

# Literature Review

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This literature review will explain the significance of Tibetan Buddhism and its influence on the modern Chinese society. For hundreds of years, Tibetan Buddhism has been shaping the structure and foundation of Chinese Buddhism. Once introduced, Tibetan Buddhism has also affected Chinese society and has continued to be an important part of Chinese faith. Three themes will be explored in this literature review to examine this complex relationship.

The themes are as follows:

## 1) Tibetan nationalism and identity and religion

Tibetan Buddhism is unique. It has reached many cultures around the world but it has had a significant impact on China. This section will shed light upon Tibetan Buddhism as a religion and will examine how and why it is a successful branch of Buddhism especially within Chinese communities.

## 2) Tibetan Buddhism's influence on China

Before the 20<sup>th</sup> Century, Chinese Buddhists were sent to Tibet to study Tibetan Buddhism. This is a major reason why Tibetan Buddhism is still strong in China. This section will examine the influence Tibetan Buddhism has had on China.

## 3) The influence of the Chinese on Tibetan Buddhism

This section looks at the effects of Chinese influence on Tibetan Buddhism. This section will examine the influence of Chinese practitioners on Tibetan Buddhism through their own

practice or through finance. This section will also be looking at the pressures of the Chinese Communist Party's influence on Tibetan Buddhism.

## Tibetan Buddhism, Tibetan Nationalism and Identity

Tibetan Buddhism is very prevalent in Chinese communities all over mainland China, Hong Kong, and Taiwan. It is also very popular amongst Chinese communities abroad.

Lamas, khenpos and rinpoches, the teachers of Tibetan Buddhism travel to these communities to set up Tibetan monasteries and institutions. The monastery becomes a place where Chinese Buddhists can consistently go to for practice and teachings.

Tibetan Buddhism wasn't always this open. Tibet is geographically secluded from the rest of the world. Much of Tibet sits on the Tibetan Plateau with an elevation of 4500 meters above sea level. Because of these geographical obstacles, it was complicated to travel in and out of Tibet.

Politics and colonization also contributed to the seclusion of Tibet from the rest of the world. In the book *Tibetan Buddhists in the making of modern China*, author Gray Tuttle argues that the introduction of globalization and industrialization played a key role in the closing up of Tibet.

In the latter half of the 19<sup>th</sup> Century, the Manchu dominated Qing Dynasty began losing control over China in the face of Western powers and globalization. As a result, ethnic Chinese began playing an increasingly active role in running the Qing government. This personnel change in the Qing Dynasty contributed to the seclusion of Tibet. More importantly, it marked the move from what Tuttle called an Inner-Asian method of governance, where Tibet kept its own administrative structure which was loosely controlled

by the Manchu - controlled Qing government, to the Western notion of the nation state model (Tuttle 2). In the Western model, territory and borders played a key role in governing the influence and authority of Tibet. With this model, the Chinese attempted to take direct control of Tibet's internal affairs and military.

It was at this point that Britain invaded Tibet. This invasion convinced Chinese officials to claim Tibet for the Qing. This decision to increase governance over Tibet has shaped a territorial policy that China has towards Tibet this present day.

This shift from an 'Inner-Asian' model to a nation-state model also fundamentally changed the role of the ruling religious lineage, the Gelukpa, and the role of its leader, the Dalai Lama. In the newly Qing imposed nation-state model, the Dalai Lama became the international face of Tibet. Instead of exclusively dealing with the domestic affairs of Tibet, the Dalai Lama was thrown into the world of international politics. This change is most obvious when the 13<sup>th</sup> Dalai Lama sought exile in Mongolia and India during the British invasion. During his trip, the Dalai Lama had his first experience with European and other international representatives. At this point, not only did the Dalai Lama have to act as the head of Tibetan religion, but he also represented the Tibetan region.

