

Trans-Himalayan Buddhist Secularities: Sino-Indian Geopolitics of Territoriality in Indo-Tibetan Interface

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The history of Buddhist studies in the Himalayas is often traced back to Brian Houghton Hodgson (1801-1894), an officer of the British East India Company stationed in Nepal exploring the trade routes to China through Tibet (Waterhouse, 2004:7). His fine collection of Buddhist texts contributed to the establishment of Buddhology in the West by pioneering figures like Max Müller and Nathaniel Wallich (Lopez, 2004:49-51). Toward the end of the nineteenth century while European Buddhologists were indulging themselves in the textual and historical studies of Buddhism, native Buddhists in these regions rather began to link their traditional doctrinal teachings to pan-Asian Buddhist political actions. For instance, the birth of Calcutta-based Maha Bodhi Society founded by Anagarika Dharmapala in 1891 attested to this transregional trend of modern Buddhist practices. It later spawned a variety of the socially engaged Buddhisms throughout Asia and the rest of the world, and compelled contemporary scholars to rethink Buddhist practices in the framework of Buddhist modernism, which is understood as a product of Western colonialism, industrialisation, and modernisation as well as of Asian Buddhists' agentive responses to these forceful changes of our modern times (McMahan, 2008:5).

This chapter is a study of trans-Himalayan Buddhist secularities as a parallel development of state sanctioned secularisms and Buddhist modernism in contemporary India and among Tibetans in diaspora. I wish to inquire into how the differently expressed Buddhist secularities in these two constituencies are agentively engaged in the geopolitics of Tibet in relation to China. The working definition of secularism in this chapter is understood as a state sanctioned principle that constitutionally ensures the separation of religion and state and/or legally warrants equal treatment of all religions within its sovereign territory; whereas secularity broadly refers to public expressions of religion as well as institutional appropriations of religious practices for non-religious purposes.

Situated in this transregional context, I attempt to make two arguments regarding the studies of secularism and secularity. First, in the ethnographic sense, Tibetan Buddhism in the last half a century has been a moving matter in the trans-Himalayan flows of people, ideas, and interregional politics. Its secular engagements and their outcomes are plural in nature contingent upon how secularism and secularity are locally interpreted and generate global perceptions of Tibet politics, which are now affecting the ways how Tibetans and non-Tibetans project the post-Dalai Lama status of Tibet. Second, secularism and secularity are two sets of divergent concepts and practices and yet both dialectically lodge in one another. In such unique entanglement, the trans-Himalayan Buddhist secularities in essence are projects of both Buddhists and politicians. They are entwined with geopolitical debates of Tibetan affairs in the near future and the Buddhist ambitions of spreading Buddhism globally in a set of secular discourses attempted to encapsulate human universals beyond the trans-Himalayan region.

Tibet Card in a trans-Himalayan Indian secularity

When I arrived on the campus of Jawaharlal Nehru University in Delhi for a visit in April 2016, I found myself in a public lecture series extended from the initial

student protest march against the judicial killing of Afzal Guru, a Kashmiri separatist convicted and later executed in 2013 for his role in the terrorist attack of the Indian Parliament in 2001. These well-organised lectures took place on the evening of every Friday. The terraced public area and its adjacent parking lot are now known as ‘the Freedom Square’ among students. In many ways, JNU is an integral part of India’s civil society concerning the nation’s religious, ethnic, and political diversity as well as the public debates of India’s frontier issues such as the territorial belongs of Kashmir and Arunachal Pradesh. Besides the differently expressed outcries against his terrorist act and the judicial execution of him, the controversy of Afzal Guru is also a secular politics of religion-based national and ethnic identities in India. It inevitably triggers a variety of public debates and upswings of diverse collective emotions at the Freedom Square originating from different ethno-religious constituencies, such as Dalits of Buddhist, Christian and Hindu orientations, Muslims from Kashmir, and Buddhist Tibetans. The state sanctioned secularism for the tolerance of religious differences in India is obviously witnessing its public practice on the case of Afzal Guru controversy. It also affords me to see the public presence and political role of religion as a type of religious secularity, which I will delineate shortly.

