praying and accumulating Karmic merit. All the Tibetan sacred sites—monasteries, sacred mountains, lakes, sacred city, etc.—have one or more circumambulation paths signified by prayer wheels, flags, *mani* stone walls or piles, etc. Because of its deep engraving into Tibetan ethnic identity, not only has circumambulation been used as a symbolic protest against the Chinese rule (Schwartz 1994), some scholars even argue that it is daily practices like circumambulation—rather than any grand religious rituals such as Monlam Chenmo—that forms the deep consciousness of Tibetan self-identity (Makley 2003).

also on his way to this sacred site. Following the Druchu River up we passed through the Kirti monastery and reached an open field. During the cold winter morning the Druchu River is often covered with some thick white fog floating above it, which makes it look like a river of boiling water. Tashi led me to some small water mill houses built over the river. Until I came close to these water mills I realized that these water mills were in fact built as naturally turned prayer wheels. They are also part of the circumambulation route. Tashi went down to the house and carefully cleared out the grass in the river that had stuck in the wheels.

Crossing the open ground we entered a narrow valley that is densely covered by pine trees that are hundreds of years old. This is the source of Druchu River and is also where the Tiger's Cave is. The mountain opens a narrow cleavage where the Druchu River comes out. As we entered the valley it suddenly became quiet and dark. The high cliff and pine trees cut out most of the light from the outside. A cave is just down the cliff. Tashi told me this is the cave where the first Kirti Lama⁶⁸ had practiced and the natural imprint on the wall was left by his hand. A four-meter high latse (Tib: *la rdzas*) stands in front of the cave entrance. A latse is a stone cairn with wood chips and arrows thrust on top and decorated with prayer flags. They are widely used as a part of sacred landscape in Tibet such as mountain peaks or mountain passes. Beside the latse there is a small stone platform used as an altar blackened by the frequent incense that is burned upon.

The mouth of the cave is too low for anyone to walk in—we had to squat to get into the cave. It was so dark inside that I could barely see anything even with the flash-light Tashi brought. Despite the darkness, Tibetan pilgrims came in constantly

⁶⁸ The term Lama here is a specific term to address a reincarnated living Buddha (or *Tulku*). It is an Amdo equivalent to Rinpoche in central Tibet. Other variants in Amdo are also prevalent in the local dialect. I chose to use in my study the local way of addressing instead of the commonly known Lhasa terms.

and offered ceremonial scarves (Tib: *kha btags*). Coming out of the cave, Tashi and I offered some incense in front of the legendary handprint and then followed others to the source of the Druchu River that lay beyond the cave. The source is a small stream coming out from the earth. Tashi scooped up some water with his hands, drank some and put the rest on his head—the Tibetan way of getting blessed from a sacred site. The water stream forms a small pond before it enters the valley. Following other Tibetan pilgrims, we came to the bank of the pond. Tashi brought some bread to feed the fish in the pond. Many people just watched the shoal of fish swimming leisurely in the crystal clear water.

2.2 Taming Stories and the Importance of Borderland in Tibetan History

Since Tashi and I shared the same interests in Tibetan history I asked him to tell me more about the local history. It didn't surprise me, as a student of Tibetan language and history, that the local history for Tashi means exclusively the written sources on the history of the monastery and the lineage of Kirti Lama. I also knew that I asked this question to the right person because educated monks are supposedly the only authorities who are eligible to tell the “history” (Tib: *lo rgyus*).

A long time ago, this was a terrible place: no Buddhism, no monastery, only the mountain demons and wild animals that were harming people. You saw the tiger's cave there? There were actually tigers in there! Only when the First Kirti Lama came here from Lhasa, he tamed all these demons and wild animals. Because he brought the Dharma Law (Tib: *chos*) to this wild land. After that, this place started to have the current name Taktsang Lhamo and became a happy land.⁶⁹

The Tibetan word “tame” (Tib: *'dul pa*) carries a special meaning besides bringing in cultivation out of the native wildness. In a Tibetan literary context, it first of all

⁶⁹ Fieldnotes February 1999.

conveys the idea that a positive force (i.e., Bodhisattva) conquers a negative one (i.e., demon), not by destroying it, but by turning its negative—in most cases also powerful—energy into the service of the positive force and ultimately into a positive one. This genre of “taming” stories prevails in all kinds of Tibetan literature, such as religious developments (Tib: *chos 'byung*), biographies (Tib: *rnam thar*), historical texts (Tib: *lo rgyud*, or *deb ther*), particularly since the introduction of Buddhism in Tibet.⁷⁰ This theme is particularly salient when the story relates to the previously unknown or barbarian borderland. I noticed later in my fieldwork that this story of local history told to me by Tashi comes exclusively from the few written sources on Taktsang Lhamo. It is also the “official” version of local history that one would hear from almost everyone in town—from Tibetan monks to illiterate Tibetan nomads, even local Hui Muslims.⁷¹

In Tibetan history, Central Tibet and borderland Tibetan regions (such as Kham, Amdo or Ngari) have played different yet complementary roles in the religious development on this high plateau. One key feature of the borderland in Tibetan history is its role as a “reservoir” for alternative religions and their practitioners—both Buddhists and non-Buddhists—which is a crucial feature in the religious and cultural complexity of Tibetan history.⁷²

⁷⁰ Charlene Makley (1999) argues that this concept of taming is a genderized heroic behavior in Tibetan context, which illustrates particularly Tibetan masculinity through monkhood.

⁷¹ In my dissertation I have used mainly three Tibetan literary sources: a monastic print of local history by Zorge Nyima (Nyima 1985); a monastery history and Kirti Lama lineage compiled by the exile Kirti monastery in Dharamsala (KTGS 2000); and the 18th century Tibetan classic *The Religio-Political History of Amdo* (Tib: *mdo smad chos vbyung*) written by Chagongpa (Tib: *brag dgon zhabs drun dkon mchog bstan pa rab rgyas*) (dKon-mchog-bstan-pa-rab-rgyas 1982). As a Tibetan frontier, Taktsang Lhamo has very few records in any official documents. *The Religio-Political History of Amdo* is an authoritative and comprehensive Tibetan source on the religious development and political history of Amdo. Other sources are mostly unofficial print materials from local monasteries about their development history and biography of their incarnate lamas.

⁷² I thank Professor Mark Elliot for pointing out the idea of marginal survival in folklore studies as our panel discussant in Harvard East Asia Graduate Conference 2008.

Abundant Tibetan literatures have recorded the religious development on the Snowland.⁷³ Before Buddhism arrived in Tibet, Bon—a pre-Buddhist indigenous religion in Tibet—first spread to Central Tibet from the extreme west of the Tibetan plateau (Tib: *mnga' ris*) where the ancient Tibetan civilization of Zhangzhung (Tib: *zhang zhung*) originated long before the rise of the Tibetan empire (7th-9th century).⁷⁴ While the successive Tibetan kings passionately supported Buddhism over three centuries, the practitioners of Bon were severely persecuted and purged from Central Tibet. Many Bon practitioners were forced to escape to the then faraway borderland regions where the central power could not reach and they thus could continue to practice their beliefs. At the end of the ninth century Buddhism reached its apex in Central Tibet, when the last Tibetan king Langdarma came to power and started his radical anti-Buddhist campaign. He persecuted Buddhists just as his predecessors had done to the Bon before. This time it was the Buddhist turn to escape to the borderland, until the Tibetan empire finally ended with the assassination of Langdarma by two Buddhist monks. After a century of turmoil, near the end of the 10th century Tibet saw a revival of Buddhism.⁷⁵ One major source of this Buddhist revitalization was a reintroduction of Buddhist teachings and texts that had been conserved in the borderland regions (Kham and Amdo) by those Buddhist monks who fled from Central Tibet.⁷⁶ Not only has the borderland been a “reservoir” of those texts, but it also served as an asylum for those monk and scholars during extreme periods. While borderland was more tolerant and inclusive on the one hand, this is exactly the reason

⁷³ This part of the Tibetan religious history is based on several Tibetan classic literatures: *chos-'byung mkhas-pa'i dga'-ston* (A feast of the wise), *deb-ther sngon-po* (The Blue Annals), *sba-bzhed* (The history of Samye Monastery), *mdod-smad chos-'byung* (The religio-political history of Amdo).

⁷⁴ So far the study of *Zhangzhung* civilization is mostly based on textual and archaeological sources. See e.g. (Norbu 1996; Bellezza 2002; Aldenderfer and Moyes 2004).

⁷⁵ In Tibetan history this is called the “second spread” or the “later spread” of Tibetan Buddhism (Tib: *phyi dar*) in contrast to the “first spread” of Tibetan Buddhism (Tib: *snga dar*) from India in the 8th century.

⁷⁶ For a bibliography of Tibetan language historical sources see (Martin and Bendor 1997). For a collection of western language sources on Tibetan history see e.g. (McKay 2003).

that characterized it as a wild and uncivilized place that is there to be “tamed” by civilized center.⁷⁷ Taktsang Lhamo was one of those wild and uncivilized borderland with demons and animals harming people until it was “tamed” by the arrival of Kirti Lama and the Gelugpa Tibetan Buddhist monastery.⁷⁸

2.3 Amdo/Gansu: A Frontier on the Edge of Two Empires

After almost a full day of listening to Tashi talk of local history, I could not help noticing that he did not mention the local Muslim Hui in any part of this “local history”. Nor did he even the Serchi monastery, as if they have never existed at all. Even when I asked a related question about Serchi monastery Tashi simply answered “I don’t know” and then went back to the original subject.

As I spent more time in Taktsang Lhamo, it did not take me long to find out that this antagonism of Serchi monastery is not particular to Tashi—all the monks from Kirti monastery I met later have the same attitude when they talked about Serchi. The same applies to Serchi monks when talking about Kirti monastery. Not only do the monks set up a clear line between the two monasteries, they also behave and act in their daily lives as if the other one does not exist on the same land. I learned after I settled down there that my monk friends in Kirti would be in low spirits if they knew I

⁷⁷ Many Gelugpa monasteries in Khamo and Amdo today were in fact other sects that were converted into Gelugpa monasteries. In some cases this conversion, or taming process, was done with violence. For example, during the Qing dynasty, the official policy was to propagate the Gelugpa and suppress others. Thus many non-Gelugpa monasteries had been converted to Gelugpa during this period. In late eighteenth century after the Qing emperor Qianlong successfully suppressed the Tibetan uprising in Jinchuan (Kham) area, he had ordered the conversion of the central Bon monastery of Jinchuan, which he believed had nurtured the uprising again Qing (Chen 1987).

⁷⁸ Rongchen Gendun Gyantsan (1374-1450) was the founder the Kirti monastery. He was born in Amdo and educated in Central Tibet before he came back to Taktsang Lhamo. He is said to have tamed the local demons in Taktsang Lhamo and have turned them into protective deities of Buddhism. He has since been honored as the legendary founder of Kirti monastery and the beginning of the Kirti Lama lineage. It is said that because of his virtue even the tigers stopped harming people. The three Tibetan sources of regional history record similar accounts with some minor differences (Nyima 1985; KTGS 2000; dKon-mchog-bstan-pa-rab-rgyas 1982). They have recorded the same appellation—Jagnapa (Tib: *ljags nag pa*, or “the one with black tongue”)—of this legendary lama.

had visited Serchi or attended their rituals. Moreover, as I discovered later in my fieldwork, even the local lay communities have clear divisions between Serchi goers and Kirti goers. A Tibetan couple who owned a small grocery shop in Langmusi told me their experience when they first opened their shop:

One day a group of people (Tibetan) came in my shop. Suddenly one guy saw the portrait of Kirti Lama at the top of the wall in my shop. He told his friends: “Hey, look, they have Kirti Lama’s photo here!” Other guys immediately stopped what they are going to buy. They murmured a bit and quickly left without buying anything. [...] I knew why they left. Because they are from the Serchi *mtha’wa*.⁷⁹

The Tibetan term *mtha’ wa* refers to a specific time and space—the pre-nation state Amdo, particularly during the Manchu Qing dynasty. During this specific period of time, Amdo was simultaneously the frontier of the Manchu Qing dynasty (1644-1911) and of the Gelugpa Tibetan power in Lhasa (1642-1951). On a practical level it was the local monasteries that had shared the local power through the system of *mtha’ wa*. Each monastery, Kirti and Serchi, had its own *mtha’ wa* including both Tibetan and Hui villages while the power boundary between the two was constantly contested. The tension between the two monasteries is thus rooted back to this imperial period. This leads to two points that I want to pursue further. One is the multi-ethnic nature of the Qing dynasty as well as the nature of ethnicity in Qing dynasty. The second is the dynamic nature of this meeting ground at the frontier of the two empires, which eventually set up the basis for a turbulent transition to the modern Chinese nation.

⁷⁹ Fieldnotes October 2001. The word *mTha’ wa*, or *lha sde*, means the village owned by monastery politically and economically. Village households are subjected to tax or other corvee labor to the monastery. Many terms like this are either ceased to be in use today or stripped off the original meanings because of the change of social and political system. For example, the word *lha sde* changes into *sde wa* today which conveys a equivalent meaning of village or *cun* in Chinese.

The Manchu not only established the politically powerful Qing dynasty that extended its territory much wider than before, but it also from the very beginning sought to manage a multi-ethnic empire. In the past ten years scholarship on the Manchu as an ethnic minority polity has turned significantly towards a reflection on the ethnic identity of Qing, namely the questioning of the Chineseness of this Manchu dynasty.⁸⁰ One major shift in this historical reflexivity is from the formerly China-centered view of Qing to a Manchu-centered—or likewise Tibetan, Uyghur, Mongolian—perspective. By exploring the ethnic policy and ethnic practices in the Qing dynasty particularly through minority language documents (Manchu, Mongolian, Tibetan, etc.), this scholarship has called into question of the so-called Sinicization of the Manchu ruler (Rawski 1996; Millward 1998). In other words, by assuming the Sinicization of the Manchu ruler we narrow ourselves to a Sino-centric view of the Qing studies and thus miss other perspectives, such as a Manchu perspective of Qing. Thus, since the Qing empire was far from “a single, unified political state”, the ethnic relationship in the empire has multiple facets related to many other issues such as economy and politics. Millward (1998) thus argues for a Manchu-centered perspective on Qing studies. What should be called into question then is not so much how Sinicized the Manchu Qing dynasty was. In his interpretation of the Qing vision of a multi-ethnic empire, Millward depicts the Qing vision of a universe that is represented by the Qing emperors. Below the apex of the pyramid, all the “ethnic blocs” (Manchu, Tibetan, Mongol, Han, Muslim, etc.) were arranged in a rather parallel relation than a hierarchical one (Millward 1998: 201). In other words, when we take a Manchu-centered perspective at the Qing studies, ethnicity *per se* was not considered the first and foremost concern for the Qing. As shown in the case above, the local Tibetan

⁸⁰ This group of scholarship is often called New Qing History, for example (Crossley 1997; Millward 1998; Elliott 2001; Hostetler 2001).

reaction to the Kirti Lama portrait reflects the collective memory of the pre-nation state period when notions, such as *mtha' wa*, were defined in political and economic terms without taking ethnicity into consideration.

Much has been written on the significant difference between a discursive frontier in a pre-nation state empire and a clear-cut border in a modern nation state.⁸¹ These works have pointed out from different aspects that the fluid nature of the frontier in the pre-nation state empire has contributed to the later problematic nature of border and territory in the modern nation state. The Amdo/Gansu frontier has been more complex as it had been simultaneously the frontier of two empires and yet had never really been part of either. During the long and complex history in Amdo, not only had many ethnic and religious forces—Tibetan, Chinese, Manchu, Mongol, Muslim, Gelugpa, different Sufi orders—claimed Amdo in different times, different ways and on different levels. More significantly, these political, religious, and economic forces had been intertwined with each other and formed specific relations with each other such that no one force could replace another. This multi-centered situation in Amdo/Gansu frontier and its complex relation with Tibetan and Chinese powers lasted until even after the CCP took power in China.

Taktsang Lhamo represents a typical case of collective social memory in this sense. The tension between two local Tibetan monasteries, despite their fealty to same religious tradition, is deeply rooted in the social, political and economic organization back to the imperial period. The “shopping incident” above—where the Tibetans, both lay and monastic, would consciously avoid everything or everyone that has to do with their rival unit—has clearly shown the influence of a collectively memorized past in their everyday lives. In fact this confrontation between the two monasteries along with each communities had crossed the ethnic boundary as well. Hui village in Taktsang

⁸¹ (Anderson 1983; Duara 1995; Lipman 1997; Schein 2000; Harrell 2001c; Keyes 2002).

Lhamo was also separated according to *mtha' wa* of two different monasteries with political and economic responsibilities while downplaying the significance of ethnic difference in this borderland.

2.4 Tibetan Monasteries and Hui Traders on the Sino-Tibetan Frontier

Chinese and Western tourists come to Taktsang Lhamo to see an authentic Tibetan place. Once they are here, they often have to deal with the Muslim Hui people first since the local Hui, despite being a local minority, are the owners of most businesses in town—from hotels, restaurants, grocery stores, tailor shops, small bakeries to the only bus line that goes in and out of town once a day.⁸² For more than a century the local Hui community has been living and running businesses in this part of the town which the local Tibetans refer to as Gyago.⁸³ Today the big part of this town center falls into Gansu province, and only a small portion is in Sichuan.

In contrast to the Hui-concentrated downtown, the two Tibetan monasteries occupy a large part of local landscape including the surrounding mountains, valleys, forests, and the two big compounds of monastic buildings and monastic communities. These are the destinations for visiting tourists, and the pilgrimage sites for local Tibetan and pilgrims. Businesses owned by the monastery were at one time limited to a Tibetan clinic run by the medical college of the monastery and some small *tangka* (scrolled Tibetan Buddhist painting) shops.⁸⁴ This contemporary contrast of spatial

⁸² The situation was described as in 2001. Since then many Tibetan and Chinese have joined the local businesses, especially after the building of a local highway in 2004. See chapter 6 for more on road construction and tourism.

⁸³ Tib: *rgya sgo*, lit., “Chinese door”, it refers to the local Hui village that lives outside the Tibetan community. The local Tibetans call the Hui *hehe* which is a Tibetan transliteration of the Chinese term Huihui. But I noticed that the Tibetan term *rgya* (lit., “Han Chinese”) has been used in a very loose way. It basically refers to non-Tibetan rather than actually Han Chinese. When we initially arrived in Taktsang Lhamo local Tibetans referred to my wife, a western woman, as *rgyamo*, or “Chinese woman”.

⁸⁴ In 2003, a new hotel built by the Serchi monastery opened its door to tourists. This has inspired the Kirti monastery to build another hotel.

and economic disparity between Hui and Tibetan, however, disguises the former important role that the Tibetan monasteries played in the Sino-Tibetan frontier business. For centuries Tibetan monasteries were the local political and religious centers as well as trading centers.⁸⁵ Big monasteries usually own a large part of local land, pastures, forests, livestock, as well as small monasteries (Tib: *bu dgon*) and subject villages (*mtha' wa*).⁸⁶

As a frontier land of both Manchu Qing and of Central Tibet, Tibetan monasteries in Amdo were organized very differently from those in Central Tibet. They were largely independent from either authority and the complex relations among themselves usually overshadowed their apparent religious affiliation.⁸⁷ These monastic entities often integrated a comprehensive structure of religion, politics and economy. Before the 1950s there were a wide variety of monks in Kirti monastery—from the religiously oriented majorities to different administrative positions, financial management, tax collection, and as trading professionals (see Figure5).⁸⁸ The monk

⁸⁵ Eric Teichman, a British officer who traveled in northwest China during the 1917, wrote in his travelogue that “large monasteries on the Kokonor border [northeastern Tibet, or Amdo] are commercial as well as religious centers” (Teichman 1921). Republican Chinese officer Ma Hetian also observed the prosperous monastery market in Labrang when he traveled there in 1936 (Ma 1947: 53).

⁸⁶ In monastic relationships the bigger monastery, called “mother monastery” (Tib: *ma dgon*), had full power over some small monasteries, called “son monastery” (Tib: *bu dgon*). According to a state survey in 1955 (ABLD 1985), Kirti monastery property at that time was estimated as: 1) cash: 300,000 (silver tael); 2) cattle: 600 horses, 14 mules, 450 yaks, 300 milk cows, 3500 sheep; 3) land: 46 acres; 4) real estate, including temples and assembly halls: 800,000 (silver taels). There were also 18 small monasteries (Tib: *bu dgon*), 4 nomadic tribes (Tib: *tsho ba*), and 12 villages (Tib: *mtha'wa*) that were directly controlled by the Kirti monastery (Yan and Que 1993).

⁸⁷ Robert Ekvall observed this situation in the 1930s. When talking about the political division in Taktsang Lhamo, he wrote, “three tribes and two lamaseries divide among themselves the control of the region, and in the jealousies and rivalries of that divided administration lawlessness thrives” (Ekvall 1938). In fact, since the establishment of Kirti and Serchi monasteries, religion has never brought them together in the way that Gelugpa monasteries in Central Tibet would ally with the religio-political government in Lhasa and with each other (Goldstein 1989). Although they both belong to the same Yellow Hat school (Gelugpa), religion has never stopped the rivalry—sometimes even violence—between them which was mostly caused by the political or economic conflict (ABLD 1985: p140; Ekvall 1939). Many Western and Chinese travelers in the early 20th century noticed the significant independence of Tibetan monastic and lay units in Amdo (Ekvall 1939; Ma 1947; Rock 1956; Teichman 1921; Yu 1947).

⁸⁸ These included, for example, *ombo* who was the leading chanting monk (chief steward) of each college, *jiwa* who was in charge of the financial management such as monastic fund raising, tax

traders were selected to do business for the monastery often as a lifetime profession. They were in charge of a wide range of monastic business: loaning monastery money to generate interest, trading monastery cattle or other products, collecting taxes and contributions from their subject villages for the various religious events in the monastery. Although they were not paid in any material form, these monks, if they succeed in their business, would be considered as gaining equal merit as those who did through textual studies.⁸⁹ At the same time, the monastery itself was also a main trading place. During the numerous religious ceremonies throughout the year, Tibetan pilgrims came from different regions to the monastic center for religious purposes, and also for trade (McKay 1998). This periodic gathering provided a good business opportunity for Tibetan traders, and also attracted adventurous outside traders such as the Hui.

During the Qing dynasty, many Hui businessmen traveled back and forth in the Sino-Tibetan borderland between Gansu and Sichuan.⁹⁰ This long distance trading resulted in the creation of several big trading posts along this route as well as the appearance of some professional Hui trading caravans. Taktsang Lhamo was one of the trading stops for the Hui traders and caravans between Gansu and Sichuan. In 1865, some Hui businessmen from the nearby Hui centered region of Hezhou and Taozhou started to settle down in Taktsang Lhamo.⁹¹ As the first non-Tibetan people settled down in Taktsang Lhamo, the Hui had to ask for the permission from the local Tibetan

collection, and *shangzod* who was the personal manager of the Lama. Even after the political relaxation in the 1980s, only the religious part of these monastic functions had been restored while other political economic activities are strictly forbidden. For a review of political and religious organization of monastery and government in pre-1950s Lhasa, see (Goldstein 1989: 1-37).

⁸⁹ Field interview 2004. See also (ABLD 1985; Yan and Que 1993).

⁹⁰ The trading route was mainly between Songpan (north Sichuan) and Taozhou/Hezhou (Gansu) with some major stops in between, including Taktsang Lhamo (Fu and Xu 1967).

⁹¹ These people's names were recorded in the mosque as part of the local Hui community history. Fieldnotes 2003-2005.

monastic authority.⁹² Today, this ask-for-permission has been interpreted rather differently by Tibetan and Hui residents in Taktsang Lhamo. The Hui villagers explained this part of their history to me as a gracious invitation to the Hui from the Tibetan monastery. This Tibetan-initiated invitation, according to Hui, could be explained by the local need for more commerce and thus more skilled businessmen, like Hui.⁹³ However the local Tibetans explained the same “ask” to me as an apparent evidence of paramount authority of the Tibetan monastery at that time. Therefore, the Tibetan acceptance of the Hui community in Taktsang Lhamo was rather a monastic—thus also a Tibetan—benevolence granted to the Hui who came to Taktsang Lhamo as refugees escaping ethnic and religious violence in that period.⁹⁴

Since then a small Hui community had been accepted separately by the Kirti and Serchi monasteries as their own *mtha' wa*. As the subjects of the Tibetan monastery, Hui villagers had the same responsibility and obligations as the Tibetan counterpart, such as paying tax, providing corvee labor, and contributing to the monastery.⁹⁵ In return the monastic authority granted them a piece of land and the permission to stay. In addition, Hui villagers could seek the same protection from monastic authorities as Tibetan villagers in case of any trading dispute or even war with other political units. Ethnic and religious difference was tolerated and

⁹² About this asking permission (Ch: *wen hua*, lit. “ask the word”; Tib: *mgo vdogs* lit. “tie one’s head to”), Robert Ekvall who had been living in Taktsang Lhamo during the 1930-40s wrote in fine detail the hard time he went through to get the local monastic permission to live there. At the end it happened to be the rivalry between the Kirti and Serchi monastery that actually helped him to be able to stay there (Ekvall 1952).

⁹³ Muslim communities had settled in Tibetan borderlands throughout the Qing dynasty. Local Gansu gazetteers show, for example, that Jamyang Shepa, the head lama of Labrang monastery, invited Muslim merchants to settle down in Labrang area in order to promote local business.

⁹⁴ Field interview December 2003. For the ethnic violence and religious conflict in the Hui area at that time see (Lipman 1990).

⁹⁵ A Chinese official survey in 1955 (ABLD 1985) documented five major sources for the monastery income: 1) Lama of the monastery (Living Buddha) go out for religious services, i.e., get paid by locals for doing religious rituals; 2) Regular religious donation from the *mtha'wa* to the monastery (Tib: *mang ja*); 3) *Jiwa* (monk trader) collecting taxes from tribes and villages; 4) Religious service in special cases, such as death, sickness, natural disaster, etc.; 5) Corvee labor from the *mtha'wa*.

downplayed at that time. In fact, with the increasing religious needs of the Hui community, they even bought a local house and changed it into a mosque prayer hall, the first of its kind in this Tibetan heartland.⁹⁶

In his seminal study of rural marketing system in pre-1949 China, G. William Skinner (1964-65) makes clear a distinction between the economically—or “naturally” in his term—formulated communities (i.e., marketing community) and the politically imposed administrative units from the top (i.e., villages, counties). These two different conceptions of the basic community unit in China, according to Skinner, would never converge perfectly. He further argued that it was the “standard marketing community,” instead of the administrative village, that is more important in terms of social and cultural dynamics and thus deserves more attention (Skinner 1964-65: 31).

This argument however is only partly true when it applies to a complex frontier context like Amdo. Throughout the Qing period, a distinct—yet not always visible—Hui community had started to take shape all over the Sino-Tibetan borderland where Amdo Tibet and the Chinese northwest frontier fade into each other. The multi-ethnic and multi-centered nature of this frontier has often been taken as the source of the economic poverty and of a turbulent history of ethnic and religious conflict. The periodical escalation of religious and ethnic conflicts in northwest China was a significant phenomenon from late imperial times to the modern period.⁹⁷ The multi-ethnic and multi-centered nature, without an effective control from either Beijing or Lhasa, made it both highly profitable and highly adventurous to do businesses in this

⁹⁶ It is recorded that they paid 50 taels of silver for the house and also invited a leading Ahong (Ch: *kai xue a hong*) for this temporary mosque (RGDF 1996: 783).

⁹⁷ The wider accommodation and domestication of the Muslims on the Sino-Tibetan borderland is a subject that is beyond the scope of this study. For a history of Muslim in northwest China, see (Lipman 1997).

Sino-Tibetan frontier.⁹⁸ It is also this nature that has significantly complicated Skinner's differentiation between an economically/naturally formulated marketing community and a political administrative unit.

Although the economic dynamic was primarily based on the Hui individual motivation of maximizing business profit, the actualization of economic practices had depended exclusively on the localized hierarchy of power, namely the Tibetan monasteries and social organizations on the Sino-Tibetan frontier.⁹⁹ The two parallel concepts of community that Skinner put out actually merged into a more complicated entity within which ethnicity and religion could not play the dominant role before entering the age of modern nation state. Muslim Hui businessmen often spent much time to establish close relations with the local Tibetan monasteries and lay village chiefs to establish business connections there.¹⁰⁰ The self-enclosed and self-sustained nature of many pre-modern Tibetan frontier lands made successful trade heavily dependent on the personal relationship with the local social political authority, namely the Tibetan monasteries and lay chiefs. Facility in Tibetan language became the first

⁹⁸ The Hui successfully established (and in some places dominated) the trading route in the Tibetan borderland (Ekvall 1939). Their business adventures to the Tibetan land had lasted for centuries and this tradition has even been revived after the Chinese political relaxation in the 1980s.

⁹⁹ Many scholars have discussed the social political administration in Qing dynasty on the local level. Steve Sangren explains the administration below county level in Qing imperial government that "[i]n practice, magistrates relied a great deal on local leaders and the various organizations they headed to maintain order and to disseminate values amenable to the government" (Sangren 1987: p16). In contrast to Sangren's amendment to Skinner's argument, James Millward has treated it as a concrete problem since "he [Skinner] discussed only one of several Qing systems." Millward discusses in details what Sangren calls "local leaders and the various organizations" (i.e. *tusi*, *jasak*, or *beg* systems) which, he argues, is "a blind spot" in the "China-centered" study of Qing. To have a better understanding of "China" in general, and Qing in particular, thus needs a shift of perspective to what he calls "a Qing-centered history of the Qing" (Millward 1998).

¹⁰⁰ Robert Ekvall documented the ethnographic details about these differences between Tibetan traders in Taozhou and Muslim Hui traders who came to the Tibetan highland (Ekvall 1939). According to him, Tibetans, especially nomadic Tibetans, had little interest in getting involved with anything Chinese because of their pride in being a nomad. There was a very short period of time during the year that they would travel to Taozhou for trading the goods they needed. In contrast to Tibetan traders, Hui businessmen in Taozhou lived exclusively on trading with Tibetans. When they traveled to Tibetan areas, they usually relied more on their Tibetan hosts. Thus they spent more time and had more intimate relationship with local Tibetan than Tibetans in Taozhou.

requirement for the Hui traders who had regular contacts with the Tibetan frontier, which still holds true today. A popular saying among the Hui in Gansu—“learning Tibetan is worth silver” (Ch: *xue le zanghua zhi yinzi*)—tells the commercial importance of speaking Tibetan. In fact not only were most of the Hui businessmen here bilingual in Chinese and Tibetan, but those who spent a long time in Tibetan lands even settled down permanently and took Tibetan wives. Most of them, however, stayed strictly with their religious identity of Muslim.¹⁰¹ In this way the Muslim Hui community started to cohabit with the Tibetan community in the heart of Tibetan land. The main social contacts between the two peoples was through economic interactions—barter trade, monastic taxes, or commercial business,.

2.5 From Frontier of Two Empires to Ethnic Minority in one Nation:

Modernization or Sinicization?

Before the liberation (1949), we Hui had a very good relationship with the Tibetans. We brought more businesses here and they (Tibetans) protected our businesses. At that time everything here was decided by the Kirti Lama (Ch: *shen me du shi ger de la ma shuo le suan*). There was no *minzu maodun* (ethnic conflict) and we didn't even know what *minzu maodun* was. It has only changed since the *gaige kaifang* (reform and open door policy) period. Especially after the 1990s, our relationship (Hui-Tibetan) has become very *jinzhang* (tense).

Zhang, a Hui shop owner in Langmusi in his 60s¹⁰²

When I was a child, we had no idea what it means to be a *shaoshu minzu* (minority nationality), like Hui or Zang. All the kids played together and grew up together. So you see I can speak Chinese just like those Hui can speak Tibetan. But now it is very different. Most young monks in our monastery

¹⁰¹ Most written records and my field interviews show that when this kind of inter-group marriage happens, it is always the case that Tibetan wives would be converted to Muslims and start to have less (if not cut off) contact with her natal family. See (Ekvall 1939: 62).

¹⁰² Fieldnotes, 2004.

don't understand why old monks have such good relationship with those Huihui.

Galzang, a Kirti monastery monk in his 40s¹⁰³

Our frontier is part of our territory. Our frontier people is part of our people. If everything were united, there would be no such problem of frontiers. Unfortunately the Western imperialists who intruded into our country always started from our frontiers. During the recent two hundred years, they have used every means, from coercing to enticing us, in order to make our country collapse. This has become a very serious situation. When this hand of the [imperialist] ghost first came in, [Chinese] intellectuals realized the crisis and warned their countrymen. [...] However, till the end of the Qing dynasty, the [Chinese] study of the frontier has declined. But the Western imperialist survey and publication [regarding our frontiers] have been flourishing. This made us feel both pained in our hearts and ashamed.

Ma Hetian,
a Republican Chinese official traveling to this region during the 1930s¹⁰⁴

Both Tibetan and Hui in Langmusi insist that their ethnic relationship was quite harmonious in the pre-1950s period, and even in the beginning of the Communist era.¹⁰⁵ This was a somewhat surprising discovery for me in the beginning of my fieldwork because of the apparent separation and rivalry between the two ethnic groups nowadays. It was not surprising, however, that the local Tibetan authorities had had much tension with central state power at that time since the late imperial times when various kinds of modernization effort from the Qing imperial government had reached many parts of its frontier region.¹⁰⁶ William Coleman (2002) in a recent analysis of Tibetan uprisings against the central Qing modernization effort argued that

¹⁰³ Fieldnotes, 2004.

¹⁰⁴ (Ma 1947), the translation is mine.

¹⁰⁵ All information and quotations here are based on my field interview during 2003-2005.

¹⁰⁶ Recent scholarship on ethnic identities in modern Chinese history has emphasized the important change from the former empire to the rising of a new Chinese nation state. This scholarship includes a wide range of cross-disciplinary and cross-regional literature from anthropology to history, political science, literary theory, etc., to name only a few of them: (Anderson 1983; Gellner 1983; Gladney 1991; Duara 1995; Harrell 1995a; Dikotter 1997; Lipman 1997; Bulag 1998; Schein 2000; Harrell 2001c; Mueggler 2001; Keyes 2002; Fiskesjö 2006).

the frontier in the late imperial times had in fact become “a test ground for the new Chinese modernist and modernist ideology.” He argued that it was this outside modernization attempt that had radically changed a carefully balanced social political structure by many different parties—the “cultural nexus of power” in Duara’s sense (Duara 1988). It was this external interruption of the local power balance that had eventually led to the violent local reactions such as the Batang uprising and the increasing banditry in southern Kham during the early 20th century (Coleman 2002; Spenden 2002).

When Sun Zhongshan first founded Republic of China in 1911, his notion of nation and ethnicity was based on the ideal unity of the five large ethnic groups in China—Han, Mongolian, Tibetan, Hui, and Manchu (Ch: *wuzu gonghe*, or “Five Races in Unity”). This ideal of racial solidarity envisioned by Sun led directly to a modern creation of a “Chinese race” (Ch: *zhonghua minzu*)—a dominant idea based on the confrontation between yellow and white races which has been shared by many Chinese intellectuals and political activists.¹⁰⁷ The national consciousness of a unified China emerged as primarily a reaction to the humiliation suffered by China at the hands of Western imperialist powers and an intellectual adoption of Western modernity.¹⁰⁸

Since then a popular desire especially among Chinese intellectuals for a new united and strong “China” has been expressed against both the “feudal” representation of the formal Qing empire and the “colonial” representation of the Western imperialist powers. Many Chinese intellectuals started to look at these old frontiers from a new

¹⁰⁷ See (Dikotter 1992: 124; Dikotter 1997)

¹⁰⁸ Sun Zhongshan clearly stated that “those so-called ‘independent provinces’, are secessions from the Qing Empire, but they are still unitary parts of a new [Chinese] nation, including Mongolia and Tibet.” Many scholars have indicated the importance of the Republican period (1911-1949) as a transition period from the imperial dynasty to the modern nation state (Duara 1995; Hon 1996; Chow 1997; Dikotter 1997; Tuttle 2005).

perspective of modernity and of a modern Chinese nation.¹⁰⁹ What has been raised into the public realm by these incidents of attention to the frontier is not only a taste of the exotic in one's own (imagined) homeland, it was more importantly an urgent need for modernization in the nation's frontier regions that had been newly discovered as a crucial part of the newborn nation. This propagation of modernization led to the nationwide campaign of New Life Movement (Ch: *xin shenghuo yundong*) in which many traditions of Han Chinese and ethnic minorities became the main target.¹¹⁰ Moreover this modernization process of the Republican became even more problematic on its ethnic frontiers. It was called a Sinicization process because Han Chinese were openly encouraged to move to the frontier minority areas and minority peoples were encouraged (or obliged) to give up their traditional customs and to adopt "modern" (Chinese) culture.¹¹¹

2.6 Modernization: A Tibetan Case

It would surely be reductive if we simply depicted frontier people as recipients or victims of the Chinese modernization projects. An eminent example is the Fifth Jamyang Shepa (1916-1947)—chief reincarnation lama of the great Amdo Tibetan monastery of Labrang. In early 20th century the fall of the Qing dynasty and the rise of Chinese and Muslim warlords in northwestern China put the Labrang monastery directly in confrontation with both the Chinese modernization and military aggression

¹⁰⁹ Various frontier reports or explorations became the rage in government sponsored projects, academic publications, as well as popular readings. See, e.g. (Fan 1938; Gu and Wang 1988; Ma 1947; Yu 1947). The Chinese journalist Fan Changjiang's travelogue from the northwest frontier, which was originally published as a series in a major Chinese newspaper, *Da Gong Bao*, became so popular among the public that when it came out later as a book it was reprinted three times in less than two months (Fan 1938).

¹¹⁰ In Han Chinese regions, for example, it was the prohibition of the foot-binding practice, and in ethnic minority regions, it was cultural suppression and Sinicization. See Gu Jiegang's critique of the Republican policy of Pan-Hanism (Hon 1996).

¹¹¹ See Gu Jiegang's critique of the Republican government. Sinicization policy included, for example, forcing non-Han people to take Chinese names, "Miao woman had their topknots cut off and their pleated skirts shredded by Republican troops" (Schein 2000), place names in non-Han areas were given Chinese equivalents, etc. see (Deal 1979; Dreyer 1976).

of Muslim warlords. According to his brother Apa Alo's (Ch: *Huang Zhengqing*) account, the Fifth Jamyang Shepa was very interested in all kinds of modern things from the time he was young.

The Fifth Jamyang Shepa learned photographic technique from [a western Christian missionary who came to Labrang]. When they left, he bought many foreign goods, such as iron stove, cameras, watches, globe, from these western missionaries. [...] He could take photos and even develop them by himself. He researched the globe and gave all the countries and cities Tibetan names. [...] He liked to read pictorials from China and overseas. His domestic quarters, though Tibetan in style on the outside, are decorated and furnished in western style inside. He had it done according to those pictorials. [...] He is also very interested in transmitter-receivers. He even compiled a telegraph code in Tibetan. When he was studying in Lhasa, we usually communicated through this Tibetan telegraph code.¹¹²

As one of the biggest Gelugpa monasteries outside Central Tibet, Labrang had a well-established system of monastic education. Having been exposed to various kinds of modern phenomena, the Fifth Jamyang Shepa was not satisfied with only the traditional monastic education. Despite being worshipped as a living Buddha, he saw clearly his own impotence in protecting and sustaining his religion without coping with what he considered to be inescapable changes.

He [Jamyang Shepa] told me [Apa Alo] that our religion would not survive only by relying on the living Buddha. [...] The combination of religious and political power in Tibet will not last in the long run. [...] He said when he was in Lhasa he went to the Lhamo La lake—the most sacred lake near Lhasa where they look for the miraculous prophecy for the reincarnation of the Dalai Lama. In the magical manifestation of the lake he saw money being printed by machine in Labrang. He concluded that Labrang will surely be changed dramatically in the future.¹¹³

¹¹² (Huang 1989), the translation is mine.

¹¹³ (Huang 1989), the translation is mine.

Coming back to Labrang in 1940 after two years of studying in Lhasa, the Fifth Jamyang Shepa started his own modernization effort in Labrang. He established the first modern vocational school for young monks in Labrang, where not only the traditional monastic knowledge would be taught but they would also include modern knowledge such as Chinese, mathematics, geography, history, chemistry, physics, painting, music, physical exercise, educational psychology, and sanitation and medicine. In 1945, his avant-garde idea of building a modern Tibetan vocational school, mostly for monks, in Labrang was financially supported by the Republican Chinese government. However this idea of a modern school with the support of the Chinese government was strongly opposed by the conservative monastic authority and eventually rejected as a threat to the Labrang monastery. With the decline of the Republican government and the unexpected death of the Fifth Jamyang Shepa, this monk school finally ended in 1947. This distinctive Tibetan attempt at modernization was completely diverted with the advent of the Communist power and the new PRC.

2.7 Liberation and Classification: From Republican to Communist

Despite the Republican government's modernization effort it was not until the Communist period beginning in 1949 that most uncharted territories and unexplored frontiers were fully incorporated in the new Chinese nation. The Communist ethnic policy, though in many ways a continuation of the Republican project of Chinese nation building, openly criticized the "Han Chauvinism" in the Republican policy to justify the legitimacy of the new polity over the old Republican one (Fei 1981). In all the official Chinese rhetoric after 1949, both in Chinese and later translated into many other minority languages, "liberation" (Ch: *jie fang*, Tib: *bcings 'grol*)—the Communist victory over the Republican to achieve the national power—is the most significant temporal marker between "the old society" (Ch: *jiu she hui*, Tib: *'jig rden*

rnying ba)—Imperial or Republican China before 1949, and “the new society” (Ch: *xin she hui*, Tib: *'jig rden gsar ba*)—Communist China after 1949. As the illuminating point of “the new society,” the state policy of regional autonomy of ethnic minorities (Ch: *minzu quyū zizhi*) and ethnic equality (Ch: *minzu pingdeng*) served to highlight the Communist “liberation” of ethnic minority peoples in China and the authentic equality among all peoples in “the new society.”

While the Republican government employed the Western notion of modernization to promote a unitary citizenship over ethnicity, the Communist theory set up “a universal standard of progress or modernity that exists independent of where the center might be on the historical scale at any given moment” (Harrell 1995c). This Communist standard of progress is based on the Morgan-Engels model of social development from primitive society, to slave society, feudal society, and capitalist society that universally applies to every human societies at all times. Thereby, according to this theory, ethnic difference among different peoples would ultimately cease to exist in the highest stage of development—Communist society.

In early 1950s, this Communist theory of ethnic equality was first practiced by the national campaign of ethnic identification (Ch: *minzu shibie*) which, on the one hand officially acknowledged the cultural and ethnic diversities in China, but on the other hand pressured the very existence of ethnicity in a new socialist context (Fiskesjö 2006). As many have indicated, this ethnic identification was anything but a simple recognition process.¹¹⁴ It was indeed an ethnic reconstruction process—a process that actively engaged both the identifier and the identified. Those being identified may or may not agree with the new categories the state created for them, but they nonetheless hardly questioned the legitimacy of the category itself or the power of categorizing.

¹¹⁴See (Fei 1981; Harrell 1995c; Litzinger 2000: 3-8; Tapp 2002).

2.8 Creating a Society Identity: *Slave and Serf*¹¹⁵

During the radical period of Great Leap Forward and Cultural Revolution afterwards, ethnic consciousness—even ethnicity altogether—was actively eliminated and replaced with class consciousness.¹¹⁶ The official discourse stated that people of all ethnic origins in China had been equally repressed and exploited by the “Three Big Mountains” (Ch: *san zuo dashan*)—Imperialism, Feudalism, and Capitalism—before they were liberated by the Communist Chinese government in 1949.¹¹⁷ Along this line, Tibetan society before 1951 was officially defined as a “feudal serf society” (Ch: *fengjian nongnu shehui*) dominated by the “three big lords” (Ch: *san da ling zhu*, Tib: *gzhung sger chos gsum*)—monasteries, aristocrats, governments—brutally exploiting the great majority of the Tibetan public who were described mostly as serfs (Wu 1991).

The Chinese application of Morgan-Engels model in Tibet explains the Tibetan society as a stage between the slave society and the feudal society before the Communist liberation in the 1950s. This has thereby created a unique identity for Tibetan society in the new Chinese state. Unlike elsewhere in China, where one of the four society models must apply, Tibetan society is unique in the sense that, it was on the more primitive stage compare to most other places in China, yet it requires a specific category for itself that no other society applies. According Ya Hanzhang, a renowned Chinese historian and Tibetologist, the Tibetan empire (7th -10th century)

¹¹⁵ I thank Magnus Fiskesjo for his thought-provoking comments on this subject.

¹¹⁶ See, i.e., (Makley 2005) for a local memory of the Cultural Revolution in Labrang.

¹¹⁷ In the Chinese Communist terminology, “Feudalism” includes the imperial Qing government, the local Tibetan monastic or tribal authorities (“feudalist serfdom”), and the Chinese and Muslim warlords (“feudalist warlords”). “Capitalism” refers mostly to the Republican government and the capitalist style enterprises in the beginning of the 20th century. “Imperialism” refers to the foreign powers that had come to China after the Opium war in 1840, which include foreign missionaries, industrial or business enterprises, or individual travelers (ABGK 1985; GZDF 1999).

was in the stage of slave society. After that Tibetan society evolved from slave society to “feudal serf society” (Ch: *fengjian nongnu zhi shehui*) and had since stayed in that stage until it was liberated by the Communist Chinese in 1950.¹¹⁸ This society identity for Tibetan has since been propagated through not only political propagation and popular media like film which at that time was still a scarce resource meant only for government use.¹¹⁹ But it has also been “scientifically” proved by long term academic discourse, even based on ethnographic field research.¹²⁰

The new universal scale that Chinese Communist set up was in fact a powerful discourse—what Harrell (1995a) termed “the hegemony of definition.” Not only had it created a new identity for the whole Tibetan society in China, but it also performed a “practice of time,” in Mueggler’s term, which historicized ethnic conflicts and tensions.¹²¹ In other words, under this new strategy of time, ethnic conflicts and tensions became something that only existed in the past or “the old society”—in contrast to “the new society” which was characterized by ethnic equality.

2.9 Hui Accomplice in Tibetan Riots: the Paradox of Ethnic Equality

Ethnic equality (*minzu pingdeng*) is the fundamental principle of Marxism to solve all the ethnic problems. [...] From the political and legal perspective, ethnic equality is embodied in two aspects in our country: one is the regional autonomy in minority areas which means minority people can decide for themselves in their own affairs; the other is the equal right of all the minority groups whether big or small. (Ya 1984: 130)

¹¹⁸ Ya Hanzhang’s article appeared first in the Chinese official journal *China Tibetology* in 1988 and was later selected in a special collection on the Tibetan feudal serf system (Wu 1991). In fact the “feudal serf society” model was set up for Tibetan society as early as the 1950s when the ethnic identification (*minzu shibie*) was carried out in Tibetan regions.

¹¹⁹ This include both the popular Chinese made movie *Nongnu* (serf) and also a series of documentaries, new reports, which carried the same ideological undertone.

¹²⁰ The first research of this kind was the *minzu shibie* (ethnic classification) in Tibetan areas during the 1950s. (ABLD 1985) This academic effort to reconfirm the Tibetan society identity as a “feudal serf society” has been continued till present. (Wu 1991)

¹²¹ Mueggler (2001) has used “practice of time” in his ethnography of a marginalized community in southwest China. Another anthropologist Charlene Makley (2005) applied Mueggler’s concept in an Amdo Tibetan society in Labrang. See also chapter 4 in this dissertation.

