

The Boundaries of Identity:
The Fourteenth Dalai Lama, Nationalism, and *Ris med* (non-sectarian)
Identity in the Tibetan Diaspora

Elena Young
The Faculty of Religious Studies
McGill University, Montréal
October 18, 2010

A thesis submitted to McGill University
in partial fulfillment of the requirements of the degree of Masters of Arts

© Elena Young, 2010

Table of Content

| | |
|--|------------|
| Abstract | i |
| Résumé | ii |
| Acknowledgments | iii |
| Note of Transcription | iv |
| Abbreviations | v |
| Figure 1: Map of TAR | vi |
| Figure 2: Map of Khams | vii |
| Introduction | 1 |
| Chapter 1: ‘Ris’ or ‘Ris med’: Qualifying the <i>Ris med</i> Movement in Nineteenth Century Khams | 13 |
| Chapter 2: The Dalai Lama and the Re-imagining of Tibetan Institutional and Sectarian Frameworks | 43 |
| Chapter 3: Imagining Tibet | 74 |
| Conclusion | 97 |
| Bibliography | 101 |

Abstract

This thesis examines the complex process by which Tenzin Gyatso (Bstan 'dzin rgya mtsho), the fourteenth Dalai Lama, has publicly and consciously sought to rise above traditional structures of sectarianism in order to forge a coherent Tibetan identity in exile. As the self-proclaimed political and spiritual leader of the Tibetan people, the Dalai Lama, as well as the Central Tibetan Administration (CTA), has frequently de-emphasized his Dge lugs pa sectarian affiliations, instead employing a mode of “non-sectarian” representation. I argue in this thesis that this “non-sectarianism” can be historically traced back to the nineteenth century *ris med* (“non-bias” or “non-sectarian”) movement, a trend spearheaded in the eastern region of Khams, Tibet. In this way, the current Dalai Lama’s efforts to unify Tibet under a rubric that delineates a non-sectarian identity, indeed parallels an earlier moment in the story of Tibet, one that was equally unstable and yet central to the historical narrative of Khams. Employing a historical and textual analysis based on primary and secondary sources, this thesis is a study of the fourteenth Dalai Lama’s appropriation of the historical *ris med* model, and an investigation of the techniques and modes of “non-sectarian” representation adopted and disseminated by this leader and his administration-in-exile. It investigates the implications of the Dalai Lama’s *ris med* identity on the larger project of ideological nation building in the Tibetan context, and explores how, “non-sectarianism” becomes decidedly sectarian in its desire to imagine a homogenous and unified Tibet in exile.

Résumé

Ce mémoire examine le processus complexe par lequel le quatorzième Dalaï-lama du Tibet a publiquement et sciemment cherché à s'élever au-delà de structures sectaires traditionnelles dans le but d'établir une identité cohérente dans le contexte de l'exil. En tant que chef politique et spirituel auto-proclamé du peuple tibétain, le Dalaï-lama, de même que l'Administration centrale tibétaine, a fréquemment minimisé son appartenance à la secte Dge lugs pa, faisant plutôt usage d'un mode de représentation « non-sectaire ». Dans le présent mémoire, je soutiens que cette approche « non-sectaire » peut être liée d'une façon historique au mouvement *ris med* (« sans parti pris » ou « non-sectaire ») du dix-neuvième siècle, dont l'avant-garde était active dans la région tibétaine du Khams. De cette façon, les efforts du Dalaï-lama d'unifier Tibet sous une rubrique non-sectaire, suivent parallèlement un moment antérieur dans l'histoire du Tibet, un moment tout aussi instable mais quand même central au narratif historique de la région du Khams. Au moyen d'une analyse historique et textuelle de la littérature primaire et secondaire, ce mémoire propose une étude de la façon dont le quatorzième Dalaï-lama s'est approprié le modèle historique du *ris med*, ainsi qu'une enquête sur les techniques et les modèles de représentation « non-sectaire » adoptés et disséminés par ce leader et son administration en exil. Il explore aussi les conséquences de l'identité *ris med* du Dalaï-lama sur le projet global de construction d'une nation tibétaine, ainsi que la façon dont la pensée « non-sectaire » devient indubitablement sectaire en raison de désir d'imaginer un Tibet homogène et unifié en exil.

Acknowledgements

The completion of this thesis would not have been possible without the generosity and kindness of many supportive people.

First and foremost, I would like to express my utter gratitude to my supervisor, Professor Lara Braitstein. Her breadth of knowledge and encouragement have made this work possible, and I am very thankful for the guidance and patience she has shown towards this project from its beginning to end. Her support has been truly indispensable.

I would like to thank the Faculty of Religious Studies at McGill, especially Professor Victor Hori for shedding some light on the topics of Japanese non-sectarianism and diasporic Buddhism more broadly. I'd also like to thank Professor Daves Soneji for his guidance, particularly on the subject of nationalism, and for the enthusiasm he has shown towards this project since its inception. A heartfelt thanks also goes out to Philippe Turenne for helping me to better understand nineteenth century *ris med*, and for always taking the time to answer my questions. I'd also like to thank him for his help with translation of the abstract into French.

Natalie Kaiser has constantly taken the time to help me think through ideas both big and small, and I thank her for always being there. Bernadette Smith has been a cheerleader the whole way through; I am deeply thankful for her faith in me. A big thanks goes out to George Smith for always providing me with sustenance, both nutritional and emotional. And finally, Shital Sharma has helped with this endeavor in more ways than I can list here. I thank her for helping me to see this through to the end.

I am especially grateful for the love and support shown by my parents, now and always. This work is ultimately dedicated to them.

And finally, I would like to thank His Holiness the fourteenth Dalai Lama. He inspired this project, and he continues to inspire millions of people around the world, myself included.

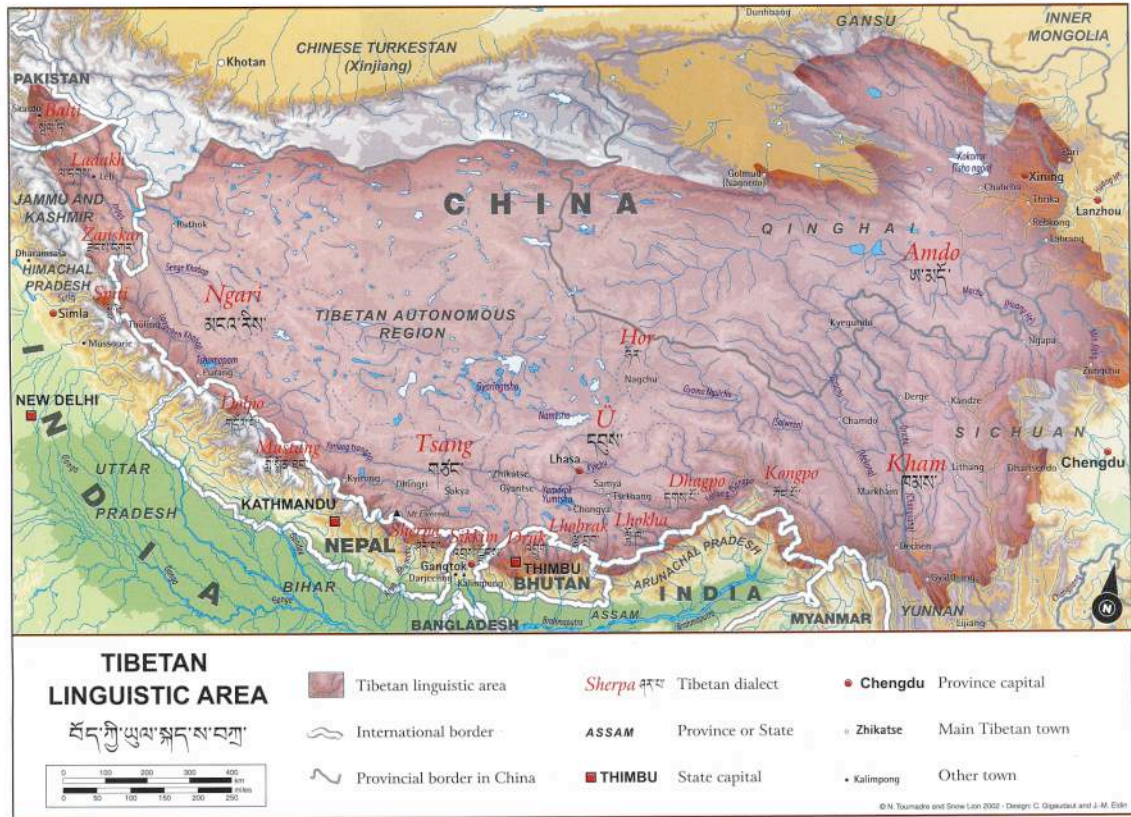
Note on Transliteration

All Tibetan words are in Wylie transliteration, with the exception of some commonly used titles and words such as Lama (*bla ma*) and Tulku (*sprul sku*). In some instances, personal names appear in their phonetic spelling, for example, Tsering Shakya and Ringu Tulku, retaining the popular phonetic spelling used in English publications and media by these individuals. Tibetan head letter (*mgo yig*) are capitalized for the names of people, places and Tibetan book titles, for example, 'Jam mgon Kong sprul, and *Mani bka'bum*. To refer to followers of Tibetan religious traditions, I have followed the conventions of Tibetan grammar and used the suffix pa, for example, Dge lugs pa and Rnying ma pa.

Abbreviations

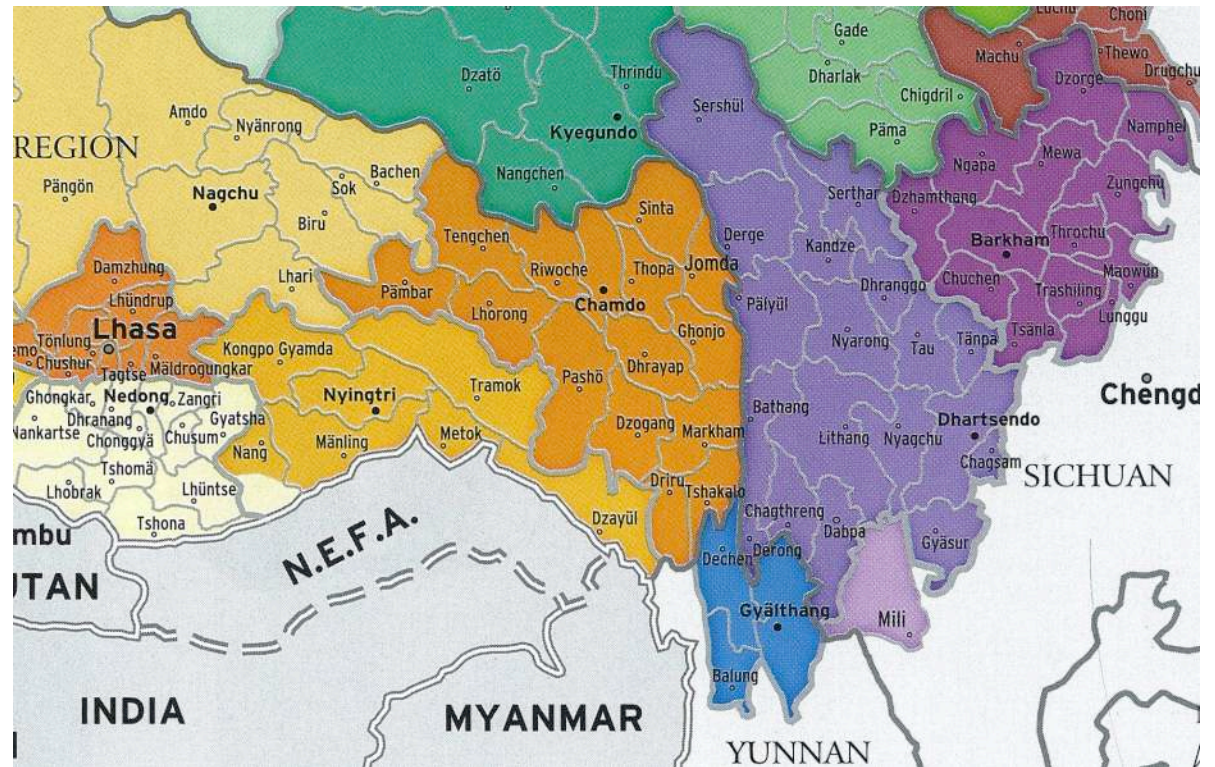
| | |
|--------------|--|
| PRC | People's Republic of China |
| CTA | Central Tibetan Administration |
| OHHDL | Office of His Holiness the Dalai Lama |
| ATPD | Assembly of Tibetan People's Deputies |
| CTE | Council for Tibetan Education |
| CIHTS | Central Institute for Higher Tibetan Studies |
| NKT | New Kadampa Tradition |

Figure 1



Map of the Tibetan Autonomous (TAR). Found in *Manual of Standard Tibetan* (Tournadre and Dorje, 2005).

Figure 2



Map of contemporary Khams, Tibet. Derge [Sde ge] is geographically located between Lhasa to the west and China to the east, with the Nyarong [Nya rong] region to the south-east. Found in *Manual of Standard Tibetan* (Tournadre and Dorje, 2005).

Introduction

“Each valley has its own dialect, each Lama has his own dharma.”
Tibetan Proverb

For the past several decades, Bodhanath, Kathmandu has been home to a large community of Tibetans in exile. I spent the summer of 2009 in Bodha, a community centered around the great Bodhanath Stūpa, or *mchod rten*, on the northeastern edge of Kathmandu’s urban sprawl. One afternoon in late July, I was having tea with a local Tibetan who worked as a language teacher at the Ka-Nying Shedrub Ling Monastery where I was doing my language training. I asked him the significance of the monastery’s name. He told me that the monastery was established under the directives of the sixteenth Karmapa, the spiritual head of the Bka’ brgyud (Kagyū) school of Tibetan Buddhism, while the monastery is also the direct beneficiary of sacred teachings from the Rnying ma (Nyingma) school. Hence the abbreviated namesake, Ka-Nying. I asked my language teacher if these sorts of inter-sectarian alliances were common in Tibetan Buddhism; did he, himself, feel an allegiance to just one sect of Buddhism, or rather, did he identify with a multiplicity of teachings? He told me that he felt a responsibility towards all the sects of Tibetan Buddhism, and that he held a *ris med* (“non-sectarian” or “non-partial”) view. To privilege the teachings of one school above another, he continued, was quite simply, small-minded. Only very old people, set in their ways, continued to think that way, he insisted. After all, he continued, His Holiness the Dalai Lama is a *ris med pa*, a follower of the non-sectarian path.

Later that evening I had dinner with a colleague who, having married a Tibetan, happened to be fluent in Tibetan. I mentioned my exchange with my language partner. To my horror, she told me that when she introduced herself to that same language teacher, the first thing he wanted to know was her husband's sect. Sectarian allegiances, in this case, depend on who is asking. It would seem as though sectarian allegiances continue to pervade Tibetan communities, as long as one's loyalty to one's sect does not trump one's loyalty to the ideal of a Tibetan Buddhism that accommodates sectarian differences, and a Tibet that is unified under the leadership of the fourteenth Dalai Lama. Furthermore, it would seem as though this hierarchy of loyalties is particularly important when speaking to a foreigner, such as myself. This thesis investigates the fourteenth Dalai Lama's self-representation as *ris med* leader, as well as the various ways in which he has subsequently promoted non-sectarianism in exile. It is also interested in the methods in which the Dalai Lama and the Tibet government-in-exile have actively forged a clear Tibetan identity in exile that overrides sectarian affiliations.

Since 1959, Tenzin Gyatso (Bstan 'dzin rgya mtsho), his Holiness the fourteenth Dalai Lama of Tibet, has lived in exile from his homeland, operating as the temporal and spiritual leader of the Tibetan people, and *de facto* head of the Tibetan government-in-exile¹. Following the final military overthrow of the Tibetan

¹ It should be noted that in 2001, the Tibetan parliament, on the advice of the Dalai Lama, elected the Kalon Tripa, the highest executive authority. The first elected Kalon Tripa — Professor Samdhong Rinpoche Lobsang Tenzin — took the oath of office on 5 September 2001. He was elected to the post of Kalon Tripa for the second time in August 2006. See the official website of the Central Tibetan Administration.

government by the People's Republic of China (PRC), the Dalai Lama, together with almost 100,000 Tibetan refugees, sought political asylum in India, where he continues to live in exile to this day. The Dalai Lama has been a major force behind the Tibetan people's efforts at preserving their cultural identity in exile. This has involved establishing a new education system, monasteries, drafting a Tibetan Constitution, and re-organizing the Tibetan government along democratic lines. The fourteenth Dalai Lama has responded to this particular historical crisis by appealing to a religious-national pride: religious sophistication and greatness are conveyed to be at the heart of Tibetans' identity, and Tibetan Buddhism has come to be articulated as representing the value and worth of the Tibetan culture and way of life (Goldstein 1998, 6).

Anthropologist Margaret Nowak, in her study of Tibetan refugee communities in India during the late 1970s, found that the Dalai Lama and the Tibetan government-in-exile were faced with the difficult task of forging a clear Tibetan Buddhist identity that would override the traditional sectarian identities that kept Tibetan divided amongst themselves: "...the Dalai Lama himself...is engaged in a public relations campaign to stress harmony and unity among the sects. This is likewise true with respect to regional difference" (Nowak 65).

Sectarianism in Tibet can be traced back to the beginning of the thirteenth century when Tibet saw the development of distinct sects² that evolved from

² I am using the term "sect" here to describe a specifically Tibetan religious phenomenon. Sociologists of religion such as Ernst Troeltsch and H. R. Niebuhr have contributed a great deal to the study of religious sectarianism, accounting for diverse patterns of religious experience through the development of a now classic topology of "church" and "sect." Additionally, B.R Wilson notes that sects, by virtue of their minority condition, stand "in self-conscious opposition to the

various lineages of teaching initiated during previous periods. Generally speaking, there are four of these institutional entities: the Rnying ma, the Bka' brgyud, the Sa skya, and the Dge lugs. A fifth group, the Bon, is sometimes considered a very old sect, predating the introduction of Buddhism into Tibet. In Tibetan these sects are called *chos lugs*, literally translated as *dharma systems*³. Central to each of these groups is the notion of lineage; the idea that the Buddhism taught by their respective lamas can be traced back to the historical Buddha himself. For the most part, each of these groups has maintained religious authority through an allegiance with the past and an ability to make the past relevant to the present (Lopez 1997, 24). In the seventeenth century, with the help of the Mongols, the Dge lugs pa sect rose to political power under the rule the fifth Dalai Lama. Up until 1959, under the leadership of the Dalai Lama lineage, Tibet had an independent government that integrated both the religious and secular spheres (*chos srid gnyis 'brel*).

In exile, the fourteenth Dalai Lama has publicly and consciously sought to “rise above sectarianism” (Kapstein 1998, 190), and has frequently deemphasized his Dge lugs pa sectarian affiliations, instead employing a model of “non-

conventional patterns of religious belief and practice” (6). I wish to differentiate my use of the terms “sect” and “sectarianism” from the ways in which they have traditionally been conceived in the field of the sociology of religion.

³ *Chos lugs* is generally rendered into English with one of the three terms: order, school, or sect. As Donald Lopez points out, each of these translations is misleading. “Order” implies a unique monastic code; however, all Buddhist monks follow the same Indian monastic code, and adherents to these institutional entities consist of lay devotees as well. “School” implies a differentiation on the basis of philosophical beliefs, and although there are many ideologies that distinguish these *chos lugs*, they nonetheless adhere to the tenets of Mahayana Buddhism. “Sect” carries with it the negative connotation of dissent from a majority group (Lopez 1997, 24). Nonetheless, in recent scholarship *chos lugs* is most commonly translated as “sect,” and as such I will use this translation the most frequently. I may, however, use the translations “school” and “order” interchangeably as well.

sectarianism.” However, the “non-sectarian” model utilized by the Dalai Lama and the Tibetan government-in-exile is not a novel concept, but one that can be traced back to the nineteenth century *ris med* (“non-bias” or “non-sectarian”) movement, a trend spearheaded in Eastern Tibet by lamas such as ’Jam dbyang Mkhyen brtse’i dbang po (1820-1892), ’Jam mgon Kong sprul Blo gros mtha’ yas (1813-1899) and their disciple ’Ju Mi pham rnam rgyal (1846-1912). In following the model established by these teachers, the Dalai Lama has cast himself as a *ris med pa*: an adherent to the *ris med* path. My thesis will focus on the fourteenth Dalai Lama’s self-representation as a “non-sectarian,” how this kind of re-imagining could only have taken place in a diasporic context, and the ways in which this self-imagining has resulted in the homogenization of Tibetan Buddhist religious identity in exile. Furthermore, this project will examine the implications of such a mode of representation, and how it is reflexive of a larger nationalist project of “imagined community” (Anderson 3), an “artificial creation mythically retrojected into the past of human communities in order to legitimize their present political organization” (Dreyfus 2002, 37).

This thesis opens with a chapter historically contextualizing the nineteenth century *ris med* movement that took place in Khams, Tibet, in order to provide a historical framework for non-sectarianism in Tibetan Buddhism. During the nineteenth century, the Kingdom of Sde dge in Khams, Tibet, experienced an increase in Dge lugs hegemony. In response, Sde dge bore witness to a cultural renaissance that gave rise to a growing trend in non-sectarianism. Spearheaded by several prominent lamas from the Bka’ brgyud, Rnying ma and Sa skya schools of

Tibetan Buddhism, the *ris med* claimed to approach the Buddhist dharma not from the point of view of sectarian affiliation, but from a place of unity and inclusion. Western scholars have grappled with the difficult task of qualifying the *ris med* movement (Samuel, 2003; Smith, 2001; Ruegg, 1989): the ecumenical and encyclopedic nature of the movement suggests that it sought to transcend the particularities of sect and faction. However, the non-sectarian movement was unanimously and unabashedly not Dge lugs pa. In fact, in order to exist as a self-contained movement, religious, cultural, political or otherwise, the inclusive *ris med* approach necessitated its antonym, the exclusive. Chapter 1 will present a brief historical survey describing the socio-political climate of nineteenth century Khams before exploring the scholastic, literary and doctrinal developments forwarded by the *ris med*.

