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མཆོད་པོ། Inside Self & Other : An interdisciplinary discussion on “Enemy” in the Tibetan Exiled Community

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SIT Study Abroad

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Inside Self & Other:

An interdisciplinary discussion on “Enemy” in the Tibetan Exiled Community



Sign posted in Paljorling Tibetan Refugee Camp in Pokhara, Nepal

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Abstract

This paper focuses on the concept and treatment of “enemy” in Tibetan society. Drawing on interdisciplinary research theories and methodologies, the aim of this paper is accomplished in four progressive parts. First, it identifies the psychological processes and biases that propel “enemy image making,” a sociological concept. Second, it identifies Tibetan Buddhist teachings that may function as tools for combating these psychological phenomena. Third, it investigates how these teachings have been embodied by the Tibetan culture and internalized by the Tibetan people in exile to discern whether these “dharmic tools” have proven efficient. These sections will largely draw upon secondary sources as well as interviews conducted in three distinct living environments for Tibetan refugees across India and Nepal. The fourth, and final aim of this paper, is to place the Sino-Tibetan issue in a world context and extrapolate what universal lessons one can learn about human compassion, patience, tolerance, and forgiveness when discussing leadership and reconciliation.

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Introduction

In reaction to the Chinese occupation of Tibet in 1959, many Tibetans fled into exile. Some left in the '40s upon hearing rumors of a Chinese advance, others left in 1959. Still many Tibetans continue to seek asylum abroad. Currently 2% of the Tibetan population lives in exile while the remaining 98% remain in Tibet where they face many difficulties. The Tibetan identity, language, and religion have been threatened and in response to this threat Tibetan refugees have vigilantly worked to maintain their rich culture and tradition in exile. Despite the complication of identity as Tibetans are born second, third, fourth etc. generation in exile, Tibetan nationalism is quite evident and efforts to preserve and promote Tibetan identity are determinably vivacious.

Over the course of research and interviews I have encountered various tales of heartbreaking loss and abuse experienced by Tibetans at the hands of the Chinese. The situation in Tibet is characterized, among other things, by complicated economic and political history, motivation, and identity; it is an understandable context for enemy-image making. And enemy-image making *has* occurred. However, the degree to which it is expressed and the degree to which it is negated are both unique, impressive, and in many ways inspiring. Many Tibetans, while experiencing afflictive emotions, are able to contextualize their experience and display compassion towards their enemy.

September 21, 2014, about a month into my trip, I ran into my friend Karma¹ on the street. We laughed as the two of us, both holding newspapers, stumbled to put our palms together in greeting. I was holding an issue of the Nepali Times and he, a copy of the Himalayan Times. An article on the front page of his paper caught my eye, "Dalai Lama praises Xi." His Holiness is an exceptional example of Tibetan tolerance and forgiveness.

In an attempt to unpack where the ability to counteract the process of enemy-image making might come from, I dove into both psychological and Buddhist approaches to understanding "enemy" and looked for points of intersection. What I found were many instances where Tibetan Buddhism seemed to provide "dharmic² tools," or to use the Buddhist term, antidotes to many of the afflictive cognitive processes usually observed in enemy image making. The intuitive next step was to see how these antidotes were being internalized by the average Tibetan refugee who may or may not be actively studying and practicing dharma. How are these values embodied by the Tibetan culture? Furthermore I wanted to know whether Tibetans would verbally express these antidotes when speaking about the Chinese people.³ I ultimately spoke with refugees around Nepal and India.

One representative of the Tibetan Center of Conflict Resolution I spoke to while in Dharamsala noted, "You just can't have a possibility of a life without conflict. So my thoughts, we better be better equipped to deal with them rather than using violence and abusing each other and really going down that path." Across the world there are conflicts, perhaps by studying the Tibetan people and their philosophies we all may become "better equipped to deal with them" rather than perpetuating a culture of violence. I think there is much we, as practitioners of peace studies as well as human beings, may learn from this part of the world.

Something important to note, is the somewhat sensitive nature of this work. In order to make those I spoke with comfortable, I promised complete anonymity. Therefore, the identities of the people whom I interviewed will remain ambiguous throughout this paper: all Tibetan, Nepali, and Indian names have been changed and identifiers will be excluded. The people I spoke with were stunningly vivacious and their brilliant humanity deserves acknowledgement, so I would like to take a moment to recognize them as *complete beings* with extremely important things to share.

¹ All names have been changed

² Dharma refers to the teachings of the Buddha

³ In important distinction to acknowledge here is that this paper's main focus *is not* Tibetans in Exile's attitudes towards the Chinese Government but rather the Chinese people.

Methodology

Three months is a long time however it is not nearly enough to begin grasping a foreign culture. That being said, I believe there is value in the alertness that comes when one enters into a new culture for the first time. There is a certain degree of awareness and reflection that follows the juxtaposition of one's own culture to a new one; there are of course also ways in which this skews judgment. I did my best to unpack my expectations and assumptions before beginning my research though it seems impossible for one to ever control the way these things pave pathways in our subconscious and conscious. Throughout my interviews I tried to remain culturally sensitive and to avoid framing or leading. I recorded almost all of my interviews and then transcribed them completely to try and avoid selective listening. Without doubt however, I brought my own experience into every interview and these experiences as well as my identity as a white, female, citizen of the United States surely impacted the outcome of this research. I do not believe however, these truths detract detrimentally from the reality of my adventures and encounters - they are just absolutely critical to acknowledge. I believe by acknowledging these things we may also learn something about the way cultures interact and present themselves to one another.

My research was conducted in three different locations. I hypothesized that the differing living environments of Tibetans in exile might result in different expressions of culture and experience. I will be using some interviews from a prior trip to India in October 2014 but the vast majority of information used in this paper will be extracted from interviews conducted over the month of November 2014. I began my research in two of the four refugee camps of Pokhara, Nepal. I stayed with a wonderfully sweet and strong Tibetan woman in Tashi Palkhiel, the camp where I conducted five interviews with both men (2) and women (5) of various ages (19-87). For most of the interviews I conducted in Pokhara I used translators.

Tashi Palkhiel was about a twenty-minute cab ride away from the tourist hub of Pokhara. It was slightly secluded and relatively spacious. As a point of comparison I also spent one day in Paljorling Camp. Paljorling is literally tucked into a fold of the city: you walk from a busy street through a gate into a small, cramped enclosed community. While nearly all of the people I spoke with in Tashi Palkhiel who came from Tibet came from Nomadic families, the man I spent the most time with in Paljorling was an ex-guerilla fighter from Kham. I only spoke to three individuals in Paljorling and I didn't stay quite long enough to get a handle on the environment there, however I was there long enough to appreciate that the Tibetan camps are different and can cater to somewhat different communities of Tibetans. I was curious to see, despite these differences, if there was a way in which culture was cultivated uniquely in an enclosed community perhaps less subject to assimilation.

Next I traveled to the Kathmandu valley where I interviewed 8 individuals (4 men and 4 women ages 21- 45) around Boudhanath. The Kathmandu valley consists of an amalgam of ethnicities co-existing next door to one another. Here, I was curious to see what, if any, effects assimilation might have on the expression of Buddhist Philosophical and, more broadly, Tibetan Cultural views. In Kathmandu I spoke mostly with friends I had accumulated during the prior two months living in the valley and thus was able to conduct more extensive interviews entirely in English.

My final destination was Dharamsala, India. I stayed in McLeod Ganj where I conducted all but one interview. The final interview was at the Tibetan Center for Conflict Resolution in Lower Dharamsala. All interviews in India were conducted in English. I was curious to see how the highly political and spiritual environment of Dharamsala would also impact the narratives I received. It's extremely important to point out that Tibetans in India enjoy *significantly* more freedoms than those in Nepal. I noted that there was slightly more freedom of expression in the camps than in the Kathmandu Valley, however nowhere I visited in Nepal compared to Dharamsala in terms of the ability for Tibetans to express their culture, religion, and activism. Unfortunately, in India, due to health problems, I was unable to conduct as many interviews as I would have liked. I spoke with 6 individuals (1 man and 5 female age 27-39).

