



THE HOLY LAND REBORN

Pilgrimage & the Tibetan Reinvention of Buddhist India

TONI HUBER

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of Buddhist India

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Mancotta, Assam, February 2007 T.H.



NOTE ON TRANSLITERATION

It is difficult in many cases for nonspecialists to pronounce Tibetan words when they are rendered in transliteration according to their proper spellings. For example, the Tibetan term for “meditation place” is written *sgrub gnas* but pronounced something like *drupné*, and the place name Tö Ngari is actually transliterated as sTod mNga’ ris. In the absence of any standard or widely accepted system for representing Tibetan pronunciation, I have used my own simple phonetic equivalents for Tibetan words throughout the main body of the text and the notes. The pronunciation generally follows that of central Tibetan dialects, although it is not entirely consistent with any one area. Correct written forms of Tibetan proper names, rendered according to the widely accepted Wylie (1959) system, are given for each phonetic equivalent following its listing in the index at the end of the book. Wherever it has been germane to cite Tibetan text, book titles, or technical terms in Wylie, they mostly follow my phonetic equivalents or translations in parentheses.

Transliteration of Sanskrit follows standard lexicographical usage, except for common words such as “nirvana” or “mandala” that occur in standard English dictionaries without diacritical marks.



INTRODUCTION

Other cultures have recurrently used India as a foil to define their own historical moments: to reassure or to doubt themselves.

—*Sunil Khilnani*

India through the Tibetan Looking Glass

One cold and overcast summer day during the mid-1980s, I visited the ruins of the great fifteenth-century monastic complex of Ganden in Central Tibet. It was there, at this spectacular 4,000-metre hilltop site, that I unexpectedly learned to consider India from an entirely new perspective. At a point along the famous pilgrimage path that encircles Ganden, I came upon a group of Tibetan pilgrims inspecting a deep crevice in a rock face. When I enquired of an elderly man among the group about the significance of this spot, he ventured with earnest that it was a natural portal or “door” leading to a long underground passage or tunnel. Whoever managed to enter this passage and travel along it, he said, would, with sufficient faith and perseverance, eventually emerge once again in India. And, he confidently assured me, the traveller would resurface at no lesser place than the Vajrāsana or “Adamantine Throne” at Bodh Gayā on the plains of India, at the precise spot where Buddhists believe that the Buddha attained his profound awakening some two and a half millennia ago. The Vajrāsana is considered the most potent of all Buddhist holy places, a site that traditionally minded Tibetans still maintain is the very “centre of the world.” The new information I was being offered intrigued me. I immediately began to imagine the journey through this underground, subcontinental passage and what it must be like to reemerge in oppressively hot and dusty premon-

soon Bihar after leaving behind the bracing alpine environment that now surrounded us. It was, admittedly, a fascinating possibility.

Upon further inquiry with the shrinekeeper monks at Ganden, I later discovered that my elderly pilgrim had been mistaken or confused about this site. Ganden had no subterranean portal leading to India, they reported. Disappointed, I was just about to let go of my interest and fantasies and to dismiss the incident as just one more “tall tale” I had heard from Tibetans. But then the monks said matter-of-factly that while the old man was wrong about Ganden, there were indeed such portals leading to India to be found elsewhere in the Tibetan landscape, and a lively discussion ensued about where they might be located.¹ Since that day at Ganden, I have become aware of a great many claims of miraculous physical connections between Tibet and India, be they portals and passages, subterranean bodies of water that link the two regions, or even topographical features, such as mountains and boulders, which have flown through the air from India across the high Himalayas to become relocated on Tibetan soil. These traditions all express the same idea of and desire for some form of intimate and embodied connection between the places and topography of Tibet and India, one that has existed in the Tibetan imagination for many centuries. They are all, in fact, popular and colloquial manifestations of a much larger and very rich set of more formal narratives and rituals in Tibet that are devoted to expressing and actualizing a vital Tibetan relationship with India as a sacred Buddhist terrain or territory. It is this relationship, in all of its many and varied dimensions, which I have sought to systematically document and to understand in the present study. This introduction very briefly considers some general Tibetan attitudes toward India, along with my own principal motivations and aims for undertaking this study and an outline of the chapters which constitute the book.

If there is one place, one land, which the peoples of Tibet have held in highest esteem, above all others—even often above their own land—it is India. In Tibetan thought and action, Tibet and India are inextricably bound together. However, the continuities that Tibetans perceive as binding Tibet to India are not the economic, political and social, or even ecological ones we might anticipate. Rather, they have been almost entirely cultural, based upon a successful and far-reaching religious conversion that began well over a millennium ago. India gained its high standing in Tibetan civilization as the land of the Buddha and of Buddhist religion, and also as the source or origin place of high culture. Scholars have often pointed out that Tibet was in fact surrounded by various neighbouring lands—not just India—from which the Tibetans received the Buddhist teachings at the

time of their conversion. Furthermore, we know full well that the constituents of historical Tibetan high culture do not derive just from India but are in fact rather diverse and complex in origins. Nevertheless, thanks to the selective memory borne of a particular historiographical tradition, Tibetans have consistently and almost exclusively focused upon India as the “mother” of everything they value in their civilization. In a statement epitomizing this centuries-old type of Tibetan thinking, the Fourteenth Dalai Lama, Tenzin Gyatso, recently remarked,

We Tibetans consider ourselves the child of Indian civilization. And since the introduction of Buddhism to Tibet from India, Tibetan society has been transformed into a unique Buddhist civilization. For the Tibetans India is always the *Ārya bhūmi* [i.e., “holy land”].²

The child-parent metaphor so often resorted to in such Tibetan statements is actually quite appropriate, since the Tibetan relationship with India has always been highly asymmetrical. Over time, the Tibetans acquired vast amounts of cultural knowledge and techniques from India. However, for their part, Indians over the centuries were never much interested in anything the Tibetans had to offer, except of course the gold which they traditionally carried south over the Himalayas as payment for the knowledge being received from their Indian gurus. More recently, Tibetans have appeared in India as a stateless and disempowered refugee community, one that is highly dependant upon ongoing Indian support and goodwill for its existence. In this enduring context of imbalance, Tibetan societies have also developed complex and changing attitudes toward India over the course of time. Alongside their admiringly devotional discourses about India, one can also find an alternative “dark side” which is characterized instead by degrees of Tibetan fear and loathing of India and the Indians. The occurrence and significance of such negative images should not be overlooked or underestimated.

Why India?

The general and sustained Tibetan veneration of India begs at least two fundamental questions. First, why, at a certain point in their history, did the Tibetans elevate India so highly in status, even above their own land and society? And, second, after accepting India as supreme, why was it that Tibetans continued to hold it in such high regard, especially over many centuries during which they had no significant contacts with their south-

ern neighbour? Throughout this study I will have quite a lot to say about this second question, which is a fascinating one due to the fact that even while the reality of post-thirteenth-century Tibetan relationships with Asian "others" was firmly focused upon Mongol, Chinese, or Nepalese neighbours for more than half a millennium, India's high standing in Tibet remained undiminished, and even perhaps increased in certain ways. At more than a few points in this book, I will be arguing that the "real" India of direct experience has mostly been irrelevant in Tibet, and that Tibetan constructs and appropriations of India have taken on a life of their own. Indeed, they have come to constitute an important type of cultural resource that individuals and institutions in Tibetan societies have often drawn upon as agents in their own internal negotiations of power, authority, and legitimacy.

As for the first question posed above, "why India?," to my knowledge it has only ever been indirectly considered as an aspect of the overall Tibetan conversion to Buddhism. For instance, Matthew Kapstein has recently advanced the idea that the eventual and thoroughgoing conversion of Tibetan civilization to Buddhism can be understood in terms of a crisis following the end of Tibet's imperial power during the ninth century and afterward:

Tibetans were faced not only with a practical political and economic crisis, but, as are all those whose communities experience great and traumatic change, with a crisis of understanding as well. The sophisticated cosmology and soteriology of Buddhism provided one possible way of making sense of the Tibetan world as a domain of meaningful agency and possible excellence, which began during and continued even after its tryst with imperial greatness.³

Analogous arguments about social change and crises of meaning have of course often been put forward to account for much about the origins and development of Buddhism in Asia,⁴ not to mention many other instances of religious conversion. Following Kapstein's line of thinking, one can postulate that, together with the cultural panacea which Buddhism apparently represented to postimperial Tibetans, there also came India as the illustrious home of this new and superior order of meaning, the source and model of all things excellent. This was not the real India which Tibetan travellers to the subcontinent over the centuries have so often experienced and reported as somewhat threatening or obnoxious. Rather, it was an idealized India that was to be encountered largely through a vast, imported corpus of Indocentric Buddhist literature. In these texts, India was described as

being nothing less than the very centre of the world, a place of abstract, almost paradisaical perfection populated by a long historical succession of spiritual and intellectual supermen. This cast of Indian superheroes included none other than the epitome of wisdom and compassion himself, the Buddha Śākyamuni, together with his illustrious disciples. Especially influential were some of his later followers, such as the sublime philosophers Nāgārjuna or Dharmakīrti, as well as a whole series of ritually potent and apparently immortal Tantric saints and magicians.

Studying the Indo-Tibetan Relationship

If Tibetans themselves have long been fixated upon India, then so too have scholars engaged in the study of Tibet. A great many students of Tibetan studies—beginning with “founding fathers” of the discipline such as Kőrösi Csoma Sándor (1784–1842)—have often explored and described the earlier period of Tibetan contacts with Indian Buddhist civilization and some of its consequences for Tibet.⁵ Indeed, many scholars even refer explicitly to an “Indo-Tibetan Buddhism” or “études indo-tibétaines” as their formal fields of inquiry. Yet, in my view at least, academic scholarship on Tibet has remained quite distorted in its attempts to understand and represent the crucial relationship between Tibet and India.

To date, the long-standing contacts between Tibet and India have been considered overwhelmingly in terms of the agendas of scholasticism and the formal institutions of elite or high culture.⁶ The focus of most of this research has been upon such topics as the translation of Indian Sanskrit texts into Tibetan, the particular Buddhist teachings and lineages that were transmitted from India to Tibet, those Indian Buddhist missionaries and their Tibetan converts who were the principal agents of cultural transmission, and the rhetoric and polemics of legitimation during the foundation of new, Indian-inspired Buddhist lineages or schools in Tibet. Still others have been interested in the transfer and uptake by the Tibetans of Indian systems of philosophy and the traditional sciences, or concepts relating to spiritual authority and temporal power, not to mention Indic styles and aesthetics in the fields of beaux arts, belles lettres, and so on. Even within this well-focused set of interests, further preferences are evident. For example, some scholars, notably those more purely concerned with India or its forms of Buddhism, have studied Tibetan culture more as a kind of archive or tool with which to try and recover or to look back into ancient Indian intellectual and religious history. Thus, Tibet has often served as a convenient vehicle to help reach another elusive destination: a long-lost India.

All of the aforementioned topics and types of inquiry into questions Indo-Tibetan are without doubt legitimate and highly significant. However, in the shadow of all this valuable scholarly activity, other important questions concerning the relationship of the Tibetans themselves to India have gone entirely neglected or received only the most cursory treatment. It is the purpose of this book to begin a systematic investigation of Tibet and India from an entirely different perspective, one which is far less rarefied and more down to earth than anything we have been offered until now.

India as a Tibetan Place

Above all, this book is a study of India as a Tibetan place. Its main focus is the importance of India for Tibetans in terms of a complex of common ritual activities and often-popular narrative discourses that Tibetans themselves have invested in India over a long period of time. I will begin to confront questions about exactly what India has meant to the Tibetans as a type of place, as a destination, and as a topography or even territory, and also as a kind of "other," in both real and idealized terms.

In general, I want to ask how Tibetans have defined India as a space and infused it with meaning, and so created and re-created or reinvented it as a specific type of place or, rather, a series of places. I want to consider how the inhabitants of the world's highest plateau have maintained a ritual relationship to the South Asian lowland, particularly by way of the very common practice of pilgrimage, and what it means for them to identify India as their "holy land." Moreover, I will begin exploring how the idea of India as a religious territory or sacred geography has been utilized by Tibetans as a type of cultural resource in the development of religion and society in Tibet itself. I am interested in India as an object of Tibetan knowledge, although not primarily as an abstract one which never leaves the confines of textualized schemes or erudite discourses. My concern is rather with knowledge and action. Thus, I will be focused throughout much of this study upon Tibetan actions and experiences relating to India as both a physical and an imaginary destination and landscape. I have sought to document, where possible—and make no mistake, this is often a prodigiously difficult task—how Tibetans, as Buddhists, have acted in relation to India and Indians, especially what they have actually done "on the ground" in terms of ritual action while they have been in India, and also while they have been seriously engaged with cultural constructs of India.

While the general mode of inquiry I am undertaking is not necessarily new in the field of Tibetan studies during recent decades, what is cer-

tainly novel in this book is that the focus is now being directed toward India. Since the late 1980s, academic research has made strong growth into a wide range of interrelated ideas and practices in Tibetan societies concerning categories such as place, space, topography, territory, landscape, and the phenomena of pilgrimage, mountain and territorial cults, and so on.⁷ Virtually all of these many and excellent studies, whether historical, anthropological, or even philological, have been geographically focused upon areas of the Tibetan plateau and the adjacent high Himalayas. This may perhaps appear surprising, since India is, and has long been, extremely important to the Tibetans themselves in terms of these same categories and phenomena. Moreover, for the very first time in history, a more or less permanent Tibetan society is now actually resident in India. Yet what is often most significant to a society itself is not always the priority of those outsiders who would study it, and we increasingly recognize that scholarship is as much the unreflective artifact of a particular *Zeitgeist* as it is a calculated critical activity. The obvious lack of recent scholarly interest in India as a place and a geography of great significance for Tibetans is, I suspect, actually a strong reflection of our own long-standing romanticism about Tibet and the Himalayas as highly desirable travel destinations and sites of fantasy and potential fulfilment.⁸

A Historical Blind Spot

A second aim I have for this book is to investigate the above questions about the Tibetan relationship to India over a long historical period. This partly reflects my own personal introduction to the topic. Years ago, I initially went on pilgrimage to Buddhist sites with Tibetan exiles settled in India and then began to read accounts of much earlier pilgrims from Tibet travelling to India during the eleventh through thirteenth centuries, and I realized what a very ancient activity it actually was. I consider a longer historical context to be important in this study for two reasons. First, I wish to clearly demonstrate continuity of certain enduring patterns, on the one hand, but also to highlight innovations in relation to shifting political, social, and economic realities, on the other. Second, I will also begin to address the obvious lacuna of about six whole centuries in our historical understanding of the relationship between Tibet and India.

If one inquires today of educated Tibetans—both those living in Tibet and in South Asian exile—about the history of their civilization's relations with India, they invariably focus upon two distinct periods in their accounts. Their explanations of the first period always begin with the

seventh-century imperial dispatch to India of Thonmi Sambhota, who is traditionally hailed as the inventor of the Tibetan system of writing, and end during the thirteenth century with the last Tibetan students and translators to obtain teachings from a living Indian Buddhist community in its final stages of demise. The second period that Tibetans go on to mention usually commences at the turn of the twentieth century, with the turbulent events during the early reign of the Thirteenth Dalai Lama, Thubten Gyatso (1876–1933),⁹ and extends up until the recent Tibetan Diaspora into South Asia. These same two periods are also those focused upon almost exclusively in both written Tibetan historical surveys and also works of modern non-Tibetan historical scholarship.¹⁰ Students of Tibet and Tibetans themselves have thus been given the distinct impression that there were no sustained and meaningful Tibetan activities and interests in India between the fourteenth and the nineteenth centuries, which is a remarkably long hiatus between neighbours by any account. As I will demonstrate in part 2 of the present study, such an impression is misleading and in need of substantial revision.

Buddhist Transformations in South Asia and Tibet

My third motivation for this book has been to undertake a study of Tibetan religion which is not limited—as is so often the case—to considering only Tibetan histories, actors, and cultural logics. Research questions and materials relevant to the study of Tibetan Buddhism, and to the broader fields of Buddhist studies and the scholarly study of religions, do of course have mutual relevance. At points throughout this book, I will revisit both Western academic research on and non-Tibetan Buddhist religious interest in the sites associated with the Buddha in India. I do so for two reasons. First, I want to call into question what appear to have become taken-for-granted perspectives on the status and role of place, geography, and territory in the study of Buddhism, perspectives which do not necessarily advance our understanding of the myriad manifestations and transformations occurring in Buddhist worlds, both past and present. I will attempt to dislocate a few ostensible certainties about the sites of the Buddha in India, and begin presenting an alternative “shifting terrain” of the Buddha instead. Second, I want to contextualize patterns of activity and representation that are evident in the history of Tibetan Buddhism in relation to a much broader context of Buddhist history and even the history of the modern academic study of Buddhism itself. Religion in Tibetan societies more often than

not consists of patterns of thought and action which closely parallel those found in many other societies, particularly other Buddhist ones.

With this work, I also want to draw fresh attention to aspects of the development and impact of distinctly modern forms of Buddhism in South Asia throughout the twentieth century. I will investigate how certain new types of Buddhism have been strategically created around or focused upon the holy places associated with the Buddha during the past century. Modern forms of revival Buddhism in India which began to emerge around the beginning of the twentieth century were not, as they have often been presented, merely derivative of certain discourses and practices from the colonial milieu of Protestant missionaries and orientalist scholarship. They were also a result of deliberate choices and strategies pursued by a range of Asian actors who maintained their own complex interests and motivations. In part 3 of this study, I will examine some of this agency in the creation of new forms of modern Buddhism, especially that of Tibetan Buddhists who came into contact with South Asian Buddhist revival movements in India, a case which shows that the impact of such contacts began to transform all the parties involved.

Outline of the Book

This book is divided into three related parts, which generally—but not exclusively—follow the historical ordering of the material which is presented and analyzed in them. Part 1, “Locating and Dislocating the Land of the Buddha,” is primarily concerned with the development of different systems of knowledge and action related to India as the site of the holy places of the Buddha and of a Buddhist sacred geography. Chapter 1 briefly reviews these issues in relation to both earlier Indian Buddhism and the modern scholarship of Buddhist studies, in order to critically situate, within a much broader and more comparative frame of reference, many of the Tibetan religious developments discussed later in the book. Chapters 2, 3, and 4 deal with how India came to Tibet. I describe the acquisition and status of Tibetan knowledge about and representations of India as a Buddhist land. These are considered not only in terms of a *Rezeptionsgeschichte* and the acquisition of text-based knowledge but also as acts of “place transfer” and in relation to how certain types of ritual action, such as religious travel or pilgrimage, played an important role in the process.

In part 2, “Reinventing the Holy Land in India,” I offer a series of detailed case studies demonstrating different types of Tibetan cultural pro-

cesses and patterns—characterized variously as reinventions, rediscoveries, transfers, replications, and colonizations—applied to Indian sites and topography between the thirteenth and nineteenth centuries. The case studies presented in chapters 5 through 8 seek not only to document specific Tibetan instances of reinventing India as a Buddhist place; I also attempt to understand and explain their occurrence in historical and theoretical terms. These cases are focused upon a wide variety of sites of Tibetan activity in India, including regions as diverse as the Punjab, Assam, Bengal, Bihar, and the Middle Ganges. In each instance, I consider the significance of such developments for Tibetan religion and society during the period under discussion. I also try to reveal ways in which Tibetan Buddhism has always been a partial product of the influence of non-Tibetan agents and historical change in neighbouring regions, just as Tibetans have, in some instances, also influenced religion and society in other local Asian contexts in turn.

Finally, in part 3, “Modern Rebirths of the Holy Land,” I give an account of how a series of profound transformations taking place in India during the period of modernity reshaped not only both Buddhist and Tibetan activities there but also ways of thinking about and representing India as a Buddhist place. In chapters 9 and 10, I examine the central importance of pilgrimage to archaeologically rediscovered Indian Buddhist sites in the development and spread of modern forms of Buddhism in early twentieth-century India. In this context I focus upon Tibetan exposure to and participation in this revived, modern Indian Buddhist milieu prior to the Tibetan Diaspora into South Asia in 1959–60. This reveals how Tibetans had been actors and agents in the formation of what has become generally known in the literature as “Buddhist modernism” or “modern Buddhism,” while at the same time they also came under the influence of new South Asian religious developments. Chapter 11 completes the book by situating key features of the contemporary, deterritorialized Tibetan Buddhist exile society within the context of the archaeologically and religiously revived sites of the Buddha in India. I will argue that the renewed status of India as a modern Buddhist place remains a crucial cultural resource upon which Tibetan refugees continue to draw until today, even though their actual attitude toward India is often deeply ambivalent.

Labels of Convenience

While “India,” “Tibet,” and “Tibetans” are very common, recognizable, and thus convenient labels to use herein, they certainly invite some criti-

cal definition. It is not my aim in this book to define a particular “India” of my own, nor to defend or criticise other possible visions of it (historical, religious, colonial, nationalist, ethnographic, etc.). Rather, I will be presenting changing definitions, ideas, and—importantly—experiences of how Tibetans have recognized India. In so doing, I will have to constantly relate Tibetan materials to both relevant geographical and historical reference points on the Indian subcontinent. Several centuries of European colonialism followed by modern “Indian” nationalism have given the idea of India some more widely recognizable profiles that one can either work with or against, or, indeed, merely take for granted. However, the idea of what Tibet is and, for that matter, who the Tibetans are, seems, by comparison, far less tangible or obvious to most of us.

For the sake of convenience in this book, when referring to “Tibet” I generally intend a broad geographical, ecological, and ethnographic definition. This mainly encompasses the Tibetan plateau system and adjacent high-altitude Himalayan regions populated by societies in which Tibetan-style Buddhism has remained predominant and been transmitted within a context of common written language, cognate social institutions and values, and a shared sense of historical experience. On one level, this simple definition of Tibet incorporates a diverse range of both historical and contemporary polities and stateless societies whose local differences were (and often still are) significant, particularly in terms of identities, spoken dialects, productive systems, political organization, and so on. This diversity should never be overlooked, and in other types of studies it might indeed be the main emphasis. However, on another level, my definition also assumes a significant degree of historical interrelatedness between the many regions of Tibet thanks to various important and long-term economies of circulation as well as common “grammars” of practices, symbols, and social relations. I use the modern referent “Tibetan” to refer to the many different Buddhist agents or actors from the Tibetan plateau, the adjacent high Himalayas, and the recent Indian exile community whom I will be discussing. I do not, however, intend “Tibetan” in any strict sense as a unitary and durable label of ethnic or national classification which can be applied uncritically across time and space. It is, as much as any label or identity, a convenient construct, one with which I can encompass the many inhabitants of the diverse yet related localities of the Tibet I have defined. Nevertheless, this label recognizes that Tibetan Buddhists also circulated widely within the region as pilgrims, missionaries, traders, officials, migrants or refugees, all of which helped to create and maintain a degree of shared “Tibetaness” in certain important aspects of thought and action, regardless of diverse lo-

cal and regional identities. A widespread recognition of India as their common holy land was just one among these undeniably shared aspects.

Finally, in attempting to open up some new perspectives with this wide-ranging work, I would be the first to admit that it is ambitious, and that while it represents a starting point, it remains also a rather incomplete story. Both more depth and breadth would be desirable. It is my hope that historians and anthropologists of Tibet and Buddhism will continue pursuing these and related questions in order to test the patterns I have outlined and the initial arguments I have advanced in their support.



PART I

*Locating and Dislocating
the Land of the Buddha*



CHAPTER ONE

The Shifting Terrain of the Buddha

Men in their fear fly for refuge in mountains or forests, groves, sacred trees or shrines. But those are not a safe refuge, they are not the refuge that frees a man from sorrow . . .

—*Dhammapada*, 188–89

Dislocating the Buddha

For much of the nineteenth century, leading European orientalist were convinced that Kuśinagar, a place famous in the history of Buddhism as the site of the Buddha's death, was located in Assam near the banks of the Brahmaputra River in the far northeastern corner of the Indian subcontinent. In the absence of alternative evidence, scholars of Buddhism accepted this identification of Kuśinagar in Assam on the basis of ethnographic reports by colonial observers. At the time, and for some centuries previously, this Assamese site was visited by large numbers of Tibetan pilgrims who went there to worship at the place where they believed the Buddha had attained the ultimate salvational goal of their religion, that is, his final nirvana (*parinirvāṇa*), or passing completely beyond suffering.

By the end of the nineteenth century, however, orientalist study of travel narratives by early Chinese pilgrims in India, and the archaeological excavations they subsequently inspired, indicated that ancient Kuśinagar was located in the Middle Ganges region, more than five hundred kilometres distant from the popular Tibetan site in Assam. With this new identification, now based upon textual and archaeological authorities rather than ethnographic ones, Western scholars of Buddhism were quick to scathingly dismiss the living Tibetan tradition about Kuśinagar. It was branded a "very erroneous identification" based upon a "very scanty knowledge of Indian

geography" and, moreover, one leading to a mistaken faith in the site, the powerful but misguided strength of which had long "misled" these northern mountain dwellers to endure strenuous religious journeys to Assam "undeterred by the intemperate heat of the plains."¹ Such negative assessments of "Lamaism" or Tibetan Buddhism at the time were completely in keeping with the prevailing European view of that religion as being nothing but a highly corrupted and deviant later form of a more pure, primitive Buddhism which was supposed to have existed in South Asian antiquity. The full story of the "Nirvana in Assam" will be related in chapter 5, although I have briefly prefigured it here because it raises a number of issues which form the critical point of departure for my own study.

During the nineteenth century, the scholars who rediscovered Kuśīnagar in the Middle Ganges region were engaged upon a specific quest to locate the "original" sites of the Buddha in India. In doing so, they sought to map out and anchor their fantasy of a pure "golden age" of ancient Buddhism upon the Indian topography. The specific notions of authenticity which they employed in this process became something of an established canon, one which has long guided scholarly thinking about the geography of Indian Buddhism. With precious few exceptions,² the literature of modern Buddhist studies still abounds with implicit assumptions that the original sites of the Buddha are a known and uncontested quantity, and thus a stable and taken-for-granted point of reference. Yet, a certain complacency has been nurtured by such assumptions, and this has been unproductive for our critical understanding of many aspects of the nature and development of Buddhism. This is especially the case concerning notions or categories of place and space, topography and landscape, religious territory or geography, as well as closely related practices such as pilgrimage which are found in Buddhist societies, both past and present. We might well ask what the example of the shifting identification of Kuśīnagar given above suggests to us: To me it suggests that rather than assuming any certainties from the outset, we might better begin by considering an alternative assumption, namely, that there has actually never been anything like a fixed and stable tradition concerning either the individual sites or the overall geography of the Buddha in India. Instead, in this chapter I would like to argue that we are only ever looking at, and indeed, are even helping to generate, a "shifting terrain" of the Buddha. Furthermore, instead of making a fetish of the places apparently associated with the Buddha, which is what we have continued to do ever since the commencement of the colonial archaeological quest to locate and exhume the "original" sites, we might better focus our critical attention upon those creative agents—whether Buddhist or non-

Buddhist, together with their social worlds—who have actually generated the many different claims and schemes that contribute to this shifting terrain.

By invoking a shifting terrain of the Buddha here, I would not deny that certain individual sites in India do have an ancient history of repeated, albeit often rather discontinuous, use and significance for Buddhists. However, even if we very briefly consider—as I am about to do—what we know (or think we know) about the ancient sites associated with the Buddha in India, it quickly becomes clear that we can no longer afford to simply consider them as a known, fixed, and long-established singular tradition, or one which might always serve as a ready and reliable reference point. Additionally, the shifting of the terrain of the Buddha which I consider to be apparent in Indian Buddhism is, I would argue, also characteristic of other regional and historical forms of Buddhism, not to mention even the scholarship of Buddhist studies itself. The following necessarily brief and selective review of materials concerning the places associated with the Buddha in India is intended to draw attention to these points. It may be wondered why I would begin a book dedicated to the study of Tibetan religion with a chapter about other Buddhists and their worlds. I have done so intentionally to provide a more general critical context within which to appreciate the specific Tibetan materials and case studies that I will present and analyze throughout the remainder of the book. I want to demonstrate that while the Buddhists of Tibet have frequently contributed to what we might think of as a shifting terrain or landscape of the Buddha, they are certainly not alone in having done so. When placed within such a larger Buddhist context, the Tibetan form of Buddhism immediately appears much less exotic and unique than it is often presented as being.

Our current knowledge of archaeological, textual, and art historical evidence of Indian Buddhism has yielded a variety of different schemes or groupings of sites for defining a possible terrain of the Buddha in India. Additionally, a number of aspects of the historical development and missionary spread of Buddhism in Asia further complicate the overall picture.

Two Sites of the Buddha, Perhaps Three

The earliest actual evidence of certain Indian places being directly associated with the (or a) Buddha and being ritually visited and worshipped by his later followers, that is, as the object of Buddhist pilgrimage, comes in the form of two pillar inscriptions attributed to the Mauryan Emperor Aśoka (third century BCE). One such inscription was located at Rummun-

dei, while the other was found—but perhaps not originally located—at Nigālī Sāgar (Niglīva). Both places are situated in the Nepal Terai. The first site, Rummundei, is identified as Lumbinī, and claimed as the birthplace of the Buddha Śākyamuni, while the second is associated with the reliquary shrine (*stūpa*) of the former Buddha Konākamuni (or Konākamana), being a place which Aśoka visited more than once.³ Both of the inscriptions are donative, indicating local works and deeds undertaken at these sites by Aśoka, apparently on account of their already established sanctity. Another Aśokan inscription, the so-called Eighth Rock Edict, may possibly relate to the emperor's visit to Bodh Gayā as a holy site, although the precise interpretation of the word *saṃbodhi* in this inscription as a place name referring to the site of Buddha Śākyamuni's enlightenment remains unresolved. Further inscriptions generally mention "Dharma excursions" (*dharmayātrā*) undertaken by Aśoka, some apparently lasting over two hundred days.⁴

Gregory Schopen has pointed out the close relationship between the text of the Rummundei inscription concerning Aśoka's pilgrimage to Lumbinī and a well-known passage in the *Mahāparinirvāṇa-sūtra*. This important Buddhist text, which gives an account of the Buddha's final death and funerary rites, is widely considered as being the locus classicus for the tradition of pilgrimage in early Buddhism.⁵ The implication of Schopen's observation is that Aśoka's pilgrimage activities may have already been following an established tradition.

Four Sites of the Buddha

The *Mahāparinirvāṇa-sūtra* itself recommends visits to four main sites associated with the Buddha Śākyamuni's life, described as being the places where he was born, where he attained complete awakening, where he first taught his doctrine to others, and finally where he died and passed completely beyond suffering. The places where the Indian Buddhist tradition eventually came to locate these four sites have all been identified within the Middle Ganges region along the great river and its tributaries, extending north into the Nepal Terai and down into southern Bihar. Over the course of time, these sites have been identified as being located at Lumbinī, Bodh Gayā, the Rṣipatana or Mṛgadāva at Sārnāth, and Kuśinagar respectively. Although these well-known identifications of the four main sites of the Buddha's life have been assumed unproblematic by virtually all modern observers, this assumption might appear rather facile when the evidence is examined more closely. For instance, in indicating their significance,

the *Mahāparinirvāṇa-sūtra* itself does not explicitly identify any of the four sites by name or geographical location;⁶ neither have we any precise idea when places such as Sārnāth and Kuśinagar were included alongside those which we know for certain that Aśoka actually visited. Furthermore, in an important review of archaeological findings from all major ancient sites associated with the Buddha's life, including the four places mentioned above, Herbert Härtel cautioned that the presence of reliably identifiable Buddhist culture at these sites appears not to predate the Aśokan era, that is, the middle period of the third century BCE.⁷ It is certainly well to recall that the Aśokan era is several centuries later than the recently revised dating for the person known as the Buddha Śākyamuni who is supposed to have lived and been active at these sites, and it is even later still than the various traditional datings of the "long chronology" commonly in use by Buddhists to historically situate the life of the Buddha.⁸

Finally, it is of no small significance that the only surviving early pilgrims' reports of Buddhist India which we possess, and which modern scholars have utilized so frequently, simply fail to agree with the well-known and common identifications of the four main sites of the Buddha. For example, in discussing the four sites of the life events of the Buddha, the Chinese pilgrim Faxian (travelled 399–414) clearly stated:

There are four places of regular and fixed occurrence (in the history of) all Buddhas:—first, the place where they attained to perfect Wisdom (and became Buddha) [i.e., assumed to be at Bodh Gayā]; second, the place where they turned the wheel of the Law [i.e., assumed to be at Sārnāth]; third, the place where they preached the Law, discoursed of righteousness, and discomfited (the advocates of) erroneous doctrines [i.e., assumed to be at Śrāvastī]; and fourth, the place where they came down, after going up to the Trayastriṃśas heaven to preach the Law for the benefit of their mothers [i.e., assumed to be at Sāṃkāśya].⁹

Should we conclude that Faxian somehow "got it wrong" because he deviates from what we have always assumed were the original, traditional Indian identifications of the four main sites? Or is it perhaps more appropriate to view Faxian as another Buddhist actor in the ongoing generation of a shifting terrain of the Buddha? For all we presently know, he may well have been repeating an alternative fourth-century Indian scheme of the four main sites of the Buddha of which we currently have no other record, or contributing a Chinese Buddhist innovation concerning the landscape of the Buddha in India.

Ten Sites of the Buddha

As far as can be discerned from the surviving evidence, early Buddhist pilgrimage in India involved a twofold type of relic worship focused upon the person of the Buddha. The first and apparently more important type of early Buddhist relic worship involved what have been claimed as being the Buddha's actual corporeal remains or "bodily relics" (*śarīra*, *dhātu*) and the funerary monuments or reliquaries (*caitya* or *stūpa*) believed to enshrine them. The second and related type of relic worship involves objects and places that had allegedly come into direct contact with the Buddha's person during his lifetime, including such things as his robes or begging bowl, his footprints, the places where he meditated or resided, and so forth. Such objects and sites, sometimes referred to by commentators as "contact relics" or "traces,"¹⁰ have often been marked or enclosed by *stūpas* and shrines as well. The contents of such relic-bearing *stūpas* were regarded as having the status of living entities, and thus pilgrimages to and worship at them entailed a form of direct and potentially transformative encounter (*darśana*) with the Buddha himself.¹¹ Furthermore, such pilgrimages are recommended as being soteriologically beneficial in certain early texts, and there is even some possibility that in early Buddhism pilgrimages to these forms of the Buddha—usually presented as being purely voluntary—may have been something more like an obligatory ritual activity expected of devout followers.¹²

In relation to the Buddhist cult of relics, the *Mahāparinirvāṇa-sūtra* relates the narrative of an eightfold division of the Buddha's bodily relics as well as of his funerary urn and the ashes from his crematory fire, with the subsequent erection of a total of ten *stūpas* in which to house them and where homage could be paid. The eight different sites of the "relic share" *stūpas* are clearly listed in the text as Kuśinagarī, Pāpā, Calakalpā, Rāmagrāma, Viṣṇudvīpa, Vaiśālī, Kapilavastu, and Magadha, while the funerary urn *stūpa* was erected at Droṇagrāma and the crematory ashes *stūpa* at Pippalavatī.¹³ However, once again, when we turn to one of our only witnesses of earlier Buddhism in ancient India, Faxian, we find that the sites of the *stūpas* (or "topes") bearing Buddha relics listed in the *Mahāparinirvāṇa-sūtra* hardly match at all with what the Chinese pilgrim reported as a fixed and invariable tradition during his own day:

The places of the four great topes have been fixed, and handed down without break, since Buddha attained to nirvāṇa. Those four great topes are those at the places where Buddha was born [i.e., assumed to be at

Lumbinī]; where he attained to Wisdom [i.e., assumed to be at Bodhi Gayā]; where he (began to) move the wheel of the Law [i.e., assumed to be at Sārnāth]; and where he attained to pari-nirvāṇa [i.e., assumed to be at Kuśinagar].¹⁴

Once again, the Chinese witness appears to be reporting a significant shift in the landscape of the Buddha, one in which the ten *stūpas* of the division of the Buddha's bodily relics and funerary remains have become well and truly eclipsed by the four sites of the biographical episodes of the Buddha's life. It was indeed the biographical sites which became greatly elaborated upon over the course of centuries.

Thirty-Two Sites of the Buddha

The claimed biographical sites of the Buddha are often represented as, or appear to imply, a ritual network for pilgrimage throughout the Middle Ganges region. It is in the versions of the influential Buddhist life story of the Emperor Aśoka, the *Āśokāvadāna* or *Divyāvadāna*, that we find the first more systematized literary accounts of an extended pilgrimage network which constitutes something akin to a larger Buddhist ritual circuit and religious territory in India. The *Āśokāvadāna* dates from about the second century CE and contains materials that may be somewhat older. Part of the narrative relates a pilgrimage undertaken by Aśoka. It actually maps the Buddha's biography onto the geography of India and offers its readers a well-defined set of thirty-two sites among which the royal pilgrim travels, led by his monk guide Upagupta.¹⁵ These thirty-two sites of the Buddha's life mentioned—but seldom explicitly named—in the narrative appear to encompass the Middle Ganges region. There is a striking analogy between the thirty-two sites of the Buddha's life and the Indian scheme of the thirty-two marks of the "Great Man" (*Mahāpuruṣa*) which are also attributed to the Buddha. John Strong aptly described this correspondence as the systematic establishment of the whole person of the Buddha in his life as a *Mahāpuruṣa* onto the geography of India. Pilgrimage to the thirty-two sites could thus be seen as symbolically reconstructing the body of the Buddha as a *Mahāpuruṣa*, while the sites together constitute a "single mesocosmic 'chronogram' that allows one to relive gradually, and then all at once, the whole life of the Buddha."¹⁶

Strong's suggestions present us with fascinating possibilities, to be sure. However, the issue of exactly how early textual accounts, such as the *Āśokāvadāna*, may have either reflected the reality of, contributed to

the development of, or even been completely irrelevant to actual Buddhist pilgrimage practice in ancient India is one that remains almost entirely a subject for speculation. The status of the surviving artworks and texts of ancient Buddhism as prescriptive, descriptive, or pure fantasy has not often been clearly established. We simply don't know whether art imitated life, or life imitated art, or whether both occurred together in a complex choreography, or not at all. From the range of speculative possibilities, one has nevertheless come to the fore with enduring frequency in the scholarship of Buddhist studies. This is the common assumption that what is represented in ancient Buddhist literature and plastic arts reflects, and thus reveals, a real world of earlier Buddhism. I will return to this point below for some critical reflection, for I think the assumption is seriously flawed when attempting to make claims about a past Buddhist pilgrimage culture in India.

Eight Sites of the Buddha

Another type of scheme or network of sites, this time based upon a narrower set of eight locations of the Buddha's life story, appears to have come into wider circulation much later, possibly during the post-Gupta era of Indian Buddhism. To the four main biographical events assumed to have taken place at Lumbinī, Bodh Gayā, R̥ṣipatana (Sārnāth) and Kuśinagar, there were added four secondary events which are credited to have occurred at Śrāvastī, Rājagṛha, Vaiśālī, and Sāṃkāśya (fig. 1.1). John Strong has pointed out that the eight places in this scheme can be divided into two distinctive groups. The first four "major" biographical sites were all located in groves of trees in fairly obscure locations, while the four "secondary sites" were all major towns or cities in ancient India.¹⁷ In addition, these four secondary sites are all associated with supernatural events that serve to demonstrate the Buddha's superhuman powers or abilities.

A group of eight scenes depicting these eight events from the Buddha legend are found represented in eastern Indian sculpture dating from the Pāla period.¹⁸ These eight events and the sites at which they were located were also systematically related together as a group in certain texts at some undetermined point in time, quite possibly during the post-Gupta period when we know that the relevant sources were in circulation. In Chinese and Tibetan Buddhist sources that appear to have been translated from Sanskrit, namely the *Aṣṭamahāsthānacaitya-stotra* and related literature, we find this group of eight sites first described as the "eight great places" (*aṣṭamahāsthāna*).¹⁹ However, as above, considerable caution is required in the interpretation of this grouping of eight sites as a network of pilgrimage

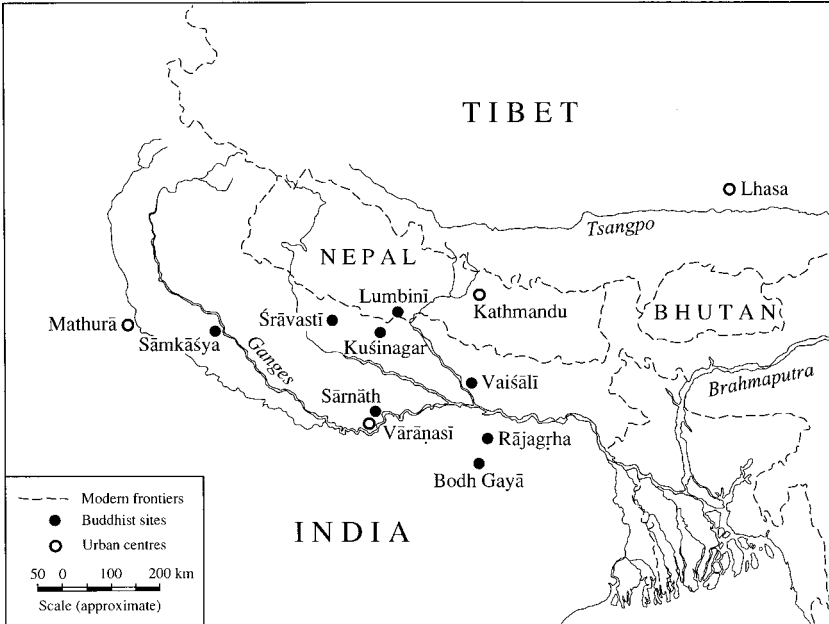


Figure 1.1. The eight places of the Buddha. Drawn by Norma Schulz and Toni Huber.

destinations in Indian Buddhism. I will take up a more detailed discussion of this point below, but here we can observe that—unlike the earlier *Mahāparinirvāṇa-sūtra* and related epigraphic sources—in the terminology employed in the few known texts which appear to come from India and specifically deal with the “eight great places” and the eight *stūpas* located at them, they are never recommended as being objects of actual pilgrimage (*yātrā*, *pradakṣiṇā*, etc.), nor of direct encounter (*darśana*). Rather, we only find mention that general worship rites (*pūjā*) and honouring or salutation (*namas*) be directed toward the eight *stūpas* and their locations as objects of memorialization or commemoration.²⁰

No doubt dedicated scholars of Buddhist studies could come up with still further schemes or sets of places associated with the Buddha in India, but I think my point has been made. There are multiple possibilities for defining a terrain for the Buddha in Indian Buddhism alone, and that terrain appears to shift over time. What we have provided so far is just one obvious starting point for considering a shifting terrain of the Buddha. Additionally, there are aspects of the historical development and spread of Buddhism throughout Asia and beyond which also reveal its ongoing occurrence.

An Expanding Terrain of the Buddha

Another factor which contributed to a shifting landscape of the Buddha is that Buddhism, as a religion offering universal salvation, was not long confined to its region of origin. Thus, together with early Indian Buddhism's missionary spread, we find evidence that the sacred geography of the Buddha did not remain confined only to the Middle Ganges region that we have so far been discussing. The best known case of this occurred in Gandhāra and the Kuṣāṇa domains during the early centuries of the Common Era, where sites associated with the Buddha were being actively established well beyond Buddhism's ancient historical heartland, and which led to the northwestern Indian subcontinent becoming, in the words of Étienne Lamotte, "the second Holy Land of Buddhism."²¹

When Chinese Buddhist pilgrims such as Faxian and Xuanzang (in India 629–45) passed through areas of northwestern India, long before they even got near the more ancient region associated with the Buddha's life in the Middle Ganges region, they encountered a great many additional sites—often marked by *stūpas*—which were associated not only with the Buddha's portable *sarca*, such as his relics and possessions, but also with his life events. These early Gandhāran and Kuṣāṇa creations of unprecedented new holy places of the Buddha were made possible—or at least justified—by exploiting the growing corpus of narratives or popular stories about the Buddha's previous lives. Thus, most of the sites associated with the Buddha in northwest India that the Chinese pilgrims reported are those commemorating important events in the Buddha's previous rebirths. As such, they did not technically violate the scheme of original ancient sites in the Middle Ganges region, rather they augmented it. To further legitimate the new sites of the Buddha in northwest India, new narratives eventually came into being which claimed that the Buddha Śākyamuni had actually travelled to the region himself.²² A range of different claims about the Buddha's journeys well beyond the Middle Ganges region have continued to reoccur in other Asian Buddhist traditions.²³

A third, closely related dimension of a shifting landscape of the Buddha is the use of the original Indian holy sites of the Buddha for missionary purposes, specifically by way of their transfer and reestablishment or even duplication at other geographical locations. Good examples of this idea are again found in the many narrative traditions concerning Aśoka. For instance, in some texts the Mauryan emperor is credited with collecting all of the available relics of the Buddha which had been housed in the original

reliquaries and then redistributing them and erecting eighty-four thousand new relic-empowered *stūpas* all over Jambudvīpa as part of his efforts to spread the Buddhist religion.²⁴ Another related example is the narrative of the Buddhist conversion of the Sinhalese, during which a Sinhala mendicant is sent to Aśoka's court and then returns to the island with various relics of the Buddha, including the teacher's right clavicle. Following this, a branch of the original Bodhi Tree under which the Buddha experienced his complete awakening is also sent to the island and planted there.²⁵ The logic of such stories is clear: since the physical presence of bodily and contact relics of the Buddha is what essentially constitutes a "holy/sacred place" in South Asian Buddhism, the division and transfer of the same materials can serve to duplicate authentic and equally potent holy places of the Buddha outside India. This was a missionary strategy, and hence an oft-repeated one, and Asian Buddhist traditions abound with claims of Buddha relics and other sacra associated with the Buddha that have become situated outside of India.

Pan-Asian Transmission of the Geography of the Buddha

Missionary Buddhism eventually moved well beyond the South Asian arena that we have so far been discussing, and we find still further creative interpretations or new versions of the sacred Buddhist geography of India being generated in different non-Indian Buddhist convert societies. These new, non-Indian interpretations of the geography of the Buddha in India were not only developed and put into practice in various local Buddhist worlds in other parts of Asia, they were also actualized by non-Indian agents back in India itself, as we have already mentioned above in the case of a Tibetan "rediscovery" of Kuśinagar in Assam. Buddhist converts outside of India or South Asia did not merely "invent" such new traditions from scratch, they did so on the basis of very different types of transmissions of Buddhist knowledge into their local environments.

Various earlier Indian Buddhist texts, such as the *Āśokāvadāna* and the *Lalitavistara*, or later sources concerning the *aṣṭamahāsthānacāitya* cult, were all eventually spread by missionaries and travellers both to and between different lands across Asia and translated into local languages. Thus, if we just consider the Tibetan context as an example here, we find that versions of all three of the aforementioned texts eventually arrived in Tibet, where they were translated into classical Tibetan and included in the formal canonical collections of Tibetan Buddhism. For many Bud-

dhist convert societies geographically remote from India, the translations of such Indian Buddhist works provided what appeared in local contexts to be representations of India as a kind of Buddhist “holy land,” that is, as a seemingly well-defined or coherent religious territory or sacred geography that included certain key sites, which in some cases were even presented as forming a ritual network of sorts. Such sources and the representations they offered were, of course, often received by non-Indian Buddhist convert populations well before these people could have made any actual pilgrimage visits to the holy places attributed to the Buddha in India. These sources thus served as an essential basis for imagining India, and for depicting it in local art and literature as a distant land of the Buddha, a land that the vast majority of Buddhists throughout Asia would never be able to visit and experience in person.

While these last observations make the process of transfer of this specific area of Buddhist knowledge appear rather straightforward, nothing could be further from the facts as we presently understand them. If we just consider the aforementioned example of the *Āśokāvadāna*, *Lalitavistara*, and *Aṣṭamahāsthānacaitya-stotra* being transmitted to Tibet, it is apparent that what the Tibetans received in these three textual traditions were three different systems of classifying the holy places associated with the Buddha in India, systems which agreed in some respects but which did not concur in others. Exactly how the Tibetans may or may not have reconciled or responded to these obvious anomalies is part of the story of the creation of Tibetan Buddhism as a distinctive religious tradition. A good example to mention in the present context is the dispute that arose in early Tibetan Buddhist scholarship concerning the classification of the “twelve acts” (*dvādaśa kārya*) of the Buddha, which are of course related to the locations of the holy places of the Buddha legend in India. This dispute arose precisely because the “twelve acts” were found mentioned differently in a range of Indian texts that the Tibetans had obtained and translated.²⁶ The variation of traditions underlying such debates does not mean that the Tibetans have been poor Buddhist scholars or necessarily more prone to “invention” than other Buddhists. This situation is, rather—at least in part—a function of the complexity of a particular transmission history of Buddhist sources from India to Tibet and other neighbouring regions, not to mention certain other historical contingencies of the conversion process.

To complicate this situation even further, we can recall what is already very well known, that Buddhism underwent three very broad, yet complex, overlapping and concurrent historical phases of doctrinal and ritual development in India, those often described in very general terms as be-

ing “Mainstream”²⁷ or Hinayāna Buddhism, Mahāyāna Buddhism, and Vajrayāna or Tantric/Esoteric Buddhism. Here again, within these three very broad developmental contexts, we find some major differences in the understanding of and ritual response to the specific holy places of the Buddha, or to a wider Buddhist sacred geography in India. For instance, we will demonstrate in chapter 4 that the later Tantric Buddhist sacred geography of India is almost totally unrecognizable from the perspectives of Mainstream and Mahāyāna Buddhism.

Most of these shifts in the terrain of the Buddha mentioned so far have yet to be comparatively analyzed by scholars. The present study is primarily concerned with a complex and long-term case of non-Indian Buddhist convert relationship to the terrain of the Buddha in India, namely that of the Buddhists of Tibet, who adopted a combination of aspects of Mainstream, Mahāyāna, and Vajrayāna Buddhism during their own very drawn-out conversion to the foreign Indian religion. As we shall see, Tibetan Buddhists have a particularly rich history of what I will call “reinventing” Buddhist India and thereby contributing to the shifting terrain of the Buddha. However, as I have attempted to briefly demonstrate above, in this respect they are by no means unique in the history of Buddhism, and there is certainly no justification to fall back upon earlier prejudices about Tibetan Buddhism representing some particularly aberrant form of the religion. Furthermore, I also think we no longer have the luxury of simply imagining that modern Buddhist studies scholarship can exist as a detached and critical observer of all the shifts in the terrain of the Buddha that might be attributed to Buddhist communities and individuals. Indeed, reinventing Buddhist India is as much a part of modern scholarship on Buddhism as it ever has been in Tibet or in other past and present Buddhist environments. I will now make this clear with a specific example.

The Eight Sites of the Buddha Reinvented

The ongoing shifting of the terrain of the Buddha has most recently been maintained by a global cast of modern interpreters, both Buddhists and non-Buddhists alike. One finds, for example, much reference throughout the past century to a scheme of eight sites in the Middle Ganges region that are variously referred to as the “eight places of the Buddha,” or “eight great places of the Buddha,” and also the “eight places of Buddhist pilgrimage.” Janice Leoshko rightly remarked of this scheme and the attention paid to it, that it had “come to define sacred Buddhist geography in the 20th century.”²⁸ The new orthodoxy that this scheme of eight places represents

today actually came about through a distinct convergence of speculations and interpretations by both Western scholars of Buddhism—particularly art historians—and modern Buddhist practitioners. Let us now examine how and why this development took place.

Investigations of Buddhist sites in the Middle Ganges region by archaeologists and art historians during the nineteenth and twentieth centuries revealed a series of sculptured stone stelae that depict eight scenes or events from the legend of the Buddha's life. All such known examples date from the last major era of Indian Buddhism and its artistic development, that is, the so-called Pāla period which was centred in eastern India.²⁹ While these eight scenes are found described in various earlier textual narratives of the Buddha's legend, they were never named and treated systematically as a distinct group of eight. The primary Indian textual evidence of a grouping of these eight specific life events is known from a few short works that also appear to have been composed and circulated during the same era as the sculptured stelae, the Pāla period. In the various surviving Chinese and Tibetan versions of these apparently Indian texts, the eight events of the Buddha's legend are systematically linked with a set of eight Indian places at which they are said to have occurred, and also with the eight *stūpas* erected at them: Lumbinī, Bodh Gayā, Ṛṣipatana (i.e., Sārnāth), Kuśinagar, Śrāvastī, Rājagṛha, Vaiśālī, and Sāṃkāśya (fig. 1.1). As I pointed out above, it is essential to realize that the ritual terminology employed in these particular texts treats the eight places and the eight *stūpas* located at them as objects of memorialization or commemoration and not as objects of actual pilgrimage or direct encounter.

In concert with the textual sources, we also find that these eight places and the *stūpas* at them were never treated *in practice* by earlier Buddhists as a group or network of eight distinctly related places of pilgrimage. The well-known early Chinese pilgrims who sought out and toured around the Indian Buddhist holy places during the Gupta period merely visited each of these eight places as individual and unrelated stops on more extensive itineraries to a whole range of other sites associated with the Buddha and Buddhism throughout South Asia. They did not behave in relation to or mention them in any way as a distinct unit or particularly significant group. Furthermore, as we will discuss in chapter 3, a whole range of Tibetan pilgrims who visited the same region and sites over a period of several centuries during Pāla times never actually performed pilgrimage to more than a few of these eight sites. In fact, the first Tibetan ever recorded as visiting all eight of these sites only did so—under the strong influence of modern

forms of revival Buddhism—during the 1930s (see chap. 10). Thus, it is clear that real Buddhist practitioners, performing actual pilgrimages both prior to and during the period of production and existence of the sculptured Pāla stelae depicting the eight scenes of the Buddha's legend, did not recognize the eight places associated with them as a distinct grouping for ritual purposes, nor did they make a special priority of visiting them all. I am labouring this point somewhat in view of the discussion to follow.

What is of interest to us here is that, in spite of all the aforementioned evidence, a series of interpretations by art historians and modern Buddhists has created a distinctive pilgrimage cult based around these same eight Indian Buddhist sites associated with the eight events of the Buddha legend depicted on the sculptured Pāla stelae. How did this leap from ancient pieces of carved Indian stone to a new and modern sacred geography of the Buddha come about during the twentieth century?

From Theory: Art Imitates Life . . .

The colonial archaeologist Alexander Cunningham (1814–93) laboured more intensively than any other nineteenth-century scholar on the identification and excavation of ancient Buddhist remains in India. Cunningham's activities encompassed the eight aforementioned sites, although he never identified or discussed these eight places as a distinctive group.³⁰ This only began to occur with the discovery at Sārnāth, during the Archaeological Survey of India's excavation campaign in 1906–7, of a well-preserved, sculptured stele that depicted eight scenes from the legend of the Buddha's life. This find was first described and illustrated by John Marshall (1876–1958) in his report on the excavations published in 1907. As far as I am aware, Marshall was the first scholar to specifically link this set of eight scenes from the legend of the Buddha with eight actual geographical sites, which he referred to as the "eight chief places."³¹ While the locations of the "four main events" of Buddha's life were already taken for granted by scholars as having occurred at Lumbinī, Bodh Gayā, Rāṣipatana (Sārnāth) and Kuśinagar, Marshall now ventured that "the four minor scenes appear to be connected with Vaiśālī, Rājagṛha, Sāṅkāśyā, and Śrāvastī,"³² thus completing the set of eight identifications. Just two years later, in 1909, Alfred Foucher (1865–1952) further discussed the site of Śrāvastī as the only place which Marshall had been hesitant to identify with complete certainty with one of the eight scenes depicted on the Sārnāth stele. In doing so, Foucher made the first explicit connection between the eight scenes of

the Buddha's life found on the stele, and the practice and political economy of ancient Buddhist pilgrimage to the eight sites that he and Marshall had just identified and grouped together:

We know, indeed, for certain that eight towns of Madhyadeśa had finally divided among themselves, not the relics, but the legend of the Buddha. In their immediate neighbourhood were eight specially holy places, supposed to preserve the vestiges of the eight principal miracles of the Master. This implies that they formed as many centres of attraction for pilgrims, the organized exploitation of whom—one of the few industries which still survive in India—must have constituted an appreciable source of income.³³

Foucher then went on to discuss the process of development which “brought the number of the great pilgrimages up to the sacred figure of eight,” and identified the eight places by name in his discussion of the eight scenes on the stele.³⁴ Other scholars also began independently to engage in the same speculations about earlier Indian Buddhist pilgrimage and its geography. In a review of Buddhist antiquities discovered at Sārnāth that was published in 1914, Jean Philippe Vogel (1871–1951) drew attention again to the so-called Mahipāla inscription dated to the year 1026. The inscription describes certain restorations undertaken at Sārnāth by several pious donors. In its mention of the building activities of the donors, the inscription includes the phrase *aṣṭamahāsthāna-śaila-gandhakuṭīm*, which Vogel rendered as a “shrine of stone relating to ‘the eight great places.’”³⁵ In his following interpretation, Vogel stated:

Nor is it clear what is meant by “the eight great places” (*aṣṭamahāsthāna*) . . . It may, however, be noted that among the sculptures discovered at Sārnāth there is a slab with representations of the eight main events of the Buddha's life. The places where these events were supposed to have occurred were . . . the principal places of Buddhist pilgrimage and might well be indicated by the word *mahāsthāna*, meaning “a great place.”³⁶

Buddhist pilgrimage and the holy places associated with the legend of the Buddha have served as a remarkably enduring focus for the theories of art historians and other scholars concerned with the interpretation of Indian Buddhist art and culture. The early discussions by Marshall, Foucher, and Vogel cited above were just the beginning of a whole series of more de-

veloped scholarly speculations about the connections between pilgrimage, holy sites, and the production and meaning of artistic representations in early Buddhism.³⁷ Much of the inspiration for focusing on pilgrimage and holy sites in the twentieth-century study of Indian Buddhist art derived from the influential works of Foucher, especially in the development of theories about early Buddhist aniconism and the systematic depiction of scenes from the Buddha's legend. Concerning this second theme, Foucher continued to interpret the Buddha's life story in terms of a series of "pèlerinages," especially in his popular book *La vie du Bouddha, d'après les textes et les monuments de l'Inde*, which was first published in French in 1949, with a widely cited English translation following in 1963.³⁸ Other archaeologists and art historians of Indian Buddhism soon began following Foucher's precedents of linking this form of Buddhist art in various ways to the supposed sites and especially the practice of Indian Buddhist pilgrimage.

. . . To Practice: Life Imitates Art

Foucher's unproven assumption was that earlier Indian Buddhist pilgrimage practices focused upon the group of eight sites had inspired certain later art works representing eight events in the Buddha's life. This theory has indeed proven to be a crucial and fertile inspiration for modern art historians and other scholars of Buddhism. However, it was only when this same idea crossed over into a world of real Buddhist practitioners that it actually gained a religious life of its own outside of the domain of modern scholarly discourse. In the context of the modern Buddhist revival occurring in South Asia during the early twentieth century, it was not long before this "crossover" actually took place. To give but one good example of how this transmission of theory into practice occurred, we can mention a public lecture entitled "The Eight Great Places of Buddhist Pilgrimage" which was delivered in 1935 by Daya Ram Sahni (1879–1939), a retired director-general of archaeology in India with a particular interest in Sārnāth. In his lecture, Sahni followed Foucher and his predecessors and specifically related the eight sites together as a ritual grouping for pilgrimage practice. A written version of Sahni's lecture was then broadcast to modern Buddhists by the Indian Buddhist revival organisation, the Maha Bodhi Society, in the 1936 edition of its internationally circulated missionary journal, *The Maha Bodhi*.³⁹ As we will see in chapters 9 and 10, groups such as the Maha Bodhi Society had always taken careful heed of and strategically utilized the findings of most branches of colonial scholarship on ancient Buddhism

in their attempts to revive Buddhism in India once again. It was thus no surprise that Sahni's presentation was vigorously taken up as a part of their construction of a modern approach to Buddhist practice. Since the first half of the twentieth century, the "eight places of the Buddha" scheme has become increasingly circulated and invoked in a very wide range of contexts, both as the primary model for representing and understanding India as a sacred Buddhist terrain of pilgrimage and also as a basis for actual ritual practice among modern Buddhist converts.

It is worth briefly surveying some materials that demonstrate the sheer pervasiveness that this scheme of "eight places of the Buddha" has attained during our times, and which also, in part, reveal some of the mechanisms facilitating its wide diffusion among both Buddhist practitioners and scholars alike. First, let us consider a book produced by the Government of India in 1956. It was intended to present the holy places of the Buddha to those Asian Buddhist elites who had been officially invited to India to attend—together with significant numbers of their followers—the international celebration of the Buddha Jayanti. This unique event was staged by the government of a newly independent India to mark the 2,500th anniversary of the birth of the Buddha Śākyamuni. Following then well-established precedents of the colonial era, the Buddha was widely hailed as one of India's most brilliant native sons by her new nationalist leaders, such as Jawaharlal Nehru, who had at times worked closely with the Maha Bodhi Society. The well-illustrated official text distributed during the Buddha Jayanti presented a comprehensive range of data about the sites of ancient Buddhism derived principally from orientalist research, although it still retained the character of a "guidebook" for pilgrimage. As a measure of the degree to which the "eight places of the Buddha" scheme had already become institutionally accepted in India, the entire first half of the book presented independent India's modern Asian Buddhist visitors with a very detailed sixty-page, site-by-site treatment of the "eight places of the Buddha."⁴⁰

More recently, in 1981, British Buddhist Jeremy Russell published a short booklet aimed at spiritually inclined Westerners with an interest in the modern Buddhist revival in India. He wrote it in order to help fulfil his own missionary aim "to offer some information and perhaps inspiration to other pilgrims, with the wish that this revival may increase." His book was entitled *The Eight Places of Buddhist Pilgrimage: A Pilgrim Guide*, and he resorted to Alfred Foucher as one of his scholarly authorities.⁴¹ Russell's modest and initially somewhat obscure booklet, now some decades out of print, proved in time to be unexpectedly influential. It now reaches a global audience in digitally reproduced forms on a variety of Buddhist

missionary and modern spirituality Web sites administered by Thais, Tibetans, and Westerners, all promoting the scheme of eight places of the Buddha and pilgrimage to them through the medium of the Internet.⁴² In my own experience, Russell's *Guide* has also often been used as a kind of itinerary by tour operators in India as the basis for recent forms of religious tourism to the eight sites of the Buddha. In other digital media, the scheme of eight places of the Buddha has also become the subject of commercial films widely available in DVD format. The recent film *Buddha's Journey: A Journey to the Holy Sites in Nepal and India* (2005), by German Buddhist Uwe Bräutigam and documentarist Gunnar Walther, follows a Tibetan monk named Tashi on a systematic pilgrimage to each of the eight sites in chronological progression; at each destination, the relevant episodes in the Buddha's legend are related. The film includes encounters with "committed Buddhists from all over the world" at each of the eight sites in order to underscore their universal significance for modern, international Buddhism.

In the Footsteps of Foucher

It is not only modern Buddhists and those inclined toward Asian religions who have often been inducted into the seemingly irresistible "eight places of the Buddha" scheme and its relationship to pilgrimage in recent times. In the wake of Foucher's earlier works, the academic world and those with an interest in Asian arts and culture have also regularly been reacquainted with the scheme of eight places, and many claims concerning its historical importance now circulate. During the mid-1980s, several American art historians were active in this respect. Beginning in 1985, John C. Huntington published a series of articles collectively entitled "Sowing the Seeds of the Lotus: A Journey to the Great Pilgrimage Sites of Buddhism." These appeared in *Orientalism*, a very widely read publication dedicated to the study and appreciation of Asian art.⁴³ Following what had already become well-established precedent, Huntington initially invoked the primacy of the scheme of the "eight places of the Buddha." Such was the current appeal and status of this scheme that Huntington was able to effortlessly project, far back in time, what he considered to be its actual ritual significance in the lives of early Indian Buddhists:

Although the history of the early development of the eight major sites is lost in the oral traditions of the early Buddhists, by no later than the fourth century, the tradition of Eight Great Miracles and the sites

associated with them had become a reality of north Indian Buddhist practice.⁴⁴

Huntington continued to elaborate the symbolic transformations of what he took to be an actual pilgrimage to these eight sites, even invoking a “pilgrimage route” between them.⁴⁵ Parallel to but independent of Huntington’s work, Patricia Karetzky, another American art historian working during the 1980s and 1990s, put forward exactly the same types of views on Buddhist pilgrimage to the eight sites under the direct influence of Foucher’s studies. Karetzky also published them to reach a similar audience of art lovers and academics. In interpreting the various Indian stelae which depict the eight events in the life of the Buddha, Karetzky, like Huntington, explicitly argued that pilgrimage preceded art, in that “the importance of the eight major pilgrimage sites dictated the selection of scenes illustrated on the stele.”⁴⁶ Needless to say, perhaps, neither Huntington nor Karetzky—like Foucher and their other predecessors—have been able to advance any evidence in support of their consistent claims about ancient pilgrimage practice and the importance of the eight sites in earlier Indian Buddhism.

History does, as they say, have a way of repeating itself. Inspiration concerning pilgrimage to the “eight places of the Buddha” was once drawn by the first modern Buddhists from art historians’ ideas earlier in the twentieth century. Such inspiration is now being drawn once again by contemporary Western Buddhists from the works of the more recent American art historians we have just mentioned. An excellent example of this can be found in an impressive and well-illustrated book of nearly five hundred pages, entitled *Holy Places of the Buddha*. It was commissioned and published in 1994 by a Tibetan Buddhist missionary organization based in California whose activities are aimed at Western Buddhists and Buddhist sympathizers. The book is intended to provide information for just such an audience, and its first part, representing at least one quarter of the work, is predictably entitled “The Eight Great Places of Pilgrimage,” and provides a comprehensive survey of each of the eight sites of the Buddha’s legend in the now familiar scheme. Significantly, the compiler of the work, Elizabeth Cook, draws explicitly upon the interpretations of the art historian John Huntington for her discussion of the religious significance of these eight sites for Buddhists.⁴⁷

Claims about the purported significance of the eight places of the Buddha do not stop at discussions of ancient or modern Buddhist pilgrimage in India. They have now been extended to explain ritual life in vari-

ous Buddhist societies throughout Asia, including Tibet. The cult of the *aṣṭamahāsthānacaitya* (*gnas chen po brgyad kyī mchod rten*) certainly exists in Tibetan Buddhism, chiefly as a set of eight relic shrines or *stūpas* with eight differing forms linked respectively to eight Indian places and events in Buddha's life and represented in textual, iconographic (i.e., painting, drawing, and sculpture), and architectonic forms in Tibet. And, in keeping with what we know with certainty of the Pāla cult, the Tibetan approach to these representations has been commemorative in function. Nevertheless, some scholars have specifically described the *aṣṭamahāsthānacaitya* as a form of place transfer from India to Tibet, and thus as being vital for Tibetan pilgrimage ritual, in that they:

Transport the Buddhist sacred geography of India into the wider Buddhist world. . . . Their role in transferring the sacred Indian pilgrimage sites to Tibet, which makes possible the worship of the eight great events in the life of the Buddha, and especially his enlightenment, is considerably . . . important for Tibetan pilgrims.⁴⁸

Other scholars of Tibetan Buddhism—clearly inspired by Mircea Eliade—are even bolder in their appraisals concerning the apparent ritual and symbolic value of the *aṣṭamahāsthānacaitya* for Tibetans, stressing that, “Each of them marks not so much an episode in historical time, as a hierophany, a breaking point in ordinary phenomenality through which a contact with supramundane reality may be established.”⁴⁹

Unfortunately, these and other claims about the significance of the cult of the eight places of the Buddha made by scholars of religion on behalf of Tibetan Buddhism bear no relationship to any evidence drawn from Tibetan cultural history,⁵⁰ nor are they supported by the ethnography of actual Tibetan pilgrimage practice.⁵¹ On the one hand, such claims do represent a common problem in the study of Tibetan religions, where *prescriptive* texts and other aspects of a cult are often too casually treated as though they were actually *descriptive* of local thought and action.⁵² On the other hand, they also furnish further instances of how the “eight places of the Buddha” are treated as though they were an enduring—seemingly even immutable—and uncontested set that forms the basis for an apparently ancient tradition of Buddhist pilgrimage ritual, and moreover one that can explain Buddhist ritual across time and space. The scheme has attained something of a canonical status among modern interpreters of Buddhism. But all this is merely a reflection of the tacit and uncritical acceptance of yet another shift in the terrain or geography of the Buddha. It is a distinctly

modern shift. It is a shift that has been recently crafted around a particular and rather late example of artistic representation from among the rediscovered ruins of a long-dead world of Indian Buddhism.

I have chosen my example of the “eight places of the Buddha” above with care because it is demonstrably one which has been put into practice by real Buddhists, rather than one which has merely remained an abstract scheme on the pages of texts. Moreover, the linkages I have indicated here between the production of scholarly knowledge and the development of trends in religious practice are perhaps a sobering reminder that any of our academic research on the holy places associated with the Buddha has the potential, at least, to also contribute to the shifting terrain of the Buddha in India.

Tibetan Reinventions

Throughout the remainder of this work, I will be presenting and analyzing specific Tibetan claims and practices relating to the sites of the Buddha in India and the wider Buddhist geography which they have come to define. By discussing above examples of the shifting terrain of the Buddha, I have already sought to relativize these Tibetan claims and practices in relation to other Buddhist and non-Buddhist occurrences of a similar type. However, I do maintain a certain critical position regarding the actual Tibetan Buddhist materials I will present.

Rather than resort to the more commonly used term “invention”—now well known, for example, from Eric Hobsbawm and Terrance Ranger’s oft-cited “invention of tradition” or “invented traditions”⁵³—instead I intentionally use the word “reinvention” in the subtitle and text of this book to refer to the ways in which Tibetans have, over time, come to understand, and to construct through practice, both India and certain individual sites there as Buddhist geography or ritual territory.

My use of the term “reinvention” points to further examples of the ongoing social processes and agency which characterize human cultural production in general as well as the shared and also contested understandings and actions that they can give rise to. Thus, “reinvention” does not connote anything necessarily inauthentic in terms of some ultimate measure of genuineness, since one can critically historicize the content of all cultural production. Rather, I intend “reinvention” as a way of provoking our interest in understanding what makes such ongoing claims plausible to those who receive them, and by whose authority and for whose gain they are produced.⁵⁴ While it may be theoretically astute to avoid appeals

to the opposition of the “authentic” or “genuine” versus the “invented” or “fake” in our own analysis, we should not then be too hasty in dismissing or overlooking this issue altogether. For one thing, notions and debates about the authenticity or validity of cultural claims have often figured very prominently within Tibetan Buddhist societies themselves. Thus, we will see that many Tibetan claims about Buddhist India presented herein have already been the subject of polemics and various degrees of contestation among Tibetans themselves. Similarly, the range of critical Tibetan positions on the authenticity of Buddhist holy places is as wide as we can expect to find among commentators in other social and historical contexts. At one end of the Tibetan polemical spectrum are those who would claim a certain type of native ethnographic authority. For example, some maintain that ritual practices involving meditative visualization, such as the generation of a mandala in a certain area and the invocation of a Buddha into it, can ontologically transform a mundane site into a sacred Buddhist one. But we also find that other Tibetans would insist upon the letter of rigorous historical inquiry as the basis for any claim that a site be considered a Buddhist holy place.

Moreover, Tibetans, as Buddhists, have always thought of and identified themselves within a greater community of Buddhism, an imagined community that has had a long historical continuity and a very wide geographical distribution. In particular, the Tibetans have consciously identified themselves with earlier Indian Buddhists in terms of the construction of their own religious genealogies and historiography. However, the stressing of such continuities often highlights contradictions which serve to undermine them. For example, if we situate various Tibetan claims about the Buddhist geography of India within the context of the wider Buddhist community across space and time, we find that many such claims certainly appear as significant or even total deviations from what has long been widely accepted and reproduced by other Buddhists. We also find the same deviation existing between such historical Tibetan claims and modern scholarly claims about the locations of the major ancient sites attributed to the Buddha in India. The extent of such deviations should be clearly pointed out using critical scholarship, and I will not hesitate to do so. Nevertheless, from this perspective “reinvention” is also a useful term to employ, in that it denotes the continuing cultural creativity and the distinctiveness of Tibetan communities and individuals in their approach to actually being Buddhists in practice. The “re-” in “reinvention” also highlights several dimensions of this creativity. The Tibetan agents I will discuss have always inherited or adopted cultural materials from India, where the same materi-

als enjoyed their own, often long, developmental histories. They then used these as a starting point and basis for their own round of reinterpretations. "Reinvention" also better captures the new Tibetan interpretations and practices that continue to develop, mostly with reference to one another, over time.

A Buddhist Holy Land?

Along with "reinvention," I have also employed the term "holy land" in the title of this book and throughout my text, and a few preliminary remarks may be in order here so that my intentions in doing so in discussions of Buddhist India and Tibet will be unambiguous. In the English language, the term "holy land" (sometimes "holyland") is derived from the medieval Latin *terra sancta* and was originally a Christian reference to western Palestine, and especially Judaea, as the setting for the life and death of Jesus Christ. Palestine is also thought of as the holy land of the Jews when described as the land of Canaan in the Old Testament. In current English usage, the expression "holy land" still commonly defines these same areas, but as a descriptive term it has also come to generally signify a "region similarly revered in non-Christian religions,"⁵⁵ and in this sense it is also widely used today. I do not consider the term "holy land" (in lowercase) as problematic to refer to the most important religious geography or ritual territory recognized by followers of a historical religion. This general significance will be appreciated by most readers when they encounter the term herein, and I intend to use it occasionally in this manner. In fact, the expression "holy land" is often used in modern scholarship on both Buddhism and Tibet in order to refer to Buddhist India in this same general manner.⁵⁶

The use of "holy land" to refer to Buddhist India is, however, not always as general or neutral as just suggested. As I will describe in detail in chapter 9, various South Asian Buddhists of the early twentieth century, especially those whom scholars such as Heinz Bechert and Gananath Obeyesekere have variously described as "Buddhist modernists" or "Protestant Buddhists,"⁵⁷ began writing about India in English and referred to it very frequently and passionately as their "Holy Land" (frequently in uppercase). Since these newly emerging forms of modern Buddhism evolved in close relation to colonial missionary Christianity in South Asia, the adoption of the English expression carried with it a strong European Christian discourse about what a holy land should be like. The acceptance and development of this discourse by modern Buddhists was in fact one aspect of their

efforts to represent Buddhism as a “world religion.” For the purposes of the present study, which focuses predominantly upon Tibetan Buddhism, I have no hesitation in employing “holy land” as a serviceable translation for the Classical Tibetan Phagyül (*phags yul*), which will be discussed in chapter 3. Although this is indeed what Tibetans themselves have begun to do in recent times when writing or publishing in English, we might also be wary of the potential significance that the expression “holy land” could carry in their writings. Nowadays, leading Tibetan Buddhist lamas, and especially the Fourteenth Dalai Lama, commonly publish their works and give speeches in English for an international audience, and in this material they regularly identify India as their “holy land.”⁵⁸ Yet, after leaving Tibet and going into exile, the Dalai Lama has also emerged as the leading international proponent of so-called Buddhist modernism.⁵⁹ As an inheritor of representations of Buddhism from earlier generations of modern Asian Buddhists, it cannot now be taken for granted that the Dalai Lama’s use of the expression “holy land” is simply a translation of Phagyül, and thus devoid of the connotations of modern Buddhist discourse.