In the second chapter I afford considerable attention to the ways in which the fourteenth Dalai Lama has appropriated the non-sectarian framework introduced by the *ris med* movement, thus transforming traditional Tibetan Buddhist sectarianism in a diasporic context. From a position of exile, the Dalai Lama, as de facto leader of the Dge lugs sect, has found it useful to appropriate this *ris med* approach, which had developed out a historical need to counter Dge lugs pa hegemony. Just as the nineteenth century *ris med* movement was established and disseminated through popular literature, educational reform and doctrine, the Dalai Lama and the Tibetan government-in-exile have used similar venues. Chapter 2 analyzes the literary and web-based material produced and disseminated by the Dalai Lama and the government-in-exile as venues for

promoting non-sectarianism. I discuss the doctrinal arguments made by the Dalai Lama when arguing for the ultimate unity of the sects of Tibetan Buddhism. I then go on to investigate how the Tibetan parliament-in-exile has been constituted to represent all the sects and regions of Tibet, as well as the ways in which the establishment of the Tibetan education system-in-exile has served as a means of stressing and transmitting the ideology of a unified Tibetan nation. These venues have provided a space from which the Dalai Lama has cast himself, not as a highly influential and high ranking *sprul sku* (incarnate lama) of a traditionally parochial sect, but as the spiritual and temporal leader of a newly homogenized, unified Tibet.

The final chapter of the thesis analyzes the motivations underlying the appropriation of non-sectarianism by both the nineteenth century *ris med* movement and by the fourteenth Dalai Lama. Historically, *ris med* leaders were responding to a highly oppressive situation following the increased missionary activity of the Dge lugs pa sect in Eastern Tibet. Presently, the Dalai Lama and the Tibetan government-in-exile continue to be faced with the daunting task of needing to appeal to a Western liberal-democratic audience while fostering hope and resilience among a dispersed Tibetan refugee community. In this last chapter I argue that the Dalai Lama's non-sectarian stance has served as a means of creating and maintaining a sense of national unity in the Tibetan exiled community that has come to predominate over sectarian affiliations. In denouncing factionalism, the Dalai Lama has turned himself into what sociologist Sherry Ortner refers to as a "summarizing symbol," "those symbols which are

seen as summing up, expressing, representing for the participant in an emotionally powerfully and relatively undifferentiated way, what the system means to them” (Ortner 1339). In this way, the Dalai Lama has constructed Tibetan religious identity; in the absence of a territory called “Tibet,” he has nonetheless constructed what Thongchai Winichakul refers to as a “geo-body,” a geographical technology that draws, in this case, figurative borders, creating nationhood spatially through the production of institutions and practices (Winichakul 16). The liminal nature of diaspora provides a “pure” space for the drawing of these borders, and for a kind of “cultural cleansing” (Malkki 6). Here, refugees, after undergoing a kind of cultural renewal, imagine themselves as constituting a strengthened and improved nation deserving of a homeland. Tibetan nationalism, then, is arguably not the product of certain social conditions such as language or race or religion, but rather one that has been “imagined” into existence (Anderson 1991). The last section of this chapter analyses the Dalai Lama’s self-representation as “non-sectarian” as contributing to the homogenization of Tibetan Buddhist religious identity in exile, and how this is reflexive of a larger nationalist project of “imagined community.”

Methods and Materials

This study employs a textual and historical analysis based on primary and secondary sources. My study of nineteenth century *ris med* depends heavily on works by historians such as E. Gene Smith (2001), Geoffrey Samuel (1992; 1993), and Tashi Tsering (1985). These publications are not only influential and invaluable

insofar as they represent some of the first contributions to scholarship on *ris med*, but they also provide an indispensable historical account of Sde dge and Khams during the nineteenth century. Additionally, Alexander Patten Gardner's doctoral dissertation entitled *The Twenty-five Great Sites of Khams: Religious Geography, Revelation, and Nonsectarianism in Nineteenth Century Eastern Tibet* (2006), was invaluable in its attempts to problematize the ways in which Western scholars in the 20th century have transformed and idealized the *ris med* of lamas such as 'Jam mgon Kong sprul, particularly his innovative and clever distinction between *ris med* and the nominalized "*Rimay*" appearing in the Western lexicon.

Jeffrey Hopkins' article entitled "Tibetan Monastic Colleges: Rationality versus the Demands of Allegiance" (2001) provides a useful framework for understanding the highly parochial nature of the Dge lugs pa scholastic and monastic order. Works by S. Douglas Duckworth (2008) and John Whitney Pettit (1999) informed my understanding of the ways in which recent scholarship surrounding the doctrine of *gzhan stong* ("extrinsic emptiness") has been construed.

I look to both primary and secondary sources in order to analyze the current Dalai Lama's self-representation as a *ris med pa* in exile. Primary sources include interviews conducted with the Dalai Lama by reporters and journalists, particularly the conversations that took place between the Tibetan leader and Thomas Laird on the subject of Tibetan History. These exchanges took place between November 1997 and July 2000, and are documented in Laird's book entitled *The Story of Tibet: Conversations with the Dalai Lama* (2006). I consulted several speeches and talks given by the Dalai Lama, mostly those leading up to his

acceptance of the Nobel Peace Prize in 1989. I relied heavily on a series of public teachings given by His Holiness in Europe and North America during the 1980s on the teachings of “the Great Perfection,” *Rdzog chen*, the central teaching of the Rnying ma school. These teachings were edited and compiled by Patrick Gaffney (2000). Other essays and speeches collected in popular English-language publications including *Kindness, Clarity, and Insight* (1984), and *His Holiness the Dalai Lama: Speeches, Statements, Articles, Interviews 1987 to 1995* (1995) were also consulted.

Several primary web-based sources including The Official Website of the Office of His Holiness the fourteenth Dalai Lama of Tibet (<http://www.dalailama.com/>) and The Official Website of the Central Tibetan Administration (<http://www.tibet.net/>) served as a resource for accessing statements and speeches made by the Dalai Lama and his office. Although not scholarly in nature, these web-sites are invaluable insofar as they serve as the venues from which the government-in-exile engages with global audiences, publicly issues stances taken by the Dalai Lama on controversial subjects such as sectarianism and Shugs ldan worship, and is able to imagine and re-imagine its identity as representing a body of people in a way that is up-to-date, dynamic and always changing.

Secondary works by Stephanie Roemer (2008), Margaret Nowak (1984) and Sherry Ortner (1973) were indispensable to my analysis of the Dalai Lama’s employment of non-sectarian ideology at the level of Tibetan policy, education and parliament in exile. Ortner’s theory of “summarizing symbol” provides a theoretical

framework from which to analyze the Dalai Lama as a non-sectarian. I used several works by Georges Dreyfus throughout the various developments of my thesis, including *The Sound of Two Hands Clapping*, his seminal book on Dge lugs pa scholasticism (2003a), his analysis of the dominant Dge lugs pa Prāsangika-Madhyamaka model (2003b), and his discussion of the Rdo rje Shugs Idan controversy issued on the official website of the Dalai Lama.

Additionally, I employed a conceptual framework culled from a range of academic disciplines including anthropology, sociology, diaphora studies and geography. The theoretical perspectives I use to analyze the Dalai Lama's non-sectarianism in the context of nation building stem largely from Thongchai Winichakul's work on the construction of political "geo-bodies" in the process of mapping nationhood (1994), Liisa Malkki's ethnographic study of Hutu refugees and her theory of the categorical construction of "purity" in exile (1995), and theories of nationalism as "imagined communities" as forwarded by Benedict Anderson (1991) and Partha Chatterjee (1993). Robert Barnett's article entitled "Violated Specialness" (2001) and Toni Huber's article entitled "Shangri-la in Exile" (2001) both make the important argument that Tibetan identity in exile is not the product of an essential substratum, but rather has been informed by transnational identity politics, and earlier Western Orientalist fantasies of Tibet. Their arguments have informed my own understanding of the process by which the Dalai Lama has crafted a non-sectarian Tibet in response to Western expectations.

This thesis maps the multivalent meanings and incarnations of that which has come to be referred to as *ris med*, as it moves through the past two centuries of

Tibetan Buddhist religious history. *Ris med*, once an ambiguous and fluid category, has been appropriated by a “supra-national” authority, the fourteenth Dalai Lama, and, it too, has been carried into exile from its homeland. Ironically, in the liminality of exile, *ris med* has solidified, concretized. In the hands of the Dalai Lama, *ris med* no longer embodies the eclecticism and ambiguity it once had, but partakes in a larger project of building national unity and homogeneity in the dispersed Tibetan community, leaving little room for dissonant and local voices that run counter to coherent and stable notion of Tibetan refugee identity. In this way, *ris med* sets forth a decidedly partisan version of a supposedly non-sectarian and inclusive ideal.

Chapter 1:
**‘Ris’ or ‘Ris med’: Qualifying the *Ris med* Movement in Nineteenth
Century Khams**

Ringu Tulku, a contemporary *ris med* lama living in the United States, recently authored a book outlining the non-sectarian philosophy of the nineteenth century *ris med* lama, ’Jam mgon Kong srpul⁴. In the introduction to this work, Ringu Tulku references the fourteenth Dalai Lama, and claims that the Dalai Lama has been very much influenced by the Great *ris med* lamas of the past century, and that he, too, is a follower of the non-sectarian path (Ringu Tulku 13). In exile, the Dalai Lama has consistently framed himself as a follower of the non-sectarian path when addressing Tibetan and Western audiences. *Ris med*, here, functions as an appealing device, one that presents Tibetan Buddhism as open, tolerant, and innovative. It does not represent a novel concept, but a movement that developed in eastern Tibet during the nineteenth century. This chapter will attempt to return *ris med* to its original place and time, locating the movement within the larger socio-historical framework of nineteenth century Khams, and outlining some of the difficulties that arise when one tries to define *ris med* as a cohesive movement, insofar as it proves to be a category that is fluid and tends to defy qualification.

⁴ See *The Ri-me Philosophy of Jamgön Kongtrul: A Study of the Buddhist Lineages of Tibet*, Ringu Tulku, 2006.

Qualifying *Ris med*

The Khams-pas of Eastern Tibet tell the story of an encounter that took place between the non-sectarian lama Rdza dpal sprul and a group of scholastic monks who were opposed to his non-sectarian tendencies. While Rdza dpal sprul was on retreat, the scholars approached the entrance to his cave with the intension of challenging the lama to a sectarian debate. Several bemused villagers gathered to watch. One of the monks demanded that Rdza dpal sprul proclaim his religious affiliations, expecting that he would answer that he was a Rnying ma pa. Instead, Rdza dpal sprul answered, simply, that he was a follower of the Buddha. The monk then asked him the name of his refuge and guru. He replied that his *mūlaguru* was the Three Jewels. The monk, becoming anxious, demanded that Rdza dpal sprul reveal the name bestowed upon him at the time of his esoteric initiation, certain that this would force the lama to disclose his Rnying ma affiliations. In response, Dpal sprul pointed to his penis, explaining that it was his “secret mark,” *gsang mtshan*, which means both the honorific for penis as well as the word for one’s esoteric initiatory name. The onlookers howled with laughter, and the scholar monks left dejected, having lost a debate that never quite got off the ground (Smith 246).

This is the story of one lama’s victory over parochial bias, but it is also reflexive of a larger ris-med movement taking place in eastern Tibet during the nineteenth century. The kingdom of Sde dge in the province of Khams was bearing witness to a cultural renaissance and religious flourishing that encouraged

inter-sectarian exchange (Gardner 110). Scholars have continuously used the category of sectarian division to describe Tibetan history and doctrine, citing instances where the four main schools of Tibetan Buddhism have produced scathing attacks against their opponents, and framing the narrative of Buddhism in Tibet in terms of power struggles between competing sects, marked by oral debate, persecutions and factional wars (Powers 360). It is important to note, however, that although Tibetans did use doctrinal polemics to fight their battles, most of these wars were fought along political and regional divides, and that the creation and propagation of Tibetan Buddhist sects was often the result of allegiances formed between leaders of particular religious sects and regional powers fighting for control of the Tibetan plateau of Mongol patronage (Gardner 127)⁵. During the nineteenth century, this political and doctrinal factionalism was met by a kind of counter-movement⁶ spearheaded by several prominent lamas, and came to be commonly referred to as *ris med* (“non-sectarian,” “non-biased”) and is thought to describe a need to approach the Buddhist dharma not from the point of view of sectarian affiliation, but from a place of unity and inclusion.

Contemporary *ris med* lamas commonly point to that fact that a biased approach to the dharma contradicts the essential non-dual nature of ultimate

⁵George Dreyfus elaborates: “The creation of Tibetan schools has often owed more to the chance occurrences of history and to political expediencies than to substantive religious or philosophical differences” (2003, 28).

⁶Alexander Gardner’s dissertation argues against classifying *ris med* as an actual movement: “What seems to have been the case in the late nineteenth... was not a ‘movement’ but simply a sizable community of scholars who put long-held values of inter-sectarian exploration and respect into a regionally and historically specific practice” (136).

reality⁷. However, during the nineteenth century, the great *ris med* teachers including ‘Jam byang Mkyen brtse’i dbang po (1820-1892), ‘Jam mgon Kong sprul Blo gros mtha’ yas (1813-1899) and their disciple ‘Ju Mi pham (1846-1912), were reacting against an increased political presence of Dge lugs hegemony in Khams and specifically in the kingdom of Sde dge. Long-standing tensions between the predominantly Dge lugs government in Central Tibet and the aristocratic powers in Khams incited some lamas from the Bka’ brgyud, Sa skya and Rnying ma schools of Buddhism to create a united front (Pettit 21).

With the 1962 publication of Mme Ariane MacDonald’s study of the *Mañjuśrīmūlakalpamaṇḍala*, some of the first information about the life and works of ‘Jam mgon Kong sprul and ‘Jam byang Mkyen brtse became known outside of Asia (Smith 235). Since then, Western scholars have tried in various ways to qualify the *ris med* movement, and come to terms with the complexities of what it means to be “non-sectarian.” In his important work on Mi pham’s *Beacon of Certainty*, John Whitney Pettit suggests that the *ris med* movement represented the forging of “a sort of cultural—if not quite political—solidarity” (21). However, he hints at the difficulty in calling *ris med* an “innovative” movement, arguing that ecumenism has in fact long been the “rule rather than the exception among eminent Tibetan scholars” (98). Pettit points to the fact that the

⁷ In his work *The Rime Philosophy of Jamgön Kongtrul the Great*, Ringu Tulku does an excellent job of surveying the development of the *ris med* approach of the nineteenth century, but elucidates a highly emic understanding of the tradition. For example, he writes: “We need to realize that all Buddhist traditions ultimately arrive at the same point. . . true followers of the Buddha cannot help but be Ri-mé, or nonsectarian, in their approach”(5). In addition to divorcing the movement from its socio-historical context, Ringu Tulku imbues *ris med* with an implicit method of self-valorizing.

concept of “*ri su ma chad par*”— seeking the dharma without discrimination— appears consistently in the biographies of Tibetan lamas (98). E. Gene Smith also tries to describe *ris med*: in his most famous work, the introduction to ‘Jam mgon Kong sprul’s Encyclopedia the *Shes bya kun khyab*, he describes non-sectarianism as “less than a movement, but more than a trend” (236), grounded the language of unity and eclecticism (237). On the other hand, Seyfort Ruegg argues that the impartial and unlimited nature of the *ris med* movement was not so much eclectic as it was universalistic and encyclopedic (310). And finally, in his discussion of ‘Ju Mi pham’s treatment of the doctrine of Buddha-nature, Douglas Duckworth notes that non-sectarianism in Tibet during the nineteenth century was by no means simplistic, but should be characterized by an attention to a plurality of interpretations. He elaborates:

Such attention to plurality of interpretations does not (necessarily) mean a coercive amalgamation of others’ view with one’s own, but involves a move in the direction of inclusiveness that contrasts with a more insular model of scholarship that frames the boundaries of discourse within a more narrowly delineated tradition of interpretation (xxii).

Duckworth here is contrasting two hermeneutics: one that is highly inclusive and one that is highly exclusive. But this carries with it an implicit contradiction, namely, that the inclusive is only inclusive insofar as it is not exclusive. I would argue that in nineteenth century Khams, the inclusive *ris med* approach arose in self-conscious opposition to the exclusive Dge lugs pa approach. The task of defining what *ris med was* is indeed a difficult one; the inclusivity of the movement suggests that it was practically everything. Based on

the logic that the inclusive is only inclusive because it *is not* exclusive, I would argue that, when attempting to characterize what it meant to be non-sectarian in nineteenth century Khams, perhaps it is more fruitful to discuss what *ris med* was *not*. The non-sectarian movement was unanimously and unabashedly not Dge lugs pa. In fact, over the course of its fruition, *ris med* consciously defined itself against Dge lugs pa hegemony. This interpretive approach, which was by no means univocal, stemmed from a highly tumultuous political situation, and played out in the realms of scholasticism, literature and doctrine. The proponents of the non-sectarian movement were consciously creating a space where the predominant, and at a times oppressive, Dge lugs pa leadership could be countered. They were not only “non-Dge lugs pa,” but their self-identity very much depended on the parochial biases of the Dge lugs pa sect. I will now go on to present a brief historical survey describing the socio-political climate of nineteenth century Khams before exploring the scholastic, literary and doctrinal developments spearheaded by the *ris med*.

The Kingdom of Sde ge: War, Turmoil and Intrigue in the Royal Capital

What came to be known as the nineteenth century *ris med* movement was centered in the royal capital of Sde ge in the eastern Tibetan region of Khams [Figure 1]. However, this alliance of ritual, intellectual and literary character came into being as the result of earlier developments that had taken place on Khams’ historical terrain. The seventeenth and eighteenth centuries saw a revival of the Rnying ma pa school, characterized by the re-building and growth of several

monastic centers, including Sming grol gling, Rdo rje brag and Zhe chen. Up until this point, the Rnying ma tradition had been highly de-centralized, consisting predominately of hermitages and *gompas* (monasteries). With the institutional recognition that came with the construction of these monastic centers, the Rnying ma tradition was able to establish and maintain a respectable clerical and scholastic tradition (Samuel 1993, 533).

The eighteenth century Rnying ma renaissance was marked by the fame of the great scholar 'Jigs med gling pa (1730-1798), who, while in a visionary state, received extensive teachings from the great fourteenth century scholar and systematizer of Rnying ma thought, Klong chen rab 'byams (Duckworth xix; Samuel 1993, 543). Like Klong chen rab 'byams pa, 'Jigs med gling pa played a significant role in the development of the philosophy of *Rdzog chen*, "the Great Perfection", a meditation system of utmost importance to the Rnying ma sect. 'Jigs med gling pa received a cycle of revelations know as the *Klong chen snying thig* from Klong chen rab 'byams pa, which in more recent times would become the basis of the main *Rdzog chen* teachings lineages (Samuel 1993, 534). Both Klong chen rab 'byams pa and 'Jigs med gling pa would have a significant effect on the great *ris med* lamas of the nineteenth century: 'Jigs med gling pa's next three rebirths were each important leaders of the non-sectarian movement; they were recognized to be Dil mgo Mkhyen brtse, 'Jam byang Mkhyen brtse'i dbang po and Rdza dpal srul. Additionally, each of these lamas were key figures in the further transmission of the *Klong chen snying thig*. The works of Mi pham, the student-colleague of 'Jam dbyang Mkhyen brtse'i dbang po and 'Jam mgon Kong

sprul, can be read as extended commentaries on the writings of Klong chen rab 'byams pa (Duckworth xix).

E. Gene Smith argues that one of the primary factors in the non-sectarian movement's later development was a tragedy that took place involving the Sde dge ruling family during the eighteenth century (26). Over the course of the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries, the Sde dge princes were patrons of any activity that was considered meritorious. This was not unusual for Khams pa aristocracy; often this patronage of this sort exhibited very little sectarian allegiance. However, naturally, certain schools came to enjoy the re-occurring patronage of certain families, generation after generation. By the end of the eighteenth century, the Ngor pa sub-sect of the Sa skya school had developed a preferential relations with the ruling Sde dge family. The Sa skya came to control the royal monastery and were singularly patronized by the royal family.

At this time, 'Jigs med gling pa's reputation as a great Rnying ma scholar and teacher had spread throughout eastern Tibet. Both the King of Sde dge, Kun 'grub bde dga' bzang po, and the queen, Tshe dbang lha mo, became disciples of his, and 'Jigs med gling pa quickly became one of the most famous teachers in the kingdom. The sudden preferential treatment that was being shown to the Nyingma-pas incited jealousy among the Ngor pas. In 1790, the King died quite suddenly, leaving his young widowed wife to become regent for their infant son, Tshe dbang rdo rje rig 'dzin. During her brief eight-year regency, she proved to be a fervent Rnying ma pa: she was a loyal patron of 'Jigs med gling pa, and had several blocks carved for a number of works by Klong chen pa and 'Jigs med

gling pa (Smith 25), much to the trepidation of the hierarchs of the royal Sa skya monastery. In 1798, this preferential treatment led to an open civil rebellion, and the queen and her reputed lover, 'Jigs med gling pa's disciple named Dowa sgrub chen, were imprisoned and later executed. The twelve-year-old Tshe dbang rdo rje rig 'dzin became the nominal ruler of Sde dge under Sa skya pa tutelage, and ruled for several decades. The Prince later renounced his aristocratic position taking robes in 1826. He would go on to produce a remarkable historical document entitled the *Royal Genealogy of Sde dge (Sde dge'i rgyal rabs)*. This work was careful to re-affirm the time-honored relationship between the Sa skya sect and the aristocracy of Sde dge, but clearly stated that the religious policy of Sde dge should express and support a commitment to the tolerance and patronage of all schools and sects. Tshe dbang rdo rje rig 'dzin uses the term *ris med* in his genealogy to describe an ideal Sde dge state in which all religious traditions were embraced and given equal treatment by the court (Gardner 132). According to Smith, this was perhaps the first explicitly non-sectarian Tibetan document (25; Pettit 98). As Gardner notes, the episode of sectarian clash involving Tshe dbang rdo rje rig 'dzin's mother the queen, illustrates "the delicacy with which the numerous religious institutions coexisted in Dergé [Sde dge], and the readiness with which their distinctiveness could be turned into political weapons" (131).

