In a Borrowed Garden:
A Rhizomatic Theory of Transnational Tibetan Art

by

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Middletown, Connecticut April, 2012
In memory of Tamshang Chenmo Penpa Dorje (1930–2011)
May your merit multiply in the hands of your people.
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*May all sentient beings be well and happy.*
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Gouache on cotton, 83.5 x 55.5 cm. Folkens Museum Etnografiska, Stockholm. Reproduced from Rhie and Thurman (1996, no. 82)

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Note: Unless otherwise indicated, all photographs were taken by the author.
DRAMATIS PERSONÆ

NORBULINGKA INSTITUTE, DHARAMSHALA

Tamshang Chenmo Penpa Dorje
Tsetan Norbu
Tsering Palden
Tenzin Dhondhup
Tenzin Phuntsok

The late Master Sculptor
Assistant to the Master Sculptor
Senior sculptor
Junior sculptor
Public Relations Officer (PRO)

SICHUAN GAMA GAZI TIBETAN CRAFTS FACTORY, CHENGDU

Duoqing Zhaxi
He Yaofa
Gongxia Zhenshu

Founder and CEO
Co-founder and General Manager
Manager

OTHERS

Dangzeng

Professional thangka painter, Chengdu
NOTE TO THE READER

With the exception of place-names, personal names, and words that are commonly used in English, all non-English words appear in italics. For the reader’s convenience, I have, to the best of my ability, rendered all Tibetan words phonetically; though words quoted from written sources follow the transliteration systems used by the authors of those texts. All Chinese words are rendered in hanyu pinyin within the body of the text – please refer to the glossary for the corresponding Chinese characters. All translations from Chinese are the author’s. In the few cases of orthographical uncertainty in Chinese and Tibetan, I indicate the fact with the use of a question mark.
Tashi Delek!
Though in a borrowed garden
you grow, grow well my sister.

This Losar
when you attend your Morning Mass,
say an extra prayer
that the next Losar
we can celebrate back in Lhasa.

When you attend your convent classes
learn an extra lesson
that you can teach children back in Tibet.

Last year
on our happy Losar,
I had an IDLI-SAMBAR breakfast
and wrote my BA final exams.
My IDLIS wouldn't stand
on my toothed steely forks,
but I wrote my exams well.

Though in a borrowed garden
you grow, grow well my sister.

Send your roots
through the bricks,
stones, tiles and sand.
Spread your branches wide
and rise
above the hedges high.

Tashi Delek!

Tenzin Tsundue, Losar Greeting

“...unlike trees or their roots, the rhizome connects any point to any other point, and its traits are not necessarily linked to traits of the same nature; it brings into play very different regimes of signs, and even nonsign states. The rhizome is reducible neither to the One nor the multiple...it is composed not of units but of dimensions, or rather directions in motion. It has neither beginning nor end, but always a middle (milieu) from which it grows and which it overspills...

A rhizome has no beginning or end; it is always in the middle, between things, interbeing, intermesso. The tree is filiation, but the rhizome is alliance, uniquely alliance. The tree imposes the verb ‘to be,’ but the fabric of the rhizome is the conjunction, ‘and...and...and...’”

Deleuze and Guattari, A Thousand Plateaus
I first came into contact with the cultural endangerment model of exilic Tibet in November of 2010, when I conducted interviews with sculptors at the Norbulingka Institute, an institution dedicated to the preservation of Tibetan traditional arts and culture in the Tibetan exile capital of Dharamshala, India. The Master Sculptor of the metalcrafts workshop at the Norbulingka, Tamshang Chenmo\(^1\) Penpa Dorje, studied for fourteen years under Chenmos Zambla Dorje, Zola Shilog and Major Wangyal in the distinctive sculptural tradition of his hometown of Tsedong in Tsang province of central Tibet\(^2\). As a child, he would mould little animal figurines out of clay to pass the time as he tended his family’s flocks. Once, he found a hammer embedded in the clay, and saw it as a sign from Heaven that he should become a metal craftsman.

Described by his students as the only fully qualified sculpture master to have escaped into exile from Chinese-occupied Tibet, he is regarded at the Norbulingka as the last living master of the Tibetan sculptural tradition in the entire world. According to them, with the incorporation of the Tibetan territories into the People’s Republic of China (PRC) in the 1950s, all art in Tibet today is degenerate, enlisted in the service of the Communist propagandistic agenda. Under the new Communist regime, they said, Chenmo-la’s teachers and fellows were heavily persecuted as class enemies for their close ties with the feudal order, and many died from torture, malnutrition, or

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\(^1\) The official title for the head of an art workshop in the Tibetan tradition.

\(^2\) Jackson, in his encyclopædic work on pre-1959 Tibetan painting, names “rTse-gdong in eastern gTsang” as one of the districts that became renowned in the nineteenth and twentieth centuries for its artistic accomplishments. (Jackson, *A History of Tibetan Painting*, 354.)
suicide. In this model of cultural endangerment, the exilic sculptors at the Norbulingka Institute are framed as the sole custodians of their imperiled artistic traditions.

However, is it accurate to portray the 5.4 million ethnic Tibetans who still live in Chinese-occupied Tibet as having utterly repudiated their “culture” and “tradition,” post-1959? Have Chinese interventions in geographical Tibet in the twentieth century truly parched the river of Tibetan art and culture, or have they merely altered its ebb and flow? Are Tibetans in China and those in exile forever estranged, twin lakes destined never to meet? In the summer of 2011, to address these questions, I sought out Tibetan artists and Tibetan-owned workshops in Chengdu, the major Chinese city closest to the Tibetan territories – and found many. The main streets of the Tibetan Quarter in Chengdu’s southwestern Wuhou District are lined with showrooms for the Tibetan craft factories usually based in the suburbs, signboards inscribed in both Tibetan and Chinese (fig. 1). With Deng Xiaoping’s Reform and Openness (Ch. gaige kaifang) policies in the late 1970s, the lifting of religious restrictions coincided with the growth of the Tibetan economy, prompting a massive demand for Buddhist images to replace those that were destroyed during the Nationalities Reform (Ch. minzu gaige) and the Cultural Revolution. At the same time, however, Tibetans in Chinese-occupied Tibet experienced profound change – Gongxia Zhenshu, a manager at one of the crafts factories, reminisced about how in the past, Tibetans never put any stock in the accrual of worldly wealth, and any surplus was channeled into gaining
religious merit. These days, he said, “people have changed. They only think of worldly reality, and fail to pay attention to spiritual substance.”

In this thesis, I conduct a comparative study of the parallel development and current articulations of the conservative Tibetan tradition of statuemaking in the Tibetan diaspora, which includes the intra-state diaspora4 of Tibetans who have migrated to other parts of China. Based primarily on ethnographic fieldwork conducted in the Norbulingka Institute in Dharamshala and the Sichuan Gama Gazi Tibetan Crafts Factory in Chengdu, I will examine the production and use of works of Buddhist art – with a particular focus on metal sculpture – embedded in the socio-political networks from which these communities emerge. Ultimately, I position these communities within the new global cultural economy of a post-1959 Tibet, in order to complicate notions of Tibetan “culture” and “tradition” as static, place-bound unities. While there still exist numerous metalcrafts workshops in geographical Tibet itself, the border-crossing experiences of diasporic communities accentuate the concepts of displacement and uprootedness I wish to explore in this study. As will become apparent, however, geographical Tibet – whether in its imagined or “real” aspect – is continuously invoked in the representational claims of the diaspora.

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3 Gongxia Zhenshu (manager, Sichuan Gama Gazi Tibetan Crafts Factory), in a personal interview with the author, 14 July 2011.
4 Khachig Töloyan defines an intra-state diaspora as constituted by “communities ruled by the same imperial states that ruled the portion of the homeland from which they originated, and with which they could maintain relatively easy contact.” (Töloyan, “Textual Nation,” 80.)
Cartographies of Tibet

For the purposes of this study, I designate “geographical Tibet” as the Tibetan-speaking territories which occupy the 1.2 million square kilometers of land between the Himalayas to the south and the Kunlun Ridge to the north and east, divided into the three linguistically distinct regions of Ü-Tsang, Amdo and Kham (fig. 2). The native Tibetan tribes and states occupying these territories were first unified by King Songtsen Gampo (c. 617 – 649) of the Pugyel Dynasty, who instituted Buddhism as the de facto state religion of Tibet. At the time of the Chinese incursions in the 1950s, these were again administered as a single polity under the Dalai Lama’s Gelug monastic order, which established their hegemony in the seventeenth century when the Great Fifth Dalai Lama (1617 – 1682) suppressed rival sects in Amdo and Kham with the assistance of Mongol chief Gushri Khan.⁵ Up till the twentieth century, however, Gelug political dominion over the regions outside its power base of Ü-Tsang remained precarious, especially among the nomadic pastoralists in the peripheries where tribal allegiances often took precedence over mandates from the center.

Under the Chinese administration, the whole of Ü-Tsang and the western half of Kham now constitute the Tibetan Autonomous Region (TAR), with Amdo and the rest of Kham subsumed into the provinces of Qinghai, Gansu, Yunnan and Sichuan (fig. 3). The Chinese annexation of geographic Tibet in the modern era began with a military skirmish in Dengo, Kham at the end of May 1950.⁶ This escalated into a full-scale military invasion by October, where the People’s Liberation Army (PLA)

⁵ Goldstein, The Snow Lion and the Dragon, 9.
⁶ Shakya, The Dragon in the Land of Snows, 38.
captured the major city of Chamdo and proceeded to occupy the whole of Kham and Amdo. While the Chinese were initially able to govern these eastern regions with relative ease, attempts to initiate Socialist reform in the Nationalities Reform of 1955 met with widespread resistance, and eventually roused the populace to the cause of the bloody Kanding Rebellion. Consequently, leading up to the canonical year of rupture, hundreds of refugees from Kham and Amdo were continuously flooding into Lhasa. All this came to a head on March 17, 1959. Thousands of ordinary Tibetans had been amassing in front of the Norbulingka palace for three days, inflamed by rumors of a Chinese plot to abduct the Dalai Lama. Deaf to calls to stand down from both Tibetan and Chinese authorities, the crowd loudly denounced the Communists, stoned known collaborators, and barred the palace gates to guard His Holiness from the PLA. At four o’clock in the afternoon, the PLA responded. Two Chinese mortar shells landed outside near the Norbulingka palace, two of many that would be fired in Lhasa over the next three days. Dressed in layman’s clothes, the Dalai Lama escaped that night on horseback with his family and the members of his government. On March 30, after thirteen days through snowfall and high mountain passes, the first group of Tibetan exiles crossed the Khenzimana Pass into India.

Through to the early 1960s, tens of thousands of Tibetans followed their leader into exile, making the treacherous journey across the Himalayas into India, Nepal and Bhutan. In the initial months, Tibetan exiles in India were put to work in

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7 Ibid., 136–144.
8 The Norbulingka Palace, which translates literally to “Jewel Park,” is the Dalai Lama’s Summer Palace in Lhasa. To avoid confusion, the “Norbulingka palace” will denote the summer palace in Lhasa while the cultural institute in Dharamshala will be referred to as the “Norbulingka Institute,” “Norbulingka” or “Institute.”
9 Shakya, The Dragon in the Land of Snows, 186–211; Avedon, In Exile from the Land of Snows, 50–61.
road gangs in the north until more permanent agricultural settlements were founded in the southern state of Karnataka. In April 1960, the Dalai Lama moved the seat of his government-in-exile to McLeod Ganj, a British hill-town in the northern state of Himachal Pradesh that had been abandoned with the departure of the Raj. With the rise to international prominence of the Dalai Lama in the 1980s, hordes of tourists and spiritual seekers were drawn into his orbit. This spurred the revitalization of the economy in the area, spreading down the mountain into the entire Dharamshala area.

Today, the Tibetan exile community resides in and around an area which will forthwith be referred to collectively as Dharamshala – inclusive of McLeod Ganj and the surrounding villages of Bhagsu Nag and Naddi, the offices of Tibetan government-in-exile in Gangchen Kyishong, the mostly Indian town of Lower Dharamshala, and the Norbulingka Institute in the Kangra Valley (fig. 4).

Significantly, institutions like the Norbulingka, which is consciously named after the Dalai Lama’s summer palace in Lhasa, were built as manifestations of the exilic desire for the homeland, maintaining a microcosm of Tibet in India. The big monasteries in southern India – Sera, Ganden and Drepung – all have their analogues in Tibet, as does the main temple in Dharamshala, the Thekchen Choeling.

Meanwhile, the Cultural Revolution of 1966 to 1976 wrought as much devastation in Tibet as it did in any other province of China. Targeted at eradicating the last remnants of Tibet’s feudal traditions, Mao’s Red Guards strove to suppress all religious and cultural markers of a separate Tibetan identity. Shakya describes how:

In every village, the people were mobilised to destroy religious and cultural artefacts. Families were forced to throw out all religious objects from their homes...Tibet’s greatest monuments – the three
monasteries of Sera, Drepung and Ganden, which formed the repository of Tibetan learning – were not spared. Centuries-old religious objects were smashed and all copper, bronze, silver and gold items were carefully labelled, removed and transported to China.¹⁰

That said, this is not intended to posit a dichotomy where the Tibetans were passive victims of Han Chinese iconoclasm – the local Red Guard movement in Tibet comprised zealots of both Tibetan and Han ancestry.¹¹ Also, many Tibetans since the 1950s, genuinely enamored with the Socialist vision of an egalitarian society, had become card-carrying members of the Party. In any case, with the death of Mao Zedong and the fall of the Gang of Four in 1976, the Cultural Revolution gave way to a period of rapid economic development with Deng’s Reform and Openness policies moving China toward a market economy. Furthermore, at the Second Tibet Work Forum of 1984, Party General Secretary Hu Yaobang announced the “opening of Tibet,” where access restrictions for both Chinese enterprises and individuals wanting to set up businesses in Tibet, as well as for domestic and foreign tourists, were lifted.¹² While the resultant influx of Chinese migrants caused resentment among the Tibetan populace, these policies succeeded in bringing substantial improvements to the quality of life of many Tibetans. Newly empowered by economic wealth, Tibetans themselves began to leave their home villages for Chinese cities like Beijing, Shanghai and Chengdu in search of business opportunities, education, and leisure. According to a recent study by the Institute of Contemporary Tibetan Studies in

¹¹ Ibid., 316; Dowdey, Meador, and Padma’tscho, Pearl of the Snowlands, 18–21.
Beijing, the number of ethnic Tibetans in Chengdu is estimated at more than 30,000 permanent residents, with a floating population of 150,000 to 200,000.\footnote{Zhou, Yan, and Yang Sun. “Xinhua Insight: Tibetans Leave Home to Seek New Opportunities.”\textit{Xinhua News Agency}, March 14, 2012. http://news.xinhuanet.com/english/indepth/2012-03/14/c_131467409.htm.}

“Tibetan-ness”

This brief historical outline contextualizes our understanding of how the displacement of Tibetans from Tibetan areas into exile and their reconstitution as a nation with a government in India, interface with the reconfiguration of political power within Tibetan areas from Buddhist monastic feudalism into Chinese Communism, to produce a fertile plane for reinterpretations of Tibetan culture, identity, and tradition.

Historians of Tibet\footnote{See Samuel, \textit{Civilized Shamans}; Shakya, \textit{The Dragon in the Land of Snows}; Goldstein, \textit{The Snow Lion and the Dragon}; Anand, “A Contemporary Story of ‘Diaspora’.”} have argued that the conception of a unified pan-Tibetan identity itself is a recent one. Before the rupture of 1959, Tibetans were bound more by local or regional allegiances than by anything resembling a modern nation. However, it benefits both the Dalai Lama’s government-in-exile in India and the PRC government to essentialize “Tibetan-ness” into easily definable qualities. In geographical Tibet today, where “Tibetan-ness” used to be an unqualified circumstance determined by geography, language and religion, it is now an ethnic classification. A 1991 White Paper on Human Rights published by the Chinese government states that “after scientific differentiation, 55 minority nationalities (Ch. \textit{xiaoshu minzu}) were acknowledged and...became equal members of the great family of Chinese nationalities.”\footnote{Information Office of the State Council of the People’s Republic of China, “Article VII.”} The Tibetans in exile – and many of those remaining under
occupation – further redefine this ethnic classification in nationalistic terms, arguing that ethnic distinctions between them and the Han Chinese prove their right to independence. Furthermore, Tibetan exiles have displaced “Tibet” from its geographical location onto the person of His Holiness the Fourteenth Dalai Lama. Many refugees from Tibet even today cite an audience with the Dalai Lama as their primary reason for going into exile,\(^\text{16}\) and he has become a rallying point for the idea of an idyllic pre-1959 Tibet. The PRC government, recognizing the power of this collective resignification, repeatedly demonizes the Dalai Lama as a secessionist, forbidding the display of his image. Interestingly, Harris argues that the common practice of displaying the photographic image of the Dalai Lama in temple shrines and monasteries among Tibetans stems from forcible insertion of images of Chairman Mao in Tibetan homes during the Cultural Revolution (fig. 5). It is evident that Tibetans have reappropriated this resented Communist practice for the purposes of reaffirming an alternative cultural and national identity.\(^\text{17}\)

This thesis functions on the basic assumption that the portrait of the Dalai Lama, like any other image or work of art, is a social agent, in that it “is seen as the outcome, and/or the instrument of, social agency,”\(^\text{18}\) and can thus be positioned within networks of social relations that map its production and use. As Alfred Gell puts it, artworks:

\(^{16}\) According to a psychological study conducted by Sachs et al. in 2008, 90.7% of 855 recent Tibetan exiles living in Dharamshala cite meeting the Dalai Lama as one of their reasons for leaving Tibet, as opposed to a mere 12.1% in order to escape persecution. “Participant statements (‘Tibet without [the Dalai Lama] is nothing. We always long for His Holiness in Tibet’; ‘The Dalai Lama is everything to all Tibetans’) illustrate fervent feelings of faith and devotion surviving even among Tibetans who were born decades after the Dalai Lama’s departure from Tibet” (Sachs et al., “Entering Exile,” 206.)

\(^{17}\) Not to mention the visible intrusion of twentieth century photographic technologies into the traditional Tibetan Buddhist practice of displaying religious icons in temples and shrines.

\(^{18}\) Gell, Art and Agency, 15.
have relations with one another as well as with the people who create and circulate them as individual objects. They marry, so to speak, and beget offspring which bear the stamp of their antecedents. Artworks are manifestations of “culture” as a collective phenomenon, they are, like people, enculturated beings.\(^{19}\)

In the age of globalization, these social networks have expanded beyond regional or national boundaries. Anthropologist Arjun Appadurai defines five categories of mutable landscape which constitute these global networks – ethnoscapes, mediascapes, technoscapes, financescapes and ideoscapes, which are multiplicities of agent-perspectives that continuously interpenetrate one other.\(^{20}\) Of particular relevance to the Tibetan diaspora are the ethnoscapes and the ideoscapes, with the former encompassing communities of displaced peoples, and the latter “concatenations of images...[which] frequently have to do with the ideologies of states and the counterideologies of movements explicitly oriented to capturing state power.”\(^{21}\) Chapter 1 elucidates the theoretical paucity of existing interpretations of Tibetan art and culture in light of recent anthropological work on globalization and diaspora. To begin to rectify this situation, I propose an alternative theoretical framework based on Deleuze and Guattari’s model of the rhizome, which takes into account the global cultural economy of the twentieth century, where the various communities in geographical Tibet and the Tibetan diaspora involved in the construction of Tibetan culture are in fact interconnected nodes within a transnational network of Tibet.

\(^{19}\) Ibid., 153.
\(^{21}\) Ibid., 36.
A key analytical concept introduced by Deleuze and Guattari is that of “territorialization,” a term they use to refer to the points of connection and lines of exchange between these rhizomatic nodes. The remaining chapters illuminate the lines of territorialization in the Tibetan case through several analytic lenses. Chapter 2 demonstrates how the sources of what has come to constitute the Tibetan artistic “tradition” are themselves subject to selective reinterpretations. I describe in detail the application of metalworking techniques of repoussé and casting, which are believed to have been transmitted into Tibet by the Newari craftsmen of the Kathmandu Valley, in both my fieldsites. Through this examination, I also historicize the Newari connection to traditional Tibetan art in trying to account for the differences between the preferences of each workshop in the use of these practices. This will enable a discussion of the ways in which these techniques are enculturated in the socio-political environments of their respective communities. I then address the metaphysics and practice of scriptural iconometry – that is, the prescriptive canons of measurements and proportions to be followed in fashioning religious images – investigating how effective it is at aligning the artistic lineages of each workshop with an earlier Buddhist genealogy.

Chapter 3 further tests the limits of tradition by focusing on how agents make references to the Tibetan “homeland” in legitimizing acts of innovation and experimentation in their art. I turn my attention to works of art as the vessels through which the techniques and texts which embody tradition in workshops of Tibetan art are expressed. The chapter is organized into two case studies, each loosely centered in one of my two fieldsites. The first discusses the replicas made at the Norbulingka
Institute of the Bodhgaya Buddha, the central image in the international pilgrimage site of the Mahabodhi Temple in India, tracing the lines of territorialization linking Tibetan art with older Indian imagemaking traditions. The second case study examines the philosophy of innovation of the Sichuan Gama Gazi Tibetan Crafts Factory in Chengdu, placing it in the context of broader attempts in the post-1959 era to harmonize Socialist Realism with traditional Tibetan thangka painting styles.

Methodology

This thesis is based on three months of ethnographic field research conducted in the summer of 2011, which was divided between two main field sites. I spent a month at the metalcrafts workshop in the Norbulingka Institute in Dharamshala, India, building on the three weeks of research I did there in the fall of 2010. Inaugurated in 1994, the Norbulingka accommodates the metalcrafts, thangka painting, appliqué, woodcarving and tailoring workshops in its Center for Arts. The metalcrafts workshop is staffed entirely with ethnic Tibetan sculptors – comprising three instructors, five senior sculptors, and five junior sculptors – under the leadership of Tsetan Norbu. Tsetan took over recently from his teacher, the late Tamshang Chenmo Penpa Dorje, who also served as the sculpture master of the Center for Tibetan Arts and Crafts, the predecessor to the Norbulingka, from 1976 to 1992.

The next part of my research was based in Chengdu, the capital city of Sichuan province in China, home to the Southwest University of Nationalities and a significant center for Tibetan art distribution, where I spent two months. Through Professor Patrick Dowdey of Wesleyan’s Mansfield Freeman East Asian Studies
Center, I met a number of prominent figures in the Tibetan art world of Chengdu, and eventually gained access to two Tibetan-owned art factories in the city. One of the two, described to me as the biggest Tibetan-owned factory of traditional Tibetan crafts in the whole of China, which opened in 2002, employed more than 170 painters and sculptors, mostly of Tibetan ethnicity. I also interviewed civil servants at the provincial Department of Religions, owners of stores selling religious images and paraphernalia, and other members of the Chengdu Tibetan art world, with regard to the religious, political and commercial status of traditional Tibetan Buddhist statuemaking in contemporary China.

In this thesis, I amalgamate the two art factories in Chengdu as the “Sichuan Gama Gazi Tibetan Crafts Factory” – while the Norbulingka Institute, as a non-profit organization, has enough of an international presence to be named outright, the Chengdu factories are private businesses which may not appreciate the academic publicity. Also, in order to protect the identities of my interlocutors in both sites, I assign them pseudonyms, with the exception of the late Penpa Dorje. In many cases, I also create composite characters.

In the course of my fieldwork, I engaged in participant observation of the daily practices of each workshop, recording the various stages of the metalworking process. I recorded my observations through note-taking, tape recording of semi-structured interviews and informal conversations, and taking photographs or videos of the metalworking process, with the permission of my interlocutors. The methods of transmission of skills from teacher to student, and the interactions between sculptors of differing ranks, proficiencies, and ethnicities revealed the relationship between
artists, as well as that between artist and prototype – with the latter encompassing oral instruction, prescriptive manuals of art, and the artist’s own visual experience. Sitting with the sculptors as they worked and asking them questions about the decisions they make, provided insight into the way the individual interacts with all these external factors in everyday actions. In Dharamshala, I presented myself as a student eager to learn hands-on workshop techniques, and thereby secured a formal short-term apprenticeship, assuming the role of a (budding) artist in this network of relationships.

Finally, as Rushdie acknowledges about his imaginative recreation of the Bombay of his childhood in *Midnight’s Children*, “my India was just that: “my” India, a version and no more than one version of all the hundreds of millions of possible versions. I tried to make it as imaginatively true as I could, but imaginative truth is simultaneously honorable and suspect.” In the same way, I must recognize that my own biases as an ethnographer make my analysis of displaced Tibetan artists as much a representational claim as those of the agents involved. In my fieldwork, I was limited by my rudimentary grasp of the Tibetan languages. This was mitigated to some extent in Dharamshala, as most of the sculptors were quite fluent in English. In Chengdu, however, my fluency in Mandarin Chinese only allowed me to converse with Tibetans who occupied the higher levels of management in factories and shops. Regular sculptors tended to have come very recently from their home villages in Tibetan areas, where Chinese language education is severely lacking. Additionally, due to the diverging characters of my fieldsites – with the Norbulingka an institute for cultural preservation and the Gama Gazi a business – the degree of access which I

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was granted to each differed greatly, which is inevitably reflected in my writing. The Norbulingka, accustomed to and perhaps a little weary of inquisitive foreigners, allowed me full access to the metalcrafts workshop and the sculptors themselves, while members of the administration and the Board of Directors proved elusive. At the Gama Gazi, however, though I was able to interview a number of top-ranking executives through a connection with a Tibetan painting instructor at Sichuan University, it was not possible to spend extended periods of time in the factories themselves conversing with craftsmen. In acknowledging these ethnographic limitations, however, I wish to emphasize the validity of the rhizomatic system of multiplicity – where every perspective, no matter how limited, reflects upon and contributes to the whole.
1.

2011: A NOMADOLOGY OF TIBET

The “peaceful liberation” of Tibet by the Chinese communists, and the subsequent
creation of a Tibetan diaspora with the self-exile of the Dalai Lama in 1959, thrust the
Tibet Question onto the global stage. In the twenty-first century, “Tibet” remains a
global site of competing discourses and representational claims. The prominence of
the Fourteenth Dalai Lama in international conversations about culture, religion and
national sovereignty, and the relative inaccessibility of Chinese-occupied Tibet to
foreigners, means that the community of Tibetan exiles dominates the global
imagination of Tibet. Donald Lopez has written extensively on the Western
fascination with Tibetan Buddhism, which tends to see the Chinese invasion as
exposing “Tibet’s timeless culture to time, time that would cause the contents of the
culture to wither and turn to dust like bodies of those who dare leave Shangri-La.”
In this vein, well-known Tibetologist Robert Thurman labels the actions of the PRC
government in Tibetan areas as “cultural genocide,” writing that “the once broad river
of living culture, the ongoing performance of ancient Tibetan artistic traditions, can
now only be found in tiny trickles in the exile communities and in private museum
collections around the world.” This representation based on Tibetan cultural
endangerment is not limited to that early breed of Western Tibetologist – who did

23 Lopez, Prisoners of Shangri-La, 7–8.
24 Rhie and Thurman, Wisdom and Compassion, 7.
most of their work in exilic South Asia rather than in Chinese-occupied Tibet itself—
but indeed is also espoused by the Tibetan exile community. The Library of Tibetan
Works and Archives in Dharamshala, for instance, describes the motivation behind its
establishment as “the devastation wrought by the...Chinese takeover of Tibet in 1959
[which] has rendered the existence of Tibetan culture in peril.”