In addition to Tibetans I've made effort to talk to practitioners or students of Dharma from other ethnicities or origin: I spoke with one Sherpa student, one Nepali student, one American student, and one Indian nun. Additionally, I spoke with a woman named Ellen Bruno who spent almost 20 years in southeast Asia interviewing and documenting

Tibetan Buddhist nuns who had been “imprisoned or tortured for their nonviolent protests of the Chinese occupation of Tibet” for a documentary titled “Satya: A Prayer for the Enemy” (Satya A Prayer for the Enemy). In these ways I did my best to use my time, networking, and financial resources to get the most expansive and diverse narrative I could in order to capture the experience of Tibetans exiled in Nepal and India. That being said, Tibetans are scattered around the world and the conversations I’ve had cannot be generalized or used to homogenize a whole, dynamic, people.



View of Tashi Palkhiel Tibetan Refugee Camp in Pokhara, Nepal



View from the balcony of the old Tibetan Reception Center in McLeod Ganj, Dharamsala



Birds eye view of Kathmandu, Nepal

I. Enemy Image Making

“Enemy Image Making” is a conceptual framework for understanding the way that ideas of “enemy” are formed and perpetuated by different peoples. With the help of psychological sciences we may unpack the components of enemy image making as they are expressed cognitively. I think it is useful to first discuss dual-process theory, one way of understanding the way our brains work, like other organs in our body, to conserve energy. This theory provides a platform for investigating the building blocks of enemy image making.

All aspects of our physiology rely on certain stores of limited resources. For example: at any given point in time, there is a finite store of oxygen in our system being utilized by our cells. Our body must work to use this store optimally and without waste. Similarly, our brain relies on certain energy stores that are not unlimited. It has many means of conserving energy via the utilization of certain cognitive tricks and shortcuts. These tricks and shortcuts, in a context of conflict, often result in distortion of reality.

Dual-Hypothesis Theory

The dual-hypothesis theory identifies two types of cognitive processing- Type-1 one based on “emotional intuition” and type-2, more practical, based on “cognitive control” (Greene). Type-1 processing works quickly, requires little attention, and draws minimally upon the our brain’s resources while Type-2 processing is comparatively energy intensive, “slow, sequential, and correlated with measures of general intelligence.” It has been suggested, “ type-2 thinking enables uniquely human facilities, such as hypothetical thinking, mental simulation, and consequential decision making” (Evans & Stanovich 2013). We often rely on type-1 thinking, using often-superficial information to supplement our decisions. Daniel Kahneman coined the term “cognitive misers,” to describe the human tendency to default to type-1 processing in place of more deep, comprehensive, and careful consideration of stimuli (Kahneman, 2011).

What makes this relevant to Enemy Image making is the fact that many of our biases, stereotypes, and emotional rote responses to other peoples are derivatives of this type-1 processing and require conscious intervention towards type-2 processing in order to be combatted. Jonathan St. B. T. Evans and Keith E. Stanovich describe in *Dual-Process Theories of Higher Cognition: Advancing the Debate*, how, “if both types of processing are to have their say, the fast horse must wait for the slow horse to arrive before any potential conflict can be resolved.”

In this paper we attempt to identify the ways in which our enemy image making, as fueled by type-1 processing, leads us awry and in what ways we may facilitate different interventions. A combination of “difficulty, novelty, and motivation” may together tap into cognitive resources. One interesting thing to consider as we eventually delve into Buddhist ideals and Tibetan culture, is that individuals with high “need for cognition” and low “faith in intuition” tend to draw more on type-2 processing (Kitayama & Park 2010).

So what is it exactly that’s so problematic about quick as opposed to deep thinking? When you are looking at a menu trying to decide whether to order soup or toast . . . not much! In fact, quick thinking has evolved quite successfully to help us navigate our world rather effectively with impressive accuracy. However, when we are forming our opinions of another person, or another people, particularly in a context of political tension or conflict, quick thinking can become detrimental. This is particularly the case when we talk about members of an in-group in relation to a perceived out-group.

In-Group v. Out-Group: Us v. Them

An In-group, simply put, is a social unit composed of individuals who share a sense of belonging. An out-group, on the other hand, is a differentiated social unit to which individuals do not experience a sense of belonging.

Enemy images have always been rooted in the human need to define a sense of identity with reference to a particular group or tribe. Those that we perceive as different from our tribe, can easily be seen as

threatening. Under such circumstances, the natural human need to belong transforms into the phenomenon of tribalism - a reactive hardening of boundaries, which “insulates and defends ‘me and mine’ against what appears to be an overwhelmingly complex and threatening world” (Daloz et al, 1996)

Enemy Images can serve the short-term purpose of facilitating a sense of belonging or pride in one’s identity, providing an “exaggerated enemy image” as sharp contrast to an “idealized self” and a platform for shifting blame onto others (Psychologists for Social Responsibility). In this way we are able to “define a sense of identity” which “insulates” the self at the expense of another: all negative attributes are designated to an out-group and all positive attributes are designated to the in-group. This exaggerated perception of out-group usually hinges on stereotypes⁴. Stereotypes taken to the extreme result in the dehumanization⁵ of “other.” The “us versus them” mentality is built up by type-1 processing and often results in the distortion of “attention, memory, and attribution.”

Cognitive Biases associated with Enemy Image Making

Enemy image making involves selective attention and memory. Selective attention leads an individual to search for, pay attention to, and remember information that aligns with their previously held beliefs (Broadbent, 1958). With enemy image making, this means that members of an in-group may pay more attention to information that reinforces the negative aspects ascribed to members of an out-group and vice versa. Not only does enemy image making result in the distortion of what we pay attention to and how we remember those things that capture our interest, but it also manipulates the way we interpret stimulus in the present.

The fundamental error results when someone fails to acknowledge context and attributes someone’s behavior to innate characteristics. For example, the discrimination towards homeless people in the United States may be accredited to this bias. People perceive homeless people as criminal, dirty, uneducated, or unqualified as opposed to considering situational variables like illness, economy, or politics as potential causes of their unfortunate circumstances. In this way we ignore context, we ignore the realities of the human experience. This is heightened in the case of enemy image making: members of an in-group attribute all negative actions of an out-group to innate negative qualities of its members. Simultaneously, people tend to attribute positive actions to situational factors as opposed to innate qualities. In this way people perceive all actions as supporting their negative stereotypes of “other.” Not surprisingly, fundamental attribution error when applied to the self manifests in the opposite direction: negative actions are attributed to situational factors while positive actions are attributed to innate qualities. In this way the “us versus them” mentality is cultivated (Sherman 2014).

All of the negative ways in which we perceive the enemy ultimately result in self-fulfilling prophecy. When people anticipate harsh action and act harshly, they are often met with reciprocal harshness. Presuming the other will act negatively and approaching interactions with such expectancy usually results in the fulfillment of that expectation. The observed cyclical and reciprocal nature of aggression and violence can be attributed to *this* concept. However due to the biases described above, members of an in-group hardly take blame upon themselves for suffering, instead they shift blame entirely onto members of the out-group (Psychologists for Social Responsibility).