Does it really matter who refers to India as a Buddhist “holy land” and in what context, or is this merely a matter of semantics? I think it does matter. Prior to the early twentieth century, there were no records of Buddhists politically engaged in campaigns and legal battles or performing acts of great personal sacrifice in order to “liberate” or “defend” the sites in India which they associated with the Buddha. As we will see in chapter 9, the Buddhist modernists changed all this when they labelled these same sites as their “holy land” and actively preached the need for a Buddhist “crusade” to rescue them from the control of Hindu “infidels.” Since then, their call has often been heeded. In 1992, for instance, some Buddhist monks at Bodh Gayā attempted suicide by fasting and self-immolation because the site remained under Hindu occupation and use, while other Buddhist demonstrators entered a Hindu temple there and vandalized statues and assaulted the brahman priest.⁶⁰ We should recognize that the sites of the Buddha in India have indeed become a Buddhist holy land in exactly the way in which the early Buddhist modernists had wished.



CHAPTER TWO

Buddhist Knowledge and Anachronism in Tibet

The White Gya is the great king of the southern direction.

—*Imperial Tibetan pillar inscription, ca. 815*

Introduction

Buddhist inhabitants of the Tibetan plateau have maintained religious contacts with India for more than a millennium, and for almost as long they have consistently defined India as the most important place in their universe. However, when we begin to consider how and why Tibetans first came to know and to value India both as the land of the Buddha and as the origin place of their religion and high culture, we often find ourselves faced with more questions than answers. The same is true when trying to plot the beginnings of the acquisition of direct, firsthand Tibetan knowledge about India, especially by way of religious journeys to the holy sites of the Buddha in the Middle Ganges region. Neither the dates and nature of the earliest Tibetan religious contacts with India nor the origins of Tibetan Buddhist pilgrimages there have ever been established with historical certainty, and they will likely remain elusive. We might well then ask, What can we hope to learn about Tibetans and India by investigating the first period of conversion to Buddhism in Tibet, which occurred during the age of the Tibetans' great Central Asian empire (early seventh to mid-ninth centuries)? And why is it important to begin our inquiries there?

In this chapter, I want to begin exploring the importance of the manner in which knowledge of India was acquired in Tibet and its consequences. I will point out that there is precious little reliable evidence which actually places Tibetans in India prior to the tenth century, and that there is thus a corresponding lack of evidence of accurate, firsthand knowledge about

India being in circulation in early Tibet. The contemporary sources do yield fragments of an interesting ancient and essentially nonreligious Tibetan view of India, but they too contain nothing to indicate Tibetan travel to India. Nevertheless, the imperial Tibetans did possess a substantial body of knowledge which frequently referred to India, and one which we are certain was in circulation during the later half of the imperial era and for many centuries thereafter. This came in the form of hundreds of mainly Indian Buddhist texts translated into the Tibetan language. By comparing the state of early Tibetan knowledge about India with much later Tibetan accounts of India, we can begin to demonstrate a fundamental aspect of the understanding and representation of India in Tibet which has persisted over the long duration. It is one which we will return to reflect upon throughout this book. From the earliest period of their interest in India, Tibetans have most often considered their South Asian neighbour in highly idealized and anachronistic terms. They have consistently done so via the distorted but seemingly authoritative lens of inherited Buddhist literature rather than on the basis of direct experience and comprehensive contemporary knowledge of India itself.

Figments of Ancient Tibetans in Buddhist India

Reading widely in the scholarly and popular literature which describes Tibet during its imperial era, one easily obtains the distinct impression that Tibetans often undertook journeys to India at the time, and that they even established themselves there politically as well. Moreover, since at least the twelfth century and up until the present day, Tibetan Buddhists themselves have readily assumed that their imperial ancestors were frequent travellers to India, and that their very civilization was built upon the results of such visits. Indeed, this assumption is partly what lies at the heart of a historically constituted Tibetan identity. For example, in contemporary Tibetan classrooms in both China and South Asia, when Tibetan children first begin to learn the written orthography and grammar of their own language they are told of a heroic knowledge quest to India undertaken by one Thonmi Sambhota. Thonmi is supposed to have been a seventh-century imperial minister who is claimed to have invented the first written Tibetan language.¹ The story of Thonmi Sambhota is in fact typical of many such "heroic quest to India" narratives that begin to appear in Tibetan Buddhist literature around the twelfth century, that is, about five hundred years after the events which they purport to describe. Needless to say, perhaps, neither the narrative itself nor even the name

Thonmi Sambhota can be found in any Old Tibetan or Chinese sources from the imperial era.

Modern scholars too have long been ready to make the same type of assumption about imperial Tibetan presence and activities in India. For instance, a well-known early twentieth-century historian of India, Vincent Smith (1848–1920), confidently wrote of the route from Lhasa to India during the first half of the seventh century that it was “frequently used by pilgrims and other travellers.”² Similarly, contemporary Tibetologist David Snellgrove claimed of the eighth-century Tibetan conversion to Buddhism—a time when many Indian and other Buddhist missionaries are known to have been present and active in Tibet itself—that “it was normally the Tibetans who went to India in quest not only of books but of the expert guidance they needed.”³ Such claims of a flow of Tibetans to India have often been made in relation to others concerning an apparent Tibetan political presence in northern India during the period of empire. Smith, among others, stated of the first great Tibetan empire-builder, Emperor Tree Songtsen (alias Songtsen Gampo, r. ca. 622–49),⁴ that he “occupied Tihhüt, and . . . In A.D. 703 . . . India [sc. Tihhüt] threw off the Tibetan sovereignty.”⁵ For his part, the modern Tibetan historian Shakabpa Wangchuk Deden (1908–89) described the emperor’s dispatch of a very large force of “12,000 mounted troops from Tibet” to invade India.⁶ The mid-twentieth-century Tibetan intellectual Amdo Gendun Chöphel (1903–51) propagated exactly the same claims as Smith about northern Bihar (i.e., Tihhüt) being under Tibetan control, albeit for an even longer period in his opinion, and described an eighth-century Tibetan invasion of southern Bihar (i.e., Magadha) in addition.⁷ A contemporary, European-trained Tibetologist from Tibet, Samten Karmay, recently stated of eighth-century Tibetan influence in India that “the Pāla kings of Bengal were made to pay tribute,” a claim he obviously felt was well enough established to not even merit a footnote in the academic book in which it was published.⁸

All of these claims, and others like them, share several things in common. First, they all assume frequent imperial-era Tibetan visits to and activities in India. Second, they have all been influenced by Tibetan Buddhist narrative accounts of the imperial era which were composed, as far as is presently proven, around the twelfth century or even later. Finally, and less fortunately, none of the above claims we have just cited would meet the standard validity criteria of critical historical scholarship. The latter two points will be of no surprise to experienced scholars of Tibetan history who are familiar with the complex and problematic nature of the sources concerned, as well as with the development of the field of study, and I do

not intend to pursue them any further here. Rather, it is the first common assumption they all share, and indeed promote, which makes them interesting for our present study. This assumption about the ancient Tibetans in India is one which is liable to be reinforced by commonsense considerations as well, of which we will just briefly examine, and attempt to dispel, two examples.

Due to the close geographical proximity of the Indian plains to southern and western parts of the Tibetan plateau, one might reasonably assume that contacts between these neighbouring regions were probably frequent in ancient times. After all, Tibetan settlements on the southern margins of the high plateau are less than two hundred kilometres as the crow flies from Lumbinī and Kapilavastu, the very sites where Buddhists believe the Buddha was born and raised.⁹ Furthermore, although the high Himalayan mountain range stands between these two adjacent regions, it has never—as we know from so much evidence—formed a significant barrier against direct Indo-Tibetan contacts taking place whenever either Tibetans or their South Asian neighbours decided to engage in them. It is therefore sobering that there is such a great dearth of genuinely early and unequivocal evidence concerning Tibetan visits to India during the entire duration of the Tibetan empire. Along with this strongly apparent lack of Tibetan presence in India, there is, as we might expect, a corresponding lack of evidence of firsthand Tibetan knowledge about India during the period as well. For instance, if one considers, by comparison, the often detailed contemporary reports of India found in earlier Chinese, Arab, or Persian sources,¹⁰ one is at a complete loss to find anything comparable in the surviving Old Tibetan corpus.

Evidence of economically motivated travel to India by early Tibetans is something else we expect to find between such relatively close neighbours, but this is similarly lacking. Reading history backward from the recent past certainly gives pause for thought on this question. For example, examining the nature of economic intercourse between Tibet and India during the past three or four centuries, for which we have good evidence available, one finds that much of the economic contact between these regions has actually been mediated through various Himalayan border populations, being those peoples who always benefited from their role as middlemen in trade and who have therefore long maintained this as the status quo.¹¹ If this has indeed been the case over an even longer period of time—and there is some evidence to indicate that it has¹²—it is not hard to imagine that, for pragmatic reasons, Tibetan plateau dwellers had little need to cross the Himalayas to India in order to trade. It is also abundantly clear

that the imperial Tibetan political and economic focus became increasingly oriented toward Central Asia, thus marginalizing the potential role of contacts with southern neighbours in an earlier period.¹³ Indeed, while no Old Tibetan reports of India exist, we do find imperial Tibetan maps and geographies of Central Asia.¹⁴

Another commonsense assumption about Indo-Tibetan relations appears to be widely implicit and sometimes explicit in thinking on early Tibetan history. Because the Tibetans eventually went on to adopt an Indian style of Buddhism during their imperial era, and since they also began to adapt other Indic cultural materials or patterns, such as a written script or perhaps certain architectural designs—the claimed Indian origins for the layout of the early Samyé Monastery, for example—it is assumed that the Tibetans must necessarily have gone to India. However, this idea remains largely unsubstantiated using the available Old Tibetan sources from the actual period concerned. We can currently place only a tiny handful of early Tibetan actors in India who were there seeking Buddhism, and, even among those few we might be more sure about, a good proportion are reported to have died in India before they returned to Tibet.¹⁵ It can be noted, for the sake of comparison, that one Chinese visitor to India alone recorded scores of pilgrims from China, Central Asia, and Korea in India during the late seventh century, but no Tibetans.¹⁶ Alongside evidence of only a very small number of Tibetans in India, there are plenty of indications of Indian or Indic-influenced Buddhists being active in Tibet during the imperial era, thus obviating the need for Tibetans to visit India themselves. It is attested beyond doubt that Indian Buddhist missionaries and other non-Indian Buddhist missionaries versed in Sanskrit and bearing Sanskritized names¹⁷ were present in Tibet from about the 760s or 770s through to the early decades of the ninth century, and that they worked there alongside Tibetan students of Buddhism as teachers and cotranslators of imported Buddhist literature within what has been described as a climate of “imperial cosmopolitanism” prevailing in Tibet during the empire.¹⁸ In addition to an initial Chinese and later Indian Buddhist presence in Tibet itself, scholars have also drawn attention to the important role played by Tibetan contacts with such neighbouring non-Indian but Indic-influenced populations as the Newars, the Khotanese, and the Kashmiris in the transmission of Buddhism during the early period. Indeed, the two earliest Old Tibetan edicts discussing the status and origins of Buddhism in Tibet never once mention India, while Nepal is explicitly cited as the immediate source of the religion.¹⁹

The agency behind the foreign Buddhist missionaries in Tibet during the imperial era also remains largely unknown. It is well to recall that virtually every critical study of the missionary phenomenon in the history of religions reports missionaries arriving uninvited in new lands. And, if foreign Buddhist teachers were actually invited by the Tibetan elite, then it needs to be considered that this was not only a matter of religious motivation on their part but also one of political expediency as well.²⁰

In the above reflections, I am not suggesting that early Tibetan travellers never went to India. Rather, I want to stress that, according to all available evidence, they appear to have gone there very rarely indeed and to have travelled at all only infrequently. There also seem to have been few pressing reasons for Tibetans to actually visit India at the time, since India, in a manner of speaking, in fact came to them. My point is primarily that some of the pervasive assumptions about imperial Tibet and India that have stood for a very long time are perhaps best described as figments, being neither convincing nor supported by sound historical data. Following from this, I will also entertain my own assumption. While firsthand and comprehensive native Tibetan knowledge about India must accordingly have been very meagre during the imperial era, what knowledge there was in Tibet more often probably arrived there secondhand and thus also in selective and idealized forms. What the contemporary sources actually suggest is that there were two significant bodies of knowledge about India circulating in the Tibetan empire. One came in the form of translated Buddhist literature from the latter half of the eighth century onward, and we will consider this below. The other came via a broader sphere of ongoing Tibetan political and cultural contacts with neighbouring China, contacts which endured in different forms throughout most of the duration of the Tibetan empire.

Tibetans between Buddhist China and India

The first and very brief historical appearance of Tibetans in north India is dated to the mid-seventh century CE. Although we have virtually no information about these Tibetan visitors and what they actually did, some of the background details of the events have been recorded. There was a fruitful exchange between the Tang court in China and the court of the later Gupta emperor, Harṣavardhana (r. ca. 606–47), between which six diplomatic missions were exchanged from 641 to 648, with at least one mission in 643 proceeding to Buddhist holy sites in India via Tibet.²¹ The Tang em-

peror Taizong (r. 626–49), who in 641 was forced to grant the expansionist Tibetan emperor Tree Songtsen a Chinese princess as bride, dispatched a mission of Chinese diplomat-pilgrims to India at the time of the confusion following the death of Harṣa in 647. This mission was robbed and abused while staying at the late emperor's court, and they sought assistance from their then allies, the Tibetans and the Nepalese. A large force of Nepalese cavalry supported by a smaller force of Tibetan troops rescued the Chinese by attacking the Gupta capital at Kānyakubja.²²

Although only a brief military raid upon an area well to the west of the main Indian holy sites of Buddhism, this contact with India could have served to introduce Tibetans to the contemporary practice of foreign Buddhist elites—such as their imperial Chinese neighbours—of visiting what had already become for other Asians the well-established land of the Buddha in Magadha, and a venue of international pilgrimage. In fact, one of the most famous foreign pilgrims ever to visit the land of the Buddha, the Chinese monk Xuanzang, had just departed from India two years prior to the Nepalese and Tibetan raid, after having spent nearly a decade touring Buddhist sites throughout the subcontinent.

Other strong evidence also supports the idea that Tibetans gained direct knowledge of Buddhist pilgrimage, and also more specifically of pilgrimage to Buddhist India, by way of the activities of their Chinese neighbours. Tibet had well-developed imperial interests in Central Asia. During the eighth and early ninth centuries, Tibetans visited the Chinese Buddhist holy mountain of Wutai shan in northwestern China. This popular pilgrimage site, dedicated to the bodhisattva of wisdom and learning Mañjuśrī, is a place which Tibetans have continued to visit as pilgrims to this day. In 824, the Tibetan court even made a formal request to the Tang dynasty administration for a map of this famous Buddhist holy mountain, which the Chinese duly provided.²³ Furthermore, letters composed in Old Tibetan, discovered during the early twentieth century at the Central Asian oasis of Dunhuang, were written to introduce a late eighth- or early ninth-century Chinese Buddhist pilgrim en route to India to the local Tibetan colonial officials who controlled the southern Silk Road at the time. These documents mention the Indian Buddhist monastery of Nālandā, as well as holy places associated with the biography of the Buddha, as the principal goals of the Chinese pilgrim's journey to India.²⁴

While imperial-era Tibetans clearly did have some knowledge of Buddhist pilgrimage to India due to the activities of Chinese diplomatic and religious travellers passing through their territories, there is virtually no contemporary evidence that they emulated these examples and went to

India themselves as pilgrims. Why, as newly converted Buddhists, would they not have done so?

There may, in fact, be a very convincing religious reason for a lack of Tibetan pilgrimage to India during the imperial era and immediately afterward. Gregory Schopen raises an important point concerning the Tibetan translation of the seminal passage on pilgrimage to the sites of the Buddha found in the *Mahāparinirvāṇa-sūtra*. In a comparative reading of the later Tibetan and Chinese translations against the ancient Sanskrit and the Pāli versions, Schopen discovered that the Tibetan version, which must have been translated by the beginning of the ninth century,²⁵ adds a completely new passage here that allows for an equivalent “mental pilgrimage” by way of the “calling to mind/visualization” (*anusmaraṇīya*) of the sites of the Buddha from afar, rather than the performance of an actual pilgrimage to them. Concerning this innovation, Schopen considers that “when the texts moved outside of India—where actual pilgrimage would have been extremely difficult—new readings, like *anusmaraṇīya*, and new options, like visualization . . . had to be introduced into the text.”²⁶ The translators working in imperial Tibet thus appear to have provided newly converted Tibetan Buddhists with the option of ignoring actual physical journeys to India.

The White Gya

The dearth of sound historical records about imperial-era Tibetans traveling to and having direct knowledge of India should not lead us to suppose that India was absent from the ancient Tibetan cultural horizon. There was a clear ethnogeographic definition for India in Tibet at the time, albeit one which was originally nonreligious and lacking in any associations with Buddhism. It too reveals little in the way of firsthand knowledge about India existing in imperial Tibetan thought.

From early times, and up to the present day, Tibetans have consistently referred to India, in its various geopolitical and cultural definitions, as Gyagar (*rGya gar*). Since the second syllable *gar* appears in this word in the compositum for *dkar*, meaning “white”—and the spelling “*rGya dkar*” is encountered in early texts—the name “*rGya gar*” literally means the “White Gya.” Although the first syllable *rgya* can have a variety of different meanings in Tibetan, in the compound “*rGya gar*” and other similar Old Tibetan names it has always served as an ethnonym, as an ancient ethnogeographic label for peoples and areas bordering on the Tibetan world-space.²⁷ Thus, during the Tibetan imperial era the neighbouring Chinese

were known as the “Gya” (*rGya*) and their country was accordingly called the “Land of the Gya” (*rGya yul*).²⁸

Early Tibetan classificatory systems often resorted to a simple black-white symbolism. Thus, we find various border peoples south and east of the Tibetan plateau divided up into so-called “black” (*nag*), “white” (*dkar*), and even “variegated” (*bkra*, *khra*) groups by the Tibetans.²⁹ The use of black-white ethnic classifiers in this whole region probably derives from early Chinese schemes used to designate peoples dwelling to their west and southwest. The Tang historical texts describe different “barbarian” groups such as the Baiman and Wuman, the latter “black” label here referring to the rulers of the Nanzhao empire immediately to the southeast of the Tibetan plateau. Here we also recall that the earliest known Tibetan self-appellation was as the “Black-Headed Pö” (*Bod mgo nag po*), first appearing in the mid- to late 760s on the Lhasa pillar inscription of Emperor Tree Songdetsen (r. 754–97).³⁰ Such “black” and “white” ethnonyms still persist in the self-appellations of groups to the immediate southeast of the Tibetan plateau, such as the Yi, who call themselves Nosu or Nuosu, meaning “the black people”; the Naxi, a name which can mean the same; and the Premi, or “white people.”³¹

Following this ancient regional classificatory pattern, we find that India as Gyagar or the “White Gya” existed in opposition to Gyanag (*rGya nag*), literally the “Black Gya,” this being the common Tibetan appellation for China (*rGya yul*) in later times.³² Such terminology for India was already in use by the zenith of the Tibetan empire in specific geopolitical schemes, such as those found in various royal inscriptions which can perhaps best be read as imperial propaganda of the day. The pillar inscription at the tomb of Emperor Tree Daysongsen (776–ca. 815), probably written not long after 815, mentions China as “the land of Gya . . . to the east” (*shar phyogs . . . rgya’i yul*), and India as “the White Gya . . . to the south” (*lho phyogs . . . rgya gar*).³³ The Sino-Tibetan Treaty inscription of 821–22 mentions the four major regions bordering the Tibetan empire as “the White Gya of the borderland to the south” (*lho phyogs gyi mon rgya gar*), Tashig (probably Persia) to the west, Drugu Nomel (probably Turkic-speaking peoples) to the north, and China (*rGya*) to the east.³⁴ This designation of India was carried through into the classical period, and thus we find some of the earliest native Tibetan histories of Buddhism describing India as the “domain of the White Gya to the south.”³⁵

In relation to these ancient ethnogeographic and geopolitical schemes, other sources of the period also testify to Tibetan cultural categorizations of India as well. While I will make it clear in the following chapter that

India only gained a very specific religious identity as a “holy land” of Buddhism in Tibet very much later—in fact, several centuries after the Tibetan empire had come to an end—traces of the constituents of the idea of India being a special and perhaps even Buddhist land in various senses are nevertheless found in some Old Tibetan sources. An interesting document which contains cosmogeographical schemes slightly influenced by Buddhist writings discusses India as one of the four kingdoms of the borderlands in the context of the theory of the “Four Sons of Heaven.”³⁶ The text mentions Magadha (*Ma ga ta*) as the “land to the south,” ruled over by the king of Gyagar whose rule is associated with *tsuglag* (*gtsug lag*), a term which in all likelihood in this context is intended to mean either the “science of proper conduct or policy” (i.e., cognate with the Sanskrit *nītiśāstra*), or which refers directly to Buddhist sacred texts.³⁷ This defines India as the sole place within the scheme that is associated with “high culture,” since China to the east is designated as a place of men, Trom Kesar to the west as a place of merchants, while Drugu and Tasig to the north are places of horses.³⁸

In later times, we find that this crude imperial-era division between India as the realm of high culture, on the one hand, and China as the realm of mundane human affairs, on the other, became much reified as a cliché in Tibetan popular thought. There are numerous proverbs or aphorisms still in circulation today which attest to this idea, and which literally rank India “above” or *tö* (*stod*), and China “below” or *mé* (*smad*). Some examples are:

Religious law arises from India above.

Civil law arises from China below.

India above is the land where the Buddha preached religious law.

China below is the land where the emperor set down civil law.

The wheel of religious law was turned in India above;

[there they] take refuge firstly in chanting the religious law.

The prosperity of commerce was encompassed by China below;

[there they] make effort firstly in building up business.³⁹

The dual terminology of *tö* and *mé* here does not simply represent a geographical schema, as it is often more narrowly interpreted, it also forms most definitely a cultural ranking. *Tö* does indeed mean “highlands,” being a designation for the high plateau lands of far western Tibet, and *mé*

does mean “lowlands,” usually applied to the Amdo borderlands in the northeast. But Tibetan geographers have since earliest times correctly located India or Gyagar to the south rather than the west, and correctly recognized it as being a lowland area.

Knowledge of India in Translation

Alongside the dearth of evidence for actual imperial-era Tibetan Buddhist visits to India, and the alternative non-Buddhist native Tibetan ethnogeographical understanding of Gyagar, we can be certain that from the eighth century onward, information about the ancient historical geography and cult sites of Buddhist India did become available in Tibet. This occurred by way of the systematic translation into Tibetan language of mainly Sanskrit but also some Chinese works on Buddhism. The transfer of all this information did not, as already mentioned, necessarily entail anything significant in the way of direct Tibetan visits to India.

By the late eighth and early ninth centuries, hundreds of Buddhist scriptures had been translated by Tibetans in collaboration with scholars from neighbouring regions.⁴⁰ To take the case of Mahāyāna *sūtras*, which, together with their commentaries, represent by far the most abundant class of text in the imperial-era Tibetan corpus of Buddhist translations, one finds that such works commonly begin with an account of the site at which the Buddha Śākyamuni was delivering his religious discourse and then mention other related Indian settings. For example, in the first few pages of the *Pratyutpanna-buddha-saṃmukhāvasthita-samādhi-sūtra*, which was probably first translated into Tibetan before 800 CE, we find that the site of Veṇuvana and the ancient cities of Rājagṛha, Śrāvastī, Vaiśālī, Campā, Vārāṇasī, Kapilavastu, and Sāketā are all mentioned in the opening sections.⁴¹ Lists of the names of Indian Buddhist sites, derived mainly from the *sūtras*, were compiled together with their translated Tibetan equivalents in early bilingual glossaries, such as the *Mahāvyutpatti*, much of which appears to date from the early ninth century. What is most interesting about this record is how incomplete it is, for even in an apparently important work such as the *Mahāvyutpatti*, some of the most famous Indian Buddhist holy places of the day were not even represented. This is one of many indications of the anachronistic nature of the knowledge of Buddhist India which the Tibetans were inheriting by way of translation at the time.

Most of the translated Buddhist material which became available in imperial Tibet would probably have been confusing to Tibetans when they

came to relate it—if indeed, they ever did—to actual Indian political and cultural geography during the eighth and ninth centuries CE. The classical texts were replete with a comprehensive record of names of ancient Indian sites, kingdoms, clans and tribes, and geographical information from the time in which the Buddha himself is thought to have lived, more than a millennium beforehand. Many such sites and regions and the populations which inhabited them had long since either been renamed or had disappeared from the Indian cultural landscape altogether.

This problem of the profoundly anachronistic nature of information about India supplied in the translated Buddhist texts was also compounded by contemporary contradictions in the communications between Indian teachers and Tibetan students interested in their foreign Buddhist culture. An example is found in the *Bhoṭasvāmidāsalekha*, a letter ostensibly written sometime between 780 and 790 by the Indian teacher Buddhaguhya to Tree Songdetsen, the reigning Tibetan emperor and an early patron of Buddhism in Tibet. In his missive, Buddhaguhya informed the Tibetan ruler that Śākyamuni had taught all three scriptural collections at the Vajrāsana in India.⁴² As is well known, and according to earlier Buddhist sources which the Tibetans themselves were then translating, the Buddha is said to have turned the Wheel of the Doctrine at Ṛṣipatana near Vārāṇasī, while the threefold scriptures were recorded at Rājagṛha.⁴³ Such a statement by Buddhaguhya is perhaps to be understood as reflecting the situation in his day when Bodh Gayā, site of the Vajrāsana, had become the cultic centre of the entire Buddhist world. But conflicting information of this sort must have been confusing for Tibetans trying to form a coherent impression from afar of the land of the Buddha in India.

Idealized views of the natural and cultural life of India also gradually became available to Tibetans by way of Indian literary works at a very early stage in the development of their interest in Buddhism. While very stylized glimpses could be had from the *sūtras* themselves, more substantial works also appeared. For example, the *Sthaviropānimantraṇa* by Bhavakandadasya, a work on religious life in India, was translated into Tibetan by the mid- to late eighth century. It supplies idealized descriptions of Indian settings together with the names of various species of flora and fauna.⁴⁴

We must seriously consider the question of just how much contemporary significance this mass of imported, textually based information might have had for Tibetans in the eighth and ninth centuries, divorced as it was from its living context and given the apparent lack of elite Tibetan contacts with India during the imperial era. It is eloquent testimony to this

question that one can search Old Tibetan manuscripts and epigraphs in vain for any mention of the great sites of Indian Buddhist culture and history. It is in a few Tibetan documents recovered from Dunhuang that we find some of the earliest indigenous Tibetan references to India as a Buddhist place or landscape.

One of these rare examples is a short work concerning the Buddhist doctrine of transmigration, entitled *History of Birth and Death* or *Cycle of Birth and Death* (*Skye shi'i lo rgyus/Skye shi 'khor ba*). It contains a narrative in which Rinchen, a semidivine protagonist, undertakes a pilgrimage to the Buddhist holy land in search of a solution to the problem of death. Rinchen's journey begins in the land of the gods and passes through many other lands until he eventually reaches the confines of the southern cosmic continent of Jambudvīpa, which is the part of the world-system in which India is located according to traditional Indian Buddhist cosmography. Rinchen then proceeds to Magadha (*dBus 'gyur can/'chang*) at its centre, and, arriving at the tree of Mahābodhi (*Bo de chen po'i shing*), he meets Śākyamuni Buddha (*Sangs rgyas shag kya*) and receives teachings from him.⁴⁵ There is no substantial reference to any "real" India in the narrative, since the setting for the story is more an abstraction from Indian Buddhist cosmography, while the environment of the Buddha himself is described in the wondrous and artificial terms typical of Mahāyāna *sūtras*. Whatever the India we may find here, it is more like a glorious backdrop against which a liberation narrative unfolds. This style begins to describe the character of various later Tibetan hagiographical accounts of pilgrimages to India, which will be discussed in the following chapter.

The large corpus of translated Buddhist literature which became available in Tibet during the imperial era certainly appears to represent the major Tibetan source of knowledge about India at the time. This translated corpus also constituted an enduring body of knowledge, one which long survived the more ephemeral oral transmissions of information about India from Indian or other foreign missionaries and teachers. Moreover, it was a body of textual knowledge which was certainly accorded a degree of high cultural prestige in Tibet, at least during the reigns of some of the later, more Buddhist-oriented emperors. This is clearly evident in terms of the state resources and officially sanctioned organization and care which were invested in producing and regulating the translations of these Buddhist texts into Tibetan.⁴⁶ The substantial prestige and degree of authority already acquired by translated Buddhist literature in early Tibet then increased enormously during the second wave of translations of Indian Sanskrit texts, which began around the beginning of the eleventh century.

Anachronism as the State of the Art

Thus far, in the earliest Tibetan sources, we have encountered two different country names, Gyagar and Magadha, both being used to designate an entity we can recognize as "India." Beyond this most simple level of labeling, in both the Old Tibetan and early Classical Tibetan sources we find no detailed expressions of the contemporary realities of the Indian subcontinent as an extremely complex and dynamic political, social, ethnic, and geographical region. The imperial Tibetans and their immediate successors appear not to have had access to the more comprehensive Indian geographical views of a greater, subcontinental idea of India as found expressed, for example, in the Sanskrit epic or Purāṇic visions of India as Bhāratavarṣa, or in the reports of wide-ranging Chinese Buddhist pilgrims and other travellers. The only level of sophistication they appear to have obtained about Gyagar as "India" were the names of the ancient cities and other resorts of the Buddha, or the scheme of "sixteen great countries" (*ṣoḍaśa mahājanapada*), and so on, that had first been introduced to them via early Tibetan efforts to translate ancient Buddhist literature from Sanskrit.

The traditional but highly anachronistic Buddhist textual view of ancient India which the Tibetans obtained was one that had, on the one hand, long been frozen in time, but which, on the other hand, appeared very authoritative since it came together with the Buddhist teachings that attained the highest prestige and canonical status in Tibet. Many of the names the Tibetans learned via the Buddhist sources actually referred to places that had long since fallen into oblivion by the later Gupta period. Indeed, the early seventh-century Chinese traveller Xuanzang passed through India seeking out such ancient Buddhist sites as are found mentioned in the Buddhist texts which the Tibetans translated soon after. However, the Chinese pilgrim found many of the most famous sites, such as Rājagṛha, Vaiśālī, Śrāvastī, Kuśinagar, and Kapilavastu in ruins and desolate, while others, such as Sāketā, are never even mentioned, presumably since even their names had already disappeared from local usage.

Thus, in the Tibetan imperial era we already find the first evidence of a trend that continued to characterise Tibetan geographical and cultural understandings of India for the next thousand years or more. The Tibetans possessed and relied upon a great deal of inherited information about ancient Buddhist India by way of translated Buddhist literature. This largely obsolete but religiously authoritative knowledge base was maintained as their primary reference point for relating to India, and it came to form the first discernible layer in the ongoing process of reinventing India in Tibet.

It is remarkable just how anachronistic the presentation of India remained in much later Tibetan thinking and writing, precisely because of Buddhist textual authority and scholastic conservatism. As a typical example, we can consider the account of India presented in the *General Description of the World* (*'Dzam gling spyi bshad*) that was composed in 1777 by Sumpa Khenpo Yeshe Penjor (1704–88).⁴⁷ During his own day, Sumpa Khenpo was one of the leading clerics and scholars of the then dominant Gelukpa school of Tibetan Buddhism. His collected works—which usually run to eight volumes—contain a wide range of traditional scholarship, including the various studies of history and chronology for which he is perhaps best known.⁴⁸

I have deliberately chosen to discuss Sumpa Khenpo's *General Description of the World* because it is known to have been a popular text among premodern readers of Tibetan, even circulating as a separate short monograph.⁴⁹ Moreover, as I will describe in chapters 5 through 7 below, it was composed precisely at a time when many new, firsthand Tibetan reports of India had begun to circulate in Tibet. The *General Description of the World* is a summation of the author's late eighteenth-century knowledge about the geography and peoples of the "world," that is, the world traditionally conceived of as the southern cosmic continent known as Jambudvīpa. At least one-third of the text is devoted to describing India, which, in keeping with traditional Tibetan Buddhist geographical representations, was treated as the centre of the world (see chap. 3), and is therefore dealt with first of all.

After some preliminaries, Sumpa Khenpo informs his Tibetan readers that India is a land with many great cities and towns, and he lists the six "great cities" as well as a further twenty-three Indian lands and cities of "great renown." However, all of the names he offers under these headings are derived from early Buddhist literary sources translated in the Tibetan canon. Virtually all of the six great cities on his list were—as Xuanzang had discovered a thousand years previously—already ruined and long defunct, their names totally forgotten in living Indian communities. As for the remaining famous lands and cities on the list, many of them were in fact nothing of the sort. Rather, we find that Sumpa Khenpo has taken a range of proper names and terms from the Buddhist canonical texts that appeared to him (and to many other Tibetan Buddhists) to be significant Indian place names, and he treated them accordingly as if they were actual lands and cities of "great renown." His list thus included a cave known as *Indraśailaguhā* which some Buddhist sources describe as the site of the great god Indra's interview with the Buddha; the so-called *bodhimāṇḍa*

or precise site of the Buddha's awakening; *parinirvāṇa* or the state of final release from rebirth and suffering in Buddhist cosmology; the Śāravatī, which was a river marking the southern boundary of the Middle Country (Madhyadeśa) of ancient Indian geography, and so on.⁵⁰ In short, he recorded absolutely nothing that a late eighteenth-century Tibetan visitor to India would have been able to actually locate on the ground, let alone learn about from any living inhabitant of India.

Sumpa Khenpo next takes his readers on a tour around places in Magadha, although most of those which he introduced were ancient Buddhist sites that had long been buried under metres of Indian topsoil. He describes various adjacent regions in the cardinal directions and then introduces those Indian Buddhist monastic communities that enjoyed great reputation in Tibet, all of which, however, had disbanded and fallen into ruin by the twelfth and thirteenth centuries at very latest.⁵¹ He rounds off his account of India with a long description of the eight "charnel grounds" (*śmaśāna*) and twenty-four "great seats" (*mahāpīṭha*), which together represent the sites of Indian Tantric holy places of importance in the Buddhist Vajrayāna teachings.⁵² However, Sumpa Khenpo—like all Tibetan Buddhists—was at a loss to identify the geographical locations of any of the eight charnel grounds he mentions in India. This is because he was presenting them as they are normally described in ritual manuals for Tantric practice, as mere names and attributes devoid of location data. Similarly, his notes on the location of the twenty-four Tantric *pīṭha* sites were repeated from a Tibetan commentarial tradition that was already more than four hundred years old, and just one among many such competing accounts which differ widely in the location data they offer.⁵³

The *General Description of the World* is fairly typical of many such Tibetan works of the period. Even information on India obtained by scholars apparently much "closer to the source" than Sumpa Khenpo was little different. For instance, a list of the names of over fifty Indian states or ruling dynasties, plus a few location notes, was compiled in 1749 by the Eighth Situ Panchen, Chökyi Chungné (1699/1700–1774).⁵⁴ Situ Panchen partly gained his knowledge while studying with South Asian scholars in the Sanskritized environment of Kathmandu Valley. However, his list is a very curious mixture of purely ancient names found in the works of Pāṇini, the *Mahābhārata*, and the *Purāṇas*, plus other old names which stopped being used after the Gupta period and the Rāṣtrakūṭa/Pāla period respectively, and a few later place names current in India during his own time. His own additional location notes reveal that he often had no idea where the places he mentioned were actually located. For instance, he describes

Sauvāra, which is normally located along the lower Indus valley, as being to the south of Bengal instead. Not all premodern Tibetan scholars remained quite so anachronistic in their outlook nor so confused in their geographical knowledge of India, although things were very slow to change.

Half a century after Sumpa Khenpo, a more “up-to-date” presentation of India appeared in the *Full Account of the World* (*'Dzam gling rgyas bshad*) composed by the Fourth Tsenpo Nomonhan, Jampae Chökyi Tenzin Trinley (1789–1838).⁵⁵ Tsenpo Nomonhan's description of world geography was in various respects remarkably advanced for a Tibetan of his day, mainly because he was able to research and compose his work in and around the Chinese imperial capital of Peking, where he enjoyed direct access to several European visitors and other sources of foreign knowledge about the world beyond Tibet and China. In spite of this, his detailed account of Magadha and neighbouring regions associated with the life of the Buddha remained profoundly conservative since it also originated in ancient Buddhist literary sources found in the Tibetan canon. It was, however, substantially supplemented by the seventh-century travel account of the Chinese pilgrim Xuanzang, a summarized version of which had been translated into Tibetan sometime during the first half of the eighteenth century.⁵⁶ Following Xuanzang, plus some hearsay from later travellers providing more recent place names, the Tsenpo Nomonhan projects the seventh-century descriptions forward in time more than a millennium, as though everything that the famous Chinese pilgrim had described was still there to be seen in exactly the same way by any would-be nineteenth-century visitor to the Middle Ganges region and the Nepal Terai. In fact, the many sites he detailed all still lay buried, awaiting excavation and restoration by British explorers and archaeologists a century or more later.

It has not been my intention here to belittle this premodern Tibetan system of geographical knowledge about India by systematically pointing out its traditional and anachronistic nature. Rather, my point is to demonstrate how completely locked into the very particular world of inherited Buddhist literature and textually mediated knowledge it actually was, and also how, even long after the imperial Tibetans first obtained this literature, relatively little had changed in the Tibetan understanding and representation of India. One may recall here, for the sake of contextualization, that most of Tibet's leading Buddhist scholars still argued the position that the world was flat rather than round well into the twentieth century, on account of their near total dependence upon the authority of canonical Buddhist accounts.⁵⁷

It could be argued that established Tibetan views about India were due

not only to the exclusive authority invested in inherited Buddhist literature but also that they were rooted in historical realities. For long periods of Tibetan history, relatively few Tibetans visited India. Thus, we could not expect Tibetan societies to maintain much in the way of a current or practical knowledge base about the real, contemporary India and its ever-changing and profound diversity and complexity. However, other evidence reveals that the real issue was not always or necessarily a lack of accurate information in Tibet. Rather, it was the way in which information was received and interpreted, as I will repeatedly demonstrate in the chapters to follow. Traditional Buddhist prejudices, and the expectations and fantasies that they gave rise to, remained steadfast. Even when critical and accurate firsthand Tibetan accounts of India and its Buddhist sites did actually appear and circulate in Tibet, rather than transforming Tibetan knowledge, they were instead often rejected in favour of more idealized but inaccurate views.



CHAPTER THREE

Journeying to the Centre of the World

When I was about to proceed to Nepal and India, I made the solemn vow
not to come back without seeing the Vajrāsana.

—*Chag Lotsāwa*, 1258

Introduction

The Tibetan emperors of the late eighth and early ninth centuries astutely followed the example set by many of their immediate neighbours and adopted Buddhism as a religion of court and state. However, their empire, with its later cosmopolitan character, its specific focus upon Central Asia, and its multifarious but ambivalent preoccupation with China, was not an environment in which Tibetan travel southward to India flourished or was even particularly necessary. Yet, after the empire came to an end, the outward focus of certain Tibetan regions began to shift quite firmly toward South Asia. The postimperial period witnessed a devolution of centralized political authority and interests back into the hands of many minor, localized elites and territorialized clans in areas such as the far western and south-central zones of the Tibetan plateau. Some of these local elites followed the pattern of their imperial forebears and developed a renewed interest in Buddhism. It is indeed no coincidence that many of the earliest Tibetan Buddhist travellers to India came from or were sponsored by just such newly emerging local rulers and dynasties, often situated near the passes on the north side of the Himalayas which provided access to South Asia. In fact, the travel by these earliest Tibetan pilgrims to India in the form of visits to Buddhist sites and teachers eventually helped enable a major transformation in Tibetan civilization: the establishment of new and sophisticated forms of Tibetan culture and so-

ciety with deep roots in Indian Buddhism, much of which is still with us today.

In this and the following chapter, I will briefly investigate the origins of pilgrimage as a type of postimperial Tibetan ritual. I will show how the actual practice of pilgrimage to India, together with an ongoing influx of new Buddhist ideas from India into Tibet, allowed for unprecedented Tibetan ways of understanding and representing India as a “holy land,” as an esteemed place of cultural origins, and even as the centre of the Tibetan universe. This formation and cultivation of images of a highly superior India came to serve as an important aspect of the evolution and maintenance of a new and enduring Buddhist religious hegemony across the Tibetan plateau, one whose discourse subordinated Tibet itself to India.

Origins of Tibetan Buddhist Pilgrimage

The first historical records of actual Tibetan religious visits to India and its Buddhist shrines only appear beginning in the eleventh and twelfth centuries. They concern a series of persons active during the period that Tibetan historiographers often refer to as the “later propagation of Buddhist teaching” (*bstan pa phyi dar*), from the late tenth to the late thirteenth centuries. These early Buddhist travellers from Tibet to India include many of the famous lama-translators or *lotsāwas* (*lo tsā ba*) who either helped to establish or who were retrospectively taken as the origin points for the newly emerging Tibetan Buddhist lineages and schools of that time. As confirmation of these early Tibetan religious visits to India, it is also from about the eleventh century that we find the first Tibetan depictions of the great Indian Buddhist holy sites in painting and sculpture.¹ Moreover, the same period was the main formative era in which a specific ritual culture of pilgrimage began to emerge in Tibetan societies.

These surviving narratives demonstrate that their subjects were all pilgrims or religious travellers, as opposed to traders, diplomats, or tourists of any kind. Their reasons for visiting India invariably revolved around either the desire to study there and obtain the Buddhist teachings from Indian gurus or the performance of worship and offerings at the great Buddhist holy places, and often their journeys combined both. Thus, all early Tibetan travellers visited the major Indian Buddhist holy places with religious goals in mind, and their visits qualify as “pilgrimages” in our general understanding of that term, a fact confirmed by the specific language of the Classical Tibetan sources describing their journeys, which we shall investigate below.

During the period of later propagation of Buddhist teaching in Tibet, sites such as Bodh Gayā were already well-established pilgrimage venues for Buddhists from all over Asia. It is probably by way of direct Tibetan contacts with these same sites and their Buddhist culture that pilgrimage first started to become a distinctive type of ritual in Tibet. Not surprisingly, then, we find that the earliest known examples of what might be considered as native Tibetan pilgrimage guidebook literature are exclusively concerned with Bodh Gayā and Magadha. One anonymous work, dating from the early thirteenth century and entitled *Register and Guide for the Vajrāsana* (*Rdo rje ldan gyi dkar chag dang lam yig*), includes an explanation of the Vajrāsana and the deeds of the Buddha there, the origin story of the Mahābodhi image erected by the three brahman brothers at the site, an account of Aśoka's building of *stūpas*, and a brief geography of sites around Magadha.² A similar work, by the scholar Chomden Rigpae Raldri (active mid- to late thirteenth century), entitled *The Flower Ornament: An Extensive Explanation of the Vajrāsana* (*Rdo rje gdan rnam bshad rgyan gyi me tog*), has chapters describing the nature and layout of the Vajrāsana and Bodh Gayā Temple precinct, recounting the deeds of the Buddha there, detailing the legend of the founding of Mahābodhi by the three brahman brothers, recalling the actions of the Emperor Aśoka there, and the recounting of the deeds of Nāgārjuna and other Buddhist figures in relation to the site.³

The great Tibetan ritual interest in and knowledge of this premiere holy place in the Buddhist world resulted not just from Tibetan pilgrimage there. It was also prompted and enriched by specialist Sanskrit literature from India that was becoming available in Tibet in translation, and which was then preserved in the Tibetan Buddhist canon. For example, a number of canonical sources, such as the *Vajrāsanavajragīti* and *Vajrāsanasādhana*, relate directly to special forms of worship of the site of enlightenment as it symbolizes the Buddha's supreme achievement there.⁴

All the basic ritual elements that make up the Tibetan concept of pilgrimage can also be traced back to earlier Indian models, even if, over the course of time, they became both further elaborated and simultaneously attenuated in terms of indigenous Tibetan discourses and ritual practices.⁵ We most commonly use the English term "pilgrimage" to translate the Tibetan compound expressions *nékor* (*gnas skor*) and *néjel* (*gnas mjal*). These compounds can be resolved respectively as "going around a *né*" and "meeting/direct encounter with a *né*." The concepts of both circumambulation and direct encounter conveyed in these terms are derived from *pradakṣiṇā* and *darśana*, which were ritual models adopted by earlier

Indian Buddhism from out of the broader ancient Indic cultural matrix. For Tibetans, *né* (*gnas*), as the object of pilgrimage or “holy place,” simply means an “abode,” but specifically the location or residence of a Buddha or other significant beings in the pantheon or cosmos. The nature and importance of *né* for Tibetan pilgrimage overlaps strongly with the ritual status and treatment accorded to the sites associated with the Buddha in Indian Buddhism, especially the funerary monuments or reliquaries (*caitya* or *stūpa*) said to enshrine bodily relics of the Buddha. Accordingly, the term found in native Tibetan works since at least the twelfth century to refer to such Indian sites as objects of pilgrimage is *néchenbo* (*gnas chen po*) or “great abode (*né*),” which is a translation of the Sanskrit term *mahāsthāna* used in later Indian Buddhist texts to refer to the sites of the Buddha legend in India and also sometimes to the *stūpas* of the Buddha located at them.⁶

Another vital aspect of Tibetan understandings of *né* that seems to closely parallel what can be discerned about early Indian Buddhist beliefs and practices is the idea that pilgrimage sites, as both sacred objects and their immediate physical surroundings, somehow physically embody both salvational power and superior morality. This is clear in the earlier Indian sources from the expressions one finds which state directly, or strongly imply, that the Buddha was a living presence in his relics and also in the funerary monuments enshrining them; that these relics and shrines possessed a legal status akin to that of a person; that contacts and contiguity with them in both life and after death was a ritual priority; and that such contacts with them could yield soteriological benefits.⁷ As I have described at length elsewhere, this overlaps strongly with the manner in which Tibetan Buddhists often treat their own indigenous holy sites as *né*.⁸ As a logical extension of all these ideas, Tibetans consider the actual physical environs and substances of any Buddhist *né* to also embody the same sacred and moral qualities of enlightened being, as if they had suffused or permeated the surroundings. Moreover, the superior qualities of a holy place can thus be harvested and carried away, such as is commonly seen in the collection of water, earth and stones, or talismans from holy places by pilgrims. For Tibetan pilgrims, this ritual knowledge has always informed an important mode of tangible contact with the physical sites of Buddhism in India, as I will demonstrate in subsequent chapters.

The Hagiography and Historiography of Travel

To begin to understand early Tibetan religious travel to India and the ways in which it might have begun to shape new views of India back in Tibet,

we are able to resort to only one or two types of closely related Tibetan sources. Accounts of Tibetan pilgrims going to India are most often found in the genre of religious biography or hagiography known as *namthar* (*rnam thar*) in Tibetan, which frequently offer full-length portrayals of the lives of Buddhist monks, lamas, or even laypersons. The term literally means an account of “complete liberation,” referring to the reputed attainment by the subject of the final salvational goal of Buddhism, specifically as that goal is viewed by the Tibetans.⁹ Very occasionally these accounts do offer more detailed itineraries of Tibetans on pilgrimage to Indian Buddhist holy places, although for the most part their descriptions are rather brief. The other type of source is historical texts, but especially the genre known as *chöunchung* (*chos 'byung*) or “arising of Dharma,”¹⁰ which frequently contain short biographical extracts or accounts of Tibetans who visited India as well as very brief notices related to the same theme. In fact, quite a few of the early Tibetans who travelled to India are merely mentioned in such historical texts as having gone there, and no other information about their travels has survived.¹¹

While these two types of Tibetan sources have long been the object of scholarly study, they have not always been critically appreciated as complex literatures which represent a range of aims and motivations very different from our own modern expectations of written history and biography. One key point in understanding the nature of the Tibetan histories we have to use as source materials, and one that is true in general of early Tibetan Buddhist historiography, is the role played by the status of India in Tibet. It is precisely because of the great prestige that came to be associated with India in Buddhist Tibet that Tibetan authors have consistently attempted to relate themselves, their lineages and teachings—and indeed, just about everything—back to India. Thus, the importance of connections with India have often become highly inflated or even imagined and faked. The best example of this phenomenon must surely be the precedence given by later Tibetan Buddhist historians to narratives describing the Indian origins of the first Tibetan king instead of the tradition of divine origins and descent from the sky which was central to the ancient royal cult.¹²

The great ingenuity with which later Tibetan Buddhist authors sought to associate all of their traditions directly with India was, in large measure, one important dimension of constructing claims of legitimacy and authority among the various new and competing Buddhist lineages that began emerging in Tibet from the eleventh and twelfth centuries onward.

Thus, we find that the position of India has often been at the centre of Tibetan Buddhist polemics, and this perhaps since the earliest period of Buddhist conversion. Various sources describe the so-called Samyé debate, an event at which eighth-century Tibetans supposedly opted purposefully for the Indian transmissions of Buddhism over others that were available at the time.¹³ The Samyé debate remains one of the most nebulous events in the early history of Buddhism in Tibet, to be sure. But whether we regard the sources describing it as representing historical events or not, the narratives concerning it clearly point to a Tibetan acceptance of India as *the* anchor of cultural legitimacy. In traditional Tibetan thinking, the prevailing Buddhist maxim concerning authority and legitimacy was simple: If it cannot be traced back to India, the holy land of Buddhist origins, and to the Indian Buddha himself, it is not authentic.

This later Tibetan Buddhist enthusiasm for India not only makes the sources we must use more problematic and sometimes suspect, it has also had its influence upon the way modern scholars have tended to consider the Indo-Tibetan relationship. I briefly pointed this out earlier with examples on the representation of the Tibetan imperial era. Similarly, it has also influenced the manner in which a later period of Tibetan religious history in relation to India has been represented, and distortions have resulted. For instance, this can be seen in the way in which the amount of Tibetan Buddhist religious travel to India during the period ca. 1000–1300 CE has been described by Western Tibetologists in what have become standard scholarly works. Thus, David Snellgrove and Hugh Richardson (1905–2000) easily referred to the “vast numbers of Tibetans who visited all parts of northern India” at that time, while Giuseppe Tucci (1894–1984) left us with the vision of a “continuous stream of Tibetan pilgrims to India.”¹⁴ While fairly common, such statements are rather exaggerated. The available records actually enable us to talk only of several score of early Tibetan travelers going to India as pilgrims, and whose visits, moreover, occurred fairly discontinuously over a period of three whole centuries. Furthermore, these pilgrims mainly travelled to a very narrowly defined range of sites within a rather limited geographical region of the vast Indian subcontinent, as we shall soon see.¹⁵

Namthar or Tibetan hagiographies remain our richest source of information on early Tibetan pilgrims in India, but they too are often highly problematic from a historian's point of view. While they do contain historical details, more often than not *namthar* also range from being eulogistic or laudatory to symbolic and didactic in their nature and intent, and they

can frequently offer up materials such as personal visionary experiences and dream sequences from the lives of their subjects which are blended into their narrative structure. It is therefore often unrealistic to expect factually objective and realistic historical accounts in these texts. Moreover, we lack independent witnesses to verify the contents and claims of most of the *namthar* that are available. According to a strict interpretation, many *namthar* might yield for us no more than lists of Indian places and sites whose names we could be sure the Tibetan authors or compilers of the texts knew, plus a few details of interest to set the scenes of their narratives. In other words, their composition need not necessarily depend upon their authors or subjects ever having travelled to India.

While early *namthar* which represent India do require cautious use as historical sources, they are nevertheless important for helping to understand the ways Tibetans have come to perceive India from afar throughout their history, since such texts were frequently referred to, read, recited, and even represented in painted or performed versions over the centuries. The accounts they contain often tend to present the Indian environment and society in abstract or highly idealized terms, and in such texts we see the beginnings of the active Tibetan creation of India as a very desirable, even glorious, type of place and destination. This is well illustrated by the account of a mid-eleventh-century pilgrimage to Magadha recorded in the hagiography of the Ra Lotsāwa, Dorjedrak (1016?–1080?). I choose Ra Lotsāwa's *namthar* as an example here because it was, and still is, one of the most widely read classics of traditional Tibetan literature. It also contains one of the more detailed accounts of an early Tibetan itinerary to Indian Buddhist sites. Ra Lotsāwa's twelfth-century biographer describes the lama's arrival at the heart of Buddhist India as follows:

As for the Vajrāsana, precise site of the Buddha's profound awakening, the place where one thousand and two Buddhas will appear and the site which is indestructible even at the end of the cosmic cycle: The entire ground for about one *yojana* [around the site] is a pure field of white, resembling rock crystal, and flat like the palm of a hand, upon which are pleasingly arranged the forms of various offering substances. Such things as the soil and pebbles in this place are without defect. Everywhere in the expanse of forests with various types of fruits, there grow different species of medicinal herbs. In all directions flow excellent streams, and there are fine meadowlands with saffron amongst the blooming flowers. Various game animals and bird species sport as they move cautiously about. Just reaching this place gives rise to an inten-

sive experience of incomprehensible wellbeing, pure perception, and lucid happiness.¹⁶

It is immediately clear that the idealized environment being described here to Tibetan readers closely resembles the perfect Buddhist pure lands or Buddha-fields (*buddhakṣetra*) presented in the Mahāyāna literature which Tibetans had become familiar with since the late eighth or early ninth centuries. Expressions such as “flat like the palm of a hand,” which are frequently applied to Buddhist India in the early Tibetan travel accounts,¹⁷ are actually stock phrases used in Mahāyāna literature to describe Sukhāvatī, the Buddha-field of Amitābha.

The appeal and importance of such early Tibetan representations of India lie in their ability to create or craft the carefully nuanced allure of a holy land, the sacred aura of its sites, and the richness of its special properties for those prospective pilgrims dwelling far distant from it. We know from many other pilgrimage traditions that holy lands are often represented in a timeless or transhistorical fashion, as miraculous, liberating, healing, and as being perfect and pleasing environments in every respect, regardless of their actual conditions. Moreover, text-critical analysis often reveals that a great many pilgrimage accounts are nothing but collages. They consist of retold narratives that the pilgrim authors collect at holy places or on the road as well as reused passages borrowed and adapted from earlier—often classic—written works. Much later Tibetan pilgrimage literature is indeed composed in this collage style, but perhaps this mode of writing began in the earliest Tibetan accounts of India as a holy land. It is striking to read sections of the twelfth-century narrative of Ra Lotsāwa's pilgrimage to Magadha against that of the famous seventh-century Chinese pilgrim Xuanzang. In a typical passage, Ra Lotsāwa describes the Bodhi Tree at Bodh Gayā as follows:

In autumn it does not wither. In winter it does not dry out. All of its leaves and flowers give off a great lustre. . . . Those Indians whose fundamental faith is firmly established come here in an unceasing human stream to make offerings, even from distant lands. They combine various kinds of excellent medicinal herbs with milk, and whitewash the Bodhi Tree with it, and thus it is as though it is never bereft of moisture. At dusk, daybreak, noon, and in the evening, many pilgrims circumambulate the site. There are many lines of people making prostrations and offerings after the custom of the different lands in the four directions. With a great, carrying sound they offer prayers.¹⁸

Five centuries earlier, the famous Chinese pilgrim Xuanzang wrote of the Bodhi Tree at Bodh Gayā in near identical terms:

The leaves wither not either in winter or summer, but they remain shining and glistening all the year round without change. . . . [T]he princes of different countries and the religious multitude from different quarters assemble by thousands and ten thousands unbidden, and bathe (the roots) with scented water and perfumed milk; whilst they raise the sounds of music and scatter flowers and perfumes, and whilst the light of day is continued by the burning torches, they offer their religious gifts.¹⁹

Other specific details about Buddhist India found in Ra Lotsāwa's *namthar* cannot have been observed by him and appear instead to derive from accounts like that of Xuanzang²⁰ or from other Buddhist sources of an earlier period.²¹ It is also worth mentioning that, like many *namthar*, which are frequently but incorrectly taken to represent eyewitness narratives, this account was only written down much later from hearsay, in this case thirdhand, by a disciple of a disciple of Ra Lotsāwa.²² This particular example is enough to point out here the remarkably artificial and concocted or even falsified nature of early Tibetan *namthar* accounts of India as a holy land of Buddhism.

The Early Pilgrims

The earliest Tibetan travellers described in our sources, those departing between the late tenth and the mid-twelfth centuries,²³ did not belong to any of the strongly defined and institutionalized schools or sects that we normally associate with Tibetan Buddhism. These had yet to come into existence and take on a clear institutional form in the dynamic religious context which then prevailed in Tibet. Thus, the motivations and experiences of many early travellers must be understood more as reflecting those of devoted, curious, and determined individuals—and the teachers or rulers who often dispatched them—rather than as representing any sectarian positions. However, the situation soon changed, and even slightly later Tibetan travellers to India had more polemical and sectarian positions implicit in their missions. The Chag Lotsāwa, Chöjepal (1197–1264), for example, who went to India in 1234, was specifically armed with lists of both Tibetan texts translated from Sanskrit and those known as “revealed treasures” in Tibet in order to discover which were known in India and which were not.

Such an investigation could be used to critically challenge the legitimacy of some of the newly forming Tibetan religious lineages and the texts they claimed as being authentically Buddhist, that is, of Indian origin.²⁴

The individual stories of these earliest Tibetan religious travellers do vary considerably. They are not only those of the famous *lotsāwas* setting off on determined missions to translate the Buddhist teachings in India which we so often read about in modern scholarly surveys or popular accounts of Tibet. Quite a few pilgrims undertook the journey to India purely due to their own personal concerns, and their translation work may or may not have followed from this. Latö Marpo (eleventh century), for example, went to India after he and some friends polluted the underworld spirits believed to cause death through leprosy. When his friends all died of the disease in Tibet, fearing for his own life he sought some kind of powerful purificatory religious practice from Buddhist teachers in India which might cure and save him.²⁵ Marpa Lotsāwa, Chökyi Lodro (1002/1012–97), went to India to study Buddhism of his own free will but partly on financial grounds. Tradition has it that since his teacher Drokmi Lotsāwa, Shākya Yeshe (993–1077?), charged such high fees for imparting only a little Buddhist knowledge, it seemed worthwhile to Marpa to organize his own journey for personal study in India.²⁶ Other pilgrim-travellers were actually dispatched to India by their superiors. Drokmi Lotsāwa and his companion Taglo Shönu Tsondrü were ordered to travel to India by high-ranking clerics in the service of the rulers of western Tibet. But while Drokmi studied widely with Indian teachers and became an accomplished translator, Taglo spent his time at the great Mahābodhi shrine of Bodh Gayā, performing circumambulations there as a devout pilgrim.²⁷ Still other Tibetan travellers went to India to undertake very specific missions, often with the sole intention of inviting preeminent Buddhist teachers to travel back to Tibet with them. The journey by Nagtso Lotsāwa to the monastery of Vikramaśilā and to Bodh Gayā was undertaken in order to invite the Indian monk Atiśa Dīpaṃkara Śrījñāna (b. 972/982) to visit and teach in western Tibet.²⁸ The vast majority of early Tibetan pilgrims to India were male, and although one or two female travellers are mentioned they often appear in the company of men. This was the case with Dzedden Öchag (eleventh century), the consort of Drokmi Lotsāwa, who accompanied her male partner on his second journey to India.²⁹ Further accounts describe other individual Tibetans who dearly wished to go to India at this time but who were prevented from making the journey for various reasons.³⁰

Despite the individual nature of these early visits to India, there are, to be sure, a few common cultural elements that frequently reappear in

the accounts. Several of these developed into literary clichés over time, although they frequently also reflect conditions which we know prevailed during the period. For instance, one topic for which there are abundant references in the early narratives is that nearly all religious travellers from Tibet carried substantial quantities of gold with them, in order to help achieve their twin goals of study and worship while in India.³¹ Since ancient times in India, gold was the universally acceptable currency among Indian teachers,³² and it was also one fairly readily available to the Tibetans. There are even popular Tibetan sayings that poignantly capture this point: “To venture to India wealth is needed. To fill sausages blood is needed.”³³ Thus, for example, the early religious travellers Khyungpo Neljor (b. 978/990) and Marpa Lotsāwa both made a special point of visiting gold mines in Tibet and exchanging their material assets for gold dust before departing in search of Buddhist sites and teachers in India. The Tengpa Lotsāwa, Tshultrim Chungne (1107–90), had no gold when he desired to visit India, so he worked as a copyist of Buddhist manuscripts in order to earn enough to cover the payments he expected to make during his journey there. During Tengpa Lotsāwa’s long sojourn in India his father passed away back home in Tibet, and his brother travelled all the way to Bodh Gayā in order to deliver to him the large quantity of gold that was equal to his share of the family inheritance.³⁴

Another common and very closely related theme in the accounts is the ever-present threat of robbery and assault faced by Tibetan travellers in India, who were probably targeted precisely because they were known to carry quantities of gold!³⁵ Such events must have been terrible experiences, and the Indian bandits or highwaymen who waylaid Tibetan travellers are known by a special term in the early accounts, one not attested in the lexicons, which means something like “robbers who delight in death.”³⁶ Yet it is well to recall that all the above details are those found in *namthar*, where the exact line between reality, exaggeration, and fantasy is often impossible to determine.

Most Tibetan accounts of pilgrimages to India are also replete with a stock range of hagiographic narrative themes that serve no other purpose than to boldly glorify their lama subjects. We often find that Buddhist India is reduced to a mere backdrop, much like a theatre set—albeit a glorious one—or a set of props in order to showcase the superior religious abilities which the Tibetan travellers are credited with possessing. The beginnings of this trend toward Indian Buddhist sites as stage settings for Buddhist quest or liberation narratives was already apparent in the early

Tibetan texts found at Dunhuang, introduced briefly in chapter 2. One of the most common of these glorificatory themes found in the sources is the use of Tantric special powers (*siddhi*) by Tibetan protagonists on pilgrimage to India. Such powers are deployed in order to overcome a wide range of dangerous local Indian deities and demons or wild animals, on the one hand, and threatening human agents, such as hostile Hindus and bandits, on the other.³⁷

Tibetan Buddhist India on the Ground

Since India gradually became a type of religious territory or holy land for the Buddhists of Tibet during the eleventh to thirteenth centuries, we should examine how they actually began to realize this in ritual terms, by way, that is, of pilgrimage itineraries to its Buddhist sites. What extent or territory did Buddhist India actually cover for the early Tibetan Buddhist pilgrims? What to them were its most important sites, and did these sites form a network or a hierarchy of sorts? While bearing in mind the unique nature and often unverifiable contents of the sources we have to work with, we can begin to answer these questions by surveying a wide variety of the surviving itineraries of Tibetan religious journeys to India prior to 1300.³⁸

Figure 3.1 presents most of the major, identifiable Buddhist destinations claimed to have been visited by early Tibetan pilgrims in India, and their individual itineraries provide us with an overall picture of what "India" meant to Tibetan experience at the time. The Buddhist India in which all these sites were located was always identified in general as the land of Gyagar to the south (*rgya gar lho phyogs*), as it had been during the imperial era. There is also common agreement that Gyagar was constituted by the flat and expansive, low-altitude topography of the Indian plains (*rgya thang*, *rgya 'ding/gting*, or *thang khab*) which began where the lower foothills and outlying ranges of the Himalayas came completely to an end. Some travelers also used cultural definitions, stating for example that they arrived in the "country of Sanskrit" (*Nā ga ri'i gling*) when reaching the flat Indian plains. All early Tibetan religious travellers departed from Tibet toward the south or west in order to reach Buddhist India, and in so doing they had to first pass through a zone of intermediate or border countries which were not part of Gyagar and which had their own distinctive Tibetan designations. One important set of access points fell within the general region covered today by the Nepal Himalaya and its lower foothills descending to the Terai. This whole area was known as Lhobel (*lHo bal*), while its

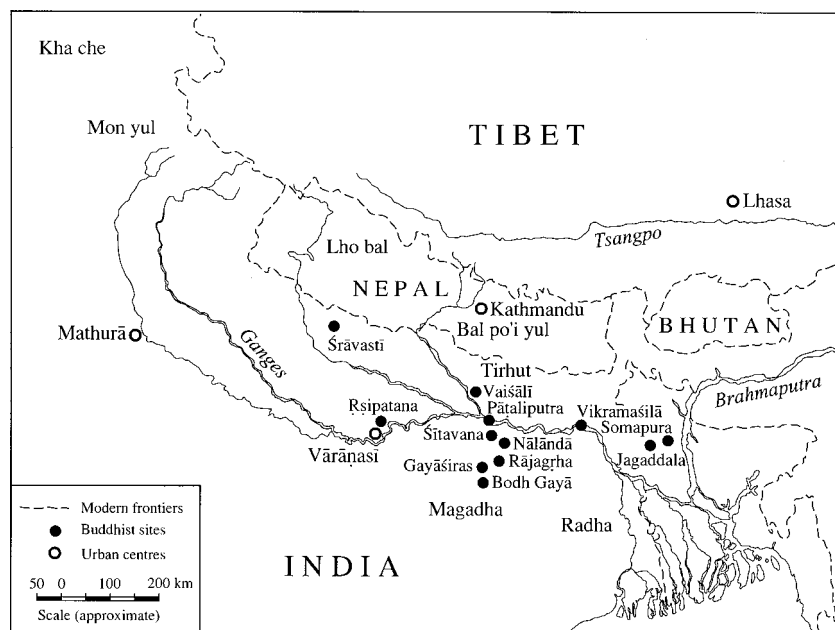


Figure 3.1. Tibetan Buddhist experience of India prior to 1300 CE.

Drawn by Norma Schulz and Toni Huber.

most important cultural centre was the present Kathmandu Valley, variously named Belyül or Belpoe Yül (Bal yul, Bal po'i yul) or the "low/central region" of Belpo or Belyül (Bal po'i mthil, Bal yul mthil).³⁹ Other travellers reached Gyagar via the Tibetan Buddhist highland regions of the western Himalayas, which today fall mainly within the modern Indian states of Himachal Pradesh and Kashmir.⁴⁰ The lower hill country of this zone was known as the Land of Mon (Mon yul), which extended down to the plains where Gyagar began.⁴¹ Further to the west was Khachay (Kha che), which was roughly equivalent to much of present-day Kashmir and also considered to be a different country from Gyagar.⁴²

Most early Tibetan pilgrims in India tended to visit several popular individual sites, thus linking certain Buddhist places together into small networks before returning home. While Bodh Gayā and Nālandā were frequent destinations, others sites, such as Śrāvastī or the Jagaddala *viḥāra* in Varendra, only have one or two recorded Tibetan visits over the entire three centuries with which we are concerned. Tibetan travellers of the day also appear to have been extremely goal-oriented, focusing their interests almost exclusively upon specific Buddhist sites and merely transiting

through other Indian districts and towns in order to reach their Buddhist destinations. This fact is certainly reflected in the contemporary poverty of Tibetan information about almost anything else in India which was not related to the Buddhist sites and teachers which pilgrims visited.⁴³

Virtually all early Tibetan destinations in India were confined to a limited area of the north Indian plains within the Middle Ganges region (fig. 3.1). Today this area coincides primarily with the Indian state of Bihar but also includes the eastern fringes of Uttar Pradesh, parts of far western and northern West Bengal, and a few localities of northern Bangladesh. The area was tightly defined, so that when Tibetans visited the western parts of what they later called Bhaṅgala, or Bengal, they clearly stated they were going to “eastern Gyagar.” Thus, geographically, the Gyagar of Tibetan pilgrims’ experience and descriptions was actually restricted to a very small part of the Indian subcontinent as a whole. Historically, this same region was one generally encompassing most of the ancient lands of the Buddha Śākyamuni’s traditional life story plus the later Gupta-era kingdoms of Magadha and Gauda. Politically, this same area lay mainly within the realm of the western Pāla dynasty but also overlapped the fringes of Gāhaḍavāla territory to the west and that of the Senas to the southeast—until, that is, they all succumbed finally to Ghaznavid, Ghūrid, and Mamlūk raids and conquests. Thus, it is clear that early Tibetan pilgrims only travelled within a very few of the dozens of political and cultural entities that existed across the Indian subcontinent at the time, and their firsthand knowledge of South Asia’s enormous diversity was therefore extremely narrow.

Although Tibetans appear to have had virtually no experience of any greater India before 1300, there are one or two claims of early pilgrim travellers having ventured further southward or westward. Unfortunately, these records are problematic and the destinations they mention have either remained unidentified or are ill-defined and disputed. If such journeys indeed occurred they certainly represent marginal cases during the period in question.⁴⁴

As for the view of Gyagar held by Tibetans from afar, that is, by those who never ventured out of Tibet themselves during the period, the image of India was more or less coincident with what the pilgrimage accounts describe. For instance, in the latter decades of the twelfth century, Lama Shang (1123–93) was able to represent “the whole of Gyagar” (*rgya gar thams cad*)—albeit with somewhat confused orientations—as in figure 3.2.⁴⁵

Uḍḍiyāna, a famed land of Tantric Buddhist teachings for Tibetans which is usually regarded as a separate country from Gyagar far to the

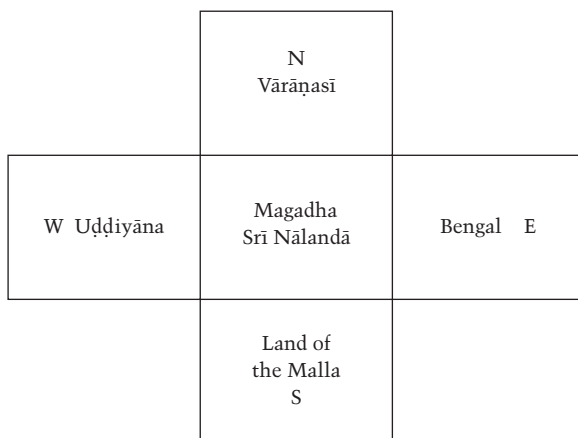


Figure 3.2. India according to Lama Shang.

west, is clearly an anomaly here and was probably added to complete the list of important Buddhist origin places known by Lama Shang.

The “Eight Great Holy Places” and Tibetan Pilgrimage

In chapter 1, I described a scheme of eight sites of the Buddha’s life story known as the “eight great holy places” (*aṣṭamahāsthāna*) and discussed its status in both the history of Buddhist studies scholarship and modern Buddhism. My contention was that although this grouping of eight sites has been reified by modern scholars and practitioners alike as an ancient and traditional network of Buddhist pilgrimage practice, and thus one that is worthy of being “revived” again for practice today, in reality there is no historical basis for this assumption. I also pointed out that all the art historical and textual evidence put forward to support the case for the “eight great holy places” being an important, traditional pilgrimage network in India among earlier Buddhists, was current during the Pāla period of east Indian history. Much of this same period is covered by our survey of early Tibetan pilgrimage to India, and virtually all Tibetan pilgrims to India up until and during the thirteenth century actually travelled within the Pāla realms and, after the 1160s, what we should more accurately designate as their former realms. What is more, the Tibetans of the period also knew of the same scheme of “eight great holy places” from Buddhist textual sources which they had obtained and translated.⁴⁶ Thus, we should be in a strong position

to test for, first, the now common assumption about the importance of the “eight great holy places” as a living pilgrimage tradition practiced by real Buddhists in an Indian past, and, second, a precise historical period when we know the scheme was current in Buddhist artworks and texts.

Figure 3.3 records Tibetan visits to sites included in the scheme of “eight great holy places” over a three-century period, with Xuanzang’s visits for comparison. These Tibetan pilgrims’ itineraries were chosen specifically from among all the possible early accounts because these pilgrims actually visited two or more of the eight sites. There are so few of them represented here because, by comparison, most other pilgrims are recorded as having visited only one of the eight sites.

It is clear that Tibetans on pilgrimage in India during the Pāla and immediate post-Pāla period simply made no priority of visiting the eight sites, nor is there any record of them attempting but failing to reach those sites which were left unvisited. This obvious lack of real ritual interest in the “eight great holy places” on the part of Tibetan pilgrims may appear surprising when we consider that the phrase *aṣṭamahāsthāna* (*gnas chen po brgyad* in Tibetan) was also frequently invoked in relation to Buddhist India in early native Tibetan Buddhist works of the same period.⁴⁷ How are we to understand this apparently conflicting data about the claimed importance of the “eight great holy places” in India based upon texts and works of art, on the one hand, and the evidence of actual Tibetan ritual

Eight places of the Buddha	Xuanzang (629–645)	Ra Lotsāwa (mid- 11th cent.)	Pelchen Galo (1110s–1120s)	Chag Lotsāwa (1234–36)	Orgyenpa (1261)
Lumbinī	■				
Bodh Gayā	■	■	■	■	■
Sārnāth	■	■			
Kuśinagar	■				
Śrāvastī	■		■		
Rājagṛha	■		■	■	
Vaiśālī	■	■		■	
Sāṃkāśya	■				

Figure 3.3. Early Tibetan pilgrimage to the eight places of the Buddha.

practice, on the other? My answer is that, first, the Tibetans actually read the Buddhist literature they had imported and translated from other languages, and they understood what it was telling them. The versions of the *Aṣṭamahāsthānacaitya-stotra* which they possessed contain no ritual vocabulary of pilgrimage, only one of commemoration and memorialization, something that can be accomplished without necessarily going anywhere. Second, their use of the phrase *aṣṭamahāsthāna/gnas chen po brgyad* in their own texts was often entirely free of reference to the associated *stūpas* and life events of the Buddha to which it is indexed elsewhere. For many Tibetan authors, the expression “eight great holy places” came to function as an empty category or a type of shorthand—albeit an abstract one lacking in clarity or consensus since there were many different versions of the *aṣṭamahāsthāna* scheme circulating in Tibet—and it was used to refer to the geography of the Indian Buddhist holy land or, even more generally, to Buddhist India itself.⁴⁸ Such a shorthand or empty category is nothing unique in Buddhist traditions. Richard Gombrich has pointed out that often when the expression “sixteen great countries” (*ṣoḍaśa mahājanapada*) appears in certain Buddhist writings it “seems to have been almost a technical term.”⁴⁹ Finally, without needing to resort to any speculation, we have another very good reason to explain why early Tibetan pilgrims in India were not interested in the “eight great holy places” associated with the Buddha’s legend. As pilgrims to late Buddhist India, their attention was also often focused upon places specifically associated with Indian Vajrayāna or Tantric Buddhism, its cult sites and its gurus, and on the existing monastic centres at which Tantric teachings could be obtained (see chap. 4).