Of course, the PRC government, for its part, has done its fair share of
misrepresentation in justifying its invasion of geographic Tibet in the 1950s. The
authors of 100 Questions about Tibet, a 1989 pamphlet published by the PRC
government, claim in response to exilic calls for Tibetan independence that “the
assertion that ‘historically Tibet has been an independent country’ is one that has
been fabricated by a handful of people with ulterior motives, and it does not conform
to historical facts.” The official in charge of Tibetan Buddhism at the provincial
Department of Religions in Chengdu tried to convince me that Tibetans – along with
the other fifty-four ethnic minorities recognized by the government – evolved in
ancient times from an essentially Han Chinese source, citing similarities in the
pronunciation of modern spoken Tibetan with that of classical Chinese. Tibetan
culture, he said, is therefore only a natural outgrowth of the majority Han culture, and
should be regarded as part of the same tree. “All fifty-six ethnic groups in China live
together like brothers!” he said – which surprised me, as I thought that the recent

26 China Tibet Information Center, “100 Questions and Answers About Tibet,” 2. The “historical facts”
China enlists for their purposes are based in the incorporation of Tibetan areas as an “administrative
region” under the Mongol regime of Tibet and China in 1247, which was then transferred to China’s
Yuan Dynasty (1271-1368). The Tibetan government-in-exile argues that “[Tibet’s] relationship with
Mongol, Chinese and Manchu rulers, to the extent that they exercised any political significance, was
personal in nature and did not at any time imply a union or integration of the Tibetan state with – or
into – a Chinese state” (DIIR Publications, Tibet Under Communist China, 111.)
spate of self-immolating monks in Tibetan areas\textsuperscript{27} would have put a damper on his fraternal notions. To me, the portraits of the Dalai Lama I saw surreptitiously placed in shrines in Tibetan villages far from Chengdu revealed the desperation of ordinary Tibetans in expressing their dissent against this dominant Chinese narrative.\textsuperscript{28}

The common factor in these standard interpretations of “Tibet” is their conception of Tibetan culture and tradition as stable entities which can be caught, pinned to a board and labeled. Anthropologists have long recognized that “‘cultures’ must be seen as less unitary and more fragmented, their boundedness more of a literary fiction...than as some sort of natural fact.”\textsuperscript{29} In recent literature on refugee and diasporic communities, there has been an effort to question the rootedness of culture in place.\textsuperscript{30} Liisa Malkki, in particular, follows Appadurai (1988) in arguing for the necessity of analytic tools which resist a “metaphysics of sedentarism” – the imprisonment of cultures within localized spatial coordinates – and subsequent “pathologization of uprootedness.”\textsuperscript{31} Even before 1959, national and geographical boundaries were traversed routinely in the development of what is today considered under the general purview of “Tibetan culture” – art historians like Amy Heller (1999) have discussed the productive artistic exchanges that took place between Tibet, India, Nepal and China, especially during the Tibetan occupation of the Silk Road between 787 and 842, the Mongol patronage of Tibet in the thirteenth and

\textsuperscript{28} “Since 1994, displaying images of the Dalai Lama has been prohibited (potentially punishable with imprisonment). In some cases it seems that even owning a photograph has come to be considered illegal.” (Holmes, No Faith in the State, 28.)
\textsuperscript{29} Gupta and Ferguson, “Beyond ‘Culture’,“ 3.
\textsuperscript{31} Malkki, “National Geographic,” 59–62.
fourteenth centuries, and the reign of the Qianlong Emperor in China (1735-1796). In the “experientially shrinking” world of the twenty-first century, where the Silk Road has been supplanted by cross-continental airline routes and the Internet, these lines of exchange are even more apparent. More recent work on Tibetan transnational cultures has recognized that the uprootedness of the Tibetan people from the spatial and temporal locale of pre-1959 Tibet has resulted in competing representations surfacing in scattered communities in the diaspora which all lay claim to the “homeland” as the wellspring of their own Tibetan “culture.” Monolithic “Tibetan culture” is therefore more accurately reinterpreted as a multiplicity of cultures, produced by and producing a varied assemblage of representational claims made by communities in both geographical Tibet and the Tibetan diaspora.

In this chapter, I will outline the theoretical framework that will be used throughout this thesis to examine the ways in which Tibetan cultures have been deterritorialized from their original contexts in pre-1959 Tibet and simultaneously reterritorialized into new environments in diaspora. In my exploration of the multiplicities of sources and current manifestations of traditional Tibetan art in both my fieldsites, I seek to formulate a “Nomadology” of Tibet based on Deleuze and Guattari’s rhizomatic model, where the roots of tradition in the narrative of Tibetan art are themselves in continuous motion. As I will argue, Tibetan communities both in and out of exile are all rhizomatic nodes of the same system – in constant flux, occupying multiple places in space and time; creating and recreating, placing and displacing “ancient Tibet” as a site of authentic culture.

33 See Diehl, Echoes from Dharamshala; Harris, In the Image of Tibet; Korom, Constructing Tibetan Culture; Dodin and Räther, Imagining Tibet; Klieger, Tibet, Self, and the Tibetan Diaspora.
A Rhizomatic Model of Transnational Art

Clare Harris observes that art-historical publications of Tibetan art usually feature works that were created before 1959, and that “even those studies which include research carried out in the Himalayas and on the Tibetan plateau rarely mention any evidence of cultural activity in the twentieth century...[and] this denial of ‘modernity’ in Tibet threatens to fix it in a past state for perpetuity.”\(^{34}\) Recent academic forays into the art of globalization, as integral to the production of cultural identity in diasporic communities, are limited to a focus on contemporary avant-garde artists who consciously “exercise their right to diaspora, their freedom to wander across the boundaries of various cultures, nations and media forms.”\(^{35}\) Art historians are grappling with how the condition of postmodernity, where diasporic artists and their art have been dislocated from place-bound cultures or styles, manifests in contemporary art which engages directly with questions of belonging and identity. I would assert, however, that these theoretical questions are equally pertinent to the study of the “traditional” art of these diasporic communities. In the case of the Tibetan diaspora, while an unbroken lineage of master artists traceable to ancient Tibet is strongly emphasized, their post-1959 condition of dissipation has nonetheless necessitated a degree of innovation and experimentation. As Nicholas Mirzoeff puts it, diaspora engenders “multiple viewpoints” in art, such that it “moves beyond the one-point perspective of Cartesian rationalism in the search for a forward-looking, transcultural and transitive place from which to look and be seen.”\(^{36}\) Given the need to harmonize multiple perspectives in the art of the Tibetan diaspora – the compulsive

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\(^{34}\) Harris, *In the Image of Tibet*, 12.
\(^{35}\) Oliva, “The Globalization of Art,” 44.
dreams of an “imagined homeland” with the changed circumstances of occupation or exile, for instance – an analytical model of artistic tradition and culture as spatially and temporally localized is inadequate for a sensitive treatment of the transnational contemporary practice of traditional Tibetan art.

In *A Thousand Plateaus*, Gilles Deleuze and Felix Guattari propose an alternative to the arborescent model that characterizes the representations of monolithic “Tibetan culture” I have described thus far, where reality is organized as an assemblage of lineage systems which branch out from irreducible roots – “tradition,” “ancient Tibet,” or “homeland,” for example. Instead, they ask us to consider a rhizomatic system, where “the principal root has aborted, or its tip has been destroyed; an immediate, indefinite multiplicity of secondary roots grafts onto it and undergoes a flourishing development.”\(^{37}\) In a rhizomatic model of Tibetan culture, there is no objective unity in a particular place or time against which contemporary manifestations can be judged as to how “authentic” or “Tibetan” they are. Rather, “Tibet” and “Tibetan-ness” are substantive multiplicities, derived as much from geographical spaces or historical points of rupture (like 1959) as they are from the representations or imaginings of those “reals.”

While Deleuze and Guattari stress the irreducibility of the multiplicity of the rhizome into units,\(^{38}\) in a real-world application of their model to “Tibetan culture” one must distinguish between two interrelated layers of heterogeneity. On a macro-level, all representational claims about Tibet can be seen as organized into nodes, loosely defined by approximate boundaries of space and time – the Tibetan


\(^{38}\) Ibid., 21.
community in exile in India and other parts of the world, the Tibetans in geographical Tibet and in the intra-state diaspora of China, Western academics and Tibetan Buddhists not of Tibetan ancestry, to designate a few. Due to the hierarchy of representations within each node, certain perspectives made by elites are usually determined to be more “authentic” or “traditional” than others by members of the community, and are then presented through public channels as representative of the viewpoint of the entire community. This accounts for the relative stability of arborescent models of reality, which undoubtedly serve a purpose for the various agents who champion them with words, mortar, and the free market. At the micro-level, however, each node is still constituted by multiplicities of voices. Individual views may be expressed in one node which have less in common with the collective representation presented by that node, than with the views of members from another. Through the social practice of collective imagination, which has become “a staging ground for action, and not only for escape”\textsuperscript{39} with the empowerment of non-elites through increased mobility and the mass media, “authentic Tibetan-ness” both in individual nodes as well as in the entire rhizomatic network is in fact expressed by a cacophony of rival voices, with each perspective contributing to the whole.

I must emphasize that these two layers are prolifically interconnected. Deleuze and Guattari’s first and second principles of “connection and heterogeneity” in the rhizome state that “any point of a rhizome can be connected to anything other, and must be.”\textsuperscript{40} For one thing, the boundaries between the nodes are more permeable than is usually assumed. The Norbulingka metalcrafts workshop receives

\textsuperscript{39} Appadurai, *Modernity at Large*, 7.
\textsuperscript{40} Deleuze and Guattari, *A Thousand Plateaus*, 7.
commissions from Tibetan monasteries in China and Western non-profit organizations like Tibet House in New York City (fig. 6), while Tibetans from Chinese-occupied Tibet visit Dharamshala temporarily, with or without Chinese permits, for an audience with the Dalai Lama or to visit family and friends in exile. Since at least 1995, the Central Tibetan Administration (CTA), the official designation for the Tibetan government-in-exile, has encouraged refugees to return to Chinese-occupied Tibet in order to “maintain the Tibetan population in Tibet in the face of increasing Chinese migration and to ease the pressure on Tibetan settlements in India.”

I myself met a number of Tibetans at the workshops in Chengdu who had received their education in exilic India, and as a result, were more fluent in Hindi and English than they were in Mandarin.

Finally, while one might intuitively view the Tibetan community residing in the geographical area of Tibet as the center, with the intra-state and inter-state diasporic communities as its periphery, in Deleuze and Guattari’s rhizomatic model, “the central ring does not exist independently of a periphery that forms a new center [and] reacts back upon the first center.” It is more accurate to conceive of each of these nodes as simultaneously center and periphery, such that Tibetan communities both in and out of exile are equally involved in the construction of a transnational diasporic “Tibet.” Indeed, representational claims from each node are informed by

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41 Immigration and Refugee Board of Canada, “India.”: “In January 1995, the Central Tibetan Administration established new regulations concerning the length of time recent arrivals in India could remain in the country. According to The Tibet Journal, monks between the ages of 16 and 25 can stay in India for six months before having to write and pass their college exams. Those who fail the exams are obliged, by the CTA, to return to Tibet. Tibetans between the ages of 6 and 13 can stay and study in schools, 14 to 17 years-olds can study in the Tibetan Children's Villages, and those between the ages of 18 and 30 can study for one year, after which they are obliged to return to Tibet. Tibetans who can prove that they were subject to harassment in Tibet are exempted from the above rules.”

42 Deleuze and Guattari, A Thousand Plateaus, 50–51.
and defined against those of all the others. As Deleuze and Guattari describe in their third principle of “multiplicity,” the rhizome “has neither subject nor object, only determinations, magnitudes and dimensions that cannot increase in number without the multiplicity changing in nature.” While there are undoubtedly shifting hierarchies between nodes which determine their relative share in formulating “Tibetan culture” in various arenas, no one node holds a monopoly on representing the whole. Rather, changes in a node reverberate throughout the entire network, and the resultant modifications in the other nodes revert onto the original sender in a kind of feedback loop, which again relays signals outwards. “Tibetan culture” is thus a continuously emergent multiplicity, remade anew with the slightest fluctuation in the representational imaginations of its constituent agent-perspectives.

*Territorialization*

That said, I would like to temper the radical heterogeneity of the rhizomatic model I have outlined above with Diehl’s concern that “global flow” perspectives may ignore the fact that “many of the cultural constraints and opportunities operating in a community are still generated from within the community itself and cannot be simply explained as the indiscriminate results of sweeping international forces.” As will be elaborated upon in chapter 3, representational claims made by the Tibetan diasporic community are largely founded on allusions to the ancient Tibetan “homeland,” conceived in arborescent terms as the ultimate source of authenticity, which imposes internal limits on permissible forms of experimentation. This accounts for the fact

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43 Ibid., 8.
that members of the Tibetan diasporic community often appeal to arborescent models in interpreting their unmistakably rhizomatic state of existence. Indeed, Deleuze and Guattari emphasize that the arborescent and the rhizomatic models are not opposing systems, such that there are “knots of arborescence in rhizomes, and rhizomatic offshoots in roots.” This is further illustrated by Gupta and Ferguson’s observation that “the irony of these times is that as actual places and localities become ever more blurred and indeterminate, ideas of culturally and ethnically distinct places become perhaps even more salient.” Therefore, in a very real sense, “ancient Tibet,” or the “homeland,” constitutes one of the nodes in the rhizomatic network of Tibet which defines and is defined by all the others. Finally, to unearth the local in the global, Appadurai characterizes locality as “a phenomenological property of social life, a structure of feeling that is produced by particular forms of intentional activity and that yields particular sorts of material effects.” In the twenty-first century of hypernomadism and displacement, the locality of the “homeland” is no longer rooted in place, but is rather a travelling concept that is constantly resown in multiple locations by diverse agents. In this section, I will define “territorialization” as the mechanism by which the locality of “ancient Tibet” or the idealized “homeland” is invoked and then recast in the new contexts of the Tibetan diaspora.

More than any of the other nodes, the “homeland” exerts an overwhelming compulsion on the entire rhizome, and yet is itself particularly amorphous, susceptible to the slightest calibrations in every agent-perspective. In the Tibetan

diaspora, this can be attributed to the catalytic signification of rupture. In line with a Jewish-centered model of Diaspora, the Tibetan diaspora can be defined by:

cocher as a causative factor of out-migration of people with a well-defined identity from their homeland; conscious cultivation of collective memory of the homeland, with a strong emphasis on ultimate return...; preservation of culture through a patrolling of communal boundaries as the defining feature of the dispersal...47

Among the displaced communities of Tibetans, therefore, there is a deep perception of the spatial and temporal rupture caused by the Chinese invasion of Lhasa in 1959, as having banished them from their ancestral homeland. This sense of loss compels the nodes of the Tibetan diaspora to recreate the “homeland” in their new geographical localities. As Deleuze and Guattari’s fourth principle of “asignifying rupture” in a rhizomatic system de-emphasizes the significance of the fracture point itself. It draws attention instead to the ways in which fissures in a rhizome are continuously renewed, the edges restitched onto others or even back together again. This process of re-unification occurs in the rhizome through “lines of segmentarity according to which it is...territorialized...as well as lines of deterritorialization down which it constantly flees.”48 It is evident that, as Inda and Rosaldo emphasize, “there is no dislodging of everyday meanings from...particular localities without their simultaneous reinsertion in fresh environments.”49 In this thesis, for the sake of simplicity, I will use the term “territorialization” to designate the double movement of deterritorialization from an original context and reterritorialization into a new one.

48 Deleuze and Guattari, A Thousand Plateaus, 9.
49 Inda and Rosaldo, “A World in Motion,” 12.
These lines of territorialization, embodying processes rather than fixed structures, will function as the variables of analysis in this study.

Territorialization, as defined by Deleuze and Guattari, has an expansive metaphorical application, such that “anything can serve as a reterritorialization, in other words, ‘stand for’ the lost territory;...a being, an object, a book, an apparatus or system.”\(^5^0\) In this thesis, I narrow down the use of the term to focus on the deterritorialization of a Tibetan “homeland,” in the form of “culture” or “tradition,” and reterritorialized into new physical localities – a work of art or a geographic location in diaspora. On a practical level, with the signifiers of “culture” being the knowledge or skills possessed by its carriers, who are individual Tibetan refugees or migrants, my use of territorialization will pertain more directly to the application and rhetoric surrounding specific artistic practices or cultural forms. As Gupta and Ferguson suggest in denaturalizing the fixity of culture in place, “dominant cultural forms may be picked up and used – and significantly transformed – in the midst of the field of power relations that links localities to a wider world.”\(^5^1\) To give an example of territorialization in the Tibetan diaspora, the religious art of statuemaking, as practiced in imperial workshops in Tibetan areas, was brought into exile in India in the form of artists’ manuals and scriptural texts by refugee artists,\(^5^2\) and reinstated in workshops like those in the Norbulingka, emulating pre-1959 models while altered by the constraints of the modern economy. In this way, the cultural form of artmaking

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\(^5^0\) Deleuze and Guattari, *A Thousand Plateaus*, 503.

\(^5^1\) Gupta and Ferguson, “Beyond ‘Culture’,” 5.

\(^5^2\) “In a cameo of the exile narrative, a young refugee and would-be painter, Tsering Dhundup, told me how...in 1961 his father (Jampa) and a number of others managed to escape from Tibet via Nepal and took with them a collection of drawings which they feared would be destroyed if left behind. They recognized that these images could be used to perpetuate artistic knowledge in India, but perhaps more importantly they also brought an old palm-leaf-format edition of Menla’s [fifteenth-century proponent of one of the first two painting schools in Tibet] text with them” (Harris, *In the Image of Tibet*, 59.)
was deterritorialized from the specific context of workshops in pre-1959 Tibet, codified into forms more easily transmitted through transnational arteries of electronic media and travel, and finally translated at its destination point into the new locale of workshops in India. Through an examination of the variance between codified cultural signifiers, and the significations they acquire in the course of reterritorialization in each node, one is able to conjecture about both the extenuating circumstances in the new locale which necessitate adaptive innovation, as well as the nature of the tradition or idealized “homeland” which is cultivated by that node.
2.

TRADITION IN BLOOM

Gega Lama, a renowned Tibetan *thangka* painter of the Karma Gadri school who went into exile in India in 1959, gives the following account of the origins of Buddhist sculpture in Tibet in his painting manual, *Principles of Tibetan art* (1983):

Later in his life, the Blessed One himself gave permission for images to be made of his likeness, in order to guide holders of extreme views...

...Śakra, the lord of the Trāyasthrimśa gods, was preparing to erect a statue of the Teacher in precious metals and jewels, but Viśvakarmā (the celestial artisan) was unable to determine correctly the measure of the Teacher’s foot; thinking of the Buddha and praying to him, he arrived in the Teacher’s presence. Together with a number of divine artisans, he then fashioned several images of the Buddha at various stages of his life – at eight, twelve, and twenty-five years of age. The Teacher himself blessed these statues by bathing them in his radiance. The statue of him at age twenty-five was taken to the gods’ realm, that of him at age twelve to China, and that of him at age eight to Nepal. They remained in those places for many years, after which the latter two were brought to Tibet (by the Chinese and Nepalese queens of King Songtsen Gampo) and enshrined in the temples of Rasa and Ramoche (in Lhasa).53

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53 Gega, *Principles of Tibetan Art*, 43.
This story invokes a number of narrative tropes which suggest the rhizomatic nature of the historical development of Buddhist art in Tibet, even centuries before the modern age of globalization. Even in the pursuit of an arborescent inquiry as the origin of Tibetan art, one is drawn into networks of routes and migrations that reveal a multiplicity of sources, all of which were integral to the formation of the artistic conventions and practices that constitute Tibetan art today. Heller, in giving an inventory of the various cultures Tibet was in contact with during the age of the Pugyel Dynasty (seventh to mid-ninth century C.E.) along the extensive network of silk routes, asserts that “this international melee influenced the development of both esthetics and religious ideals in Tibet, as well as bringing the Tibetans in contact with many products of foreign origin.” In Gega Lama’s story, no less than three broadly defined origin nodes can be identified. First, India, the birthplace of the historical Buddha and where the earliest instances of figural Buddhist art have been found, is invoked in situating the story in Trāyastriṃśa, the heaven closest to the mortal realm. Trāyastriṃśa, or “belonging to the thirty-three,” is so named for its status in Hindu and Buddhist cosmology as the abode of the thirty-three gods of Hinduism, the dominant religion in India. Here India is regarded as almost coterminous with a divine, mythic node of origin in the miraculous conception of these images, referencing the perception of ideal (Skt. pramāṇa) form in iconometry, which will be discussed in greater detail later on in this chapter. Furthermore, Viśvakarmā, the

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54 Heller, Tibetan Art, 10. “Through trade, proselytism and military campaigns, Tibet became linked with many cultures and kingdoms, principally those of Bengal, Nepal, Kashmir, Gilgit, Pakistan (Uddiyana), Persia (Iran), Sogdiana, Khotan, Uigur, Turk, Chinese (both Tang empire and Shu kingdom in modern Sichuan), Korea, Tuyuhun, Tangut, Nanzhao in modern Yunnan, and Burma.”
55 Ibid.
56 Keown, A Dictionary of Buddhism, 308.
Vedic deity of craftsmen and architects, is here credited with sculpting three of the earliest anthropomorphic representations of the Buddha for Śakra, the king of the Hindu gods. Both the earliest sculptor and patron of Buddhist images are, therefore, divine personages closely associated with India.

The other two origin nodes, China and Nepal, are appealed to in the reference to the marriage of King Songtsen Gampo to Nepalese and Chinese princesses. As Heller puts it, while “India was the matrix of Buddhism...it is probable that Tibetans first encountered Buddhism through trade with their immediate neighbors Nepal and China during the first half of the seventh century.”57 Due to the fact that evidence of the existence of these two princesses derives entirely from legendary Tibetan chronicles like the *Old Tibetan Annals* and the *Mani Kabum*, some Tibetologists like Tucci have questioned their historicity. Following Lo Bue (1985), however, I would counter that even if the two princesses are mythical, the fact that Tibetan chroniclers were moved to fabricate them is telling of the depth of the relationship Tibet had cultivated with China and Nepal since time immemorial. According to the *Old Tibetan Annals*, Songtsen Gampo’s conquering army had reached the borders of the Chinese empire by 634 C.E., and a Tibetan embassy was sent to Chang’an to ask for a Tang princess in “matrimonial alliance.”58 Princess Wencheng entered Tibetan territories in 641 C.E., and is credited by Gega Lama with introducing Buddhist artistic traditions into Tibet through the work of the “many skilled Chinese artists [who] accompanied her on her journey.”59 Artistic representations of this matrimonial alliance between China and Tibet are, unsurprisingly, encouraged by the PRC

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58 Blondeau and Buffetrille, *Authenticating Tibet*, 5.
59 Gega, *Principles of Tibetan Art*, 45.
government to justify its stand that the two cultures are inseparable, tracing their roots to the same great Chinese civilization.

That said, the role of the Nepali princess Bhrkuti Devi and, consequently, that of Newari craftsmanship, in the formation of Buddhist artistic traditions in Tibet, is not to be understated. Artists in the Kathmandu valley, where most Nepali centers of arts and crafts production are located, are always Newars, the ethnic group indigenous to the region, and invariably Buddhist. The exquisite artistic skills of Newari craftsmen have been acknowledged as early as the seventh century by the Chinese Buddhist pilgrims Xuanzang and I-Ching. Tucci, von Schroeder, Heller, and Lo Bue trace the beginnings of Newari influence on Tibetan art to as early as the reign of Songtsen Gampo, when it is possible that a colony of Newari artists had already been established in Lhasa. This conjecture is based partly on the Nepalese aesthetic forms observable in the architectural elements of the early seventh century Great Temple (Tb: tshuglagshang) of Lhasa, which is said in Tibetan accounts to be built by the Newari artisans summoned by Bhrkuti Devi (fig. 7). Since the age of Songtsen Gampo, therefore, Newari aesthetics have had a sustained impact on the Buddhist art of Tibet throughout its history, with a possible break during the hundred year period of social chaos marked by the assassination of King Tri Ralpachen in 842 C.E. During this time, Buddhism came under persecution in central Tibet by the heretic king Langdarma and rival noble clans which were adherents of Tibet’s indigenous Bön religion, and migrated into the Buddhist kingdoms in western and eastern Tibet. The Second Transmission of Buddhism, however, inaugurated by the arrival of the

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60 Blom, Depicted Deities, 4–5.
62 Dorje, “Zhakabpa’s Inventory to the Great Temple,” 50–1.
eastern Indian monk Atisa into central Tibet in 1040, reestablished the patronage base in Tibet for Newari craftsmanship. Migrations of Newari craftsmen into Tibet continued through the age of monastic hegemonies, such that in 1845, they comprised the largest group of resident foreigners in Tibet, numbering approximately three thousand in Lhasa alone. Indeed, the symbiotic relationship of Newari craftsmen and Tibetan patronage continues into the post-1959 era, such that when the former experienced a decline in local royal and temple patronage due to Gorkha king Mahendra’s land reforms in 1964, the influx of commissions from Tibetan refugees for images to consecrate new monasteries and shrines in India and Nepal kept them afloat, to the extent that Lo Bue notes how “these new types of patronage have promoted a renaissance of Newar metal statuary.”

The first part of this chapter will further historicize the Newari connection to traditional Tibetan art as practiced in my fieldsites, in order to demonstrate the rhizomatic nature of the sources of tradition which constitute the “homeland.” With this in mind, I will evaluate the metalworking techniques used in the Norbulingka and the Gama Gazi, in relation to each other and to accounts of contemporary Newari practices, exploring how the treatment of the Newari connection by each community reflects their modes of identity formation. The next part of the chapter will be an investigation of the practice of iconometry, systems of measurement and proportions which originate in Sanskrit scriptural texts, as a relatively invariable means of transmitting “tradition” to later generations of artists. While differences in how both workshops engage with the Newari connection reflect the heterogeneity of the

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64 Lo Bue, “Newar Artists of the Nepal Valley, I,” 412.
65 Ibid., 264.
“tradition,” iconometry maintains a centripetal force which imparts to the rhizome a kind of consistency. Ultimately, through this analysis, I hope to illustrate the selective memory of “tradition” – despite appeals to universal antiquity in public rhetoric, a so-called pure tradition is in fact often the result of a long process of selection and reinvention, culling cultural practices which do not conform to the group identity that is desirable to the community that affirms it.

**Stealing the Hands of the Newari**

At the end of a working day on a slow Saturday afternoon, I asked Tsetan Norbu, Assistant to the Master Sculptor at the Norbulingka Institute, if he could tell me the story of how metalworking techniques came into Tibet. “Oh,” he said quite amusedly, “all the sculptors in the Norbulingka could tell you that one.” When Chenmo-la was younger and still active in the workshop, he used to gather all his students together during off-periods and regale them with stories. The one he told most often was the origin story of Tibetan metal sculpture, and the sculptors had heard it so many times that they would nod off, thinking to themselves, “oh yes yes I’ve heard this before, so boring, I know what happens next.”

A great Rinpoche of Sakya called some Nepalese to Tibet – Newaris, they are mostly Buddhist and very skilled artists. He invite them and he paid good salary, house and food, what they want he

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66 Tsetan Norbu (Assistant to the Master Sculptor, Norbulingka Institute), in a personal interview with the author, 12 June 2011
67 Meaning “precious one” in Tibetan, a Rinpoche is a high-ranking incarnate lama (Tb. *tulku*) in the Tibetan Buddhist tradition, considered a reincarnation of earlier masters.
68 Sakya here refers to the Sakya (*Sa skya*) monastic order of Tibetan Buddhism, which developed during the Second Transmission of Buddhism into Tibet in the eleventh century, and not Śākyamuni Buddha’s *kṣatriya* clan, the Śākyas.
gave. He ask the Newari artists to teach some students of Tibetan people. But they said "no, no, never." So the Rinpoche asked them to get them as helper. “And you have to teach nothing, but they will help you.” Rinpoche chose the best students in Tsedong; five, four students, it's more than that I don't know. He told them, “in their eyes you are only assistants, but in your eyes you are students. They will never teach you but you have to learn this technique. You have to learn everything by seeing from your eyes.” So the students help the artisans, but also they look how they make the statues. But after work, in evening time Rinpoche taught the students measurements and everything, from scriptures you know. So like that, after many years, the students – they make their own statues. Newari was surprised you know, “how come they make statues, I didn't taught them.” But students are very clever; they chose the best students. So they learned very quickly. Then lastly the Newari artist said, "Oh, they stole my hands, my skill and everything." So after that, these skills, this art of making a statue come into Tibet. It's a story you know, I don't know if it's real or just a story.

Tsetan Norbu, Assistant to the Master Sculptor at the Norbulingka
Interviewed by author on 12 June 2011

I correlated Tsetan’s version of the story with those of two other sculptors, and found that the only deviations in narrative elements were in the number of students from Tsedong – while for Tsetan there were four or more, the other two maintain that there were only three. This stands testament to the consistency and staying power of Chenmo-la’s origin tale. One must note that the sculptors at the Norbulingka receive minimal education in the theoretical and historical aspects of their art in a formal classroom setting, which is usually the province of the
monasteries – rather, they are consumed entirely by the manual techniques of metalwork. Therefore, Chenmo-la’s stories form the basis of their own understanding of the cultural history of their work. With Chenmo-la himself being from Tsedong, all three men claim a direct transmission of skills from those “helpers” of the Newari craftsmen to the Norbulingka workshop. While none of the sculptors were able to pinpoint the exact time period in which it was set, and I was unable to interview Chenmo Penpa Dorje personally, there are clues embedded in the narrative which I will trace in this section in order to find a historical setting for it. Specifically, the allegiance of the great Rinpoche to the Sakya monastic order, which reached their pinnacle of influence from ca. 1260 – 1350 C.E. when they established the first monastic hegemony in central Tibet. Notably, central Tibet shares a border with Nepal, and the power base of Sakya, the Sakya monastery founded in 1073, was the closest to Nepal of all the other orders.