As I mentioned above, both Hui and Tibetan in Langmusi remember the harmonious relationship they had in the past, in contrast to the increasing tension between the two groups today. The initial settling of some Hui families in Taktsang Lhamo was based on their full compliance with the local Tibetan hierarchy. Furthermore, they were even incorporated as part of it despite of their ethnic and religious difference.¹²² The Communist ideal of ethnic equality means a change of local structure of social political power as well as a deep alteration of the traditional Tibetan-Hui relationship. This relationship has officially gone from ethnic hierarchy before the “liberation” to ethnic equality (*minzu pingdeng*) after the “liberation” and finally to ethnic conflict after the economic reforms in the 1980s.¹²³ Indeed the transition in these periods did not gain the local popularity that the Communist leaders had expected. On the contrary, it involved much violent resistance and violent reactions—including the widespread Tibetan rebellion against the Chinese government in the late 1950s, as well as the later “putting down of those rebellions” (Ch: *pingpan*) and “democratic reform” (Ch: *minzhu gaige*) by the Chinese government.

What has interested me, as I found out later in my fieldwork, is the case of “Hui accomplice” in those Tibetan rebellions. Not only does this show the irony of “ethnic equality” that had replaced the former ethnic (Tibetan) hierarchy, but it also creates the pretext for the ethnic conflict later on—which I call the paradox of the ethnic equality.

¹²² One of the many mutually recognized roles between Tibetan and Hui was that Hui acted as an intermediate because of the Tibetan unwillingness to deal directly with Han Chinese. Robert Ekvall in his biographic novel (1952) reported this unwillingness of Tibetans to deal directly with the Chinese not only in business affairs but also in political affairs. After the Gansu warlord Lu Dachang (Ekvall recorded as Cheng Lu Chang) looted the nearby monastery and killed all the monks, monastic authorities in Taktsang Lhamo decided to negotiate with him in order to avoid the same fate. They chose Ekvall as their representative for negotiations because of his Chinese language ability and his extensive relations on the Chinese side (Ekvall 1952: 139-152).

¹²³ See more on this subject in the next chapter.

After about six months living in Langmusi, I became familiar with my Hui neighbor Ali, a restaurant owner in his forties. Ali's family is one the earliest Hui families who settled down in Langmusi. Being a Kirti monastery *mthar' wa*, his family could do much more business in the surrounding Tibetan regions under the protection of Kirti monastery. From late imperial period throughout the Republican time, this part of China was characterized by endless wars and unstable living condition. Having a protected business resource saved the life of a family or even a community. Therefore, as Ali said, the Hui community in Taktsang Lhamo was more grateful to the Tibetan protection than resentful of their exploitation of tax and labor.

Like all the Hui in Langmusi, Ali speaks perfect Tibetan and has many Tibetan friends and customers including monks and lamas in the monastery and nomad families on the grassland. He told me this is all because of his farther who speaks even better Tibetan and, more importantly, had good relationships with many important monks and lamas in Kirti monastery including the Kirti Lama—the chief incarnate lama of the Kirti monastery who is now in exile in India.¹²⁴ Most old generation Tibetan monks in Kirti monastery know very well Ali's father and have good respect on him. As I gradually found out, this respect has come from a special period of Kirti monastery history.

From 1954 to 1957, Taktsang Lhamo and many surrounding regions had been constantly under the pressure of the national campaigns of “democratic reform” (Ch: *minzhu gaige*) and “socialist reconstruction” (Ch: *shehuzhuyi gaizao*). These campaigns aimed at depriving the political and economic privileges enjoyed by the

¹²⁴ I never got to meet Ali's father since he was not living in Langmusi any more. After he came out of the jail, he worked with Ali in a transportation business in the early 1980s. Not long after he discovered he had serious health problems because of the years in jail. He has since moved to the nearby big city of Linxia for the convenience of medical treatment. Ali told me that his father seldom wanted to tell this part of his history to anyone, even to his close relatives. It was only during the years when they drove together from Chengdu to Lhasa that he would tell these stories on the truck in order to keep him awake during those weeklong journeys with day-and-night driving. Fieldnotes April 2004.

local monasteries. In response many surrounding areas had reported violent resistance (called *panluan* or “rebellion” in Chinese documents) to the new Chinese system.¹²⁵ During the high tide of Chinese military campaign of “putting down of the Tibetan rebellion” (Ch: *pingpan*) in 1958 Kirti Lama decided to escape to Lhasa. The journey from Taktsang Lhamo to Lhasa then was very long and dangerous. It involved passing through many turbulent regions which were at that time dominated by the Han Chinese or by Muslim Hui. Besides his own entourage, Kirti Lama asked Ali’s father to accompany him because of his Chinese and Tibetan language ability as well as his Muslim Hui identity. On this long and dangerous journey Ali’s father was the Chinese translator for the Kirti Lama and helped him all the way to Lhasa.

When they finally arrived in Lhasa, it happened to be the year of the Tibetan uprising of 1959. Kirti Lama decided to go exile to India and he encouraged Ali’s father to go with him.¹²⁶ But this time Ali’s father refused because of his family in Taktsang Lhamo. When he returned to Taktsang Lhamo one year later, Ali’s father was immediately arrested in the name of “accomplice of rebellion” and sentenced to fourteen years in prison. He came out of prison near the end of the Cultural Revolution.

¹²⁵ In the biography of a local Tibetan chieftain, Ou Erxiao, who has from the beginning been a Communist supporter in this region, he recounted the severe situation when they first tried to carry out the party policy in these regions. “Many local [Tibetan] leaders were very skeptical and did not understand [the Communist administration]. Some of them even turned anti-revolutionary. Some in Zorge openly opposed the party policy saying that there had never been any imperial dynasty in the history that had controlled our system” (GNZX 1989). There are also many exile Tibetan writings about the resistance to the Communist change, see e.g. (Huabaier 1994).

¹²⁶ There have been many Hui Muslims, especially those who had close connections with Tibetans, who went in exile to India during the Tibetan uprising. In Langmusi, at least two Hui families I know have relatives who left at that time and are still living in Nepal. Some of them even changed their identities and claimed to be Tibetan later. There were also others who tried to move to Arab countries and settled down there (LTXZ 1997).

CHAPTER 3

RECONSTRUCTION OF MONASTERY AND MOSQUE: “MAJORITY MINORITY” AND “MINORITY MINORITY”

The old monastery of Namu,
on the border of Gansu and Sichuan;
In the old days,
the smoke of incense and the sound of drums and bells,
permeated the great temples and monastic buildings;
Praying for everybody,
too busy were the monks and nuns.

All of a sudden, wind and cloud gathered on the clear sky;
In the name of “breaking the old and building the new,”
gods and deities were expelled from temples,
monasteries were demolished,
only some ruins of an old wall left;
Ten years of desolation,
trees have been growing old and incense smoke disappeared in the sunset;

Today, the landscape is still the same but the Buddha has gone to the West.¹²⁷

A Chinese writer wrote this poem on the ruins of the Kirti monastery when he visited Langmusi just after the Cultural Revolution in 1981. The change of weather here implies the “ten years catastrophe” (Ch: *shinian haojie*) of the Cultural Revolution (1966-1976), during which religion was one of the major objects of attack. The two monasteries in Taktsang Lhamo—Kirti and Serchi—were both destroyed at that time.¹²⁸ Most high lamas went into exile following the Kirti Lama’s departure in

¹²⁷ Sun Zhicheng, “Reflections on the ruins of Langmusi” (RGWS 1998: 38), text originally in Chinese, the translation is mine.

¹²⁸ The “Red Guard” and “working groups” started to attack monasteries since the Great Leap Forward campaign in 1958 onwards until they were completely demolished during the Cultural Revolution. Fieldnotes January 2004.

the late 1950s, with a few left who were later tortured and imprisoned. Other monks were forced to return to their hometowns as lay workers or peasants for the new socialist country. The Lhamo mosque was used as a storage building for the local commune called the Red Star Brigade (Ch: *hongxing shengchandu*). All the religious activities were strictly forbidden until after the death of Mao in 1976.¹²⁹

The downfall of the “Gang of Four” and the re-emergence of Deng Xiaoping in the late 1970s marked the official ending of this radical period in Chinese history and signaled the beginning of a new age characterized by political relaxation and economic reform. Both Tibetan and Hui in Taktsang Lhamo could once again practice their religion publically. The religious revival under this condition has not only brought deep changes in both Tibetan Buddhism and Hui Islam, but more profoundly in the understanding of religion and the view of ethnic relations vis-à-vis the Chinese state in a radically changed social political context.

In this chapter I examine the religious revival in this borderland through the main theme of monastery and mosque reconstruction. The end of the Mao era and the beginning of the Deng era gave the Tibetan and the Hui a completely new context within which their destroyed religions were able to revitalize. It is this new social political context that both the new Tibetan Buddhist revival and Hui Islamic revival have taken place. More importantly, this coexistence of Tibetan Hui religious revival in Chinese social political transformation has formed a new Tibetan-Hui relation. On the one hand, Tibetans—the local majority in this ethnic minority region—have reconstructed their space by excluding Hui and Chinese as the ethnic other. On the other hand, Hui—the local minority in this ethnic minority region—have rebuilt their

¹²⁹ My Hui neighbor in Langmusi told me that the situation was the worst during the Cultural Revolution. Hui people in the Commune were purposefully put to raise pig in order for them to get rid of their “old” (religious) belief. If anyone in the Hui community was reported to do a Ramadan fast, the “working group” would come to his home and force him to eat. Fieldnotes March 2004.

community by rebuilding their core values, namely Islam and entrepreneurship. A new ethnic and economic confrontation between the local Tibetan and Hui community has gradually been overlaid the former political, economic and ethnic order. New boundaries and tensions between the two groups have since taken form.

3.1 The Visit of the Panchen Lama: Religion and Politics Combined

Orville Schell, in his forward to the Goldstein and Kapstein's volume on Tibetan Buddhist revival in contemporary China, indicated the paradoxical nature of the alternating Chinese interludes between "loosening up" or "tightening down" (Goldstein and Kapstein 1998). The early 1980s has been characterized by many as the "loosening up" period when the CCP was more in favor of a soft policy towards a solution of the "Tibet Question."¹³⁰ It was under this condition that two important figures—the Panchen Lama and the Kirti Lama, both highly respected religious leaders—visited Taktsang Lhamo subsequently in 1982 and 1984. This served as an important catalyst for both Tibetan and Hui religious revival.

The Panchen Lama is widely considered in Tibet as the incarnation of the "Buddha of Infinite Light" (Tib: *'od ba med*), the second most influential religious leader of Tibet after the Dalai Lama. However the Panchen Lama's status has been ambiguous and controversial among some Tibetans (especially those in exile) because of his cooperation with the Chinese government.¹³¹ It was not until more recently that

¹³⁰ This "loosening up" period started from Deng Xiaoping's return to power when the CCP initiated a series of effort to solve the "Tibet question" and ended in late 1980s when the riot in Lhasa escalated and ended with a Chinese martial law for one year. Hu Yaobang, the General Party Secretary then, visited Tibet in 1980. He openly advocated a withdrawal of Han Chinese cadres from Tibet and a promotion of ethnic Tibetan cadres for a real autonomy (Wang 1994). Soon after that the Chinese government invited the exiled Tibetan government for a dialogue. Many renowned Tibetan lamas had visited their homeland for the first time after they went exile (Goldstein 1997). See also (Goldstein and Kapstein 1998). The Kirti Lama also came back during this period to his monastery for the first and only time since he went exile in 1958.

¹³¹ Many high lamas who did not go into exile have experienced the same criticism as "traitors of Tibet." See also the life story of the famous Amdo Geshe Shes-rab rGya-mtsho (Stoddard 1986). However despite their cooperative attitude and the fact that many were appointed important positions in

some newly released documents have shown that the Panchen Lama actually always was an active protector of Tibetan language and culture both during the radical period of the Cultural Revolution and after.¹³² After he came out of prison in 1980 and resumed his political position in the government, the Panchen Lama immediately set out on several trips to Tibetan regions including central Tibet, Qinghai, Sichuan, Gansu and Yunnan. These trips in the early 1980s formed part of his whole effort to promote Tibetan language and culture in Tibetan regions and particularly to revive the religious life in Tibet after the devastating period of the Cultural Revolution.

The Panchen Lama's visit to Tibetan regions can be characterized with the well known Tibetan term *chos-srid gnyis-'brel* (religion and politics combined). As an important religious leader who held a high-level political position in the Chinese government, the Panchen Lama's visit carried a two-fold meaning.¹³³ For his followers, it was a religious trip with a highly renowned Buddhist lama. It was especially meaningful since this was the first blessing trip after a period of religious devastation. At the same times this trip was also a political visit from a high-level government official who represented all nationalities under the multi-ethnic state government. In this way his visit was not only significant for Tibetans but for all the peoples—Tibetan, Hui or Han Chinese—who lived in this ethnic minority region. Because of the semi-official and semi-religious nature of these trips, they were documented in some official journals and are also well remembered by the local people in the Tibetan regions he visited.¹³⁴ I first got to know many details about the

the Chinese government, most of them were severely tortured (some to death) during the Cultural Revolution. It was until after some recently released documents that these "Tibetan traitors" have been seriously reevaluated as the protectors of Tibetan culture.

¹³² The recent release of the previous Panchen Lama's secret report to the CCP in 1962 has shown his courageous critique of the CCP policy in Tibet with a wholehearted will to protect Tibetan culture and religion from being destroyed (Bskal-bzan-tshe-brtan 1997).

¹³³ His official title, resumed in 1980, was the vice chairman of National People's Congress, the highest legislative body in the Chinese government.

¹³⁴ Information on these trips of the Panchen Lama comes from the local gazetteers (Ch: *wenshi ziliao*) of Gansu and Sichuan, and also from interviews during my fieldwork.

Panchen Lama's trip to Gannan and Aba through some audiotapes that my monk friend Tashi had saved. These tapes are private recordings of Panchen Lama's public talk in each place he went, which were later circulated privately among Tibetans. The content of these talks is mostly to encourage the local Tibetans to preserve their ethnic culture, particularly the use of Tibetan language, Tibetan education and the revival of monastic culture, under the new relaxed CCP policy.¹³⁵

Many people in Taktsang Lhamo today still remember vividly the day when Panchen Lama arrived in 1982. It was October 1st, when the Panchen Lama was on his way from Gannan to Aba with a half-day stop in Taktsang Lhamo. He was accompanied by some Tibetan officials from the Gansu and Sichuan provincial governments as well as several high lamas like Jamyang Rinpoche and Gongthang Tshang from Labrang monastery. Batar (Tib: *dbal thar*), a local Tibetan government official, wrote later in his memoir: "In October 1982, the news that Panchen Rinpoche would come to visit spread quickly to every family on the Zorge grassland. This golden season of autumn on the grassland was covered with auspicious clouds and bathed in colorful sunlight" (ABZX 1993). Hundreds of monks from the local monasteries and thousands of Tibetan nomads and farmers from local and surrounding regions waited for a "head-touching" blessing by the Panchen Lama.¹³⁶ The process of touching thousands of heads lasted the whole morning.

Ama Drolka in her seventies, a life-long resident in the Dongkha village of Taktsang Lhamo, told me during my short stay in her house about her experience at that time. "Before Kirti lama went to India, I was blessed by him twice. After that the

¹³⁵ In his talk the Panchen Lama emphasized the importance of using Tibetan language and Tibetan language education in Tibetan regions, which had been forbidden during the Cultural Revolution. He also stated that since much of Tibetan culture is found in monasteries it is very important to rebuild the monasteries that had been destroyed and to revive the monastic life (ABZX 1993).

¹³⁶ A traditional Tibetan way of getting religious blessing is through having the top of one's head touched by a lama's hand during or after a religious ceremony (Tib: *mchod mjal*, Ch: *mo ding*).

Chinese government (Ch/Tib: *gongjia*) came. Being a monk was prohibited, circumambulation was prohibited, [...] then since Panchen Rinpoche came the [government] policy (Ch: *zhengce*) has been changed.”¹³⁷ The two Chinese loan words *gongjia* (government or state), or sometimes *Apa gongjia* (father state), and *zhengce* (policy) are both quite popular in the local Tibetan everyday dialogue. Yet they refer to two different periods in Tibetan/Chinese history—one from the Cultural Revolution period and the other from the post-1980s reform and open-up period. Charlene Makley (2005), when studying the local memories of Cultural Revolution in Labrang, discovered the term *Apa gongjia* (father state) to be an important “oppositional testimony” among the Tibetans.¹³⁸ She argued that this term is “both a subject of actions and an object of local sentiments.” The Chinese loan word *zhengce* has become popular among Tibetans particularly because of the tremendous impact of policy change on local Tibetan people’s life since the 1980s. Ama Drolka’s narrative of temporal change—from *gongjia* to *zhengce*—indicates a conceptual change of time marked by the arrival of Panchen Lama. While *gongjia* is still used among Tibetans, mostly elders, more and more new Chinese terms, such as *zhengce*, have entered everyday Tibetan speech especially among the younger generation. These Chinese loan words, along with many Tibetan words that have taken new meanings in the new social context, have been used to represent a whole new age with new phenomenon and new feelings appearing everyday in an ethnic borderland of a multiethnic nation.¹³⁹

¹³⁷ Tib: *kirti lama rgya bkar ma 'gro dus ngas lan gnyis mjal song, de dro gongjia thon da ni aku byad ma wa gi sko ra 'gro ma wa gi, [...] pan chen ring po che thon dang di nas zhengce 'gyur song*

¹³⁸ Makley investigated on this subject among the elder Tibetan villagers in Labrang (Makley 2005). The terms “magical state” and “social imaginary” have been previously used by anthropologists such as (Coronil 1997; Mueggler 2001; Taussig 1997).

¹³⁹ See more examples and elaborations on this point in chapter 5 and chapter 6.

The Panchen Lama's visit to Taktsang Lhamo also changed the life of Hui people. As Batar continued in his memoir, "as soon as Panchen Rinpoche learned that there was also a Muslim mosque in this village, he said he would like to pay a visit there." Although the Lhamo mosque has been in this Tibetan land for more than a century, this was probably the first time that a Tibetan lama came to visit this Muslim mosque. My Hui neighbor Min told me he also joined the welcome group in the mosque to offer a Tibetan ceremonial scarf (Tib: *kha btags*) to the Panchen Lama. During the visit Panchen Lama asked about the mosque rebuilding and the religious life in the mosque. He told the *ahong*—religious leader of the mosque, or *Imam*—and Hui villagers that all the nationalities in China should enjoy equal rights including the practice of their religion. He especially mentioned that we should pay close attention to the right of ethnic minority groups as well as those who live in the regions where they are minorities. "He is a real [political] leader for all of us [Tibetans and Hui]," Min concluded to me with emotions.

What Min expressed here resonates with the contemporary Hui struggles living in Tibetan regions. Although Hui is officially an ethnic minority group that enjoys equal rights with their Tibetan counterparts, on the practical level these rights cannot always be secured only because they live in a *Tibetan* autonomous region. Since the CCP resumption of ethnic autonomous administration policy in ethnic minority regions (Ch: *luoshi minzu quyue zizhi zhengce*) after the Cultural Revolution, many local government positions in these regions have been filled with ethnic minorities—those who represent the ethnic identity of their region.¹⁴⁰ This at the same time has created a blind spot in the vast ethnic borderland regions with coexistence of multiple ethnic groups. Here I use the term "minority minorities" to indicate those who have

¹⁴⁰ In case of central Tibet, for example, many Tibetan cadres have been promoted after the 1980 visit of the General Secretary Hu Yaobang (Wang 1994).

considered this ethnic borderland their homeland for centuries yet do not belong to the dominant local ethnic group to which the autonomous administration power naturally goes.¹⁴¹ In Taktsang Lhamo, Tibetan and Hui villagers started simultaneously to rebuild the Kirti monastery and the Lhamo mosque. Yet the official approval of the Hui villagers' application for rebuilding the mosque was not granted from the Tibetan dominated Zorge county government until after the Panchen Lama's visit. Since then, the first Islamic association of Zorge County was established and based in the Lhamo mosque symbolizing the beginning of the revival of Islamic life in this region.¹⁴²

3.2 The Kirti Lama's Visit to Taktsang Lhamo

The Kirti Lama has always been worshipped by Tibetans in Taktsang Lhamo as "our lama."¹⁴³ The strong regional identity represented by the loyalty to local monastery and Lama was expressed clearly during his 1984 visit. Despite his long exile since 1958, his followers—from monks in Kirti monastery to lay Tibetan nomads in the region—have never stopped seeking his blessings and help on various occasions, as if he were still present in the monastery.¹⁴⁴

¹⁴¹ This term "minority minorities" comes from my fieldwork interview with a local Hui resident. See later in this chapter. It applies to both Han Chinese and other ethnic minorities (in this case Hui) who live in a minority region where they do not belong to the dominant ethnic minority group. See (Harrell 2001c) and (Hansen 2005) for descriptions of Han Chinese as minority in the ethnic minority regions.

¹⁴² The practice of ethnic autonomous administration policy in multiethnic borderlands is sometime more complicated than it looks while other time might be, on the contrary, very straightforward. The general principle is to privilege the local majority ethnic population or the historically dominant ethnic group in the local region. Yet autonomous region of one ethnic group might include many autonomous prefecture or county of different ethnic groups. Because of the pyramid structure of Chinese political administrative power, autonomous administration of all levels is ultimately rendered under the control of central government.

¹⁴³ Tib: *nga 'tsho bla ma*. In some ways this regional loyalty is much more concrete to the local Tibetans and thus has even surpassed the highest loyalty to either Dalai Lama or Panchen Lama that seems more far away. See chapter 2 for my argument regarding the multiethnic influence and the independent nature of ethnic and religious polity in Amdo history.

¹⁴⁴ Except during the Cultural Revolution, it has been a common local practice to ask people who would go on a trip to India (or back) to bring information to (and from) the Kirti Lama. Communication between Tibetans in China and those in exile has been deliberately cut and actively surveilled by the Chinese government. Regular mail related to Tibetans does not go through smoothly between China to India. When I arrived there for my fieldwork in 2003, home telephone service was just introduced to

Compared to the Panchen Lama's visit, the Kirti Lama's trip back to his home town in 1984 was of a much lower profile.¹⁴⁵ The Chinese official policy was to treat the Tibetan delegation from the exile government as an "unofficial" or "non-governmental" visiting group and to accommodate Tibetan Lamas according to their different statuses and local influences.¹⁴⁶ Therefore the highest level host unit for these delegations in Beijing was the National United Front (Ch: *zhongyang tongzhanbu*, NUF)—a long-standing politically functional unit in the CCP whose work has primarily to render various non-Communist organizations, parties, forces—either political or cultural—under the leadership of CCP. Given that the Kirti Lama is a religious figure with only regional influence, he was hosted by some prefecture level officials from Sichuan province. His itinerary in China was completely managed by the Chinese side, which eventually created some frustration from many of the Tibetan followers of the Kirti Lama.

Although the news of his coming was not announced from the Chinese government side, many Tibetans around Taktsang Lhamo still got the word immediately. Basang, a Tibetan cadre in his 40s, told me that the news arrived in his home village—about one day trip by truck from Taktsang Lhamo—even earlier through some people who had come back from India.¹⁴⁷ This exciting news led them to an immediate decision to meet the Kirti Lama at the first possible moment. Since

this area. In the beginning when it was still quite expensive to have a telephone at home, one of the main reason Tibetan monks would install a phone was to call their relatives or the Kirti Lama in India. In 2005 when I was about to leave Taktsang Lhamo, internet service provided by China Telecom came to town. Some monk friends started to ask me to teach them how to use computers so that they could communicate easily and inexpensively with the exile Tibetan community in India.

¹⁴⁵ This part of information was solely obtained through my field interview with Tibetans from many different regions around Taktsang Lhamo. There is no official document record about this trip either in Chinese or in Tibetan.

¹⁴⁶ For detailed analysis of these Tibetan delegations to China see (Goldstein 1997).

¹⁴⁷ This source of information has relied on the people who travel back and forth between the local village and India. Since this kind of travel always involves a lot of uncertainty and danger, the news source thus is also uncertain depends on the many situations. Yet this has been dramatically changed since the telephone service and later the high-speed internet access reached this area.

they could not get any further information on Kirti Lama's itinerary, a group of young villagers lead by Basang decided that they would go to Chengdu, the capital city of Sichuan, instead of waiting in Taktsang Lhamo. The decision was indeed not easy. To Basang and his fellow villagers, Chengdu seemed to be very far both geographically and culturally. "None of us had been out of this village before, let alone to a big Chinese city," Basang said, "we first took the village truck and then changed to a bus, it took us four to five days then to arrive at Chengdu." Perhaps the most difficult thing for these young Tibetan villagers was that they didn't understand any Chinese.¹⁴⁸ In fact, they faced more challenges than simply some language difficulties. The Kirti Lama's itinerary in China was arranged by the Sichuan government and as usual there was no public access to this kind of information. Basang and his fellow villagers believed that since Kirti Lama would be accompanied by the Sichuan government officials, Chengdu would certainly be his first stop before going further to Taktsang Lhamo. They were not the only ones waiting. During their stay in Chengdu, Basang's group met several other groups of Tibetan people from other regions who, like them, were also waiting for the arrival of the Kirti Lama.

After nearly one month waiting in Chengdu, Basang told me, to their great disappointment, they heard that the Kirti Lama had already arrived in Chengdu without any public announcement and had already left for Abo. "Of course all this was managed by the [Chinese] government," Basang said angrily, "they just did not want us to meet Our Lama!" The frustration of this experience had stimulated even more passion from these young Tibetan villagers to meet "Our Lama" whom they had worshipped yet never met in their life. They had to go back to Taktsang Lhamo and finally were able to receive the blessings from the Kirti Lama.

¹⁴⁸ Tib: *rgya bskad ma shes ni zhis gi bkar gi*

During the Kirti Lama's visit to Taktsang Lhamo, not only Tibetans were excited to meet their Lama after nearly 30 years, it was also a big day for the Hui villagers in Taktsang Lhamo. Ali told me that his father, along with many other old Hui villagers, was asked specifically by the Kirti Lama to come for a meeting even though Kirti Lama had only one day in Taktsang Lhamo and he had thousands of Tibetans lining up for "head touching" blessing from him. The meeting was short. Ali recounted his father's word that everyone there was very emotional but they had nearly no words to say. Kirti Lama asked about their life since he left and also told the current leading lamas in Kirti monastery that they (the Tibetan monastic authorities) should take better care of these Hui villagers.¹⁴⁹

The traditional relationship (before the 1950s) between Kirti monastery and Gyago Hui village was one of a monastery-government and a subject village (Tib: *lha lde*). Under this relationship, Gyago Hui village, despite of their religious and ethnic differences, was treated not much differently from other Tibetan villages that were also the subjects of the Kirti monastery. The Chinese takeover of this region in 1950s had radically changed the ideological framework of the social political context for both Tibetan and Hui. The traditional hierarchical relationship was doomed as dark feudal residual and was replaced by the new socialist ideology. However this traditional relationship, particularly the ethnic relation between Tibetan and Hui, was not actually dissolved in the new socialist system. On the contrary, it has been preserved by being "frozen instantly." Even during the Cultural Revolution, Tibetans and Hui were equally victims of the radical Chinese policy while Buddhism and Islam had suffered equal attacks from the constant socialist campaigns. Therefore the

¹⁴⁹ This was confirmed to some extent when later some young lamas and monks from Kirti monastery told me that they couldn't understand why the Kirti Lama asked them to be nice with these Hui people.

traditional relation including the hierarchy between Tibetan and Hui had been kept intact until the end of the Cultural Revolution.

This frozen relation temporarily melted when Kirti Lama visited in 1984. Unlike the Panchen Lama's visit, the Kirti Lama's visit gave no actual political economic benefit to the Tibetan or Hui villagers in Taktsang Lhamo. Yet his arrival greatly awakened the local memories of the traditional social political hierarchy that was the hotbed of religious sentiments suppressed during the Cultural Revolution. It was also from this moment that the Tibetan-Hui relation started to be restructured under a radically changed social political context—one that not only unfreezes the traditional Tibetan-Hui relationship but completely changes the way they interact with each other vis-à-vis the Chinese government.

3.3 Rebuilding the Monastery

The rebuilding of the Kirti monastery has been under the leadership of Alak Lobsang,¹⁵⁰ one of the reincarnate lamas at Kirti monastery who did not go into exile in the 1950s. Soon after the beginning of the Cultural Revolution, he was imprisoned as an “ox-ghost and snake-demon” (Ch: *niu gui she shen*).¹⁵¹ It was not until twelve years later—after the Third Plenum of the Eleventh CCP Congress officially announced that Cultural Revolution has been a “historical mistake”—that his case was redressed as one of the more than three million “mishandled cases” from the Cultural Revolution.¹⁵² The official Chinese policy to “redress these mishandled cases” (Ch:

¹⁵⁰ Alak Lobsang now in his 60s has been both the religious leader and political representative of Kirti monastery in the Chinese government since the 1980s. The personal story of Alak Lobsang and the related history of Kirti monastery have been collected during my two years fieldwork in Taktsang Lhamo, including several interviews with Alak Lobsang and other related persons. See also chapter 6 for more details.

¹⁵¹ “Ox ghost snake demon” is a terminology first used by Mao Zedong in 1950s and later adopted by the Red Guards as a widely applied charge to any of their targets during the Cultural Revolution. It refers broadly to those “struggle objects” in all political campaigns, including intellectuals, religionists, landlords, rich peasants, rightists, anti-socialists, anti-revolutionists, anti-CCP, anti-Mao, etc.

¹⁵² See more on this Chinese policy change in the introduction of (Goldstein and Kapstein 1998).

pingfan) includes two parts: one is to “rectify the name” (Ch: *pingfan zhaoxue*) of the victimized person on the ideological level; the other is to reinstate the previous working position of the person—often with some financial compensation and sometimes promotion—on the practical level. When Alak Lobsang came out of prison in 1980 he found he could return to his former religious practices. Religion was allowed again on the religious “Ground Zero” in Taktsang Lhamo but it has to be regulated in a whole new political and economic system.¹⁵³ As most of the lamas in Kirti monastery had either passed away or been in exile, Alak Lobsang, despite his relatively low religious status, became the leading figure in rebuilding the Kirti monastery and the monastic community. He was at the same the official chairman in the new Kirti monastery *Siguanhui* (Democratic Administrative Committee of the Monastery).¹⁵⁴

Siguanhui is a completely new institution at every religious institution after the official Chinese relaxation of restriction on religious practices since the 1980s. It applies to all kinds of religious institutions including Daoist temples, Islamic mosques, Buddhist monasteries, and nunneries. Its primary function is to bridge between the government administration and various religious institutions including the religious leaders and their followers. *Siguanhui* is usually elected by the religious community itself but has to be approved by the religious administration part of the government before it starts functioning (see figure 6).¹⁵⁵ The primary responsibility of the *Siguanhui* is to keep the religious institution informed with the most up-to-date

¹⁵³ The monasteries in Taktsang Lhamo were destroyed completely during the Cultural Revolution.

¹⁵⁴ Ch: *siyuan minzhu guanli weiyuanhui*, Tib: *dgon ba dmangs gtso bdag gnyer u yon lhan khang*. The Tibetan term is a translation from the Chinese.

¹⁵⁵ Since 1950s the Chinese government had tried to render the wide variety of religious organizations in China under a unified *Siguanhui* system. However it was not until the early 1980s that this system actually started to be applied to the most of the temples, mosques, or monasteries, mostly along with the religious revival in these religious institutions. Despite of being a self-elected committee, *Siguanhui* is nominally under the leadership of religious bureau in the government. Every *Siguanhui* member must be approved by the religious bureau after they are elected in the monastery. It is also the formal channel through which Chinese government policy is infiltrated in the monastic community.

directions from the government and also to inform the government with the latest news in different religious institutions in order to render them fully under state control. Although it is often the case that the head lama in the monastery is appointed as the chairman of *Siguanhui*, this election process initiated and managed by the government has fundamentally changed the nature of monastic structure—namely the separation of religion from politics and monastic self-sufficiency.¹⁵⁶

With the loss of the political and economic functions, the lack of monks and financial resources in the monastery made the initial rebuilding of the Kirti monastery very hard. Monastery income became entirely based on the voluntary contributions from the Tibetan public including the local invitation of lamas and monks to perform rituals.¹⁵⁷ Alak Lobsang started by traveling frequently to different regions performing rituals for local families and communities and trying to recruit more monks at the same time. “The government gave 7,000 *yuan* (around \$870) to the monastery restoration as a compensation to the Cultural Revolution destruction. But that’s almost nothing when you want to build a big monastery like Kirti,” Alak Lobsang told me later.

In early 1980s many people in the remote villages still did not know that religion had been allowed again by the government. When Alak Lobsang arrived he found that the religious sentiment among the Tibetan public was reborn with much passion after more than ten years of repression during the Cultural Revolution. Many people came to Taktsang Lhamo even though they actually worshipped on a temple

¹⁵⁶ See comparison between figure 5 and figure 6. The traditional Tibetan monastic structure which emphasizes on the combination of religion and politics (Tib: *chos srid gnyis'bre*) has been replaced by the separation between religion and politics (Ch: *zhengjiao fenli*) and the monastery self sufficiency (Ch: *yisi yangsi*, lit. “to breed the monastery with the monastery”) after the Chinese takeover. Melvyn Goldstein has documented the similar political economic challenge in Lhasa’s Drepung monastery in the post-1980s religious revival (Goldstein 1998: 35-39).

¹⁵⁷ Monastery income in the pre-1950s era was primarily based on tax from its *lha sde* (or villages that belong to the monastery) in addition to voluntary contributions (see the comparison of figure 5 and figure 6). For more on tax and corvée labor in pre-1950s Tibetan society see (Goldstein 1971a; 1971b).

under construction along with a small group of monks lead by Alak Lobsang. They donated whatever they had—usually self-produced food, such as *tsampa*¹⁵⁸ from the farmers, meat and butter from the nomads—to the monastery and monks. In addition to material donation the majority of local people also donated their labor. This has eventually become the main resource for rebuilding the monastery.

At that time Alak Lobsang received more invitations than he could handle to perform different rituals and blessings out of the monastery. Being invited to perform rituals in local families or communities is not only a routine task for lamas and monks and a sign of his religious reputation—the highly regarded lamas usually get invited more often and get paid higher—but it is also practically an important part of the monastery and monks income to cover their monastic expenses. Unlike in Central Tibet, where the centralized monastic system usually provided basic housing and food to all the monks, the monastic communities in most Amdo monasteries have a quite different way of economic support even though they share the same Gelugpa tradition.¹⁵⁹ In Taktsang Lhamo monks have been primarily supported by their natal families or relatives both during the pre-1950s and since the 1980s. This support ranges from housing, food, to any kind of basic needs throughout a monk’s life.

During his religious trips around the region, Alak Lobsang was also trying to recruit more monks for the monastery. “Many people were eager to resume their religious life and therefore were willing to contribute almost anything they had to the monastery,” monk Dungrub recounted to me, as part of the monastic history in his own experience. “I was part of the ‘contribution’ that my family gave when Alak

¹⁵⁸ *Tsampa* (Tib: *rtsam pa*, ground barley flour) is a Tibetan staple food. It is prepared by mixing the already roasted barley flour with yak butter (Tib: *mar*), Tibetan tea (Tib: *bod ja*) and some dried yak cheese (Tib: *phyur pa*).

¹⁵⁹ Even when the monastery collected tax in the pre-1950s era, tax income was not the primary sustenance of the everyday life for monks in many Amdo monasteries. Instead, it was the family or other personal sources that supported most monks. This still holds true in most monasteries in Amdo. My comparison here is limited to the Gelugpa monastic system in Central Tibet and Amdo.

Lobsang came to my home town in 1980.” Sending a child to be a monk in the monastery has a long tradition in Tibet. It was the foundation of what Melvyn Goldstein (1998) called “mass monasticism.” Taktsang Lhamo and most parts of Amdo, sending a child to a monastery means a lifetime contribution from a family to the monastery since the family is supposed to support this child—as a monk—throughout his life. Dungrub was eight years old when he came to live with one of the teachers in Kirti monastery.

While some young monks were recruited by Alak Lobsang, others joined the monastery voluntarily. Because of the shortage of monks in the beginning, anyone who wanted to become a monk, whether voluntarily or sent by his family, was welcomed and hosted in Taktsang Lhamo. A big part of the monks’ time, besides the routine monastery gatherings and studies, was devoted to the construction labor of rebuilding the monastery temples as well as their own houses. The building materials, mostly timber, could be obtained easily and cheaply from the surrounding forest regions.¹⁶⁰ Although the families were supposed to provide food and everyday needs for their monk sons, in the early 1980s the monastery often received more donations than they needed for the small number of monks present.

3.4 Return of the Body and the Soul

The rebuilding of the Kirti monastery constitutes the symbolic landscape of Tibetan Buddhist revival in Taktsang Lhamo. Yet it was not until the rediscovery and

¹⁶⁰ Although the reform and open up policy has been applied in China since 1980, in a remote borderland village like Taktsang Lhamo, people did not see this affecting their daily lives until the early 1990s. For example, the official ban of unauthorized (by the government) cutting and transportation of trees from the regional forest area, which has resulted in a sharp increase in living expenses for many locals, namely housing. It at the same times increased the tension between the monastery and the local village (especially Gyago Hui village). The local price level has started to rise dramatically, without necessarily the rising of local income, since the 1990s with the intense economic development.

return of the preserved body of the Fifth Kirti Lama to the monastery that both the body and the soul of the Kirti monastery came back in the local Tibetan people's life.

The Fifth Kirti Lama, Tanpa' Gyantshan (Tib: *bstan pa'i rgyan mtshan*) (1681-1755), is the most important figure in the Kirti Lama lineage since he is the one who transformed the previous "practice cave" (Tib: *ri khrid*) into the present day Kirti monastery (see chapter 2). After his death, his body was preserved in a stupa (or *choten*, Tib: *mchod ldan*) according to the Tibetan tradition for the high rank lamas or honorable figures.¹⁶¹ Since then this stupa has occupied a special temple in the monastery named the "temple of the body" (Tib: *gdung khang*). It had been the most important site on the circumambulation path in the Kirti monastery complex until it was completely destroyed along with the whole monastery during the Cultural Revolution.

The stupa temple today is a small one, located on the top of the hill overlooking other temples around and the villages bellow. It is the most honorable location for a temple in Tibetan tradition. My monk friend Dungrub, who has his house next to the stupa temple, always feels blessed by living in such an honorable place. While the location is prestigious, it is in fact very difficult to live in this part of the monastery from a practical perspective. As there is no road access for any kind of motor vehicle he has to carry up everything he needs for daily life, from firewood, to coal, food, and water. Dungrub has been living here for nearly 15 years. He said he feels a special connection (Tib: *las*) to the stupa temple. It was he who told me this legendary story of how the Kirti Lama's body had been saved by local Tibetan people and later returned to the Kirti monastery.

¹⁶¹ The Tibetan literature recorded this in detail as part of the Kirti monastic history (Nyima 1985: 33-38).

In late 1950s the “working groups”—a group of working cadres from the government—came to carry out the “democratic reform” in Taktsang Lhamo. They aimed to destroy the “Four Olds” in the monastery. Many Buddhist scriptures were burned and Buddhist statues destroyed. During Mao’s national campaign of the “Great Iron Melting” (Ch: *da lian gangtie*), all metal objects—from the pots and pans in private homes to the Buddhist statues made of metal—were collected and melted for the collective use of socialist construction. During this campaign most of the metal objects in the Kirti monastery were destroyed. Immediately following this “democratic reform” was the Great Proletarian Cultural Revolution during which all the buildings and temples in the Kirti monastery were completely torn down by the Red Guards who came from the regional capital of Zorge or Chengdu.

According to Dungrub’s story, when they destroyed the Kirti Lama’s stupa in the stupa temple, the Red Guards did not know there was a sacred body inside it. The local Tibetans who pretended to help them secretly took the body and transported it to a local family. In the beginning the family didn’t know what to do with it. Since the Red Guards would search every family for any kind of religious objects, they had to hide this sacred object immediately. They first decided to bury it under the ground in their house. The working group came to search their house but did not find anything. The family believed it would not be safe to keep the body there. They exhumed the body and took it to another family in a remote nomadic region.

The story goes that the Red Guards still suspected that some families had hidden some precious objects related to Kirti monastery. They returned determined to find something. In order to protect the real body, the father of the family made a fake body and placed it in a box claiming that was the thing he had been hiding. The Red Guard then decided to send the old man along with the fake body in the box to the regional center for further investigation. On his way to the regional center the old man

committed suicide by jumping into the Druchu River with the box. In this way the real treasure (the Kirti Lama's body) was saved and the case was ended with the conclusion of "criminal's suicide because of fear" (Ch: *weizui zisha*).

Both the concealment of treasure and the story of its rediscovery have a long legacy in the Tibetan history. The best known is the *Terma* (or treasure) tradition and the *Terton* (or mystic charismatic treasure revealer) in the Nyingmapa sect.¹⁶² While the treasure in the Nyingmapa tradition is usually a hidden text from ancient times, revealed by a *Terton* who is himself (or later becomes) a charismatic leader, this treasure in the Kirti monastery is the actual body of the Fifth Kirti Lama. Unlike the charismatic *Terton*, this person and family did not become the treasure-saving hero and have been remembered only as an anonymous local family. I have heard various versions of this same story during my two-year fieldwork. None of them gives the actual name or place of the treasure saving family or of this old man who committed suicide.

I tried to raise this question with Dungrub, asking whether he knew anything about this family or any person related to the incidents and why no one remembers their names. "Because that's natural," Dungrub answered without any hesitation, "anyone [Tibetan] would do the same in that situation. And after all it was *not* those people who saved the *sku gdung* [preserved body]. It was the *sku gdung* itself! If it were a normal human body it would have decayed long ago. The reason it can be saved and preserved [till today] is because that is a *sku gdung*!" In fact not only had it been preserved well as before, but it had even grown some new hairs on the body over

¹⁶² David Germano provides a vivid description of a modern movement of this ancient treasure finding tradition (*terma*) in eastern Tibet and its leading figure Kenpo Jikphun, a well known *terton*, (Germano 1998). For other historical and textual sources, see (Gyatso 1993; Gyatso 1996; Thondup and Talbott 1986).

years. Dungrub claimed to me that everyone in the welcome group saw this when the *sku gdung* was brought back to the monastery.

Apparently *sku gdung* for Tibetans is something much more than just a human body. It is for all Tibetans not just a treasure that is eternally alive and blessing its followers with its self-evident omnipotent power. But it also gives the monastery its soul, just as the living form of this power—reincarnated lama (Tib: *sbrul sku*, Tulku or Alak)—does.

The final return of the Fifth Kirti Lama's body was a very emotional moment for the people of Taktsang Lhamo. Although it has not been recorded in any documents or publications, everyone in Taktsang Lhamo remembers this day in their heart. When Alak Lobsang started to rebuild the Kirti monastery and recruit young monks, many Tibetans were still not completely sure that religion was allowed again. It was not until the visit of Panchen Lama to the region that the family that had saved the Fifth Kirti Lama's body finally felt assured that it was safe to bring the body back to the Kirti monastery. They met with Alak Lobsang and revealed this news, which immediately spread to all the surrounding regions. Alak Lobsang and the monastery decided to stop everything else temporarily to build a temple for the stupa (Tib: *gdung khang*) in the shortest possible time. Kalsang Tso, a Tibetan woman in her fifties, works as a nurse in a local government hospital in Tewu County. When I met her in the house of her brother who is a Kirti monk, she told me that since she and her husband are both government cadres they did not have enough time to do many of their religious duties.¹⁶³ When they heard about the return of Fifth Kirti Lama's body and the rebuilding of the stupa temple, she came here to donate her labor. She even tried to do double work in order to cover the part of her husband, who could not take the time. With more and more donations of materials and labor from local people, the

¹⁶³ Tib: *nga 'tshos gnyis las byed ba yin na khom ma mang po med gi chos mtsal mang po ma song*

temple of stupa was finished within the same year and became the first holy center for Tibetan pilgrims.

3.5 Revival of Islam and Hui Entrepreneurship

Like most other visitors to Langmusi, the Chinese writer who wrote the poem on the Langmusi ruins in 1981 saw only the relics of a Buddhist land. This is no surprise given the mosque prayer hall is simply a Chinese style mansion surrounded by hundreds of Hui residence houses built in a similar Chinese red-brick style.¹⁶⁴ At the end of the 1970s, there were about 70 Hui families living in the Gyago village (*Hongxing cun*, or Red Star village, as it was called then) on the Sichuan side and fewer in the Langmusi village on the Gansu side. Only one religious leader (*ahong*) was hired from outside with several young Quranic students (*manla*) studying with him.¹⁶⁵ They are often invisible to the outsiders because they have no special dress or elaborate rituals like Tibetan monks. It is said that it was also because of this unassuming appearance that the prayer hall of the mosque even survived the Cultural Revolution as a storage house for the People's Commune.¹⁶⁶ The Red Guards and the "working groups" focused mostly on destroying the more visible religious symbols in the Tibetan monasteries.

Local Hui people always feel proud when talking about this subject because it reaffirms that Islam is a powerful religion, even indestructible, in the face of a decade of disastrous attack. When Lao Ding talked about this subject with me in his home, he pointed to his simply decorated house: "Look, what can you destroy here? No status,

¹⁶⁴ The mosque minaret was only built in 1986.

¹⁶⁵ The *ahong* in the mosque usually serves a 3-5 years term. In Langmu mosque (Ch: *Namo qingzhen si*) there were 3-5 *manla* studying in the mosque when I was there. See chapter 6 on education.

¹⁶⁶ The mosque itself (a court yard complex before) was destroyed during the Cultural Revolution, only the prayer hall survived as a storage house.

no paintings, nothing. That's what it is like in our mosque. We Muslims have our faith [religion] in our heart. No one can destroy that.”

While the nature of Islam gets the highest credit for the survival of Islam as a religion and the revival of Islamic life in Hui villages, the second thing that gets credited is the Hui consensus regarding their natural talent for doing business. Hui villagers in Gyago settled down in the Tibetan area as trading middlemen beginning in the Qing dynasty. Even during the Cultural Revolution when all kinds of private businesses were strictly prohibited as capitalist, many Hui villagers were still secretly doing some trading just to survive, a practice later known as the “capitalist tail (to be cut).”¹⁶⁷ At the end of Cultural Revolution it was in fact the trading tradition that came back first to the Hui villager's life before the actual revival of Islam. In fact many Hui villagers commented on their “natural talent” in doing business as something engraved in the Hui identity, just like Islam. In his now classic treatment of Hui identity in China, Dru Gladney (1991: 118) argued that the revival of “Hui ethnic identity is inseparably identified with an Islamic tradition.” In contrast the Hui “national characteristic” of entrepreneurial ability is rather a result of the Chinese state effort to construct a unified Hui identity inside the contemporary multi-ethnic nation state of China (Gladney 1998b). Indeed these two characters have been actively promoted, if not imposed, by the Chinese state as the Hui ethnic character (Ch: *minzu tezheng*). Moreover, Hui themselves have over many decades internalized these identities—not just as a passive recipients but also as active manipulators for their own cause—a process that Gladney has called the “social life of labels.”

The trader or businessman identity for the Hui in Taktsang Lhamo is inseparable from the ethnoreligious identity of Hui and Muslim. In fact these two

¹⁶⁷ During the Cultural Revolution all kinds of private business were strictly prohibited and were treated as the “capitalist tail” to be cut off. It was reported that many “working groups” tried to cut this “capitalist tail” off Gyago village because of its long time trading tradition.

identities of businessman and Muslim are mostly complementary and mutually dependent. As Ali told me, “We Hui are born as Muslims with natural talent in doing business. But we only do certain businesses, such as serving as trading middlemen between Tibetans and Chinese (Han), running Qingzhen restaurants, bakeries, shops, or hostels.” What Ali depicts here is less a categorization of business than a religious demarcation of it. In other words, the Hui business identity is both ethnically territorialized and religiously confined or sanctioned—Qingzhen.¹⁶⁸ This Hui identity of both Muslim and businessman has been recognized from both the Hui point of view and by others like the Han and the Tibetans.