A few decades later, while teachers like 'Jam mgon Kong sprul and 'Jam byang Mkhayen brtse were becoming more popular and influential, Sde dge was once again engulfed in incessant warfare. In the early 1830s, Nyag sked A Mgon po nam rgyal, a warlord from the region of Nyag rong, had launched a campaign

to take over all of eastern Khams, including the kingdom of Sde dge (Kapstein 2006, 167). In 1837, this tyrannical chieftain, who was popularly known by his nickname “Nyag sked the Blind” spent several years subduing a local feud in Nyag rong, a region just east of Sde dge [figure 2], uniting the upper, middle and lower parts of the Nyag rong valley before going on to occupy the rest of eastern Khams, including Sde dge in 1862. From a political and geographical standpoint, Khams was interposed between the Lhasa-based Dge lugs pa administration of the Dga’ Idan Palace, and the Chinese provincial authority of Sichuan. From 1725 on, Khams east of the ‘Bri River had been a protectorate of the Chinese empire, and the Qing stationed troops along the southern tea route (Gardner 146). On the other hand, Central Tibet managed to maintain a firm presence in Khams west of the ‘Bri [figure 2]. But Sde dge was only officially a protectorate, and remained more or less self-governing until the advent of the Nyag rong war. However, conditions were unsettled in both Central Tibet and China at this time: Central Tibet was pre-occupied with the Tibet-Gorkha War from 1850-56, while China was fighting the Opium War and later quelling the Tapai Rebellion. Tashi Tsering⁸ notes, “while both the Manchu Emperor of China and the Tibetan Government of Lhasa were busy attending to their areas of tension and turmoil, Mgon-po rnam-sgyal had succeeded in becoming a parallel power in Kham” (205). In 1862, when the Nyag

⁸ While most scholars depict Mgon po rnam rgyal’s campaign as tyrannical and unspeakably cruel (see Kapstein 2006), Tashi Tsering argues that his rule had the positive effect of uniting the many provinces of Khams. He elaborates: “Unfortunately, this unity was lost after [Mgon po rnam rgyal’s] death [at the hands of the Lhasa army] leaving Tibet open to the last incursions of the dying Manchu dynasty.” For an alternative perspective, see Tsering 1985.

rong army was at the peak of its power, they proceeded to conquer Sde dge, which put up very little resistance. The Chinese forces launched a failed offensive attack from the east, and encouraged the Central Tibetan army to attack from the west. The ministers of Sde dge and members of its ruling families resented Nyag rong's rule, and also turned to Lhasa to ask for help. The Tibetan army was dispatched in 1863, pillaging and looting the countryside over the course of their advancement. The army inflicted a great deal of violence upon the local Khams population, and this gross misconduct resulted in strong feelings of antagonism on the part of Khams pas toward the Lhasa regime, feelings that are continuously harbored to this day (Tsering 210; Kapstein 2006, 167). The Tibetan army succeeded in driving the Nyag rong army out of Sde dge in 1864, killing Mgon po rnam gyal a year later. Furthermore, the Lhasa administration demanded an indemnity from Beijing, arguing that the Qing should pay the Tibetan's expenses insofar as the region officially belonged to China. This was a savvy move on Lhasa's part: the Qing could not afford the price being asked for by the Tibetan administration, and proposed a counter-offer of sovereignty over Nyag rong, which the Lhasa administration in turn accepted (Gardner 147).

The mid-nineteenth century was marked by an expansion of the Lhasa government into the region of Khams. The Dge lug establishment strengthened as Dge lug pa missionary activity spread into a weakened Sde dge (Smith 245; 332).

Authorizing the Past: *Ris med* as a Scholastic Alternative to the Dge lugs pa Model

While the Dge lug presence in eastern Khams persisted, the *ris med* movement continued to flourish throughout the late nineteenth century and into the twentieth century. Following the Nyag rong war, the Dge lug pa scholastic approach was gaining prominence in eastern Tibet. As we shall see, contemporary scholars of *ris med* often characterize this Dge lugs pa model dismissively, deeming it a categorically conservative tradition in comparison with the emerging *ris med* movement.⁹ For example, Smith calls Dge lugs pa scholastic approach “a new form of religious bigotry” (245). The Dge lugs pa academic tradition was for the most part an exercise in writing commentaries, summaries, and textbooks closely based on the works of Tsong kha pa and his followers, and was becoming a “fairly arid business,” according to Geoffrey Samuel (1993, 538). According to these scholars, from the point of view of those outside the Dge lugs tradition, the codification of scholastic textbooks (*yig cha*) of the great monasteries of Central Tibet had lead to a kind of intellectual stagnancy. Smith describes this phenomenon lavishly: “While that magnificent tradition that had added so much to Tibetan ethical and spiritual values continued to produce remarkable teachers and gurus, the rank and file [Dge lugs pa] monks concentrated upon the slavish pursuit of formalistic argumentation according to the scripts set forth in the *yig cha*” (245). These manuals summarize key philosophic and doctrinal points, and

⁹ It should be noted that, although I hold that *ris med* emerged in response to an increased Dge lugs pa activity in Khams, a presence which may have been interpreted as quite restrictive and conservative in relation to the traditions practicing in the region, I do not mean to imply that the entire Dge lugs pa scholastic tradition is inherently arid and insular. Nonetheless, in the various sources I have cited in an attempt to qualify *ris med*, the Dge lugs pa doctrinal and scholastic systems are often characterized in this way. This undoubtedly has more to do with the ways in which *ris med* has been constructed in scholarship as an open and fluid system, and less to do with an accurate or nuanced historical representation of the Dge lugs pa’s presence in Eastern Tibet.

the definitions contained within them, known as *tseñ nyi*, are derived from Indian root texts. These form the basis of a student's curriculum (Powers 360).

According to Dge lugs pa critics, the philosophic recipes provided by these scholastic manuals were simply memorized and regurgitated; catalogues of positions could be utilized in disputation without the Dge lugs pa monk having had any understanding of the underlying experience (Samuel 1993, 538). The refutation of a religious teacher, a doctrine or a spiritual experience had simply become an exercise in applying an argument memorized from the monk's youth.

Leaders of the non-sectarian movement may have seen this scholastic approach as detrimental insofar as it represented a kind of "intellectual petrification" (Smith 245). This is because the role of orthodoxy is particularly important to the Dge lugs tradition, because it uses such a powerful sectarian rhetoric. Strategically, the tradition marginalized other traditions by excluding them from the debate, "leaving Dzong-ka-ba [Tsong kha pa] as the sole inheritor of Indian Buddhism" (Dreyfus 2003b, 322). A young Dge lugs pa monk's understanding of Indian texts is always filtered through Tsong kha pa's interpretations; the student's intellectual, as well as his entire world-view, is based on the validity of the Dge lugs sect. Georges Dreyfus notes that this was most certainly a political move on the part of the Dge lugs pa (2003b, 322). From the 17th century onward, the three Dge lugs monastic universities ranked far superior to non-Dge lugs institutions in terms of power, wealth and prestige (Dreyfus 2003b, 322). Dreyfus notes: "their [the Dge lugs scholarly tradition's] ignorance of the views of other schools is not merely an omission. It reflects a strategy of

marginalization intended to deprive other schools of any scholarly legitimacy” (2003, 322). The increased Dge lugs pa presence in eastern Tibet in the nineteenth century lead to a patronage competition in the region, and Dge lugs pa *dge bshes* (high ranking monks) would often demonstrate the scholarly superiority of their tradition over other traditions in order to convince the local population of the superiority of their school, and of the “natural superiority of the new over the old” (Smith 245)¹⁰.

According to *ris med* scholars, in reaction to these scholastic power-grabs, the non-sectarian lamas took an alternative approach, and—quite logically—campaigned for the natural superiority of the old. Monastic *ris med* educators required that their students study a small number of Indian Buddhist *sūtras*, *śāstras*, and philosophical texts, emphasizing a different aspect of religious education, which Smith calls “scriptural exposition” (*shes pa*) (246). The study of these Indian originals in their Tibetan translation became the focal point of the *ris med* curriculum. A student following the non-sectarian curriculum would be expected to study editions of these works and provide interlinear explanatory annotations (Smith 246), as well as be able to master the Indian originals through oral exposition. For example, *ris med* lama Mkhan po gzhan dga’ produced a set of annotated commentaries on thirteen of the most important texts of the *Bstan ’gyur*, the Tibet canon of translated Indian scriptures. These achieved great

¹⁰ The scholars I have sited here clearly depict the factional nature of the Dge lugs scholastic model as categorical and problematic. In his article “Tibetan Monastic Colleges,” Jeffrey Hopkins paints a very different picture, arguing that “[parochial bias] brings an energy to study and debate, a focus for students not yet moved in a universalistic way” (265). See Hopkins, 2001.

popularity, and were adopted as the *yig cha* of the Rdzong gsar bshad grwa (Smith 332, n834). In contrast to the curriculum of the Dge lugs pa monastic colleges, the aim of the *ris med* curriculum was to push students to gain a better understanding of the meaning of the argument, as well as its doctrinal implications (Samuel 1993, 538; Smith 246). The Dge lugs scholarly tradition advocated that to name and identify one's opponent was vital to defeating him (Smith 246). The non-sectarian scholastic approach, on the other hand, clearly rejected this view, as demonstrated by the popular story of Rdza dpal sprul and his *sang tsen*, his "secret mark." Geoffrey Samuel summarizes: "The aim was more to understand the meaning of the arguments than to label and name incorrect positions, and by returning to the [Indian] originals the whole body of controversy that had emerged over the centuries through the Tibetan exegesis of these texts could be by-passed" (1993, 538). By returning to the originals, the *ris med* teachers espoused the superiority the old. And evidently, names and labels had no place in this non-sectarian system.

In his article entitled "Tibetan Monastic Colleges," Jeffrey Hopkins recounts his own experiences living in a Dge lugs pa college, and the centrality of allegiance he observed there. He compares this strong sense of factionalism to a warrior's oath of loyalty to his chieftain in Anglo-Saxon England (265). He notes: "what is so surprising in these [Dge lugs pa] universities is that the seemingly higher loyalties are replaced by lower ones—allegiance to Buddha is replaced by allegiance to a college" (265). It could be argued that the leaders of the *ris med* movement made a similar observation. These leaders would have thought that the

centrality of factionalism within the Dge lugs pa monastery was deeply at odds with the Buddhist tradition's own doctrine universal compassion, and sought to rectify this reversal in allegiance by emphasizing a new model of scholasticism.

***Ris med* and the Promotion of Popular Literature**

The Dge lugs pa school places a great deal of importance on the clerical path of monastic renunciation. Generally speaking, the tradition maintains the re-affirmation of study, scholarship and debate as essential elements of the Buddhist path, and views the path of the fully ordained monk as the highest form of Buddhist practice (Ray 189). I would argue that, from a literary point of view, the *ris med* movement saw the potential benefits in popularizing religious texts written in colloquial language, and folk traditions such as the *Epic of Gésar of Ling*. Evidently running counter to the elite monasticism that may have been seen to characterized the Dge lugs pa project, the popularization of accessible literature allowed the non-sectarian movement to carve out a space where the hegemony of the Dge lugs sect could be countered.

One instance of this strongly popular side of the *ris med* movement can be seen in the works of Rdza dpal sprul, in particular his classic entitled *Kun bzang bla ma'i zhal lung*, which summarized the Buddhist path in a language that was easily understandable (Samuel 1993, 539). This particular work is a book of instruction for preliminary practices of the cycle of revelations the *Klong chen snying thig*, which, as previously mentioned, was the basis of the main *Rdzog chen* teachings lineages (Samuel 1993, 539). Rdza dpal sprul produced shorter

works that expound on the meaning of *Rdzog chen* and *ris med* in a highly accessible manner. They include two works entitled a “Letter to Abushri,” and the “Propitious Speech from the Beginning, Middle and End.” The “Propitious Speech” summarizes the entire Buddhist path in terms of the recitation of the six syllables of Avalokiteśvara *om mani padme hum*, thus appealing to the most popular and universal rituals of Tibetan Buddhism (Samuel 1993, 539):

Limitless phenomena are delusion, never the truth.

Samsara and nirvana are just conceptions, nowhere real.

If it is known that the arising thoughts are self-liberated, this accomplishes perfectly the stages of the path.

By this pith of liberation, recite the six syllables (Thinley Norbu qt in Samuel 1993, 539).

Non-sectarian lamas sought to compile and make available as many teachings and practices as possible to students (Powers 360). As a result, they produced an enormous compendium of Buddhist learning, most popular of which was ‘Jam mgon Kong sprul’s *Compedium of All Knowledge (Shes bya mdzod)*. Kong sprul and his students are said to have traveled all over eastern Tibet in search of the initiations, oral instructions and texts of various lineages, both popular and obscure (Powers 360; Samuel 1993, 541). Accessibility was a priority for the non-sectarian leaders, and the encyclopedic nature of the *ris med* synthesis certainly sought to make available a wealth of methods and practices in an unprecedented way.

I’d like to contrast these literary developments with the textual output of the Dge lugs pa. The insular nature of Dge lugs scholasticism as discussed earlier

meant that authors were mostly producing textbooks that expanded on debates and doctrine stemming from earlier sources. With a few exceptions, the monasteries, as sites for authorship, tended to remain “bastions of dogmatic conservatism” (Powers 361). The non-sectarian movement sought to counter-act Dge lugs pa literary tendencies: instead of turning in on itself and producing its own tradition of highly insular and conservative textual repertoire, the *ris med* recognized the advantage in being exactly that which the Dge lugs pa was not, namely, highly inclusive and accessible.

The *ris med*'s extensive literary output was not limited to religious and doctrinal texts; they contributed to the popularization of folk materials, in particular, the classic *Epic of Gésar of Ling*. King Ge sar of Gling (*Gling Ge sar rgyla po*) is the hero of one of the major epics of Central Asia; famed for his bravery and heroic spirit as a warrior, Ge sar is believed to be an incarnation of Avalokiteśvara, the bodhisattva of compassion. A vast cycle of epic poetry and mythology featuring Ge sar has resulted in his mythic status in central and Eastern Tibet. Geoffrey Samuel argues that this epic is particularly important for the people of Khams, and is of great importance to Khams pa mythology, where the story is told in far greater detail than in the central or western Tibetan version of the epic (1996, 68). Some Khams pas maintain that all the people of Khams are directly descended from Ge sar (Parmee in Samuel 1993, n5 589). In the eastern Tibetan version of the epic, Ge sar of Gling is a founding ancestor of the people of Khams, a cultural-hero who slayed the “non-Buddhist” kings of the four directions and victoriously ruled over east-Tibet (Samuel 1993, 68).

The *ris med* lamas of the nineteenth century took a serious interest in the *Epic of Gésar of Ling*. Most of the principle non-sectarian lamas, including ‘Jam byang Mkhyen and ‘Jam mgon Kong sprul, wrote at least one Ge sar text, while others wrote a great deal more (Samuel 1992, 718). One of the earliest examples of the popularization of the folk epic was a work produced by Mdo mkhyen brtse ye shes rdo rje (1800-1866), who wrote a book of Rdzog chen teachings mimicking the style and language of the Epic. However, it was Mi pham’s interest in the epic that made it an important element of the *ris med* movement. A significant portion of Mi pham’s literary output was either influence by the epic or was devoted to its hero, Ge sar of Gling. Like Mdo mkhyen, he authored a *guruyoga* text using the style and diction of the epic. Additionally, Mi pham composed a series of rituals dedicated to Ge sar as a deity associated with longevity (Powers, n5 365), a text for Ge sar arrow-divination, and song-texts meant to accompany a series of folk-dance interpretations of the epic (Samuel 1993, 540). Mi pham also supervised the editing and printing of three of the epic’s principal episodes. Contemporary *ris med* lamas continue to composed new Ge sar episodes and ritual texts (Samuel 1992, 718).

Arguably, the archetypal heroic qualities exhibited by Ge sar might have appealed to *ris med* leaders. Samuel argues that Ge sar himself is a “trickster” figure, often compared to Padmasambhava (1993, 541). Samuel is describing a figure who is a non-conformist: someone who exists outside of the boundaries of authority. This cultural-hero continuously de-constructs and re-constructs structures of power, making Ge sar “much more the lama than the king” (Samuel

1992, 720). Ge sar here is beginning to sound more like a Tibetan Robin Hood than a virtuous Buddhist King. Samuel goes as far as to say that Ge sar's "trickster" qualities were in many ways "shamanistic," and thus would have appealed to *ris med* leaders (1993, 540). The main thesis of this particular work by Samuel contrasts the "clerical" tendencies of the Dge lugs pa regime with the "shamanistic" or "yogic" qualities of the *ris med* movement. Therefore, according to Samuel, the adoption of the epic by the leaders of the *ris med* attests to the extent to which their position was open to the shamanistic aspect of Tibetan society (1993, 540). I think that the "clerical-shamanistic" binary proposed by Samuel is problematic insofar as it is somewhat restrictive and leads to oversimplification. I would argue that, not unlike Ge sar, *ris med* leaders, struggling with a new and perhaps restrictive Dge lugs pa regime, sought not to completely overthrow established power structures, but rather to create a *new* space where an alternative—and radically different—approach to religious praxis could take place.

Open-ended Emptiness: *Ris med* and *Gzhan stong* (Other-emptiness)

The effort on the part of the *ris med* to counter-act the hegemony of the Dge lug pa presence also played out in the field of Tibetan *Mādhyamaka*, the "middle-way" school systematized by Nāgārjuna in the second century, CE. Scholars have often qualified this encounter by explicitly linking the *ris med* movement with *gzhan stong* ("other emptiness") doctrine, and the Dge lugs pa with its binary, *rang stong* ("self emptiness") doctrine. I would argue that this in

fact a gross oversimplification. It would be more accurate to assert that while the Dge lugs pas had a very exclusivist approach to *Mādhyamaka*, which ruled out *Svātantrika* as well as *gzhan stong*, ris med teachers sought a more inclusive approach to understanding the nature of emptiness.

Gzhan stong is a philosophical position in which ultimate reality is described in positive language (Gardner 141). Emptiness, here, is an ultimate truth, and should be considered self-existent and unchanging, present in all phenomena. According to John Powers: “[emptiness] is empty of what is other than itself—that is, the mistaken perceptions attributed to it by deluded being. But it is not void of itself, since it is the final nature of all phenomena” (363).

Emptiness can then be understood as a repository of all the qualities of Buddhahood, something that is inherent in all beings. This “repository,” present in all beings, is the doctrine of Buddha-nature (*tathāgata-garbha*), and holds that all sentient beings have the potential to become Buddhas. The etymology of the term “*tathāgata-garbha*” reflects a great deal of complexity. The Sanskrit compound *tathā + gata* means “thus gone one,” referring to the Buddha, and is the same spelling of the compound *tathā + āgata*, meaning “thus come one” (Duckworth xiii). Therefore the term “*tathāgata-garbha*” reflects a dual imagining of a transcendent Buddha that has gone, and immanent Buddha that is present. We begin to see a language here that is reflexive of a kind of simultaneous of absence and presence. The term “*garbha*” can mean “womb,” “embryo,” “essence” or “matrix,” suggesting a potentiality for the development and subsequent attainment of Buddhahood (Duckworth xiii). Proponents of other-emptiness conceive this

potentially as something that is positive, subtle, ineffable, and beyond the grasp of conceptual thought (Powers 363). Buddha-nature is conceived as a positively framed understanding of ultimate reality, something that is present.

Since, according to *gzhan stong*, ultimate reality is empty only of relative and phenomenal factors, but is not empty of its own characterization, this doctrine of “other emptiness” is often contrasted with the dominant *Prāsaṅgika-Mādhyamaka* position, which asserts that ultimate reality is the absence of a falsely imagined intrinsic nature (*svabhava, rang bzhin*) (Gardner 141). When contrasted with *gzhan stong*, this position is often referred to as *rang stong*, or the doctrine of “self-emptiness”.

This is not to say that these scholars are altogether incorrect in explicitly pairing *gzhan stong* with the *ris med* teachings. As aforementioned, a number of figures associated with the *ris med* movement, in particular ‘Jam byang Mkyen brtse’i dbang po and ‘Jam mgon Kong sprul, were in fact proponents of other-emptiness. Kong sprul goes as far as to consider it the glue that held various schools together (Pettit 112). His *Encyclopedia of Knowledge (She bya kun kyap)*, a work that brought together several different views and systems of thought, is thought to be one of the earliest statements of nonsectarian thought (Duckworth xx; Smith 237). A text that deals specifically with Kong sprul’s view of other-emptiness is entitled the *Stainless Light Rays of the Vajra-Moon: Teachings on the View of the Middle Way of Other-Emptiness (Gzhan stong dbu ma chen po’i lta khrid rdo rje zla wa ‘dri ma mde pa’i ‘od zer)* (Duckworth n37, 194). Furthermore, ‘Jam byang Mkyen brtse’i dbang po’s massive twenty-four volume

Collected Works included a summary of the other-emptiness view of the Jo nang, a tradition that consists of some of the most famous proponents of this view. This has lead several scholars to make the claim, as John Whitney Pettit does, that “[other-emptiness] is both a product of and a catalyst for ecumenism” (112).