The evidence about early Tibetan pilgrimage in India and the status of the “eight great holy places” serve to remind us yet again of the inherent difficulties in attempting to reconstruct the real life activities of past religious worlds purely on the basis of reading prescriptive texts and interpreting surviving works of art.

A New Identity for India

One of the many results of the first wave of Tibetan pilgrimages to India was the glorified redefinition of India in Tibet using exclusively Buddhist representations. This redefinition of India was constructed in relation to Tibet itself, and it generated new orders of geographical and cosmological thinking among the Buddhist societies of the Tibetan plateau.

All of the itineraries of earlier Tibetan religious travellers employ the

ancient ethnogeographic referents “Gyagar” or “Gyagar to the south” for India. It is not until the early thirteenth century that we find alternative religious terminologies and definitions being commonly used in indigenous Tibetan literature in order to explicitly designate India as a Buddhist “holy land.” Like the name “Gyagar” itself, these Buddhist alternatives have persisted in use to the present day. The most important is the designation “Phagpaé Yül” (‘Phags pa’i yul), most often abbreviated as “Phagyül” (‘Phags yul), which in native Tibetan works has been consistently applied to India in general, and the region around Magadha in particular, since the thirteenth century.

The founding Drigung Lama, Jigten Gampo (1143–1217), still referred to “Gyagar” and Magadha in the late twelfth or early thirteenth centuries, as did his pupil Lama Shang when writing some of the earliest lineage biographies of the Kagyüpa school which contain accounts of Tibetan journeys to India.⁵⁰ The earliest native Tibetan usages of “Phagpaé Yül” for “India” of which I am currently aware—and there are most probably other earlier examples—are those found in the thirteenth-century works of the Sakya Pandita, Kunga Gyaltsen (1182–1251).⁵¹ The earlier Sakyapa historical works by Sakya Pandita’s uncles, such as those written in 1167 by Sonam Tsemo (1142–82) and during the late 1100s or early 1200s by Dakpa Gyaltsen (1146–1216), use the expressions “Gyagar,” “Central Land” (Madhyadeśa, Yul dbus), and Magadha when discussing India.⁵²

It is worth noting here that Sakya Pandita himself never once journeyed to India, although he had regular contact with a series of Indian Buddhist missionaries who visited and resided in Tibet, and he was truly one of their most thoroughly converted and able students. Sakya Pandita and his Tibetan contemporaries in twelfth- and thirteenth-century Tibet were imbibing a certain Indian discourse about India as a Buddhist territory through their direct contacts with South Asian scholars and texts, and they were also creating or elaborating a particular Tibetan discourse about India as a Buddhist holy land. India was viewed by such persons quite naturally as a place of Buddhist origins, but therefore also as a place of special qualities when compared with their Tibetan homeland. In Buddhist terms, India was the source of all which was superior, but also most importantly all that was to be defined as authentic, and this very point became increasingly important polemically as different lineages and types of Tibetan Buddhism began to differentiate from one another during the period. Tibetans thus supplemented their traditional ethnogeographic designation for India with a new referent that signified the very special Buddhist status that India had begun to strongly and rapidly acquire in Tibet.

"Phagpaé Yül" or "Phagyül" is a Tibetan translation of the Sanskrit "Āryadeśa" or its close cognate "Āryabhūmi."⁵³ The name can be rendered literally either as the "Land of the Noble/Superior Ones" or "Land which is Noble/Superior." The English expression "holy land" is also an equally serviceable translation in most instances where the Tibetan occurs. In Tibetan understanding, the *ārya*- (*'phags pa*) component of "Phagyül" has both a general and a specific sense. Generally, it refers to India as the land of the Āryans ("Āryadeśa"), which in the Buddhist commentaries refers to a land whose virtuous inhabitants have seen the truth directly. According to some Tibetan Buddhist historians, what makes the inhabitants of India "noble," "superior" or "sublime," and "holy" is that they were originally descended from the gods.⁵⁴ More specifically, in Tibetan Buddhist culture the *ārya*- component of "Phagyül" refers to enlightened beings, that is, the *buddhas* and *bodhisattvas* who were born, attained awakening, and passed completely beyond suffering in India. Therefore, a common Tibetan synonym for "Phagyül" is "Phagtrung" (*'Phags 'khrungs*), meaning "Birth [place of the] Noble/Superior [Ones]." "Phagyül" in Tibetan also defines India as the land of origin of the Buddhist religion, meaning that it is therefore superior to all other lands.⁵⁵

These classical terms for and definitions of India have remained the stock-in-trade of both Tibet's Buddhist elite and laity. Thus, the present Dalai Lama often makes public statements such as: "For Tibetans, India is a higher (Arya) land. Many higher beings came from this land."⁵⁶ In more recent Tibetan works, we find the term "Phagyül" carefully defined as "the field where there exist reliquary shrines possessing a nucleus of [the Buddha's] relics," in order to capture the idea of a territory containing a related collection or network of sacred sites based upon the corporeal remains of the Buddha.⁵⁷ Present-day Tibetan religious leaders writing and speaking in English have widely adopted the standard expression "holy land" as their translation of "Phagyül,"⁵⁸ and contemporary Western scholars writing on Tibet have also adopted the same general usage.⁵⁹

Tibetan Buddhists only began to refer to India as Phagyül—their "holy land"—because, like other Buddhists, and like followers of other religions who also recognize their own very special religious territories, they had started to accept, and to take for granted, a particular cosmology. It was a cosmology in which India was presented as the most important place in the universe. Tibetan ideas in this case were absorbed directly from classical Buddhist literature, with perhaps the most important being the notion of India as the "centre of the world." This major transition in cosmological

thinking and its attendant geographical conceptions marks, as clearly as any other indicator, the transformation of Tibetan civilization into a Buddhist one.

Shifting the Centre of the World

In the cultures of other historical religions a city, usually a holy city or urbanized shrine complex, has often come to be viewed as the centre of the world. In medieval Europe, Jerusalem was taken to be the “navel of the world,” while adherents of Islam regard Mecca as the centre of the earth. On the cosmic level, at least, Buddhism is no exception to this pattern. In the *Abhidharmakośa* world system, the highest divine city of Sudarśana is located at the centre of the summit of Meru, the cosmic mountain. However, the Buddhist idea of centrality in the geographical world-space of human life is particularly defined in terms of the practice of religion and human spiritual achievement. On the one hand, in common with Jerusalem and Mecca, the centre of the Buddhist holy land is the centre of the world. This applied to both the “Central Region” (Madhyadeśa) of India and the ancient country of Magadha in the Gangetic Basin in general. On the other hand, the Buddhist idea of the centre of the world was not focused upon a city or urban centre. Rather, it applied especially to the Vajrāsana or “diamond seat” of the Buddha at Bodh Gayā, as the “precise site of the Buddha’s awakening” (*bodhimaṇḍala*), the pinnacle of human spiritual achievement according to Buddhism.

According to various Buddhist narratives, the Vajrāsana as the site of awakening is not only the central reference point of space but also of time. The Vajrāsana is the origin point of the religion, but it is also the exact point of its ending. Certain Buddhist accounts of the final degeneration of the Dharma or teachings of the Buddha state that at the very end of the cosmos, all the relics of the Buddha—his teeth, hair, bones, and fingernails—will magically break out of their reliquaries and travel back to the Vajrāsana and reassemble one last time to be worshipped there by the gods, before igniting and burning to nothing.⁶⁰ The most profound image of the utter centrality of this spot is that, with the total destruction of the cosmos at the end of each world-cycle, the Vajrāsana itself remains completely unaffected, floating in space as the “seed point” for the emergence of enlightenment in the new future cosmos.⁶¹

Just as ancient Indian Buddhists unequivocally and unhesitatingly placed their own most significant ritual and historical territory and sites

in India at the very centre of the universe and the world, so too did the ancient Tibetans place their own land at the centre. This early Tibetan view of Tibet itself at the centre is well expressed in a passage from a ninth-century document written in Old Tibetan:

This centre of heaven / This core of the earth / This heart of the world
/ Fenced round by mountains / This headland of all rivers / Where the
peaks are high and the land is pure / A country so good / Where men are
born as sages and heroes / And act according to good laws / . . .⁶²

The proud and self-confident image of world-centredness expressed here resonates with what we also know of other aspects of ancient Tibetan culture, such as its territorial cults and origin myths. Tibetans viewing themselves at the centre of the world is not something found only in ancient Tibetan culture. Dan Martin has recently demonstrated that during the early centuries of the emergence of the organized Bön religion, there was a clear preference among certain thinkers to place Tibet at the centre of the world as they understood it.⁶³ This preference has also resurfaced occasionally among other local individuals or groups throughout Tibetan cultural history.⁶⁴ Yet, with the conversion of Tibetans to Buddhism, an alternative Indian Buddhist notion of cosmic and world centrality was introduced into Tibetan thinking about one's self and one's land and their relative place in the universe. As we have just intimated, this competing sense of Indian centrality never completely erased the Tibetans' own ideas of themselves at the centre, although it did cause a massive displacement in the ways in which most Tibetans accepted their place in the world as members of a Buddhist civilization. India became the new centre of the world for Buddhist Tibetans, and they increasingly accepted it as their ultimate cosmological and geographical reference point.

Early in their conversion to Buddhism, the Tibetans adopted an Indocentric Buddhist ideal of world cosmology and geography directly from Indian texts and teachers.⁶⁵ When Buddhaguhya wrote the *Bhoṭ-āsvāmidāsalekha*, his purportedly late eighth-century letter to the Tibetan monarch and early patron of Buddhism in Tibet, Tree Songdetsen (r.754–97), he talked to the Tibetan ruler of “Madhyadeśa, the heart (or essence) of the southern cosmic continent.”⁶⁶ Tibetans duly recognized the Vajrāsana in conformity with such Buddhist models. They called it the centre or “navel” (*lte ba*) of the world conceived as Jambudvīpa, the southern cosmic continent. They also differentiated its qualities as a centre and identified it as being both the “geographical centre” (*sa tshigs*) and the “religious cen-

tre" (*chos tshigs*) of the world as well as of India.⁶⁷ In Tibetan, the Vajrāsana is also commonly referred to as the "essence of the earth" (*sa yi snying po*). The use by Tibetans of the name Vajrāsana, or Dorjeden in Tibetan translation, is both a geographical reference to the site of the Mahābodhi shrine at Bodh Gayā and a cosmological reference to the exact spot there at which the Buddha attained his awakening. With the Vajrāsana as the religious centre, surrounding Magadha and, by extension, India itself are viewed as places or territories endowed with certain essential qualities. Therefore, they are commonly defined as the "place of merit" (*puṇyabhūmi/bsod nams sa gzhi*) in the world, and hence as the preeminent location for a pilgrimage-based soteriology to be enacted.

Early Tibetan pilgrims to India who were familiar with Sanskrit returned with Indian Buddhist notions of centrality to report back to their fellow Tibetans. For instance, in the early thirteenth century, the Chag Lotsāwa returned from his sojourn in India and explained an etymology for the name "Magadha," rendered by the Tibetan translation "Ügyurchang" (dBus 'gyur 'chang):

In Tibetan the word means "holding that which became the centre." *Madhya* means "middle" and *ga-ti* "becoming." *Dharayati* means "holding." This country stretches from Vajrāsana towards the four quarters . . . and is the very centre of the world. The "middle" [*dbus*], as explained in the Doctrine, is that "where there is study, reflection, and meditation." A border region [*mtha' 'khob*] is characterized by the absence of study, etc.⁶⁸

Of course, there is a twin discourse about Buddhist India encapsulated in such explanations, which correlates cultural or religious and moral superiority with cosmo-geographical centrality (*dbus*) compared with the benighted state of the periphery (*mtha' 'khob*). Following these discourses, the Indian Vajrāsana in Magadha became enshrined for centuries to come in much Tibetan Buddhist thinking and writing about both the world in general and Tibet in particular. Specifically, the Vajrāsana became the conventional point of reference in a great many Tibetan Buddhist geographical descriptions. This reference point has been applied as much for contextualizing the greater entity "Tibet" itself as it has been for the relative positioning of many individual Tibetan localities.

Perhaps the earliest such Tibetan geographical indexing of their land in relation to the Vajrāsana occurs in the important late twelfth-century narrative compilation known as the *Mani Kambum* (*Ma ṇi bka' 'bum*). In its

anachronous glorification of the seventh-century Emperor Tree Songtsen (alias Songtsen Gampo) as an emanation of the *bodhisattva* of compassion Avalokiteśvara, the centre of Jambudvīpa is identified as the Vajrāsana while Tibet is located to the north of it.⁶⁹ When Sakya Pandita extensively eulogized the wonders of his own land by composing his youthful poem *Praises to Tibet* (*Bod yul la bsngags pa*) in the year 1200, he did not place Tibet at the centre of the world as might be expected. Rather, he could only refer to Tibet as being “to the north of the *bodhimaṇḍa* of Vajrāsana, a place amply beautified by the touch of Sugatas as numerous as the particles of the ocean.”⁷⁰ This convention is still applied today. In his history of Buddhism in Tibet published in 1992, the reincarnate lama Shingza Kelsang Chökyi Gyeltsen first introduces his country in the title of chapter 7 as “Snowy Tibet north of the Vajrāsana” (*rDo rje gdan gyi byang phyogs gangs can bod*). In doing so, he is quoting an earlier phrase used by the sixteenth-century Tibetan Buddhist polymath Pema Karpo (1527–92), although in the contemporary context this is probably not just a traditional Buddhist reference but also a conscious statement of Tibetan orientation toward India as opposed to China.⁷¹

Local Tibetan histories and geographies are no less oriented toward the Vajrāsana. In an account of the remote district of Shekar in western Tibet written in 1731, the author, Ngawang Kalden Gyatso, described the local holy mountain, Shekar Dorjeri, not with reference to the great Tibetan Buddhist centres of his own day in Lhasa, Tashilhunpo, or Sakya, nor to any other regional geographical features, but to the Vajrāsana itself: “One hundred *pagtse* to the north of the Vajrāsana, there is the Land of Snows, the land of Padmapāṇi. In this area there is Shekar Dorjeri of Rulag.”⁷² Similarly, a twentieth-century Sherpa account of the Mount Everest region of Shölung and Khumbu was written in Tibetan by Sangye Tenzin, a local lama. Sangye Tenzin knew that Western scientists had determined Mount Everest to be the world’s highest point, and so he stated: “The navel of the world is Vajrāsana in India, and its summit is this snow mountain Jomo Langma [i.e., Mount Everest]. On the southern flanks of it are Shölung and Khumbu.”⁷³

These usages are not merely literary conventions; they express the complete acceptance of a specific cosmological orientation and are also implicated in an entire system of geographical knowledge. Prior to the twentieth century, many of Tibet’s most knowledgeable Buddhist scholars unequivocally accepted the geographical centrality of the Vajrāsana. The Third Panchen Lama, Losang Pelden Yeshe (1738–80), who gathered a wealth of detailed geographical information about both India and the lands beyond,

considered the Vajrāsana in Magadha as both the undisputed geographical or physical (*sa tshigs*) and religious centre (*chos tshigs*) of the world.⁷⁴ Other scholar-lamas of the period, such as Zhuchen Tsultrim Rinchen (1697–1774), who wrote commentaries on the Tantric teachings, further reinforced this traditional view by incorporating sites like the Vajrāsana into schemes of Tantric ritual geography.⁷⁵ In the early nineteenth century, the Fourth Tsenpo Nomonhan gained a great deal of information about global geography from Chinese and European sources. But despite this new foreign knowledge, his Buddhist views on the world could not be shaken. He determined that, even though there were now no Buddhists in the holy land of Magadha, it was still the religious centre of the world, and that while it was not the geographical centre of either the world or of India, it was nevertheless the “central land” because it was stated to be so in many religious texts.⁷⁶

The Vajrāsana not only served as a more or less universal geographical reference point for Tibet and its localities, it also came to be used in more general Tibetan schemes for classifying religious geographies of pilgrimage. For example, in various pilgrimage and geographical texts we find the “five holy places” (*gnas chen lnga*) scheme (fig. 3.4) which mapped the most important sacred regions of Buddhist pilgrimage in the southern cosmic continent.

Thus, surrounding the Vajrāsana in Magadha at the centre were the mountain abode of Mañjuśrī on Wutai shan in China to the east, Avalokiteśvara’s island paradise on Potala to the south, Uḍḍiyāna

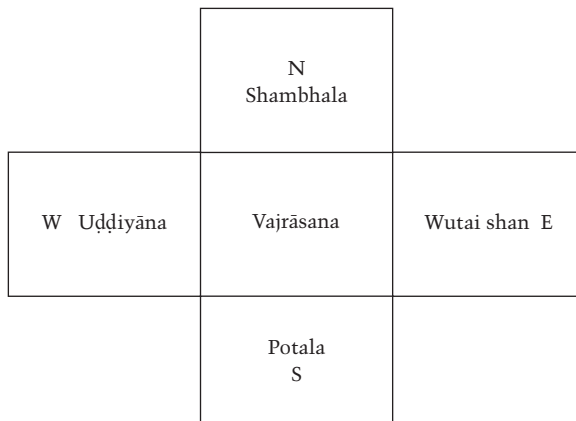


Figure 3.4. The five holy places scheme.

Tantric origins, to the west, and the millennial paradise of Shambhala to the north.⁷⁷

The cosmological and geographical centrality of the holy land of Buddhist India, and especially its central region, also entailed a strong discourse of cultural, moral, and human superiority. Indian Buddhist texts that the Tibetans translated contained explicit Indocentric references that were then available for use by Tibetan commentators if they so chose.⁷⁸ From quite early on, the Indian Buddhist attitude about India's cultural and human superiority was incorporated into new Tibetan Buddhist views of the world. The teacher Gampopa Sonam Rinchen (1079–1153) composed one of the earliest indigenous Tibetan systematic expositions of Buddhism, the *Jewel Ornament of Liberation* (*Thar pa rin po che'i rgyan*). In its second chapter, Gampopa introduced Tibetans to the Indian concept of the "precious human body" as the basis for the attainment of Buddhahood by the individual, and he discussed the best type of human birth as "to be born as a human being in Madhyadeśa," which he interpreted as "birth in the central country is birth in a land where one can depend upon holy persons."⁷⁹ Conversely, we find that authors or compilers of early Tibetan Buddhist histories sometimes portrayed Tibet as a backwater with "barbarian" qualities and "beyond the pale" (*mtha' 'khob*) in relation to the central superiority of India. When the Tibetans were confidently Buddhist, they of course portrayed themselves as an extension of this superiority and their non-Buddhist neighbours were then cast as the barbarians instead.⁸⁰

As non-Indian converts to the foreign religion of Buddhism, Tibetans were not alone in their adoption of the Indocentric Buddhist cosmology and world geography, although the acceptance of such attitudes was not always as thorough as in Tibet. One thinks here of the well-known ca. fifth-century Chinese Buddhist apologetic, the *Mou tzu*, with its astronomical proofs that India, not China, was indeed the true Middle Country, the centre of heaven and earth, the point of equilibrium and harmony.⁸¹ Cosmologies are, in their usual spatiotemporal vastness, ahistorical when compared with the shorter timescales of the unfolding of events in human history and territory. This is one feature that can allow them to remain dominant and unchallenged aspects of culture over long periods of time. However, the shifting of historical realities within the experience of a civilization can force challenges upon accepted cosmologies and their attendant geographies and cultural stereotypes. The acceptance of the Indocentric worldview was indeed robust and long-lived in the Tibetan case. However, the force of Tibetan historical realities eventually intruded and began return-

ing Tibet to the centre of some Tibetans' own Buddhist view of the world, as certain examples from the nineteenth century demonstrate very well.⁸²

Toward an Expanded Tibetan Holy Land in India

Considering all the evidence presented so far, there is no doubt that the geographical region which Tibetan Buddhists of the eleventh to thirteenth centuries treated and began to refer to as their "holy land," or Phagyül, was in fact remarkably conterminous with the minor kingdom of Magadha and a few adjacent areas during Pāla times. However, with only a very limited horizon of experience on the ground in India, Tibetan observers generally lacked a realistic geopolitical sense of the actual significance of Magadha in relation to the complex history and vast sociocultural geography of the Indian subcontinent as a whole. Rather, they had read of a grander Magadha in the ancient Buddhist texts, and this is what tended to define their vision of India/Gyagar. It is typical that, when the mid-eleventh-century pilgrimage to India by Ra Lotsāwa was recorded a century later in Tibet, its author gave a highly inflated description of Magadha as a "huge country of great extent," clearly referring to its seventh-century greatness under the later Gupta empire, and not at all to the modest collection of rural villages it had become by the time of the lama's visit.⁸³ In other words, back in Tibet, in spite of several centuries during which India was actually visited by Tibetan pilgrims, India appeared to be much more Buddhist than it ever was in reality during the period of Tibetan conversion to Buddhism. What is more, even grander Tibetan fantasies of an extensive Buddhist India at the subcontinental level began to develop from this time onward. How was this possible?

There were two cultural and historical factors operating at this time that caused the Tibetans to begin greatly expanding their total vision of India as a Buddhist holy land. The first of these was the actual demise of north Indian Buddhism within the areas habitually visited by Tibetans. The accounts of the last Tibetan pilgrims to journey through the region record glimpses of ongoing disruption and destruction at Buddhist sites, and a keen awareness of such events was also maintained by those who remained in Tibet.⁸⁴ Thus, Tibetans abandoned pilgrimage travel to the Middle Ganges region for practical reasons, and we currently know of no sound historical sources recording any Tibetan pilgrims making actual tours of the ancient Buddhist holy land in Magadha for nearly half a millennium, that is, from the end of the thirteenth until the mid-eighteenth

century. However, this did not mean that Tibetan Buddhist pilgrims abandoned India altogether or lost interest in it as a Buddhist place. Indeed, rather than going to the defunct territory of ancient Buddhism, they set out instead to the northwest and northeast of the Indian subcontinent in search of an Indian Buddhism they were convinced still existed there as well. Later Tibetan commentators were equally convinced that Buddhism also existed in many regions throughout the entire subcontinent. Exactly how and why this all occurred will be treated at length in part 2, "Reinventing the Holy Land in India." However, a second factor also radically changed Tibetan ideas about both India and Tibet as religious territories of Buddhism. This was the increasing knowledge and popularity among Tibetans of explicitly Tantric religious sites in India, sites that were mostly located well outside the area of Gyagar or traditional Magadha as Tibetans understood and experienced it. It is these new Tantric Buddhist geographies and Tantric visions of India in Tibet to which we will now turn our attention.



CHAPTER FOUR

Tantric Buddhist India and Its Tibetan Appropriation

By resorting to *pīṭha* or *upapīṭha*, people can become stainless. Wandering to them and examining their characteristics, one will become wise and free from conceptuality.

—*Samvarodaya-tantra* 9:25

Introduction

During the imperial era of Tibetan history, when peoples of the high plateau of Tibet began their slow conversion to and assimilation of Buddhism, the bulk of Buddhist practices, narratives, and doctrines that were reliably available to them were those of the Mainstream (or Hinayāna) and particularly Mahāyāna styles of Buddhism. By comparison, the Vajrayāna or Tantric Buddhist teachings were more marginally present in Tibet at this time.¹ Access to Tantric teachings during the imperial era was impeded, in part, due to careful controls established by a conservative Tibetan religiopolitical elite. Yet, in spite of certain degrees of rarity and restriction, it is evident that a culturally creative background interest in Indian Tantra did develop in imperial Tibet, and that it continued despite the widespread decline of Buddhist monasticism there following the disintegration of the empire during the ninth and tenth centuries.²

During the same period in India, Tantric systems were enjoying a remarkable flourishing. New and ever more sophisticated Tantric Buddhist ritual and narrative texts were being compiled, often in a complex relationship to other non-Buddhist systems of South Asian Tantra. Before the demise of all practicing schools of Indian Tantra by the thirteenth century, the Vajrayāna tradition culminated in the production of a sophisticated set of rituals and narratives set down in a class of texts known as the

Yoginītantras. Tibetans only attained any systematic and reliable transmission of these later Indian Vajrayāna traditions after a series of Tibetan scholars had worked to carefully translate and introduce the *Yoginītantras* into Tibet with the aid of Kashmiri, Indian, and Nepalese collaborators as a part of the “later propagation of Buddhist teaching” in Tibet. The rapidly developing Tibetan Buddhist lineages or schools which were forming during this second major phase of Tibetan conversion to Buddhism became known as the “New Ones” (*gSar ma pa*). This was because they based their claims of legitimacy and authenticity upon “new” (*gsar ma*) translations of texts—especially Tantras—which were being made from Sanskrit originals claimed to be extant and in use in India. The *Yoginītantras* quickly became the centrepiece of higher religious practice in most of these new Tibetan Buddhist lineages, and they have remained so up until the present day.

It was also by way of their introduction to the *Yoginītantras* at this time that Tibetan students of Tantra first became acquainted with a network of Indian holy places which were totally novel for them. Indeed, these same holy places were unprecedented in the history of Buddhism itself. This unique Buddhist category of holy place was that of the *pīṭha*, literally meaning a “seat” or “footstool,” or also a “raised altar” or “mound.” Most important for Tibetan religious culture, the *pīṭha* were entirely different in definition and location from the pilgrimage sites of the ancient Buddhist holy land in the Middle Ganges region, which the Tibetans had already come to know and accept. Over time, the Tibetan Buddhist cultural relationship with the *pīṭha* sites was to become as important—if not even more important—as that with the ancient Buddhist holy land itself. In this chapter, I will introduce the *pīṭha* sites as the Buddhists of Tibet have come to know, understand, and engage with them as a particular construction of place. I will demonstrate that the complex origins and nature of the Indian cult of the *pīṭha*, together with its specific transmission to and acceptance in Tibet, provided the basis for novel types of interpretations of the system by Tibetan agents. Tibetan acquisition of the *pīṭha* cult was also an important factor in their development of a new and far more extensive, subcontinental vision of India as Buddhist holy ground. Moreover, the thorough appropriation of this Indian scheme of sacred geography contributed to the alternative creation of a new type of Tantric Buddhist geography in Tibet itself.

Buddhist Tantric Geography

In the Indian religious context, the term *pīṭha* has a number of different and potentially confusing meanings. Conventionally, *pīṭha* can refer to

holy places in the sacred geography of India whose mythological origins where often first signalled in epic and Purāṇic narratives, and which are especially associated with worship of the great goddess in her different forms within the Śākta and Śaiva systems. The term was also used to classify scriptural “collections” as classes of Āgamas, such as the Vidyāpīṭha Tantras of Kashmir Śaivism.³ In Indian Tantra, *pīṭha* are referred to as both external geographical sites and internal subtle locations (*cakra* or *nāḍī*) within the practitioner’s body, and both are described as being “seats of revelation” and “places of concentration.” The Buddhist *Yoginītantras* discuss the *pīṭha* as the “abodes”—or *né* (*gnas*) in Tibetan—of initiatory goddesses known as *ḍākinī* and *yoginī* who are ritually associated with and thought to be emanations of the principal Tantric deity who is the object of the meditational rite (*sādhana*). The *pīṭha* are literally described as meeting places where male and female partners can come together and engage in rites, whether this be externally and physically or internally and mystically realized. Concerning the efficacy and religious benefits of ritual resort to the *pīṭha*, some texts stress that the practitioner becomes stainless, wise, and free from delusion, and also that, at these sites and in a state free from fear, special powers or attainments (*siddhi*) can be quickly obtained.⁴

When Tibetans first obtained knowledge of the *pīṭha* as a type of holy place by way of the *Yoginītantras*, contemporary non-Buddhist Indian Tantric schools had already refined their intentional use of the term *pīṭha* in the context of advanced Tantric practice. By the early eleventh century, for example, systems which shared much in common with the Buddhist *Yoginītantras*, such as Trika Śaivism, had rejected the external aspects of the Kāpālika cult of the cremation grounds and opted instead for a very marked mystical internalization of practice.⁵ This is reflected in important texts such as the *Tantrāloka* of Abhinavagupta (late tenth and early eleventh century), in which the *pīṭha* are interpreted as being a purely internal feature of the subtle body of the practitioner, more exclusively equated with the energy centres or *cakra*.⁶ Yet, the Buddhist *Yoginītantras*, such as the *Samvara-tantra* corpus which became of central importance to the Tibetans, continued to present the *pīṭha* in a dual manner: as being external cult sites (*bāhyapīṭha*) of specialized pilgrimage which also had an internal (*nāḍīsthāna*) equivalent within the yogin’s body during meditational practices. The point to be emphasized here is that, regardless of what the Indian texts may have intended or what Indian practitioners may have actually done, we do know for certain that over the centuries Tibetan interpreters consistently understood the *pīṭha* as a type of Tantric Buddhist site or place precisely in terms of this dual external and internal ritual function.

Moreover, as if to place emphasis upon the external function and understanding of such sites, in Classical Tibetan religious language the term *pīṭha* was translated as *né* (*gnas*), meaning “dwelling/abode” or “place” (from the Sanskrit *sthāna*), that is, the abode or place of a deity or of enlightened being. It thus became synonymous with the more general term—also *né* (*gnas*)—that was used universally from about the eleventh century onward for the conventional concept of a “holy place” of pilgrimage in Tibetan Buddhism.⁷ This is perhaps highly significant when we consider below the ways in which Tibetans creatively engaged with the *pīṭha* as sites of religious practice.

The Tantric *pīṭha* sites were introduced to Tibetan religious practitioners in specific chapters of the Buddhist *Yoginītantras* and the Indian commentaries upon these core teachings and, as we will discuss below, also by way of the cult of the Buddhist Siddhas and through contacts with various Indian teachers. In the texts, the *pīṭha* are frequently found mentioned as lists or catalogues of place names, most commonly, but not exclusively, twenty-four in number.⁸ Generally, the names of *pīṭha* in these lists correspond with sites and regions which can be identified throughout the geography of subcontinental India, although some names are obscure and others are situated at multiple geographical locations throughout historical time. Tantric theory and practice concerning the Vajrayāna *pīṭha* is rather complex and esoteric, but for our present discussion the most important factor is that all *pīṭha* share certain qualities or attributes, and they exist as an integrated network of related sites which can be expressed in different ways. Thus, the *pīṭha* network can be manifest at alternate (but implicated) levels of reality: in cosmic space; in the geographical world; within the human body; and symbolised in the form of a psychocosmogram or mandala.

The cosmological and geographical setting for the Vajrayāna *pīṭha* network was clearly conceived on a grander scale than both the ancient Buddhist holy land and also the limited vision of “India” or Gyagar which the Tibetans had come to know of and actually visit. The Tantras locate the *pīṭha* in cosmographic space, that is, throughout Jambudvīpa, the southern cosmic continent according to Buddhist cosmology. Subcontinental India is clearly imagined as constituting the major part of Jambudvīpa, with the “Middle Region” or Madhyadeśa being explicitly mentioned in some texts as its most auspicious, central zone. This latter point is curious since virtually none of the *pīṭha* sites listed in the *Yoginītantras* are actually located in Madhyadeśa as this territory is usually understood by the Tibetans, although the reasons for this will soon become clear. The name lists of *pīṭha*

can also be further subdivided, depending upon the individual Tantras or their commentaries, into a number of categories of sites. One of the more important elaborations of the system in the history of Tibetan Buddhism is the development of references to the *pīṭha*'s having a set of parallel sites within the subtle yogic body of the practitioner and thus being correlated systematically with body parts.

The network of twenty-four *pīṭha* sites as a whole described what the Tibetans often referred to as the *vajrakāya* or "adamantine body." This "body" is conceivable as both an internal and an external projection, and it is often represented ritually as a psychocosmogram or mandala, with different planes or levels of reference. Thus, the adamantine body mandala of the *Samvara-tantra* system can be appreciated on three different planes, with eight *pīṭha* of the total of twenty-four arrayed around each plane in specific directions (fig. 4.1).⁹ If this mandala is used to refer to an internal projection (often called *kāya-maṇḍala*) of the adamantine body system, these three planes represent the respective body (*kāya*), speech (*vāc*), and mind (*citta*) aspects of the practitioner's psychophysical person. Furthermore, within the frame of reference of the psychic body of the meditator or yogi, the network of internal *pīṭha* are identifiable with parts of the human body through which important psychic energy channels (*nāḍī*) pass or form complex arrays. Thus, according to the influential *Samvara-tantra* scheme, we find it stated that the *pīṭha* of Rāmeśvara is the point between the eyes/eyebrows, the *pīṭha* of Godāvarī is the left ear, Himālaya is the genitals/penis, Kulutā is both knees, and so on (fig. 4.2).¹⁰ As a meditator, it is possible to internally "visit" or transit all the *pīṭha* within the body by circulating psychic energy (*prāṇa*) around the subtle channels while engaged in a session of yoga.

Externally, the adamantine body is projected outward onto the cosmos and the geography of subcontinental India itself. This enormous, macrocosmic "body" is also envisioned as a three-levelled mandala with a spatial hierarchy, having eight *pīṭha* arrayed above in the heavens, a further eight upon the surface of the earth, and finally eight located underground (fig. 4.1). It should be noted that this system is largely ideal in terms of the directional array of many *pīṭha* as they are represented around the mandala. If the names in the texts are taken to refer to known geographical sites, together with the locations they are given relative to the cardinal directions, the arrangement does not always come close to their actual and commonly accepted positions in Indian historical geography. If one considers the directional locations and the order given for the *pīṭha* around the mandala in the *Samvarodaya-tantra* (fig. 4.1), the geographical inconsistencies

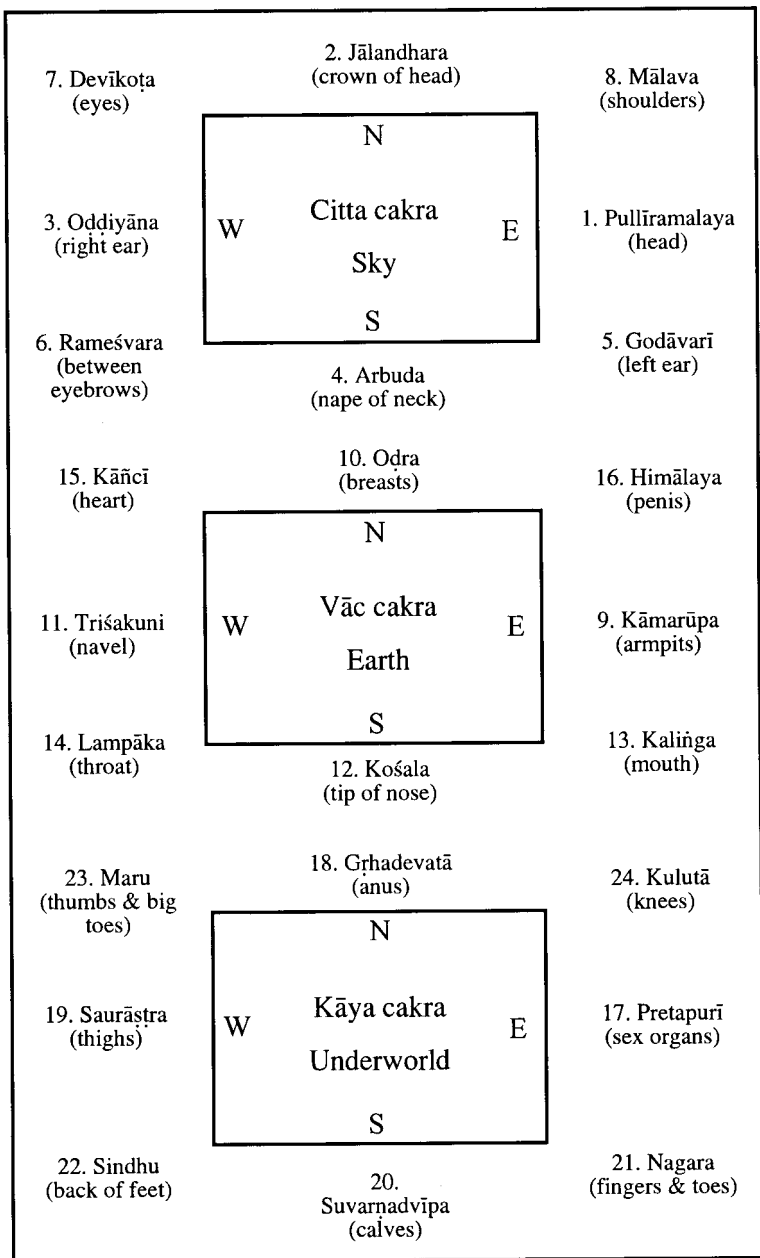


Figure 4.1. The twenty-four pīṭha in the Saṃvara-maṇḍala.

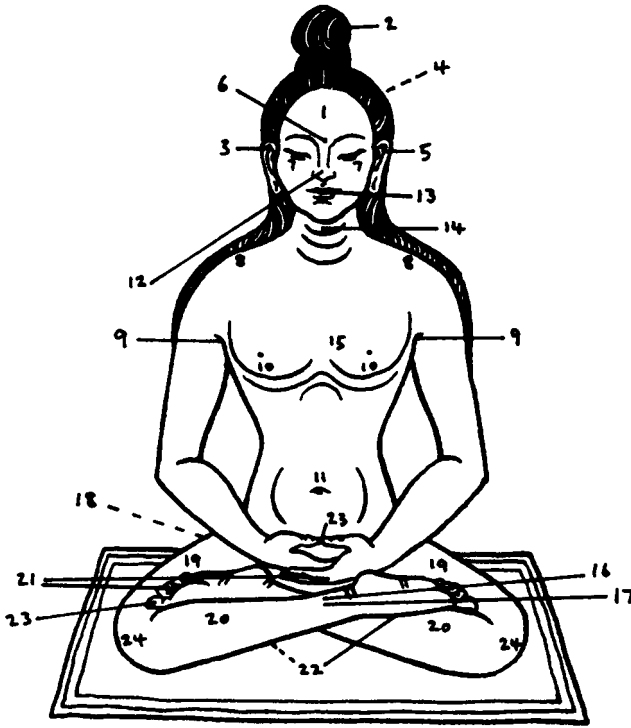


Figure 4.2. The twenty-four *pīṭha* within the yogin's body. Drawn by Dharmacāri Āloka, from *Vajrayoginī: Her Visualizations, Rituals, and Forms* (Wisdom Publications, 2002), courtesy of Elizabeth English.

become immediately apparent. For instance, Kāñcī has never been located in the northwest; Lampāka is a site in the northwest of ancient Indian geography, not the southwest; Sindhu has always been north of Saurāṣṭra, rather than south of it; and Kośala is in the north, not the south; and so on.

Despite the elaborate spatial hierarchy that also lists sites in the heavens and underground, Tibetan interpreters have understood the geographical level of the *vajrakāya* as comprising twenty-four external *pīṭha* that are identifiable primarily in terrestrial geography. Thus, in order to visit them one actually needed to physically wander all over India and, in some cases, even further afield. Furthermore, the two sets of internal and external referents to the *pīṭha* are understood as being interchangeable. For example, the Tibetan commentaries quite literally refer to the external *pīṭha* known as Godāvarī as being “the place of the left ear.” Tibetans even

claim that miraculous signs associated with the body part referent of a *pīṭha* are manifest in the local topography at such sites. At the geographical site which Tibetans identify as Godāvārī, for instance, it is claimed that the image of a left ear is self-arisen upon a rock.¹¹ Thus, this *vajrakāya* geography of subcontinental India can be clearly imagined and referred to as both a microcosmic and a macrocosmic body.

Interpreting the *Pīṭha* Cult

Our interest in outlining the *pīṭha* cult in Vajrayāna Buddhism here is primarily to allow us to appreciate how Tibetans have understood and engaged with it on their own terms while developing new aspects of their Buddhist culture. To this end, there are some interpretative cautions that need to be carefully borne in mind. First, the internal practice on the *pīṭha* gives rise to several difficulties of analysis when considering Tibetan religious data. Perhaps because Tantric teachings focus strongly upon meditative experience and the psychophysical body of the yogin as the prime locus of ritual, a tendency to devalue actual physical pilgrimage to the external *pīṭha* in favour of the internal *pīṭha* has been manifest in Indian Tantra. Internal pilgrimage is thus often said to be superior to external pilgrimage and so on. Statements to this effect can be found in the Indian textual sources that the Tibetans translated.¹² A parallel current of thought can also be found running through much non-Tantric Indian pilgrimage literature concerning ritual interaction with *tīrtha* sites.¹³ However, such statements from Indian sources which were sometimes repeated by Tibetan commentators should not lead us to think that conventional pilgrimage travel to the actual geographical locations of *pīṭha* sites was devalued by Tibetans in practice. Indeed, we find both modes of practice existing and being accorded equal and complementary importance in Tibetan Buddhism, with the external *pīṭha* in fact often being considered as the superior practice locations for meditating upon the internal sites. Another problem of interpretation of Tibetan narratives about Tantric practice arises due to the interchangeability and overlap of the dual system of internal and external *pīṭha*. When a Tibetan historical or biographical source describes a practitioner as having “visited the twenty-four *pīṭha*” and supplies little or no further elaboration, it is often a moot point whether this refers to a conventional external pilgrimage journey, to an internal meditative exercise, or to both.

Furthermore, it is worth pointing out that confusion is often the ideal bedfellow for creativity. For instance, at first glance, the *pīṭha* tradition appears to be a highly sophisticated and coherent system. However, for

anyone interpreting the *pīṭha* lists and classifications across the whole corpus of Buddhist *Yoginītantras* and their commentaries, it quickly becomes apparent that they are inconsistent and potentially confusing. Not all Tantras list the same total number of sites, and the sites named in the lists vary between different Tantras (and even in different lists within the same Tantric corpus), as do the schemes for dividing up the sites into subcategories and correspondences. When one also adds the variety of interpretations found in the commentarial literature, the confusion is only multiplied for the aspiring practitioner of Vajrayāna.¹⁴ In response to this complexity and inconsistency, Tibetan students of the Tantras have themselves generated a welter of different interpretations over the centuries in order to make sense of the considerable variation in the Indian traditions that they inherited. Their task has not been made any easier by the obviously hybrid origins of the *pīṭha* system found in the *Yoginītantras*.

Origins of the Buddhist *Pīṭha* Cult

The complex relationship between Buddhist and other forms of non-Buddhist Tantrism, particularly of the Śaiva tradition, has long been apparent to scholars, and it has often been noted and discussed in terms of iconography and ritual forms, or common names and shared terminology. However, a great many fundamental questions regarding the exact nature of this relationship—especially the perennial “who borrowed from whom?” question—remain unanswered. Moreover, most claims or speculations in this field of scholarly interpretation remain unsubstantiated, that is to say, they have not been traced carefully back to their origins. In the case of the Vajrayāna cult of *pīṭha* sites, I think there are compelling grounds for considering it in large part a Buddhist invention which departs significantly from earlier forms of the religion, and a novel elaboration of elements from the non-Buddhist Indian cultural matrix. I am not making this point here in order to claim that Vajrayāna is any less authentic as a form of Buddhism or as a religious system. Rather, I do so in order to throw light upon the Tibetan acceptance and adaptation of an interesting aspect of their own Tantric Buddhist tradition.

The Vajrayāna cult of *pīṭha* sites in India was not only novel for eleventh-century Tibetans when they first received the tradition, it was also relatively new in the history of Buddhism itself. This is because the entire *pīṭha* system was derived from a much broader and more ancient set of Indian traditions, with strong connections to and deep roots in non-Buddhist systems. First, it can be observed that the symbolism of the *pīṭha*

cult is based upon an association of Indian places with body parts and with goddesses. Such associations are a later development of ancient themes commonly found in Indic cosmic dismemberment myths. These myths include the archaic narratives of Prajāpati and the later Dakṣayajñanāśa through to the Purāṇic versions of the story of Satī's death and Śiva's grief, in which the body parts of the goddess herself fall down to earth and sanctify a network of sacred sites. Furthermore, what is striking about the external *pīṭha* network in terms of a Tantric Buddhist definition of India is that it completely ignores the traditional sites of the life of the Buddha and other major places of historical import to early Buddhism, that is to say, it ignores the ancient Buddhist "holy land" which we have so far investigated in the previous chapters. This fact in itself is one of the strongest betrayals of the non-Buddhist origins of the entire system. However, there is even stronger specific evidence available that demonstrates this, as we will now see.

We know that much of the material that comprised the corpus of Buddhist *Yoginītantras* is also found in the Vidyāpīṭha type of Tantras in the Bhairava section of the Śaiva canon. It is these teachings, with their marked Kāpālīka character, which form the principal basis of the major Śaiva esoteric traditions, such as the Trika and Krama systems of Kashmir Śaivism. Recently, Alexis Sanderson has attempted to critically demonstrate some aspects of the common ground between Buddhist *Yoginītantras* and the Vidyāpīṭha Tantras of Śaivism.¹⁵ It is of significance in the present context that Sanderson has analyzed the Śaiva texts in relation to the Buddhist *Samvara-tantra* corpus, which includes Tantras such as the *Laghusamvara*, *Samvarodaya*, *Abhidhānottara*, *Vajradāka*, and *Dākārṇava*. It is these Vajrayāna Tantras that became so important for the "New Ones" or new translation lineages of post-eleventh-century Tibetan Buddhism. It is precisely this material, together with the earlier *Hevajra-tantra*, which came to have the most influence upon the adoption of the Indian cult of Tantric *pīṭha* sites into the Tibetan tradition. Sanderson has established philologically that the list of *pīṭha* in the *Samvara-tantra* texts is found to be extracted from the Śaivite *Tantrasadbhāva* of the Trikas. It is germane to repeat Sanderson's observations here as they reveal not only the source of at least one of the Indian Buddhist *pīṭha* lists—and the one which had the greatest and most enduring importance for the Tibetans—but also the pure "inventedness" of aspects of the system which the Tibetans eventually inherited:

The direction of transmission is evident from the fact that there is an anomaly in the Buddhist list which can best be explained as the re-

sult of a distortion of the Śaiva model. The anomaly is the occurrence of Gṛhadevatā after Pretapurī and before Saurāṣṭra in the series of the Saṃvarodaya. This Gṛhadevatā is the only place name that does not occur in the Tantrasadbhāva's list; and it is the only name that is puzzling. It is puzzling because the meaning of the word is 'household deity,' hardly a likely name for a place. Now, in the version in the Tantrasadbhāva we are told not only the names of the *pīṭhas* but also classes of deities associated with each. The class associated with Saurāṣṭra is that of Gṛhadevatās, the household deities. Evidently, while intending to extract only the place names from a list pairing names and deities, the redactor's mind has drifted without his being aware of it from the name-list to that of the deity-list and back again.¹⁶

In confirmation of Sanderson's finding, Gṛhadevatā never occurs in surveys of *pīṭha* names in non-Buddhist Tantras, nor in the earlier Buddhist *Hevajra-tantra*.¹⁷ While both Śaiva and Buddhist Tantras appear to have developed in a complex, hybrid relationship of intertextuality, the point I wish to emphasize here is that, regardless of the origins of the Vajrayāna *pīṭha* cult, the Tibetan students of the "new" Tantras never seriously questioned the veracity or Buddhist credentials of the system they received in the post-tenth-century period. Tibetans accepted what they found in these texts in total. They took it as being authentically Buddhist and authoritative, and they then proceeded to engage with the *pīṭha* cult on those terms.

Thus Tibetans, as accepting inheritors of such anomalies as Gṛhadevatā, tried to make sense of them as being the important Buddhist cult sites which the Tantras made them out to be. So, what sense did they make of the invented place name Gṛhadevatā, we might well ask? Like all the *pīṭha* in the lists of the *Saṃvara-tantra* system, Gṛhadevatā figures in schemes which correlate the geographical sites with parts of the body and also with ideal locations on the three-tiered *vajrakāya* mandala. In these schemes, Gṛhadevatā is in fact relegated to being the "anus" of the adamantine body, and it is placed in the far north of the *kāya* or "body" tier of the mandala (fig. 4.1), a location which could well be described in colloquial German as being "am Arsch der Welt." When we survey the extensive Tibetan writings about the *pīṭha* of the *Saṃvara-tantra*, there is never—and not surprisingly—any explicit mention of Gṛhadevatā as an actual destination that Indian or Tibetan practitioners ever visited. When the first systematic Tibetan commentators on the Tantras, such as Butön Rinchen-drub (1290–1364), set about discussing where the *pīṭha* were located in the

geography of India or South Asia, they naturally found themselves at a loss in the case of Gṛhadevatā. One solution was in fact to avoid Indian geography altogether and simply place the site in distant Central Asia, in an area which had a former Buddhist background known to the Tibetans in a much earlier epoch, and a location which could still be included within what was generally defined as Jambudvīpa. Thus, Butön stated: “Gṛhadevatā exists as a meditation place which is marked by a stone *liṅga* resembling a heart at Changra Mukpo in Khotan.”¹⁸ His identification of the location of the psychocosmic anus in the deserts of Central Asia was accordingly accepted by generations of later Tibetan commentators.¹⁹

The particular geographical challenges presented by invented sites like Gṛhadevatā were in fact the exception. However, while other sites did possess ancient or well-known Indian identities, this did not ensure any straightforward Tibetan engagement with the *pīṭha* cult in practice within the actual context of India. Thus, as we shall see below, the locations and nature of the *pīṭha* were the subject of a great amount of both confusion and creative interpretation on the part of the Tibetans. There was another basic methodological problem faced by Tibetan Buddhists as inheritors and interpreters of this Indian cult, one which has confused present-day scholars just as much. Not only do the Tantras of both the Buddhist and non-Buddhist traditions contain different catalogues of *pīṭha*, but their later commentarial traditions, not to mention other independent religious developments, have generated a welter of different lists recording the names of *pīṭha* sites. The result is that often the same names appear on many different lists, and the simple assumption is that identical names must refer back to identical locations. No assumption could be more misleading when it comes to studying the *pīṭha*, the reason being that there were often multiple geographical sites identified as being the same *pīṭha* under the same name in different historical periods.²⁰ An identical problem has plagued the historical identification of the Tantric Siddhācāryas, whose similar or identical names are recorded in so many different lineage lists from disparate time periods and regional traditions.²¹

For completeness, we should briefly mention another important subdivision of cult sites for Tibetan followers of Vajrayāna Buddhism, that of the eight cremation or charnel grounds (*aṣṭaśmaśāna*).²² The Indian Kāpālika practitioners viewed *śmaśāna* as premier ritual sites because there they could best achieve the states of controlled possession by fierce deities such as Bhairava and Kālī whose haunts were the charnel grounds.²³ In line with Kāpālika ritual form and symbolism, Vajrayāna Buddhism also adopted *śmaśāna* practices,²⁴ and such sites appear to have been functionally some-

what similar to the *pīṭha*. Symbolically they are represented together with the *vajrakāya*, normally being arrayed around the outermost *cakra* of the mandala of the principal meditation deity. The status of the external locations of the *śmaśāna* that became familiar to Tibetans from the popular *Samvara*- or *Hevajra-tantra* cycles makes any confusion surrounding the *pīṭha* seem paltry by comparison. Like the different *pīṭha* lists, the Tibetans also maintained multiple catalogues of the *śmaśāna*,²⁵ although they never made sustained and systematic attempts to geographically identify their locations in India. In fact, Tibetans do not appear to have visited any of the eight charnel grounds listed in the *Samvara-tantra* literature while they were in India as pilgrims.²⁶ Exactly why remains a subject for speculation. The Indian Tantric charnel ground that was most frequently visited by early Tibetan pilgrims was named Śitavana, the “Cool Grove,” or Silwae Tsal in Tibetan, although it is not one of the eight *śmaśāna* mentioned in the principal *Yoginītantras* and it appears to have had its own cult.²⁷ Tibetan confusion surrounding the location of the external Śitavana *śmaśāna* in India was truly profound, with so many different sites being identified as to be meaningless for actual travellers attempting to find it. According to the Tibetan sources, a pilgrim could set out from Bodh Gayā in virtually any direction of the compass and arrive at Śitavana!²⁸

Siddhas and the *Pīṭha* Cult in Tibet

While the first systematic Tibetan translations of the *Yoginītantras* and their commentaries were the earliest source of comprehensive Tibetan knowledge about the Indian *pīṭha* cult, hagiographies of the eighty-four Siddhas or “adepts” (*siddha*) or “great adepts” (*mahāsiddha*) of Indian Vajrayāna were no doubt also highly influential. These hagiographical narratives present what might appear to be accounts of human Tantric practitioners in India whose life events often take place at certain *pīṭha* and who also engage in ritual travel to the *pīṭha*. However, the status of such narratives and the figures they portray is far from being straightforward.

In non-Buddhist Indian Tantra at the time of the Tibetan adoption of the *Yoginītantras*, the concept of Siddha was truly ontologically complex. The title “Siddha” not only designated certain types of human practitioners but also frequently referred to demigods and superhuman heroes whose abode was equally in the celestial realms and within the actual body of the yogic practitioner. David White, for example, has identified mythological, cosmological, and soteriological Siddha traditions, in addition to sects such as the Siddha Kaula who were the human emulators of the demigod or divine

Siddhas.²⁹ However, judging from the available Tibetan sources, in the reception of Indian Tantric culture in Tibet this original Indian ontological complexity was not preserved in the Tibetan understanding of Siddhas.

Narratives about the Vajrayāna Siddhas of India were generally accepted—and indeed, sometimes actually authored—in Tibet as referring to historical human beings who lived in India, and who possessed all manner of special powers (*siddhi*) due to their mastery of ritual and the enlightened states of being they had attained. From the perspective of critical scholarship, the historical existence of almost all of these Indian Vajrayāna Siddhas is of course unproven and certainly a moot question; according to Ronald Davidson they were “as much literary events as human beings.”³⁰ Even when the Tibetan sources attempt to treat them as historical persons, they often appear to be rather transhistorical entities, that is, as having life spans of hundreds of years in some cases, and as reappearing in historical narratives century after century.³¹ It must also be noted that the sources for most of the later Tibetan written materials on the Siddhas were most often gathered from oral traditions rather than from translations of original Indian Sanskrit manuscripts. This process continued in Tibet up until the works of Tāranātha, which were produced in the late sixteenth and early seventeenth centuries.³²

While the historicity of the Buddhist Siddhas in India may remain very obscure, to say the least, the religious nature of their cult in Tibet has not. The Siddhas as presented in Tibetan sources appear to have two primary functions. The first is as ideal religious models whose hagiographical existence in Vajrayāna was primarily inspirational and didactic in intent. Second, the narratives of their lives are also likely to have been intended—and have certainly been used—to provide important legitimacy to new Vajrayāna lineages that had developed in India and Tibet. The need for claiming legitimacy and authenticity of origins was strongly felt in Tibet during the period of the “later propagation of Buddhist teaching,” when a variety of often competing Buddhist schools or sects were being established as both religious and sociopolitical institutions. It is no surprise, therefore, that such Siddha stories which purportedly portrayed the former human transmitters of the Tibetans’ premier form of Buddhism flourished in Tibet. Thus, just as most Tibetan students of the Vajrayāna completely accepted the veracity of the Buddhist *Yoginītantras*, so too did they accept the mass of traditions concerning the Vajrayāna Siddhas as being historical accounts of their genuine and authoritative human lineage forebears. The close connections between Siddhas and the *pīṭha* sites depicted in these

traditions merely served to highlight the apparent importance and external existence of the latter.

What appear to be Indian traditions about the Siddhas began to be incorporated into Tibetan works between the twelfth and fourteenth centuries. Tibetan authors, such as the important scholar Gampopa Sonam Rinchen, composed life stories of certain later Indian Siddhas such as Tilopa and Nāropa by the mid-twelfth century. Translations or adaptations of what are most likely Indian oral cycles about the Vajrayāna Siddhas may date from the fourteenth century.³³ Most important for our present purposes, these early Tibetan hagiographical texts frequently mention the wanderings of the Siddhas to different external *pīṭha* sites around India. For example, the biography of the Siddha Udhilipa, who lived in the town of Devīkoṭa, which is identified as an important *pīṭha*, states that he received initiation into the *Catuṣpīṭhamahāyoginī-tantra* and was instructed by his guru to visit the twenty-four *pīṭha* and to perform practice on the twenty-four *ḍākinī* at them.³⁴ Similarly, the Siddha Yogipa was instructed to perform his practice explicitly in the form of a pilgrimage to the twenty-four *pīṭha*.³⁵ Once again, it must be recalled that it is possible to interpret such references as intended to describe either internal or external ritual journeys, or both.

There must also have been Tibetan oral accounts of the *pīṭha* cult available following the travels of Tibetan students to India in search of Vajrayāna instruction and initiation. One can imagine that such students would have been versed in the *pīṭha* cult as part of their training under Indian adepts. Similarly, Indian practitioners who visited Tibet could have taught about the *pīṭha* cult there directly. For instance, a twelfth-century Indian yogin named Vairocanarakṣita, who visited Tibet and taught Lama Shang, among others, is claimed in the Tibetan histories to have wandered around India meeting various Siddhas and to have obtained a series of initiations at sites throughout the subcontinent, including visits to western India, Magadha, Vārāṇasī, Nālandā, Vikramaśīlā, Somapuri in the region of Kośala, Jālandhara, and all the other twenty-four *pīṭha*, except the famous Uḍḍiyāna.³⁶ The eleventh-century Indian master Phadampa Sangye, whom different accounts credit with having visited Tibet anywhere between three and seven times, also gave Tantric teachings to the Tibetans on their home ground. It is recorded that during his training in India, Phadampa Sangye visited and meditated in Bodh Gayā, on the banks of the Ganges, in the jungles of eastern India, around the cemeteries of southern India, at the charnel ground of Śitavana, and in the land of Ābhīra, and that he

performed Tantric rites at all of the twenty-four *pīṭha*.³⁷ We should note that both Phadampa Sangye's and Vairocanarakṣita's itineraries combined the sites of the ancient Buddhist "Middle Region" with the more widespread Tantric geography of India.

Early Tibetan Travellers to the *Pīṭha*

We know that multiple sources of information on the *pīṭha* cult appear to have been available to early Vajrayāna practitioners in post-eleventh-century Tibet. However, those surviving itineraries of Tibetan religious travellers which date from the eleventh- to thirteenth-century period clearly demonstrate that they did not actually travel to the external *pīṭha* listed in the *Yoginītantras*. This is perhaps somewhat surprising, since many of the Tibetan religious travellers of this period were singularly intent upon seeking the *Yoginītantra* traditions in India. Some travellers, such as Marpa Lotsāwa, who journeyed to India on three occasions, went to various Buddhist monastic universities in search of Tantric teachings, but he is said to have also visited a range of sites outside of the ambit of the traditional Buddhist holy land. The places visited by Marpa Lotsāwa were the resorts of Indian Siddhas, whom he sought out so as to gain Tantric initiations, although none of his alternative destinations were *pīṭha* sites as listed in the Tantras.³⁸ Similarly, during the early thirteenth century, Chag Lotsāwa visited the main ancient Buddhist sites of Magadha but also went to the charnel ground of Śītavana, a celebrated place of Buddhist Tantric practice and associations, although also not a *pīṭha* or site mentioned in the major Tantras.³⁹ Khyungpo Neljor's eleventh-century itinerary in India, which included the Vajrāsana as well as a series of Tantric charnel grounds, such as Sosadvīpa, provides yet another example of the same pattern.⁴⁰ The question of why most early Tibetan pilgrims neglected the external twenty-four *pīṭha* sites in India remains a subject for speculation due to lack of evidence. It is only in the itineraries of certain thirteenth-century Tibetan travellers who lived as wandering Tantric yogins, and who most closely modelled their lives upon those of the Indian Vajrayāna Siddhas, that we find the external *pīṭha* sites first claimed to have been visited in any intentional and systematic manner.

These first intentional journeys from Tibet to Indian *pīṭha* sites for the sake of Tantric practice appear to have begun around the late twelfth or early thirteenth centuries. A biography of the founding lama of the Dri-gungpa school, Jigten Gampo, recounts how in the year 1208 the master's mendicant disciples were dispatched over a very extensive geographical

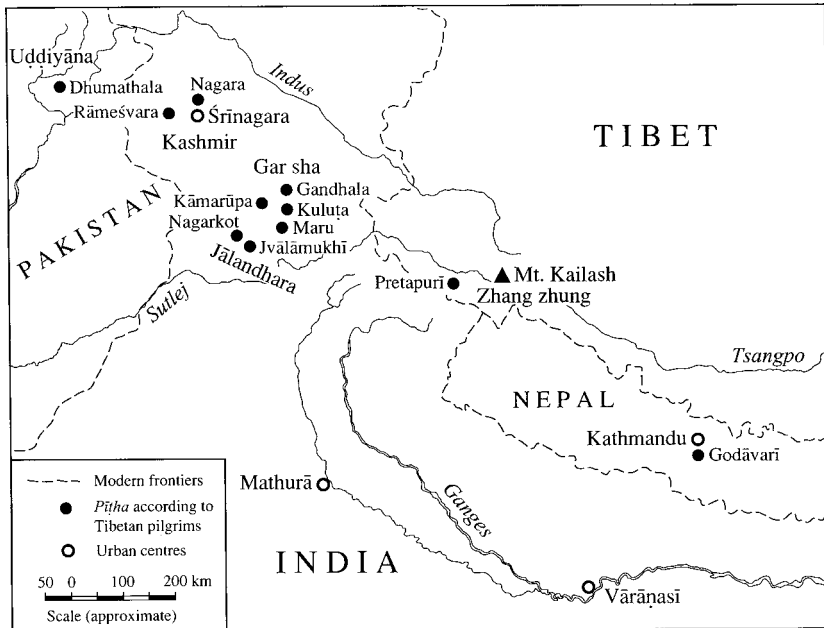


Figure 4.3. Tantric sites of northwest India according to Tibetan pilgrims.

Drawn by Norma Schulz and Toni Huber.

area, both across and well beyond the Tibetan plateau. For example, they visited the two western *pīṭha* of Uddiyāna and Jalandhara recognized in the Vajrayāna texts, and they also went to the site of Gandhala in Lahoul, to the Vajrāsana, and also Nepal, in order to practice meditation.⁴¹

More detailed early accounts of actual Tibetan visits to the external *pīṭha* are first found in the biographies of the yogin Gōtsangpa Gampo Dorje (1189–1258), who travelled in the first quarter of the thirteenth century, and his disciple Orgyenpa Rinchenpal (1229/30–1309), who followed his teacher's footsteps during the middle of the thirteenth century. Both travellers mention visits to a range of Tantric sites (fig. 4.3), some of which they considered to be among the twenty-four external *pīṭha* of the Tantric *vajrakāya* network. Both travellers were versed in the traditions of the *Samvara-tantra*, and their motivation as pilgrims was clearly to visit and experience such places on account of their prior knowledge of the religious nature and function of the Vajrayāna *pīṭha* cult. The sites they visited were all located in the far northwest of the Indian subcontinent, which they reached via western Tibet. Their journeys took them through Himalayan districts of what is now Himachal Pradesh (Spiti, Lahoul, and Chamba),

through parts of Kashmir, and further west to the Swāt Valley region of the Hindu Kush mountains. Swāt Valley, in particular, was a place which became famous in Tibetan Buddhist history as the location of Uḍḍiyāna, which was regarded as being a separate country from Gyagar or “India” and, most importantly, hailed by the Tibetans as one of the places of origin of their Tantric Buddhism. Both the itineraries and the particular language used to describe Götsangpa’s and Orgyenpa’s pilgrimages to the India *pīṭha* are very revealing and worthy of careful consideration here.

Itinerary 1: Götsangpa Gampo Dorje

Sometime around the year 1214, the yogin Götsangpa passed through the area of western Tibet called Zhangzhung, which lay just west of the famous holy mountain of Kang Tisé, better known to Indians and Westerners as Kailāsa or Mount Kailash.⁴² There he visited his first Vajrayāna *pīṭha* while actually still on Tibetan soil. He identified this site as the *mahāpīṭha* (*gnas chen*) of Pretapurī (Tre ta pu ri/Tīrthapuri). He classified the place as being located on the “body wheel” (*kāya cakra*) level of the threefold division of the adamantine body mandala (fig. 4.1). Götsangpa further defined the site using a term other than *pīṭha*, or *gnas* in Tibetan; he classed it instead as being among the twenty-four “countries” (*yul*, also “lands” or “territories”). Moreover, he specifically made mention that divine representations of the Śaivite deity Maheśvara existed there, and we will indicate the great significance of this point below. He travelled on through the western Himalayas, via the region of Spiti, to the Tibetan Buddhist district of Lahoul, or Garsha as it is called in Tibetan. There he visited a holy mountain named Gandhala (Gandha la, Dril bu ri)⁴³ which he described as being empowered by the presence of *ḍākinī* and as the abode of *yoginī*, just as the *pīṭha* are indicated in the *Yoginītantras*, although the site is not a *pīṭha* listed in the Tantras, nor did he specifically identify it as one. Götsangpa then descended from the Tibetan-speaking zone of the high Himalayas to the lower hills and plains of the kingdom of Chamba, which he described as being “on the road which leads to the barbarian borderlands of Gyagar.” He specifically journeyed to the *pīṭha* of Jālandhara, which is still famous today in both Śakta and Śaiva traditions,⁴⁴ and which he again readily classified as being among the twenty-four “countries” (*yul*) and described as a region rather than an individual site. Götsangpa proceeded to the main town of Nagarkot, visiting the acclaimed Hindu shrine of Jvālāmukhī and a series of five local cemeteries there. Although these sites were clearly non-Buddhist and were observed by the Tibetan pilgrim to have been used

by Tīrthaka and brahmins, Götsangpa identified what he saw and experienced there in terms of the esoteric symbolism and practice of the *Samvara-tantra*. After two days' further travel, his final visit was to a site he identified as being the *mahāpīṭha* of Kuluṭa, one of the twenty-four "countries," a site on the "body wheel" level of the internal body (*nang lus*) mandala which corresponds to the knees of the adamantine body network.

Itinerary 2: Orgyenpa Rinchenpal

During the spring or summer of 1254, Götsangpa's student, Orgyenpa, set off in the footsteps of his teacher on his first journey outside of Tibet.⁴⁵ Although he did not visit all of the same *pīṭha* and charnel grounds, his general classifications of them, as well as his interpretation of what he saw and experienced at them, are also expressed in terms of the symbolism and practice of the *Samvara-tantra*.

Orgyenpa initially passed through the area of Mount Kailash in western Tibet, but the first *pīṭha* he identified upon reaching the foothills of the western Himalayas were Kuluṭa and Maru from among the twenty-four "great countries" (*yul chen po*), which were sites he explained as corresponding respectively to the knees and toes of the adamantine body. He next followed his teacher's footsteps to the Jalandhara *mahāpīṭha*, which he described as being a place of "celestial action" (*mkha' spyod*) among the twenty-four countries, and one located on the "mind wheel" of the mandala and corresponding to the crown of the head of the adamantine body. Orgyenpa, whose name means "the one [who went to] Uḍḍiyāna" (or Oḍḍiyāna; O rgyan in Tibetan), then undertook the long and perilous journey west to Uḍḍiyāna, a place which for him was located in the Swāt Valley region, on the southern flanks of the Hindu Kush. Uḍḍiyāna is found listed as a *pīṭha* in the principal *Yoginītantras*. It is located on the "mind wheel" of the mandala and corresponds to the right ear in the adamantine body scheme of the *Samvara-tantra* tradition, although curiously Orgyenpa's itinerary mentions none of this. However, for our Tibetan traveller, Uḍḍiyāna is clearly not an individual site but an entire Tantric region whose main place he calls Dhumathala (Dhu ma tha la). Uḍḍiyāna was Orgyenpa's major goal, and the itinerary refers to it as a "miraculous *pīṭha*" (*sprul pa'i gnas*) or a "miraculous heavenly field" (*sprul pa'i zhing kham*).⁴⁶ Although this formerly Buddhist region exhibited a mixture of Islam, local cult, and perhaps remnant Hindu influences at the time, it is striking that Orgyenpa once again readily interprets all he experiences there in terms of the symbolism and practice of the *Samvara-tantra*. In

particular, he considers all local women to be Buddhist *ḍākinī* or *yoginī*, and that their every mundane action has some “secret” underlying level of Tantric significance. On the return journey back to Tibet, Orgyenpa passes through neighbouring Kashmir, and en route he visits another *pīṭha* which he identifies as Rāmeśvara, which corresponds to the space between the eyebrows. He was also in Nepal and identified the *pīṭha* of Godāvarī there, which corresponds to the left ear.

In addition to these early Tantric itineraries, we can also mention a later pilgrimage undertaken between 1612–13 and 1615 by another wandering Tibetan Drukpa yogin, Taksang Repa Ngawang Gyatso (1574–1651), which was inspired by and thus closely followed the earlier itinerary of Orgyenpa (fig. 4.3). His journey was highly significant because, in addition to identifying and visiting all of the same *pīṭha* between Mount Kailash and the Swāt Valley as his thirteenth-century predecessors had done, Taksang Repa continued the same process they had earlier begun since he too made further identifications of the twenty-four *pīṭha* throughout the region. He identified a site close by to Śrīnagara, the capital of Kashmir, which he refers to as Nagara and as being the place of the fingers of the adamantine body, which also has the name Nagara in the *Samvara-tantra* tradition. Then, travelling further south between Lahoul and Chamba, he identified the *pīṭha* of Kāmarūpa, which he states is the armpits of the adamantine body.⁴⁷

The Holy Land Redefined

The above itineraries of Götsangpa and Orgyenpa raise at least two crucial issues for understanding the Tibetan interpretation of the Vajrayāna *pīṭha* cult and changing Tibetan ideas about India as a Buddhist holy land in general. The first concerns the terminological and conceptual system which these pilgrims employed to characterize the *pīṭha* and the second, their actual geographical claims about the locations of the *pīṭha* they visited.

The accounts of both Götsangpa and Orgyenpa discuss the geographical sites which they accepted as *pīṭha* using a system of references that is not found in the principal texts of the *Yoginītantras* in which the *pīṭha* are listed. The Tibetans referred to the sites as the twenty-four “countries” (*yul*) or “great countries” (*yul chen*). Götsangpa’s itinerary explained the meaning of these countries using a threefold scheme:

1. Twenty-four “external countries” (*phyi rol gyi yul*) that exist in Jambudvīpa, the southern cosmic continent—which, as noted, is the setting for the *pīṭha* mentioned in the Tantras—and throughout

which Heruka, a wrathful Tantric emanation of the Buddha, subjugates coarse beings.

2. Twenty-four “secret countries” (*gsang ba'i yul*) that exist on the three tiers or wheels (*cakra*)—body, speech, and mind—of the mandala.
3. Twenty-four “internal countries” (*nang gi yul*) that exist within one's own body.

Götsangpa also noted the significant presence of a representation of Maheśvara at one site. Orgyenpa, for his part, observed that Jālandhara, as a *pīṭha*, is a place of “celestial action” among the twenty-four countries. All of these references actually originate in an influential narrative describing the subjugation of the Indian Śaiva deity Maheśvara (also known variously as Rudra, Bhairava, or Śiva), his troupe of malignant emanations, and the appropriation of their symbols and territories by the wrathful Vajrayāna meditational deity Heruka and his Buddhist counterforces.⁴⁸ The story of Maheśvara's subjugation is truly a cosmodrama. It is one in which the action occurs at the twenty-four “self-originated” countries of Jambudvīpa, and the names of these countries are in fact identical with the *pīṭha* listed in the *Samvara-tantra* tradition. A vital aspect of the story is that a wrathful manifestation of the Buddha called Heruka, together with his troupe of minions, appropriates all aspects of the Śaiva cult as part of their victory and makes them Buddhist. Thus, common Śaivite symbols, such as the pair of genitalia-like icons called *liṅga* and *yoni*, become significant as markers of the Buddhist Heruka's victory over Maheśvara and the presence of Heruka's Buddhist emanations in the twenty-four countries or *pīṭha* sites. The activity of this Buddhist subjugation takes place on three planes which replicate the arrangement of *pīṭha* into three groups of eight on the three tiers or wheels of the mandala, these planes now being called, respectively, the sites of “celestial action” (*mkha' spyod*), “action on the earth” (*sa spyod*), and “action underground” (*sa 'og spyod*). It is also in this narrative that we find the *pīṭha*/countries spatially assigned to cardinal and intermediate directions around the mandala or the macrocosmic adamant body as it is projected onto Jambudvīpa.

While the narrative of Maheśvara's subjugation by Heruka appears to have various Indian antecedents, its developed form is only known in Tibetan versions dating from the late twelfth or early thirteenth-century, the earliest written version apparently being that found in the works of the Sakyapa master Drakpa Gyaltsen (1147–1216).⁴⁹ Significantly, it is also during this same period that we find the first native Tibetan catalogues of the

pīṭha sites being created.⁵⁰ The narrative of Maheśvara's subjugation went on to become extremely widespread in Tibet, especially in terms of its use in the interpretation of holy places and sacred landscapes or geographies. Its importance for Tibetans interpreting an essentially alien South Asian religious world beyond the Himalayas cannot be underestimated.

In addition to its obvious function of claiming origins and legitimating authority for a Buddhist form of Tantra, the significance of the narrative of Maheśvara's subjugation for Tibetan understandings of India as holy ground is at least twofold. Most important, it provided a set of symbolic resources which Tibetan travellers and commentators could use on the ground to make some "Buddhist sense" of the group of mostly unknown Śaiva and Śākta cult places in South Asia which constituted the *pīṭha* network. In the wake of the wide dissemination of this narrative and its many variants, whenever common Hindu symbols, such as the *liṅga* and *yoni*, were encountered by Tibetan pilgrims in South Asia, it has been possible for these same utterly non-Buddhist symbols to be effortlessly reinterpreted as representing the conquering force of Vajrayāna Buddhism, and hence as signifying authentic Buddhist holy places. The narrative also neatly accounts for the obvious and continuing Hindu status and worship of such sites. As one eighteenth-century Tibetan Buddhist guide for visiting places of Hindu worship south of the Himalayas so clearly expressed it:

When one asks if one site in particular is a holy place, the indispensable sign is the real presence of a ritual support in the form of a natural *liṅga* and *yoni*. . . . If one concentrates on the vanquished, here is the *liṅga* of Śiva and the *yoni* of Kālī. They are there. If one concentrates on the vanquishers, there is the *liṅga* of Heruka and the *yoni* of Vajrāvārahī. . . . This is why, at the present time, Hindus, attached to their own modes of thought, consider that these are the supports of the terrible couple of Śiva and Śāktī and make their offerings there. And, we Buddhists, judging that the victorious subdued the defeated, make also offerings.⁵¹

The thirteenth-century yogins Götsangpa and Orgyenpa were among the earliest Tibetan pilgrims to use this system of interpretation on their travels, and it continued to feature in Tibetan pilgrimage culture for many centuries to come.