Shortly after the Dalai Lama returned to Tibet, the Qing Dynasty crumbled and Tibetan independence was achieved. In his return, the Dalai Lama took precautions to prevent another invasion of Tibet by attempting to establish the country as an independent nation-state. In doing so, currency was introduced, an army was trained and a national flag was created (Tuttle 51). These attempts to create a nationalist administration brought about much unrest to the cultural and religious world of Tibet. The attempts to label Tibet as a nation-state alienated many religious figures and many of these lamas did not fully recognize

or acknowledge the authority of the centralized administration. High ranking lamas such as the Panchen Lama, the second highest ranking lama in the Gelukpa, sought exile in China because he felt alienated. Many monks became disgruntled with the centralized Tibetan administration and sought exile in China. This trend then creates what Tuttle calls “another feature of globalization: the rise of the conception of pan-Asian Buddhism” (Tuttle 67). This pattern is significant as it establishes deeper connections between Tibetan Buddhists and Chinese Buddhists.

In Tibet, religion and politics is often mixed together (Tuttle 18). In the 17<sup>th</sup> Century, the Gelukpa was being threatened by Tibetan rulers from another lineage, Kagyupa. In order to respond to this threat, the Gelukpa decided to obtain the support from the Mongols. This follows a tradition where when a religious lineage and its traditions are under threat, an outside army is invited to protect the lineage. The Gelukpa was able to eliminate the Kagyupa rule of Tibet with the help of Mongol armies in the 17<sup>th</sup> Century but the Mongol leader was able to retain the title of king of Tibet. The Manchu Emperor of China replaced the Mongols after the last Mongol king in Tibet was killed in the early 18<sup>th</sup> Century. However, throughout this time, Gelukpa prelates were the actual rulers of Tibet. These prelates worked with imperial representatives from Manchu empire of China and the Dalai Lama to oversee the affairs in Tibet.

It is obvious that there has always been a relationship between religion and politics. Instead of political parties having political power. It is the Tibetan Buddhism lineages that take on the role of a ruling political entity. Because of foreign influence and globalization during the 19<sup>th</sup> Century, the role of the Dalai Lama transformed into what it is now – the ruler of a Tibetan Buddhism school and also, the leader of a nation-state.

We see this now in the role of the 14th Dalai Lama. He is the leader of the Tibetan Government-in-exile and Tibetan Buddhism as well. There are portraits of the Dalai Lama displayed in many Tibetan Buddhism monasteries and centres around the world regardless of the religious lineage. The dualistic role of the Dalai Lama represents the identity of the Tibetan people through religion and political leadership.

The current Dalai Lama has announced that he would consider retirement. In a recent trip to the United States, the Dalai Lama said, "If majority of Tibetan people feel the Dalai institution is no longer much relevant, then this institution should cease -- there is no problem" (Martin). This presents the Tibetan people with a question – who would be able to take on both the role of a political and a religious leader?

For the Chinese communist party, one of the main candidates was the Panchen Lama, the second in leadership for the Gelukpa. The 11<sup>th</sup> reincarnation of the Panchen Lama, which the Dalai Lama chose was captured by the Chinese when the boy was six years of age in 1995. The boy was never seen again. China has since appointed their own candidate for the Panchen Lama and has given the lama a larger role within the Communist Party in order to win over control of the Tibetan population. The now 20 year-old Chinese Panchen Lama has recently been allowed membership to the National Committee of the Chinese People's Political Consultative Conference, China's top advisory board.

Another candidate that can take on the political and religious responsibilities of Tibet is the 17th Karmapa, Ugyen Trinley Dorje, the leader of the Kagyu lineage. This high lama is considered to be the third in hierarchy after the Dalai Lama and the Panchen Lama but he has the charisma to attract hundreds of thousands of followers. Even though he escaped from Chinese control and now is in exile, the Karmapa and his lineage also has a lot of traction

within the Chinese community in Hong Kong, Mainland China and Taiwan. Another unique aspect of the 17th Karmapa is that the Chinese government and Tibetan authorities worked together to acknowledge his authenticity.

Because of this, the influence and participation of the Chinese government, Chinese community and Chinese practitioners will play a large role in the agenda of both the Panchen Lama and the Karmapa. This goes to show that Tibetan Buddhism, culture and identity is now inextricably linked to the Chinese community.