In 1978 Ali’s father opened the first small grocery shop in the village. Soon after, other Hui villagers opened some shops, small restaurants and some family based Qingzhen bakeries. As the Tibetan monastery reconstruction work in Gansu and Sichuan brought more and more people back to the village these small businesses immediately found their way. After all, Hui villagers had always been here as business middlemen before private business was banned in Cultural Revolution. What they did in the late 1970s and early 1980s was nothing more than a return to their previous way of living.¹⁶⁹

These Hui business owners restarted their business activities by taking local products (mainly animal livestock) to the surrounding regions and taking some industrially made daily necessities back to Taktsang Lhamo. Ermai—now the owner of the biggest clothing shop in town—recounted his family business history to me with much pride.

¹⁶⁸ Gladney’s (1991) ground-breaking work describes more in details on the Hui idea of “Qingzhen”, or Pure and Authentic. See also Gillette (2000) for a recent ethnographic account of an urban Hui community’s revival of Islam which also includes the idea of Qingzhen.

¹⁶⁹ Immediately after the relaxation of political policy in China in 1980s there have been many different kinds of revival of traditions. For example, a revival of Tibetan nomadic life style or “nomadism” in northwest Sichuan was observed as a result of the de-collectivisation and general withdrawal of the state (Manderscheid 2002).

Before liberation, my family had about one hundred yaks and horses which were the main means of transportation—just like today’s trucks! Every year we used these yaks and horses to bring in [Taktsang Lhamo] vegetable cooking oil, “big tea,”¹⁷⁰ wheat flour, and salt. Sometimes it was a trip of hundreds of *li*¹⁷¹ and sometimes it could be thousands. We also brought out sheep, yak or wool, meat, milk, and hides. There was no road and the society was not stable (Ch: *shehui bu wending*)—robbery, local warlords, all kinds of imposed taxes... It was very hard at that time.¹⁷²

In the early 1980s the road conditions in Langmusi still had not changed much from before. A mud path was built in the 1950s mostly for the state-owned vehicles to pass through this remote village before it was officially claimed as part of the newly established PRC state.¹⁷³ Trucks or any motor vehicles were still prestigious in the early 1980s, and were only owned by the few government units or state owned shops. For the locals it was still yaks and horses with wood-wheeled carts that moved them around. With the de-collectivisation and re-allocation of land and livestock to individual households (or “household responsibility system” Ch: *baochan daohu*), Ermai’s family got back their yaks and horses which had been confiscated before and used them again for transportation in their newly started business.¹⁷⁴

“We soon earned some money from our business,” Ali remembered, “and although it was not a lot, at that time it was really a big amount of money to us and it

¹⁷⁰ “Big tea” (Ch: *dacha*), as it’s widely called by Hui in Northwestern China, is also referred to as “Tibetan tea” (Tib: *bod ja*) by the Tibetans and as “brick tea” (Ch: *zhuancha*) by the Chinese, since they are usually packed in brick shape. It is a sort of roughly roasted tea leaves produced in central and western China and has been a major trading product between inland China and its borderland regions since early times. See chapter 2 on the “Tea horse Trade” in this borderland history.

¹⁷¹ Chinese distance unit 1 *li* = 0.5 km

¹⁷² Fieldnotes May 2004.

¹⁷³ This road was built from 1952 to 1954 during which time the PLA was still fighting with the local resistance—both the Tibetans and the KMT (Republican Chinese) army. (GNZX 1989) See chapter 6 for more on the subject of road construction in Taktsang Lhamo.

¹⁷⁴ In a similar way many scholars have talked about the revival of nomadic way of life in Tibet immediately after the de-collectivisation in late 1970s. The revival is undertaken more as “a way of survival” rather than for any other cultural related reasons. See (Goldstein 1994; Goldstein and Beall 1990; Manderscheid 2002; Wu 1999).

meant a lot to my family.” In fact not only Ali’s family made some money from their business, nearly all the small businesses at that time became the first “rich families” (Ch: *fuyuhu*) in the village. After this initial success of a business venture, Ali’s father insightfully decided to invest in a truck for long distance freight transportation aiming mainly at the booming market of transportation from Sichuan to Lhasa through Gansu and Qinghai. Although it was only a second-hand truck that cost 7,000 *yuan* at that time, this investment was so huge that it had to be pooled from all the savings of eight families related to Ali.

Chinese Muslims have a long history of doing business in both Central Tibet and its borderland regions. Since the beginning of Chinese economic reform, many Chinese Muslims (Hui) have taken the advantage to re-establish their businesses in Central Tibet.¹⁷⁵ The reopening of the Tibetan-Nepalese border town of Zhangmu (Tib: *'gram*) in the early 1980s has accelerated the demand of freight transportation from urban Chinese cities to Central Tibet and further to Nepal.

The later years proved the risky investment that Ali’s father made was also a highly profitable one. Ali said they repaid all the debts in just one year with even some profit left. In the following years because of this initial success in the new national transportation market, more and more Hui families in Gyago village have joined this truck transportation business. In 1986 Gyago village decided that they would make all the “truck families” a company style group and named it “Red Star Truck Group.”¹⁷⁶

The truck group transported everything from food, vegetables, industrially made goods, to cattle, and milk products. They all joined in the transportation market between Chinese cities (mainly Sichuan and Gansu) and ethnic Tibetan regions. This

¹⁷⁵ For the history part see chapter 2, for cases of Muslims in contemporary Lhasa, see (Jest 1995; Moevus 1995).

¹⁷⁶ The group lasted for more than ten years and was disbanded in the late 1990s (RGWS 1998). Many Hui families sold their trucks and started to invest in local hotels, restaurants, or other tourist-related businesses.

is no coincidence. My Hui neighbor Min, who used to be a member of the truck group, said that the fact that they live in a Tibetan region makes all the difference.

We speak Tibetan like our native language. Even though it is not the same dialect in Lhasa, they [Tibetans] treat us differently when we speak [Amdo] Tibetan. We are also used to the high land climate and especially Tibetan food like *tsampa*, yak butter tea, which Han Chinese find it very hard to adjust to.¹⁷⁷

The success of Hui business in Gyago village benefited directly the revival of Islam. The most visible landscape of this revival is the rapid rebuilding of the mosque and then the minaret, which did not exist before. At the same time it also complicated the relation between Hui and Tibetans in Taktsang Lhamo by triggering a conflict, both religious and economic, between the two officially equal ethnic groups in a Chinese nation—a conflict that never existed before.

3.6 Rebuilding the Mosque: Temptation and Tension

The Tibetan community in Taktsang Lhamo has been traditionally separated based on two monasteries—Kirti and Serchi. This has also provided the basis for the later Chinese administrative division between the Sichuan and Gansu provinces in Taktsang Lhamo. The Hui community, despite being much smaller, also followed this Tibetan separation and became two subject villages (Tib: *lha sde*).

Before the 1950s when the Tibetan monasteries functioned as the local authority, the Hui community was administratively separated into Kirti *lhasde* and Serchi *lha-sde*—the Hui villages that were the subjects of the Kirti monastery or the Serchi monastery. From the religious perspective, however, there was initially only one Muslim community gathering in one mosque. This mosque followed the Gedimu

¹⁷⁷ Fieldnotes 2003.

(Ar: *qadim*, or "old") tradition—the oldest Islamic tradition in China, what Gladney (1999) called “the first mode of Islamic reform.”

Since the 1930s a new Islamic reformist movement, Yihewani, has been spreading quickly in northwest China.¹⁷⁸ Taozhou (today’s Lintan in southern Gansu) was one of the most Yihewani-influenced centers and was also the hometown of many early Hui residents in Taktsang Lhamo. Through the Hui connections back to their hometown, Yihewani had slowly spread to the Tibetan borderland area. From the 1940s a small group of Hui in Taktsang Lhamo started to split off from the majority Gedimu mosque and gathered for religious practices in another family house.¹⁷⁹ Before they could build their own mosque, Hui villagers found the world was suddenly changed with the advent of the new Chinese communist state. Soon after that, the purges of Cultural Revolution purportedly erased all the religious marks and religious-based differences on the societal level. As a result the religious conflicts between Gedimu and Yihewani did not get the chance to emerge when they were already suppressed in the total erasure of ethnicity and religion during Cultural Revolution.

At the end of the Cultural Revolution, with the disbanding of the People’s Commune, the formal storage house was returned to the Hui community in Gyago village. Hui people started to gather and pray in this house unofficially and sometimes secretly until the Panchen Lama’s visit in 1982. Min, who was present in the Hui welcoming team for the Panchen Lama, recalled that period to me as passionate and harmonious.

¹⁷⁸ Yihewani (Ikhwan al-Muslimin), a reformist Islamic movement influenced by Wahhabi ideals in Arabian peninsula, was originated in Gansu by an Arab-returned Chinese Muslim Ma Wanfu (Lipman 1997: 201-211).

¹⁷⁹ The actual time of Yihewani’s arrival in Taktsang Lhamo was not all clear from my several interviews with some old Hui villagers. It was clear however that Yihewani had not yet set up a broad network in this village before it was crushed, along with other religions, by the Communist revolution.

In the beginning we were not sure this [re-opening of the religion and mosque] was true. Many of us were still afraid that the working groups or those Red Guards would come back again [...] until the Panchen Lama came and told us we can believe our religion again [...] because he was the highest political leader in the government who had come here.

With the Panchen Lama's nod to the Islamic practice in Taktsang Lhamo, the local Tibetan government official from Zorge County immediately sanctioned the rebuilding project of the Lhamo mosque. However unlike the Kirti monastery who got some government compensation for the rebuilding, the mosque rebuilding did not get anything from the government except a permission on paper.

At that time, we [Hui and Tibetan] were so happy that we could practice our religion again. No one thought about anything else. They [Tibetans] built their monasteries and we [Hui] built our mosques. We even helped each other—we helped them when they need labor and they helped us when we need building materials like timber.¹⁸⁰

Gedimu mosque in China is known for its *jiaofang* system (or “mosque community,” also called *sifang*). Unlike Sufi or Yihewani, each Gedimu mosque has its own individual *jiaofang* with very weak inter-*jiaofang* connections. Two leading figures in the *jiaofang* system are in charge of religious and administrative affairs. The “teaching *ahong*” (Ch: *kaixue ahong*) is the Quranic teacher and religious leader in the mosque as well as in the whole community. He can only be hired from outside the community and serves on a contract basis for 2-6 years. The *xuedong* is usually one or more of the old reputable men in the community who serve the mosque to manage its

¹⁸⁰ Min told me a real event in 1983 when a monastery stupa accidentally burned, all the Hui villagers in Gyago had come to help to help put the fire out, without any hesitation. They also contributed free labor and construction materials afterwards.

assets, including land, buildings, religious expenses and contributions. Although the *xuedong* has only administrative power in the mosque and community, it is also the *xuedong* who choose a “teaching *ahong*” as well as the renewal of his contract.

The initial rebuilding of the Lhamo mosque was a renovation of the prayer hall which could host 400 people praying at one time. With the prayer hall finished in six months, the Lhamo *jiaofang* resumed and the communal religious life was restarted after a committee of three *xuedong* hired a “teaching *ahong*” to host the mosque. When I met *xuedong* Zhang in his office, he did not hide his enthusiasm about Islam and used the Chinese official terminology to describe it.

Islam is a pure religion and purely a religion. It has nothing to do with politics. That’s why as Chinese Muslims we don’t have a problem of believing in Islam and following the [Chinese] government [policy] at the same time. This is called *aiguo aijiao* [love one’s country and love one’s religion].¹⁸¹

The traditional religious and administrative separation in the Gedimu *jiaofang* system—between *xuedong* and *ahong*—coincidentally parallels the new Chinese religious regulation system. Thus as a *xuedong* in the Lhamo mosque, Zhang is also the chairman of the Lhamo mosque *Siguanhui*.

In 1986, the Gyago village decided that they would expand the prayer hall in order to host more people. At the same time they also decided to build a new minaret (Ch: *xuan li ta*) for the mosque that had never existed before. Although religious practice has been officially permitted since the 1980s, all religious leaders and religious institutions still have to obtain official approval from the government before they can practice their religion legally. “We got the government approval to build this minaret,” *xuedong* Zhang said. When more Hui villagers were successful in the new

¹⁸¹ Ch: *aiguo aijiao*, lit., “love one’s country and love one’s religion.” This is an official Chinese propaganda slogan intended to promote the loyalty of all religions to the state, as a priority of each individual religious group.

Chinese market, contributions accumulated quite fast and easily. In only two months a 90 foot high minaret was erected inside the mosque courtyard. Unlike the prayer hall, which was mainly Chinese in style, the minaret was built with typical Islamic style covered with green glazed tiles. Moreover, this new landmark in the Tibetan land stands side by side with the Kirti monastery stupa across the street overlooking the monks' dorm quarters.

The Tibetan landscape has traditionally been built into a vertically hierarchized space where the most sacred objects or figures should always be positioned on higher locations and nothing else can be placed equal or higher. Until the 1990s the human landscape in Taktsang Lhamo had been fairly plain due to the devastation of the Cultural Revolution. Only the newly rebuilt white stupa and golden roof of the monastery temples stood out among the white-painted monk houses and other earth-colored lay houses. However, the minaret, which had never existed before in Taktsang Lhamo, appeared to be an alien landmark and breaking the traditional dominant Tibetan landscape.

Complaints started to circulate first inside the monk community and quickly spread into all the local Tibetan communities. My monk friend Dzoba—who has his house facing the mosque minaret across the street—looks very disturbed every time there is a prayer call from the top of the minaret. “That’s so noisy and so disturbing,” Dzoba said to me, “and it is five times everyday!” The building of the minaret apparently triggered the resentful feelings of the Tibetan community, particularly monks, towards the Hui community. My talk with Dzoba and many other Tibetans shows that this resentful feeling has indeed been growing for sometime and the building of the minaret was just the catalyst.

Taktsang Lhamo has always been considered a Tibetan land by both Tibetans and non-Tibetans. Now it is also a Tibetan autonomous prefecture under the official

Chinese administration. For most Tibetans it was only the initial benevolence of the Kirti Lama that Hui could settle down here in this Tibetan land. Since the 1980s the Hui community has rebuilt their mosque prayer hall, even faster than the Tibetan monastery, partly due to the Hui community contributions that were made possible by the fast growing Hui businesses in Taktsang Lhamo. Tibetans in Taktsang Lhamo believe that local Hui businesses made their money only from Tibetans, who are the primary, if not only, customers to the Hui hotels, restaurants, and grocery shops. This still holds true even today, even considering the growing number of Chinese tourists. In that sense, not only do Hui people live in Tibetan land at the mercy of the Kirti Lama but these Hui businesses also live on Tibetan patrons. When I talked about this with Dzoba, he admitted that although Hui have the same religious rights as Tibetans they should exercise this rather “quietly” (Ch: *qiaoqiao de*). In other words, Hui religious activities should be kept at a low profile—a standard that should only be judged by the Tibetans.

However, most Hui I talked to clearly attributed their businesses success to the possibility of the larger social environment, namely the change to a market-oriented economy in China, and their “natural talent” for doing business as Hui. “We Hui have always been born like this [good at doing business]. Now we happen to have the best time [for doing business].” When they feel pressure from the Tibetans, they seek recourse from official Chinese propaganda. As Min replied confidently to my question on the minaret, “Tibetan and Hui are the same *shaoshu minzu* (ethnic minorities). Why should they build everything and we could not build a minaret? It [building the minaret] was approved by the religious bureau [of the local government]. Even the Panchen Lama told us we have the freedom now to practice our religion.”¹⁸²

¹⁸² Fieldnotes January 2005.

The tension between the two communities escalated when the other Muslim community in Taktsang Lhamo—Yihewani—started to build a second mosque on the Gansu side of Langmusi in the early 1990s. As the Yihewani community started late in Taktsang Lhamo during the 1940s, they are a much smaller community compared to the Gedimu *jiaofang* on the Sichuan side and have never had a real mosque for themselves either.¹⁸³ When the government policy was relaxed in the 1980s, the Yihewani community restarted their religious activities, along with other Hui and Tibetans, by gathering in a lay house that functioned temporarily as a prayer hall. When I met *xuedong* Ma of the Yihewani mosque—without a mosque building—in the courtyard of the prayer house, he seemed to be excited to have finally found some outsider who would listen to his complaints.

We are a small mosque with only three hundred *jiaomin* (followers). It took a long time for us to get enough contributions for the building of a mosque or a minaret. We also have the government approval [to build a mosque and a minaret].

The courtyard they used for praying is one of the lay houses in the Gansu side village under the Serchi monastery. Nothing from the outside can be recognized as a mosque. The inside of the courtyard also looks like a normal family house. The main hall serves as the prayer house and some small side rooms as a washing room, a mosque office, and a maintenance room. On the other side of these rooms is a huge house skeleton that seems to be still in the process of construction.

“We started to build our mosque in 1990 but they [Tibetans] stopped us,” Ma said, “this [house skeleton] is it. It has been left like this for more than ten years [since then].” Ma’s frustration is representative of the Hui community, particularly the Yihewani. Although they got the official approval to build their mosque, local

¹⁸³ See footnote 3 in chapter 1 for the population in Taktsang Lhamo.

Tibetans still managed to prevent them from proceeding. Many Hui believe that as an ethnic minority in China they have already been in a disadvantaged position and living in a Tibetan autonomous region makes them the “minorities in a minority region” (Ch: *shaoshu minzu diqu de shaoshu minzu*). As Ma explained to me,

The [Tibetan] officials could not turn down our [mosque] building project directly because that would not be in line with the national ethnic policy (Ch: *minzu zhengce*). But they could encourage the local [Tibetans] (Ch: *xiamian de ren*) to prevent us. We could not do anything because they [Tibetans] are just so many. Once you go out of here [to the countryside or to the pasture] you don't see any Hui. In the end, they [Tibetan officials] could show up and stop us officially [from continuing our mosque construction] for the sake of avoiding ethnic conflict (Ch: *minzu maodun*).

What happened exactly at that time is still a sensitive and emotional subject to both Tibetan and Hui community even after more than ten years.¹⁸⁴ It is also a troublesome issue for the local government officials because it might distort the ideal ethnic harmony that the government has always tried to depict. Therefore everyone I have talked to seemed to give me an understatement of the incident. My Tibetan monk friend Tashi said in a casual way that a big group of Tibetan nomads from a remote pasture farm came around with anger one day when they heard the Hui were building a second mosque in Taktsang Lhamo. “But they are nomads. They are uneducated. What can you do to them?” he said. As a result, only the skeleton of a half-built mosque remains.

Although no one in the Hui community would tell me more details about this incident, I got to know in my later interviews that during the first half decade of the

¹⁸⁴ *Shijie ribao* (World Journal), a Chinese language newspaper based in the US, reported similar incidents in Aba prefecture in early 1990s. It is said that the construction of local mosque in Aba Tibetan area had caused “a bloodshed incident” during Tibetan-Hui conflict (March 9, 1993). But I could not verify if this was relevant to Taktsang Lhamo or if there was any “bloodshed.” See also (Makley 1999: 327-328) for a description of Hui-Tibetan conflict in Labrang area in the 1990s.

1990s, many Hui families had emigrated out of Taktsang Lhamo because of the ethnic pressure and the unfair treatment they felt. Most of them tried to establish businesses in the Hui centered towns such as Linxia or Lintan, where most of them originally came from more than a century ago. Even though lots of them eventually came back to Taktsang Lhamo in the late 1990s for different reasons, many still left a house there as a “back way” (Ch: *houlu*) and some also left their children to be educated in a Hui environment.¹⁸⁵

3.7 The Tibetan Monastery and Its “Chinese Door”: Making Space and Boundaries

When studying different community and ethnic groups, anthropologists have emphasized the importance of constructing otherness and exclusiveness (Barth 1969; Gupta and Ferguson 1997a; 1997b). In Taktsang Lhamo one sees this symbolic construction on the first sight of local buildings—mostly between monastic buildings and lay village houses. Temples are painted in a dark red color that only belongs to the monasteries. Monk houses are painted uniformly in white and lay houses have no right to paint in white or the monastic red.

Beside the immediately visible color differences the spatial separation between the two communities is also very clear to the locals—both monks and lay Tibetans or Hui. Although there is no marked boundary between the Tibetan monastery and the Hui village, locals are very well aware of an invisible boundary that separates Gonnang (Tib: *dgon nang*, lit., “inside monastery”)—the monastery territory that includes all the temples, monks’ quarters, as well as the sacred landscape behind it—from Gyago (lit. “Chinese door”)—the Chinese/Hui village or town outside the monastery territory. For monks in the monastery this is the line beyond which they are

¹⁸⁵ See chapter 6 and chapter 7 for more discussion on the Hui conception of their position in Taktsang Lhamo as well as their new relation with Tibetans in the Chinese market oriented economy.

not allowed to go during weekdays, and particularly at night. For lay Tibetan or Hui villagers this is the beginning of the circumambulation path during the day and the boundary they are not supposed to cross at night, particularly in the case of women. A disciplinary monk—locally referred to as Geke in Amdo dialect¹⁸⁶—patrols this line every night with his big stick tapping every step on the ground to ensure that no monk goes beyond this line and no outsider comes in.

The term Gonnang and Gyago are nothing new in the local Tibetan language. They have been used among the local Tibetan and Hui symbolizing two different local spaces—one monastic and one secular. Before 1950s Gyago referred specially to the Hui community which at that time referred to the idea of a small Hui village in the Tibetan heartland. The Chinese takeover in the 1950s and thereafter gradually moved the former political center in the Tibetan monastery to the local Chinese government in the newly established town of Langmusi (see figure 3). Since then the concept of Gyago has also been extended to a larger space including both the Hui village and the Chinese administrative town center.

However the real contrast between Gonnang and Gyago started with the religious revival and the economic change in town in early 1980s. While the Tibetan monastery was unambiguously the local political and economic center in the pre-1950s era, the religious revival after the Cultural Revolution has enabled the development of both the monastery and the mosque as separate religious centers from virtually the same starting point. In the mean time Hui villagers have played a major

¹⁸⁶ Disciplinary monk (Tib: *dge skos*, or *zhal ngo*) is a highly institutionalized system in the Tibetan monastic system. For example, in the pre-1950s Lhasa, a notorious group of disciplinary monks empowered by the Tibetan government during the Monlam Chenmo period was in charge of collecting various kinds of tax or fine from anyone in the city (Goldstein 1989) (Bell 1928) (Bell 1970). In Amdo dialect it is known as Geke and is slightly different from that in Lhasa. Today in Kirti monastery there is one Geke in each college and one general Geke of the monastery. There are also several assistant Geke known as Geyo (Tib: *dge yog*). See chapter 4 for more on the position and function of Geke in the monastery.

role in the local economy taking the advantage of the post-1980 Chinese reform policy. The non-monastic Tibetan communities in Taktsang Lhamo have been living primarily on herding yaks and sheep. It was not until the late 1990s that they started to catch up with some local businesses, targeting mostly the growing tourist market. Since then a real “Chinese door” has been opened with more and more “modern things” (Ch: *xiandaihua de dongxi*) and “luxuries” (Ch: *xiangshou*) pouring in everyday.¹⁸⁷ For more than two decades local Tibetans’ attitude towards those “modern things” and “luxuries”—and their spatial container Gyago—has changed significantly. It is the process of this change along with the local reaction to this change, what Anthony Cohen called symbolic boundary making (Cohen 1982), that have created the new spaces and boundary between Gonnong and Gyago in the post-reform context.

My Tibetan friend monk Dzoba has always been proud of his early embracement of “modern things” and his “advanced thinking” in the monk community—from his fairly good spoken Chinese to his avant-garde usage of a mobile phone when a landline was still a luxury for most locals.¹⁸⁸ Nevertheless he admits that it was also these things that made him embarrassed and the subject of ridicule by his fellow monks—when he came here initially in 1982.

When I just arrived here everyone laughed at me immediately since I brought a quilt with me to sleep. People here are nomads, they use only *tsharu* for everything.¹⁸⁹ They also laughed at me because I had chair at home. They said Tibetans should sit on the floor. Only Chinese use chairs. [...] I like to drink *xicha* (lit., “fine tea”, refers to the green tea from southern China) and eat beef noodles (Ch: *niurou mian*) in Hui restaurants. That [kind of food and drink] is

¹⁸⁷ These are two Chinese loan words used very frequently in local Tibetan language. My translation here (and hereafter) does not always go with the original meaning in Chinese because I translate them according to how local Tibetans have used and perceived these terms or ideas in their own context.

¹⁸⁸ See more on the subject of modernity and modernization in chapter 6.

¹⁸⁹ *Tsharu* (Tib: *tsha ru*, lit., “sheep skin”) refers to a thick Tibetan robe made with sheep skin typically worn by the Tibetan nomads in Amdo. It is used as a robe during the day and as a quilt at night.

very common in my hometown since that is a “half nomad half agriculture” (Tib: *rong ma vbrog*) region. But here they only eat *tsampa* and drink “Tibetan tea” (Tib: *bod ja*).¹⁹⁰ If someone drinks *xicha* or eats Hui noodle, people would say: “he is really [like] a Chinese (Tib: *kho rgya tag tag red*).”

For local Tibetans at that time to be like a Chinese was nothing but derogatory. With the increasing contact between the monastery and local Chinese authorities since 1980s, especially after the establishment of the *Siguanhui*, many monks felt antipathy towards the Chinese influences, starting with the pressure to speak Chinese. At that time a newly invented Tibetan term—Gyagarma (lit., “the Chinese lover”)—was used widely in the monk community to label those who speak Chinese or those simply those who deal with Chinese frequently—i.e. working in *Siguanhui*, or have “Chinese habits,” like monk Dzoba.¹⁹¹ The practice such as highlighting those “Chinese lovers” in the monk community has verbally and subjectively created a “Tibetan” space in the Tibetan community as the antithesis to everything related to Gyago and “modern things.” However this newly created “Tibetan” space and its boundary with Gyago had been gradually diminished with fast inflow of “modern things” and “luxuries” through the “Chinese door.” Hui villagers have been the major intermediary between the expanding Chinese market and the increasing curiosity to the outside world among the Tibetan community, particularly young monks.

One day at lunchtime I continued the talk about “modern things” at Dzoba’s house with Dzoba and a group of his fellow monks after their morning session. A young novice monk study with Dzoba was bringing some dried yak dung from the yard to make the fire in stove. Another young monk was preparing the dough to make a big pot of *thugpa* (Tib: *thug pa*, Ch: *mianpian*, noodle soup mixed with meat and

¹⁹⁰ See footnote 42 in this chapter for Tibetan tea.

¹⁹¹ Gyagarma as a derogatory term had been used mostly inside the monastic community. I never heard anyone (Tibetan or Hui) outside the monastic community mention this word. During the recent years, the use of this term has diminished significantly given that more and more monks speak Chinese, willingly or not, and have more Chinese connections.

vegetables) as lunch for everyone. Everyone else was waiting and chatting with a cup of Chinese green tea (*xicha*). “If you offer a guest Tibetan tea (*bod ja*) [these days],” Dzoba said to me, “people will talk about you as being mean and you will feel ‘face hot’ (Tib: *ngo tsha gi*, or shame).” Then he continued his comments on the change of monk attitude towards “modern things.”

Now everything has changed. Who doesn’t like “modern things”? Who doesn’t like “luxuries”? Even the nomad families have TVs and VCD players at home. Young monks like to watch TV too. We don’t have a TV in monastery so they go to Gyago [to watch TV]. Before most of the monks ate *tsampa* before the morning session and ate another *tsampa* with tea after [for lunch]. Only on weekend could we go out to have some noodles in the Hui restaurant. Nowadays most of them don’t eat anything before the morning session waiting for a good feed of *thugpa* or *chaocai* (Chinese stir fried vegetable or meat) after, unless they are too poor and can only afford to eat *tsampa*.

Although monks occasionally receive donations in cash, their principal support comes almost exclusively from their families, which is only in the form of food (*tsampa*, butter, bread, sometimes meat), yak dung for fuel, or wood as building material. Therefore it is very hard for them to gather even a small amount of money for any kind of cash purchase—two *yuan* for noodles in the Hui restaurants, five *yuan* for tea in teahouse, or anything that they cannot obtain from their families or donation. With more and more “modern things” and “luxuries” in Gyago many monks these days feel the increasing need and pressure for money.

Both the monastery regulation and the economic condition prohibit monks from having a TV in their houses. Many young monks thus try to sneak out during the weekdays or at night to the many teahouses in Gyago to watch Chinese TV series or American and Hong Kong movies. The teahouse has become the most popular place in Gyago since it provides free movies playing for those who do not come here to chat.

Sherab, the novice monk of Dzoba, told me that the most popular TV series many young monks saw at that time was the Chinese classic *Xiyouji* (Journey to the West, or The Monkey King) as it is a translated version in Amdo Tibetan and also because the story has to do with Buddhism. Another popular place in Gyago is the Hui restaurants where monks can gather together at different levels of price—from a bowl of two *yuan* beef noodles to an all-meat luxury feast that costs hundreds.¹⁹²

Contrary to the traditional antipathy towards the Gyago, today this “Chinese door” has opened an exotic place for Tibetan monks where they can satisfy much of their curiosity for “modern things” and “luxuries.” This has eventually created a quite mixed feelings in the monk community. On the one hand, old monks have started to feel that they have less and less control over their young novices these days. With all the attractions just out there across the street even the disciplinary monk cannot catch every young novice who sneaks out. On the other hand, going out of the monastic territory has also become more “dangerous” for monks. As most Hui businesses in town target the Tibetan customers, rumors circulated in the monk community that not only have things in Hui shops are overpriced but the Hui restaurants in town served their Tibetan customers dirty food.¹⁹³

On the Hui side, however, this space and boundary making is rather a core making process—“what they see as core meaning, institution, occupation, and/or activity” (Gray 1998)—than a demarcation of otherness. The different space and

¹⁹² I have more discussion on food, drink and modernization in chapter 6.

¹⁹³ Many stories have circulated even with actual names of the restaurant and the person in questions. The fact that there are never any Hui people eating in the Hui restaurants makes the Tibetans even more suspicious and proves rumors. Hui villagers themselves see no need to go to a restaurant as all Hui restaurants are family based and every family cooks virtually the same food. The rumor goes further to speak about the water contamination. The water source in Taksang Lhamo comes exclusively from the Druchu River as there is no tap water supply. All the households and restaurants used whether the water directly from the river or the pumped water from wells for every daily use including drinking and cooking. Tibetans are located on the upper part of the river (see figure 3). They believe they have the better quality water. Hui live on the lower part of the river and have been using the polluted water since the river is also the place where local people wash their clothes, and throw ash and garbage. See chapter 6 for more on this subject.

boundary making between the Tibetans and Hui comes from the different self-conception in the local place: as “majority minority” and “minority minority.” More and more Hui shop and restaurant owners today place their hopes on the Chinese national development (such as the GDOW) that is increasingly integrating this once remote borderland into the national system, both economically and politically. Some local Hui businesses have already benefited from the growing numbers of Chinese and Western tourists—backpackers, artists, and journalists—during the recent years. More and more Hui believe that with further development of the local infrastructure by the government they can count on more business from outside. Yet the tension between the Tibetan and Hui communities has not been relieved with these developments. On the contrary, it makes the local tension subtler and ultimately fuses the ethnic tension with the wider political and economic domains.

CHAPTER 4

MONLAM CHENMO, THE CRAZY DRUNK TULKU, AND THE CULT OF BAZAL: CONSTRUCTING A TIBETAN PLACE IN THE POST-SOCIALIST CHINESE STATE

The religious revival in Taktsang Lhamo goes beyond the reconstruction of monasteries and mosques. In post-Cultural Revolution China, an increasing assertion of ethnic, cultural, or local identity has been tied to a rising alternative base of power that marks different places.¹⁹⁴ Anthropological studies on place used to be dominated by a presumed social geographical setting that self-evidently contains what ethnographers perceive as their research subjects. During the recent decades many scholars have started to challenge the “assumed isomorphism of space, place, and culture” (Gupta and Ferguson 1997b). As a result, more ethnographic writings have emphasized on how a meaningful place has actually been inhabited (Mueggler 2001) and how local people have re-worked, appropriated and contested their engaged place (Bender 1993).

In this chapter I demonstrate the local construction of a Tibetan-centered place in Taktsang Lhamo after the 1980s. By Tibetan-centered place I mean to convey an interwoven concept of a Tibetan-fashioned local environment and a series of cultural phenomenon, moral values, social memories that are deeply embedded in it. These unfolding events and live figures under investigation—the revival of the annual

¹⁹⁴ For example, a Han community in northwest China revived their Confucian tradition by the manipulation of historical memory in ritual (Jing 1996). The “Arabization” has provided the urban Hui residents in Xi’an with an alternative to the Chinese socialist ideology (Gillette 2000). An Islamic based religious revival has taken a Hui community of northwest China back to the fundamental Islamic rules countering the state ideology (Gladney 1998b).

monastic ritual Monlam Chenmo, a crazy and drunk reincarnation lama, and the cult of a local protective deity—have embodied that particular genre of social memories and moral values as a cultural phenomenon which gives rise to a local vision of a Tibetan landscape in a post-socialist Chinese state. Emphasizing the ritual construction of authority and place, I further argue that the “practice of time” has been an important strategy throughout this reconstruction process of ethnic and religious identities.

The reconstruction of a Tibetan-centered place in Taktsang Lhamo has been a multi-vocal one, which involves confrontations and negotiations between Tibetan and Hui and vis-à-vis the Chinese state. I will show below that Hui people have also been involved in this Tibetan place reconstruction process. As Muslim Chinese living in an ethnic Tibetan borderland, Hui in Taktsang Lhamo have been situated in a “betwixt and between”¹⁹⁵ position—caught between an ethnic Chinese state and a local Tibetan authority. The Hui ethno-religious revival in Taktsang Lhamo has not been simply an “Arabization” or “Islamization” process, as suggested in some scholarly works on other Hui communities in China.¹⁹⁶

For the Hui themselves this marginalized integration into the local Tibetan place has been reinterpreted from different perspectives: Islamic religion, Chinese ethnic policy and the Chinese-introduced ideology of modernization.¹⁹⁷ In this way their marginalized living conditions in an ethnic Tibetan land within a Chinese state has somehow been compensated for by a contradictory subscription to both a Chinese-introduced ideology of modernization, and an alternative religious belief of Islam. The revived Hui entrepreneurship, as the other significant aspect in the Hui ethnic revival,

¹⁹⁵ This term was used by Victor Turner to describe a liminal situation in a ritual transformation process (Turner 1967).

¹⁹⁶ For example, Gillette has shown an Arabization in an urban Hui community in Xi’an (Gillette 2000). Gladney argues that the ethnic and religious revival in a northwest Hui community has a fundamental reference to the Islamic religion (Gladney 1991; Gladney 1998a).

¹⁹⁷ See chapter 6 for more on the modernization in both Tibetan and Hui communities.

has been developed parallel with the official Chinese-propagated market economy after the 1980s. The discrepancy and confrontation between a Tibetan-centered place construction and the Hui ethno-religious revival of Islam and entrepreneurship ironically rejoined in the Chinese nation building and Chinese modernization process, which has dramatically transformed the traditional social and ethnic relations in Taktsang Lhamo.

4.1 “Asking For Money:” Monlam Chenmo Revived

One week before the start of Monlam Chenmo in 2004, Sangwu, the 16-year old novice of my monk friend Tashi, came to my house one morning for a cup of Nestle instant coffee which he had recently discovered in my place as “much tastier than tea” (Tib: *ja las ka fei zhi gi zhim gi*). As most locals drink tea in Tibetan or Chinese style, instant coffee is considered a luxury. Some limited stocks in few local shops are priced for the occasional tourist’s need.

Having lived in Taktsang Lhamo for a while, I was used to many kinds of random visits—from a passing by hello through the window in early morning to a group visit at mid-night. Yet it was a surprise to me that Sangwu could come out of the monastery at this time. The novice monks are the main duty carriers for the year round rituals. At this time of the year their days are usually fully occupied with various kinds of monastic duties—i.e., rehearsing Monlam Chenmo rituals—which last all day and even night for a month until the end of the New Year.

To my surprise Sangwu told me that he was actually on a monastic mission—a special mission: he, along with some ten other young novice monks, had been sent by the monastery to “ask for money” from all the Hui and Chinese businesses located in where is traditionally considered Kirti subject territories. Because of the confrontation usually involved in this act, the monastery chooses a group of novice monks who have

no responsibility in the monastery to carry out this annual monastic tradition “unofficially.”¹⁹⁸ That is to say, this mission is officially not a monastery-approved act. Neither the local government nor the monastery authority openly acknowledges there is something like this going on because of the apparent conflict with the official Chinese ethnic policy. This morning Sangwu’s group successfully collected money from more than ten Hui and Chinese shops. “Some of them were unwilling to give in the beginning,” Sangwu talked to me proudly, “but it’s impossible for them not to give (Tib: *ma skyed ma ba gi*).” After the coffee Sangwu left quickly as his friends were waiting for him to continue their money collection in the afternoon.

Later I came out of my house and met my Chinese neighbor Li—a tailor shop owner from Sichuan who has been here for more than ten years. As usual we started our chat in Sichuan dialect with his favorite subject—his plan to move back to Sichuan after making enough money to buy a house in Chengdu (the capital city of Sichuan province). Talking about Sichuan made him more emotional that day because of what happened—he had just been “asked for money” by Sangwu’s group. Hence as soon as I brought up the topic, Li could not help complaining to me:

They said they came to *huayuan* (begging for religious purpose). But this is not *huayuan*, this is robbery! And it’s every year like this. We have nowhere to complain about it. Even the *paichusuo* (local police office) won’t say anything. After all they are all Tibetans.

The money requested from these shops is in the name of an annual contribution to the Monlam Chenmo. While Tibetans come to contribute voluntarily it has been a local tradition that non-Tibetan residents, particularly businesses, in the traditional

¹⁹⁸ As Tashi explained to me later, the monastery is well aware that this tradition is not totally legitimate under the current Chinese regulation. By sending those novice monks to undertake this mission, the monastery or the monastic leaders were deliberately trying to avoid the responsibility in case of being questioned by the Chinese authority. They believe that the authority cannot do anything to these young monks who are supposedly “ignorant” and ultimately have nothing to lose.

monastery territory should contribute to this important annual festival as well. My Hui neighbor Min who is from one of the first generation Hui families in Langmusi told me that his family used to provide the monastery with fried bread (Ch: *youxiang*, a traditional Hui specialty food) as a contribution to the Monlam Chenmo before the 1950s. But nowadays he expressed the same frustration as other Hui or Chinese shop owners when they were “asked for money.”

Now is different. We are equal [as ethnic minorities]. How can they ask for money like this? And there is even no fixed amount. You just have to give whatever they asked!

Later I learned from Sangwu that the amount they asked from each shop is usually different according to how much money the shop has made for the past year. In practice this means how much money this group of young monks believe they have made. It is because of this reason that the situation between the group of young monks and Hui/Chinese shop owners sometimes became very tense.

Monlam Chenmo has been an important Tibetan ritual that embodies both the religious and political authority of the monastery originating in the pre-Communist Tibetan social and political complex. The ceremony was initially founded in 1409 by Tsongkhapa, the great Tibetan religious reformer and the founder of the Gelugpa sect of Tibetan Buddhism, as an annual religious ceremony joined by all the Gelugpa monasteries in Lhasa.¹⁹⁹ With the rapid development of Gelugpa, Monlam Chenmo was transformed from a Lhasa-based religious ceremony to a national ceremony held by the Dalai Lama that gathered thousands of monks and laities from all ethnic Tibetan areas. In the beginning of the twentieth century, Monlam Chenmo reached its heyday under the leadership of the former Thirteenth Dalai Lama. Charles Bell, a

¹⁹⁹ According to the biography of Tsongkhapa, the first Monlam Chenmo in 1409 was attended by eight thousand monks at the Jokang temple in Lhasa (Sherpa and Thurman 1982).

former British officer in Lhasa at that time, recorded that during the Monlam Chenmo in 1921, the monastery service “was attended by ten to twenty thousand monks [from Lhasa, plus] twenty to thirty thousand of laity and forty to fifty thousand monks [from outside Lhasa] crowd into the Holy City” (Bell 1931: 26). Not only was it an extremely crowded religious event, but it had also become a symbolic national event organized by the religio-political government in Lhasa with significant religious, if not political, influence in all the ethnic Tibetan regions.²⁰⁰

As regional versions of this national ceremony, numerous Gelugpa monasteries throughout Tibetan regions had also formulated their own ceremonies of Monlam Chenmo. According to their different regional influences, these monasteries often have different scales of Monlam Chenmo and result in different regional centers of social political importance. The one in Taktsang Lhamo is one of these regional ceremonies, and has been performed for centuries.

Following the Dalai Lama’s exile in 1959 and the subsequent Cultural Revolution, Monlam Chenmo along with other religious activities were discontinued all over Tibet until it was permitted again in the early 1980s.²⁰¹ The first Monlam Chenmo revived in Taktsang Lhamo after the Cultural Revolution was held in 1980 when the Kirti monastery was not yet rebuilt. Two hundred monks led by Alak Lobsang performed this ritual in a big red tent during a period of two weeks.

²⁰⁰ For a memoir of Monlam Chenmo in 1920s-1940s, see (Bell 1928; Bell 1970). There are also many Chinese sources on this subject. Most of them come from the Chinese mission to Lhasa (Gelek and Zhang 2003; Zhu 1947).

²⁰¹ The actual time and process of religious revival differ significantly in different regions in Tibet. According to a Chinese scholar who worked in Lhasa from 1960 to 1985, Monlam Chenmo was held in Lhasa altogether three times under Chinese government rule during this period (Liao 1991). For a new book release on Tibet during the Cultural Revolution see (Zeren and Wei 2006). The 1980s revival of Monlam Chenmo in Lhasa lasted only a short period of time until the imposition of Chinese martial law in 1989 (Wang 1995: 21-26). After 1990 Monlam Chenmo was allowed only as an individual monastery-based ceremony and thus terminating the former symbolism of a national unity.

Thousands of Tibetan farmers and nomads from nearby regions gathered to celebrate this ritual after nearly twenty years.²⁰²

Ritual as a *rite de passage* is considered as a “traditionalizing instrument” since it has been “constructed in such a way that even in case of a newly invented ritual [...] it is supposed to carry the same unreflective convictions as any traditional repetitive ritual” (Moore and Myerhoff 1977). In Taktsang Lhamo the reinvention of Monlam Chenmo took place in a post-socialist Chinese context after the 1980s.²⁰³ Indeed this process of inventing tradition seeks not just to go back to its former convictions, but more importantly to restore the authority that had formerly been carried in these convictions. Through the revival of Monlam Chenmo Tibetans in Taktsang Lhamo have actively seek to restore their former authority in the reconstructed Tibetan place. The practice of “asking for money” tradition in the Monlam Chenmo period is one of these efforts.

4.2 Ritual Construction of Authority and Symbolic Violence of the Geke

Since the early 1980s the natural environment around the Kirti monastery has been reclaimed as a sacred Tibetan site.²⁰⁴ This includes the sites located on the

²⁰² The revival of religious practice in China since 1980s has been strictly confined to religious ritual or public festival in both content and form. Any political function part is strictly forbidden. According to Robert Ekvall’s (1952) account, Monlam Chenmo in the pre-1950s Taktsang Lhamo was much more than a religious festival or praying. It was as first of all an event that demonstrates the paramount power—both religious and political—of the monastery. At the same time it was an important trading occasion of the year when Tibetan nomads, farmers, and Muslim Hui traders came across the regions to trade at the monasteries’ trading post. At that time most big Tibetan monasteries in Amdo had their own trading posts and specialized monk traders, i.e. Labrang monastery (Nietupski 1999; Makley 1999). In addition, it was also a popular social occasion for young men and women to find their loved ones.

²⁰³ As Hobsbawm and Ranger indicated, invented traditions not only “throw a considerable light on the human relation to the past,” but “they are highly relevant to that comparatively recent historical innovation, the ‘nation’ ” (Hobsbawm and Ranger 1983). In the recent decade a noticeable scholarship has focused on the nation-state building process in China through the historical or anthropological studies of how non-Han ethnic minority groups have been incorporated in the new Chinese nation-state, e.g. (Bulag 2002; Litzinger 2000; Schein 2000).

²⁰⁴ In the early 1980s Kirti monastery was given back the monastery land as well as the sacred sites around it. This includes, for example, the mountain forest behind that monastery which since then has been protected from any kinds of destruction.

circumambulation path such as the Tiger's Cave, the source of the Druchu River, as well as the mountains, forests, and water ponds that are located beyond the monastery territory and circumambulation path. Each year before the Monlam Chenmo monks should repaint their houses in white on the outside so that all the monk houses in monastery territory look brightly white.²⁰⁵ Outside the front door of every monk's house and monastery temple a Tibetan religious pattern has to be drawn on the floor, with auspicious yellow colored sand.

As an important beginning-of-the-year ritual, the monastic preparation of the Monlam Chenmo starts nearly one month before the actual beginning on the fourth day of the Tibetan New Year. Monks in different colleges (Tib: *graw tshang*) practice different rehearsals of chanting, debating, and mask dancing (Tib: *cham*) according to their colleges and their own status.²⁰⁶ From the fourth day of the Tibetan New Year all the monks gather in the great assembly hall at three o'clock every morning. Monlam Chenmo formally commences on the first morning with the ritual of an annual change of the chief monastery disciplinary monk (Tib: *tshogs chen dge skos*), or the Geke as he is called locally. During this two-week period monks spend most of the day in the assembly hall praying and chanting (Tib: *tshongs*) except for a four to five hour sleep at night.

Besides mass chanting the central monastic activity during the first week is the annual open exam for a *Geshe*, or a Tibetan monastic doctoral scholar degree. The exam takes form of a public debate (Tib: *dam bca'* or *rtsod pa*) between the monk

²⁰⁵ White is the Tibetan auspicious color and has special symbolism of sacred or pure in Tibetan tradition, such as *khata* (white Tibetan ceremonial scarf). My monk friend Dungrub wrote his first poem saying "snow is the *khata* that Buddha gives the human world."

²⁰⁶ For example, novice monks in different colleges have to go through different phases in the monastic training during which they have to take up different duties, such as dancing *cham*, hanging the grand *Tangka*, or making butter flower offerings.

candidate(s) and a committee of monastic teachers.²⁰⁷ After nearly a whole week of debating, one or more successful candidates would be granted a *Geshe* degree and congratulated by fellow monks. A large number of pilgrims from all over the region start to pour into town at this time for this biggest annual ceremony. They usually manage to sleep in a local relative or friend's place—even just a corner of their living room or in an open courtyard. It is the only time of the year when lay Tibetans, mostly women, are allowed to stay with their monk relatives or friends in the monastery.²⁰⁸ In exchange for the lodging, the visitors usually bring some food (i.e. yak butter, *tsampa*, meat), or offer to do some domestic work (i.e. fetching the water from river, cooking and keeping the fire in the stove burning constantly) in the host's house. During this period everywhere in the monastery and the nearby villages is always crowded. Each morning when the small mountain valley of Taktsang Lhamo loomed out of the foggy, smoky light, another Tibetan day of celebration begins. The smoke for cooking fires—that used to come out of the chimneys of every house only when someone is at home (using fire)—now comes constantly from every house because nearly every house has their own visitors even the monks are not in their homes most of the day.²⁰⁹ The circumambulation path—which is normally visible only during the daily

²⁰⁷ During the traditional Lhasa Monlam Chenmo this exam was hosted by the Dalai Lama and the monks who received their *Geshe* degree there were supposed to have the highest credibility in Tibet. With the fragmentation of Monlam Chenmo in post-1980s Tibet, the *Geshe* exam has also been held separately in individual monasteries. In order to have a broader environment of studying, Kirti monastery has managed to rotate the exam with another monastery in Ngawa so that each monastery will host the exam for both every other year. From 2002 a critical logic debate (Tib: *tshad ma dam bca'*) has been added in the Monlam Chenmo at the request of the Kirti Rinpoche in addition to the traditional philosophical debate (Tib: *phar phyin dam bca'*).