I was particularly drawn to Dibyesh Anand’s lecture at the Freedom Square. Flown from London, he delivered his talk entitled ‘In Perspective of Kashmir: Azaadi as an Anti-Colonial Idea’. As a native of Kashmir and a scholar of modern Tibetan studies, he compared Kashmir and Tibet cases during his passionate argument for the self-determination of the Kashmiris. At the same time he also expressed the depressing aspect of the state-sanctioned nationalisms in India and China. He remarked that whether they are in the right or the left of the ideological spectrum, the nationalists and patriots in these two countries stand united when it comes down to the defense of their states’ sovereignties. He pointed out that the Indian left could advocate rights for the weak and the Chinese left could oppose class oppressions; however, on the issues of the territorial belongings of Kashmir, Arunachal Pradesh, and Tibet, the sovereignties of the Indian and the Chinese states rise above these nationalists’ ideological beliefs in democracy, justice, and equality. Obviously human universals concerning the freedom and autonomy of a people are rather predicated upon the particularities of its modern ruler, namely the nation-state. Particularised human universals are a pronounced condition of modern nationalism under which the statecraft assumes itself as the vessel of the national consciousness. In other words, nationalism in its variety is not merely ‘a state of mind’ (Kohn, 2008:10) and ‘an imagined community’ (Anderson, 1991), but also possesses instrumentality for other kinds of objectives but pursued in the name of national unity and security. The case in point here is India that is currently witnessing a trend of playing a Tibet card in the context of its border disputes with China in the Himalayas. The talk of the Tibet card is widely entertained among scholars, policy researchers, and geopolitical critics in India.

This enthusiastically pursued Tibet card is trans-Himalayan in nature as those who advocate it dwell first on the Sino-Indian border disputes, Sino-Pakistan alliance, and a projected water war between nations situated in the river systems sourced from the Tibetan Plateau, and then on crediting India as the sole spiritual source of the Sino-Indian and Sino-Tibetan Buddhist nexuses. The logic of the Tibet card apparently rests upon both religion and the modern sense of sovereign territoriality. The former is being conscripted to serve the sanctified status of the latter. The latter is a product of what van Schendel calls the ‘cartographic surgery’ (van Schendel, 2002:652) of the region by modern nation-states especially those emerged after the

World War II. Cartographic lines have literally overwritten and, therefore, sliced up the eco-geological contiguity and ethno-linguistic familiarity of the Himalayan region. They were the primary sources of border disputes and later also evolved into ideological dividing lines during the Cold War era, which shaped the way how each modern nation-state in the region perceives and constructs the national character of its own and its neighbors. Tibet is a case in point between the Indian and the Chinese states.

Tibet card is not new to the contemporary politics of Tibet between Indian and China. Hodgson's Himalayan anthropology in the nineteenth century built the Buddhist civilisational linkage between India and Tibet through his collection of Tibetan Buddhist texts in Nepal. However, the antecedence of his ethnological and Buddhological work was his colonial assignment to open trade routes to China via Tibet. The strategic importance of Tibet as a buffer or as a British India-China corridor was thus the premise of Hodgson's presence in the Himalayas. In the mid-twentieth century Himalayan anthropology, the metaphor of 'zipper' replaced 'buffer' highlighting the Indo-Tibetan interface in which Tibetan civilisation was looked upon as 'a variant of, the Indian hierarchical tradition' (Fisher, 1978:2). This appeared to be a Southern Himalayan centric vision of Tibetan plateau with an assumption that the civilisational force shaping Tibetan culture came from the ancient India. In the twenty-first century, this south-to-north export of Indian civilisation in the past, especially Buddhism, to Tibet, continues to afford the credit to India as the source of Pan-Asian Buddhist civilisation; however, at the same time, the Indo-Tibetan interface is increasingly being reframed into India-China geopolitical contentions. Tibet, especially the exiled Tibet on Indian soil, is now a card to be played.

In his latest public opinion piece, Brahma Chellaney, a leading geostrategist of India, elevates the trans-Himalayan political value of Tibet to India's 'strategic asset', 'instrument of leverage', and 'ultimate trump card' (Chellaney, 2015) in response to China's playing Pakistan card and Kashmir card. While China has solidified its territorial sovereignty over Tibet, India hosts the Office of Dalai Lama and the exiled Tibetan government. Metaphorically speaking, China possesses the body of Tibet while India holds the heart of Tibet. The political role of the 14th Dalai Lama officially ended in 2011; however, the Central Tibetan Administration (CTA) based in Dharamsala has not yet risen to the same charismatic scale as the Office of Dalai Lama, the religious and civilisational symbol of Tibet. The Tibet card Chellaney advocates in essence is thus a Dalai Lama card. This geopolitical emphasis of his religious role in India-China politics predominantly serves the national interests of India. The secularity of Tibetan Buddhism in this regard is being appropriated as a geopolitical instrument.