Though the sculptors were unable to recall the names of either the Sakya Rinpoche or the Newari craftsmen who feature in Chenmo-la’s origin tale, these historical details provide additional clues as to their respective identities. In 1240, the leader of the Sakya sect, Sakya Pandita, submitted to Mongolian authority in order to forestall a full-scale invasion of Tibet. Lo Bue draws from the Yuan Annals in asserting that in 1260, the ruler of the Mongolian Yuan Dynasty (1271-1368), Kublai Khan, requested the Sakya Pandita ‘Phags-pa (1235-80) to “erect a ‘golden pagoda’ in Tibet,” and that the king of Nepal, Jaya Bhima Malla (1258-71) managed to assemble eighty out of the hundred Newari artists that were required for the

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69 Heller, Tibetan Art, 125.
70 Ibid., 133.
A member of the royal family, Aniko, who “in spite of his young age... was already an accomplished draughtsman, modeller and metal caster”\textsuperscript{72} was chosen to lead the team. Aniko (Ch: \textit{anige}) is one of the few Newari craftsmen who is named in the written records from this period, and it seems that Newari influence in the art of China and Tibet has largely been ascribed to him or his disciples from the thirteenth century on. Gompojab (mGon-po-skyabs), the eighteenth century translator of the \textit{Liangdu Jing},\textsuperscript{73} for instance, declares, “situated to the north of India and west of the lands of the Tubo Dynasty, Nepal is known for its skilled craftsmen, Anige being the most distinguished of all.”\textsuperscript{74} Acknowledging the fact that Sakya patronage of Aniko was not an isolated incident in the thirteenth century, when many Sakya chapels in central and southern Tibet were being built,\textsuperscript{75} I would venture to designate the Sakya Rinpoche and the Newari craftsmen as Sakya Pandita ‘Phags-pa and Aniko’s team respectively. As one of the most prominent accounts of Sakya patronage of Newari craftmanship recorded in Tibetan and Chinese historical texts from that period, these historical figures would have been known to a man as erudite and as well-versed in the ancient texts as Chenmo Penpa Dorje. Unfortunately, there are no available written Tibetan records dating from that period which document this event, or that name the first ethnic Tibetan metal sculptors of Buddhist statuary, which makes it difficult to verify its historicity. Nevertheless, for the purposes of this study, the imaginative value of Chenmo-la’s account in the collective formulation of

\textsuperscript{71} Lo Bue, “Newar Arist of the Nepal Valley, I,” 265.
\textsuperscript{72} Ibid.
\textsuperscript{73} The \textit{Zaoxiang Liangdu Jing}, or the Canon of Iconometry for Statues and Images, is the Chinese translation from the Tibetan version of the Sanskrit \textit{Pratimā-lakṣaṇa-sūtra} which I will describe in detail later on.
\textsuperscript{74} mGon-po-skyabs, \textit{The Buddhist Canon of Iconometry}, 51.
\textsuperscript{75} Heller, \textit{Tibetan Art}, 132–3.
the “homeland” by the Norbulingka sculptors is significant in itself.

This was demonstrated most clearly to me in the way that the Norbulingka sculptors used their own understandings of Chenmo-la’s narrative as a basis for imbuing these reterritorialized artistic practices associated with “ancient” Nepal with significations of tradition and authenticity. Tenzin Dhondhup, a junior sculptor whom I also consulted regarding this origin story, spends quite a lot of time in Kathmandu, as his father works there. He told me that in his rounds of old Buddhist temples all over Nepal, he noticed that the ancient metal sculptures in them looked very similar to the ones they make at the Norbulingka. This, he said, is proof of the Newari source of Tibetan metalcrafts. However, drawing from the trope of secrecy in Chenmo-la’s story, Dhondhup claimed that he saw the negative effects of Newari unwillingness to impart their skills in modern Nepal. He told me that in the sculpture workshops he visited, it seemed like the Newari have lost the techniques of imagemaking, and are instead confined to making prayer wheels, ritual objects, jewelry and other minor accessories. While Dhondhup is able to acknowledge “ancient Nepal” as a source-node of tradition, he simultaneously locates its present-day survival exclusively in Dharamshala. This contradicts the testimony of the managers at the Gama Gazi, as well as the results of my survey of the Tibetan Quarter in Chengdu where most shops selling Tibetan Buddhist items are located – there are more businesses importing statues from Nepal than there are showrooms for local factories. Slusser et al. also describe the Nepalese city of Patan, where they did their fieldwork in a Newari repoussé workshop led by Raj Kumar Shakya, as “a particularly active center where with modifications metallurgy is still carried out by Newar families in ancestral ways
in home workshops.” More surprisingly, Dhondhup’s evaluation of Nepal contradicts that of another sculptor at the Norbulingka, Tsering Palden. Palden, who grew up in Patan, described to me how the city is full of metallurgical workshops, and it was his fascination with the beauty of their images that inspired him to enroll in the metalworking program at the Norbulingka. As discussed in chapter 1, the rhizomatic nature of “Tibet” can thus be perceived even on an individual level, where members of the same node hold contrasting views on the origins of their culture.

I must also note here that Penpa Dorje’s Tsedong school seems to have a particular affinity to Newari craftsmanship, perhaps even more so than the other central Tibetan metal workshops of Tashilhunpo and Lhasa. According to Jackson’s interlocutor Chenmo Shilog, the Tsedong tradition of metal sculpture began “many centuries ago when one of their forefathers worked at Sa-skya and elsewhere with some Newar metal-workers who had come to Tibet.” In Chenmo Shilog’s account, unfortunately, both the Newari craftsmen and the Tsedong forefathers remain unnamed. The selectivity of tradition is therefore revealed in how the chronicle of a particular artistic school, which was most famous for “its makers of metal, especially gilt copper statues and other sculpted images,” is expanded in the exile community of Dharamshala to represent the history of the myriad schools of sculpture in Tibet.

In any case, in the course of my interviews, many Tibetans even in Chengdu followed Chenmo-la in ascribing at least part of the early development of Tibetan art

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77 Given that Jackson records Chenmo Shilog as having been born in 1921, only 9 years before Chenmo Penpa Dorje, it thus seems unlikely that the former is the same Chenmo Zola Shilog who was named as the latter’s teacher in my Introduction. However, the possibility cannot be ruled out completely, as I was told that Chenmo Zambla Dorje was Penpa Dorje’s main teacher, and it is possible that an assistant tutor might not be that much older than his students.
78 Jackson, A History of Tibetan Painting, 367. (note 816)
79 Ibid.
to the tutelage of Newari artisans. According to Heller, Tibetans were “renowned at the time for exceptional skills in metallurgy, for base and fine metals”\(^{80}\) during the reign of the Pugyel Dynasty. She cites their accomplishment of building an iron chain bridge to traverse the Yangtze river in order to invade western Sichuan as indicative of metalworking techniques which “made them more than a millennium ahead of their adversaries.”\(^{81}\) These indigenous techniques must have become refined and harnessed towards statuary and decorative arts with the influence of Newari craftsmen, to whom Gega Lama attributes the introduction of “the traditions of...casting in such precious metals as bell-metal (\textit{li}) and copper”\(^{82}\) in the ninth century C.E. It is possible that repoussé techniques were introduced into Tibet even earlier by the Newari, or that they developed naturally from indigenous techniques of metalcrafts, though there is insufficient textual or material evidence to say for sure.

The Gama Gazi makes almost exclusive use of the lost-wax casting technique in the production of their metal sculptures, with the exception of a group of five Newari craftsmen from Kathmandu who specialize in fine repoussé and chasing work. I observed, however, that these Newari craftsmen only used repoussé techniques for decorative relief carvings on the surfaces of casted sculpture to depict costume and ornamentation. In contrast, at the Norbulingka, Tibetan craftsmen utilize repoussé techniques for every stage of the process in producing commissioned works. Slusser et. al’s 1999 account of the contemporary practice of the art of repoussé by Newari craftsmen in the city of Patan, near Kathmandu, describes techniques and practices that mirror closely those that I studied at the Norbulingka. In the technical

\(^{80}\) Heller, \textit{Tibetan Art}, 9.
\(^{81}\) Ibid., 9–10.
\(^{82}\) Gega, \textit{Principles of Tibetan Art}, 49.
descriptions to follow, I will pay close attention to the ways in which the Newari sculptural techniques of repoussé and lost-wax casting are deterritorialized from the Tibetan “homeland” and reterritorialized into both the Norbulingka and the Gama Gazi, absorbing significations which allow them to be used in claims to authenticity and cultural difference.

Repoussé

At the Norbulingka, the art of repoussé, where relief designs are created by hammering sheet metal alternately on both sides, is regarded as the most traditional sculptural technique in ancient Tibet, as opposed to casting techniques, which sculptors say were rarely used due to the difficulty involved in getting metal to reach melting point in the altitudes of the Tibetan Plateau. Indeed, the elevation level in the Tibetan Plateau, reaching an average of 13,000 to 15,000 feet (4,000 to 5,000 meters) above sea level, is certainly higher than that of the Kathmandu Valley, which rises to 4,344 feet (1,324 meters). In the reterritorialization of repoussé into exilic India, therefore, the artistic technique has assumed significations of authenticity and tradition based on its perceived greater antiquity. As Slusser et al. note, it is remarkable that the contemporary use of repoussé techniques in Nepal, compared to that of casting techniques, has received so little scholarly attention, considering that “in almost no other place can one still talk to practicing craftsmen and study their technique in active workshops – a veritable timewarp, like being able to question Benvenuto Cellini.” To this I would add that apart from brief mentions in exhibition

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83 Encyclopædia Britannica, “Plateau of Tibet”; Encyclopædia Britannica, “Kathmandu.”
84 Slusser, Sharma, and Giambrone, “Metamorphosis,” 216.
catalogues of Tibetan art, academic inquiry into the art of repoussé as practiced by Tibetan sculptors today is virtually non-existent. As in Raj Kumar Shakya’s workshop, “the apparent complexity of lost-wax casting notwithstanding, it is repoussé that is the more difficult and held in greater esteem” by the metalworkers at the Norbulingka. It takes eleven to twelve years of training for a Norbulingka sculptor to master the range of repoussé techniques required to craft a full-sized image. On the other hand, the absence of signification ascribed to casting techniques is evidenced by the fact that the Norbulingka is willing to outsource casting to an Indian master in Delhi, despite its emphasis on the “Tibetan-ness” of its products. The following description of the repoussé process at the Norbulingka is based on my own observations apprenticing in the metal workshop.

While Loden Sherab Dagyab, in his monograph *Tibetan Religious Art*, identifies the smelting and preparatory hammering (Tib. *gzi-brdun*) of metal into flat sheets as the first stage in the repoussé process, the Norbulingka purchases ready-made sheet metal of various gauges from shops in New Delhi, which is also the practice of Raj Kumar Shakya’s workshop in Patan. Slusser et al. observe that the Newari metalworkers usually prepare a drawing on “locally fabricated creamy-white paper made of the bark of the wild daphne plant,” which is referred to during the hammering process. At the Norbulingka, however, the design is drawn directly onto the metal. A suitable section of metal is cut from the larger sheet using a pair of tin snips. An iconometric grid is plotted onto one of its surfaces, and a two-dimensional

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85 Ibid., 217.
86 Dagyab, *Tibetan Religious Art*, 47.
image of the divinity is sketched onto the grid with a permanent marker (fig. 8). The sculptor then proceeds to transpose the two-dimensional sketch of the divinity into three dimensions by hammering the sheet metal against an iron anvil (fig. 9). The anvil (Tb. sgo-ru, Nw. khalu), which is also used in Patan workshops, consists of a thick steel shaft supported by a forked wooden stand which can be raised and lowered by varying the angle at which the shaft is inserted. Various anvil covers (Tb. gorben) placed over the head of the shaft, along with different hammers (Tb. tho-ba), are used to produce a variety of effects on the metal (fig. 10). Using the two-dimensional image bound by the iconometric grid as a guide for the placement of the sheet metal between gorben and hammer, the sculptor hammers out the basic mass of the image. The metal is then turned back and forth and hammered on both sides to adjust the volumes and contours to the prescribed degrees. At various points in the process, since hammering stresses the crystalline structure of the metal, it becomes too brittle to work with. It is thus annealed by being heated by a blowtorch till red-hot, allowing “the molecules to return to their previous structure,” then cooled in an acid solution, which also cleans off soot from the firing.

I had the privilege of studying the exact application of the repoussé technique in crafting a six-inch tall head of Śakyamuni Buddha in copper with Tsering Palden, who is one of the most experienced sculptors at the Norbulingka. As usual, the head was sculpted in five distinct parts – the front and back halves of the head which spans the bottom of the neck to where the head meets the top-knot (Skt. uṣṇīṣa), the top-knot with a crest jewel (Skt. cūḍāmaṇi, Tb. nortog), and the ears – and soldered

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88 See the section on iconometry below for a more detailed description of the practice of iconometry.
89 Slusser, Sharma, and Giambrone, “Metamorphosis,” 218.
together using a silver alloy. The general objective was to shape the head in accordance with Chenmo-la’s dictum on facial types, which states that while female deities have a rounded forehead with an egg-shaped facial structure, male divinities like Śakyamuni Buddha have a square, flattened forehead with a round face. After sketching the design in an iconometric grid on the copper sheet, Palden hammered it against a tapering gorben fitted on the anvil to create the nose and the brow line – two curved protuberances leading up from either side of the nose to the ends of the eyebrows (fig. 11). He told me that this must be done first, as it becomes more difficult to sculpt in higher relief when the metal becomes more compacted. After this initial shaping, Palden hammered down the lateral sides of the copper sheet to create a sort of open cylinder (fig. 12). He then used combinations of differently-sized hammers and gorben to create contours and bulges for facial features in the face, constantly checking for iconometric precision with compass and scale. In order to create gentle contours, one slides the metal along the gorben while hammering it along the curve one wishes to create. Once the general volumes were in place, Palden hammered the top and bottom of the half-cylinder to form the steep inclines of the top of the head and the chin (fig. 13). In order to make sure that the forehead, nose and chin are the most protruding areas of the face when looked at from the side, Palden constantly turned the piece around, depressing the face area by hitting it on the outer surface, while simultaneously pushing out the forehead by hammering it directly on the metal of the interior.

The next stage was to use engraving or chasing techniques (Tb. tshag, Np. katājyā, kijyā) to define the facial features and to refine the texture of the contours.
The piece was pressed face-up into a warm pine resin (Tb. la-‘be, Nw. jhau)\textsuperscript{90} which is smeared onto a wooden board (Tb. ‘be-sin). The resin “fills all the hollows of the work in progress and, when it cools and sets...provides a resilient base against which the artist can proceed without risk to the hard-won relief.”\textsuperscript{91} Using various combinations of hammers and shaping tools called punches (Tb. song), Palden chiseled out the subtler forms of the eyes, eyebrows, lips, nose and chin. The technique used for this is what Dagyab calls “the ornate type of relief engraving or repoussé work (‘bur-tshag/hrob-tshag),”\textsuperscript{92} where the boundaries of the relief were first marked on the outer surface with sharper punches, creating a negative outline. Then, the piece was removed from the resin, and the copper was hammered from the inside using blunter punches to cause the area within the outline to bulge outwards (fig. 14). Finally, the copper is placed back into the resin and hammered again on the outside to refine the outlines and contours of the facial feature being depicted. Also in this stage, using the “engraving of a decorative motif on a smooth surface (‘jam-tshag)”\textsuperscript{93} technique, where the copper is hammered lightly on the outer surface with finer punches (fig. 15), Palden incised two curved lines in the neck to depict neck folds, wavy dimples on either side of the mouth, and the outlines of the eyes.

\textsuperscript{90} The Norbulingka sculptors usually called this brown taffy-like substance “wax” in English, but I was later told by Tsetan Norbu that it was in fact made from the resin of pine trees. According to Dagyab: “there are two varieties of la-‘be...the rougher of the two preparations is simply made from the resin obtained from the bark of coniferous trees which is moulded into a sticky dough by exposing it to heat. Finally it is given a greasy coating of butter or some other fatty substance to enable it to be handled more easily. The second variety is prepared from spos-dkar, an aromatic gum resin. Spos-dkar is first ground to a powder, then run through a sieve and mixed with mustard oil (pad-gan) until it has achieved a fairly dry dough-like consistency. A quantity of clean baked clay, equivalent to half of the spos-dkar, is ground into powder, run through a sieve and when mixed with this gluey substances gives la-‘be” (Dagyab, Tibetan Religious Art, 48). The Newari in Patan use the latter method to make this resin (Slusser et al., Metamorphosis, 218).

\textsuperscript{91} Slusser, Sharma, and Giambrone, “Metamorphosis,” 218.

\textsuperscript{92} Dagyab, Tibetan Religious Art, 48.

\textsuperscript{93} Ibid.
Once the chasing was finished, the resin was warmed slightly to soften it, releasing its hold on the piece. Next, Palden put in the coils of hair on the top of the head and the *uṣṇīṣa*. Evenly distributed circles were drawn in black to act as guidelines. A thin iron bar with a rounded end was then placed in a vice, and the piece placed face-up onto it. The second tool, a punch with a concave end that fits neatly into the rounded end of the iron bar, was then placed on the outer surface of the piece. The piece was thus sandwiched between the ends of both tools, aligned with one of the drawn circles. Palden simply hammered down on the punch, producing a small bump in the metal (*fig. 16*). This technique is also used to create the *ūrṇā* between the Buddha’s eyebrows, an auspicious whorl of hair. After a sufficient number of coils were hammered in, the piece was filed and sanded down to smooth over the unnecessary marks which are inevitably made in the repoussé process. Finally, the five component parts of the head were soldered together using a silver alloy (*fig. 17*), and it was then coated with a clear varnish in order to prevent the copper from oxidizing. In most cases, the head would then be sent to the *thangka* workshop at the Norbulingka to be painted with gold or mineral paints (*fig. 18*).

*Casting*

In contrast with the Norbulingka Institute, the Gama Gazi makes exclusive use of lost-wax casting in its sculpture workshop, with repoussé techniques only applied in the final stages of engraving and chasing fine detail. Gongxia Zhenshu, a manager at the Gama Gazi, told me that the Gama Gazi’s patrons prefer to commission casted sculptures, presumably due to the lower cost. In contrast, as mentioned earlier, the
Norbulingka makes exclusive use of repoussé techniques for statues commissioned by monasteries and private patrons. However, it also employs a skilled sand-caster from Delhi to cast cheaper sculptures for off-the-shelf sales to tourists at their souvenir shops in McLeod Ganj and other Indian cities, though still using repoussé images as models. In this section, I will compare the processes of lost-wax and solid casting as performed in the Gama Gazi and the Norbulingka respectively, paying attention to how the significations these artistic practices have absorbed in these different contexts reflect the identity claims of each community. While I was not able to witness the entire casting process at both field-sites, I will fill the gaps in my observations with my interviews with sculptors, who explained the execution of these techniques to me with the aid of the tools involved and leftover materials from previous castings.

The Gama Gazi makes use of the indirect method of lost-wax casting, where the cast is made indirectly, from a wax copy of a clay model (Ch. *niba muju*), as opposed to the Newari workshops in the Kathmandu Valley that Lo Bue (1981) and Michaels (1988) describe in their field observations who use the direct method, where the cast is made directly from a wax model. Apart from this difference, the casting process carried out by the Gama Gazi is more or less similar to that of the Newari workshops. Zhenshu told me that since clay-modeling is the most highly-skilled task in the workshop, only the senior sculptors and masters are entrusted with it. Using his hands, the sculptor builds up the figure from the bottom up, and then moulds its volumes and contours using differently-sized wooden shaping tools with leveled surfaces at each end (Tb. ‘*ded-wan?’) (fig. 19). Throughout this process, as with
repoussé techniques at the Norbulingka, a compass and scale are used to check that the figure adheres to iconometric prescriptions (Ch. *bśli*). Finally, ornaments, costume, and iconographic attributes are modeled in clay and attached to the figure. After the clay model is complete, a permanent mold is made from it. The surface of the clay is first brushed all over with a white glue (Ch. *gujiáo*), and then packed with an outer covering of plaster (*fig. 20*). Once the permanent mold sets, it is cut apart into pieces according to the parts to be casted.

The next step is to create a hollow wax copy of the model. Green liquid wax (Ch. *la*) is poured into the component molds and swirled around until it forms an even layer on the inner surface of the mold (*fig. 21*). Once it cools, the wax copy is removed from the permanent mold, and a group of women take over the work of “building the wax” (Ch. *xiula*), using chisels and simple heating tools to smoothen the surface of the wax and to define the patterns and contours in the image (*fig. 22*). The women also fit the undersides of the wax component with an arrangement of brown wax cylinders, which are meant to serve as sprues when the wax is melted away (*fig. 23*). A carrying frame of metal poles which runs through the wax figure is also constructed at this stage. It is significant to note that of all the metalworking processes carried out at Tibetan workshops that I have visited, whether in repoussé or in casting, this is the only stage wherein female workers are permitted, and even preferred. Zhenshu informed me that this was because *xiula* does not require much strength, and so “even women can do it,”^94^ though I would be more inclined to ascribe it to cultural restrictions against women performing skilled crafts.

Additionally, all the women seemed to be ethnic Han indigenous to Sichuan. It

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^94^ Zhenshu, interview on 28 July 11
appears that in the industrialized setting of the Gama Gazi, there exists a hierarchy of skill specialization, though one based more on perceived skill level rather than on significations of authenticity and “Tibetan-ness.”

I observed that the casted sculptures produced by the Gama Gazi are all hollow (fig. 24), due to the Tibetan Buddhist convention of inserting a relic core into the image when it is installed. While I was not privy to this stage of the process, given that the wax is not modeled over a core, it seems likely that the sculptors practiced hollow casting rather than clay-core casting (fig. 25). According to Michaels, hollow casting involves coating the inside of the hollow wax model thinly with clay, and smearing two to three thicker layers on the outside. The inner and outer levels “are secured by metal pins so that they do not come into contact with one another after the wax has been melted off.”95 After the layers of clay and sand have hardened, the wax copy is then placed in a kiln (fig. 26), which melts out the wax and hardens the outer shell to form the final perishable mold (fig. 27). Molten metal is poured into the mold. When the metal cools, the shell is hammered and sand-blasted away to reveal the rough casting. After being sanded smooth with electric polishing discs, repoussé techniques are used to chase the outer surface of the casted image, with hammers and punches much like those at the Norbulingka. At the Gama Gazi, however, the repoussé techniques I observed being used at this stage were limited to the ‘jam-tshag technique, hammering lightly on the outer surface to define the ornamentation and facial features of the sculpture (fig. 28). After the different component parts of the figure are soldered together, the final stage is then to paint and, in some cases, to gild the image, all processes which are done on-site.

95 Michaels, The Making of a Statue, 40.
While the clay model in the Gama Gazi’s lost-wax casting process is usually destroyed as a matter of course by the end of the process, sand-casting at the Norbulingka preserves the original repoussé model. This is further indicative of how the Norbulingka privileges the art of repoussé as the most authentically Tibetan metallurgical technique, where it is the endurance of the repoussé “masterpiece”\textsuperscript{96} which legitimizes its casted copies. Tenzin Dhondhup, using plastic biscuit trays to illustrate his narrative, told me that the Delhi caster uses a two-part casting flask, which is filled with casting sand. The statue to be reproduced is placed face-down into one side, then taken out and placed the other way around in the other, to create negative impressions (\textit{fig. 29}). A sprue for the molten metal to enter the mold, as well as a channel to allow the displaced air to escape, is cut from the sand. This air channel is an essential detail – if it is not put in, the molten metal bubbles over, producing large gaps in the resultant casting (\textit{fig. 30}). The two trays are then put together to form the mold, with a central core inserted from the bottom of the figure to produce a cavity within the casting. Molten metal is finally poured into the mold, and once the metal cools, the casting flask is simply taken apart to release the rough casting. Like the permanent plaster mold used in lost-wax casting, this one is therefore reusable. The rough casting is then handed to one of the junior sculptors, who saws off the solidified metal in the sprue and air channel, sands the surface smooth with electric polishing discs, and then chases and engraves the image – mirroring what is done at the Gama Gazi. The junior sculptor is also tasked with crafting the iconographic attributes and jewelry of the casted divinity using repoussé techniques (\textit{fig. 31}).

\textsuperscript{96} The Norbulingka sculptors invariably referred to the repoussé models that were used to make the molds for sand-casting as “masterpieces.”
Finally, the different components of the image are soldered together, and the completed sculpture is sent either to the thangka workshop to be painted or to Delhi to be gilded.

Comparison and Analysis

It is remarkable to note the consistency in the repoussé processes of the metalworkers at the Norbulingka Institute, the Patan workshop of Raj Kumar Shakya, and even those of Dagyab’s unnamed sources. Keeping in mind that the Norbulingka workshop traces its lineage to Chenmo-la’s hometown of Tsedong in central Tibet, this concurrence can be attributed partly to the high migration levels of Newari craftsmen into central and southern Tibet since Songtsen Gampo’s time, as mentioned earlier. During the reign of the Fifth Dalai Lama (1617-1682), who brought the Gelug monastic sect to political dominance in 1642, a Newari colony of sculptors settled in the ‘Dod-jo-dpal-khyil,’ a prominently placed metal workshop by the Potala Palace in Lhasa. According to Lo Bue, the Thirteenth Dalai Lama (1876-1934) displaced the Newari craftsmen there in favor of Tibetan ones in order to encourage the development of the Tibetan artistic tradition, but the effects of over three hundred years of “Newar virtual monopoly of metal work in Tibet was betrayed...by the circumstance that most of the craft tools were known by their Newari names.”

However, both the Norbulingka sculptors and Dagyab’s sources refer to their tools and techniques by Tibetan names, as I have shown in my description. The possibility must therefore be admitted that these terms might only have been developed in the

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97 Lo Bue, “Newar Artists of the Nepal Valley, II,” 409.
98 Ibid.
late nineteenth to early twentieth century as part of the Thirteenth Dalai Lama’s nationalistic initiative to reify the “Tibetan-ness” of art. The political situation of Tibet at the time, wracked by foreign incursions by the British and the Chinese after nearly five hundred years of relative isolationism under the Gelugpa, seems to have spurred a reconceptualization of Newari artistic practices as equally Tibetan, which parallels the territorializations undertaken by the Norbulingka in the post-1959 era. At the same time, it seems peculiar that Newari lost-wax casting is not used by the sculptors at the Norbulingka, especially considering the fact that the average elevation level at Dharamshala is comparable to that of the Kathmandu Valley at around 4,780 feet (1,457 meters). On a functional level, one would think that this would have mitigated any technical reservations for using casting techniques in Dharamshala. The emphasis on repoussé at the Norbulingka must thus be attributed to the compulsion of the Tibetan exile community in Dharamshala to emphasize their connections to an ancient “homeland” through attaching significations of authenticity to repoussé. Given that Tibetan sculptors in Chengdu also ascribe a greater antiquity to repoussé, this broadly accepted historical idea has been harnessed in the selective construction of “tradition” in the Tibetan exile community.

That said, the constraints of the refugee experience undoubtedly influenced this aspect of exilic identity formation. Lost-wax casting flourishes in the Tibetan metal workshops in Chengdu, using techniques mostly consistent with those of the Newari workshops described by Lo Bue and Michaels. This contradicts Lo Bue’s claim that the lack of Tibetan lost-wax casting workshops in the Tibetan exile settlements in Nepal “suggests that Tibetan lost-wax metal statuary depended heavily
upon Newar sculptors well into the 20th century.”

Lo Bue’s oversight may have resulted simply from the fact that of the Tibetan artists who escaped into exile, an overwhelming majority of them were *thangka* painters rather than sculptors. As mentioned earlier, the Norbulingka sculptors informed me that to their knowledge, Chenmo Penpa Dorje was the only metal sculptor who managed to escape Chinese-occupied Tibet. Since Penpa Dorje specialized in repoussé statuary, the syllabus of the Norbulingka, which he based on that of his own workshop back in Tsedong, does not include lost-wax casting techniques. This could explain the dearth of Tibetan lost-wax workshops outside of Chinese-occupied Tibet. Additionally, while Dagyab mentions both sand and lost-wax casting techniques in his monograph, he claims that the former was the more widely practiced of the two. This could also be ascribed to the bias inherent in taking the exile population of artists as his only source for information on casting techniques – even the Norbulingka sculptors used to do their own sand-casting before they realized it was more advantageous to employ the specialized skills of the caster from Delhi.

These differences can also be ascribed to the regions from which the masters of each workshop claim their artistic lineage. Dagyab relates that “there were many famous centres of casting to be found in eastern and central Tibet of which the most well-known were the ones in Lhasa and sDe-dge,” with the former being the aforementioned ‘Dod-jo-dpal-khyil. With Duoqing Zhaxi and the majority of his most experienced sculptors hailing from the region of Derge, in Kham of eastern Tibet, it is possible that lost-wax casting techniques were more frequently performed by ethnic

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99 Lo Bue, “Casting of Devotional Images,” 70.
100 Dagyab, *Tibetan Religious Art*, 50.
101 Ibid., 51.
Tibetan sculptors in Derge, as compared to those in Tsedong or even Lhasa, where it might have been the province of Newari immigrants. Furthermore, while some Newari craftsmen must have settled and worked in eastern Tibet, especially considering the prominent accounts of Aniko and his team of craftsmen migrating further east into China, Derge is much further away from Kathmandu than either Lhasa or Tsedong. Amy Heller, in mapping out the trade and pilgrimage routes which connect the Tibetan geographical area with its neighbors, also indicates that the only major path leading from Kathmandu to Derge converges on central Tibet before diverging into various possible directions (fig. 32). I would argue, then, that the sculpture workshops in pre-1959 Derge were probably less dependent on Newari metalworkers than those in central Tibet, and must have had a higher number of ethnic Tibetans proficient in metal casting out of necessity. This is reflected in the availability of ethnic Tibetan sculptors trained in lost-wax casting techniques from Derge to populate the Gama Gazi.