The Maheśvara subjugation narrative, as Tibetans maintained it, also had a second significance. It allowed for a certain slippage to occur between cosmographical space and geographical space, and this had important implications for the way in which Tibetans came to view "India" as a

sacred territorial or geographical entity. This tendency toward collapsing Buddhist cosmological and geographical space together is already apparent in some of the earliest native Tibetan works on Buddhism and probably occurred under the influence of Mahāyāna literature. In early Indian Buddhist texts, as well as in Jaina and other Sanskrit epic literature, “India” is described in terms of “sixteen great countries” (*ṣoḍaśa mahājanapada*), which extended approximately from Bengal in the east to the Punjab in the west, and also southward some way onto the Deccan Plateau. The Buddhist Madhyadeśa or “Middle Region” corresponded approximately with this and contained seven major towns or cities.⁵² However, increasingly in Mahāyāna and Vajrayāna texts, the cosmological Jambudvīpa, rather than the historical-geographical Madhyadeśa, became the preferred referent mentioned as the setting of Buddhist narratives. In one of the first Tibetan histories of Indian Buddhism, that composed in 1167 by Sonam Tsemo, the sixteen great countries are described as being equivalent to the cosmic continent of Jambudvīpa.⁵³ In both the Maheśvara subjugation narrative and the earliest native Tibetan catalogues of the *pīṭha*, the twenty-four countries/*pīṭha* were also represented as equivalent to Jambudvīpa. The twenty-four countries also constituted the same geography around which the Indian Siddhas were thought to circulate, and these “countries” were also—for the most part—apparently identifiable around subcontinental India. Thus, within a new and evolving Tibetan Vajrayāna knowledge system, Jambudvīpa and its twenty-four countries were increasingly taken to be more or less geographically equivalent to subcontinental India itself.

This greatly expanded vision and respatialization of Tibetan understandings of the Indian subcontinent as Phagyül or the Buddhist “holy land” seamlessly incorporated all the ancient Buddhist holy places together with the more recently adopted Tantric *pīṭha* sites. This now subcontinental holy land became the common representation in almost all later Tibetan thought and practice related to India, as we shall see in the following chapters. Considered from the perspective of our modern-day and now well-habituated subcontinental concept of “India”—both as former colonial territory and later modern nation-state—we might say that Tibetans had made a conceptual shift from a Buddhist holy land *in* India to a Buddhist holy land *of* India. Orgyenpa’s travels are our earliest Tibetan example of this expansion process becoming realized in practice because, following his visits to the Tantric *pīṭha* throughout the far northwestern areas of the Indian subcontinent, he later journeyed to Bodh Gayā and nearby sites in what was once ancient Buddhist Magadha. Thus, ironically, during the mid-thirteenth century, at the very time when Buddhism itself

was actually dying out in India, Tibetans had just begun to expand both their pilgrimage activities and their understanding to embrace a greater India as Buddhist holy territory.

The Shifting Terrain of the *Pīṭha*

Perhaps the most remarkable aspect of the journeys of Götsangpa and Orgyenpa described above were their claims for the locations of the *pīṭha* which they visited. Instead of being located around the whole of India, the sites were all situated within a narrow geographical band running from the southwestern Tibetan plateau through the western Himalayas and across to the Hindu Kush in the far northwest of the Indian subcontinent (fig. 4.3). Orgyenpa claims to have visited the *pīṭha* of Maru while passing through the western Himalayan foothills and then that of Rāmeśvara while en route to Kashmir, and later he went to Godāvarī in the Nepal Valley. Such Tibetan identifications completely defied Indian traditions of historical geography which had been known and maintained since ancient times. Maru is the region of the Rajasthani desert and Godāvarī and Rāmeśvara are located in the very far south of peninsular India. Orgyenpa's later successor, Taksang Repa, also identified the *pīṭha* of Kāmarūpa near Chamba in the foothills of the Punjab, whereas in Indian traditions this place is invariably located along the Brahmaputra River valley of Assam in the far northeast of the subcontinent. Essentially, these Tibetan pilgrims' identifications shifted the *pīṭha* and relocated the parts of the cosmogeographical Tantric body or *vajrakāya* along the axis of the entire western Himalayas. What are we to make of these novel Tibetan interpretations of the Buddhist *pīṭha* geography of India?

This thirteenth-century identification of *pīṭha* in the far northwest of the Indian subcontinent has already been subjected to scholarly interpretations, albeit unconvincingly so. Giuseppe Tucci ventured that since "the fortunes of [Indian] Buddhism started to decline, the zone of the geographical *vajrakāya* has been limited to the Himalayan region."⁵⁴ Tucci was implying that Indian social and political factors and Indian agents were responsible for the geographical redefinition. While this may appear to be a reasonable assumption, we have no evidence at all in support of it. What we actually have are two Tibetans travelling between western Tibet and the Hindu Kush, who happen to identify many famous *pīṭha* along their route. More recently, and with reference to Tucci's work, Mark Dyczkowski cited the ability of highly advanced Tantric practitioners to interiorize the *pīṭha*

system and then reproject it out onto a local landscape. He has suggested that this is how early Tibetan pilgrims were thus able to visit the *pīṭha* in northwestern India: they reprojected them there.⁵⁵ However, a close reading of different versions of the Tibetan biographies of Götsangpa and Orgyenpa does not support such an interpretation, and the idea of external reprojection of *pīṭha* is itself extremely rare in Tibetan discussions of Tantra. As an alternative to such interpretations, I would point out that the Tibetan historical sources clearly reveal the early thirteenth century as the beginning of a long-term process of Tibetan cultural creativity in relation to the Tantric Buddhist *pīṭha*. Since this time, Tibetans have shifted the twenty-four external *pīṭha* to a multitude of different locations throughout India and also right across the Tibetan plateau. They have done so on the basis not only of what they considered to be the best available information but also as they saw fit in relation to the dynamics of their own religious, social, and political milieux at different times and places.

Most dimensions of this shifting terrain of the *pīṭha* might best be appreciated by briefly surveying Tibetan identifications of just one particular Indian Tantric site listed in the *Yoginītantras*. For this purpose, I have chosen the *pīṭha* named Devīkoṭa or the “Citadel of the Goddess.”⁵⁶ Devīkoṭa has been mentioned as a Tantric cult place in India since at least the tenth century,⁵⁷ and it is one of the most frequently mentioned *pīṭha* in both non-Buddhist and Buddhist Tantras.⁵⁸ Moreover, its history in the Tibetan sources is particularly rich in relation to the different phases of development of the *pīṭha* cult in Tibetan Buddhism. The search for an “original” or “authentic” Devīkoṭa site—likely a fruitless undertaking given the number of different claims and candidates which exist⁵⁹—need not detain us here since our present goal is understanding Tibetan interpretations. Curiously, there is no record of any Tibetan pilgrim-practitioner ever going to an actual Indian place named Devīkoṭa. Thus, Devīkoṭa is typical of a great many Indian religious sites about which the Tibetans possessed no firsthand knowledge but which they nevertheless readily incorporated into their view of India as a holy land and, what is more, also became particularly inventive about in the development of their own form of Buddhism. In fact, from the early thirteenth century to the present day, Tibetans have maintained at least eight different geographical locations for the Devīkoṭa *pīṭha* which we know of—four being identified in India, and four others in Tibet itself (fig. 4.4). These will now be briefly surveyed in order to understand how Tibetan Buddhists creatively engaged themselves with the holy sites of Indian Tantra.



Figure 4.4. Tibetan Devikōṭa sites in South Asia and Tibet. Drawn by Norma Schulz and Toni Huber.

Multiplying the *Pīṭha* in India

Between the fourteenth and seventeenth centuries, Tibetan scholars identified at least four totally different and unrelated sites in India as being the Devikōṭa *pīṭha*. None of those claiming such identifications ever went anywhere near India during their lives. Their writings on Devikōṭa are typical of a very long and extensive tradition of Tibetan scholarly knowl-

edge about Indian sacred sites that existed as a kind of “virtual reality,” entirely within the realms of speculation.

The first such Tibetan Devīkoṭa in India appeared in a scholarly commentary on the *Samvara-tantra* by the fourteenth-century Tibetan polymath, Butön Rinchendrup. He identified it with a “temple” (*lha khang*) in the region of Varendra in present-day Bengal, even briefly supplying correct location details.⁶⁰ Butön’s Sakyapa contemporary, Lama Dampa Sonam Gyeltsen (1312–75), wrote a commentary on a different Tantra, the *Hevajra-tantra*, in which he described the same site as a “town” and elaborated it in terms of the narrative of Maheśvara’s subjugation, with a “matrix symbol” (*dharmodāya*) or representation of a vulva (i.e., *yonī*) made of stone being located there, and equating it with the eyes of the *vajrakāya*.⁶¹ Clearly, such text-based identifications by scholars were dependent upon the details which each different Tantric corpus (in both written and oral transmissions) might supply. Tantric literature remained the creative locus of Tibetan attempts to locate the *pīṭha* in India and elsewhere. Around the middle of the sixteenth century, Pema Karpo (1527–92), the Fourth Drukchen or hierarch of the Drukpa Kagyüpa school of Tibetan Buddhism, actually identified two Devīkoṭas, one in southern Tibet at Kharchu (on which see below), and another in present-day Bihar in eastern India. What made Pema Karpo’s identification so novel was not only that he simultaneously claimed two totally different sites as being Devīkoṭa but also his justification for doing so, using the Tantric theory of correspondences between the *pīṭha* and the parts of the body in the *vajrakāya* network. Citing the Tantras, he stated, “The eyes [of the *vajrakāya*] are Devīkoṭa. Because there are two internal eyes, there are two [external] *pīṭha* of Devīkoṭa, of which the one connected with the right [eye] exists in the land of the Buddhist monarch Aśoka, known as Pāṭaliputra, in eastern India, and the *pīṭha* which is connected with the left [eye] is this one here [at Kharchu in southern Tibet].”⁶²

Yet another Devīkoṭa location appeared during the mid-sixteenth century, this time claimed by the Fourteenth Shalu Khenchen, Jamyang Khyentse Wangchuk (1524–68), who identified it as the “Devīkoṭa Gorge” in South India⁶³ in a discussion of the site of the Khasarpaṇa image of Avalokiteśvara which was famous among various early Tibetan pilgrims to India. In fact, maps of seventeenth- and eighteenth-century South India do locate a place named “Devikottai” on the Coromandel Coast where the northern branch of the Kāverī River enters the ocean, fifty kilometres south of modern Pondicherry.⁶⁴ It is possible that the Shalu Khenchen obtained this information from later Sanskrit sources which turned up in Tibet.⁶⁵

In any case, the Shalu Khenchen's identification was purely scholastic and addressed a specific problem. The Khasarpaṇa image was claimed by Tibetans to be in the Raḍha district of western Bengal, adjacent to historical Varendra and hence near the site of the ancient town named Devīkoṭa. This lama was clearly attempting to maintain the locations of the famous image and Devīkoṭa in close proximity, albeit in a totally different region of India.

Not long afterward, during the early seventeenth century, a fourth location for Devīkoṭa in India appeared from the pen of the scholar Tāranātha (alias Kunga Nyingpo, 1575–1635). The latest candidate was some five hundred kilometres to the east of Varendra, somewhere between the central Assam Valley and Tripura, most likely in the tribal country of the northern Kachāri Hills.⁶⁶ Tāranātha's unique claim was based upon an oral account of a journey from northeastern India to Arākān undertaken during the late sixteenth century by his Indian teacher, the eclectic Nāth yogin Buddhaguptanātha (1514–1610), about whom we will have more to say in later chapters. Tāranātha's report represented this new Devīkoṭa as an entity of far greater magnitude than the mere temple or town which earlier Tibetans had discussed, and he now described it instead as the "land of Devīkoṭa" and as being one of the "eastern kingdoms."⁶⁷ Needless to say, perhaps, there was no such historical domain ever recorded in this area, and, beyond a few place names, all of the detail in Tāranātha's report is nothing more than dubious cliché at best.⁶⁸ However, the Tibetan student understood his Nāth teacher to be a Buddhist of sorts, and thus as someone representing a completely unique survival of the Vajrayāna lineages which had become extinct in India at least three centuries earlier. While there is no independent historical evidence to verify Buddhaguptanātha's purported Buddhist status, the immense authority carried by a direct transmission of knowledge from an Indian teacher in Tibet was certainly enough to impress other Tibetans.

These different Indian Devīkoṭa locations were generated by Tibetans as attempts to accurately interpret a site—albeit a defunct one—which their inherited Vajrayāna cult emphasized as being of crucial ritual importance within the Indian holy land. Such efforts were part of an ongoing Tibetan scholastic quest to refine their understanding of Buddhist India at a distance. This process was dynamic, on the one hand, in that new sources of purportedly "Indian" information were uncritically welcomed and incorporated. On the other hand, it was also conservative in that different claims were slavishly reproduced over long periods of historical time

mainly on the basis of an acceptance of the authority of particular intellectual lineages. For instance, identification of the Varendra Devīkoṭa was repeated at least up until the late nineteenth century by a range of Tibetan scholars who accepted the early Sakyapa Tantric commentarial literature as being authoritative, and its maintenance depended upon preference of scholastic lineage above all else.⁶⁹ Likewise, it was particularly Gelukpa scholars who maintained the identification of Devīkoṭa in the Kachāri Hills up until the late twentieth century.⁷⁰ Remarkably, these diverse and conflicting Indian locations which the Tibetans maintained for Devīkoṭa were never debated, and this is perhaps a sign that—well-known exceptions aside—Tibetan clerics often did not inquire much beyond the bounds of their own scholastic lineages. A similar lack of debate between those who advocated different Devīkoṭa sites on Tibetan soil is also evident. However, the *pīṭha* in Tibet derive from an entirely different set of imperatives within Tibetan Buddhism, as I will now briefly demonstrate.

Transferring the *Pīṭha* to Tibet⁷¹

Devīkoṭa was first claimed to exist in Tibet during the late twelfth and early thirteenth centuries and was certainly concurrent with Götsangpa and Orgyenpa's identification of *pīṭha* between western Tibet and the Swāt Valley. Those initially making such claims were members of the various branches of the Kagyüpa school, especially the Drigungpa and Drukpa lineages. However, their ranks were also joined in following centuries by the Gelukpa and Nyingmapa schools⁷² and the nonsectarian Rimé movement as well. Only one Tibetan school, the Sakyapa, argued against the claims that Indian *pīṭha* existed in Tibet. However, their erudite protests were an intellectual epiphenomenon with virtually no practical impact.⁷³ Thus, the transfer of Indian *pīṭha* to Tibet was actively taken up right across the sectarian spectrum, and it should be thought of as a phenomenon that is characteristically Tibetan Buddhist. Moreover, in the transfer and establishment of Indian *pīṭha* in Tibet, we can see that in each new instance the principal agents act according to specific political and economic imperatives, albeit couched in the guise of normative religious discourse. These imperatives usually involved periods of institutional expansion and—often in conjunction with—a more acute need for sponsorship and status, and they are evident in the earliest cases of *pīṭha* site transfer to Tibet.

The first identifications of Tantric *pīṭha* in Tibet were related to the rising power of the Drigungpa branch of the Kagyüpa school around the

beginning of the thirteenth century. This occurred under its founder-lama Jigten Gampo and his lineage successors, who—as Roberto Vitali so aptly described them—“combined meditation practice with a keen attention to political affairs.”⁷⁴ During this most creative and dynamic period of major sectarian expansions in the history of Tibetan Buddhism, Tibetan agents were systematically adapting and embedding forms of Indian Buddhism into their own local social, intellectual, political, and ecological milieux. New Buddhist lineages with monastic bases as well as the powerful clans or ruling families who helped establish and patronize them were organizing themselves and vying with one other in order to secure increased political influence and territory throughout central and western Tibet. The Drigungpa quickly became one of the leading new religiopolitical forces in thirteenth-century Tibet due to their competitive acquisition of new patronage and territory combined with their attractiveness to new practitioners and institutional expansions. Before their disastrous defeat in 1290 following a long intersectarian conflict with the rival Sakyapa school, the Drigungpa had control of territories which included parts of the Himalayan borderlands from Dakpo and Char in the southeast as well as vast areas of western Tibet.⁷⁵ Jigten Gampo is said to have dispatched large parties of his students to the three sacred mountain sites of Tsari, Labchi, and Kang Tisé (i.e., Mount Kailash) which all came under Drigungpa control throughout the thirteenth century.⁷⁶ The intention was to establish them as religious bases in the form of retreat sites or hermitages for Tantric meditation. It was during this process that all three mountains became explicitly identified with Tantric *pīṭha* sites from the Indian *Yoginītantra* lists. Kang Tisé was claimed to be Himālaya or Himavat, Labchi was hailed as Godāvarī, and Tsari was indicated as being both Devikoṭa and Cāritra.

Legitimation of new Tibetan Buddhist cults and their sites by way of direct association with India was a strategy that Jigten Gampo and his followers had no hesitation in deploying during their day. For example, they claimed that Kang Tisé or Mount Kailash had been visited by the Buddha in person and that he had preached various scriptures there.⁷⁷ Jigten Gampo was prepared to extend the range of the ancient holy land of the Buddha all the way across the Himalayas and onto Tibetan soil controlled by the Drigungpa themselves. He also knew full well that Buddhism had been completely eclipsed by momentous political and religious developments in India at the time and that the Buddhist holy land there was becoming a hostile territory, its sites no longer accessible for Tibetan practitioners.⁷⁸ Such early Kagyüpa lamas thus set about providing an equivalent locus of Indian Tantric sacred geography on the Tibetan plateau so that

the *Yoginītantras* could be systematically practiced there instead, albeit at places controlled by themselves. In order to establish their new Tibetan *pīṭha*, the Kagyüpa innovators cited the Indian Tantras chapter and verse and made novel claims, such as the idea that Tsari must be Devikoṭa because the Tantric “field protector” (*kṣetrapāla*) deity who dwelt at the *pīṭha* was none other than the local deity at the Tibetan holy mountain. In other words, they argued that the boundaries of the *vajrakāya* were not limited to South Asia but extended across the Himalayas onto the Tibetan plateau. The Kagyüpa claims about Tsari have endured to today, and Tibet’s leading modern Buddhist intellectuals have completely accepted that it is Devikoṭa.⁷⁹ Nevertheless, other Tibetan Devikoṭas also began to appear across the landscape of the high plateau.

During the mid-sixteenth century, Drukchen Pema Karpo claimed another Tibetan Devikoṭa at Kharchu in the Lhodrak district of southern Tibet. We have already noted above how Pema Karpo uniquely used *vajrakāya* theory concerning the two eyes to justify his claim and thus maintain intimate links between the Tibetan and Indian sites. In Kharchu he chose a location which was redolent with ancient religious associations for his own Kagyüpa school and for Tibetans in general.⁸⁰ His doing so must be viewed as a conscious act of revitalization of a local holy place which served his particular interests at the time. As the fourth incumbent hierarch or Drukchen of the Drukpa lineage, Pema Karpo found himself in the unenviable position of being stationed in southern Tibet, remote from his native Kongpo, and bereft of the religious holdings and properties of the scions of the Gya clan of Ralung who founded and normally ruled the Drukpa.⁸¹ He was forced to establish his own new power base elsewhere and to generate religiopolitical influence and patronage for the future of his lineage seat. To this end, he made a life-long career of gradually extended his influence across southern Tibet by successfully reinvigorating sites like Kharchu and Tsari. Pema Karpo’s Kharchu Devikoṭa remained recognized as such by various lama scholars who visited it well into the twentieth century.⁸²

Within a century of Kharchu’s identification as Devikoṭa, Gelukpa followers of the *Samvara-tantra* corpus⁸³ established their own Devikoṭa at Phabongka. This local holy place lay very close to the Sera Monastery, one of the major Gelukpa scholastic institutions in the environs of Lhasa. Phabongka then became famous as Tibet’s “Second Devikoṭa” (*De bi ko ta gnyis pa*).⁸⁴ Like Kharchu, Phabongka was already attributed multiple layers of historical and religious significance by Tibetans, but in particular it had associations with the seventh-century Emperor Songtsen Gampo, the greatest “civilizing hero” to feature in the later Tibetan Buddhist historiography

of the imperial era. Developing a more elaborate cult for Phabongka and other sites around Lhasa was especially important for the Gelukpa school in its efforts to strengthen the religiopolitical profile of their new and increasingly centralized Lhasa-based Ganden Phodrang state from the seventeenth century onward. Phabongka's close connection with Songtsen Gampo's civilizing activities is particularly telling, due to the many efforts made by the Fifth Dalai Lama, Ngawang Losang Gyatso (1617–82), and his Regent, Desi Sangye Gyatso (1653–1705), aimed at merging the Dalai Lamas, Songtsen Gampo, and the cosmic bodhisattva Avalokiteśvara into a potent symbolic system at the heart of a new Tibetan Buddhist political culture.⁸⁵ While Gelukpa scholars used all the same types of Tantric theories and references as their Kagyüpa predecessors in order to justify their identification of Phabongka as a new Devīkoṭa, they actually made the legitimization of Indian meditation sites on Tibetan soil more “Tibetan” and, for that matter, more Gelukpa. They stressed the practice at Phabongka of previous Tibetan Buddhist masters, especially Gelukpa luminaries such as the school's founder, Tsongkhapa (1357–1419), and the First Jamyang Shaypa, Ngawang Tsondrü (1648–1721/22). Moreover, mid-nineteenth-century Tibetan references to Phabongka as being the “Second Devīkoṭa” in relation to the earlier Kharchu Devīkoṭa demonstrate that the proliferation of Tibetan duplicates of Indian *pīṭha* sites had begun to attain a kind of critical mass as an internally referential system, one which no longer required a linkage back to India.⁸⁶

The final appropriation of Devīkoṭa as a thoroughly Tibetan site was orchestrated by three highly innovative Khampa lamas, Kongtrul Lodrö Thayé (1813–99), Jamyang Khyentse Wangpo (1820–92), and Chogyur Lingpa (1829–70), who were all leading figures in the nineteenth-century Rimé or nonsectarian movement⁸⁷ which flourished particularly in the Derge kingdom of eastern Tibet. The three jointly founded what they called the “Third Devīkoṭa” (De wi ko ṭa gsum pa) at a place named Tsadra Rinchen Drak. The novelty in this case was that they did so upon a totally obscure hillside in a remote part of Derge. This site completely lacked the long religious histories and fame of any of the other chosen Tibetan Devīkoṭa sites, and in an important sense it provided something of a tabula rasa upon which they could inscribe their own ideas about its sanctity.⁸⁸ They did so largely by claiming visionary “revelations” (*gter ma*) of the site's identity, composing and circulating “guidebooks” (*gnas bshad*, *gnas yig*) and “holy place eulogies” (*gnas bstod*) to promote its sublime qualities and publicly displaying “door posters” (*sgo byang*) to advertise the ritual benefits that purportedly derived from worshipping there during “pilgrim-

age gatherings" (*gnas 'dus*). Through these and other activities, the otherwise unknown hill of Tsadra Rinchen Drak was quickly transformed into a popular local pilgrimage site which was claimed to be a *pīṭha*.

There was of course far more to the establishment of a Devīkoṭa at Tsadra Rinchen Drak than is indicated by all the normative Tibetan Buddhist accounts found in the sources. There was also a history there of dire economic need and a bid for independence by a talented but powerless individual within a manipulative religiopolitical environment. The figure at the centre of all these activities, Kongtrul Lodrö Thayé, had emerged from obscurity during the 1830s and 1840s due to local recognition of his talents as a scholar. He was conveniently proclaimed as a spiritual incarnation or *tulku* by his employer, the Karma Kagyüpa hierarch of Paepung monastery, Situ Pema Nyinche Wangpo (1774–1853), for fear that his gifted young secretary would be requisitioned away from the monastery and into the services of the rival Sakyapa-dominated Derge government. Kongtrul's *tulku* status as the first incumbent of a totally new and low-level incarnation lineage meant that he had no properties or funds whatsoever. To distance himself from the pressures of the monastery, he went into retreat at Tsadra Rinchen Drak and was soon joined there by his elderly and destitute mother. The two lived in utter poverty on the remote and wild hillside until, that is, Kongtrul and his colleagues successfully promoted the environs of his humble hermitage as the Third Devīkoṭa and turned it into a popular pilgrimage venue.

In the hands of the Rimé lamas, the Devīkoṭa *pīṭha* became completely Tibetanized and lost all of its direct associations with India. Their innovation was to represent their chosen site in Kham as an elaborate duplication of the very first Tibetan Devīkoṭa, the famous holy mountain of Tsari discussed above. Thus, Tsari's extensive scheme of ritual topography was imposed totally—albeit on a much reduced scale—upon the local landscape of Tsadra Rinchen Drak, as signified by its name "Tsadra," which actually means "Resembling (*'dra*) Tsa[ri]." Thus, after nearly seven hundred years of locating Devīkoṭas on the Tibetan plateau, Tantric *pīṭha* sites had finally been cut completely free of their anchor back in the holy land of India. The more conservative central Tibetans had been unable to make such a definitive break, heavily bound as they were by the conventions which recognized India as the ultimate legitimating device for all of their religious institutions. This step was taken instead by this late-flourishing regional religious movement in distant eastern Tibet, one which had the self-confident intention of constructing a new Tibetan Vajrayāna geography for itself across the whole extent of its own local territory.⁸⁹

The Ontology of Appropriation

The major Tibetan reorientation toward India, which began during the “later propagation of Buddhist teaching” period, clearly marked a watershed during which Tibetan agents learned how effectively India’s extremely high Buddhist status in Tibet could be employed to legitimate and enhance their own cultural innovations. A veritable avalanche of things Indian—including toponyms, individual natural features, entire local topographies, deities, cult objects, relics, and more—was claimed to have been transferred from South Asia northward over the Himalayas, there to be incorporated into a newly developing Tibetan Buddhist landscape on the high plateau. Thus, the establishment of Tibetan Tantric *pīṭha* such as Devīkoṭa was just one among many types of transfer of Indian places to Tibet. The widespread acceptance of all such transfers raises various questions about the ways in which Tibetans have often regarded “place” and its ontological status. What exactly did these transfers mean to the Tibetans in terms of the relationship between their original Indian locations and the new sites in Tibet? Were Tibetan *pīṭha* regarded as merely replicas or duplicates of “real” sites which only existed in India? Did such Tibetan and Indian places simultaneously share an identical status or perhaps varying degrees of continuity, or did transferred *pīṭha* now only exist exclusively in Tibet? The answers to such questions are best sought in relation to the wider phenomenon of transferring India to Tibet.

Richard Salomon has recently drawn attention to the widespread phenomenon of toponym transfer throughout the broader cultural region of Indic-influenced South and Southeast Asia. His historical examples of the duplication of original Indian toponyms—many of them of famous Hindu sacred places (*tīrtha*) in India, but also names of Indian cities—span the whole region from Burma in the west to Indonesia in the east.⁹⁰ In common with the region Salomon investigated, we also find examples of the transfer of Indian toponyms to the Tibetan plateau.⁹¹ However, in all cases that I know of, the Indian toponyms which were applied to Tibetan sites and landscapes form a very exclusive set, being limited only to those belonging to either ancient Buddhist places or later Vajrayāna sites in India, and including names such as Vajrāsana and Mahābodhi (both of which Tibetans treated as toponyms), Magadha, Rājagṛha, Vaiśālī, Kukkuṭapādagiri, Nālandā, Devīkoṭa, Godāvarī, Cāritra, Śītavana, and so on. The transfer of such toponyms between different cultural regions—and for that matter, within the same cultural region—cannot simply be understood as operating in a uniform or straightforward manner, even at the most fundamental

level. For example, some transferred toponyms are always represented in translation in the local languages, while others are invariably transliterated or phonetically transcribed to preserve their original form, and still others appear in multiple and even hybrid forms. There is often an internal logic to be discerned in such linguistic representations. Additionally, the newly named sites are often qualified with adjectives, such as the “second” or the “northern” or the “new”—just as they have been in the new world landscapes produced by European colonialism—in order to make clear their intended relationship to the original place whose name they receive. Yet, in certain cases such qualifications are dispensed with. The intentions behind and implications of the transfer and application of each foreign toponym into a new cultural and geographical context must thus be considered on an individual basis.

In the occurrences of Indian toponyms transferred to Tibet, we find a whole spectrum of different intentions behind local uses of Indian names. At one end of this spectrum, an Indian Buddhist toponym in Tibet might be applied purely as hyperbole, for the benefit of rhetorical effect to add to the prestige of a certain local religious site or institution.⁹² But more often than not, when we are able to investigate individual cases in more detail, we can find an implicit element of ontological continuity being stressed to varying degrees between Indian and Tibetan places. For example, Tibet’s most famous Buddhist temple, the Jokhang in Lhasa, has been frequently and emphatically associated with the Vajrāsana in India since at least the fourteenth century, perhaps even earlier.⁹³ This is not surprising since Tibetans strongly subscribe to their own popular origin narrative concerning the Jowo—the principal statue of the Buddha as a twelve-year-old youth that sanctifies the Jokhang—that it was originally located within the Bodh Gayā Mahābodhi Temple in India.⁹⁴ Thus, there is a powerful element of historical and ritual continuity in their minds when they read or hear of the Jokhang being named, as it commonly has been and still is, as the “Vajrāsana of Tibet” (Bod yul gyi rDo rje gdan), the “Second Vajrāsana” (rDo rje gdan gnyis pa), or even “Vajrāsana the Navel of the Land of Snows” (Gangs can sa yi lte ba rDo rje gdan).⁹⁵ So-called Vajrāsana sites can of course be found in many parts of the Tibetan plateau and adjacent high Himalayas.⁹⁶ Yet, the degree of ontological relationship with the Indian Vajrāsana, as claimed or implied for each of them, can only be known by investigating each local Tibetan context and its history.

Thus, what may at first appear in texts as straightforward Indian toponym transfer can actually express rather comprehensive and sophisticated ontological connections claimed between India and Tibet. For instance,

I have often visited the Drigung district of the Shorong Tsangpo Valley northeast of Lhasa, with its various monastic and cult centres, and found it referred to as the “Northern Vajrāsana,” while its environs of Sho Drigung are designated the “Magadha of Tibet.”⁹⁷ Such toponymic transfer at Drigung is just the most superficial level of a far more complex set of claims about an intersection or interpenetration of India and Tibet in this region, one closely associated with the status of the Drigungpa school’s founding lama. Jigten Gampo himself had an “Indian” identity, being regarded by his followers as an embodiment of the Indian Buddhist philosopher Nāgārjuna, and is also famous for having personally appeared to his disciples at Drigung as the Buddha Śākyamuni.⁹⁸ A narrative in one of his biographies also claims direct physical links between Magadha and Drigung in Tibet. An Indian serpent-deity from the subaquatic realms, the *nāgarāja* Apalālo, once appeared at the bridge across the Shorong Tsangpo River and presented a precious tooth relic of the Buddha to Gardampa Chödingpa (1180–1240), one of Jigten Gampo’s leading disciples. Apalālo was actually a local territorial deity from the Buddhist holy land of Magadha, but he had access to the Drigung region by way of an underwater portal that physically connected these sites in India and Tibet. When Gardampa presented the precious tooth relic of the Buddha to his master, Jigten Gampo replied, “It is good to return wealth to its owner (*nor bdag po la sprad pa legs*),” implying that he himself was the Buddha. The tooth relic was then enshrined within a statue of Jigten Gampo especially crafted by Gardampa and known as “Dharma Lord of the Golden Temple” or Serkhang Chöje, an image that the Drigung lama himself consecrated repeatedly.⁹⁹ It became one of Drigung’s most important relics, bringing together both the empowerments of the Buddha of Magadha and the lama of Tibet who embodied him at an equivalent Tibetan version of the land of the Buddha, one that was also physically connected, via the underwater portal, with the original holy land in India. As a further reminder that Drigung was indeed the “Magadha of Tibet,” its second most important temple was named “Immutable Vajrāsana” or Mingyur Dorjeden,¹⁰⁰ while the Indian Tantric cemetery (*śmaśāna*) of Śītavana in Magadha was duplicated¹⁰¹ there in the form of the Tenchak charnel ground at nearby Terdrom, which remains a favourite resort of Tibetan pilgrims even today. Tenchak is claimed to have a very high level of ontological continuity with the Indian Śītavana by way of various direct physical and metaphysical connections, including sharing the same deities, wild animals and their traces, funerary stones (*dur rdo*) which flew from India to Tibet, and even “bridges” of rainbow light whose respective ends connect the Tibetan and Indian sites.¹⁰² Ontologically, In-

dia and Tibet seem to flow together intimately at Drigung's Tenchak in terms of the various beings, substances, and attributes they share in common. These local traditions strongly imply that, when performing rituals there, a pilgrim might just as well be in India.

The example above of the Drigung region conveniently illustrates the wide variety of common strategies employed both to justify transfers of Indian holy places to Tibet and to enhance popular reputation and ritual status of local sites. What is claimed at Drigung can in fact be found all across the Tibetan plateau. One encounters repeated mention of everything from boulders and sacred objects, and even mountains, flying through the air from India and falling to earth once again in Tibet,¹⁰³ as well as the presence there of Indian Buddhist relics of various kinds¹⁰⁴ and the manifestation of common territorial or protective deities connecting both Indian and Tibetan sites.¹⁰⁵

To return to the ontological status of the *pīṭha* in Tibet, as in the case of Drigung, we would by rights have to undertake historical and ethnographic investigations of each individual Tibetan *pīṭha* to begin to clarify Tibetan understandings and how these have been influenced. However, the rhetoric of the founders of the various Tibetan Devīkoṭas and related sites is available as a starting point, and it reveals a significant development over time. The earliest claims argued that these Indian—or perhaps better, Indic—Tantric sites actually existed in their original locations along the Himalayan margins of the Tibetan plateau, and even Pema Karpo's novel use of *vajrakāya* theory did not conflict with this. Thus, the Vajrayāna holy land of India and the Tibetan Buddhist cultural space were initially claimed to be partly overlapping zones. However, the later claims for *pīṭha* in Tibet clearly asserted, in various ways, that they were now actually Tibetan places rather than Indian ones. What remained constant across all cases was that there was never any talk of them being duplicates or replicas of Indian originals, as is so often the case in the transfer of sacred geography (see chap. 5). The Tibetans always considered that they had access to the “real thing,” hence the enduring appeals to their ritual efficacy and soteriological promise regardless of whether they were regarded as “Indian” or “Tibetan” in the final analysis. From the perspective of Tantra, distinctions such as India and Tibet were in any case mere conventions since the internal *pīṭha* could be realized and visited within one's own subtle body. With this Tantric Buddhist ontology always in the background, it is perhaps no wonder that Tibetans were able to simultaneously maintain at least eight different external locations for Devīkoṭa in both India and Tibet without ever bothering to argue their relative merits.



PART II

Reinventing the Holy Land in India



CHAPTER FIVE

Nirvana in Assam

Buddha could not have selected a more lovely spot for the dissemination of his doctrines or the close of his career.

—*Edward Tuite Dalton, 1856*

Replica Holy Lands

The creation of replicas of and substitutes for the holy lands of the great world religions, with their key shrines and sacra, has been a very widespread and well-known historical phenomenon. We find that such holy land replicas or substitutes are often believed to be—and are particularly promoted as being—as ritually efficacious as their originals. During the fifteenth and sixteenth centuries, for instance, several reproductions of the Christian Holy Land were created in different parts of Europe. Replica complexes, such as the late fifteenth-century “New Jerusalem” of the Sacro Monte di Varallo Sesia in northern Italy, even included duplicate holy places with the distances between them constructed to exactly the same scale as those of the original sites in Palestine.¹ By the seventeenth century, the performance of the Christian practice commonly known as Stations of the Cross, which was based upon a tableau of sites developed out of the Crusaders’ experience of the Holy Land, was commonly judged to be an equivalent of or substitute for actual pilgrimage to Palestine itself. The creation of replica holy lands and the question of their efficacy has been no less a feature of religious cultures during the modern age. Thus, we find that devout late nineteenth-century American Christians were assured that the elaborate scale exhibition models of Palestine they visited in the Midwest of the United States were “equivalent to an actual tour of the Holy Land.”²

A wide range of similar developments, albeit inspired by different motivations and historical circumstances, also occurred in many Buddhist environments. As an example, one can mention Southeast Asian efforts to replicate the Majjhimadesa—the Magadhan Buddhist holy land—in local Thai and Burmese historical landscapes. The Mon king Dhammacetiya had the Schwegugyi, a replica of the Indian Mahābodhi Temple, constructed at Pegu during the mid- to late fifteenth century, while his Thai contemporary, Tilokarāja, built his Mahābodhi replica, the Wat Chet Yot, in Cheng Mai at the same time. Unlike other such replicas of the Mahābodhi Temple found elsewhere in Asia, these Thai and Burmese versions were in fact attempts to re-create the whole religious topography of Bodh Gayā. To that end, they carefully included substitutes of the monuments marking the so-called seven stations, being the sites around Bodh Gayā at which the Buddha reputedly spent each of the first seven weeks following his enlightenment there.³

Replicas of the landscape or topography of the Buddhist holy land were often carefully modelled imitations of the Indian Buddhist sites, precisely in order to enhance their authenticity, sanctity, and ritual efficacy. Their builders took pains over the inclusion of genuine sacra as well in some cases, such as the planting of seedlings said to come from the original Bodhi Tree. In spite of striving for close imitation, Buddhist holy land replicas across Asia were always intended and accepted by their builders and worshippers as being nothing more than pious replications, albeit ones that might serve the same ritual function as their originals. While between the thirteenth and eighteenth centuries Burmese, Thai, Chinese, and Nepalese Buddhist elites created replicas of the ruined, unreachable, or lost Indian Buddhist holy land on their own home territories, it is curious that their Tibetan neighbours never engaged in such activity. This was not because the Tibetans lacked the information to be able to create replicas of Buddhist holy land sites. They certainly possessed various detailed textual descriptions of them and even collected three-dimensional scale models of important sites such as Bodh Gayā (fig. 5.1).⁴ The Tibetans, in fact, did something far more remarkable than their Buddhist neighbours, something that entirely obviated the need for any elaborate local replicas of the sites of the Buddha's life on Tibetan soil. They created a Buddhist holy land replica directly in India itself, at a new location that was of great convenience to them in terms of proximity and access. Yet in doing so they did not recognize this substitute holy land as being a replica of any kind. Rather, they considered it to be a “rediscovery” of the original but lost ancient Indian holy places of the Buddha.

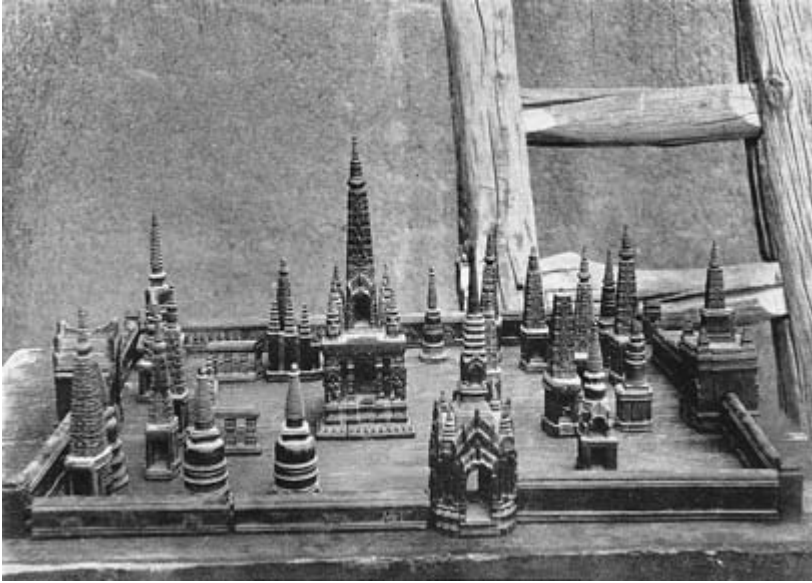


Figure 5.1. Model of the Mahābodhi Temple, Narthang Monastery, Tibet, 1937.

The Tibetan Kuśinagar

The Tibetan replica holy land was founded in India after the claimed re-discovery there by Tibetan Buddhists of Kuśinagar, site of the Buddha's final nirvana, albeit at a great distance from its original ancient location. Kuśinagar (or Kuśinagarī) is one of the most famous places in the life story of the Buddha. It is also the legendary origin of one of the central aspects of public cult life in Buddhism, that is, the erection of funerary monuments or reliquaries (*caitya/stūpa*) over deposits of the Buddha's relics and of ritual worship of them. As is related in various Buddhist texts, Kuśinagar was the spot where the Buddha died and attained his final nirvana, the ultimate release from suffering and cyclic existence. The same texts also portray it as the place where the Buddha's remains were cremated and where his ashes and relics were then divided. The very first *stūpa* containing relics of the Buddha was then erected and worshipped at Kuśinagar by the Mallas. Thanks to archaeological evidence, the actual site of the ancient Kuśinagar is now known to be located at Māthākuwar (Kasia) in the present-day Deoria district of southeastern Uttar Pradesh, about forty kilometres from Gorakhpur. Thus, it lies well within the ambit of the ancient holy land of the Buddha in the Middle Ganges region.

The Kuśinagar that became the single most popular Indian destination

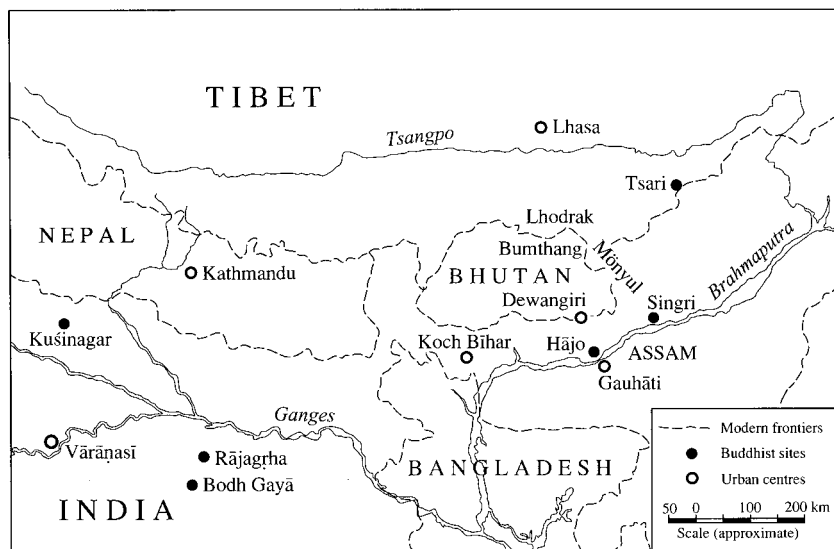


Figure 5.2. Tibetan Buddhist pilgrimage in northeast India. Drawn by Norma Schulz and Toni Huber.

for Tibetan Buddhist pilgrims during the six hundred years prior to the beginning of the twentieth century had nothing at all to do with early Indian Buddhism nor with the original site of Kuśinagar in the Middle Ganges region. Since at least the late sixteenth century, followers of Tibetan Buddhism identified this major Buddhist holy place as being more than five hundred kilometres to the east in Assam instead. The site lies in the lower Assam Valley, at a place named Hājo, located not far to the north-west of Assam's major river trade city of Gauhati on the north bank of the Brahmaputra River (fig. 5.2).

There are no records of pilgrims from the Tibetan Buddhist world ever visiting the actual site of ancient Kuśinagar in the Middle Ganges region during their initial period of direct contact with Buddhist India up until the thirteenth century. As an active Buddhist cult place, Kuśinagar appears to have fallen into disuse by the eleventh century,⁵ and, in any case, before the Ghaznavid, Ghūrid, and Mamlūk raids and conquests of north India made their full impact upon local social and cultural institutions. The last Buddhist account we have of the site is when Xuanzang, the seventh-century Chinese Buddhist pilgrim, made a visit there and found it desolate and in ruins.⁶ Kuśinagar was to lie buried beneath the northern Indian topsoil and jungle for the best part of a millennium. Its location at Māthākuwar was

only identified with certainty in 1875–76, when the colonial archaeologist A. C. L. Carlleyle established its presence there using evidence unearthed during excavations. Although some dispute concerning this identification lingered into the first decade of the twentieth century, it was indeed reconfirmed by the discovery of further inscriptions there. However, the actual history of the ancient site of Kuśinagar was to remain both unknown and unimportant for centuries to a great many devout Buddhists in the Tibetan world. Indeed, the Tibetan Buddhist reinvention of and pious attention to the site of an alternative Kuśinagar was so thorough that, prior to the end of the nineteenth century, it also convinced a generation of European scholars working on the ancient history of Buddhism in India that Assam must indeed have been the original site of the Buddha's death, cremation, and final nirvana. It thus proved to be a major contribution to the shifting terrain of the Buddha in India.

Rediscovery of Kuśinagar in Assam

There are several traditions concerning the initial rediscovery of Kuśinagar in Assam by followers of Tibetan Buddhism. All of them involve visionary revelation, a very common form of cultural production in relation to the establishment of sacred space and holy sites, not to mention many other manifestations of Tibetan religious life. One contemporary oral tradition holds that a Tibetan religious master, the Second Karmapa Lama, Karma Pakši (1204–83), had a vision that inspired him to search for and locate the site. The Buddha himself appeared in this vision and informed the Karmapa that since the holy places of India were now all inaccessible to pilgrims from Tibet, this new site in Assam was equivalent in all ways with the original Kuśinagar in the Middle Ganges region.⁷ This modern story cannot be traced back to any historical text, however.⁸ In any case, the story appears anachronistic because, during the mid- to late thirteenth century, while Tibetans were indeed becoming aware of the decline and destruction of Buddhist sites in north India, they were nevertheless still travelling to them as pilgrims since Buddhist religious life and institutions had not yet ceased to function in the region. A far more credible tradition, recorded in historical documents, indicates that the rediscovery of the Assamese Kuśinagar occurred during the very late sixteenth or early seventeenth century, and that it was perhaps a Bhutanese innovation.

A Bhutanese Buddhist master named Lama Tashi Wangyal (alias Drukpa Tashi Wangyal), a southern disciple of Pema Karpo, the hierarch of the Tibetan Drukpa lineage, made a prophecy in Bhutan concerning the

rediscovery of the site of the Buddha's final nirvana at Kuśinagar. Following this he travelled south into neighbouring Assam on what was described as a "search" (*tshol*). Arriving at the village and temple of Hājo, he claimed to have "discovered" (*brnyed pa*) and "opened the door to the holy place" (*gnas sgo phyed*) of Kuśinagar, so that Tibetan Buddhist pilgrims could once again encounter this place containing the Buddha's empowerments directly. A complex of closely connected political concerns, mundane geographical factors, and religious realities appear implicated in this Tibetan Buddhist exercise in "rediscovery" of an ancient site of the Buddha in nearby Assam. Lama Tashi Wangyal undertook his prophetic journey to Hājo and claimed it as Kuśinagar in the company of his Bhutanese patron, the ruler of the powerful Yodung Wangma clan, Ngarig Gyelpo, together with the clan's other principal leaders. The relationship between the lama and the Yodung Wangma chief conformed to the typical Tibetan religiopolitical pattern of patron-preceptor, in which each supported the other's activities.

The Yodung Wangma clan itself maintained extensive claims of ownership over the important *duar* ("gateway") lands. The *duars* comprised a strip of territory on the Indian plains, immediately adjacent to the southern border of Bhutan and the Himalayan foothills there and running from the district of Kuch Bihar in the west through to Kāmarūpa in the east. There were eighteen separate *duars*, with the eleven between the Tista and Manas Rivers in the western section called the Bengal *duars* and the remaining seven in the eastern section between the Manas and Dhansiri Rivers known as the Assam *duars*. The *duars* collectively functioned as an important border market zone at the base of the passes which lead north into the hills of Bhutan, one into which Bhutanese would migrate during the winter season for trade. Bhutanese sovereignty over some of these areas entitled them additionally to taxation rights over the local Indian border populations.⁹ Lama Tashi Wangyal's journey to discover Kuśinagar appears to have been part of the legitimization of his clan's claims of ownership over some of the Assam *duar* lands in the eastern section.¹⁰ Hājo is itself a mere forty- or fifty- kilometre journey south of these *duars* at the terminus of the formerly well-travelled route to Gauhāti via the Bhutanese settlement of Dewangiri (or Dewathang in Tibetan), a journey passing directly through the eastern *duar* tracts, and of about three days duration in premodern times.

One of the first European writers to critically discuss the Tibetan identification of Kuśinagar in Assam was an early British scholar of Tibetan and Himalayan Buddhism, Laurence Austine Waddell (1854–1938). In contrast to the indigenous account given above of the visionary rediscovery

of the site, and without a consideration of the local political context of the actors involved, Waddell tried to explain the Tibetan Buddhist selection of the Hājo area in terms of local Assamese place names and the interpretation which the lamas presumably made of them. Waddell noted that some kilometres to the south of Hājo there was a village named Sālkuṣa, while Cunningham had pointed out that the general region is sometimes known as Kuṣa Vihāra in the Indian sources, which he considered as being an older form of the name Kuch/Koch Bīhar.¹¹ Waddell's idea was that since the name Kuśinagar was traditionally translated into Tibetan quite literally as rTswa mchog grong or Ku sha'i grong khyer, the "Town of Kuṣa Grass," then the nearby village of Sālkuṣa would have been interpreted by educated lamas (presumably with a knowledge of Sanskrit and Assamese) as being Kuśinagar on the basis of the similarity of names. While the simple comparison of place names has served as a time-honoured methodology for the identification of Buddhist sites in India in both the Tibetan world and in Western scholarship, it frequently raises more questions than it answers.

A far more satisfying and historically grounded explanation than that offered by Waddell involves taking careful account of other, older Tibetan Buddhist cultural attitudes toward Assam as well as detailing the existence of very well established non-Buddhist Indian religious institutions there. Such an approach helps to explain not only the identification of Hājo but also why Tibetan and Bhutanese Buddhist interests in Assam were strong during the late sixteenth and early seventeenth centuries, in spite of the fact that throughout the whole history of Indian Buddhism the region has never been a place where the religion became established.¹² Investigating this broader context informs our understanding of the attraction the area held for Tibetan Buddhist practitioners and the spectacular success that pilgrimage to the Hājo site enjoyed in later centuries, as we will see below.

Earlier Tibetan Religious Interest in Assam

The greater region of western Assam in which Hājo is located has long been known to the Tibetan world by its old Sanskrit name of Kāmarūpa. It was also considered by Tibetan Buddhists as the location of powerful Tantric cult sites in the system of twenty-four Vajrayāna *pīṭha*, such as Devikoṭa, recognized as the "eyes" of the geographical *vajrakāya*, and Kāmarūpa, assigned to the "armpits." The Vajrayāna narrative tradition in Tibet mentions Assam, and particularly Devikoṭa and Kāmarūpa, as places frequented by some of the "great adepts" or *mahāsiddhas* of Indian

Vajrayāna Buddhism. Various fantastic stories about Indian yogins, such as Kṛṣṇācārya and his activities at Devikoṭa, circulated widely in mediaeval Tibet. Such hagiographical accounts served to endow the region of Assam with a reputation for being an active Vajrayāna cult centre and the abode of various initiatory goddesses or *ḍākinī*, and they inspired at least a few early Tibetan practitioners to visit the area.

Centuries before Hājo was ever recognized by Buddhists from Tibet and Bhutan, another Assamese site had already captured the attention and fired the imagination of Vajrayāna practitioners in Tibet. This was Singri,¹³ a small hill on the north bank of the Brahmaputra River at Dhekiajuli, to the west of modern Tezpur City, which is still known today by the same name. Singri Hill was originally mentioned as Śṛṅgāṭa in the Hindu Tantric-influenced *Kālikāpurāṇa* (ca. eleventh century) and recommended in that text as a site of Śiva worship for pilgrims visiting the area.¹⁴

In late fourteenth- and early fifteenth-century Tibet, it was rumoured that two Indian Buddhist Siddhas or adepts, namely Nāgabodhi and Mitra-yogin, were both still alive and dwelling at Singri in Assam. Mitrayogin was a Siddha about whom the Tibetan tradition maintains numerous stories of miraculous powers.¹⁵ He made a well-known visit to Tibet in 1196, at the invitation of the Trophu Lotsāwa, Champapel. This means that by the late fourteenth century, Mitrayogin must have been at least two hundred years old, the Tibetans presumably believing that he was able to extend his life by means of alchemical practices or other Tantric powers in a “deathless” (*chi med*) condition, or that he was in fact merely manifesting in an emanation body form. Meanwhile, the Siddha Nāgabodhi is presented as an even more timeless character in the Tibetan sources. The biography of the principal mediaeval synthesizer of Tibetan Buddhism, Tsongkhapa, states that when he was travelling between Nyel and Lhodrak in southern Tibet, and about to meet the Mahāsiddha or “great adept” of Lhodrak, Namkha Gyaltzen (b. 1326), he resolved to set out for Singri in India in order to personally meet with and question both Nāgabodhi and Mitrayogin about some difficult points in the interpretation of the *Guhyasamāja-tantra*¹⁶ and the *Samvara-tantra* corpus. Tsongkhapa, however, never reached Singri, being persuaded to turn back somewhere near the Bhutan-Tibet border because of the dangers of the journey.¹⁷ However, his contemporary, the Kagyüpa yogin Tsangpa Lodro Zangpo (1360–1423), did apparently make the journey to Singri.¹⁸ Tsangpa Lodro Zangpo had been the long-time disciple of Barawa Gyeltsen Palzangpo (1310–91), who had been active at Tsari, a holy mountain and Tantric retreat centre on the Tibetan border to the north of Assam,¹⁹ and a place frequently held to be closely related to the

pīṭha of Devīkoṭa which later Tibetan commentators located somewhere in Assam. A visit to Singri by the saint Thangthong Gyelpo (1385–1464), in what appears to be 1434, is also recorded in one version of his biography.²⁰

Apart from these earlier Tantric associations that elite Tibetan Vajrayāna practitioners made with Singri, this Assamese site has no known Buddhist history whatsoever, and is in fact the location of an ancient and famous Śaiva temple, known locally as Gopeshwar. This did not stop later Tibetan and Bhutanese Buddhists from developing, sometime before the eighteenth century, an active pilgrimage to Singri based on the belief that the Buddha had visited the spot and left behind a single head hair that later grew into a tree there. Tibetan and Bhutanese pilgrims to Singri would ritually deposit their long hair tresses that had been cut off in the ordination ceremony. The Hindu Gopeshwar temple itself was taken by them to be an ancient *stūpa*, while the pool of groundwater in its sunken crypt was believed to contain a submerged image of the Buddha, the hair-knot of which could supposedly be felt beneath the water by the faithful, but never seen. The tradition of making pilgrimage to Singri, and treating it as a Buddhist site, has been maintained to this day by followers of Tibetan Buddhism (see below).²¹

Singri offers a fine example of how, on the strength of an early Tibetan narrative about Vajrayāna activity in an obscure part of Assam, a pilgrimage based upon an invented tradition about the Buddha came into being at a Hindu temple site and then persisted over the centuries. It appears that exactly the same process occurred at Hājo, which was located in the centre of the region Tibetans recognized as the *mahāpīṭha* of Kāmarūpa mentioned in the Tantric texts. During the late sixteenth and early seventeenth centuries, the Tibetan Buddhist world was also exposed to various unique narratives about Kāmarūpa by way of the literary works of the historian Tāranātha. He represented the area as both a place where Buddhism was supposed to have existed in ancient times and also as a centre for the activities of Vajrayāna Siddhas.²² Such claims must have been “nice to think” within the Tibetan tradition, for they meant that India was still, indeed—on its peripheries at least—a living Buddhist holy land. Tāranātha’s narratives imbuing Assam with an invented Buddhist history and culture, of which I will give a good example below, have remained a feature of the Tibetan understanding of India up to the present, even among the most critical of writers.

Furthermore, when Tibetans actually visited Hājo and nearby Gauhati with the possibility of an Indian Buddhist holy land in mind, they did not encounter a religious culture that was in total ruin, long neglected, buried,

or lost, as was the case with the ancient Buddhist sites in the Middle Ganges region and elsewhere in India. Instead, what they found there was a vibrant Indian religious milieu, in which the rebuilt sites of ancient Indian temples were filled with mendicants, pilgrims, and worshippers belonging to different sects of Hinduism, some obviously Tantric.

The Koch Rājā's Revival

During the mid-sixteenth century, the main temple at Hājo, that of Hayagrīva, the Horse-headed Viṣṇu, was entirely deserted and almost lost in thick jungle following its destruction during raids on the Kāmarūpa region by a Bengali Muslim army under the command of Kālā Pahār. In 1581, the Koch kingdom was divided into Koch Bihār to the west, which became a Mughal vassal in 1584, and Koch Hājo to the east, which held out against the Mughals until 1612, and of which Hājo was a main regional political and cultural centre. Thus, in 1583, the temple of the Horse-headed Viṣṇu at Hājo was restored by the Koch Rājā of Kāmarūpa, Nar Nārāyaṇ (1534–84), who was an enthusiastic Vaiṣṇava revivalist.²³ The same monarch had also entirely rebuilt the nearby ancient goddess temple of Kāmākhyā at Gauhāti in 1565. This temple has long been famous as the potent site where the vulva of the goddess fell to earth according to the great dismemberment narratives of Śaiva and Śākta Hinduism. Kāmākhyā was a place which the Tibetans identified with the Vajrayāna *mahāpīṭha* of Kāmarūpa, but also one which they sometimes mistakenly confused with Hājo.

This local, late sixteenth-century revitalization of Hinduism throughout the area occurred before the Tibetan Buddhist rediscovery of Kuśinagar at Hājo. Visiting lamas from the Himalayas were probably convinced that thriving Vaiṣṇava and Śākta temple cultures at Hājo and Kāmākhyā were ancient Buddhist sites which had persisted and been partially assimilated by Hindus. We find confirmation of just such a supposition in contemporary Tibetan narrative sources. This comes to us in the form of a hagiography of the Indian Siddha Kṛṣṇācārya written in 1632 by Tāranātha, no doubt based in part on the reports of his Indian teacher Buddhaguptanātha, who travelled to Kāmarūpa in what must have been the latter part of the sixteenth century. Tāranātha's account relates an unsourced (presumably oral) narrative about a Vajrayāna *yoginī* known as Bandhepa, who was apparently the principal female disciple of Kṛṣṇācārya, and her encounter with a magically powerful image of the Horse-headed Viṣṇu, named "Harigirimātho" located in Kāmarūpa.²⁴ The name "Harigirimātho" recorded by Tāranātha is actually a Tibetan phonetic combination of two Indian names, those of

Hayagrīva and of “Madhob” or “Mādhav,” the local post-sixteenth-century Assamese name for the famous Horse-headed Viṣṇu image and temple at Hājo.²⁵

The intent of Tāranātha’s narrative is clearly to depict the decline of Vaiṣṇavism in the area and the rise of Buddhist Vajrayāna there in its stead, thanks to the powers of Bandhepa. The account also relates how the Hayagrīva image gained a damaged face, which is in fact the reported condition of the main Horse-headed Viṣṇu image found in the Hājo temple, although other non-Tibetan sources relate the damage to external military attacks on the area. Any seventeenth-century Tibetan reader of Tāranātha’s narrative would imagine that the environs of Kāmarūpa were indeed once, and perhaps still at the time, very Buddhist. Yet, this Tibetan report of Vaiṣṇava decline in the region was composed at the very time of vigorous Vaiṣṇava revivalism throughout Kāmarūpa inspired by the works of the Koch Rājā. It serves as yet another reminder of the great caution that must be exercised in relation to Tāranātha’s reports about India, in which a few verifiable place names and local details garnered from his Indian informants are integrated with elaborate fantasies of a thriving Buddhist India during the Mughal era.

At present, we can but offer a collection of mostly well-informed speculations on various details of the rediscovery of the Tibetan Buddhist Kuśinagar at Hājo. However, what is certain is that after it was identified as such Hājo quickly blossomed to become the single most important Indian pilgrimage resort for Tibetan and Himalayan Buddhists to visit right up until the early twentieth century.

The Replica Holy Land

The earliest report of a pilgrimage to the rediscovered Kuśinagar at Hājo is from a Tibetan lama, Pagsam Yeshe (1598–1667), who was also a member of the northern branch of the Drukpa Kagyüpa lineage to which Lama Tashi Wangyal belonged. He made his visit to Hājo during the cool season of 1633–34 and left a good description of the site as an active place of Tibetan pilgrimage.²⁶ This wandering lama had been travelling through the Lhodrak region of southern Tibet, visiting various places such as Kharchu, Drowolung, and the famous Sekhar Gutog Temple, which were all sites of religious significance to his own Drukpa lineage. We know that his Indian sojourn just preceded the second Tibetan attack on Bhutan in 1634, and he reported fears of the impending invasion in the Bhutanese areas he passed through en route to Hājo.²⁷ During the early winter months, he crossed

over the Himalayas and into the Bumthang Valley of central Bhutan, then descending through the ravine country to the south by way of Rong and Kamsher. Arriving finally on the Indian plains, he set out for the site he believed to be Kuśinagar. Upon reaching Hājo—which he referred to in Tibetan as the “Town of Kuṣa Grass”—he found not only an alternative Kuśinagar but, more remarkably, a whole range of relocated Magadhan sites and landscapes, an entire replica Buddhist holy land.

This replica Magadha in Assam was in fact a highly compressed version of the original Buddhist Magadha. During his pilgrimage around the dozen or so square kilometres of the Hājo precinct, Pagsam Yeshe first encountered what was claimed to be a reliquary shrine of the Buddha Śākyamuni, being an alternative for the so-called Nirvana *Stūpa* which the Malla had erected at the site of the nirvana in Kuśinagar, as is related in the ancient Buddhist texts. Not far to the east of this shrine, he was also able to visit the sacred hill of Vulture Peak or *Gṛdhra-kūṭa-parvata*, upon which, according to the Buddhist scriptures, Śākyamuni had preached so many of his teachings, and which is normally located at Rājagṛha, over two hundred kilometres from the actual Kuśinagar in the Middle Ganges region. Close by he also encountered, in short order, the Nairāñjanā River on whose banks the Buddha had practiced austerities for six years, the Buddha’s bathing pool, the famous Bodhi Tree itself, and yet another of the Buddha’s reliquary shrines. These were all major sites located in and around Bodh Gayā in Bihar, the place of the Buddha’s enlightenment, and also normally hundreds of kilometres distant from the ancient Kuśinagar near Gorakhpur. The lama was even able to catch a glimpse of the body of Queen Māyā, the Buddha’s mother, down a deep hole in the earth.

Less than half a century later, in about 1680, a Bhutanese Drukpa lama named Yeshe Ngödrup (1641–1727) became one of a rapidly increasing number of pilgrims who made the journey to Hājo to encounter the Buddhist holy land there.²⁸ He found that even more holy places associated with the life of the Buddha had been identified in the area. One was a rock cave located on the banks of the local version of the Nairāñjanā River, in which the Buddha is said to have practiced his austerities. At another point, a large trough-shaped stone could be seen, reputedly used by the Buddha to wash his garments, and the water which gathered in this natural basin was collected by Tibetan pilgrims for curing illnesses. Another black pool of liquid was said to be Buddha’s spittle, while a great river with white sands on the horizon—undoubtedly the nearby Brahmaputra—was said to have been miraculously drawn forth by the Buddha’s finger.

These accounts by Pagsam Yeshe and Yeshe Ngödrup reveal that,

within a relatively short time after its discovery, the Tibetan Kuśinagar at Hājo had developed into an entirely new replica of the ancient Buddhist holy land. It was a replica into which a host of the most famous Magadhan religious sites of the Buddha's life, plus some new elaborations, had been conveniently transposed and compressed in order to fit within a discrete, local Indian topography, and one around which a visiting pilgrim could conveniently tour in a day or so. However, the landscape that the Tibetans had now so effectively marked out as a kind of concentrated cultural replica—much like a modern theme park—was by no means a religious tabula rasa when they first encountered it. The new Tibetan interpretation of the Hājo landscape effectively reinscribed the traditional Buddhist holy land onto an existing and ancient Vaiṣṇava and Śaiva religious topography, one that dated back at least to the eleventh century. This same topography, replete with an older sacred history of its own, is already found fully described in the *Kālikāpurāṇa* as a specific pilgrimage venue associated especially with the Hayagrīva *avatāra* of Viṣṇu. In the seventy-eighth chapter of the *Kālikāpurāṇa*, there are accounts of the Maṇikūṭa Hill, upon which the Hājo temple stands, identifying it as being the residence of Hayagrīva. Nearby were the sacred lake of Apunarbhava and the flat rock of Harabrthi, which were both associated with Mahādeva the yogin, who was believed to be deep in eternal meditation. Some holy rivers flowed in the vicinity, and the surrounding hills each had a sacred significance or were envisaged as embodiments of Hindu deities.²⁹ It is precisely these more ancient Hindu sites that we find systematically redefined in the much later Tibetan accounts.³⁰

Exactly which aspects of this replica Buddhist holy land in Assam were created by Tibetan Buddhists themselves, and not by others, we cannot verify in all cases. It seems likely that what the Tibetans began, and then eagerly accepted and participated in, was probably also augmented at times by input from other South Asian travellers or local Assamese, especially those who might have benefited in various ways from the presence of numerous highland Buddhist visitors in the area. At least one late seventeenth-century Buddhist pilgrim to Hājo wondered whether or not some of the claimed Buddhist sites in the area were not fabricated by “the crafty Indian inhabitants there who live by means of deception.”³¹ One case of non-Tibetan influence appears to involve the principal holy object at Hājo, the central Hayagrīva image in the main temple.

The Hayagrīva of Maṇikūṭa is already identified by the epithet Mādhav in the *Kālikāpurāṇa*, and thus the image is colloquially known as “Madhob” or “Mādhav” by later Indian worshippers. The same image was believed by

Tibetan Buddhist pilgrims to be a representation of the Buddha, while the Hājo temple itself, with its egg-shaped domed roof, was taken to be the “Nirvana *Stūpa*” built by the Malla. From the late seventeenth century until today, Tibetan Buddhists have consistently referred to the Hājo image as “Mahāmune” or “Mahāmuni.”³² This epithet simply means “great sage” in Sanskrit, and Tibetans know it well from the mantra of the Buddha, for instance. It is in common usage in many other Indian contexts to refer to any number of revered non-Buddhist religious figures, such as Kapilamuni, whose shrine was located at the mouth of the Ganges in nearby Bengal. However, the specific usage of the name Mahāmuni at Hājo to indicate what was taken to be a great image of the Buddha might well be considered a result of Burmese Buddhist influence in Assam.

The name Mahāmuni is of course famous throughout Burmese lands, being one of the oldest and most important cults—and Buddha images—in Burmese religious and political history, one of particular prominence up until the late eighteenth century in the region of Arākān, not far to the southeast of central Assam. The original Arākānese Mahāmuni temple was located in Kyauktaw, while another was established at the foot of the Chittagong Hills at Rangoonia.³³ Assam experienced centuries of ebb and flow in its contact with Burmese groups—the Ahoms, the ruling dynasty of Assam, were themselves Shan migrants—and the occasional Burmese Buddhist mission sent to search for Bodh Gayā would also have probably passed through the region. “Mahāmuni” was indeed the same name that also came to be applied to the surviving stone images of the Buddha in the ruined Bodh Gayā Mahābodhi Temple.³⁴ It is perhaps no surprise that it also came to be used at Hājo.

Hājo as a Tibetanized Place

Regardless of the origins of the developing traditions at Hājo, Tibetan Buddhists now engaged with them in ever increasing numbers. In seventeenth- and eighteenth-century Tibet, the news had spread that after centuries without access to the Indian Buddhist holy land, it was once again possible to make pilgrimages to the holy places of the Buddha in India.

The Hājo region quickly gained in ritual popularity among Tibetan travellers. In sources from the late seventeenth or early eighteenth century, we find it described as a meeting place for pilgrims from all over the Tibetan plateau, from central Tibet to the Hor and Kham regions in the east and as far as Tö Ngari in the west.³⁵ This is perhaps not surprising, given the relative ease with which Tibetans could reach the site. Compared

with most other regions of India, the replica holy land at Hājo was a very convenient destination for Tibetan travellers in the centuries following its “rediscovery.” It could be reached fairly directly from southern Tibet by way of two main routes. One went via the Monyul corridor immediately east of Bhutan, while another passed through Bhutan itself by way of Bumthang and Dewangiri (fig. 5.2). During the late seventeenth century, the newly formed Gelukpa state in Lhasa had successfully expanded its influence southward into Monyul, and the area became a site of great religio-political interest when the incarnation of the Sixth Dalai Lama, Tsangyang Gyatso (1683–1706), was discovered there. Upon reaching the plains to the south, Tibetan pilgrims encountered Assamese communities which had maintained centuries of dealings with their Tibetan Buddhist neighbours in Bhutan, and they would not have found themselves too far out of place there.

With many Tibetans visiting Hājo, it was only a matter of time before the newcomers added their own additional layers of uniquely Tibetan cultural representations to the local topography there, not to mention their own particularly Tibetan Buddhist religious practices. In this respect, it seems that Khampa pilgrims from eastern Tibet may have made their fair share of contributions at Hājo.

By the late seventeenth century, Khampa pilgrims became increasingly frequent visitors at Hājo, with some even engaged in trade or labour in the local Assamese markets around the site.³⁶ Many such Khampa travellers were part of a long-term and widespread displacement of peoples from the overpopulated and often strife-torn valleys of eastern Tibet, who gradually migrated west and south across the Tibetan plateau and beyond in search of better places to live and new opportunities (see chap. 8). As more Khampa pilgrims made the journey to Assam, certain influential Buddhist masters from Kham are known to have visited Hājo for the purpose of conducting purely Tibetan-style religious practices there. They also played a role in spreading the renown of the replica Assamese holy land back in Tibet. One such practitioner was the Nyingmapa lama Rikzin Nyima Drakpa (1647–1710).

Rikzin Nyima Drakpa was a somewhat controversial “revealer of hidden religious treasures” (*gter ston*) who hailed from the Nangchen region of Kham and was known in certain quarters for his powers of black magic. He was a student of Pema Rikzin (1625–97), the founder of the famous Dzogchen Monastery in Kham, although he spent much of his career travelling around Tibet and neighbouring regions, spreading Pema Rikzin’s teachings and revealing new textual and material “hidden religious treasures”

(*gter ma*), among other activities.³⁷ Nyima Drakpa extended his treasure-revealing work into India itself. After dwelling in the Nakshö region of western Kham, he set out to visit the Tibetan Kuśinagar at Hājo in the cool season of 1684. A passage in his biography describes his journey and gives an interesting insight into Tibetan pilgrimages to Hājo at the time:

On account of a clear prophecy that the time had come to extract the treasure of Kuśinagar in India, he went to India in the company of some thirty-five male and female pilgrims who supported him with food and clothing. Although the conditions for travel were very miserable, and the going was difficult at that time in the region of Mon due to the obstacles caused by the conflict between the Gelukpa [state in Lhasa] and the Drukpa [of Bhutan], he happily reached the holy land thanks to the opportunities provided by measureless compassion and good works. Just gazing upon the holy places of India produced the miraculous experience of joy arising in his heart, together with the mind being liberated with feelings of great bliss. . . . Then, in accordance with a secret prophecy of Guru Rinpoche, in the wood-male-rat year [= 1684], at the holy place called Hājo (Ha co) which is the northern entrance to Kuśinagar in India, he extracted treasures that included two brother images of the Buddha, Jowo Mikyö Dorje and Chöku Mikyö Dorje, which were made out of various types of bronze from eastern and western India by the glorious protector Ārya-Nāgārjuna himself, and the doctrinal cycle of Lhamo Ngagsungma who was the protective deity of those supports.³⁸

Thus, as its popularity increased, Hājo was destined to become a foreign stage for the enactment of such virtuoso performances of Tibetan-style Buddhism. It also became a new source of the most ritually empowered substances in the Buddhist world: alleged relics of the Buddha of both the bodily and “contact” varieties.

Following his revelation of these hidden religious treasures at Hājo, Nyima Drakpa returned to southern Tibet during the spring of 1684, by way of Monyul and Loro. From there, he proceeded north to the great Nyingmapa monastery of Mindröling in central Tibet, where he called upon the most influential Tibetan treasure revealer of his day, Terdak Lingpa (1646–1714). The travelling Khampa treasure revealer then presented Terdak Lingpa with relics collected on his pilgrimage to Assam, including earth, stones, and plant parts from the great Buddhist holy places of India that he considered he had just visited in the region of Hājo. The

most auspicious object brought from Assam was a tree branch about the size of a forearm and covered with many leaves, which Nyima Drakpa had obtained from what he had taken to be the original Bodhi Tree growing in Assam.³⁹ Thus, the replica Assamese holy land had become a source of replica Buddha relics for use by the Tibetan religious establishment.

In an earlier historical period, when visits by Indian teachers to Tibet still occurred now and again, claimed Buddhist relics from Indian sites had arrived in Tibet in the possession of such persons and where accordingly appropriated into the Tibetan ritual context. For instance, a biography of the Third Sharmapa Lama, Chöpel Yeshe (1406–52), records that during the early fifteenth century he obtained earth and stones from the “eight great holy places” of the Buddha in India as a gift from an Indian yogin who was visiting Tibet. These and other materials were then used by the lama to manufacture a particular kind of relic pill, known as the “One Hundred and Eight Great Holy Places Earth and Stone Pill.”⁴⁰ Such pills could be used in Tibet for purposes as diverse as consecration, healing, and personal protection. Centuries later, when Tibetans were entirely cut off from a long-dead Indian Buddhism and its lost cult sites, replica Buddhist relics from Assam were the most likely source for various of the claimed collections of Buddha relics appearing in central and eastern Tibet from this time onward. For example, at the end of the seventeenth century, when the mortal remains of the Fifth Dalai Lama were entombed in the famous shrine known as “Single Ornament of the World” (*’Dzam gling rgyan gcig*), his enormous gold and jewel-encrusted burial *stūpa* erected within the Potala Palace in Lhasa, a host of Indian relics were added by his Regent, Desi Sangye Gyatso, in order to consecrate it. In the impressive list of these relics we find included empowered and auspicious types of earth and stones from Śrāvastī, Śītavana, Kuśinagar, Phūllahari, and from a *stūpa* consecrated by the Buddha on the banks of the Nairāñjanā River near Bodh Gayā; earth and sandalwood associated with the body of Kāśyapa Buddha from Vajrāsana; *udumbara* flowers which grew in the Buddha’s bathing pool at Vajrāsana; wood and fruit from the Bodhi Tree at Vajrāsana, and so on.⁴¹ It is highly likely that all or part of such a relic collection at this time came from Assam.