It is an appealing logical move, then, to associate the *ris med* movement with *gzhan stong*, and the Dge lugs pa with the more exclusive *rang stong* approach. Several scholars make this jump: for example, John Powers describes other-emptiness as the “cornerstone” of most *ris med* practice (362). Also, Paul Williams explains how *gzhan stong* “became a key expression among *ris med* thinkers precisely for an approach which, in its stress on a non-conceptual Ultimate which thereby transcends ultimate analysis...was important to the *ris med* project of harmonizing traditional doctrinal rivalries” (qt in Gardner 142). However, associating *gzhan stong* with *ris med*, and *rang stong* with the Dge lugs pa school, is problematic insofar as it oversimplifies the doctrinal positions held by many *ris med* followers, including Rdza dpal sprul and Mi pham, as we will see in the next paragraph. As Gardner notes, just because ‘Jam mgon Kong sprul espoused other-emptiness, does not mean that one should formulate a definition of *ris med* that includes a purposeful embrace of other-emptiness. In doing so, “one man’s exploration and innovation are thus flattened into being a movement’s platform, and the important differences between ‘Jam mgon Kong sprul and ‘Ju Mi pham, for example, are lost” (Gardner 141).

Furthermore, as Brunnholzl notes, *gzhan stong* cannot be conceived of as a mololithic system. What it means to be a *gzhan stong pa*, and espouse a *gzhan stong* view of reality, can vary from teacher to teacher:

Certain Tibetans use the term shentong [gzhan stong] to refer to a doctrine with set positions...Others speak about it in the sense of a philosophical or an experiential outlook. Some refer to it as a tradition of how to practice meditation (*sgom lugs*) and others take it to be a combination of theory and practice, that is, view and meditation.” (Brunnholzl 174)

It is problematic, therefore, to associate *ris med* with a doctrinal position such as other-emptiness, insofar as both *ris med* and *gzhan stong* are fluid categories that tend to defy definition.

‘Ju Mi pham’s position on the subject of other-emptiness is yet another example of the difficulty faced by scholars when trying to define *ris med* and the doctrine of other-emptiness. Mi pham was the student-colleague of ‘Jam mgon Kong sprul and ‘Jam byang Mkhayen brtse, and is thought to be a central figure and primary architect of the non-sectarian movement (Duckworth xviii).

According to some scholars, Mi pham differed from his contemporaries insofar as he is an example of a *ris med* lama who adhered to a self-emptiness view (Powers 362), while other scholars maintain that his view is simply ambiguous. For example, in his *Precious Beacon of Certainty*, a text espousing the Great Perfection system of the Rnying ma school, Mi pham, for the most part, criticizes other-emptiness. However, in one short text, he upholds the view. In another, he incorporates certain aspects of other-emptiness in some instances, while rejecting it in others (Pettit 112). Regardless, the ambiguity of Mi pham’s position on

other-emptiness and his role as a highly influential proponent of the *ris med* confirms that the *ris med* movement had by no means unanimously adopted a *gzhan stong* platform, as many scholars have tried to generalize.

In order to understand the complexity of Mi pham's position on this topic, Duckworth asks us to substitute the terms "affirmation" (usually employed to talk about other-emptiness) and "negation" (usually employed to talk about self-emptiness)—which refer to the realm of linguistic representation—with the words "presence" and "absence," respectively. He argues that "presence" and "absence" have more of an ontological connotation, "rather than simply its linguistic representation" (xii). The concepts of "presence" and "absence" are central to Mi pham's work. For Mi pham, there is a fundamental tension between the concept of emptiness and the idea of divine presence, and for him Buddha-nature serves as a focal point and means by which he is able to resolve this tension (xii).

According to Duckworth, a "dialectical unity" between presence and absence runs throughout Mi pham's work (xxviii). This dialectic can be imagined as both Hegelian (involving a synthesis and a final resolution) and Derridian (where two seemingly opposing ideas remain in open-ended tension): on the one hand, Mi pham's dialectic can be understood as "closed" insofar as he maintains that the ontological ground of existence, ie: Buddha-nature, is a "monistic unity." On the other hand, he sustains an open-ended, Derridian-style dialectical tension insofar as he maintains contexts for the deconstruction of reified notions of such a ground (Duckworth n87, 199). To put it simply, "Mipham is a proponent of *neither* self-emptiness nor other-emptiness" (Duckworth 74).

Duckworth outlines four ways of responding to Dge lugs pa dominance from a doctrinal point-of-view: “(1) a more hostile attitude toward Geluk [Dge lugs] positions... (2) a more submissive attitude to Geluk authority on exoteric exegesis... (3) a more dismissive attitude that excludes Geluk from the conversation and remain focused solely within one’s own tradition...; and (4) ... wholesale conversion to Geluk (willed or forced)” (xxii-xxiii). Mi pham, he goes on to claim, forged an alternative fifth response to Dge lugs pa dominance by appropriating certain elements of the tradition while disputing others. In this way, it could be argued that Mi pham’s own brand of non-sectarianism can be seen at the level of engagement with his Dge luk pa opponents (Duckworth xxii). In this sense, like the nineteenth century *ris med* lamas that came before him, Mi pham too sought to consciously carve out a space where the dominant Dge lugs pa presence could be contested.

I have argued in this section, that it would be an oversimplification and exclusivist to associate *ris med* with the *gzhan stong* doctrine. Rather, I have suggested that followers of *ris med* sought to counter the doctrinal exclusivity of the Dge lugs pa sect. The Dge lugs order, following the views espoused by Tsong khapa, tended to uphold *Prāsaṅgika* as the supreme *Mādhyamaka* view. Critics of Tsong khapa and certain *ris med* figures challenged this assertion.

In the fourteenth century, Tsong kha pa, who would later become the founder of the Dge lugs sect, responded to what he saw as a distinction between two ways of understanding emptiness, known as the *Svātantrika-Prāsaṅgika* distinction. Although this distinction was well known before Tsong kha pa’s time,

he greatly contributed to the domination of the *Prāsaṅgika* view. To oversimplify, for Tsong kha pa and his followers, the difference between a *Svātantrika* and a *Prāsaṅgika* view lay in their respective understandings of the object being negated during the process of ascertaining emptiness (Dreyfus 2003b, 318). According to Tsong kha pa, *Svātantra*, falsely, holds that phenomena exists objectively on the conventional level, and should not be negated as it would jeopardize the conventional validity of phenomena. By contrast, the *Prāsaṅgika* view *does* negate this objective existence. Thus the *Svātantrika* negation is partial and rough; it leaves out the more subtle object of negation; namely objective existence, which *Prāsaṅgika* negates (Dreyfus 2003b, 319).

Critics of Tsong kha pa, including some participants in the *ris med* movement, firstly, rejected his assertion that there is a substantive difference between the *Svātantrika* and *Prāsaṅgika*'s understanding of emptiness. In addition to rejecting this distinction, they asserted that Tsong kha pa's approach to emptiness is questionable. For them, emptiness is not a negation. If emptiness were a negation it would consist of the rejection of a proposition and hence it would be conceptual. And a conceptual fabrication cannot stand as the ultimate nature of things (Dreyfus 2003b, 320). For these critics, emptiness is non-conceptual and beyond description, and hence transcends both affirmation and negation.

The stance taken by the critics of the Dge lugs *Prāsaṅgika* model, including certain *ris med* thinkers, was less about expressing a deep opposition to Dge lugs ideas, and more about allowing for the formulation of a more

heterogeneous view that could compete with this dominant Dge lugs pa tradition. In this way, the category known as *ris med* defies qualification. Instead of defining *ris med* as a monolithic system associated with a set doctrinal position, which it clearly is not, I propose that perhaps it is more accurate to think of *ris med* as representing a more open and flexible approach to *Mādhyamaka*, and a more inclusive approach from which to counter the Dge lugs pa's highly exclusive *Prāsaṅgika* approach.

At the end of the nineteenth century, 'Jam mgon Kong sprul composed a list of great sites of religious importance, and created what Alexander Gardner refers to as a "narrative map" (vii) of the geographical centers and borders of Khams. This network of religious sites is known as "the Twenty-five Great Sites of Khams" (*Mdo khams gnas chen nyer lnga*). At a tumultuous time when Khams was being threatened with cartographical erasure, Kong sprul's map firmly established the geographical landscape of Khams, all the while according each of the religious sites a legitimacy that would be memorialized across time and space. However, 'Jam mgon Kong sprul, known as one of the great *ris med* lamas, excluded the Dge lugs pa sect from his narrative map, denying them a place on the landscape of Khams (Gardner 111). Kong sprul, a man esteemed for his espousal of non-sectarianism, is clearly participating in a decidedly sectarian project.

In the same way that Duckworth imagines the concepts of presence and absence running through Mi pham's work in a kind of dialectical tension, a similar kind of dialectic runs through this chapter. In this chapter, I have argued

that the task of describing the nineteenth century *ris med* movement in affirmative language is in fact a very difficult one. Non-sectarian lamas sought to create a unified tradition that was all encompassing, compiling elements from various traditions across space and time. To borrow Duckworth's terminology, the encyclopedic nature of this movement makes it extremely difficult to talk about *ris med* as a kind of presence. The *presence* of the *ris med* tradition is so all-subsuming, that I have argued instead that we attempt to understand *ris med* in terms of its *absence*, that which it is not, namely, Dge lugs pa.

While attempting to come up with a conceptual framework to discuss the various schools of Tibetan Buddhism, certain scholars have set up a distinct binary between the *ris med* movement and the Dge lugs pa tradition. For example, Geoffrey Samuel describes the nature and evolution of Tibetan society along a "shamanic" and "clerical" spectrum, whereby the *ris med* movement is depicted as particularly "shamanic" and the Dge lugs pa as particularly "clerical" (Samuel 1993). Similarly, Reginald Ray imagines Buddhism as we know it today as being composed of two primary orientations consisting of the nineteenth century *ris med* movement on the one hand, and the Dge lugs pa tradition on the other. Unlike these highly binary approaches to the conceptualization of Tibetan sectarianism, I am not arguing that the non-sectarian movement has somehow cancelled out the existence of other non-Dge lugs schools of Tibetan Buddhism. Rather, the *ris med* movement represents a reactionary trend born out of a specific socio-historical context. Like Kong sprul's narrative map, one might ever go so far as to say *ris med* was a decidedly sectarian project; a project that set out to

“resist the real enemy of the day; not “sectarianism,” but Lhasa and its dominant Dge lugs pa order” (Gardner 152).

Duckworth maintains that what it means to be non-sectarian is not clearly delineated, and that a broader range of texts and documents need to be documented before we can begin to get a better understanding of the movement’s stance (xxiii). In understanding non-sectarianism as a movement that is in many ways counter-cultural, I have argued that it is important to imagine the *ris med* movement in terms of its *absence*, in order to accurately begin to conceive of it in terms of its *presence*.

Chapter 2:
The Dalai Lama and the Re-imagining of Tibetan Institutional and Sectarian Frameworks

“May the lives of the masters who uphold these teachings be secure and harmonious! May the sangha preserve these teachings through their study, meditation and activity! May the world be filled with faithful individuals intent on following these teachings! And long may the non-sectarian teachings of the Buddha continue to flourish!”

- “A Prayer for the Flourishing of the Non-Sectarian Teachings of the Buddha,” by the fourteenth Dalai Lama

This chapter explores the modes of representation used by the Dalai Lama when casting himself as a *ris med pa*. Just as the nineteenth century *ris med* leaders disseminated non-sectarian ideology through popular literature, educational reform and doctrine, the Dalai Lama and the Tibetan government-in-exile have used similar venues as publicity tools. This chapter will begin by looking at how the fourteenth Dalai Lama has used doctrine, particularly *Mādhyamaka* philosophy, to justify non-sectarianism, as forwarded in popular English-language publications. I will then go on to explore the ways in which the Central Tibetan Administration (CTA) has forwarded a highly non-sectarian policy when establishing their government-in-exile, and finally, I investigate the controversial ban placed on the highly sectarian deity Ddo rje shugs ldan by the Dalai Lama. This chapter is predominantly empirical; the theoretical implications of a non-sectarian re-imagining of Tibetan unity by the fourteenth Dalai Lama and the CTA will be addressed in Chapter 3.

In 2006, American journalist Thomas C. Laird published a series of recorded conversations with the fourteenth Dalai Lama on the topic of the history of Tibet. The seventeenth century was a particularly important time; it was the time when the Great Fifth Dalai Lama ruled over Tibet and unified its disparate geographies. The fourteenth Dalai Lama discusses some of the non-sectarian tactics employed by his predecessor: “The fifth Dalai Lama showed great wisdom when he followed the non-sectarian path, officially and formally. In order for him to become head of all Tibet, to lead the Tibetan government, that was very necessary” (qt in Laird 165). In response, Laird, makes a cross-historical reference, compares this activity to the nineteenth century *ris med* movement, which he describes as an attempt by “many great monks to unite all the schools of Tibetan Buddhism, since they felt the division between the order were spiritually insignificant” (Laird 166). “That is right,” the Dalai Lama tells Laird, “usually we consider him [the 5th Dalai Lama] as a great Rimey [*ris med*]. Everyone does except the Kagyupa [Bka’ brgyud pa]” (qt in Laird 166). As explored in chapter 1, the *ris med* movement of the nineteenth century was unanimously and unabashedly *not* Géluk-pa, although it has often been imagined to be ecumenical and encyclopedic in nature insofar as it sought to transcend the particularities of sect and faction. This is perhaps most aptly illustrated by ‘Jam mgon Kong sprul’s exclusion of the Dge lugs pa sect from his narrative map, which had the effect of denying the Dge lugs pa sect a place on the landscape of Khams (Gardner 111). In this interview with Laird, the fourteenth Dalai Lama is describing the non-sectarian activities of the fifth Dalai Lama as similarly contradictory, though taking place in

a different time and place: the Great Fifth was nonsectarian and not exclusive, but he was also not Bka' brgyud pa.

In this same conversation, the fourteenth Dalai Lama reflects on this exclusivity. He tells his interviewer of a letter he recently received from a very old Bka' brgyud monk from Khams. In the letter, the old monk described to the fourteenth Dalai Lama how the fifth Dalai Lama forced several Bka' brgyud monasteries in Khams to convert to the Dge lugs school, and as a result, for the last three hundred years, the people in that area have resented the Dalai Lama institution. The old monk went on to tell the Dalai Lama how the past three hundred years of pain caused him to avoid taking the Kālachakra initiation¹¹, and caused him to deliberately avoid meeting the Dalai Lama in Beijing in the 1950s (Laird 167). However, since the 1950s, the Dalai Lama's activities in exile have caused the old monk to re-evaluate this sentiment he has carried with him all these years. The Dalai Lama goes on to tell Laird, ““Now he had heard, and realized, this I genuinely follow Rimey [*ris med*], and [he] wanted to make some kind of confession before his death. So he wrote me the letter”” (Laird 168).

Following his exile in 1959, it is clear that the fourteenth Dalai Lama has appropriated a non-sectarian framework, transforming traditional Tibetan Buddhist sectarianism in a diasporic context. From a position of exile, the Dalai Lama has cast himself as a *ris med pa*: an adherent to the *ris med* path. However, although he has successfully appropriated several elements of the historical *ris*

¹¹ Kālachakra initiation is a rite of initiation for the *Kālachakra (Wheel of Time) Tantra*, a Buddhist tantra of the Highest Yoga Tantra class. The Dalai Lama is a Kālachakra lineage holder, and gave his first initiation in the West in July of 1981, outside of Madison, Wisconsin. He continues to give numerous Kālachakra initiations all over the world.

med movement, I would argue that he is utilizing a modified model of non-sectarianism, one that looks more closely like the “Rimay” described by Alexander Gardner. According to Gardner, “Rimay” is a term that was coined by Western authors in the 1960s and 70s to describe the cultural activity that took place in Khams, Tibet in the nineteenth century¹²: “the term has been embraced by many who wish to promote the fantasy of Buddhism free of religious institutions, normative doctrines and ritual complexity” (Gardner xii). Gardner here is describing a new “*ris med*,” a non-sectarian ideology that has become thoroughly embedded in a modern, Western vision of Tibetan Buddhism:

What in Tibetan appears as the ‘*ris-med* patriarch’ or the ‘*ris-med* teachings’ became in English *the* Rimay... Once nominalized, ‘Rimay’ floated free of those things that it originally referred—the very people, places and historical events that ‘Rimay’ was suppose to refer to (Gardner 112).

He goes on to note that it should come as no surprise, then, that many Tibetan lamas who teach in the West, including the fourteenth Dalai Lama, have come to identify as “Rimay”(113)¹³. In a diasporic context, the Dalai Lama has utilized the *ris med* ideal in order to re-imagine a unified Tibet that transcends the particularities of religious sectarianism. Furthermore, Rimay provides a

¹² “Rimay” here is of course the phonetic spelling of the nineteenth century *ris med* movement. Gardner has chosen to use the term “Rimay” to describe a Western appropriation of the term. I, too, will do the same. “Rimay” will describe a modern, predominantly Western phenomenon, distinguishable from *ris med*, which will refer to the nineteenth century movement in particular.

¹³ Although Gardner points out that the Dalai Lama has made use of the non-sectarian ideal to hold to exile community together, he claims that the Dalai Lama does not use the term “Rimay” to characterize his teachings. Gardner is mistaken here, as demonstrated by the Dalai Lama’s aforementioned interview with Thomas C. Laird.

conceptual location from which the Dalai Lama and the CTA have propagated and disseminated this ideal to the Tibetan exile community, as well as to Western audiences.

The Union of Old and New Schools: Doctrinally Justifying *Ris med*

In his conversation with Thomas C. Laird, the Dalai Lama's narrative arrives at an interesting juncture in the story of Tibet: It is the late seventeenth century, and a dangerous rivalry had materialized between the sixth Dalai Lama and the power-thirsty Lha bzang Khan. Lha bzang was the grandson of the Mongol chieftain Gu shri Khan, and was a staunch supporter of the Dge lugs pa tradition. At this time, the sixth Dalai Lama had recently come into power, and had been initiated into the *Rdzog chen* teachings of the Rnying ma sect. The fourteenth Dalai Lama tells Laird of the disdain expressed by Lha bzang Khan towards the sixth Dalai Lama, disdain that stemmed from highly sectarian feelings. It is clear that the fourteenth Dalai Lama sees Lhazang Khan's sentiments as dangerous: " 'Poor Lhazang Khan!' the Dalai Lama laughed. 'His head is very small...And then some of the [Tibetan] Gelugpa [Dge lugs pa] monasteries, they supported Lhazang [Lha bzang] Khan...in this way there was sectarian controversy between the Nyingmapa and the Gelugpa'" (qt in Laird 188). In response to this, Laird notes, "He [Lha bzang Khan] only saw the conventional level of reality" (188). The Dalai Lama agrees.

The historical narrative constructed by the Dalai Lama over the course of his conversations with Thomas Laird often characterizes the sectarian violence in

Tibet as very much operating on the level of the *conventional*. Violence and bloodshed due to sectarian strife in Tibet seem to occur as the result of power plays and political alliances. The implication of this narrative is that *ultimately* there is unity among the schools of Tibetan Buddhism, but it seems to abide outside of the realm of politics. Some Western scholars tend to agree with this distinction. George Dreyfus writes: “Claims of difference or superiority [between Dge lugs pa and non-Dge lugs pas] cannot be taken at face value. More often than not they are rhetorical attempts to legitimize the religious claims of a group or advance some overtly political cause” (2003, 31). Sectarianism in Tibet, according to these historical accounts, is more the result of historical events and political intrigues than actual religious or philosophical difference (Dreyfus 2003a, 30; Laird 168; Gardner xiii).

In propagating himself as a proponent of non-sectarianism, the Dalai Lama institution has often cited the unity of the schools of Tibetan Buddhism, a unity that ultimately supercedes mundane political rivalries. The supremacy of this type of unity has been broadcasted vis-à-vis the Dalai Lama administration’s official website:¹⁴ the message section of the website is reserved for messages and press releases issued by various members of the Dalai Lama’s office. In

¹⁴ <http://www.dalailama.com/office>. The website is administered by the personal office of the Dalai Lama, the Office of His Holiness the Dalai Lama (OHHDL). This administrative body provides secretarial assistance to the Dalai Lama, and can be viewed in English, Tibetan or Chinese. The site is updated regularly.

September 1996, the 100th Ganden Tripa, the head of the Dge lugs sect¹⁵, released a statement pertaining to the importance of a non-sectarian approach:

This is an inter-sectarian theological strife caused by misunderstandings, which certainly can be solved through clarifications and correcting the things by reminding [them of] their misunderstandings and the faux pas. Thus, everyone must strive in understanding the truth by which we can gradually solve this issue... As the great Lamas of the past visualized the union of the mind of peaceful and the wrathful deities, it appears to them in a pure form. It is completely different from the worship by an ordinary person like us whose mind is filled with continuous flow of deluded emotions (<http://www.dalailama.com/messages/dolgyal-shugden/ganden-tripa>).

Similar to the historical narrative constructed by the fourteenth Dalai Lama, the OHHDL publicly states that disputes generated by sectarianism signals a misunderstanding of the way things “really are”. These disputes reflect a conventional, and mistaken view, of reality. A correct, and ultimate, view of reality would dissolve this misunderstanding. To make the point, he contrasts the deluded mind of the ordinary person with the consciousness of a great Lama who is able to see the ultimate unity in that which appears disparate. An understanding of Tibetan sectarian strife is symptomatic of an untrained mind, the Ganden Tripa seems to imply.