Finally, it seems that a paradox arises between my interlocutors’ rhetoric of how casting on the Tibetan plateau was impossible due to the high altitudes, and the recorded existence of casting workshops in pre-1959 Tibet which must have been the source of the transmission of casting techniques into the current practice of both the Norbulingka and the Gama Gazi. It appears that while casting is undoubtedly more difficult in the higher altitudes of the “homeland,” it is not categorically beyond the realm of possibility. I would argue, therefore, that the supposed unfeasibility of casting techniques in ancient Tibet is used as a representational device by sculptors to

reinforce the significations of antiquity invested in repoussé. Indeed, the reliability of repoussé, in relation to the numerous defects in casting which can result from insufficiently heated metal, might account for the historical preference for the former in the development of Tibetan metal statuary.

Business Models

The Norbulingka’s emphasis on “tradition” is integral to its business model and, subsequently, its survival as an institution. As the Norbulingka receives no external funding from the CTA or any international non-governmental organizations, it is sustained entirely on the profits from product sales. The Norbulingka administration leverages on the sculpture workshop’s claim to authenticity in preserving Tibetan craftsmanship in exile, producing ritually efficacious high-end statues built using the most traditional Tibetan techniques, with materials closest to those that were used in Tibet that can be found in India, to justify setting its prices well above the market rate of Buddha images produced by Nepali and Indian-owned workshops. Tsetan Norbu told me that for privately commissioned statues, the administration regularly charges the patron a markup of close to three hundred percent over the cost price of materials and labor. This is only feasible, he says, “because [the Norbulingka] has a name, it has a brand, and customers know it is interested in the support of culture.”

Ironically, however, this means only foreigners are able to afford their work, and local Tibetan monasteries and devotees have no choice but to buy Nepali imports – a

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104 Tsetan Norbu (Assistant to the Master Sculptor, Norbulingka Institute), in a personal interview with the author, 4 June 2011.
practice which subverts the territorialization of “authenticity” in the Norbulingka’s work.

This shift in the business model of the Norbulingka to focus on tourist dollars seems to be a recent development. Norbu told me that back in the 1980s, the workshop was flooded with so many commissions from Tibetan monasteries that they had a five-year long waiting list. When I visited in 2011, however, they were only handling three commissions – two from the Office of His Holiness the Dalai Lama and one from the Norbulingka administration itself. Tenzin Phuntsok, Public Relations Officer of the Norbulingka, informed me that sixty percent of the Norbulingka’s sales is derived from sales of sand-casted and a few small repoussé statues in their shop catering to tourists in McLeod Ganj, the backpacker haven in Dharamshala. This lack of demand for commissioned statues in repoussé has serious consequences for the transmission of skills to junior sculptors at the Norbulingka. The pedagogical method at the Norbulingka mirrors how the Tibetan students surreptitiously “stole the hands” of the Newari in Chenmo-la’s origin story. The student learns through observation of the master, and then practices the techniques thus imbibed on an actual commission, usually with guidance from a senior sculptor. Since the revenue stream of the Norbulingka has been diverted to the tourist market, the few commissioned repoussé works are naturally assigned to senior sculptors, and junior sculptors are kept busy with the simpler tasks of chasing fine detail on and crafting iconographic attributes for sand-casted statues, which are more easily marketed as souvenirs. The junior sculptors are thus deprived of the opportunity to learn how to use repoussé techniques to craft entire sculptures, even though that is
considered the pinnacle of their metalworking tradition. It is questionable whether the current business model, which seems to prioritize profit maximization over the transmission of skills, is entirely suitable for the Norbulingka’s stated purposes of heritage preservation.

Without more extensive research into the patronage economy of the Tibetan exile communities, however, it is difficult to determine conclusively whether a business model which focuses on commissioned statues for local monasteries and shrines, or one which caters to the tourist industry with mass-produced souvenirs, is more sustainable for the Norbulingka Institute. In any case, taking a different perspective, the argument can be made that with the deterritorialized people of the exile community being reframed as the sole carriers of authentic Tibetan culture, the survival of the latter is essential to the continued existence of the “homeland” for those that subscribe to that arborescent model of cultural endangerment. Profit maximization is, therefore, to some extent a legitimate means of undertaking the preservation of Tibetan culture. As Phuntsok puts it, “to preserve Tibetan culture we need manpower, for manpower we have to pay a salary, for that we need a fund, that fund comes from selling our products.”\textsuperscript{105} Indeed, apart from their function in preserving cultural heritage, institutions like the Norbulingka were conceived as means of employment and financial support for the refugees themselves, sustaining the Tibetan race in a very literal way. As the Dalai Lama explained to John Avedon, “we divided our culture into two types. In the first category we placed that which...needed to be retained only in books as past history. The second category

\textsuperscript{105} Tsering Phuntsok (Public Relations Officer, Norbulingka Institute), in a personal interview with the author, 1 Jun 11
included whatever could bring actual benefit in the present...those crafts from which we could earn a livelihood...we took special pains to safeguard.”

In addition to its more intangible responsibilities towards Tibetan “culture,” the Norbulingka provides its employees with salary, accommodation, education for their children, and medical expenses (fig. 33). The Norbulingka thus ensures economic survival for Tibetan refugees in India, who may be disadvantaged in securing jobs in relation to the Indian majority. Therefore, the maintenance of the locality of “Tibet” in Dharamshala can be seen in practical terms as the ultimate function of the Norbulingka, sustaining a race of cultured Tibetans for the eventual repopulation of geographical Tibet, where it is believed the PRC government pursues a policy of genocide against Tibetans.

At the Gama Gazi, however, antiquity is not as directly correlated with the value and authenticity of their products. When I asked Gongxia Zhenshu about the preference for lost-wax over repoussé in the Gama Gazi, he acknowledged that in ancient Tibet, all Tibetan metal workshops used repoussé for the whole image-making process. Nowadays, however, all the workshops in Chengdu use lost-wax casting, though he assured me that most of the accomplished masters were still proficient in repoussé techniques. It is clear that while there still is the perception of repoussé as being of greater antiquity at the Gama Gazi, economic concerns still take precedence over any significations of authenticity in metalworking techniques, allowing the sculptors in Chengdu to employ lost-wax casting, which offers much

106 Avedon, In Exile from the Land of Snows, 92.
107 Childs and Barkin, “Reproducing Identity,” 40. This is intimately related to the strong social censure against cross-cultural relationships in the Tibetan exile community: “Health literature [circulated in the Tibetan exile community] promotes ethnic endogamy by representing Westerners as a threat for HIV contagion...Members of the exile community are encouraged to further a nationalistic agenda...by reproducing exclusively with Tibetans at a sufficient rate to ensure population growth” (Childs and Barkin 2006:49).
faster production times and lower costs. At the same time, however, it has been the practice for some time of the Gama Gazi to hire Newari craftsmen to do exquisite chasing and engraving in repoussé – what I described above as 'jam-tshag and 'bur-tshag/hrob-tshag – though they are only involved with ornamental or decorative work. When I visited the factory, there were five men from Kathmandu, who were assigned their own studio (fig. 34). Their advanced repoussé techniques are largely beyond the abilities of the ethnic Tibetan sculptors at the Gama Gazi, most of whom have only studied the sculptural arts for three to four years, with a focus on lost-wax casting.

Duoqing Zhaxi, the founder and CEO of the Gama Gazi, boasted in an interview with me that his was the only factory in China ambitious and successful enough to attract Nepali foreign talent. There is, of course, a shrewd economic rationale behind Zhaxi’s decision to associate the Gama Gazi with Newari craftsmanship. As I heard from various interviewees, for Tibetan Buddhists in Chengdu, sculptural imports from Nepal are regarded as of the highest quality, more authentic than those made by local Tibetan factories, and thus command higher prices. He Yaofa, the co-founder and General Manager in charge of production and manufacturing of the Gama Gazi Factory explained to me that as a result of Deng’s Reform and Openness policies, the flourishing of the Chinese economy in the 1980s coincided with new religious freedoms, and the void left by the iconoclasm of the Cultural Revolution resulted in many Tibetan Buddhists wanting to rebuild temples and to stock them with images. However, at that point, there were not enough qualified Tibetan artists to meet the demand, and patrons turned to Nepali imports to
fill the gap. Local factories took to producing sculptures crudely based on Nepali models purchased off-the-shelf, leading to the bad reputation which dogs the Gama Gazi and other Tibetan-owned factories in Chengdu to this day. By hiring Newari craftsmen to work in his factory, Zhaxi is thus reterritorializing his customers’ connotations of authenticity and superiority of imported Nepali artwork onto his own local products, by physically transporting Newari artistry into his geographic locality. In this way, both the Norbulingka and the Gama Gazi can be seen as partaking in the commodification of antiquity, though through particularized strategies tailored to their specific environments.

**Iconometry: Making the Well-Proportioned Image**

In Chenmo-la’s origin tale, it is significant that at the end of each working day spent observing the Newari sculptors perform their closely-guarded repoussé techniques, the Tibetan students leave the workshop to study the Buddhist scriptural prescriptions on measurements and proportions with Sakya Pandita. This posits a dichotomy between the hands-on skills of metallurgy and the theoretical aspects of art as encapsulated in iconometry, though it is clear that a mastery of both is essential to becoming a master sculptor. In Tibetan art, iconometry is essentially the science of figural proportions, expressed in prescriptive systems of measurements which function as constructive devices for the representation of divinities. One of the main motivations for the development and translation of iconometric scriptures seems to have been to ensure aesthetic conformity even as the Buddhist doctrine travelled along the Silk Road. One of five prefaces written by Prince Ai’yue which were
included in the *Liangdu Jing*, states that Gompojab, the translator of the work, “possessing deep insight and wisdom in appearance, determined that the producers of images in his day have deviated from the proper course and have gone astray in their formulations of iconography...[which] has resulted in people’s failure to pay respect to the excellence of the Buddha.” This is cited as the motivation for Gompojab to translate the scriptural text into Chinese, in order to standardize the application of Buddhist iconometry among contemporary sculptors in Qing Dynasty China, the period of most extensive contact between Tibet and China before the twentieth century.

When I apprised Gongxia Zhenshu of the existence of the workshop at the Norbulingka, the only question he had was “are they following the rules and regulations?” I told them they did, and he leaned back in his chair, nodding in a satisfied manner, saying “as long as they follow the rules and regulations, it’s fine.” It is significant that adherence to rules and regulations, which were implied to be related to iconography and iconometry, is the most important factor in authenticating the transplanting of the Tibetan sculptural tradition in India. Clare Harris, in her book on the development of Tibetan painting since 1959, relates how an important fifteenth century painting treatise by Menla Dondrub came into India in 1961, forming the foundation of efforts to revive Tibetan traditional arts in exile. Jampa Tseten, the only court *thangka* painter who managed to escape Chinese-occupied Tibet, “brought an old palm-leaf-format edition of Menla’s text” with him, which he used to train

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109 Gongxia Zhenshu (manager, Sichuan Gama Gazi Tibetan Crafts Factory), in a personal interview with the author, 14 July 2011.
thangka students in India till his death. Iconometry can thus also be seen as the result of the deterritorialization of artistic practices into mathematical form, easily codified in text and transmitted to be reterritorialized in new localities. In the Tibetan community-in-exile, iconometry has taken on nationalistic overtones in its reterritorialization – Chenmo-la informed me that “the proportions of measurement for Tibetan images have been all the same since Songtsen Gampo, and any statue with different measurements is definitely not Tibetan.” It is evident that for Chenmo-la, iconometry defines the “Tibetan-ness” of works of art.

The importance of iconometry is also emphasized by Tibetan artists in the intra-state diaspora. Dangzeng, an accomplished Tibetan thangka painter in Chengdu, told me that “these directives [of iconometry] are a kind of science. They are very scientific. On the whole, it does not err in explicating the measurement of Man.” When prompted to clarify what he meant by “scientific,” he said that there is a graduated progression to learning art, like learning the alphabet when one learns English, and that if one wants to draw images of the Buddha, the marked scales in the Liangdu Jing are a fundamental basis of knowledge that must be acquired before one is able to put it all together. This hearkens to the distinction between vidyā (science) and kalā (art) that is made in Indian aesthetic theory. The Tibetans themselves count the practice of iconometry in imagemaking as “one of the branches of the manual arts, a division of the traditional technical sciences which form one of the five main fields

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110 Harris, In the Image of Tibet, 59.
111 Chenmo Penpa Dorje (Master Sculptor, Norbulingka Institute), in a personal interview with the author, 24 November 2010.
112 Dangzeng (thangka painter, Chengdu), in a personal interview with the author, 18 August 2011.
of knowledge"¹¹³ – the Science of Craftsmanship (Tb. bzo rig pa). In the ten fields of knowledge a learned Tibetan was expected to be familiar with in ancient Tibet, Craftsmanship is one of the five major sciences (Tb. rig gnas chen po lnga), as opposed to the five minor ones, which include drama and poetry.

In this section, I will make the case that iconometry is an essential mechanism by which Tibetan tradition is reterritorialized into new localities by Tibetan sculptors both in exile and in Tibetan China. Sculptors made claims to the effect that adherence to iconometry authenticates their work as ritually efficacious in its true representation of an Ideal (pramāṇa), whose conception can be traced to the roots of Buddhist art in India. However, at the same time, inconsistencies in the canonical scriptural texts, as well as the varying interpretations of these texts in written commentaries and oral transmissions down different artistic lineages, have led to variances in the practice of iconometry in contemporary workshops. Referring to the origin myth with which this chapter opened, perhaps the account of Viśvakarmā making three statues of the Buddha at various ages, which would reflect different bodily proportions, alludes to these alternative iconometric traditions. I argue that the rhizomatic nature of Tibetan tradition can be perceived in the attempts to reconcile the arborescence of the original Ideal with the substantive multiplicity of iconometric sources.

*The metaphysics of iconometry*

...in the case of divinities drawn without correct proportions due to confusion as to what is acceptable or not, the awareness aspect of the divinity cannot imbue the drawing. In whichever locality such faulty

images exist, that region’s prosperity declines, rainfall and water supply become erratic, harvests are poor, and so forth. Because such images have only negative influence, one should remove them to rocky or snowy wastes and wilderness areas...

Furthermore, producing such faulty representations causes one to be reborn an animal in future existences: even should one be born a human, one will take birth in a low station, in poor families, without such necessities of life as food and drink, clothing, wealth, crops, bedding, ornaments, and so on. Similarly, one will be born with one’s body deformed in the same way (as the images one had produced), wherever the fault lay on the upper or lower part of the figure – lame, blind, deaf, with malformed limbs, hunchbacked, with blotchy complexion, with imperfect organs and faculties, with extra fingers and toes, with a dull complexion, and so forth. One will be born as a defective individual.

Gega Lama, Principles of Tibetan Art (1983, 67-8)

According to Coomaraswamy, Indian aesthetic theory conceptualizes the formal element in art as “a purely mental activity, citta-saṅñā.” In a kind of meditative state, the statuemaker, having cleansed his mind of wandering thoughts that originate from self-attachment, visualizes the form of the divinity to be represented according to a canonical prescription (Skt. sādhana, mantram, dhyāna). The mind thus “produces or draws (ākarṣati) this form to itself, as though from a great distance.”

The ideal form of the divinity is conceived in the fertile earth of the ideal space (Skt. ākāśa) of the sculptor’s mind, and the one is identified with the other. The

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114 Coomaraswamy, “The Theory of Art in Asia,” 34.
115 Ibid.
statuemaker must “realize a complete self-identification with it [the image] (ātmānāṁ...dhyāyāt, or bhāvayet)...the form is thus known in an act of non-differentiation...is the model from which he proceeds to execution.”116 This self-identification of the sculptor with his image is demonstrated viscerally in Gega Lama’s inventory of the maledictions that befall a sculptor of a disproportioned image, where the body defects in the image are transplanted directly onto the sculptor’s own body in his next life.

Tibetan aesthetics, being largely based on translations from the Sanskrit of Indian scriptural texts pertaining to art (Skt. śilpa śāstra), is equally concerned with the innately envisioned Ideal. The models for the work of the Tibetan sculptors at the Norbulingka and in the Gama Gazi are not drawn from the natural world of flora and fauna, but from the Ideal forms transmitted through their masters’ oral teachings and iconographic prescriptions in canonical scriptures. Coomaraswamy further clarifies the Ideal as a concept entirely removed from the popular associations of the English word – he uses instead the Sanskrit pramāṇa, which “is the self-evident immediate (svataḥ) perception of what is correct under given conditions.”117 These “given conditions” in the context of art can be defined as the meditative state in which the artist perceives the Ideal form – and, if one is unable to reach that level of spiritual accomplishment, the guidance of the artistic lineage of tradition. Indeed, Coomaraswamy explains how the “aesthetic pramāṇa finds expressions in rules (vidhi, niyama), or canons of proportions (tāla, tālamāna, pramānāni)...and in the lakṣaṇas of iconography and cultivated tastes, prescribed by authority and tradition;

116 Ibid., 35.
117 Ibid., 40.
and only that art ‘which accords with canonical standards [śāstra-māna] is truly lovely, none other, forsooth!'”118 Thus, while ordinary painters and sculptors in modern times119 are not required to perform preparatory rituals or meditations in their artistic process, I would see their devotion to and strict adherence to iconometric guidelines, both in rhetoric and in practice, as a sacral act. The sculptors use iconometric systems – as mathematical abstractions of the Ideal – as a means of associating their work in the present moment with that Ideal.120

Furthermore, the viewers of works made according to the rules of iconometry are, for their part, called upon to look beyond the facade to contemplate the Ideal itself, in what Coomaraswamy calls a “matter of penetration.”121 Iconometry is therefore integral to the function of Buddhist sculptures as objects of devotion. As Gega Lama’s origin tale quoted at the beginning of this chapter implies, the first images of the Buddha are believed to have been created with Śakyamuni Buddha himself as the prototype. Coomaraswamy asserts that “there is...the closest possible analogy between the ‘factitious body’ (nirmāṇa-kāya) or ‘measure’ (nimitta) of the living Buddha [i.e. the artistic image], and the image of the Great Person which the artist literally ‘measures out’ (nirmāti) to be a substitute for the actual presence.”122 In this way, both artist and patron are called upon to engage directly with the divinity of the Buddha, which is constantly signified in the reterritorialization of the abstract

118 Ibid., 41. Coomaraswamy quotes the Sukranitisara, IV, 4 105-6.
119 From my observations at the Norbulingka and the Gama Gazi. Also see Jackson and Jackson, Tibetan Thangka Painting.
120 In most contemporary academic writing about iconometry in both the Indian and Tibetan traditions, iconometry is sometimes conflated with and always closely associated with iconography. Indeed, in the Tibetan scriptures relating to art, iconographic and iconometric prescriptions are not differentiated in positioning or emphasis. I will, however, make a distinction between the two, and will focus on iconometry as a more quantifiable variable.
122 Ibid., 7.
code of iconometry in every new work of traditional Buddhist sculpture. In fact, while sculptors of religious images are known colloquially as gu seng ge (“statue makers”) or lak she ba (“craftsmen”), Tsering Palden informed me that they call themselves ten shing (“makers of Dharma”), with ten meaning “Dharma” and shing, “to make.” The insider nomenclature of Tibetan Buddhist sculptors therefore reflects their work in literally manifesting the Buddhadharm in physical form, through the immutable beauty of iconometric grids.

The practice of iconometry

As mentioned earlier, at the Norbulingka, the two main tools used for ensuring that the sculpture-in-progress adheres to iconometric prescriptions are a long-pronged iron compass, and a wooden scale. The scale for three-dimensional images is made from a planed wooden stick acquired from the woodcarving workshop next door. First, the total height of the image or body part to be made is established, according to the contract of commission. At the Norbulingka workshop, this measurement is generally expressed in terms of the English scale – feet and inches. The next step is then to look at what type of divinity is to be represented, as well as its body posture, in order to determine the number of modules within the total scale. The sculptors call this module a zhal, which literally means “face” in Tibetan. Each zhal thus represents the vertical length of the face of the Buddha. A standing image of a Buddha is constituted of 10.5 zhal, while a seated Buddha is made up of 7.5. Assuming an 8 foot tall standing Buddha, each zhal measures 8 ft/10.5 = 9.1 inches. The sculptor marks off 9.1 inches on the wooden stick with a ruler, demarcating the absolute limits of the
wooden scale. A zhal is made up of 12 sor, or “finger” in Tibetan. Using a compass, the sculptor estimates the halfway and quarter point of the scale to mark off 6 and 3 sor. The 3 sor length is further subdivided into 2 and 1 sor lengths.

The initial step in the construction of any Buddhist statue is the plotting of an iconometric grid on the surface of the sheet metal. Using the sharp edge of a punch and a ruler, the sculptor first etches a vertical line right down the center of the sheet metal, which acts as the axis of the figure, or central perpendicular (Tb. tshans-thig). This axis is intersected at stipulated points, according to the appropriate scale, by horizontal lines perpendicular to it. Diagonal and oblique lines, as well as arcs inscribed using a compass, further add to the complexity of the grid. The sculptor finally sketches a two-dimensional image of the divinity onto the grid in black, using the lines and intersection points as cues for the placement and the spatial flexions of facial features and parts of the body. This two-dimensional design is then used to guide the hammer in producing the volumes and outlines of the piece. In the course of being repeatedly hammered and annealed, however, the iconometric grid is invariably distorted. The image is thus constantly redrawn onto the metal at the same time as it is being hammered into it, a processual confluence of the second and third dimensions. As volumes and surfaces emerge out of the sheet metal, the sculptor performs veritable acrobatics with his long-pronged compass and scale along planes and edges to ensure they conform to the appropriate iconometric grids governing three-dimensional space. As Tsering Palden told me once, “the thangka painters are lucky, you know. They only have to learn the measurements in two dimensions. We
metalworkers have to learn in three!” Indeed, Chenmo Penpa Dorje’s own treatise on imagemaking includes iconometric diagrams which illustrates the prescribed proportions for three-dimensional volumes.

The first two years of the twelve-year metalworking course at the Norbulingka is dedicated to learning the iconometric proportions through memorization and by sketching images in their iconometric grids over and over again. Iconometry is inscribed into their muscle memory through repetition, years before the students even lay hands on hammer and punch. Of course, in practice, sculptors refer to textual sources to jog their memory, especially the iconometric diagrams included in artists’ treatises. However, I found that especially with the senior sculptors, these iconometric grids came quite naturally when they were absorbed in the redrawing process that I detailed above. As Mosteller argues in relation to the practice of iconometry by contemporary Indian stone sculptors, this “mnemonic system for transmitting visual imagery unites proportion and style in such a way that the definition of artistic form is controlled by measure.” The inculcation of iconometry in the memory of the Norbulingka sculptors thus ensures the maintenance of Chenmo Penpa Dorje’s artistic lineage in exile, even estranged from the Tibetan “homeland.” The act of checking iconometric prescriptions is therefore an everyday manifestation of the territorialization of Tibetan culture from geographical Tibet into the diaspora, such that the sculptor is constantly reterritorializing codified “tradition” into its new locality – the physical form of his sculpture-in-progress.

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123 Tsering Palden (senior sculptor, Norbulingka Institute), in a personal interview with the author, 25 November 2010
124 Mosteller, “Problem of Proportion and Style,” 390.
Sources of Iconometry in Tibetan Art

Up till the thirteenth century C.E., systems of iconometry were extremely mutable, due to the continual expansion of the Buddhist pantheon and the lack of formalized standards of imagemaking. The first redaction of the Tibetan Buddhist Canon of Scripture that is in contemporary usage today was completed in the early thirteenth century, and is known as the Narthang old edition. Later editions with revisions and additions have been printed since then, and many variants exist today in monasteries and libraries in China, Tibet, India and Japan. With the redaction of the Narthang old edition into the fourteenth century, however, Tibetan art was “standardised with reference to a...canon which, though by no means free from variation or even inconsistency, was at least of finite size and agreed content.”

In general, the Canon consists of two parts – the Kangyur, which collects scriptures attributed directly to Lord Buddha; and the Tengyur, a series of commentaries and treatises written by Buddhist masters inside and outside Tibet. Four iconometric works, all of Indian origin, are included in the Tengyur – the non-Buddhist Citralakṣaṇa from the sixth to seventh century, the Pratimā-lakṣaṇa-sūtra, the Daśatāla-nyagrodha-parimaṇḍala-buddha-pratimā-lakṣaṇa, and the Sambuddha-bhāṣīta-pratimā-lakṣaṇa-vivaraṇa. However, based on commentaries on imagemaking written by Tibetan Buddhist theologians and on artists’ treatises, the Tibetan iconometric tradition is based mainly on three texts – chapter 5 from the Kalacākra-tantra and chapter 30 from the Mahāsaṃvarodaya-tantra in the Kangyur, and the

above-mentioned Pratimā-lakṣaṇa-sūtra in the Tengyur.\textsuperscript{128} All of these were translated from Sanskrit to the Tibetan, which attests to the debt Tibetan art owes to Indian imagemaking traditions.

As Denwood and other art historians have noted, the measurements given in the three major iconometric texts do not tally.\textsuperscript{129} Additionally, later Tibetan commentators interpreted these measurement systems in different ways, which could partly be a result of the ambiguity in use of “symbolic [numerical] terminology, rather than actual numbers”\textsuperscript{130} and of the variance in the demarcation of parts of the body in the tantras.\textsuperscript{131} These commentators were fully aware of the discrepancies between the three texts, and ascribed them to errors on the part of preceding commentators, the requirements of media – sculpture as opposed to painting, or, most interestingly, as valid alternative systems.\textsuperscript{132} Jackson and Jackson note that “the techniques for painting Buddhas entered Tibet at different periods and from different regions.”\textsuperscript{133} It is entirely possible that each transmission of artistic techniques came laden with its particular system of iconometry. Also, Lo Bue observes that these iconometric texts only form a small part of the tantras or sūtras they are found in, and are written more as a religious study of aesthetic perfection rather than to be of practical use to the working artist. He ascribes this to the “cultural gap between the scholarly world which produced the texts on iconometry and the artistic community which produced

\begin{thebibliography}{9}
\bibitem{128} Peterson, “Sources of Variation,” 241; Lo Bue, “Iconographic Sources,” 195; Mgon-po-skyabs, The Buddhist Canon of Iconometry, 11–20. Also Jackson and Jackson, Tibetan Thangka Painting, 147.: “The main iconometric system of Tibetan authors...agreed with the tantras and their commentaries, and not with the four iconometric treatises in the Tanjur.”
\bibitem{129} Denwood, “The Artist’s Treatise of sMan-bla Don-grub,” 24; Gerasimova, “Compositional Structure,” 40–1; Lo Bue, “Iconographic Sources,” 194–5; Peterson, “Sources of Variation,” 239.
\bibitem{130} Peterson, “Sources of Variation,” 241.
\bibitem{131} Mosteller, “Problem of Proportion and Style,” 391–2.
\bibitem{132} Peterson, “Sources of Variation,” 242; Jackson and Jackson, Tibetan Thangka Painting, 144.
\bibitem{133} Jackson and Jackson, Tibetan Thangka Painting, 144.
\end{thebibliography}
the images,\textsuperscript{134} noting from his fieldwork with sculptors in the Kathmandu Valley that iconometric diagrams and oral teachings, rather than scriptural texts, were the primary means of transmission of canonical iconometry. This corresponds with my own observations in the Norbulingka and the Gama Gazi. Apart from the masters and workshop heads, none of the sculptors I talked with owned a copy of the above-mentioned scriptural texts, but most of them had a set of iconometric drawings or photographs within easy reach as they worked.

It is reasonable to assume, however, that these orally transmitted iconometric systems trace their lineage to one or more of the alternative systems proposed in the scriptures. Chenmo-la informed me that his own sources are the Kalacākra-tantra and a text written by Maudgalyāyana (Tb. mau 'gal gyi bu), one of Śakyamuni Buddha’s two closest disciples. The former has already been mentioned as one of the three main sources of Tibetan iconometry. I have not, however, been able to find any reference to any iconometric texts written by Maudgalyāyana – the closest being the Pratimā-lakṣaṇa-sūtra, which is said to be the words of the Buddha transcribed by his other main disciple, Śāriputra (Tb. sha ri'i bu). Dangzeng, the thangka painter in Chengdu, told me that the main scriptural text used by contemporary artists from eastern Tibet is the aforementioned Zaoxiang Liangdu Jing, which is a Chinese translation by Mongol scholar Gompojab from the eleventh to fourteenth century Tibetan translation of the Sanskrit original of the Pratimā-lakṣaṇa-sūtra, commissioned by the Qianlong emperor in 1742. In order to better understand these variations and lineages, it would be productive to do a side-by-side comparison of these various iconometric systems, in both scriptural sources and those used in practice today.

\textsuperscript{134} Lo Bue, “Iconographic Sources,” 188.