Many Khampas continued to visit Assam and Hājo throughout the next several centuries.⁴² A good example of how a young Khampa pilgrim might get from Kham to far distant Assam during the early nineteenth century is found in the life story of one Losang Thabkay (b. ca. 1787). He was a native of the Trehor region of Kham in eastern Tibet. Deciding to become a

monk, he took up ordination and journeyed to Lhasa where he received his monastic training at the major Gelukpa monastery of Drepung. However, finding monastic life was not to his taste, he gave up his vows and reverted to being a layman. The young Khampa then set off to undertake a pilgrimage around the holy places of central Tibet, which in itself was not an uncommon ritual accomplishment for unattached Tibetans interested in Buddhism. His travels took him southeast to the famous holy mountain sanctuary of Tsari, which ranked as one of Tibet's most important destinations of pilgrimage.⁴³ From Tsari, it was only a relatively short journey west via Loro before he reached the Monyul corridor, the favoured route to the Tibetan replica Buddhist holy land in Assam. In this way, during the cool season of 1803, Losang Thabkay arrived in India and visited a remarkable range of sites in Assam which were then actively identified with the Buddha, including Kuśinagar, the Gṛdhra-kūṭapārvata, Singri, and even the great Indian holy city of Vārāṇasī.⁴⁴

By the late nineteenth century, visitors to Hājo found that a specifically Tibetanized landscape had evolved there. The area was being ritually marked, "read," and interpreted in detail in the same manner as is typical of indigenous pilgrimage places throughout Tibet. The shape of a local three-peaked hill was viewed as the hypostatized bodies of the Buddha and his two chief disciples, while various rocks were taken as being fragments of the Buddha's staff or of his other belongings. A huge basinlike stone in the jungle there was said to have been a bowl, used by the Lord of Death to boil the heads of sinners in, and miraculously unearthed at the site by the Buddha himself,⁴⁵ while a local "tank" or Hindu ritual bathing pool was believed to have been created by the Buddha's superhuman earth-moving actions. A charnel ground or cemetery had also been identified by the Tibetans at Hājo,⁴⁶ and the bushes in its vicinity were festooned with strips of cloth ritually deposited there by pilgrim-worshippers, exactly as occurs in Tibet itself. Upon the local Assamese rocks, Tibetans had carved their familiar mantras *Oṃ ma ṇi pad me hūṃ*, *Oṃ ah hūṃ*, and so forth, in Tibetan characters. They had also renamed the local cultural and physical features of the site. Thus, the tanks or ritual pools associated with the main Vaiṣṇava and Śaivite temples became known in Tibetan as the "Holy Water Lake" (Yon chab mtsho)⁴⁷ and "Manibhadra Lake" (mTsho Ma ṇi bha dra) respectively, and Tibetan narratives were associated with them, while a series of sixteen local hillocks were duly identified as the "Sixteen Sthavira" (gNas brtan bcu drug). The inner sacred world of Indian temple culture at Hājo was also reinscribed by the Tibetans. All the Vaiṣṇava and Śaiva images inside were now identified as being Buddhist by the lamas,

with some named “Orgyen Guru” and “Dorje Drolo” after manifestations of Padmasambhava, the Tibetans’ much-worshipped “Second Buddha.”⁴⁸

The Doubtful Minority

During its period of flourishing as a Tibetan holy place, Hājo became completely taken for granted by persons from all classes of Tibetan society as being the actual Indian location of the major sites of the Buddha’s life. Noting the views of ordinary Tibetan pilgrims during the mid-eighteenth century, the Fourth Khamtrül Rinpoche, Tenzin Chökyi Nyima (1730–1779/80), reported that they now commonly accepted that the Gṛdhrakūṭāparvata was located at Hājo—which he referred to as the “Indian Kuśinagar”—rather than at Rājagṛha in Magadha.⁴⁹ In the public domain, the faithful were in no doubt about the authenticity of the rediscovered holy land or its religious virtues.

In only one actual pilgrim’s account of a visit to Hājo do we encounter some limited scepticism. This is the rich description of the site and its Assamese environs by the Bhutanese Drukpa lama Yeshe Ngödrup, who toured the area around 1680. As an educated cleric, Yeshe Ngödrup possessed some basic knowledge of the historical geography of ancient north India as it is presented in the canonical scriptures of Buddhism as well as an acquaintance with assorted Tibetan writings on India. While he accepted that Hājo was in fact Kuśinagar, the idea that the other main sites of the ancient Magadhan holy land were also located there did not seem at all credible to him:

Furthermore, there are many other sites, including a small hill which protrudes here known as Gṛdhrakūṭāparvata, the Vajrāsana, a dark pool, the waters of which are famous as being the Buddha’s saliva, and a great river with light-coloured sand rising up and visible far off in the distance which is said to have been drawn forth by the Buddha’s finger, and these appear to be deceptions and are hard to accept as being genuine. According to the *Vinaya* and *Sūtra* collections, besides denoting the final nirvana as having occurred in the borderland realm of the Malla at Kuśinagar, other sites, such as the Nairāṇjanā [River] and the Gṛdhrakūṭā[parvata] doubtlessly exist in parts of Madhyadeśa. Furthermore, the central region of the world is known as Madhyadeśa, and as for the absolute centre, that is the great *caitya*-temple of the Dharma known as Vajrāsana, the site where the Buddha attained enlightenment.⁵⁰

Yeshe Ngödrup next distinguishes what defines the “borderland” (*mtha’ khob*) realm of the Malla, and on the basis of this he put forward his evidence that Hājo’s identity as Kuśinagar appeared to be correct:

As for the city of the Malla country: If one passes some days beyond this famous present-day site [of Hājo], there is a great country with houses built from large stones with such things as roofs, doors and door bolts, and many murals painted on them, and a great river with a stone bridge across which horses, horse-carts, and ranks of elephants are able to travel. Furthermore, having heard reports of such an amazing province from a few pilgrims who went there and spoke of what they saw, it probably is the true region of the Buddha’s final nirvana.⁵¹

Remarkably, Yeshe Ngödrup considered that the Malla, an ancient tribal confederation which, by early Buddhist accounts, enjoyed its heyday some two thousand years earlier in the northwest of the Middle Ganges region, still existed in all its glory in a neighbouring region of Assam! The same idea is also found in later works by other Tibetan scholars, who also identified Kuśinagar in Assam. In this and other instances we come to realize yet again how mediaeval Tibetans maintained a remarkably timeless view of India, as if the descriptions of its civilization gleaned from the ancient parts of the Buddhist canon that they inherited had remained valid and unchanged over millennia.

During the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries, Tibet’s leading Buddhist luminaries from across the sectarian spectrum also accepted the veracity of Hājo as the Buddhist holy land. This was a time, as we shall see in chapter 6, when the Tibetan intelligentsia had rekindled their former interest in India and all things Indian by way of contacts with the Sanskritized Nepal Valley. The claim that the place of the Buddha’s nirvana and the rest of the Buddhist holy land had been rediscovered and become accessible once again was bound to have been greeted with much positive interest. It was the often completely uncritical nature of this interest which is more surprising, although this gives us a good insight into the very vague ideas about India which most Tibetan scholars had been left with after centuries of only broken contact with their southern neighbour.

In 1693, the Fifth Dalai Lama’s Regent, the scholar-statesman Desi Sangye Gyatso, composed a survey of monasteries and holy places entitled *The Yellow Beryl* (*Vaiḍūrya ser po*), and in which he located the Assamese Kuśinagar not far from the “hidden land” of Kyimojong—a place usually

associated with Bhutan—in the centre of Kāmarūpa, near the Tibetan border.⁵² Elsewhere, during his clandestine negotiations to secure the young boy who was to become recognized as the incarnation of the Sixth Dalai Lama, Desi Sangye Gyatso also cited the location of Kuśinagar as being near Monyul, which is just north of Hājo.⁵³ Thus, the Assamese holy land was being accorded credibility at the very pinnacle of central Tibetan religious and political life, and this acceptance was to be maintained.

Following the death of the Seventh Dalai Lama, Losang Kelsang Gyatso (1708–57), the Ganden Phodrang state at Lhasa performed numerous commemoration rites in his honour, including special ritual distributions of gifts and wealth (*mang 'gyed*) which were made during 1757. Included in the list of recipients for these offerings were those adjacent countries that the Tibetans had positive ties with at the time, including Assam, which had then become generally known as “Kuśinara.”⁵⁴ Throughout the eighteenth century, the idea of the presence of Kuśinagar in Assam became firmly implanted in Tibetan thinking and writing about India. In his widely read and circulated geographical work of 1777, the *General Description of the World*, the Gelukpa scholar Sumpa Khenpo Yeshe Penjor identified Kuśinagar as being in eastern India, not far south of the famous holy mountain of Tsari which itself lies just to the north of central Assam. Remarkably, Sumpa Khenpo even claimed that Kuśinagar could actually be seen from the very popular “middle circuit” (*bar skor*) pilgrimage route that runs high around the mountain.⁵⁵ The famous Nyingmapa savant Jigme Lingpa also recognized the identification of both Kuśinagar and Gṛdhrakūṭāparvata at Hājo in his *Discourse on India to the South* (*lHo phyogs rgya gar gyi gtam*) composed in 1789.⁵⁶ In his turn, the Third Panchen Lama not only maintained the by now widely accepted status of the site but also enhanced it by adding even more religious associations to its significance. In his well-known 1775 treatise entitled *Explanation of Shambhala and Narrative of the Holy Land* (*Shambha la'i rnam bshad 'phags yul gyi rtogs brjod*), the Panchen Lama described the site in his account of Kāmarūpa as follows:

Called “Kamaru” in the vernacular, it is one of the twenty-four countries for Tantric practice, and is located on the eastern radial of the speech wheel [of the *vajrakāya* mandala] of Śrī Cakrasaṃvara. This very place is also Kuśinagar, the land where the compassionate Tathāgata showed the way of passing beyond suffering, and it is the land of the Malla. Here there exist the grove of Sāla [trees] with a throne as the place where the Buddha passed beyond suffering, and the site where

the likes of the great Tantric initiatory deity Nyuguchen⁵⁷ dwell. In that spot, which is worshipped by all Hindus and Buddhists, there is a naturally arisen representation of the vulva of the mother goddess known as Kāmākhyā, or “Kumucha” in the local dialect, and representations of the horse-headed Viṣṇu called Girimatho.⁵⁸ As for the land of the Malla itself, it is said to be the land of Assam that exists to the east of this great Tantric site [of Kāmarūpa].⁵⁹

Here, as elsewhere throughout his geography of India, the Panchen Lama was anxious to identify the original Tantric *pīṭha* sites on Indian soil. The fact that Kāmarūpa and Kuśinagar now coincided on the Tibetan “map” of Buddhist India only increased the religious status of Hājo greatly as a pilgrimage venue. However, the Panchen was mistaken in conflating the site of Hājo with the famous—but completely separate—temple complex of Kāmākhyā some kilometres distant atop the Nilachal Hill, on the banks of the Brahmaputra near the town of Gauhati.⁶⁰

It is hardly surprising that not all Tibetan students of Buddhist holy land geography were able to accept this most obvious misidentification of such an important sacred territory. The more sceptical and quite well-informed Fourth Tsenpo Nomonhan, a member of the Panchen Lama’s own Gelukpa school, penned his objections to Hājo in the lengthy section he wrote on northeast India in the 1830 redaction of his monumental geography entitled *Full Account of the World* (*’Dzam gling rgyas bshad*):

In a place not far from Dewangiri, there is a small village called Hājo. Nowadays, it is identified as Kuśinagar by those persons who travel to India. The hill there called Mātho or Ukalimātho,⁶¹ has a representation of the horse-headed Viṣṇu, and a Vaiṣṇava prayer hall (*namghar*). Both can be visited by anyone. They are very well known to those who strive after a visit to Kuśinagar and, in addition, to all the staunch Hindus for the very miraculous image of Umā called Kāmākhyā Devī. . . . Many people [who go there] say they have most probably visited the [Buddhist] holy places of India, such as Kuśinagar, Vārāṇasī, Vaiśālī, and Magadha. Be that as it may, it is clear in many *sūtras* that Kuśinagar exists close to the site of Kapilavastu, and it states in the *Mahāparinirvāṇa-sūtra*⁶² that Kapilavastu is a part of Madhyadeśa. The description in Xuanzang’s travel account generally agrees with those sources as well. Thus, as far as [making a visit to] Kuśinagar is concerned, there is no point in going to the land of Girivarta [i.e., Kāmarūpa, Tripura, Assam, etc.]. It is explained in many *sūtras* and treatises, such as the *Vinayapuṣṭamālā*,⁶³

that Vārāṇasī and the likes are also the great cities of Madhyadeśa. Thus, it is meaningless to think that they exist in Assam and in the country of Khasaraṅga, which belong to the barbarian lands at the farthestmost boundaries of India to the northeast of Bengal.⁶⁴

The Tsenpo Nomonhan's argument is quite forceful since he not only points out the purely Hindu nature of the cult there but also cites scriptural evidence from the Buddhist canon and even compares this with Xuanzang's account of India, which reported no Buddhism anywhere in Assam. The Tsenpo Nomonhan's use of Xuanzang to try and confirm—albeit at a distance—the location of holy places known from the classical Buddhist sources is interesting. Fifty years later this same approach was to become the famous *modus operandi* of Alexander Cunningham (1814–93), the “founding father” of the archaeology of early Indian Buddhism (see chap. 9). The Tsenpo Nomonhan's knowledge of Indian cultural life in the area was clearly disparate. On the one hand, he was able to mention *namghar* prayer halls or community temples which have been an institution particular to Assamese Neo-Vaiṣṇavism since the time of its founder Sankardeva (1487–1568). On the other hand, he repeated the Panchen Lama's mistake of equating Hājo with the larger but completely separate temple complex of Kāmākhyā in Gauhati. In spite of his arguments against Kuśinagar—or any other site in Magadha for that matter—being located in Assam, the Tsenpo Nomonhan was unwilling to dismiss all Tibetan claims of Hājo being a Buddhist site that offered spiritual benefits for those practitioners who visited it. Thus, he completed his assessment by stating:

Nevertheless, in the land of Kāmarūpa in general, and in Hajogam in particular, there dwell many initiatory goddesses (*ḍākinī*), both of this world and those who are supramundane. There is a great deal of empowerment there to be sure, because the place is full of beings who manifest the power of the Tantric lineages, and because it is also one of the twenty-four *pīṭha*.⁶⁵

The Tsenpo Nomonhan's mention here of *ḍākinī* or Tantric “initiatory goddesses of this world” is of interest since it may help to explain why Tibetan Tantrists were so captivated by the idea that of all possible places in India, Assam must be a Vajrayāna region. “Worldly *ḍākinīs*” may in fact refer to the presence at Hājo and nearby Kāmākhyā of troupes of female dancers, locally called *naṭī*, who performed regularly before the shrine. This is an old tradition, dating back at least to the mid-sixteenth century, when the

Koch Rājā Nar Nārāyaṇ endowed the Hājo temple with a troupe of female dancers, a tradition maintained in various ways at least up until the late nineteenth century.⁶⁶

The more critical Tsenpo Nomonhan appears to have been somewhat of a lone voice in his day in arguing directly against the Tibetan claims made for Hājo as part of the ancient Buddhist holy land. But we might well ask ourselves the question: Would his appeals ever have made any difference to the large numbers of devout Tibetans then travelling every winter to Assam in search of the blessings of the Buddha's sacred traces in the Brahmaputra Valley? As has happened repeatedly in the history of Tibetan Buddhism, just as in the history of other religions, faith and a desire for direct experience of some form of "spiritual power" and the perceived ritual efficacy of such encounters have proven the stronger when pitted against scripture and reason. By the nineteenth century, the development of the Tibetan Kuśinagar and its associated replica Buddhist holy land had already attained its own "critical mass," and its popularity only climbed, even to the point where it became an international pilgrimage venue, just as the ancient holy land of the Buddha in Magadha had been in the past. European observers visiting Hājo in the mid-nineteenth century remarked on the presence there of large numbers of Buddhist pilgrims from Nepal, Bhutan, Tibet, Mongolia, and even China.⁶⁷

Hājo and European Studies of Buddhism

The Tibetan "rediscovery" of Kuśinagar is indeed of interest as an instance of Tibetan religion in the making: a single and unattested identification developed into such an elaborate and extremely popular cult of pilgrimage. Yet, such a "rediscovery" in relation to the ancient holy land of Buddhism was by no means unique in the history of the Buddhist religion itself. To realize this one only has to recall the remarkable spate of "rediscoveries" of reputedly buried Aśoka-era *stūpas*, complete with Buddha relics, which was made by devout Buddhist archaeologists across the landscape of fourth-century China.⁶⁸ What is unique about the Tibetan rediscovery in Assam is that it took place on Indian soil itself and not in some far-off homeland of non-Indian Buddhist converts. In nineteenth-century India, another attempt to rediscover the ancient original holy places of the Buddha was also underway, this time led by European colonial archaeologists and scholars of Buddhism. The Tibetan "rediscovery" in Assam was to intersect with this "scientific" effort, and it came to influence the early development of the modern discipline of Buddhist studies.

Hājo and its Assamese environs were so well known as Kuśinagar in Tibetan texts and by Tibetan Buddhist pilgrims that the identification of Kāmarūpa more generally as a setting for the Buddha's life became widely accepted throughout the nineteenth century by European scholars stationed in India and engaged in some of the first studies of the history of ancient Buddhism. In one of the earlier works of European scholarship on the life of the Buddha, based entirely on Tibetan sources, the pioneering Hungarian Tibetologist, Körösi Csoma Sándor (1784–1842), stated with conviction that:

The scene of the principal transactions in the life of Shākya, is generally, in Central or Gangetic India, or the countries from Mathura, Ujjayana, Vaishali or Prayāga (Allahabad) down to Kāma Rupa, in Assam [. . .] The death of Shākya, as generally stated in the Tibetan books, happened in Assam, near the City of Kusha (Tib. Sa-chan or Sachok) or Cāma Rupa, under a pair of Sāl trees.⁶⁹

Körösi Csoma went on to remark that, concerning the Buddha's cremated remains, "they are deposited in a magnificent pyramidal building (S. Chaitya; Tib. Mch'hod-rten; vulg. Chorten) in the City of Kusha or Kāma Rupa." And in his translation of supporting *Vinaya* passages, he glossed the site of the final nirvana as being "his last sleeping bed, in the city of Sá-chen (rtsva-can: of Kusha. S. Cāmarupa, in Assam)."⁷⁰ None of the canonical texts that Körösi Csoma actually cites in this article mentions the name Kāmarūpa in relation to the Buddha's passing away, and we must infer that he gained his information from other written Tibetan sources or as oral commentary from his Tibetan informants. Several years later, in 1838, James Prinsep (1799–1840), the first orientalist to attempt to decipher and translate the Aśokan edits and then secretary of the Asiatic Society of Bengal, investigated the origins of the names "Cooch Behár" and "Koch Vihar" (i.e., Kuch/Koch Bīhar). Inspired by Körösi Csoma's identification of Kuśinagar with Kamarūpa, Prinsep surmised,

The name Kusha vihar is doubtlessly derived, though the people now know nothing of it, from the Buddhist monastery or *vihara* which existed there in ancient times. [. . .] It would be very desirable to examine the site and remains of Kusha-vihara minutely, as it can hardly be doubted that the place whose champions contended for the possession of Buddha's relics with the eight chief powers of India, must have been at that time, and long after, a town of great importance. The rich valley

of Assam was probably then what it seems again destined to become in a few years.⁷¹

Prinsep's note must be one of the earliest calls for the commencement of an archaeology of ancient Buddhist sites in India, albeit one beginning in Assam, not in the Middle Ganges region. Although several European orientalists of the day, such as Julius Klaproth (1783–1835) and Eugène Burnouf (1801–52), briefly noted the falsehood of Kōrōsi Csoma's identification,⁷² their remarks were overlooked or went unheeded by many others with a keen interest in Buddhism at the time. Thus, the Assamese site went on to become the focus of a longer and more intense scholarly interest.

Scholarship finally began to proceed on the ground in Assam itself. In 1855, Edward Tuite Dalton (1815–80), the principal assistant of the commissioner of Assam, visited the temple at "Hajou" or "Hazoo" and reported his findings to the august membership of the Asiatic Society of Bengal in Calcutta. He duly noted the many "Buddhists from Nepal, Bhootan, Thibet and China" visiting and worshipping at the site, observing that "Budh [i.e., Buddha] could not have selected a more lovely spot for the dissemination of his doctrines or the close of his career."⁷³ Dalton's colleague, a certain Mr. Robinson who was apparently a keen student of the ancient history of Assam, was moved to remark of Hājo that,

The situation of these temples with reference to the town of Kusha, their site on the further bank of the Hirango [i.e., Brahmaputra], and one of them being to the present day consecrated to the worship of Maha Muni, together with the high degree of reverence paid to the place, by Buddhists, would lead us to infer, with as much certainty as any short of positive testimony, that one of them is the Choitya [i.e., *caitya*] adorned with the head ornament near which was the grove of Sal trees (there are plenty of them) where Sākya Muni went to his last sleeping bed, and near which also the rites of cremation were performed.⁷⁴

William Wilson Hunter (1840–1900), historian and colonial statistician, who organized the extensive nineteenth-century statistical survey of India which was later condensed into that well-known colonial reference work, the *Imperial Gazetteer of India*, accepted Robinson's position, and under the entry "Hajo" in the 1885 edition he described it as a holy place of pilgrimage for worshippers of the Buddha, being "a spot rendered sacred by the presence of the founder of their faith."⁷⁵

The pioneering German lexicographer of Tibetan language, the Moravian missionary Heinrich August Jäschke (1817–83), also accepted the identification of Assam as the site of the Buddha's final passing, and this had ongoing consequences for later scholarship on Tibetan religion.

Jäschke originally published his famous handwritten *Handwörterbuch der Tibetischen Sprache* in 1871, although it came to be more widely known under its English title *Tibetan-English Dictionary* when translated and first published in London in 1881. Under the syllable *rtsa/rtswa* in the German version he included the entry “- mchog Kuscha-Gras . . .—[grong] Stadt in West-Assam, wo Buddha starb, Glr.; Kamarūpa.”⁷⁶ Jäschke is known for his accuracy and thoroughness, and, in the opinion of many, after well over a century his dictionary is still one of the best of its kind available. However, his citation of the *sigla* Glr. in this entry is misleading, and indeed, it has misled later scholars concerned with the location of Kuśinagar in Assam. Jäschke described the *sigla* Glr. as standing for “Gyalrabs, Gesch. der tibetischen Könige; aus der mongol. Übersetzung (Bodhimör) teilt Schmidt in der G.d.O.M. [Geschichte der Ost-Mongolen] viele Bruchstücke mit.”⁷⁷ This refers to Isaac Jacob Schmidt's (1779–1847) 1829 German translation of the *Bodhi mör*, a Kalmuk historical text which includes extracts from the famous fourteenth-century Tibetan historical work, *The Mirror Illuminating the Royal Genealogies* (*rGyal rabs gsal ba'i me long*) by Lama Dampa Sonam Gyaltzen.⁷⁸ Jäschke's citation of Glr. is misleading because neither in Schmidt's translation of nor notes to the Kalmuk text, nor in the original Tibetan text of *The Mirror Illuminating the Royal Genealogies* itself, do we find any reference to Kuśinagar being in Assam or Kāmarūpa. In fact, in the case of Schmidt, he wrongly identified the site of the final nirvana as being at Rājagṛha,⁷⁹ while Sonam Gyaltzen mentions the name Kuśinagar only once in his history, and then only briefly in an abbreviated form (*rts[w]a mchog*) when discussing the twelve deeds of the Buddha.⁸⁰ In any case, Sonam Gyaltzen would never have placed the nirvana in Assam because it was only “rediscovered” there by Tibetan Buddhists several centuries after he passed away. Jäschke's identification of Kuśinagar with a city in “West-Assam” can only have been derived from his knowledge of the popular Tibetan pilgrimage tradition to the area, gained either from his Tibetan and Himalayan Buddhist informants and/or the colonial scholarship of the early to mid-nineteenth century. The idea, as disseminated further by Jäschke's more specific identification, that Buddha passed away in “West-Assam” persisted uncontested well into the late nineteenth century. For example, Theodore Duka (1825–1908), the Hungarian surgeon who was

Körösi Csoma Sándor's first and most sympathetic biographer, repeated it again in his summaries of his fellow countryman's scholarly writings on the life of the Buddha in 1885.⁸¹

Writing over a century later, and relying—quite understandably—on Jäschke's generally excellent *Tibetan-English Dictionary*, one of the leading contemporary Tibetologists, Michael Aris (1946–1999), stated that “the identification of Hajo as Kuśinagar seems to have been fully accepted by many Tibetan authorities, including bSod-nams rGyal-mtshan and Tāranātha.”⁸² We now know why Aris, following Jäschke's *sigla* Glr., unwittingly but erroneously mentioned Sonam Gyaltzen in this connection. However, his reference to Tāranātha here is also misleading. It stems from his reliance upon Laurence Austine Waddell's incorrect statement in his work *The Buddhism of Tibet or Lamaism* (1894) that Tāranātha considered the great *stūpa* of Kuśinagar—the “Nirvāṇa-Chaitya”—to be located in Kāmarūpa. Waddell resorted to the German translation of Vasilij Pavlovic Vasil'ev's (1818–1900) *Buddizm, ego dogmaty, istorija i literature* (1857), which employed citations from Tāranātha's famous history, the *Arising of the Dharma in India* (*Rgya gar chos 'byung*). Vasil'ev accurately represented a passage in the Tibetan text concerning a *vihara* named Mahācāitya in Kāmarūpa, although, when read in context, this site had nothing to do with Kuśinagar and relates to a completely different time period from that of the Buddha, information that was obviously misunderstood by Waddell.⁸³ Thus, confusions about Hājo and its identity have been compounded across centuries and extend into the contemporary period and its scholarship.

At the close of the nineteenth century, the continuing confusion over the identification of Hājo with Kuśinagar was more graphically brought to the attention of the scholarly public of colonial India and Europe by Waddell, whose scholarly interests spanned not only Tibetan and Himalayan Buddhism but also the archaeological search for traces of early Buddhism in India as well. Waddell was quite familiar with the identification of Kuśinagar at Māthākuwar due to the work of the Archaeological Survey of India. He exposed the Tibetan misinterpretations to the Asiatic Society of Bengal in a lecture given in Calcutta in 1892 when he read his paper entitled, “*The 'Tsam-chhō-dung' (rtsa-mchhog-grong) of the Lamas, and Their Very Erroneous Identification of the Site of Buddha's Death.*”⁸⁴ An abbreviated and slightly rewritten extract of the same material was later incorporated into the thirteenth chapter, “Shrines, Relics, and Pilgrims,” of his well-received and widely read work, *The Buddhism of Tibet or Lamaism*.

A Tibetan Change of Heart

The rejection of Hājo as Kuśinagar by European scholars at the turn of the twentieth century would, by itself, have made no impact upon Tibetan practices and beliefs whatsoever. Rather, it was another rediscovery, this time the archaeologically assisted reemergence of the remains of the real Kuśinagar from beneath ten metres of north Indian soil, which represented the actual challenge to well-established Tibetan views.

Following Carlleyle's identification of Māthākuwar near Gorakhpur as the location of Kuśinagar, extensive excavations of the site were undertaken between 1904 and 1912 by the Archaeological Survey of India.⁸⁵ It was only coincident with this archaeological rebirth that modern Buddhist pilgrims, including some Tibetans, once again resumed pilgrimage visits to worship at the now partially reconstructed ruins of Kuśinagar, where a new *stūpa* was also erected by Burmese Buddhist missionaries.

By the turn of the twentieth century, the highest levels of the Tibetan religious elite came to learn, from firsthand experience, of the extensive discoveries and excavations of ancient Buddhist sites and remains by colonial archaeologists. In 1905, the Sixth Panchen Lama, Chökyi Nyima (1883–1937), toured a series of excavated and restored Buddhist holy sites at the invitation of Indian colonial administrators (see chap. 9), who were trying to court his political favour in the wake of the Thirteenth Dalai Lama's flight to Mongolia. Although his itinerary did not include Kuśinagar, the Panchen Lama also witnessed that these sites were undergoing a religious revival at the hands of early Buddhist modernist groups, such as the Maha Bodhi Society, and that they were accepted as being legitimate by a wide variety of Buddhists from different lands as well as by contemporary scholars. The colonial officials who accompanied the Panchen on his 1905 pilgrimage saw to it that the significance of the archaeological remains was expounded to him and his party by Indian academics. It now became absolutely clear to some leading Tibetan clerics that their cherished, centuries-old location of the site of the Buddha's death in Assam was in fact an unfortunate mistake, and it did not take long for them to turn their backs on Hājo and start heading toward Gorakhpur instead.

The first Tibetan visit to the site of ancient Kuśinagar of which we know was actually a very important one, being that of the Thirteenth Dalai Lama in 1911 (see chap. 9). The Dalai Lama and his party were escorted to the site by British officials during his forced exile in north India following the Chinese occupation of Lhasa in 1910. Tibetan writers of pilgrimage guidebooks for India in the mid-twentieth century then felt it necessary to

alert pilgrims to their continued misidentification of Kuśīnagar in Assam. In the 1930s, the modern Tibetan scholar Amdo Gendun Chöphel visited the excavated ruins of Kuśīnagar. He then wrote instructions in his popular guidebook for Tibetan pilgrims travelling to India on how to reach the spot and to make no mistake about the identity of what he called a “substitute” (*dod*) site:

Purchasing a ticket from the Sārṇāth [railway] station as far as Tahsil-Deoria, and [proceeding] from there by motorcar, one reaches Kuśīnagar. It is the place [we Tibetans call] Tsamchogdrong and its name today is Māthākuwar. In eastern India there is another Kuśīnagar, and to the west in Afghanistan also there are all the holy places where [the Buddha] took birth, turned the wheel of Buddhist doctrine and passed beyond suffering, and thus they also exist in many other lands. In the view of the common convert, the holy place where the Teacher himself passed beyond suffering is indisputably this very one here in Madhyadeśa.⁸⁶

In spite of Amdo Gendun Chöphel’s clear message, during the modern period of Buddhist revival in India, Hājo continued to be mistakenly identified by some Tibetan and Himalayan Buddhists as the site of the Buddha’s death. Pilgrims from eastern Tibet who were travelling in India during 1945 went to the site of the Buddha’s enlightenment at Bodh Gayā, then continued on to the spot where he gave his first Buddhist teaching near Vārāṇasī, and then completed their holy land pilgrimage by heading directly to Assam to visit what was still believed to be the site of his death.⁸⁷

But Hājo’s days of high popularity were now over. By the 1950s, when increasing numbers of Tibetans started to leave Tibet in anticipation of the greater exodus that ensued after the Lhasa uprising of 1959, the Hājo Kuśīnagar went into decline as a major holy place for Tibetan Buddhists. The more widespread knowledge that the real Kuśīnagar was restored, its reinscription upon the modern Buddhist map of India, and the fact that it attracted the attention of an international Buddhist community all led Tibetans away from Assam and back to the Middle Ganges region again. In my own interviews with Tibetan exiles living in refugee camps in north-east India after 1959, I discovered that many never even came to know of nearby Hājo’s existence due to the prominence of its ancient and now more popular competitor in the Middle Ganges region.

The Assam Buddhist Holy Land Revisited

Some years ago, Michael Aris reported that “many Tibetans, Bhutanese and Monpa” continue to make the mistaken identification of Hājo as the site of Kuśinagar and Gṛdhrakūṭaparvata,⁸⁸ and that the nearby site of Singri is a “continuing attraction for the Monpa as a place of Buddhist pilgrimage.”⁸⁹ Similarly, other recent research in northeastern India confirms that Hājo and Singri are still places of pilgrimage for the Tibetan Buddhist highlanders of Arunachal Pradesh, such as the Monpa, Sherdukpen, and so on.⁹⁰

During the past few years, I have myself made several visits to Hājo and its environs, as well as the site of Singri near Tezpur, to assess the current extent of Tibetan Buddhist interest in and influence at these sites. I found that both Hājo and Singri have mainly continued to function as popular local places of pilgrimage for Assamese Hindus. On the Gurudachal Hill adjacent to Hājo, there is also a mid-seventeenth-century mosque known as Poa Mecca which attracts Muslim pilgrims as well.⁹¹ On the summit of the Maṇikūṭa Hill, the ancient temple of “Mādhav” housing the famous image of Hayagrīva (i.e., Mādhav) still stands as the principal object of Hindu veneration at Hājo. Additionally, Tibetan or Himalayan Buddhists (locally called “Bhotia,” i.e., ethnic or culturally Tibetan Buddhist highlanders) still visit during the coolest months of late December and January. Some hundreds of pilgrims make the journey annually from Bhutan and the highland regions of western Arunachal Pradesh, usually coming in groups by bus. These Buddhist pilgrims circumambulate the outside of the temple and then worship in the inner sanctum that houses five main images on the altar. The large central image is taken by them to be that of the Buddha, to which Buddhist visitors make the customary local Vaiṣṇava offering of a garland of *tulasī* leaves and then perform their own additional Tibetan-style worship by prostrating, offering oil or butter, and getting the priest to offer Tibetan salutation scarves which are returned to them after being blessed. Buddhist pilgrims chant the names of the five main images, a practice which reveals the alternative identities of the statues when compared with their local Hindu identifications. These appear to have changed little since the late nineteenth century, when Waddell last recorded both sets of names at the site, although the ordering of images is different.⁹²

As was the case in the past, the images are so heavily shrouded in garments, ornamentation, and garlands that there is no way to conduct a thorough analysis of their iconography. The exterior facade of the old *mandir* is covered with a series of images depicting the various *avatāra* of Viṣṇu, one of which resembles the Buddha. The Hājo priests explain this particular

image as being that of “Veda Viyas,” a sage endowed with complete Vedic knowledge, while the Himalayan Buddhist pilgrims accept it as an image of the Buddha and one which confirms for them the “true” Buddhist nature of the site. In general, Hājo is bereft of any indications of a Buddhist heritage, ancient or modern. However, it is clear from the particular architectural form of the old Assamese temple here (fig. 5.3), and of the very similar temple at Singri as well, that earlier Tibetan and Himalayan Buddhist visitors could easily have imagined it to be an ancient Indian Buddhist *stūpa*.

Several kilometres away to the southeast, opposite the high Gurudachal Hill with its Muslim shrines, is the Madanachala Hill. This is the location of the Kedar Temple dedicated to Śiva and Durgā. A large tank beside the temple here is the one formerly identified by Tibetan lamas as the Manibhadra Lake, where *nāga* spirits emerged from the water and offered the Buddha gems. At the foot of the hill there is also a large manmade stone basin which was formerly associated by Tibetans either with the Buddha or with Yama, the Lord of Death, but which has several completely different meanings for the local Hindus. If one follows the trail behind the temple through the Sāl (Assamese: “Hāl”) forests over the crest of the hill and down the far side a little, one encounters a gigantic Sāl tree known locally as “Bura Hāl” or “Great Sāl” at an obscure spot in the forest (fig. 5.4). The massive trunk of this old tree is wrapped with a red cloth, with evidence of simple religious offerings around its base. For Assamese Hindus, this tree is associated with Śiva, and local people come here to make wishes beneath it. The priest from Kedar Temple and his father both reported many Buddhist Bho-tias coming to pay their respects to the tree in the past, although none have returned in the past few years. According to the classical Buddhist texts, the Buddha died in a “grove of paired Sāl trees” (Yamakaśālavana) near the town of Kuśinagar, and Tibetan Buddhist visitors to Hājo regard the Bura Hāl tree to be this exact spot. Modern pilgrimage guidebooks locally available at Hājo now also describe this tree as the site of Buddha’s final passing.⁹³ During the late nineteenth century, Waddell reported that Tibetan lamas identified a whole range of sites relating to the Buddha around the Kedar Temple precincts and Madanachala Hill, although his informants made no mention of this Sāl tree where Buddha supposedly died and the Tibetan historical accounts are also silent about it.

At the foot of the Singri Hill on the north bank of the Brahmaputra River, not far to the west of modern Tezpur City, there stands, surrounded by tea plantations, an ancient Assamese temple named Gopeshwar which is dedicated to the worship of Śiva. Today it is a popular local resort for Hindu pilgrimage. The inner, sunken crypt of the old temple is still flooded

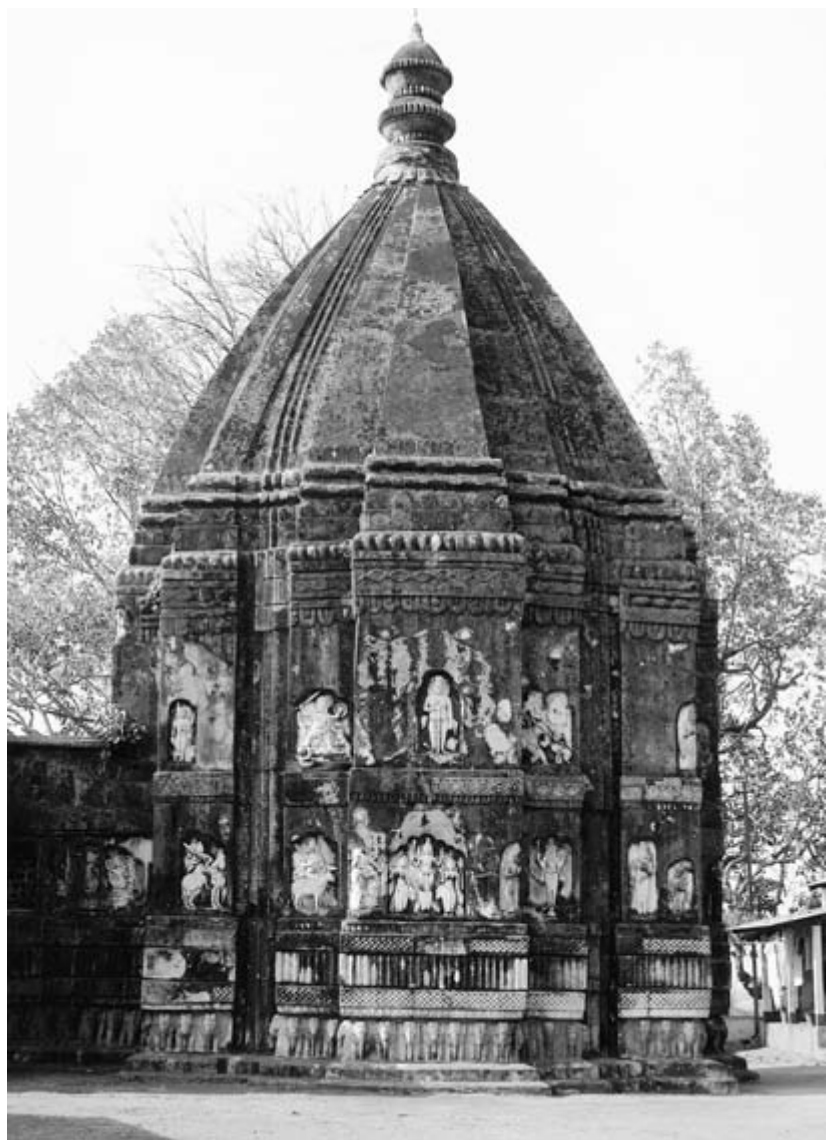


Figure 5.3. The temple of Mādhav at Hājo, 2004. Photograph by Toni Huber.



Figure 5.4. The Bura Hāl, site of the Buddha's nirvana at Hājo, 2004.
Photograph by Toni Huber.



Figure 5.5. Flooded, sunken crypt of Gopeshwar Temple, Singri, 2004.
 Photograph by Toni Huber.

with water and no image is visible beneath the water, exactly as reported in the earlier Tibetan and European accounts (fig. 5.5). The old temple vestibule has a roof supported by four large stone pillars and a vaulted ceiling crowned by a flower motif. Many pieces of ancient stone sculpture are found in the courtyard around the temple, but there is no evidence at all of Buddhism, ancient or modern, to be found at the site and its environs.

The local priest of ten years' service at the Gopeshwar Temple reported that Buddhist Bhotia visitors are now few, perhaps numbering about three hundred per year, and include Bhutanese, Monpa, and Sherdukpens. Upon entering the temple vestibule, Buddhist pilgrims throw Tibetan salutation scarves up to the top of the vaulted ceiling in offering. They also encircle their arms around one of the large stone supporting pillars and attempt to join their fingertips together in order to form a complete circle around the pillar with their bodies (fig. 5.6). This is thought to be a measure of the quality of one's *karma* when, as is typical of the Tibetan Buddhist tradition, *karma* is thought of as embodied morality. Tibetan Buddhist pilgrims' attempts to encircle the Gopeshwar Temple pillar at Singri is another example of similar "karmic tests" found at many places of

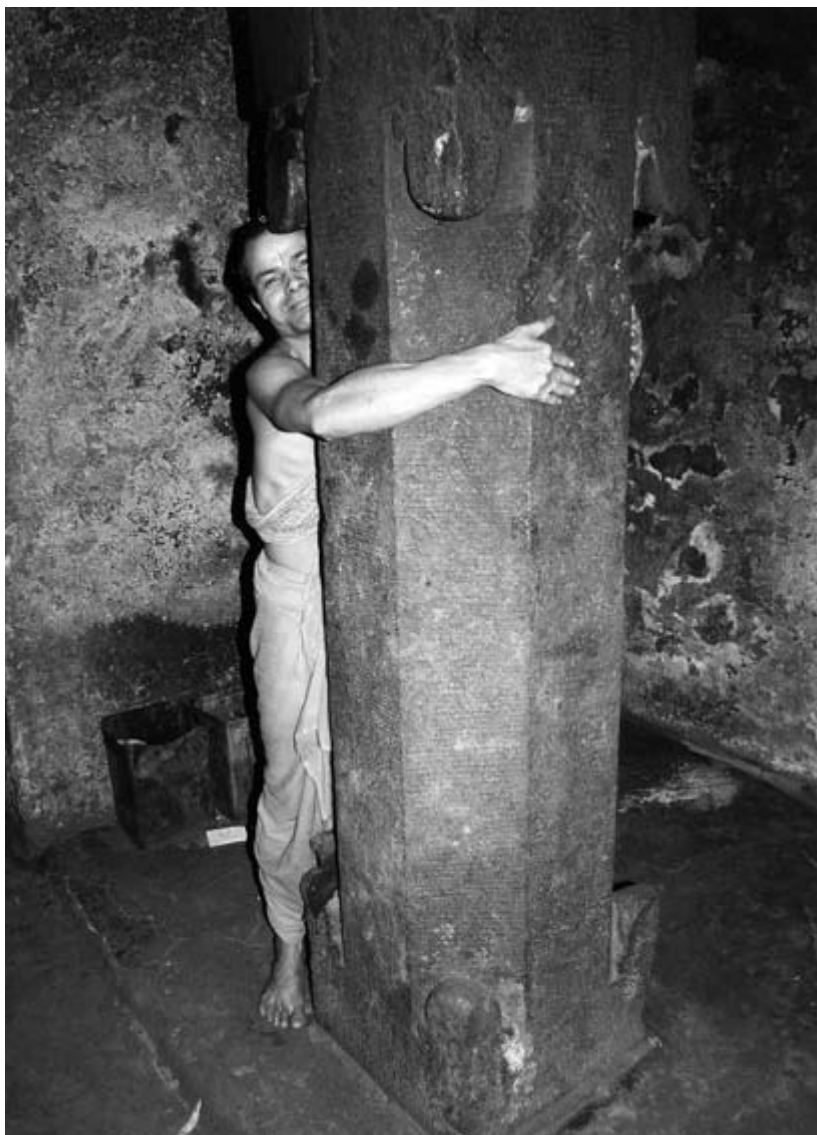


Figure 5.6. Buddhist pilgrim's test in Gopeshwar Temple, Singri, 2004.
Photograph by Toni Huber.

pilgrimage across the Tibetan plateau and throughout the high Himalayas. As observed in the earlier sources, the cutting and deposit of hair here is believed to lead to improved rebirth, and it is still performed by Buddhist pilgrims.

As I found it, the Tibetan Buddhist holy land in Assam is now only a vestige of what it once was, although it still has a living Buddhist pilgrimage culture and is not completely defunct. Thus, two alternative sites of the Buddha's nirvana remain inscribed upon the Tibetan Buddhist map of India.

Seeing Buddhism in Hinduism

During my visit to Singri, the local Śaivite temple priest indicated that some visiting Tibetan Buddhist pilgrims also shaved and deposited their hair at the Gopeshwar Temple. This accords with nineteenth-century reports of Tibetan ritual behaviour at the site: as part of their ordination ceremony, new monks' heads were shaved, and they then deposited their hair at Singri. There is indeed a local Hindu tradition concerning hair and renunciation at the site. While visiting the temple, I observed a Hindu initiation that is regularly performed there and which involves the shaving of participants' heads and the wearing of saffron-coloured garb (fig. 5.7).

When one witnesses such rites being conducted at Singri with the background knowledge that for centuries the Tibetans have identified this and other Hindu sites and rituals as actually being Buddhist, one must confront a crucial cultural phenomenon that will be illustrated throughout part 2 of this book. This is a particular Tibetan interpretive complex, which we might best describe as "seeing Buddhism in Hinduism." This is precisely the phenomenon which has allowed Tibetans to keep claiming the survival of Buddhism in India for many centuries after—according to all credible historical evidence—the religion had died out completely in its land of origins.

There are various possibilities or strategies that have permitted Tibetans to continue viewing the manifestations of Hinduism they have encountered in South Asia over the centuries as survivals of their cherished but long defunct Indian Buddhist heritage. These different modes of interpretation have often occurred together, and thus reinforced each other, and that is why I think of them as an interpretive complex. Let us briefly summarize two key components of Tibetan "seeing Buddhism in Hinduism," of which various examples are given in the following chapters.



Figure 5.7. Hindu rites at Gopeshwar Temple, Singri, 2004. Photograph by Toni Huber.

The Attraction of Names

Tibetan claims of Hindu sites being Buddhist have often been made on the basis of the mere similarity of names. In India, use of the same common place names often occurs at multiple but entirely different locations all across the Indian subcontinent. When Tibetans have encountered and recognized such names, they have often used them to claim a new Buddhist-related identity for a local Indian site, doing this even many times over when the same place name occurred at different locations throughout India. For example, Śrīnagara ("Srinagar") is an auspicious and attractive name which means something like "City of Fortune" or "Splendid City," and it has thus been used to name a variety of towns, cities, and even districts throughout India.⁹⁴ For Tibetans, the name Śrīnagara has been related to the sought-after sites of the life of the eleventh-century Tantric Buddhist Siddha Nāropa. One set of Tibetan traditions associated a Śrīnagara in Bengal or Bihar with Nāropa's life, and early Tibetan pilgrims identified and visited the saint's famous hermitage of Phūllahari in that general region.⁹⁵ Another Tibetan tradition associated Nāropa with the well-known capital of Śrīnagara in Kashmir, and hence another Phūllahari was identified and

visited in that region by Tibetan pilgrims.⁹⁶ Yet another Tibetan tradition, this time one based upon knowledge of the Śrīnagara which was once the capital of Garhwal on the upper course of the Ganges, accordingly identified Phūllahari at the nearby and very important Hindu *tīrtha* of Hardwar, and Tibetan pilgrims set about visiting that site as a Buddhist destination.⁹⁷ Moreover, Tibetan identifications of these various Phūllaharis and Śrīnagaras allowed for secondary claims about the relocation of other important Indian Buddhist sites in their respective localities. Thus, the great monastic centre of Nālandā in the Middle Ganges region, of which Nāropa was claimed to have been the abbot in Tibetan sources and which Tibetans also identified as being very close to his hermitage of Phūllahari, was later identified in Kashmir, close by the Tibetan Phūllahari there, and it was a destination of Tibetan religious travellers.⁹⁸

The attraction of a name was often only the starting point for a series of more nuanced reinterpretations of Indian sites. Once an Indian place was considered to be or even to have formerly been Buddhist, then other Tibetan interpretive possibilities allowed for the identification of its local inhabitants and religious life as being Buddhist as well.

Perceptions of History and Identity

Tibetans have maintained several consistent historical assumptions concerning the status of Buddhism during and after the Ghaznavid, Ghūrid, and Mamlūk raids and conquests in India. The first is the simplistic assumption that Indian Buddhism fell victim to Muslim invasions. Modern historians now consider that Indian Buddhism was already in severe decline at the time due to a range of possible factors, including lack of patronage, competition from other Indian religions, and so on, and that the upset caused to Buddhism by foreign invasions was merely the final straw which broke the ailing camel's back. These more complex explanations have not figured in Tibetan historical thought, thus Muslims are blamed by Tibetans for the end of Indian Buddhism. The second, more profound assumption is that the Indian population, who were then Buddhist, changed their religious identities but somehow nevertheless remained essentially "Buddhist" in their later thought and action. The idea that Buddhism thus survived in India, albeit subsumed under the cover of the external forms and names of Hinduism, has been a taken-for-granted piece of background knowledge for Tibetan travellers to India. Garshapa Sonam Rabgye, a mid-eighteenth-century Tibetan traveller to India whose journey will be fully

described in the following chapter, had this to say of the religious identities of the populations he encountered while in Bihar during 1752:

The Buddhists (*nang pa*) here used to be known as Bodhimarga (Bo dhi marga), but today they are called Hindu (Hen du). The non-Buddhists (*phyi ba*) here used to be known as Śivamarga (Shi wa marga), but today they are called Muslim (Mu gsur man).⁹⁹

As we will discuss in chapter 7, the assumption behind such simple travellers' observations was actually a reflection of what highly educated Tibetan Buddhist scholars, such as Tāranātha or the Third Panchen Lama, believed to be the case concerning the state of Buddhism in mediaeval India, namely, that it had somehow continued to survive albeit embodied by certain forms of Hinduism and under cover of new identities. Other traveller's reports from India merely served to confirm these widespread assumptions back in Tibet. For example, in his late eighteenth-century account of India, the lama Jigme Lingpa reported a traveller's description of the famous Vaiṣṇava temple of Jagannātha at Puri on the Orrisan coast. He described the Jagannātha shrine as being a "great *stūpa*," in exactly the same way in which the Assamese Hindu temples at Singri and Hājo have been interpreted by Tibetan Buddhists as being ancient Buddhist *stūpas*. Of the population of Indian worshippers at Puri, Jigme Lingpa went on to observe:

Moreover a class called Hindus are similar to the Buddhists in their rites of offerings (*mchod pa*), burnt oblations (*sbyin sreg*), transference of consciousness (*'pho ba*), severance (*gcod*) and the like; so it is said they observe the same religious system. . . . Although they are said to be of the same religion as Buddhists, in regard to their [social] behaviour and so forth they belong to the assembly of brāhmins.¹⁰⁰

It is not at all surprising that Tibetans might find the rituals of Indian worshippers superficially familiar, since the Tibetan style of Buddhism inherited many of the same general ritual forms and even symbols from a common Indian matrix. On the one hand, mere superficial similarities have most often been enough for Tibetans to readily conclude the later and continued existence of Buddhism in India. But, on the other hand, it is also evident in Jigme Lingpa's assessment that there was ongoing recognition of dissimilar social patterns. This has always allowed strong distinctions of community or ethnic identity to be maintained by the same Tibetan observers, hence his identification of "brahman Buddhists."

This Tibetan cultural pattern of perceiving the survival of forms of Buddhism in local manifestations of Hinduism proved to be a very enduring trait, one that served as an important basis for many Tibetan appropriations of Indian religious sites and practices over the centuries. It continued, right up until recent times, to inform the judgements of some of the most critically minded Tibetan observers in India. We can recall here that the modern Tibetan intellectual, Amdo Gendun Chöphel, believed that during the 1940s there were still “many” Buddhist Tantra practitioners (*nang pa'i sngags spyod pa*) active in the region of Kāmarūpa where Singri and Hājo are located.¹⁰¹ Needless to say, perhaps, recent and contemporary investigations of religious life in this part of India do not at all support such Tibetan suppositions. It is true that Tantrikas have been active in Assam for a very long time, yet all the evidence shows them to have been what Douglas Brooks calls Vaidika Tantrics, those who ultimately legitimize—often in complex ways—their form of Tantra in relation to the Vedas and who seek to establish their authority firmly within Hindu society.¹⁰² In other words, they are totally non-Buddhist by any definition. Amdo Gendun Chöphel never visited Assam in order to conduct his own investigations into the religious life and history of Tantra there. But for him this would have seemed unnecessary, for he had centuries of eminent Tibetan authorities to assist him with his ready conclusion.

For as long as Tibetan commentators have failed to undertake any systematic and critical inquiries into the actual, local Indian meaning and history of what they observed or had reported to them from India, they have been able to continue seeing Buddhism in Hinduism.



CHAPTER SIX

Return to the Centre of the World

According to the sayings of some people, the real Vajrāsana is a spot three months’ journey west of Gayā.

—*Jigme Lingpa, 1789*

Introduction

The ancient site of the Vajrāsana at Bodh Gayā, accepted by Buddhists as the precise spot of the Buddha’s enlightenment and the place that the inhabitants of Tibet regarded as the very centre of the world, was to remain, by all available accounts, completely lost to Tibetan worshippers for centuries. Following the final decline and even material destruction of Buddhist culture throughout the Middle Ganges and other regions of India during the thirteenth century, some four hundred and fifty years went by before pilgrims from the high plateau ventured back to the area which had once been ancient Magadha. Throughout this period of interruption, Tibetans long avoided the Middle Ganges region, only gradually becoming motivated to return to it and search for the Vajrāsana once again.

It was not until the mid-eighteenth century that we find a Tibetan pilgrim, an obscure yogin by the name of Garshapa Sonam Rabgye, actually returning to Bodh Gayā on a unique journey of religious exploration. In this chapter I will examine Sonam Rabgye’s journey back to the heart of his ancient Buddhist holy land, along with the developments leading up to it, its eventual impact in Tibet, and its significance for our own thinking about the history of Asian Buddhist interaction with Bodh Gayā. Sonam Rabgye’s visit to Bodh Gayā and nearby sites only occurred after a distinct renewal of cultural interest in India had gradually gained momentum once

again within Tibetan Buddhist circles. I will suggest that a Tibetan return to the Middle Ganges region at this time was largely stimulated by contacts with Nepal but also enabled by the particular ethos and practice style of one lineage of Tibetan Buddhism, the Drukpa branch of the Kagyüpa school. Moreover, the journey only occurred following intervening centuries in which Tibetan knowledge about the Indian sites of the Buddha became increasingly obscure and often even merged with fantasy. Many Tibetans also came to harbour ambivalent attitudes toward India in general, some tinged with both hatred and fear.

Barbarians, Dangers, and Fears

Due to major shifts in the geopolitical realities of Asia throughout the thirteenth century, the Tibetans abruptly stopped going to India as pilgrims in the wake of the Buddhist decline there. Almost simultaneously, they also began to turn their attention toward powerful Mongolian and Chinese neighbours and invested their energies in new political and religious exchanges in that direction. Contemporary transformations in India and their cultural consequences came to be viewed very negatively in Tibet. While followers of Islam were establishing their power over an Indian Buddhist holy land which had just begun to be eulogized so highly in Tibet, the Tibetan Buddhist elite began to view these developments according to the dire millennial prophecies they had inherited from the *Kālacakra-tantra* literature. Thus, Sakya Pandita could inform his thirteenth-century Tibetan readers that “in the Age of Degeneration, the holy land of India will become filled with the doctrines of the barbarians”;¹ his prophecy was to echo down the centuries in Tibetan accounts.² To the Tibetans, these “barbarians” were primarily the non-Indian followers of Islam whom they simplistically perceived as solely responsible for the destruction of Buddhism in India.

The demise of Indian Buddhism was followed by five centuries of foreign Muslim rule—by Turks, Afghans, and Mughals respectively—over vast areas of northern and central India, including the whole Middle Ganges region. The Tibetans, viewing developments in India from afar, held strong views about the negative effects of Muslim rule upon the religious life of India over the centuries. During the mid-eighteenth century, for example, when Sonam Rabgye set out to rediscover Bodh Gayā, the scholar Sumpa Khenpo informed Tibetans that, following the Pāla era, all the areas constituting the Indian holy land had been thoroughly converted to the

traditions of the Muslim “Lalo” (*kla klo*, after Sanskrit *mleccha*)—a highly pejorative term meaning “barbarian” or worse—and those of the other non-Buddhists of India (*tīrthaka*).³ The Third Panchen Lama also observed of the Muslims in India at the time that, “since they expound such a brutal religion they will surely go to the greatest Hell!,”⁴ while other Tibetans of his day still invoked the “power of the cruel Duruṣkas of Islam” in India.⁵ The Indian holy land was thus deemed to be religiously and socially hostile because of Islam and, to a lesser extent, Hinduism. Moreover, it was viewed as a physically dangerous place to visit.

The dangers of pilgrimage to distant foreign lands and shrines is a rather universal theme in the literature of world religions.⁶ Some of the records left by the last pilgrims from Tibet to visit the Indian Buddhist holy land certainly made it clear to Tibetans viewing India from afar that it was a dangerous environment during the thirteenth century. Chag Lotsāwa travelled around the Buddhist sites of the Gangetic Basin between 1234 and 1236 and claimed that more than once he had to hide or flee ahead of advancing Muslim troops who were apparently sacking Buddhist sites.⁷ Quite apart from the risk of encounter with marauding bands of foreign invaders, the early pilgrims to India also reported being assaulted, enslaved, robbed, struck down by the heat, falling prey to tropical illnesses, suffering snakebite, and other dire and often fatal circumstances. It must be noted that all such trials are mostly conveyed in a cursory or matter-of-fact way in the early accounts, with little in the way of dramatisation. However, this was not always the case in later Tibetan literature, especially in works written by Tibetan authors who had been cut off from a lost Buddhist India for centuries. In such accounts, we find journeys to India retrospectively portrayed in an exaggeratedly negative manner. The celebrated Kagyüpa hagiographer, Tsang Nyön Heruka (1452–1507), produced some of Tibet’s most popular versions of the life stories of its early Buddhist saints at the close of the fifteenth and beginning of the sixteenth centuries. In one of his best-known works, the life story of Marpa Lotsāwa, Tsang Nyön represented the pilgrim’s journey to the holy land of four centuries previous as nothing but a fearful ordeal for the would-be traveller:

On the road to India, there is a great plain called the Plain of Plains where even a horse breaks down from fatigue. The pass [across the Himalayas] called Glaciers and Sand Dunes is so terribly cold that it is frozen even in the summertime. The tropics of Nepal are very hot, and the great Ganges River is very fearsome. In the small districts along the road through the primitive borderlands of India, great famine and wild

bandits abound. All this has been said by the guru himself and must certainly be true.⁸

Similar catalogues of dangers, difficulties, and dreads associated with going to India are presented throughout Tsang Nyön's work. However, if we compare them with a much earlier version of Marpa Lotsāwa's life story, one composed during the first half of the thirteenth century, we find a totally different presentation of travel to and life in India. In this earlier version, Marpa Lotsāwa undertakes three round-trip journeys and spends a total of about twenty years in India, but does not experience a single fear or bad incident!⁹ Thanks to liberal exercise of his "poetic license," Tsang Nyön's ever-popular sixteenth-century works left their Tibetan audiences in no doubt as to the dangers and fears associated with travel to India.¹⁰ Such literary dramatization of the heroic lives of Tibetan saints meant that continuing negative impressions of journeys to the Buddhist holy land were assured.

Magical Travel to India

In contrast, and perhaps also in response to, notions of a dangerous or simply unattainable Indian Buddhist holy land, we also find numerous Tibetan accounts of what we might call "magical" or "visionary" travel to India's major Buddhist sites over the centuries. In these narratives, various rulers and great lamas use their supernatural powers or visionary states in meditation to visit Indian Buddhist holy places without the risks or hardships necessarily endured by ordinary physical travellers. The idea of magical travel found in such narratives is clearly derived from Indian Buddhist literature, in particular from Mahāyāna *sūtras*. In such texts, many of which had been translated into Tibetan during the early spread of Buddhism in Tibet, the Buddha and his leading disciples are able to appear in two or more places simultaneously, generate other phantom bodies which travel on their behalf, or enter into meditative states (*samādhi*) to enable travel around the cosmos in an instant, and so on. Such fantastic or magical travel to Indian sites by Tibetan protagonists had already begun featuring in native Tibetan Buddhist literature during the "later propagation of Buddhist teaching" period, and it continued for many centuries thereafter, when the real journey to India had become so problematic or devalued.

An episode in the *Hole in the Pillar Testimony* (*bKa' chems ka khol ma*) presents Emperor Songtsen Gampo's seventh-century dispatch of a Buddhist mission to acquire a miraculous statue of his tutelary deity from

southern India. The journey cannot be undertaken by any ordinary human traveller due to Tibetan fear of the vast wilderness of India and of carnivorous beasts on the road. Therefore, the king uses his supernatural powers to produce an emanation of a Buddhist monk by the name of Śīla Akaramati, who magically travels to India and accomplishes the royal assignment. While doing so, the phantom monk traveller also visits the great holy places associated with the Buddha in Magadha and systematically collects a wide range of sacred substances at these sites, such as Buddha relics, sand from the Buddhist holy places, branches from the Bodhi Tree, and so on, which are then transported back to Tibet for use in various rituals.¹¹

The same theme of magical travel is later employed in the hagiographies of famous Tibetan lamas concerning claimed “visits” they made to the great Buddhist holy places of India. One such account presents the sixty-year-old founder of the Drigungpa lineage of Tibetan Buddhism, Jigten Gampo, using his powers to manifest himself in India at the very site of the Vajrāsana during the early thirteenth century, albeit in the form of a white-skinned Buddhist monk. In the narrative of his magical visit to Bodh Gayā, the site is depicted as being under the control of Muslim invaders known as the Garlogpa,¹² but the Drigungpa lama is able to subjugate this “barbarian” army by entering into a *maitrī-samādhi*.¹³ Another example in the same vein is found in the well-known sixteenth-century life story of the lama Thangthong Gyelpo (1385–1464), who is famous in Tibetan history for being a kind of patron saint of technology and cultural innovation. While still a young man, Thangthong Gyelpo is said to have engaged himself in intense Tantric meditation, which enables him to “travel instantaneously by way of magical powers.” Accordingly, without actually leaving his meditation cave in Tibet, he is able to perform an entire pilgrimage of Buddhist sacred sites in India, visiting the Bodhi Tree and the Mahābodhi image at the Vajrāsana several times, then proceeding to Nālandā monastery and other sites and finally entering a retreat cave near Bodh Gayā.¹⁴ Since India had become regarded as such a hostile and dangerous place in Tibet, the storyline here adds that “he travelled into the presence of the Bodhi Tree at Vajrāsana *free from harm* in the adamantine body (*vajrakāya*) state.”¹⁵ Perhaps the most interesting aspect of this particular narrative is the account of Thangtong Gyelpo’s return to his home after eighteen years’ absence, where he informed his relatives and countrymen that he had travelled to India. His account was met with incredulity and derision, and he was branded a “madman” whose claims are dismissed as “nothing but a pack of lies.”¹⁶

Other examples of magical travel to India do not draw upon the ontologically ambiguous state of the meditator dwelling deeply absorbed in concentration in one place while “travelling” to another place simultaneously. Rather, they describe special physical powers of “swift-footedness” (*rkyang mgyogs*), which enable travellers to actually run so fast that they literally fly across the landscape. The seventeenth-century biography of the famous Tibetan medical practitioner Yuthog Sarma Yönten Gombo (1126–1202) claims that he made a total of five visits to India. On one such journey to the Vajrāsana, Yönten Gombo was able to return from India all the way back to Tibet—a journey which normally required many weeks on foot—in just a single day by way of extremely rapid magical travel, all the while clutching in his hands, as proof of the deed, fresh green leaves and new flowers of the highly esteemed medicinal plant Arura, which grows in India but not in Tibet.¹⁷ There are many other examples of such visionary or magical travel to India in Tibetan literature,¹⁸ most of them functioning as narrative strategies to attribute superior powers to the subjects of hagiographical writings.

A Revival of Interest in India

The centuries-long absence of Tibetan pilgrims from the Middle Ganges region is perhaps easy to appreciate as a purely practical response to the demise there of a living Indian Buddhist culture. However, the return once again of Tibetans to the same region during the continued absence of Buddhism there is something far from obvious. The complex of longer-term historical factors leading up to this return merit a careful examination in both this and the following chapter. First, it can be observed that while post-thirteenth-century Tibetans developed certain aversions toward and phobias about India, they also maintained limited contacts with it and even rekindled various positive interests in it.

After the thirteenth century and prior to the seventeenth-century rise of a specific Tibetan Buddhist interest in Assam, Tibetan religious contacts with India occurred principally in the form of very occasional South Asian visitors arriving in Tibet.¹⁹ Significantly, those infrequent travellers who left some discernible traces in the Tibetan historical record, such as Śākyaśrī Śāriputra, who visited in 1414,²⁰ and Varnaratna, who went there three times between 1426 and 1454,²¹ were often closely associated with the Vajrāsana at Bodh Gayā. Still later, in 1590, an eclectic Indian Nāth yogin and inveterate traveller, Buddhaguptanātha, also visited Tibet. An account of his pilgrimages and travels around India was recorded

by Tāranātha, who claimed that Buddhaguptanātha visited not only the Vajrāsana at Bodh Gayā but also other ancient Indian holy places of the Buddha as well.²² While the details of such claims are demonstrably either impossible or highly improbable for the period in which they are said to have occurred, they are nevertheless important from another point of view: their reception in the Tibetan world via the widely read and influential works of scholars such as Tāranātha. They gave Tibetans the distinct impression that the sites of the Buddha in India might still be extant and even functioning centres of the Buddhist cult in some form.

The earliest post-thirteenth-century Tibetan attempt to seriously revisit ancient Magadha and to search for the long-lost Vajrāsana in Bihar actually took place in 1752, and it was followed several decades later by further visits. Where did this mid-eighteenth-century Tibetan urge to suddenly reexplore the lands of ancient Buddhism come from after nearly five centuries of neglect? Was it because of Buddhaguptanātha's claims to have been there? Or was it due to the spreading popularity of an alternative Indian Buddhist holy land in Assam which Tibetans had continued to develop and visit throughout the seventeenth and early eighteenth centuries? As I will argue below, such factors can only be considered as background aspects of much more complex historical developments at the time. Other possible lines of explanation, such as the role of Indo-Tibetan trade facilitating pilgrimage, appear to be completely unconvincing. There are various reports of sixteenth- through eighteenth-century traders in India who are taken to be "Tibetans" of some kind or other, but who in fact appear to be mainly Bhutanese or members of other neighbouring Himalayan populations.²³ Similarly, the presence of what some observers have described as "Tibetan goods" in Indian markets is no indication that Tibetans from the plateau were visiting India. What these and other sources all reveal is that Tibetans themselves did not travel to the Indian plains to engage in direct trade. Instead, Tibetan goods passed to India by way of various Himalayan middlemen, such as Bhutanese, Newaris, Sherpas, and various other border populations, or goods were carried by professional long-distance trading groups, including Gosains, Kashmiris, and Armenians, who visited Tibet from India and surrounding regions.²⁴

Two major factors played into the eighteenth-century Tibetan decisions to revisit the ancient Buddhist holy land. One was the history of Tibetan religious and cultural contacts with the unique Vajrayāna Buddhist environment found in the Newar towns of the central Nepal Valley. The second was a concomitant growth of interest in all things Sanskritic and Indic among certain sectors of the educated Tibetan elite.

The Attraction of Nepal

Gene Smith has thoughtfully observed that "the 18th century was for Tibet a period of rediscovery of India and Sanskrit,"²⁵ and he indicated the role that was played in this process by Tibetan visits to the Kathmandu Valley.²⁶ A renewed interest in India and its classical heritage appears to have emerged gradually in elite Tibetan circles, especially in the wake of increasing contacts with the Sanskritized Newari environment of the Kathmandu Valley towns. This was especially so during the seventeenth- and eighteenth-century period of the Malla rulers who were sympathetic to Buddhism, and under whose reign a "Tantric Renaissance" of sorts took place in the Kathmandu Valley.²⁷ While Tibetan interests in Nepal certainly peaked during this period of cultural and religious flourishing, they had actually begun much earlier, and appear to have been consistently focused on those holy places located in the Kathmandu Valley which were of particular significance to the Tibetans, especially the major Buddhist reliquary shrines at Svayambhūnāth and Bodhnāth.

A growing body of historical scholarship concerning the shrines at Svayambhūnāth and Bodhnāth, and the development of a Tibetan pilgrimage guidebook literature for Nepal, now afford us a better view of Tibetan interests and activities in Nepal during the period.²⁸ Unfortunately, the Tibetan sources are not explicit about the type and numbers of pilgrims visiting the Nepal Valley from Tibet during the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries. While Tibetan laypersons were certainly present as pilgrims,²⁹ many travellers appear to have been the more highly ranked or virtuosos religious practitioners who are either the subjects or the authors of our sources. In other words, they were mainly the same type of religious travellers to be found visiting India before the thirteenth-century destruction of Buddhism there. We should perhaps consider that, in the wake of the loss of the Indian Buddhist holy land, the Newar Buddhist environment and shrines of the Kathmandu Valley came to function somewhat like a later substitute for Buddhist India. Nepal offered most of the same possibilities as India had done in the past, such as access to new teachings and teachers, religious worship at major Buddhist shrines, and of course also an ongoing source of Indic culture, such as the study of Sanskrit. In fact, earlier Tibetan religious travellers to Nepal had benefited from these same features there in the past. However, in later centuries, Nepal also offered something which the Tibetans had never encountered earlier in India itself, and this was the prospect of closer relations with neighbouring ruling elites who were perceived as potential patrons. It is indeed no accident that many of

the later Tibetan religious figures who took an interest in and made the effort to visit Nepal were from lineages that had been marginalized in the pre-seventeenth-century struggles for hegemony in central and western Tibet, and whose activities now focused more often—and of necessity—on the territorial peripheries of the Tibetan plateau instead.

Another factor associated with Tibetan interest in the Indic and Buddhist cultural milieu of Nepal was the revival of Sanskrit studies in Tibet. Following the demise of Indian Buddhism and the virtual cessation of vigorous scholarly exchanges, the Tibetan cultivation of Sanskrit naturally went into decline. It enjoyed something of a revival during the time of the Fifth Dalai Lama³⁰ who, although himself not a brilliant Sanskrit scholar, certainly encouraged and offered patronage to the Tibetan translators who first introduced the famous Pāṇinian system of grammar into Tibet. The eighteenth century witnessed an even stronger elite Tibetan interest in Sanskrit and Indian linguistics, including the production of a remarkable number of Sanskrit-Tibetan lexicons.³¹ Outstanding individual scholars in the revival of Sanskrit studies in Tibet began travelling to Nepal, such as the Eighth Situ Panchen, Chökyi Chungné (1699/1700–1774), who first visited the Kathmandu Valley in 1723.³²

A related cultural development from this period in Tibet was a revival of the art of the Tibetan Jātaka, or narratives of the former rebirths of Buddhas, which had first begun to flourish while early Tibetan religious travellers were still visiting Buddhist India.³³ Later scholarly authors in Tibet drew heavily upon knowledge of ancient Indian geography when composing the stories of their subjects' illustrious past lives. For example, as part of the development of the religiopolitical cult of the Dalai Lamas, the Regent of Tibet, Desi Sangye Gyatso, wrote an account of the rebirths of his powerful master, the Fifth Dalai Lama, in which he portrayed him as an emanation of the popular *bodhisattva* of compassion Avalokiteśvara. For almost all of the locations in his narrative concerning the thirty-six former non-Tibetan rebirths of the Fifth Dalai Lama, Desi Sangye Gyatso chose Buddhist kingdoms or holy places of the Buddha's life in Magadha as well as Bengal or other famous sites in ancient Buddhist history on the Indian subcontinent. The framing of the work thus offered eighteenth-century Tibetan readers a literary tour of the classical Buddhist geography of ancient India.³⁴ Characteristic of this and other later examples of Tibetan Jātaka which recast Tibetan past lives in India is that they presented rather confused or mistaken presentations of Indian geography to Tibetan readers.³⁵

While these cultural factors are indeed of importance as part of a wider perspective on the period, there is a set of concrete imperatives associated

with Nepal which may have more directly led to a mid-eighteenth-century Tibetan return to the ancient Buddhist sites of India. The inhabitants of the Nepal Himalayas had themselves rekindled a ritual interest in nearby India as a Buddhist holy land. For one thing, they constructed a replica of the Bodh Gayā Mahābodhi Temple in the city of Pātan, a site that became locally known as Mahābauddha. The history of this temple remains somewhat obscure, although certain Nepali sources state that Abhayaraj, a sixteenth-century Buddhist *vajrācārya* priest from Pātan, went to Bodh Gayā and resided there for several years. He then returned with a model of the Mahābodhi Temple that was used as the basis for the construction of the new temple in Pātan. The temple indeed appears to date from the late sixteenth century.³⁶ A mid- to late eighteenth-century Tibetan source gives a somewhat different account of the temple's origins, one which stresses instead its ritual power due to its direct connections back to the original site, but which nevertheless demonstrates a keen Tibetan awareness of Nepalese Buddhist visits south to the Gayā region.³⁷

Even more telling evidence indicates that Nepalese activities may have provided inspiration for Tibetans to return to the Vajrāsana. At least some pre-Gorkha-era Nepalese figures with whom the Tibetans directly associated were themselves apparently making pilgrimages to India, although whether these were Hindu- or Buddhist-inspired journeys is in fact unclear. For example, the Sixth Sharmapa Lama, Chökyi Wangchuk (1584–1630), travelled to the Nepal Valley in 1629–30. While in Kathmandu he met with the ruler of Jumla, Vikrama Śāh (r. 1602–31), who had just returned from a pilgrimage to India. The Sharmapa himself apparently had the intention of visiting India, although he never did.³⁸ There are also further reports of Nepalese visiting the Bodh Gayā Mahābodhi Temple in India during the eighteenth century.³⁹

Travelling Yogins of the Himalayan Borderlands

The most important factor in explaining the mid-eighteenth-century Tibetan return to Bodh Gayā is the religious nature of the Drukpa lineage of the Kagyüpa school of Tibetan Buddhism, which had a long history of ongoing activities throughout the western and central Himalayan lands. It is in this particular context that we can understand the journey of the earliest known pilgrim to revisit the lost Vajrāsana, Garshapa Sonam Rabgye, who was a follower of the Tibetan Drukpa lineage.

The hallmark of the Drukpa lineage⁴⁰ since the time of its eleventh-century founder, Tsangpa Gyare Yeshe Dorje (1161–1211), has been a strong

advocacy of mendicant asceticism and solitary meditation. This is not to say that all the later Drukpa followers were wandering mendicants who eschewed the mundane world in favour of meditation in the wilderness or remote locations. However, enough of them have always done so that they gained the well-deserved reputation in Tibet as that land's long-distance religious travellers and pilgrims par excellence. Tsangpa Gyare is presented in the Tibetan Buddhist histories as advising his many disciples to "spend their lives in meditation in some famous places." What is more, his directive was truly international in scope, recommending for this purpose distant holy places without regard to ethnic boundaries or political frontiers. Tsangpa Gyare's suggested meditation destinations included places such as Uḍḍiyāna, Jalandhara, Kashmir, the Gṛdhrakūṭapārvata at Rājagṛha, Wutai shan in China, the holy mountains of Tsari and Kang Tisé (i.e., Mount Kailash) in the Himalayan borderlands, and so on.⁴¹ Based on this directive, various students of the Drukpa have indeed spent much of their religious careers wandering to such places, either due to their own volition or because their Drukpa teachers have echoed the words of Tsangpa Gyare over and again across the centuries.