In the contemporary trans-Himalayan context, the power of religion in the public sphere deserves more nuanced understandings and interpretations. Given the increasing number of religion-based participants to public affairs in different national constituencies subverts the secularist thesis that religious beliefs and practices decline in modern societies (Casanova, 2006:7). On the contrary religion is found in a variety of political engagements. Religious values are being made into a 'universally accessible language' (Mendieta and VanAntwerpen, 2011:5) and accepted as part and parcel of modern social imaginaries (Taylor, 2002:116). In the case of Buddhism, this vision of public sphere is well demonstrated in socially engaged Buddhist practices world over. Therefore, the secularist thesis concerning the decline of religion is being proved inadequate. Religion is rigorously engaging the public.

Tibetan Buddhism also has an overwhelming presence in the global public sphere; however, the Tibet card phenomenon in India does not quite fit this trend of translating religious values into social ethics for the public good. Instead, its focus is on the India-centered policy implications and geopolitical impacts of the Dalai Lama and Tibetan Buddhism. In other words, the political instrumentality of both is the value of the Tibet card to India's strategic needs allegedly constrained by China's presence in the Himalayas and other fronts of India-China contentions. To battle what he calls 'China's cartographic aggression', Chellaney proposes the use of the Tibet card as India's leverage 'to reopen the issue of China's annexation of Tibet' (Chellaney, 2015) while the Dalai Lama no longer contends the territorial debate on Tibet with the Chinese state.

In the public sphere of India, Tibet card played from Chellaney's angle is diversely interpreted. While I was participating in the Second Symposium in Memory of the Late Professor Dawa Norbu at JNU in April 2016, I noticed that Tibet card was one of the phrases that frequently appeared in the presentations of the invited scholars and policy analysts. I presented my transregional work on the porosity of ethnic boundaries in the case of the spread of Tibetan Buddhism in China. It did not appear too musical to those who contend China's cartographic representation of Tibet. A senior defense analyst and former Indian diplomat politely dismissed the secular presence of Tibetan Buddhism in contemporary China as a part of Xi Jinping's maneuvering of Buddhism for his political gains. However, off the podium, I entered assorted conversations with scholars and students about Tibet card.

Among Tibetan students and scholars based in India at the symposium, some are concerned with whether or not the Indian state will decide to deport all Tibetan refugees back to China or make them fully integrated into Indian society as Indian citizens after the passing of the Dalai Lama. Their rationale is based on the perception that the Tibet card is a Dalai Lama card and, therefore, when the Dalai Lama is no longer with them, India would no longer host Tibetan refugees. Others favor the Tibet card, as they believe that it is best to resolve Tibet issue when the Dalai Lama is still alive. If India joins their Tibet cause, the assumption is that China will reconsider rather than ignore the matter. Everyone seems to be doing a bit of fortune telling concerning the fate of Tibet on Indian soil.

In my conversations with Indian participants, the Tibet card is more diversely understood. Those who are situated in the policy circle tend to take the same position as that of Chellaney by positing China as a threat to India. Those who are in the fields of development studies and economics prefer to drop the Tibet card based on the rationale that Tibetan refugees proportionally receive much more international attention than the India's poor who have little presence in the public sphere of India. Those who are ideologically left leaning, as Anand remarked during his lecture, prefer to look at Tibet as Kashmir to India as a long term issue for negotiation rather than to take a side. Quite a few of them look upon China as a positive reference for India's economic and social development with the rationale that China has economically risen as a third world country with a respectable track record of maintaining its national integrity. Those who are in the left spectrum appear to prefer downplaying or not playing Tibet card against China.

In the religious front, the perception of Tibet on India soil is synonymous with Tibetan Buddhism because of the Dalai Lama's global Buddhist presence. I had conversations with a few conservative Indian graduate students who look upon Buddhism as a socially radical religion that presents instability to Indian society by citing how Buddhist conversion of Dalits has been politicised. From the perspective

of these religious conservatives the Buddhist side effect of the Tibet card would likely contribute to the intensification of communalism in India; therefore, they prefer the Tibet card not to be played in India's domestic fronts but only for the advantage of India's national security. In comparison, Buddhist Dalits whom I met on campus are all appreciative of the Dalai Lama's public statements on fighting the caste system; however, some of their radically minded peers allege the Dalai Lama as an ally of the Brahmins, not willing to build true alliance with Navayana (new vehicle), the Dalit Buddhist movement initiated by the late Dr. Bhimrao Ramji Ambedkar. Their opinion is based on two accounts: the public appearance of the Dalai Lama is predominantly with Indian Brahmin political elites not with the socially marginalised, and the state funding for relief projects from Indian taxpayers and the international aid programs brought in in the name of the Dalai Lama is preferentially in favor of Tibetan refugee communities and, therefore, overlooking India's depressed classes.