Comparison

As my project focuses on the living tradition and practice of sculpture, I will first approach the scriptural texts and artists’ treatises as a contemporary sculptor would. Disregarding the actual text itself, I refer to iconometric diagrams provided in the treatises, using a compass to derive any measurements not explicitly stated in the grids by comparing them to those which are. This was a common practice in the Norbulingka and the Gama Gazi, and indeed, most of the sculptors were unable to read the classical register of Tibetan used even in the treatises written by modern masters. Tenzin Dhondhup told me that only high lamas and Geshes\textsuperscript{135} would be able to read them with ease, and that about ten years ago or so Chenmo-la arranged for weekly classes where a Geshe explained his book to all the sculptors, line by line, in conversational Tibetan so they would understand it. Dhondhup laughed as he told me that as a thirteen year old, most of it still went over his head, and he usually zoned out, as if he were attending a prayer festival (Tb. monlam).

The Tibetan iconometric traditions are also characterized by their hierarchic classification of the Buddhist pantheon into categories according to their levels of enlightenment. Each category of divinity is assigned a unique set of measurements and proportions which differ mainly through the total units (either \textit{zhal} or \textit{sor}) which make up the entire figure, descending down the scale. As previous scholars of Tibetan iconometry have noted, the number of iconometric classes also varies greatly according to time period and school, though in general, from the fifteenth century on,

\textsuperscript{135} The equivalent to a Doctor in Theology in the Tibetan Buddhist tradition
the number has been standardized to six – five for deities and one for humans. In choosing to focus on the iconometric class of Buddhas, I assert that Buddhas, as the central figures in the pantheon of Buddhism, would best embody the metaphysical ideals of iconometry. The iconometric class of Buddhas is the only one that is consistently elucidated in all scriptural sources and artist treatises. Also, as the iconography of the Buddha was the first to be developed in the history of Buddhist sculpture, as recorded in both material and written history, it follows that the iconometric system which governs it would probably be the basis of all the others.

Peterson has tabulated the iconometric systems from the three canonical sources – the Kalacakra-tantra, the Mahasamvarodaya-tantra and the version of the Pratimā-lakṣaṇa-sūtra in the edition of the Tengyur in Beijing. As these texts can only be found in Sanskrit and Tibetan, I will use Peterson’s assessments and diagrams. While Peterson provides iconometric diagrams to illustrate the seated Buddha in the Kalacakra and Mahasamvarodaya tantras, she does not for the standing Buddha, and not at all for the Pratimā-lakṣaṇa-sūtra. Another scriptural source available to us is the Zaoxiang Liangdu Jing and its commentary, translated into English by Cai Jingfeng in 2000, which also includes iconometric diagrams. To these, I would add

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136 “Contemporary artists seem to follow a classification of six groups derived from sMan-thang-pa’s fivefold system by adding one category for humans.” (Lo Bue, “Iconographic Sources,” 197.) Lo Bue cites the field research of David and Janice Jackson and Tucci as his sources for this statement. Unfortunately, the sculptors I interviewed were unable to give me an exact exposition of the different classes. In any case, Jackson and Jackson quote Shu-chen in asserting that no one scriptural text “contained descriptions of all iconometric classes, and therefore one had to refer to several texts to get all the proportions” (Jackson and Jackson, Tibetan Thangka Painting, 146.), which makes this a less useful basis for comparison for my purposes.

137 Peterson’s source for her iconometric diagrams from the Kalacakra and the Mahasamvarodaya tantras are unclear. In her footnotes, she acknowledges Janice and David Jackson, and H.R. Downs Jr. for “access to their collections of thig rtsa (iconometric diagrams)” (Peterson, “Sources of Variation,” 248.), which might be one possible source.

138 Gompojab, in his Introductory Remark, tells us that “the Grand State Tutor entrusted me with an authentic edition of the said Canon, together with five specimens of portraits” (Mgon-po-skyabs, The
the only art treatise written by a modern Tibetan artist available in English, Gega Lama’s *Principles of Tibetan Art* (1983). Gega Lama, who counts himself part of the Karma Gadri school of painting, wrote this while in exile in India as a manual for the practicing thangka painter. Also, at the Norbulingka, I was given as parting gifts Chenmo Penpa Dorje’s two-part treatise on sculpture published in 2001, and an iconographical treatise by the late Rigzin Paljor, who used to be Senior Master of Thangka Painting at the Centre for Tibetan Arts and Crafts. While both texts are in scriptural Tibetan, they include a number of annotated iconographic drawings which were referred to on a daily basis by the Norbulingka sculptors. Finally, some sculptors at the Gama Gazi referred to iconometric diagrams in a Chinese language publication, the *Sketchbook of Tibetan Buddhism in China* (Ch. Zhongguo zangchuan fojiao baimiao tuji), which I managed to purchase. In summary, this comparative analysis will examine the iconometric grids applied to male Buddhas in the seated and standing positions in these seven scriptural texts and artist manuals. For ease of reference, I will hereafter refer to the three artist manuals by the last names of their authors, to the three scriptural texts in an abbreviated form, and to the *Sketchbook of Tibetan Buddhism in China* simply as “Sketchbook.”

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*Buddhist Canon of Iconometry*, 52.) The iconometric drawings included in Cai’s translation must therefore have been added before the eighteenth century, perhaps drawn from an actual artist’s treatise.
Table 1:
Iconometric proportions for Seated Buddha Figure (in *sor*)

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Figure no.</th>
<th>35</th>
<th>36</th>
<th>37</th>
<th>38</th>
<th>39</th>
<th>40</th>
<th>41</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td><strong>Vertical</strong></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Crest jewel (<em>nortog</em>)</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Head protuberance (<em>usnīsa</em>)</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Top of skull to hair line</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Face</td>
<td>12.5</td>
<td>12</td>
<td>12</td>
<td>12.5</td>
<td>12</td>
<td>12</td>
<td>12</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Neck</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Chest</td>
<td>12.5</td>
<td>12</td>
<td>12</td>
<td>12.5</td>
<td>12</td>
<td>12</td>
<td>12</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Stomach</td>
<td>12.5</td>
<td>12 (8+4)</td>
<td>12</td>
<td>12.5</td>
<td>12</td>
<td>12</td>
<td>12</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Side of hip</td>
<td>5 (4+1)</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>4 (3+1)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Thigh to pubic zone</td>
<td>8</td>
<td>8</td>
<td>8</td>
<td>8</td>
<td>8</td>
<td>8</td>
<td>8</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Junction of crossed legs</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Lower extension of knees</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Total (sans nortog):</strong></td>
<td>70.5</td>
<td>68</td>
<td>68</td>
<td>69.5</td>
<td>68</td>
<td>68</td>
<td>68</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Fingertips of right hand to pedestal</td>
<td>6 (4+2)</td>
<td>-</td>
<td>-</td>
<td>4.5</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>-</td>
<td>-</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Pedestal</td>
<td>12</td>
<td>-</td>
<td>-</td>
<td>12</td>
<td>-</td>
<td>-</td>
<td>-</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Horizontal (one side of body)</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Middle of face to ear</td>
<td>6</td>
<td>6</td>
<td>6</td>
<td>6</td>
<td>6</td>
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<td>2</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Ear to inner arm</td>
<td>4.5</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>4.5 (4+0.5)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Inner arm to shoulder</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>6</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Shoulder to outer arm</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>-</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Outer arm to knee</td>
<td>8</td>
<td>8</td>
<td>7</td>
<td>8</td>
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<td>8</td>
<td>8</td>
</tr>
<tr>
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<td>26.5</td>
<td>26</td>
<td>25</td>
<td>26</td>
<td>26</td>
<td>26</td>
<td>26.5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Full horizontal length:</strong></td>
<td>53</td>
<td>52</td>
<td>50</td>
<td>52</td>
<td>52</td>
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<td>53</td>
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</table>
Table 2: Iconometric proportions for Standing Buddha Figure (in sor)

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<th>Figure no.</th>
<th>n/a</th>
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<th>40</th>
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</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td><strong>Vertical</strong></td>
<td>Kala-cākra</td>
<td>Samva-rodaya</td>
<td>Liangdujing</td>
<td>Dorje</td>
<td>Lama</td>
<td>Paljor</td>
<td>Sketch-book</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Crest jewel (nortog)</td>
<td>-</td>
<td>-</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Head protuberance (uṣṇīṣa)</td>
<td>-</td>
<td>-</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Top of skull to hairline</td>
<td>-</td>
<td>-</td>
<td>4.5</td>
<td>4.5</td>
<td>4.5</td>
<td>4.5</td>
<td>4.5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Face</td>
<td>-</td>
<td>-</td>
<td>12.5</td>
<td>12.5</td>
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<td>12.5</td>
<td>12.5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Neck</td>
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<td>4</td>
<td>4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Chest</td>
<td>-</td>
<td>-</td>
<td>12.5</td>
<td>12.5</td>
<td>12.5</td>
<td>12.5</td>
<td>12.5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Stomach</td>
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<td>12.5</td>
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<tr>
<td>Side of hip</td>
<td>-</td>
<td>-</td>
<td>4.5</td>
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<td>4.5</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>4.5</td>
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<tr>
<td>Groin area</td>
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<td>8</td>
<td>8.5</td>
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<td>8</td>
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<tr>
<td>Hips and thighs</td>
<td>-</td>
<td>-</td>
<td>29 (4+25)</td>
<td>29 (4+4+21)</td>
<td>29 (4+4+21)</td>
<td>29 (4+12.5+12.5)</td>
<td>29 (4+25)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Knees</td>
<td>-</td>
<td>-</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Calves</td>
<td>-</td>
<td>-</td>
<td>4.5</td>
<td>4.5</td>
<td>4.5</td>
<td>4.5</td>
<td>4.5</td>
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<tr>
<td>Feet</td>
<td>-</td>
<td>-</td>
<td>25</td>
<td>25</td>
<td>25</td>
<td>25</td>
<td>25</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Total (sans nortog):</strong></td>
<td>125</td>
<td>120</td>
<td>125</td>
<td>125</td>
<td>125</td>
<td>125</td>
<td>125</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Horizontal (one side of body)</strong></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Middle of face to ear</td>
<td>-</td>
<td>-</td>
<td>-</td>
<td>6</td>
<td>6</td>
<td>6</td>
<td>6</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Ear</td>
<td>-</td>
<td>-</td>
<td>-</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>6.5</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Ear to armpit</td>
<td>-</td>
<td>-</td>
<td>-</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>4.5</td>
<td>4.5</td>
<td>4.5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Armpit to wrist</td>
<td>-</td>
<td>-</td>
<td>-</td>
<td>38 (14+6+1+16+1)</td>
<td>37.5 (4+2+8+6+1+16+0.5)</td>
<td>37 (12.5+8+12.5+4)</td>
<td>38 (20+1+1+6+1)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Hand</td>
<td>-</td>
<td>-</td>
<td>-</td>
<td>12.5 (7+5.5)</td>
<td>12.5 (7+5.5)</td>
<td>12.5</td>
<td>12</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Total:</strong></td>
<td>62.5</td>
<td>60</td>
<td>-</td>
<td>62.5</td>
<td>62.5</td>
<td>62</td>
<td>62.5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Full arm span:</strong></td>
<td>125</td>
<td>120</td>
<td>-</td>
<td>125</td>
<td>125</td>
<td>124</td>
<td>125</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Numerical analysis

In examining the above systems of iconometry for variation, it is striking at first glance that there seems to be so little of it. Looking at the row value for total number of sor in the iconometric diagrams for the Buddha figure, in the vertical proportions for the Seated Buddha, the value in Lama, Paljor and the Sketchbook is 68 sor, conforming to that of the ones in the Samvarodaya and the Liangdu Jing. Dorje adds 1½ sor to that number, and the Kalacākra 2½ sor. The differences in the horizontal proportions, however, do not correspond to this correlation – Dorje, Lama and Paljor conform to the Samvarodaya’s total of 52 sor, while the Sketchbook’s total of 53 sor is the same as the Kalacākra. The Liangdu Jing’s total of 50 sor differs from all the rest. The measurements for the Standing Buddha reveal a greater level of standardization. The vertical and horizontal totals of Dorje, Lama and the Sketchbook all conform to that of the Kalacākra and the Liangdu Jing with 125 sor for both values. Paljor has a vertical total of 124½ sor and a horizontal total of 124 sor, while the Samvarodaya is alone in prescribing 120 sor for both. It is evident that there is no consistent correlation between the values prescribed in the artists’ treatises and the scriptural texts – for example, while Dorje’s vertical and horizontal totals for the Standing Buddha are the same as that of the Kalacākra; it is 1 sor less for the vertical and horizontal totals of the Seated Buddha, the latter actually conforming to the value in the Samvarodaya.

Taking a closer look at the values prescribed for the individual segments, we can see that these variations in the total are the result of incremental additions of ½ sor to specific body parts. For example, Dorje adds ½ sor to the Face, Chest and
Stomach vertical measurements in the Seated Buddha, accounting for its \( 1 \frac{1}{2} \text{sor} \) divergence with the others. I argue that this \( \frac{1}{2} \text{sor} \) margin of difference is laden with significance. As I mentioned in my description earlier, Tibetan artists use two main units of measurement, the larger one called a \textit{zhal} and the smaller a \textit{sor}. According to Peterson, the commentaries on the \textit{Kalacākra-tantra} inform us that the “hieratic distinction” between Buddha and Bodhisattva images is made by modifying the value of the large unit of measurement, such that “each large measure on Buddha images is allotted an additional \( \frac{1}{2} \text{sor} \) i.e. 12\( \frac{1}{2} \text{sor} \) to the 12 \textit{sor} unit of all other classes of deities. This additional \( \frac{1}{2} \text{sor} \)...is the point of greatest departure from the iconometric canons of the other two texts and is the element of greatest variability in the iconometric practices of contemporary craftsmen.”\(^{139}\) In fact, it seems that in artists’ treatises and scriptural texts, the first step in constructing the iconometric system is to conceptualize the vertical length of the figure as divided into a fixed number of large units. An eighteenth-century Tibetan précis of Menla Dondrub’s influential fifteenth-century painting treatise states that the Buddha proportional class is made up of “125 \textit{sor} (=10 \textit{thal mo} [large unit] of 12\( \frac{1}{2} \text{sor} \) each).”\(^{140}\) Gega Lama, in the introduction to his chapter on the method of iconometry, states that “however large an image one wishes to draw, the distance from the cranial protuberance (\textit{uṣṇīṣa}) to the heels is divided into ten equal parts: one such part is termed a ‘large unit’ (\textit{cha chen po}), [also called] face (\textit{zhal}), span (\textit{mtho}), or hand (\textit{thal mo}).”\(^{141}\) This conceptualization of the

\(^{139}\) Peterson, “Sources of Variation,” 241.
\(^{140}\) Jackson and Jackson, \textit{Tibetan Thangka Painting}, 50.
\(^{141}\) Gega, \textit{Principles of Tibetan Art}, 78. Gega Lama also further clarifies the use of the \( \frac{1}{2} \) variation by the practicing painter, in distinguishing between the Buddha and Bodhisattva iconometric classes, which should only be applied in situations where it is necessary to draw forms of the buddhas and bodhisattvas at identical heights: “Two surfaces of equal height are first divided into ten equal parts each. The measure of a bodhisattva’s form is arrived at with this measure of (ten) large units divided
figure as made up of large units echoes the prescriptions in the Kalacākra and
Samvarodaya tantras.\textsuperscript{142}

It is clear that the $\frac{1}{2}$ sor variation in the large zhal unit accounts for the
discrepancy of 5 sor ($\frac{1}{2}$ sor x 10 zhal) between the total vertical length of the
Standing Buddha figure in the Kalacākra and Samvarodaya tantras, which
distinguishes what could be two distinct iconometric traditions. With the existence of
such a large discordance in two primary scriptural sources, it is unsurprising that this
was a matter of controversy among Tibetan artist-scholars in the period of Gelugpa
standardization of art and religion in the late seventeenth and early eighteenth
centuries. To illustrate how the $\frac{1}{2}$ sor variation came to emblematize fidelity to
tradition, I will summarize the accounts provided in Jackson and Jackson, Peterson
and Lo Bue. The two main interlocutors in this debate were Desi Sangye Gyatso
(1653-1705), the regent who succeeded the Fifth Dalai Lama, and Shuchen Tsultrim
Rinchen (1697-1774), a famous painter and scholar. In his Bstan bcos baidurya dkar
po las dris lan ‘khrul snang g.ya’ sel, Gyatso, from observations of his artist
contemporaries, argued for a differentiation in iconometric systems on the basis of
media. Painted Buddhas, following the Mahāsamvarodaya-tantra, should measure
120 sor, while sculpted Buddhas must conform to the Kalacākra-tantra’s prescription
of 125 sor.\textsuperscript{143} Shuchen questioned this statement when the Baidurya dkar po was
published after Gyatso’s death. After careful study of five great artistic treatises by

\begin{itemize}
\item[142] "...statements in the Kalacākra Tantra to the effect that a Buddha image should measure 125 sor, or ten spans of twelve and one-half sor." (Jackson and Jackson, Tibetan Thangka Painting, 144.)
\item[143] Peterson, “Sources of Variation,” 243; Lo Bue, “Iconographic Sources,” 196; Jackson and Jackson, Tibetan Thangka Painting, 144–5.
\end{itemize}
Tibetan authorities, and the tantras and their commentaries, he concluded that Menla Dondrub’s fifteenth-century treatise had to be accepted as “the fundamental treatise...since it was perfect accord with the Indian sources accessible to him in Tibetan translation.”\textsuperscript{144} Shuchen notes that Menla Dondrub emphasized that “the image of the Buddha should measure 125 sor whether it is drawn (or painted), cast, carved or modeled.”\textsuperscript{145} In accordance with Tibetan conventions of scholarship, he then references Tibetan commentaries in the Tengyur by scholars such as Bo-dong Pan-chen (1375-1451) and ‘Brug-chen Padma-dkar-po (1526-1592) who also interpreted the discrepancy in the Kalac\=akra and Samvarodaya tantras as an error in the latter – “the failure [of the Samvarodaya-tantra] to mention the half sor should be understood as being merely a lack of clarity of expression on the part of the tantra.”\textsuperscript{146} Shuchen finally traces the source of Gyatso’s opinion to an “interlinear note (mchan bu)” in the sixteenth-century treatise of ‘Phreng-kha-ba Dpal-dlan-blo-gros-bzang-po which prescribes the same distinction on the basis of media, taking it to be “the careless insertion of a later scribe or editor.”\textsuperscript{147}

In light of the above controversy, it appears that the Kalac\=akra tantra prescription of 125 sor has been the dominant position taken by Tibetan scholars since the publication of Menla Dondrub’s treatise in the fifteenth century. The fact that the total vertical lengths for the Standing Buddha in the iconometric diagrams provided in all the contemporary artists’ treatises in my study conform to this value, with the exception of Paljor which subtracts $\frac{1}{2}$ from the total, supports this view. It is

\begin{footnotes}
\item[144] Jackson and Jackson, \textit{Tibetan Thangka Painting}, 145.
\item[145] Ibid., 147. (note 12)
\item[146] Padma-dkar-po, quoted in Ibid., 145.
\item[147] Ibid.
\end{footnotes}
clear that there were fruitful interchanges between the oral and written traditions of iconometry. In fact, most writers on iconometry were artists themselves – Desi Sangye Gyatso and Shuchen Tsultrim Rinchen included – and the treatises written by venerated artists like Menla Dondrub were often taken to be as authoritative as the scriptural texts themselves. Chenmo Penpa Dorje’s two-part sculpture treatise likewise draws equally from his own practical experience with statuemaking and from the scriptural texts. The sculptors at the Norbulingka told me that he was as much a scholar as he was a sculptor, which is reflected in his familiarity with the classical register of Tibetan that the ordinary sculptors are unable to read. Norbu told me that Chenmo-la, encouraged by the Dalai Lama to preserve his knowledge for future generations, started the preparations for his treatise in 1989. As he was still keeping regular office hours at the Norbulingka, he took twelve years to finish it, often eschewing sleep in order to pore over texts in the Kangyur and Tengyur to find the references he needed. His unremitting labor in compiling the texts caused him to come down with tuberculosis for two years, a debilitating disease which his students say was the root cause of his death. One might be tempted to interpret this analogically as an artist’s sacrifice for the sake of scriptural fidelity.

Ethnographic insights

It is significant to note, however, that both Dorje and Paljor are used as sources of iconometry by sculptors at the Norbulingka workshop, considering the discrepancies between the two. When I asked Tsering about this ½ sor variation, he told me that “it depends on Chenmo-la. Sometimes when I am making a statue, he will come and say
you have to make it 12½ because the statue looks much smaller, so you have to make it [the measurement] larger. It depends on the shape [of the statue] and how it looks.”

The ½ sor variation will then be applied to all the large units in the image.

In accordance with this statement, I observed in my fieldwork that the counsel of senior sculptors still takes precedence over the iconometric diagrams, the latter functioning more as a set of guidelines for the initial drawing and modeling. At the Norbulingka, the sculptors would consult Tsetan Norbu, about the correctness of their work at every stage of the repoussé process. The first thing that Norbu did was to use his compass and scale to check if the iconometry of the figure conformed to Chenmo-la’s system. More importantly, he would also visually estimate, without the use of tools, the accuracy of volumes and contours harder to codify numerically. He would make comments like “the cheeks are not round enough” or “the chin is too sunk into the neck.” When I asked him how he quantified these requirements iconometrically, he said that it was more based on his experience as a sculptor – under Chenmo-la’s tutelage – than on any written text. It is clear that in the actual practice of workshops today, oral transmission still supersedes the scriptural text as the final authority on iconometry.

This issue arises from the impossibility of precisely translating three-dimensional forms into the two dimensions of iconometric diagrams. While Shuchen Tsheltrim Rinchen and Menla Dondrub may not differentiate iconometric systems on the basis of media, it is evident that on a practical level, diagrams made for the use of painters will not completely satisfy the requirements of a sculptor. Penpa Dorje’s

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148 Tsering Palden (senior sculptor, Norbulingka Institute), in a personal interview with the author, 28 May 2011
manual, the only treatise in my study which specifically deals with the medium of sculpture, includes three pages of iconometric diagrams which provide the designs a working sculptor would transfer directly onto a flat sheet of metal that will then be manipulated in some way into the third dimension (Fig. 46). I have not seen such diagrams anywhere else either in field or in literature research – though admittedly, the only other artists’ treatises I have been able to procure were written for painters. For example, the upper two diagrams in figure 46 prescribes the different horizontal lengths for the top and bottom of a tapered sheet of metal meant to be rolled up into a tube, which represent the receding circumference of the arm and forearm. For parts of the body whose three-dimensionality are much more difficult to represent two-dimensionally, only the flat vertical and horizontal measurements are given for the initial sketch, as per the usual diagrams. It is only the careful guidance of their seniors which allows the individual sculptor to achieve the volumes and contours in the third dimension which are considered iconometrically correct in their particular workshop.

Another example of how the process of drawing on a two-dimensional surface is subject to the requirements of sculpture can be derived from my own experience learning how to sketch the Buddha figure in my apprenticeship at the Norbulingka. I was assigned the iconometric diagram of the Seated Buddha to copy out, and was meticulously reproducing every line and mark with the sandpaper-sharpened tip of a mechanical pencil. Tsetan Norbu wandered over, took the sketch from me, and proceeded to correct it, going over my lines with a sure hand (Fig. 47). He advised me that the drawing conventions for a three-dimensional image are different, observing first that the folds in the robes as I had rendered them were too intricate to be
represented in metalwork. He repositioned the feet and hands, making the toes and fingers bigger and blockier. He finally directed me to refer to the sculptural examples they had all over the workshop. Indeed, as a complement to oral teachings, finished sculptures made by more senior sculptors or even Chenmo-la himself were the main visual referent for the accurate iconometric reproduction of volumes and curves. I observed that sculptors doing repoussé work always kept such a sculptural model close at hand.149

Finally, the limitations of iconometric diagrams in practice are apparent not only from their insufficiency in expressing three-dimensionality. There are observable inconsistencies apart from the absolute numerical values of the grid itself. Take for example the Standing Buddha iconometric diagrams in Dorje and the Sketchbook, which agree on both the total vertical and horizontal lengths of the image – 125 sor. As mentioned, the former is used in the Norbulingka workshop and the latter in the Gama Gazi Factory. In the first place, the ways in which the large units are divided into sections bounded by the horizontal and vertical gridlines differ.150 While in the vertical length of Dorje the Side of Hip is allocated 4 sor and the Groin Area 8½ sor to make up the 12½ sor large unit, in the Sketchbook the ½ variation is applied to the Side of Hip instead. We can see the same differentiation in the horizontal lengths of the figures, where Dorje assigns the Hand 12½ sor and the Ear to Armpit 4 sor, while in the Sketchbook the ½ sor variation is attached to the latter segment. Secondly, a variation much more visible to the naked eye is that the ways in which the Buddha

149 Sculptors, especially those working on accessories for casted statues, also referred to photographs of finished sculptures as a guide for iconography.
150 I attempt to convey this discrepancy in Tables 1 and 2 by showing the additions of the differently segmented areas required to achieve the total value represented by the body part designation in the row heading. I follow Jackson and Jackson in their designation of body parts bound in the grid.
figure is sketched within the boundaries of the iconometric grid differ according to the Master’s hand. For example, in Dorje the musculature of the upright left leg is much more defined, with the curvature of the thigh slanting gradually away from the 6 sor boundary of the grid, and the knee correspondingly located closer to the horizontal midpoint of the box. In the Sketchbook, on the other hand, the left thigh lines up almost exactly with the vertical line of the grid, with the knee going slightly over the 12½ sor boundary. This gives the legs of the figure in Dorje a more slender, graceful appearance. With these formal variations in the diagrams being the prerogative of the Master of the workshop, or at least of somebody working very closely with him, we can discern even in these semi-textual referents the preponderance of the oral tradition in workshop practice.

Conclusions

In the above analysis, it seems that the fundamental dichotomy in the contemporary practice of Tibetan iconometry is between textual and oral transmission, corresponding to how the sculptor’s rhetoric of complete fidelity to canonical prescriptions is counterbalanced by the contingencies of actual practice. I would argue that in the day-to-day practice of the workshops in the Tibetan diaspora, oral teachings ultimately take precedence over textual sources. The primary reason for this is the low literacy rate in scriptural Tibetan among ordinary sculptors in both regions, which results in their inability to comprehend the artist treatises or scriptural texts on iconometry. Iconographic diagrams, while useful reference points in the design stages, are limited in their application to three-dimensional masses. At the
Norbulingka, many sculptors told me that the standard of Tibetan has dropped drastically in exile, a result of the attempt to reconcile the three main Tibetan dialects, further muddied by the necessities of learning Hindi and English in school. While there are Tibetan medium schools at the elementary, middle and high school levels, unless one chooses to study Buddhist theology at the Central Institute for Higher Tibetan Studies in Sārnāth, college programs are usually conducted in Hindi or English. In any case, most of the sculptors at the Norbulingka are high-school dropouts. A similar situation has occurred in Chinese-occupied Tibet with the disintegration of the hegemony of monastic institutions, which were traditionally responsible for education. Admittedly, it is arguable that even in pre-1959 Tibet, only the Master and his most advanced students received sufficient training in Tibetan to be able to read scriptural texts.

At the same time, however, it is apparent that the canonical texts of imagemaking serve to underwrite the oral tradition, especially in certifying the products of the workshop as part of an unbroken lineage of sculpture that can be traced all the way to the origins of Buddhist art in India. As mentioned before, the sculptors at the Norbulingka emphasize their adherence to the textual prescriptions of iconometry to legitimize themselves as authentically “Tibetan” sculptors even in the alien cultural context of Dharamshala. Artists in Chinese-occupied Tibet, who are perhaps less compelled to explicitly prove their “Tibetan-ness,” nevertheless stress the importance of the science of iconometry as recorded in the scriptures in producing valid works of art. Furthermore, the “cultural gap” that Lo Bue finds between the scholarly and artistic worlds in Tibetan art is more porous than he makes it out to be,
such that many Tibetan writers of artistic treatises were not only artists themselves, but also consulted their artist contemporaries as authorities in their own right. Chenmo Penpa Dorje, himself, spent hours delving into the Kangyur and Tengyur for canonical prescriptions on art to supplement and authenticate his own extensive experience with statuemaking. Perhaps the most visible quantitative representation of how the oral lineage of teachings takes as its foundation canonical scriptures is in Table 2 – how the total vertical lengths of the Standing Buddha in all but one of the artist treatises in my comparative study conform to the value of 125 sor given in the Kalacākra-tantra. As described earlier, this standardization is the result of extensive debate between Tibetan scholar-artists about the discrepancy in values given in the Kalacākra and Samvarodaya tantras. In sum, however, it is nevertheless the case that oral teachings – and the visual models of earlier sculptural work – are absolutely necessary in filling in the details a living practice requires which are difficult to render in a textual form, accounting for the differences in how iconometric prescriptions are reterritorialized in the products of each of my fieldsites.
3.