We have already met with various widely travelled Drukpa yogins, such as Götsangpa Gampo Dorje, Orgyenpa Rinchenpal, Tsangpa Lodro Zangpo, and Pagsam Yeshe. The same types of mendicant Drukpa practitioners were also active throughout the Himalayan borderlands during the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries, from Monyul and Bhutan in the east across to Kashmir in the far west. At this time, different branches of the Drukpa lineage were cultivating their interests throughout areas of western Tibet, extending even beyond Ladakh and Zaskar.⁴² In 1612–13, Lhatsewa Ngawang Zangpo (1546–1615), the leading Drukpa cleric in central Tibet at the time, dispatched his disciple Taksang Repa Ngawang Gyatso on a long-distance pilgrimage to the far northwest of the Indian subcontinent.⁴³ For a number of reasons, the motivations for and process of Taksang Repa's dispatch, journey, and return to Tibet are of interest since they parallel the situation of Garshapa Sonam Rabgye's trip to Bodh Gayā a century and a half later.

In 1612–13, Lhatsewa followed Tsangpa Gyare's historical precedent and dispatched Taksang Repa westward with instructions to aim for the famous Tantric *pīṭha* of the western Himalayas as well as Kashmir and beyond. More important, the journey was closely inspired by the earlier travels of his lineage forebear, Orgyenpa Rinchenpal, whose itinerary we investigated in chapter 4. Taksang Repa duly toured the western Himalayas and eventually reached the Swāt Valley in 1615. Most Tibetans understood

Swāt to be the site of Uḍḍiyāna, one of the cherished origin points of their Tantric teachings, and an area closely associated with the so-called Second Buddha of Tibet, Padmasambhava. In a careful reexamination of Lhatsewa's motivations for sending his disciple to the Swāt Valley, Peter Schwieger has convincingly argued that they should be understood from the point of view of religious and historical interest, as a "backward-looking" journey, back, that is, to the roots of the Kagyüpa school and to the perceived roots of Tibetan Buddhism itself.⁴⁴ Moreover, Taksang Repa's journey generated considerable interest about conditions in India among some of the highest Tibetan political and religious authorities of his day.⁴⁵ This was despite the fact that his account clearly revealed not only the great dangers that lay in store for those wishing to travel through northern India but also that Buddhism was completely extinct there and had long been so. It seems to me that the nature of Lhatsewa's dispatch of his student to the west appears to be somewhat analogous to Garshapa Sonam Rabgye's mid-eighteenth-century journey described below.

The Drukchen's Mission to Bodh Gayā

Following Taksang Repa's visits to northern India and the Swāt Valley, other Drukpa mendicants continued to undertake similar long-distance trans-Himalayan religious journeys. For example, Rangrig Repa (d. 1683), a little-known yogin from the western Himalayan region of Spiti, is claimed to have visited parts of India, especially the famous Tantric charnel ground known as Śītavana or "Cool Grove," as well as Jālandhara, Kashmir, and perhaps even Uḍḍiyāna in Swāt. He also travelled east to Nepal in 1680.⁴⁶ A generation later, Drukpa interests and activities in Nepal and the western Himalayan lands still continued, now encouraged by the Seventh Drukchen, Kagyü Trinley Shingta (1718–66).

The Seventh Drukchen was a younger contemporary and acquaintance of both the scholar and artist Situ Panchen Chökyi Chungné and the remarkable Khampa intellectual and antiquarian Kahtog Rikzin Tsewang Norbu (1698–1755), from whom both the Drukchen and the Situ Panchen took teachings. Together, Situ Panchen and Tsewang Norbu maintained a long-standing interest in the Sanskritized Buddhist cultural milieu of the Nepal Valley, which they both visited in the 1720s and again in 1748.⁴⁷ Situ Panchen's interests extended also to India and its geography and history at the time. For example, his diary for the year 1749 lists the names of more than fifty Indian states or ruling dynasties plus some location notes, information he undoubtedly collected during his sojourns in Nepal.⁴⁸ The

Seventh Drukchen appears to have been influenced or encouraged by the interests of these senior scholars.

In 1747, just prior to their visits to Nepal, both Situ Panchen and Tsewang Norbu had also met the Seventh Drukchen in Lhasa. The meeting may have helped inspired the Drukchen's interest in Nepal and its Sanskrit and Buddhist cultural environment, since he too went to the Nepal Valley some years later, in 1755. However, after their Lhasa encounter of 1747, the Drukchen himself embarked upon a long tour of far western Tibetan and Himalayan regions. He especially visited Ladakh and the Himalayan valley of Garsha which is nowadays known as Lahoul.⁴⁹ These were regions where the Drukpa lineage had been gradually establishing its religious and political influence. Since the biographical materials on the Seventh Drukchen are rather fragmentary, we have few details of his activities during this period.⁵⁰ However, we can reasonably speculate that his connection with the disciple whom he eventually dispatched to India, the yogin named Garshapa (the "One from Garsha") Sonam Rabgye, was somehow related to his visit to the region of Garsha. We do know that other disciples of the Seventh Drukchen undertook pilgrimages to India after they had taken teaching from him. One was the Khampa mendicant Karma Tenzin (d. 1834), who studied with the Drukchen in central Tibet before travelling through the western Himalayas to Jālandhara in the Punjab Hills.⁵¹

We presently know hardly anything about Garshapa Sonam Rabgye, apart from the fact that his teacher the Seventh Drukchen saw fit to dispatch him via Nepal to India in 1752, on a specific mission to relocate and inspect the long-lost centre of Bodh Gayā and the origin place of Buddhism itself. Fortunately, a short manuscript account of Sonam Rabgye's visit to India has survived intact, and it will be presented in full below.⁵²

The Drukchen's decision to send his west Himalayan disciple to India was certainly not unusual by Drukpa standards of what constituted sound religious practice. Nor can it have been spontaneous. The mission has to be seen as representing, in many ways, a culmination of the various cultural trends and historical encounters over the longer period of time briefly outlined in the preceding sections. During the seventeenth century, as shown in chapter 5, several Drukpa yogins with strong connections to the Tibetan branch of the school had travelled to Assam to visit what was then hailed as the rediscovered holy place of Kusinagar. If the long-lost site of the Buddha's final death could apparently be relocated for worship, then why not the site of his enlightenment also? Sonam Rabgye makes some of the reasons behind the journey quite clear in the opening lines of his report:

After our Teacher came into the world as a fully perfected Buddha, in the centre of the Southern Continent, at the Vajrāsana in India, he turned the Wheel of the Doctrine three or four times⁵³ and created a totally pure field of conversion in which he bestowed his wisdom to the limits of space. Since then, and up until recent times, a series of translators have gone there and translated all of the holy teachings of India into Tibetan and also accurately reported on the condition of the glorious Vajrāsana. But nowadays, no one has gone and experienced the site. Due to various factors such as fear [of travel to India], reports of the conditions there are very scarce, and there is a need to go and establish what the conditions are at the site. Therefore, Garshapa Sonam Rabgye was sent there by the [Seventh] Drukchen [Kagyü Trinley Shingta].⁵⁴

The interests in, possibilities of, and—no doubt also—enticing reports about India that had built up in elite Tibetan religious circles by the mid-eighteenth century could no longer be ignored. Someone competent had to go and investigate. Garshapa Sonam Rabgye may well have been an appropriate choice for such a mission since it is possible that he possessed skills in north Indian dialects due to his origins in Lahoul.

Bodh Gayā during the Mid-Eighteenth Century

If Buddhism had been completely dead for centuries in the ancient Buddhist holy land of the Middle Ganges region, what was the north Indian world into which Sonam Rabgye undertook his pioneering pilgrimage of religious rediscovery? Was there any Vajrāsana still left for him to find there? In order to carefully contextualize the journey and experiences presented in Sonam Rabgye's travel account below, let us first consider a brief historical sketch of the mid-eighteenth-century Indian region into which he ventured.

Since the time of the last Tibetan eyewitness accounts of the Middle Ganges region during the thirteenth century, the entire region had undergone enormous political, social, and cultural transformations. When Sonam Rabgye travelled south from Nepal across what had then become known as Bihar, major shifts in regional political power were in progress. The Mughal Empire was in the final phases of its long and messy disintegration, and, in the decades before the British took control of Bihar, the growing power of the Marāthā Confederacy of western India was making its presence regularly felt in everyday life throughout the area. From their Peshwā capitals at Satara (pre-1750) and Poona (post-1750) in west India, the

Marāthā had come to dominate, to varying degrees, large areas of central and southern India. They launched sporadic raids into Bihar and Bengal south of the Ganges between 1741 and 1752.⁵⁵ The Marāthā general Balla Row had invaded southern Bihar in 1742 and, with the collaboration of local Muslim leaders, had continued conducting raids for some years there.⁵⁶ Marāthā interest in Bihar was chiefly in gaining income from areas where they had either been granted land rights to levy taxes or where they could easily conduct raids in order to collect taxes by force. However, their cultural influence was more widely felt and longer lasting in the area of Gayā, the destination of Sonam Rabgye.

In southern Bihar, not far from ancient Bodh Gayā, the district centre and town of Gayā was the site of a vigorous Hindu pilgrimage culture of India-wide importance during the period. Hindu pilgrimage to Gayā is certainly very ancient, perhaps even as old as Buddhist pilgrimage to the area. However, significant building of monuments and temples associated with the Gayā pilgrimage appears to date from the eleventh century, and its detailed encoding into mainstream Sanskrit Hinduism is apparent after this period.⁵⁷ By the time of Sonam Rabgye's visit, Gayā annually attracted at least a hundred thousand Hindu pilgrims. During the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries, Marāthas comprised a substantial proportion of the Indian pilgrims visiting and worshipping at Gayā, and some influential Marāthas had even erected buildings and works at local pilgrimage places.⁵⁸ Indian pilgrims visited Gayā to complete the *śrāddha* or final rites for dead family members, during which *piṇḍadāna* or rice-ball offerings and prayers were performed. In doing so, Gayā pilgrims spent several days undertaking a wider *śrāddha* circuit, which incorporated the derelict Mahābodhi Temple complex at nearby Bodh Gayā. Hindu pilgrims would go and worship at the ruined Mahābodhi Temple and the Bodhi Tree on their fourth day of the circuit, a tradition that persists today.

The thoroughly non-Buddhist worship that had developed over centuries at Bodh Gayā was another example of the innumerable appropriations and reappropriations of religious sites and cult practices that has flowed back and forth between different religious communities in India for centuries, and which still continues. It was the same process the Tibetans themselves were actively involved in at other sites throughout India, such as those in Assam. The name "Mahāmuni," meaning "Great Sage," was in regular use by local Indians at Bodh Gayā to refer to the main surviving stone image of the Buddha there. The popular Hindu appropriation of formerly Buddhist Bodh Gayā was distinctly Vaiṣṇava in character. Visitors entertained the Hindu belief that the Buddha image called Mahāmuni

actually represented an earthy embodiment or *avatāra* of Viṣṇu, while the Mahābodhi Temple itself was referred to as Jagannātha, an epithet for the Kṛṣṇa *avatāra* of Viṣṇu who is primarily worshipped at Puri in Orrisa. A footprint of the Buddha, carved on a stone at the site, was worshipped as the “Charan of Viṣṇu” or footprint of Viṣṇu (Viṣṇupada).⁵⁹ A tree, much venerated by Hindu pilgrims at the site and later taken to be the original Bodhi Tree by Buddhist visitors, was said to have been planted there by the god Brahma. The many small *stūpas* to the north of the Mahābodhi Temple, each having had their Buddhist finials broken off, were being identified and worshipped as Śiva *liṅga* by Hindu pilgrims. All the ancient Buddhist images and the whole environs of the temple had been given new Hindu identities and narratives, such that a series of six Buddha statues on the south side of the Mahābodhi Temple were identified as the five Pāṇḍava brothers together with their spouse Draupadī, while an image of the Buddha Vajrasattva in a small side temple was identified as Mahābrahma, and one of the future Buddha Maitreya was said to be that of the goddess Sarasvatī.⁶⁰ None of the Buddhist identities nor the former names for the site and its cult structures were known to the Indian inhabitants and worshippers of eighteenth-century Bodh Gayā. It had for all intents and purposes become a thoroughly Hindu religious complex by the time of Sonam Rabgye’s visit there.

Moreover, eighteenth-century Bodh Gayā had not only become a site of popular Hindu pilgrimage, it also had a very different resident religious population than the Buddhist monks who had frequented the place many centuries previous. Adherents of the Giri or Mountain sect of the Śaiva Daśanāmi renunciate order were well established with their local headquarters in Bodh Gayā. According to their own early nineteenth-century historical reckoning, the Girīs had first occupied the site in about 1590, when the ascetic Gosain Ghamandi Giri had found the place abandoned and thus set up his abode there. His disciple, Chaitanya Giri, is reported to have found the ruined Mahābodhi Temple site “entirely overrun with bushes and trees,” and so he established a Śaiva monastery (*maṭha*) and shrines (*mandir*) there in the early seventeenth century, becoming the first Mahant or abbot in a long series who later administered the site. Chaitanya Giri’s body was buried within the ruined Mahābodhi Temple itself, while his successors were buried in tombs (*samādhi*) within their Bodh Gayā compound. The Girīs also claimed that they gained rights to the abandoned temple precincts in the form of a land grant (*sanad*) from one of the later Mughal rulers. Their buildings were constructed with bricks salvaged from the ancient Buddhist temple ruins (fig. 6.1), and many of the images



Figure 6.1. Ruined Mahābodhi Temple and Mahant's compound, Bodh Gayā, 1871.
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that graced the Giri compounds and houses were actually old Buddhist ones that had been removed from the derelict Mahābodhi site. During the early nineteenth century, the monastery with its associated houses was the most powerful in the Gayā district, with about a thousand celibate adherents.⁶¹

Journey to Bodh Gayā in 1752

The general sketch of the political and cultural situation in Gayā and Bodh Gayā during the mid-eighteenth century provides some context in which to try and appreciate the travel account of Sonam Rabgye's journey there from Tibet during 1752. Sonam Rabgye's short text is worthy of presentation here in full, not only due to its description of the Buddhist sites he visited but also because it so graphically illustrates the formidable difficulties faced by a premodern Tibetan pilgrim attempting to travel through Bihar during this period (fig. 6.2).⁶²

Ears of Grain for the Faithful: A Travel Account of a Proper Direct Encounter with the Glorious Vajrāsana at the Centre of the Holy Land, by the Yogin of Garsha, Sonam Rabgye

1. Transit through Nepal

Sonam Rabgye departed on the fifth day of the seventh month of the Water-Ape year [1752]. He left Tibetan territory and then arrived in Nepal, where at that time Kathmandu and Gorkha were at war.⁶³ He was assaulted by Gorkha soldiers, who strip-searched him and seized all of his valuable possessions, including his gold and silver, silk robes and vests, and so on. Even though he lost all of his valuables, he exclaimed that he would sacrifice



Figure 6.2. Itinerary of Garshapa Sonam Rabgye in 1752. Drawn by Norma Schulz and Toni Huber.

his life for the sake of the Buddha's teachings in carrying out the instructions of his precious lama. [2a] He next arrived at the Buddhist shrine of Svayambhūnāth in the Kathmandu Valley and offered prayers, after which he travelled on further to a rock cave at Yangleshö.⁶⁴ Then he set out toward the south. From the Nepalese border post at Thori,⁶⁵ on the crest of the Sumeswar Range, he crossed the pass and departed from Nepal, and as he did so he was asked to pay road toll.⁶⁶

2. Northern Bihar to the Ganges

Sonam Rabgye continued on down toward the Indian plains, passing through the places of Jujur and Bamani,⁶⁷ until all the valleys and ravines were at an end and he had left the hill country completely behind. He arrived at the first Indian village of Bayaha⁶⁸ but was not asked to pay road toll again there. However, he was strip-searched, and his long yogin's dreadlocks were pulled and examined for hidden valuables.⁶⁹ At this place, some bad yogis took his iron implements and rosary beads and harassed him. Many townspeople gathered [2b] and urged the attackers to stop and let him go. After being released, Sonam Rabgye took to the road again for half a day. He had not yet reached the main road leading to Tirhūt,⁷⁰ and because of the danger, he ran and finally gained the road. From that point on, it was said that travellers would have to spend two nights in deserted hills, and there was great fear of tigers, and one could not proceed if one did not have at least eight or nine travelling companions.⁷¹ Sonam Rabgye only found one Indian mendicant⁷² for a travelling companion. He felt he had perhaps been misled about the bad conditions, and he proceeded after accepting the advice of someone else not to fear harm from tigers and leopards. He reached Bettiah,⁷³ and again he was strip-searched and inspected. After a day's travel, he reached the ferryboat [on the Buri Gandak River], and was told that without money he would not be given passage. He begged alms for two days and was then given passage on the boat. [3a] He arrived at Motihari,⁷⁴ but he was not asked to pay road toll there. Having let down all his dreadlocks, the local people once again searched through his hair looking for hidden valuables.

Sonam Rabgye then undertook more boat travel [down the Buri Gandak]. He and his companion reached Sheopur,⁷⁵ and then Mehsi,⁷⁶ and after a half-day journey from there they arrived at a place where there were many different people assembled at the base of a tree. This group saw the two travellers approaching and, "like hunters spotting a deer," the group attacked them. Sonam Rabgye and his companion were strip-searched yet

again. Their attackers demanded, "Show us where you have the gold! If you don't show us, we will throw you in the river!" A rope was tied around their necks, and the mob prepared to throw them in the river. They were led along for some distance and then were threatened yet again, "Show [us where the gold is!]" When the two travellers could not produce any, their attackers said], "In that case, we will cut your throats." Swords were held to their throats. Then, when the mob finally realized that the pair did not have any gold, the thieves seized their meditation belts, their waist bands, their knives, [3b] and even took their walking sticks because they were fitted with iron tips as well as their Mangar⁷⁷ knives which were used for cutting wood. However, when they tried to take Sonam Rabgye's heavy jacket from him, he retorted, "If you want it, you will have to kill me first!" So they let him keep it. Although the travellers were stripped and searched, they were not thrown in the river as had been threatened.⁷⁸

Sonam Rabgye proceeded further until he arrived at a riverbank, where he was asked once again for road toll, and for the remainder of the day he was not allowed to pass. After a time, he was permitted to cross. On the far side of the river there were no more thieves. He arrived at Hajipur,⁷⁹ where he encountered the Ganges River, which he observed was flowing from west to east at this point.

3. Patna to Bodh Gayā

Travelling across the Ganges in a good boat, Sonam Rabgye considered that he was then entering the kingdom of Magadha. He reflected that formerly, during the time of the Buddha, this area used to be called Magadha, but now it was known as Patna.⁸⁰ If one travelled in any direction from there, one would find the region to be full of Marāthā⁸¹ people. When he inquired of some local inhabitants about the name Magadha [4a], he found that it was completely unknown to them, even to elderly persons. At that time, the foreign lord who reigned over the area was the Nawāb.⁸² When he inquired about the site of Vajrāsana, it too was unknown by everybody. Sonam Rabgye then travelled southward for four days. He questioned an old brahman, who told him to go east. Asking directions along the way, he passed through the places called Bararah, Chakan, Bettoriah, Manpour, and Burayadganj,⁸³ and then went on to Gayā, where the palace of a very powerful Marāthā was situated.

At Gayā, Sonam Rabgye was informed that from there, it was only about a half-day journey to the Vajrāsana, so he set out in search of it. He was overjoyed just thinking about finally reaching the Vajrāsana. But upon

arrival there, he felt disheartened to find that except for the central Gandhola [of the Mahābodhi Temple] everything else had been destroyed. At the central Gandhola itself, he found that only about half of the lower story of the three-storied entry hall was still intact. The upper two stories were no longer extant.⁸⁴ Up to the left and right sides of the entry hall, there were flights of thirty-seven stone steps. Ascending these steps, he performed a circumambulation of the ruined Gandhola. [4b] Behind an image [on the face of the Gandhola] to the west, he found that the sacred Bodhi Tree was still growing there.⁸⁵ At the four corners of the main Gandhola, there had once been four similar [but smaller] shrines. However, these were now broken in half, and two of them had been destroyed without remainder. The empowered stone image of Śākyamuni that had once resided inside the central Gandhola had been taken outside, and in its place a very ugly image of the Indian tradition, which was called Jagannātha, had been installed on the first floor.⁸⁶

At the time of his visit, Sonam Rabgye found the site of Vajrāsana occupied by a great *saṃnyāsī* monastery. Its membership consisted of about seventy *saṃnyāsī*. Food was given daily inside the monastery to all the *saṃnyāsī*, *bairāgī*,⁸⁷ yogins, brahmans, and other practitioners from different religious orders who gathered there. Also, there was one powerful brahman [i.e., the Mahant] who acted as the owner of the place. On the banks of the Nairāṇjanā River,⁸⁸ to the east of the site, Sonam Rabgye found that there was still one stone statue which the heretics [5a] had not yet smashed, and which depicted the manner in which the Buddha had once dwelt there engaged in ascetic practices.⁸⁹

4. Other Buddhist Sites

Proceeding four days to the east of the Vajrāsana,⁹⁰ in the area where the monastery of Nālandā had been located, Sonam Rabgye could not even find any remnant of it still standing in among the broken bricks there.⁹¹ Up on the Gṛdhrakūṭaparvata,⁹² he found a naturally arisen throne of the Buddha, and also many others which were made out of stone.⁹³ Inside the temple at that place, he found there was a stone *liṅga* and *yoni* of the non-Buddhist tradition, to which offerings were being made.⁹⁴

Everyone whom Sonam Rabgye questioned about Kapilavastu, the town that the Tibetans call Serkya, knew nothing about it.⁹⁵ He found that in general, all the ancient Buddhist names for the region had changed, and one could only guess at what they might be. Proceeding eight days to the west

of the Vajrāsana, there was the place where the Buddha turned the Wheel of the Doctrine, Vārāṇasī, which the non-Buddhists call Benares, and which its inhabitants call Kaśī.⁹⁶ That place was populated with inconceivable numbers of persons.

5. Concluding Remarks

Sonam Rabgye observed that as a consequence of the damage done to the Buddhist religion at the Vajrāsana, life in Magadha during the time of his visit was inauspicious and lacked prosperity in comparison with other regions of India. [5b] As evening fell there, all the women fought and quarrelled with each other. The heat was so very intense there that a person could well imagine he was being burned by fire. Great windstorms, red with dust, swept the area and destroyed houses. For that reason, such things as wood, water, grass, and even stones are all scarce there. Between the fifth and sixth months, not even a drop of rain fell, and the whole land was completely parched. Furthermore, when Sonam Rabgye first arrived at the Vajrāsana, the heat was so intense that for about two weeks he was unable to even get up and do anything.⁹⁷ Then, when he was able once again, he commenced his return journey. In the dust every day on the road, the return journey took him fifty-five days to complete, and thus he experienced tremendous suffering.

There are Ten Fears⁹⁸ which Tibetans have of travelling to India:

One is not knowing the roads to begin with;
 Two is having to use flimsy boats;
 Three is fear of hostile bandits, robbers, and thieves;
 Four is the many demands for road toll; [6a]
 Five is fear of tigers, leopards, and poisonous snakes;
 Six is the fear of India's vast expanse;
 Seven is the fear of not being able to find a daily meal;
 Eight is the extreme scarcity of water and fuel;
 Nine is the distress of not being able to obtain evening lodgings;
 Ten is the fear of contracting leprosy and contagious diseases, such as smallpox.

Sonam Rabgye abandoned these fears, and focused instead upon the actual reason for making his journey, which was principally to carry out his lama's orders, and also to cleanse his own transgressions and defilements.

He certainly went to India imagining it was in order to benefit both the Buddhist religion and sentient beings.

Initially, India (rGya gar) was known as Hetha (He ṭha). Now, it is called Mādes (Mā sdes, perhaps Madhyadeśa?). The Buddhists (*nang pa*) here used to be known as Bodhimarga (Bo dhi marga), but today they are called Hindu (Hen du). The non-Buddhists (*phyi ba*) here used to be known as Śivamarga (Shi wa marga), but today they are called Muslim (Mu gsur man). Nowadays, [6b] at the Vajrāsana in India there are broken stone statues littering the ground. Similarly, there were also many broken *stūpas*.

Facts, Hearsay, and Fantasy

The visit to Bodh Gayā by Sonam Rabgye is quite significant for several reasons. To my knowledge, his is the first historically credible account of a Tibetan pilgrimage back to the ancient Buddhist holy land of the Middle Ganges region following four and a half centuries of Tibetan absence from this part of India.⁹⁹ The journey itself marked the beginning of a new historical phase in the ritual relationship between Tibetan pilgrims and their ancient Buddhist holy land in India. In fact, not long after Sonam Rabgye's visit, more Tibetan journeys to Bodh Gayā were also undertaken (see chap. 7). Finally, this Tibetan document also provides the earliest known eyewitness account of Bodh Gayā for the period immediately prior to the nineteenth century, after which the Mahābodhi Temple and its environs were dramatically transformed through a series of controversial restorations undertaken there by various parties, including a royal mission from Burma and extensive works sponsored by the colonial government of British India.

Until now, scholars interested in the history of the Bodh Gayā site prior to its colonial restoration have relied primarily upon the reports by the Scottish scientific explorer and surgeon Francis Buchanan (1762–1829), which he wrote during his tour of Bihar in 1811 on behalf of the East India Company, and also upon a few European sketches and paintings of the temple and its environs produced between 1790 and the early nineteenth century.¹⁰⁰ Because these very same sources have always been referenced in discussions of the site by modern scholars and Buddhist activists, the Burmese visits of 1802 and later are incorrectly taken to be the first evidence of an Asian Buddhist community returning to search for the site, and hence the beginnings of its Buddhist revival.¹⁰¹ In light of the 1752 journey and account by Sonam Rabgye presented herein, these assumptions need to be revised. Additionally, an eyewitness account of Bodh Gayā by a Nepalese

Buddhist from the Kathmandu Valley describes a visit to the site in what must have been the 1770s. Although a translation of this account by the British Resident in Kathmandu and pioneer of Himalayan studies Brian Hodgson (1800–1894) was published in the *Oriental Quarterly Magazine* as early as 1827–28, it too does not figure in the scholarship concerning the prerestitution history of Buddhism's single most important place of pilgrimage.¹⁰² We now know that pilgrims from Tibet and Nepal were in fact the first in recent centuries to rekindle a Buddhist interest in Bodh Gayā and undertake journeys there to investigate and worship at the site.

The short itinerary and travel observations of Sonam Rabgye presented above may appear modest by most standards. However, in the context of premodern Tibetan accounts of India, it is something of a unique document. Not once does the author engage in the usual descriptions of the miraculous or fabulous, and he spares us his visionary insights and dreams as well. His work is sober, descriptive, and lacks the characteristic boasts of special Tantric powers so often found in other works by or about Tibetan lama-travellers in India. Also in contrast to many earlier accounts, Sonam Rabgye's report reveals India "warts and all," as socially and environmentally harsh and as the undeniable setting for the complete death and ruin of one of Tibet's most cherished dreams, the Buddhist holy land, source of knowledge and salvation. In attempting to trace and corroborate all of the place names, historical details, and site descriptions which Sonam Rabgye's short account supplies, we find that it is unquestionably one of the most accurate and easily verifiable premodern Tibetan eyewitness accounts of the actual route to the heart of the Buddhist holy land.¹⁰³ Due to the factual information that the author supplies, his account also represents a practical document that other pilgrims of his day could have actually used to try and retrace his steps to Bodh Gayā. Such accuracy and practical value is something all too rare in the history of Tibetan guidebook and geographical literature. But while the style and content of Sonam Rabgye's work may indeed appeal in some respects to our contemporary Western expectations and sensibilities, our actual interest is in how it was received back in the Tibetan world where it was originally commissioned and in which it circulated. The answer, as far as we can ascertain, is rather negative. The reception which this unique eyewitness account of India received back in eighteenth-century Tibet was in fact particularly hostile and dismissive.

The only explicit, contemporary reference we can find to Sonam Rabgye's travel report is in the well-known historical and geographical account of India entitled *Narrative of the Holy Land* (*'Phags yul gyi rtogs*

brjod) which was written in 1777 by the influential Third Panchen Lama. The Panchen derides Sonam Rabgye's report as follows:

Because some stupid persons, such as the yogin of Garsha known as Sonam Rabgye, are confused, when they arrive at the Mahābodhi they do not even know where it exists, and they even confound Magadha with the city of Patna! According to absurd rumours by those who inquire into books [such as his] which are absolutely false, it is held that in the holy land even the name of the Teachings of the Buddha no longer exists.¹⁰⁴

In support of his stinging criticism of Sonam Rabgye's report, the Panchen Lama then provides a series of fantastic but unfortunately completely false estimations of the existence and strength of Buddhism across the Indian subcontinent during his own day, which we will analyze fully in chapter 7. In his obvious desire to completely repudiate Sonam Rabgye, the Panchen readily accuses him of "confound[ing] Magadha with the city of Patna." However, since Patna was the site of Pāṭaliputra, ancient capital of Magadha, and the seat of the great Mauryan empire, which was for a time, according to all the traditional Buddhist literature, the first extensive Buddhist polity in India, the Panchen once again merely revealed his own ignorance of Buddhist India. In fact, what Sonam Rabgye had reported back to Tibet was that not even the name Magadha existed in use in India anymore, and that the area was called Patna by the local Indian population. The Panchen, who never travelled to South Asia himself, was actually the inheritor and overeager transmitter of considerable misinformation about the state of Buddhism in eighteenth-century India.

To show the factual quality of Sonam Rabgye's account, we may compare here the description of the Vajrāsana at Bodh Gayā that was offered by the Nyingmapa lama Jigme Lingpa in his *Discourse on India to the South*, composed just three and a half decades later, in 1789. Jigme Lingpa, like the Panchen Lama, never went near the ancient Buddhist holy places of India himself. Instead, like almost all of his contemporaries, his knowledge about India depended upon hearsay and speculation plus very occasional eyewitness accounts, all laced with traditional material extracted from Buddhist texts in the Tibetan canon. The eyewitness accounts used by Jigme Lingpa in his *Discourse on India to the South* were gained primarily from his disciple-informant Changchub Gyaltsen (b. ca. 1717), a follower of the Nyingmapa school from the west of Bhutan.¹⁰⁵ This Tibetan Buddhist cleric, who rose to become the Tongsa Pönlob or governor of eastern

Bhutan, spent three years in Calcutta as a diplomat negotiating a territorial dispute with the British. According to Michael Aris, Changchub Gyaltsen probably travelled widely in Bengal and perhaps as far south as the Orrisan coast during his stay in India. He later founded the Thowdrak Dzogchen community in Bumthang, and one of his students there, a certain Namgyel (1748–1808, alias Lhawang Chöyin Zangpo), also became a student of Jigme Lingpa, whom he first met in Bhutan. Namgyel apparently went on a pilgrimage to India in what must have been the late 1770s or 1780s. Namgyel is known to have visited Jigme Lingpa in Tibet, and his testimony, together with secondhand reports of India from Changchub Gyaltsen, most probably provided the muddled account of Bihar related in the *Discourse on India to the South*.¹⁰⁶ Jigme Lingpa thus offered the following account of the Vajrāsana to his Tibetan readers:

If one goes southward [from Vārāṇasī one reaches] the powerful shrine of Gayā in a land of brāhmans, and it is used as a place for making both live and dead offerings. Within an area surrounded by a continuous wall [there lies] a stone *stūpa*, a stone image of Avalokiteśvara, and a footprint said to be that of the Teacher [the Buddha Śākyamuni]. . . . Apart from the mere assumption that this place may be Magadha, [the claim] has not, in the opinion of all, been properly substantiated. . . . According to the sayings of some people, the real Vajrāsana is a spot three months' journey west of Gayā.¹⁰⁷

Such a journey to the “real Vajrāsana” as described here would take one into the lower Indus Valley or the desert hills of Baluchistan in what is today Pakistan! In fact, all the evidence indicates that the description offered above by Jigme Lingpa actually refers to the thriving eighteenth-century Hindu pilgrim town of Gayā, and not to Bodh Gayā at all.¹⁰⁸ There were, moreover, further Tibetan candidates for the location of Vajrāsana at the time, and these were also based upon speculation, misinterpretations, and misinformation.¹⁰⁹ All such accounts certainly demonstrate the poor quality and sheer unreliability of information that eighteenth-century Tibetans were receiving about India and its ancient Buddhist sites.

Sonam Rabgye's 1752 journey to rediscover the lost heart of the Indian Buddhist holy land was essentially one of knowledge gathering combined with pilgrimage, and it was a logical consequence of centuries of Tibetan ignorance about and lack of direct contact with the Middle Ganges region. It is remarkable that such objective and practical eyewitness accounts of India as Sonam Rabgye produced did not appear in Tibetan records again

until the early twentieth century (see chap. 10). However, a mere nineteen years after Sonam Rabgye's journey, other pilgrimage expeditions were dispatched from Tibet to visit the Buddha's holy places in India. They were sent by none other than Sonam Rabgye's harshest critic and one of the leading Tibetan religious figures of the day, the Third Panchen Lama. Fortunately, the sources that outline the complex of motivations and influences that led the Panchen Lama to take such an interest in India are available to us in much greater detail. Like the Seventh Drukchen before him, the Panchen Lama also sought new knowledge of and contact with the Buddhist holy places of India. However, the product of this new knowledge did not represent a return by Tibetans to their original ancient holy land sites. Instead, the Panchen Lama's activities enabled Tibetans to reclaim, in the name of their particular form of Buddhism, a new and even wider but essentially non-Buddhist religious geography throughout India.



CHAPTER SEVEN

The Allure of the Atsaras

The religion of the Lamas is either derived from that of the Hindus, or improved by it. They retain, therefore, the greatest veneration for the Ganges and the places held holy in Hindustan.

—*George Bogle, 1775*

Introduction

Premodern Tibetan pilgrims to India always had to face difficulties of one kind or another, although some were less fortunate than others. Sonam Rabgye, whose pioneering 1752 journey of rediscovery was investigated in the previous chapter, was unlucky enough not only to have had to pass through the Gorkha campaigns against Kathmandu but also to have been repeatedly the victim of the general lawlessness that prevailed in Bihar during the disintegration of the Mughal Empire. However, not long after Sonam Rabgye's difficult Indian journey, travel conditions began to change for the better in the Middle Ganges region. This was due to the rapid expansion of British colonial power throughout the region during the middle of the eighteenth century. These profound events, the breakdown of one Indian empire and its replacement by another, formed the context for a renewed period of Indo-Tibetan contacts which had their own new religious consequences on both sides of the Himalayas.

In 1757, the British began conducting a series of military campaigns in Bihar and Bengal. These campaigns resulted not only in the combined provinces being granted to the East India Company in 1765 but also in Benares (Vārāṇasī) being restored to the state of Oudh by the British during the same year. Within a short time, the new colonial power, whose dominant interests were extractive and commercial, took steps to greatly

increase security and enforce law and order along routes of trade and travel throughout Bengal, Bihar, and neighbouring areas, thus ensuring a potentially much safer environment for both Tibetans travelling to India and for Indians to travel to Tibet. Moreover, the great reconfiguration of power that was taking place on the plains of India, and the political and military activities of the East India Company right up to the foothills of the Himalayas, quickly drew Tibet into a sphere of new relations with India to the south. It is within this dynamic context, during the second half of the eighteenth century, that we find a series of official pilgrimage missions being dispatched to India by the Third Panchen Lama,¹ Losang Pelden Yeshe (1738–80), and also the presence in Tibet of increasing numbers of Indian mendicant pilgrim-traders. In this chapter I will demonstrate how the renewed eighteenth-century flow of persons between Tibet and India contributed significantly to a new and unique Tibetan understanding of India as a land of Buddhism. It was an understanding in which a whole variety of unambiguously Hindu holy sites and their Indian worshippers were interpreted as actually representing a major survival of Buddhism in India. It was this view which became embodied in the pilgrimage missions of the Third Panchen Lama, in his writings about India, as well as in his establishment of the first Tibetan religious base on the lowlands of India itself.

The Panchen Lama's Pilgrimage Missions to India

The Third Panchen Lama's interests in and connections with India, by way of both his Indian and British contacts, are remarkable in that they are the best-known historical episodes in studies of Tibet published in the English language over the past two centuries.² However, their importance in terms of understanding the development of a Tibetan pilgrimage culture related to India and a Tibetan system of knowledge about India as a holy land of Buddhism has never been explored. Moreover, most studies have viewed the relationship exclusively through the perspective offered by the British colonial accounts, and the evidence of Tibetan interests and motivations has thus been misconceived or neglected as a result. A similar lopsidedness is also evident in studies of the Panchen's well-known text on the geography and history of India and Shambhala. This two-part treatise has always attracted attention from scholars because of its *Explanation of Shambhala* (*Shamba la'i rnam bshad*), a discussion of the mystical country of Shambhala which figures in *Kālacakra-tantra* traditions, rather than for its initial *Narrative of the Holy Land* (*'Phags yul gyi rtogs brjod*), which deals specifically with India and occupies more than half of the actual work.³ Thus, in

this chapter we will turn our attention to topics which generally appear to be well-trodden ground but which have not had the attention they deserve from the Tibetan perspective.

Surprising as it may seem, the Third Panchen Lama was the very first religious or political leader in the entire history of Tibet to have opened direct and substantial diplomatic and cultural contacts with Indian counterparts. Specifically, his dealings were with the ambitious *rājā* of Benares (i.e., Vārāṇasī), Chait Singh (r. 1770–81, d. 1810), and the dynamic British governor-general of Bengal, Warren Hastings (1732–1818). This fact was not only due to the particular vicissitudes of Tibet's history up until the eighteenth century but also to the type of person the Third Panchen Lama was. The Panchen was a man of erudition and a well-trained traditional Tibetan Buddhist scholar, who, like some of his eighteenth-century contemporaries, had acquired some knowledge of Sanskrit. In addition, he also had an inquiring and forceful personality with a flair for diplomacy. His connections to a greater India began during childhood when his mother⁴ taught him Hindustani, a tongue in which he was reasonably fluent as an adult. By the beginning of the 1770s, the Panchen had attained a most powerful position in Tibet. Although already the head of the very large and mainly autonomous religious estate of Tashilhunpo in Tsang (south-western Tibet), the Panchen also enjoyed a position of great prestige in Tibetan affairs due to the minority at the time of the Eighth Dalai Lama, Jampae Gyatso (1758–1804). He carefully maintained very positive relations with the incumbent Regent of Tibet, Demo Tulku Ngawang Jampae Delek Gyatso (r. 1757–77), and also with the Qing Emperor, Qianlong (r. 1736–95), especially by way of one of his closest imperial advisors, the Second Chankya Hutuktu, Rolpae Dorje (1717–86). Thus, it is from a position of strength and confidence during the latter half of the eighteenth century that we find the Panchen beginning his series of unprecedented contacts with both Indian and British rulers to the south. While these contacts in themselves do appear to have had different types of significance for the Panchen, the Tibetan sources concerning them reveal overwhelmingly that they were a means to a specific end: they facilitated direct Tibetan religious contacts with the Buddhist holy land of India, primarily achieved through the medium of pilgrimage.

First Mission: 1771

The Panchen Lama's first substantial contact with India was established in 1771, in the form of a Tibetan pilgrimage mission dispatched to holy places

in India and Nepal, the results of which are found briefly described in the Panchen's own official biography:

Last year [= 1771] in the fifth [Tibetan] month, the Drongtse Chömdzé Dungrampa Gelong Losang Tsering was dispatched to the Mahābodhi of Vajrāsana in the holy land, and to the great holy places of Nepal in order to present offerings there. He returned on the sixth day of the tenth month [of this year, 1772]. He brought joy by reading out to [the Panchen] highly respectful messages from the ruler of Vārāṇasī in India and the Gorkha ruler [of Nepal], and by presenting many different types of earth and stones from the great holy places, and water from many [sacred] rivers, including the Ganges. He was thoroughly questioned about what the conditions were like in Madhyadeśa, Magadha, and so on.⁵

While the possible political and economic dimensions of this and the later missions to India have already been considered—rather unconvincingly, I feel—by others, their cultural dimensions have not. Therefore, I will now collectively analyse all the various missions in these terms. The events leading up to the dispatch of this first mission to India are not clearly apparent from the available sources, although one factor without doubt was the increasing flow of firsthand information about India that was regularly reaching the Panchen at his court in Tashilhunpo at the time. This new source of intelligence was due to the presence in eighteenth-century Tibet of numerous mendicant pilgrim-traders who had travelled there from India. Such visitors had been arriving in Tibet in significant numbers since at least the 1730s and 1740s. In 1741, for example, a Capuchin missionary resident in Lhasa, Father Cassiano Beligatti, witnessed a religious procession in which he observed “about forty Azarrà, i.e., religious men from Hindustan, who were rich merchants, proceeding on horseback and dressed in China brocades.”⁶ In referring to the “Azarrà,” Father Beligatti was employing the general Tibetan name “Atsara” (*a tsa ra*, or less commonly *a tsa rya*), a phonetic rendering of the Sanskrit *ācārya*, normally meaning something like “religious teacher/scholar.” The name “Atsara” was generically applied by eighteenth-century Tibetans to all visiting Indians in Tibet. In India, and especially in the English colonial sources, these same types of mendicant pilgrim-traders were becoming widely known as “Gosains” during the period. “Gosain” is most probably a vernacular form of the Sanskrit *gōsvāmin*, a term denoting an ascetic. For convenience we will adopt the term “Gosain” here to describe these Indian pilgrim-traders in Tibet, although, as we will see in more detail below, this term

was generically applied to a great diversity of different individuals and groups.

Here we must emphasize that the Panchen Lama regularly maintained both formal and informal contacts with the Gosains, sometimes admitting them for personal audiences at his court and at other times casually conversing with them in Hindustani from his window. He even encouraged and supported their presence at his court when they passed through the Tashilhunpo area by acting as their local patron and providing for their regular needs while they dwelt in his domain.⁷ This charity attracted large numbers of travelling Indian mendicants to Tashilhunpo. A few years after the Third Panchen Lama's death, Samuel Turner observed that at Tashilhunpo "no less than three hundred Hindoos, Goseins, and Sunniasses [i.e., *saṃnyāsī*], are daily fed at this place, by the Lama's bounty."⁸ George Bogle (1746–81), a civil servant of the East India Company and the first British envoy to visit Tibet, was resident at the Panchen Lama's court from November 1774 to April 1775. He remarked of the Gosains at Tashilhunpo that

Their humble deportment and holy character, heightened by the merit of distant pilgrimages, their accounts of unknown countries and remote regions, and, above all, their professions of high veneration for the [Panchen] Lama, procure them not only a ready admittance, but great favour.⁹

Elsewhere, Bogle also specifically observed that the Panchen's motivations in supporting these Indian visitors stemmed from "the desire of acquiring information, and satisfying his curiosity about Hindustan, the school of the religion of Tibet."¹⁰ In addition, the Panchen also enjoyed the presentations of novel exotica from India and other foreign lands that the visiting Gosains regularly offered to him, including European eyeglasses, firearms, pearls and coral, glassware, parrots, and other items which were great rarities in Tibet.¹¹

The Panchen's 1771 dispatch of his first pilgrim mission to India must certainly have been due to indirect contacts, via his Gosain informants, with the court of the new *rājā* of Benares, Chait Singh.¹² The Panchen's generous patronage of the Gosains at Tashilhunpo had probably already become favourably known in places like Benares, as Bogle fairly conjectured: "the fakirs, in their return to their own country . . . naturally extol the bounty of their benefactor, and thus serve to spread wide the fame of his character."¹³ One can speculate that there may have been certain political and economic motivations behind the Panchen Lama's missions to

India, but these are not at all evident in the Tibetan accounts, which are almost entirely focused on the religious and cultural dimensions of the events. It is perhaps rather the case that relations began due to the political and especially economic interests of some of the Gosains themselves, who may have perceived certain strategic advantages in facilitating relations between the Indian and Tibetan leaders.

Second Mission: 1773

In 1773, the year after his first successful mission had returned from India, the Panchen dispatched a second, more ambitious mission. Extracts from the account in his official biography provide a clear impression of the conditions of travel and both the religious and diplomatic dimensions of the visit:

Previously, the most excellent Lord [Panchen] Lama dispatched, by way of Lowo [i.e., Mustang in Nepal], the Drongtse Chömdzé Dungrampa Gelong Losang Tsering, together with three companions, for the purpose of presenting offerings at the holy places of India, including the all-powerful Mahābodhi of Vajrāsana, the site of Uruvilvā Kāśyapa's conversion called Gayāśiras, the city of Vaiśālī which is presently named Prayāga, also Vārāṇasī, and the Nairāṇjanā river which is known today as the Phalgu. [Losang Tsering's] three companions succumbed to the heat of Mon and died. Concerning the land of India, it is a distant country that is extremely hot. On the road there are many fearful things, including poisonous snakes, carnivorous beasts, and thieves. Travelling is made even harder because the principalities on the border have very strict guards closing the roads. However, with the support of the Lord [Panchen Lama's] strong empowerment, the Chömdzé [Losang Tsering] himself was able to reach the various regions of India. . . . Having reached the city of Vārāṇasī, which is presently called Kaśī, he met with and made a petition to the ruler of the land, Chait Singh Bahadur, and presented him with the [Panchen's] letter which he carried, at which the ruler arose from his wooden throne and received him very respectfully. He departed together with an escort provided by the ruler, and after two weeks on the road arrived at the Vajrāsana seated [in a palanquin].¹⁴ In front of the image of Mahābodhi at the Vajrāsana, that most holy place where the Teacher [Buddha] attained enlightenment and of the one thousand Buddhas of the fortunate aeon, he offered an extensive arrangement of five types of "thousand offerings." Then, ac-

cording to the instructions of his Lord, the most excellent [Panchen] Lama, he made a series of prayers which were like medicine for the Buddhist teachings and for all sentient beings . . . The Shiworede,¹⁵ who were the occupiers of the holy place, were lined up and presented with offerings as a show of reverence. . . . Additionally, at the other holy places [he had been instructed to visit], such things as offerings and prayers were made in the same way as aforementioned, after which he gradually returned and went before the ruler of Vārāṇasī. In accord with a request from the Mahāguru [Panchen Lama] to the ruler himself, stating that proper offerings be made there also, offerings and prayers were accordingly made at the superior holy places in the country of Vārāṇasī in the same way as above.¹⁶

At this point, the Panchen's representative, Drongtse Losang Tsering, returned home to Tashilhunpo together with a reciprocal mission from Rājā Chait Singh, who sent gifts to his Tibetan counterpart. One such gift was "a replica image (*'dra cog*) of the Mahābodhi *caitya*-temple (*gan dho la*) at Vajrāsana beautified with inlaid gemstones."¹⁷ Losang Tsering also presented the Panchen with other sacra from the Indian holy land, and these were installed at Tashilhunpo for worship and included

A matchless image of the Buddha Śākyamuni and an image of Maitreya, both made out of black stone and brought back from Vajrāsana by the Dungrampa Chömdzé, and which were bathed in golden water and had the "eye-opening" rites properly performed for them. These two images and different model replicas of Vārāṇasī were worshipped with five sorts of "hundred offerings," and great prayers were made to them.¹⁸

Third Mission: 1776

A third mission appears to have taken place between March and June 1776, although the Panchen Lama's biography makes no mention of it, and it has likewise been overlooked in the various studies based upon the British and Tibetan documents produced so far. Unlike the initial missions, which were specifically dispatched to the ancient holy places of Buddhism in the Middle Ganges region, this third mission was instead an attempt to visit and worship at the twenty-four Tantric *pīṭha* sites or, at least, those Indian locations which the Panchen identified as being among the twenty-four Vajrayāna *pīṭha*.¹⁹ At this point it becomes clear that the Panchen wanted to establish an actual ritual relationship with the sacred geography of the

Indian Buddhist holy land at the subcontinental level, just as we find it described in his account of India. The far-flung Tantric sites were as much a concern for him as the more compact arena of ancient places of the Buddha to which his pilgrims had already been sent. In April 1775, shortly before his departure back to Bengal from the Panchen's court, George Bogle reported the Panchen Lama making a specific request of him:

[H]e wished also to visit by means of his servants the twenty-four places which he before mentioned; that he would write to the Governor on the subject, and desired me also to represent it to him; that he would not think of sending any Pybas [i.e., Bod pa, Tibetans] at this season of the year, and exposing them to the heats of Bengal, but proposed to dispatch them so as to arrive at [Cooch] Behar towards the cool of autumn. He hoped the Governor would give orders for their proceeding to Calcutta and would appoint a pundit skilled in the Hindu religion to attend them. . . . After this he mentioned the names of some of these holy places, accompanying them with legendary and miraculous stories which I did not then comprehend and which I think it unnecessary now to attempt to repeat. One of the temples was at Sindh. I represented its great distance. He said he did not imagine the Tibetan gylongs [i.e., monks], little accustomed to journeying could travel so far, that he intended only that they should visit the holy places such as Gaya, Gunga Sugur, etc, and that he would send Hindus on pilgrimage to the rest.²⁰

Unbeknownst to Bogle, he had become the first European in history to be instructed in the Tantric Buddhist cult of the twenty-four *pīṭha*. The Panchen Lama apparently only acted upon his own interests in the twenty-four sites during the following premonsoon season of 1776. We know this from entries in a ledger entitled *Account of Sundry Expenses Paid on Account of the Vakeels etc. of the Lama of Tibet* that was carefully kept by Bogle and which listed all the expenses he incurred in relation to the Panchen's missions to India.²¹ The entry for March 24, 1776, details the "Expenses of Tashee, a Booteea [i.e., Bhotia, a Tibetan] on pilgrimage to Jagganat Pagoda, attended by 2 Brahmans," this being a service that cost a little over 317 rupees. A sobering entry then follows for June of the same year, which lists the "Expenses in burning the body of a Booteea, who died on the return from his pilgrimage." To confirm the journey, we find that Samuel Turner was informed at Tashilhunpo that, "The late Teshoo Lama, I was told, had the merit of having thus performed his pilgrimages by proxy, to . . .

Jagarnaut."²² While the temple of Jagannātha on the Orrisan coast was not explicitly identified by the Panchen in his writings as being one of the twenty-four Tantric *pīṭha*, he certainly recognized it as being the place of Tantric activity of the Vajrayāna adept known as Vajraghāṇṭa.²³

Another document demonstrates that the Panchen's plan to have Indian intermediaries worship at some of the twenty-four Tantric *pīṭha* on his behalf was indeed facilitated by Bogle using resources that the Panchen had sent from Tibet specifically for the purpose. On a receipt written in Devanāgarī among the Bogle papers we find recorded:

Here is the receipt given by the pandas of Kamarupa for some of the money and Chinese cloth which the Panchen Rangoche Teshu Lama of Tibet sent to Mr Bogle at Calcutta on the bank of the Gangi [Hughli] to pay for religious ceremonies in the holy places of Hindustan. On receiving Rs. 20 from that sum we at Kamarupa have performed the appropriate religious rites on behalf of the Lama.²⁴

Kāmarūpa in Assam was identified and discussed by the Panchen in his account of India as being an important site of one of the twenty-four Tantric *pīṭha*.

Fourth Mission: 1777

The final Tibetan religious mission to India, dispatched during the winter of 1777, only received the briefest note at the very end of the Panchen's biography: "On the thirteenth day [of the twelfth Tibetan month, i.e., mid-January], a man was sent out to convey his compliments to the ruler of Bengal in India, the Bharasaheb [i.e., governor-general], and to make offerings at the holy places of that country."²⁵ There is no indication of what holy places in Bengal this final mission may have visited. The Panchen Lama also dispatched one other Tibetan mission to India, but according to the available sources it was of a purely diplomatic nature.²⁶

A final eyewitness report from the court of the Panchen Lama about these pilgrimage missions comes from Samuel Turner (1749–1802), another representative of the British administration in Bengal, who—following George Bogle's very successful visit—had also been sent on a mission to Tashilhunpo in 1783, shortly after the Panchen's death in China. Turner noted that "the late Teshoo Lama [i.e., Third Panchen Lama], I was told, had the merit of having thus performed his pilgrimages by proxy,²⁷ to Cashi [i.e., Vārāṇasī], Prag [Prayāga], Gunga Sagar [Gaṅgāsāgara], and Jagarnaut

[Jagannātha of Puri].” Turner also reported on late eighteenth-century Tibetan pilgrimages in the Gangetic Basin in general that

Bengal is rendered peculiarly dear to them, by the powerful influence of religious prejudice. The regeneration of their Lama is said to have taken place, in times of remote antiquity, near the site of the ancient and ruined city of Gowr [i.e., Gaur], and all those places held in veneration by the Hindoos, as Gya [Gayā], Benares, Mahow [Mau],²⁸ and Allahabad [Prayāga], are equally objects of superstitious zeal, with a votary of the Tibet faith, who thinks himself blessed above his fellow disciples, if he can but perform a pilgrimage to these hallowed spots. . . . Gunga Sagor, an uninhabited island, situated at the confluence of the Ganges with the sea, and the pagoda of Jagarnaut, upon the coast of Orissa, are also deemed places of equal sanctity, and occasionally visited, from the same motives of jealous but mistaken piety.²⁹

Still later sources confirm the general information provided by Turner’s account. While travelling through Tibetan Buddhist regions of the western Himalayas including Spiti and Kinnaur in 1817–18, the British traveller Captain Alexander Gerard (1792–1839) enquired about pilgrimages undertaken by the local Tibetan Buddhists of the region. He reported that “there are several sacred places frequented by the Lamas and Koonawurees, such as Hurdwar [i.e., Hardwar], Benares, Juggernaut [Jagannātha], and Gya, all of which are known here by the same names.” In the highland region of Spiti, Gerard also met with “a Lama from Teshoo Loomboo [Tashilhunpo], who had frequently visited Hurdwar, and could talk Hindustani very well.”³⁰

Worshipping Hindu India

What is abundantly clear from this survey of the Panchen Lama’s pilgrimage missions to the holy places of India, and what contemporary British colonial observers in India and Tibet only confirm, is that the great majority of Indian pilgrimage destinations visited by Tibetan travellers were in fact non-Buddhist holy places of the day, sites which had nothing—or at best, very little—to do with the history of Indian Buddhism, and which were instead sacred to Śāktas, Śaivas, Vaiṣṇavas, and other Indian religious movements that we usually subsume for convenience under the umbrella term Hinduism. Only a few Buddhist historical sites are actually mentioned, those being the ruined and by then thoroughly Hinduized Mahābodhi Tem-

ple environment at Bodh Gayā, the nearby Nairāṅjanā River, and Gayāśiras which is closely associated with the Hindu pilgrim town of Gayā.³¹ The Panchen made much of the pilgrimages to the famous Hindu holy city of Vārāṇasī and even worshipped model replicas of the city back in Tashilhunpo. However, we know from his other writings that he clearly understood the area's ancient Buddhist significance as the site of the Rṣipatana Grove, famous as the location of the Buddha's first teaching.³² The Panchen also states that he sent his pilgrims to the ancient Buddhist city of Vaiśālī, which he explicitly identifies with the most important Hindu *tīrtha* of Prayāga, located at the confluence of the Ganges and Yamunā Rivers at present-day Allahabad. But this was a complete misidentification, since Vaiśālī, or at least its ancient ruins, are located some three hundred kilometres eastward, on the banks of the Gaṇḍakī River in Bihar to the north of Patna.

Such Tibetan misidentifications or, in some cases, "rediscoveries" of ancient Buddhist sites at famous Hindu holy places were, as we have already demonstrated, a common development of post-thirteenth-century Tibetan pilgrimage culture in India. They were also an understandable development, given the demise of Indian Buddhism, the disappearance of most of the ancient sites, and the four-and-a-half-century hiatus in Tibetan travel to the Middle Ganges region. What is important to emphasize here is that each such case of what we might call the reinterpretation or even appropriation by Tibetans of Hindu and other non-Buddhist Indian sites as Buddhist places has a particular set of historical circumstances, events, and agents associated with it, and this is what we have to try and account for. Thus, we would ask why a great traditional scholar like the Third Panchen Lama, together with his pilgrims, so readily misidentified such a famous Hindu site as Prayāga as the location of Vaiśālī, the original location of which is clearly described in many of the old Tibetan pilgrim itineraries to India. And how are we to understand the sudden interest of Tibetan pilgrims in such apparently disparate Indian places as Gaur, Mau, Gaṅgāsāgara, Hardwar, and the Jagannātha Temple at Puri in Orrisa? Or, for that matter, why were Tibetans engaging in that archetypal Hindu religious activity, the ritual collection and transportation of water from the sacred river Ganges? When we turn to the Panchen's historical and geographical writings on India, in particular his *Narrative of the Holy Land* written in 1775, we find the same pattern. Alongside the places of ancient Indian Buddhism that all Tibetan scholars mention in their traditional works on India, there is another set of definitely non-Buddhist places cited and sometimes described throughout the text, for example Nagar Thaṭha (i.e., ancient Thatta),

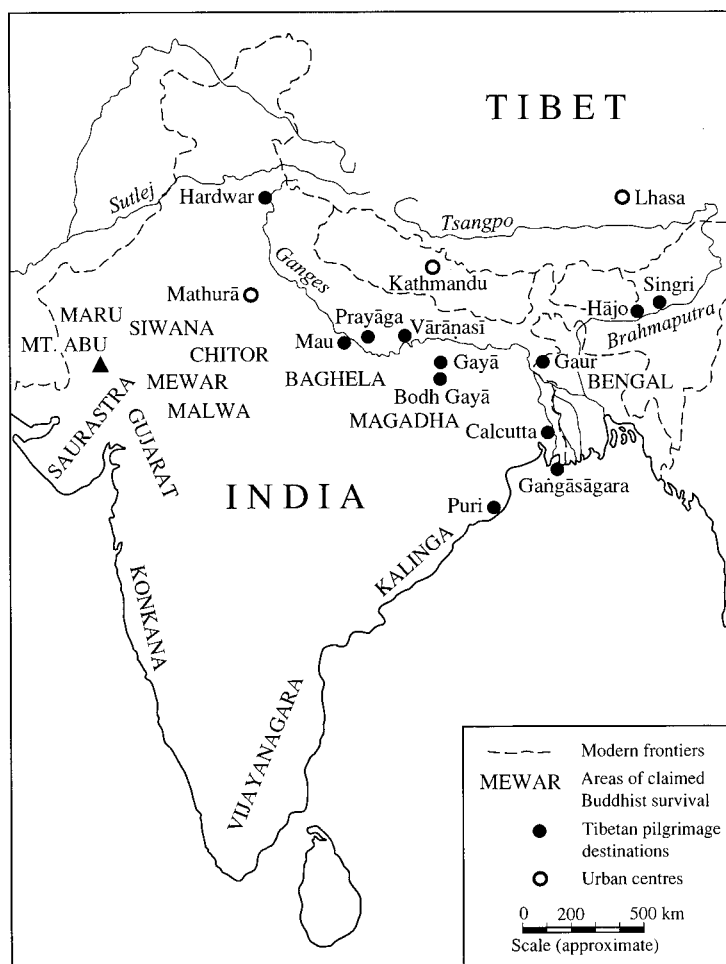


Figure 7.1. Eighteenth-century Tibetan pilgrimage and survival of Buddhism in India according to the Third Panchen Lama. Drawn by Norma Schulz and Toni Huber.

Hiṅg Lāj (ancient Hiṅgula), Hardwar (or Haridvāra), and Lucknow, along with Prayāga, Gaur, Mau, Gaṅgāsāgara, and the Puri Jagannātha temple already mentioned above (see fig. 7.1).³³ The reasons behind this vigorous Tibetan turn toward Hindu holy places can be traced back directly to the influence of various later Indian visitors to Tibet, beginning with Nāths such as Buddhaguptanātha, and including in particular the eighteenth-century mendicants known as the Gosains.

Tāranātha's Legacy

Tibetan interest in a completely new set of historically non-Buddhist Indian holy places, the names, locations, and characteristics of most of which had never before been known in Tibet, began suddenly at the end of the sixteenth century with the arrival in Tibet of Buddhaguptanātha. This widely travelled Indian teacher of the famous Jonangpa scholar Tāranātha appears to have been a member of the eclectic Indian Nāth Siddha tradition. He spent more than forty years travelling around the Indian subcontinent visiting holy places and probably also collecting stories from fellow mendicants about other sites that he himself did not reach. David White considers that the Nāth Siddha tradition to which Buddhaguptanātha belonged was originally a twelfth- and thirteenth-century development out of the Śaiva context of western India, one that was "more than any other medieval Hindu sect, most amenable to syncretism with Islam."³⁴ Furthermore, in attempting to appreciate the religious culture that a sixteenth-century figure such as Buddhaguptanātha represented, one must take account of rupture and revival in the whole high Tantric tradition in India. White has pointed out that following the "catastrophic break in most of the guru-disciple lineages" of the twelfth and thirteenth centuries, it is only appropriate to speak of Tantric "revivals" in later periods of Indian history. He indicates major revivals occurred within the thirteenth and fourteenth centuries and then again in the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries, with this later revival likely to have been based in eastern India, especially in Bengal and Nepal.³⁵

It is important to emphasize such historical developments in South Asian religion when discussing Tāranātha here. So many works, beginning with and often inspired by those of Tāranātha himself, have incautiously sought to link the Nāth Siddha traditions to survivals of Buddhism and to eastern India, and to project continuities back through time almost entirely on the basis of similarities of names and terminologies found in often disparate collections of sources. Little is currently known about Nāth Siddha practitioners in sixteenth-century India, and it has thus far proven very difficult to historically estimate and verify the religious and social background of Buddhaguptanātha in any way independent of Tāranātha's own writings about him.³⁶ Nevertheless, the information that came out of this nebulous Nāth Siddha context via Buddhaguptanātha, and which was transmitted by way of Tāranātha's interpretations into a wider, elite Tibetan Buddhist milieu, had a significant impact on the way in which

post-sixteenth-century Tibetans thought about India and, eventually, also on the ways they acted.

The results of Tāranātha's interactions with Buddhaguptanātha that have attracted the most attention both in Tibet and among non-Tibetan scholars are a series of traditional historical and hagiographical accounts of Indian Buddhism and the Tantric Siddha traditions in India. What interests us here is the particular late sixteenth-century Nāth Siddha knowledge about the sacred geography of India that entered the Tibetan tradition by way of Tāranātha's writings. Such geographical information is represented especially in Tāranātha's hagiographies of the Mahāsiddhas, particularly that of the yogin Kṛṣṇācārya, but also in his biography of Buddhaguptanātha and his famous history of Indian Buddhism.³⁷

One salient feature of Tāranātha's works that was accepted by his later Tibetan readers is his claim that Buddhism continued to persist in India long after the thirteenth century. As Simon Digby has so aptly put it, his writing typically "expresses the proselytizing belief that India could be reclaimed to Buddhism."³⁸ Moreover, Tāranātha considered that particular lineages of the Nāth order who were wandering ascetics practicing forms of Tantra were the surviving Buddhists of India.³⁹ While it is beyond our scope here to deal with the larger and complex question of Tāranātha's ideas about the survival of some form of Buddhism in post-thirteenth-century India,⁴⁰ various scholars have investigated these claims and found them at best exaggerated, confused, or doubtful.⁴¹ In chapters 4 and 5 I also briefly examined some of Tāranātha's geographical and religious claims concerning Devīkoṭa and Hājo and demonstrated that they are not historically reliable. Similarly, Tāranātha's reports of Buddhaguptanātha's sixteenth-century visits to various sites of ancient Buddhism in the Middle Ganges region also appear to be without foundation.⁴² However, from the mediaeval Tibetan viewpoint, all of our modern scholarly scepticism about Tāranātha's claims is beside the point. Such was Tāranātha's authority on matters to do with Buddhism in India that his later Tibetan readership generally accepted his writings and without reserve set about incorporating details from them into new works on India composed during the centuries that followed.

As a result, we find that many non-Buddhist Indian sites not previously featuring in Tibetan writings—such as Nagar Thaṭha, Hiṅg Lāj, Hardwar, Lucknow, Prayāga, Gaṅgāsāgara, or Puri Jagannātha—but found listed and discussed in Tāranātha's writings are then uncritically carried over into the writings and even pilgrimage missions of the Third Panchen Lama. Knowledge about many of these Hindu sites had also reached the Panchen

by way of his Gosain informants who also regularly visited them, as we will discuss shortly. At some points in his account of India, the Panchen even paraphrased whole passages from Tāranātha in order to describe particular places. Very often in this transfer process, one set of errors was easily heaped upon another, with the result that purely Hindu sites came to appear to later Tibetans as important Buddhist ones. For instance, a late Pāla era monastic centre known as Jagadalla *vihāra* had been visited by a few Tibetans during the thirteenth century and was known from various literary references as well.⁴³ Jagadalla was located in the northern part of the Varendra region of ancient Bengal, where its ruins have been partially excavated at present-day Naogaon in Bangladesh. Tāranātha had erroneously located this site in Oḍiviśa, which for traditional Tibetans referred to Oḍra or the present-day Orrisan coast of eastern India. The Third Panchen Lama then accepted Tāranātha's erroneous identification of the site and proceeded to compound it with his own. Having heard of the famous Hindu temple of Jagannātha at Puri in Orrisa from his Gosain informants, he accordingly and falsely associated Jagadalla with that site, presumably on the basis of the superficial similarity of the Indian names.⁴⁴

Gosain Influence

The process of Tibetan assimilation of the Hindu sacred geography of India that began with Buddhaguptanātha's visit to Tibet was then later strongly reinforced by the presence of the Gosains at the Third Panchen Lama's court. Although these eighteenth-century Indian travellers to Tibet were collectively known as Atsaras or Gosains, these generic terms referred to members of a much larger and more complex Indian mendicant movement or culture of the period, the members of which often had individual backgrounds that were quite disparate. Some were genuine Hindu ascetics or monk pilgrims and some were traders, and many were a mixture of both. While some also functioned as mercenaries, political agents, or messengers, others were no doubt also beggars, itinerant entertainers, and the like. They also came from both Śaiva and Vaiṣṇava religious roots,⁴⁵ with some from organized institutions such as Hindu monasteries (*maṭha*) or ascetic communities, while still others were free agents. The Gosains, as a class of pilgrim-traders, operated a unique and extensive system of successful trading networks extending from Upper India through to Bengal during the eighteenth and early nineteenth centuries.⁴⁶ Their long-distance trading activities were often closely tied to regular, annual pilgrimages that they performed around a network of Hindu sites. It was in fact this same

cultural pattern that brought increasing numbers of them to Tibet, since they desired to visit Lake Manasarovar (Mapham Tso in Tibetan) and also the adjacent Mount Kailash (Kang Tisé in Tibetan), which are both sites in far western Tibet sacred to Hindus,⁴⁷ and en route to which lay the Panchen Lama's headquarters at Tashilhunpo. Of particular interest to us here is the cycle of Gosain pilgrimages around India, which Bernard Cohen has described as follows:

The annual cycle of pilgrimage started in Upper India with attendance of the Sannyasis at the Kumbh mela, at Allahabad [i.e., Prayāga], or at Hardwar, Ujjain or Nasik, in January. In March they would all attend a mela at Janakpur in Nepal, the reputed birth place of Sita, and then would move to Bengal and across to the Brahmaputra River for bathing festivals and would then move to Sagar Island [Gaṅgāsāgara] at the mouth of the Ganges in May and try to be out of Bengal before the beginning of the rains at the end of June, when they would either start northwestwards through Bihar and back to Upper India or would move down to Puri and the temple of Jagannath.⁴⁸

Here we find, once again, the same fundamental set of Hindu sites that the Panchen Lama both wrote about and sent his Tibetan pilgrim missions out to visit (fig. 7.1). Nearly all of them are also those places where Buddhaguptanātha, as a member of a somewhat earlier Indian mendicant culture, had also travelled. We also have the individual itineraries of eighteenth-century Hindu mendicants whose geographical range was even wider than that of Buddhaguptanātha, but whose travels around India and even further afield again took them to exactly the same set of places, not to mention Tibet as well.⁴⁹

To demonstrate how the influence of these travelling Indian ascetics and their traditions reshaped Tibetan understandings and actions in relation to India, let us examine a poignant example, that of Tibetan engagement with the most well-known and universal of Hindu rites, the worship of the river Ganges (Gaṅgā) and some of the most crucial holy places or *tīrtha* located along its course.

Tibetan Worship of the Ganges

For Hindus, the Ganges is highly sacred as the supreme “crossing place” (*tīrtha*), and one in which all other *tīrtha* are concentrated. It represents a kind of archetypal and metalevel holy place in popular Hinduism. It

is a river to which Hindu pilgrims invariably make pilgrimage journeys (*tīrthayātrā*) for the purpose of ritual bathing and also to consume and make ritual collections of its waters.⁵⁰ Ganges water, or “Gangapani” in the vernacular, is popularly considered by Indians to possess various powers relating to both spiritual purification and health. For a Hindu to be cremated upon the banks of the river at places such as Vārāṇasī is considered the most blessed of all possible departures from this life. Besides Vārāṇasī, the course of the Ganges is marked by some of Hinduism’s most powerful *tīrtha*, including Hardwar, Prayāga, and Gaṅgāsāgara. But Tibetans, as Buddhists, did not have any reason to visit and worship at the Ganges.

In Buddhist tradition, the name of the Ganges is well enough known from citations in classical literature, but it is not associated in any significant way with pilgrimage to the major sites of the Buddha.⁵¹ If any single Indian river filled this role in Tibetan Buddhist tradition, it was certainly the Nairāṇjanā, a well-known site in the legend of the Buddha as it was received in Tibet, and a place that the native Tibetan accounts elaborated upon as well.⁵² From the point of view of Tibetan religious practice, systematic ritual bathing in rivers or tanks—an essential aspect of popular Hindu ritual—has not played any role at all. Tibetans even distinguish their own practices and notions of inner ascetic cleansing from those of Hindu ritual bathing using ironic colloquial expressions, such as “Hindus clean on the outside, Buddhists clean on the inside.”⁵³

Thus, as we would expect, many generations of Tibetan visitors to India were religiously indifferent to the greatest of India’s sacred rivers. In fact, during the early period of religious travel to India that ended in the thirteenth century, Tibetans actually regarded the Ganges with a great sense of dread. It was considered a dangerous obstacle that had, of necessity, to be negotiated en route to the heart of their holy land. Early Tibetan anxieties about the Ganges were multiple, and we find repeated reports of great fears about capsizing during the unavoidable ferry crossings over the river, of attacks by crocodiles “the size of a yak,” not to mention of assaults by fellow ferry passengers, of being accosted by local robbers and bandits who preyed upon Tibetans waiting on the north bank of the river for the ferry, and so on.⁵⁴ Indeed, in the later biographies of Marpa Lotsāwa, crossing the very negatively conceived “vile surging waters” of the Ganges is presented as one of the “three fears” of the journey to India, and thus the lama’s disciples urge him not to depart because “the great Ganges river is very fearsome.”⁵⁵ Not only was the Ganges itself an object of anxiety and loathing, it is clear that the Indian ritual life of the river was also regarded as something entirely alien to the early Tibetan pilgrims to India. Ra Lotsāwa,

while travelling along the Ganges, noted the deviant non-Buddhist practice of religious bathing in the river at the *ghats*.⁵⁶ Chag Lotsāwa observed with surprise the non-Buddhist pilgrims taking the ashes of their fathers to be deposited in the Ganges in order to purify their fathers' sins.⁵⁷

Given these earlier negative Tibetan considerations of the actual river Ganges itself, as opposed, that is, to its abstract cultural image in Buddhist literature in Tibet,⁵⁸ it is of great interest that in later centuries we find many notable examples illustrating that a complete reversal of these earlier attitudes toward the river had occurred. All of these examples begin after the time of Buddhaguptanātha and the advent of the Gosains in Tibetan Buddhist areas. Most striking is the evidence that Tibetans had themselves begun to partake of the established Indian ritual relationship with the great river. For instance, in the late 1670s, we find the Tsang Khanchen, Jamyang Pelden Gyatso (1610–84), a Tibetan Buddhist from Bhutan where the Gosains also actively visited, and who travelled to India on three occasions, using water carried back to his monastery from the Ganges as part of the ritual materials to perform a *gaṇacakra* offering.⁵⁹ The Third Panchen Lama, as we have just noted, had Ganges water especially collected for him by proxy pilgrims he had sent to India and then carried long-distance back to his monastery at Tashilhunpo.⁶⁰ When Gangapani was collected for the Panchen, he specifically dispatched his pilgrims to the sacred river's most powerful Hindu *tīrtha*, that is, Prayāga, Vārāṇasī, and Gaṅgāsāgara, the most potent places from a Hindu point of view at which to collect its holy waters and all places at which Gosains were established or visited as pilgrims. Any Hindu pilgrim can perform the so-called "great circumambulation" (*mahāparīkramā*), in which Ganges water is collected and carried long-distance from far north India to the far south, to be ritually used there,⁶¹ and in a sense this is what the Tibetans were doing, albeit in the opposite direction, by collecting Ganges water in the centre of their ancient Buddhist holy land and transporting it long-distance to be used ritually at the other end of their pilgrimages. The Tibetan Buddhist interest in collection and use of Ganges water is not surprising given Tibetan contacts with the Gosains. As John Clarke has pointed out, the Gosains, along with many other types of Hindu pilgrims and mendicants, did often collect and carry Ganges water, and this holy water was a potential trading commodity in the Indian world.⁶² Samuel Turner met a Tibetan in Calcutta in 1783 who had come to bathe in the Ganges and who, acting as a proxy pilgrim, had collected Ganges water to carry back to Tibet on behalf of his employer.⁶³ The Panchen Lama appears to have taken the Ganges so seriously as a sa-

cred site that he even had a Tibetan temple built on the banks of the sacred river at Calcutta, a development that we will discuss in detail below.