²⁰⁸ The monastery regulation strictly prohibits lay people to stay over night in the monastery houses, especially women. Indeed they are not even supposed to entering the monastery after dark. The only exception is one time of the year during the Monlam Chenmo period. See (Makley 1999: ch 3 / ch5) for more on gender boundary construction in the Tibetan monastery.

²⁰⁹ Every house in Taktsang Lhamo uses a stove for both heating and cooking purposes. Therefore one can easily guess from the outside if the host is in, by watching if the smoke is coming out of the chimney of his house.

circumambulation time—also gets more conspicuous and even crowded at times, because of the sudden influx of thousands of pilgrims in town.

The second week of the Monlam Chenmo brings the ritual atmosphere and public emotion to an apex during the last three days—the annual display of a giant *tangka* (scrolled Tibetan Buddhist painting) on the thirteenth day, the ritual dancing on the fourteenth day, and the exhibition of the butter-made flowers and Buddhist images lighted by lamps on the fifteenth night.²¹⁰ These grand festivities are also occasions for the ritual construction of Tibetan authority through public mobilization and performance of both ritualized emotion and symbolic violence—all engraved in the reconstructed Tibetan-centered place.

On the thirteenth day of Monlam Chenmo ritual attention is moved from the center of the monastic temple to the mountain slope behind the outer circle of the monastic sacred space (Tib: *gnas skor*). Pilgrims and villagers have gathered at the center of the monastery beginning early morning. Before the sun rises, a 20m-long roll of a giant *tangka* is carried out of the main temple by some twenty young monks and symbolically protected by the Geke and his several disciplinary assistants (Tib: *dge gyog*). After another round of chanting by all the monks, the long awaited *tangka* roll is carried from the monastic temple all the way to the mountain slope. Despite only about 500m distance, it took nearly half an hour for the *tangka* crew to pass through the pilgrim crowds who had lined up on both sides of the path from the beginning (temple) to the end (the slope) leaving only a narrow passage. As the *tangka* passed by,

²¹⁰ These three ceremonies are called *gos sku* (“displaying a Tibetan Buddhist scroll painting”), *cham* (“mask dancing”), and *me dog mchod pa* or *bco lnga mchod pa* (“flower offering” or “fifteenth offering”) in Tibetan. There is usually only one such giant size *tangka* in each monastery and it is displayed often once or twice every year. The actual size of the painting may vary from one monastery to another. In Taktsang Lhamo it is around 20m wide and 30m long and is displayed vertically. Because of this extremely big size it is usually displayed on the mountain slope. In recent years many monasteries have built a modern concrete display platform on the side of the hill slope. *Cham* used to be translated as “devil dance” or “mask dance” in the early Tibetan related literatures. See an interesting account on the changing translation of the name and meanings for *cham* through times (Schrempf 1997).

turmoil arose from the crowd while everyone fought to reach the *tangka* for a touch or to throw a *khata* on it as a form of being blessed on this special occasion. Some old people who cannot compete with the crowd even lay down in front of the coming *tangka* in order to let the monks and *tangka* pass above their bodies. In recent years there has been another significant group among the Tibetan pilgrim crowd—Chinese journalists, artists, or tourists. Armed with all kinds of modern equipments, they are eager to catch every exciting moment and every expressive perspective of this exotic ritual without any awareness that these intrude into a ritual space.²¹¹

With all these obstacles on the way, the Geke and his monk assistants have become the most visible among all the people. They waved their whips and sticks from one end to another shouting and scolding the crowd to maintain the public order. From time to time when their shout seemed to be outrun by the overwhelming crowd they would use the power in their hands—this time no longer the giant ritual stick used for the symbolic purposes, but a real one meter long leather whip or wood stick. They beat relentlessly on those whose actions tend to jeopardize the progression of the *tangka* crew. Meanwhile they are also responsible to watch for the young monks in the crew whose attention tends to be lured away from their duties. In that case the Geke would not hesitate to scold and beat them in front of the public. While everyone was still fighting to touch the *tangka* roll or just to get closer to it, most people would fearfully evade Geke's whip or stick. Some brave hearts, often young Tibetan men, would show their strength and courage at this moment by jumping up over the crowd and crawling over everyone's head to reach the *tangka* scroll. When the Geke's stick

²¹¹ See chapter 7 for more discussion on tourist and tourism and their impact on the local religious revival and ethnic relations. Makley (1999) also shows a similar occasion when a Chinese photographer was punched in the face by a Tibetan monk because of his intruding into the ritual space during the Monlam Chenmo.

fell mercilessly on his back, his face turned red with both some awkwardness and pride. Then he would quickly disappear in the crowd.

Most Tibetan people and monks I talked to take the Geke's beating and scolding as fearful (Tib: *sgrag gi*) and being beaten or scolded as shameful (Tib: *ngo tsha gi*). At the same time, however, this feeling of fear and shame is obviously something exciting, even fun, which is an inalienable part of the whole festive atmosphere. Both lay Tibetans and monks have no doubt that the Geke has to behave like that during the ritual—cruelly beating people and furiously scolding young monks in front of the public—no matter how nice and gentle a person he is in his daily life. As Tashi explained to me, it is Geke's duty in the monastery to maintain order with his power, even with violence. After all, since everyone (Tibetan) wears a very heavy and thick armor-like Tibetan robes in winter, Tashi claimed that even though the Geke's beating is real, it is still mostly symbolic because it does not actually hurt.²¹² The purpose of the Geke's symbolic violence in this specific occasion then is to balance the ritualized public emotions on the one hand, and the ritually constructed authority on the other. In other words, the default public emotion in this occasion is at once a ritualized excitement and a constantly reinforced feeling of fear which engenders an acute awareness of a reconstructed monastic authority.²¹³

4.3 The Crazy Drunk Tulku

A cold afternoon in January 2004 I went to a Hui restaurant with my wife. The restaurant is not big but usually full of people—Tibetan monks from the local monasteries and nomads from pastoral areas round. Suddenly a filthy Tibetan man

²¹² From my experience of at least three years of Monlam Chenmo there I have often heard shouts from the crowd that sounds like real pain instead of a symbolic gesture.

²¹³ In another context, Makley (2003) has demonstrated similar feelings of fear, embarrassment and excitement from two Tibetan women pilgrims when they showed their respect and humility in the sacred temple of Labrang monastery.

attracted my attention as he was talking loudly enough to be heard even from outside. He looked all black from afar: curly black hair, a big black beard, a black leather jacket, black leather pants, and black leather boots. His cloths and boots were so dusty and worn out that the black had almost become grey. His big black beard covered nearly half of his face. I had an initial feeling that he was probably drunk or just a vagabond wandering around. In Tibet, religious centers are often the asylum of vagabonds and homeless dogs.²¹⁴ Thus I was not very surprised to see a drunken Tibetan man with the appearance of a homeless vagabond.

Upon spotting me and my wife entering the restaurant, he came over with a wind of alcohol smell and started a conversation with me in Chinese. “Hey, comrade, where are you from?” he asked. “I’m from Beijing,” I answered. “Ah, me too!” he seemed to be excited, “I graduated from the Central Academy of Art.”²¹⁵ He pointed to an old camera hanged on his neck, which looks like a toy camera from an antique shop, “I’m a journalist for Xinhua News Agency.”²¹⁶ Then he turned to my wife by my side and asked, “Where are you from?” this time in English. “France,” my wife answered. “I’m from Quebec,” he seemed to be excited to have found a compatriot at another end of the globe, “Montreal, you know? My passport... Canada ...” At this time a Tibetan monk came over and took him away by telling him something that I could not hear.

After this brief introduction I saw him on the street from time to time always holding a half full bottle of *baijiu*, or Chinese booze made from rice or sorghum.

²¹⁴ The begging tradition in Tibet has a history as long as that of the religious pilgrimage. In fact it is hard to distinguish one from the other. In most cases monastery is the place where they seek shelter and food. In the 1920s French Tibetologist Alexandra David-Neel made her travel to Lhasa by disguising herself as a pilgrim beggar (David-Neel 1927). See also (Stoddard 1986). This is also true for homeless animals. When Tibetan people try to accumulate their *karma* (merit) by saving lives (Tib: *tshé thar*), they usually free the animals around the monastery so that they can be sure the animal would survive. Jokang temple and around used to be one of the most populated place for pilgrimage beggars and homeless dogs until they were wiped out by the Chinese government in mid 1990s.

²¹⁵ A prestigious art school in Beijing which many distinguished Chinese artists graduated from.

²¹⁶ Xinhua is the top official news agency in China, organized by the CCP.

Many times he was scolding someone and occasionally he seemed just talking to himself. I tried to avoid having any direct contact with him fearing that he might in any moment do something that I may or may not imagine. He seemed to me like just another vagabond, like those I have seen in many other places. It was not until the Monlam Chenmo period that I got to discover some surprising stories. In fact this person is Alak Tayi, a well-known crazy drunkard but also a high level Tulku (or reincarnated lama, Tib: *sbrul sku*) of the Kirti monastery who is believed to possess some magical powers.

The high point of the fourteenth day of Monlam Chenmo was an all-day public performance of the traditional mask dance (Tib: *cham*). Hundreds of monks in the monastery performed this dance for nearly a whole day on the open monastery square with elaborate costumes and masks. In 2004, it was a beautiful day. The sky was deep blue before the sun rose. At this time monks of the Kirti monastery had already passed a whole night chanting in the main temple. Outside the main temple people had started to gather around the big square where the dance would be performed. As start fo the dance neared, more and more people poured in the open monastic square until everyone could hardly move in the crowd. Still more people were trying to squeeze in. No one would miss this once-in-a-year chance of being blessed by this grand religious ritual while being entertained at the same time. Thus the line set up between the crowd and the reserved area for the *cham* performance had to be maintained constantly by the Geke and his several disciplinary assistants who usually carry out his duties with much violence.²¹⁷ In Taktsang Lhamo the Geke represents the highest disciplinary position in the monastery.²¹⁸ He maintains order at all monastic events including the everyday

²¹⁷ The violence in a ritual situation like this carries as much symbolic meaning as its apparent function. See (Makley 1999) chapter 5 for a similar scene during the Monlam Chenmo in Labrang monastery. She argues that it is more of a performance of “heroic Tibetan masculinity.”

²¹⁸ My monk friend Tashi insisted that the Geke even has the power to watch over the Kirti Lama in ritual occasions like Monlam Chenmo. Unlike a reincarnated lama (Alak), Geke is a monastic position

routine meetings, monk study sessions, ritual events, and the night curfew in monastic territory. In any of situations mentioned here, the Geke represents the unchallengeable power of the monastery symbolized through his specially designed robe that is elaborately propped up from his two shoulders and through a huge ritual stick held in his hand.

However this year everyone noticed the unavoidable presence of a crazy drunkard—the one I met in the restaurant. He was still in his filthy leather jacket and leather pants and the old camera hung on his neck —with apparently no film inside. From time to time he would point his toy-like camera at the crowd and the *cham* performance as busy and serious as a professional journalist. But I soon realized that his real enthusiasm was to behave as a Geke. He started by kicking and shouting at those who sit in the front line of the crowd forcing them to back up, which is usually the duty of the Geke. After he had scolded and beaten almost everyone during the *cham* performances, the crowd recognized his power by saying that even the Geke silently agreed with what he did. Thus wherever he passed, the crowd became like a flock of birds flying away from him.

After some time, he found himself a new task—robbing hats and scarves from the crowd. Whenever he saw someone with a hat or scarf, he would first sneak close to the person and then grab it with one sudden move. While the victim had yet to understand what happened, he had already run around holding his plunder and shouting aloud to the crowd in both Tibetan and Chinese: “I am the chief of this monastery. Wearing a hat or scarf here is disrespectful to the monastery. I must maintain the order of this monastery. I’m going to burn these hats and scarves right

that theoretically any monk in the community can achieve—just like any monk can study to become a Geshe (Tib: *dge shes*, the highest Tibetan scholar degree in the Gelugpa monastery system). While Geshe is a life-long title for one who owns it, Geke is a position based on terms—usually one or two years.

here right now.” It didn’t take long for him to gather a pile of hats and scarves in hand.²¹⁹

Despite his aggressive words and offensive behavior nobody seemed to be angry at what he did. On the contrary many people found some amusement in this extra scene. Moreover, after some time more and more people started to line up in front of him asking him to beat their arms, their backs, or wherever they have a disease or pain in their bodies. A young monk by my side explained that “He is helping these people to get rid of some pain or disease [by beating]. He is a good Alak and [thus] no matter how he behaves and whatever he says you should always listen and obey.” Alak is the Amdo equivalent of Rinpoche, an honorable address for a reincarnation lama or Tulku.

This seemingly crazy drunkard is in fact one of the many reincarnated lamas of the Kirti monastery, known as Alak Tayi.²²⁰ He was recognized as the reincarnation of the current Kirti Lama’s previous teacher. His early life is a mystery since he was recognized as a reincarnation lama at the end of the 1950s. It was time when monks could not maintain their monastic lives (Tib: *a kha byas mi wa gi*). Even though Alak Tayi was recognized as a reincarnated lama, he could not resume his position in the Kirti monastery and had to stay in his lay home. Soon after that, the Cultural Revolution swept all over China during which Alak Tayi, a teenager by then, is said to have left for a Chinese city and allegedly joined the Chinese army and became a PLA soldier. Others said he actually went exile to India to meet the Dalai Lama and the

²¹⁹ The role of maintaining order in the Great Prayer Festival—to keep everyone in a respectful manner—has been traditionally a position for a special group of “warrior monks” (Tib: *ldad ldop*) in pre-1950s Lhasa (Goldstein 1964). During the Great Prayer Festival in the post-1980s Labrang monastery this role has been held by a group of “seven laymen from the oldest villages in Labrang led by one specially-garbed monk” (Makley 1999). In Taktsang Lhamo it is the disciplinary monks (Tib: *dge bskos*, Geke) and the assistant disciplinary monks (Tib: *dge g’yog*) who usually assume this role.

²²⁰ The life story of Alak Tayi was collected from many different people during my fieldwork. I was well aware of the narrative nature of different versions. My interest is the narrative itself rather than the authenticity of the story.

Kirti Lama and later came back again. But no one really knows what he did during this time.

He finally showed up again in Taktsang Lhamo in the mid 1980s, when religious practice was permitted and the monastery was reopened. Kirti monastery was then being rebuilt under the leadership of Alak Lobsang. For the first time in his life Alak Tayi became a monk in the Kirti monastery over twenty years later from when he was supposed to arrive. “At that time he was no different from other monks,” my monk friend Tashi told me. “He was always very quiet and kept a low profile. Until one day he suddenly disappeared from Kirti monastery and Taktsang Lhamo.” Several years later when he showed up again to Taktsang Lhamo, he has been found always drunk and speaking crazily to everyone in Tibetan, Chinese, and English.

4.4 God, Ghost and Magical Power

I have talked to many Tibetan friends about why and how a reincarnation lama can become drunk and crazy. Most of them told me that it was during the Cultural Revolution that he became both crazy and possessed with some magical healing power. This evident connection between the Cultural Revolution and a present case like this excited my interest in how that period has been conceptualized and memorized in the local society. I asked my lay Tibetan friend Tserang to explain how the Chinese Cultural Revolution that seems to be quite far away both in time and space has affected this remote Tibetan village and their religion. My field diary noted Tserang’s answer:

We have many gods and ghosts in Tibet and we Tibetans believe in them. For example, before the liberation (Tib: *bcings ’grol*, referring to 1949), nobody would dig a well on the ground to get water since that would offend the god of the earth (Tib: *sa bdag*). If somebody did it, he would surely be punished [by the god of earth].

During the Cultural Revolution, however, Mao Zedong became the king of both human being and all kinds of gods and ghosts (Tib: *mi dang lha 'dre so so gi rgyal wo red*). No one knows if he himself is a man, a god or a ghost. His power was so big that it suppressed that of any other god or ghost in Tibet. That's why at that time people could do anything [i.e. dig a well for water] without being punished.

But these days have you seen anyone dare to dig a well again? Of course not! You know why there are so many leprous people in Tewu area [a nearby region east of Taktsang Lhamo]? That's because they offended the god of the earth by digging wells.²²¹

The terror of the Cultural Revolution, in particular the deified power of Mao, is thus memorized as a terrible yet powerful alien force set against the divine realm of Tibet and particularly against the paramount power of a reincarnate lama.²²² Alak Tayi—a reincarnate Lama, even with his crazy behavior—embodies this violent collision between the traditional belief of sacred power in Tibetan society and the terror from the memories of Chinese Cultural Revolution.

To make things more complicated and ironic, the concept of craziness or a crazy person (Tib: *smyon pa*) has been conceived quite differently in the Tibetan tradition. Instead of being thought of as any kind of sickness or abnormality, it has often been considered as a rather saintly behavior that is simply beyond the understanding of any normal person. The “saintly madman” is a “well-established stereotype in Tibet” (Ardussi and Epstein 1978). Not only is this story found in much of the religious and historical literature as well as in oral traditions, but it has also played an active part in Tibetan society. These madmen are often recognized as a kind of practitioner who possesses some special kind of magical power that normal Buddhist practitioners could not achieve in any conventional way. Geoffrey Samuel

²²¹ Fieldnotes November 18, 2003, interview with Tserang, a Tibetan cadre in his 40s.

²²² See also (Landsberger 1996-1997) for a discussion of the deification of Mao in China during the Cultural Revolution. Some have argued that the deification of Mao in China also had deep impact on minority peoples and their religions, see i.e. (Wang 1998).

(1993) goes further to argue that Tibetan Buddhism is indeed the reconciliation between orthodox Buddhism spread to Tibet from India and indigenous shamanism in ancient Tibet. Thus Tibetan Buddhist lamas are in fact “civilized shamans.”²²³ Based on his study on Bon religion and the *Rigmed* movement in Kham and Amdo, Samuel depicts the phenomenon of “mad yogi” in Tibetan society as “a shamanic critique of clericalization,” namely Gelugpa monasticism. As such, this kind of “mad yogi” has always existed in Tibetan society representing an alternative to the orthodox Buddhist practice.

However, in Alak Tayi’s case above, “mad yogi” exists not as an antithetical part to the orthodox but rather an embodiment of both. Alak Tayi himself is recognized simultaneously as a reincarnation lama in a conventional Gelugpa monastery and as a drunken crazy Tulku outside of the monastery who possesses some magical powers that do not belong to a Buddhist lama. Moreover, unlike his predecessors in Tibetan history, Alak Tayi’s “saintly madness” is the result of the intrusion of an evil alien power—namely the deified power of Mao and the terror of Cultural Revolution—into the divine realm of Tibetan reincarnate lama. Despite its evilness, this alien power is nevertheless recognized as threateningly powerful and magically influential. Thus after a devastating encounter with this evil power, Alak Tayi has been ironically enabled with some magical powers which conventional practitioners would have no way to obtain otherwise. For local people he is no less a real Lama than any other Lamas in the monastery. At the same time he possesses some magical power that obviously does not go with his lama status.

A binary understanding of Tibetan religious phenomena as orthodox (“clerical” as Samuel calls it, i.e. Gelugpa) versus shamanic (i.e., Bon) is thus not helpful to

²²³ See, e.g., the biography of Milarepa, the most well-known ascetic yogi in Tibetan history written by Gtsang-smyon Heruka, lit., “Heruka, the madman from Gtsang” (Gtsang-smyon 1962; Samuel 1993).

understand the complexity of religion and society in a specific context like the above one. It underlines one of the various possibilities (i.e., what Samuel calls “civilized shamans”) but underestimates or simply ignores others (i.e., what we might call “uncivilized or de-civilized lamas”).²²⁴ Furthermore the “civilized shaman” argument is also flawed with a universal assumption of the unified progress of time in a widely varied time and space.²²⁵

When explaining the Tibetan conception of Lama (or reincarnated bodies), Robert Ekvall indicates that the fundamental role of these “emanation bodies” in Tibetan society is not a priest hosting rituals or ceremonies. They are there “to be recipients of worship and the dispensers of benediction and aid to all who travel the long road to final liberation.” Since they represent the Budddahood in living form, they are at once monks who have to fulfill their monastic vows and yet they are above any existing law. That is to say, once he is recognized as a Lama, he will always be a Lama to all Tibetan people—whether he renounces the vows he took, breaks the monastic rules, or even he denies his reincarnation identity himself. “Nothing he can do will make him anything less than a Lama” (Ekvall 1979). The most well known case in Tibetan history is the Sixth Dalai Lama who is well known in Tibetan history for his iconoclastic character and is famous for his love poems popular among the Tibetan public. Although the Qing government denounced his Dalai Lama status because of his improper behavior that appeared to be against Buddhist principles, Tibetans have always considered him as a no-less-real Dalai Lama than any other Dalai Lama in Tibetan history.

²²⁴ In a similar way, many scholars have documented the religious coexistence of Buddhism and shamanism in other Himalayan societies. For example, an ethnic Tibetan community in Nepal employs Tibetan Lamaism and Gurung Shamanism separately for different community needs (Mumford 1989); there are different functions of Buddhism and shamanism in one Tamang community (Holmberg 1989).

²²⁵ See more on this subject of time later in this chapter.

As Robert Ekvall argued earlier, Tibetan society denies any possibility that the nature of a reincarnate lama can be changed under any circumstances. In other words, the power of Lama is considered as the highest power in the universe. The fact that Alak Tayi was recognized as a reincarnate lama in the beginning makes him a real lama among the people as well as to himself. Thus for Tibetans in Taktsang Lhamo, Alak Tayi becomes a real reincarnation lama who possesses some unexplainable magical powers. Even though he cannot perform many routine rituals and positions in the monastery, the nature of his ultimate existence is still the same as a real reincarnate lama.

Later the monk who told me to respect Alak Tayi reaffirmed me that “this Alak is very *ling* (effective). If you have any sickness or pain in your body, just ask him to beat [that part].” Note that he used the word *ling*—a Chinese word for the efficacy of magical power—here to describe the effectiveness or efficiency of a Tibetan reincarnate lama’s power. When explaining the concept of *ling* in a Chinese ritual context, Sangren (1987) contends that “in Chinese thought magical power is attributed to the mythical process” and thus *ling* “is at once the fetishized product of the reproduction of social relations and a cultural logic that gives social relations meaning and value.” In a similar vein, Toni Huber (1999) argues that the transcendental power of *chinlab* in Tibetan society “can also be regarded as an ideological mystification or misrecognition of society's own productive power.”

In Alak Tayi’s case the product/producer model has involved another layer of meaning—the cross-cultural/cross-lingual interpretation. Scholars who work on the Sino-Tibetan borderland have shown many cases of the confusion of identities as well as the interchangeable use of cross-cultural/cross-lingual concepts in the local beliefs,

cults and myths.²²⁶ This interpretation has been closely contextualized in its social and political background. As the monk continued explaining to me, Alak Tayi is a good Tibetan lama not only because he is a powerful Alak, but also because he has done many good things for Tibetan people despite of his disgraceful appearance. Indeed some of the great deeds have been able to be accomplished only because of his drunk and crazy state. The year before, it is said, he had kicked out some Hui businesses from his hometown in Zorge by violently disturbing them. Since the 1980s there has been a growing resentment and jealousy from local Tibetans towards both the success of local Hui business and the revival of Hui religious and ethnic identity. Local Tibetans tend to feel that, as guests, the Hui have built their business success upon ripping off their host, or Tibetans. Moreover, the deep down Tibetan attachment to the pre-Communist ethnic hierarchy can not be simply replaced by the official Chinese policy of ethnic equality. However there is no simple way to express these feelings. Alak Tayi's appearance as a crazy drunk vagabond and his drifter life style made him the perfect one to show some unspoken communal resentment that otherwise could not be easily expressed. Because of his known madness and drunkenness even the local police station could not do anything. After several incidents like that, other Hui businesses gradually moved out of town leaving it an "all-Tibetan" town, which is rare in these regions.

After recounting all those great deeds Alak Tayi had done for Tibetan people, the monk said regretfully to me, "if he were not like this [crazy and drunk], he would surely have been a great leader in our monastery now."²²⁷

²²⁶ For example, (Buffetrille 2002) discusses an identity confusion of a Tibetan territorial deity (*khri ka yul lha*) with the Chinese God of war (*Guan Yu*) and the Chinese God of literature (*Wen Chang*). (Schrempf 2002) presents another example of identity confusion between two local deities in Sino-Tibetan borderland.

²²⁷ Since the reopening of the monastery in 1980s, Alak Lobsang has been the de facto leader of the Kirti monastery for both religious and secular affairs. Even though he is actually not a reincarnation

4.5 Bazal and the Tactics of Time: Consuming the Future through History

One afternoon I was doing a circumambulation walk with Tashi. As it was not the usual circumambulation time, only some old people were on the way as occasional worshippers. But when we passed by the *gtsan khang*, or the protective deity temple, things changed. As a temple for a protective deity, no one is actually allowed to enter the *gtsan khang*—it is always locked except when a monk comes from time to time for the temple maintenance. Many people—young and old, local and from far away—were quite busy circling around the outer wall of the temple. Some had apparently done that for quite a while. They hung their *mani* rosaries on the wall counting the number of the loops they did by moving a bead each time they passed the same place. Others were putting more incense in the burner and throwing out piles of “wind horse” paper in the air as a form of prayer.²²⁸

This small temple houses a protective deity locally referred to as Bazal (Tib: *dpal rtsal*, lit. “[someone with both] virtue and talent”). After living in Taktsang Lhamo for a while, it did not take me long to notice that despite its small size and simple appearance the *gtsan khang* is probably the site most frequented by both locals and pilgrims among all the temples in the monastery and all the sacred sites along the circumambulation route. It was from this point that I got interested in the story of this powerful local protective deity and its historical legacy in the post-socialist condition. Moreover this legacy that is frequently told in the local area not only reinforces local identity but it also does it in a specific social context through the tactics of time.

lama from the Kirti monastery, he has been the only one that is considered trust-worthy by the Kirti Lama and politically correct by the Chinese government.

²²⁸ “Wind horse” (Tib: *rlung ta*) refers to the Tibetan prayer flag, or a small square piece of paper that is printed with Buddhist symbols, texts or patterns. As a form of protection or praying, the prayer flag is often put on sacred sites or at homem, and paper “wind horses” are thrown into the air at a sacred site or at a sacred moment.

Long time ago there was a very well-known erudite Tibetan monk scholar from a small monastery in Thewu, several days walking distance to the Kirti monastery. When the old monk knew he was about to die he decided to invite the renowned Kirti Lama to guide his death process and to ensure the right path.²²⁹ He sent a young novice monk to bring the message to the Kirti monastery. The young monk turned out to be a lazy and irresponsible one. He was too lazy to finish the long walk to the Kirti monastery and turned back midway. After he came back he lied to his master that the Kirti Lama was too proud to show up at such a small monastery like his and to perform the ritual for him. He even made up some insulting words to reconfirm his story which eventually led to the abrupt death of the old monk.

In Tibet when those with special spirit or high energies—i.e. reincarnation lamas, Tantric practitioners, highly learned monks—die, it is believed that only their physical bodies die. Their special spirit or high energy will continue through reincarnation and last eternally.²³⁰ This reincarnated spirit or energy can exist in different physical forms—human, god, ghost, or protective deity—under different circumstances. Since the old monk who was renowned for his knowledge—and thus carried high spiritual energy—died abnormally of anger and humiliation, his soul turned immediately into a powerful destructive ghost that started to wander around the region harming innocent people and destroying many things in their lives.²³¹ There

²²⁹ The concept of death in Tibetan cosmology is both a complicated and a very important one. It involves a long in-between process (Tib: *bar dor*) during which a person is neither a live nor a dead. It is therefore very important to have someone (i.e., a Tibetan lama) to guide the deceased through this process in order to be on the right path. See (Evans-Wentz 1949; Coleman 2006).

²³⁰ The idea of reincarnation was initially originated in Tibet from the Karma Kargyu sect in 13th century according to the Tibetan history classic, the “Blue Annals” (Tib: *deb ther sngon bo*). It was later adopted by the Gelugpa sect and became well-known through its two biggest reincarnation systems: the Dalai Lama and the Panchen Lama. Many other Buddhist and non-Buddhist traditions in Tibet have also adopted this system throughout their history as their principal religious dynamic.

²³¹ I heard the story from different people. Although they are not completely the same, all of them emphasized that this ghost was very harmful on people only in terms of their materialistic lives, such as destroying their houses, making them sick, causing them to lose money in business, even killing someone, etc. Yet none of them mentioned anything that has to do with their next lives.

were no other deities that could control this powerful ghost until finally Kirti Lama got to know the whole story. He first subjugated this ghost with just his one foot. Then with great compassion the Kirti Lama turned this formerly harmful ghost into a local protective deity, known as Bazal. Since then Bazal has guarded the people and territory that belongs to the Kirti monastery and had its own small temple in Kirti monastery.²³² Tamed by the Kirti Lama and worshipped as a protective deity in the Kirti monastery, Bazal has become a territorial deity that defines the identity of those who worship him. In Taktsang Lhamo the worship of Bazal separates Kirti villagers from, for example, Serchi villagers who worship their own protective deity of *zhig dag*.

Many scholars who study the cult of territorial deities in Tibet have emphasized its close relation to the Tibetan ethnic identity. Fernanda Pirie (2005) indicates that the identity reference in Amdo Tibetan societies relies much more on territory and territorial deities than anything else such as clan or lineage. Samten Karmay (1994) argues that despite of the enormous cultural, linguistic and religious differences that have existed in Tibetan society, there is a common consensus that has brought the Tibetan society together as a national whole. Activities such as the mountain cult or territory deity cult in Tibetan culture “therefore play a very significant role in the building up of [Tibetan] national identity” (Karmay 1994: 119). Toni Huber (1999) criticizes this “anachronism of applying the modern political concept and identity referent of ‘nation’ to a premodern Tibet.” He emphasizes the parochial nature that is involved in these mountain cults and “the unique relationship of each small community and territory with its own mountain deities certainly serves

²³² This story goes perfectly with the universal structure of Tibetan protective deity stories provided in the Tibetan scholar H. Jigme’s study of territorial gods and protective deities in Tibet (Jigme 2002). According to Jigme, Bazal belongs to the more general and well-known category of *zhig dag* (protective deity). In my case I believe one reason it has been called Bazal instead of *zhig dag* is to differentiate from another protective deity, known as *zhig dag*, from Serchi monastery just across the river.

to generate and reinforce many local distinctions, as opposed to common pan-regional identities” (Huber 1999: 234).²³³

A key issue in this debate of ethnic or national identity in relation to mountain/territorial deity cult is thus the understanding and use of time. To better understand the tactics of time here, the concept of time in this particular context is neither a lineal path from the past to the future, nor is it a Buddhist world of endless life cycles. Rather it is how people endure their past to the future and particularly how they quantify time into some temporal chains of causality that are both the products and generators of current social context. Following Mueggler’s (2001) insight on this point, I argue that Bazal as a territorial deity has been a local medium of time through which the effects of social memories have been continuously engaging in the production of the current context. Identity as an important outcome in this process is thus a dynamic concept that at once subscribes to the past, as a product, and predicts the future, as a producer.

Just like he was destroying the materialistic life of people when he was a ghost, Bazal now ensures people with this-worldly benefit after he was turned into a protective deity housed in Kirti monastery. His power to accomplish these goals, whether negative before or positive after, is believed to be equally very effective—as long as he is fed enough. Since Bazal used to be a ghost it is said he has a very greedy appetite. Those who need help from Bazal have to feed (Tib: *gso ba*) him a lot and constantly, either in public or in private.²³⁴ Furthermore, once one starts to feed him he cannot stop. Otherwise Bazal will not only stop helping him but even do him some harm.

²³³ See also (Epstein and Peng 1994) and most recently (Buffetrille and Diemberger 2002; Pirie 2005a).

²³⁴ For example, circumambulation around the temple of Bazal, making offering or burning incense in front of the temple would be considered as publicly feeding Bazal; having a Tangka of Bazal at home and making offerings to it would be considered as privately feeding Bazal.

To make the story more mythical and complex, I found later in my fieldwork that local Tibetans firmly believe that the Hui also feed Bazal—despite the apparent conflict with their own religion. Tibetans said that Hui feed Bazal because Bazal is very effective—it also explained why Hui businesses were going so well. Of course, Hui do it secretly, as most Tibetans explained to me, usually at home. Moreover when Hui practiced these Tibetan territorial deity cults, it is said that Hui community is also separated into two groups: those from the Serchi Hui village who would feed *zhig dag*; and those from the Kirti Hui village who would feed Bazal. As a local Tibetan told me, if you are a Serchi villager—Hui or Tibetan—Bazal will not protect you.²³⁵

As shown in the previous chapters, the local Tibetan-Hui relation in Taktsang Lhamo has been radically transformed from a presumed pre-Communist hierarchical harmony to a multi-layered complexity of contemporary ethnic rivalry. The local belief in Bazal's efficacy (at least from the Tibetan perspective) is based on the former territorial and political hierarchy rather than the current ethnic or religious demarcation. Thus contrary to the lineal logic of time progression, this local belief has endured the past through a "practice of time." It is this time-crossing belief, what Bakhtin (1981) called "chronotopes," or a temporal causality that gives rise to one of the multiple discourse possibilities including ethnic or national identity.²³⁶ By emphasizing the materialistic nature of Bazal and his power, the local worship of Bazal seems to be, on the one hand, against the Buddhist ethics of next-life that has been the dominant ideal in Tibetan society. But on the other hand, it still reinforces the

²³⁵ I got this information only from the Tibetan side. I couldn't find a way to verify or even simply pose such a question to the Hui communities. Despite of this, it at least reaffirms the characteristic of power and territoriality that Bazal embodies in the local Tibetan society. See my further discussion on the extension of this power in chapter 6.

²³⁶ Stan Mumford applied Bakhtin's dialogic theory in his ethnography of the ethnic encounter between Tibetan lamas and Gurung Shamans. He argues that, "Identity is multicentered. In the process of discourse, however, one of these possible ambivalence may become singled out and foregrounded" (Bakhtin 1981: 259; Mumford 1989: p15).

newly reconstructed Tibetan monastic authority since Bazal is the protective deity of Kirti monastery and territorial deity of this region under the leadership of the Kirti Lama.²³⁷

²³⁷ While all these seemed very interesting to me, my monk friend Tashi, on the contrary, did not hide his disapproval toward those who frequent the Bazal temple. The difference, he explains, is that to pray in those monastery temples only guarantees your future life (or lives) while Bazal is in charge of everything materialistic related to this life such as wealth or health. Therefore, he insists, those who frequent the Bazal temple are people who just want this-worldly benefit and thus are merely utilitarian.

CHAPTER 5

“WHITE COUNTRY” OR “BLACK COUNTRY”: SOCIAL IMAGINATION OF THE NATION

In 2001 Monk Tashi finally finished his course of studies after being a novice monk in the Kirti monastery for thirteen years. A novice monk is a student in the monastery and a child in his monk's household.²³⁸ As a student in the monastery it is mandatory for him to attend the monastery class everyday besides fulfilling all other monastic duties for which he is responsible. As a child in his monk's household it is his duty to take care of all the domestic housework, along with other novice monks in the house if there are any, since they are dependent on their *Akhu* economically and socially.²³⁹ The graduation thus announces the end of his life as a novice monk and the beginning of his independent life as an adult monk in the monastery.

Most young novice monks celebrate this graduation by traveling (or taking a pilgrimage trip) out of the local region often for the first time in their life. Religious travels of Tibetan monks—for pilgrimage or for study—have had a long tradition in Tibetan monastic history.²⁴⁰ Today some young Kirti monks travel for further study at other famous monasteries in order to obtain a more advanced scholarly degree (i.e. *Geshe*). Others just go for a pilgrimage trip before they come back and start a rather

²³⁸ Child monks and novice monks are often hosted by in an adult monk's house until they formally graduated.

²³⁹ Tib: *a khu*, is a widely used term in Amdo. It is the Amdo equivalent of *sku-zhogs* in Lhasa dialect to respectfully address a monk. In a monastery context it refers to the teacher/master monk who is in charge of a monk household and the finances and social relationships of his novices. When used in a secular context it also means uncle or a respected senior.

²⁴⁰ The religious ties between central Tibet and its cultural borderlands have been maintained mainly by these religious travels for study and pilgrimage. Travelogue (Tib: *lam yig*) has been a popular genre of writing among both religious and secular Tibetan scholars. A recent example in modern Tibetan history is the Amdo monk Gendun Chospel who traveled from Amdo to Lhasa, India and Sri Lanka and wrote his famous “Travelogue in India” (Tib: *rgya dkar lam yig*).

conventional monk life like most adult monks in the monastery—what Melvyn Goldstein termed “mass monasticism” (1998)—going to the routine monastic gathering everyday, fulfilling the monastic duties, becoming an *Akhu* by taking child monks as their novices, and trying to reach a reasonable position in the monastery. The aim of this traditional Tibetan ideology of mass monasticism, as Goldstein (1998) argued, is to keep as many monks in the monastery as possible no matter how imperfect they might be. Yet as the social context has been changing rapidly in China and in the world today, so have the visions and concerns of many Kirti monks. When it comes to the religious travels, the big monasteries in Lhasa and exiled monastic communities in India used to be the ideal, indeed only destinations for the young Kirti monks. During recent years, however, local monks have become increasingly aware of the Chinese restrictions on Tibetans’ mobility as well as the danger of border crossing because of the strict Chinese border surveillance.²⁴¹

While the majority of destinations for these graduation travels are the nearby important monasteries in Amdo or Lhasa, there has been a growing trend among the young monks today to turn their eyes to China. What attracts them in China are not just the traditional Buddhist pilgrimage sites such as the four Buddhist seats of Mount Wutai, Mount Emei, Mount Putuo, and Mount Jiuhua. Today the big modern cities such as Beijing, Shanghai, Guangzhou, or Shenzhen have also become the major destinations for most young Kirti monks. As I found out in my fieldwork, although Chinese Buddhist pilgrimage sites have been well described in the traditional Tibetan

²⁴¹ The new Chinese regulation requires every monk to have a “monk certificate” (Ch: *heshang zheng*) which is issued by the Religious Bureau in a local government that is politically responsible for the monastery he is from. It gives the monk an official identity and at the same time also tightening up the control of individual monks by keeping those not officially registered out of the monastery. Even though obtaining a passport has become a very fast and simple bureaucratic process today in most part of China, for many Tibetans monks it is still nearly impossible to get a passport through the official procedure. Thus most Tibetans who went across the Himalayas to India without a passport took the risk of being caught by the Chinese or the Nepalese border patrol, whether they were aware of this risk or not.

literature (such as the classic pilgrimage guide books), it is the increasing knowledge and curiosity on modern day China that has made these Buddhist pilgrimage sites in China more significant in their travel decisions.²⁴² This knowledge and curiosity have grown less from the traditional Tibetan literature or pilgrimage guides than from the increasing Chinese presence in their everyday life, such as the growing Chinese consumer products (i.e. mobile phones) and the Chinese tourists that they encounter every day.²⁴³ Furthermore these trips often have a tremendous impact on the monks' later living conditions, their social status as well as their views of many local affairs (i.e., monk school education) in the monastery. Thus choosing the travel destination between a traditional choice of India (Tib: *rgya dkar*, “white country”) and a modern alternative of China (Tib: *rgya nag*, “black country”) has become both a new challenge and a new opportunity for many young monks in the Kirti monastery.²⁴⁴

This chapter contextualizes some varied subjects—pilgrimage, mobile phone, and school—against the social political backdrop of reform and opening up of discourse in the contemporary Chinese nation-state. I intend to show that these three different subjects are better interpreted from a unitary perspective of a “social

²⁴² Many different kinds of classical religious history in Tibetan literature (Tib: *chos 'byung*, *lo rgyus*, *deb der*, *lam yig*, etc.) have described Buddhist development in Tibet, India, China, and other adjacent regions. The important Buddhist sites mentioned in this literature have later become the popular pilgrimage sites recorded in the pilgrimage guidebook.

²⁴³ See chapter 6 for more on discussion of mobile phone and Chinese tourists in Langmusi.

²⁴⁴ The linguistic distinction between the description of Tibet and China has been changed according to different context. An American friend who has been teaching English in China told me an incident in her class when they came across a topic related to Tibet. As she said naturally in English a Tibetan monk “coming to China from Lhasa”, her students were very quick to correct her. “But Tibet is part of China!” In a daily Tibetan conversation, the concept of China (*rgya nag*) can be easily conveyed as a separate spatial and cultural concept from either Tibet (*bod*) or India (*rgya dkar*). Once the conversation changes into Chinese, Tibetans use the word *handi* (lit. “Chinese land”) as an equivalent to *rgya nag* instead of the formal term *zhongguo*. However during the recently years with more Chinese tourists and media influences the common Chinese word *neidi* (lit. “inner land”) has replaced *handi* in many Tibetan conversations particularly in the young generation. While *handi* is a Tibetan linguistic invention as an antithesis of the Tibetan land, *neidi* is a Chinese linguistic invention which is used as an antithesis to all borderland areas in the nation. Therefore it self-evidently assumes a belonging—spatial and political—of both borderland (including Tibet) and *neidi*, though isolated, under the administration of one Chinese nation state. I will come back to the linguistic impact of the Chinese loan words like this later in this chapter.

imaginary”—a social imagination of the Chinese nation-state that has been projected through the changing politics of inclusion and exclusion and yet appears as if it were materialistically located. As Castoriadis (1987) explained, a “social imaginary” provides answers to those fundamental social questions which neither “reality” nor “rationality” can provide.²⁴⁵ In his thought-provoking ethnography Mueggler (2001: 5) further extended this concept as “the tangible ‘illusions’ of this magical state.” He argued that to approach the state in this “imaginary” way is to envision a state that “is not external to the fundamental concerns of daily life” but a “constitutive force at the heart of the social world.” Extending this insight, I treat these illusions and imaginaries as both art and technology. Here I particularly intend to highlight both aspects of this social imaginary through the material sites of pilgrimage journeys, mobile phones, monastic schools, public schools that have made those imaginations and illusions tangible. Moreover in the post-socialist Chinese context there is an intrinsic conflict between this social imaginary and its material sites. Thus to explore them and their conflicts is to navigate the reconstructed nationscape through a bottom up perspective that is at once imaginary and concrete.

Besides being the materialistic sites of a social imaginary these different subjects also provide a unitary key to the understanding of the complex cultural and ethnic situation (including Tibetan, Hui, and others) in contemporary Chinese society. Arguing for the important role that lay Tibetan intellectuals have played in the formation of contemporary Tibetan identity in China, Janet Upton (1996: 121) reminded us that the polemic nature of an “authentic” Tibetan subject—both popular and academic—in the twentieth century has largely reduced the complex Tibetan situation into a simple opposition between “the Chinese government” and “the Tibetan

²⁴⁵ Cited in (Mueggler 2001: 4). Every society has to answer those fundamental questions such as “who are we as a collectivity? What are we for one another? Where and in what are we? What do we want; what do we desire; what are we lacking?” in order to define its “identity”(Castoriadis 1987).

people.” This reduction of complexity ignores the real people and their everyday life that involves various mediation and negotiation in the contemporary Tibetan society in China. While my field research fully supports this argument it also shows that these mediating roles go well beyond the circle of Tibetan intellectuals. In this chapter I try to use a more personalized perspective, instead of a collective perspective of “Tibetan people” or “Tibetan intellectuals”, to show how these seemingly different subjects—pilgrimage journeys, mobile phones, and schools—can be treated as the same kind of material site upon which, many different actors have played a mediating role by constructing and imagining a Chinese nation-state that is at once far away and tangible.

I first tell the stories of a young monk’s pilgrimage experience in China, his decision to go to China and his recounting of that experience to his monk fellows afterwards. These stories illuminate the key point that modern Tibetan identity negotiation within a new context of post-reform China has a wide range of participants and ways of participation. In my case this negotiation has crossed multiple cultural and political boundaries in the name of universal Buddhism and modernity. I propose to understand the cultural and ethnic complexity in China through the changing politics of inclusion and exclusion and in the perspective of “unit of common participation” with a dynamic view of their borders or boundaries (Fortes 1938; Vasantkumar 2006).

In a similar fashion the mobile phones—widely known with its Chinese name *shouji*—have greatly changed the way locals imagine the nation. Since its arrival in Taktsang Lhamo, *shouji* has become the new fashion and a symbol of modernity desired by many locals particularly Tibetan monks. At the same time the fast spread and wide acceptance of *shouji* in the monk community as both a universal symbol of modernity and a window to see the outside world have greatly changed the way these

monks imagine the Chinese state and Chinese people as well as a reflexive image of themselves.

Lastly, I present two cases of education to show: 1) a Hui family's determination to send their children to a Chinese school in the regional capital; and 2) Tibetan monastery head lama Alak Lobsang's struggle to establish the Kirti monastery school. I argue that in these cases local actors have acted as political mediators and cultural brokers between Chinese authority and the local community. Historically these "cultural brokers" appeared variously as religious pilgrims, military warlords, nomad herders, and trading middlemen in the diverse ethnic groups living in northwestern China (Aris 1992; Nietupski 1999). Today these people, mostly rendered under the Chinese official category of ethnic minorities, have become more and more aware of their own "otherness" in an increasingly imaginable and seemingly tangible Chinese state. Furthermore they start to participate, willingly or not, in the construction of their own otherness in a Chinese nation-state. It is this reconstruction of difference that, paradoxically, has placed the newly constructed Tibetan identity—and by the same token Hui or Han identity—as part of the new Chinese nation-building context.

5.1 Mapping a Buddhist World in the Nation

Many monks in Kirti monastery told me that a student monk (Tib: *dbe cha ba*, lit. "The book one") from the Philosophical College (Tib: *mtshan nyid grwa tshang*, or *thos gsang gling*, lit. "The hall of listening and thinking") has more chance to find a teacher to follow nowadays since their knowledge is based mostly on books, at least before they enter the most advanced levels. But a student monk from the Tantric College (Tib: *rgyud pa grwa tshang*) or Kalachakra College (Tib: *dus 'kor grwa tshang*) has comparatively few choices since they passed on knowledge primarily

through oral tradition of their masters who have mostly passed away or are in exile. Therefore I was not surprised when Tashi, a novice monk from the Tantric College, expressed to me his desire to go to India. However I was very shocked by way that these ideas for extremely hard and dangerous journeys came out of the monks' mouth as something rather exciting and doable—and, just by the way, you should avoid the Chinese army! Having been practiced for centuries in Tibet, these trans-Himalayan trips—without a Chinese passport and a visa—today involve the risk of life crossing the highest plateau in the world and also the severe punishment if caught by the Chinese border patrol. Even if they get out, if they want to come back afterwards, which many of them do today, they will also face intense investigation and a heavy fine, if not a more serious punishment, from the local police station at home.