Potentially the most important thing to understand about these cognitive tendencies observed during enemy image making is that, in alignment with the dual-process theory- many of them may be combatted when one becomes aware of, and reflects upon them thereby activating type-2 processing. Martin & Sugarman (1999) describes this in *Psychology of Human Possibility and Constraint*:

“In the course of our development a good deal of what is sociocultural is incorporated into both our prereflective, intentional actions and the more advanced reflexive consciousness that emerges as

⁴ Oversimplified characteristics attributed to a group of peoples

⁵ Treating an other as if they are sub-human

development unfolds. In the context of development, the social, cultural forms and practices we have internalized become infused with individual intentional agency, eventually giving way to a truly reflexive consciousness capable of transcending these sociocultural legacies, even while constrained by them.” (qtd. In Psychologists for Social Responsibility, 2002)

Freeing oneself from these human and oftentimes culturally embedded inclinations can be quite difficult and tiring. Additionally, contexts of conflict in which involved parties have experienced trauma do not always breed environments readily conducive to internal and inter-personal reconciliation. Buddhist values and philosophies regarding “self and other” and wisdom however work to build this conducive environment, providing “dharmic tools” or antidotes as a type of preventative measure or interventional scheme for these cognitive traps placing those who internalize the ideals perhaps in a better position to express patience, tolerance, forgiveness, and compassion.

II. Buddhist Perspectives on Enemy

Reflections on Benevolence

from Ajahn Sumedho's *The Way It Is*—

May I abide in well-being,
in freedom from affliction,
in freedom from hostility,
in freedom from ill-will,
in freedom from anxiety,
and may I maintain well-being in myself.

May everyone abide in well-being,
in freedom from hostility,
in freedom from ill-will,
in freedom from anxiety,
and may they maintain well-being in themselves.

May all beings be released from all suffering
and may they not be parted from
the good fortune they have attained.

When they act upon intention
all beings are the owners of their action,
and inherit its results.

Their future is born from such action,
companion to such action,
and its results will be their home.

All actions with intention,
be they skillful or harmful;
of such acts, they will be the heirs.

Nang pa (ནང་པ)

Nang pa (ནང་པ), the Tibetan word for “Buddhist” can be translated literally as “insider.” This translation has been interpreted in two different ways: to either represent the idea that those practicing Buddhism reside on the “inside” while others reside on the “outside,” or to represent the introspective nature of the faith. Since after the past four months I personally cannot substantiate that first interpretation, I’d like to draw upon the second, particularly as it relates to dual process theory described above. This section will focus largely on the teachings of Shantideva as communicated through his text *The Way of the Bodhisattva*. Particular attention will be paid to chapter 6 on Patience, and chapter 9 on Wisdom.

Wisdom

Buddhism discusses three different kinds of wisdom: one that is heard, learned, and understood; one that is reflected upon and clarified; and finally one that is “meditatively acquired” involving the “assimilation of your knowledge with your experience” (His Holiness the Fourteenth Dalai Lama 1997). I spoke with one American student of Dharma, Jon, who described the movement through these kinds of wisdoms as such: he said that prior to encountering the first kind of wisdom, one lives in a state of doubt and ignorance. Once one begins interacting with the three kinds of wisdoms he or she begins a journey towards more correct belief. Doubt and ignorance produce afflictive emotions such as “conceit, arrogance, jealousy, desire, lust, closed-mindedness,” and hatred. I think this pre-emptive state may draw parallels to type-1 thinking: our superficial and often over-simplified understanding of reality. The intervention on the other hand, may be compared to the first type of wisdom. It involves the introduction to and understanding of novel ideas. It involves learning. Then comes type-2 thinking represented by the second type of wisdom characterized by deep reflection, an act that requires a certain amount of cognitive control. It involves analyzing and meditating on the information you receive. With extensive reflection and meditation, one may acquire the third, more experiential kind of wisdom characteristic of the Shamata mind, or calm mind. In general I think it’s safe to say that the Buddhist tradition promotes deep thinking, it revolves around a practice of profound reflection and introspection. One, with effortful intention, moves through these three kinds of wisdom.

Buddhists are encouraged to analyze everything they are taught for resonance and to take nothing on blind-faith. Therefore, all of Buddhism’s principles are understood through the utilization and promotion of logic. Monks and Nuns are constantly working to cultivate their debating skills. Jon hypothesized that even for those who don’t spend time actively practicing the dharma, having been exposed, they spend much of their time reflecting upon the principles they’ve been taught. Seemingly, this kind of analytical approach to listening, learning, and experiencing may *with focus* help combat many of the cognitive biases described in the above section. It is in this context of contemplation that enemies are encountered, deconstructed, and reconciled.

Common Humanity

Buddhist teachings are built on the understanding that all sentient beings seek happiness and wish to avoid suffering. Practitioners are prompted to reflect on this thought in attempt to develop compassion for the self and others. It is our afflictive emotions that interrupt our happiness and bring about suffering. In this sense, the afflictive emotions are seen as internal enemies. Because of this fact, one understands that there are *no* real enemies external to the self. If one wants to rid themselves of enemies, one must only deconstruct the internal enemy. Zangmu Sherpa, who completed his masters in Buddhist Philosophy, explained it to me with this analogy: Imagine there are many thorns in the world, if you try and cover each one with animal skin you will fail. If, however, you simply put on a sturdy pair of boots, the thorns will no longer cause you suffering. In the same sense, because enemy-image making is a process undergone in the mind, rooted in afflictive emotion, by attempting to rid oneself of afflictive emotions, the distinction between self and other fails to become hostile. There is no “us versus them” mentality, rather recognition of a conventional world community of sentient beings each doing their best to navigate the difficult circumstance of samsara⁶, to be happy and avoid suffering.

This idea is also reinforced by understandings of karma and rebirth. Because one’s merit and therefore future lives depend on their karma, their actions, it is believed that everything is interconnected. The Padmakara translation groups writes in their introduction to their translation of *The Way of the Bodhisattva*, that “any action can be the cause, or the cause of the cause, of another’s suffering” – these actions accumulate bad merit which may impact future rebirths (Shantideva). Many people whom I interviewed, monastic and layperson alike, also referenced the fact that it is safe to assume that every sentient being has, at some point over the course of your many lives, been your mother. You should therefore treat every sentient being as you would treat your mother.

⁶ Cycle of death and rebirth

The Dalai Lama said, “Destroying your enemy- your neighbor- means destroying yourself in the long run. You need your neighbor. More prosperity in your neighbor, you’ll get benefit” (quid. in His Holiness the Fourteenth Dalai Lama & Chan, 2005). It’s important here to note that Buddhism does not necessarily denounce the creation of labels which might define an in-group however it does draw attention to the somewhat futile nature of this endeavor as well as the illusory nature of it. For example, Dharma doesn’t say you shouldn’t call yourself Buddhist and feel a sense of belonging. In this sense, the Sangha⁷ may be your in-group and the Christian community may be an out-group. However, the bigger message is that we are all human, these labels may be used absent of judgment or attachment; it is a result of ignorance that an out-group becomes demonized or dehumanized. Members of an out-group are simply sentient beings seeking happiness and trying to avoid suffering, in this way they are no different than the self. Our happiness is in fact dependent on the happiness of others. As the Padmakara Translation Group put it, “the very act of identifying an aggressor as a really existing self over against our own (instead of being aware simply of an interplay of impersonal psychophysical forces) is itself unjustified (Shantideva).

Compassion towards the Enemy

It’s emphasized that navigating the ideals above is not easy. The conscience can be rather wild and many of us spend the majority of our days thinking with the mind of attachment, of ignorance, of doubt. During a teaching of Shantideva’s sixth chapter on Patience in *The Way of The Bodhisattva* given in Arizona, the Dalai Lama described:

Hatred is one of the six root afflictive emotions according to Buddhist psychology. The Tibetan word for it is “zhe dang” (Tib. Zhe sdang), which can be translated as either “anger” or “hatred” in English. However, I feel that it should be translated as “hatred,” because “anger,” as it is understood in English, can be positive in very special circumstances. These occur when anger is motivated by compassion or when it acts as an impetus or a catalyst for a positive action. (His Holiness the Fourteenth Dalai Lama)

Hatred is what fuels the biases discussed in this paper. It is an emotion that is entirely destructive to the one experiencing and expressing it and to the one on the receiving end of it. In *The Way of the Bodhisattva*, Shantideva comprehensively and conclusively explains exactly why it is counterproductive to hate one’s enemy, and how the only productive, logical, and meaningful solution is compassion. Compassion comes in part by recognizing interdependence and karma. Fundamental attribution bias is counteracted here, where one seeks to recognize the “causes and conditions” which result in any given action. The law of interdependence claims that nothing exists independently and thus every circumstance is the result of a slew of assembled parts. Just like many things had to happen for me to come into this world (my parents had to meet, decide to get married, decide to have children etc.) – any moment of aggression or mal-intent is also the result of many different causes and conditions.