## The Influence of Tibetan Buddhism on China

In *Tibetan Buddhists in the Making of Modern China*, Tuttle talks about the exchanges between the Republic of China and Tibetan Buddhism. This relationship is important because we see China actively pursuing the teachings of Tibetan Buddhism. One of the most important facts that Tuttle touched upon is that Chinese Buddhism absorbed many elements of Tibetan Buddhism. There were many political and economic reasons as to why this happened. Chinese Buddhism was under the threat of globalization and the emergence of a secular state. The only way for Chinese Buddhism to survive was to absorb the main elements of Tibetan Buddhism to survive. This was the case because there are fundamental differences between Tibetan and Chinese Buddhism. Chinese Buddhism bases much of their activities on theoretical teachings and this limits its spirituality. The comparatively proactive Tibetan Buddhist activities were much more appealing to Chinese practitioners and strengthened the religion as a whole in the face foreign influence and globalization.

These attempts to incorporate elements of Tibetan Buddhism into Chinese Buddhism

occurred when Chinese Buddhism was exposed to the threat of foreign religions such as Christianity and Catholicism. These attempts were also made when the Dalai Lama announced Tibet's de-facto independence from China, making it extremely difficult to attain Tibetan Buddhist texts for Chinese Buddhist monks traveling to Tibet. There were a couple of figures who brought the teachings of Tibetan Buddhism to China. Chinese monks believed that it was important for Chinese Buddhism to incorporate the teachings of Tibetan Buddhism in order for it to be better equipped to face the threats of foreign religions (Tuttle 98). In order to carry this mission out, a team of Chinese Buddhist monks were sent to Tibet. These monks encountered numerous challenges along the way. Master Fazun and Nenghai Lama were two of the lamas that took part in the journey to Tibet. Along the way they faced many challenges, the first obvious challenge was a lack of funding. Because of this, the Chinese monks survived mostly on the donations given to lamas in the Tibetan monasteries. Tuttle says that the first wave of Chinese monks studying in Tibet was supported by their fellow Chinese and Tibetan Buddhist practitioners, not by the government. This relationship has continued to the present day where Tibetan Buddhist lamas are supported by Tibetan monasteries or practice centres, many of which are funded and maintained by Chinese followers.

The Tibetan language is very different from the Chinese language. It uses a separate alphabet and phonetic system. However, the language barrier did not hinder the growing interest the Chinese had in Tibetan Buddhism, nor did it hinder the religion's growth within Chinese society. However, language barriers proved to be an initial problem for the Chinese monks Nenghai and Fazun. Tibetan language schools in China were inadequate. The language schools had insufficient records of the Tibetan language when this expedition

occurred. This is interesting because China did not make an effort to better understand Tibet after two centuries of Qing supervision over Tibetan affairs. Because there was so little material on the Tibetan language, Master Fazun and Nenghai Lama had to learn Tibetan from a Buddhist monk who was bilingual in both languages. Fazun later worked closely with this bilingual monk, who Tuttle believes was named Jiangba Lama and used his Tibetan language training to eventually produce a Chinese language text for a class on Tibetan Buddhism (Tuttle 107). According to Tuttle, Fazun's work and the bilingual Buddhist monk provides a very important link between China and Tibet allowing Chinese monks to study the texts of Tibetan culture and Buddhism.

Despite these language barriers, the influence of Tibetan Buddhism has made a deep impression on the Chinese community in China and worldwide almost a century later. Language however, is still a barrier to the practice of Tibetan Buddhism for many Chinese practitioners now, but it does not hinder the religion's popularity. There are translations provided in some of the prayer texts at select monasteries, but even with translation, the ideas and meaning of the words can be quite foreign to the Chinese practitioner. On his expedition, Master Fazun depended heavily on a bilingual monk. In modern times, Chinese practitioners depend heavily on bilingual Tibetan lamas as they have become the bridge between the two cultures. Tibetan classes are also now being taught at monasteries in Chinese communities as well so that the Chinese practitioner will at least have a basic understanding of the Tibetan language and culture. With many Chinese speakers becoming lamas in Tibetan Buddhism, they are highly sought after by monasteries and centres because of their ability to speak both Chinese and Tibetan.