When addressing both a Western audience and the exiled Tibetan community, the Dalai Lama has used this stance as a platform from which to

¹⁵ The Ganden Tripa (the “Throne holder of Ganden”) is the highest rank within the Dge lugs pa hierarchy insofar as he inherits the seat of Tsong khapa, the founder of the lineage.

formulate a clear line of philosophical argumentation in support of the ultimate unity of the Tibetan schools. The 1984 bestseller, *Kindness, Clarity and Insight*, a collection of talks given by the Dalai Lama during his North American tour, includes a lecture given in Boonesville, Virginia entitled “Union of the Old and New Translation Schools.” Here the Dalai Lama claims that the Rnying ma, Sa skya, Bka’ rgyud and Dge lugs schools of Tibetan Buddhism are ultimately the same insofar as, from the point-of-view of Tibetan *Mādhyamaka*, they all share a common understanding of the concept of a fundamental mind as that which serves as the basis of all phenomena of cyclical existence and nirvana (Dalai Lama 1984, 210). The Dalai Lama begins by demonstrating that, in terms of structure, the New Translation¹⁶ schools are essentially the same. Although the old and new schools may seem to differ in terms of their terminology, leading one to believe that there are a great many differences among the tantric practices of these schools, the Dalai Lama assures his audience that their basic structure is the same (1984, 200). The Bka’ rgyud lineage stems from Mi la ras pa and his lama Mar pa. Mar pa’s main personal deity was Guhyasamāja, a lineage transmitted from Nāropā (1984, 201). Similarly, Tsong kha pa, the founder of the Dge lugs sect, shared a close link with this lineage, insofar as Mar pa’s transmissions of Nāropā’s instructions of the *Guhyasamāja Tantra* provided the source for his teaching on the five stages of the stage of completion of the Highest Yoga Tantra

¹⁶ Sects in Tibetan Buddhism are generally divided into two categories; those who base their teachings on texts disseminated into Tibet during the first dissemination, and those who base their practice on texts disseminated during the second dissemination. These two groups are referred to as the “Old,” (namely, the Rnying ma sect), and the “New” Translations Schools (namely the Sa skya, Bka’ rgyud and Dge lugs sects) (Lopez 1997, 24).

(Dalai Lama 1984, 201). Although the similarities are more or less obvious when comparing the New Translation schools with each other, the challenge arises when comparing the New Translation Schools with the philosophical view of the Rnying ma. The Dalai Lama assures his audience that these differences, however, are superficial and, more than anything, suggest differing terminology (1984, 202).

The Dalai Lama identifies the problematic that, he believes, has caused the mistaken belief that the New Schools and the Old School differ philosophically from each other: “In the Nyingma [Rnying ma] view of the Great Perfection is an affirming negative (*paryudāsapratishedha, ma yin dgag*) whereas the Ge-luk [Dge lugs] it is a non-affirming negative (*prasajyapratishedha, med dgag*), due to which they feel that there is no way the two could be getting at the same thing” (205). His Holiness tells his listeners that although he cannot explain *why* with complete clarity, he has given much consideration as to how these two presentations come down to the same thing (206).

In the Highest Yoga Tantras, such as the *Guhyasamāja Tantra* practiced by the New Translation Schools, there is a mode of cultivating the view of the *Mādhyamaka* with a special mind, which he refers to as “the innate wisdom of great bliss” (207). When explaining the *Guhyasamāja Tantra*, the New Translation School discusses this view in two parts: the objective and subjective views. The objective view refers to the view as object: “the emptiness of inherent existence which is the object of the wisdom consciousness” (207). In terms of the subjective mind that is realizing emptiness, according to the *Guhyasamāja Tantra*,

emptiness is to be realized with an “enhanced, more subtle consciousness” (207-208). He goes on to explain that the Rnying ma teaching of “the Great Perfection” is also divided into two categories, objective and subjective. According to this tradition, the objective view can be described in the same language as used by the New Schools, namely, emptiness as the object of wisdom consciousness. The subjective view, according to the tradition of the “Great Perfection,” is known as the “basic mind” or the “subtle wisdom consciousness” (208). And the term “view,” here, more or less refers to the union of the object (emptiness) with the subject (the wisdom consciousness realizing it). This is the “innate fundamental mind of clear light;” it is basic knowledge (*rig pa*) or clear light (*'od gsal*), and it represents the proper point of comparison between New and Old Schools, according to the Dalai Lama.

In the Highest Yoga Tantra system of the New School, the fundamental mind which serves as the basis of all phenomena of cyclical existence and nirvana is posited as the ultimate reality. In the Rnying ma tradition it is called the “mind-*vajra*,” it is a factor of mere luminosity and knowing, basic knowledge itself. He adds: “Just as the New Translation Schools posit a beginningless and endless fundamental mind, so the Rnying ma posit a mind-*vajra* which has no beginning or end and proceeds without interruption through the effect stage of Buddhahood” (1984, 210). It is therefore this “innate fundamental mind of clear light” that provides the Dalai Lama with a proper mode of comparison when discussing the similarities between the New and Old Translation Schools.

He goes on to discuss the Rnying ma tradition's meditation on the union of mind and emptiness as an "affirming negative." According to this tradition, when we meditate on the profound mind, the mind identifies itself. The mind appears, positively, but is qualified by emptiness. Even though this is described as meditating on an affirming negative, "this is not like the affirming negative of illusory-like appearance" (1984, 217). In the New Translation Schools, when the clear light is manifested, the emptiness of inherent existence also appears. When the mind identifies itself, and this is done by a developed yogi that who has ascertained emptiness, dualism vanishes, and there "is no doubt that the mind is one undifferentiable entity with emptiness" (1984, 217). He concludes that "it is thus apparent that all the factors involved in cultivating the view of emptiness presented in texts common to sūtra and mantra in the New Translation Schools are contained in Great Perfection [Rnying ma] meditation" (1984, 218).

At one point in his lecture, the Dalai Lama tells his audience that, when contemplating the union of the Old and New Translation Schools, he often turns to the works of the Rnying ma master Rdo grub chen 'Jigs med bstan pa'i nyi ma (1865-1926). Interestingly, Rdo grub chen was a student of *ris med* masters 'Jam byang Mkyen tse'i dbang po, as well as Mi pham and 'Jam mgon Kong sprul (Gaffney 120). Over the course of his North American tour, the Dalai Lama speaks highly of Rdo grub chen: "He was an amazing lama free from bias concerning the views of the Nyingma, Sakyas, Kagyu and Geluk" (1984, 220). In another publication, the Dalai Lama notes that in developing his own understanding of the correspondence between the Highest Yoga Tantra and Rdzog

chen, “reading Dodrupchen [Rdo grub chen] was as if he were stroking my head in confirmation, giving me confidence that my insight was not unfounded” (qt in Gaffey 120).

The Dalai Lama’s non-sectarian approach to Tibetan doctrine is further emphasized by the fact that he has been initiated into the Rnying ma tradition of *Rdzog chen*, the “Great Perfection.” In the 1980s, the Dalai Lama toured Europe and North America giving lectures on subjects relating to *Rdzog chen*. During a lecture given at the Pagode de Vincennes in Paris in 1982, the Dalai Lama reiterated the importance of the “fundamental mind” when comparing the traditions of Tibetan Buddhism. During a discussion of the *Rdzog chen* concepts of “fruition” and the “path,” the Dalai Lama tells his audience that, while relying on the path, the “inner lucidity” of primordial purity leads to *dharmakāya*, while the “outer lucidity” of spontaneous presence leads to the *rūpakāya*. These explanations of primordial purity and spontaneous presence, as articulated by the *Rdzog chen* tradition, and that which is discussed by the Highest Yoga Tantra of the New Translations schools, “both come down to the same ultimate point: the fundamental innate mind of clear light” (Dalai Lama 2000, 33).

Several of the Dalai Lama’s teachings given on his European and North American tours during the 1980s unveil this reoccurring theme that seeks to establish unity among the four school of Tibetan. In stressing that all four traditions lead to the same point, namely, the clear light of the fundamental mind, and that this point is in its very nature *ultimate*, the Dalai Lama is asserting that a factional understanding of the four traditions must then, by its very nature, be

conventional. He does this all the while aligning himself with some of the great lamas of the nineteenth century *ris med* movement, assuring his listener that he is moved by a deep concern to dispel the kind of misunderstanding the could stem from a superficial comparison of the traditions (Gaffey 127). The Dalai Lama admits that this is a subject that “fires his interest like few others” (Gaffey 127). The implications of this position will be explored in Chapter 3.

Parliamentary and Educational Reform: CTA Policy in Exile

In addition to propagating a highly non-sectarian doctrinal stance that advocates for the ultimate unity of four traditions of Tibetan Buddhism, the fourteenth Dalai Lama, as well as his administration in exile, implemented a number of policies that forwarded a non-sectarian stance in exile, intended to promote unity among the refugee Tibetan community. These activities included forming a un-biased democratic government-in-exile, implementing a brand new education system, and meeting with representatives from the various schools of Tibetan Buddhism, in order to promote and re-create unity among the four schools of Tibetan Buddhism.

Following the flight of the Dalai Lama and his cabinet to political exile in India in March 1959, approximately 100,000¹⁷ Tibetans fled their homeland in order to escape the oppressive Chinese occupation of Tibet. According to the

¹⁷ According to Margaret Nowak, 100, 000 represents a conservative estimate of the number of Tibetans that tried to escape insofar as many, if not hundreds then thousands, died while trying to cross the Himalayas by foot (Nowak 9).

official website of the Central Tibetan Administration, 145,150¹⁸ Tibetan refugees live in exile today. On the tenth day of the fourteenth Dalai Lama's flight, he unilaterally cancelled the 'Seventeen Point Agreement,'¹⁹ the document which allowed the government of the newly established People's Republic of China to unambiguously legitimize Tibet's status as part of China (Goldstein 1998, 48), and proclaimed a new provisional government in exile.

This provisionary government established by the Dalai Lama in exile looked quite different from the central and local administrations operating in Tibet before the Chinese invasion. The Tibetan government in Lhasa was established by the fifth Dalai Lama in the seventeenth century, and was characterized by a hierarchical ranking system. At the head of this system was the Dalai Lama, and in his absence, an appointed Regent who was chosen from one of the powerful Dge lugs monasteries of Se ra or 'Bras spungs (Roemer 16). According to Stephanie Roemer, in choosing a Regent, these Dge lugs pa monasteries were able to manipulate political affairs to their own advantage (16). Next, after the ruler, the Prime Minister, known as the Silon or Lonchen, served as a direct link between the Dalai Lama and the cabinet. The executive body consisted of government officials who were either recruited from the Tibetan noble families, or from Dge lugs pa monasteries (Roemer 16). Religious affairs were generally carried out by monk officials chosen mostly from the monastic

¹⁸ According to the CTA's official website, this statistic is based on an approximate world-wide distribution: India 101,242; Nepal 16,313; Bhutan 1,883; and rest of the world 25,712 (<http://www.tibet.net/en/index.php?id=9>).

¹⁹ In doing this, the Dalai Lama denied knowing the terms of the signing (Goldstein 1998, 48). This de-legitimized the People's Republic of China's "peaceful liberation" of Tibet (Roemer 34).

populations of the Dge lugs pa monasteries of Dga' ldan, Se ra and 'Bras spungs. Stephanie Roemer notes, “hence a small ecclesiastic circle recruited itself again and again” (17).

Although this predominantly Dge lugs pa-run administration carried out a centralizing function, outside the central Tibetan capital of Lhasa, the official rule was highly de-centralized: Tibet consisted of hundreds of political-economic sub-units of delimited territory with hereditarily attached serfs, and these sub-units were held by two types of lords: either a religious corporation or monastery associated with a specific sect, or an aristocratic family. Each estate was under the primary governmental rule of the lord, whose main concern was maintaining an efficient labor force to work the land. The central government, under the leadership of the Dalai Lama, on the other hand, had nearly nothing to do with these sub-units. As long as a steady flow of wealth from the territories was realized, the central government had little interest in interfering with these lower level units (Goldstein 1971, 176). Therefore, according to Roemer, “It can be summarized that the Tibetan government [at the beginning of the twentieth century] in Lhasa was highly stratified at the central and regional level...[it] carried out centralizing functions but encountered limitations in effective control at the regional level” (19).

The Lhasa government in place in Tibet at the beginning of the twentieth century was characterized by a Dge lugs pa power-base in terms of its leadership at the central level, while remaining highly factional outside the capital. In the

context of this decentralized politic, outside Lhasa, the Dalai Lama would have in no way represented the unifying symbol of Tibetan identity that he does today.

The fourteenth Dalai Lama's non-sectarian approach to politics and government formation in exile becomes particularly evident when comparing the Central Tibetan Administration formed in exile, with the traditional Lhasa government. On April 21, 1959, the fourteenth Dalai Lama met with several Dge lugs dignitaries in Uttar Pradesh in order to discuss the recent political developments in Tibet and the anticipated future of Tibet in exile (Roemer 64). Eight days later, the Dalai Lama proclaimed the formation of the Central Tibetan Administration of His Holiness the Dalai Lama (CTA)²⁰. In 1960, the headquarters of the CTA was established in the newly founded governmental district of McLeod Ganj, Dharamsala (Roemer 65).

The CTA's structure and policy are characterized by an integration of Western democratic ideals and political concepts. Slowly, a new Tibetan elite was born which was believed to better represent the whole exile community in terms of their regional and sectarian affiliations (Roemer 91). The CTA developed a legislative organ called the Assembly of Tibetan People's Deputies (ATPD), which attempts to operate as a democratic system, and elects deputies through an electoral process. According to Roemer, "the present ATPD serves as a symbol of an institutionalized exile Tibetan Nationalism by following the idea of regional and religious status quotas" (100). The Dge lugs, Bka' brgyud, Rnying ma and Sa

²⁰ Over years, the Central Tibetan Administration has changed its name several times; it has been known as the Government of Tibet-in-Exile, as well as the Tibetan Administration in Exile. These designations will be used interchangeably.

skyas elect two deputies each, and since 1976, there have been two Bon delegates as well. Each region of Tibet, namely U-Tsang, Khams and Amdo, also provide an elected deputy. The CTA's intention here was to compose an assembly that represented all Tibetans, despite regional heritage or sectarian alliance.

Rather than recreating a government ruled by a Dge lugs pa monastic minority, the government-in-exile of the fourteenth Dalai Lama has made a conscious effort to implement a voting practice that seeks to better represent the Tibetan exile community. In this way, the Dalai Lama and the CTA have installed a governmental system that actively produces cultural identity in exile by creating a governing body to which the exile community can pledge loyalty. Furthermore, the factionalism brought on by the de-centralized government operating in Lhasa before the Chinese invasion, is replaced by a sense of Tibetan unity and loyalty, centered around the self-defining symbol of the fourteenth Dalai Lama. By de-emphasizing Dge lugs pa heterodoxy at the governmental level, and creating a parliament with representatives from all the sects, as well as regions of Tibet, the Dalai Lama has taken an explicitly non-sectarian approach to democratic reform. This, in turn, has allowed him to generate a sense of political unity and overcome internal disparity in the exile community, generating what Tsering Shakyas calls "a singular marker of identity" (9). The implications of this kind of imagined community will be further analyzed in chapter 3.

The fourteenth Dalai Lama's non-sectarian policies are also evident in the education system put in place by the CTA in the year following exile. The CTA immediately established the Council for Tibetan Education (CTE), and the first

school for Tibetan refugee children was established in 1960 in Mussoorie, Uttar Pradesh, demonstrating the extent to which the education sector was given immediate priority (Roemer 78). The new education system implemented in exile represented a radical shift away from the traditional systems operating in Tibet (Nowak 63). In adopting modern classroom instruction with textbooks and lesson plans, the CTE sought a “thorough overhaul” (Nowak 64) of the old system, and wanted to modernize through the introduction of new subjects, such as science and technology. In 1959, the Dalai Lama invited delegates from the four schools of Tibetan Buddhism, as well as member from the old Tibetan cabinet, to come together and initiate the preparation of a series of textbooks to be used to instruct school children. As Margaret Nowak notes, “not only could such a graded series of books be used to instruct children about religion and traditional culture, but a systematic attempt could be made to shape a more cohesive group identity among young Tibetans in exile” (65). Nowak argues that the CTE and the Dalai Lama were responding to two extremely divisive problems in the refugee community: sectarianism and regional factionalism (65). With the Tibetan exile community in close contact, differences in philosophical emphases tended to stand out. Nowak goes on to argue that this factionalism was further exasperated by Western devotees seeking “one true sect,” a concept she refers to as highly “un-Tibetan” (65).²¹

²¹ In his piece “Wither the Tsampa Eaters,” Tsering Shakya argues that this unity of faith, culture and language never transcended into the idea among Tibetans that they constitute a “single” people (Shakya, 9). This work will be looked at in further detail in Chapter 3.

The following song is a translation of a preface to a second-grade reader, stressing the three major regional Tibetan identities:

In the east is Mdo-Khams where the heroic Khampas live
In the North is Amdo, with its diligent Amdobas
In the center is Dbus-gtsang, the home of the religious Dbus-gtsang people...
These three regions are Tibetan.
These three types of people are Tibetan.
We are only one race [lit: “flesh and bone”].
The Universal Jewel for all the Tibetan people
Is the protective Lord, the Dalai Lama (qt in Nowak 65-66).

By acknowledging the three major regional groups and attributing them with a positive stereotype, these textbooks celebrate Tibetan difference while simultaneously drawing their young audience into an acknowledgment of the Dalai Lama as the quintessential symbol of Tibetaness. The CTE’s non-sectarian stance effectively celebrates difference on the one hand, while stressing ultimate unity on the other.

In a similar vein, a decade later, in 1965, the Dalai Lama organized a historical conference in which leaders of the Rnying ma, Bka’ brgyud, Dge lugs and Sa skya schools came together and formed the Central Institute for Higher Tibetan Studies (CIHTS). In a memoir dedicated to the life of his teacher Dudjom Rinpoche, Khenpo Tsewang Dongyal writes of how his brother attended the meeting as the representative of the Rnying ma school (17). According to Dongyal, the assembly discussed “how best to preserve and continue the ancient teachings of Tibet” (17). Khenpo also tells of how Dudjom Rinpoche, as representative of the Rnying ma sect, was summoned by the Dalai Lama to join

the CTA in formulating the curriculum and writing the textbooks for primary and secondary schools (128).

In establishing both a government and an education system in exile that consciously sought to represent each of the main sects of Tibetan Buddhism, the CTA's parliamentary and educational policy in exile demarcated a dramatic shift away from the pre-exile, Dge lugs pa-oriented leadership. Many Tibetan high officials viewed exile as an opportunity for change. According to Khenpo Tsewang, these high officials believed that Tibet was lost due to a lack of unity. He summarizes this logic: "Let us call ourselves Tibetans rather than identify with our local region [these officials would have said]. Let's have a single school of Tibetan Buddhism rather than the excess of traditions that exist currently" (129). In exile, democratic and educational reform provided the CTA and the Dalai Lama with a means to trim these excesses.

The Rdo rje shugs ldan [Dorje Shugden] Crisis: A Case Study

In exile, the Dalai Lama and the CTA have made a conscious effort to transcend sectarianism, and de-emphasize difference in general among the exiled Tibetan community. The Dalai Lama, in re-imagining and propagating his own identity as a *ris med pa*, has successfully created cohesion amongst the exile community by imagining an unified Tibetan identity that overrides the sectarian and regional identities that threaten to pull people apart. In doing so, the Dalai Lama has, in some ways, come to embody the "Rimay" ideal, a concept already present in the western imagination. Nonetheless, the CTA's Tibetan Liberation

Movement has not managed to altogether escape controversy. This last section briefly examines one such controversy that has colloquially come to be known as “The Shugden [shugs ldan] Affair.” The controversy, which involved the worship of a highly sectarian deity named Rgyal chen rdo rje shugs ldan, has thoroughly polarized the Tibetan community in the 1970s, in the 1990s, and most recently in the past few years. The controversy surrounding Rdo rje shugs ldan has demonstrated quite publicly what can happen when traditional Tibetan Buddhist structures of sectarianism are carried into exile—a space where the fantasy of “Rimay” has left very little room for these sorts of traditional frameworks. I will first summarize the popular historical narrative surrounding Shugs ldan before going on to describe the implications of the deity’s reemergence in exile.²²

Rdo rje shugs ldan emerged onto the Tibetan Buddhist landscape in the 17th century. Shugs ldan’s traditional origin myth revolves around another controversy that took place within the Dge lugs pa sect in the early 1600s: a re-incarnated lama named Grags pa rgyal mtshan (1619-1656) was born and identified by some officials as an incarnation of the fourth Dalai Lama. But as it turned out, another young boy was declared the fifth Dalai Lama, the Great Ngag dbang blo bzang rgya mtsho (1617-1682). Grags pa rgyal mtshan was then recognized as a reincarnation of another important lama, Pan chen Bsod nams

²² In order to contextualize Rdo rje shugs ldan historically, I will be using the historical narrative described in George Dreyfus’ article *The Shugden Affair: Origins of a Controversy*, for the precise reason that it appears on the Dalai Lama’s official website www.dalailama.com. It could be argued, then, that this particular narrative is “popular” because the Dalai Lama and the CTA have propagated it. I do not know if the CTA commissioned Dreyfus to write this article, or whether they simply saw it useful to provide a western, “objective” scholar’s reaction to the controversy. Regardless, I am assuming that this view of Shugs ldan’s history is shared by the CTA.

grags pa (Dreyfus 1999, 2). As adults, a rivalry existed between these two men, though very little is known about the nature of these tensions. In 1655, Grags pa rgyal mtshan was found dead. As legend has it, his death is described as occurring shortly after Grags pa rgyal mtshan won a traditional religious debate with the Fifth Dalai Lama. In acknowledgement of his victory, Grags pa rgyal mtshan had received a ceremonial scarf from the Fifth. When Grags pa was found murder, the scarf had been violently stuffed down his throat (Dreyfus 1999, 3).