THE ROOTS OF INNOVATION

My mother and father was from Tibet, they fled into exile in India. I was born in India. So if I mix with the Indians I will become like Indian. The only thing that makes a difference is my culture – so for that you have to preserve these things. I have never been to Tibet, but still I have a very strong feeling for Tibet. Indian government has supported us a lot, but we as refugees sometimes are facing problems – take a small example. In 1994, one Tibetan and Indian they fight, and the Indian was dead, so all the Indians from all regions came to Dharamshala. They break all the Tibetans’ houses, they beat all the Tibetans, we can’t do anything. At that time we have a stronger feeling that no, no, this is not our home, this is not our country. We are not belongs here, we are refugees here, we have to go back to our own land where we don’t have to face such problems. So it’s like that.

Tenzin Phuntsok, Norbulingka Public Relations Officer (PRO)
Interviewed by author on 1 Jun 11

Too tired, I am! I want to return home. I go back every year, to my hometown in eastern Tibet. My wife doesn’t want to go back, she likes it here (laughs). I’ve been in Chengdu for over twenty years, my kids are here, my business, factory, and house are also here. But I still feel like I’m living in a hotel, that this is not my own home.

When I was still a semi-nomadic herdsman (Ch. mumin), wearing the traditional Tibetan chuba, I always felt that wearing urban,
big-city clothing was more comfortable. But now, after being in the city for so long; thinking back on my youth I realize the chuba is still better! (laughs). Yes, traditional society was better; people had faith (Ch. xinyang); they had trustworthiness (Ch. xinyong).

Duoqing Zhaxi, Gama Gazi Factory Founder and CEO
Interviewed by author on 10 Jul 11

Tibet-in-exile is sustained by dreams of the “homeland.” Gupta and Ferguson write that “remembered places have...often served as symbolic anchors of community for dispersed peoples.”\(^{151}\) As mentioned in chapter 1, in the case of the displaced Tibetans in Dharamshala, the “homeland” of geographic Tibet not only reifies the common identity of Tibetans in exile, but also remains a palpable – if murky – place of return. I asked Tenzin Dhondhup, a third-generation refugee, while having chai and biscuits in his well-decorated studio apartment, what he would do if China were to grant Tibet full independence, no strings attached. He stared at me for a second like I was mad and said, “roll up all my posters, pack my bags, leave everything here, and take the next bus, train, boat or plane to Tibet, of course!”\(^{152}\) The myth of return is kept alive by the Dalai Lama and his exile government through a conscious effort to preserve “tradition” in institutions like the Norbulingka, which educate the generation of Tibetans born in exile in Tibetan language, arts and crafts. In the radically globalized space of the postmodern world, “the rapidly expanding and quickening

\(^{151}\) Gupta and Ferguson, “Beyond ‘Culture’,” 39.
\(^{152}\) Tenzin Dhondhup (junior sculptor, Norbulingka Institute), in discussion with the author, 7 June 2011
mobility of people combines with the refusal of cultural products to ‘stay put’ to give a profound sense of a loss of territorial roots, of an erosion of the cultural distinctiveness of places.”\textsuperscript{153} The “homeland” is thus deterritorialized from the geographic area of Tibet into a set of cultural practices which are seen to embody “tradition,” and reterritorialized into new localities in exile. However, as Clare Harris argues in her transnational ethnography of Tibetan painters, exile artwork which “for non-Tibetans may conform to a transparent category of traditional Tibetan art which has simply been preserved and relocated are often the result of a selectivity exercise.”\textsuperscript{154} As was discussed in chapter 2, given the rich multiplicity of artistic styles which has flourished in Tibetan areas for centuries, it is inevitable that the Tibetan community-in-exile has selected for those which best epitomize their ideal of “homeland,” authentically “Tibetan” and free from foreign influence. At the same time, they have ignored contemporary artistic developments in Chinese-occupied Tibetan areas, writing them off as irremediably contaminated with Communist propaganda.

Tibetans in the intra-state diaspora of Chengdu, however, are haunted by a similar longing for the “homeland.” Duoqing Zhaxi, the Founder and CEO of the Sichuan Gama Gazi Tibetan Crafts Factory, speaks wistfully of his village in Kham in eastern Tibet and his ideals of “traditional society” despite the success of his business. While the PRC government regards the Tibetan areas as part of the “unified, multi-national country”\textsuperscript{155} of China, Zhaxi identifies the locality of his village in Kham as his true “homeland.” Even though he owns a house and other properties in Chengdu,

\textsuperscript{153} Gupta and Ferguson, “Beyond ‘Culture’,,” 37.
\textsuperscript{154} Harris, \textit{In the Image of Tibet}, 46.
\textsuperscript{155} Information Office of the State Council of the People’s Republic of China, “Article VII.”
he told me that he is in the process of building a retirement home in his hometown, where he plans to retire in a few years. These provincial loyalties can also be perceived in how a large proportion of the ethnic Tibetan employees in the Gama Gazi hail from Zhaxi’s hometown, forming at least thirty percent of the total workforce, with most of the remainder drawn from other villages in eastern Tibet. Of course, this territorialization process differs from that of the exile community – for one, Zhaxi does return regularly to the geographic area of Tibet, and his conception of “homeland” is much more localized than that of the Tibetan exiles, who envision a generalized ideal of a pre-1959 independent “Tibet.” Given the minimal direct interference of the Chinese state in the Tibetan art world of Chengdu,\textsuperscript{156} as opposed to that of the CTA in Dharamshala, Zhaxi’s work of imagination is also less regulated and communal. However, in his struggle with multiple “homes” and in his association of “traditional society” with a remembered geographic locality, the metaphysics of his territorialization resonates strongly with that of Tibet-in-exile, demonstrating their equal participation as nodes in the rhizomatic multiplicity of “Tibet.”

In this section, I will explore the ways in which the “homeland,” as a source of authenticity and “Tibetan-ness” is territorialized in the network of social interactions surrounding the production and use of traditional Tibetan art. In order to test the limits of tradition, I focus my analysis on instances of innovation or experimentation in the products of both communities, defined broadly as any kind of deviation from usual standards of “Tibetan-ness” as determined by the leaders of each community. Given the conservative, scripture-bound nature of religious Tibetan art,\textsuperscript{156}

\textsuperscript{156}Though it must be said that the Tibetans in Chinese-occupied Tibet undoubtedly face severe restrictions on their personal freedoms in other areas of life, my contention here is that art and culture has not been particularly high on the PRC government’s list of priorities since the Cultural Revolution.
the admittance of even the smallest divergence in form and style merits the closest scrutiny. Using two case studies, I will examine both the artworks and the rhetoric surrounding them in order to trace the roots of innovation, which the artists use to justify these apparent transgressions to the broader community. Ultimately, I argue that while these artists may strongly advocate straightforward arborescent models of culture in their discourses on art due to the compulsion of locality, they are implicitly – if not necessarily consciously – aware of the essential rhizomatic multiplicity of “Tibet” which they inhabit as displaced peoples. Finally, I conclude this chapter by investigating the fevered dreams of a “second displacement” to the West that are entertained by many young Tibetan exiles in India, segueing into a discussion of the inherently rhizomatic artwork of one of their number who has taken the plunge – Gonkar Gyatso, a Tibetan contemporary painter now based in London.

Case Study I. The Pāla-Sena Influence in Dharamshala

Facing East

To demonstrate the ways in which a traditional Tibetan Buddha image embodies the “homeland” in the exile community of Dharamshala, I wish to consider briefly the lines of territorializations intersecting in a well-known statue of the bodhisattva Avalokiteśvara (Tb: chenrezig) in Dharamshala (fig. 48). Thekchen Choeling, the main temple in Upper Dharamshala (McLeod Ganj) and the exile equivalent of the
Great Temple in Lhasa,\textsuperscript{157} was built in 1969 for the express purpose of housing this majestic silver sculpture of Avalokiteśvara in his thousand-armed, eleven-headed aspect. Standing thirteen feet tall from his lotus seat, he mesmerizes all who come to pay homage with the expressions of wrath and compassion on his eleven faces. Eight of his arms emerge in three dimensions, six bearing attributes and two displaying mudrās; while the remaining 992 arms are sculpted in relief, radiating outwards in concentric circles from the center of the sculpture. Commissioned by the Fourteenth Dalai Lama himself, the statue was made in 1968 by Chenmo Penpa Dorje, when he was sculpture master at the Center for Tibetan Arts and Crafts. Most significantly, it was conceived as the successor to the seventh century clay statue of a much revered thousand-armed Avalokiteśvara in the Lhasa temple, which was built by King Songtsen Gampo (fig. 49). Though destroyed during the Cultural Revolution, fragments of it were salvaged from the wreckage and smuggled via Nepal into India – following the route taken by the refugees themselves – and ensconced within the new statue. In this way, this statue substitutes for the lost original in a very real sense. A souvenir booklet issued by the Office of the Dalai Lama declares that “there is no difference between the statue, which was housed in the central cathedral in Lhasa and the new one built in India,”\textsuperscript{158} imaginatively constructing a new locality of Lhasa in India.

In its embodiment of the Dalai Lama’s myth of return, the Dharamshala statue is exemplary of the ability of the religious image to function as a receptacle for reterritorializations of the “homeland.” This is achieved in two ways. The first works

\textsuperscript{157} Both are known colloquially by devotees as the Tsuglagkhang (Great Temple), and were built to serve as the Dalai Lama’s personal temple.

\textsuperscript{158} Office of His Holiness the Dalai Lama, \textit{The Tibetan Temple}, 5.
alongside the mechanisms of reincarnation in Tibetan Buddhism, where accomplished spiritual practitioners are said to be able to select their own rebirth upon death. Tenzin Gyatso, the fourteenth reincarnation of the original Dalai Lama (1391-1474), is a prime example of this. High-ranking incarnate lamas are also often seen as “manifestation bodies” (Skt. nirmānakāya) of Buddhas and bodhisattvas. Similarly, artistic images themselves are for Tibetan Buddhists “a ‘physical support’ – in other words an embodiment – of enlightenment,”\textsuperscript{159} and are considered to manifest the divinity of the deity it depicts. In this way, the statue manifesting the bodhisattva Avalokiteśvara, who is regarded as the patron saint of Tibet and the literal progenitor of the Tibetan race, is consequently associated with King Songtsen Gampo, and the lineage of Dalai Lamas themselves, the leaders of the Gelugpa sect who established the last monastic hegemony in Tibet at the end of the sixteenth century – both of whom are considered manifestations of Avalokiteśvara.\textsuperscript{160} The Thekchen Choeling Avalokiteśvara thus symbolically invokes rich visions of the imperial glory of a pre-1959 unified “Tibet” for a people in exile, participating in the new nationalist discourse of Tibetan sovereignty.

Secondly, the method of construction and positioning of the sculpture itself performs Dharamshala as merely a temporary place of refuge before an eventual return. Chenmo Penpa Dorje he told me that while he was constructing the statue, the Dalai Lama assured him personally that he intended it to one day be repatriated to its rightful place of installation in the Lhasa temple. Features of structural design, though common to all metal sculptures of Chenmo-la’s workshop, actualize the symbolic

\textsuperscript{159} Jackson and Jackson, \textit{Tibetan Thangka Painting}, 9.
\textsuperscript{160} See Kapstein, \textit{Tibetan Assimilation of Buddhism}, 141–162.
transience of the statue in Dharamshala – it was made in sections to be assembled at the place of installation, which means that it can easily be disassembled and transported to Tibet. The fact of it being hollow, for the insertion of a relic core of mantras and holy scriptures, is a further augmentation to its mobility. Also, the Dalai Lama specifically requested for the statue to face east, towards Tibet, expressing exilic aspirations for the “homeland.” The statue thus mirrors the intent behind the creation of institutions of cultural preservation in Dharamshala to one day be able to reterritorialize Tibetan “tradition” and “culture” back onto the land of its origin, where it is perceived to be under threat from the assimilative policies of the majority Han culture. In my conversations with sculptors about their daily prayers, most of them reported prayers for the freedom of Tibet as an integral part of their devotional practice. It is clear, then, that Tibetan devotees, in praying for the freedom of Tibet to a sculpture which embodies in a very real way the idealized “homeland,” are carrying out the work of collective imagination in projecting the reterritorialization of Tibetan culture in the future aspect of “Tibet.”

In statues like the Thekchen Choeling Avalokiteśvara, which clearly conform to Tibetan iconographic and iconometric canons, the reterritorialization of cultural codes associated with the “homeland” is clearly perceptible, where the value and effectiveness of the work is directly proportional to how faithful they are to “tradition.” However, with works of art which deviate from the prevailing style of the workshop, the process of territorialization is more complex in the ways in which innovation and experimentation is justified to the wider Tibetan community.
Replicas of the Bodhgayā Buddha

The key to understanding the metaphysics of innovation and experimentation at the Norbulingka lies in its mechanism of recognizing the existence of historical nodes of authenticity in locations outside “ancient Tibet,” while simultaneously fortifying the modern-day existence of that “Tibet” exclusively within the locality of Dharamshala. This mechanism should be recognizable from chapter 2, where I demonstrated how it was also applied to the reframing of Newari techniques. Broadly speaking, I will argue that at the Norbulingka, innovation is only permitted when it does not directly contradict the strictures of “tradition,” and refrains from tapping into styles which have become politicized in their association with Communist China. While relatively scarce, I observed a few instances of experimentation in the work of the Norbulingka. For example, while I was there, the sculptors were working on sanding down and chasing casted copies of a head of the monk Budai (Jp. *hotei*), who is more popularly known as the Laughing Buddha (*fig. 50*). Chenmo Penpa Dorje sculpted this head in repoussé some years ago only as a teaching device – Budai is particularly suitable for demonstrating the hammering out of larger volumes and contours due to his pronounced facial features. A mendicant Chan (Jp. *zen*) monk who lived in modern-day Zhejiang province in China during the late eighth to early ninth century C.E., the jocular figure of Budai “offered an opportunity for the glorification of the frugal, untrammeled, serene Zen ideal of life.”\(^\text{161}\) Records trace the earliest painted representations of Budai to the east coast of China, shortly after his death in the early ninth century,\(^\text{162}\) and his popularity spread with the Chan doctrine throughout East

\^[162\]: Ibid., 139.
Asia. However, since Chan never prospered in Tibetan areas, a phenomenon attributable to the victory of Indian Mādhyamika (“Middle Way”) teachers over scholars of Chinese Chan at the Samye Debate in Lhasa (c. 792–794), Budai is rarely portrayed in Tibetan art. The Norbulingka administration, however, recognizing the marketability of Budai to tourists and pilgrims in Dharamshala, sent the model to be casted, in order to eventually place them on sale at their souvenir shops. As a character with neither religious significance for Tibetan Buddhists, nor established conventions of representation for Tibetan craftsmen, Budai is fair game for experimentation at the Norbulingka Institute. Also, though Budai was originally a Chinese monk, this potentially dangerous association has been subsumed into the fact that he has become part of the popular vernacular imagery of an exoticized Buddhism in the West. Therefore, these cast heads exemplify the first mode of innovation at the Norbulingka, which is in service to its tourist-centric business model through the commodification of cultural forms.

However, innovation at the Norbulingka is even more favored in its second mode, where it is justified through references to styles from antiquity which are acknowledged by the exile community as the roots of the Tibetan artistic tradition, both foreign and indigenous. This gilded silver standing Buddha (fig. 51) was made in repoussé by Chenmo Penpa Dorje in the 1980s as a gift for the Dalai Lama. It was sent back to the workshop for retouching while I was there, and the sculptors told me that it was based on a Gupta period stone sculpture currently in the Government Museum of Mathurā in Uttar Pradesh. I have identified exhibit no. A-5 as the most likely prototype for this replica, given that it is in the best condition out of those of

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163 Encyclopædia Britannica, “Samye Debate (Tibetan Buddhism).”
the same type in the Mathurā museum (fig. 52). Chenmo-la faithfully reproduces the diaphanous folds of the Gupta-style outer garment (Skt. saṃghāti) covering both shoulders, revealing the physique of the Buddha in a way that is rarely done in Tibetan sculpture. The left hand of the replica gathers up the hem of the garment as it does in the prototype, and Chenmo-la chooses to “complete” the figure by sculpting the broken right hand as it would have been, raised in the gesture of protection (Skt. abhaya-mudrā). Finally, the circular nimbus, with sumptuously carved concentric bands of varying designs, is made in similar proportions to the figure, though the motifs used deviate slightly, and the lotus petals forming the innermost band are protruded. The Gupta Buddha replica’s accentuation of the enduring legacy of Indian Buddhism, a mechanism which I will elaborate on in the section to follow, is a fitting tribute to the Dalai Lama, the enlightened being who acts as the unifying emblem of post-1959 Tibet.

When I visited the Norbulingka in 2011, the sculptors had recently finished work on a big project commissioned by the administration of the Norbulingka itself – replicas of a famous statue of Śakyamuni Buddha known as the “Bodhgayā Buddha” installed at the Mahabodhi Temple in Bodhgaya, India, which commemorates the site of the Buddha’s enlightenment (fig. 53). These replicas harmonize both modes of innovation at the Norbulingka, reterritorializing the authenticity of “Tibet” into exilic Dharamshala through alluding to an ancient source of Tibetan art, which simultaneously increases their marketability. When I questioned Tenzin Phuntsok, the Public Relations Officer at the Norbulingka, on the rationale behind producing these replicas, he told me that they were specially timed to be sold to the tourists and
pilgrims which would flock to the Kalacākra Initiation, a high profile Buddhist ritual conducted by the Dalai Lama in Bodhgayā in January 2012. This reveals the dependency of the Norbulingka’s business model on a tourist industry fuelled by arborescent models of an exoticized “Tibet” which only survives in its pure, “authentic” form in exilic India. Senior sculptor Tsering Palden travelled to Bodhgayā in 2009 in order to make a plaster cast of the head of the image, and to take notes based on visual observation of its physical characteristics, for the construction of the new sculpture back at the workshop. Six copper replicas of the Bodhgayā Buddha were made in repoussé, with the best of which sent to be sand-casted, also in copper, for sale to tourists and pilgrims. The prototype, a black stone sculpture dated to the late tenth century (fig. 54), is made in the Pāla-Sena style which was predominant from the eighth to the twelfth centuries C.E. in northeastern India, right up till the decline of Buddhism in India with the Turkic invasions.

The replica is associated with the Pāla-Sena style of its prototype in two main ways, both involving formal qualities atypical of the Tsedong style used at the Norbulingka. Firstly, its samghāti, the most visible of the three robes that make up Indian monastic wear, is depicted with an intricate arrangement of evenly-spaced folds using engraved lines, leaving the right shoulder bare. This recalls the mature Gupta style of adopting Roman inspired drapery forms in rendering the samghāti, a convention taken more immediately from Kuṣāṇa Gandhāra. Eventually, these forms filtered into the Pāla-Sena style of Bodhgayā through the Gupta centers of Mathurā and Sārnāth. In contrast, the robes of Śakyamuni Buddha statues in the Tsedong

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164 Leoshko, “The Vajrasana Buddha,” 40.
style are usually represented with three visually distinct parts – the undershirt (Tb. *dhonka*), lower robe (Tb. *shemdap*) and various types of outer shawl (Tb. *zhen, chogu* or *namjar*) – as in this large Buddha statue that was made under Chenmo-la’s supervision in 2007 (fig. 55). In this Buddha, the *dhonka* is depicted using a single band faintly incised from the left shoulder across the chest to the right armpit, which is wrapped over with an outer shawl stitched together from patches known as the *namjar*, worn during ordinations and tantric initiations. The *namjar* is demarcated from the *dhonka* with a thick band carved in a higher relief, and the borders in the robe’s patches are rendered with thinner bands. Similar to the *saṃghāti* of the Bodhgaya replica, the *namjar* goes around the figure’s waist and is then bunched up and draped over its left shoulder. The edge between the *namjar* and the *shemdap*, which is also a patched robe, can be seen in the triangular fold of cloth beneath the left foot of the figure. Additionally, instead of the more typical lotus throne, the replica sits upon a diamond diaper-patterned cushion, a form which surely refers to the *vajrāsana*, or “diamond throne,” which Śakyamuni Buddha was said to have sat upon at the time of his enlightenment. The *vajrāsana* currently enshrined at the foot of the bodhi tree at Bodhgaya, a stone slab excavated in the nineteenth century, has been attributed to the time of the Mauryan Emperor Aśoka (304 – 232 B.C.E.), due to the Mauryan style honeysuckle-and-goose motif engraved along its sides (fig. 56). In the cushion beneath the Bodhgaya Buddha, however, the Pāla-Sena sculptor uses a lattice pattern of diamonds inscribed with stylized flowers. The Norbulingka replicas further simplify these flowers into symmetrical oval-leafed fronds. Similarly

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166 Sopa, “Tibetan Monastic Robes.”
patterned cushions have been found in various other images from the Pāla-Sena period, sometimes placed onto a lotus throne (fig. 57).

As much as it does from Nepal, Tibet’s artistic heritage undoubtedly stems from India, which is the geographical source of Buddhist art in all of Asia – evidenced by the fact that the earliest remains of Buddhist sculpture were found at the stūpa at Bhārhut, Madhya Pradesh dating from the second to first century B.C.E. This has consistently been affirmed by the exile community – “India is the guru and we [Tibetans] are reliable chelas (disciples),” declared the Dalai Lama in 2010. For the Tibetan people, India has always been regarded as the Holy Land, being the historical birthplace of Buddhism, and of many important Buddhist masters who played key roles in transmitting the Buddhadharma into Tibet – especially Padmasambhava of medieval Oḍḍiyāna and the eastern Indian monk Atiśa. By adopting an Indian style of sculpture in their replicas of the Bodhgayā Buddha, the Norbulingka thus reinforces exilic ideas of “tradition.” Of course, this is not without precedent in Tibetan history. Lo Bue notes the evidence of an “antiquarian taste” among the Tibetan nobility between the fourteenth and eighteenth centuries, where the Prince of Gyantse commissioned a silver statue of Tārā in memoriam to his wife in 1359, and the Tibetan historian Tāranātha ordered a sculpture of Jambhala from a Newar craftsman in Tibet in the sixteenth century – both said to be in the “Indian”

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169 “Many thousands of our people have found refuge and shelter in the neighbouring States, particularly in India which we have always regarded as our Holy Land.” (Central Tibetan Administration, “Statement of His Holiness the Dalai Lama on the Fifth Anniversary of the Tibetan National Uprising Day.”)
style, which would most likely have been identified with the Pāla-Sena school.\textsuperscript{170}

With the events of 1959, however, the dependence of the displaced peoples of Tibet on India for a locality to recreate “Tibet” in, as well as for what they perceive as their very survival as a culture, gives the Tibetans new impetus to acknowledge this artistic debt to the Pāla-Sena school, even over that which they owe to China and Nepal.

There is, furthermore, a certain affinity between the Pāla-Sena and the Tibetan schools of sculpture. The rule of the Pāla and Sena kings in Bihar and Bengal coincided with the time of the Second Transmission of Buddhism into Tibet, which began in the tenth century. Coming right after the suppression of Buddhism for more than a hundred years in central Tibet, it is unsurprising that “the artistic styles and iconographic forms of Second [Transmission] period art are heavily dependent upon the Pāla artistic traditions,”\textsuperscript{171} both directly from Indian masters and filtered through the Newari. In fact, it is said that Atiśa “carried with him to Tibet sixty loads of goods on thirty horses, which undoubtedly contained illustrated manuscripts, small stone and metal sculptures and the like.”\textsuperscript{172} Huntington and Huntington designates the school of sculpture which is most in accord with the Pāla-Sena style as the “Shar mthun sku” (lit. Sculpture agreeing with the East) – after the Tibetan nomenclature for the painting school of the same period – and the schools which develop from it in the eleventh and twelfth centuries as the Transitional and Late Sharm mthun sku schools. Huntington and Huntington identify these later schools as “a veritable golden age of Tibetan metalworking,”\textsuperscript{173} where there is a more harmonious integration of

\textsuperscript{170} Lo Bue, “Pema Karpo,” 253.
\textsuperscript{171} Huntington and Huntington, Leaves from the Bodhi Tree, 368.
\textsuperscript{172} Huntington, The “Pāla-Sena” Schools of Sculpture, 8.
\textsuperscript{173} Huntington and Huntington, Leaves from the Bodhi Tree, 369.
indigenous Tibetan styles with imported styles from Nepal and other parts of India. Interestingly, Huntington and Huntington argue that in sculpture, most of the changes “occurred in gTsang Valley workshops that were patronized by the Sa skya pas,” which would have included Chenmo-la’s hometown of Tsedong.

It is significant that with the replicas of the Bodhgayā Buddha, the Norbulingka workshop seems to be re-enacting this stylistic development in the art of the Second Transmission. Indeed, the sculptors were careful to assure me that the replica was still wholly “Tibetan,” and as with the Gupta Buddha replica, there are important “Tibetan-izing” details which distinguish the two. Firstly, one can see that face of the replica was sculpted in a way that accords with the Tsedong school, despite it being based on a plaster cast of the prototype. Unlike the prototype, which has an oval-shaped facial structure, the replica has a much rounder face with plump cherubic cheeks. The wave-like shape of the replica’s lips, with the characteristic Tibetan dimples chiseled in on the sides; and its thinner, flatter earlobes, also affiliate it with the Tsedong style. These facial features can also be seen in the Gupta Buddha replica, where the serene introversion of the prototype, with eyes half-closed, an expression characteristic of Gupta period sculptures, is modified into a more outwardly-directed smile of compassion. Secondly, even in the absence of comparative numerical data, it is visually clear that the replica and prototype were made either according to different systems of iconometry, or to alternative oral transmissions of the three-dimensional translation of two-dimensional scriptural iconometry. The head to body ratio seems larger in the replica than in the prototype,

174 Ibid., 368.
and the limbs of the former are significantly narrower, both consistent with other Śākyamuni Buddhas produced by the Norbulingka.

The prototype

Above and beyond these formal differences, however, the Norbulingka replicas identify with the prototypical Bodhgayā Buddha through what Nagel and Wood call the “substitutional model,”¹⁷⁵ where artworks collapse time, expressing multiple temporal dimensions despite their physical existence in sequential moments of a linear history. Nagel and Wood elaborate on the mechanism of substitution as performed by the religious artifact in medieval and Renaissance Europe as one where it presents itself “as a token of a type, a type associated with an origin...enforcing a general categorical continuity across a sequence of tokens.”¹⁷⁶ By conforming to the “Bodhgayā Buddha” type in its form and substance, these replicas are able to substitute for their typological antecedents, which are the successive central images that have been installed in the inner sanctum of the Mahabodhi Temple at various points in time (fig. 58). Substitution is therefore a form of deterritorialization, where the essence of a prime image is codified into a type, which is then translatable into local artistic styles. This is the mechanism that also enables the aforementioned replicas of the Lhasa Avalokiteśvara and the Gupta standing Buddha to substitute for their respective prototypes. Considering that mytho-historical sources and pilgrim accounts attribute the construction of the Mahabodhi Temple to the time of Aśoka the Great, it is clear that the Norbulingka replicas are indeed part of a long chain of

¹⁷⁵ Nagel and Wood, Anachronic Renaissance, 16.
¹⁷⁶ Ibid., 29.
replicas emerging from a mythic origin. In this section, I will trace the history of the Bodhgayā Buddha, in order to understand the fecundity of the Norbulingka replicas as a means of territorializing the “homeland.”

The present-day Bodhgayā Buddha was found in the compound of the Hindu Mahant of Bodhgayā, and installed on the request of J.D. Beglar and Alexander Cunningham in the 1880s, during the restoration of the Mahabodhi Temple by British colonial administrators. It is the largest surviving seated Buddha sculpture in Bodhgayā at more than six feet in height, a factor prompting Leoshko to affirm that it possibly “once served as the central image of the Mahabodhi temple, replacing an earlier work for some reason in the late tenth century.” The first shrine at Bodhgayā attributed to Aśoka was most probably a tree-shrine (Skt. bodhi-ghara), an “open air-storeyed shrine...built around the bodhi tree” with the aforementioned stone vajrāsana, which most art historians agree is evidenced by a Śuṅga-period relief from Bhārhut (fig. 59) which carries the epigraphic inscription “bhagavata saka munino bodho (The Enlightenment of Lord Śakyamuni).” Presumably, it was only in the Kuśāṇa period (late first to third centuries C.E.), with the increased usage of standalone sculptures as devotional objects in Buddhist practice, or even later, that a temple sanctum was constructed at the Mahabodhi for the purpose of enshrining an

177 Leoshko, “The Vajrasana Buddha,” 10; Huntington and Huntington, Leaves from the Bodhi Tree, 99.
179 Ibid., 14.
180 The Chinese pilgrim Fa Xian, who travelled in India and Sri Lanka between 399 to 414, observes that “the four Great Pagodas are those erected on the place where he was born, where he obtained emancipation, where he began to preach, and where he entered Nirvana,” which leads Cunningham to argue that “it appears to be certain that there was a great Vihāra of the Mahabodhi Tree in existence at the time of Fa Hian’s visit in A.D. 409.” (Cunningham, Mahabodhi, 17.) Fa Xian does not, however, make any mention of a sanctified seated image of Śakyamuni Buddha, which could imply that the image was either destroyed by the time of his visit by conflicts in Northern India, or that it was only installed later.
image of the Buddha, though no written or archaeological records exist for this first image. In the seventh century, however, the Chinese pilgrim Xuanzang records the presence of a black basalt central image in the Mahabodhi temple which was “adorned with a necklace and a crown,” ornamentation indicating the depiction of Śakyamuni’s “body of enjoyment” (Skt. *sambhogakāya*) that is not seen in the enshrined image today. It is reasonable to assume that this image was replaced, possibly with the one that is there presently, during the Pāla-Sena period. When the Tibetan pilgrim Dharmasvāmin visited Bodhgaya in the thirteenth century, he observed that the central image of the Mahabodhi had a face of two cubits in height, which Susan Huntington argues could correlate with that of the present one. According to Dharmasvāmin, this image was saved from Muslim iconoclasm by the walling up of the inner sanctum. Since then, at least two other images have served to substitute for this central sculpture, which Kuryan Abraham claims was removed by the Mahant to his compound in the sixteenth century: a “very crude clay image” observed by British administrator Francis Buchanan-Hamilton in 1831, and a “gilt stucco image” installed there by the Burmese mission which Rajendralala Mitra spotted in 1863.