When the Tibet card is discussed on the level of India's geopolitical interests, most of my Indian interlocutors express that their opinions do not affect how the Indian state would make the decision on how to play it. From my trans-Himalayan perspective, the Tibet card is a Tibetan Buddhist card centered upon the Dalai Lama's global charisma but is instrumentalised for gaining leverages for the Indian state's ongoing contentions and negotiations with China on the border disputes in the Himalayas. The secularity of Tibetan Buddhism in this case is not a social condition under which modernites seek intellectual and spiritual fullness in both transcendent and imminent senses in their 'buffered self' (Taylor, 2007:16-17, 38). Neither does it conform to Habermas' notion of 'the political', which emphasises the complementary relation of the secular and the religious 'that is constitutive for a democratic process springing from the soil of civil society' (Habermas, 2011:27), nor is the type of secularisation through which world religions promote their doctrines in a set of non-religious languages, such as the Dalai Lama's ideas of universal responsibilities (DL, 1999:161). Instead, the secularity of Tibetan Buddhism evoked from India's Tibet card with a Buddhist appearance is a product of an extended inter-state conflict between India and China. It possesses a multi-dimensional instrumentalism among statesmen, policy writers, geostrategists, security advisors, and political scientists who are in favor of resolving the bilateral border contentions in the cartographic fronts of the Himalayas, such as Aksai Chin and Arunachal Pradesh. This secularity of Tibetan Buddhism furnishing the Tibet card is a consequence of modernity on the global scale. In this front, I share the same view as that of Talal Asad that secularity in this case pertains neither to the traditionally pervasive presence of religion nor to the severance of religion from the state; instead it is given what Talal Asad calls an 'agentive complexity' with which geopolitical strategies and tactics could be materialised in inter-state conflicts (Asad, 2003:12, 25).

The agentive complexity of India's Dalai Lama-based Tibet card is not a replay of Nehru's Buddhist diplomacy in the mid twentieth century during which Buddhism was projected as a soft power to widen the sphere of India's influence as the source of Buddhist civilisation. The Tibet card in the twenty-first century on the Indian side is more a strategic leverage than an Asian civilisational source. It is not geared toward building an India-centered pan-Asian alliance but is border and territory specific. As Chellaney puts it straightforwardly, 'Tibet is to India against China what Pakistan is to China against India' (Chellaney, 2015).

Religion-based territorial conflicts and ethnic identity reclamations are not new in the Himalayas. Not counting the smaller indigenous ethno-religious communities, Buddhism, Hinduism, and Islam have been the primary sources of

territorial markings, conflicts, and peacebuilding especially since India entered its post-colonial era and Tibet became a part of China's socialist transformation. Most of the disputed Sino-Indian cartographic borderlines in the Himalayas are drawn through regions with predominant Tibetan Buddhist populations, e.g. Himachal Pradesh, Arunachal Pradesh, and Sikkim. Deterritorialisation and porosity of national boundaries almost become synonymous with globalisation. It may be true in other parts of the world. However, in the case of India and China, borderlines are expected to be rigidly solid. From the perspective of borderland studies, India's Tibet card is a form of territorial engagement with China. Since their formative eras, both modern nation-states have been exercising what van Schendel calls 'the spatial strategy of territoriality', through which 'Borders need to be constantly maintained and socially reproduced through particular practices and discourses that emphasise the "other"' (van Schendel, 2005:46).

In essence, the ongoing Sino-Indian cartographical slicing of the Himalayas is mostly a process of reterritorialising the geographical margins of the traditional Tibetan territory. While the legitimacy of the China side is based on its reclaiming the imperial maps of the Mongol and the Manchu empires, India builds its territorial entitlement mostly upon the British colonial cartography of the Himalayas. The agentive complexity of India has evolved from the soft power of Buddhism to a phase of harnessing strategic power of the Tibet card with the perceived geopolitical value of the Dalai Lama. The overt logic of Chellaney's Tibet card tautologically answers to his own question – 'Why India must help find the next Dalai Lama' (Chellaney, 2015). It is not religion that the Tibet card is concerned with but rather aims to win the disputed Tibetan territories in the borderlands between India and China. This trans-Himalayan secularity of religion is a process of instrumentalising Tibetan Buddhism as a geostrategic asset of the Indian state.