Following Grags pa's death, a number of bad omens plagued the Fifth Dalai Lama and his administration. The followers of the Dalai Lama believed that, because Grags pa had suffered a violent death, he had taken rebirth as a dangerous, vengeful spirit (Dreyfus 1999, 4). The high officials of the Dge lugs sect eventually managed to pacify Grags pa by propitiating the spirit which came to be know as Shugs ldan, requesting that it desist from harm and become a protector of the Dge lugs sect (Lopez 1998, 188). Having been appropriated by certain members of the Dge lugs pa hierarchy, Rdo rje shugs ldan inherited the particular function of safeguarding the Dge lugs sect against the influence of the Rnying ma tradition. Incidentally, this was a tradition towards which the Fifth Dalai Lama was particularity well disposed. According to Dreyfus, "Shuk-den [Shugs ldan] could be a manifestation of the political restriction of the Ge-luk [Dge lugs] hierarchy against the power of a strong Dalai Lama seeking to restrict and control it" (1999, 4). In this way, Shugs ldan became a symbol of Dge lugs pa sectarian purity.

The worship of Rdo rje shugs ldan enjoyed a revival in the nineteenth century, led by a Dge lugs pa monk named Pha bong kha (1878-1941). In the 1920s, Pha bong kha traveled to Khams, and was deeply disturbed to discover the success generated by the *ris med* movement in that region (Dreyfus 1999, 12). Pha bong kha, sensing that the Dge lugs tradition was being threatened, spearheaded a revival movement focused around Shugs ldan as the main protector deity. This charismatic movement, like other revivalist movements, claimed to embody the orthodoxy of the tradition (Dreyfus 1999, 12), and gained a great deal of popularity amongst some of the most important Dge lugs pa lamas of the twentieth century (Lopez 1998, 190).

Following the take-over of Tibet by the PRC in the 1950s, Shugs ldan, like so many people, deities, practices, and traditions, crossed the Himalayas into exile. Pha bong kha was the guru to many important lamas, including Khri byang rin po che (1901-1981), who later became junior tutor to the current Dalai Lama, and thus one of the most important Dge lugs pa monks in the refugee community (Lopez 1998, 190). Khri byang was extremely devoted to Shugs ldan, and thus strengthened Pha bong kha's lineage in exile.

In 1976, the situation deteriorated following the publishing of book, infamously known as the *Yellow Book*, authored by one of Khri byang's disciples Dze smad Blo bzang rin po che. The book listed the horrible fates met by Dge lugs lamas who practiced non-Dge lugs pa teachings, particularly Rnying ma practices. The *Yellow Book* cited these misfortunes as being the direct result of Rdo rje shugs ldan's wrath (Dreyfus 1999, 18). In reaction to the publishing and

circulation of the *Yellow Book* in the exile community, the Dalai Lama publicly discouraged the propitiation of Shugs Idan and discouraged his devotees from taking part in these sorts of practices. He believed that Shugs Idan's worship was provoking sectarianism in the refugee community, impeding the cause of Tibetan independence. This caused great discord in the refugee community, where devotion to the deity among the Dge lugs community remained strong.

In this way, the Dalai Lama, standing squarely on the global stage, acted less like a leader of the Dge lugs sect, and more like a *ris med* leader of Tibetan Buddhism (Lopez 1998, 191). Both the Dalai Lama and the *ris med* leaders of the nineteenth century could be said to be fighting a common enemy: sectarianism. In 1986, he spoke before a gathering in Dharamasala:

As the Dalai Lama, although I am not qualified, I am the only person to uphold the common cause of Tibet... there have lately been some problems concerning the protector Gyalchen Dorje Shugden...if those of you from Tibet accept him merely on the basis of his reputation as a great protector of the Gelukpas, it will not do any good for Tibet, either religiously or philosophically (qt in Lopez 1998, 191).

The Dalai Lama's renunciation of Shugs Idan was deeply upsetting for many members of the Tibetan exile community. In the mid-90s, the Dalai Lama's opposition to the deity became more pronounced. He made strong public statements against Shugs Idan during the Tibetan New Year celebration, and refused to give tantric initiation to the deity's devotees. Several monks denounced the Dalai Lama's decree, including one Dge lugs pa monk named Geshe Kelsang Gyatso who had established himself in London, England as the head of a new

Tibetan Buddhist tradition called the New Kadampa Tradition (NKT). Like many Dge lugs pa monks, Kelsang Gyatso was a devotee of Shugs Idan, and the deity played an important part in the practices of his new tradition. After the Dalai Lama announced his opposition to Shugs Idan worship, the disciples of Kelsang Gyatso denounced the Dalai Lama for infringing on their religious freedom, and picketed against him during his visit to England (Lopez 1998, 193).

During the last half of the twentieth century, the worship of the deity Shugs Idan had posed a direct challenge to the Dalai Lama's consolidation efforts in exile, and the sectarian stance embodied by Shugs Idan seriously threatened the unity of the Tibetan community. It was during this period of crisis that the Dalai Lama issued several statements emphasizing his *ris med* approach to Buddhism, and non-sectarianism came to the forefront of his public relations campaign.

A message entitled "His Holiness the Dalai Lama's Advice Concerning Dolgyal (Shugden)," issued on the Dalai Lama's official website, states, "historical investigation reveals the Dolgyal [Shugs Idan] practice, which has strong sectarian overtones, has a history of contributing to a climate of sectarian disharmony in various parts of Tibet" (<http://www.dalailama.com/messages/dolgyal-shugden/his-holiness-advice>). The statement goes on to list three reasons why the fourteenth Dalai Lama, from 1975 onward, has publicly denounced practices relating to Shugs Idan. The second reason is particularly interesting:

Obstacles to the emergence of genuine non-sectarianism: His Holiness has often stated that one of his most important commitments is the promotion of inter-religious understanding and harmony. As part of this endeavor,

His Holiness is committed to encouraging non-sectarianism in all schools of Tibetan Buddhism. In this His Holiness is following the example set by his predecessors, especially the Fifth Dalai Lama and the Thirteenth Dalai Lama. Not only is a non-sectarian approach mutually enriching for all Tibetan Buddhist schools, but it is also the best safeguard against a rise of sectarianism that could have damaging consequences for the Tibetan tradition as a whole. Given the acknowledged link between Dolgyal worship and sectarianism, this particular practice remains a fundamental obstacle to fostering a genuine non-sectarian spirit within the Tibetan Buddhist tradition (Dalai Lama, <http://www.dalailama.com/messages/dolgyal-shugden/his-holiness-advice>).

In aligning himself as well as his predecessors with *ris med* teachings, the Dalai Lama has re-iterated his non-sectarian stance, not only stressing that it is a fundamental characteristic of the Tibetan Buddhist tradition, as he has argued so many times before, but that it is essential to the well being and cohesion of the community. As Donald Lopez notes, “Shugden, a kind of clan deity for the Geluk sect and for a region of Eastern Tibet, having been carried into exile, thus himself must be declared obsolete and be exiled by the Dalai Lama so that Tibetans in exile many develop a national, rather than clan, identity” (1998, 196).

Interestingly, in 1996, the NKT devotees of Shugs ldan went so far as to appeal to Amnesty International, accusing the CTA of committing human rights violations and exhibiting religious intolerance (Lopez 1998,193). Although Amnesty International exonerated the Tibetan government-in-exile of human rights abuses, the implication is clear: the Dalai Lama, in homogenizing Tibetan sectarian

identity in order to become recognizable to Western globalizing discourse, had himself in turn been accused of standing in violation of human-rights.

In 2008, the Shugs Idan crisis received additional attention when the Dorjé Shugden Devotees' Charitable and Religious Society, based in India, took the CTA to court, claiming allegations of harassment and maltreatment by the Dalai Lama and the CTA against Shugs Idan supporters living in exile. On September 30, 2008, Al Jazeera addressed the Shugs Idan controversy, airing a short documentary segment entitled "The Dalai Lama: The Devil Within," as part of the on-going series "People and Power," an investigative program looking at the uses and abuses of power (<http://english.aljazeera.net/programmes/>). In the documentary, reporter Nicolas Haque spends time in a Tibetan refugee community in South India, surveying the discriminatory tactics being used against Shugs Idan-worshipping families and monastics. Haque interviews one shopkeeper who has posted a sign in her door forbidding Shugs Idan supporters from entering her shop. Additionally, several monasteries in South India have ostracized and expelled Shugs Idan monks, leaving them homeless. In response to this expulsion, the documentary films the Dalai Lama's public statement regarding the issue: "Recently monasteries have fearlessly expelled Shugden monks where needed. I fully support their actions. I praise them" (qt in Haque, 2008). A young Shugs Idan supporter, who, along with her family, has been forced to worship in secret, wipes away tear as she tells Haque, "If he [the Dalai Lama] was really Buddha, if he was really God, he would not create so much problem." In May 2008, the Dorjé Shugden Society hired Attorney Shree Sanjay Jain to represent their case.

On April 20, 2010, the Delhi High Court dismissed the charges brought against the Dalai Lama and the CTA, on the grounds that the allegations of violence and harassment were “vague averments” (<http://www.tibet.net>).²³

Presently, supporters of Rdo rje shugs ldan based both in the West and in India, continue to aggressively campaign against the Dalai Lama’s discrimination against Shugs ldan supporters. The official website of the Western Shugden Society²⁴, a group based in London, England, provides video footage of Shugs ldan-worshipping monks being expelled from monasteries, as well as scanned images of documents attesting to a “public swearing campaign,” whereby monks belonging to monastic universities in South India were forced to publicly denounce the worship of the controversial deity.

The Dorje Shugden Society, based in New Delhi, issued a press release attacking the Dalai Lama’s alleged expulsion of Shugs ldan-supporters from monasteries. Following the Delhi High Court’s decision, the Society continues to issue statements and generate awareness of the CTA’s anti-Shugs ldan campaign.

Although the charges of religious discrimination and human rights abuses brought against the Tibetan government-in-exile were exonerated both in 1997 by Amnesty International, and in 2010 by the Delhi High Court, the fourteenth Dalai

²³ Tracking down the trial’s final ruling proved to be a difficult feat, indeed. To my knowledge, not a single news-source provided coverage the trial carried out by the Delhi High Court, and although the court case managed to attract some attention at first, it seemed as though, in the media at least, the issue was quickly and quietly resolved. As such, although unreliable, the CTA’s official web site has proven to be the only source that announced the court’s final decision. I find this very peculiar.

²⁴ It should be noted that the claims made by both the Western Shugden Society and the Dorje Shugden Society are generally uncritical and unfounded. Despite the fact that these claims are in some cases unsubstantiated—the Western Shugden Society links the fourteenth Dalai with Nazi Germany—these websites and their positions have been included in this section in order to demonstrate that the Shugs ldan controversy continues to be an ongoing and controversial debate.

Lama, a veritable forerunner of the global human-rights discourse, has in turn been accused of religious discrimination. This ironic turn of events is perhaps telling of what happens when *ris med*, in its historical context, meets “Rimay,” in its Western incarnation. In banishing Shugs ldan, the Dalai Lama could be said to represent a traditional *ris med* lama—one who employs unity as a political weapon in the fight against the imposing threat of sectarianism. Presently, for His Holiness, it is not the Dge lugs sect that is the common enemy, as was the case during the nineteenth century. Rather, the enemy has come to be imagined as the highly sectarian stance represented by this orthodox Dge lugs pa deity. Nonetheless, the controversy generated in exile by the Shugs ldan crisis could be interpreted as an instance where *ris med* is simply not compatible with *Rimay*. The western fantasy of what constitutes Rimay, namely, a static and harmonious Tibet, is pervasive, and a Dalai Lama that does not comply to this fantasy must be accused of standing in violation of none other than the human-rights discourse; the very discourse that represents the Western ideals of freedom and democracy he so adamantly ascribes to.

The irony here is that in erasing difference in order to promote unity in the Tibetan community, the Dalai Lama was seeking to create a Tibetan community compatible with the fantasy of Rimay. However, as the Shugs ldan controversy demonstrates, fantasies are rarely able to live up to their expectations.

In recent years, the Dalai Lama has appropriated the *ris med* model that emerged in the nineteenth century as a response to the threat of Dge lugs pa hegemony in Eastern Tibet. He has consistently eschewed differences among the

Tibetan community in exile, subjecting the sects of Tibetan Buddhism to a process of unification that, not unlike the *ris med* movement of the nineteenth century, has been carried out on several plains. From the point-of-view of Tibetan Buddhist doctrine, the Dalai Lama has been prolific in his advocacy of the *ultimate* unity of the Old and New Translations Schools, arguing that an understanding of these systems as representing different views is the result of a deluded, conventional mind. His strong affinity for *Rdzog chen*, the principle teaching of the Rnying ma school, has also served as the grounds from which the Dalai Lama has advertised himself as a non-sectarian. Additionally, educational and democratic reforms initiated by the Dalai Lama and the CTA dramatically transformed the traditional sectarian landscape in exile. New forms of parliament became more inclusive of all the sects of Tibetan Buddhism, a move away the predominantly Dge lugs hierarchy that governed Tibet until the Chinese invasion in the 1950s. Establishing an education system in exile was one of the number priorities of the CTA. Textbook and curriculum production played a part in the dissemination of non-sectarian ideology to a new generation of Tibetans growing up in the diaspora, as well as the propagation of the Dalai Lama as the representative of the Tibetan people as a whole. The ingenious crafting and dissemination of this ideology, however, was not seamless. The discord and controversy generated by the propitiation of Rdo rje shugs ldan serves as a kind of “case study” that highlights some problems resulting from the Dalai Lama’s advocacy of *ris med*.

In a recent visit to Vancouver, the Dalai Lama spoke before a mob of affectionate Canadian fans. Vancouver Sun journalist Douglas Todd reports: “There were many funny and moving moments as [leaders including the Dalai Lama] ...talked about their topics in a decidedly non-sectarian way, which benefits a West Coast province where many people like to say, “I’m spiritual, but not religious.” (Ward 2006). The fourteenth Dalai Lama faces a challenge that no other non-sectarian leader has faced before: In addition to creating a homogenous Tibetan identity in exile, he must also conform to expectations of Rimay, and gain the support of a Western audience. The Tibetan leader is faced with the impossible task of constructing a Tibet that encompasses the particularities of sect and region, but also a Tibet that accommodates a vague kind of “Western spirituality,” which is simply non-sectarianism taken to its logical conclusion. In the next chapter, I turn my attention to the some of the implications of such an imagining.

Chapter 3: Imagining Tibet

“Or l’essence d’une nation est que tous les individus aient beaucoup de choses en commun, et aussi que tous aient oublié bien des choses.” –Ernest Renan

In chapter 1, I contextualized the nineteenth century *ris med* movement that took place in Khams, Tibet, providing a historical framework for non-sectarianism in Tibetan Buddhism. In chapter 2, I argued that the fourteenth Dalai Lama has appropriated the non-sectarian framework introduced by the *ris med* movement, allowing him to cast himself, not as a highly influential and high ranking *tulku* of a traditionally parochial Dge lugs sect, but as the spiritual and temporal leader of a newly homogenized, unified Tibet. In this chapter I will analyze the motivations and implications of the Dalai Lama’s self-representation as a *ris med pa*. First, I will briefly outline some of the differences between the nineteenth century non-sectarian movement’s understanding of what it meant to be *ris med*, and a contemporary understanding of non-sectarianism as forwarded by the Dalai Lama and the CTA. I will then discuss the ways in which the *ris med* framework has allowed the Dalai Lama to fashion himself as a “summarizing symbol,” “those symbols which are seen as...representing for the participant in an emotionally powerfully and relatively undifferentiated way, what the system means to them” (Ortner 1339). Furthermore, the liminal nature of diaspora will be discussed as “pure” space where new symbols are generated, and, finally, the Dalai Lama’s appropriation of *ris med* will be read as a means of “imagining community.”

March 10th marks the annual commemoration of the Lhasa Uprising. In Tibetan, this day is known as *Rang dbang sger langs*, “the uprising for freedom” (Nowak 32), and remembers the violent and tragic rebellion that erupted in the Tibetan capital on March 10th, 1959 in protest against Chinese sovereignty over Tibet. Following the suppression of this rebellion, Beijing incorporated political Tibet directly into the People’s Republic of China’s administrative system (Goldstein 1998, 9)²⁵, and the fourteenth Dalai Lama sought exile in India. Present-day March 10th commemorations are held in Tibetan refugee communities all over the world. A crowd gathers in a central, public location, speeches are made, demonstrations are performed. Margaret Nowak describes the event as marked by “conspicuous wearing of national dress, singing of the national anthem, ubiquitous display of the Tibetan flag, pictures of the Dalai Lama, as well as slogans, banners, and placards proclaiming the Tibetan case against the Chinese” (34). The March 10th commemoration celebrates sameness in the Tibetan community, all the while drawing cultural borders, in the place of geographical ones, that delineate difference.

Every March 10th, the Dalai Lama delivers a public address. On March 10th, 1968, less than ten years after the Lhasa Uprising, he told his people, “it was that fateful day which united the whole country in defiance of the Chinese and re-declared our sense of nationhood in no uncertain terms to the outside world, and

²⁵ Up until this point, in accordance with the Seventeen Point Agreement for the Liberation of Tibet, China had agreed to allow the Dalai Lama’s government and Tibet’s traditional economic system to continue to function unchanged (Goldstein 1998, 7). March 1959 also marks the dismal failure of the CIA supported Tibetan guerilla rebellion, which had hoped to hold some territory within Tibet as a base of operations (Goldstein 1998, 54).

that struggle to assert ourselves as people still continues today both inside and outside Tibet” (qt in Nowak 35). The people united, the Dalai Lama tells his audience, is of the utmost importance to the Tibetan cause. Tibet must present itself as a unified front not only when confronting Chinese oppression, but also when standing on the international stage. Dispersion is merely a frame-of-mind, the Dalai Lama seems to say, a conditional reality; on the inside, all Tibetans, whether residing in the homeland or in the Diaspora, are unified in their “Tibetaness.” In Chapter 2, I explored the ways in which the Dalai Lama characterized sectarian differences among Tibetans as a conventional, mistaken view of reality. Similarly, the distances that separate Tibetans living inside Tibet, from those living in exile, are also a frame-of-mind: Tibetan unity is something that lives in the hearts of all Tibetans, and transcends geo-political boundaries.

The Dalai Lama has appropriated the non-sectarian framework of the historical *ris med* movement, thus transforming sectarianism in a diasporic context. In doing so, he has unified a dislocated exiled community by encouraging its members to transcend parochial interest, all the while embodying the non-sectarian ideal he wishes to see emulated by his community. Two decades ago, Benedict Anderson demonstrated that nations were not the product of certain sociological and historical conditions, rather, they were entities imagined into existence (Anderson 1991). The nineteenth century *ris-med* movement of eastern Tibet, carried into a twentieth century incarnation, has been utilized, and continues to be utilized by the Dalai as an ideological tool with which to “imagine” Tibetan nationhood into existence.

Nineteenth and Twentieth Century *Ris-med*: An Analysis

When ‘Jam mgon Kong sprul, the great *ris med* leader of the nineteenth century, mapped out religious sites of importance, he was delineating the geographical centers and borders of the region of Khams, Tibet. The map provided Kong sprul with the technological means to memorialize those sites deserving legitimacy. All the while, Dge lugs pa religious sites and monasteries were subjected to cartographical erasure (Gardner 111). This *ris med* lama was partaking in the creation of what Thongchai Winichakul refers to as a “geo-body” (16). According to Winichakul, a “geo-body” describes an operation of the “technology of territoriality,” which participates in the creation of nationhood spatially, and whose prime technology is the map (Winichakul 16-17).²⁶ Through mapping, Kong sprul was participating in the production of “territoriality,” which according to geographic theorist Robert D. Sack, is the process by which “an individual or a group affect, influence and control people, phenomena, and relationships, by delimiting and asserting control over geographic areas... it is the device through which people construct and maintain special organizations” (qt in Winichakul 16).

By denying the Dge lugs pa a space on the landscape of Khams, Kong sprul, a lama renowned for his non-sectarian tendencies, was being highly sectarian; in the nineteenth century, the *ris med* ideal seems to have provided non-sectarian lamas a tool with which to create a unified tradition that was all

²⁶ Thongchai Winichakul’s work focuses primarily on the creation of “Thainess” through the mapping of the modern Siamese (pre 1941) nation. He argues that even geographic territoriality, that which might seem consistent of concrete, “natural” elements constituting the presence of nation, is, too, a human and social construct facilitated by the technology of map-making. See *Siam Mapped*, 1994.

encompassing, in order to consciously define itself against Dge lugs pa hegemony invading Khams at the time.

In this light, *ris med* came to represent a kind of territoriality, a political tool used to forge a unified force against a common enemy; in this case, the highly sectarian Dge lugs pas. ‘Jam mgon Kong sprul’s map can be read as an extended metaphor: *ris med* lamas mapped a new territoriality onto the sacred geography of Khams, delineating borders and boundaries vis-à-vis doctrine, scholasticism and literature that asserted a kind of *ris med* identity; an eclectic identity that could exist solely in opposition to the sectarian and orthodox identity of the Dge lugs pa.

As discussed in chapter 2, in exile, the fourteenth Dalai Lama has publicly and consciously sought to “rise above sectarianism” (Kapstein 1998, 190). He has instead employed a model of “non-sectarianism” by frequently deemphasizing his Dge lugs pa sectarian affiliations. If the *ris med* movement came into fruition only in opposition to Dge lugs pa hegemony, as I have tried to argue in chapter 1, then it is somewhat ironic that the Dalai Lama, as *de facto* leader of the Dge lugs sect, would in turn chose to appropriate non-sectarian ideology and forcefully propagate himself as a *ris med pa*. However, just as the non-sectarian lamas of the nineteenth century came together to present a united front against a common enemy, the Dalai Lama has similarly united the sects of Tibetan Buddhism against a new enemy: the People’s Republic of China. In the nineteenth century, *ris med* created a space for a more heterogeneous religious praxis. In the twentieth century, *ris med* has been utilized by the Dalai Lama and the CTA as a means to

create and propagate a more homogenous religious tradition, one that can be called uniquely “Tibetan.” But in both cases, *ris med* functions as a political tool with which to fight powerful institutions. In the nineteenth century, *ris med* represented something that is difficult to qualify, something E. Gene Smith described as “less than a movement, but more than a trend” (236). In the twentieth century, however, *ris med* has become reified, and represents a central element of the process of Tibetan nationalism.