When talking about these exile trips with monks I found, to my surprise, that what comes up first and concerns them the most was not the presumable danger and hardship of crossing the Himalayas and an international border, but instead it was a general worry or fear of the “turn-back monk” (Tib: *grwa log*, or monk who renounced his monkhood) that has cast a shadow on this centuries-old Tibetan monastic practice today. Monk Darji said to me, “I don't know why it is like this but once they [monks] go to India they tend to renounce monkhood very easily. Maybe it's because India is too open.”²⁴⁶ It is a general belief among the monks that if a monk is exposed too much to an alien and presumably “open” world he tends to renounce his monkhood easily. Renouncing the monkhood has been considered the number one threat to the monastic community. As the foundation of the Gelugpa monastic system, the “mass monasticism” is based primarily on the life-long commitment of monkhood from the moment when the families send their children to the monastery. Goldstein is

²⁴⁶ Here he used the Chinese word *kaifang* for “open.” Many Tibetans in Taktsang Lhamo use Chinese loan words nowadays not only to be convenient but to express some new concepts that have been generated in a particular (Chinese) socio-political context.

right to argue that the traditional Tibetan ideology of mass monasticism has made quantity rather than quality of the monks the priority of the Gelugpa monastic system (Goldstein 1998: 15-17). Both the Tibetan monastic community and the lay society in general have been actively reinforcing this ideology by leaving little or no space for those who do not conform to this norm. As monk Dzoba explained, “We [monks] are different from you [lay people] because we have vows on our bodies. Only the bodies that have taken those vows can wear this monk robe (Tib: *gzan*). If a monk takes off his robe [renounces those vows] he becomes nothing, not even a layman. Because all that he has achieved so far in his life—his knowledge, his belief, his practice, and his body—becomes meaningless once he starts to do things only for ‘life’ (Tib: *’tsho ba*, or material needs).” At that moment he mentioned a *grwa log* who has been running a teahouse in town since he came back from India and seemed to be doing quite well. But Dzoba was very quick to indicate: “he [*grwa log*] thought he is more clever than us because he has seen the big world (Ch: *jianguo da shimian*). But actually he is nothing: not a monk, not a layman, and not even a family member! You see, that’s why he can only stay here but can not go back to his hometown.” Indeed to be called *grwa log* is not only derogatory to the person himself, but it is also very awkward and shameful for his family among their fellow villagers. Tashi told me of similar incident that happened years ago in his own family. When his brother who was also a monk in his home monastery tried to flee to India, his family became very nervous and followed him all the way up to Lhasa. Finally they brought him back before he could arrange his escape.²⁴⁷

While going to China is a comparatively less passionate subject for many young monk novices, there has also been a general consensus among the Kirti monks

²⁴⁷ More recently it was reported that in addition to the Chinese border patrol, Tibetan villagers along the Himalayan border have been preventing other Tibetans from crossing the border because they would be held responsible for that illegal border-crossing by the local government (Vasantkumar 2006).

that going to China is less threatening than going to India in terms of the risk of renouncing monkhood afterwards. The main reason offered was that China is allegedly less “open” and also less “alien” than India. When Tashi discussed his thoughts with me before his graduation, he said the most difficult thing he (and most other monks) could foresee in China was that he didn’t speak Chinese (Tib: *skad mi shis ni nges nges dka’ ki*). Although India is a foreign country, its large Tibetan exile communities in many places, particularly in those Buddhist pilgrimage sites that most Tibetans would go, have greatly reduced the cultural and linguistic barrier—at least the feeling of that barriers—for the newly arrived Tibetans. Nevertheless, in the eyes of many Kirti monks India is still unquestionably more alien than China.²⁴⁸ After his brother’s unsuccessful escape to India, Tashi’s family constantly called him back to his home monastery—a village that is less accessible than Taktsang Lhamo—fearing that he would be contaminated by the increasingly open environment of Taktsang Lhamo. Besides pressure from his family, Tashi confessed to me that his final decision to go to China had to do with his feeling that China is “not so far away” (Tib: *thag mi ring gi*). “After all,” he said, “India is a foreign country which we don’t know much about.” Comparing India with China he said jokingly “at least we know the money here.” Tashi also confessed that he had made the first Chinese friend in his life—me, and this had encouraged him to go to China. He insisted that it was the feeling of having a Chinese friend and the talks we had about China that made China sound a lot closer than before.

²⁴⁸ In a similar way Tibetans in exile would feel closer to their “unit of common participation,” which is India. After an old Tibetan monk in exile gave a talk (in Tibetan with a personal translator) in our anthropology class at Cornell he immediately spotted an Indian student in class and came up holding his hand even though they don’t have a language of communication. Later that Indian student described this encounter to me as “unbelievable, although we didn’t say anything I could definitely feel that it was like meeting someone close in a foreign country.”

Kirti monks like Tashi imagine China to be closer through their everyday contact with Chinese people, Chinese products, and other Chinese influences. This belief of the Kirti monks illuminates the analytical importance of what Meyer Fortes (1938) termed “unit of common participation.”²⁴⁹ Borrowing this concept in the study of diverse realities in colonial Africa, Christopher Vasantkumar (2006: 53) elaborated on this classic anthropological concept and suggested that one constructive way to address the cultural complexity of China is to focus on this unit of common participation rather than a presumptively shared culture. In support of this perspective, I further argue that in order to fully facilitate this analytical tool it has to be supplemented with two things: a contextualization of the multiple production process of those seemingly conflicting practices and desires, and a close look at the constant re-making and re-imagining of the boundary itself. Without a dynamic view of this “unit of common participation” this promising framework could still be a niche of essentialism with a critical appearance.

In the groundbreaking volume of collected works on the religious revival in contemporary Tibet, Goldstein and Kapstein (1998: ix) have pioneered this field by attempting to explore and explain contemporary Tibet in China as a “unity of opposites.” Goldstein has described this Tibetan monastic revival in the 1980s as “a delicate, and not entirely conscious, process of adaptation” to the post-Cultural Revolution China. Because of a lack of a close focus on the production process of those conflicting unitary practices, however, this exploration of “unity of opposites”—which Goldstein calls a “social matrix,” stays on a dualistic level of “sociopolitically compatible with the current socialist society yet culturally authentic.” Kapstein termed

²⁴⁹ Cited in (Vasantkumar 2006: 53), Meyer Fortes writes, “to study culture contact as a dynamic process, the anthropologist must work with communities rather than customs. His unit of observation must be a unit of life and not of custom—a village, a town, a settlement, a unit of common participation in the everyday political, economic and social life” (Fortes 1938).

this dualistic unity “a dimorphism of values” in which the Tibetan sentiment is reduced to a public (or fake) appearance adjusting to the official guideline while masking an authentic heart of Tibetanness inside (Kapstein 1998: 143-144). The uncritical assumption of culture and the thereby searching for the authenticity based on this assumption presuppose the analytical dichotomies by drawing an unreflexive boundary between “the Chinese government” and “the Tibetan people”, between the ritual context and rational sociopolitical context, between the “pre-modern” Tibet and the post-1950s Tibet.²⁵⁰

In his critique of the Bourdieuan notion of practice-oriented analysis, Sangren (2000) suggested that human motives and desires are not to be reduced to “interests” in any direct fashion. The complexities of desires necessarily complicate practice theory by encompassing “the production of resistances internal to the social production and reproduction.” For example, contrary to the conventional understanding of Chinese patriliney which often excludes role of women from the production of a patrilineal society, Sangren (2000: 7) argues that “women are the most important producers of family institutions in ways that it would be difficult to construe in terms of any ‘interest’ they might possess in reproducing ‘the system’ as a whole.” By the same token, much scholarship on contemporary Chinese ethnic minorities argues that, despite their marginalized position, ethnic minorities have nevertheless played an important role in the modern Chinese nation-state building process.²⁵¹

Monk Tashi’s final decision of traveling to China was the result of many conflicting motives that have come from his family, the monastic community as well

²⁵⁰ For a critical analysis on culture and its application in Chinese/Tibetan context, see the introduction of (Kolås and Thowsen 2005).

²⁵¹ See for example Gray Tuttle (2005) on the important yet often invisible contribution from Tibetan Buddhism and the Tibetan Buddhist practitioners in the process of the making of modern China; or Dru Gladney (1991) on Hui ethno-religious revival that has integrated Hui as one ethnic minority group in the Chinese nation state.

as from the sociopolitical environment of contemporary China. More importantly it has come from a complex desire of his own that is closely related to these conflicting social motives. I treat Tashi's decision to go to China as the result of a social production process through the "unit of common participation" of which he himself is a part. The young monks' selection process of choosing between India and China as pilgrimage destination is also a matching—and by the same token, mismatching—process between a Buddhist cosmology of the world and a social imaginary of the nation. It is a Tibetan monk's mapping of a Buddhist world in the contemporary Chinese nation. During this process many geographical and ideological boundaries (i.e., Tibet, China, India, or Buddhist vs. non-Buddhist, close vs. far) have been reconstructed, negotiated, and ultimately integrated in such seemingly static yet dynamic notions as China, Chinese, Tibet, and Tibetan.

5.2 All Hui Under the Sky Are One Family

Compared to Tibetans, the official ethnic category of Hui is more fluid in nature. When the CCP leaders launched the ethnic identification (Ch: *minzu shibie*) campaign in the 1950s, Hui was probably one of the most problematic *minzu* because it contradicted Stalin's four characteristics of nationalities—common language, territory, economic life, and psychological make-up manifested in a common culture. The CCP used these criteria as the principal guidelines to identify the complex ethnic groups in China. Many scholars have pointed out the productive nature of the official creation of the Hui by the state government as one of the 56 ethnic categories in China.²⁵² The name itself has since taken on a life of its own as a social label. However, despite the common sense that Hui is essentially different from Han Chinese

²⁵² See, for example, (Gladney 1991; Kaup 2000; Tapp 2002), also "China Information" July 2004 vol.XVIII No. 2, Special issue on ethnic classification.

only in their Islamic belief, it is still impossible, as Jonathan Lipman (2004) argues, to see Hui as members of “any other Muslim ‘culture’ in which Islam is a ‘natural’ component of identity.” In other words, Hui in China is not a religious-based identity even though Islam is certainly an integral part of Hui identity. When studying a contemporary Hui community in northwest China, Gladney (1991) used the term “ethnoreligious resurgence” to depict Hui as an ethnic category that has been revitalized with an inseparable reference to Islam since the 1980s. He concluded that this ethnoreligious identity of Hui is a result of constant dialogue or negotiation between the local/self desire of Hui and the Chinese state policy (Gladney 2004).

Today most Hui in China take pride in being a member of this government-constructed ethnic category in spite of the enormous diversities—geographical region, life style, language, even religious affiliations—under the universal category of Huizu (or Hui nationality). Many Hui I have talked to particularly like to emphasize the fraternal relationship within a nationally imagined Hui community based on shared Islamic belief—typically phrased as *tianxia huihui shi yijia*, or “all Hui under the sky are one family.” The Chinese term *tianxia*, or “under the sky”, depicts a vaguely bounded concept of empire in the classical Chinese world.²⁵³ The change from the Chinese empire to the modern Chinese nation state altered the context of *tianxia*. For many people, including Hui in this case, the subject of *tianxia* was simply changed from the Chinese empire to the modern Chinese nation. While the very notion of Hui is undoubtedly situated in the Chinese context, the Hui-Hui relation has often been depicted as an “internal” or family relationship—in contrast to the Hui and non-Hui (i.e. Han or Tibetan) relation as an “external” one. Zhang, a Hui business owner in Langmusi, recounted how his family had passed the hard time during the Cultural Revolution.

²⁵³ I thank Magnus Fiskesjo for pointing this out to me.

My family has been doing business (Ch: *zuo shengyi*) for many generations in Langmusi. During the Cultural Revolution doing business was forbidden. We had no other source of subsistence. So my family decided to move to Henan [in central China] where we had some acquaintances (Ch: *shuren*) in a local Hui community. They were not even our relatives. But once we say *Seliam*²⁵⁴ everyone [Hui] there helped us just like family. If it were not because of this help we could never survive those years. We moved back to Langmusi until the [government] policy changed. It is really true that *tianxia huihui shi yijia* [all Hui under the sky are one family].

This kind of common narrative from Hui has often created a general atmosphere—for both the listeners and narrators themselves as well—that Hui are separable, or at least detachable, from the rest of the Han Chinese society. As Zhang continued, not only did this Hui membership help his family survive hard times in the Cultural Revolution, it also remains a vital identity to access the revived Hui social and business network today that has spread all over the nation. Many local businesses in Langmusi, he explained, such as collecting raw materials (i.e., wool, meat) from Tibetan nomads then transporting them to the main Chinese market, or bringing industrial goods from the Chinese market targeting mostly Tibetan customers, have long been dominated by the local Hui businessmen.²⁵⁵

It very difficult for outsiders [non-Hui people] to jump into these businesses because we have had a long relationship with Tibetans. [It is said that] Tibetans recognize only one tent. That means it takes some time to gain trust from those nomad Tibetans. But once they trust you they will go to no one else except you, from father to son and to grandson. Now we have a market economy. If Tibetans want to sell their goods to us or buy things from us, even the government can not say anything. We have our

²⁵⁴ Short for *Seliamaiti*, (Ar: lit. “peace be to you”), a common Muslim greeting. (Gladney 1991: 412)

²⁵⁵ James Millward researched the Hui wool traders in Northwestern China during the late Qing and early Chinese Republican period. The wool typically came from Tibetan nomads on the Sino-Tibetan borderland regions and went to the big cities in China (Millward n.d.).

Hui [social/business] network everywhere in the country (Ch: *quanguo daochu douyou women huizu*). No one can compete with us here.

5.3 Tibetan Monks' Pilgrimage to China

When talking about their pilgrimage experience in China, Tashi's favorite subject is always the hardship and the awkward moments they experienced during their three-month adventure. The initial idea of going to China made them both excited and afraid since it was the first time for Tashi and his two novice monk fellows, Chospel and Senge, to go to China, and only Tashi spoke a little Chinese at that time. "We had very little money with us on that trip," Tashi recalled, "so we bought the cheapest hard seat (Ch: *yingzuo*) ticket in the train. We even brought *tsampa* and butter with us to save money on the way." Still, the three young monks went with the ambition of visiting four most famous Buddhist Mountains in China—Wutai, Putuo, Jiuhua, Emei—which constitutes a trip around China with a total distance of more than seven thousand kilometers. Having a limited time and budget, the three monks chose the most affordable and most popular transportation in China—the train.

Once out of the familiar Tibetan atmosphere the first thing they noticed was that wherever they went their appearance always drew a lot of attention. Sometimes this attention was simply curiosity as everyone was looking at them and saying to each other, "Look! lamas from Tibet (Ch: *kan, xizang lai de lama*)." But sometimes it made the three young monks feel rather surprised, or even embarrassed. The first embarrassment Tashi said was on the train they took to Mount Wutai.

We had prepared to stay up on the train during the two-day trip since we only bought hard seat ticket. Once we were in the train people in that wagon started to complain the yak butter smell from our body [clothes]. We felt very embarrassed but we could do nothing. At the time for eating Chospel opened the bag of *tsampa* and butter. Suddenly everyone around

us ran away to the other side of the wagon—they couldn't stand the smell!
So we ended up having the whole bench that we could even sleep on.

After the three monks arrived in a Chinese city they found that their embarrassment in the train was still with them. “Every time we registered at the cheap hostel (Ch: *zhaodaisuo*) they always put us separately from the rest of the [Chinese] customers—separate room, separate floor, even separate hot-water thermos” Tashi said, “because they felt we are smelly and dirty as we are Tibetans.” Much to their chagrin and embarrassment the three Tibetan monks simultaneously felt somewhat satisfied even proud in the painful awareness and recognition of their otherness.²⁵⁶

It was not long after that Tashi and his friends found out that their otherness was not all negative. Indeed they sometimes found themselves in a surprisingly empowered position once they were in the booming Buddhist atmosphere such as at Mount Wutai. Many Chinese Buddhists called them *shifu* or *dashi* (master or great master). They respected the Tibetan monks like reincarnation lamas even though they scarcely knew who these monks were or what Tibetan Buddhism was.²⁵⁷

Wutai Shan [Mount Wutai] is a great place. We stayed in the Tibetan monasteries there and didn't have to deal with the hostels. There were so many [Chinese] Buddhists believers. [When they saw us] they also said, ‘Look! lamas from Tibet.’ But they respected us because we are monks. It was just they can't tell the difference between a lama and a monk.

²⁵⁶ After this trip to China Tashi has started to change his diet—cutting back on meat and butter while increasing vegetables—in order to avoid the strong body smell that embarrassed him. See chapter 7 for further discussion on the subject of food and ethnicity.

²⁵⁷ Chinese Buddhists following the Tibetan Buddhist tradition is not at all a new phenomenon. For a historical study on this subject in the Chinese Republican era (1911-1949), see (Tuttle 2005). Oversea Chinese following Tibetan Buddhist teachers including Taiwanese followers of Tibetan Buddhism, a new trend after the Communist Party came to power in the mainland and particularly after the exile of the Dalai Lama in 1959 (Zablocki 2005). With the reform and opening-up in China since the 1980s Tibetan Buddhist revival has also attracted large number of Chinese Buddhist followers (Germano 1998).

Being a simple monk in a Tibetan monastery, Tashi initially felt very uneasy with the way those Chinese Buddhists respected them. After some time he felt somehow relieved, as he gradually discovered the transcendental power of a universal Buddhism. “We [Tibetan and Chinese Buddhists] all believe in Buddhism,” Tashi explained, “That’s the most important. Before I always thought of them as Han Chinese [first and then Buddhist]. But now I see them first as Buddhists. They become not too much different from us.” Tashi’s first encounter with Cheng—a young Chinese Buddhist about his age who has later become his disciple and lay patron—is a good example of this Buddhist transcendence. They met the day after Tashi arrived at Mount Wutai when they were both doing circumambulation. Tashi noticed this Chinese young man because he was performing the traditional Tibetan practice. A dedicated Buddhist believer, Cheng works in a government office in Xi’an, a large city in northwest China, and comes to Mount Wutai once or twice a year for religious activities. He offers incense (Ch: *jinxiang*) to the numerous Buddhist temples and monasteries, both Chinese and Tibetan. They quickly got on very well though they had to manage to communicate through Tashi’s very limited Chinese vocabulary.

Even after several years I was still curious how Cheng could get on with Tashi, even became his disciple, without a functional communicating language. He was rather surprised by my curiosity and answered “but we are all Buddhists.” For Cheng it goes without saying that given his life-long belief in Buddhism and particularly his fascination with Tibetan Buddhism, the language barrier between them could nearly be ignored in their Buddhism-based relationship. “The most important thing [as a lay Buddhist] is you find a real master and obey him completely,” Cheng explained to me when I visited him once in Xi’an. “Most people in China today feel lost in front of money, power, and a fast changing society. I have felt my foot on the ground (Ch: *tashi*) since I found master Tashi.” From the beginning Cheng showed his

determination to follow Tashi as his lay disciple and patron. He called Tashi master (Ch: *shifu*) and insisted on prostrating (Ch: *ketou* or Tib: *phyag 'tshal*) himself before Tashi, in order to show the highest level of respect.

Coming out of the monastery for the first time at the end of a novice monk life was already quite new for Tashi. The idea of taking on a disciple himself, particularly a Chinese one, was somewhat challenging. “Taking on a [Chinese] disciple is different from having a [Chinese] friend,” Tashi said, “They bow to me and want to ask me a lot of questions. But my Chinese is too poor to explain those questions [in Chinese].” Although Tashi felt embarrassed with his poor Chinese in front of his Chinese disciples, he soon realized that his Chinese students did not take the actual answer too seriously. In fact it was more important that he was there to “receive” rather than to “give.” Even though he could not actually answer those questions as he wanted, the fact that he tried to explain with his limited Chinese, and maybe merely his being there, had already satisfied his Chinese disciples.

After Mount Wutai, Tashi and his two friends visited Mount Putuo and Mount Jiuhua in eastern China as pilgrims and finally arrived at Mount Emei in Sichuan, the last stop of their journey. After nearly three months of travel three young monks were both physically and economically exhausted at the end of their trip. As they ran out of money Tashi and his friends tried to stay in the Buddhist temple in Mount Emei. But the temple authority refused since they didn't have the state issued monk certificate (Ch: *heshang zheng*). Most Chinese monks are very familiar with this certificate that usually allows them to be welcomed and accommodated for free in most Buddhist monasteries or temples nationwide (Ch: *guan*). However for many Tibetan monks the idea that a monk needs a state issued ID to prove his monk identity is still quite strange. For several days, Tashi said, they ate only once a day and slept outside at night and would not give up their desire to visit the last destination of Mount Emei.

The plight of three maroon-robed Tibetan monks soon attracted attention from some Chinese Buddhist pilgrims at this popular pilgrimage site. Many of them were sympathetic with their situation and tried to help them by giving them some food, or a little money. Finally a pilgrim group of middle-aged Chinese women from Sichuan decided to take care of all the expanses of the three monks since they were on the same pilgrim route to the top of Mount Emei. The Chinese pilgrim group got on so well with the three Tibetan monks that later they even invited them to their hometown Mianzhu in Sichuan. Once again the three young monks were treated as well-respected lamas there. Unlike Cheng, these women were not looking to find a teacher to ask questions. “They were just very devoted Buddhist layperson (Ch: *jushi*),” Tashi said, “and wanted to be patrons to us (Ch: *gei women bushi*).” At the end of their stay, Dr Wang, a member of this pilgrim group and a major patron, asked Tashi if he could do something for her son who failed the national college entrance exam (Ch: *gaokao*) the year before. She asked Tashi to help him as he was trying to take it again this year. With some unwillingness, Tashi told her the magical power of Bazal and said if you feed him enough he can do everything. Dr Wang was very happy and gave Tashi 1000 yuan to offer Bazal on her behalf when they went back to Taktsang Lhamo.

Although Bazal is a widely respected powerful deity in the Kirti monastery, many Kirti monks, including Tashi, still believe that those who pray there are just looking for material—thus lower—needs.²⁵⁸ Until he came back from China with Dr Wang’s entrustment and money, Tashi had never felt obliged to feed Bazal. When I returned to Taktsang Lhamo in 2003, Tashi told me secretly that his offer to Bazal actually worked. Dr. Wang called Tashi and told him the good news that his son eventually passed the exam after praying to Bazal. Although it was not at all a surprise to Tashi he did not seem to be all happy with it either. As Dr. Wang was so happy to

²⁵⁸ See more on Bazal in the previous chapter 5.

find a new source of magical power, through the medium of Tashi, she quickly spread the word to everyone around her. Since then Tashi received so many requests to pray to Bazal that he felt very burdened.

5.4 Universal Buddhism and Social Imagination of the Nation

Although Buddhism in theory originated as a universal truth that applies to all human societies, in practice it has been transformed into many varieties as it spread over many parts of Asia over centuries. To talk about Buddhism on the practical level is to look at a particular genre of Buddhism in its particular social political context. The birth of modern nation state in Asia has added more complexity on the various localized Buddhist traditions and societies with a universal ideal in origin. Thus the modern practice of Buddhism is a delicate balance between a Buddhist ideal that transcends race, ethnicity, and nation on the one hand, and growing nation-building influence that put a national vision on the local landscape—a nationscape—on the other. Tibetan Buddhism in this sense is no exception.

After the trip to China Tashi has learned to talk about Buddhism in a universal context often associated with the concept of modernity. It is especially notable that Buddhism in this way has been not only detached from such specific contexts as nation and ethnicity but it was also privileged over them. To talk about a universal Buddhism like this reconstructs an alternative landscape to the nationscape. It navigates across the ethnic boundaries set up by the state as well as the religious boundaries that traditionally separate the different sects under the unified name of Buddhism. This is in fact not new in the modern Chinese and Tibetan history. Gray Tuttle (2005: 68) has indicated that the development of Buddhism as a Pan-Asian religion began its influence in modern China at the beginning of the 20th century. Some Chinese and Tibetan Buddhist monks at that time adopted the idea of a universal

Buddhism which was an important force to incorporate Tibet in the modern Chinese nation building process. Tuttle argued that Buddhism in this case in fact laid the crucial ideological foundation for Chinese—both Republican and later Communist—political imagination of Tibet against the backdrop of the modern emergence of Chinese nation state and Chinese nationalism.

The revival of Tibetan religious practice since the 1980s has also brought back the idea of universal Buddhism. While adapting to the new post-socialist context, this universal ideal of Buddhism has constructed an alternative landscape with its transcendental power that surpasses the ethnic, linguistic, even national boundaries. At the same time it does not necessarily challenge the authority of nationscape, which the nation-state has actively constructed and imposed on its national territory.

While some Tibetan monks have embraced a universal Buddhism that transcends ethnic and national boundaries, Hui clearly emphasize their nationally bounded ethnicity which is still based on a transnational notion of Islam. The adoption of the government-constructed category of Hui serves as an immediate reference to a collective social imaginary of the Chinese nation. This national imaginary based on a transnational belief reinforces both the insider and the outsider status of Hui in the Chinese nation.

In both cases, a unified Hui community based on a transnational Islamic belief inside the Chinese national boundary and the Tibetan empowerment of universal Buddhism, the local imagination of the nation is closely related to the post-reform Chinese social political context. Moreover this localization of the social imaginary complicates the whole scenario of the nation by constructing new material sites that hold the social imaginary of nation as if it were materialistically located. To imagine a nation like this, borrowing Erik Mueggler's word, is "to find it to be at once remote and intimate, at once alien and familiar." The materialization of the local imagination

of the nation is exemplified through the introduction of mobile phone (or *shouji*) in Taktsang Lhamo.

5.5 Shouji Fever, Shouji Scam and the Imagination of the Nation

Modern infrastructure such as electricity, landline phones, and more recently mobile phones—or *shouji*, as it is referred to locally—have been a recent yet rapidly growing phenomenon in Taktsang Lhamo. With the introduction of regular electricity in 2001 locals have finally retired the hydropower station which had for decades provided the town and monastery four-hour low-voltage power every night. Landline phones arrived almost at the same time with the electricity. However there was not even enough time for the landline phone to appear in the homes of local families before China Mobile—the biggest mobile phone company in China—had already covered this region as part of its national network and later set up a mobile phone shop in town. Since then, the mobile phone has reached an unprecedented popularity in Langmusi, particularly among the monks.²⁵⁹ This *shouji* fever among the monks comes first from the possibility of owning a *shouji*. Traditionally the monastic authority depends on two things to prevent the monks from accessing what they should not possess. One is the monastic discipline and the other is the access that the monks have to outside resources. Since the 1980s new things arrived in monks' everyday lives at an accelerating pace. But monastic authority has been slow to react to all of them leaving many ambivalent areas in the monastic discipline.²⁶⁰ Moreover,

²⁵⁹ The mobile phone explosion in Langmusi is part of the booming phenomenon in China since the beginning of the 1990s. According to the official Chinese data (www.mii.gov.cn) the number of mobile phone users in China grew from 20,000 in 1990 to 3.4 million after five years and 350 million in 2005 (Latham, et al. 2006).

²⁶⁰ For example, TV is clearly forbidden in the monk houses by the monastic authority. But some monks who can afford more expensive portable DVD player or game player still watch movies or play games at home since the monastery did not explicitly forbid those things since they were not affordable for most monks. More recently computers have entered some monks' houses as the monastery has not set up any rule on that either.

the new social-political context in post-1980s China also created more possibilities beyond the traditional Tibetan monk-patron relationship.

Dinner time, when monks gather, is the most popular time to share the latest news. In this context, the *shouji* became the most popular discussion topic and object to pass around to everyone with the owner proudly showing each fancy function. If a call came in just when the *shouji* was in circulation, the owner would start to talk right in front everyone who would then listen quietly as if this was part of the show. Many times on these occasions I noticed that the most common question asked was if this *shouji* was the same as those sold in big Chinese cities. As more and more Chinese consumer products have been brought from Chinese production centers to the remote borderland, like Taktsang Lhamo, most of these products are cheap and of low quality. With rapid development in the coastal and urban areas in China, a developmental hierarchy—between urban and remote areas, between east coast and west hinterland—has been created through both a Chinese official government discourse (i.e. GDOW) and a hierarchy of consumption.²⁶¹ It is widely assumed that Chinese products sold in the remote hinterland are usually of low quality or counterfeits that do not sell well, if at all, in the more developed urban areas. By constructing this consumer hierarchy, it produces a social desire from both ways. On the one hand, it actively encourages those “undeveloped” areas and “backward” people to catch up with their more progressive compatriots through the material standard of consumption. It also creates an opportunity for those who are on the apex of this consumer hierarchy, i.e. Han and Urban Chinese, to taste their progressiveness through their unfortunate neighbors.²⁶² The production of this social desire ultimately promotes the integration of this remote borderland into the national market, and hence the nation.

²⁶¹ See next chapter 7 for more on consumption.

²⁶² The most prominent example is the official “Helping Tibet” (Ch: *yuanzang*) project.

Desire, as Sangren (2000: 7) argued, is not only individually but also socially produced. This socially produced desire is often more complicated, even contradictory, than it seems to be as it reflects the “the production of resistances internal to the processes of social production and reproduction.” Furthermore, the result of the social production of desire is not the end of it. The monks’ desire for a high-end consumer product, such as *shouji*, along with their anxiety about its quality, results in a constant imagination and re-imagination of the state by both conforming with and confronting the consuming hierarchy that the national market has brought in. For a certain time Tashi had been very keen on comparing his *shouji* with those of incoming Chinese tourists—until finally he was content to find that his *shouji* was in fact as good as or even better than theirs.

This social imagination of the Chinese nation through the spread of mobile phones is both concrete and imaginary. It has also been reworked and integrated into the local Tibetan hierarchy. For most monks these days, having a mobile phone is not only to flash a symbol of the modern, but it is also a new form of social status and social grouping aside from the traditional ranks and monk households. Since Tashi got a *shouji* he spent considerably less time in his house. His novice monk Sangwu told me that “he no longer needs to be home (Tib: *yul la stod mi dgos*)” since people can reach him everywhere and anytime. In the Amdo monastic tradition monks live in the monastery in individual households in which the young novice monks (Tib: *grwa ba*) take care of all the domestic housework (mostly cooking, cleaning, taking care of his *Akhu*’s life) whereas their *Akhu* (or master) is responsible for the house financially. Since Tashi had his *shouji* Sangwu had visited my place more often than before. He had much more free time because of Tashi’s usual absence at home. One day Sangwu started to tell me how frustrated he was because many of his friends (young novice monks) already had a mobile phone and he did not have one yet.

More and more friends of mine have a *shouji* or *xiaolingtong* (cheap local mobile phone, hereafter XLT).²⁶³ Of course they can still call me at home [through a landline] or just come and find me. Langmusi is so small. But now everyone wants to play with his *shouji* or XLT. So they just call first whoever has *shouji* or XLT. If I don't have one they will contact me less. I also feel embarrassed [for not having one].

He finally concluded that “nowadays it is impossible not to have a mobile phone (Tib: *da shouji med na mi ba gi*)!”

There was a time when “Chinese lovers” (Tib: *rgya dga' ma*) had been a popular term among the monks to tease those who could speak Chinese or who were good at dealing with the Chinese authorities. With the booming popularity of the *shouji* in the monastery more and more monks in the monastery started to carry a *shouji* in their daily life. The primary use of SMS (text message through mobile phone) and many other fancy functions, which are all in Chinese, have made the lack of Chinese language ability more salient for the Tibetan users. Suddenly those “Chinese lovers” have become the new stars in the monastic community. The use of the term itself has also silently diminished in daily conversation because of its derogatory implication. This change of relations in the monk community has a tremendous impact on both the traditional hierarchical monastic authorities as well as the collective imagination of the Chinese nation state. Later a real incident from a cell phone message really triggered the monastery-wide debate on Chinese and China.

It started when many monks began to receive SMS messages on their *shouji*, many of which are advertisements of lottery winners or other similar kinds of fraud.

²⁶³ Not long after the initiation of mobile phone in Taktsang Lhamo China Mobile introduced a cheaper alternative to the relatively expensive mobile phone, with local reach and limited functions. Locals make the distinction between the two mobile phones through their Chinese names: *shouji*, the more expensive nationwide mobile phone versus *xiaolingtong* (XLT), the cheap alternative local mobile phone.

For a time I received as many as three groups of monk everyday in my place who all came to ask about those winning messages. Tashi told me he had also been approached by many monks with these messages because of his Chinese experience. But no matter how he explained those messages are not real, many monks were still not totally convinced. One morning Chosphe and several friends came to me with his *shouji* and a message of winning the third prize of a sweepstake worth of 50,000 *yuan*. I soon understood that they had already got the messages translated before they came to me. When I told them they were false (Tib: *rdzu ma*) all of them seemed to be confused. “(If they are false) why did they send this to me?” Chosphe asked. I tried to explain that everyone receives this kind of fishing message. This is just a common scam to cheat people for money—something that many people in China are already used to. When you respond to this message you will be asked to deposit a certain amount of money into their account in order to receive your award. If you do it they will immediately disappear with your money. The monks listened to my story with amazement but still were not convinced until they made me swear in the name of the monastery (Tib: *dgong ba*).²⁶⁴

The monks’ confusion about this *shouji* scam didn’t last for long since many started to realize they were receiving exactly the same winning message. Nevertheless it created a long lasting topic at the monks’ dinner table and during their leisure gathering times. The various discussions around the *shouji* scam, along with more SMS information coming into the monastic community everyday, have subjectively recreated an imaginary Chinese state and Han Chinese as an alien other that they nevertheless have to live in or live with.

²⁶⁴ The local Amdo dialect of swearing on monastery (Tib: *dgong ba*), especially popular among the monks, is the highest level of colloquial swearing, something equivalent to the Lhasa dialect of swearing in the name of the Three Treasures (Tib: *dkon mchog gsum*).

Conversation A:

Monks: “Do they [the scammers] also send these [same] messages to Han Chinese?”

Me: “Yes, of course.”

Monks: “So everyone receives these false messages (Ch/Tib: *xinxi rdzu ma*) on their *shouji* everyday?”

Me: “Yes, it is kind of like that everywhere in China.”

Monks: “Are there a lot of Han Chinese doing this [cheating]?”

Me: “If you count absolute numbers, yes. But in term of percentage, they are still a minority.”

Monks: “Doesn’t the state government do something [about it]?”

Me: “They don’t have the man-power and money to control everything.”

Monks: “But they have the man power and money to control the monastery [referring to the police station set up outside the monastery]. They don’t care if these Han Chinese cheaters [are cheating on Tibetans] but if we [Tibetan] say a word [that is not politically correct] they will arrest us.”

Conversation B:

Monk A: “Many Han people are Buddhists, aren’t they? I have seen so many [Han Chinese] pilgrims in the Buddhist mountain seats [in China].”

Monk B: “Those [Han Chinese] from the city only care about money. That’s why they have so many material worries that they have to believe in Buddhism [to relieve those worries].”

Monk C: “If they believe in Buddhism and do those [cheating] things at the same time, what’s use of believing in Buddhism in the first place?”

Monk D: “But Chinese are different from us. Many things [Chinese] are very strange. Like the *jushi* (Chinese lay Buddhist home practitioners), they are neither lay people [because they take vows] nor monks [because they still lead a normal lay people’s life]. Why? Those Nyingmawa [Red Sect Tibetan Buddhist] are still monks even if they have wives and children.”

Monk A: “I received an advertisement on SMS that sells electronic prayers. They said you would save your praying time by letting this electronic prayers doing it automatically for you. That was very strange.”

Monk C: “You pay for the electricity of the prayer so maybe that can still be counted [as you praying].”

Social imagination is not only poetic but also has a material dimension—a site on which people both create and are created. The imaginary Chinese state and Chinese people through the spread of *shouji* has both created a collective Tibetan ethnicity opposing the Chinese other while paradoxically incorporating their marginalized position into the Chinese state. The creation of ethnic difference and ultimate incorporation into the Chinese nation building—namely the national economic integration of the minority areas—have been actively advanced with the coming of Chinese tourism in this ethnic borderland.²⁶⁵ Moreover there is an intrinsic conflict between the social imagination and its materialistic sites. On the one hand, having a *shouji* has put Tibetan monks on the same imaginary line of the modernity as everyone else in China—thus subsuming everyone into the same unified discourse of the state. On the other hand, having a *shouji* also increasingly makes them aware of their otherness and their marginalized position in a Chinese nation. In this way these materialistic sites not only hold the social imaginaries but they also serve to constantly create and recreate them.

5.6 A State Run Monastic School, Monks without Robes, and Identity Negotiation

Studies on Tibetan education, both in China and in the West, have long been rooted in the textual and historical orientation mostly related to monastic education.²⁶⁶

²⁶⁵ See chapter 6.

²⁶⁶ For Chinese language sources see (Li 1989; Li and Yu 2002); for Tibetan language publications see (Dun-dkar-blo-bzang-'phrin-las 1981); for English see (Dreyfus 2003);

Secular Tibetan education in PRC has rarely been studied ethnographically—with some notable recent exceptions such as (Upton 1999) and (Goldstein 1998). Even less attention has been paid to the secular or social political influence on the Tibetan monastic education revival in the post-reform PRC as well as the Tibetan negotiation with it. Not only have these secular or socio-political influences largely confined and altered the traditional Tibetan monastic educational ideal, but local Tibetans have played different roles of negotiation in this revival process by actively imagining and confronting the Chinese state in different ways. As an important part of the Tibetan monastic revival in Taktsang Lhamo, the revival of the monastic education system was initiated by the construction of Kirti monastic school in 1993. The development of the Kirti monastic school is a good example of the revival of monastic education within the current social political system. Indeed it has created a frontline site of negotiation between monastic revival and the Chinese government effort to incorporate it into the new nation-state system. I shall show in this case that, in addition to the Tibetan elite (i.e., intellectuals), participants in the building of the monastic school, including the school founder Alak Longzang, the monk teachers, and more than 400 students, have all played the role of negotiators through their everyday practice while adjusting themselves and their school to a Chinese system that is both imaginary and real.

When Alak Longzang founded the monastic primary school as part of the Kirti monastery system in 1993 he had to rely mostly on voluntary labor and contributions from the Tibetan public.²⁶⁷ The school was established in the traditional Tibetan way to educate exclusively boys aged from four to fourteen who were recruited or sent voluntarily by their parents as child monks to the monastery. The teachers were all Kirti monks, assigned by the Alak Lobsang, to teach Tibetan language and elementary Buddhist texts as full-time studies. These boys graduate after four to five years of

²⁶⁷ This school was officially closed by the government as a result of the 2008 riots in Tibetan regions.

study, and at that time they are ready to enter different colleges of the monastery. The school has been tuition-free to all from the beginning. Monk teachers received 75 *yuan* (\$11) salary from the monastery. As most boys were sent as child monks to the Kirti monastery they either had a monk relative to live with or their family would arrange for them to live in different monk households. In either case the parents only need to bring some material goods (i.e. butter, *tsampa*, etc.) to the monk house as the compensation for their child's living expenses.

After more than three years of construction, the Kirti monastic school had simple classroom buildings that housed students and teachers when the Chinese government started to launch a patriotic education campaign particularly targeting the Tibetan monastic community (Goldstein 1998). Schools in the monastery often attracted enthusiastic surveillance from the government. Alak Lobsang expressed his discontent in the officially sanctioned way: "I established this school all by myself without any help from the government. But after that the government told me that monastery-founded schools were not allowed. They had to be either private or public." Indeed it is not just monastery-founded schools that are sensitive subjects but, more precisely, it is the Tibetan monastic tradition of child monks that goes directly against the Chinese state law.²⁶⁸

The school system in China is an important element of state control. Both public and private schools have to get official state authorization before they can be formally founded. This authorization includes not only the building of the school but also the authorization for the teachers working in the schools as well as the teaching materials used in the schools. After nearly two years of negotiation between Alak Lobsang and the local government, Kirti monastery school survived as a hybrid

²⁶⁸ Chinese law of youth protection, Ch: *wei chengnian ren baohu fa*, indicates the illegality of child monk practice.

combination—a monastic-run public school. The school officially became a public school in 1998 under the administration of the Ruoergai County government and its name changed to Taktsang Lhamo Primary School.²⁶⁹ Yet at the same time it is still headed by Alak Lobsang and staffed by Kirti monks—with only one new Han Chinese teacher assigned by the local government to teach the only Chinese language course. Students are still exclusively boys, many of whom would eventually enter the Kirti monastery as monks.

The negotiation between monastery and local government was neither as simple as this nor does it end there. Instead it was a dynamic process, with the Chinese government's continuing efforts—as well as the limits of these efforts—to incorporate religion and ethnicity into the nation-state system by secularizing the school education on the one hand, and the Tibetan monastery struggle to revive their education system in the traditional religious context within the confinement of the current social political system on the other. One of the most prominent examples of this negotiation is the fact that all the monk teachers and the students are not allowed to wear monastic robes in school. According to the Chinese official regulations public school education cannot show any religious preferences including any explicit religious symbols such as robes or religious texts unless they are used as a counter-examples and critiqued by Marxist materialist theory. For monks, monastic robes are one of the few most symbolically charged materials in their lives. Only those disreputable “turn-back monks” (Tib: *grwa log*)—renegade monks who renounce their monkhood—would take off their robes. However the government regulation on public schools has left the monk teachers in the Kirti monastic school with no choice but to wear lay Tibetan

²⁶⁹ Tib: *rtag tsang lha mo slob gra chong ba*, Ch: *langmusi xiaoxue*. Interestingly although the government clearly aimed to create a secular flavor to the school by taking out monastery from the original school name, the Chinese name of the school still points explicitly to the monastic nature of the school, if not purposefully.

robe or Chinese style clothing. Not only do teachers have to wear lay clothes, students also have to wear lay clothing when they are at school. Nevertheless they are still considered by the Tibetan public as child monks in the traditional Tibetan sense. Similar negotiation can be seen in the use of texts in the monastic school. Monastic schools use Buddhist texts as the main preparation for students to start their monastic lives. But as a public school it is also under the pressure of switching to secular texts. The negotiation on the text and teaching is thus part of the everyday school practice.

5.7 A Day in Taktsang Lhamo Primary School

One early morning in November 2003 I went to Taktsang Lhamo Primary School to see a friend, Kalsang, who had been one of the monk teachers there since the beginning of the school. Located within the southern bounds of the circumambulation route around the monastery, the school is an enclosed courtyard building with a basketball court size square inside. The building is a fairly simple and has a plain one-story classroom. Only the school gate is decorated in traditional Tibetan fashion with a statue of a snow lion on each side, and a Chinese national flag flying high above. When I arrived there it was just the time for the daily school ritual of raising the Chinese national flag. As a state run public school all the students and teachers have to gather together every morning in the school square to watch the raising of the Chinese national flag with the loudspeaker playing the Chinese national anthem.

I met Kalsang afterwards in a big room shared by all the teachers as their office. Because the school had virtually no source of income, procurement of supplies including office supplies and heating for office and classroom in winter had been a problem for both teachers and students. The result had been to leave the rooms with no heat at all or to let some teachers or students bring their private stock from home—

usually dried yak dung or firewood as the cheap local alternative to coal or gas. Now that the school has turned public, the government has started to provide basic office supplies as well as coal for heating in winter, which was considered a local luxury. Thus the teacher's office was heated with a coal stove that also provided hot water for drinking. Kalsang brought a cup of hot tea to me and started to talk about the change in the school since I was here the last time in 1999 and 2001. As every teacher in room was wearing Chinese style clothes or Tibetan lay robes, Kalsang started the topic with the changing of the monk robe.

At first we [the monk teachers] did not realize it was serious [that we could not wear monk robes]. Many of us only changed to Chinese clothing when there was someone from the government coming to check. We still wore monk robes in our daily lives until we got more and more pressure. First it was Alak Lungzang who went to the county government meeting very often and received critique from the county leaders. Then there were some journalists and tourists who came and took photos in school. You know those people. They only like those who wear monk robes. After [they went back] they published photos in Chinese newspapers and magazines. Then the government knew we still wore monastic robes. We had no choice [but to change].

Despite the verbal complaints that every monk teacher would tell me, there was obviously a mixed feeling towards the monastic school becoming state run. Both the teachers and students were happy with the improvement of the school due to the material support of the government. At the same time, the government policy clearly aims to separate religion from education—or more precisely, to secularize school education—and has put monk teachers and monastic schools in an uncomfortable situation.

The school has a lunch break at 11:30 when teachers and students go back to their monk households to have lunch. I went back with Kalsang to his house. His house is a large complex cohabited by Kalsang and six novices including his younger

brother. Kalsang was the master monk (*Akhu*) and the youngest novice was about five years old. When we arrived at his house the six young boys had just come back from school and had already started to cook some *thugpa* for lunch. As the master and the guest, Kalsang and I kept talking while waiting for the lunch to be served. When the young boys came with lunch we turned to discuss them.

Students in school—or future monks in the monastery—have been sensitive topic both in the government and in the monastery. There is certainly no simple answer as to whether these boys are child monks in the Tibetan monastic tradition, or are lay students in a Chinese public school like everywhere else in China. The conflict lies between the traditional Tibetan practice of accepting child monks from as early as four to five years old who are often sent by their devoted parents, and the modern Chinese state law on religious regulation and secular school education which aims to clearly separate religion from school education. While Chinese law officially allows any adult to practice religion (i.e., become monk or nun at his or her own will), it has been ambivalent on those under the legal adult age of eighteen.²⁷⁰ The result of such conflict often has more nuances and sometime contradictions at a practical level.

Except during special monastic occasions such as Monlam Chenmo when they still wear their monastic robes, the young boys in Taktsang Lhamo Primary School wear lay Chinese or Tibetan clothing all year long—some even wear the *hong ling jin*.²⁷¹ At the same time these boys still carry out all the duties of child monks in their monk household, such as taking care of domestic work in the house and serving/working at monastic rituals during the Monlam Chenmo period. As another part of the compliance with the Chinese school regulation the school began in 2002 to

²⁷⁰ The official rhetoric is that state religious regulations “forbid any forced religious education for those under 18” (ZYZJ 1995). But it has been reportedly flexible in practice, particularly in cases that deal with ethnic minorities who have child religious education tradition.

²⁷¹ This is a piece of red cloth tied up around the neck symbolizing the membership of the Young Pioneer—the official subgroup for the Chinese Communist Party for children aged around 5-13.

replace the monastic textbooks used in classes with the national standard edition of Tibetan language textbook that was compiled by the state educational bureau.²⁷²

Although many monk teachers were against this change they were also aware that they were fighting a lost battle.

First we have to take off our monk robes. Then we cannot teach our own texts. We are really becoming like any other schools in *neidi* (China). We [all the monk teachers] were so uncomfortable [worried] that we went to see Alak Lobsang [for a solution]. He assured us that we are still monks even though we can not wear our robes. The most important thing he said is to continue teaching in school. Now there is a lot of gossip [about us] but Alak Lobsang said we should ignore that and just do our job.

In reality, however, despite the change of official textbooks, the monastery and monks teachers still managed to insert their own teaching in the school schedule. I was told that the end of the afternoon is the official “off school activity time” (Ch: *kewai huodong shijian*). Unlike other Chinese schools, students in this school had an extra class at this time taught by the monks using their own monastic textbooks. Once, Kalsang accompanied me as we walked to different classrooms. There were seven to eight classrooms with more than 50 students in each. The classroom had typical Chinese school layouts: two blackboards on two end walls one for the teachers’ use and the other for Mao’s slogan *haohao xuexi tiantian xiangshang* (study hard and improve everyday) that appears in every Chinese school; three lines of wooden benches and desks in the classroom with three to four boys sharing one bench and one desk. The monks were teaching Buddhist texts in their lay clothing. One class at an advanced level was actually taught by a monk that day, in his monastic robe. “Is it no problem like this?” I asked Kalsang meaning both the robe and teaching itself. “You

²⁷² Janet Upton (1999) provided an in-depth study on these state compiled Tibetan textbooks used nationally in all Tibetan language classes.

know those government things (Ch: *zhengfu de shiqing*),” Kalsang changed to Chinese making his explanation easier, “[when dealing with them] for some things we don’t have a choice and for other things they can’t do anything either (Ch: *youxie shiqing women mei banfa, youxie shiqing tamen ye mei banfa*).”