Secularity of Tibetan Buddhism in diaspora

While at JNU, a student gave me a copy of Dagmar Bernstorff's newly published volume, entitled *Tibet: Theocracy to Democracy* (2016). The volume hosts a range of contributions from prominent scholars and public figures for a study of the devolution of the Dalai Lama's political role. Flipping through the pages, I could not find how the word 'theocracy' in the volume is understood in the context of Tibet's political history. The loose use of theocracy appears to be aligned with the popular understanding of *kashag*, the Tibet's traditional governing system. It suggests the attributes of 'premodern', "feudalistic", and 'undemocratic' as the linguistic and cultural roots of theocracy are associated with the political history of Europe and its Judeo-Christian traditions. The subtitle of the volume could be alleged as the editor's culturally reflexive preconception of the undemocratic nature of *kashag* in the last three hundred and sixty-nine years since its inception. The idea of the linear progress of modernity apparently thematises the volume. If I look at the Buddhist nature of *kashag*, its transition to the current election-based, secular polity is not as simple and linear as the popular conception suggests. It is a question of secularism, secularity, and strategic choices in multiple fronts, which present personal, collective, and geopolitical opportunities and challenges. It is thus not as straightforward as the geostrategically oriented Buddhist secularity found in India's Tibet card. It rather possesses a discernible logic for the continuity of the Tibet cause.

Situated in this backdrop I make two inter-related arguments of what Buddhist secularity means among Tibetans in India. One is that the conceptual logic of the Dalai Lama's political devolution, on one hand, aligns with the secularist thesis

concerning the ideal model of secularism, namely the separation of religion and state, and, on the other hand, it demonstrates the power of religion in public sphere in this secular age (Mendieta and VanAntwerpen, 2011:1-14). Second, in practice, the secularist reform initiated by the Dalai Lama is a strategic insurance of the Tibet cause with a long-term, uninterrupted leadership and making all options of the cause open without the constriction of religious interventions regarding the process of selecting and educating the next Dalai Lama; thus, the secularist reform in this regard is another type of agentive complexity that legally rules out the role of the Buddhist leadership in its political sphere but includes it as one of many secular options for future dialogues and negotiations of the Tibetans in diaspora with the Chinese state.

When I was preparing my visit to India, most of my self-assigned readings showed me that the secularist reform of the CTA was showcasing a landmark transformation of *kashag* based on the Dalai Lama's own initiative for democracy among Tibetans outside Tibet, traced back to the 1960s. The media reports and the CTA publications all point to the political retirement of the Dalai Lama as the birth of Tibetan secular governing system in exile. The frequently appeared phrases such as 'the political devolution of the Dalai Lama' and 'relinquishing his political power' indicate a clear ending of his political role; thus the separation of the religious and the political in the new, elected governing body is made possible. In his own public statement in March 11, 2011, the Dalai Lama narrates consistently about his long-awaited wish to democratise the Tibetan governing system (DL, 2011:11-15). It was a project that took over five decades to complete. It is thus expected that the Dalai Lama would eventually sever himself from the political governance of Tibet in exile.

To a large extent, the media and the statements by Tibetan leaders have successfully produced a public perception of the Tibetan secularist transformation as a fine example of secularism in principle, that is, the complete separation of religion and state. It particularly fits two of Jose Casanova's secularisation theses:

- b) Secularization as the *privatization of religion*, often understood both as a general modern historical trend and as a normative condition, indeed as a precondition for modern liberal democratic politics.
- c) Secularization as the *differentiation of the secular spheres* (state, economy, science), usually understood as 'emancipation' from religious institutions and norms (Casanova, 2006:7).

Such perception also coincides with a commonly shared view among scholars that secularism is an inherent part of modern states and, therefore, a marker of modern citizenship, democracy, and progress (Smith, 1963:4-5).