In light of the long history of “originals” of the Bodhgaya Buddha, we can therefore see the Norbulingka replicas as participating in this chain of substitutions which reterritorialize the authenticity of the mythic original into material sculpture – of course, seen in tandem with the metaphysical purpose of iconometry, this prime Ideal would be the divine form of the Lord Buddha himself. The fact that the

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183 Ibid.
Norbulingka replicas were not made to be installed at the Mahabodhi does not detract from their substitutional power. Indeed, their intended purpose as souvenirs ally them to the tradition of Buddhist pilgrimage – art historians have separately noted the existence of both miniature and full-scale architectural models of the Mahabodhi temple, found in Buddhist countries as disparate as Myanmar, Thailand, Sri Lanka, Nepal, China and, of course, Tibet (fig. 60). Significantly, the twenty-three miniature stone models John Guy managed to track down are mostly made in the late Pāla-Sena style, and “appear to have been produced in the Gayā region of Bihar for sale at Bodhgayā.”

Apart from the formal qualities which associate the Norbulingka replicas with the prototype detailed above, however, perhaps the most important typological feature which expresses the substitutional logic of the “Bodhgayā Buddha” type, which pervades even images which were not made explicitly as replicas, is the bhūmisparsa mudrā, or “earth-touching gesture.”

Mudrā, retaining all the connotations of a seal or the impression of a seal from its Vedic origins in a nameless gesture, is in essence “a position of the hands serving as a ‘seal’ or symbol to identify divinities,” and holds tremendous significative powers in Hindu and Buddhist sculpture. In this case, the bhūmisparsa mudrā, where the left hand rests palm up on the lap while the right hand reaches to the ground, condenses the narrative meaning of the story of Śakyamuni Buddha’s enlightenment under the bodhi tree when he touched the earth, invoking the earth goddess to bear witness to his victory over Māra. According to Huntington, the shift to the centrality of Bodhgayā in the Pāla-Sena period, from Sārnāth during the Gupta period, is reflected

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186 Saunders, Mudrā, 48.
in how the dharmacakra mudrā, which condenses the narrative of the First Teaching which took place in Sārnāth, was superseded by the bhūmisparśa mudrā in representations of the Buddha.187 Given the importance of Bodhgayā as a pilgrimage center from the Pāla-Sena period, the form of the Buddha in bhūmisparśa mudrā, “firmly established throughout Bihar and Bengal, inspired Buddhists from other parts of Asia to create similar works of art that celebrated the experience of Bodhgayā.”188 It is clear that the bhūmisparśa mudrā serves as an abstract codification of Bodhgayā itself, used as a mechanism of territorialization for sculptors all over Buddhist Asia.

Finally, to further complicate the notions of “original” and “replica” in this discussion, it is possible to observe the influence of Tibetans both in diaspora and in Chinese-occupied Tibet in the current restored state of the original Bodhgayā Buddha. Even from the twelfth to thirteenth centuries in Bodhgayā, when Buddhism was declining in the Gangetic region, Vitali records at least seven Tibetan masters who travelled to the site, with two of them having contributed to its restoration with funds from Tibet.189 After the revival of the international prominence of Bodhgayā with the British restorations in the nineteenth century, Buddhist communities all over the world began once again to remit funds to the Mahabodhi Temple for various restoration projects. In fact, when I visited Bodhgayā in the fall of 2010, the exilic Tibetan Nyingma Meditation Center in collaboration with the Light of Buddhadharma Foundation International had embarked on an initiative to repair and gild the spire of

187 Huntington, The “Pāla-Sena” Schools of Sculpture, 96.
188 Leoshko, “The Vajrasana Buddha,” 44.
189 Vitali, “In the Presence of the Diamond Throne,” 161. The six masters are dPyal Chos [kyi] bzang [po] (1163-1230), Chag dgra bcom pa (1153-1216), dPyal A mo gha, dByil ston Khyung rgyal mchog gye, Thar pa lo tsa ba Nyi ma rgyal mchog, Man lung pa bSod nams dpal (1235 or 1239-?), and U rgyan pa Rin chen dpal (1230-1309); with the last two being credited with restoration efforts.
the Mahabodhi temple using the expertise of Kathmandu metalworkers. While photographs of the Bodhgayā Buddha in both Leoshko and Huntington’s publications from the 1980s depict an unadorned black stone image, the sculpture is currently gilded, painted, and wrapped around with yellow cloth (fig. 61). Both the propensity for gilding images and the use of blue coloration for the hair are characteristic attributes of traditional Tibetan sculpture. However, the feature perhaps most telling of Tibetan intervention is the crest jewel (Skt. cūḍāmaṇī) which crowns the uṣṇīṣa of the Bodhgayā Buddha, which is not present in the earlier photographs. Known as the nortog, or “jewel-tip,” in Tibetan, it is an integral part of the iconographic program of the Śakyamuni Buddha in Tibetan artistic traditions, and is even accounted for in the iconometric diagrams used by the Norbulingka sculptors. The vast majority of Buddha sculptures either made by Tibetan sculptors or for Tibetan patrons since the Second Transmission are depicted with the nortog, all the ones I observed in the Norbulingka and the Gama Gazi being no exception. Given that I have never seen any instances of this attribute in pre-Pāla Indian Buddhist art, I believe that it most likely originated in Pāla-Sena art in Gayā, where it occurs very rarely – one notable example being this late ninth century black stone stele from Bodhgayā, depicting Śakyamuni flanked by two bodhisattvas (fig. 62). Best notes that the nortog filtered into China and, to some extent, the rest of East Asia, during the late Tang Dynasty (618 – 907 C.E.), which coincided with the middle of the Pāla-Sena period. It only became relatively more common in East Asia during the reigns of the Mongol Yuan

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190 Light of Buddhadharma Foundation International, “Projects to Restore & Beautify Bodhgayā.”
191 “The upper part of the uṣṇīṣa, termed the “jewel-tip” (nor.tog), is two small units in height, narrow at the tip and wide at the base like a jewel.” (Gega, Principles of Tibetan Art, 89.)
Dynasty and the later Qing Dynasty, both periods where China was in particularly close contact with Tibetan Buddhism, suggesting the influence of Tibetan art in the popularization of this iconographic attribute. Therefore, it is reasonable to assume that it was most likely a Tibetan donor who requested the addition of the nortog to the Bodhgayā Buddha. This exemplifies perfectly the emergent nature of the rhizome through its lines of territorialization – the Norbulingka replicas emulate the Bodhgayā Buddha for its iconographic attributes which recall the antiquity of India and associate them with the Mahabodhi Temple; yet several of these traits are in fact reterritorializations of Tibetan tradition onto the prototype itself.

Case Study II. Socialist Realism in Chinese-Occupied Tibet

The East is Red

I want to assimilate the best and the most beautiful influences from other ethnic groups, other races, other cultures; integrating (Ch. jihe) the characteristics of my own ethnicity. Home and abroad, within China, Tibet, other countries; all integrated. For example, in drawing a person – maybe you think the bodily figure of Westerners are better than Asians, but the facial features of Indians are more beautiful. If you birth a child, there isn’t much you can change about it. But in the creative process, you can change whatever you feel isn’t beautiful, you can start over. So you must make it the best, you must seek constant improvement.

193 Jonathan Best, (Professor of Art History, Wesleyan University), in personal communication with author, 28 March 2012.
I don’t want to be confined by what is “Tibetan,” or to say that I must make something in a certain “tradition.” What I want to achieve is – let’s say you’re looking at a thangka painting, and if you’re not Tibetan, if you don’t understand the culture, you are only able to roughly perceive its outward appearance. But if the figures in the painting are beautiful, in accordance with universal standards (Ch. fuhe dajia quanqiuren de yanguang), you will still be captivated by it.

Duoqing Zhaxi, Gama Gazi Founder and CEO
Interviewed by author on 10 Jul 11

Duoqing Zhaxi reached maturity at the time when Deng Xiaoping came to power in the Communist Party and declared the Reform and Openness policies in modern China in 1978. Zhaxi related to me, as we sat in the inner chambers of his factory showroom in Chengdu with the remains of dinner cooling on the table before us, how as a teenager he painted targets for a military encampment near his hometown, where the soldiers lauded him for his precision with a brush. With the Reforms and Openness policies, the PRC government relaxed restrictions on the practice of religion in the Tibetan territories, which meant that many famous Tibetan artists who survived the ravages of the Nationalities Reform and the Cultural Revolution in the 1950s through to the early 1970s were beginning to reveal themselves, and to teach in the newly reopened Buddhist monasteries. Eager to develop his burgeoning artistic talents, Zhaxi studied thangka painting under one such master, Chenmo Tongla.
Tsewang, before moving to the Derge Parkhang\textsuperscript{194} to learn sculptural techniques, where he eventually taught for two years. After inheriting this foundation of Tibetan artistic tradition as passed down by his lineage of illustrious masters, however, he found that the salary at the Parkhang was too low for his liking, and decided to leave with two disciples to become an artist on his own terms.

For over twenty-six years, even as he was trying to establish a foothold in the Chengdu art world, he traveled all over China. In his words, “for my own benefit, I wanted to do in-depth observation and research (Ch. kaocha yanjiu) into the handicraft and art of various Tibetan areas – Gansu, Qinghai, Lhasa, and even Mongolia, Xinjiang, Beijing.”\textsuperscript{195} In 2000, he also visited Nepal and India for three months to study their sketching (Ch. huihua) and modeling (Ch. zaoxing) techniques. I believe it is this impulse to gain a comprehensive understanding of a wide range of artistic styles emerging from the Tibetan tradition, grounded in observation and experience, which informs his philosophy of innovation as described in the opening quotation of this section. His visit to India, Nepal and Beijing also reveal his awareness of the major artistic sources feeding into the wellspring of Tibetan art. Even granted the possibility that he might have exaggerated the extent of his travels – Dangzeng warned me of his tendency to embellish his accomplishments for bragging rights – it is significant that cosmopolitanism is integral to his self-construction as an artist. Zhaxi, declaring his determination to not be limited by the strictures of “tradition,” therefore seeks to deterritorialize the artistic qualities of the various

\textsuperscript{194} The famous sūtra-printing academy in Kham, eastern Tibet (currently Garzê Tibetan Autonomous Prefecture in Sichuan province), where many ancient woodblocks of Tibetan Buddhist scriptures and commentaries are kept, as well as stores of thangka paintings and sculptures made by ancient masters.

\textsuperscript{195} Duoqing Zhaxi, (CEO, Sichuan Gama Gazi Tibetan Crafts Factory), in a personal interview with the author, 10 July 2011
localities to which he has travelled, and reterritorialize them into his own “Tibetan” workshop style founded in Chengdu. In appealing to a more universalist aesthetic, Zhaxi attempts to deterritorialize his artistic practices into an impossibly nomadic form, fully comprehensible to people from a variety of cultural backgrounds.

However, despite the assertion of his desire to free himself from tradition, he is careful to authenticate his innovations with the approval of Tibetan religious and academic authorities, telling me that “tradition” (Ch. chuantong) still remains the “foundation” (Ch. jichu) of his art. For example, in discussing a statue in his showroom that he proudly informed me represented Guru Rinpoche in a physical aspect that had never been done before in the Tibetan artistic tradition, he told me that he invited many experts to study it to make sure it did not conflict with the strictures of iconography and iconometry. His motivations, however, seemed to be less nationalistic than geared towards personal posterity – he welcomes criticism and instruction, he said, in the hopes that in a few hundred years his innovation will become a model (Ch. moxing) for other sculptors, and if he does it well now it will become even better in future. In any case, it is clear that in his territorialization processes, “Tibet” remains the vessel of authenticity. This is also perceptible in the way that he implies a hierarchy of viewership – that one has to be Tibetan, or to truly understand Tibetan culture, in order to go beyond a “rough” apprehension of external appearance in his thangka. In this way, Zhaxi reinforces the source of “Tibetan-ness” in the “homeland” despite the projected mobility of his artwork in the global market.

Furthermore, the cursory inspection I carried out during my visits to the Gama Gazi factory itself also reveals that Zhaxi’s iconoclasm remains on the conceptual
realm— in actuality, the majority of the sculptures in progress that I observed seemed to be made according to the strictest iconographic and iconometric prescriptions, with little deviation even in ornamentation, costume and throne. In this respect, the Norbulingka Institute, which is more conservative in its rhetoric, is conversely more able to experiment with elements that it determines incidental to “tradition.” I would argue that this is due to the differences in the patronage base of both workshops. Since the replicas of the Bodhgayā Buddha were made as keepsakes of the experience of the Kalacākra Initiation at Bodhgayā, they are charged primarily with recalling that location to the mind of the patron. This fully justifies the ornamental variations which enable them to refer to one of the most recognizable symbols of Bodhgayā—the central image in the Mahabodhi temple. In the case of the Gama Gazi, however, most of its patrons are commissioning statues for installation in shrines and temples, in some cases replacing venerable images which had been destroyed during the Cultural Revolution or Minority Reforms. It is thus reasonable to expect that these patrons would prioritize ritual efficacy and stylistic orthodoxy over artistic creativity.

Nevertheless, it is significant that, at least taken at face value, Zhaxi’s universality seems to be less in terms of Coomaraswamy’s pramāṇa, than based on ethnic physical characteristics. In his example, it is the “bodily figure of Westerners” and “facial features of Indians” that are component parts of the universality he wishes to cultivate to appeal to all possible viewers. Though, as mentioned, he does acknowledge that this is only the “outward appearance” of the work, and stresses repeatedly that he still follows the strictures of iconometry and iconography which properly invoke pramāṇa, I would argue that this is indicative of the impetus behind
his innovation. On one level, this can be seen as a kind of business acumen – in aiming to appeal to a varied audience with external markers of beauty that do not require a deep understanding of Tibetan aesthetics to appreciate, Zhaxi is casting his net wide in search of potential buyers. This is not without precedent – the observable fact that statues of the Buddha all over Asia often emulate the ethnic features of their respective host countries suggests that Buddhist patrons have commissioned religious sculptures in their own image since the Buddhadharma began to travel outside India. I would argue, however, that Zhaxi’s explicit avowal of his intention to practice mimetic representation of ethnic physical characteristics in his work, even with an eye towards synthesis, reflects his cognizance of a style of art which has permeated the cultural milieu of the People’s Republic of China since its founding in 1949 – Socialist Realism.

*Socialist Realism*

In 2010, a high Rinpoche in South India commissioned the Norbulingka metalcrafts workshop to build a *stūpa* in commemoration of his own anticipated death, replete with a copper statue of himself with photorealistic facial features (*fig. 63*). Based on a photograph of the Rinpoche, this is unusual for traditional Tibetan works of art, which favor idealized portraits with facial features distributed according to scriptural rules of measurements and proportions, as has been discussed earlier. Dhondhup told me that the utilization of mimetic realism in this particular sculpture, a style usually associated with Western art, was only tolerated because the doctrinal guidelines for sculptural representation were less strict for mortal beings, as opposed to those for
Buddhas or bodhisattvas. This, however, is not strictly true in all Tibetan artistic schools – *thangka* painter Pema Namdol Thaye, in his 1987 *Concise Tibetan Art Book*, states that “the general human measurement, according to the ancient artists is eight *thos* [equivalent to *zhal*]...similar to the divine forms,” and that, furthermore, “the religious heads and personal Root-Gurus...should be represented according to the measurements of the Lord Buddha.” In any case, one must also take into account the fact that attempts to model a portrait likeness in sculptures of great lamas predate the events of 1959, as can be seen in these seventeenth century bronze statues of the Fifth Dalai Lama, which share similar facial features (fig. 64). While I am certain that mimetic exactitude was still ultimately subject to iconometric fidelity – the face of the Rinpoche is far from attaining the hyperrealism of contemporary Western sculptors like Duane Hanson and Ron Mueck – the mere fact of the admittance of realism into the repertoire of the exilic artist is remarkable, considering its association with Socialist Realism, and therefore Communist China. As Harris puts it, in Dharamshala, “any involvement with Maoist China can be viewed as suspect and deviation from ‘traditional’ styles implies a kind of cultural treachery.” Of course, for Tibetan artists in China, the utilization of realistic techniques, especially those of Socialist Realism, is not just generally accepted by the community, but is actively sanctioned by the state. Photorealistic metal sculpture is, however, still extremely rare in both my fieldsites – the Rinpoche in South India was the only example of this at the Norbulingka, and I did not find any instances at the Gama Gazi whatsoever. Therefore, in order to trace the ideological impact of Chinese Communism in

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196 Pema Namdrol Thaye, quoted in Harris, *In the Image of Tibet*, 85.
197 Ibid., 55.
engendering innovations towards mimetic realism in Tibetan art of the intra-state diaspora, I will shift my focus to the works of Tibetan realist painting, a medium which has more readily accepted these stylistic changes. I must note, however, that since most of my ethnographic fieldwork for this thesis was performed in metalcrafts workshops, this case study will draw more on academic accounts of Tibetan *thangka* and Socialist Realist painting in this century and the last.

A product of the Soviet Union, growing out of the tradition of nineteenth century Russian realism, Socialist Realism was declared as the official academic style of the People’s Republic of China in an attempt to produce art and literature appropriate for the new socialist society.\(^{198}\) This began with Mao Zedong’s Yan’an talks in 1942, where he exhorted artists to create a popular art which would “provide better help to other revolutionary work in facilitating the overthrow of our national enemy and the accomplishment of the task of national liberation.”\(^{199}\) In aesthetic terms, Chinese Socialist Realism in the visual arts can be broadly characterized as the infusion of objective idealism – symbolizing absolute Socialist ideals in the monumentalization of figures, bold colors and dramatized compositions – into realistic portrayals of the everyday life of the masses. With the absorption of Tibetan territories into the PRC, Tibetan artists were naturally expected to follow the party line in the domain of art. Furthermore, due to the nature of the organization of labor in the PRC, “a Tibetan who wished to become an artist had little choice but to attend Chinese-style art schools and then join an artists’ work unit.”\(^{200}\) While Tibetans in exile tend to brand all Tibetan artists of the TAR as traitorous mouthpieces of

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\(^{198}\) Andrews, *Painters and Politics*, 175.

\(^{199}\) Mao, “Talks at Yan’an,” 458.

\(^{200}\) Harris, *In the Image of Tibet*, 150.
Communism, indicative of Chinese attempts to systematically extinguish traditional Tibetan culture, Harris argues for the need to take into account the individual agency of the artists themselves, in both accepting and critiquing these new styles and political doctrines. Furthermore, at least after the Cultural Revolution, the cultural policy of the PRC is less restrictive than it is commonly represented as being by exile commentators. Huang Chen, Minister of Culture and Deputy Head of the Propaganda Department in 1978, references Mao’s ideas from Yan’an in stating:

The policy towards cultural heritage, whether Chinese or foreign, is to assimilate it critically, weed through the old to ring forth the new, and make the past serve the present and foreign things serve China. We must learn from what is good in the legacy of culture, either Chinese or foreign, discarding the dross and assimilating the essential...we should take [past work] critically, and make it serve socialism.

It is remarkable how Duoqing Zhaxi’s mission to extract the best characteristics of all ethnicities into a universal beauty echoes the assimilative spirit of Huang’s policy statement, demonstrating how pervasive State policy is in the Sino-Tibetan art world. In any case, despite the overarching Marxist agenda in Chinese art up till after the Cultural Revolution, it is clear that for the individual Tibetan artist, there remains a liminal space of stylistic negotiation between traditional schools of thangka, Socialist Realism, and other modern styles.

Contrary to exilic arborescent representations of pre-1959 Tibet as isolated from developments in the outside world, artistic or otherwise, Harris argues that “prior to 1959, elite members of Tibetan society had embraced other forms of realism

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201 Ibid., 150–1.  
which, though informed by non-Tibetan sources, were by no means Socialist.” The first Tibetan painter to experiment with modernist techniques at the expense of traditional forms was most likely the controversial scholar-monk Gendun Chöpel (1905-51). Though a master of traditional thangka painting, he rebelled against the restrictions of monastic society, “[pursuing] a radical position on literary and political matters for which he was held in deep suspicion by the Tibetan authorities.” This restlessness was reflected in his art. Since the establishment of the Menri and Khyenri painting schools in the fifteenth century, what Tibetan accounts identify as the first wholly Tibetan schools of art, the practice of Tibetan art had become entrenched in stylistic conservatism. Indeed, Heller notes that in the early twentieth century, “despite the foreign presence in Lhasa of a British mission, there were very few artists who were known to be interested in western art.” Chöpel, however, travelled extensively in Tibet and India after leaving his Gelukpa Drepung monastery in 1927, and came under “artistic influences from the buddhas of Mathurā and the cave painting of Ajañṭā to the luminous mystical Himalayan watercolours painted by Nicholas Roerich, and even to Russian icons.” He experimented with the Western techniques of impressionism and realism introduced to him by Indian modernist painters like Rabindranath Tagore in his unorthodox sketches and paintings based on observations from life, as can be seen in these line drawings from his travel sketchbook which plainly attempt to capture the dynamism of everyday scenes (fig.

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203 Harris, In the Image of Tibet, 52.
204 Ibid., 113–4.
205 Heller, Tibetan Art, 220.
206 Karmay, “dGe-'dun Chos-'phel, the Artist,” 148.
It is significant that it is, once again, through the node of India that Tibetan artists made their initial forays into a new style of artmaking – Western modernism.

While Chöpel mostly inhabited the fringes of Tibetan society, one of his students, the aforementioned court thangka painter Jampa Tseten, used techniques of mimetic realism in the execution of high-profile commissions for the Tibetan state. In the mid-1950s, he finished a set of murals for the reception chamber (Tb. traktrak migyur) of the Dalai Lama’s Norbulingka Palace in Lhasa (fig. 66), which features photorealistic portraits of “leading figures of the Tibetan government, the Scotsman Hugh Richardson, and the Dalai Lama.” Nevertheless, apart from the figural photorealism, the other aspects of the mural accord with traditional conventions of thangka painting, making use of Tibetan-style ornamentation and architectural motifs. Of particular significance is the fact that the compositional structure of the mural follows the traditional rules of precedence in Tibetan art. According to David Jackson, figures are differentiated according to a hierarchy of more or lesser importance by their size and placement in the composition, where major figures are larger and usually “positioned in the middle of the painting on the central vertical axis.” Therefore, one can identify immediately that the Dalai Lama is the main figure in that particular section of the mural, being of the largest size and occupying the central axis, surrounded by the minor figures of his retinue (Tb. ’khor) and with four lineage masters on either side, identifiable from their yellow Gelukpa hats (fig 68b). It is, unfortunately, impossible to tell, due to the low resolution of available photographs,

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207 Harris, In the Image of Tibet, 52.
208 The relative importance of these iconographic classes are, in turn, usually determined by the levels of spiritual attainment they have achieved.
the precise identities of these four lineage masters, and if their faces are portrayed in a realistic or conventional style. However, their placement at the top of the mural agrees with *thangka* conventions – as Jackson puts it, “even when depicted as ‘minor figures’...[masters of teaching lineages] still occupy spatially the highest positions in a painting.”\(^{210}\) All this is entirely appropriate for the functional context of the work, being placed in a public reception chamber of the Dalai Lama’s own palace to impress on visitors the eminence of the Dalai Lama, as well as the authority of the Gelukpa sect.

After the Chinese invasion in 1959, Jampa Tseten escaped to India with the Dalai Lama’s coterie, and it is instructive to examine the public reception of his first major state commission in exilic Dharamshala. Tseten was entrusted with painting a representation of the Three Dharma Kings of Tibetan Buddhism – Songtsen Gampo, Trison Detsen and Tri Ralpachen – to adorn the entrance of the chapel housing the aforementioned Avalokiteśvara statue in the Thekchen Choeling. The choice of this particular subject to occupy a space normally “reserved for...wrathful, usually sect-specific protectors”\(^{211}\) is already an exilic reterritorialization. With the Three Dharma Kings universally accepted by Tibetans as key figures in the formation of their civilization, this choice reflects the Dalai Lama’s ecumenical vision of the Tibetan neo-nation, where unification under his leadership transcends old sectarian conflicts.\(^{212}\) Tseten chose to paint these figures in the realistic style which had been so well-received at the Norbulingka Palace before 1959 (fig. 67). The naturalistic faces of the kings, and the three-dimensional spatial relationship between them and their

\(^{210}\) Ibid., 13.

\(^{211}\) Harris, *In the Image of Tibet*, 49.

\(^{212}\) Ibid.
thrones, created through the use of *chiaroscuro* and perspective, immediately distances Tseten’s painting from the traditional *thangka* conventions of depicting flattened, idealized figures. According to Harris, even before the invasion, Tseten received training in art schools in China in order to “expand his repertoire of styles,”213 where he was undoubtedly acquainted with Socialist Realism. With the post-1959 politicization of art, however, where style became regarded as indicative of ideological stance, the association of Socialist Realism with Chinese imperial propaganda made it unacceptable to the Tibetan exile community for the portrayal of an artwork meant to be symbolic of Tibetan neo-nationhood. Jampa’s work was summarily rejected, with the painter Rigzin Paljor then commissioned to paint a replacement in the conservative Menri style.214 It is interesting to note that, as mentioned in chapter 2, it was Jampa himself who was responsible for bringing the treatise of Menla Dondrub, the founder of the Menri school, into exile. While far from Dharamshala, in the Tibetan settlements of South India, photorealistic portraits of even the Dalai Lama himself might be permissible (*fig. 68*), they remain anathema in the exilic capital of Dharamshala. This reveals the politically motivated selectivity of tradition in the Tibetan exile community, in their denial of the role that realism played in the artistic development of pre-1959 Tibet.

*The New Tibetan Painting*

This antiquarian preference in the exile community of Dharamshala prompts Harris to argue that despite the fact that Tibet’s first contact with modernism was through India,

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214 For more on why the Menri school was selected as the “house style” of Dharamshala, see Harris, *In the Image of Tibet*, 63–9.
the bearers of Gendun Chöpel’s banner are to be found in the intra-state diaspora of China and in geographical Tibet itself, where “the potentiality of modernism has been grasped by Tibetan artists and activated as a tool of political and creative survival.”

Perhaps the best examples in recent works of thangka of the reterritorialization of Tibetan “tradition” incorporated with Chinese cultural elements, in the attempt to justify innovation to both the Tibetan diasporic community and the Chinese communists, are two thangkas painted to commemorate the 60th anniversary of the founding of the PRC in 2009 by Nyangbon, the thangka master at the Rebkong Thangka Painting Center founded in 1997. The Amdo town of Rebkong, also known as Tongren, in the Huangnan Tibetan Autonomous Prefecture in southeastern Qinghai province, was inscribed on the UNESCO Representative List of the Intangible Cultural Heritage of Humanity in 2009 for its artistic traditions. These two thangkas are painted in the traditional Rebkong style which developed in the mid-seventeenth century, with idealized portraits, flattened figures, and the use of Tibetan motifs. However, the subject matter of both paintings was clearly designed to appeal to Party officials in Beijing. The first, titled Princess Wencheng Goes to Tibet (fig. 69), depicts King Songtsen Gampo welcoming the Tang princess into Tibetan territories with a white khata scarf, here alluding to standard propagandistic representations of enthusiastic Tibetan serfs embracing the People’s Liberation Army as saviors from feudal oppression (fig. 70). While this historical event is a standard, if uncommon, part of the repertoire of the Tibetan thangka artist, the other painting, The Founding Ceremony of the People’s Republic of China (fig. 71), departs entirely from

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215 Ibid., 119.
traditional subjects in portraying Chairman Mao at Tiannanmen, announcing the inauguration of the PRC in 1949. The average Chinese viewer, upon seeing this second *thangka*, would immediately liken it to a famous Socialist Realist painting of the same event – *The Founding of the Nation*, originally painted by Dong Xiwen in 1952–3 (*fig. 72*).\(^{217}\) Nyangbon recreates the monumental red pillars and red lanterns of the original painting, though he paints the bilious clouds in the traditional *thangka* style and shifts the composition of the figures from a profile to a more three-quarter view, the lack of three-dimensional shading flattening Mao against the six vice-presidents of his government behind him. Dong’s *Founding of the Nation* was commended by Mao himself as emblematic of the new Socialist art, and “brought stylistic qualities that had been associated by the party with popular art to the previously elitist medium of oil painting.”\(^{218}\) Nyangbon’s *Founding Ceremony* can be seen to fulfill the same function with the religious medium of Tibetan *thangka* painting.