Language was but one of the many obstacles to understanding Tibetan Buddhism and



culture. Fazun and Nenghai faced many of what Tuttle called cultural and physical barriers. The monks had to adapt to the new food, clothing, and shelter in Tibet which were completely alien to them. The monks had a hard time adjusting to Tibetan life. Fazun stated that it took one year to “become accustomed to Tibetan people’s lifestyle” (Tuttle 108). Unlike previous Qing government officials, who entered and travelled through Tibet with relative ease and safety, the monks had a hard time navigating through the Tibetan geography and culture. However because of their non-official capacity, these Chinese monks lived amongst the Tibetans and learned about Tibetan life in a different and comprehensive way.

Tuttle calls the relationship between the Chinese monks and the Tibetans as a cooperative relationship and contrasts that with the coercive relationship between Chinese government officials and Tibetans (Tuttle 110). The difference here, as Tuttle points out, is that the monks were trying to extract as much information as they could about Tibetan culture and religion whereas Chinese officials were attempting to gain control of the Tibetans. Even with seeking to create cooperative relations with the Tibetans, the motives of the monks were met with suspicion. Finally arriving in central Tibet, the monks actions were met with suspicion. Tibetans accused them of having political motives and blocked their progress.

The idea of a main teacher is a very important one in Tibetan Buddhism. The relationship between this Buddhist teacher, also referred to as the root guru, and the practitioner is a very personal one where comprehensive Tibetan Buddhism teachings are transmitted. Now, many Chinese practitioners are dependent on their gurus, usually rinpoches, in order to receive teachings, and religious empowerments. The influence of Tibetan Buddhism continues to grow in Chinese communities as there are more and more

rinpoches that make their way into Mainland China, Hong Kong and Taiwan and there is more and the Chinese community is receiving more and more exposure to Tibetan Buddhism. In some cases, some Chinese practitioners may have multiple gurus so as to receive as much exposure to Tibetan Buddhism as they can.

Fazun and his colleagues' work were significant in three ways. First, he paved the way for future generations of Chinese monks who were interested in studying Tibetan Buddhism by breaking down and documenting of the barriers involved for such a journey. Second, in the face of a minimal amount of Tibetan texts within China, these Chinese monks were able to bridge the Chinese and the Tibetan languages through their intensive language studies. Thirdly, they were the pioneers of bridging Tibetan and Chinese Buddhism. By translating hundreds of Tibetan Buddhist texts into Chinese, their actions finally allowed Chinese Buddhists in China a chance to study Tibetan Buddhism. This also provided material for the revival of Chinese Buddhism, as it was now possible to integrate parts of Tibetan Buddhism practice into the daily practices of a religion struggling to survive in China.

According to Tuttle, this absorption of Tibetan Buddhism into the new Chinese Buddhism was important because Chinese monks believed Tibetan Buddhism to be very successful with working with “polities without being subsumed by them” (Tuttle 123). What this meant was that the type of Buddhism in Tibet was seen to work hand in hand with national ideals and goals. Some Chinese monks wanted to transform Chinese Buddhism along the lines of Tibetan Buddhism so that it could become integrated with the state in a “mutually supportive relationship” (Tuttle 123).

## Chinese Influence on Tibetan Buddhism

As Chinese involvement in Tibetan Buddhism increased, the more Tibetan Buddhism became influenced by the Chinese community and followers. This influence can be seen in two ways. First there are negative effects of the communist government's actions to influence and manipulate the religion. Another type of influence can be seen by the financial commitments made by Chinese practitioners.