This progressive impression that the public receives is found in the Dalai Lama's landmark statement delivered in March 2011 when he was formally severing himself from the political leadership of the CTA. He succinctly remarked on the obsolescence of *kashag* in the twenty-first century, 'One man rule is both anachronistic and undesirable' (DL, 2011:12). His political successor Losang Sangay followed, 'His Holiness did it in the interests of Tibet and the Tibetan people, because he thought it undemocratic to have one leader with both spiritual and political leadership' (Sangay, 2012:44). The secularist transition of the CTA was thus completed legally and ceremonially. However, it was met with emotionally charged appeals from both Tibetan leaders and common folks. Samdhong Rinpoche was one of them beseeching the Dalai Lama to have a second thought in Buddhist terms. He

stated, ‘Since the institution of the Dalai Lama, as an emanation of Avalokitesvara, and the inhabitants of the Land of Snows, the spiritual domain of Avalokitesvara are intimately connected by a pure karmic bond, the Tibetan people must make all efforts to ensure that this relationship continues to last forever without change’ (Samdhong, 2011:9). In her documentation, Bernstorff records, ‘On 18 March the Assembly passed almost unanimously a three point resolution calling on the Dalai Lama to continue as spiritual and political leader’ (Bernstorff, 2016:17).

To know more of Tibetans’ conception of secularism and secularity, I approached a senior Tibetan monk scholar. To him Buddhism is the civilizational and political foundation of Tibet. It would be unthinkable if Buddhism were missing in the secular politics of Tibetans. He thinks that the Indian model of secularism is more suitable for Tibetans in exile. When I mentioned that Tibetan lexicon has no existing words and phrases for secularism or secular as a Western concept, he responded without hesitation, ‘Tibet had no Buddhism. When we can’t translate a foreign word properly, we can always transliterate it. *Sekula* (ཤུག་ལས་ལྷན་ལས་) sounds crispy and acceptable’! As a monk, he prefers to see the secularisation of Tibetan polity as a process of promoting Buddhist social ethics globally but in a set of non-religious language.

The secularity of Tibetan Buddhism in this sense is a type of Buddhist modernism that is understood among scholars as a co-creation of Asian, American, and European Buddhists as a product of the modern encounters between Asia and the West in the matters of industrialisation, colonialism, modernisation, and globalisation (McMahan, 2008:6-7; Heine and Prebish, 2003:4). In this process, modern Buddhism emerges as a form of social and spiritual engagement in a democratic, scientific, and rational manner. It often relies on global movements of Buddhist teachers, seekers, and financial supports (McMahan, 2008:6; Smyer Yü, 2014:475). The global presence of Tibetan Buddhism is an integral part of this modern Buddhism. The annual travel schedules and numerous publications of the Dalai Lama on secular ethics attest to the fact that the secularity of Tibetan Buddhism is part and parcel of this modern Buddhism.

From the perspective of the secularism studies, the Buddhist modernism embodied in the secularity of Tibetan Buddhism is ‘a greater religious engagement with human relationships and other affairs of “this world”’ (Warner, VanAntwerpen and Calhoun, 2010:14). On one hand, this secular trend is what Casanova calls ‘the privatization of religion’ as it has a strong emphasis on personal spirituality. On the other hand, it contributes to the expansion of social space for a variety of common concerns (ibid. 37). The Dalai Lama’s *Ethics for the New Millennium* (1999) and *Beyond Religion: Ethics for a Whole World* (2011) inherently belong to the global secularity of this modern Buddhism. The dates of the publications and related public talks demonstrate that the Dalai Lama had prepared for the secular, democratic reform of the CTA for many years.

But, the question remains– ‘How could a secularisation based on one man’s decision be regarded as a democratic process’? Everything sounds logical and promising except this transitional point in 2011, which was not election based. If democracy is understood as a modern political practice, the Dalai Lama’s political devolution process was one man’s decision, and therefore, undemocratically accomplished through his charismatic authority. In the Weberian sense, charismatic authority is seen as a type of personality-based, traditional political authority (Weber, 1978:215). The office of the Dalai Lama, in a traditional sense, is commonly perceived as a theocratic polity (Bernstorff, 2016; Sautman, 2006:22; Dawa Norbu,

1979:74; Goldstein, 2007:1; Dreyfus, 2005:2). Its premodern, feudalistic, undemocratic rule is discernibly assumed among scholars as previously mentioned. In the social sphere of the modern West, charismatic figures, regardless of their religious and/or ideological orientations, are often lumped together as exemplifying the public good or social evils they promoted such as in the cases of Hitler, Stalin, Gandhi, Nehru, and Mao (Schweitzer, 1984). In this modern context, as a highly reified concept and a political perception, charismatic authority is kept at bay. The institution of the Dalai Lama is caught in this depreciative understanding of charismatic authority in modern societies. To modernites who understand the practice of democracy as being reliant on the political participation of the wider population of a given nation, there appears to be an absence of democracy in personality-based authority, in this case leading to little social space or intellectual sophistication for understanding the charismatic authority of Tibet's Buddhist governing system. The Dalai Lama's decision to secularise the *Kashag* in 2011 was discernably what I would call 'a perceptual leap' from the modern association of tradition and charismatic authority with feudalism and undemocratic ruling to the birth of a democratic Tibetan polity.