Eric Hobsbawn, as well as others, has stressed the difference between “national identity” and “nationalism” (Kapstein 1998, 140). While national identity suggests the identification of oneself as belonging to a group, nationalism should be understood as “the conviction that the national group ought to be embodied in a unique nation-state” (Kapstein 1998, 140). It is difficult to qualify national identity; it might consist of language, religion or history, but its parameters are malleable and broad. Nationalism, on the other hand, has a much more rigid determination. It could be argued that, prior to the Chinese invasion of Tibet in 1949, Tibet had a strong national identity, characterized by a shared sense of history, a common language and a shared culture anchored by Tibetan religion. Matthew Kapstein argues that modern nationalism did not exist in Tibet prior to the 1950s: “despite the existence of an independent Tibetan state and the distinct identity of Tibetan culture and civilization...Tibetan nationalism has emerged primarily as a reaction to the incorporation of Tibet into the PRC in 1951” (1998, 141). During the 1950s, Tibet was not yet a unique nation state. During the height of the Tibetan resistance in 1959, a letter appeared in the *Tibetan Mirror*

appealing to “all *tsam pa*²⁷ eaters,” to join in the resistance against Chinese forces (Tsering Shakya 9). At this point in time, shortly before the Dalai Lama’s flight into exile, Tibetans appealed to a sense of national identity. Too early to draw upon the rhetoric of modern nationalism, leaders appealed to a staple food, *tsam pa*, to unify the people living in the region called Tibet, insofar as most elements of Tibetan Nationalism had yet to be imagined into existence.²⁸

Ris med, as utilized by the Dalai Lama and the CTA, plays a direct role in the production of the political embodiment of a unique Tibetan nation state. The details of this process of nation building will be discussed in the pages to come. But it is clear that both the historical *ris med* of nineteenth century Khams, and the *ris med* espoused by the fourteenth Dalai Lama, are implicit in the delineation of borders, in the Winichakulian sense. Borders, whether drawn on a map or existing in the cultural imagination of the individual, are an assertion of power, a demarcation of the sphere of “Us” against “Them” (Winichakul 16). Whether the “Other” is imagined to be the increasing hegemony of the Dge lugs pa sect, or the oppressive regime of the PRC, non-sectarianism, despite its presupposed inclusivity, in fact delineates a closed system, a powerful tool that brings people together through the exclusion of others.

²⁷ *Tsampa* is parched barley flour, and is a staple of the Tibetan diet.

²⁸ Both P. Christiaan Klieger and Georges Dreyfus theorize that a “proto-Tibetan Nationalism” characterized pre-1950 Tibet. Klieger argues that this nationalism revolves around patronage relationships that took place between Tibetans and Mongols, while Dreyfus argues that since the twelfth century, Tibetans understood themselves as belonging to a country defined by the narratives and memories articulated by the literature of the hidden treasure tradition (*gter ma*), particularly the *Mani bka’ ’bum*. See Klieger 1992 and Dreyfus 2002.

The Dalai Lama as a “Summarizing Symbol”

Although there is a strong base for the assertion of Tibetan national identity, it is surely an identity that crystallized when threatened. In her seminal work on Tibetan refugee communities in the late 1970s, anthropologist Margaret Nowak notes that one of the most difficult tasks faced by the Tibetan government-in-exile was confronting the sectarian and regional differences that kept Tibetans divided among themselves (65). In the early 1960s, sectarianism had become highly operative among Tibetans in exile, insofar as the increased population density centered in centralized in refugee communities brought individuals from highly remote localities, into contact with each other:

Now [in exile], with everyone in closer contact, differences in philosophical emphases and interpretations stand out more sharply; moreover, intersectarian awareness of the others’ relative strength, in number as well as in influence, promotes a certain competitive attitude aggravated all the more by Western devotees seeking a very un-Tibetan “one true sect” (Nowak 65).²⁹

As discussed in chapter 2, in response to this problem, the Dalai Lama and the CTA have engaged in a public relations campaign, to promote national unity among the sects.

In denouncing factionalism among the sects, the Dalai Lama has turned himself into what might be designated a “summarizing symbol.” According to

²⁹ Regionalism has also been a highly divisive problem in the refugee community. Regional factionalism, particularly negative feeling harbored towards centers of influence such as Lhasa, as well as dialect differences, exacerbated divisive problems in exile (Nowak 65). Also, see Tsering Shakya 1993.

anthropologist Sherry B. Ortner, “summarizing symbols...are those symbols which are seen as summing up, expressing, representing for the participants in an emotionally powerful and undifferentiated way, what the system means to them” (1339). Ortner uses the American flag as an example of a summarizing symbol: the flag, here, stands in for a conglomerate of ideas and emotions including democracy, freedom, progress, etc. She goes on: “It [the summarizing symbol] stands for them [all these ideas] at once. It does not encourage reflection on the logical consequences of them as they are played out in actuality, over time and history” (1340). Arguably, the Dalai Lama can be interpreted in light of this designation. In order to cultivate unity among Tibetan people during a time of crisis following the 1950s, the Dalai Lama recognized the usefulness in this sort of symbolic appropriation. In all probability, insofar as summarizing symbols must transcend the particularities of time and space, a sectarian Dalai Lama would be ineffectual. The Dalai Lama must de-emphasize his ties from the traditionally sectarian Dge lugs pa school, and take on an identity that overrides sectarian (and regional) affiliations. He must become a symbol that “summarizes,” rather than one that reduces or divides.

The Dalai Lama’s self-identification as a *ris med pa* has allowed him to function as the summarizing symbol of Tibetan identity through the promotion of “sameness” among Tibetan refugees. However, it’s important to note that the Dalai Lama’s appropriation of non-sectarianism, in placing a national allegiance above a sectarian one, also creates an ethos whereby that which is “Tibetan” is also defined against that which is “un-Tibetan.” Winichakul call this process one

of “negative identification” (5). In his discussion of Thai nationalism, Winichakul write: “If the domain of what is Thainess is hard to define clearly, the domain of what is not Thai—that is, un-Thai—is identified from time to time” (5). In this way, that which is Thai, or Tibetan, is defined from the outside, from the other side of the ideological border. Tsering Shakya notes that in Tibetan refugee communities, even more so than faith, uniform identity is based on anti-Chinese ideology (11). Despite the plurality of identities encompassed in the concept of *Bod pa* (a Tibetan), “the singular marker of identity emerges only in opposition to ‘the other’” (1993, 9).³⁰

Moreover, according to Tsering Shakya, “unity has been fostered in exile though the manipulation of symbols and the deliberate invention of tradition” (11). The Dalai Lama’s *ris med* identity allows him to function as a “summarizing symbol;” a symbol that stands in for an undifferentiated system, in an attempt to homogenize Tibetan identity. The next section will explore the ways in which the condition of exile in particular creates a space for the production of these symbols.

Purity in Exile

Exile, the loss of homeland, exists as a kind of liminal space between borders. Having been forced to leave behind their native land, Tibetan refugees

³⁰ P. Christiaan Klieger’s work has also touched upon the theme of the “Other” in the production of Tibetan identity: “The strategy for the Tibetan people in general, at least since the occupation in the 1950s, is to perpetually define oneself as different from the powerful ‘Other’” (2002, 2). See his introduction in *Tibet, Self, and the Tibetan Diaspora: Voices of Difference*, 2002.

have entered a kind of limbo of displacement. I would argue that this highly malleable state, one lacking in fixity, facilitates the production of new symbols. The Dalai Lama has been able to appropriate *ris med* and partake in a new sort of self-imagining in exile, precisely because it is a state that lacks the rigidity of the former system.

Margaret Nowak discusses the displacement brought on by exile from the homeland in the context of Victor Turner's theory of "liminality." Turner's concept of liminality relates to ritual theory, and describes the intermediary stage of structured ritual, where the initial stage involves a detachment of some kind, and the final stage involves social re-integration and re-aggregation (45).

Liminality, according to this theory, is a highly ambiguous and unsettling state, but nonetheless it is a state that abounds with creative possibilities: in a liminal state, the classifications on which symbols and metaphors normally depend are annulled, liberating them from behavioral norms and creating a space for new meanings (Nowak 46). Nowak applies this symbolic anthropological theory to the refugee's desire to seek new meanings in a new situation: "in ambiguous social states, symbols and metaphors are likely to proliferate" (Nowak 46).

In her work on Hutu refugees in Tanzania, anthropologist Liisa H. Malkki analyses the ways in which displacement and deterritorialization shape the social construction of nation and history (1). Malkki conducted her field research in a refugee camp named Mishamo Refugee Settlement, which consisted mostly of Hutu refugees who fled ethnic cleansing by the Tutsi minority in Burundi in 1972. She notes that the most prominent social fact about the settlement was that its

inhabitants were often partaking in a constant construction and reconstruction of their history as “people” (3). These narratives form a historical and moral trajectory that asserts the Hutu as “rightful natives of Burundi” (Malkki 3). She goes on to argue that the spatial and social isolation of the refugee camp figures in this process:

The camp had become a central means of asserting separateness from “other” categories...and was in this sense a locus of categorical purity. Never intended as such by its architects, the camp has become the most central place from which to imagine a “pure” Hutu national identity. The irony was...that in the natural order of things, refugeeness is itself an aberration of categories, a zone of pollution (Malkki 3-4)

In other words, despite the “unnatural,” liminal state of exile, refugeeness becomes a repository for the purification of identity. Responding to their displacement from the natural national order, refugees partake in the creation of new, or at least altered, national identities. Malkki elaborates: in exile, the *hutu* (with a lower case h) hopes to become the *Hutu* (with an uppercase H). In the cultural imagination of the refugee community, the *hutu* is imagined as servant and slave to the Tutsi, the “imposters from the north” (223). The massacre launched the *hutu* into exile, and the trials and tribulations of exile taught them to become “true refugees,” a precondition to becoming “true/pure Hutus.” Hutuness, according to Malkki, is distinguished from hutuness: while the later are still slaves to the Tutsi, the former have become “ ‘the Hutu’ as ‘a people’ ” (Malkki 223). It is the Hutu, with a capital H, who are the people worthy of regaining a homeland.

Khenpo Tsewang Dogyal Rinpoche mused that in the 1960s, Tibetan officials looked back sadly on the loss of their homeland and thought, “due to lack of unity, we lost our country. Now is the perfect opportunity for change” (129). To borrow Malkki’s framework, I would argue that, under the leadership of the fourteenth Dalai Lama, exile has served as a precondition from which the *tibetan*—made servant to the Chinese—is able to become the *Tibetan*, a unified “true/pure people” deserving of a homeland.

In an article by Laurie McMillin, Tibetan author Jetsun Pema notes that some Tibetans believe that “[Tibetan] culture is only alive in exile” (qt in McMillin 157), and that Tibetans living in Tibet are not seen as fully “authentic”: “These identities—Buddhist, Tibetan nationalist, exile—all combine to create something I will call, after Vincanne Adams, the ‘authentic’ Tibetan” (McMillin 157). As the Dalai Lama once put it in a speech in 1985, in the homeland, Tibetans have been merely reduced to a drop of ethnic essence in “a vast sea of Chinese” (qt in Karmay 113). Thus, the authentic Tibetan is a refugee, one who does not compromise their nationalist ideals and is blessed by the continual presence of the Dalai Lama (McMillin 157)³¹.

To return to Malkki’s study, she notes that “identity [in exile] was a heavily idealized, moral, and political one...a matter of profound essences” (123). I have argued here that territorial displacement, the state of being in exile, creates a space for the re-production of identity, and the formation of a more “authentic”

³¹ Some scholars have argued the opposite, claiming that “authenticity,” as a socially constructed phenomena, is in fact embodied in the Tibetan living in the TAR, proper. The diasporic Tibetan, in view of his or her liminal state, becomes a site of categorical “impurity,” insofar as they have been influenced by the West. See Klieger 1992.

imagining of Tibetan person-hood. In this way, as Toni Huber notes, “the experience of diaspora provided the initial stimulus for modern Tibetan identity production” (358). He goes on to elaborate that this identity production drew heavily on cross-cultural imports offered by the West and other trans-national cultural influences. This “flow of resources” that may have influenced the production of new symbols produced by the Dalai Lama will be explored in the next section. For now, the Dalai Lama, recognizing that exile provides a liminal, open space from which to produce identity, has appropriated non-sectarianism as a means of uniting his people under the rubric of a “purer,” more homogenized and idealized Tibetaness, one deserving of a homeland.

Imagining Community

In 1999, an article by Tsering Shakya entitled “Whither the Tsampa Eaters,” ran in the Nepali monthly Review magazine *Himal*. The article, states the brief abstract, addresses the new strategies and means of survival devised by the Tibetan periphery in order to preserve Tibetan identity (Shakya 1999, 8). Essential to this survival strategy, claims Shakya, is the notion of the invention of a “shared tradition:” “Most Tibetans in exile are now socialized into thinking of themselves as a homogenous group through schooling and group rituals” (Shakya 11). The article’s tone is ambiguous. It is difficult to discern whether or not Tsering Shakya feels this is an effective device. Is this socialization into thinking about Tibetan identity as homogenous something that will ensure the survival of the Tibetan people, or is it merely a manipulative form of brainwashing on the

part of the Government-in-exile? He doesn't divulge. Nonetheless, for Tsering Shakya, the notion of Tibetan identity as something that is homogenous and essentialized is not contingent on a given reality or on certain sociological conditions. On the contrary, he tells us that prior to the 1950s, the unity of faith, culture and language, never transcended into the idea among Tibetan-speakers that they constituted a single people, or a political entity (9). Tibetan unity is something that has had to be imagined into existence.

Two decades ago, Benedict Anderson demonstrated that nations were not the product of certain inherent, unchanging conditions; rather, they are a kind of "cultural artifact," a product that has been "imagined" into existence, but that nonetheless generates profound emotional legitimacy (Anderson 4). The Dalai Lama's self-representation as a *ris med pa* has transformed traditional ways of imagining sectarianism, encouraging a heightened homogenization of Tibetan Buddhist religious identity in exile. Arguably, this mode of representation is reflexive of a larger nationalist project of imagined community, an "artificial creation mythically retrojected into the past of human communities in order to legitimize their present political organization" (Dreyfus 2002, 37). Anderson argues that major institutional forms were required in order to give concrete shape to nationalism, particularly what he calls "print-capitalism," brought about by the convergence of capitalism and print technologies (Anderson 46). Furthermore, what he refers to as the "last-wave" of nationalism, mostly in the colonial territories of Africa and Asia, was a response to the global imperialism made possible by the achievements of industrial capitalism (Anderson 139). Anderson

is arguing here, that the nationalisms imagined in Europe, the Americas and Russia, supplied a model that could be adopted by elites in colonial territories.

In his book entitled *The Nation and its Fragments: Colonial and Post-colonial Histories*, Partha Chatterjee raises a question in objection to Anderson's argument: If nationalisms produced by the imaginations of Europe and the Americas are then simply adopted by the rest of the world, what does the postcolonial world, then, have left to imagine (Chatterjee 5)? He continues, "History, it would seem, has decreed that we in the postcolonial world shall only be perpetual consumers of modernity...even our imaginations must be forever colonized" (5). Chatterjee goes on to argue that anticolonial nationalism embarks on its own process of imagining sovereignty well before it begins a battle with imperial power (6). This imagination divides the world into two domains: the material and the spiritual. Accordingly, the material is the realm of the "outside," of economy and of state-craft, a domain where the West has proved its superiority and had to be carefully replicated by the East (6). The spiritual, on the other hand, is an "inner" domain, a space that bears the marks of cultural and religious identity, a space where the colonial state is kept out (6). It is here, argues Chatterjee, that nationalism launches its most powerful and creative project: "to fashion a 'modern' national culture that is nevertheless not Western" (6). The realm of the spiritual, therefore, does not remain unchanged. It, too, undergoes a creative transformation into something imagined.

I think that the Dalai Lama's attempts to unify Tibetan identity through the promotion of a non-factionalist imagining of nationhood can, in some ways, be

read in relation to Chatterjee's anticolonial nationalism model.³² In the outside realm of the material, the Dalai Lama and the CTA have clearly acknowledged the superiority of the Western model, and have made attempts to modernize accordingly. This has been particularly apparent in the context of democracy and human rights; the Dalai Lama has consciously and skillfully begun to speak the language of the Western human rights discourse: concepts like democracy, human rights, universalism and national struggle have provided him with a new vocabulary to use on the world stage, culminating in his 1989 receipt of the Nobel Prize for peace.³³ The Dalai Lama has a well-known interest in the physical and natural science, as well as in psychology. He has met with several Western scientists, and has repeatedly praised scientific and technological advances in the West (Cabezón 300). Nonetheless, in accordance with the "inner/outer" model forwarded by Chatterjee, the "inner," namely, tradition and spirituality, bears the essential marks of cultural identity, and would seem to remain distinct. The Dalai Lama discusses traditional Tibet in relation to the West: "Scientific and technological advancement seem to be the greatest pride of the Western world. This point of view stands in direct opposition to that of my own country, Tibet.

³² I recognize that Chatterjee's conception of an "anti-colonial" or "post-colonial" state is contingent on the colonial presence of a Western invader. Tibetan Nationalism, in this sense, cannot be called "anticolonial" insofar as Tibet was not colonized by the West, and insofar as Tibetan Nationalism only took shape in exile. However, Tibet was, indeed, colonized by the PRC, and, furthermore, has had a great deal of interaction with Western models of government, both prior to its invasion by China, and following the exile of the fourteenth Dalai Lama. Insofar as the Tibetan government-in-exile has modeled itself on Indian and Western style democracy—the realms of the "outside"—all the while maintaining a distinct spiritual identity—the realm of the "inside." In this way I find Chatterjee's model to be useful and applicable.

³³ Ronald D. Schwartz discusses the ways in which this new vocabulary, adopted by exile leaders in exile, has flown back into Tibet allowing Tibetans living in the TAR to align themselves with modern political terminology. See "The Anti-Splittist Campaign and Tibetan Political Consciousness" in *Resistance and Reform in Tibet*, 1994, p. 207-237.

We were technologically backward, but spiritually very rich” (qt in Cabezon, 300). The Dalai Lama here, and elsewhere, has found it useful to make the distinction between the inner and the outer, the spiritual and the technological.

Chatterjee argues that anticolonial nationalisms “imagine community” at the level of the spiritual, in the “inner” domain of cultural identity. Insofar as the promotion of non-sectarianism represents a transformation of traditional structures of lineage and religious praxis, the Dalai Lama is essentializing and homogenizing tradition, and imagining nationhood at the level of the “inner,” in accordance with Chatterjee’s model.³⁴ However, I would argue that the centrality of the human-rights discourse in the shaping of Tibetan identity causes the “inner” and “outer” domains delineated by Chatterjee’s model, to converge. In this way, the case of Tibet in some ways falls outside the jurisdiction of Chatterjee’s theory.

Tibetan nationalism, I would argue, is unique insofar as its cultural re-imagining is inextricably linked to the Tibetan Liberation Movement, a movement spearheaded by the Dalai Lama in an attempt to regain a Tibetan homeland and publicize the numerous human-rights violations being carried out by the PRC in Tibet. The Tibetan Liberation Movement can be characterized as belonging to the “outer” realm of Chatterjee’s model; it uses the language of human rights and

³⁴ At this point it is important to note that Tibetan nationalism, in some important ways, differs from Chatterjee’s model of anti-colonial nationalism. Focusing on the case of India, Chatterjee defines two periods of “social reform”: In the earlier phase, Indian reformers looked to colonial authorities to bring about the reform of traditions and customs (the “inner”). In the second phase, there was a strong desire to keep the colonial authorities from intervening in matters pertaining to “national culture” (6). It was during this second phase, according to Chatterjee, that nationalism in the Indian context took place. In the case of Tibet, the re-imagining of the “inner” sphere is more elusive. There was never a Western colonial presence that imposed itself on traditional and social reform in a direct and systematic way, therefore, there was never impetus to overtly keep that “out” of the inner sphere. The result is the imaginings of a cultural Tibet, which were, consciously or not, influenced by Western expectations.

democracy, and appeals to policy and legislature. Nonetheless, in order to appeal to a Western democratic audience, the realm of the “inner,” of tradition and culture, must conform to Western expectations of “Tibetanness.”

In his article entitled “Violated Specialness,” Robert Barnett argues that the dominant image of Tibet that emerges in Western and exile political discussions, is a Tibet that has been imagined as a kind of violated sacrality: “a zone of specialness, uniqueness, distinctiveness, or excellence that has been threatened, violated or abused,” (273) and that this representation has become embodied by the person of the Dalai Lama (Barnett 303). In this way, the “inner” and “outer” realms, delineated by Chatterjee’s model, collapse in the personhood of the Dalai Lama. Barnett speculates that the imagination and propagation of this image by Tibetan officials was crafted during a series of strategy meetings in the late 1980s, encouraging the use of a constructed notion of Tibetan uniqueness as a tool of diplomacy (Barnett 273). Furthermore, and particularly relevant to the discourse of imagined nationalist identity, Barnett argues that this notion of “violated specialness,” as represented vis-à-vis the symbol of the Dalai Lama, has in fact been culled from earlier essentialist, Orientalist literary views of Tibet. This Western literary output, which pre-dates even the nineteenth century, depicts Tibet as a mythical “Shangri-la,” a paradise housing an innately spiritual people.³⁵ The result is what Toni Huber calls “the post-colonial predicament,” a process by which the “Oriental Other,” in this case Tibet, having been exposed to the essential imaginings of itself by the West, in turn begins

³⁵ For a more detailed analysis of the literary depiction of Tibet as a mythical “Shangri-La,” see Rudolf Kaschewsky’s article entitled “The Image of Tibet in the West Before the Nineteenth Century,” 2001.

to embody these same Orientalist constructions. In this way, the “Oriental,” whom the West has objectified, “also [becomes] the creative agent for essentialist constructions, and moreover an agent who reflects, refracts, and recycles Orientalist discourse back to what is held to be the dominant objectifying group” (Huber 363). These creations and propagations of Tibet as a “zone of violated specialness” by Tibetan officials are, according to Barnett, “all uniform imaginaries that are often devoid of a sense of political process or complexity, and without a space in which other, nonuniform voices may be heard and easily included” (303).