Additionally, shifting blame is not an option since an act of aggression against you is in large part a product of karma that *you* have accumulated in this or a past life. Since the aggressive act, a result of your bad karma, will result in the acquisition of bad karma for the perpetrator while you, the victim, have an opportunity to practice compassion, it makes no sense for you to feel hatred towards your enemy. Looked at a different way, one mustn’t expect another human being to be anything but such. The Bodhisattva understands the difficulty of human existence and recognizes ignorance (Shantideva). He or she knows not to expect perfection from another sentient being and therefore the cycle of violence and hatred perpetuated by self-fulfilling prophecy is cut off at the neck.

The summary is this: your enemy doesn’t exist external to yourself. One must cultivate compassion internally and all external enemies cease to exist. In order to cultivate compassion one must understand interdependence, karma, and the reality that all sentient beings seek happiness and wish to avoid suffering. If these values are *truly* cultivated, one may

⁷ Community of those practicing dharma

transcend the biases of enemy-image making, as they will be free of the afflictive emotions that cause them. If one is able to embody these values, they adopt a life dedicated to benefiting all sentient beings. One becomes a Buddha for the benefit of all sentient beings; this is the ultimate goal.

Me: Can you talk to me about “Enemy?”

Lobsang, a monk in Pokhara: An Enemy is a real friend of yours. From enemies we get chances for our mind. If there is no enemy, how can you control yourself? From him you can learn love and compassion. He is a teacher- from him you get practice. He can heart you but he cannot hurt your mind. When I was small in my village. I used to go to school. We did not have good facilities or education under the government of Nepal. Some boys came to have class in my village. I was very stupid. This one boy came from a village nearby. One day, we went into the forest and on the way we saw a nest. We both climbed and saw a very good bird, a summer bird. The mother [bird] was run away and her eggs were in the nest. We promised to keep the eggs alive and came back to the village. The next day I went to go and check: no eggs no nest- eggs on ground cracked. I got really angry; I thought it was the other boy. The next day I go to school and other boy is laughing at me. We got in fight, I felt enemy in my heart. Teacher told me to go away. I tried to fight teacher. I went home. The next day too, I fought him. In here [gestures to heart], I still have difficulties but I don't point at them as enemies.



Pematsal Sakya Monastic Institute Gate outside Tashi Palkhiel Tibetan Refugee Camp in Pokhara, Nepal

III. Tibetan Religion, Culture, and Identity

“Buddhist Culture”

Buddhism is a religion and cannot define an entire culture. However, for Tibetans, an overwhelming majority of whom *are* Buddhist, the values and philosophies are crucially *embedded in* their culture. From my experience, I’ve observed its inherency in the way Tibetans think and behave. Tibetans themselves have referred in our conversations a “Buddhist culture.” The Buddhist philosophies are reflected in the values Tibetans are brought up with from childhood. One of the founders of the Tibetan Center for Conflict Resolution was first exposed to western ideas of conflict resolution at a workshop run by Danish foreigners. When considering how to make these ideas relevant to Tibetans, Buddhism was utilized as a vessel. The representative I spoke with said, “When we started trainings, we wanted to reach out to the people and make connections. One good way of doing that was to draw from the rich Buddhist culture that Tibetan people are brought up in. So then if you could integrate the classic western approach to conflict resolution with the Buddhist philosophy, then it’s much more appealing to the Tibetan people.” Interestingly when I asked if this was an easy connection to make, she responded “a very easy connection.” I followed up by asking if there was something the west could learn from the Buddhist values. A bit flustered, the representative made a telling distinction, she said “Most of what we learned- even though we are Buddhist ... I didn’t go to a monastery so maybe this question should be more towards Buddhist monks because they are the ones that *actually* study Buddhist philosophy in a *real* sense- we have a kind of understanding from what our parents have been asking us more in action ‘doing this would be this’ ‘doing that would be that.’” It was interesting to hear her distinguish between those living a monastic life and laypeople when it came to an understanding of Buddhist philosophy - but then continue to explain that despite this point, there was a degree of colloquial understanding which was vital enough to be an obvious resource for helping Tibetans understand foreign concepts.

Religion is a huge part of Tibetan life, but many people are not actively studying dharma or Buddhist philosophy. Religious values, however, are passed down by parents to their children. I asked Phuntsok, a friend of mine in Boudha what kind of values he tried to instill in his children and his response was that he “emphasized compassion.” He mentioned teaching his kids to feel gratitude for meat and to not kill bugs. He wanted his kids to respect life. He tried to cultivate inquisitiveness by asking his children to look at the books they read and think about the authors, “how did they write that?” In this response he touched on many of the ideals discussed in the above section.

I asked one 19 year old girl in Pokhara, Choden, during a discussion on compassion towards the Chinese what inspired her to practice these ideas- her answer was “books and the Dalai Lama’s speech.” Many young people I spoke with also mentioned non-fiction as a source for learning about Buddhist values and philosophy as well as cultural history⁸. Almost all of the people I spoke with mentioned the Dalai Lama as their primary inspiration⁹. I asked Choden whether her parents also inspired her in this way and she said “our parents as well! My father, he doesn’t really advise us a lot about things like that- but we learn a lot from his actions.... He says a lot of things in front of people about manners, about everything... We learn from that. From his actions we learn.”

⁸ Points towards increased literacy rates in the exiled community

⁹ Phuntsok said something interesting regarding the Tibetan ability to exercise Buddhist values: “People say it’s because of the Dalai Lama, but I say it’s not the Dalai Lama. The Dalai Lama has a great reputation and he promotes the Tibetans all over the world. But we have a different sense, different wisdom and this comes from our culture, our religion.” I mention this because it was a unique comment; many Tibetans credited *any* positive qualities to His Holiness.

Can laypeople practice Dharma?

The Dalai Lama is the epitome of a compassionate being in the Tibetan Buddhist tradition. Not only is he believed to be the reincarnation of the deity of compassion, but also he has been recognized worldwide as a genuine and empathetic peace leader. This has resulted from years of practice, from intensive meditation and exclusive access to the highest teachers and teachings of the Tibetan Buddhist tradition. Having spent so much time cultivating qualities, it's easy to understand how they have come to be expressed in his speech and action. This being said, I was very curious how Buddhist values might be internalized by the average layperson. Over my month of research I took an experiential approach to some of the Buddhist traditions, participating in guided meditations on compassion, mindfulness, attachment, and emptiness. I read much about tonglen, a meditational practice in which you visualize absorbing all the suffering in the world and expelling all happiness for the benefit of all sentient beings. I found these practices to be extremely rewarding but also very time and energy intensive. Thinking about all my friends and host-families struggling to sustain a livelihood, I became particularly curious about the Tibetan who, perhaps *only* has access to the culturally inherited concepts of Buddhism. In other words, I asked myself "considering this 'Buddhist culture,' can a layperson actively cultivate the qualities and values deemed beneficial by the Buddha?" . . . "Can laypeople *really* practice Dharma?"

I explored these questions with many people, particularly monks, nuns, and students of dharma. Many times we spoke about meditation practices, of deep philosophical ventures and access to gurus and scriptures. Then I would ask whether people without these resources or practices might still be able to cultivate the qualities of Buddhahood. The first time I asked this question, I was sitting in the library of Pematsal Sakya Monastic Institute in Pokhara with a monk named Lobsang. Lobsang proceeded to provide me with a useful analogy that I utilized in all the interviews I conducted thereafter. He told me that dharma was like an instrument. In order for one to practice, they had to have a certain degree of understanding regarding the workings of that instrument. For example, I would not be able to practice guitar without an understanding of the way the strings function, the hand positions that produce certain sounds, ect. He said, "Practice comes from those who have learned. Those who know can practice. Those who don't know cannot."