In the social reality of Tibetans in and outside Tibet, the majority of people prefer the integrity of the Office of Dalai Lama as a Buddhist governing system. This collective preference has not changed since the advent of Tibet's modernisation whether in the style of socialist China or in the style of the modern West. According to Samdhong Rinpoche's statement and Bernstorff's documentation aforementioned, the Dalai Lama's decision met almost a unanimous opposition from Tibetans. Their preferred governing body is the Office of Dalai Lama as both the political and spiritual leadership or simply as a Buddhist leadership. It is thus legitimate to ask the question – Why all of sudden Buddhist governing system was made 'anachronistic and undesirable' to Tibetans while Tibetan Buddhism is widely accepted for its socially engaged, environmentally friendly, and politically democratic character around the world?

Based on my reading of the speech scripts of the Dalai Lama, Losang Sangay, and Samdhong Rinpoche, and my conversations with Tibetan students and scholars, and my Indian colleagues, the secularist ending of *kashag* is a post-Dalai Lama project as an insurance that the leadership of Tibet cause would not enter a long, unpredictable interim period between the passing of the current Dalai Lama and the political maturity of his future successor, which could last sixteen to eighteen years as shown in the early lifetime of the current Dalai Lama. The politics of the succession of the Dalai Lama presents gravely predictable scenarios, namely two reincarnations of the Dalai Lama or no reincarnation at all. The political power transfer from the Dalai Lama to Sikyong (the leader of the CTA) is supposed to nullify these uncertainties and undesirable projections of the future; therefore, the continuity of the Tibetan leadership in diaspora will be guaranteed. In principle, Sikyong is de jure the political half of the Dalai Lama or de facto the whole representation of the Office of Dalai Lama if/when the Tibetan negotiations with the Chinese state will be renewed in the near future.

The secularity of Tibetan Buddhism in this case is the strategic engineering of a bet on the fate of Tibetans in diaspora. While it presents democratic opportunities for younger generations in India to participate in the political affairs of the CTA, it invites challenges and predicaments, too, from Tibetans in Tibet and from the Chinese and Indian states as well. In my conversations with my Tibetan students and colleagues in China, the reincarnation of the Dalai Lama is unquestionable. In private

conversations, many of them confess the unthinkability of a Tibet without the continuous reincarnations of the Dalai Lama in the future. Thus it could be said that Dalai Lama is a collective psyche of Tibetans.

In the geopolitical front, the ties of India and China with Tibetans in exile are all centered upon the Dalai Lama. Among the Indian politicians and policy advisors whom I had conversations with, a rising number of them is starting to entertain scenarios to dissolve the CTA on the Indian soil as a teaser for China to give India territorial concessions on the disputed borderlands in the Himalayas. Although the Dalai Lama has cordially expressed his wish many times to visit Beijing or meet with Xi Jinping, his legally sanctioned non-political role makes the Chinese state unwilling to invite him since he is no longer the full, legal representation of the Office of Dalai Lama, which has been the sole ground of Sino-Tibetan dialogues between 1979 and 2010. The secularities of Tibetan Buddhism are caught in the cartographic contentions between India and China as well as in Tibetans' own projection of a post-Dalai Lama Tibet. The geopolitical nature of these secularities is becoming more and more pronounced in the trans-Himalayan politics of Sino-Indian territorial engagements.

Ends of Buddhist secularity in the multisided political frontiers of the Himalayas

Since Hodgson initiated the Himalayan studies in the fields of anthropology and Buddhology in late nineteenth century, the Himalayas has been a multisided political frontier from the colonial era to the post-colonial phase and the current globalisation of the region. The initial British geopolitical vision of Tibet as a buffer zone between India and China no longer exists as the territorial Tibet's relation with China is that of a part to the whole. In India the buffer zone is now re-visioned as a geopolitical card and a set of actual unsettled physical borders with China. The desired tangibility of the solidified borderlines and the intangibility of the leverages and the assets of Tibetan origin are all woven together in India-China relations. During the time when Hodgson was on the Nepal and Darjeeling side of the Himalayas, the boundaries of different ethno-linguistic communities were the high mountains and big rivers, and thus were mostly naturally conceived. It is noteworthy to point out that Hodgson claimed that the linguistic patterns of the ethnic groups were 'all of Tibetan origin' (Arnold, 2014:214). This ethno-linguistic reality has not changed much since then regardless that modern nation states like India and China have been reterritorialising the region since the mid-twentieth century. It is thus inevitable for India to play the Tibet card.