While the monk teachers and students have been struggling hard to maintain their monk identity in school, their own community has been changing their views about this special group of monks. I later heard some gossip from other monks about the change in credibility of their fellow monk teachers in school. As the monastic school turned public, all the monk teachers in the school officially became “state cadres” (Ch: *guojia ganbu*). These monk teachers are now government employees and even receive a salary every month from the government. In 2003 the rumor was that a monk teacher’s salary was 1000 *yuan* a month, which was not only an unheard number for most monks but was even higher than many supposedly privileged local cadres.²⁷³ The visual change of taking off their robes and receiving the salary from the government have immediately separated the monk teachers in school from the rest of the monk community. “At first they went to teach in school because they were asked by Alak Lobsang to contribute to the monastic school,” one monk said. Stereotypical beliefs among the monks often privilege academic study towards the highest Buddhist degree whereas teaching child monks is often the alternative choice for those who obviously cannot achieve that goal. If those monks chosen to be teachers in school were not fully respected by the monk community in the beginning, now they were even looked down upon by their monk fellows who called them *na gongzi de ren* (salary receivers) sarcastically behind their back. “Who knows if they are contributing to the monastery or the monastery is contributing to them.” As such, the gossip among

²⁷³ Salary difference in different regions reflects one of the many hierarchical differences in China. It often parallels with the regional administrative hierarchies. Thus one could logically imagine a city salary higher than a county one and in turn higher than a village one.

the monks often focused on whether those monk teachers were actually forced to take off their robes by the government or if they were more willing to trade them for a high salary, given that they could not follow the ideal monk path.

5.8 Suzhi and Hui Politics of Exclusion: A Voluntary Minority?

Besides the Tibetan monastic school there are two public primary schools in Taktsang Lhamo, one in each of the provinces of Sichuan and Gansu. A local Hui teacher in the Sichuan side school told me proudly that as a Chinese school they follow the national standard curriculum here, just like every school in *neidi*, with everything taught in Chinese. A fluent Tibetan speaker himself, the young Hui teacher immediately linked the Chinese language with the idea of modernization (Ch: *xiandaihua*).

We Hui speak Tibetan because of our old tradition of doing business [with Tibetans]. Nowadays China is modernizing and we minority people also have to catch up [with this modernization]. Everyone thus must learn Chinese today. Without good Chinese you can do nothing!

Chinese education policy allows schools in ethnic minority regions to be either a “Chinese school” (Ch: *hanxiao*) where Chinese is the main teaching medium or a “minority school” (Ch: *minxiao*) where an officially sanctioned ethnic minority language is primarily used in teaching. Langmusi Hui Village Primary School (Ch: *langmusi huimincun xiaoxue*), the school on the Sichuan side, is one of those “Chinese schools.” It is staffed by Hui and Han Chinese teachers and enrolled primarily local Hui and Tibetan children. Hui in Taktsang Lhamo speak a dialect quite different from the standard Mandarin Chinese (*putonghua*).²⁷⁴ In all religious contexts, Arabic is the

²⁷⁴ Hui in northwest China speak a dialect of Chinese that is generally categorized as “northwest dialect” (Ch: *xibei hua*, or *xibei fangyan*). Researches on the Hui dialect show that there are many

main medium. However, as an official ethnic minority in China Hui do not officially have their own “minority language.” In their everyday life Hui use their own dialect among the Hui community members but switch to Tibetan or Mandarin Chinese with outsiders. Nevertheless Hui are in agreement on the importance of mastering Mandarin Chinese as both a practical tool to participate in the booming Chinese market and also a symbol of modernity, which parallels the Chinese state discourse of “backwardness” including the incapability of using Chinese that characterizes most ethnic minorities.

A conversation with my Hui neighbor Min makes it clearer that, being aware of their double minority position in both the nation and region, Hui people in Langmusi have openly accepted the state-propagated ideology of modernity. They have further tried to manipulate this ideology for their own cause while actively participating in the Chinese nation-building process. It was through this inclusion and exclusion process that Hui have given the new interpretation of such concepts as modernization, religious freedom and ethnic equality, in accordance with the new social political context.

Min family relies on a small grocery shop and a Qingzhen bakery as their source of income. His two boys were both in school, one in the Ruergai County and the other in Langmusi, while the youngest girl dropped out after finishing primary school. Min first explained the difference between boys and girls in a family.

Girls will marry out eventually and become members of other families (Ch: *renjia de ren*). But boys are different. If they learn more knowledge now they will be able to help the family out later on.

Arabic and Persian loan words mixed up in their daily conversational language which makes it nearly unintelligible for most Chinese speakers, even local Han Chinese (Yang 1996).

From here Min brought up the topic of education quality in different schools and people's quality based on different education.

Tibetans value (Ch: *zhongshi*) [only] their religion. But we Hui pay lots of attention to education. My elder son is in Ruoergai county school. Of course that's better than the school here but it also costs much more money [to send him there]. I can't afford to send my younger son to go there at the same time. So he is just going to this school in Langmusi [Langmusi Hui village primary school].

[...]

The school here is a low quality one because the teachers here are low quality (Ch: *suzhi di*). None of them are college graduates. Their [spoken] Chinese level is not even better than mine. Students who go to this school can not really learn anything here and they will come out with a low quality too.

[...]

The different quality of schools makes for a different quality of students (Ch: *xuexiao suzhi buyiyang xuesheng suzhi ye buyiyang*). If I had enough money I would have sent my children even to schools in Beijing. [Because] that's where there are the highest quality schools. Now that the policy is good [for doing business] I just have to work harder to make more money.

Min's conception of human quality comes directly from the official Chinese discourse of *suzhi* (quality). As many studies on this phenomenon have indicated (Yan 2003), this discourse of *suzhi* has imposed both an official abstract value in order to shape a new human subjectivity and a new form of governmentality. It also reproduces the existing social hierarchy yet disguises itself in a form of economic development. Schools and education are the fields where the *suzhi* discourse is heavily propagated by the state. Research on this subject, however, has mostly focused on the *suzhi* discourse as a state technology of inclusion (Kipnis 2007; Anagnost 2004). What follows then, is a natural division between those who resist this inclusion and those who are more cooperative with the state. Gerard Postiglione (2004: 5) proposed a

concept of “voluntary minority” in his research on the contemporary ethnic minority education in China. Using the ethnographic data from state schools in rural Tibet, he argued that if the “indigenous minorities view the education system as a way to strip them of their own culture and identity without giving them an equal opportunity in the wider society, [... they] will respond with resistance. If, however, they hold the view that they can use this education to achieve success, they will often surmount the obstacles posed by cultural divergences.” In the later case those minorities become what he calls “voluntary minority.”

What is missing in this analysis are the actual people in this process who are the agents of both inclusion and exclusion. I suggest that this absence can be compensated for by adding the dimension of the social imagination of the nation to it. In this case the Hui embracement of the state ideology of *suzhi* should be understood first of all as part of their politics of exclusion. Hui in Taktsang Lhamo have been caught in a borderland that is both part of the Han Chinese majority state and an ethnic Tibetan majority region. This situation of a minority in an ethnic minority region has made the Hui expression in this region different from the Hui in most other Hui majority regions in the northwest (Gillette 2000; Gladney 1991). On the one hand, Hui in Taktsang Lhamo explicitly and eagerly differentiate themselves from the local Tibetans in the sense that Hui are supposedly not exotic and have higher *suzhi* than the Tibetans. For this end Hui do not hesitate to employ various kinds of state discourse (such as *suzhi* in this case) to depict themselves as modern and progressive, as opposed to the local Tibetans who are backward and exotic and who are still trapped in their traditions—symbolized and reaffirmed by the tourist gaze.

On the other hand, the Hui alliance with the Chinese state is a delicate one. While Hui value Islam no less than Tibetans value Buddhism, Min’s emphasis on the Hui-Tibetan difference through a different ethnic emphasis on religion and education

is indeed a reflection of the politics of exclusion. It parallels the state discourse of modernization through a secularized education. At the same time it also sets up the undertones of a different context for Islam that naturally escapes the official state trap of supposedly backward tradition. Therefore it is not uncommon to hear a Hui commenting on their ethnic emphasis on education in ways that appear completely separate from the officially Chinese sanctioned domain of religion. This Hui politics of exclusion not only reflects their understanding of the new ethnic relations with both Tibetans and the Chinese, but more importantly it also reflects a social imagination of the nation. Just like the Tibetans who imagine their position in a Chinese nation through their travel and the use of mobile phone, Hui express their ethnic situation as a minority in an ethnic minority region by positioning themselves at once on the border and in the center of an imaginary nation.

Both Tibetans and Hui in Taktsang Lhamo have been actively imagining themselves as part of the new Chinese economic development and nation-state building. Both see the state education system as a means to bring certain social benefits or positions within their reach. In this sense they are both “voluntary minorities” in Postiglione’s term. To define ethnic motivation only on the basis of material benefit, however, is ultimately a reductive approach to its ethnic and religious complexity. As Sangren (2000) argued, desire is socially produced in a complex situation. It is often a result of many conflicts and negotiations that go well beyond the immediate interest measured solely through material benefit. In this case the traditional Tibetan monastic practice of pilgrimage has been renewed with the monks’ rediscovery of Chinese Buddhists and Chinese pilgrim sites. The mixed feeling of the Tibetan monks towards the Chinese shows both the “voluntary” side and its reluctance, even resistance. By the same token, Hui acceptance of the Chinese state has often been

amplified when they are juxtaposed with the Tibetans as a “minority minorities” in their own homeland.

As official ethnic minorities in a Chinese state, Tibetans and Hui are both at the marginalized periphery of a nation and at the center of their national imagination. By adding another dimension of this social imagination of the nation we can go beyond an arbitrary division of the voluntary and resistance. Instead of understanding their practices through labels of “model minority” or “problem minority” we look directly into the multi-faceted practices unfolding in their particular context of the nation—both in a political economic sense and in an imaginary perspective from a particular ethnic group. Only through a close look into the complex and dynamic nature of these seemingly conflicting motivations and desires can we overcome those analytical dichotomies by focusing on their multiple production process.

CHAPTER 6

“HELLO, TICKET!”

In the summer of 2001 I returned to Taktsang Lhamo to do my pre-dissertation fieldwork. After a bumpy, dusty and delayed two-day journey, I finally got off the bus on the main street of Taktsang Lhamo. The dirt street before in the town center had been recently paved, which made it look like a small Chinese town. As there was still no running water or sewer system, people habitually poured the dirty water out on the street. Unlike the dirt street before that absorbed water, the new concrete paved road became like a running river. This river ended shortly on the Gansu side where the paved road ended. A familiar dirt path started again, as I walked up to my friend Tashi's house in the Kirti monastery.

Just as I approached the monastery, I suddenly heard some knocking and shouting from a small house on the side of the road. I looked there and to my surprise I found someone calling to me. The noise came behind the small window of this simple one-room house. As I walked towards the house, a small window opened and an old monk's face came out speaking to me in broken Chinese: “Hey! You! Buy ticket!” No matter how I explained that I was not a tourist and that I was just visiting an old friend who is a monk here, he would not let me pass until I finally gave him fifteen *yuan* for the ticket.

Later I got to know from Tashi that this small house was the newly established ticket office of the Kirti monastery. That old monk was assigned by the *Siguanhui* to work there as a ticket collector for the monastery. After I left Taktsang Lhamo that year I heard from Tashi that he was going to replace the old monk as the Kirti monastery ticket collector. The job was not easy. Since there is no actual gate or any

other visible border of the monastery, it is the duty of the monk (ticket collector) to call on the coming visitors to buy tickets. Most monks in the monastery hardly speak any Chinese, let alone English, to explain the official reason of buying tickets. Tourists, mostly Chinese, often refuse to buy tickets. The confrontations between the monk ticket collector and tourists sometimes can be very tense. The previous old monk was said to have fought with too many tourists that the *Siguanhui* had to find someone else who is more apt at dealing with tourists. This position of ticket collector became a hot potato in the monastery.

Finally the *Siguanhui* decided to appoint a group of three young monks—instead of one—who were reputed to know more about the outside world and speak more Chinese. One of them is my friend Tashi. In order to be polite this time, Tashi asked me seriously to teach him the correct way to address tourists both in Chinese and in English. After a short conversation he decided the Chinese standard form of address would be *Nihao, qing maipiao* (Hello, please buy a ticket). He found the English equivalent a little too complicated for him to say, “Hello please buy a ticket.” He shortened it to just two words: “hello” to be polite and “ticket” as the content. Thus in 2003 when I returned to Taktsang Lhamo, I was greeted by Tashi at his ticket office in English—“Hello ticket!”

In this chapter I explore the influence of modernization and consumption, particularly tourism, as an important new factor in the local religious revival and ethnic reconstructions. The changing social and political context in China also changes the “organizational features” (Barth 1969) which govern the construction of ethnic religious identity and the inter-ethnic encounters in Taktsang Lhamo. I start with the construction of a local highway with its historical legacy in the 1950s that connects this once remote ethnic borderland to the new Chinese nation state. While the construction of Lan-Lang Road in the 1950s was explicitly carried out under an

ideology of socialist development in the early days of the PRC, the rebuilding of this road in 2003 was contextualized in a more complex situation in which the traditional ethnic and religious relations have been both revived and contested in the new national ideology of market economy. What has come with the new Lan-Lang Road is not only the invasion of market goods and the tourist gaze but also a new social arena created by the ideology of modernity and consumerism. It is within this newly created social arena that religious revival and ethnic reconstruction in Taktsang Lhamo have become multi-vocal and have taken a more diversified direction than a simple reproduction of the collectively memorized past.

Studies on tourism and their impact on the local societies can be characterized by two trends. One has focused on the deleterious effects of tourists and tourism on local cultures and traditions (Smith 1989). These authors have talked about tourists and tourism in terms of cultural consumption, cultural imperialism and the commoditization of local society in the face of global modernity. In the case of tourism in Tibet, Cingcade (1998) argued that Western tourists have come to search for authenticity and uniqueness with strongly pre-conceived desires, which has in turn produced the Tibetan desire to fulfill them in order to gain success in the new modern dominant discourse. She also criticized the tourists to Tibet as Orientalists who, through their consuming activities, have transformed the original Tibetan religious tradition into a secular business “performance” for tourists.²⁷⁵

The other trend has been critical. Some even question “tourist” as an analytical category.²⁷⁶ Admitting the unavoidable consequences of tourist encounters, these authors have tried to resume local agency in the face of the tourists and the power of modernity. Talking about tourist impact on the High Himalaya, Charles Ramble (1993)

²⁷⁵ (Cingcade 1998), see also (Adams 1996). Greenwood made the similar critique of the commoditization and secularization of Basque ritual in Spain (Greenwood 1989).

²⁷⁶ (Urry 1990), See also (Kolås 2004) for a case study of tourism through a native point of view.

took an optimistic view of the local people and the preservation of their tradition. “By and large,” he said, “the host societies of the Himalaya take a benevolent view of tourists. They like the things they [tourists] bring. But nobody seriously wants to *be* like the tourists” (Ramble 1993: 24). John Urry (1990) made a more nuanced argument, arguing that the tourist gaze “in any historical period is constructed in relationship to its opposite, to non-tourist forms of social experience and consciousness.” The concept of tourist is thus context-specific and relational to other non-tourist categories.

Following these lines I analyze tourism and consuming practices in Taktsang Lhamo primarily as an important and integral part of the general phenomenon of local religious revival and ethnic reconstruction. In particular I place these practices against different time scales on a complex social economic context rather than an individual phenomenon in an isolated time and space. In relation to the “practice of time” from chapter 5, I depict various consuming practices including tourism through different time references that have been envisioned by different parties in different contexts. Both Tibetans and Hui have felt the impact and changes in their lives brought by increasing numbers of Chinese and Western tourists. Yet through different native eyes—Tibetan and Hui—and in different contexts, I shall show a more inter-subjective encounter in a complex social political context that has led to various kinds of subject formations and various destinies envisioned by different parties.

6.1 Road Construction: Making Taktsang Lhamo Legible in the Nation

The reform and open-up policy after the 1980s has not only made China a giant factory for the world but also a great construction site itself. Among all the development projects, road construction has been seen both as the top priority for policy makers and the golden path to get rich for the people. A popular saying during

the 1990s went “If you want to get rich, build the road first” (Ch: *yao xiang fu, xian xiu lu*). As these construction projects have expanded from urban Chinese cities to the remote hinterland, particularly to the ethnic minority areas, their mission has gone well beyond the materialistic project of getting rich. It has become a modern nation state project to transform those ethnic minorities from backward, primitive, uncivilized to progressive, modern, and civilized—what Stevan Harrell (1995a) terms a “civilizing project.”

Although Taktsang Lhamo is located between two provinces of Sichuan and Gansu, the geographical remoteness and the lack of infrastructure in this region break apart the 213 National Road (Ch: *guodao*) that connects the two provincial capitals of Lanzhou and Chengdu. Buses that pass by this region only stop at the bridge that leaves another 5 km zigzag mountain path meandering into the valley of Taktsang Lhamo. Until 2003 only three buses operated privately by local Hui families went in Taktsang Lhamo. Some locals ran their tricycle motor tractor to make one *yuan* profit each by picking up occasional tourists from the bridge. The Hui families started to run these buses with the increasing transportation demand from the local Hui who commute frequently to Linxia and Lintan for both business and family needs. The 200 km between Linxia and Taktsang Lhamo often takes a whole day to cover, because of both the bad road condition and the old age of the bus. Yet the Hui bus families were all unwilling to invest in a better bus. If the road condition is that bad, it does not worth investing more on buses.

6.1.1 A Road to Nation

In the beginning of the 21st century China officially launched a long-term comprehensive national project: the Great Development of the West (GDOW) (Sines 2002). The project aims to invest in the local infrastructure in China’s poor, vast

Western regions in order to better exploit the rich natural and human resources there. As many scholars have indicated, it also constitutes a modern nation-state strategy to map the former uncharted territory into part of its territorial legibility (Scott 1998). The strategic use of the “West” is certainly not merely a geographical direction. It symbolically represents all places where local rhythm does not go with the national one and therefore local practices are “illegible” to the state. This national ideology has generated dyadic concepts of a backward place with an inferior people and uncivilized culture waiting to be modernized (and civilized) by a “regime of representation” with the unquestionable good of development and modernization (Escobar 1995). As narrated in an official memoir about the first construction of Lan-Lang (Lanzhou to Langmusi) Road (Ch: *Lan-Lang gonglu*) in the early 1950s:

The Gannan Tibetan Autonomous Prefecture is located in the Southwest of Gansu province and on the northeast rim of the Tibetan plateau. Here the immense pasture and rivers have nurtured dense forests and rich natural resources.

However, before Liberation, there were only two simple roads [in this region] with no maintenance and no bridges. The roads were often blocked and transportation relied exclusively on draught animals, manpower, and wood wheeled carts. The rich natural resources could not be developed and exploited [because of the road condition]. Local products could not go out and industrial products [from urban Chinese cities] could not go in. Because of this [isolated] situation malicious merchants exploited the people with high priced products and Republican bandits hid themselves there. Local people of all nationalities suffered from the harassment of those bandits and lived in long-term poverty.²⁷⁷

During a three-year period (1952-54) this road was built by the PLA (People’s Liberation Army). The primary goal of building this road then was to “liberate” local people of all nationalities from the repressive “old society” (Ch: *jiu shehui*)—the harassment of Republican bandits and the economic exploitation of malicious

²⁷⁷ Yu Yongquan: “Lan-Lang gonglu de chuqi xiujian”, in (GNZX 1989). The translation is mine.

merchants. For nearly half a decade this road was maintained as a political symbol to salvage a backward and desperate borderland by connecting it to a civilized socialist nation.

For most people in China the change from Mao's China to Deng's China meant a shift from a life centered on political and ideological rhetoric to an economic and materialistic one. The rebuilding of the Lan-Lang Road after four decades reflects the shift of this meaning. In 2003 a new Lan-Lang Road project was launched as one of the many development projects to open up China's backward but resource-rich west. This new road cuts across the adjacent regions of Hui autonomous prefecture of Linxia and Tibetan autonomous prefecture of Gannan connecting these regions ever closer to the provincial capital and national centers in China. The last stop on this road is Langmusi, before it goes further to Sichuan province. One of the main observable differences between the new road and the old one in 1950s is the amount of investment. Both projects were exclusively paid for by the state government. The old project used 2.75 million *yuan* to build the whole road as well as bridges from Lanzhou to Langmusi over a three-year period (GNZX 1989: 161). In 2004 just the first stage of investment for the last section of Lan-Lang Road, about 161 km, reached 6.2 billion *yuan*.²⁷⁸ If the socialist construction during the 1950's had initiated the nation-building effort by bringing political attention to every corner of its imagined territory, the GDOW project in 2000 has again reinforced this effort by spreading the new market wave from the national and province centers to the far remote borderlands like Langmusi.

²⁷⁸ Data comes from Gannan Daily, the official newspaper of the Gannan prefecture government, November 29, 2004. This is only for a second class freeway cost. According to a Linxia official report, the Lanzhou-Linxia part of the Lan-Lang Road will be constructed as a first class highway, which costs about 22 billion *yuan* for this 50km long express way.

6.1.2 A Road to Taktsang Lhamo

It was a cold day in October 2003 when I returned to Taktsang Lhamo on the Hui family bus from Hezuo. The bus had to stop very frequently because of the road construction along the way. Thus although we started early in the morning it was nearly dark when we finally finished this 160 km distance arriving at the bridge near Taktsang Lhamo. Even worse was the news that the bus could not go further because the road construction team was preparing for an explosion in front. While the road construction in 1950s mainly followed the curve of the mountains and rivers the new construction today simply cut them through, which required the blasting of many hills including the one between the bridge and the valley of Taktsang Lhamo. Many passengers chose to walk through this 5 km mountain path as it was unsure whether or when the bus could pass.

While most people tried to get away from the center of the construction as they passed the working zone, I was curious to see what was going on there. After another explosion, one man with a helmet ran over to me shouting with an accent from northeastern China: “What are you doing here?!” I explained that I was doing a field research on the development of this area. My Beijing accent self-evidently proved that I am a closer compatriot (Ch: *laoxiang*) to him. “Isn’t that so hard (Ch: *jianku*) to work in this poor and backward area?” He replied and seemed to have found someone who comes from a modern civilization (like him) and thus can share his *jianku* experience in this uncivilized wildness. His name was Li, a construction team leader from northeastern China—in fact the whole team was from the northeast. We started to chat right in front of the construction site. I was curious why a construction team that far was hired while many young locals, especially minorities, could not find a job. “This place is too backward. Minority peoples,” Li said, “if you let them sing and dance they are good at it. But if you let them work they are just stupid and lazy (Ch: *you lan you*

ben).”²⁷⁹ Li believed that the government is clever to hire them for the road construction because the locals (minority people) would never get the road done. “We have no time to waste here. Our next project has already been contracted.” Li openly acknowledged that he and his team members hate to work in a poor and backward place like here because of the very bad working and living conditions. Nevertheless he also admitted that these days he got more contracts in western China, mostly backward and remote minority regions, because of the GDOW project.

As we were talking, Li proudly showed me around his working site. He explained that the hardest part of this construction was first of all to blow off the top of the mountain through which the former 5 km path to Taktsang Lhamo passed. After the road is done the distance will be shortened to 3 km. When I asked about a small group of Tibetan workers among his team, Li said he hired some local workers when they are short of hands. But “they can only do some ‘heavy manual works’ (Ch: *cuhuo*),” he said, “such as clearing the rock pieces after explosion.” Just as I was about to leave, I told him that I would like to take some photos of the construction site. Understanding that I was doing *minzu* (minority) research, Li immediately ordered his men to back off from the site. Many of his workers didn’t understand this order immediately until he shouted aloud: “you don’t have any *minzu* characteristics, do you (Ch: *nimen you meiyou shenme minzu tese*)?” This time they understood that their leader was telling them to stay away from a presumed search of *minzu* characterized images as none of them are ethnic minorities. With Li’s team workers quickly stepped aside, they seemed to be relieved from performing in front of my camera to audiences

²⁷⁹ In fact I heard similar words even from a Tibetan monk who was in charge of building the monastery hostel. He claimed that he would rather hire (Han) Sichuan workers from far away than local (Tibetan) labors. As he explained, workers from Sichuan are hardworking in nature and cheap to hire while locals are often lazy and hard to deal with.

off the stage. At the same time, the small group of Tibetan workers left on this stage appeared both puzzled and awkward in front of one camera with a laughing audience.

6.2 Ticket, Time and Tension

The road brings both tourists and consumer goods to Taktsang Lhamo. It also brings new concepts of time to this tradition engraved borderland. Until now much research on China, particularly on ethnic minorities in China, has documented an explicit exploitation of the concept of road and time by the Chinese state to create a spatial and temporal metaphor of backwardness of ethnic minorities versus progressiveness of the majority Han.²⁸⁰ Since the Communist party came to power in China the Marxist model of a unilateral social progression—from primitive society through slave society to capitalist society then socialist society and ultimately communist society—has been applied as a universal truth to all human societies at all times. On this universalized social scale ethnic minority societies have been treated as “our living past.” As a result one of the self-entitled missions of the Chinese government was to help those backward people to catch up with the progressive Chinese.²⁸¹ In recent years further research on this and related subjects have complicated the issue by showing that ethnic minority peoples in China have not merely been the passive receivers and innocent victims of a state power and its ideology. Considerable research has demonstrated both the resistance and negotiation through reversion and internalization of this state ideology by the ethnic minorities.²⁸²

²⁸⁰ See, i.e., (Harrell 1995c; Schein 2000; Litzinger 2000; Mueggler 2001).

²⁸¹ In the 1950s the Chinese government announced as a first great achievement that one ethnic minority, the Erlunchun, in China had been successfully transformed from primitive society directly into part of the new socialist Chinese society—compare to the same progression of the Chinese society that has taken thousands of years.

²⁸² For example, Jing (1996) has documented a reinvention of religious tradition through the manipulation of local memories. Mueggler (2001) argued that rituals and oral traditions have functioned as an “opposite practices of time” which countered an imagined magical state and tried to heal the trauma in the collective memories.

In Taktsang Lhamo the conflicting concepts of time used in the monastery, in the Hui community, and by tourists have given rise to new spaces and subjectivities through a multi-faceted inter-subjective encounter. Along this line, I shall also show how different practices have been labeled and associated with different times, which I have called the “time of practice.” I start with the new phenomenon of the ticket since I see it as a hub of most of the new events, practices, and tensions.

6.2.1 The Debate on the Ticket at Kirti Monastery

For most monks in Kirti monastery, being simultaneously a monk chanting and gathering in the monastery and a ticket collector sitting in a tourist office seems too bizarrely different to contemplate. Therefore ever since Kirti monastery set up its own ticket office in 2000, that small house, along with the monk ticket collector and events that revolved around it everyday, has never stopped being a subject of conversation, sometimes even a hot debate, in the monk community. In 2001 the new ticket office and the old monk who stopped me for a ticket quickly became the favorite subject of jokes during the monks’ dinner time. Whenever there were any tourists during the day the story would be circulated among the monks later at dinner: how the old monk argued with the tourists (in Chinese), or how he hunted down those who tried to escape the ticket in the monastery alleys. By laughing at the old monk’s behavior, a bizarre and ridiculous atmosphere has been created around this position of monk ticket collector and the very existence of the ticket office itself has been questioned.

The establishment of the ticket office in Kirti monastery started in the year 2000 with impetus from the government to embrace the market as well as an increasing financial need in the monastery. The Chinese government openly propagates that culture and tradition show their value only when they help to develop the local economy to reinforce the dominant place of the new rising market in the

nationwide economic reform.²⁸³ The monastery is no exception. While Tibetan monasteries have been deprived of their previous political and economic privilege since the 1950s, it was not until more recently that the monastery self-sufficiency campaign (Ch: *yisi yangsi*) actively got the monasteries involved in the new Chinese market. Since the early 1980s the Chinese government has encouraged Tibetan monasteries to develop new sources of economic revenue despite the fact that many monasteries received ample volunteer donations from local Tibetan communities immediately after the government sanction of religious practice.²⁸⁴ An official government report on religious policy concludes:

Based entirely on volunteer actions and with ample consideration, religious institutions should gradually and steadily reform any outdated customs and bad habits that go against the socialist construction of material civilization and spiritual civilization. At the same time they [the religious institutions] should, according to their own situations, start some productive or service enterprises that benefit the society.²⁸⁵

From the 1990s, tourism emerged as a big potential market especially for those remote backward minority regions that are affluent in natural and cultural resources but otherwise lack other economic advantages. Collecting entrance fees from tourists as part of the monastery income became both a challenge and a new way to expand the traditional monastery independence. The debate in the monastery started over the issue of whether they wanted to be controlled by another government branch, namely the Tourist Bureau in the Zorge government, besides the official leadership of the Religious Bureau in the Zorge government that had already been imposed on the

²⁸³ The original Chinese slogan goes *wenhua datai jingji changxi*, literally, “culture provides the scene, where the economy acts.”

²⁸⁴ In 1980s the Serchi monastery received a government loan to buy a truck in order to join the rising market of transportation (Guan and Li 2000; Niu 2000).

²⁸⁵ An investigation report on the implementation of religious policy by the central government office investigation committee released on December 29 1985 (ZYZJ 1995: 138-139).

monastery. If the monastery wants to collect tourist tickets it then has to accept all the administrative regulations as a tourist site and thus has to be regulated by the Tourist Bureau—such as obtaining a “certificate for collecting tickets at a tourist site” (Ch: *luyou jingdian shoufei zheng*) from the local Tourist Bureau, and paying certain taxes from the annual tourist income. It also has to assign specific persons—in this case monks from the monastery—to carry out this full-time job. This is far from a monk’s duty, if not conflicting with it.

Meanwhile the opposing opinions argued that if they did not collect tickets from the tourists, the monastery would just let the money pass by us and we would just watch everyone else collect it. Although nobody has raised it for public debate, it is the common consensus that nowadays it is becoming more and more difficult to get enough money from either volunteer donation or any other source of revenue to fulfill all the monastery needs. Making business is no easy task for them either. From the experiences of their Hui neighbors many Tibetan monks believed that collecting entrance fees from tourists is probably the least demanding business that the monastery can engage in to make money. They also used examples of famous Tibetan monasteries in Lhasa and Amdo—Jokang temple, Potala, Kumbum monastery, Labrang monastery—that had already collected entrance fees from tourists for a long time.

The final decision of the *Siguanhui* to set up a ticket office and place an old monk as the first ticket collector did not end the debate. It simply changed it from the public forum in the *Siguanhui* meeting room to various private occasions such as tea-house chats, dinner gatherings or the intermissions of monastery classes. After the old monk became an object of jokes in the monk community, the *Siguanhui* finally reassigned three young monks as the new ticket collectors in 2002. As time went by the debate on the ticket office seemed to wane, especially after this ticket office started

to yield more than 80,000 *yuan* every year to the monastery. But the ticket office itself continues to be a hot topic and the discussion around it has continues to be a favorite everyday topic among the monks.

Just as I thought the debate had ended when I came back to Taktsang Lhamo in 2003, I found that many young monks started to challenge this issue through reference to their own experiences, particularly those who have been to China. As more and more monks in the monastery (mostly young monks like my friend Tashi) started to travel to Buddhist pilgrim sites, temples, and monasteries in China, they seemed to see the future of their monastery in the light of their Chinese counterparts. Many Tibetan monks were surprised by the economic stability in the Buddhist temples and monasteries all over China. However most of them do not think that is the way monasteries or monks should be—even far from what they hope for their own future. Dungrub, after coming back from his trip to China in 2003, directly criticized the shortsightedness of the *Siguanhui* authority:

The *Siguanhui* is just satisfied with the 80,000 *yuan* every year. But if we go on like this our monastery will become like those in China. Monks do nothing but selling tickets, running souvenir shops, and becoming tourist guides. [If they are like that] then what is the difference between a monk and a [lay] person with a job? What is the difference between a monastery and a tourist site? I am very afraid of this [happening to our monastery].

This complaint from Dungrub was quite representative among the young monks who consider themselves more modern and experienced with the outside world—as opposed to the old monks who have never left the monastery, like those in the *Siguanhui*. In addition to their worries about the monastery's future there was also a deep-down uneasiness with this job that conflicts with fundamental Buddhist ideology of avoiding any kind of personal confrontation. In fact Dungrub has even proposed an

alternative plan to the current ticket system based on his first year of working experience as one of the three ticket collectors.

Tourists come from such distant places to visit our monastery. We should be happy to give them good explanations of our monastery and our history. But now we have to stop them and if they don't buy tickets we have to prevent them from coming in. As a monk in the monastery, I feel very uncomfortable with this.

I have explained this to *Siguanhui* many times. Tourists coming here everyday are very different people. Some of them are rich and can afford the ticket. Some are poor and can not afford the ticket. Some believe in Buddhism and come here [to pray or for pilgrimage] just like Tibetans.²⁸⁶ Some do not believe in Buddhism and come here just for a visit. Therefore it is not fair to charge them with the same ticket price. If the *Siguanhui* could take my suggestion we should let everyone come in for free. Not only that, we should also provide them with a good guide to explain everything in the monastery and give them some small souvenirs like a *srung mdud* (protective amulet) before they leave. If they were satisfied [with what we provided] and had the ability [to donate] they would possibly donate even more [than a ticket]. If they were poor and could not afford the ticket then they don't have to pay. [At the end the revenue in general is similar. And] we won't have to have conflicts [with tourists] every day. Sometimes I felt very uncomfortable all night if I had tension with someone during the day.

Dungrub's proposal seemed to be too avant-garde even for many monks of his own generation. The *Siguanhui* committee listened to him with much suspicion. Giving free entrance and even souvenirs to tourists simply made no sense to them. They did not give a second thought to this idea. Some even said there was something wrong with Dungrub's head.

²⁸⁶As a general rule, Chinese and Westerners coming to the monastery are treated as tourists and have to buy a ticket to enter the monastery. Tibetans are treated as pilgrims and people who come to pray and are thus free. This is the case in all monasteries and religious/tourist sites in Tibet. However on the practical level the way to determine whether one is Tibetan or not differs widely from one place to another.

The debate over tickets did not end in the monastery and the monastic community. Instead it created a new arena where Tibetan monks, Chinese tourists, and Hui villagers have to refigure their own role in this unfolding historical moment.

6.2.2 Tourist Time and Monastic Time

The creation of the ticket office has introduced a new concept of time—which I call tourist time, because for most monks this time comes with the tourists—to the monastic community, which conflicts with the monastic time with which the monks are more familiar. To compare these two ways of timing I look at two technologies—calendars and daily schedules—used by a specific group in a particular space. In most Amdo Tibetan regions including Taktsang Lhamo the Tibetan calendar has been widely used both for local Tibetans' everyday life and for rituals and festivals in the Tibetan monasteries. In practice, this Tibetan calendar is same as the Chinese lunar calendar and thus different from the Tibetan calendar used in central Tibet which is often considered as the *Tibetan* calendar. For this reason monastic rituals or festival events, such as the Monlam Chenmo, could fall on a different date in an Amdo monastery and in a Lhasa monastery.

On the Muslim side of the village the Hui villagers also use the Chinese lunar calendar for their daily lives, except when they deal with tourists. Unlike the Tibetan rituals and festivals which are counted after the Tibetan/Chinese lunar calendar (Tib: *bod zla*, Ch: *nongli*), Muslim religious rituals and festivals have been based solely on the Islamic calendar (Ch: *yili*). The western calendar is associated with everything related to the government and more recently with the tourists. In the case of the Hui villagers their time has been marked by the five prayer times everyday and the weekly grand prayer every Friday (Ch: *zhuma*). For monks in the monastery it is the monastic call and the Geke that set up the main rhythms of their day. Although clocks and

watches were nothing new to locals including monks, their lives were not timed to and tied up by those little machines.

When Tashi took the ticket collector job with two other monks in 2002, he was not very happy about it but had no choice since it was a decision from the *Siguanhui*. After awhile he complained to me that many of his monk fellows considered him and the others who did this job as lazy because as monks they no longer complied with the monastic routine. Instead they use the time of the watch to measure their day—a characteristic that is often attributed to tourists or to those who work for the government (Tib: *las phyed pa*). As ticket collectors they start their day by opening the ticket office at eight o'clock every morning, and finish their day by closing it at six in the evening. They have nothing to do afterwards.

Monks in the Kirti monastery follow the monastic rhythm set up by the call of a huge Tibetan trumpet (Tib: *dung*) and by the monastery Geke. They start their day at five to six o'clock with their morning session in the monastery assembly hall (Tib: *tshogs chen lha kang*). Since there is usually no breakfast time, many monks bring *tsampa* with them and take it during the session break with some hot tea that is served in the assembly. The morning session ends at eleven to twelve o'clock at noon when monks go back to their dormitory for lunch. The afternoon session often takes place in each college (Tib: *grwa tshang*) with different subjects.²⁸⁷ The evening is the official time for group recitation outside. Everyday after dinner young monk students come out of their dormitory to join their study group under the strict surveillance of the Geke. They follow the traditional Tibetan way of reciting or reading aloud to review what they have learned. During the time of monastic rituals or ceremonies, they often have extra gatherings and chanting sessions throughout the night.

²⁸⁷ As a typical Gelugpa monastery Kirti monastery consists of four colleges: the Philosophical College (Tib: *mtshan nyid grwa tshang*), the Tantric College (Tib: *rgyud pa grwa tshang*), the Kalachakra College (Tib: *dus 'kor grwa tshang*), and the Medical College (Tib: *sman pa grwa tshang*).

Teachers and lamas lead these daily activities and routine monastic rituals, while the Geke observes the monks and punishes those who do not commands. Although most monks now use a clock or a watch, the call of the trumpet on the top of assembly hall is still the standard time scale for everyday monastic events as well as the progression of these events. In each gathering session or event, the Geke is the sole person who controls time. Those who are late for their sessions or gatherings will be scolded and beaten in front of all of the monks. Every day after dark Geke embarked on one of his most important duties—patrolling the monastery border to keep the monks from going out of the monastery after dark and to keep outsiders, especially women, from entering monastery territory. Many tourists do not understand this rule and often end up quarrelling with the Geke when they are refused entry with their tickets. In this case Tashi was approached several times by such dissatisfied tourists. He had no other explanation except that the monastery opens during the day and closes after dark—though there is not actually a door, or even a fence, to close on itself. He later told me that it was very unpleasant to compare his monastery with a tourist site in China.

6.2.3 Tensions between Tibetans and Hui

This issue of tickets and the ticket office has not only created tensions between the monks and tourists and between the young and old monks in the monastery, it has also brought on some new tensions between Tibetan monks and local Hui Muslims. As the major hotel and restaurant owners in town, Hui villagers have benefited from the growing numbers of tourists attracted by the local Tibetans, their culture and mostly their monasteries. From the Tibetan side, especially among monks in the monastery, there has been a growing feeling of both cultural pride and economic jealousy over the Hui people. However on the Hui side they completely do not accept

this view. Most Hui business owners attribute their economic success mainly to their ethnically marked talent of doing business and the Chinese government policy which has created a good environment for doing business.

Although the tension exists in many aspects of local life it has been expressed only in some subtle ways. As the tourist business increases year by year, some local Hui businesses started to believe that tourists could become a more reliable source of their income than those locals who have been their customers for centuries. A successful Hui restaurant owner told me that if they are lucky the money they make from the tourists during the month of Monlam Chenmo can be more than their total annual income from their local business. Many Hui restaurants have started to prepare two different menus during the tourist season—one for locals and one for tourists. From 2003 some newly opened Hui restaurants targeted tourists. These restaurants only open several months a year during the short tourist season and stay closed most of the time. They are known to the locals as serving only expensive dishes and no local food (such as the cheap Hui style beef noodle soup).

In Taktsang Lhamo, some of the old Hui family houses and lands were initially granted by the Kirti monastery and have since been inherited for many generations. They are often on the outer circle of the monastery. Ali's house is one of these. It is right next to the monastery ticket office. From 2004 he opened one of the new tourist restaurants in his house and made good income during the Monlam Chenmo. After the tourist peak of the May 1st national holiday, I went to his restaurant for a casual talk. Ali and his wife looked both tired and happy from a busy but exciting week of tourists. The previous week had been the so-called "golden week" of May—one week of national holiday during which more and more urban Chinese leave the big cities to escape the increasing working pressures and city pollution. "If you had come any time last week," Ali said, "I would not have even one minute to talk to you." He admitted

that he had only gone once to the *zhuma* prayer on Friday and had no time to do the five time daily prayers for the past week. “We were not able to close [the restaurant door] before midnight for one week,” he said. Since I live across the street from Ali’s house I could hear the tourist noise in his restaurant late at night. Many other Hui family shops also extend their business hours during the tourist season. Nine to ten o’clock is no longer the bedtime for many locals. This, according to Ali, is the result of more competition from other restaurants in town. “If you want to attract more tourists you must satisfy their needs,” Ali explained to me proudly.

But satisfying the tourists’ needs has also created certain tensions between some Hui businesses and Tibetan monastic community. Coming out of Ali’s restaurant I went directly to the ticket office to visit my friends there. I immediately felt that the monks in the ticket office seemed to be unhappy knowing that I had emerged from Ali’s restaurant. After a short reluctance Tashi told me not to go to Ali’s restaurant any more because the Hui had made more trouble for the monastery ticket sales. I had seen the monks’ difficulties of selling tickets everyday. Among all the tourists, foreigners have the best reputation for being honest ticket buyers—with the only exception of those from Islamic countries. “They [Muslim tourists] all said they are going to the Mosque [thus don’t want to buy a ticket],” monk Dongrub said, “but who knows where they go once they enter from here!” Chinese tourists are often the most trouble. “Some of them said they are Buddhists [thus don’t want to buy tickets]. Some saw that we are monks and wanted to negotiate the price. Some just refused to pay!” Dongrub said, “I have too much headache (Tib: *nga zhi gi sgo kho’i*) [with the Chinese tourists].” This time I learned that recently Kirti monks have caught some Chinese tourists who entered the monastery without buying tickets. Eventually they got to know that it was the Hui restaurants that gave these tourists the “back door” access in order to attract more business. Since there was not any kind of gate or border

to keep the monastery separate from the rest of the village, Hui restaurant owners, who are familiar with local roads, often show Chinese tourists in their restaurants the alternative ways to get around the ticket office. As a conclusion, Dongrub said “Islamic people are not good people” (Tib: *yisilan myi ma hra gi*).²⁸⁸

In addition to this conflict over tickets, Tibetan monks have also discovered that more and more tourists have learned local history—mostly the history of Tibetan monastery and lama lineage—from the local Hui restaurant owners. Although many monks in the monastery are very erudite about their own history and some of them are also willing to share their knowledge with outsiders, most monks do not speak enough Chinese to communicate with the Chinese tourists. The Hui restaurant owners not only have the linguistic convenience to communicate with the tourist. But they are also the main service providers in town and are very apt at dealing with various kinds of people due to their extensive business experience. They quickly convinces most Chinese tourists that their version of local history and stories—though all about this Tibetan land, Tibetan people, and Tibetan monastery—are as authentic and detailed as those from the Tibetan themselves. Whenever I talked to the monks about this, they were all very angry and eager to point out that whatever the Hui said is not trustworthy.

6.3 The Political Economy of Tea

Over the past several decades, the emphasis on human agency in practice theory has become central in much anthropological work. Following the theoretical framework provided by Bourdieu (1977), Sherry Ortner defined practice theory as “a theory of relationship between the structures of society and culture on the one hand,

²⁸⁸ Today Tibetans borrow the Chinese word *yisilan* to indicate Islam as a religion as well as Hui for the name of ethnic group. Traditionally in this region there was seldom a specific word for Islam in local Tibetan and the Tibetan term for the Hui is *hehe*. I have noticed many monks still using *hehe* as a general name for all Muslims, so the Muslims from outside China are called *shijie hehe* (lit. “foreign Muslim”).

and the nature of human action on the other.” As a promising approach to emphasize human action and agency, the theory of practice posits a way to connect individuals to society by transcending the traditional dualism of subjectivism and objectivism. Here I intend to connect everyday practice of individuals to their specific social political context. In other words, to illuminate the human agency and cultural logics of human practice, it is important to place the everyday practices into a context that is sensitive to political and economic concerns.

In the following paragraphs I analyze one of the most important everyday practices in the Tibetan monastery—patron relations and patronage. I shall show that the cultural politics in the people’s everyday actions are indeed closely connected to the changing political-economic context. I first demonstrate the changing context of the political economy in the Tibetan monastic system in China. Through focusing on the practice of patronage I emphasize a scenario of conflict: On the one hand, new Chinese government regulations have sanctioned the practice of Tibetan religion but cut off its former political and economic function and thus forced the Tibetan monastery to completely change its way of survival; on the other hand, since the 1980s many Tibetan monks and reincarnate lamas have gradually discovered the new possibility of patronage from Chinese Buddhist believers as well as some new urban capitalists in China who are eagerly looking for cultural exotics both to reinforce their own political and economic status and to relieve the feeling of cultural loss left by the accelerating economic development. This new Chinese influence has further stratified the monastic community in the post-1980s era and made the religious revival on this ethnic borderland more complex.

6.3.1 Changing Contexts of the Monastic Patronage System

One of the crucial issues in the Tibetan monastic system, both before and after the Communist takeover, is to secure patronage. Patronage enables the monastery to carry out all rituals and ceremonies and provides daily sustenance for the monks. Meanwhile it also carries a heavy symbolic value for the monastery and for the reincarnate lama—those who receive more patronage are those who have a higher reputation and more prestige, and vice versa. This giving and receiving relation is an important mode of interaction between the lay and monastic communities of Tibetan society.

In Taktsang Lhamo the formal Tibetan term *sbyin bdag*—patron or sponsor—is often replaced by a more popular expression in the monastery called “tea” (Tib: *mang ja*, lit. “lots of tea” or “tea for the mass”). Specifically this tea refers to anything—tea, butter, meal, cash—that is donated by one or more patrons for certain monastic ritual or ceremony and distributed to the monks in the name of the hosting lama. Thus to be a sponsor or patron is widely known as “to make a lot of tea” (Tib: *mang ja skol*).

Unlike their Chinese counterparts, Tibetan monks (particularly in Gelugpa tradition) are exempt from any physical work involved in agricultural or pastoral production. In the pre-1950s age, the Kirti monastery had regular income taxes from subject villages, tax that constituted the major source of monastic revenue in addition to other donations. A special monk crew headed by a close relative of the Kirti Lama was assigned separately from the monastic community to ensure the annual tax income and to manage the monastery funding as their life-long profession.²⁸⁹ The incorporation of Tibet into the new Chinese nation state system strictly subdued any

²⁸⁹ According to the Chinese government survey of the Kirti monastery in 1955, the total monastery assets included silver cash (300,000 *yuan*), cattle (329,000 *yuan*), real estate (800,000 *yuan*) and land (ABLD 1985). See figure 5.

former political and economic power for the Tibetan monastic system—a system that had supported Tibetan monasteries for centuries. With the relaxation of the Chinese state policy on religious practices since the 1980s, much scholarship has concentrated on the ethnic and religious revival in China including ethnic Tibetan regions.²⁹⁰ Yet few have given emphasis to the nature and the change of monastery patronage as well as its stake in the post-reform era—what I call the “political economy of tea.”

After the termination of the tax-based patronage in the 1950s, especially under the post-1980s Chinese regulation of monastery self-sufficiency (Ch: *yisi yangsi*), there has been a significant diversification of patrons and patronage in the Kirti monastic revival.²⁹¹ While the government has prohibited the previous mandatory patronage to the monastery through legal regulation, the boom of the Chinese market gradually transformed context of the monastery patronage. Monastery income is uncertain and the monastery leaders have to deal with many new situations that they have never imagined before. This diversification of patrons and patronage also affects various changes in religious revival. It has deeply affected the reconstruction of newly revived monastic lives as well as local ethnic relations.

6.3.2 The Political and Economic Bases of Religious Revival

When religious practice was initially permitted again in the late 1970s, Alak Lobsang with his several young novices spent much of their time traveling around the nearby pastureland and agricultural villages. He announced the news from the government and tried to revive public faith in the monastery and monkhood that had been brutally suppressed during the Cultural Revolution. At the same time he prepared

²⁹⁰ On the religious revival in China after the 1980s, see, i.e., (Gladney 1991; Jing 1996), on Tibetan regions see (Goldstein and Kapstein 1998; Makley 1999).