Tibetan ritual use of Ganges water continues to the present day. The Bönpo lama-pilgrim Khyungtrül Jigme Namkha Dorje (1897–1955) bathed in the waters of the Ganges at Hardwar during a pilgrimage he performed around India in the early twentieth century.⁶⁴ The Tibetan Buddhist intellectual, Amdo Gendun Chöphel, also himself drank sacred Ganges water upon first reaching the river during his travels in the 1930s, although this act was probably more of a confirmation of his having finally reached India.⁶⁵ The Hindu practice of associating funerary rites with the Ganges also eventually got accepted in Tibetan Buddhist communities. Among Tibetan-speaking Buddhists in both Ladakh and Bhutan, it became a popular practice during the nineteenth and twentieth centuries to transport the cremated remains of their loved ones to India in order to deposit them in the Ganges, following the brahmanical orthopraxy.⁶⁶ Even merely crossing over the Ganges, which had been the greatest of dreads associated with early Tibetan pilgrimages to Magadha, later became a thoroughly positive event. Frederick O'Connor (1870–1943), a British representative who served in Tibet, crossed the river with a large party of Tibetan pilgrims in 1905 and reported, “We crossed the Ganges, to the joy of the Tibetans, to whom, as well as to Hindus, it is a sacred river.”⁶⁷

New adaptations of Tibetan Ganges worship continue today, and no better example can be found than in the activities of the Fourteenth Dalai Lama. In a recent instance, we find the Dalai Lama participating in the Kumbh Mela festival, which occurs every twelfth year and is India's most spectacular manifestation of Hindu *tīrthayātrā* as well as the world's largest religious gathering.⁶⁸ For centuries Kumbh Melas have also been one of the major gathering points for India's wandering ascetic population, including the Nāths and Gosains. In January 2001, millions of Hindus from all over India and the rest of the world gathered in Prayāga at the *tīrtha* formed by the confluence of the Ganges and the Yamunā Rivers with what is held to be the invisible course of the sublime Sarasvatī River. The Dalai Lama's participation at the 2001 Kumbh Mela was reported as follows:

At dusk, he joined the Shankaracharya of Kanchi, one of India's four top Hindu religious leaders, in a special prayer on the river banks. The two stood on an elevated wooden platform covered with white sheets and worshipped the Ganges with 108 lighted lamps in a tradition that goes back centuries. An estimated 20,000 people watched from behind

wooden barricades, while hymns were sung in the background. The Dalai Lama then scooped up water from the river and sprinkled it on his head in a mark of respect. Allahabad [i.e., Prayāga] is the site of the confluence of the Yamuna, Ganges and mythical Saraswati. "This confluence has become a very important venue for Hindu and Buddhist religious congregations. Now this function should come up as an important venue for a change of character and thought of people to make them work for peace," the Dalai Lama said in a speech.⁶⁹

Observers who know the activities of the Fourteenth Dalai Lama well may be quick to focus upon the obvious political and instrumental dimensions of his actions as reported here. While that may be true as a partial explanation, we also now know that he was carrying on a centuries-old Tibetan appropriation of a popular Hindu pilgrimage practice, one that dates back at least to the Third Panchen Lama and his pilgrim missions to India.

Tibetan *Tīrthayātrā*

The above examples illustrate the Tibetan adoption of the general Hindu ritual life of the Ganges. However, other Tibetan appropriations of Hindu pilgrimage activities relating to the great river are very specifically derived from Tāranātha and the Gosains. An interesting example of this is found in the case of Gaṅgāsāgara, meaning "[Meeting] of the Ganges and the Ocean." Sometimes called Sāgaradvīpa or "Sagar Island," it is a very large, uninhabited sand island located at the western mouth of the Ganges delta on the Bay of Bengal and is accessible only by boat. Its shape is constantly changing because of the shifting course of the river channels and sand deposits, and it is sometimes flooded over completely during the monsoon season. Gaṅgāsāgara is an ancient Hindu *tīrtha*, being mentioned in the *Mahābhārata* and also very frequently in the *Purāṇas*. For many centuries it has been the venue for mass Hindu pilgrimages held on astrologically auspicious dates and attended in particular by Vaiṣṇava and Śaiva mendicants, such as the likes of Nāths and Gosains.⁷⁰

Gaṅgāsāgara has no Buddhist history whatsoever, nor has it ever been considered as a candidate for one of the twenty-four Tantric *pīṭha* or eight cemeteries of the Vajrāyana tradition which Tibetans have taken so much keen interest in. Although Gaṅgāsāgara has *tīrtha* status in India, it has also very occasionally appeared in certain later Indian catalogues of Tantric *pīṭha* sites, such as those available to sixteenth-century Nāths and compiled well after the post-thirteenth-century demise of Vajrāyana Bud-

dhism in India.⁷¹ Gaṅgāsāgara first appears in Tibetan sources only during the early seventeenth century. It was Tāranātha who initially inscribed Gaṅgāsāgara on the expanding Tibetan map of the Indian holy land, mentioning it in both his history of Indian Buddhism and in the biography of Buddhaguptanātha, who made a pilgrimage to the site.⁷²

As with Buddhaguptanātha's account of Devīkoṭa, the fundamental image of Gaṅgāsāgara which his Tibetan student conveyed tends to contradict what we know about the site from other sources. According to Tāranātha's account, Gaṅgāsāgara was a "small country" and apparently a place associated with the life of the Indian yogin Kṛṣṇācārya, who was important both in Tibetan religious history and in Tāranātha's own lineage for the transmission of the *Samvara-tantra*. Gaṅgāsāgara was held to be the site of several temples which contained miraculous items associated with Kṛṣṇācārya, especially an image of Avalokiteśvara in the Hālahāla form and a set of *ḍākinī*'s bone ornaments. Tāranātha also described it as the death place of Kṛṣṇācārya the Younger, the former Siddha's disciple. We should carefully note here that the earlier version of Kṛṣṇācārya's life, that found in the stories of the Mahāsiddhas which were first transmitted to the Tibetans between the twelfth and fourteenth centuries, contains no mention of any of these new details supplied by Buddhaguptanātha or Tāranātha.⁷³ Many Indian sources record that Gaṅgāsāgara did have a famous temple centuries ago, being the resort of numbers of mendicant pilgrims, but it was dedicated to the divine Hindu sage Kapilamuni, whose image it housed as the primary focus of popular worship during pilgrimage festivals there. In later times, this temple was washed away in one of the inundations that appear to have periodically swept the sand island of Gaṅgāsāgara clean of human artifice and which rendered it uninhabitable in the long term.⁷⁴ Two other temples associated with the island are both Vaiṣṇava, one being dedicated to Vāmana, the "Dwarf" *avatāra*, and the other to a Tantric form of Lakṣmī.

No records document any Tibetans visiting Gaṅgāsāgara or any mention of the site again in Tibetan works until the Third Panchen Lama learned of it from his Gosain informants and, in particular, from the accounts of Tāranātha, whose notes on Gaṅgāsāgara he paraphrased closely when composing his historical geography of India in 1775. He described Gaṅgāsāgara as a Tantric Buddhist holy place of Kṛṣṇācārya and Avalokiteśvara, and he mentions the violent storms there during the annual monsoon, among other details.⁷⁵ His description reveals that he certainly had eyewitness accounts or reports of the place available to him.

Some years later, the unique Tibetan pool of knowledge about

Gaṅgāsāgara was added to by Jigme Lingpa in his 1789 account of India. The Nyingmapa savant, working from hearsay, related an entirely unknown tradition about the goddess Sarasvatī being born there, and he noted also that Indian “heretics” drowned themselves there in the river, intimating that this suicidal practice was an act of extreme austerity with a soteriological purpose.⁷⁶ Jigme Lingpa appears to be mistakenly referring to the recorded practice of casting children into the sea at Gaṅgāsāgara as a religious offering. The practice was documented in India at the time of Jigme Lingpa, and British colonial maps of the late eighteenth century mark a spot at the north end of the “Gunga Sagor” island as a “Place of Sacrifice.”⁷⁷ This ritual drowning was banned by the Government of Bengal together with the support of the brahman priesthood during the early nineteenth century.⁷⁸ In 1800, following his mission to the Panchen Lama’s court, Samuel Turner reported that “Gunga Sagor, an uninhabited island, situated at the confluence of the Ganges with the sea [is] occasionally visited [by the Tibetans].”⁷⁹

Due to its remote location and uninhabited status, it would probably have been difficult—if not impossible—for Tibetans to visit Gaṅgāsāgara without the assistance of experienced Indian guides, and then only during the annual winter pilgrimage season. It is doubtful that more than a handful of Tibetan pilgrims ever made the journey. There appear to be no nineteenth- or twentieth-century records of them having done so, and after the late eighteenth century the place is not mentioned in Tibetan texts again. However, this decline of records of Tibetan pilgrimages to India has to be seen in the context of the Qing Dynasty’s closing of Tibet’s borders with India and Nepal at the end of the eighteenth century, about which more will be said in the following chapter.

Another of the great Hindu *tīrtha* on the Ganges which the Panchen Lama, under Gosain influence, newly promoted for Tibetan pilgrimage was Hardwar (or Hardvār), located at the point where the Ganges emerges from the Himalayan foothills onto the plains of northern India.⁸⁰ The Panchen uniquely identified Hardwar as the site of Phūllahari, the hermitage of the eleventh-century Vajrayāna Siddha Nāropa,⁸¹ and Hardwar did receive regular Tibetan pilgrimage until the mid-twentieth century. Thus, Gaṅgāsāgara, Hardwar, and the other great Ganges *tīrtha* which the Tibetans appropriated in fact became inscribed, for at least several centuries, on the ever-changing Tibetan Buddhist map of India as a sacred space or religious territory. And, most important, these were inscriptions that served, at times, as a basis for Tibetan ritual action in India.

A “Tibetan Garden” in Bengal

Due to his strong religious interest in India, the Third Panchen Lama resolved to establish a permanent Tibetan Buddhist base in the holy land itself. The result was the building of a unique, hybrid Tibetan Buddhist-Gosain temple in the Howrah district of greater Calcutta. At the time, Calcutta had just become—by virtue of the Regulating Act of 1773—the new East India Company capital and would soon be the most important city in South Asia. These new political realities probably escaped the Panchen Lama’s notice and were of no account to him in any case. Avoiding the city centre entirely, he insisted his new Tibetan temple be erected right on the banks of the sacred river Ganges, or Hooghly, as its western tributary is known in Bengal.

The foundation of this Tibetan temple is of considerable interest to our present discussion. First, it embodied the understanding and optimism of the Panchen Lama that Buddhism still existed in India as well as his ambition that through his patronage some type of Buddhist revival in the western regions of Bengal could be brought about and maintained. Second, it reveals further evidence for the strong religious—as opposed to purely political or economic—motivations behind the Panchen’s efforts to enter into and maintain relations with Indian and British powers in India at the time.

Tibetan and British Motivations

The Panchen Lama’s temple in Calcutta is not mentioned in the contemporary Tibetan sources that are available to us, partly because the Panchen’s biography stops in early 1777. Instead, rich information about it is found in Persian and English letters exchanged between the Tibetan and British parties involved and other associated documents. The idea of building a permanent religious establishment in India was already part of the Panchen’s agenda when he first had direct contact with the British in late 1774. He related his ideas to George Bogle during one of their many personal interviews together:

I wish . . . to have a place on the banks of the Ganges, to which I might send my people to pray. I intend to write to the Governor[-General of Bengal, Warren Hastings] on this subject, and wish you would second my application.⁸²

To this request, Bogle gave the Panchen a promise of support and stated that Hastings would likewise treat it in a very positive manner.⁸³ Later, Bogle reported more details of the Panchen's intentions directly to Warren Hastings himself:

In my address of the 5th of December, I mentioned the Lama's desire of founding a religious house on the banks of the Ganges. About seven or eight hundred years ago, the Tibetan pontiffs had many monasteries in Bengal, and their priests used to travel to that country in order to study the religion and language of the Brahmans, and to visit the holy places of Hindustan. The Mussulmans, upon conquering Bengal, plundered and destroyed their temples, and drove them out of the country. Since that time there has been little intercourse between the two kingdoms. The Lama is sensible that it will throw great lustre on his pontificate, and serve to extend his fame and character, if he can, after so long an interval, obtain a religious establishment in Bengal, and he is very solicitous about this point.⁸⁴

Bogle apparently misunderstood the Panchen's discussion of the history of Tibetan religious links with India, and his statement "Tibetan pontiffs had many monasteries in Bengal" can only be taken to mean that Indian Buddhists had many monasteries there where earlier Tibetans visited and studied, a fact the Panchen would have been well aware of. Nevertheless, Bogle's description certainly reveals the strong desire of the Panchen Lama to revive the eleventh- to thirteenth-century period of active Tibetan Buddhist religious connections with India. The Panchen's intentions were partly born out of a wildly optimistic but false understanding of the current status of Buddhism in India, an understanding fuelled by Tāranātha's writings as well as by his own interpretation of information received from his pilgrimage missions and Gosain informants. At the very end of his own report on India, the *Narrative of the Holy Land*, in a statement derived partly from Tāranātha's writings⁸⁵ and employing a curious mixture of ancient and more recent regional and local names, the Panchen described the condition of Indian Buddhism during the late eighteenth century as he believed it could still be found surviving in a greater Indian context (fig. 7.1):

Now, if one asks in what way the teachings of the Buddha exist in those places [throughout India] today: In Madhyadeśa, Magadha, and so on, there are ordained Buddhist monks and yogins who practice and accomplish the Tantric teachings, and a few of them hold true to their vows;

and there are a few more than that to the east in the country of Bengal; and there are quite a lot in the county of Koki⁸⁶ still further to the east; and there are very many to the south and west in such places as Vijayanagara, Koṅkaṇa, Mālwa, Kalinga, Maru, Mewar, Chitor, Siwāna, Abu, Saurāṣṭra, Gujarat, and Bhamdvaṃ [i.e., Baghela] in the midst of the Vindhya Hills.⁸⁷

By this fantastic estimation, much of eighteenth-century India outside of the Central Deccan and the far north would have maintained a substantial living Buddhist culture! In Bengal and in Bihar, which the Panchen mentions as Magadha, Buddhism would have been only a mere survival at this time according to him. At some points in his account, the Panchen Lama explicitly mentions the practice of Buddhism in India by “brahman Tantra practitioners” (*bram ze rig sngags ’grub pa*) and “wandering ascetics” (*kun tu rgyur*), and that various religious sites were still worshipped by “both non-Buddhists and Buddhists” (*phyi nang gnyis kha*).⁸⁸ He clearly believed, as had Tāranātha by whose work he was inspired, that various branches of Indian mendicant culture—especially those operating within a broader South Asian Tantric context which appeared superficially familiar to Tibetan inheritors of the Vajrayāna—must have continued the practice and transmission of Buddhist Tantric lineages and other aspects of Buddhism for many centuries after institutionalized Indian Buddhism disappeared. We should note also that the Panchen’s conception of a Buddhist India given here is subcontinental in its extent, a far cry from the narrowly defined “Gyagar” of the earlier period.

Elsewhere in his account, the Panchen Lama was even more specific in his statements concerning the survival of Indian Buddhism, making remarkable claims of how Buddhist monasticism was apparently thriving at specific sites. For instance, he describes an obscure Pāla-era temple or monastery site named Trikaṭuka or Gausompuri, which he seems to assume still existed as an active Buddhist institution during the late eighteenth century in the ancient Raḍha region of western Bengal, an area later subsumed under the Burdwan, Hooghly, and Bancooran districts. At this site, he claimed, “even today the practice of the three foundations for Buddhist monasticism still exist.”⁸⁹ The Tibetan expression “three foundations” (*gzhi gsum*) refers to the bimonthly confessional and restoration ceremony (*poṣadha*), the summer retreat (*vārṣika*), and the ceremony of lifting restrictions at the end of the summer retreat (*pravāraṇā*) for Buddhist monks.

The Panchen’s writings on India are replete with such exaggerated and unfounded claims. However, they explain very well why he was so earnest

in his mission to create a permanent Tibetan presence back in the Indian holy land. It remained for him a living Buddhist territory, albeit one in need of revival in certain regions. One of those regions, according to his above quoted account, was Bengal.

The Panchen Lama apparently also had other, more personal motivations underlying his religious interests in India. In the preamble of the letter in which the Panchen put forward his first direct request to Warren Hastings for land and support for his temple-building plan in the spring of 1775, he made the following interesting revelations:

In former times I repeatedly received my existence from Allahabad, Benaras, Patna, Puneah and other places in Bengal and Orissa and having ever enjoyed much happiness from those places, I have imbibed a partiality for them and a sincere love and affection for their inhabitants, are strongly impressed upon my heart. The well known place of Outaragund [i.e., Uttarākhuṇḍ] gave me my last existence, and thanks to God the inhabitants of this quarter are all content and satisfied with me. Where my spiritual essence will transmigrate to next, will hereafter be seen.⁹⁰

The Panchen Lama was appealing to his own personal version of the Tibetan Jātaka tradition, or narratives of the past lives of Buddhas and reincarnated lamas (such as himself) who are considered to be Buddhas. Such narratives frequently claimed that their former rebirths had occurred in the illustrious holy land of India. Hence, from this particular Tibetan Buddhist perspective, his own feeling was that his bonds with India were indeed very long-standing and positive ones.

While the evidence in the sources clearly demonstrates that the Panchen Lama had primarily religious motivations behind his plans and activities in India,⁹¹ the British treated the building of a Tibetan temple in Calcutta as a diplomatic necessity that promised the possibility of commercial advantages.⁹² Specifically, the East India Company hoped to encourage large numbers of Tibetans to travel down to India in order to stimulate trade in Indian commodities and at Indian trade marts. According to due protocol, the Panchen Lama acted upon Hastings' request that he write a series of supporting letters to all concerned parties in Tibet, Nepal, and China. For his part, Hastings had established a new annual trade fair at Rangpur in Bengal in order to encourage commercial intercourse with Himalayan and Tibetan traders.⁹³ However, from the British point of view, a significant obstacle to developing better trade with Tibet was the reluctance of Tibet-

ans to travel south to India. Bogle had interviewed various Tibetan traders while staying at Tashilhunpo and had discovered that they regarded travel to India as highly undesirable due to the heat, the health risks, and also due to a general apprehension about the unknown conditions of a country that was completely foreign to them.⁹⁴ Bogle viewed the building of a Tibetan temple in Bengal as a good opportunity to help overcome this obstacle. He considered using pilgrimage to their “holy land” as a cultural strategy to lure Tibetans back to India, as he carefully explained to Hastings:

Prejudices of this kind are to be cured only by habit, and your compliance with the Teshu [i.e., Panchen] Lama’s desire of founding a monastery and temple on the banks of the Ganges will probably tend to remove these strong prepossessions against the climate of Bengal, and to produce an intercourse with the northern nations. The safe return of the people whom the Lama proposes to send next winter to visit the holy places in Bengal will serve to inspire their countrymen with confidence; the fondness of the Tibetans for everything strange or curious, strengthened by religion, will probably lead many others to undertake so meritorious a journey; and these pilgrimages, like the Hajj at Mekkah, may in time open a considerable mart for the commodities of Bengal.⁹⁵

Incidentally, Bogle’s comparison here between the *hajj* to Mecca and Tibetan Buddhist religious journeys to India was one of the first such examples of a new discursive approach to India as a Buddhist holy land which flourished in European and Buddhist modernist circles during the nineteenth and early twentieth centuries. In this discourse, which we will discuss in chapter 9, the holy places of Indian Buddhism were to be increasingly understood and articulated in relation to those of the other great “world religions,” such as Christianity, Judaism, and Islam, each of which, in the eyes of the Europeans, already had their own recognized “holy lands” as part of a set of universal characteristics fit for comparative understandings of what constituted “religion.”

The East India Company officials in Calcutta also discovered what they considered to be an additional obstacle to their plans to develop a flourishing trade between Tibet and India. This was the conservative attitude of the then Tibetan Regent at Lhasa, the Demo Tulku. He was perceived to be hostile toward Tibetan relations with foreign powers, due to Qing imperial influence operating at Lhasa through the office of the Amban, and was thus unwilling to open Lhasa to visitors from India. Therefore the

company had a second reason for generously supporting the Panchen Lama's temple plans: its officials hoped to use the Panchen's good relations with the Qing court to gain an imperial audience for company officials so that they would be able to address their concerns about access to Lhasa directly in Peking.⁹⁶ Bogle reported to Hastings that the Panchen had indeed acted on their behalf in these concerns, but what is of most interest here is that the Panchen employed his current enthusiasm for pilgrimage to Indian holy sites to try to engage imperial interest in the situation:

He has written to the Changay Lama [i.e., the Second Chankya Hutuktu, Rolpae Dorje], who is the high-priest at the Court of Peking, and in great favour with the Emperor, advising him to send his people to visit the temples in Hindustan. He has also promised to use his best offices with the Emperor of China to procure leave for the Company to send a deputation to Peking. The first, I am convinced, will take place.⁹⁷

Despite Bogle's convictions, no imperial pilgrimage mission was dispatched to India from China. It is clear, however, that the Panchen Lama's earnest plans for a modest pilgrims' temple in India were, from the outset, implicated in a larger colonial strategy extending all the way from Calcutta to Peking.

Foundation of the Temple

The success of the Panchen Lama's plans for a Tibetan temple near Calcutta depended not only upon the goodwill and cooperation of the East India Company officials but also upon the considerable diplomatic and organisational skills of his trusted and talented Gosain agent, Pūraṇ Giri (1745–95). "Purangir" (also "Poorungeer"), as he is known in the English sources, was also equally well known and regarded by the British at the time.⁹⁸ Purangir was the crucial cultural interlocutor between the realities of the very different worlds of 1770s Bengal and Tashilhunpo, upon whom all parties depended in the exchanges between the British and the Panchen's court. He had first played an important role in the diplomatic resolution of the Anglo-Bhutanese conflict of 1774, and the Panchen clearly respected him for this and placed great confidence in him.⁹⁹ With this in mind, the Panchen's plans included a leading role for the trusted Gosain mendicant in his new religious centre in Calcutta. Bogle had interviews with the Panchen on the first and third of April 1775, during which the lama made clear his wishes concerning the new establishment and its operation:

He said he proposed, if a place on the banks of the Ganges was granted to him, to place the Gosain [Purangir], who was down in Calcutta, there; "and," says he, "if he should stand in need of any small matter, I trust you will supply him." I asked him about what part of the country he wished it to be. He said that he would like it to be near Calcutta . . . only to be near the Ganges. . . . "I do not wish it to be a large house, and let it be built in the fashion of Bengal." ¹⁰⁰

On April 4, 1775, shortly before Bogle was to depart from Tashilhunpo back to Calcutta, the Panchen Lama showed him a collection of Tibetan religious icons and their vestments and informed him that they were intended to be dispatched to India for installation in the new temple at Calcutta upon its completion.¹⁰¹ The Panchen also sent one hundred pieces of gold together with carpets and cloth banners with Bogle to Calcutta for use in decorating the interior of the proposed building.¹⁰² The record of correspondence between Calcutta and Tashilhunpo at the time reveals the Panchen's great enthusiasm for the building of the temple, since the lama had already invested in all of these preliminary steps long before Warren Hastings had considered the plan and actually sent back his confirmation of assistance in early 1776.¹⁰³

The site chosen by the British for the new Tibetan temple was located directly on the west bank of the Hooghly opposite Calcutta, in the Howrah district near a village named Ghusari.¹⁰⁴ The construction of the temple appears to have been completed already by June 1776.¹⁰⁵ The ground on which it was built was initially leased to the Panchen Lama by the East India Company in December 1775, and full legal possession of it was finally obtained in June 1778, when Warren Hastings formalized the grant (*sanad*) of one hundred *bighas*¹⁰⁶ of freehold land around the site. The first *sanad* was made jointly in the names of the Panchen Lama and Purangir Gosain.¹⁰⁷ This land was extended in area, when, in November 1781, following the Third Panchen Lama's death in Peking, his elder brother Losang Jinpa, who was treasurer and later regent of Tashilhunpo, wrote to Warren Hastings to appeal again for more land at the site.¹⁰⁸ Thus, a second *sanad* for an additional fifty *bighas* of land adjacent to the existing temple was issued in the name of Purangir and the late Third Panchen in February 1783.¹⁰⁹ Thus, the temple was eventually endowed with a considerable estate.

The temple itself is described as being "a two-storied house of worship with a boundary wall, having at its centre a gateway facing the river [Hooghly], and affording a passage into the main quadrangle within the enclosure. The special feature in the construction is the absence of arches,

and its partaking of a Tibetan character. A garden is attached to it.”¹¹⁰ During the time of Purangir, the property was described as also having “numerous cottages all around for the accommodation of pilgrims and traders from Tibet.”¹¹¹ Purangir received the continued support of British officials in Calcutta during his residence at the temple, most likely because they required his own and his disciples’ services as diplomatic go-betweens with the Tibetans well after the Third Panchen Lama had passed away.¹¹² When Purangir performed a pilgrimage to Lake Manasarovar in Tibet during 1778,¹¹³ Bogle arranged and paid for gardeners to keep up the grounds of the monastery in his absence.¹¹⁴ When a neighbouring landlord, a certain Raj Chand Rai, forcibly took possession of fifty *bighas* of the temple’s land during Purangir’s absence in Tibet due to his service in the Samuel Turner mission of 1783, Turner wrote a strong request in 1786 to the acting governor-general of Bengal, John MacPherson (1745–1821), asking that he intervene directly in this incident in favour of Purangir and the interests of the Tashilhunpo court.¹¹⁵ The seeming rapidity and ease with which the Panchen Lama had obtained a substantial land grant for a temple in India and the manner in which the British defended his interests must have impressed his Gosain agent (*vakīl*) Purangir. He was evidently inspired to repeat the process elsewhere on his own behalf, using his new connections with the highest offices of the East India Company.¹¹⁶

Bhoṭ Bagan as a Religious Site

In Calcutta, the new Tibetan temple site with its complex of garden and residences became known as the Bhoṭ Bagan, or “Tibetan Garden,” while the actual temple building was referred to as either Bhoṭ Mandir or Bhoṭ Maṭh, “Tibetan Temple” or “Tibetan Monastery.” Since the temple was permanently under the supervision of Purangir until his death in 1795 and thereafter in the charge of his Gosain disciples and lineage descendents, the resident priest or administrator was designated as either Bhoṭ Gosain, meaning “Tibetan Gosain,” or Bhoṭ Mahant, “Tibetan abbot.” The adjacent *ghaṭ* leading down to the Hooghly was known locally as the “Bhoṭ Mahant’s *ghaṭ*.”¹¹⁷

We should now consider whether the Bhoṭ Mandir was, in spite of its name, actually a functioning Tibetan religious establishment: something which had never been recorded on the plains of India prior to the twentieth century (see chap. 11).¹¹⁸ In other words, was the Panchen Lama successful in any measure in effecting a modest revival of Buddhism in Bengal, as was his goal? At least up until the death of Purangir in 1795,¹¹⁹ and also during

the time of his immediate disciple, Daljit Giri (d. 1836),¹²⁰ who became the second Bhoṭ Mahant, we are certain that Tibetan Buddhists were regular visitors there. One late eighteenth- or early nineteenth-century eyewitness observer noted of the site that “people from Tibet and Bhutan constantly resorted to it during the time for which my knowledge reaches; I conclude the same to this hour.”¹²¹ In 1783, Samuel Turner met a Tibetan pilgrim in Calcutta who resided with Purangir at the Bhoṭ Bagan.¹²² The second Bhoṭ Mahant Daljit Giri’s contacts with Tibetans are also on record. He himself visited Lhasa in 1793, acting in the same capacity of diplomatic intermediary as his teacher had done before him, this time facilitating exchanges between British officials in Calcutta and the court of the Eighth Dalai Lama.¹²³

In addition to Tibetan visitors during the first few decades of the Bhoṭ Bagan’s existence, we also know that for this same period and indeed for the entire nineteenth century, the place functioned continuously as a residence for and resort of various Gosains in Calcutta. Judging from the scant evidence available, the ritual life of the site appears to have been a combination of general devotional Hinduism and the particular form of Śaivism practiced by Purangir and his later followers, all of whom belonged to the Giri or Mountain sect of the Daśanāmi renunciate order. The Giris, it will be recalled, were the same Śaiva sect whose members had occupied the ruins of the Mahābodhi Temple at Bodh Gayā since the late sixteenth century.

In 1890, the Bengali scholar Gaur Das Bysack studied the Bhoṭ Bagan and reported to the Asiatic Society of Bengal simply that “the services performed in the Maṭha consist of a mixture of Hindu and Tibetan rituals.”¹²⁴ However, Bysack recorded no details of the rites or ritual behaviour at the site in support of this claim, and it appears he made his observation purely on the basis of the religious images he saw installed in the Mandir. According to the statement of a Bengali worshipper who visited the site from 1908 onward, only purely Hindu ritual was performed by brahman priests at the Bhoṭ Bagan, including *pūjā* for Mahākālā who was at that time considered the principal deity of the Mandir, as well as for Durgā, Lakṣmī, Sarasvatī, and Satyanārāyaṇa. The presence of non-Hindu images from Tibet was noted by this early twentieth-century worshipper, but they were not the object of ritual.¹²⁵ The temple itself certainly did contain a mixture of Hindu and Buddhist images which Bysack’s friend, the Bengali Tibetologist Sarat Chandra Das (1849–1917), was able to identify for him in detail (fig. 7.2). The principal images and sacra found in the temple at the end of the nineteenth century were a truly hybrid assortment representing

Buddhist Images	Hindu Images and Sacra
Tārā	Viṣṇu
Mahākāla Bhairava with consort	Durgā
Cakrasaṃvara with consort	Vindhyavāsini (i.e., Durgā)
Guhyasamāja with consort	Gaṇeśa
Vajra Bhṛkūtī	Gopāla (i.e., Kṛṣṇa)
Padmāpāṇi (i.e., Avalokiteśvara)	Nandi
	various Śiva <i>liṅgam</i>
	<i>śālagrāma</i>
	foot imprints of Kapilamuni
	<i>kharams</i> (sandals for a deity)

Figure 7.2. Buddhist and Hindu images in the Bhoṭ Mandir, ca. 1890.

both Tibetan Buddhism and Hinduism, according to the classification by Das.¹²⁶

It is notable that the majority of the Buddhist images listed are esoteric forms from Indian Vajrayāna also found in Tibet, in particular those having most relevance for higher Tantric practices. While Tārā and Avalokiteśvara are extremely popular devotional deities for Tibetans, interestingly the collection lacks even a plain statue of the Buddha or anything else that could be identified specifically with Tibet, such as statues of Tsongkhapa and other leading lineage lamas or important Tibetan protective deities. Tārā (also Tārakā) is of course frequently worshipped in Bengal by Hindus, as is Mahākāla more generally throughout India as a form of Śiva. Therefore, their status within the Mandir is truly ambiguous when it comes to considering Buddhist or Hindu worship there. The range of Hindu images and sacra was an eclectic assemblage, unremarkable in this context. As a whole, the collection of images would have provided ritual reference points to all manner of Indian and Tibetan worshippers. However, those Buddhist visitors to the site who were not from Mahāyāna or Vajrayāna backgrounds would have found nothing familiar there at all. They would not have realized they were in a Buddhist place of worship.

In spite of the hybrid nature of the site, there were clear indications that the Gosain Śaiva presence at the Bhoṭ Bagan was, perhaps not surprisingly, overwhelmingly the dominant one throughout the nineteenth and twen-

tieth centuries. In addition to the main temple and its images, a series of Śaiva tombs (*samadhi*) surmounted by *liṅga* and covered by shrines were constructed separately within the precincts of the Bhoṭ Bagan. Purangir's tomb, constructed following his death in 1795, had an inscription stating:

[A]ll people should honour and worship this shrine and the Mahādeva [i.e., Śiva]; a Hindu not doing so would incur the sin of brahmanicide, and a Musalman and others [i.e., Buddhists], for the like offence, would go to *dozakh* (hell), as affected with guilt at the seat of *Khoda-ta'ala* or the most high God.¹²⁷

A second shrine was then erected at the site in 1847,¹²⁸ and others followed, all dedicated to dead Giri Mahants of the Bhoṭ Bagan. A total of nine such Śaiva *samadhi* surround the main building today, at least two of which still bear partly legible inscriptions.

Thus the available evidence shows that initially, for perhaps about thirty years during the late eighteenth and early nineteenth centuries, Bhoṭ Bagan was indeed both a functioning Tibetan Buddhist temple and a rest house for Tibetan Buddhist pilgrims from the high plateau and the surrounding Himalayan regions. Bysack reported that, by the end of the nineteenth century, the whole Bhoṭ Bagan complex had declined to a mere shadow of the establishment it had once been.

The Post-Tibetan Garden

Whatever became of Calcutta's "Tibetan Garden"? All available evidence indicates that Tibetan interests in and associations with the Bhoṭ Bagan ended during the early nineteenth century. There was good reason for this sudden interruption of contact. The severe, century-long Qing Dynasty restrictions imposed upon Tibetan travel to India and Nepal, first enforced during the 1790s (see chap. 9), ensured that Tibetan pilgrims were effectively cut off from the site. Furthermore, while Purangir and Daljit Giri, the first two Bhoṭ Mahants, had maintained direct contacts with the Tibetans by way of their various missions to Tibet, their lineage successors were barred from carrying on such activities due to the same Chinese closure of the border. Without Tibetan visitors or contacts with Tibet, Bhoṭ Bagan ceased to be functionally Buddhist from the point of view of religious practice. Even the very existence of the site appears to have fallen almost completely outside Tibetan knowledge of India during most of the nineteenth and twentieth centuries.

The only modern, published Tibetan reference to Bhoṭ Bagan is that made by Amdo Gendun Chöphel, the modern Tibetan intellectual who spent a decade in India in the 1930s and 1940s, including periods when he lived and worked in Calcutta. Amdo Gendun Chöphel was occasionally associated with the modern Indian Buddhist revival group the Maha Bodhi Society, which had its headquarters in Calcutta, but he also spent his time in the city's brothels gaining experiences which undoubtedly aided the writing of his treatise on erotic love and which were also expressed in some of his artworks.¹²⁹ Amdo Gendun Chöphel makes a fleeting reference to the Bhoṭ Bagan in his otherwise detailed travel account of South Asia, *The Golden Level* (*Gser gyi thang ma*). In it he specifically refers to the Third Panchen's Calcutta establishment as a "Buddhist temple" (*sangs rgyas kyī lha khang*), without however giving any sense of its original religious hybridity or its later Śaiva character.¹³⁰ Amdo Gendun Chöphel was usually a careful and critical observer, and his throwaway and inaccurate line on the Bhoṭ Bagan is clear evidence that he never actually went there in person. Rather, he may have just heard mention of it or, more likely, read of it in published accounts of the Bogle and Turner missions available to him in the colonial libraries to which we know he enjoyed regular access. During the 1950s in Calcutta, a small and diverse group of Himalayan Buddhists and Tibetan traders who dwelt in the city sought to establish a temple for themselves. They knew a little of the history of the site of Bhoṭ Bagan, and so petitioned the Seventh Panchen Lama, Losang Chökyi Gyaltsen (1938–89), to reclaim the property and make it available to them on the condition that they would establish a Gelukpa temple there in return.¹³¹ Their efforts came to naught. Nowadays, save for one or two of the most well-read modern Tibetan historians or cosmopolitan intellectuals from Dharamsala or Delhi, one is very hard pressed to find any Tibetan in either India or Tibet who knows of the existence of Bhoṭ Bagan and its history.

The Last Tibetan Abbot

After all real links with Tibet came to an end, the control of Bhoṭ Bagan remained—as it has until today—in the hands of branches of the Daśanāmi order. Following the death in 1836 of the second Bhoṭ Mahant, Daljit Giri, the abbacy passed jointly to his four disciples, Jagganath Giri, Joy N. Giri, Ganga Giri, and Kali Giri. The longest surviving member of this group was Kali Giri, and, upon his death in 1857, he was succeeded by his two disciples, Bilas Giri and Umrao Giri, who also held the position of Bhoṭ Mahant jointly. Bilas Giri passed away in 1889, and Umrao Giri held the posi-



Figure 7.3. Bhoṭ Mahant Trilokh Chandra Giri, ca. 1928. © The British Library Board. All Rights Reserved. OCSV 14, 2:284.

tion until about 1904-5 when he too passed away.¹³² Since Umrao Giri had no personal disciples, the original Gosain master-disciple lineage of Bhoṭ Mahants came to an end with him. The Bhoṭ Bagan then passed into the hands of an official court receiver,¹³³ and it became necessary to appoint the next incumbent by way of a committee comprised of Mahants from other Daśanāmi establishments throughout the region, although the institution was to remain under Giri control.¹³⁴ On May 5, 1905, this committee appointed Trilokh Chandra Giri (fig. 7.3) as the last so-called Tibetan abbot.¹³⁵ He held the position of Bhoṭ Mahant until what appears to have

been his forced retirement in 1935, when he found himself the defendant in a legal case involving allegations of financial impropriety and adultery with the wife of one of the Bhoṭ Bagan's tenants.¹³⁶ When Trilokh Chandra Giri's disciple Ratan Narayan Giri then claimed but failed to succeed him as Mahant,¹³⁷ Bhoṭ Bagan was once again placed in the hands of a court-appointed receiver, thus ending the long Giri tradition at the site. Since the end of the 1950s, Bhoṭ Bagan has been under the control of the Āśrama order of the Daśanāmi.¹³⁸

Mahakal Lost in the Slums

Nowadays, those who take the trouble to locate No. 5, Gossain Ghat Road on the banks of the mighty but heavily polluted Hooghly, in Howrah's overcrowded and predominantly Bihari-speaking industrial suburb of Ghusuri, will be greeted by a forlorn sight. The once grand-looking edifice of Bhoṭ Bagan, surrounded by its substantial and well-kept grounds full of large trees (fig. 7.4), is now a decaying shadow of its former self (fig. 7.5). The building is locally referred to as the "Shiv Mandir" or "Shankar Mandir," the latter name now gracing the front balcony facing the street. Its original estate has been reduced to a mere six and a half *bighas*, from which nearly all the trees have been removed, and the site is hemmed in close on two sides by dilapidated factories and a rusting shipyard. Groups of local boys play cricket and football in the barren earth lot in front of the building and shrines. Yet, on the roof of the Mandir, at the very back of the complex, well out of view of any observers who are not standing within the inner courtyard itself, there is a simple tablet inscribed in Bengali characters, bearing the name "Bhoṭ Bagan Math." This is the only external sign—for those who can read and understand it—that now remains to indicate its former Tibetan heritage.¹³⁹ Yet, not far away in the local police station, locked safely away from public scrutiny, other Tibetan traces are to be found. These are the religious images from Tibet which used to be the principal focus of worship within Bhoṭ Bagan.

From the early twentieth century until recent decades, the principal deity who "owned" the Mandir—and who is thus the formal and legal recipient of its revenues according to Hindu tradition—was identified as Mahakal (i.e., Mahākāla), or "Sri Sri Iswar Mahakal Thakur," and the main temple has also been referred to as the "Mandir of Mahakal."¹⁴⁰ This deity was represented by the statue known as Mahākāla Bhairava, one of the five metal images of Tibetan origin housed in the Mandir. Although it has now been stolen, several clear nineteenth- and early twentieth-century



Figure 7.4. Bhot Bagan, Howrah, ca. 1928. © The British Library Board.
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Figure 7.5. Bhot Bagan, Howrah, 2005. Photograph by Toni Huber.



Figure 7.6. Image of Tārā alias “Mahakal” from Bhoṭ Bagan, 2005.
 Photograph by Toni Huber.

descriptions of this particular image do detail it as a most impressive form of Mahākāla having nine heads and eighteen legs, with thirty-six arms holding weapons and clasping a female partner.¹⁴¹ Mahākāla was of course the favoured guardian of the Panchen Lamas, which explains why the image was originally installed in the Bhoṭ Bagan.¹⁴² When the original Mahakal was lost to thieves, another striking Tibetan image was selected to take its place. This was a large gilded Tārā (fig. 7.6) which still survives today in the lockup of the local police station. Sarat Chandra Das person-

ally identified and described this image and considered that, because of its unusual style, it must have been manufactured in and brought from China by Purangir in 1780, after he accompanied the Third Panchen Lama to Peking.¹⁴³ Today, the identities of the now stolen Tibetan Mahākāla and the surviving Tārā statues have become fused by local worshippers, and the Tārā image is now being recognized as “Mahakal.”

The non-Indian origin and non-Hindu identity of these metal images from Tibet and China have often been mentioned by those Hindus either working or worshipping at Bhoṭ Bagan. They have noted, for example, that the Tārā wears heavy boots, which no Hindu goddess would do, and that the styles of all these images are unlike anything one can see worshipped in contemporary Hindu temples. The Tibetan images were kept together on a separate altar and attended by a particular Hindu priest, and while some Hindus asked to make offerings to them, others avoided these obviously foreign gods.¹⁴⁴ Following the theft of the original statue of Mahākāla from the Mandir, the remaining four Tibetan metal images had to be placed under police protection, and thus can no longer play any role in the daily ritual life of the site.¹⁴⁵

Thus today only an obscure inscription and a few religious icons in a police lockup are all that remain to recall what Bhoṭ Bagan once was: the only pre-twentieth-century Tibetan religious institution established on the great lowland expanses of South Asia. The original religious hybridity of the site was once a fitting testimony to a unique period in the history of Tibetan Buddhism, when wandering Hindu mendicants, whose devotion, curiosity, and commercial interests took them as far as Tibet, made an unduly significant impact upon the changing Tibetan Buddhist cultural relationship with India. The last few traces of this eighteenth-century Tibetan investment in a religious partnership with the alluring figures of the *Atsaras* are now all but lost in the sprawling cityscape of contemporary Calcutta's industrial slums.



CHAPTER EIGHT

The Precious Guru in the Punjab

One of the Tibetans I met at Rawālsar told me he intended to travel straight to Amritsar, as this was another place connected with Padma-sambhava. I was astonished to hear such a statement, and resolved to make enquiries on the spot.

—*August Hermann Francke, 1910*

Introduction

During their long acquaintance with India, Tibetans had often discovered that prevailing political, economic, and social conditions in India governed both the vitality of the Buddhist holy land and their access to it as pilgrims. We have seen that both the thirteenth-century demise of Indian Buddhism and the very promising eighteenth-century Tibetan revival of religious contacts with Bengal had been facilitated by way of major transformations in the political landscape of South Asia. In this chapter I will investigate how, on the one hand, a dramatic change in political affairs in Tibet itself during the nineteenth century completely thwarted the potential new wave of Tibetan pilgrimage to colonial Bengal. I will also show, on the other hand, how at the same time an ongoing series of displacements and migrations of local populations on the Tibetan plateau eventually led to the opening of new frontiers for Tibetan reinvention and colonization of the terrain of the Buddha in India. This time, the focus of Tibetan activities was to be India's northwestern region of Punjab, which was the traditional heartland of the Sikh community and its religious life and history. It was in the Punjab that Tibetans for the first time transplanted and established one of the principal aspects of their own indig-

enous Buddhist cult into an otherwise completely non-Buddhist Indian environment, where they have maintained it up until the present day.

The Political Context of Reinvention

In the wake of the Gorkha conquest of Nepal in 1769 and subsequent Gorkha conflicts with Tibet during the following decades, Tibet closed its doors to the outside world for more than a hundred years, including the entire nineteenth century. This closure occurred immediately following the 1792 Gorkha-Tibetan war, a conflict in which Tibetan "victory" was only achieved due to a powerful Chinese military force being dispatched to Tibet over long distances and at great expense to the Qing imperium. The Chinese ousting of the Gorkhas from Tibet came at a price, and the Tibetans were made to pay for it with their freedom.

The period between 1793 and 1904 has been called "the real dark age of Tibet" by historians.¹ This more than century-long isolation of Tibet began with Qing administrative reforms issued during 1793 by the Qianlong Emperor. The 1792 war had been very expensive and troublesome for China's rulers. Thus, one section of the new reforms were aimed precisely at preventing new conflicts by carefully controlling Tibetan intercourse with neighbouring countries through sealing of the borders. The twenty-nine article Qing ordinance of 1793 heralded a new era of Chinese state interest in and regulation of international Tibetan pilgrimage activities. The imperial policy was designed not only to enforce provisions to exclude foreigners from entering Tibet but also imposed specific controls on Tibetan pilgrims wanting to cross the Himalayas south- and westward. Strict orders were issued to the effect that "clergy and lay persons of all ranks must not go on pilgrimages to the lands of India, Nepal, Kashmir and Ladakh. In accord with the recent imperial order, all are banned from undertaking such pilgrimages."² In his own ordinance, the Qing Emperor cited the "evil intentions" of the Gorkhas which might be provoked by continued Tibetan pilgrimage south of the Himalayas, and he even urged the Tibetans to modify their behaviour as Buddhist pilgrims. He actually argued that visits to the holy sites of the Buddha in South Asia were superfluous from a religious perspective. Qianlong suggested instead that faithful worship of the famous "Jowo" statue of Śākyamuni housed in the Jokhang Temple of Lhasa would have the same ritual effect.³ Tibetans may well have viewed such recommendations as in keeping with the patronizing and inaccurate appraisals of Tibetan religion which Qianlong made elsewhere.⁴

While Qing travel restrictions in Tibet did not completely stop Tibetan contacts with neighbouring South Asian regions, they did indeed make such journeys considerably more difficult to negotiate. Chinese guard posts were stationed along all the frontier passes—even on very remote routes—leading out of Tibet to the south. While some traders may have been able to obtain all the required passports, sworn guarantors, plus the fees and bribes needed to cross the frontier for certain permitted commercial activities,⁵ most ordinary pilgrims and clerics did not enjoy such resources, and in any case they would have needed to pose as traders and deceive the frontier guards. The restrictions had a very significant impact on the number of pilgrims who were able and willing to proceed from southern Tibet to India via the regular routes across the Himalayas along the frontiers with Nepal, Sikkim, and Bhutan. A significant dearth of records concerning Tibetan pilgrims in Bengal and the Gangetic Basin for the entire nineteenth-century period confirms this, while from the south virtually no foreign visitors managed to reach Tibet during the same time.⁶ The Qing restrictions also contributed to an attendant xenophobia in nineteenth-century Tibet,⁷ serving not only to cut off those who dearly wanted to go to India from having anything to do with it but also to heavily restrict the flow of reliable knowledge about India that reached Tibet.

The new and strict isolation, together with a heightened xenophobia in Lhasa, made anything even remotely associated with India a danger for interested Tibetans. For example, one unfortunate victim of these circumstances was the Fifth Panchen Lama's chief minister, the open-minded and highly respected Drongtse Khyabying, Losang Pelden Chöphel (d. 1887), who is also known as the Sengchen Lama or Sengchen Tulku in non-Tibetan sources. In their own quest for knowledge about the now isolated Tibet, the British colonial government in India began sending a series of native explorer-spies, or "Pundits" as they became known, to Tibet. Their task was to gather intelligence while travelling in disguise—often as pilgrims—across the high plateau.⁸ One such explorer-spy was Sarat Chandra Das (1849–1917), a Bengali headmaster stationed in Darjeeling who went on to become one of the early scholars of Tibetan studies.⁹ Through chance encounters with disguised Indian travellers such as Das, a few nineteenth-century Tibetans were able to satisfy their strong curiosity about the now forbidden holy land to the south. When Das first met the Drongtse Khyabying in Tibet during a clandestine mission there in 1879, the lama, who greatly desired but was unable to visit Bodh Gayā, immediately asked him "many questions regarding the state of the Indian Buddhists and the Buddhaland."¹⁰ Unfortunately, in the political climate of the

day, the Drongtse Khyabying paid the ultimate price for the satisfaction of his curiosity about India and his fascination for the world beyond, as he was executed by the Lhasa government upon the discovery of his connections to Das.¹¹

The case of the Drongtse Khyabying is a dramatic and complex one to be sure. However, this lama's enforced separation from and lack of any accurate contemporary information about India was something he shared in common with almost all other Tibetans of his day. Indeed, the level of ignorance about neighbouring India among nineteenth-century Tibetans appears to have been quite profound. When the English traveller St. George Littledale was crossing northern Tibet in 1895, he encountered a Tibetan nobleman who was stationed there and who began to question him about India. Littledale reported that, "He asked if it was true that there was a big tree near Calcutta, out of the branches of which came all the heat of India."¹² It was in fact the case that some "information" about India was regularly arriving in Tibet. As Charles Bell (1870–1945), British diplomat and confidant of the Thirteenth Dalai Lama, observed of the situation which prevailed in Tibet throughout the nineteenth and into the early twentieth century,

The whereabouts of many of the places [of Indian Buddhism] mentioned in their sacred books are unknown to them. Such information as they have they gain from the Tibetan beggars who roam through northern India during the cool season. These beggars are of course uneducated. Accordingly, much incorrect information is given, and Tibetans are misled.¹³

Bell's appraisal of the Tibetan "beggars" in northern India couldn't have been closer to the truth.

Indian Khampas

At the same time, the Tibetan Buddhist penchant for rediscovery, appropriation, and colonization of patently non-Buddhist Indian holy places that had developed so strongly during the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries, and that had been put into practice in Assam and the Middle Ganges region, was exercised upon Indian soil in spite of Qing imperial policy. It next manifested itself in areas of Upper India and the fringes of the western Himalayan foothills during the nineteenth century.

Tibetan travellers across the central Himalayas during the nineteenth

century had found their passage blocked or severely hindered due to the Qing travel restrictions. However, these frontier controls were much more lax in the most far-flung and less frequented regions of the Himalayan borderlands, such as on the routes through far western Tibet that led to Upper India or along the southeastern frontier leading to Assam. Most of the records that we do have of Tibetans travelling to India at this time are in fact of journeys via either the far western or far eastern ends of the Himalayan Range. But who were the Tibetans proceeding to India via such routes, especially to Upper India, an area most Tibetan pilgrims had largely avoided prior to this time? As Charles Bell pointed out, there was a significant transient population of genuinely impoverished persons, both the dispossessed and mendicants by choice, who were travelling to northern parts of India during the period. These types of persons are often referred to as "Khampas" or "Indian Khampas" (Gyagar Khampa) in the sources.

The more that scholars discover about the Tibetan population and its history, the more we have come to realize that Tibetan settlements on the high plateau have not always been the timeless and unchanging homes of their present inhabitants. There have, in fact, been many local and regional migrations and resettlements of populations all across the Tibetan plateau. During recent centuries, peoples from the more densely populated eastern Tibetan region of Kham have been migrating out of their home areas for a variety of reasons. Since no dedicated historical studies of this phenomenon have been undertaken to date, we can only surmise that known Khampa migrations have been due to several probable factors which are also true for other regions of the Tibetan plateau and the Himalayas. One such factor is competition among fairly dense populations in the narrow valleys of Kham which have limited arable land, while a second might be excessive taxation regimes. Another factor is displacement following the various serious social and political upheavals that regularly plagued the region. As possible causes of Khampa displacement and subsequent migrations during the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries alone, we can cite the Qing military invasions of Jarong in 1747–49 and 1771–76 and the wide-ranging campaigns of the Nagrong warlord Gompo Namgyel (d. 1865) from the 1840s until 1865, not to mention any number of smaller, local feuds.¹⁴

For hundreds of years prior to the nineteenth century, migrant Khampas had already spread across the Tibetan plateau and into ethnic Tibetan areas throughout the western Himalayas. The Sherpas of the Mount Everest region in northern Nepal are the best-known historical Khampa migrants to the western regions of Tibet and the Himalayas, although their sixteenth-

century migration was much earlier than those that immediately concern us here.¹⁵ A mass Khampa migration to the northwestern Changthang is known to have occurred in the early eighteenth century, and linguistic evidence and origin narratives from the pastoralist tribes of Gertse indicate the source of at least one stream of this migration as the region of Kham Nangchen.¹⁶ A mid-nineteenth-century Khampa migration and settlement into other parts of far western Tibet was described by the Pundit explorer Nain Singh when he travelled through the region during 1873.¹⁷

Many of the eastern Tibetans who had migrated to remote, cold, dry, and high-altitude areas of northern and far western Tibet found it difficult—short of living by banditry and hunting—to subsist, since even the main form of production, pastoralism, was often very marginal. These migrants often moved on through the western Himalayas to warmer and lower regions of north India as beggars, pilgrim-mendicants, or petty traders, sometimes even settling there as well. Due to the memory of former waves of historical migrations from the east, the name “Khampa” later came to be widely used to refer to any migrants, travelling beggars, or mendicants who arrived in western Tibetan and Himalayan communities during the nineteenth century, regardless of whether they actually originated in Kham or not.¹⁸ An extension of this usage, “Indian Khampa” or Gyagar Khampa,¹⁹ also became commonly used to describe Tibetan migrants living within the colonial Indian state, and especially in Upper India, long before the modern Tibetan Diaspora into South Asia began during the 1950s and 1960s.

When the British Raj took control of the Hill States of the western Himalayas, it became much easier for Tibetan travellers such as the so-called Khampas to visit and dwell in these areas unmolested. An early nineteenth-century British traveller, Alexander Gerard (1792–1839), passed through the lower hills of what is nowadays Himachal Pradesh in 1817–18 and duly observed,

There is a sect of wandering Tatars [i.e., Tibetans] called Khampa, who are in some respects similar to the Jogees [i.e., yogis] of Hindustan. They visit the sacred places, and many of them subsist wholly by begging. Some are very humorous fellows; they put on a mask, perform a dance, singing and accompanying it with a drum, or they play, sing, and dance, all at once, holding the fiddle above the head, behind the back, and in a variety of other strange positions. Since the British Government have got possession of the Hills, Khampas come down in crowds to visit the holy places to the westward.²⁰

Similarly, in Tibetan language accounts describing this area in the mid-nineteenth century, we find mention not only of Indian Khampas and Khampa travellers throughout the lower hill regions of the Punjab but also of groups of other Tibetan pilgrims and beggars wandering and dwelling in the area as well.²¹

Since this whole region of north India has no distinguished Buddhist history to speak of,²² and since there are certainly no Indian Buddhist sites that Tibetans had ever previously recognized there, we should ask exactly what holy places attracted these nineteenth-century Tibetan visitors. There is in fact one famous holy place in the area, an Indian Tantric *pīṭha* that had long been accepted and visited by Vajrayāna Buddhists from Tibet. This is the Hindu goddess shrine of Jvālāmukhī, “She of the Flaming Mouth,” located in the foothills of Kangra not far from the town of Nagarkot. This general area has been regarded by Tibetans as the site of the Jālandhara *pīṭha* mentioned in the Tantras. Tibetan pilgrims have visited Jālandhara/Jvālāmukhī since the thirteenth century and continue to do so today, although their understanding of the site has demonstrably changed over time, probably in order to conform more closely with contemporary Indian ideas about it.²³

Thus, Jālandhara/Jvālāmukhī was the only site in the Punjab that had a long-term Buddhist—albeit completely Tantric—significance for Tibetans on pilgrimage. During the nineteenth century, however, a range of new sites throughout the Punjab were appropriated by Tibetans and added to their expanding holy land map of India. All of these new holy places had one thing in common: they were dedicated to Padmasambhava, a figure of singular importance in the history of Tibetan Buddhism, whom the Tibetans most commonly refer to as their “Precious Guru” (Guru Rinpoche).

The Precious Guru in the Punjab

One of the more remarkable developments of Tibetan Buddhist culture is the creation of the figure of Padmasambhava as a kind of “Second Buddha”—albeit in the form of a Tantric deity complete with his own pure land abode and pantheon of emanations—and his assumption of primacy of place over the Buddha Śākyamuni in a whole range of rituals and narratives in Tibetan religion. In spite of the enormous significance given to Padmasambhava in Tibetan Buddhism, he remains a most nebulous figure whose very historicity has often been called into doubt by recent scholars of Tibetan religion.²⁴ Be that as it may, it is important for an understanding of Tibetan religion to consider what the Tibetans have done with, and

in the name of, Padmasambhava. In terms of the development of a Tibetan sacred geography and pilgrimage culture, the reputed life and deeds of Padmasambhava during his claimed late eighth-century visit to Tibet have served as one of the principal bases of traditional authority for claiming a place to be a religious site in the Tibetan Buddhist world. One of the most common clichés in descriptions of Tibetan holy places is that their human history must either begin with the presence of this ubiquitous figure or, at very least, insert a visit by him at some early point in the narrative. Indeed, Padmasambhava is mentioned in relation to a vast range of holy sites right across the Tibetan plateau and throughout the adjacent high Himalayan ranges. In terms of sacred geography alone, the cult of Padmasambhava is more or less total throughout the Tibetan world space, and Tibetans have sought to extend it even further into surrounding regions of Asia.

Dan Martin has recently discussed the phenomenon of the “International Buddha” as represented in the life story of the founder of the Bön religion, Tönpa Shenrab, as another approach to rethinking the issue of Bön origins. In doing so, he rightly draws our attention again to the fact that while the geographical scope of the Buddha Śākyamuni’s classical biography is very limited, specifically to the area of the ancient Buddhist holy land, the Tibetan life story of the Second Buddha, Padmasambhava, presents him, like Tönpa Shenrab, as being a truly International Buddha.²⁵ Although Tibetan sources are fairly unanimous about Padmasambhava’s origins in an area called Uḍḍiyāna (or Orgyen in Tibetan), a non-Indian land whose possible location is as vague and contested as the saint’s own historical existence,²⁶ they nevertheless expect to find his influences in the many lands in which he is supposed to have acted out his earthly deeds—mainly in the form of various emanation bodies. One such place is known to the Tibetans as Zahor (or Sahor). According to various Tibetan hagiographies, Zahor is the site where the Precious Guru meets and seduces one of his consorts, the nun-princess Mandāravā, and subsequently survives being burnt alive by her outraged father, the king of Zahor, by miraculously transforming the burning ground into a lake and arising unscathed upon a lotus from its centre. This particular event in the legend of Padmasambhava is regularly celebrated in monasteries of the Tibetan Buddhist school known as the Nyingmapa, or “Ancient Ones,” on the tenth day of the third Tibetan lunar month.²⁷

In the “New Translation” (gSar ma pa) Tibetan histories of Vajrayāna, the location of Zahor is accepted as being a country or kingdom in eastern India. We do not know exactly where Zahor was meant to be located as an ancient territorial unit, although many different citations of the name

appear to indicate the general region of Bengal. This identification has been accepted by various Tibetan historians and repeated over the centuries. However, in the popular hagiographies of Padmasambhava produced by the Nyingmapa from the fourteenth century on, a confusion arose concerning the identity of two important figures in the Tantric origin narratives, namely King Tsa and Indrabhūti, and this in turn resulted in Zahor becoming identified in the northwest of India instead.²⁸ It appears that this geographical displacement was made in order to equate Zahor more closely with the region of Uḍḍiyāna, a place of Tantric origins that the Tibetans considered to be located in the region of the Swāt Valley of the Hindu Kush mountains, in the far northwestern corner of the Indian subcontinent.²⁹

While the relocation of Zahor closer to the Swāt Valley region may have occurred easily within the narrative tradition, it did not take place smoothly on the ground. For centuries thereafter, the Tibetans who actually travelled westward from Tibet to Swāt Valley never located Zahor in this region, nor anywhere in between. Götsangpa and Orgyenpa, the famous thirteenth-century travellers through the western Himalayas and beyond to the Swāt Valley, do not mention any site or region named Zahor (or anything similar) in their extensive itineraries. In the early seventeenth century, the Drukpa yogin Taksang Repa made a long pilgrimage throughout the western Himalayas to reach Swāt, which he identified as Uḍḍiyāna. While there, he even visited the site at which he considered Padmasambhava to have been burnt, although he states that he found no trace of the lake that is mentioned in the hagiographies. Nor did he identify any place named Zahor in his detailed itinerary.³⁰ However, the absence of a place identified as Zahor on the ground was not to last indefinitely.

A much later Tibetan tradition identified the district of Mandi in the lower hills of present-day Himachal Pradesh as being the kingdom of Zahor and also as the location of the exploits of the Precious Guru Padmasambhava and his consort.³¹ In particular, a small lake at an obscure spot named Rewalsar, not far from the main town of Mandi, became chosen as the location of Zahor Tso Pemachen, "Zahor Possessing the Lotus Lake" or, as it has more recently and simply become known, Tso Pema, the "Lotus Lake" of Padmasambhava. Tibetans in fact began to popularly regard the small lake at Rewalsar as both the place where the saint was born and also where he miraculously escaped being burnt.³² It is unlikely that these Tibetan identifications were made before the late eighteenth or perhaps early nineteenth century, as the Mandi-Zahor equation is unknown in the Tibetan accounts of India before this time.³³ The earliest historical records of Tibetan pilgrims at the site are only dated to the opening decades of

the nineteenth century. Alexander Gerard, who in 1817–18 described the lake, along with the site of Jvālāmukhī, as being the “most esteemed places of lama worship” in the Punjab Hills,³⁴ indicated the miraculous features recognized by Tibetans there at this time:

Rowalsir, or Cho Pudma, in Mundee, about ten miles west of the capital, is a pond, a bow-shot or more across, in which are seven small floating islands, probably of wood, covered with earth; the largest is forty or fifty feet in diameter, projecting in the middle like a hill, and on the top there vegetates a tree and some flowers. It is said these islands traverse without assistance from one side of the lake to the other in the morning, and return in the evening. Sometimes they are all in motion together, but for these last three years only the largest and another have moved about; and the Lamas, who are most expert at repeating their sacred sentences, say they can call them when they choose.³⁵

A Tibetan account that describes the life of Tibetan beggar-pilgrims living in the Mandi area during the mid-nineteenth century clearly shows that the locality of the Lotus Lake at Rewalsar and its topographical features were strongly associated with Padmasambhava and his consort Mandāravā

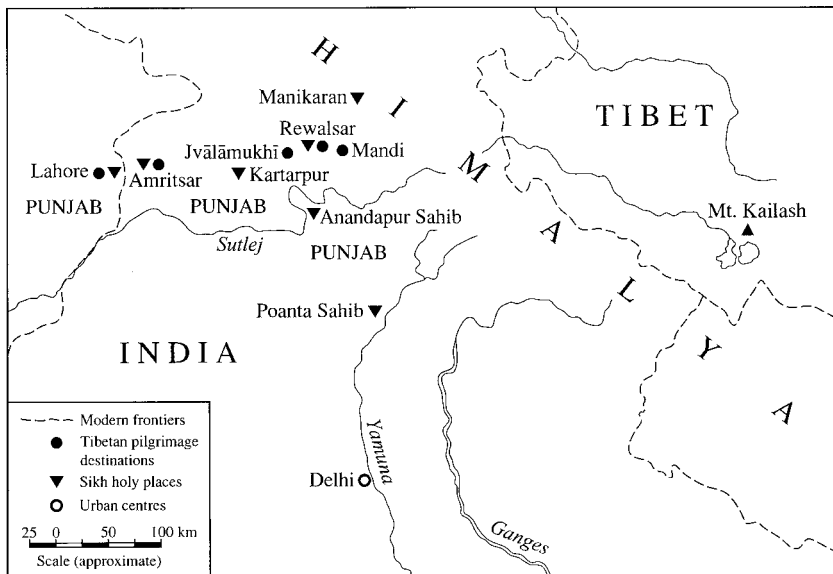


Figure 8.1. Nineteenth-century Tibetan pilgrimage in the Punjab.
Drawn by Norma Schulz and Toni Huber.

by that time.³⁶ The Tibetan popularity of Rewalsar appears to have declined for a period during the early twentieth century, although it gradually revived again with the advent of the Tibetan exile during the 1950s and after.³⁷ This earlier decline was probably due to the sudden acknowledgement by Tibetans during the first half of the twentieth century of so many other Buddhist sites throughout India, including some rather novel ones elsewhere in the neighbouring Punjab.

Tibetans at the Golden Temple

In addition to Rewalsar and its small lake, several other sites scattered throughout the Punjab were also popularly identified by Tibetans as Padmasambhava's sacred birthplace and burning lake. Remarkably, one of these was the famous sacred tank known as the "Pool of Nectar" which surrounds the Golden Temple in the city of Amritsar, the most holy shrine of the Sikh religion and the effective centre of a Sikh holy land in the Punjab. The German missionary and academician August Hermann Francke (1870–1930) visited Rewalsar in 1910 and reported, "One of the Tibetans I met at Rawālsar told me he intended to travel straight to Amritsar, as this was another place connected with Padma-sambhava."³⁸ Later eyewitness reports describe what were sometimes "great numbers" of Tibetan pilgrims visiting the tank at the Golden Temple, believing it to be the site of either the burning or the origin lake of the Precious Guru Padmasambhava.³⁹

The fame of the Golden Temple among Tibetans during the twentieth century as a holy place of Padmasambhava was such that it also became identified with other sites that Tibetans associated with Buddhism in India. One such secondary identification was of the Golden Temple as the historical palace of the beloved Tibetan opera character Prince Drimé Kunden, whose intense acts of generosity and public charity are modelled upon the main protagonist in the Buddhist *Viśvantara Jātaka*. Some of my elderly Tibetan informants have stated that upon arriving at the Golden Temple, Tibetan travellers found that its identity as the palace of Drimé Kunden was confirmed for them by the Sikh custom of performing acts of charity at the site, such as handing out food to pilgrims and worshippers.⁴⁰

With many Tibetan Buddhists visiting the Golden Temple, it was perhaps inevitable that the site, and the Punjab in general, attracted the attention of Bönpo pilgrims from Tibet as well. A popular tradition among Bönpo pilgrims visiting India during the mid-twentieth century was the identification of the Golden Temple with the Gyakhar Bachō palace that was built by Milu Samleg, a figure who is credited with the revelation of

the Bönpo *Mother Tantras* (*Ma brgyud*). Charles Ramble has ventured that this claim depended upon Bönpo identification of the external appearance of the Sikhs with their turbans, beards, and ritual knives (*kirpan*)—and especially the crossed-*kirpan* of the later Sikh crest associated with Guru Nānak—with descriptions of ancient priests or kings depicted in Bönpo texts.⁴¹ Bönpo pilgrims also credited the famous Hindu pilgrimage shrine of Jvālāmukhī in the lower Punjab Hills as being another place of Milu Samleg's activity in the region.⁴² These Bönpo identifications need to be considered in relation to other conceptions of regional geography. According to Bönpo geographical perspectives, Gyakhar Bachō is said to be located in the region called "Intermediate Zhangzhung" (Zhangzhung Barpa), while greater Zhangzhung itself is usually taken to be a larger area of western Tibet and the adjacent Himalayas centred on the upper Sutlej River area.⁴³ A generous interpretation of Zhangzhung by Bönpo pilgrims could conceivably include parts of the Punjab and hence the supposed setting for the life events of Milu Samleg there, especially at the Golden Temple.

The other Punjab location that drew Tibetans to it as a site of the life of Guru Padmasambhava was the city of Lahore, a seemingly even less likely candidate than the Golden Temple in Amritsar. For example, sometime around the year 1908, two Khampa pilgrims of the Nyingmapa school set out from Tibet to undertake what was already a popular journey, "to go to Lahore in the Punjab, to see the place where the rival suitors bound the Guru Pedma Sambhava on the pyre, when the guru was seated on a lotus flower in the midst of the flames."⁴⁴ Lahore is strongly associated with Sikh foundation history, since Guru Nānak was born not far to the west of the city, and it was also the birthplace of the important fourth Sikh Guru Ramdas (1534–81), who established the Sikh holy city of Amritsar. The Tibetan confusion about the site no doubt also resulted from the similarity of the names "Zahor" and "Lahore" to the ears of Tibetans from the far distant high plateau, who possessed little accurate knowledge of India and who were trying their best to find their way to what had become the designated sites of the Precious Guru somewhere to the west.⁴⁵ Tibetan pilgrims certainly visited Lahore at this time. Indeed, as we know, it was a real Tibetan pilgrim visiting Lahore at the end of the nineteenth century who met Lockwood Kipling (1837–1911), the father of author Rudyard Kipling (1865–1936), and who thus inspired the most famous "lama" character of modern English literature in Rudyard's best-selling novel *Kim*.⁴⁶

Why was it then that so many Tibetans of the nineteenth century began identifying sites throughout the Punjab specifically with Padmasambhava, especially given that such places were a very long way from the Swāt

Valley area with which their Precious Guru had always been so strongly associated? The answer to this question undoubtedly lies not only in the history of the Tibetan migrations into Upper India already mentioned but also in the historical development of the Sikh religion over this very same territory, especially from the late seventeenth century onward.

Whose Guru Is He Anyway?

The Sikh community in the Punjab gradually developed their own religious territory in northwest India, one that was centred upon their holy city of Amritsar and a range of sites at which the various founding fathers or “gurus” of Sikhism had dwelt or visited. The later hagiographies (*janam-sākhī*) of the original founder of Sikhism, Guru Nānak (1469–1529), describe a series of missionary journeys (*udasi*) he performed around India and also to neighbouring regions. On his third journey, during the early sixteenth century, Guru Nānak is said to have even travelled widely throughout the Himalayas and to parts of Tibet. Over time, Sikh followers also established a series of temples (*gurdwara*) at places where Guru Nānak was believed to have meditated or dwelt during his travels. In 1695, the tenth and last Sikh Guru, Gobind Singh (1666–1708), moved into the western Siwalik Hills, in what is now lower Himachal Pradesh, and settled there with his army. Subsequently, sites such as Poanta Sahib, Rewalsar, Manikaran, Anandapur Sahib, and other places became established Sikh pilgrimage sites due to the traditions about Guru Nānak, Guru Gobind Singh, and other Sikh gurus, and *gurdwaras* were duly set up in each of them for the reception of Sikh pilgrims. Specifically, Guru Gobind Singh himself is said to have stayed at Rewalsar for one month.

These local Sikh religious developments preceded the other historical events we have described above that led to increased Tibetan travel into the western Himalayas and down to the Punjab. Thus, Tibetans traveling through the lower Punjab Hills during the period would have been encountering Sikh sites that were locally known and associated with “the Guru,” a name that meant only “Precious Guru” or Padmasambhava to the Tibetans. One site in particular in this Sikh and Hindu landscape, that of Rewalsar, was to become an extremely strong focus for worship of the Tibetan “Precious Guru,” one which has long outlived Tibetan attraction to Amritsar and Lahore. To properly appreciate the development of a very popular and enduring Tibetan “guru” cult at Rewalsar, we need to view the phenomenon in the context of more widespread religious patterns of

interaction between Sikhism and Tibetan Buddhism found throughout the Himalayas.

The collapsing together of both Sikh and Tibetan Buddhist references and worship traditions to their respective gurus is found today at sites throughout the Himalayas where the two religious communities have come into contact. I have personally encountered it during the past few decades at pilgrimage places in the western Himalayas, Sikkim, and Arunachal Pradesh. This overlap of both Sikh and Tibetan designations and religious significations can be observed to operate in both directions. Tibetans consider Sikh guru sites, such as Amritsar, Lahore, or Rewalsar, as being the places associated with their Guru Rinpoche. By the same token, Sikhs newly arrived in a Himalayan area who find Tibetans worshipping Guru Rinpoche there believe for their part that they have located one of the places visited by Guru Nānak during his third journey.

To illustrate the dynamics of the interaction of Sikh and Tibetan Buddhist cult interests, I draw upon a recent example from my own research in the far eastern Himalayas. Following the 1962 Sino-Indian border war along the disputed McMahon Line in the eastern Himalayas, troops of the Indian army, including many Sikhs, became stationed in the remote Mechukha Valley (formerly known as Pachakshiri), which is home to the Memba community of Tibetan Buddhists. Mechukha is located directly at the disputed Indo-Tibetan border of north-central Arunachal Pradesh, and the establishment of a military base and airfield there has ensured the permanent presence of Indian army personnel in the area. The Indian soldiers stationed at Mechukha discovered that the Memba, who are mostly followers of the Nyingmapa school, paid great reverence to a cave in the northern valley which was known as the "Guru's Cave." I first visited Mechukha in 2002 and found this cave, called Pemshibi in Memba dialect, to be a well-known Guru Rinpoche site, one intimately connected with the legend of the "opening" of the area as a zone of Tibetan Buddhist culture by Padmasambhava. The Memba perform an annual pilgrimage to the cave on the fifth day of the first Tibetan lunar month and worship their Precious Guru there. However, Sikh visitors to Mechukha interpret the same site as a cave in which Guru Nānak was reputed to have stayed and rested when he was travelling through this area on his journey eastward. This same Pemshibi cave has now become a local Sikh holy place dedicated to Guru Nānak and receives regular Sikh pilgrimage. The Sikh Regiment stationed at Mechukha had built a *gurdwara* at the site, and the *Guru Granth Sāhib*, the holy book of Sikhism, was being read there daily.⁴⁷ Moreover, visiting

Sikhs, including highly educated persons, are convinced their “Guru of Pemshibi cave” is the same as that of their local Memba hosts. This conviction is well illustrated by Retired Colonel Dr. Dalvinder Singh Grewal, a Sikh officer in the Indian army who served in various parts of Arunachal Pradesh, and who undertook academic studies of many highland communities throughout the area. Grewal observed of Memba religion that the “Membas are Mahayana Buddhists belonging to the Nying-ma-pa sect. They follow the teachings of the Buddha and Nanak Rinpoche.”⁴⁸

Northern Arunachal Pradesh provides us with an excellent example of the reverse version of the same process of religious assimilation between Sikh and Tibetan cults that I consider to have occurred at Rewalsar, and elsewhere throughout the Punjab, by way of Tibetan agency during the nineteenth century.

At Rewalsar specifically, nineteenth-century Tibetan visitors would also have found a second layer of earlier Śaiva tradition there that helped to ensure its positive identity as a Padmasambhava site. There are Śaivite temples at the site that predate the modest nineteenth-century Tibetan temple there, and a local Sanskrit *māhātmya* for the area records the legend of Ṛishi Lomaśa, a figure whose exploits there are in fact very similar to those attributed by the Tibetans to Padmasambhava.⁴⁹ Finally, it must be pointed out that in order for nineteenth-century Tibetans to enjoy some meaningful religious connection with important sites in the life of their Precious Guru, a location like Rewalsar was also excellent from a purely practical point of view. It was a far less dangerous destination than the Swāt Valley, which was then being ruled by volatile Pathān tribesmen who were generally hostile to outsiders. The Punjab Hills have always also been much more accessible for Tibetans travelling down toward India via any of the adjacent ethnically and culturally Tibetan areas of the western Himalayas, particularly upper Kinnaur, Spiti, Garsha or Lahoul, and Zaskar.