In this way, both the “outer” sphere of democracy and policy, and “inner” spheres of culture and tradition—which I have argued, in the case of Tibet, are inextricably inter-twined—are being imagined in relation and in reaction to Western assumptions and expectations. The Dalai Lama, as leader of the Tibetan Liberation Movement, has recognized that international human rights politics are reliant on notions of subjectivity and truth that are primarily universal. For this reason, he saw the need for a kind of erasure of cultural specificity. As Vincanne Adams puts it, human rights “are seldom phrased in terms of cultural differences” (93). In the context of this framework, it makes sense that factionalism and sectarianism in the realm of Tibetan Buddhism ought to be downplayed. In speaking to a global audience, the Dalai Lama saw the differences implied by various schools of Tibetan Buddhism as speaking a language of dissonance rather than one of unity. A dissonance that could be interpreted as potentially dangerous.

For this very reason, arguably, the Dalai Lama has recognized that a Tibet defined in terms of *difference* would appeal less to a global audience than a Tibet

defined in terms of *unity*. For example, in 1987, the Dalai Lama presented his Five Point Peace Plan in his landmark address to the United States Congressional Human Rights Caucus. This was a proposal that sought to serve as the basis for negotiations with China. The address begins: “The world is increasingly interdependent, so that lasting peace—national, regional, and global—can only be achieved if we think in terms of broader interest rather than parochial needs” (9). Parochialism, refers not only to discrimination, but the act of simply emphasizing difference, and is considered dangerous insofar as it is the cause of turmoil. In *Kindness, Clarity and Insight*, the Dalai Lama writes: “Philosophical teachings are not the end, not the aim, not what you serve...If we go into differences in the philosophy and argue with and criticize each other, it is useless” (47). In the context of a global community, the categories of difference that set Tibetan Buddhists apart doctrinally, philosophically and from the point-of-view of lineage, are not only not useful, they are detrimental to the Tibetan cause, a cause that is, in turn, contingent on Western support.

The Dalai Lama, in positing a strong *ris med* identity, is transforming tradition and creating a cultural identity that bears the marks of an “essentialized” people; an imagined “geo-body” that has not escaped Western influence. Here we must return to Alexander Gardner’s distinction between the historical *ris med*, and the more contemporary Rimay: “Perhaps its [Rimay’s] purported ideals are too attractive to resist: tolerance, open-inquiry, inter-sectarian exchange...appealing as it is, it comes as no surprise that many Tibetan lamas who teach in the West have come to characterize themselves and their teachings as ‘Rimay’” (113). In this way, *ris*

med, as an idealized fantasy, is a participant in the propagating of an image of Tibet that represents what Barnett has qualified, a “violated specialness.”

To conclude, the Dalai Lama’s appropriation of *ris med* can be understood as a survival tactic: like the historical *ris med* of nineteenth century, the Dalai Lama’s non-sectarian identity has presented a united front against an oppressive regime. It has served as a political tool with which to draw ideological borders demarcating the “insider” from the “outsider”; the “Us” from the “Them.” *Ris med* has also provided the Dalai Lama with a means of constructing himself as a “summarizing symbol” to unite a disparate people. Exile created a space from which the proliferation of new symbols could emerge; “Refugeeness” is theorized as exhibiting a kind of a categorical purity in exile, a space where nationhood is imbued with worth, generating a people more deserving a homeland. And finally, the Dalai Lama’s appropriation of *ris med* ideology is to a certain extent operating within the theoretical framework of Anderson and Chatterjee’s nationalism as a community that is “imagined” into existence. In the absence of Tibet as a territory or space on which to map his country as a geographical body, the Dalai Lama has imagined ideological borders into existence; he has invoked a “subtle-body,” a figurative territoriality, in want of a homeland.

And what of the voices of difference, those narratives that challenge the hegemonic nature of *ris med* discourse? Carole McGranahan tells the story of a resistance army headed by the Khams pa trader Andrug Gompo Tashi, who fought Chinese troops until 1974, a resistance movement that was covertly supported in Lhasa during the 1950s, and afterwards by the exile government.

McGranahan wonders why these narratives of Khams pa resistance are often left out of nationalist histories. She speculates that these historical silences might be attributed to the fact that most of the resistance fighters were from Khams, thus they were Tibetans living on the periphery of a Lhasa-centered range of vision. She also speculates that it has to do with the Dalai Lama's public decision to make the Tibetan struggle a non-violent one, a decision that has gained him such popularity in the West. Voices that run contrary to mainstream narratives are often erased. Like the Shugs ldan devotees who fall outside the tightly fused image of cultural unity, the stories of those who challenge visions of community must fall under what McGranahan calls, a "historical arrest:" "The apprehensions and detaining of particular pasts" (571). As Kesang Tsering, a Tibetan woman living in Kathmandu puts it: "History is truth and fear. And some lies." (qt in McGranahan 570).

Conclusion

I think back to my time in Bodhanath, and to the many conversations I had with my language partner. I often think back on our discussion about sectarianism, and wonder how my language partner, who spoke so passionately of his non-sectarian outlook, could then turn around and speak to my friend, the one intimately connected to the Tibetan community, with such a sectarian tone. Identity is fragile, and it is unstable, constituting and re-constituting itself at every given moment. And identity, as the domain of who one *is*, is never so clearly defined as when it encounters the outsider, the who one *is not*.

The fourteenth Dalai Lama provided his people— those thousands of Tibetans in exile from their home— with an anchor, something to hold onto in a sea of change and displacement. The Dalai Lama and his people lost their homeland to a foreign power, sought asylum in a foreign land, and appealed to a foreign community for help. Never before had difference, that which is un-Tibetan, imposed itself in such stark contrast to that which has no choice, but to become, essentially, Tibetan.

Ris med, the ideal of non-sectarianism, provided the Dalai Lama with a model, culled from Tibet's own social history, with which he has been able to encourage his people to rise above the sectarian differences that might have once kept them separated among themselves. Strands of a movement which have now come to be referred to as *ris med* appeared in the nineteenth century as an elusive and undefined trend that promoted unity among the sects in response to a very specific political crisis: the increased Dge lugs pa hegemony that had infiltrated

Eastern Tibet. A century later, *ris med* has once again been utilized to promote unity in the face of a more serious crisis with enormous repercussion. In this instance, however, *ris med* has been employed by the Dalai Lama. As a self-proclaimed non-sectarian, the Dalai Lama has presented himself as a non-partisan leader and spokesman for his people, an advocate for their wellbeing. This veritable public relations campaign has, in many ways, successfully created homogeneousness in the Tibetan community, where before there was disparity. In this way, tradition and identity have been imagined into existence: local and sectarian identities have been replaced by a broader allegiance to Tibet as a nation. This is a world where unity and plurality teeter in a fine balance.

It would not seem, however, that this has resulted in the overall erasure of “sect” from the diasporic Tibetan world. In his discussion of Vaisnavism in Bengal, Partha Chatterjee discusses the complexities of maintaining particularities in harmony with a larger concept of unity. He calls this the maintaining of “mutual separateness” and “mutual dependence” (197). He notes that a universalizing religion like Vaisnavism must justify itself only by accommodating differentiated forms of social identity within itself (183). Unity, here, is accomplished through doctrinal and practical justifications, while unresolved differences continue to conflict with normalizing processes of unity. In this way, unification does not erase particularities; rather it brings them into a relationship of contingency: “Any universalist religion will bear in its essence the contradictory marks of identity and difference, the parts being held together in a whole by an ideological force that proclaims...its unity” (Chatterjee 186).

Can the unity of the Tibetan nation be said to maintain a “mutual separateness” and “mutual dependence”? Do sectarian identities, often conflicting with the national *ris med pa* stance of the nation, remain in a relationship of contingency with the national whole, in a way that, as Matthew Kapstein notes, “presupposes and in some respects also maintains, the very fabric of [the Tibetan] world” (1998, 145)? The Shugs ldan affair, as a case of “arrested history,” would prove otherwise. Is this “relationship of contingency,” that which weaves the fabric of the Tibetan world, quite simply, a *ris med*—or rather, *Rimay*—fantasy? The non-uniform voices of sectarianism seem to contradict the imaginings of an ideology that wishes itself to be viewed as open, tolerant and innovative.

Having lost a concrete territory on which to draw the borders belonging to a “geo-body,” the Dalai Lama has instead generated a “subtle-body” on which to map the complexities of Tibetan identity. Tibet, then, becomes a discursive construct that demarcates the “Tibetan” from the “non-Tibetan.” In this way, the homogenous category of “Tibetan” necessitates its antonym: when viewed from the outside, differences that militate against an essentialized imagining of the Tibetan community must be omitted in the interest of uniformity. Plurality can exist, but it must be quieted and internalized; there one moment, and gone the next.

When advocating for ultimate unity of the schools of Tibetan Buddhism, the Dalai Lama seemed to be telling his people and the world that difference results from a conventional, mistaken view of reality. Ultimately, Tibetans are one people. But the Dalai Lama no doubt realizes that the conventional provides the

basis for realizing this ultimate message; difference cannot be imagined out of existence. It must be safeguarded close to the heart, ready to emerge in a new given condition, on a new day.

Bibliography

- Adams, Vincanne. "Suffering the Winds of Lhasa: Politicized Bodies, Human Rights, Cultural Difference, and Humanism in Tibet," *Medical Anthropology Quarterly*, Vol. 12:1, March 1998. 74–102.
- Anderson, Benedict. *Imagined Communities: Reflections on the Origin and Spread of Nationalism*, revised edition. London and New York: Verso, 1991.
- Barnett, Robert. "Violated Specialness: Western Political Representations of Tibet," *Imagining Tibet: Perceptions, Projections, & Fantasies*. Ed. Thierry Dodin and Heinz Räther. Boston: Wisdom Publications, 2001. 269-316.
- Brunnhölzl, Karl. *In Praise of Dharmadhātu : Nāgārjuna and the Third Karmapa, Rangjung Dorje*. Ithaca, New York: Snow Lion Publications, 2007. 173.
- Cabezón, José Ignacio. "Buddhist Principles in the Tibetan Liberation Movement," *Engaged Buddhism: Buddhist Liberation Movements in Asia*. Ed. Christopher S. Queen and Sallie B. King. Albany, New York: State University of New York Press, 1996. 295-320.
- Central Tibetan Administration. < www.tibet.net >
- Chatterjee, Partha. *The Nation and its Fragments: Colonial and Postcolonial Histories*. Princeton, N.J.: Princeton University Press, 1993.
- Dalai Lama. *Dzogchen: Heart Essence of the Great Perfection*, Trans. Geshe Thupten Jinpa and Richard Barron (Chokyi Nyima), Ed. Patrick Gaffney. Ithaca, New York: Snow Lion Publications, 2000. 113-122.
- , His Holiness the Dalai Lama: Speeches, Statements, Articles, Interviews 1987-1995. Dharamsala: DIIR Publications, 1995
- . "Union of the Old and New Translation Schools." *Kindness, Clarity, and Insight*. The Fourteenth Dalai Lama His Holiness Tenzin Gyatso. Trans. by Jeffrey Hopkins, Ed. Jeffrey Hopkins and Elizabeth Napper. Ithaca: Snow Lion Publications, 1984. 200-224.
- . "His Holiness the Dalai Lama's Advice Concerning Dolgyal (Shugden)" <<http://www.dalailama.com/messages/dolgyal-shugden/his-holiness-advice>>

- Dongyal Rinpoche, Tsewang Khenpo. *Light of Fearless Indestructible Wisdom: the Life and Legacy of H.H Dudjom Rinpoche*. Trans. Samye Translation Group. Ithaca, New York: Snow Lion Publications, 2008.
- Dreyfus, Georges B.J. *The Sounds of Two Hands Clapping: The Education of a Tibetan Buddhist Monk*. Berkley and Los Angeles: University of California Press, 2003a.
- . "Would the True Prasangika Please Stand Up? : The Case and View of 'Ju Mi Pham.'" *The Svātantrika-Prāsangika Distinctions: What Difference does a Difference Make?* Ed. Georges B. J Dreyfus and Sarah L. McClintock, Boston: Wisdom Publications, 2003b. 317-348.
- . "Tibetan Religious Nationalism." *Tibet, Self, and the Tibetan Diaspora: Voices of Difference*, PIATS 2000: Tibetan Studies: Proceeding of the Ninth Seminar of the International Association for Tibetan Studies, Leiden 2000. Ed. P. Christiaan Klieger. Leiden: Brill, 2002. 37-56.
- . "The Shugden Affair: Origins of a Controversy Part I and II." 1999.
<<http://www.dalailama.com/messages/dolgyal-shugden/ganden-tripa/the-shugden-affair-i> >
- Duckworth, "Introduction." *Mipham on Buddha-Nature: The Ground of the Nyingma Tradition*. Albany: State University of New York Press, 2008. xi-xxxii.
- Ganden Tripa, <<http://www.dalailama.com/messages/dolgyal-shugden/ganden-trip>>
- Gaffney, Patrick. "Part Four: The Pinnacle of All Yanas, San Jose, 1989," *Dzogchen: Heart Essence of the Great Perfection*, His Holiness the Dalai Lama. Trans. Geshe Thupten Jinpa and Richard Barron (Chokyi Nyima), Ed. Patrick Gaffney. Ithaca, New York: Snow Lion Publications, 2000. 113-122.
- Gardner, Alexander Patten. *The Twenty-five Great Sites of Khams: Religious Geography, Revelation, and Nonsectarianism in Nineteenth-Century Eastern Tibet*. Diss. University of Michigan, 2006.
- Goldstein, Melvyn C., "Introduction." *Buddhism in Contemporary Tibet: Religious Revival and Cultural Identity*. Ed. Melvyn C. Goldstein, Matthew T. Kapstein. Berkeley: University of California Press, 1998. 1-14.
- , "The Balance Between Centralization and Decentralization in the Traditional Tibetan Political System," *Central Asiatic Journal*. 15(3): 1971,170-182.

- , *The Snow Lion and the Dragon: China, Tibet, and the Dalai Lama*. Berkeley: University of California Press, 1997.
- Haque, Nicolas. "The Dalai Lama: The Devil Within," *People and Power*. Al Jazeera Programmes, Oct 1, 2008.
<<http://english.aljazeera.net/programmes/>>
- Hobsawm, E. J., *Nations and Nationalisms since 1780: Programme, Myth, Reality*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1990.
- Hopkins, Jeffrey., "Tibetan Monastic Colleges." *Imagining Tibet: Perceptions, Projections, and Fantasies*. Ed. Thierry Dodin and Heinz Räther. Boston: Wisdom Publications, 2001. 257-268.
- Huber, Toni. "Shangri-la in Exile: Representations of Tibetan Identities and Transnational Culture." *Imagining Tibet: Perceptions, Projections, & Fantasies*. Ed. Thierry Dodin and Heinz Räther. Boston: Wisdom Publications, 2001. 357-372.
- Kaschewsky, Rudolph. "Images of Tibet in the West before the Nineteenth Century." *Imagining Tibet: Perceptions, Projections, & Fantasies*. Ed. Thierry Dodin and Heinz Räther. Boston: Wisdom Publications, 2001. 3-20.
- Kapstein, Matthew T., "The Rule of the Dalai Lamas." *The Tibetans*. Oxford: Blackwell Publishing, 2006. 127-167.
- , "Concluding Remarks." *Buddhism in Contemporary Tibet: Religious Revival and Cultural Identity*. Ed. Melvyn C. Goldstein, Matthew T. Kapstein. Berkeley: University of California Press, 1998. 139-151.
- Karmay, Samten G. "Mountain Cults and National Identity in Tibet," *Resistance and Reform in Tibet*. Ed. Robert Barnett and Shirin Akiner. Delhi: Motilal Banarsidass Publishers Private Limited, 1994. 112-121.
- Klieger, Christiaan P. *Tibet, Self, and the Tibetan Diaspora: Voices of Difference*, PIATS 2000: Tibetan Studies: Proceeding of the Ninth Seminar of the International Association for Tibetan Studies, Leiden 2000. Ed. P. Christiaan Klieger. Leiden: Brill, 2002.
- . *Tibetan Nationalism : the Role of Patronage in the Accomplishment of National Identity*. Berkeley, CA: Folklore Institute, 1992.
- Korom, Frank J., *Constructing Tibetan Culture: Contemporary Perspectives*, Ed. Frank J. Korom, Quebec: World Heritage Press Inc, 1997.

- Laird, Thomas. *The Story of Tibet: Conversations with the Dalai Lama*. New York: Grove Press, 2006.
- Lopez, Donald S. Jr., "Introduction." *Religions of Tibet in Practice*. Princeton: Princeton UP, 1997. 3-36.
- , "The Prison." *Prisoners of Shangri-la*. Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1998. 181-207.
- Malkki, Liisa H. *Purity in Exile: Violence, Memory, and National Cosmology among Hutu Refugees in Tanzania*. Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1995.
- McGranahan, Carole. "Truth, Fear, and Lies: Exile Politics and Arrested Histories of the Tibetan Resistance." *Cultural Anthropology*, Vol. 20, Issue 4, 2005. 570-600.
- McMillin, Laurie Howell. "New Age Namtar: Tibetan Autobiographies in English," *Tibet, Self, and the Tibetan Diaspora: Voices of Difference*, PIATS 2000: Tibetan Studies: Proceeding of the Ninth Seminar of the International Association for Tibetan Studies, Leiden 2000. Ed. P. Christiaan Klieger. Leiden: Brill, 2002. 155-164.
- Nowak, Margaret. *Tibetan Refugees: Youth and the New Generation of Meaning*. New Jersey: Rutgers University Press, 1984.
- Ortner, Sherry B. "On Key Symbols," *American Anthropologist*. Vol. 75, No. 5. (1973): 1338-1346.
- Pettit, John Whitney. "Traditions and the Great Perfection," "Distinctions of Mipham's Thought." *Mipham's Beacon of Certainty: Illuminating the View of Dzogchen the Great Perfection*. Boston: Wisdom Publications, 1999.
- Powers, John. "11: The Four Orders." *Introduction to Tibetan Buddhism*. First ed. Ithica: Snow Lion, 1995. 355-365.
- Ray, Reginald. "Modern Traditions: Geluk." *Indestructible Truth*. Boston: Shambhala, 2000. 189-206.
- Ringu Tulku. "The Meaning of Ri-mé." *The Ri-me Philosophy of Jamgön Kongtrul the Great: A Study of the Buddhist Lineages of Tibet*. Boston and London: Shambhala, 2006. 1-14.
- Roemer, Stephanie. *The Tibetan Government-in-Exile: Politics at Large*. London and New York: Routledge advances in South Asian studies, 2008.

- Ruegg, Seyfort D. "A Tibetan Odyssey: A Review Article." *Journal of the Asiatic Society of the Great Britain and Ireland*, no. 2, 1989, 304-311.
- Samuel, Geoffrey. "Tibetan Societies: K'am," "Tibet: Gelugpa Power and Rimed Synthesis." *Civilized Shamans: Buddhism in Tibetan Societies*. Washington and London: Smithsonian Institution Press, 2003, 64-86; 525-552.
- . "The Gesar Epic of East Tibet," *Tibetan Literature: Studies in Genre*. Ed. José Ignacio Cabezón and Roger Jackson. Ithaca, New York: Snow Lion, 1996, 358-367.
- . "Gesar of Ling: The Origins and Meaning of the East Tibetan Epic." *Tibetan Studies: Proceedings of the 5th Seminar of the International Association for Tibetan Studies. Vol 2: Language, History and Culture*. Ed. Ihara Shoren and Yamaguchi Zuiho. Tokyo: Tokyo Press Co., Ltd., 1992. 711-722.
- Schwartz, Ronald D. "The Anti-Splittist Campaign and Tibetan Political Consciousness," *Resistance and Reform in Tibet*. Ed. Robert Barnett and Shirin Akiner. Delhi: Motilal Banarsidass Publishers Private Limited, 1994. 201-238.
- Shakya, Tsering. "Whither the Tsampa Easter." *Himal*, Sep/Oct 1993. 8-11.
- Smith, E. Gene. "Introduction," "Jam mgon Kong sprul and the Non-Sectarian Movement." *Among Tibetan Texts: History and Literature of the Himalayan Plateau*. Ed. Kurtis R. Schaeffer. Boston: Wisdom Publications, 2001. 1-12; 227-234.
- Tournadre, Nicolas and Sange Dorje. *The Manual of Standard Tibetan: Language and Civilization*. Trans. Charles Ramble. Ithaca, New York: Snow Lion Publications, 2003. ii-iii.
- Tsering, Tashi., "Nag-ron Mgon-po Rnam-rgyal: A 19th Century Kham-pa Warrior." *Soundings in Tibetan Civilization*. Ed. Barbara Nimri Aziz and Matthew Kapstein. New Delhi: Manohar Publications, 1985. 196-214.
- Tse-tung, Mao, "Selected Works of Mao Tse-Tung," *Foreign Language Press*, Vol. II, 1967. 339.
- Ward, Doug, "Humble Dalai Lama Simply a Superstar." *Vancouver Sun*, September 11th, 2006.

Wilson, Bryan R., *Patterns of Sectarianism: Organization and Ideology in Social and Religious Movements*. Ed. Bryan R. Wilson. London: Heinemann Educational Books Ltd, 1967.

Winichakul, Thongchai. *Siam Mapped: A History of the Geo-Body of a Nation*. Honolulu: University of Hawaii Press, 1994.