Anil Maheshwari, a correspondent with *The Hindustan Times* tackles one of the major issues in Tibetan religion and politics from within China and the Tibetan government in exile in his book, *The Buddha Cries! Karmapa Conundrum*. The book attempts to shed light on the controversy that surrounds the leadership within one of the major lineages in Tibetan Buddhism, the Karma Kagyu Lineage. This controversy is an example of how China uses its power to manipulate the traditions of Tibetan Buddhism so that the religion could better be controlled by government.

Maheshwari deals with one of the major issues which affect the modern relationship between China and Tibet. This controversy also shows the balance between politics and religion in important Tibetan issues. The issue of future Tibetan Buddhism leadership is also touched upon in this book. This will be an extremely important topic in future Sino-Tibetan dialogue where China's hard-line tactics against the Dalai Lama may not be as effective with his successor.

The book shows that China's attempts to influence Tibetan politics have resulted in divisions within the Tibetan community. The book examines the leadership controversy to an extremely important and influential religious lineage, the Karma Kagyu. As mentioned in the first section, the leader of the Kagyu lineage is highly regarded within Tibetan Buddhism

and because of this, they will play a significant role in the shaping of Tibet's future. Strength-wise, among the four orders, Kagyu has the largest following in the West. The number of its non-Tibetan followers all over the world is over three hundred thousand. The number of Kagyu follower in Tibet and in Mainland China is estimated to be at one million (Maheshwari 16). The death of the 16<sup>th</sup> Karmapa, the leader of the Kagyu Lineage, in 1981 gave room to a power struggle that has lasted to the present day. Ever since the 16<sup>th</sup> Karmapa's death, different factions within the lineage have crowned two lamas, Ugyen Trinley Dorje and Trinley Dorje, as the 17th Karmapa. This has effectively split the lineage into two, making it hard to find a unified voice for one of Tibet's largest religious authorities. This power struggle is relevant as it also illustrates the attempts taken by the Chinese government to influence Tibetan politics by controlling its religious leaders, in this case, the two Kagyu rulers.

Because China understands the link between religion and politics, we see China actively pursuing control of Tibet by controlling the ones that are traditionally in power. Initial Chinese support for the candidacy of Ugyen Trinley Dorje showed that China was willing to cooperate with the Tibetans. This cooperation only occurred on the basis that the Chinese would be able to control the chosen leader. China then attempted to exert its influence over Ugyen Trinley Dorje once he was chosen to be the Karmapa. In year 2000, Ugyen Trinley Dorje fled Tibet in order to join the Dalai Lama and the exiled Tibetans. With Ugyen Trinley Dorje fleeing we see the Chinese scramble to exert their influence over Tibet by granting the second Karmapa candidate, Trinley Thaye Dorje the ability to freely enter Mainland China's borders.

Maheshwari's book is important to my thesis because it represents the fear of Chinese

manipulation in the affairs of Tibetan Buddhism. This is because when Ugyen Trinley made his escape from Tibet, many Tibetans still feared that he was an agent for the Chinese government. However, this fear is coupled with the fact that Tibetans would be willing to accept the candidacy of Ugyen Trinley as not only the Karmapa but also, as the religious and political leader of Tibet after the Dalai Lama passes away. The main reason for this is because Ugyen Trinley made his own escape from Tibet to be with the Tibetan people in exile. This was a political action he took which made it obvious that he has sided with the Tibetan people instead of remaining under Chinese rule. Ugyen Trinley was recognized by the Chinese to be the Karmapa and also as a living Buddha. This was done in the hopes of gaining a more legitimate claim over the Tibetan Autonomous Region. If the Karmapa had decided to stay in Tibet, he would've been treated like a king. The Karmapa however, decided to take on the responsibilities of a Tibetan leader in exile when he made his escape from China.

Ugyen Trinley is an important figure in the future affairs of Tibetan politics, religion and its relationship with China. There are many centres which are dedicated to Ugyen Trinley Dorje and his coterie of high lamas in Hong Kong, Mainland and Taiwan. This illustrates that even though the Ugyen Trinley Dorje is in exile, he still retains a very strong presence within the Chinese community.