In order to better understand the territorializations involved in this process of innovation, it would be appropriate to examine one of the earliest attempts to produce a form of Sino-Tibetan Socialist Realism. The Kanze school of New Tibetan Painting (*Tb. dKar-mdzes Bod-kyi ri-mo gsar-pa*), based in the town of Kanze in Kham, was founded by the Tibetan Rinzin Namgyal and Han Chinese Mis Ting-kha’e\(^{219}\) in 1980.

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\(^{217}\) Significantly, Nyangbon’s adaptation seems to be based not on Dong’s first instantiation of *Founding of the Nation*, but on later revisions of the painting in 1967 and further (*fig. 72b*), where Nyangbon (and other painters after his death) were ordered to replace politically disgraced characters in the original with up-and-comers in the Communist Party at the time. This can be observed most clearly in the depiction of four microphones, rather than the original two, to balance out the composition with the changes in the left side of the painting. For more details, please see Andrews, *Painters and Politics*, 75–86.

\(^{218}\) Ibid., 82.

\(^{219}\) This is the Tibetan transliteration of the Chinese name of the artist as published by Per Kvaerne.
to produce art which synthesized Socialist Realism with the New Menri school of thangka painting.\textsuperscript{220} This New Tibetan Painting clearly met with state approval in its ideological thrust, having been given support by the Sichuan branch of the Artists’ Association of China. Additionally, their first trio of paintings in the new style was exhibited in Beijing in 1981, with two of which then installed in the Cultural Palace of Minorities in Beijing.\textsuperscript{221} One of these two, \textit{King Gesar of Ling} (fig. 73), is exemplary of this new style, and demonstrates the ways in which the Kanze school negotiates the space between Socialist Realism and Tibetan tradition in order to achieve state sanction.

The central figure of the painting, the eponymous King Gesar of Ling on a rearing steed decked out in ceremonial war garb, is depicted with realistic facial features, with the slight foreshortening of the figure indicating the application of one-point perspective receding into its crown. It seems unlikely, therefore, that this central figure is drawn according to the rules of iconometry, let alone the subsidiary figures of warriors and laypeople in the bottom sector of the painting. Iconometric diagrams illustrating the proportions for mounted figures in Gega Lama’s treatise depict the horse and rider in a lateral view, with the animal galloping on all four legs (fig. 74). The representation of King Gesar sitting astride a horse rearing on its hind legs, with the animal turned in a three-quarter view (fig. 73b) is thus also contrary to

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\textsuperscript{220}Heller, \textit{Tibetan Art}, 189. The New Menri school of painting originated out of the Menri style, which was one of the two earliest Tibetan schools of art founded in the fifteenth century. The New Menri style, which was developed in the seventeenth century, is particularly amenable to synthesis with Chinese Socialist Realism – Heller describes it as having “further integrated Chinese landscape devices such as billowing clouds and architectural motifs to break up as compositional divisions of the painted surface in addition to the ornate brocade styles emulating the Chinese silk for upholstery and some of the robes worn by the Tibetan prelates, while the individuals’ faces are highly personalized in their expressions and hair styles.”
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\textsuperscript{221}Kvaerne, “The Ideological Impact on Tibetan Art,” 168.
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iconographic conventions. The influence of Tibetan *thangka* conventions are, therefore, relegated to the structure and ornamentation of the painting, and seem to function as mere cues of “Tibetan-ness” for the casual viewer. King Gesar emanates a halo of flames, the “blaze of awareness fire” which usually radiates from wrathful protector deities, and is enclosed within a double-layered pentagonal border, a common framing device in *thangka*. While the inner border made up of stylized lotus petals is more conventionally Tibetan, the outer brocade-patterned border contains a series of narrative roundels which seem to depict scenes from the Gesar epic. This hints at the “life of the Buddha” type biographical *thangka*, though more in spirit than form – unlike the self-contained roundels of “King Gesar,” in the New Menri style these pedagogical *thangkas* usually depict scenes from Śakyamuni Buddha’s life interconnected using landscape elements, describing them within the same pictorial space as the central figure (*fig. 75*). Finally, the schematically represented lotus throne and pedestal on which Gesar is perched completes the reference to *thangka* compositional structure.

Of course, one should not be too hasty to conclude unequivocally, as Kvaerne does, that the Kanze school painters intended “King Gesar of Ling” to present “a gaudy, one-dimensional, fairy-tale distortion of history” without taking a closer look at the socio-historical context of King Gesar himself. The valorous deeds of King Gesar are known mainly through the orally transmitted epic cycle of the same name, believed to date from the Second Transmission of Buddhism in Tibet, but with clear traces of narrative elements from pre-Buddhist Tibetan society. Given the

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multitude of elaborate regional variations in this epic cycle, it is difficult to outline the story of King Gesar except to say that in essence, he was a divine emissary of an indeterminate time period connected with the kingdom of Lingts’ang in the northern part of Kham, and sent from Heaven to vanquish the non-Buddhist kings of the four directions.  

Estimated to be the longest epic in the world, bards of the Gesar epic can be found today all over the Himalayan regions, inducing its identification by the PRC as a “precious Tibetan gem...[and] a key research project for the sixth, seventh and eighth five-year plans.” Harris recognizes rightly that the appeal of the Gesar epic to the Chinese Communists lies in its potential in being presented as a secular tale – in the nomination form submitted by the PRC government for the inscription of the epic on the UNESCO Representative List of Intangible Cultural Heritage, it is described in distinctly humanistic terms as “unique as a wellspring of indigenous cultural diversity and evidence of sustainable, yet dynamic, human creativity,” with only cursory references to its use in religious rituals. However, in actuality, with the complex interchange between popular and religious forms of literature in pre-1959 Tibet, Buddhist themes are inextricably woven into the fabric of the Gesar epic, such that it is untenable to regard it “as the Chinese seem to do...[as a] reflection of a society where the clergy had not yet developed a strong influence, and to attempt on that basis to exploit it ideologically against the former Tibetan social system.”

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225 China Tibet Information Center, “100 Questions and Answers About Tibet,” 69.
226 Harris, *In the Image of Tibet*, 154.
Admitting the possibility, therefore, that the artists of the Kanze school may be attempting to signify these contradictions even under the veneer of conformity with state ideology, a more nuanced interpretation of *King Gesar of Ling* may be put forth. The first indication of this can be seen in the two incontestable symbols of Buddhism prominently positioned along the central axis of the painting, which identify King Gesar with Śakyamuni Buddha himself. The first one is the *dharmacakra* (Tb. *chos kyi ’khor lo*), or “wheel of law,” supported by a *garuḍa*, and represented in the way most common in Tibetan art – surrounded by a pear-shaped aura, with a tripartite whorl at the hub symbolizing the three Buddhist refuges of Buddha, Dharma and Sangha (*fig. 72c*). It crowns the peak of the brocade-patterned border directly above King Gesar. This is a position commonly occupied in *thangkas* with a single central figure by either a tutelary deity, a lineage master to indicate which monastic order the work belongs to, or even Śakyamuni Buddha himself (*fig. 76*). Given that other structural elements of the painting follow the conventions of single-figure *thangkas*, I would argue that the *dharmacakra* here fulfils a similar function, identifying the allegiance of King Gesar to Buddhism. The *dharmacakra*, a universal Buddhist motif originating in early Indian Buddhism, symbolizes in Tibetan Buddhism “the rapid spiritual transformation revealed in the Buddha’s teachings...and the overcoming of all obstacles and illusions.”²²⁹ It is possible to conjecture, therefore, that the *dharmacakra* in this context represents the continued relevance of the teachings of the Buddha to the Tibetan people in cleansing them of the false ideology of atheistic Communism, thereby bringing forth a new spiritual transfiguration.

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The recitation and transmission of the Gesar epic was banned in Gelugpa monasteries, causing its steady decline in Tibet prior to the Chinese invasion. This was most possibly because of the satirical criticism leveled against the monastic hegemony in some of its variants – which, given how condemnation of monastic feudal lords by former serfs played such a key part of Communist propaganda campaigns in Tibet, could have been another reason for the PRC government to have encouraged its reintroduction. In targeting the Gelugpa order with its power base in central Tibet, however, the state overlooks not only the mendicant Buddhist shamans\(^{230}\) who have roamed the periphery of Tibet’s successive monastic hegemonies, but also the continued popularity of the Gesar epic in the eastern Tibetan region of Kham even throughout Gelugpa rule. With the PRC revitalization campaign, “mass publication of the Gesar episodes has exploded in the low-price market [and] a new appreciation of their literary monument has arisen among Tibetans.”\(^{231}\) Since Gesar is lauded as the founding father of the people of Kham, the PRC government’s aggressive promotion of the Gesar epic seems to have had the unintended side-effect of producing a situation where in Kham today, “the stories of [Gesar’s] conquest of different countries and his other heroic exploits...have contributed to the awakening of the national consciousness.”\(^ {232}\) Considering that the town of Kanze is itself in eastern Tibet, it is entirely possible that Rigzin Namgyal was drawing on these strands of resistance in his portrayal of King Gesar. With this in

\(^{230}\) Here used in Geoffrey Samuel’s sense, which describes a key feature of the Tibetan religious landscape where “its typical figure is the Tantric lama, who undergoes a prolonged retreat in order to gain the shamanic power of the Vajrayana, and subsequently utilizes that power on behalf of a lay population.” (Samuel, *Civilized Shamans*, 8–9.)

\(^{231}\) Blondeau and Buffetrille, *Authenticating Tibet*, 216.

\(^{232}\) Karmay, “Mountain Cults and National Identity in Tibet,” 144.
mind, the retinue of laypeople in the bottom sector of the painting, dressed in traditional Tibetan garb and arranged around the second symbol of Buddhism, the centrally placed stūpa, can be seen as a revolutionary crowd welcoming the victorious King Gesar after his defeat of the PRC imperialists. In this projection of the eventual conquest of the non-Buddhist “kings” of Communist China by King Gesar, here symbolizing a sovereign Tibetan nation, the Gesar epic is retold as an imagined future homeland. The adaptation of the Gesar epic to reflect conditions of modern life is not unusual – when news of World War II reached Tibet, Kamtrül Rinpoche (1929-1980) “composed an additional book of the epic entitled Gesar Conquers the Kingdom of Jarman [where] Gesar travels to Germany and assassinates Hitler for the benefit of all sentient beings.”

That said, however, it is ultimately difficult to determine to what extent the references to traditional iconography and long-established structural conventions in the painting were intended to be indicative of deeper symbolic meanings, or if these “Tibetan” motifs are purely decorative ciphers. While it was made clear to me by my interlocutors at the Norbulingka and the Gama Gazi that ornamentation and figures not of divine origin are subsidiary details which are more amenable to experimentation, I would say that structural conventions of arranging these elements in relation to the central divine figure still play a key role in encapsulating Tibetan tradition – serving to identify divinities, differentiate types of thangka, or distinguish schools of painting. For example, King Gesar is flanked on both sides by two lissome female figures who are unidentifiable from the single attributes they hold in their hands. Comparing these with the writhing female figures emerging out of the water

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formations at Gesar’s feet, who are similarly depicted with close-fitting robes and pinned-up hair, they can be seen on one level as participating in the Han eroticization of minority women that is more clearly observable in Chinese prints of everyday Tibetan life (fig. 77). However, at the same time, they recall in their number and positioning the Tibetan convention of depicting two attendant bodhisattvas by the sides of Buddhas, such as in this sculptural tableau made in the Norbulingka workshop of Śakyamuni Buddha accompanied by his two chief disciples, Śāriputra and Maudgalyāyana (fig. 78). Is this a reference to the Buddhist interpretation of King Gesar as “the incarnation of a Buddha [who] fights against incarnations of demons who threaten to destroy his kingdom and the world,” or merely an empty recapitulation of convention? In light of the socio-historical context of the Gesar epic, however, I would argue for the possibility that the Kanze school did not merely imbibe Socialist ideology wholesale, and was instead exploring these questions of signification while they were in the process of designing these thangkas in the new style. Ultimately, I must conclude that given the absence of iconometric exactitude in the depiction of the central figure of King Gesar, few Tibetans trained in the thangka tradition would consider King Gesar of Ling a religious work of art. It is perhaps best described as a secular painting, with religious elements that have been enlisted in a nationalistic enterprise due to their significative powers and relevance to the Tibetan people.

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234 Blondeau and Buffetrille, Authenticating Tibet, 215.
“The West” as Surrogate Shangri-La

If there is an imaginative construct more compelling to the Tibetan exile community in Dharamshala than that of the “homeland” of “Tibet,” it is the allure of “the West.” As Diehl, from whom I borrow the title of this section, puts it, “the West has become...something of a substitute Shangri-La, a realm one can actually see and know, unlike the Tibetan homeland whose current inaccessibility...[is] more in keeping with the traditional myth of a hidden heaven on earth.”²³⁵ The Norbulingka sculptors trace this Westward look, of course, to the events of 1959. Tsering Palden invoked tropes of pre-1959 isolation when he told me that before the Chinese Occupation, Tibetans were wholly sheltered from the outside world, and when the refugees were forced into exile they suddenly saw so many alien things in India – here he mimed a wide-eyed gasp of shock – they realized there were all these new desires to fulfill. This discussion developed out of a conversation about his girlfriend between strokes of his hammer on copper. She managed to migrate to Madrid some years before due to her family connections with a high Rinpoche there who has a large European following, and though she only managed to secure a job as a domestic helper, she is so enamored with Italy that she gave him an ultimatum – if he wanted to stay with her, he would absolutely have to move to Italy to join her, as she never wants to return to India. Though maintaining his usual jovial demeanor, I could sense how conflicted he felt over it. What use would a master of Tibetan Buddhist sculpture be in Italy? Though he heard that there may be work to be had that requires his specialized skills, in the form of jewelry making and repair and so forth, he joked feebly that he would most likely end up washing dishes. When I suggest he try to

²³⁵ Diehl, _Echoes from Dharamshala_, 147.
continue his art in Italy, to innovate and experiment with the skills he learned at the Norbulingka and enter the modern art world, he laughed, saying “Tibetan artists, we just copy from what Master gives. No creativity, no way to create something out of my own mind, to say ‘this is mine.’”

It is perhaps telling of the failure (or success, depending on your perspective) of the Norbulingka’s training regimen that even though it equips its graduates with the traditional artistic practices of “Tibet” in order to “preserve our heritage, not only for ourselves, but also for the whole of humankind,” it paralyses them with “tradition” to the extent that they feel unable to deterritorialize these Tibetan aesthetics into forms transferrable into the West, where so many of them wish to go. If detached from the locality of Tibet in Dharamshala, the lines of territorialization of Tibetan culture short circuit for the individual artist.

It is perhaps in the Westward look, however, that the Tibetan exile recognition of the rhizomatic multiplicity of Tibet is most explicit, in their acknowledgement of the various global influences that permeate their own personal lives. Tibetan youth watch Bollywood movies, listen to American rap and R&B, wear the latest Korean hiphop fashions, talk about applying for visas to visit family and friends in Taiwan, Italy and Israel. They list the various Hollywood stars, political leaders and other celebrities who have visited the workshop – Pierce Brosnan, Sean Penn, Nancy Pelosi, Robert Thurman – and discuss how their artwork is snapped up by the tourists that stream in daily to watch them at work, like Egyptian mummies in a museum. As I demonstrated earlier, in Chengdu, where artistic tradition is less politicized and state-

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236 Tsering Palden (Assistant to the Master Sculptor, Norbulingka Institute), in a personal interview with the author, 4 June 2011
regulated, Tibetan artists embrace the multiplicity of sources and styles of Tibetan religious art. I spent many instructive sessions with Dangzeng running through a good proportion of the hundreds of Tibetan painting schools and their respective influences from China, India and Nepal – once, in order to demonstrate how difficult it is to pinpoint a single “Tibetan” style, he sketched fingers in five different thangka painting styles over the course of Tibetan history, which he defined according to Chinese dynastic periods (fig. 79). At the exilic Norbulingka, however, where artworks embody the very survival of their culture and race, it is only in matters of everyday life that do not fall under the jurisdiction of tradition which remain open to experimentation – though of course, these seemingly minor negotiations of identity reconfigure the whole. Many older sculptors lamented the lack of genuine interest of the younger generation in Tibetan culture. “Why aren’t brainy Tibetans interested in their own art?” Norbu challenged me. “If Tibetan art and culture is truly heavy and valuable then it would naturally draw people to it, wouldn’t it?”

His contention was that no college-educated Tibetans, with the ability to understand the finer theoretical points of scripture which he says is essential to a true Buddhist artist, would want to join the Norbulingka – according to his calculations, a Bachelor’s degree holder earns the same amount as a graduate of the Norbulingka’s twelve-year sculpture program, and no young Tibetan out of college would undergo another twelve years of training if he saw no appreciable difference in his prospects. The territorializations involved in exile ethnoscapes of Tibet are therefore seen to grate against those in its ideoscapes, where displaced Tibetans are simultaneously expected to adjust to the conditions of

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238 Tsering Palden (Assistant to the Master Sculptor, Norbulingka Institute), in a personal interview with the author, 4 June 2011
the modern economy, finding employment and places in society; and to preserve a limited selection of cultural practices from pre-1959 Tibet as unchanging “tradition.”

In an attempt to rein in these myriad strands of territorializations, I will discuss finally an ethnic Tibetan contemporary artist whose work perhaps best expresses the rhizomatic multiplicity that is Tibet. Gonkar Gyatso, the founder of The Sweet Tea House, a contemporary Tibetan art gallery in London, fully and consciously acknowledges the disparate nodes that make up Tibet. This is a personal awakening that was painfully and experientially gained. Gyatso was born in Chinese-occupied Lhasa, and studied art at the Minority Art School in Beijing, where he gained a command of Socialist Realist styles. Back in Lhasa, he started the “Sweet Tea” movement with fellow Tibetan artists, producing “a new type of art which was both specifically Tibetan (rather than Chinese) and explicitly anti-traditionalist in form.”239 After the movement was disbanded by the PRC government for its lack of inclusion of Han Chinese artists, he fled into exile to Dharamshala, where his art was rejected by the refugee community for its refusal to participate in exilic ideas of “tradition.” He decided to retrain himself in religious thangka painting, mastering the system of iconometry that I have argued is key to the authenticity of the Norbulingka’s products. Outside the classroom however, as can be seen from his Iconometric Buddha of 1992 where the iconometric gridlines are fully visible (fig. 80), he “performed a kind of archaeology on these sub-structures and made them...[function] as a signifier of traditionalism beneath which the Buddha appears...imprisoned.”240 Finally, he moved to the West, studying in London and

239 Harris, “The Buddha Goes Global,” 702.
240 Ibid., 705.
becoming the first Tibetan from Chinese-occupied Tibet to exhibit in the United States. There, however he found his disavowal of “essentializing narratives”\textsuperscript{241} of Tibet sabotaged his attempts to enter the Western modern art world. It is clear that his all-too-clear recognition of the rhizomatic multiplicity of Tibet, which he tried to convey in his work, hindered his success in the various art worlds due to the exclusivity of their respective arborescent perceptions of “Tibet.”

A poignant representation of this artistic struggle can be seen in his 2003 series of four photographic self-portraits called *My Identity* referencing a famous photograph of the Thirteenth Dalai Lama’s court painter Tsering, where he depicts himself at his easel in four digitally-modeled settings – Chinese-occupied Tibet, Dharamshala, London, and an ideal pre-1959 Tibet – the last a recreation of that archival portrait (fig. 81). As Harris puts it, “Gyatso’s *Identity* series can be construed as a slap in the face for each of his audiences, depending on which vision of Tibet they most closely adhere to.”\textsuperscript{242} In trying to explode the arborescent myths of “Tibet” by challenging his viewers to pigeonhole him in the stereotype they think best suits him, Gyatso forces an engagement with his work that reveals the various lines of territorializations in this construction of localities. It is clear that as mentioned, in a real-world application of Deleuze and Guattari’s rhizomatic model of transnational cultures, there exists a hierarchy of representations. Though individual artistic expressions may attempt to assert alternative perspectives, certain territorializations of “tradition” and “authenticity” from positions of power are prioritized over others. Gyatso’s explicit confession of the entirety of the rhizomatic network of “Tibet,”

\textsuperscript{241} Ibid., 706.
\textsuperscript{242} Ibid., 712.
unlike the implicit allusions in the work and rhetoric of the Norbulingka and the Gama Gazi, struggles to find a place in a world where “history is always written from a sedentary point of view,” and the pathologization of uprootedness demands one’s allegiance to, if not place, then to a place-bound “culture.”

The morning I was to leave Dharamshala, I was awoken by a telephone call from Tsering.

“The workshop is closed. Chenmo-la just passed away.”

The tail-end of the monsoon unfurled onto the dirt path as I approached the pale-pink apartment of the deceased, where the wake was to be held. Near the end of his life, Penpa Dorje was bedridden, confined to this building. I ascended the stairs. The junior sculptors were in the kitchen wrapping sweet paneer momos – steamed dumplings brought into Tibet from Han Dynasty China and adapted to Indian cuisine. As I walked in, I found Dhondhup in the middle of a story:

“Chenmo-la was very scary last time. He always said, ‘I’m not a Buddha, only human. So I can still get angry, and if you misbehave I’ll beat you!’ And he did!”

We laughed, then fell silent. Tsetan was at the door, the mantle of succession heavy on his shoulders. He caught my eye.

“Go pay your respects to Chenmo-la,” he said.

Familiar faces from the Norbulingka stoic in the uppermost floor, lining the corridor to the rooftop verandah where the casket was placed. Monks and relatives sat cross-legged in rows, chanting om mani peme hung for the spirit of the departed, believed to remain in this realm for forty-nine days before rebirth.
The last time I saw Penpa Dorje was last November, on that same verandah. A frail, elderly man in a limpid pool of sunlight, shuffling *mahjong* tiles at a table with three of his friends. I asked Tsering to translate my thanks for his help with my project, and he got up to clasp my hands in both of his. In his smile, I sensed the same *bodhicitta* imbued in the faces of his sculptures.

I was unable to approach the casket. His body in repose – like the copper husk of a Buddha statue on its back on the workshop floor, before its consecration with rites and relics.

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In writing this thesis, I often relive the day of Penpa Dorje’s wake, and speculate about what my friends were thinking that afternoon. In the exilic model of Tibetan cultural endangerment, the death of Penpa Dorje symbolizes the severance of the Norbulingka sculpture workshop’s umbilical cord to the “homeland.” Chenmo-la leaves behind in India a legacy of eight sculptors fully proficient in the techniques of the Tsedong school, six of whom remain at the Norbulingka to carry on his work of transmitting tradition to further generations of young Tibetans. However, from the standpoint of place-bound notions of culture, the fact that they were born and trained in India, where foreign influences would have adulterated their artistic purity, and not Tibet as Chenmo-la was, casts suspicion on their authenticity. It is clear that such an evaluation does not only belittle the considerable skill of these men, but also discounts the adaptability and the inclusive nature of the Tibetan artistic traditions, as can be seen in the multiplicity of source-nodes from which they claim descent.
As this study has shown, Tibetan culture – or indeed, the culture of any diasporic community – is more productively apprehended as a transnational rhizomatic network of cultures, constituted by interconnected nodes dispersed throughout the globe which all make representational claims to Tibet as their “homeland.” In this spatial and temporal remapping of Tibet, the “homeland” is no longer hemmed in by the natural boundaries of the Kunlun Ridge and the Himalayas, and is instead an itinerant locality that is continuously being reterritorialized into new locations. In the diasporic community of Dharamshala, painstaking efforts have been made to recreate the social and political institutions of pre-1959 Tibet, though with significant adjustments that reflect the need to adapt to the new environment of India and the changed circumstances of exile. In this way, while the Norbulingka Institute claims to model its organizational structure after the traditional guild system, where master artists lead teams of apprentices in executing commissions, its growth as a non-profit institution for cultural preservation necessitated the expansion of its administrative and corporate staff over the years, which the sculptors accuse of subverting the traditional power hierarchies of a guild workshop. Indeed, the presence of a souvenir shop on its grounds, and its plans to open chains in major Indian cities, indicates how the Norbulingka’s patronage base has shifted from temple and monastery commissions to the mass production of the tourist market.

As evidenced by their replicas of the Bodhgayā Buddha, these reterritorializations have resulted in adaptive strategies of innovation and experimentation which negotiate the Norbulingka’s rhetoric of unwavering adherence to a rigid code of tradition. In aligning their replicas with the Pāla-Sena style of
Indian art, an irreproachable source of Buddhist tradition, the Norbulingka manages to justify its deviation from workshop conventions. In a similar fashion, the experimentation involved with the Kanze school in assimilating New Menri *thangka* painting with Socialist Realism displays acumen in mediating both styles in its attempt to seek approval from both Chinese and Tibetan patrons. In the traditional crafts factories like the Gama Gazi, however, though Duoqing Zhaxi professes the desire to experiment with various ethnic characteristics to promulgate a new universal style, the nature of their patronage base necessitates a more conventional approach to the iconography of their sculptures.

What is remarkable about my findings, then, is not so much the differences between the sculptural workshops of the inter-state and intra-state Tibetan diasporic communities, but rather their similarities, indicative of the lines of territorialization which interweave both into the same rhizomatic network of Tibet. Both workshops derive authenticity and legitimacy from their references to the deterritorialized “homeland,” though they perform their reterritorializations in ways that are fitted to their new environments, occasioned by their condition as minority groups within larger communities. This can be seen in the ways in which repoussé takes on associations of the “homeland” in each workshop – while the Gama Gazi references the more recent history of Nepali imports in the 1980s to commodify tradition, the Norbulingka delves into an antiquity which reaches into the origins of Buddhist sculpture in Tibet, a lineage transmitted to them from their master sculptor. Iconometry, as an eminently suitable means for the deterritorialization of artistic practice into mathematical codes which was utilized even along the trade routes of the
Silk Road, is used in both workshops to great effect today – though requiring the oral teachings of a master sculptor to clarify in its reterritorialization. In the end, it is clear that both communities lay claim to the “homeland” of ancient Tibet in ways which feed back into representations of that “homeland,” and the roots of tradition in the narrative of Tibetan art are themselves emergent, and in continuous motion.

In the rhizome of Tibet, therefore, the traditions of Tibetan Buddhist art are flourishing. The phrase “living tradition” is, in many ways, a tautology – a tradition is, of necessity, constantly growing; the emergent result of complex mechanisms of selection and improvisation. Even with Chenmo Penpa Dorje’s untimely demise, his legacy lives on in the transnational rhizomatic network in which his own Norbulingka workshop is embedded – though in ways which may not agree with arborescent exilic ideas of purity and authenticity.

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The time draws near for me to leave to catch my Snow Region bus to New Delhi. I make my excuses and say my goodbyes. As Tsering clasps my hand in farewell, he looks me straight in the eye and asks,

“So you’re going to Tibet next?”

I nod. A pause, silence.

“Make sure you send some yak meat back to us.”

All present burst into laughter, the air filling with roasted cumin and chili fragrance. A roomful of second and third generation refugees who have never before seen their native land of snows, the Norbulingka sculptors nevertheless savored on their tongues the aroma of yak jerky through the wistful memories of their grandparents.
Two months later, I stop into a gift shop in a small Tibetan town in Amdo, now part of Qinghai province in China. Amidst tea leaves, yak plush toys, and bottles of barley wine, I find a rack of yak jerky products in glossy packets, labeled in both Tibetan and Chinese.

“It’s very popular,” the Chinese shopgirl says. “Your parents will love it.”

Back in Singapore, I bundle up the packages of yak meat in white *khata* scarves and airmail them to Dharamshala.
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Figure 13. The Buddha head after the formation of the chin and the top of the head.
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Figure 76. Sertrap, late 18th to early 19th century, Central or Eastern Tibet. Gouache on cotton, 143.5 x 90.2 cm. The Zimmerman Family Collection. Also note the conventional way in which the wrathful protector deity is depicted in relation to his steed. There are, however, remarkable parallels between this painting and King Gesar – the subsidiary mounted figures and the organization of structures along the central axis, to name a few.
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Figure 78. Norbulingka Institute, Śakyamuni Buddha with his two chief disciples. Gilt silver.
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Figure 80. Gonkar Gyatso, *Iconometric Buddha*, 1992. Mixed media on cotton cloth, 100 x 60cm. The artist is pictured here holding up his painting in Dharamshala.
# GLOSSARY OF CHINESE TERMS

This glossary is not a comprehensive, nor authoritative, repository of technical terms. It serves, rather, as a reference tool for the ethnographic component of this thesis. Most of these terms were gleaned from interviews and discussions in Chengdu and then translated into English by me. I have provided both the Simplified and Traditional characters where they differ.

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<td>In accordance with the views of people from all over the world</td>
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