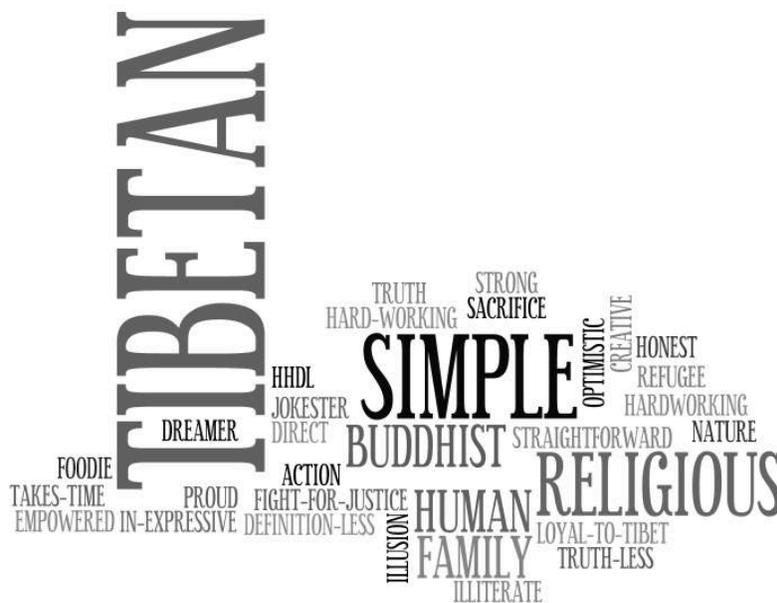
I found this image fairly useful. I explained it to a nun at Jamyang Nunnery Main Office in McLeod Ganj and asked her what her thoughts were. She described to me: "We don't get everything from the outside- some things we get inside. We have this potential. Meditation allows this inner potential to quietly build inside. In one day there's benefit but [practicing] every day is better. The sense grows and later it becomes stable. Naturally we become strong and confident inside. If then difficult things happen, you can face very well because you have this inner strength that you've built up inside." I asked if those without knowledge would be able to develop this *inner* potential and she said, "we need to know how the instrument works" to practice things according to Dharma, "ordinary people have an internal potential. We all have this potential. But whether to use in a negative or positive way is up to the individual." She continued that, "people who work in the fields may have very strong faith, perhaps blind but very strong. They never went to school but they have strong belief . . . If they can rejoice from inside- this nobody teaches them but it's by their own thinking. They have many opportunities: recite, pray, read scriptures . . . some people are very good. We can try to make oneself calm." To stick with the instrument analogy, this nun seemed to argue that many people have access to self-learning tools, and perhaps one may, to a certain extent, be able to teach themselves to play and practice in order to cultivate their inner potential.

I asked my friend Zangmu Sherpa whether he believed Buddhist teachings could be used in everyday life. He answered that it depends on the person, whether they are a genuine practitioner or not. He said, "not all the Tibetan, Sherpa, or Buddhist people could apply these [ideas] because the don't know the principles." After explaining again the instrument analogy, I asked him if he believed that despite not knowing the instrument, laypeople may be impacted by the sound of it's music. I was thinking about the exiled communities heightened access to high lamas and texts. Many Tibetans in exile are able to hear the teachings of His Holiness the Dalai Lama, for example, in person, on the radio, or on the Internet. I was curious how access to these teachings and others might impact people. Zangmu said, "of course [the music] will impact people. In olden days in India, in the Buddha's time, there were many non-Buddhists. One person belonging to a different religion saw a Buddhist monk walking peacefully and was overwhelmed by the way that monk walked. He asked the monk:

‘how do you become so humble and passionate?’ The monk replied: ‘oh it’s because I am practicing dharma- my guru is Buddha’ and the man asked the monk if he could visit Buddha, The monk took him and the man became a monk. Dharma may change a person’s life just by witnessing it.” I think what Zangmu was trying to communicate, particularly as an ex-monk himself who had de-robed earlier in his life but continued to study Buddhism in an academic setting, was not that one is impacted if they enter a monastery, but if they are moved to action by the teachings they receive. He told me, “For me, I think I can apply it but then all of a sudden, it takes a couple of minutes.” One Nun in Kathmandu, when asked the same question about music responded, “*most* people can practice this, it is difficult but slowly, slowly” by thinking about it, “each month, each year you get better, our minds are same.”

These narratives seem to connect back to Dual-Process Theory and the Three Wisdoms. Perhaps hearing the music is yet another way of thinking about that first type of wisdom which transitions an individual into type-2 processing/the second type of wisdom involving reflection. Despite not studying Dharma actively, laypeople are able to, in the context of a “Buddhist culture” learn from and reflect upon Buddhist values of tolerance, forgiveness, and compassion. The situation of exile perhaps has people contemplating *more* actively these issues that are quite explicitly relevant to their lives as they attempt to reconcile opinions towards their occupiers. This might particularly be the case as Tibetan culture, including Tibetan Buddhism, is being determinably preserved and promoted by the exile community.

Culture and Identity



I asked several Tibetans whom I interviewed to “provide me with three words to describe their identity or who they are.” The above picture conveys the most popular answers. Size of the word correlates with frequency (the bigger the word, the more people used it in their answer.)

The final question I thought about before diving into the narratives of those I interviewed for evidence to substantiate the claim that “Buddhist philosophy provides observable antidotes to Enemy-Image making,” was how culture was internalized. I had come to the conclusion that yes, in fact Buddhist Philosophies were an inherent part of Buddhist culture and that even laypeople had *the potential* to cultivate the values and qualities of the Buddha. This being said, I wondered how those cultural values actually reverberate within the individual? How is culture actually internalized by someone and how might we discuss the implication of culture while also acknowledging diversity of experience and expression? To answer these questions I looked to the field of Cultural-Psychology. One article I read set out to answer these same questions:

“How can people create, maintain, transform knowledge which pertains both to individual cognition and to socio-cultural knowing?” How do we make sense of the competing notions of the person as a biological system, but also as a discursively produced set of concepts; How does the dynamic interplay between self and other provide resources for identity development? How can collective cultural meanings come to regulate individuals’ conduct? How does the relationship between the individual and the social world become construed in different ways within different theoretical frameworks?” (Byers 2014)

In the article I was introduced to Jaan Valsiner who provides a framework for thinking about the relationship between the individual and culture that I find valuable. He outlined a distinction between personal culture and collective culture. Personal culture “refers to the private or public construction of meanings by an individual person,” while collective culture refers to “the domain of cultural processes that occur between people, rather than simply privately” including “any public expression of a personal culture” (Byers 2014). A collective culture is the consensus of several personal cultures. The relationship between personal and collective cultures can be characterized by mutualism. While collective cultures are informed by personal cultures, in the same way, “shared cultural forms are transformed into novel personal meanings” which may or may not coincide with the consensus established by collective culture. Culture consists of the “convergence and divergence of perspectives, meanings and ideas that characterize the individual, the social world, and the relation between them (Byers 2014).

I think these ideas are particularly good to keep in mind when thinking about Tibetan identity and culture. Under the pretext of Chinese occupation, Tibetans in exile have largely united in protest. However, that being said, the Tibetan identity in exile is complicated and continues to become more complicated as refugees are born second, third, and fourth generation in exile. In this sense I think it’s important to understand that while many people care deeply about expressing their Tibetan identity in light of the threat to it’s very existence, all Tibetans relate to their Tibetan identity in different ways. One Tibetan activist in Dharamsala on my previous trip to India in October noted, “exile has tested us in so many different ways” and helped to “Evolve Tibetan identity.” He gestured to myself and some of my peers, “you ask-how and why am I American” – a question I have asked constantly the past several months away from home- “now Tibetans ask the same question- they have only had to ask in the last half decade. Before they didn’t have to ask that question.” He explained that, because Tibetans were largely nomadic, they didn’t travel much outside of Tibet. Historically, Tibet has remained geographically and socially isolated from the rest of the world. The activist claimed that asking “why am I Tibetan has better helped the Tibetan community better understand themselves and the world.”