Indian card players like Chellaney make clear the orientation of the Tibet card geared toward resolving India-China border disputes. The consequences of globalisation in the twenty-first century in borderland studies are often emphatically identified as the porosity and fluidity of borders due to the increasing velocity of cross-border movements of people and goods, legal, illegal or illicit. In the same time, globalisation in borderlands around the world also means erecting fences, aligning barbed wires with cartographic lines, and legitimising borderlines of the past empires and dynasties. Van Schendel points out, 'Here fluidity becomes associated with danger' and 'In a globalising, reterritorialising world that abounds with images of transnational flows, borders are far from disappearing; they are a crucial measure of continued state control' (van Schendel, 2005:40).

In the case of India and China, their cartographical object is one and the same, that is, the geographical margins of traditional Tibetan territory in the Himalayas; however, their objectives differ in the manner of how to slice these margins in their respective maximum interests. India thus mostly holds on to the British colonial

cartography of the Himalayas, while China those of the Mongol and the Manchu empires. These geographical margins of Tibet are thus a modern cartographical consumption of India and China.

These political frontiers of India and China in the Himalayas are being extended into the secular sphere of Tibetan Buddhism and vice versa. The intersection of Tibetan Buddhism and the territoriality of the Himalayas is becoming a highpoint of India-China relations. To continue on the earlier discussion on the agentive complexity of secularism and secularisation from Asad's viewpoint, my case study of Tibetan Buddhist secularities in the Himalayas shows two trends of the secular appearance of religion. One is the increasing power of religion in public sphere in the case of the Dalai Lama's sustained effort to promote secular ethics worldwide. Another is the geopolitical instrumentality of Tibetan Buddhism exercised in both Indian and Tibetan contexts. The latter is the focal point of this chapter as an integral part of Asian borderland studies framed in my anthropological approach to Buddhist modernism and secularity. In both trends, I see the state-sanctioned secularism not only as the prototypical model of separating state from religion but also as a generative mechanism of modernity, which produces personal, public, and geopolitical meanings. Religious secularity obviously possesses worldly interests, as Calhoun says, 'They not only pursue goals other than promoting religion, they operate outside the control of specifically religious actors. Much of social life is organised by systems or "steering mechanisms" that are held to operate independently of religious belief, ritual practice, or divine guidance' (Calhoun, 2010:37).

The Dalai Lama's secularist intent discussed above may sound utilitarian and geostrategic; however, when it is contextualised in Tibetan diaspora in India and elsewhere, it is sympathetically understood with Asad's idea of agentive complexity for the sake of the continuity of the diasporic Tibetan communities. Such agentive complexity could also be understood as a synergised complexity from the perspective of diaspora studies. Such synergy comes from the diasporic community's effort to sustain itself in its hostland with the hope for the eventual return to the homeland. It is an outcome from a recognizable reality of diaspora in which 'the identities of specific individuals and groups of people are negotiated within social worlds that span more than one place' (Vertovec, 2001: 573). In this sense, Tibetans in diaspora have successfully built their new establishment in a new place, that is, India. The geostrategic aspect of Tibetan Buddhist secularity demonstrates Tibetans' will for self-preservation. It is because they live in 'in-between spaces' which provide 'the terrain for *elaborating strategies of selfhood* – singular or communal – that initiate new signs of identity, and innovative sites of collaboration, and contestation, in the act of defining the idea of society itself' (Bhabha, 1994:1 emphasis added). To be more precise, the newness that Tibetans experience in India could be understood as their double or multiple consciousness because of their situatedness 'in a lived tension, the experiences of separation and entanglement, of living here and remembering/desiring another place' (Clifford, 1997: 255). The Himalayas have been religious and political frontiers for centuries; however, in the twenty-first century, these frontiers are becoming survival niches of Tibetans on Indian soil, in which Tibetans mostly choose a Buddhist presence with a long-term strategic goal prepared for a post-Dalai Lama future.

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