This brings us to the second type of influence the Chinese have had on Tibetan Buddhism. In his essay published in the *Far Eastern Economic Review*, Dr. Tsering Shakya points out that the most generous and significant supporters of Tibetan monasteries are members of the Chinese communities from Hong Kong, Taiwan, Malaysia and Singapore. As devotees, the Chinese simply hand over thousands of dollars to the monasteries (Shakya).

This is nothing new. The relationship of patronage, which exists between the Chinese followers and Tibetan Buddhism, has been around for centuries.

According to Fabienne Jagou in her article, *The Thirteenth Dalai Lama's visit to Beijing in 1908: In search of a new kind of chaplain-donor relationship*, the chaplain-donor relationship was mostly maintained between the Chinese royal family and the Dalai Lama during the Qing Dynasty. This relationship occurs between two parties, the patron, the Qing Emperor and the representative of the faith, the Dalai Lama. In this relationship, the Dalai Lama acts as the spiritual leader where as the Qing Emperor would act as the “universal king of the Buddhist Law” (Jagou 351). As the “universal king of the Buddhist Law,” the emperor is tasked with protecting the religion militarily and also maintaining the religion by giving offerings to Tibetan monasteries. The Dalai Lama would then be responsible for dedicating prayers for the emperor’s well being and also for the emperor’s religious education.

Since the opening up of Tibetan Buddhism to the lay people of China following the fall of the Qing Dynasty in 1911, the religion has become popular throughout Chinese society (Zablocki 385). With increased interaction between Chinese individuals such as masters Nenghai and Fazun and Tibetan Buddhism during the Republican era, the religion has become well established in the Chinese mainland community. In the article *The Taiwanese Connection: Politics, Piety and Patronage in Transnational Tibetan Buddhism*, Abraham Zablocki points out that Tibetan Buddhism now is largely funded by Chinese followers not only from mainland China but from Taiwan where the religion is thriving. Zablocki argues that Tibetan Buddhism is popular in Taiwan and much of the money that runs and maintains Tibetan Buddhism is from Taiwanese followers. Tibetan Buddhism

arrived in Taiwan after the Kuomintang and its followers left the mainland in 1949. Around that time, followers of Tibetan Buddhism were able to establish religious centres on the island.

In 2005, the Taiwanese run Mongolian and Tibetan Affairs Commission reported that there were 238 Tibetan Buddhist centres in Taiwan (Zablocki 391). Zablocki argues that the actual number of Tibetan Buddhism centres is greater as many centres “are overlooked and so not included in the MTAC’s registry.” According to Zablocki, Taiwanese patrons of Tibetan Buddhism have played an important role in rewriting the traditional relationship between the follower and the religious figure by transforming it into a globalized model of sponsorship. In this model, “the dispensation of money, ideas and identities transcends ethnic and cultural boundaries. (Zablocki 407).”

## Conclusion

Affluent Chinese people are now turning to the idea of faith. However, this is not new. Centuries ago, dynastic families have been patrons of Tibetan Buddhism. Dynastic family members have often requested spiritual guidance and religious offerings from their religious teachers. In return, they provided the means to maintain the religion. This relationship was transformed as the old Dynastic system crumbled early in the Twentieth Century exposing Tibetan Buddhism to a much larger number of Chinese. The growing interest in Tibetan Buddhism prompted influential Chinese monks to study the religion in depth. By travelling to Tibet, these monks were able to immerse themselves in the study of Tibetan Buddhism. The Chinese monks were able to bring much of what they learned back to the mainland thus increasing the influence of Tibetan Buddhism on the Chinese society.

Nowadays, the Chinese followers of Tibetan Buddhism make consistent donations to the monasteries and practice centres wherever they are. Because of this, Tibetan Buddhism has flourished in Chinese society. This success is has spread wherever the Chinese people settle. The continuation of this strong relationship between the Chinese followers and Tibetan Buddhism helps maintain Tibetan Buddhist institutions all over the world. For the Tibetan monks and religious institutions, this relationship will help expand their operations around the world and also, to improve and maintain the institutions present within Chinese communities.



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