My friend Dolkar and I sat snug in the corner of Ramsterdam, one of my favorite restaurants in Kathmandu, over two cups of steaming milk tea. Dolkar is 23 years old; she was born in Nepal second generation in exile. Her parents were born in a small village of Tibet where they grew up as nomads. She is one of my many Tibetan friends who really struggle with their Tibetan identity. Everything Dolkar knows about Tibet she learned from the stories of her elders. Her father often says “you guys are lucky because you are not married you know, early, otherwise you would be married and you might be looking after 3,4 children.” The two of us joked that perhaps by now, she’d even have her very own yak. Dolkar told me that she asks her father many questions about Tibet and I asked her where her curiosity came from. She answered that “it’s important to know where your roots are, also because I think it’s different you know, to be born in your own country and to be born here.” I asked her how the politics of identity made her feel and she told me that “sometimes I’m like ok it’s interesting and sometimes I’m like ok I’m fed up.” She told me, “I don’t know, carrying a Nepali passport, it’s a must. You have to have that otherwise you can’t work, you cant do anything here in Nepal but then, I don’t know, its strange. I would rather have an RC than a passport, but then having RC is not much help in Nepal. I don’t know it’s like your stuck somewhere and you try to reach out to the Tibetan part of the world.” One 27-year-old woman I spoke with, a representative of the Students for Free Tibet India branch and a third generation born in exile, told me that she likes English more than

Tibetan and that she finds jeans more comfortable than Chuba¹⁰. She acknowledged “I know this is assimilation, and there is a threat against identity.” She takes preserving her culture very seriously, “if someone is trying to break something, you try and save that thing.” For her, despite her preferences, “language is very important” and the “Lhakar movement is a great movement.”¹¹ She admitted however, “if Tibet becomes an independent country, maybe I won’t care about it because the threat isn’t there.” The three words (see picture above) she gave me to describe her identity were “Tibetan, Tibetan, and Tibetan.”

Tibetan identity is actively promoted and preserved in exile. In many ways expression of culture has become an effective form of activism: one-way of keeping Tibetan identity alive. Tibetans are strongly encouraged to feel pride and a sense of belonging in the Tibetan Identity. In this way a collective culture, an in-group, is established. The culture (the religion, the values, the nationality, ect.) certainly informs people’s identity (see picture above) however each individual has their own way of internalizing this culture and integrating it into their own identity.

With a strong footing in the psychological processes of Enemy-Image Making and the way these processes may be negated by the internalization of Buddhist philosophy and the cultivation of Buddhist values and qualities; and with an acknowledgment that these philosophies are in fact inherent in the culture, meaningful in their ability to resonate with Tibetans: monk and layperson alike, and in dialogue with Tibetans as they reconcile their own identities we now move towards the meat of my research. The following section looks at how Tibetans do and don’t internalize and embody these principles when it comes to their attitudes towards the Chinese people who occupy their land.

¹⁰ Traditional Tibetan dress

¹¹ A nonviolent movement involving peaceful protest, boycott, and the utilization of culture as a weapon – most notably the Lhakar movement can be observed in exile on Wednesdays when Tibetans wear traditional dress.

IV. The people

Snow Lion of Peace

Lyrics by Chab Da Pho Nya

Music by Tashi Sharzur and Miguel Frasconi

Produced and published by Tashi D. Sharzur

In the snowy land of Tibet there dwells a lion,
A snow lion found in no other region.
The Supreme One is the peaceful snow lion.
Love and mercy are his turquoise mane.
Truthful speech is the lion's roar.
Enlightened deed are the lion's might.
This peaceful snow lion is an ornament of the world.
May this ornament gain victory over the world!
In the snowy land of Tibet there is an army,
An army that is found in no other region.
The saffron-clad monk hood is the peaceful army.
Monastic robes are their peaceful ornament.
Scriptures in hand are their benevolent weapons of joy.
The religion of nonviolence is their military strategy.
This army of peace and joy is an ornament of the world.
May this ornament gain victory over the world!

Ellen Bruno is a documentary filmmaker who spent nearly 20 years in Southeast Asia. She produced a film entitled “Satya: A Prayer for the Enemy” “based on the experiences of young Tibetan Buddhist nuns who [had] been imprisoned and tortured for their nonviolent protests of the Chinese occupation in Tibet” (Satya: A Prayer for the Enemy). I asked Ellen what was the most difficult and inspiring part of her research. She said the most difficult thing was listening to accounts of torture. She added however that the most inspiring part was that, “when I got angered by the accounts . . . the nuns were quick to remind me that even in the torture sessions there was the possibility of connection and understanding. A moment where the dichotomy of us versus them vanished and the torturer saw the prisoner as their daughter or sister or just a fellow human. They saw these fleeting moments as the place of all hope possibility.”

One woman in Tashi Palkhiel got emotional as she recounted fleeing Tibet and witnessing the death of her beloved animals. She had come from a nomadic family. Most of the people I spoke to in Tashi Palkhiel came from nomadic families. I watched so many of their eyes gloss over as they revisited memories of their animals, of milk, butter, curd and homegrown tsampa. Many of them really struggled in the new climate and culture of India. Their clothing, diets, and livelihoods changed drastically. Without documents, most of them were resigned to joblessness, begging, or a career in the souvenir industry catering to the few tourists who come by to visit the Tibetans. It broke my heart to hear their stories of difficulty. Consistently however, before I had time to sink into sadness: a throaty chuckle, a belly laugh, a witty remark, or an offering of tea would interrupt my musing. These people were full of life, of laughter, and of love. Now many of them live relatively comfortably. Many of them brought up the Chinese before I did to tell me that they didn’t hold hatred in their hearts, that they forgave, and that they were grateful for the resources and comforts they enjoyed presently.

All of the Tibetans I spoke with made a distinction between the Chinese people and the Chinese government. For all of them, their qualms were with the government. As 87-year-old Yanchen, a witty and kind woman in Pokhara put it, “I

don't feel bad things about the Chinese, they are also suffering, and they are good people." I asked my friend Wangmo in Boudha about this distinction and she responded immediately "right now I am keeping one Chinese woman in my own bed, I gave my own bed to a Chinese woman and I'm staying in my kitchen. So we don't have hatred towards Chinese people."

Many of the young people I spoke to talked about their childhood feelings towards the Chinese. My friend Gawa in Pokhara admitted that when she was a little girl she used to think, "all Chinese are bad... they snatch our country- something like that. And I grew older, and I got something, knowledge." The representative of SFT I spoke with in McLeod Ganj mentioned something similar, she said as a young girl she too "hated the Chinese" but as she got older and started to understand that the Chinese were also suffering under their government, she began to gain an appreciation for common humanity. My friend Tenzin in Boudha referenced the same transition in thought. I asked him what changed and he told me frankly, "I grew up- maybe that's the reason why. I can understand humanness. I can understand that they have feeling and I have feeling." Another friend in Boudha, Choegyal talked about his own experience growing out of childish ignorance saying "now I can differentiate between judging them without knowing, or judging them by knowing. So I have to [investigate] before I have a negative side."