²⁹¹ For research on the similar subject of the patron and patronage among the exile Tibetan communities, see (Zablocki 2005).

the reconstruction of the Kirti monastery by recruiting young monks and collecting donations. Most people were very excited by this news but suspicious of its veracity. As they learned it to be true people started to resume their religious practices and their patronage. Villages once the subjects of Kirti monastery now formed a volunteer league to support the Kirti monastery through their patronage on a rotating basis—each village supporting one ritual of the year. For an elaborate ritual like Monlam Chenmo the cost can be huge. Even with the support from all villages Monlam Chenmo in the 1980s was held in a tent that functioned as a great assembly hall. There was no formal costume to wear in the *cham*. Patronage was mostly in the form of various kinds of necessities for the monastery and for the monks such as food, drinks, and labor services contributed to rebuild the monastery or to facilitate the monastic rituals.

Many monks who entered the monastery during the 1980s remember that period as having more patrons and patronage but fewer monks in the monastery compared to today. “People then were poor but they were more devoted,” a monk said. Therefore although patronage was not significant in its amount many monks still believe that they had a better life back then. After all there were very few occasions that they actually needed money and everything then was still much cheaper. Back in the early 1980s there was only one Hui restaurant in town and it was considered a luxury by the monks to have a beef noodle soup for half *yuan* in the restaurant.

Only ten years later, when I was in Taktsang Lhamo in 1999, a major topic in the town during the Monlam Chenmo was about patronage. It was the largest amount of money that the Kirti monastery had received so far—the total amount was said to be 100,000 *yuan*, a huge sum of money considering the monthly wage of a local government employee’s was less than 500 *yuan*. This money had solved the problem of the costume making and final decoration of the grand assembly hall as well as the

living expenses for all the monks during the fifteen-day ceremony. More conspicuously this huge amount of money came from one local Tibetan family who ran a series of local businesses in Taktsang Lhamo and got rich in the new market economy. While in the beginning everyone in town (mostly monks) had great respect for this family because of this patronage, it was not until later that people began to talk about the utilitarian end of this patronage. Because of this patronage this family business got the privilege of building the only hotel located on the monastery property. After it was built in 2001 this Tibetan hotel immediately took away a large part of customers from many Hui hotels in town because of its monastery location and because it was seen as authentically Tibetan by tourists. Since then the family businesses have greatly benefited from the economic privilege they got from the monastery.²⁹²

In normal years, donations to the monastery were not extraordinary. Alak Lobsang used all his salary, besides the donation he received, to make “tea” in the regular monastic ceremonies. With the change of the Chinese government policy and the redress offered (Ch: *luoshi zhengce*) after the Cultural Revolution, many head lamas in these monasteries (including Alak Lobsang) have been assigned a position in the local government.²⁹³ To many local Tibetans, the concept of salary has been introduced with the advent of Chinese government. Yet it had always been associated with Chinese and with someone who works for the government (Tib: *las phyed pa*).

²⁹² Several years later, many monks including some *Siguanhui* members in the Kirti monastery started to regret their decision to give those privileges in return for the patronage. They believed that this family business—including a hotel, a restaurant, a tea house and a shop, all by the side of Kirti monastery—has been benefitted more by the tourist trade than they have contributed to the monastery. This eventually led to the decision of the Kirti monastery *Siguanhui* to build their own hotel, a much bigger one, right next to this family hotel.

²⁹³ These positions were often rendered under the Political Consultative Conference (Ch: *zhengxie*) or National United Front (Ch: *tongzhanbu*), which are the principal government entities for communicating between the ethnic religious community and the local government. The rank of the position given to each lama often depends on the scale of the monastery and the reputation of the lama himself. The highest rank of this kind was that of the former Panchen Lama who held a senior position in the National People’s Congress.

When Alak Lobsang started his job in the local government, he felt that holding a position in the government distracted him from his responsibilities in the regular monastic affairs since he constantly had to attend government meetings in different places. Yet he also admitted that these frequent travels are essential to maintain his position both in the Chinese government and more importantly in the new system of monastic organization (see figure 6). With the political and economic function eliminated from the former monastic system Alak Lobsang as the leader in the new monastic system had no choice but to deal with the local Chinese government for the various political and economic factors related to the monastery. He told me that the first cash patronage he distributed in the monastery was the money he received from the government. Although his salary was not very high it gave him more freedom to choose many things he needed in the growing market and which the donations he usually received—yak butter, meat, *tsampa*—could not offer.

Compared to Alak Lobsang, many other reincarnate lamas in the Kirti monastery do not have the same access to political and economic resources. Moreover, with the new Chinese religious regulations, some reincarnate lamas could not even resume their status in the monastery. According to these regulations on religious organization and religious personnel, all monasteries and monks have to register with the religious bureau in the local government and obey the specific rules on religious practice. Every reincarnate lama in the monastery has to be approved by the religious bureau and issued a “certificate of reincarnate lama” (Ch: *huofo zheng*) before he can publicly hold any religious positions in the monastery.²⁹⁴ This is meant to filter out the external influence from the Tibet independence movement, particularly from the exile

²⁹⁴ In September 2007 the highest Chinese government administrative unit, National Religious Bureau, officially issued the “Regulations on the Reincarnation Lama in Tibetan Buddhism.” http://www.gov.cn/ziliao/flfg/2007-08/02/content_704414.htm. However, the political control of the reincarnation lamas in Tibetan monastery has been applied well before this official issuance. See for example the controversy over the reincarnation of the Panchen Lama in 1995 (Zablocki 2005).

Tibetan religious community which has been connected in one way or another with the Tibetan monasteries in China. Reincarnate lamas found and recognized by the exile community are thus not recognized from the Chinese side. Without a position in the monastery a reincarnate lama would lose the official title to host any ritual in the monastery and to receive patronage during those ceremonies. It would in turn hurt his reputation in the monastic community because of his inability to generate patronage even if he was initially accepted through the recognition of the exile community. His public influence among the people would diminish unless he could improvise his own way to reinstall himself and his status in the new monastic system.

The stories of generous Western patrons have been widespread among the monks in the Kirti monastery. Most of these stories come from those who have traveled to India. After the Chinese open-door policy in the 1980s, Taktsang Lhamo started to see Western tourists from time to time. During my fieldwork in Taktsang Lhamo I was approached several times by the monks to write letters in English to Europe or America. All of them requested donations. Yet I have not heard of any successes during my stay or after. A monk friend who asked me once to write such a donation letter talked to me in a disappointed tone that he heard many big monasteries in Lhasa and Dharamsala received generous patronage from *shijie* (foreigners), yet no one seemed to be interested in Taktsang Lhamo.²⁹⁵ In recent years, while many reincarnate lamas still tried hard to find their way out of the dilemma in the new monastic system, some lamas and monks have found improvised solutions from the newly discovered Chinese patrons and patronage. Many of these Chinese patrons have been found among the Chinese tourists.

²⁹⁵ *Shijie* is Amdo dialect (Tib: *phyi rgyal*), the equivalent of *yinji* (foreigner) in Lhasa dialect.

6.4 Buddhism, Tourism and the Chinese Patrons: The Stories of a Lama and a Monk

“Chinese Buddhism” and “Tibetan Buddhism,” despite their same family name, did not share the same religious concept of “Buddhism” until the early 20th century. According to Gray Tuttle (2005), the increasing interaction between Tibetan and Chinese Buddhists since then has occupied a unique place in the creation of the modern Chinese state. The exile of the Dalai Lama and his Tibetan government in 1959 has brought Tibetan Buddhism from the remote Himalayas to the front stage of the modern world. Since then Tibetan Buddhism gained great popularity both in Western countries and in the Chinese world outside the mainland (Schell 2000; Zablocki 2005). The religious revival in Tibet following the change of Chinese policy in 1980s has further complicated this situation. It has not only brought many Tibetans in China back to their long-defunct religion but it has also regenerated the Chinese popular interest in Tibet and Tibetan Buddhism. David Germano (1998) has documented a charismatic Amdo Tibetan lama, Khenpo Jigme Phuntsog, during the Tibetan Buddhist revival in the 1990s. Among all his followers, Chinese Buddhists including monks, nuns, and lay people have constituted a significant part of the student body in the Buddhist institute that Khenpo established.

While Western backpackers initially introduced the idea of tourism to local people in 1980s, it was the Chinese tourists later—individual travelers such as students, amateur artists, and later the new generation of urban capitalists—who have quickly become the main tourist body on the street of Langmusi and in alleys of the monastery.²⁹⁶ Among these Chinese tourists, quite a few claimed to be Buddhist

²⁹⁶ Taksang Lhamo was listed in many western language guidebooks, such as “Lonely Planet”, as early as in the 1990s. Since the late 1990s more and more Chinese tourists have come to know Taksang Lhamo through the Chinese media and guidebooks. However the tourist boom after the construction of the Lan-Lang Road in 2004 is still dominated by individual tourists and few commercial tourist groups have arrived in this borderland. Those commercially organized tourist groups that actually pass by this

practitioners at home (Ch: *jushi*) or Buddhist believers (Ch: *xinfo*). They came as both tourists and pilgrims. Other tourists range from those trying to escape the urban pressure to amateur artists looking for inspiration from exotic minorities. Despite the different interests, all these tourists, both Buddhist and non-Buddhist, have been attracted to the Tibetan monastery, Tibetan monks, and Tibetan Buddhist practices.

6.4.1 Alak Jigme

The new Chinese tourist gaze on the monastery and monks has gradually influenced the newly re-constituted monastic relations. It has created a new opportunity for those who are willing—and first of all who are able—to deal with these Chinese tourists. The change in Alak Jigme’s status in the Kirti monastery represents a new agent in the Tibetan monastic revival and the new monastery system, namely Chinese patronage.

Alak Jigme was a young reincarnate lama in his 20s. Since the Dalai Lama recognized him as a reincarnate lama in the Kirti monastery when he was fifteen years old, Alak Jigme has become one of the “uncertified reincarnate lamas” under the new Chinese rule. His official position (as an abbot of one of the four colleges) in the Kirti monastery could not be confirmed for that reason. An immediate consequence following the lack of resolution of his position was the uncertain patronage from the Tibetan patrons as well as the low reputation of the monastery that in turn worsened the future prospect of patronage. When I first met him in my friend Tashi’s house in 1999, he was doing nothing but “sitting” (Tib: *'dug*, a local Tibetan colloquial expression meaning “staying or wandering idly”) in the monastery.

region often pass by Taktsang Lhamo without staying. A tour guide told me that it is mostly because of the low quality and capacity of local tourist infrastructure. He said, “people want to feel the wildness of nature. But after one day of wildness they still need to stay in a modern hotel and restaurant with everything they are familiar with.” Interview in Langmusi, May 2004.

In the Kirti monastery two positions are needed to make “tea”—patronage to the whole monastic community—on a regular basis through the year: one is the abbot of the monastery or college (Tib: *mkhan po*) that is often held by a reincarnate lama of the monastery; the other is the Geke of the monastery or college that can be held by any monk in the monastery recommended by the reincarnate lamas or the *Siguanhui*. Lamas or monks who are going to hold these two positions usually have to prepare for the patronage well before they actually take the position. Although there are no written rules for the actual amount of each patronage, there are definitely certain expectations from the monk public and these expectations have been growing quickly in recent years. If the patronage does not meet the public expectation, people would “talk a lot.”²⁹⁷ The lama or Geke who was responsible for the patronage would feel embarrassed and then have more difficulties in maintaining his reputation in his position. On the contrary, if the patronage exceeds public expectation, people would also talk about it afterwards. In this case those who gave the patronage would gain more respect both in their positions and in the monastery. This ideal connection between the wealthy patronage and the highly renowned lama or Geke position in the monastery has been based on the pre-1950s political and economic context.

Shortly after Tashi started to work at the ticket office in 2002 he met a group of Chinese tourists from Shanghai. They claimed to be Buddhist practitioners or Buddhist believers and came to Taktsang Lhamo for religious purpose more than tourism. After a short congenial talk with Tashi they were immediately attracted to the reincarnate lama he mentioned because he has been recognized by the Dalai Lama. Tashi then brought them to meet Alak Jigme in his house, to receive his blessing—a white *khada* (ceremonial scarf) and a colorful silk tie for protection (Tib: *srung mdud*).

²⁹⁷ Tib: *kha mang gi*, literally means “many mouths,” it is a local Tibetan colloquial expression, meaning to gossip or talk badly about someone or something in a private circle.

This meeting proved to have a magical affect on both the Chinese group and Alak Jigme. Although the Chinese group relied totally on Tashi's rough translation to understand the few words Alak Jigme said, they apparently left with complete satisfaction. After some time one of the Chinese in this group—a wealthy auto dealer in Shanghai—contacted Tashi again through the new *shouji* (mobile phone) he got. The Chinese businessman wanted to invite Alak Jigme for a blessing trip to Shanghai with all their expenses covered. Having no responsibility in the monastery at that time, Alak Jigme gladly accepted the invitation and asked Tashi to be his translator.

The trip was a fruitful one. Not only did Alak Jigme and Tashi experience an airplane for the first time in their lives, but it was also the first time that they gave blessing to a group of Chinese businessmen in a five-star hotel. The Chinese group, all of whom were wealthy clients of the auto dealer, was fascinated by the blessing of a young Tibetan lama who was recognized by the Dalai Lama.²⁹⁸ At the end of their stay the Chinese host learned that such a young, promising lama was still taking a bus to go to the countryside for blessing or teaching. Thus they suggested a donation of a four-wheel drive Toyota. When Tashi recalled that moment to me, he made a shocked expression with his face. But in the end they decided not to accept this huge donation. Tashi explained to me that in the Kirti monastery only Alak Lobsang had a four-wheel drive at that time, which was given to him because of his position in the government. It would be very awkward for Alak Jigme to have the same car as someone with a lower status. For practical reasons, it was more urgent for Alak Jigme at that time to “make a lot of tea” for the monk public than to ride in a luxury four-wheel drive vehicle. Finally the Chinese patrons agreed instead to pay for the “tea” expenses (patronage) in all ceremonies that he would host during one year.

²⁹⁸ Tashi told me that the fact Alak Jigme could not have any position in the Kirti monastery indirectly proved his connection with the Dalai Lama.

When I came back to Taktsang Lhamo in 2003 I was surprised to hear that Alak Jigme unofficially held the abbot position of the Kalachakra College in the Kirti monastery. Monks were talking about the generous patronage he gave during the rituals he hosted. A young monk told me it was the biggest amount he received in one monastic gathering—five kilos of yak butter and twenty *yuan* cash. Although the Chinese source of his patronage was no secret to the monk community, Alak Jigme still got the reputation of being good at dealing with new things and thus won a lot of public support, especially from the majority of young monks. Some even suggested that the *Siguanhui* should confront the government's disapproval on this issue and put Alak Jigme in his appropriate position in the Kirti monastery. The young monks' support to Alak Jigme is not just a latent critique towards the older generation of authorities who are slow to direct their monastery in the new social economic situations. In the new monastic administrative system the *Siguanhui* leaders and its committee members are officially elected through a monastery-wide open vote every four to five years—though the final result still has to be approved by the Religious Bureau. Although there is usually no suspense regarding who will be elected, some old monks elected confessed in private that they are now under more public pressure than before when they have to make any monastic decision.

Alak Jigme's success in the Kirti monastery seemed to also have inspired others in a similar position. The most visible case is the changing attitude of the Geke towards the Chinese tourists when they maintained public orders. In previous years only a government authorized badge issued to some state employed journalists or government officials could guarantee privileged access to the ritual grounds during the monastic ceremony (Makley 1999). During the recent years the number of tourists and amateur artists to this region, particularly during the festivals like Monlam Chenmo, has been skyrocketing. Armed with the latest fancy gear from AV equipment to four-

wheel drive vehicles, these tourists come explicitly to hunt for everything exotic. It is thus no wonder that the high-sitting leading lama and the well dressed and equipped Geke during the ceremony have become the most observed subjects. While the traditional symbolic power of the Geke requires a more violent treatment towards the public, regardless of whether they are Chinese tourists or the Tibetan pilgrims, today this responsibility has been confronted with Geke's pragmatic need to "make a lot of tea" during his tenure. During the last two years of Monlam Chenmo that I have attended, I observed that the Geke has visibly treated the Chinese tourists in mild manner, even though they have obviously been intruding during the monastic rituals.²⁹⁹ In contrast to Geke's gentle treatment to the Chinese tourists, the young monks in the monastic community, particularly the child monks, were very hostile towards the intruding Chinese photographers. Many Chinese photographers who passed the Geke's control into the ritual center finally had to give up in order to protect themselves and their expensive equipment from the constant small stones coming from the crowds of young monk.

6.4.2 Monk Dzoba

Just before I left Taktsang Lhamo in 2005 monk Dzoba became a popular subject of talking in the monastic community. The former abbot of the Medical College had resigned from his position for certain reasons—and one of them was said to be his inability to generate necessary patronage. Before the *Siguanhui* assigned a new abbot, monk Dzoba bravely suggested that he could be the new abbot of the Medical College. This act shocked everyone in the monastery since it was probably

²⁹⁹ During the Monlam Chenmo 2004 when a Geke saw I was taking photos and videos he even called on me to enter the ritual ground to take photos right in front of the Tibetan public.

the first time in the Kirti monastery history that a monk volunteered to become an abbot of a college.

Dzoba is no more than a normal monk in the Kirti monastery. Since he first arrived in the Kirti monastery in the early 1980s he was known among his fellow monks as a *Gyagarma* (Chinese lover). As he comes from mixed region with Tibetan, Hui, and Chinese, Dzoba naturally speaks good Chinese and has many “Chinese habits,” such as drinking green tea (instead of Tibetan tea), eating Chinese style food (instead of *tsampa*), sitting in a chair (rather than on the floor), or sleeping with a quilt (rather than in a Tibetan style robe). While these were initially talked about and laughed at by many of his fellow monks, nowadays he has become prouder of these Chinese habits as well as his Chinese language ability.

Through his meeting with many Chinese tourists to Taktsang Lhamo as well as his own trips to China, not only has Dzoba made many Chinese connections, but his knowledge about the outside world has made him like a rising celebrity in the monastery. Many monks like to come to his house for dinner because they would enjoy hearing about all the interesting things from outside: how Tibetan monks can stay for free in Chinese temples during their pilgrimage, what is it like to stay in a high-class hotel, and how some rich Chinese Buddhists can be more generous than Tibetan patrons. He often attracts many young monks who are curious about everything outside the monastery. He also has some fancy gear brought from the outside that many monks like to inspect. He was one of the first in Taktsang Lhamo who owned a mobile phone and almost every time he came back from the outside he would change to a new model with some new fancy functions.

His monk friends believe that Dzoba’s confidence to go against the monastic mainstream comes from his knowledge about the outside as well as his alleged business success. Monks in Kirti monastery are not strictly forbidden to be involved in

any kind of commercial business. However, it is widely considered as a shame or dishonor to do so for monks who have taken all the vows. Dzoba insisted that he had no business relation with his Chinese friends. But everyone else in the monastery seemed sure that Dzoba has commercially benefited from his Chinese liaison. They started to tease him by calling him *akhu laoban* (“monk boss” or “monk businessman”)—a combination of a Tibetan word for “monk” and a Chinese word for “boss” or “businessman” implying his business relations with the Chinese.

The fact that Dzoba as an ordinary monk nominated himself publicly for a high monastery position showed his confidence in both his celebrity status and his financial abilities, which many in the monastery would not openly announce but nevertheless admit as an important factor in the monastery position today. Although the *Siguanhui* did not grant this position to Dzoba in the end, the influence of this event has reconfirmed in the minds of many monks and reincarnate lamas that to be a monk or a lama in the monastery today no longer means the same thing as it did before. Monks who are quick to understand and adapt themselves well to the new context (such as Alak Jigme and monk Dzoba) find it an time with more opportunities. However few have thought of the stakes that are involved in these new opportunities.

6.5 Food, Mobile Phones and Stomach-ache: Modernization and Consumption in the Ethnic Borderland

The building of the Lan-Lang Road has made this ethnic borderland more accessible to the Chinese nation, both geographically and economically. Meanwhile it has also greatly increased the mobility of the locals for participating in the fast growing nation-wide market that has developed since the 1980s (Davis 2000). Compared to my previous stays I felt immediately, when I arrived in 2003, that there were significantly increased choices of commercial products, particularly industrial

food, imported from outside. Many local Hui residents have opened new shops with more consumer goods. The new Lan-Lang Road has made it possible to transport more products from elsewhere in China with much lower cost than before. Three vegetable shops—two run by the Chinese vendors from Sichuan and one by a local Hui family—have supplied the increasing restaurant demand for fresh vegetables. One Hui family opened the first commercial public shower to meet the increasing demand.³⁰⁰ On the top of the hill of Taktsang Lhamo valley, China Mobile has set up a transmission tower and put the mobile phone coverage of this region into its national network. Tourists can now get connected through their mobile phone in Taktsang Lhamo. Even some advanced locals started to carry a mobile phone bought from outside. Although most of these facilities were a direct response to the growing need of tourists, the explosive choices for consumption suddenly poured into this ethnic borderland and tourists have become live models of consumption practice deeply influencing the everyday practices in the local Tibetan and Hui.

While consumption used to be a sub-category of production, it has attracted much scholarly attention in recent decades. Many have linked the concrete everyday practices of consumption to other constitutive parts of culture and society such as religion, ethnicity, nationalism, globalization, political economy, etc. (Anagnost 1997; Appadurai 1996; Certeau 1984; Davis 2000; Gladney 1998b). Borrowing from theorists like Michel de Certeau (1994), this scholarship highlights the individual creativity and ability to control consumption practice and tries to restore the human agency that could otherwise be buried in the grand discourse. In the case of China the rise of consumerism with the reform and opening up policy since the 1980s has been generally positioned as a new challenge to the political hegemony of the Chinese

³⁰⁰ Before this public shower, the only place we could take a shower was in one of the local hotels, which often did not have enough supply of water or electricity.

government (Davis 2000), an alternative voice in the taken-for-granted concept of the “Chinese culture” (Latham, et al. 2006), or an emergence of public sphere as a result of the retreat of government intervention (Gillette 2000). The consumption of food, for example, is the one of the most explicit cases in which the everyday practices can be at the heart of such ideological domain as the reconstruction of ethnic identity or the resurgence of nationalism (Cesaro 2000; Rudelson 1997). In her ethnography of urban Hui in Xi’an, Gillette (2000) documented a contemporary Chinese Muslim community in China that has openly embraced the Islamic tradition as an alternative index to achieve what they envision as modern or modernization. However, as she contended, despite the resistance to the Chinese state imposed ideology “[m]ost ordinary Chinese citizens [including urban Hui residents in Xi’an] shared the government leaders’ material standard of modernization.”³⁰¹ Indeed it is this hybridity that characterizes many parts of the Chinese as well as the ethnic minority society in contemporary China.³⁰²

My own research in Taktsang Lhamo shows a similarly nuanced scenario of the everyday practices of consumption. It supports the view that increased choices of individual consumption practice have provided a new arena for the religious revival and ethnic identity reconstruction in the ethnic borderland of post-reform China. Both religious revival and ethnic identity have been expressed through various daily practices of consumption which were made possible by a simultaneous political relaxation and market expansion in China. Even sickness, as I shall show, can be incurred, diagnosed and cured through the ethnically marked practices of consumption. While this new consuming expression of ethnicity and religion does pose a new

³⁰¹ See (Gillette 2000: 15). Also (Upton 1996; Davis 2000).

³⁰² Johnathan Lipman has suggested a “hyphenated identity” in which Hui could be comfortably be situated as both Chinese and Muslim without reducing each into the other (Lipman 1996). Dru Gladney also used a similar concept when he criticized Huntington’s “clash of civilization” (Gladney 1998b; Huntington 1996).

challenge to the Chinese state hegemony, it has nevertheless been conditioned by the political and economic context of Chinese modernization—some have labeled it “a new form of governmentality” (Ngai 2003).³⁰³

6.5.1 Meat, Tsampa, Tea, and Vegetables

As a traditional nomadic region local food structure in Taktsang Lhamo has been rather simple. Meat and milk products from sheep and yaks are the main local produce. Tibetan peasants from the neighboring agricultural regions provide ample supply of *tsampa*—the Tibetan staple food. Together they constitute the principle content in the local Tibetan diet. Symbolically meat represents an expensive or luxury food served in celebrative occasions while *tsampa* is often viewed as a cheap default food in everyday life.

Local Tibetans including monks love to eat meat.³⁰⁴ A typical local treat to welcome honored guests, close friends and family members, or to celebrate a festival season are some gigantic pieces of freshly cut and boiled meat accompanied with steamed Tibetan Momo (locally referred to as *zangbao*) stuffed with meat, or preferably fat. For many local Tibetans, having meat mixed with vegetables is considered the “Chinese way.” To eat purely vegetables is nearly unthinkable. When I lived in my friend Tashi’s house, he always had a whole leg of pork or sheep (Tib: *skam sha*), dry and raw, hung on the wall of his living room. Besides using it for

³⁰³ By criticizing the “myth of democratizing through equal access to consumption”, Ngai (2003) pointed out that behind this seemingly democratized practice of consumption it is usually the social, political, and economic context that determines the individual access to various social and economic resources. Therefore in the post-reform era of Chinese state consumption has also become “a new form of governmentality.”

³⁰⁴ Compared to Chinese Buddhist monks, Tibetan monks have not been restricted on their diet, mainly meat. My monk friends explained this with the severe climate condition on the Tibetan plateau that requires more energy—thus meat—from food and that also makes growing vegetable nearly impossible. In recent years, with the increasing global influence on Tibetan communities, particularly through the exile Tibetan communities in India, meat eating has become a new concern in the monastic community in Taktsang Lhamo.

cooking, Tashi's favorite joy every time he finished chanting was to jump up from the floor, take a knife from the side table, slice a big piece of meat with fat from the hanging leg, and then fill up his mouth with a look of complete satisfaction.

In contrast to the luxury and festive nature of meat, *tsampa* serves mostly as cheap breakfast and lunch for monks who have to go through the long morning sessions, for lay families who have to be out of home for the whole day herding their cattle, or for those who simply can not afford anything else. As a daily staple food in Tibetan life *tsampa* is a unique Tibetan food adaptation to the high altitude environment. Moreover it has also become a Tibetan cultural symbol that has transcended the geographical, linguistic or other cultural barriers across the Tibetan plateau. Therefore it carries as much material importance to the Tibetan daily life as the symbolic one.³⁰⁵

In many Amdo Tibetan regions where Hui immigrants have settled for centuries Hui food has changed the local Tibetan taste and become an important part of the Tibetan diet. Not only have local Tibetans adapted well to Hui style food, but the Hui influence is found in local Tibetan food as well.³⁰⁶ One of the most popular local Tibetan dishes in Taktsang Lhamo, the *thugpa*—a Tibetan style noodle soup mixed with meat—can be the Tibetan version of the popular Hui restaurant dish the *mianpian*, or Hui noodle soup with meat.

Another significant adaptation in the Tibetan diet is the adoption of Chinese and Hui style tea. Because of the general lack of vegetables in Tibetan diet, tea has

³⁰⁵ Indeed *tsampa* has even become ethnic marker to differentiate Tibetan from non-Tibetans. During the Tibetan uprising in 1959, Tibetans identified themselves as “*tsampa* eaters” in contrast to Chinese as the “rice eaters.” See (Shakya 1993) for more on *tsampa* and Tibetan ethnic identity.

³⁰⁶ In a borderland region where everything is by nature hybrid, it is hard, if possible at all, to describe one particular food in the modern ethnic terms that have been recently created in a nation-state context. It is not my interest to look for the origin of one particular food. But rather I mean to convey the idea of a mutual influence on each cultural tradition through everyday life interaction. See also the later part of this chapter.

always been an important complement in Tibetan everyday life. Unlike in central Tibet where the yak butter tea (Tib: *ja sal ma*) is served all the time along with or outside meals, Tibetan tea in Taktsang Lhamo is often served without butter and salt. After the 1980s Chinese tea has gradually appeared in local Tibetan life. Monk Dzoba remembered vividly that he was often laughed at by other monks at that time for drinking Chinese green tea while everyone else was drinking Tibetan tea. Twenty years later, Tibetans in Taktsang Lhamo including monks are drinking primarily the Chinese green tea (Ch: *lucha*), locally referred to as *xicha* (fine tea or small tea). Only in some occasions people still drink the Tibetan tea (Tib: *bod ja*), locally referred to as *dacha* (coarse tea or big tea), which is now considered cheap. It is now considered awkward, or “face warm” (Tib: *ngo tsha*), to treat a guest with Tibetan tea. In addition to the Chinese green tea, the Hui style Muslim tea (Ch: *babao cha*), locally referred to as *wanzi* (cup), has also become a popular drink in Taktsang Lhamo. Muslim tea is a Hui invention through the history of Chinese interaction. This tea is typically served in a traditional Chinese style cup filled with a mix of Chinese green tea leaves, some cube sugar and several kinds of dry fruit. While Muslim tea used to be consumed only in the Hui community, nowadays it has become popular in Tibetan families and among the Tibetan monks as well.

Vegetables do not grow easily at this altitude and virtually did not exist in the local Tibetan diet. Tibetans borrow the Chinese word *cai* (Tib: *tshal*) for vegetable since the Tibetan word *rtsa* means mostly grass which serves only as food for animals.³⁰⁷ “People here don’t eat *any* vegetables!” This was a local Chinese restaurant owner from Sichuan told me when I went to his restaurant the first time. Since most Chinese dishes in his restaurant come with a mix of meat and vegetables

³⁰⁷ Robert Ekvall has some detailed ethnographic account on the everyday life in Taktsang Lhamo during the 1920s-1940s, in which he has described how nomad Tibetans laughed at those Chinese who eat grass and have no strength.

Tibetan customers typically finished their dishes by picking out the meat and leaving everything else.

The appearance of the three vegetable grocery shops in town was in the beginning because of tourist demand. The Hui vegetable shop serves the special Hui community need since Hui would not buy their vegetables from a non-Hui Chinese shop for religious reasons.³⁰⁸ However after I arrived at Taktsang Lhamo in 2003 I have noticed that eating vegetables has somehow become a trendy thing among the monk community. Although big pieces of meat still play the dominant role in the important days of festivals, many monks started to buy vegetables for their regular meals. At first I related this to the fact that vegetables are a lot cheaper than meat and thus more affordable for poor monks who have little connection to the herding families who have meat.³⁰⁹ It turned out that many monks have much more to say on this subject than simply a price difference. In fact it surprised me that they hardly even mentioned the price factor. Instead they often related eating vegetables to being civilized and modern. As one monk told me after his trip to China:

Before I went to China I only liked to eat meat and butter but never ate any vegetables. During my travel in China because it was hot everywhere I have always had so much grease and a bad odor coming out of my body. Wherever I went [Chinese] people would avoid me. I felt so ashamed of this! (Tib: *nga zhig gi ngo tsha phyi gi*) This is a bit uncivilized (Ch: *bu wenming*), isn't it? Then I realized it was because I ate too much meat and butter. Now I eat vegetables everyday and I find vegetables are also tasty (Tib: *zhim gi*).

³⁰⁸ I have noticed sometimes that some Hui restaurant owners did buy vegetable from the Chinese shop when they served Chinese tourists. It was probably because of the Chinese tourist demand for certain vegetable that was not available from the Hui shop.

³⁰⁹ The meat monks consumed has mostly come from Tibetan nomad or herding families as gift or contributions rather than commercial exchange. For those monks who have little connection to these families (i.e. a monk from agricultural region) they often have less meat at home or they have to exchange what they have (i.e. *tsampa*) with other monks who have meat.

For monks and local Tibetans who have not been to China eating vegetables also became a new fashion which relates to the conception of modern brought by the tourists or their monk friends who have been to the outside world.³¹⁰ Consumption is no longer a simple matter of taste or habit. Rather it is more and more intertwined with such new ideological concepts as modernity, ethnicity, or the state.

Stevan Harrell (1995a) traced the genealogy of the civilizing project that has been constructed between a civilizing center and those to-be-civilized peripheries inhabited by the uncivilized peoples. While this civilizing project served mostly the imperial imagination of their subjects on the fringe of the empire, it has become much more concrete in the nation state era. Since the founding of the People's Republic the Communist Chinese government has propagated a socialist modernization project that promised to bring all nationalities equally to the golden path of socialism. However to articulate the enormous cultural, ethnic, and economic differences in a multi-ethnic nation state within a unified state model of Communist modernization has worked to both incorporate and marginalize those people in a nation building project. After the 1980s this state model of modernization has shifted to a complex mix of materialist pragmatism, a consumer oriented market, and socialist state control. In Taktsang Lhamo the changing consumption practices—from meat, *tsampa* and Tibetan tea to vegetable and Chinese or Muslim tea—show the local participation of the materialistic modernization that Chinese government has advocated. What is at stake, however, is the mutual influence between the materialistic modernization and the ethnic and religious revival. While the local ethnic and religious revival aimed to recuperate the cultural identity and tradition, their change of consumption practices shows a

³¹⁰ I have myself been an agent of modernity in this case as well. Since I came there whenever someone invited me for food they always prepared vegetables. In the beginning it was more curiosity and slowly many of my friends started to relate vegetables with me and with an idea of modernity that I have embodied.

transformed meaning of their tradition which have been paradoxically represented through a Chinese version of modernity (i.e., *bu wenming*, uncivilized).

6.5.2 “My Mobile Phone Eats More Than Me!” Contesting and Contrasting the Modern in Tibetan and Hui Communities

The high popularity of the *shouji* among the monks is first a collective reflection of the conception of modern in the monk community. My fieldwork also shows that the conception of modernity has been conceived quite differently by Tibetan and Hui. These differences have further complicated the ethnic and religious revival in this borderland community.

In 2003 a mobile phone alone without any bundled plan cost more than a month’s salary of a local government clerk. Owning a mobile phone in Taktsang Lhamo was both a flashy symbol of the modern and it could also be a financial burden for most locals. However, based on my own estimation in the field, it was the lowest income group among all locals—namely Tibetan monks—who has the highest ownership rate of mobile phone.³¹¹

After getting a mobile phone, Tashi became more socially respected among monks while at the same felt more financial pressure than before. One night after dinner he was talking on his mobile phone with a friend when suddenly the phone was cut. His mobile phone needed to be recharged with another card in order to be functional again. The phone card costs 50 to 100 *yuan* which represents a large amount of money for a monk who has no regular income—even donations he receives are often not in cash. Frustrated as he was Tashi threw the phone heavily on the table and complained loudly: “I have already had two disciples [to feed]. Now I have to

³¹¹ My estimation was made through interviews with numerous persons in Hui and Tibetan communities. More than half of the Tibetan monks I have talked to have or used to have a mobile phone in 2005. But in the Hui community this percentage was significantly lower.

feed him [*shouji*] too. And this *shouji* eats more than me!” Tashi told me that ever since he had this mobile phone he often ended up spending the only cash he had on a phone card and then “eating *tsampa* three times a day” as he had no money left to buy anything else. As I noticed more monks started to carry a mobile phone, it is true to nearly everyone that their mobile phone “eats” more than themselves. At that time I always wondered why they would keep a mobile phone (and still many others were still so eager to have one) if they could not really afford to use it.

The answer is certainly beyond what can and cannot be afforded. *Shouji*, along with other new things, has become part of new social status and unofficial political status in the monastic community—as opposed to the official monastic hierarchy. When the cheap local mobile phone XLT became a second rave in the monk community it has created a visible mobile phone hierarchy. Monks who use XLT are mostly young novice monks and those who can not afford a *shouji*. As Sangwu explained to me, the expensive *shouji* is for *Akhu* and the relatively cheap XLT is mostly for young novice monks or those poor *Akhu*. “So what kind of *shouji* should the Lamas have then?” I asked. “They all have more advanced *shouji* (Ch: *xianjin de shouji*).” Sangwu answered seriously, “Don’t you see that Alak Jigme’s *shouji* can take photos (Tib: *shouji dbar lan gi*)!” While the traditional monastic hierarchy has cast an ideological projection on the mobile phone the social stratification in the monk community can now be quantified through its material site of the mobile phone. Meanwhile these new changes in the monk community take the Chinese material standard of modernization as an assumption and criteria to prove, at least to themselves, that they (Tibetans) are as modern as everyone else (Chinese or others).

Hui in Taktsang Lhamo also like to think of themselves as modern. They have taken both local Tibetans and the Chinese state as an index against which to contrast their own vision of modernity. On the one hand, Hui apply the official government

standard of modernization to identify themselves as the advanced leading part—along with the Han—among all the nationalities in China. On the other hand, they differentiate themselves unambiguously from the Han by their belief in Islam. Indeed their universal standard of modernization comes directly from what is believed to be the modern nature of Islam which makes all its believers, Hui in this case, just naturally modern. In other words, people who have modern belief are no doubt modern themselves.

In a casual talk with a Hui shop owner, the young man in his 30s answered my questions about Hui-Han difference with rather curiosity: “Why? Aren’t we just like you [Han]? Hui and Han are [ethnically] the same—only that we believe in Islam. Therefore so called Hui are just Han who believe in Islam.” To go on with his explanation on Islam, this young man with high-school level education gave me a speech on Islamic religion and modernization:

For outsiders who don’t know anything about us [Hui] and our belief [Islam] they always ask [me] why you Islamic people are all bellicose and aggressive. This is a big misunderstanding. Let me tell you something more about Islam. Islam is actually not a religion. [Because] religion is [to certain extent] related to superstition. Islam only teaches you the best way to be in the world. These ways of being (Ch: *zuoren de daoli*) include everything from disciplining yourself and being kind to others to keep a hygienic everyday living habit. For example, we only eat sheep that were killed by an Ahong (Imam) and we wash ourselves everyday. That’s why SARS has never reached the Hui area. Islam is a universal truth at all times (Ch: *yisilan jiao shi yongheng de zhenli*). It is the most modern thought (Ch: *zui xiandaihua de sixiang*).

The Hui self alignment with the Chinese at this point should be understood as no more than a cultural statement of being non-exotic in contrast to the local Tibetans who are exotic in both Chinese and Hui eyes—that is why tourists come here to see those Tibetans but not the Hui. Many scholarly works on Chinese Muslim communities in post-1980s China have documented the same trend of Hui applying Islamic ideology

as an alternative to the Chinese official discourse yet still sharing the same materialistic standard of Chinese modernization (Gillette 2000; Gladney 1998b). This was particularly salient when my Hui neighbor Min talked about the education of his two children. He first contended that among all the nationalities in China the Hui emphasize education the most. When I asked how he identified this Hui emphasis on education Min gave me his conception of modern education and of modern Hui by comparing the Chinese school education with the Tibetan monastic education and Hui religious education in mosque.

To be a modern person one's education has to consist two parts. One is the ability part (Ch: *nengli bufen*) which one acquires from school. This [part of education] gives you the ability to make a living in society. The other is the quality part (Ch: *suzhi bufen*) which one gets from his tradition. Both Tibetan monastic education and Hui Mosque education are the quality part [of education]. But that alone is not enough. We also need our kids to go to [Chinese] school in order to acquire modern knowledge. Nowadays China has entered the modern age (Ch: *xiandaihua de shidai*) because of its change to the market economy. But everyone knows that we Hui have always been good at doing business [thus modern] since ancient times!

By showing Hui as an advanced nationality with inherited modern nature—in contrast to the Han Chinese who have just become modern recently, Min's comment has shown an internalized discourse of Hui as a national minority in China with a distinctive culture. Paradoxically this internalization process of the Chinese materialistic standard of modernization also shows the revival of ethnic Hui identity that used to be suppressed in the Han Chinese state.

6.5.3 Hui Tsampa Eaters and Tibetan Stomach-ache

The Hui have always been well known in China for their strict regulations in their religion as well as in their everyday life, particularly their diet restrictions (Ch:

qingzhen).³¹² For this reason the boundary between Hui and others all over China is primarily based on diet restrictions (Gillette 2000: 114-132). Despite the dietary difference there has been a general consensus among both the Hui communities and the non-Hui communities in China that Hui food served in Hui restaurants is both delicious and hygienic because of their religious restrictions.³¹³

In Taktsang Lhamo Hui people are visibly different from the Tibetans with their Chinese style dressing, plus their white hat for men and turban for women. At the same time living in Taktsang Lhamo for generations has also given most of them some distinct physical features as well as some social customs that are characteristic to highland people. For the Hui adaptation to the Tibetan social environment Robert Ekvall (1939) contended early in the 1930s that the longtime trading interaction with the Tibetans has even changed their (Hui) ethnically “bigoted” character and their “truculence and religious intolerance.”³¹⁴

Since the first time I came to Taktsang Lhamo what surprised me the most—besides the fact that every Hui resident speaks excellent Tibetan—was that many local Hui have *tsampa* for their daily meal. One winter afternoon in 2003 I paid a visit to the Hui restaurant owner Zhang and his wife Wu in their restaurant as they were having a late lunch of *tsampa*. Both in their 40s, the Hui couple was each using one hand to

³¹² Food restrictions have been an important aspect in Hui religious life. For many Hui communities in China the religious revival after the 1980s meant first of all resuming their diet restrictions, notably the prohibition of pork. See, (Gillette 2000: ch. 4-5) for a detailed discussion on Islamic diet restrictions in a contemporary urban Hui community in China; Gladney described as “no pigs for the ancestors” (Gladney 1991) in the religious resurgence in a Hui community in the northwest province of Ningxia; and (Hillman 2004) on the religious revival and pork restriction in a Hui community in the Southwest province of Yunnan.

³¹³ In northwest China where Hui population concentrates a local popular Chinese saying goes “the food Hui cooks is good to eat but the word they say is not trustworthy” (Ch: *huihui de fan keyi chi, huihui de hua buneng ting*), which is the Chinese confirmation of the tasty Hui food.

³¹⁴ Robert Ekvall was obviously not a fan of Hui Muslims even though he has been living on this ethnic borderland for a long time. When describing the relation between Hui Muslims and Tibetans on the Sino-Tibetan borderland in 1930s, he said: “the experience and influence of Tibetan trade and travel seem also to have modified the truculence and religious intolerance of the Moslems, for those Moslem communities which have had much trade and contact with Tibetans are not so bigoted as their co-religionists of the Hochow [Linxia] district” (Ekvall 1939: 62).

hold a bowl and using the other hand to mix barley flour with some fresh yak butter and hot Tibetan tea in it until it was made into a kind of flour patties by clasping the mixture—the traditional Tibetan way to make *tsampa*. They did not seem to be embarrassed with my curiosity. On the contrary they answered me with even some pride.

We have been very used to it [*tsampa*] since we have been living here for generations. Our ancestors have been eating *tsampa* because it was the cheapest way to eat while traveling. It never went bad no matter how long you kept it.

Indeed since the pre-Communist time Hui traders have been trading in nomad Tibetan areas (Tib: *rtsa sa*, Ch: *caodi*) during which *tsampa* has been their principal food. It was the cheapest and most convenient food to carry with—they just need to ask for some tea or even water wherever they travel to prepare a fast meal. More importantly, speaking the nomad Tibetan dialect (Ch: *caodi hua*) and eating *tsampa* made those Hui traders more welcome and easily accepted in nomad Tibetan tents, which in turn also made their business in these Tibetan regions easy. These days despite Hui style food constitutes the main part of their daily diet, Wu said: “If we don’t eat *tsampa* for some days we would surely miss it.”³¹⁵

In many Tibetan borderland places with Hui inhabitants, Hui restaurants are often the dominant local restaurants. Hui style food thus has had a major influence on the local diet over time. Meanwhile I have also noticed that no matter how many Hui restaurants or teahouses there are, their customers are always Tibetans or Chinese. I have never seen one Hui customer in a Hui restaurant or teahouse. Hui themselves usually give an easy short answer to this—since every Hui wife cooks well at home

³¹⁵ Fieldnotes December 2003, interview with a Hui couple in their restaurant. The Hui adoption of Tibetan traditions, including food, was also recorded by Robert Ekvall (1939).

there is no need for Hui to go to the restaurant. For most Tibetans Hui restaurants are here in the Tibetan land first of all because of the Tibetan benevolence. It is thus natural that they provide a service to Tibetans, which is a symbolic continuation of the tax and contribution that the Hui *mtha'wa* (subject family or village) had to pay to the Tibetan monastery on a regular basis in the pre-1950s era. For that reason I have always found local Tibetans enjoy the Hui food and being served in the Hui restaurants—until the final days of my fieldwork when I suddenly started to hear some negative rumors among the Tibetan monks about the Hui restaurants and their food. It all started with my friend Tashi who came to my place one day asking me if I have any medicine for *hokhu* or “stomach sickness” (Tib: *pho ba kho'i*).

Ever since the three monks (including Tashi) started to work in the ticket office they started to frequent the nearby Hui restaurants more often than before. As ticket collectors they don't have to comply with the monastic schedule for routine gatherings. With the ticket office on the border of monastery and non-monastery territory they also have more chances to go out of the monastery without being easily caught by the Geke. Tashi told me that many Chinese tourists are very interested in talking to them. Sometimes these Chinese tourists would invite them for an extended talk out of their office—usually in the nearby Hui restaurant. Sometimes they would also go by themselves in order to save their lunch time by not walking back home and cooking. Besides the three ticket collectors, other monks from the Kirti monastery also go to the Hui restaurants more often these days—mostly on monastery Sunday. It is the only day of the week that monks are officially allowed to go out of the monastery. Most young monks would go in groups to the Hui restaurants in town spending this leisure time over a Hui meal and a cup of Muslim tea.

When Tashi first came to ask for medicine I did not realize that there was a phenomenon of “Tibetan stomach-ache” in the monk community. Later, when I asked

him if the medicine I gave him actually worked, he told me that many monks have had the same problem and many of them started to take Tibetan medicine that is provided by the monastery owned clinic. Soon after that rumors became rampant in the monk community. More monks claimed to have the same symptom of stomach-ache after they ate in the Hui restaurants. All blamed the Hui restaurants and their food for the “Tibetan stomach-ache.” One story circulating at the monks’ dinner was that, Hagei’s restaurant (one of the most popular Hui restaurants in town which often gathered a lot of Tibetan customers) always has too many customers to serve. In order to make more noodles at a time Hagei’s wife used her feet to make the dough. They used the dish washing water to boil the noodle. Every Hui knew this. That’s why you never see even one Hui eating in a Hui restaurant. The story used a deliberately derogative way—women and feet—to describe Tibetan monks as the victims of dirty and ill-disposed Hui business.³¹⁶ Yet despite the obviously fictional account many stories like this have been widely circulated among the monks in a half serious-half joking way.

After this “Tibetan stomach-ache” incident Tibetan monks stopped going to the Hui restaurants for a while. Many monks were still rather pessimistic about the fact that ultimately they can not avoid the presence of Hui and Hui restaurants. As my friend Tashi told me, “after all we have been eating Hui food for so many years. There is nothing we can do about it.” Meanwhile after this incident many monks have found the magical effect of Tibetan medicine to cure the stomach sickness from dirty Hui food. Tashi still goes to the Hui restaurants from time to time when he has to deal with the Chinese tourists. But after he comes back from the Hui restaurants he always passed by the monastery clinic for some stomach medicine. “These are not really medicines,” Tashi explained to me, “they are just some medicine powders that you can take regularly for the benefit of your health.” At the same time I also noticed that he

³¹⁶ Both woman and feet are derogative concepts for Tibetans monks in this context.

had resumed the habit of drinking cheap Tibetan tea—this time not to save money but to save his health. The local Tibetans believes that Chinese green tea has a tasty flavor but it does not do any good to your stomach because it is “cold” in its nature. On the contrary Tibetan tea does not taste very good in mouth but it is “warm” in nature. Tashi told me in a joking way: “our stomachs have taken too much Hui food, drinking Tibetan tea would be good for our stomach.”