This "negative side" is the internal enemy Shantideva spoke about. Tenzin elaborated, he said "When you say enemy- my definition you can say affliction and ignorance. My definition is like that. Because the actual, the real enemy is not outside, its inside – your affliction, your ignorance, your hatred. First you have to remove the enemy from your inside after that you can cope with other enemies. It's feels much easier to deal with the outside enemy- you just say something, you punch him but the ignorance- the affliction you have to remove from inside – that is something else." Tenzin was not the only one to reference the difficulty of dealing with afflictive emotions. Yanchen described to me in her home in Pokhara how difficult it was to see Tibetans being tortured on the news. She told me "I can't do anything but just sit and be sad, sometimes angry." "The Dalai Lama says there's no use holding hatred in your soul" she continued, "previously there was no telecast regarding Chinese issues, the anger comes from seeing it with our own eyes. Now everyone is talking about it and the feeling increases." In exploring this difficulty a few people echoed the distinction between anger and hatred made by His Holiness the Dalai Lama. The representative of Students for Free Tibet told me, "I don't necessarily hate them but I am angry. I don't need to hate them, why waste so much energy- but the anger, that drives me, it motivates me."

Some people reconciled this difficulty through contextualization: they explored their own ideas on the causes and conditions that brought about the occupation of Tibet. In doing so, many touched on ideas of interdependence and karma. My friend Choden in Pokhara told me, "I think, it's because of the ignorance or because of the simple-minded thoughts of the people- yeah- because Tibetan peoples at that time . . . there was a prediction that Tibet would be invaded by another country – there was a prediction. So due to that predication, Tibetan people feared connecting with other countries or with foreigners. So Tibet was very much kept apart from the world. And they had no connection with the world- I think that is the main reason Tibet was invaded." Yanchen told me another reason that she didn't want to say bad things about the Chinese was that it was the Tibetan's bad karma that the Chinese were in Tibet to begin with. In Pokhara, I spoke with one Chef who also expressed that "all things happen for a reason" and that he was happy to be where he was despite his difficulties. As an extension of this idea, many Tibetans expressed that Chinese mistreatment of Tibetans in Tibet could be traced back to government suppression, "even the people who are doing bad things to Tibetans are under the suppression of the government" the chef told me. In Paljorling camp, an ex-guerilla fighter explained to me, "if there is a big change in the [Chinese] government, then the people will follow."

Generally speaking, almost of all the Tibetans I spoke with exhibited an intention to exercise forgiveness, and tolerance towards the Chinese people. They were uncomfortable holding hatred in their hearts and expressed an acknowledgment of common humanity, of common suffering. Furthermore, so many people reconciled the situation in Tibet by exploring the historical and karmic conditions that created it.

Acknowledging Humanity

The case of Tibet appears, at first glance, to epitomize issues of peace. Mention ‘Tibet’ and a series of stereotypical images come to mind: a mountainous Shangri-La; smiling maroon-robed monks; and the figure of the Dalai Lama, who is so often seen to personify Buddhist values of compassion, tolerance and universal responsibility. The myth of Tibet as an essentialized space of nonviolence, and of Tibetans as embodying pacifism, is a powerful rhetoric that has been promoted by both Western commentators and by (exile) Tibetans. It effectively positions the Tibetan nation, people and freedom movement in important moral hierarchies: Tibet as utopia, as virtuous, as victim. However, this is also a set of representations and discourses that works to silence violent pasts and presents, has internal contradictions, and is contested- and at times resisted- within the Tibetan community. (Megoran et. all 2014)

I want to take a moment to recognize that despite showing an incredible disposition towards the Tibetan values and qualities discussed in earlier sections of this paper, the Tibetans I spoke with were imperfect, struggling to navigate their own minds and experience. I read a story that was extremely grounding in *The Wisdom of Forgiveness* by His Holiness the Dalai Lama and Victor Chan (one of the first Chinese men to sit across from His Holiness after the Tibetan leader’s escape into exile). The book is about His Holiness’s path towards cultivated forgiveness towards the Chinese people and it’s organized into a series of really wonderful and oftentimes charming anecdotes both about His Holiness and others. The pages that really stood out to me documented a conversation that Victor Chan had with the Dalai lama in which the Dalai Lama described an occasion when a Chinese Soldier beat a Tibetan boy in prison. Chan describes, “The Dalai Lama relaxed, slumped against the back of his armchair. Then he said, unprompted: ‘but If was on the spot and meet the Chiense soldier, the officer who beat that boy. . . if I was there, and I have gun, then I don’t know.’ He raised his right hand from its resting position on his abdomen, fingers holding an imaginary gun. A mischievous smile played across his lips. ‘such moment, I may shoot Chinese,’ The Dalai Lama said shrugging his shoulders. He lifted his arms and spread them wide. Then he started to chuckle.” Chan describes his subsequent feeling of discomfort imaging a scenario that seemed to him, highly improbable. Chan asked the same question I had reading this exclamation, “even with your Buddhist training?” The Dalai Lama responded: “Possible. Under such tense circumstances, possible. Sometimes, thinking comes later. Action comes first.” The reason I find this story so valuable is because it describes how a man who, for much of the world, represents what is possible in terms of cultivating compassion is still only human. It describes how even a figure who so many love and admire, myself (admittedly) included, is imperfect. I mean to say this here because I think it’s important that we check our assumptions about the Tibetan people, even when talking about their outstanding ability to display admirable qualities. I think doing so allows us to erase our fantasies and experience something debatably more incredible and inspiring: the raw, human experience of these qualities exhibited in a way that is believable, is tangible, is cultivatable, and perhaps replicable.

The Political Prisoners of Tibet

You can see these perceptible qualities really shine through some of the stories I heard depicting incredible resilience in spite of emotional and physical trauma. For example, there are some incredible stories of political prisoners escaping into exile and rebuilding lives for themselves, reconciling their experiences to a certain extent. These people, many of whom are emotionally and physically scarred, are not perfect in their ability to overcome and forgive though they are outstanding. Phuntsok, my friend in Boudha who tries to teach his children compassion, was a political prisoner for 6 years in Tibet between 1988 and 1994. In that time he experienced extreme hardships mental and physical. He was tortured, interrogated, malnourished, and witnessed incredible suffering. If you meet him today, he is a witty, vivacious, kind-hearted father of three beautiful children. He is an outstandingly learned and considerate friend and mentor. Over the course of our

interview he spoke of Chinese friends and of Chinese writers and musicians who he admired. I asked him how he came to be the way he was. He responded, “When I was born, I was born with that sense. I’m a very hard worker though, I always study – I never got a proper degree, but I always put other people first, I’m so honest, I never lie. That I think is so important. That’s what’s made me comfortable wherever I go. I don’t want an invisible wall between you and me, when I talk I want to look in your eyes. Forgiveness is really important; I know I met *so many* horrible people. But still I have to understand, this is not only happening to me it’s happening everywhere.” Our conversation wove in and out of many topics and eventually landed on Buddhist Psychology. Before his imprisonment, Phuntsok had been in a monastery where he had studied Buddhist philosophy and psychology. He sat back in his chair and took a drag of the cigarette cooied between his pointer and middle finger. “Maybe that’s the answer to your earlier question about how I am like I am... you see person and then you make judgment- you can control it. Your brain makes a decision and your heart makes a feeling. When you talk about, ‘oh I don’t know’” he gestured to his brain, “ if you say ‘oh I’m so sad,’” he gestured to his heart. “Once you understand these things – you are equipped to deal- sometimes I get angry, I get really angry- at least you can control it and you can review it. If you have an ability to review your anger – you have the ability to not do that again.”

I interviewed one staff member of Gu-Chu-Sum, an organization working “by, for, and of” the political prisoners of Tibet. She told me, “[the political prisoners] are strongest, for me they are the strongest force of the Tibetan freedom struggle, its these people coming together thinking yes, we have worked inside Tibet, yes we suffered there, and yes after the trouble we have gone through we are here in this free country- we want to continue this freedom struggle, we don’t want to stay idle.” The organization acknowledges both the strength and vulnerability of this population of Tibetans in exile. “We have to cater to these people,” the representative told me. We began a conversation about the nonviolence, She said “The Tibetan freedom struggle has remained nonviolent- especially because of propagation of words of His Holiness the Dalai Lama – also because most of the Tibetans are very Buddhist people- it may be clichéd but we try and resort to nonviolent movement as much as we can . . . I always believe, you have to be so strong to resort to nonviolence even though somebody is hating you, somebody is slapping you- and you are tolerating that. It’s very natural, any normal human being, to slap back even harder. To choose another way to change that persons mind, it’s incredible. Not going through the routine way- you have to be *more* brave. The amount of torture and cruelty these people have gone by- they believe this will change.” I asked her to elaborate on the way Buddhism impacted the ability of political prisoners to stick by nonviolence. She answered, “Many prisoners come from monastic or nunnery backgrounds: Individually I’m sure it makes you stronger- studying Dharma, actively resorting to nonviolent means despite violence being used about you. Maybe you don’t have to be just a strong person but you have to have faith. That could be one reason it could be much beyond that as well- their nationalism is too strong: they are proud Tibetans.” inspiring

What makes Tibetans Unique

I was sitting on a balcony overlooking McLeod Ganj, nearing the conclusion of my research period when my friend Dawa came to join me. My brain a swarm of ideas and conclusions, we began a discussion on my research. When I told her about the kinds of patterns I had been seeing, she told me a story: “I remember protesting Chinese politicians in Deli. It felt like 6 million Tibetans were in my mind. With all the history and trauma behind me, I was so angry; I was like “fuck you” at this man. He was in the car with his wife and we laid down in front of his car.” She continued that, “Buddhism does impact [Tibetans], but when it’s something as big as China, as powerful as China, it’s very difficult.” Dawa’s family has a history of hosting Chinese exchange students. She, like so many others I spoke to, made a point to recognize that she felt nothing special for the Chinese people, *only* for the government. She told me a story about one Chinese girl who came to McLeod, “she was so nervous about coming, and this one *old, old* man brought her Katak.¹² He told her how happy he was that she was there to learn and hear about the Tibetan experience. The girl almost cried.” In

¹² Tibetan ceremonial prayer scarf

many ways, Dawa's stories capture the frustration, the dissonance, the emotion, as well as the nonviolence, resilience, contextualization, tolerance and compassion exhibited by the Tibetan community in exile.

This is what I find so special; it's the fact that *despite* the afflictive emotions, Tibetans are able to exercise compassion towards Chinese people. The woman I spoke with at the Tibetan Center for Conflict Resolution was quick to remind me, "Conflict is experienced even in cultures of peace." This said, I think the culture of peace has had profound implications on the way Tibetan's relate to and reconcile their conflicts. I believe their ability comes from continuous reflection on and internalization of those Buddhist values embodied in the Tibetan culture from childhood through adulthood. The understanding of these ideals enables people, even in highly emotional situations, to reflect on their state of mind and consider the consequences of their actions.

V. Conclusion

It seems very plausible given the outcomes of this research that Buddhist philosophies may contribute to the cultivation of tolerance, forgiveness, and compassion in place of the typically observed patterns of enemy image making. Many of the values advocated in the Buddhas teachings have been embodied by the Tibetan culture and therefore Tibetan people, despite difference in the way Tibetans identify and therefore internalize culture. These values have translated into an impressive resilience and understanding of common humanity.

Many people have recognized the ease at which these values, taught via the use of logic, may translate to a more secular community. I believe the logic used to communicate the practicality of compassion, as expressed in texts like Shantideva's *The way of the Bodhisattva*, has potential to resonate with people world-wide. There have been minimal but vibrant attempts to incorporate Buddhist teachings or meditative practices into reconciliation methods. I believe this effort is worth investigating and enriching. Perhaps we should look for ways to make Buddhist values and practices accessible and relevant for wider audiences. I think there is much to be learned from the Tibetan community in exile that could be added to our toolbox when approaching reconciliation efforts. In the context of the Tibet issue, I believe the work of organizations that bring Buddhist values to the forefront, like the Tibetan Center for Conflict Resolution, should be empowered.

In a very broad sense, I think we can observe that rooting a peace movement in faith, or even a belief that is culturally relevant and deeply held, can unite people. This was observed in the movements surrounding Gandhi and Martin Luther King as well. As we look to build peace in this world, perhaps we can search for more platforms rooted in the values of identity and culture.

Finally, it's clear that the work of spiritual leaders like the Dalai Lama who have found ways of relating reconciliatory ideals to large bodies of people on the basis of faith or deep belief has had a profound impact on the Tibetan people. This should point to the positive power of leadership that prioritizes truth, humanity, and dialogue with their communities. Whereas many leaders play a perpetuating role in the unraveling of enemy-image making, His Holiness the Dalai Lama was cited over and over again as an inspiration for compassion and understanding. This kind of narrative should be acknowledged as a positive example for leadership around the world.

Appendix: Pictures



Me and two of my wonderful translators in Pokhara



A sign posted in the cafeteria of the children's hostel at Tashi Palkhiel Tibetan Refugee Camp in Pokhara, Nepal



Boudhanath Stupa in Kathmandu, Nepal



Tushita Meditation Center in McLeod Ganj, Dharamsala where I
Explored Tibetan Buddhist Meditational practices on compassion and mindfulness

Glossary of Terms (in order of appearance in text)

Enemy image making: a conceptual framework for understanding the way that ideas of “enemy” are formed and perpetuated by different peoples.

The dual-hypothesis theory: a theory that identifies two types of cognitive processing (type-1 and type-2).

Type-1 processing: One type of cognitive processing described by the dual-hypothesis theory. Type-1 works quickly, requires little attention, and draws minimally upon the our brain’s resources.

Type-2 processing: One type of cognitive processing described by the dual-hypothesis theory. Type-2 is comparatively energy intensive and slow-working.

In-group: a social unit composed of individuals who share a sense of belonging.

Out-group: a differentiated social unit to which individuals do not experience a sense of belonging.

Selective attention: when an individual pays attention only to information which confirms previously held beliefs.

Fundamental error: when someone fails to acknowledge context and attributes someone’s behavior to innate characteristics.

Nang pa (ནང་པ་): the Tibetan word for "Buddhist"

Samsara: the cycle of death and rebirth

Sangha: community of dharma practitioners

Communal culture: “the domain of cultural processes that occur between people, rather than simply privately” includes “any public expression of a personal culture” (Byers 2014)

Personal culture: “refers to the private or public construction of meanings by an individual person” (Byers 2014)

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Suggestions for Future Research

1. In Buddhism, adversity is often looked upon as an opportunity for cultivating positive qualities. How has the Tibetan attitude towards Chinese been shaped by the context of conflict? Over the course of my research I heard many Tibetans reference their host communities, or other religious institutions/communities in negative terms. What other out-groups are prominent and how do attitudes towards them take a different shape than attitudes towards the Chinese? Why?
2. I saw several differences between the communities I visited- many spaces seemed to correlate with certain narratives. How does the space in which a people reside impact the way their culture is expressed – particularly in the case of a refugee community whose culture faces threat?
3. How might meditation be used as a form of reconciliation? Over the course of my research I investigated Tonglen practices as well as meditations on compassion, mindfulness, emptiness, and attachment. I found these extremely beneficial and full of potential. How do these practices impact a person’s approach to negotiation or reconciliation with a member of an out-group?
4. Does meditation or reflection on Buddhist ideas actually trigger parts of the brain associated with type-2 processing?
5. Some people I spoke with referenced schools as a resource for cultivating ideas of common-humanity and compassion while others spoke fairly critically about the Tibetan schools as cultivating negative attitudes. How are Sino-Tibetan issues discussed formally and informally in these school systems?
6. What is the role of media in perpetuating or deconstructing enemy-image making? I encountered many pamphlets and publications both by the Central Tibetan Administration and other non-profits and organizations – most of which documented human rights abuses. How might *these* kinds of documents contribute to Tibetan attitudes towards the Chinese?
7. How have Tibetans and foreigners alike romanticized the Tibet issue, and how has this romanticization impacted Tibetan attitudes towards the Chinese?
8. How do different understandings of Tibetan identity correlate with opinions on the approach to negotiations with China?