CHAPTER 7

TIBETAN SPLITTISTS AND BIN LADEN'S THINGS: A BORDERLAND PERSPECTIVE ON THE LOCAL, NATIONAL AND GLOBAL

7.1 September 11th in Taktsang Lhamo: Local, National, and Global

In summer 2001 I went back to China for a semester-long stay in Taktsang Lhamo as part of my pre-dissertation fieldwork.³¹⁷ In the evening of September 10th (Beijing time, the morning time of September 11th US Eastern Time) I was visiting my Tibetan friend Cairang at his home that he was temporarily using as his office. Cairang was the head of a local government administrative office. The main office building was under construction by a Hui construction group from Linxia. Cairang's office had one of the few television sets in town at that time. That night the official Chinese TV channel very briefly broadcasted the breaking news of the September 11th attack in New York City. As a norm for Chinese media towards a breaking event like this the first report was delayed in time with much reservation as regards explanation since they were waiting for higher authorities to decide for the official tone that every news media in China would have to follow. Cairang and I looked at the short clip on TV and neither of us could believe what we saw.

It seemed to have taken longer than usual for the Chinese authorities to decide on an official tone this time. For the next few days the Chinese media showed surprisingly little exposure of this event that was shocking the whole world. In sharp contrast to the Chinese official reservation, the local Tibetan monk community immediately responded to this event based on their daily news feed from the short

³¹⁷ See map figures for references of different names and locations.

wave radio. With the exploding spread of the news in the monk community, lots of new terms such as “Osama Bin Laden” and “terrorist attack” quickly became the most talked-about subjects on many occasions, from the monks’ dinner tables to the random gatherings on the road. What surprised me first in this response of the monks was that despite the apparent geographical and political distance between an event like this and monastic life on a remote Tibetan borderland, talks like these among the monks were hardly rhetorical. Indeed they were closely related to the contemporary Tibetan politics and the ethnic religious relations in Taktsang Lhamo. Most monks would express their condemnation not only of Bin Laden or terrorists as the representative of Muslim people but they also openly directed their criticism towards Islam as a problematic religion. As one monk started up the topic during a group dinner in monk Roba’s house, “Islam is the worst religion in the world. Wherever there are Muslims and Islam there is problem.” Therefore the American response to the terrorist attack was seen as both morally right and heroic against something evil. While the degradation of Islam and moralization of America in this particular event might have more to do with many other things,³¹⁸ the impact of this global event in a remote Tibetan borderland was reflected directly on the local ethnic awareness and ethnic relations vis-à-vis the Chinese nation.

As I have shown in the previous chapters, the transition of this region from the pre-nation state of de facto independence to the incorporation in the Chinese nation has radically shifted the social political context for Tibetan and Hui in this ethnic borderland. The Chinese incorporation and the subsequent Cultural Revolution had actively sought to suppress ethnic differences by dissolving them in the communist notion of class. While the post-1980s political relaxation have since then relieved the

³¹⁸ For example, Charlene Makley has cogently argued that gender has played a significant role in both the Tibetan Buddhist revival in the post-1980s period and the reconstruction of a Tibetan culture centered on masculine power (Makley 2007).

cultural and ethnic expression by separating them from class struggle it has also gradually waken up the long suppressed ethnic differences along with the ethnic tensions. Brackette Williams (1989: 429) has pointed out early to understand the relation between nationalism and ethnicity—or as she puts it, “why ethnic groups must have distinctive cultures” in nations—we must start from nation-building as a mythmaking and “the material factors that motivate and rationalize its elements.” Most Tibetans and Hui in Taktsang Lhamo contended to me that they were never thinking of each other in terms of “Tibetans” or “Hui” in the old days (before 1950), even before the 1980s. The ethnic tension between Tibetan and Hui has become visible mostly since the ethnoreligious revival started in both communities from the beginning of 1980s. Although it has often resolved around economic issues, this tension has its root in both ethnic and political demand in the new Chinese state reflecting a continuous dilemma of the multiethnic policy in China. In an ethnic borderland like Taktsang Lhamo the increasing disjuncture between the political and ethnic advantage of the local Tibetan majority and the economic advantage of the local Hui minority against a political economic shadow of a Chinese state has not only challenged the ethnic equality policy by fueling the tension between the two ethnic groups, but increasingly it has put this tension under the magnifying glass of a national, and sometimes global, forum.

After the September 11th incident the local Tibetan community, particularly monks, started to absorb many new loanwords, most of which are Chinese translation of English terms such as *kongbu fenzi* (terrorist) or *benladeng* (Bin Laden), both in their political discussion and in their daily life. One day after a joyful chat in the teahouse we were on our way back from Gyago (downtown) with three monk friends Dongzhu, Darji and Tashi when Dongzhu suddenly thought of something that he forgot to buy for dinner. As we were just passing by a Hui grocery shop I went in

almost without thinking until I realized my three friends were still hesitating outside. Dongzhu called me out from the outside and suggested that we go to the small Tibetan shop by the monastery. Out of the Hui shop I was still puzzled as we, including many other monks in the monastery, often went to this Hui shop because they offered much more choices than the small Tibetan one. To continue the joyful atmosphere Dongzhu said to me half joking and half serious in Chinese: “we don’t buy Bin Laden’s things (Ch: *women bu mai benladeng de dongxi*).” Then the three friends immediately laughed together. Apparently it was one of the popular jokes among the monks at that time—to refer to the local Hui with the new Chinese loanword *benladeng* (Bin Laden).

On the other hand the Hui in Taktsang Lhamo reacted to this September 11th incident in a more subtle way. In the following weeks the Chinese official media started to show their condemnation of this terrorist attack. In keeping with the Chinese official position of anti-imperialism (namely American imperialism) and also to avoid any political undertone that might potentially go against its own interests, the official TV channels in China showed images and reports from both the Western media and the anti-Western Arabic media, which is rare on Chinese TV. On the Chinese national media various government and non-government associations in China started to announce their anti-terrorist position. Among all the carefully crafted media responses, it was noticeable that the Chinese National Muslim Association (Ch: *zhongguo yisilanjiao xiehui*) was the first religious and non-government association to publicly announce their stance toward this incident on behalf of all Muslims in China. Following the official Chinese line, the announcement emphasized “the condemnation on Bin Laden and the terrorist attack by all the peace-loving Muslims in China” thus deliberately separating the terrorists from the majority Muslims and Islam.

As I was visiting my friend Cairang the following week, I noticed the television set in his room had been gone from time to time. Cairang told me it was the

Hui construction group working next door that had been borrowing the TV everyday after work, since September 11th. He then said to me secretly: “They [the Hui workers] just like to see the Arabic script on the TV.” Out of curiosity I visited the construction site next door for the first time. This working site for the Hui workers was also their dining place during the day and sleeping place at night. When I went in it was their dinner time and I found they were doing their daily prayer in front of the TV that was broadcasting some Arabic TV images with Arabic scripts.

The day after my visit to the Hui construction site, I was again in Cairang’s place when a young Hui man from the construction group came in to borrow a knife. I handed him the Swiss army knife that I often carried in my pocket. The young man of my age took the knife and looked at it with a bit surprise, then said to me: “Oh, I know this knife. It is a Swiss army knife. It is the most famous knife in the world.” Although a Swiss knife was no longer something to show off in most Chinese metropolitan areas, knowledge about a modern object surely could be a connection between a Hui from the ethnic borderland and a Han from the city. I quickly got into a conversation with him as he was also curious about me and many modern things that he presumed I was connected with.

A: Where are you from? [presumably I was not local because of my possession of a Swiss army knife]

B: I’m from Beijing and I’m here doing research.

A: I have been to Beijing too.

B: Really, what did you do there?

A: I stayed there for one year learning Arabic language.

B: Then what did you do?

A: I came back home and joined this construction group led by my uncle.

B: So why did you go to Beijing and learn Arabic then?

A: Well, you Han learn English for practical reasons. But we Hui learn Arabic for ourselves (Ch: *women huizu shi wei ziji xue de*). To be a Muslim is not just to believe in a religion. Islam teaches you first how to be a modern and civilized person (Ch: *xiandai de wenming ren*). Only Americans [Westerners] believe that Muslims are all terrorists.

Our conversation then immediately touched upon the current affairs of the terrorist attack. The Hui young man used the official Chinese media tone to defend Muslim and Islam and to criticize Western countries and Western media as always anti-Muslim. He first claimed that Bin Laden does not represent Muslims. Then he immediately turned to the guilt of America and the Western world towards all the developing countries, especially towards the Islamic world and Muslim culture, which somehow justified the terrorist attack as something inevitable for those who deserved it. Throughout our conversation he had been at the same time playing with the different functions of my Swiss knife. From time to time he also tried it on the wooden table and praised the good quality of the knife. At the end he returned the knife to me with some reluctance and said: “foreign products are good though (Ch: *waiguo de dongxi haozhe ne*).”³¹⁹

The Hui and the Tibetans in Taktsang Lhamo experienced this global incident in their own way. The contrast between the interpretations and reactions of the two ethnic groups diversified this global event in the local context by drawing upon the traditional local values and meanings as well as the official state discourse. In the recent years while some scholarly works have started to think about the “crisis of the nation state,” “post-national social forms,” (Appadurai 1996) or “the place left empty by the historical collapse of socialism,” (Mignolo 2000) others suggest that

³¹⁹ The modernization through consumption after the 1980s has been seen in many Hui communities over China, see (Gillette 2000).

“transnationality [...] does not simply reduce state power, [...] it also stimulates a new, more flexible and complex relationship between capital and government” (Ong 1999) and that contrary to the “expansion of transnationalism at the *expense* of nation-state, [...] we have been perhaps too hasty to herald the retreat of the nation-state” (Vasantkumar 2006). Through the case above I would argue here that not only has the state resituated itself in this new global discourse with “graduated sovereignty,” (Ong 1999) but the localization process of the global incident has also stimulated new multiple relationships between the state and different ethnic groups against the backdrop of a global influence. On the one hand, Islam as a transnational religion with a transnationally imagined community (Anderson 1983) has been clearly confined within the Chinese nation by the Muslim Hui in Taktsang Lhamo. Not only have the Hui used the national discourse to defend their religion and ethnicity but they also actively backed up the nation as a member of this nationally, instead of transnationally, imagined community. On the other hand, while Tibetan Buddhism has always been territorially marked and confined, it has apparently taken a new divergence to show its universal appeal in the age of globalization. Furthermore the local ethnic tensions as well as the role of state in this tension has made the localization of the global incident like this unique and complex, i.e. the Hui response in Taktsang Lhamo could be quite different from the Hui in other Hui majority regions (Gladney 1991).

This complexity of religion and ethnicity in the national and global context challenges the dominant western approach of a “celebration of ethnic resistance.” As Bulag (2002) has indicated, the “celebration of ethnic resistance” often tends to essentialize ethnicity as the exclusive definition of identity for minority people and thus to de-contextualize ethnicity from its complex and fluid socio-economic and political conditions. By looking into the multiple dynamics among the Hui, the Tibetan and the Chinese state I intend to demonstrate the localization process as an

alternative base of power and ideology which both offsets state power in one way, and yet reinforces it in another (Gillette 2000; Jing 1996).

7.2 Tibetan Splittists, Colonialism, and Internal Colonialism

During the Monlam Chenmo in 1999 an unexpected incident cast a shadow on the festival atmosphere in Taktsang Lhamo. One day during the two-week ceremony I suddenly found that there seemed to be more police than usual appearing around the monastery. Evening is usually the time for monks to get together and pass around the news of the day. It was then when I got to know that during the day some Tibetan independence slogans were found on the walls of the monastery circumambulation route. Political censorship in China strictly prohibits any symbolism that could be related to the separation of the motherland. Those who carry or show that symbolism are doomed as “splittists” (Ch: *fenlie fenzi*) and are subject to severe punishment. It is well known that traditional religious events, particularly grand events like Monlam Chenmo, often trigger the immediate and fundamental nationalist emotions among the Tibetan public. As such, although these newly revived public religious events have been officially permitted by the Chinese government—to a certain extent even promoted as local tourist attractions—they nonetheless attract the enthusiastic surveillance from the Chinese government and Chinese police at the same time. I was thus not surprised at what happened until one of my monk friends swore on the monastery that it was absolutely not the monks in the monastery who did that. Although no one was actually arrested, many monks in the monastery were called to the local police station to be interrogated, which created a very tense atmosphere in the monk community.

Several days later the police who had come from the higher regional authority left Taktsang Lhamo without finding any evidence or arresting anyone. But it was said that they would continue investigating this incident. At least for the moment the atmosphere in the monastery returned to the festival. However soon after the police left, a rumor started to spread quickly in the monk community that this whole Tibetan splittist incident was actually a set up by the local Hui. A young monk said to me with a very sure tone: “Who else can it be if we did not do that? They [Hui] all know Tibetan very well.” Besides the apparent impossibility for me to verify this rumor either from Tibetan side or from the Hui side, I found it much more intriguing to ponder the context and consequences of such rumors and beliefs—rather than determine their authenticity—and more importantly the stakes involved and the implication for each party in this event, as well as those for the state.

The incorporation of this region into the new Chinese state in the 1950s has changed the local political organization and thereby economic structure. The ownership of land has been transferred from the former monastic power to the new Chinese state. After the 1980s with the state shift to a market economy both local families and the Tibetan monastery have at least partially regained their right to local land without the official change of state ownership of land. With the increasing economic development based primarily on the market economy and privatization the ambiguities left in terms of both the ownership of land and the right to use it have become the source of tensions between local Hui and Tibetan as well as the state (Pirie 2005a, 2005b)—one of which is the Hui claim of their former Tibetan monastery land based on their now equal ethnic rights in the new Chinese state. These ambiguities regarding land tenure have become more significant after the 1990s as tourist income has increased significantly. The

increasing popularity and accessibility of Taktsang Lhamo have brought more and more Tibetan pilgrims and Chinese tourists each year to this once remote borderland. These Tibetan pilgrims and Chinese tourists have immediately benefited the local businesses that are mostly owned by Hui families. The initial success of local Hui businesses have further encouraged the growth of more new businesses which have eventually changed local social political context and thus challenged many traditionally setup boundaries—for example, between the monastery and town, Tibetan and Hui, tourist and local, etc.—in the new post-socialist Chinese context.

With the expectation of more tourist income, a local Hui family started about a year ago to build a new family hostel right across from the Tibetan monastery. This new Hui hostel irritated both many local Tibetans and the monastic authority that had already reclaimed the Hui occupation of the Tibetan land. Tibetans in Taktsang Lhamo see this land as unambiguously Tibetan through both the traditional Tibetan cultural authority and the contemporary Chinese political nomenclature of Tibetan autonomous prefecture—thus downplaying the national ideology of ethnic equality that has been equally propagated by the Chinese state. Through ethnic Tibetan power in the local government, the Tibetan monastery and lay Tibetan community successfully intercepted the construction of the Hui hostel in “Tibetan” land and suspended it indefinitely. The Hui community tried to appeal to the higher levels but the appeal did not attract attention from the higher Chinese authorities who only put the superficial stability and prosperity of the local situation over everything else. This tension between the equally propagated national policy of ethnic equality and minority autonomy has finally ended with the Tibetan “splittist” incident. The independence slogan found during the Tibetan New Year had immediately drawn

the highest concern from the top Chinese authority to this remote borderland. Despite of the end result, that no evidence was found and no one was arrested, the incident itself along with its political implications had at least temporarily decreased local Tibetan power. As a result the Hui hostel construction was silently resumed.

The multilateral relations among the Tibetan, Hui, Han Chinese, Chinese state and forces of globalization illuminate such concepts as colonialism, internal colonialism, orientalism and identity politics vis-à-vis state politics in a specific Chinese context.³²⁰ In recent research on both imperial dynasty China and the modern Chinese nation-state, many have advocated a reconsideration of the colonial nature of Chinese imperial power (i.e. Manchu Qing), and by extension Chinese state power today.³²¹ In a discussion of the post/colonial experience in China, Dru Gladney questioned the so-called semi-colonial status of China and argued through an ethnic minority perspective that “there is nothing ‘semi’ about their [Hui] colonial experiences [in the Chinese state]” (Gladney 2004). Vasantkumar (2006: 89) concluded his discussion of the colonial expansion in Chinese history by saying “it becomes clear that the PRC is not post-colonial in some fuzzy 1990s theoretical sense but is emphatically, to this day, a colonial regime.” In a slightly different fashion Louisa Schein (2000: 103) carefully differentiated the connotations between colonialism and orientalism in her thought provoking ethnography of Miao in China. She argued that her borrowing

³²⁰ The term “internal colonialism” originated from a political antithesis of the diffusion model against the backdrop of core-periphery social/political/economic structure (Hechter 1975).

³²¹ Qing as a colonial power towards central Asia has been explored widely in the recent years (Elliott 2001; Hostetler 2001; Millward 1998). David Goodman treated the development of Guizhou in early 1950s as an “internal colony” by the Communist Chinese State (Goodman 1983). Dru Gladney indicated the colonial nature between the Chinese government and the ethnic minority peoples in China (Gladney 1994a; Gladney 2004). See also two case studies of Chinese colonization in minority areas of southwest and northwest China from the local Han migrant point of view (Hansen 2005). Most recently Christopher Vasantkumar, after a long discussion of Qing colonial expansion and Republican transition, has asked “[w]hy is it so hard to see China as a colonial power anyway?” (Vasantkumar 2006: 80)

of the term orientalism from Said (1978) was meant to avoid the intrinsic flaw in the colonialist discourse in which “the East [the colonized or orientalized] is muted and therefore, by extension, rendered incapable of othering.” In other words by using the term orientalist instead of colonialist, Schein seeks to emphasize that, just as China could be colonial power disguised as the colonized to the West, those internal Others in China, treated by many as the colonized, could also exercise their power of othering towards China and the West. This mutual influence of colonial relations reflects the Tibetan-Hui relationship in Taktsang Lhamo vis-à-vis the Chinese state.

In chapter 1 I have argued that a subaltern perspective in Tibetan studies (and by extension the studies of other marginalized groups in China) should be applied with a critique to the isomorphism of “the subaltern” and such single category as ethnicity, race, religion, that has been taken for granted without a reflexive critique. I view this debate on subaltern, colonialism and orientalism in China as an extension of identity politics in relation to power and resistance. Identity politics have generally been perceived by many as a threat or resistance to both the dominant power (i.e. that of the nation-state) and the majority identity (i.e. a unified national identity) particularly in the context of newly formed modern nation-states.³²² James Scott (1990), for example, has famously theorized the “art of resistance” on an intermediate ground between what he called “public transcripts” and “hidden transcripts”—a middle ground which is officially sanctioned by the dominant power and yet has been constantly contested, sometimes manipulated, by the subordinate groups towards subversive ends. Many scholarly works have recently pointed out, however, that identity politics

³²² See (Gupta and Ferguson 1992; Hobsbawm 1990; Malkki 1995). For a general theoretical framework on domination and resistance see (Comaroff 1985; Scott 1990). Dru Gladney gives the ethnographic case of the Hui resistance to the Han Chinese state (Gladney 1994b).

do not always go against the state. Indeed they may be seen as much supportive to the state authority as destructive.³²³ To use “internal colonialism” and “subaltern” as single ethnic/racial/religious category, in my view, is a continuous “celebration of ethnic resistance” as I mentioned above. I further argue that in the contemporary context of China these ethnic/racial/religious categories among others have become rather flexible—or might be called “empty signifiers”³²⁴—and open to many new constructions and dialogue, such as ethnic interaction, political economy, global consumerism, and thus are not properly located simply through such conceptions as “subaltern” or “colonial/colonized.”

Furthermore as shown in the Tibetan “splittist” incident above, global influences were deliberately reworked through the lens of national and local cultural/political context and were then taken in as part of the local dialogue. Although I have no way to verify if those independent slogans actually had anything to do with local Hui or not, it seems to me more important and interesting to see different beliefs held by different parties about what actually happened and the consequential impact of these different beliefs on the ethnic relations vis-à-vis the Chinese state. The single category of colonialism, internal colonialism or subaltern falls short of accommodating such a complex scenario where religion, ethnicity, and politics intersect with each other without sacrificing any one of them. One must go well beyond the dichotomy of colonial/colonized to explain, for example, the change of Hui in Taktsang Lhamo from being a “Tibetan accomplice” in the 1950s rebellion against the Chinese incorporation to

³²³ See for example a case study of Bai in Yunnan (McCarthy 2000). While arguing for the colonial status of ethnic minorities in China, Dru Gladney (2004) also asked the question why some minorities desire to be recognized—consider the official ethnic minority population grows three times greater than that of Han—while others oppose to it.

³²⁴ I got this inspiration from my colleague Eric Henry who first used this concept of “empty signifier” to accommodate the ever-changing cultural meaning of English learning in today’s Chinese society (Saussure 1966).

rivaling with their Tibetans neighbors by adopting official Chinese discourses after the September 11th. Recent works on Han Chinese in ethnic minority areas can provide more insights on these points (Harrell 2001c; Hansen 2005). As these works show us many Han living in ethnic minority areas, whether temporarily or permanently, are actually “not better or worse than their minority neighbors.”³²⁵ It is rather a sense of being a member of an imagined powerful majority—condensed and symbolized in the name “Han”—that keeps the superior feeling of those poor Han over their economically richer and politically more powerful minority neighbors. To understand today’s multi-cultural/multi-ethnic China is to understand China—including both the condensed symbol of Han and its ideological antithesis of ethnic minority—from both external and internal limits of those multi-facets of its body.

7.3 Ethnicity, Belonging, Trans/nationalism: The Civilizing Project Revisited

The subject of this project changed over the period of my fieldwork. My initial proposal was to do my research in this Sino-Tibetan borderland town focusing exclusively on local Tibetan Buddhist revival, namely the monastic rituals and public festivals year around that have been revived after the Chinese Cultural Revolution. While the Tibetan case has been taken by many as a perfect example of resistance, colonialism, and ethnic nationalism—in both a political and cultural sense—it seemed to me that ethnicity itself as a category has often been over privileged. In fact over the centuries ethnicity has been “promoted” to a highly contested ground where race, nation, nationalism, politics have all struggled to play a role in the former symbolic expression of a primordial group marker (Barth 1969; Williams 1989). As such I intended, in my fieldwork, to contextualize the Tibetan ethnicity in a broader and

³²⁵ See (Harrell 2001c), particularly chapter 14 on the Han as default ethnicity but also on what he called “majority as minority.”

deeper background through both observable factors such as religion, history, political economy, and more subjective factors like everyday practice, personal narratives, and collective memories. Such an approach unavoidably reveals the nuances of a heavily loaded and politically polarized situation by showing a mix of social, cultural, economic, and political impacts on both a local and national level. It was my intention to contribute to the existing scholarly works on the contemporary Tibetan Buddhist revival in China, which have been scarce and less than satisfactory to accommodate this complex and wide spreading phenomenon.

Throughout my two-year fieldwork in Taktsang Lhamo, however, I found myself being increasingly caught in between the two local ethnic communities. This is not just because of my growing awareness of the Hui presence as long-term local residents in this Tibetan land, the predicted difficulties of doing fieldwork in a culturally and politically sensitive site, or the actual dilemma when working with two complicatedly related communities at the same time. But all these difficulties, dilemmas and complexities have ultimately complicated my original idea on the re/construction of ethnic religious identities and boundaries in the nation-state. By relating this idea to the social production of different boundaries, inclusive/exclusive politics, and multiple senses of ethnic and national belongings I find it worth an academic revisit to Stevan Harrell's groundbreaking introduction of "civilizing project" back in 1995. While the unequal relationship between the center and periphery was not unfamiliar to most,³²⁶ Harrell's conceptualization of this relation as a "civilizing project" has made it more nuanced by basing it on at least three assumptions.

Firstly it assumed an inclusive politics of the civilizing center by excluding the periphery. This is a drastically different point from the previous studies on the

³²⁶ See for example (Shils 1975).

center/periphery or majority/minority relations. In Barth's well-read piece on ethnic groups and boundaries (Barth 1969), he asserted that many minority situations are the ones that are rejected by the majority, or as he called "host population." This is because, according to Barth, "[i]n a total social system, all sectors of activities are organized by statuses open to the members of the majority group," while the minority system does not provide the same basis for action in the same system. Harrell however emphasized the nuanced part of this both exclusion and inclusion process. In all three cases of the civilizing projects he provided in the Chinese history—Confucian, Christian, Communist—the civilizing center has all intended to transform the periphery and to include into the "civilized" world. Yet for that sake it has to first single out the periphery and to hegemonically define it as the "uncivilized," thus precluding an imagined area, both geographical and ideological, from the assumed civilized world dominated by the center.

Second, during this process of inclusion and exclusion different kinds of boundaries are produced between center and periphery, majority and minority, the default ethnicity and those who are ethnically identified, the "civilizer" and "those to be civilized." By discerning these boundaries the conception of civilizing project has juxtaposed two seemingly parallel boundaries: the geographical hierarchy between a center and its periphery and the ideological hegemony between the superior and the inferior. Harrell pointed out the tentative attraction to relate the geographical periphery to ideologically constructed ethnicity. To push his critique to this juxtaposition he also used three metaphors—sexual (peripheral peoples as women), educational (peripheral peoples as children), and historical (peripheral peoples as ancient)—to challenge the complex existence of these boundaries.

Lastly, the most nuanced part of this argument is the consequences of this kind of civilizing project, or what Harrell called the "peripheral peoples' reactions to

civilizing projects.” He argued that in the majority of cases “the peripheral peoples, while resenting the attempts to civilize them, nevertheless accept the general premise that they are less civilized or morally less worthy.” This is in line with the scholarship on power/resistance (Scott 1990) or ethnic boundaries (Barth 1969). Although it was later criticized as potentially assuming and reinforcing the very existence and purity of a Han majority (Gladney 2004), Harrell’s treatment of the peripheral peoples’ reaction still stands alone by leaving space for the usually ambiguous and complex feeling of ethnic and national belongings in this process. In fact this complex feeling of belonging has become especially salient with the emergence of the modern nation-state which has changed the former “frontier peoples” into the “peoples within borders” (Keyes 2002). One of the direct byproducts in this changing process, as Charles Keyes indicated, is “a clear distinction between the *nation* and the *peoples* or *ethnic groups* that are taken as belonging to this nation” (Keyes 2002: 1193, emphasis in original). This mixed and sometime conflict feeling between ethnic and national belonging has become even more complicated when contextualized within transnationalism, displaced groups such as diasporas, “border-crossing peoples or peoples across borders” (Keyes 2002). Even within the context of one nation-state, i.e. China, recent scholarly work on ethnic minorities in China has discovered “a hiding of a history of negotiation behind a narrative of unfolding” of the Chinese nation (Harrell 1996). One of these negotiations reflects on the dilemma of many minority elites who have to work both within the state and at the same time within their own traditions. Litzinger (2000: 238), for example, shows this dilemma of the Yao intellectuals and their politics of belonging by asking if they “were driven by the same desires as their Han intellectual counterparts” and what were their findings in their own tradition. Similarly Janet Upton has demonstrated a Tibetan intellectual elite’s new interpretation of Tibetan history that can be treated as a sign of the revival of Tibetan

ethnic nationalism within the official discourse of a Chinese social political framework (Upton 2000).

By revisiting the civilizing project, my intention is less to argue for a grand framework for my own research—not to mention for whichever studies, which I consider as a limit to the research scope. But on the contrary I intend to open up new horizon by addressing the nuances and spaces that have been initiated in the conceptualization of civilizing projects. Indeed many scholars have contributed to this process. Charlene Makeley (1999, 2007), in her highly innovative studies on gender and Tibetan Buddhist revival in post-Mao China, pointed out the gendered nature of the Tibetan revitalization of their traditions—both religious and non-religious alike. Thus to contextualize this process is to explore the ways in which Tibetans (men and women, lay and monastic) have struggled to define their locality through the re/construction of a male-centered power and space ultimately rooted in the monastery. This argument is very insightful for understanding both the logic of Tibetan everyday practices and the enormously politicized and destructive changes after the Chinese incorporation. As she argued cogently, these changes are most accurately seen as not an erasing of Tibetan culture in their homeland but rather an emasculating of an essentially masculinized culture (Makley 2007: 31-32). Through her analysis of the relation between gender and Tibetan Buddhist revival it becomes clear that the Chinese incorporation of Tibet and the subsequent changes in Tibet have gone well beyond a dualist view of either “cultural protection” as claimed by the Chinese government or “cultural genocide” as claimed by the Tibetan government-in-exile.

In my case I try to approach the same question through religion, ethnicity and nation. The overlap and conflict between the ethnic belonging with the national belonging of Tibetan and Hui have been produced through the dynamics of religion and ethnicity in the Chinese nation-building process. I started this dissertation by

introducing two ethnoreligious revivals—the prominent Tibetan Buddhist revival and the almost invisible Hui Islamic revival—in an ethnic borderland town of Taktsang Lhamo. My own position as a Han Chinese working on the subject of ethnic minority has been reflected both in my fieldwork and later in my writing. To write on ethnic borderland and boundaries in the national and international context I have not only challenged the bounded identity (such as a pure Tibetan core hidden behind a collaborative face with the Chinese colonial power) and arbitrary boundaries (such as Tibetan-Hui separation both in religion and ethnicity), but I have also intended to recover a variety of peoples' voices through their concrete everyday practices. The arbitrariness of the boundaries and the active role of a peripheral borderland have in turn brings back the question of civilizing project as a unilateral hierarchy. My study on consumerism and modernization in this ethnic borderland shows, on the one hand, the new consumerist practices can be treated as both an individual practice and a new form of governmentality (Ngai 2003). On the other hand, these practices might also be treated as a voluntary civilizing project in which the peripheral peoples (or the minorities) have actively participated, even to a certain extent manipulated, the whole civilizing process but for their own causes.³²⁷ Furthermore, in the contemporary transnational context and global influence this civilizing process has been further nuanced and diversified in its representation. I then conclude with a Tibetan-Hui rivalry today that has drawn upon both the discourses of national politics as well as a transnational and global influence through a local/national filter.

³²⁷ See (Postiglione, et al. 2004) for his concept of “voluntary minority.” Harrell has made a similar argument in his study of the Yi intellectuals writing their own history in the context of a multi-ethnic Chinese nation building. Gillette (2000) similarly argued that Hui in Xi'an have diverted the official civilizing direction through Arabization and applying the Islamic ideology of modernity. This manipulation of civilizing process has nevertheless been resolved in the negotiation of modernization and consumption.

APPENDIX



Figure 1

Map of Gansu, Sichuan, Qinghai Border

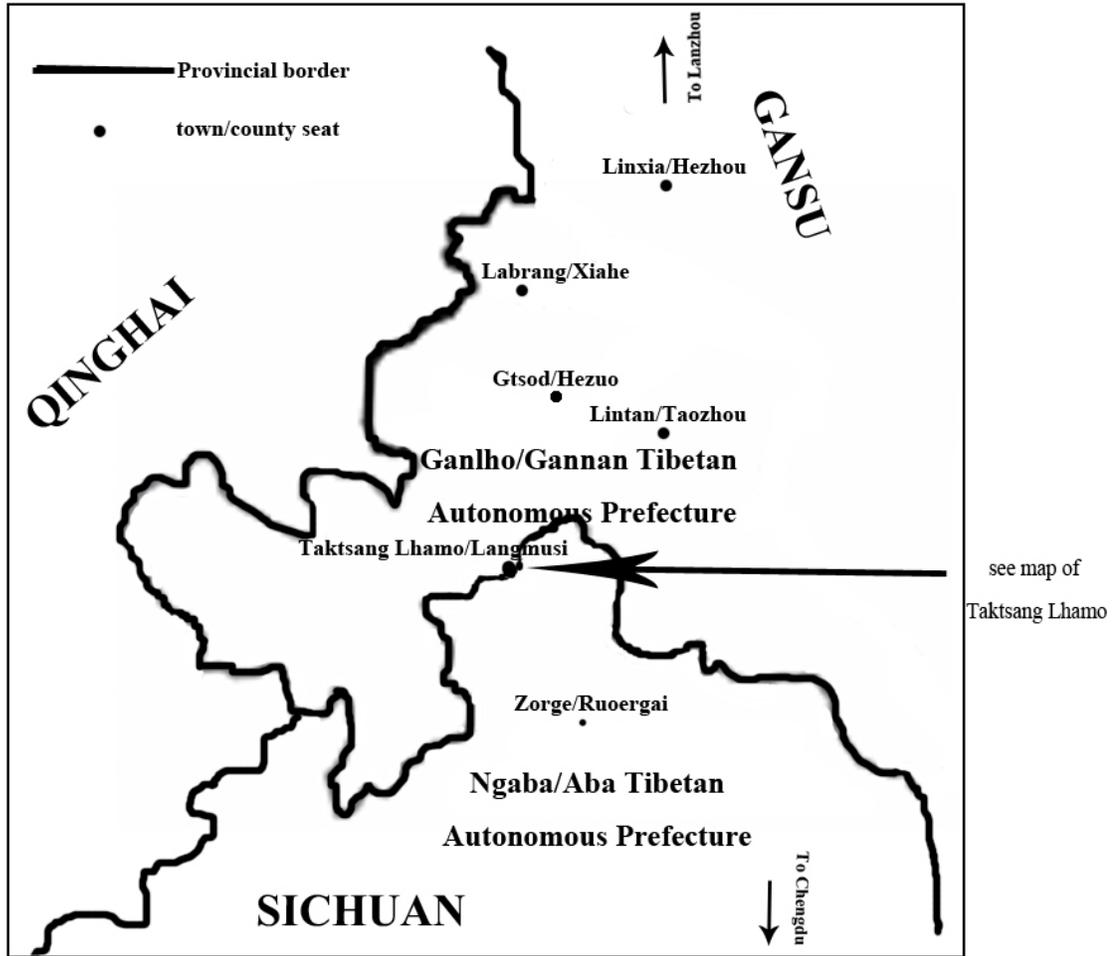


Figure 2

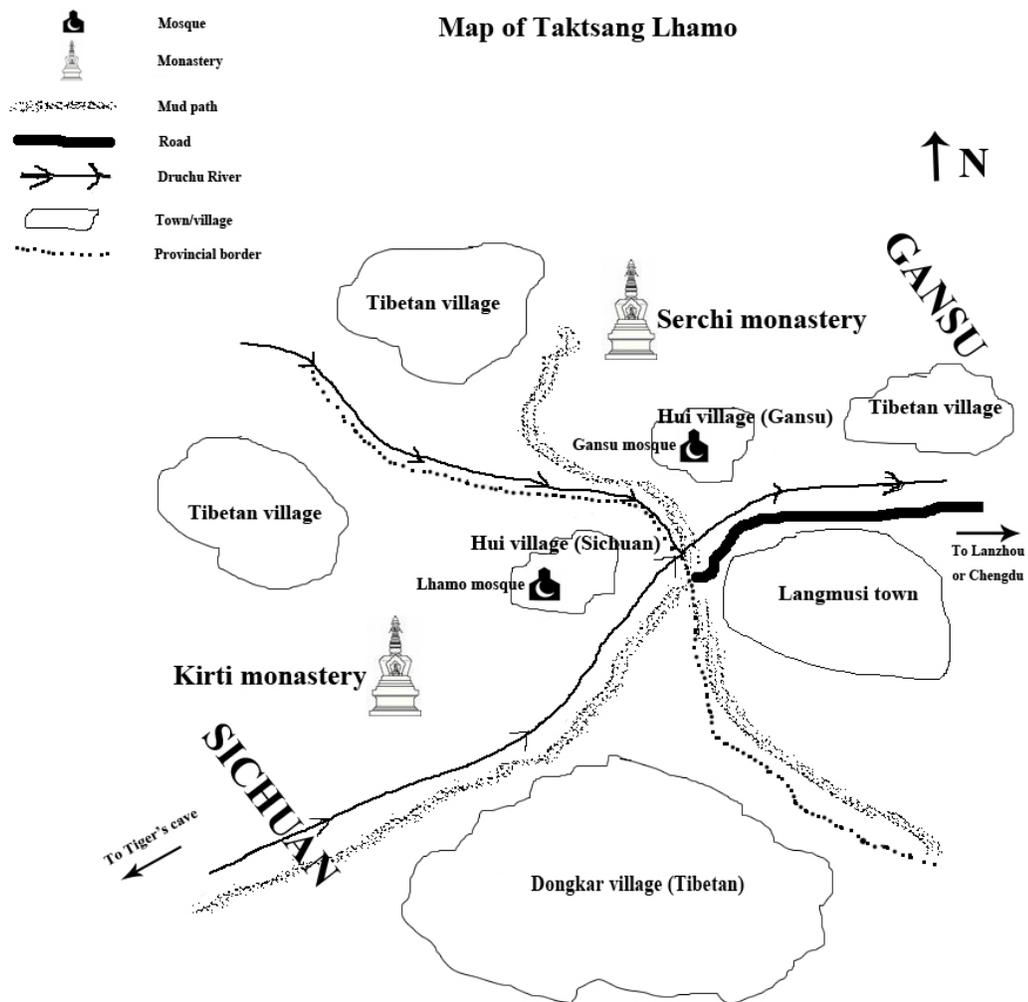


Figure 3

Map of Tibetan Regions in China

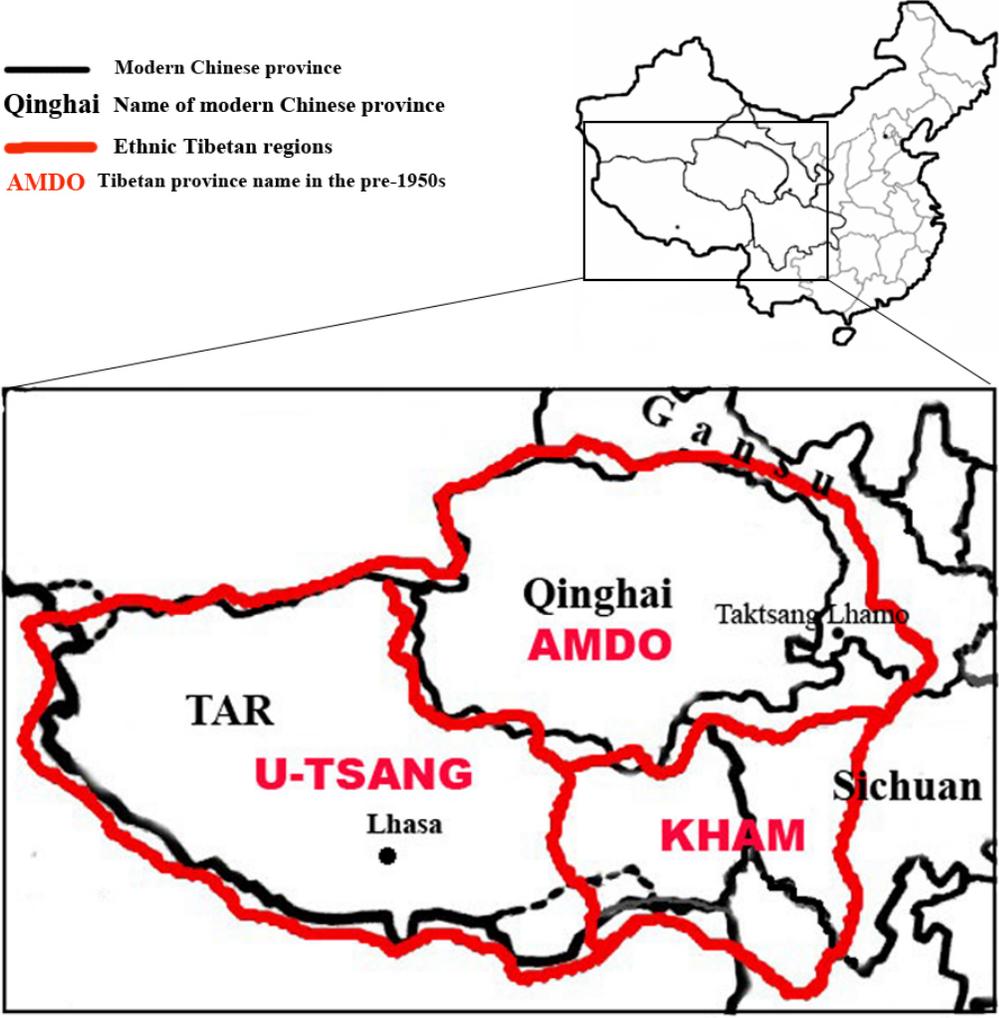
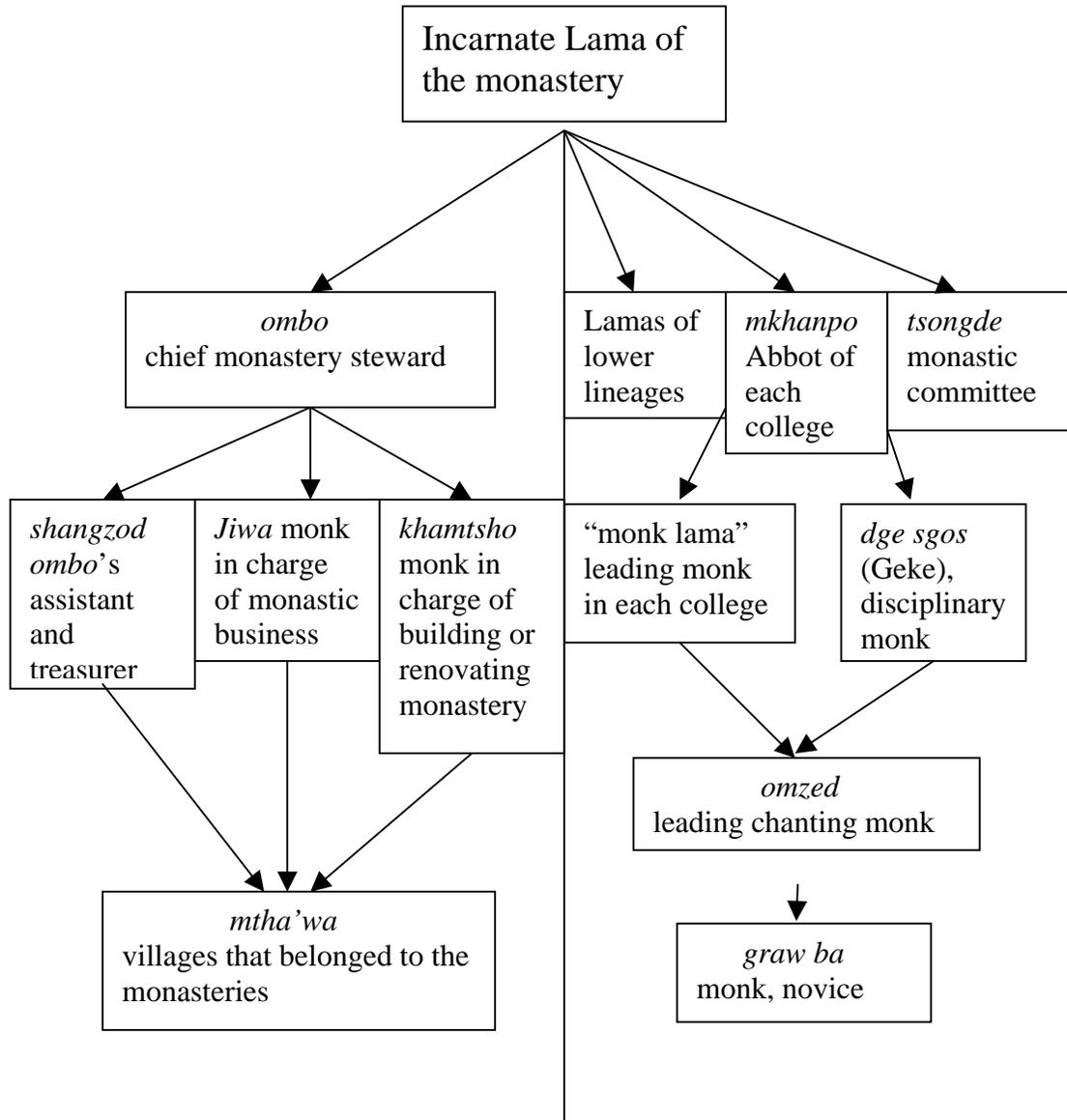


Figure 4

The Religious and Political Organization of the Tibetan Monastery in Amdo Before the 1950s



Right side of the vertical line indicates the religious part of monastic positions, many of which have been revived after the 1980s.
 Left side of the vertical line indicates the political function of the Tibetan monastery organization, which has been strictly restricted under the Chinese administration.

Figure 5

The Religious and Political Organization of the Tibetan Monastery in China
Since the 1980s

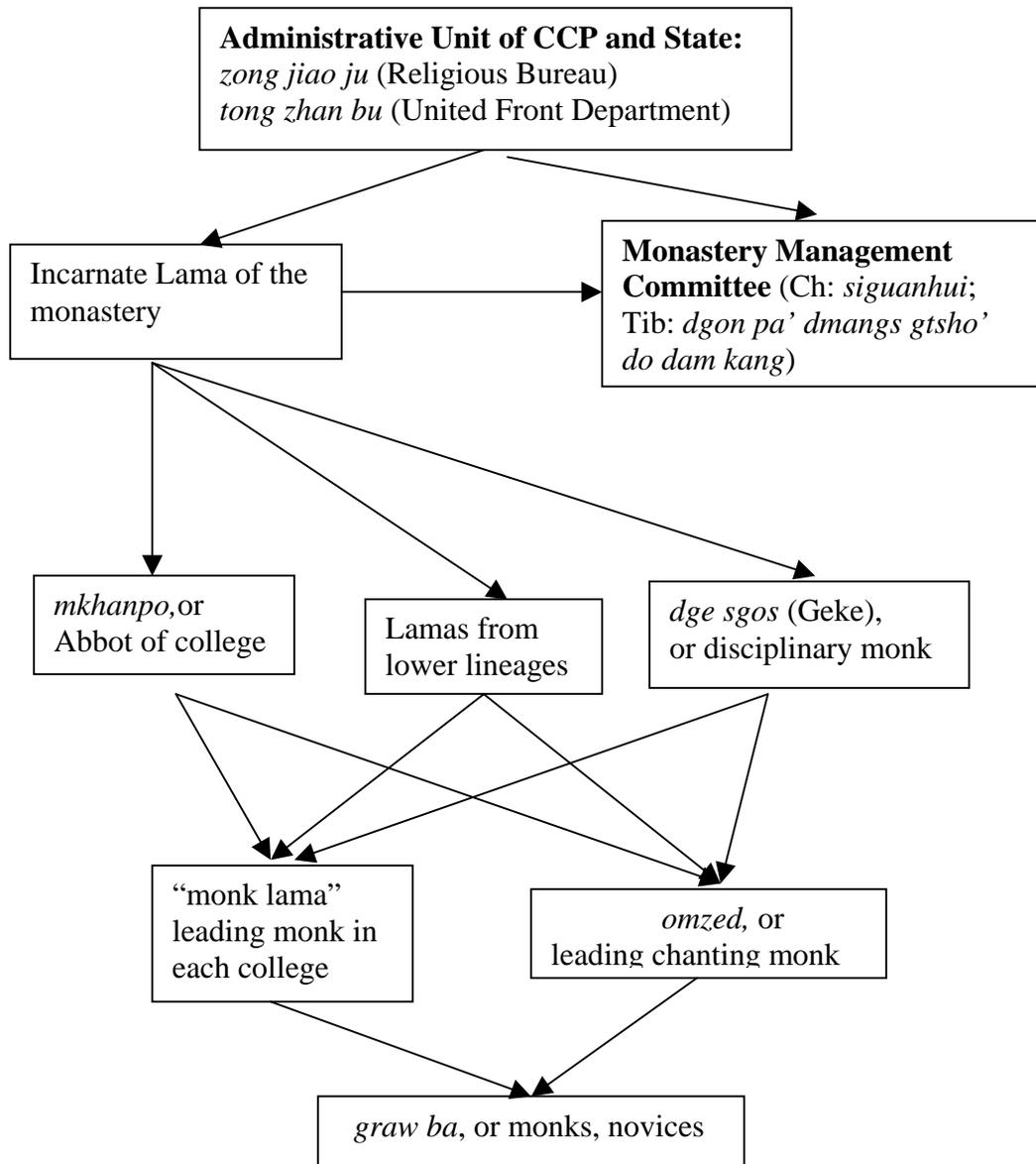


Figure 6

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