The case of the Precious Guru in the Punjab demonstrates a new level of development in the continuing Tibetan redefinition of India as a holy land of Buddhism. Initially, Tibetans had recognized the sites of ancient Indian Buddhism in the Middle Ganges region and duly performed pilgrimages to them. They also acknowledged and creatively transferred the sacred geography of the pan-Indian Tantric *pīṭha* cult to places throughout the Himalayas and Tibet which suited their own particular purposes. Still later, they claimed to have “rediscovered” the ancient sites of Buddhism in other parts of India far removed from the Middle Ganges region, and they also appropriated a range of Hindu holy places due to the increasing influence of Indian mendicants upon their own understanding of India as a Bud-

dhist territory. Finally, in the Punjab during the nineteenth century, they no longer needed any such Indian referents to work with. Instead, from Mandi to Amritsar and Lahore, they transferred a vital aspect of their own Buddhist culture and history—the cult of the Precious Guru, Padmasambhava—from Tibet and transplanted it to the holy land of India itself. This development parallels, in some ways, the earlier adaptation of Indian *pīṭha* to the Tibetan environment, since ultimately the original Indian Buddhist referents also became redundant in that process, and the importance of the newly claimed *pīṭha* sites was purely one of significance within the logic of Tibetan Buddhist culture itself. Such Tibetan religious developments in the Punjab during the nineteenth and early twentieth centuries can be considered precursors to the more recent establishment of an indigenous Tibetan sacred geography in India, one adaptive outcome of the substantial Tibetan exile community forced to settle in India since the 1950s.⁵⁰



PART THREE

Modern Rebirths of the Holy Land



CHAPTER NINE

Archaeological and Discursive Rebirths of Buddhist India

The last words of the Lord Buddha at Kusinara were that Bhikkhus, Bhikkhunis, Upāsakas and Upāsikas should visit the four Shrines sacred to His memory. . . . The Muhammadans visit Mecca; the Christians visit Jerusalem; the Hindus visit the various Shrines at Ramesseram, Benares, Dwaraka, Mathura, Brindaban, Vishnupad at Gaya, and Jagannath Puri at great sacrifice; but the Buddhists of Japan, Burma, Siam, Ceylon, China and Tibet have forgotten their Holyland!

—*Anagarika Dharmapāla, 1900*

Introduction

This round lambasting aimed at the Asian Buddhist community by the modern Buddhist activist Anagarika Dharmapāla (1864–1933) was, as we can now well appreciate, certainly an unfair accusation to level at the Buddhists of Tibet. Since the seventeenth-century rekindling of Tibetan interest in pilgrimage to India, many in the Tibetan community had directed their religious energy and attention toward India as a Buddhist holy land of pilgrimage. They had most often done so in ways which would have probably horrified the conservative and prejudiced Dharmapāla, since their pilgrimages had become focused not only upon the ancient places of the Buddha referred to here but also upon many of the sites which he mentions the Hindus as visiting “at great sacrifice,” plus a rich array of other Indian places also deemed to be authentically Buddhist by the Tibetans. Be that as it may, Dharmapāla’s pronouncement above epitomizes in many ways the radical and far-reaching transformations that were occurring at the ancient sites of Indian Buddhism during the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries. In close conjunction with the rise of monumental archaeology

as a distinctive feature of British colonialism, these transformations established both the new material form and the new meaning that Indian Buddhist holy sites were to acquire during the age of modernity. They also played an important role in the way in which Buddhism came to be understood as a “world religion” in both Asia and the rest of the world.

Tibetan understandings and practices related to India were likewise challenged and changed by these same transformations. They deserve our attention here in order to appreciate the new context of twentieth-century Tibetan religious relationships with India to be discussed throughout this final part of the book. In particular, I also want to explore how the modern forms of revival Buddhism which began to emerge in India were not, as they have often been presented, merely derivative of certain discourses and practices from the colonial milieu of missionaries and orientalist scholarship. They were also a result of deliberate choices and strategies pursued by a range of Asian actors with their own complex interests and motivations. Tibetans present in India during the first half of the twentieth century were continually drawn into and affected by the Buddhist revival taking place there. In this chapter I will investigate two very different cases of how Tibet’s most elite pilgrims—the Dalai Lama and the Panchen Lama—both had encounters with the emerging and politicized modern Indian Buddhist revival milieu which was deliberately focused upon the excavated and restored sites of the Buddha in India.

Buddhism and Monumental Archaeology

The modern revival of Asian Buddhist interest in India during the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries was closely associated with a grand program of colonial archaeological discovery conducted throughout the subcontinent. Since all the Buddhist holy sites of India had lain neglected, ruined, and in many cases completely buried for many hundreds of years, early twentieth-century Tibetan pilgrims to India were often astounded to find them newly revealed and radically transformed. For example, famous sites such as Nālandā, the great monastic university which had once been the most vital Indian source of Buddhist teachings for Tibetans, had been completely lost to them for at least seven or eight centuries. Sonam Rabgye found nothing at all remaining of Nālandā, save a few ancient bricks strewn upon the ground, when he visited the area in the mid-eighteenth century (see chap. 6). Yet Tibetan pilgrims to Bihar in the 1920s witnessed Nālandā literally rise once again like a phoenix from the ashes as it was systematically rediscovered, excavated, mapped, restored, and pre-



Figure 9.1. Nālandā *stūpa* site no. 3 prior to excavation, 1917–18. Reproduced by permission of University of Cambridge Museum of Archaeology & Anthropology (P.15563.HRG).

served, all under the curatorial care of the Archaeological Survey of India (figs. 9.1 and 9.2). The distinctive colonial phenomenon of monumental archaeology, which now reconstituted the long-lost edifice of Indian Buddhism, held profound cultural significance: it suddenly rendered these ancient sites available once again for contemporary religious purposes.

This major scientific endeavour was carried out by several generations of archaeologists and orientalists working in the service of the Government of India, most notably under the initial direction and inspiration of Alexander Cunningham.¹ Upon taking up the directorship of the Archaeological Survey of India after 1871, Cunningham saw his scientific and curatorial brief as involving “those monuments that, either by their association with significant events, or by virtue of their beauty and grandeur alone, were worth preserving either wholly or in part, as historical specimens.”²

Monumental archaeology was also part of a grander colonial program of knowledge gathering and prestige generation that eventually became encouraged at the highest levels of imperial power. Even the “Great Game” strategist Lord Curzon (1859–1925), viceroy of India from 1899 to 1905, stated of his and the colonial regime’s political responsibilities: “It is . . .



Figure 9.2. Nālandā stūpa site no. 3 after excavation, 1928–29. Reproduced by permission of University of Cambridge Museum of Archaeology & Anthropology (P.15564.HRG).

equally our duty to dig and discover, to classify, reproduce and describe, to copy and decipher, and to cherish and conserve.”³ While the work of government archaeologists was itself scientific, its broader significance was clearly nonscientific, and it was these other agendas which partly justified the often tremendous expense of undertaking not only the identification, excavation, and restoration of so many ancient sites but also their ongoing curation and control.

Benedict Anderson contends that the reconstruction of monuments by Asian colonial states placed their ancient builders and the colonized local populations in a certain hierarchy:

Contemporary natives were no longer capable of their putative ancestors’ achievements. Seen in this light, the reconstructed monuments, juxtaposed with the surrounding rural poverty, said to the natives: Our presence shows that you have always been, or have long become, incapable of either greatness or self-rule.⁴

Not only did the recovered monumental past serve as a testimony to contemporary decline in India for the colonials, it could also reveal to them

just how little value their Indian subjects placed upon their own historical heritage. Neglect of the past by a people was, in the eyes of the colonizers, a sure sign of unfitness for control of the present and future. Such were the complaints in the colonial press, for instance, following the discovery in 1909 of an alleged deposit of the Buddha's relics during an excavation of an ancient Buddhist funerary monument near Peshāwar:

It is very unfortunate to observe, even in these days of all-sided knowledge and activity, that India's antiquities should receive far less attention from the Indians than they deserve! . . . The nation, which could not look to its past, has no right to devise plans for its future! . . . [T]he discovery of the Buddha's relics in Sind scarcely evoked any attention even from educated Indians . . . The average Indian would look blank if he were asked what was done with the relics after they had been discovered!⁵

Monumental archaeology also allowed the colonial state to appear as the guardian of a generalized "Tradition" over an area which could be mapped and "museumized," and which became a kind of regalia for the state and also an object of the new tourism:

The old sacred sites were to be incorporated into the map of the colony, and their ancient prestige . . . draped around the mappers. This paradoxical situation is nicely illustrated by the fact that the reconstructed monuments often had smartly laid-out lawns around them, and always explanatory tablets, complete with datings, planted here and there.⁶

Confirmation of the impact of this work is found in the observations of numerous colonial tourists who visited the museumized Buddhist monuments of India. After a stop at the parklike setting of the heavily renovated Mahābodhi Temple complex at Bodh Gayā in 1930 (fig. 9.3), British travel writer Robert Byron (1905–41) reflected:

The genius of the place has descended, through a period of ruin and desuetude, to benefit from English guardianship. . . . The English have left their mark, as they do, in a peculiar fond manner, when engaged in archaeological reparation; I doubt if the temple, in all its long life, has ever worn such a tidy, solid air as it does today. Yet the genius of the place, instead of being expelled, has been rejuvenated.⁷



Figure 9.3. Parklike setting of restored Mahābodhi Temple, Bodh Gayā, 1903.

The English left their mark at the restored pilgrimage sites of the ancient Buddhist holy land in other ways which both followed traditions at the sites and conspicuously and indelibly attached prestige to themselves. For instance, at Bodh Gayā, they added yet another inscription to the historical collection already carved there in stone by pious Buddhist donors and restorers in ancient times. Right over the main entrance to the shrine all worshippers and tourists could clearly read an inscription stating: "This ancient temple of Mahabodhi, erected on the holy spot where Prince Sakya Sinha became a Buddha, was repaired by the British Government under the order of Sir Ashley Eden, Lt. Gov. of Bengal, Anno Domini 1880."⁸ Despite the reference to the Indian religious nature of the site, the dating makes it clear whose "Lord" the restorers remained faithful to, and that their work was no act of Buddhist piety or merit making.

The religious significance for Buddhists of archaeological work at the site was, however, claimed and summed up neatly by Alexander Cunningham in his late nineteenth-century report on the excavations of the ruined temple at Bodh Gayā: "The most important discovery was the fact that the present Temple is built exactly over the remains of Asoka's Temple, so

that the original Vajrāsan Throne still retains its old position of Buddha's seat, and the reputed centre of the universe."⁹ For the Victorian era colonials, the reconstruction of such Buddhist monuments also pointed back into the past to a former "golden age" of Buddhist culture, when spiritual and intellectual supermen like the Buddha and his famous students once graced the subcontinent. In the eyes of many nineteenth-century orientalis, this was the age of a pure and uncorrupted "original Buddhism," and these monuments were the structures which it had produced and inhabited before its regrettable demise. Their reconstructed grandeur was testimony to the greatness of achievement of an ancient India, a greatness which now appeared to a colonial generation living and working in the real contemporary India to have dramatically declined and fallen into decay. This type of thinking was later embraced by the political elite of an independent India, and it is indeed no accident that the famous lion capital from a pillar erected by the powerful Buddhist Emperor Aśoka became the prime symbol of the newly unified and independent modern Indian state.

While the colonial discourse that focused upon the recovered remains of ancient Buddhism was concerned with past greatness and its subsequent decline, another set of actors—a new breed of modern Buddhists in South Asia—were simultaneously working to impose exactly the opposite significance upon these same remains: to re-create them as vital contemporary places of revival and renewed future greatness.

Modern Buddhist Activists

Coincident with the archaeological rediscovery and restoration of Indian Buddhism, another complex cultural phenomenon had begun, also stimulated by colonialism in South Asia. This was the development of a linked series of modern Buddhist renewal or revival movements, which began in nineteenth-century Ceylon. The movement there has been labelled "Protestant Buddhism" by scholars such as Gananath Obeyesekere and Richard Gombrich, reflecting its complex relationship with a colonial Protestant missionary milieu and also the Reformation-type nature of religious individualism associated with it. This revival movement soon spread to other Theravādin Buddhist lands and to India as well, and it began to develop rapidly in new directions. In India it also came under the influence of parallel modern Hindu revival movements, which had in turn arisen out of complex interactions between colonialism and South Asian intellectual and religious communities. It is this wider and more international development of the modern Buddhist revival movement that is of primary interest

to us here. Heinz Bechert first described the character of this wider movement by coining the phrase "Buddhist modernism" and stating that:

There was a close interrelation between Buddhist resurgence in the East and the early phases of the spread of Buddhism in the West. This interrelation was not only organizational; essentially it concerned trends towards reinterpretation of Buddhism as a system of thought. We may refer to these trends as "Buddhist Modernism."¹⁰

Briefly, in terms of this reinterpretation, Buddhism became viewed as a religion of humanistic rationality, rather than one of blind faith, dogma, and mechanical ritualism. This socially enlightened system, based on a "triune" core of meditation, philosophy, and psychology, was also held to be a return to the "original" and "pure" Buddhism that had been gradually corrupted over the centuries as it spread throughout Asia. It was the same original Buddhism that the nineteenth-century orientalists thought they had rediscovered as they deciphered old Buddhist manuscripts and studied the impressive material edifice which the archaeologists had exhumed from India's soil. Buddhist modernism's advocates, as Donald Lopez has recently pointed out, characteristically represented "Buddhism as a 'world religion' fully the equal of Christianity in antiquity, geographical expanse, membership, and philosophical profundity, with its own founder, sacred scriptures, and fixed body of doctrine."¹¹ Moreover, as we shall soon see, this modern form of Buddhism was also to have its own "Holy Land" (most often capitalized in the texts of Buddhist modernists) that was defined partly after the model of Christianity and the other near-eastern religions. At this time, Buddhism also quickly began to serve as a modern, politicized identity marker. It became linked with emergent, local South Asian nationalist and anticolonial movements, and it was rallied to the cause of various social reforms.

While one can reliably sketch the general outlines of Buddhist modernism, as we have just done, it has been a complex phenomenon, the various historical phases, individual representatives, and regional Asian manifestations of which require specific consideration. An important and early expression of Buddhist modernism as it manifested in India was the organization of international Buddhism as a new form of missionary religion that was to become global in scope, albeit based on the Indian subcontinent. One of the very first institutional expressions of international Buddhism was the founding of the Maha Bodhi Society, and this very act was publicly

played out and symbolically focused upon the newly emerged colonial archaeological stage.

Barely had Alexander Cunningham finished his report concerning archaeological excavations at Bodh Gayā during the 1880s when a new organization, the Maha Bodhi Society, was formed with the aims of gaining legal control of the site for Buddhists and of reviving Buddhism in India. At the time, as described in chapter 6, the area of Bodh Gayā was thoroughly occupied and used by various Hindu institutions. Although Hindus had actively used the abandoned precincts of Bodh Gayā as both a monastery and pilgrimage complex since the late sixteenth or early seventeenth century, this was suddenly deemed totally unacceptable by the new breed of Buddhist modernists. The Maha Bodhi Society was founded by Anagarika Dharmapāla and his associates in 1891. Dharmapāla, alias Don David Hēvāvitarana, a Sinhalese layman whose adopted epithet “Defender of the Dharma” was completely appropriate to his new calling, is without doubt one of the more remarkable figures in modern Buddhist history. His career as a missionary and revivalist is worthy of brief review here since he made a significant impact upon the first Tibetan engagements with modern forms of Buddhism.¹² His legacy includes, among other things, the driving force behind the early establishment of Buddhism as a missionary religion in the modern world system, the raising of a new pan-Asian Buddhist consciousness, and, of particular interest in the present context, the revival of Buddhist religious and historical sentiments about India as a holy land.

Dharmapāla, together with the Japanese Theravāda Buddhist convert Shaku Kōzen (1849–1924) (fig. 9.4), first visited the ruins of Bodh Gayā in January 1891, a few months prior to their joint founding of the Maha Bodhi Society. Dharmapāla’s own focus on Bodh Gayā had already been preceded by a considerable buildup of scholarly, religious, and political interest in the site throughout the nineteenth century.¹³ Various Burmese pilgrim missions to the site combined worship with interest in restoring it. Then followed the actual excavation and a somewhat speculative and controversial reconstruction of the site—including the planting of a new Bodhi Tree—under the direction of Alexander Cunningham and his staff at the Archaeological Survey of India.¹⁴ This coincided with the popularization of the Buddha’s life story and the promotion of “saving” Bodh Gayā for Buddhists through the literary works and political protests of the British newspaperman and Buddhist Edwin Arnold (1832–1904).¹⁵ Arnold appealed not only to a Western public and to colonial politicians but also to an Asian Buddhist audience. Under Arnold’s influence, Japanese Buddhists



Figure 9.4. Dharmapāla and Shaku Kōzen, Bodh Gayā, 1891.

had already started in 1890 an organization called the Society for the Restoration of Indian Buddhist Sites, which raised money to support archaeological works in India.¹⁶

Only after this complex colonial and international scene had been set did Dharmapāla enter the picture. According to his own writings, he was directly inspired by Arnold's plea but also by a "flash of inspiration" he claimed to have had upon his first visit to Bodh Gayā. Part of Dharmapāla's genius in choosing Bodh Gayā (and later Sārnāth) as the symbolic centre of a new international Buddhism was his use of the restoration of sacred sites as a focus for Buddhist revival. Precisely this type of strategy, also in the context of British archaeological excavation and restoration, had already been well used in Dharmapāla's native Ceylon throughout the course of the nineteenth-century Buddhist revival there.¹⁷ The appropriation and colonization of the rediscovered sites of ancient Buddhism by Dharmapāla and the early Buddhist modernists in India fit completely with their fundamental understanding of the new type of Buddhism they were now vigorously championing. They considered—in concert with late nineteenth-century European views—that more recent local manifestations of Asian Buddhism were in fact much degenerated forms of the earlier "pure" form of

the religion that the Buddha himself had founded in ancient India. Thus, those rediscovered ancient sites associated with the person and life of the Buddha were in fact the very places of origin of the pure religion that they now claimed as possessing the same values and ideals as the European Enlightenment—reason, empiricism, science, universalism, individualism, tolerance, freedom, and rejection of religious orthodoxy—and which they now sought to revive and spread.¹⁸

Unlike his Burmese Buddhist predecessors at Bodh Gayā, whose interests were solely religious, Dharmapāla was also a political activist whose aims and interests in the site, guided as they were by his strong anticolonial and anti-Hindu sentiments, were as much secular as religious. He soon initiated political and legal actions in India against the occupants of the Śaiva-administered compound, which he described as a “Hindu fakir establishment” with “monstrous figures of Hindu deities.”¹⁹ Dharmapāla was quick to resort to the discourse of the day concerning indigenous Asian disinterest in the past, a discourse which the archaeology of Buddhist sites had promoted in India. Thus, he was soon accusing his fellow Asian Buddhists of having “forgotten their Holyland.” In fact, during the course of his long-running campaign over Bodh Gayā, Dharmapāla was to redefine both Buddhist and more general public discourse about the main shrines of ancient Indian Buddhism and India itself.

Defining a Modern Buddhist Holy Land

By the time he first visited Bodh Gayā, Dharmapāla was already being cultivated as what Gananath Obeyesekere called a “Protestant Buddhist” protégé of the founder of the Buddhist Theosophical Society in Ceylon, Henry Steele Olcott (1832–1907).²⁰ The American Colonel Olcott, a founder of the Theosophical movement, lawyer, journalist, and Western Buddhist convert, used his talents for organizing, fund-raising, and propaganda to prepare Dharmapāla impeccably for both his Bodh Gayā temple campaign and his founding of an international Buddhist missionary movement. Reflecting upon the role of the Theosophists in Asia, Poul Pedersen recently observed:

It was not only that they strengthened Western interest in Eastern traditions. Perhaps more important was their introduction of Western interpretations of Eastern traditions to the educated Asian elites. Much of this would become integrated into their own national and cultural self-understanding and used for their own purpose. It opened, in

other words, Western discursive dominance over Oriental religion and philosophy and stimulated a creative cultural exchange between East and West.²¹

This is precisely what transpired in the case of the Maha Bodhi Society's bid to revive the Indian Buddhist pilgrimage shrines. The whole idea of the sites associated with the Buddha's life in India being a "holy land" was, like so much of Protestant Buddhism, closely derivative of the nineteenth-century Western, and particularly English-speaking, interpretations of both Christianity and Buddhism.

From a young age, Dharmapāla was heavily exposed to Christianity through his mixed Anglican and Roman Catholic missionary education in colonial Ceylon. Although a passionate Buddhist revivalist, he could also quote the Bible to good effect with the ease of a Christian preacher. Dharmapāla wrote and spoke a great deal comparing Buddhism and Christianity, often in a way that closely echoed the many comparisons already posed between the two religions during the earlier Victorian discovery of Buddhism.²² His later education at the hands of the leading Western Buddhist Theosophists, Helena Blavatsky (1831–91) and Henry Olcott, also acquainted him with the mid- to late nineteenth-century discourse about India and Buddhism prevailing among Western orientalists, mystics, and occultists. For Blavatsky, in particular, India itself came to assume the role once played by ancient Egypt in the early modern Western occultist and spiritualist circles. For her, India became a new kind of holy land as the source of all the "ancient wisdoms" and abode of the (often disembodied) spiritual masters. Blavatsky began to focus on India and its early Buddhism and brahmanism as the fountainhead of all religions when she wrote *Isis Unveiled* in 1877. But it was mainly Olcott who wished to actually visit what he too viewed as the "holy land," and the pair of them first set foot on India's "sacred soil" in February 1879. Olcott and Blavatsky were the forerunners of an ongoing flow of Western pilgrims, travellers, and tourists to "sacred," "holy," or "spiritual" India which has continued up to the present day.²³

For the orientalist scholars and writers of the period, archaeology and the philological study of religious texts revealed a civilization to be much admired in its past "classical golden age." This paralleled in many ways the manner in which ancient Greece was admired and romanticized in the tradition of Western Classicism. Both Plato's Hellenic milieu and the Buddha's Gangetic one were eagerly idealized as enlightened worlds populated

by intellectual and spiritual supermen. This type of comparison has a long history, even when applied to the Buddhist sacred sites themselves. The Jesuit missionary-traveller Ippolito Desideri (1684–1733), who journeyed from Patna to Benares in 1722 after returning from Tibet, wrote that the area of the great Indian holy city was “[W]hat Athens was to the ancient Greeks . . . the Thibettans believe that here Sciacchiá-Thubbà [i.e., the Buddha] was made perfect and became their legislator.”²⁴ However, the projected golden age of Buddha’s India also testified to a terrible “civilizational decline” which appeared to be manifest in the India of colonial experience. This comparison itself, as we have observed, was viewed as a justification for “renewal” through enlightened colonial rule.²⁵ The Victorians considered the historical Buddha in India as a reformer comparable to their Jesus or Luther, while their Indian colonial subjects were seen to be in the grip of a “despotic, tyrannical, oppressive and corrupt” brahman priesthood.²⁶ All of these influences and attitudes set the tenor and determined the rhetoric of Dharmapāla’s mission to revive India as the modern Buddhist holy land.

Indian Buddhism’s long-neglected sacred territory and principal shrines first got drawn into a modern “holy land” discourse by various Victorian orientalist, including those who supported and those who opposed Buddhism. Although there are brief, slightly earlier orientalist references to India as a Buddhist “holy land,”²⁷ the first significant, widely circulated ones occurred following Edwin Arnold’s original 1885 visit to Bodh Gayā. In his best-selling *India Revisited* (1891), Arnold described the area of the Gangetic basin containing the four major sites of the Buddha’s life as

. . . more important and absorbing in regard of what may be called “Religious Geography” than Mount Hira, where the Prophet received commission to write his Koran, or Paniput, where the Bhagavad-Gita was recited; nay, approaching—if one may say so—in human import the sacred sites of Palestine itself, since Buddhism, justly understood, is in certain aspects an Asiatic Christianity.²⁸

At the heart of this holy land, Arnold went on to observe, “the Buddha-Gaya Temple is to the Buddhist what Jerusalem and Mecca are to the Christian and the Mussulman,” and “this is the great central shrine of the Gentle Faith; the Mecca of Buddhism.”²⁹ Arnold may have been borrowing such comparisons from European travellers who used them in the previous decades to describe the Hindu holy city of Benares. In 1843, C. J. C. Davidson

had already called Benares "the Hindoo Jerusalem," and in 1870 Norman Macleod had written that "Benares is to the Hindoos what Mecca is to the Mohammedans, and what Jerusalem was to the Jews of old."³⁰

Following the publication of Arnold's very popular writings, the comparisons of the principal Indian Buddhist sites with Jerusalem and Mecca were taken up with great vigour by Victorian scholars of India and Buddhism. In his turn, the British Sanskritist, and virulent anti-Buddhist, Monier Monier-Williams (1819–99) remarked,

In truth, Buddhagaya is a kind of Buddhist Jerusalem, abounding in associations of thrilling interest not only to the followers of the Buddha, but to all who see in that spot the central focus whence radiated a system which for centuries has permeated the religious thought of the most populous regions of Eastern Asia, and influenced the creed of the majority of the human race.³¹

So, too, those late nineteenth-century scholars who actually researched the remains of ancient Buddhism, such as Laurence Austine Waddell, referred to the Indian terrain where they worked as the "Buddhist Holy Land."³² Even many twentieth-century scholars writing about Buddhist India have effortlessly referred to it as the "holy land."³³ In the late nineteenth century, such statements afforded Dharmapāla his point of departure, and he was soon penning articles with titles such as "India: The Holy Land of the Buddhists."³⁴ Writing and speaking to an international public in English, Dharmapāla began to refer to India as the "sacred land for all time to come" and the "Holy Land to the millions of Buddhists," while at its centre "Bodh Gaya is to the Buddhist what the Holy Sepulchre is to the Christians, Zion to the Jews and Mecca to the Mahommedans," a place which is the "hallowed and most interesting centre of their faith—the Mecca, the Jerusalem, of a million Oriental congregations."³⁵

Dharmapāla tapped into the European Christian historical sense of the "holy land" as a worthy object of crusade, albeit a crusade conducted in nonviolent Buddhist style: "I was engaged in India in a bloodless crusade of peace, which resulted in rescuing the sacred site [i.e., Bodh Gayā] which, like the holy sepulchre of the Christians, is held in veneration by all Buddhists."³⁶ Dharmapāla's statements, which aimed at rousing his fellow Buddhists to join this modern crusade, employed the symbolic force of the idea of a holy land in religious history as a site for investment of intense collective sentiment: "Should the Buddhists not feel for the hallowed shrine [of Bodh Gayā] with seventeen hundred years of sacred associations

with the same feeling as the Jews show to Jerusalem and the Moslems to Mecca[?]"³⁷ and further,

The Christians were expelled from Jerusalem by the Muhammadans about 700 years ago. . . . After 700 years the Christians are again in possession of their "Holy Sepulchre." The Jews have returned to Palestine after an exile of nearly seventeen centuries, and they were helped by the British Government. The Muhammadans of India are moving heaven and earth to restore Mecca to the Sultan of Turkey. . . . The fact of the matter is the Buddhists are inactive. They have not the religious enthusiasm of the Muhammadans who love Mecca, they have not the religious fervour of the Christians of England and America who spend millions to keep the Holy Sepulchre in Christian hands.³⁸

The new discourse spread. Comparisons of the ancient heart of Buddhist India with Mecca or Jerusalem had become entirely commonplace among those Westerners who knew anything about India at the turn of the twentieth century, epitomized and aided perhaps by Rudyard Kipling's reference to Bodh Gayā as the "Mecca of Buddhism" in his classic and very popular novel *Kim*, published in 1901. The discursive treatment of Indian Buddhist holy places soon moved beyond the somewhat dry comparisons with Jerusalem and Mecca to become more richly textured. Lillian Luker Ashby, the wife of a colonial administrator who resided just a few kilometres from the Mahābodhi Temple on the road to Bodh Gayā in 1907, projected the Buddhist holy site onto a perceived universal level of emotional or mystical experience, one attendant upon all people's encounters with any "holy lands":

. . . the oppressively mystic atmosphere . . . pervaded all Gaya. Visitors to other famous cites which are particularly hallowed by religious legends—Jerusalem, Glastonbury, Mecca—report being sensible of this same feeling of psychic presences, as though the confluent emanations of the concentrated meditations of the multitudes formed an overpowering current of extramundane influence.³⁹

This new and increasingly nuanced discourse, defining the Buddhist holy land and its central shrine as an object of struggle and as a site for pan-Buddhist (and, perhaps, panhuman) emotional identification, was also translated into various Asian languages and spread by way of Maha Bodhi Society propaganda organs and networks into regional Buddhist communities across Asia.

Both the shift in discourse about Buddhist India, and its international dispersal, represent something unprecedented in the history of Buddhism. These new ideas and rhetoric soon began appearing in modern Asian Buddhist writings, including those by Tibetans. For example, in a 1930s Tibetan-language work on the Buddhist holy sites published by the Maha Bodhi Society and entitled *Guide to India* (*rGya gar lam yig*), the Tibetan intellectual Amdo Gendun Chöphel addressed his rather parochial Tibetan readers with rousing passages about Hindu-occupied Bodh Gayā that were completely inspired by this new Buddhist modernist discourse. Some Tibetans back in Lhasa who read the *Guide to India* during the 1940s immediately responded to this new presentation of Buddhist India by seeking to become members of the Maha Bodhi Society.⁴⁰

The impact of this modern Buddhist discourse of India as holy land also quickly spread well beyond Asian Buddhist communities. Western travelers, participating in the growing marketplace of Asian tourism, visited sites like Bodh Gayā from the turn of the century onward and began to recycle the very same ideas and language of a Buddhist holy land, exactly as expressed by Dharmapāla in the missionary leaflets he wrote and then had distributed to visitors at the restored holy places. Foreign visitors dutifully penned them into their own internationally published travel accounts of the site. Even to the most jaded and negative of colonial correspondents, the Buddhist holy land now seemed irresistible. For example, the American travel writer and photographer, Eliza Scidmore (1856–1928), whose opening lines in her early twentieth-century account of India read “It can hardly be said with literalness that one enjoys India. . . . it proved itself, despite its colour and picturesqueness, quite as melancholy and depressing a country as I had thought it would be,” could not contain her admiration for what now appeared to be an even more important holy land than the familiar ones of the ancient Near East:

Not Jerusalem nor even Mecca is held in greater reverence by the millions of Christians and Mohammedans than is Buddha-Gaya by many more millions of Buddhists, who, inhabiting every part of Asia save India, look upon the temple at Mahabodhi as their greatest shrine.⁴¹

Indians, too, could hardly ignore the modern revival of Buddhism and its ancient sites, and the advent of a new holy land discourse that was taking place within their own country. Perhaps the most interesting reactions to these developments are found in the works of leading Hindu nationalist thinkers of the day, such as V. D. Savarkar (1883–1966), who wrote his

famous treatise *Hindutva*—which was to become something of a bible for modern Hindu nationalism—while incarcerated in Ratnagiri Jail during the early 1920s. Savarkar was acutely aware that modern Europeans and other non-Indians regarded India's ancient Buddhist past with the greatest admiration and as a high point of Indian civilization, to be compared with their own beloved holy lands to the west. Accordingly, he sought to recapture the glory of the golden age of Buddhist India on behalf of the Hindu nation. Not surprisingly, the third chapter of his *Hindutva* was devoted to subsuming Buddhism within a greater construct of Hindu history, culture, and identity. Here Savarkar stated, on behalf on hundreds of millions of his fellow Indians, "the Buddha—the Dharma—the Sangha. They are all ours,"⁴² and went on to preach widely that followers of Jainism, Buddhism, and Sikhism were all Hindus. Strikingly, Savarkar concluded *Hindutva* with the idea of India being a unique "Holyland" while using a language remarkably similar to that of Dharmapāla, but applied of course from a Hindu nationalist perspective.⁴³

Thus the emerging modern Buddhist milieu, both Indian and international, became increasingly focused upon the revived sites of the Buddha and, already by the early twentieth century, began to strongly redefine Buddhist attitudes about and practices at these sites. This was the new arena of thought and action into which Tibetan visitors to India were now inexorably drawn.

Revisiting the Modern Holy Land

Only a small trickle of Tibetan pilgrims managed to arrive at the freshly restored and excavated site of Bodh Gayā as the modern Buddhist revival was beginning there prior to 1900. The situation changed dramatically, however, following the events of 1904, when formal contacts between Tibet and the British Empire were forcibly established by way of Lord Curzon's dispatch of a military mission to Lhasa, the so-called Younghusband Expedition. Both Lord Curzon and his representative Francis Younghusband (1863–1942) wanted to extend British influence into Tibet in order to indicate clearly to the Russians that when it came to the "Great Game" between the colonial powers in Central Asia, the Tibetan plateau was under their influence. Tibet's complete failure to engage in diplomatic relations, as well as minor border disputes and trade interests, also played a role in both precipitating and justifying the mission to Lhasa.

The ensuing post-1904 relationship between British India and Tibet, which was mostly of a political and economic rather than cultural or

religious nature, was encouraged and reached a peak during the middle of the highly eventful reign of the Thirteenth Dalai Lama, as part of his brief and highly contested attempt to begin modernizing Tibet. The Dalai Lama's more outward-looking policy initiatives opened Tibet up to India in unprecedented ways, although his efforts were challenged at every turn by a highly conservative and self-interested faction of powerful Tibetan Buddhist clerics and monastic institutions. The result was that modern colonial India once again became an accessible holy land, and now Tibetan pilgrimage travel was more possible and far easier than ever before.

The post-1904 era witnessed a complete reversal of the rigorous Qing travel restrictions placed upon Tibetans wanting to go to India. Eventually formalized through the introduction of various treaties and agreements, the new laws permitted and sometimes facilitated the mutual flow of pilgrims between Tibet and India.⁴⁴ Within only a few years of the Younghusband Expedition, certain British border officials were already trying to promote Indian pilgrimage to the Mount Kailash region of western Tibet, with an open policy for Tibetan visits in the opposite direction to India.⁴⁵ This new liberality toward cross-border travel was enthusiastically embraced in Tibet, and rapidly increasing numbers of Tibetan pilgrims—more than at any earlier time—flocked to India throughout the first half of the twentieth century. In chapter 10 we will look at how Tibetan pilgrims from all possible social backgrounds were now fairly easily able to travel around India. Among this new mass of visitors, there were also a few totally unprecedented pilgrimages. For the first time in Tibetan history, Tibet's highest-ranking religiopolitical leaders, the Dalai Lama and the Panchen Lama, were able to personally visit the ancient holy sites of the Buddha. The visits by the Sixth Panchen Lama, Chökyi Nyima (1883–1937), and the Thirteenth Dalai Lama are worthy of careful investigation here. They illustrate how a developing group of Asian Buddhist modernists, those who were intimately associated with the missionary revival of the Buddha's holy places in India, attempted to draw the religious elite of early twentieth-century Tibet into their particular discourses and activities.

The Panchen Lama in India

During December 1905 and January 1906, the Sixth Panchen Lama performed a pilgrimage to Buddhist sites in India. It was a pilgrimage the likes of which no other Tibetan visitor to India had ever experienced before because it was so distinctly modern. Not only was the entire journey undertaken by first-class rail travel, it also included sites whose identification

and accessibility had been totally determined by modern oriental scholarship, on the one hand, and whose status was being contested by Buddhist activists in terms of modern politicized identities, on the other.

The unprecedented visit to the Buddha's ancient holy places by one of the highest religious figures resident in Tibet took place against a complex political background. The Panchen Lama's visit was the result of an invitation by the British colonial government in India. The Younghusband Expedition to Lhasa had led directly to the exile of the Dalai Lama to Mongolia in 1904, leaving a power vacuum in Tibet. Now the British wished to court the Panchen Lama politically.

Officially, the Panchen's invitation to India was to meet the Prince and Princess of Wales during their royal visit to Calcutta from December 29, 1905, to January 6, 1906. The Panchen Lama was one among an elite group of distinguished guests drawn from the politically significant nobility of the Himalayan frontier states. The idea of including the Panchen in this context apparently first came from the *de facto* British representative in Tibet at the time, Captain Frederick O'Connor (1870–1943), who served as the first British trade agent then stationed in Gyantse, and his senior, the political officer in Sikkim, John Claude White (1853–1918). White later wrote of the Panchen that “if possible he should be induced to pay a visit to India at this particular juncture.”⁴⁶ It is clear the British intended to use the prospect of pilgrimage to the Buddhist holy places as a lure to secure the Panchen's acceptance of the invitation, and perhaps also as a necessary “religious cover” for what other parties would undoubtedly consider as a political visit. White recorded in his memoir of the invitation process that the Panchen would be tempted by the opportunity which the visit presented for going to the Buddhist shrines, and he explicitly instructed O'Connor to prompt the Panchen Lama with this idea by asking him “if he intends, and would like to visit Bodh Gaya.”⁴⁷

Due to the continuing Chinese imperial interference in Tibetan affairs at the time, such a visit to India was certain to cause a negative reaction from Peking, and the Panchen duly received a serious censure from the Chinese emperor.⁴⁸ While in India, the Panchen must have been worried not only about the Chinese response but also about the hostility of the Lhasa government, because he appealed directly to the newly appointed viceroy of India, the Earl of Minto (1845–1914), for protection from both Peking and Lhasa, even explicitly requesting the loan of modern weapons for self-defence on his return journey, a request which was declined.⁴⁹ Given the fraught political context, it is not surprising that British officials arranged for the Panchen to spend most of his first month in India visiting

Buddhist holy places, with his participation in the major political ceremonies at Calcutta only occurring at the very end of his stay.⁵⁰

The Panchen Lama descended to the plains of India on December 2, 1905, and spent the next twenty-three days touring the ancient Indian Buddhist sites of Taxila, Sārnāth, and Bodh Gayā, with other visits en route to Rawalpindi, Agra, and Benares. This was no humble religious journey however. It had more the character of a state visit, for the Panchen had set out from Tibet with a retinue of at least three hundred persons after initially requesting that a thousand be included in his entourage. More than sixty of his party—mainly highly ranked monastic and lay officials from Tashilhunpo, plus supporting staff—accompanied him to visit the Buddhist sites.⁵¹ The large Tibetan pilgrimage party was also attended upon at all times by a team of British colonial officers and their indigenous staff. The entire party travelled throughout the subcontinent on the modern Indian railway system in special trains dedicated to this elite pilgrimage event.

Educating the Panchen

The available accounts make clear that, in addition to occasional political ceremonies and touristic interludes en route, the Panchen Lama himself treated the journey to the ancient Buddhist holy places as a very important religious event during which he could both personally worship at the sites of ancient Buddhism and perform various Tibetan Buddhist rituals there for other purposes. This was, after all, exactly the type of experience that the British officials had hoped to be able to offer the Panchen in India as part of their bigger plan to gain his trust and influence him. However, the British also sought to augment the self-determined Tibetan Buddhist religious content of the visit with a supplement of the products of colonial knowledge gathering, specifically in the form of an introduction to monumental archaeology and modern Buddhist studies. A Bengali scholar of Buddhism and one of the pioneering Indian scholars of Tibetan studies, Satis Chandra Vidyabhusan (1870–1920),⁵² was deputed by the Government of India to attend on the Panchen Lama throughout his entire pilgrimage tour. Satis Chandra Vidyabhusan, who at the time was professor of Sanskrit and Pāli at the Presidency College in Calcutta, was one of a new breed of educated modern Indian Buddhists and a member of the recently formed Indian Neo-Buddhist community in Calcutta, the Bauddha Dharmankura Sabha. His prime duty on the pilgrimage tour was “to accompany the Lama during his tour in the capacity of expert archaeological advisor regarding Buddhist shrines and sacred lore.”⁵³

The Bengali scholar introduced the Panchen Lama and his retinue to sites that no Tibetan had ever previously visited and of which few had even been aware prior to that time. For instance, they went to the excavated ruins of Taxila or Takṣaśilā, the principal town of ancient Gandhāra. Takṣaśilā had remained obscure in Tibetan Buddhist cultural history since little more than its name—Donchokyül in Tibetan—was known from a few translated Buddhist texts, and thus it was never even mentioned in the traditional Tibetan discussions of India. Like so many other ancient Buddhist sites, Takṣaśilā had disappeared into oblivion beneath the Indian topsoil long before the Tibetans became Buddhist pilgrims to India. The reemergence of Takṣaśilā back into modern Buddhist historical consciousness was due to the particular form of monumental archaeology practiced by Alexander Cunningham and his colonial colleagues, who resorted extensively to nineteenth-century European translations of early Chinese Buddhist pilgrims' itineraries and accounts in order to relocate and excavate this and many other ancient Buddhist sites. Frederick O'Connor, the Panchen's principal British escort in India, reported of Satis Chandra Vidyabhusan's presentation of Buddhist Takṣaśilā to the Tibetans that, "the Lama and his higher monk officials were greatly interested in it all. . . . They examined the place carefully."⁵⁴ The Bengali scholar's presentation itself was drawn wholesale from the works of Alexander Cunningham and Samuel Beal as well as from other texts that represented the state of the art of modern Buddhist studies in India at the time.⁵⁵ Many of the stories of the sites at Takṣaśilā that Satis Chandra Vidyabhusan related to the Tibetans were unique to the Chinese pilgrims' accounts and not found in older Buddhist canonical texts. Similarly, his detailed interpretations—all drawn uncritically from the same sources—of places that were already familiar to and had long been worshipped by the Tibetans, such as Sārnāth and Bodh Gayā, added a great deal about these places which was heretofore unknown in the history of Tibetan Buddhism. Satis Chandra Vidyabhusan thus initiated the Tibetans into a thoroughly modern reconstruction of Buddhist India purely by way of the contemporary scholarship of an emerging and European-dominated Buddhist studies.

The modern reeducation of the Panchen Lama concerning the Buddhist nature of these ancient Indian sites was not something he and his fellow Tibetans were indifferent to. Indeed, the often speculative interpretations offered by Satis Chandra Vidyabhusan created new ritual precedents. For example, the most famous Buddhist association with the site of Sārnāth is as the location of the first teachings given by the Buddha to his initial five disciples. The exact traditional location of this event is unknown and, in

any case, certainly remains a moot point from the perspective of scientific archaeology.⁵⁶ Nevertheless, early Buddhist pilgrims and modern scholars alike have identified it with the third-century BCE Mauryan-era pillar erected at the site.⁵⁷ However, when the Panchen Lama visited Sārnāth on December 16, 1905, Satis Chandra Vidyabhusan immediately focused the Tibetans' attention on the least ancient of all the monuments at the site, the so-called Dhamek *stūpa*, an octagonal tower of the Gupta era or perhaps an even later period, and explained carefully that this was the exact spot where the Buddha initially preached a Buddhist sermon to his first five disciples.⁵⁸ As a demonstration of how very receptive the Panchen Lama was to this newly acquired information, he made an immediate and elaborate ritual response:

Around this tower, stupa or choi-ten, the Tashi Lama [i.e., Panchen Lama] burnt five maunds [= ca. 165 kg]⁵⁹ of clarified butter, lighted nearly 500 lamps, scattered flowers and tormacakes [*sic*] in abundance and uttered prayers in adoration of Buddha for more than an hour. After walking around the tower several times, the Tashi Lama assumed the form of Buddha [sitting cross-legged on the ground] and lamas and laymen worshipped him instead of the tower.⁶⁰

This was the young and rather inexperienced Panchen's first public ritual initiative outside of his native Tibetan environment, and he certainly rose to the occasion. Moreover, the Panchen's party also began practicing their own Tibetan-style Buddhist rituals at the site, traditions that the conservative Anagarika Dharmapāla and his sanitized modern form of Maha Bodhi Society Buddhism would probably not have countenanced. In a fascinating detail from a Tibetan eyewitness account of these same ritual events at Sārnāth, it was reported that during the proceedings in front of the Panchen,

The Tibetans now recited this prayer, "As the end of the 724 year long era nears, Pan-chen bLa-ma in a terrifying incarnation will subdue the army of savages. From this moment on religion will flourish in the stable Kingdom of Tibet!"⁶¹

This is a direct reference to popular Tibetan beliefs at the time that the Sixth Panchen Lama embodied the Shambhala king in the millenarian-style prophecy of the *Kālacakra-tantra*.⁶² As is well known, the Panchen himself eventually went on to stage the first series of mass, public performances of the "Great Kālacakra Initiation" (or Dukor Wangchen in Ti-

betan) outside of Tibet, holding spectacular ceremonies between 1928 and 1932 before audiences of up to a hundred thousand persons in China and Inner Mongolia.⁶³ As we will see in chapter 11, the present Dalai Lama has continued the extensive public performance of Dukor Wangchen around the world including, most importantly, the holy places of the Buddha in India.

The Panchen Lama's acceptance of Satis Chandra Vidyabhusan's identification of the Dhamek tower as the site of the Buddha's first sermon was also highly significant and typical of the way in which acceptance of colonial archaeology helped to shape new Tibetan pilgrimage traditions during the twentieth century. In making his identification, Satis Chandra Vidyabhusan was faithfully following a unique speculation he had read in the works of Alexander Cunningham.⁶⁴ No traditional Tibetan Buddhist had ever attempted to identify the exact spot of the Buddha's first sermon at Sārnāth, but a new identification, albeit modern and speculative, was now proposed and accepted. Still today, as I myself have observed at Sārnāth, a great many Tibetan pilgrims worship the Dhamek *stūpa* as the "holy place of the turning of the Dharmacakra."⁶⁵

The Panchen and the Politics of Buddhist Modernism

From Sārnāth the Panchen Lama's pilgrimage party proceeded to Bodh Gayā, and it was there, at the most important of all Indian Buddhist holy places, that the Panchen first became enmeshed in the prickly politics of Buddhist modernism. Although it had recently become the focus of a modern Buddhist revival, Bodh Gayā had also been a popular Hindu place of pilgrimage for many centuries, and its Mahābodhi Temple complex was still firmly under the official control of the Giri sect of Śaiva renunciates, specifically the resident Mahant or abbot who administered the site. For Anagarika Dharmapāla and his Maha Bodhi Society activists, who sought with considerable determination to regain Buddhist control of the site, the incumbent Śaiva Mahant had come to embody the "Hindu enemy" of the Buddhists.⁶⁶ The pages of the Maha Bodhi Society's journals and their pamphlets offered their fair share of vitriol directed against the Mahant of Bodh Gayā. It was, however—and much to the chagrin of the Maha Bodhi Society—the then incumbent Mahant, Krishna Dayal Giri, who had been officially informed by the colonial authorities about the impending visit of the Panchen Lama to Bodh Gayā. Realizing the implications of this event, the Mahant had staged a tremendous ceremonial welcome for the Tibetans when they arrived on the nineteenth of December, a welcome that was

complete with a local Indian band, a crowded procession of Hindu ascetics and priests, elephants, and a silver sedan chair to transport the Panchen Lama himself. The Mahant lodged the Tibetans in style in his guesthouse and facilitated their religious intentions at Bodh Gayā over the following days. The Panchen and his Tibetan party proceeded to make enormous ritual offerings at the site.⁶⁷

The proceedings took a different turn when, on December 21, a Sinhalese representative of the Maha Bodhi Society, Mudaliyar Gunavardhana, and the Society's resident Buddhist monk at Bodh Gayā, Bhikkhu Suman-gala Swami, met with the Panchen Lama and with other members of his party, particularly the young Maharaj Kumar of Sikkim, Sikyong Namgyal Tulku (1879–1914), and the ranking British official, Captain Frederick O'Connor. The Maha Bodhi Society representatives then actively sought to usurp the role played by the Mahant and to undermine any favourable impressions he may have made upon the Tibetan visitors. To this end, they made petitions to the Panchen's party concerning the "precarious" Buddhist status of Bodh Gayā, about which, it appears, the Tibetans themselves had no particular knowledge or interest at the time. The Maha Bodhi Society reported these developments to its members in the following, somewhat gloating, manner:

[Mudaliyar Gunavardhana and Sumangala Swami] brought to the notice of the Sikkim prince, the grievances of the Buddhists and pointed out the [Hindu] marks of desecration painted on the forehead of the Central Image of the Buddha inside the sanctuary. The Tashi [i.e., Panchen] Lama's party then opened their eyes and Captain O'Connor was then summoned and the very unpleasant state of affairs revealed to him. He laid the grievances of the Buddhists before the Tashi Lama and measures were then taken by His Holiness to prevent a recurrence of the desecration. The costly gifts that were brought to the Shrine to be offered were removed from the Altar as soon as the Tibetans came to know of the tactics of the Saivite Mahant. He expected a certificate from His Holiness certifying that he had shown all attention to the Tashi Lama's party; but he was disappointed. The Saivite priest failed in his diplomatic game.⁶⁸

To round off their counteraction, Mudaliyar Gunavardhana and Sumangala Swami then presented gifts from the Maha Bodhi Society to the Panchen Lama, including a copy of Anagarika Dharmapāla's photograph and "holy relics and the golden jewel of the Maha-Bodhi."⁶⁹ The first link between

the Tibetan Buddhist elite and the often confrontational politics of Buddhist modernism in India had been forged.

The instrumentalization of the Panchen's visit at Bodh Gayā by the Maha Bodhi Society was not viewed well by other influential parties at the time, especially those who favoured a more cautious and diplomatic approach. John Claude White considered the events at Bodh Gayā to have been unfortunate: "I am sorry to say, the Tashi Lama while there, owing to want of sound advice, made some grave mistakes and succeeded in alienating the sympathy of the Mohunt and the Hindus, the last thing to be desired, as the Buddhists are very anxious to have the shrine again in their own hands."⁷⁰ The same view was apparently shared by some members of the Tibetan Buddhist elite from the Himalayan states who also visited Bodh Gayā shortly afterward, following their own participation in the royal visit to Calcutta. Ugyen Wangchuk (1862–1926), the then Tongsa Pönlop who would shortly thereafter become the first King of Bhutan, visited Bodh Gayā just after the Panchen and considered that "it was folly to quarrel with the Hindus."⁷¹

Departing Bodh Gayā on December 25, the Panchen Lama's large pilgrimage party then travelled directly to Calcutta, where they stayed a further seventeen days. The British ensured that the Tibetans' visit to Calcutta was full of the appropriate level of grand political pomp and ceremony, plus the interest and novelty of Calcutta's modern attractions, including visits to horse races at the Maidan, and the Zoo, the Monument, the Indian Museum, the Kidderpore Docks, and long motorcar rides through the electrically lit city streets. And it was here, at the heart of the British Raj, that the Panchen Lama and some of his high officials became personally engaged in the growing Buddhist modernist revival project that was focused upon the ancient Indian holy places of the Buddha.

The Buddhist Shrines Restoration Society

The turn-of-the-century Calcutta which the Panchen Lama visited was not only the centre of British colonial power in South Asia, it was also the centre of new developments in modern Indian—and especially Bengali—intellectual and religious culture. These new developments included the early flourishing of Buddhist modernism in India. It was also a milieu in which connections—both real and imagined—with Tibetans and their Buddhism were already a fact of life.

Although the Buddhist activist Anagarika Dharmapāla had originally founded his Maha Bodhi Society in Ceylon in May 1891, exactly one year

later the Maha Bodhi Society of India was established in Calcutta, with Dharmapāla acting as its secretary. The first president of the new Indian chapter was Sir Asutosh Mookerjee (1864–1924), a distinguished Bengali educationalist and jurist who, at the time of the Panchen Lama's visit, was one of the governors of Calcutta University and a judge at the Calcutta High Court.⁷² The new Buddhist organization quickly attracted the attention of other elite members of educated Bengali society as well as that of some European residents of Calcutta. The Maha Bodhi Society president at the time of the Panchen Lama's visit to Calcutta was Norendra Nath Sen, an editor of the *Indian Mirror* (Calcutta) who was himself a Buddhist Theosophist and close follower of Helena Blavatsky, one of the founders of the Theosophical Society. Norendra Nath Sen was present during Blavatsky's alleged contacts with the "Mahatmas," a group of disembodied spiritual masters closely associated with Tibet and whom she claimed as her mystical inspiration. Sen had even published reports in the *Indian Mirror* about the Tibetan Mahatmas, including the text of one of the mysterious self-manifesting letters from Blavatsky's main master, Koot Hoomi (alias "K. H."), whose signature was followed by "some writing in the Tibetan language."⁷³ In one of her blatant frauds, which were all later exposed, Blavatsky even claimed to have received training in occult sciences from the master Koot Hoomi while living with him for two years near the Panchen Lama's monastery of Tashilhunpo.⁷⁴

Simultaneous with the origins of the Maha Bodhi Society, a different Indian Neo-Buddhist organization, the Bauddha Dharmankura Sabha (later the Bengal Buddhist Association), was founded in Calcutta in 1891. This was the work of Kripasharan Mahasthavir or Mahathero (1865–1927), a Buddhist monk and missionary from the Chittagong Hill Tracts in far eastern Bengal. Kripasharan Mahasthavir was educated within the Sangharaja Nikaya community, a Sinhalese-inspired Theravāda Buddhist revival movement which began in late nineteenth-century Arākān, and which he helped spread into Bengal and other parts of India.⁷⁵ In 1903 the group opened the first modern Buddhist temple in Calcutta, the Bauddha Dharmankura Vihara in Kapalitola.⁷⁶ By the time of the Panchen Lama's visit, the Bauddha Dharmankura Sabha had, along with the Maha Bodhi Society of India, attracted a similar (often identical) following of elite Indian and European participants. One leading member of the Bauddha Dharmankura Sabha was Satis Chandra Vidyabhusan, the Panchen Lama's personal scholarly guide to monumental archaeology and modern Buddhist studies throughout his Indian pilgrimage.

Although Satis Chandra Vidyabhusan was a scholar skilled in Tibetan

language, he was mainly the product of a growing, late nineteenth-century Bengali interest in the translation and study of Buddhism from Pāli texts, one that overlapped strongly with emerging Buddhist modernism and European Buddhist studies. In 1892, he founded the Buddhist Text Society in Calcutta in collaboration with a group whose members included the famous Bengali scholar of Tibetan studies, Sarat Chandra Das (1849–1917),⁷⁷ and the pioneering Sanskritist of the Asiatic Society, scholar of early Buddhist remains and educationalist Rajendralal Mitra (1823/24–1891).⁷⁸ These individuals maintained close contacts with leading European orientalisks of the day and were inspired by the earlier foundation of the Pāli Text Society in London at the instigation of the British orientalist Thomas William Rhys Davids (1843–1922) in 1881. One of Satis Chandra Vidyabhusan's senior contemporaries, the well-known poet Sarvananda Barua (1866–1908), who worked in Pāli and Bangla, composed the *Jagatjyoti Kavya*, a work closely based upon Edwin Arnold's highly influential nineteenth-century life of the Buddha, *The Light of Asia*. Satis Chandra Vidyabhusan studied Pāli but also literary Tibetan and became, along with Sarat Chandra Das, one of the first Indian Tibetologists. He in fact greatly assisted Das in the production of his well-known *Tibetan-English Dictionary*, first published in 1902, to which he added many of the Sanskrit entries together with English glosses.⁷⁹

Given the existence of the developing modern Calcutta Buddhist establishment that we have just sketched above, it will not be surprising to learn that on Sunday, December 31, 1905, the Panchen Lama was hosted as the guest of honour at a special joint meeting of the Bauddha Dharmankura Sabha and the Maha Bodhi Society, held at the Bauddha Dharmankura Vihara in Kapalitola. The list of Asian and European guests present at this meeting reads like a small *Who's Who* of the elite of Calcutta's Buddhist revivalist and Buddhist modernist scene at the time.⁸⁰ An address by the Calcutta Buddhists and their supporters, which was written in Tibetan, was read out to the Panchen Lama and then translated into English for the benefit of the non-Tibetan audience. This address was a very eloquent appeal to the Panchen to become the spiritual leader of the modern Indian Buddhist revival, the essence of which stated:

We avail ourselves of this grand opportunity, which we regard as a piece of rare good fortune, to welcome Your Holiness in all gladness, as the other leaders of our Religion have already done, acknowledging Your Holiness to be the religious head of the Buddhists of India. . . . It is true that in former ages India, the native land of Buddhism, attained univer-

sal celebrity through the splendour of that Religion, yet, at the present day, Tibet is the only country where it flourishes in its pristine glory, and it is in Tibet that the light of its future hope may be justly said to shine. . . . At its present crisis Buddhism has found in the person of Your Holiness such a leader [as Aśoka], and we are proud to affirm that every Buddhist heart rejoices in the hope that the time is not far distant when our Religion will be reorganized and restored to its former glory.⁸¹

While the Panchen Lama appears to have politely accepted these honours, there is no indication that he in any way intended to become the head of the new Indian Buddhist church. Nevertheless, the Panchen was being carefully set up. A series of Buddhist activist meetings and private interviews with the Panchen followed in quick succession on January 7, 9, and 10, during which the Panchen was positioned by the Calcutta Buddhists to intervene on their behalf at the highest levels of the colonial government.⁸² As a first result of these encounters, a new organization by the name of the Buddhist Shrines Restoration Society was established on January 9. Its officers comprised a collection of Buddhist revivalists from India and other Asian countries, influential Tibetan Buddhists from the Himalayan states, Government of India officials, and the Panchen or "Tashi" Lama and leading members of his entourage in India. It is worth presenting the truly unique and cosmopolitan composition of the Central Committee of the Buddhist Shrines Restoration Society here in its original form (with additional identifications in brackets):⁸³

Patron: His Holiness the Maharaja of Sikkim

President: His Holiness the Tashi Lama

Vice-President: His Highness the Maharaj Kumar
of Sikkim, Sid Kyong Tulku

Three Honorary Advisors:

Captain W. F. O'Connor, C.I.E., Political Department
Lieutenant-Colonel Phillott, Secretary to Board
of Examiners, Calcutta
W. Garth, Esq., Barrister-at Law, Calcutta

Two Resident Secretaries:

Mahamahopadhyaya Satis Chandra Vidyabhusana, M.A., of Calcutta
Mr. Dawa Samdup [Maha Bodhi Society Resident
Secretary] of Gangtok

Treasurer: Mr. J. Chapman, Calcutta

Working Members:

Babu Norendra Nath Sen of Calcutta

Reverend Kripasarasa Bhikkhu of Chittagong

Mr. M. H. Oung, Burma

Kaji Jerung, Dewan of Sikkim

Lobzang Choden, Rai Sahib of Gangtok

K. Sempa [later Maha Bodhi Society Resident Secretary] of Darjeeling

Major O. Hayashi [Military Attaché] of Japan

Nomipaen Yonjin Rinpoche [Senior Tutor to the Panchen Lama]
of Tibet

Kazi Ugyen [Liaison Officer] of Bhutan

Lama Shabdrung [Tibetan Clerk to the British Trade
Agent, Gyantse] of Tibet

Dr. N. Annandale and others.

Many of the names of the committee members are recognizable as persons involved with both the contemporary Bauddha Dharmankura Sabha and the Maha Bodhi Society. In light of this, we might ask what was the need for a third, new Buddhist organization? For one thing, both of the existing Indian Buddhist revival organizations based in Calcutta at the time were avowedly missionary in terms of their objectives. The Buddhist Shrines Restoration Society, on the other hand, was unique in that it was the first such Indian organization solely dedicated to the welfare of the Buddhist holy places and facilitation of pilgrimage to them. The formal objectives of the Buddhist Shrines Restoration Society were listed as follows:

... to look after and concern itself generally with all shrines and localities considered sacred and important by reason of being associated with the holy name of Lord Buddha; to take steps for the upkeep and proper custody of such as have fallen into neglect or are being improperly used; to create facilities for Buddhist pilgrims and students where such do not already exist; to improve existing facilities where there is room for improvement; to arrange for proper forms of ceremonial and embellishment in such manner as is deemed desirable.⁸⁴

The first and primary objective listed here, concerning "all shrines and localities considered sacred and important by reason of being associated with the holy name of Lord Buddha," was indicative of significant

new challenges that Buddhist modernism, with its basis in monumental archaeology and European orientalist studies, presented to traditional Tibetan Buddhist knowledge and practice during the early twentieth century. Indian and other Asian and European Buddhists of the day all accepted without question that the site of the Buddha's death, Kuśinagar, was that which had been carefully excavated near Gorakhpur in the United Provinces. This site had already become famous in early Indian Neo-Buddhist circles by way of the actions of a travelling Bihari wrestler by the name of Mahavira. He became the first Hindu to be ordained as a Buddhist monk. Mahavira settled at Kuśinagar in 1891, initially establishing a pilgrims' rest house and then erecting the first modern Vihara of the Indian Buddhist revival at the site in 1902.⁸⁵ The Tibetan's alternative traditions about Kuśinagar being in Assam had suddenly become absolutely inadmissible in modern India. Similarly, many other places that had become incorporated into the Tibetan understanding of India as a holy land of Buddhism were also equally invalid in terms of the "map" of Buddhist India now being promoted in the modern Buddhist revival context. Just how some twentieth-century Tibetans reacted to such challenges will be discussed in the following chapter, although, if the Panchen and his followers felt challenged at the time, I have found no indication of this.

Following the fact of its establishment, the Buddhist Shrines Restoration Society has left surprisingly little trace in the historical records. Its first—and perhaps only—major act occurred on January 10, 1906, the day immediately after its foundation, with its newly appointed Tibetan president, the Panchen Lama, taking centre stage. At its inaugural meeting on January 9, a petition about neglect of the Buddhist holy places had been drafted in order to be presented to the lieutenant-governor in Calcutta. On the morning of the tenth, the Panchen's last day in Calcutta, he was first visited by members of the Buddhist Shrines Restoration Society and other Buddhist followers and then immediately proceeded to Government House for his only private interview with the viceroy of India, Lord Minto. Following the interview, the viceroy recorded that:

At the close of the interview the Lama referred to Buddh Gaya, and asked me to try and improve the conditions there, in order that the worship of Buddhist pilgrims at the temple might be facilitated.⁸⁶

It is very difficult to estimate whether or not the Buddhist Shrines Restoration Society had any effect on the Buddhist holy sites of India. One can only note that all of the functions stated in its objectives were in fact real-

ized by the Maha Bodhi Society of India, along with the work of various individual Asian Buddhist missions—from Burma, Japan, Ceylon, and so on—whose members also established their presence at the main holy sites of the Buddha.

Whatever the Buddhist Shrines Restoration Society may or may not have achieved, it certainly served as a conduit for drawing other members of the Tibetan Buddhist elite into the religious and political arena established by the Buddhist modernists in India. A good example of this is the young Maharaj Kumar of Sikkim, Sikyong Namgyal Tulku. He was a recognized Tibetan Buddhist incarnate lama and had accompanied the Panchen on his pilgrimage around India; he later became vice-president of the Buddhist Shrines Restoration Society. Sikyong Namgyal had already been identified by the British as the successor to the throne of Sikkim, and they had begun to intensively cultivate him for political purposes.⁸⁷ As part of the carefully orchestrated British induction of Sikyong Namgyal into their sphere of influence, the British government sponsored him on a world tour during 1908, in the company of Frederick O'Connor. On this tour he addressed large audiences of Buddhists in Japan and Burma about the mission of the Buddhist Shrines Restoration Society in India.⁸⁸ Then, while visiting China, Sikyong Namgyal was able to meet the Thirteenth Dalai Lama, who was at the time in Peking as part of his exile from Tibet in the wake of the Younghusband Expedition. The young incarnate lama of Sikkim personally introduced the Dalai Lama to the Buddhist campaign concerning the contested status of Bodh Gayā. This was the first recorded contact between the Dalai Lama and the Buddhist modernist movement beginning to flourish in India. During his meetings with the young and enthusiastic Sikyong Namgyal, the Dalai Lama was intensely curious to learn about the Panchen Lama's visit to India. O'Connor, an eyewitness to their conversations, reported that "the [Dalai] Lama particularly wished to know whether the Tashi Lama obtained any influence over the Buddhists or Buddhist sympathizers in India."⁸⁹

When Sikyong Namgyal finally became the Maharaj of Sikkim in February 1914, he promptly demonstrated his true credentials as a Buddhist modernist. He invited a Theravādin missionary monk, Kali Kumar, from India, in an attempt to introduce and spread a more "orthodox" and rational style of Buddhism in place of the traditional Tibetan Buddhism then prevalent in Sikkim, with all its sophisticated ritual, cosmological, and social dimensions. Sikyong Namgyal's religious reforms were intended to go hand in hand with wider administrative and social transformations he had planned for Sikkim, especially of the monopoly over land holdings and

trade enjoyed by both the Kazi class of aristocratic landlords and the monasteries.⁹⁰ These attempts, however, were all short-lived. Following the sudden death of the young ruler in late December of 1914, the Indian missionaries were evicted and their modern Buddhist reforms abolished.⁹¹

Having performed his first and last active duty as president of the Buddhist Shrines Restoration Society on January 10, 1906, the Panchen Lama departed the following day for Tibet, where a particularly charged and turbulent political future awaited him, one that ensured he would never again be able to return to India. The Panchen and many members of his large entourage certainly carried back to Tibet with them some insight into a newly emerging modern system of knowledge about Buddhist India as a holy land. The visit to India also appears to have left a deep personal impression upon the young Panchen Lama.⁹²

The Dalai Lama's First Brush with Archaeology

The instability that marked Tibetan political history during the early decades of the twentieth century also led, just a few years after the Panchen Lama's visit, to another unprecedented Tibetan pilgrimage to India. During February 1911, the Thirteenth Dalai Lama was also able to visit many of the main sites of the Buddha's life in India, being the first incumbent Tibetan head of state ever to do so. His itinerary included the town of Gayā, the Bodh Gayā Mahābodhi Temple, the nearby Nairāṇjanā River and charnel ground of Śītavana, and also Lumbinī, Kuśinagar, Rājgir, Sārṇāth, and Vārāṇasī.⁹³

The Dalai Lama's opportunity to visit these places was in fact purely coincidental and due to the Tibetan leader's hopeless political circumstances at the time. On the one hand, the Dalai Lama, who had been exiled from 1904 to 1909 in Mongolia and China due to the Younghusband Expedition, had just been forced into a second exile in India following the Chinese occupation of Lhasa in 1910, and he strongly desired to return to Tibet as soon as possible. On the other hand, once in India he was also the effective hostage of the colonial government of India. At the time, the British neither wanted him to return to Tibet nor would they offer him any assistance against the Chinese. While in India the Dalai Lama was secretly shadowed at all times by British agents, and, with the exception of a brief official visit to Calcutta, his pilgrimage to the sites of the Buddha was the only major excursion he made—and indeed was permitted to make—away from his Himalayan exile bases at Darjeeling and Kalimpong.⁹⁴ In a sense,

this pilgrimage was one of the only options he had for finding any virtue in a difficult situation.

According to the Dalai Lama's British confidant and biographer, Charles Bell (1870–1945), the Tibetan leader had very little actual interest in or even knowledge about India itself at the time of his exile. He knew of course that it was the holy land of Buddhist origins but apparently not much more than that. Once during the Dalai Lama's exile in Darjeeling, which was at that time a part of Bengal, Bell, who was fluent in Tibetan, was questioned directly by the Dalai Lama, who asked "Where is Bengal? We read this and other such names in our books, but we do not know where the countries are," and Bell noted that "The Court Physician was in the room when the Dalai Lama said this to me, and hastened to join in the admission of ignorance."⁹⁵ These impressions of general ignorance about India appear to be accurate in the light of other information we have of the Dalai Lama's activities during his visit there.

Being in India under completely different conditions than those enjoyed by the Panchen Lama before him, the nature of the Dalai Lama's connections and engagement with the modern Indian Buddhist revival milieu were accordingly dissimilar. He had in fact nothing to do with the activism and politics that the Panchen had been drawn into, and he focused instead upon the revived importance of the Buddha's relics.

It is very well known that relics of the Buddha and their worship have continued to function as a central feature of the Buddhist cult since early in the history of its development.⁹⁶ Indeed, most Buddhist pilgrimage can be thought of in essence as a particular if often rather attenuated mode of relic worship. The cult of relics of the Buddha has spread, in various forms, well beyond India to all parts of Asia, including Tibet. While there are different categories of relics recognized by various Buddhist cultures, such as the Tibetans,⁹⁷ it is the claimed corporeal remains (*śarīra*, *dhātu*) of the Buddha Śākyamuni himself that are regarded as having the highest ritual status. The primary importance of such relics is universally recognized by Buddhist communities, and thus they constitute at least one "common currency" which all Buddhists accept.

During the modern revival of Buddhism in India, claimed relics of the Buddha came to play a key role in the development of a new Buddhist ritual culture there, some dimensions of which will be discussed below and in chapter 10. General presentations of Buddhist modernism usually stress its eschewal of ritual, although this is somewhat inaccurate. Along with pilgrimages and processions, the emphasis placed upon the cult of relics

represents an interesting exception to the more “rational” Buddhist modernist or Protestant Buddhist reformulation of religion in terms of the centrality of meditation, philosophy, psychology, and morality, and the general suspicion about and rejection of ritual. On the one hand, relic worship was known to have been a common aspect of the ancient Buddhist cult, and thus in the eyes of the Buddhist modernists it represented a return to the pure roots of an imagined “original” Buddhist practice. On the other hand, the revived role of relics was undoubtedly, at least in part, another by-product of the works of monumental archaeology. During the course of scientific excavations of Buddhist sites throughout the nineteenth and early twentieth centuries, various relic deposits emerged back into the light of day after millennia of burial. Thus, reputed Buddha relics suddenly came back into circulation within society and were available to be deployed ritually and politically by those who gained control over them. Viewed from a strict historical and archaeological perspective, the existence of actual bodily relics of the Buddha will always be a moot point, although in general Buddhists have readily and uncritically accepted a great many claims made about their existence and authenticity. For Buddhist modernists, claimed Buddha relics that were systematically excavated by archaeologists at sites accepted as those of ancient Buddhism were associated with an aura of scientific rationalism. Their authenticity was believed “scientifically proven” beyond dispute, and therefore they became highly acceptable *sacra* for use in a modern Buddhist cult. The pioneer Buddhist modernist and revivalist Anagarika Dharmapāla became one of the great twentieth-century exponents of the modern cult of Buddha relics.

The Thirteenth Dalai Lama had in fact been in the sights of the Buddhist modernists even prior to the Panchen Lama’s visit to India in 1905. Anagarika Dharmapāla was himself attracted to Tibet and its Buddhism, probably due to the influence of his Theosophical mentor, Helena Blavatsky, and her Tibet-related spiritualist fantasies. Dharmapāla was in any case a very effective and strategic activist, and courting Tibetan Buddhist support for his fledgling Buddhist revival movement was a necessary step. As early as 1892, Dharmapāla attempted his first contact with the Dalai Lama, and he did this by deploying Buddha relics. He presented a relic of the Buddha housed in an ancient ivory *dagoba* to the Tibetan Buddhist community in Darjeeling and requested that it be sent onward to Lhasa as a gift to the Dalai Lama.⁹⁸ We have no records of any connection between the Maha Bodhi Society and Lhasa being established at this time, but it seems highly unlikely. For one thing, the Dalai Lama himself was only sixteen years old, still in his minority, and highly isolated from the outside world behind the

Tibetan Regent and a screen of tutors and officials. The Lhasa government was also in a state of almost paranoid rejection of anything to do with British India in the wake of its embarrassing 1888 military defeat in a border conflict in the Chumbi Valley, as well as the execution of the Panchen Lama's chief minister, the Drongtse Khyabying, just a year earlier because of the Indian spy scandal. Thus Lhasa flatly refused all contact with India. The Chinese too maintained great pressure on the Tibetans not to enter into direct relations with Indian contacts. Things became even worse due to the Younghusband Expedition and the subsequent exile to Mongolia and China of the Dalai Lama from 1904 until the end of 1909.

It remains, however, an unexplained fact that when Dharmapāla began publishing his new missionary tract, the *Journal of the Maha Bodhi Society*, he listed the Thirteenth Dalai Lama, "Lozang Thub-Dan Gya-Tcho, Grand Lama of Tibet" as the society's sole patron on the inside cover of each issue. This recognition of the Dalai Lama lasted from the mid-1890s up to 1906. Dharmapāla also singled out the Dalai Lama as the only Buddhist leader to be mentioned in the dedication list of his best-known activist tract, *History of the Buddha Gaya Temple*, which was first published in 1900 and often reprinted thereafter. In 1899, Dharmapāla again renewed his attempts to contact the Dalai Lama in Lhasa, and once again he resorted to the use of Buddha relics as his chosen political instrument. At Bodh Gayā in January of that year, he met the Japanese Buddhist monk Kawaguchi Ekai (1866–1945), who was about to embark upon a clandestine journey into Tibet in order to study Tibetan Buddhism. Dharmapāla entrusted Kawaguchi with a casket in the form of a miniature silver pagoda which contained a relic of the Buddha, and he also gave him a Buddhist text written on palm leaf, with the request that both be presented to the Dalai Lama in Lhasa on his behalf. Kawaguchi dutifully accepted the mission and noted that Dharmapāla was "very anxious to visit Tibet, but thought it useless to attempt a trip thither, unless he was invited to do so."⁹⁹ Although Kawaguchi did carry the gifts to Tibet, his disguise eventually failed him in Lhasa and he was forced to flee back to India without being able to pass anything on to the Dalai Lama or his representatives.¹⁰⁰

The Dalai Lama may have had informal contacts with members of the Maha Bodhi Society during his exile in Darjeeling and Kalimpong from 1910 to 1912. The area was home to several more progressive Sikkimese followers of Tibetan Buddhism, such as the remarkable Kazi Dawa Samdup (1868–1922). He had been heavily involved in the organization since the 1890s and was also attached to the staff of the political officer supervising the Dalai Lama's exile residence in India.¹⁰¹ However, by this time

Dharmapāla appears to have dismissed any hopes of involving the elusive Tibetan leader in his activities, and by 1906 the Dalai Lama's name had been dropped as patron of the Maha Bodhi Society and did not appear again. This was due in part to the Panchen Lama's visit to India. The Panchen had departed from India in mid-January 1906, but Satis Chandra Vidyabhusan, who had guided the Panchen on his Indian tour, was a member of the consulting board of the *Journal of the Maha Bodhi Society*. It was probably he who advised Dharmapāla to drop the Dalai Lama as the society's absentee patron, since the Dalai Lama really was completely absent, living in exile in Mongolia and China at the time and with an uncertain political future. Dharmapāla was no doubt also frustrated at never having gained his much hoped-for official invitation to visit Tibet, despite his concerted efforts over many years.¹⁰² In any case, there is no record of any prior contact between the Dalai Lama and the Maha Bodhi Society when the Tibetan leader finally visited Calcutta and the Buddhist holy sites. The Dalai Lama's further engagements with the revival of modern Buddhism in India were those he made directly himself with the most ritually charged fruits of monumental archaeology, the Buddha's relics.

In March 1910, not long after his initial arrival in India, the Dalai Lama was formally invited to Calcutta to visit the viceroy, and it was there that he had his first encounter with scientifically excavated relics of the Buddha. As the British had done with the Panchen Lama during his visit, they sought to entertain the Tibetan leader and his entourage before he departed Calcutta by showing them appropriate cultural sites around the city. The Dalai Lama and his chief ministers were taken to the Indian Museum where, at the time, a startling new Buddhist archaeological find was being temporarily housed. This was the reliquary of the Kuṣāṇa Buddhist Emperor Kaniška (ca. second century CE), the so-called "Second Aśoka," which had been unearthed from an ancient *stūpa* at Shāh-jī-kī-Dherī near Peshāwar in 1908.¹⁰³ The reliquary was so famous because it was believed to contain three pieces of bone belonging to the Buddha. When shown the reliquary on a viewing table in the museum gallery (fig. 9.5), the Dalai Lama immediately exercised his Buddhist savoir-faire and enacted a simple but profound ritual gesture, as witnessed personally by his British confidant Charles Bell:

Taking the casket in his hands, he [the Dalai Lama] blessed all the Buddhists present, including those of his own staff, the young princes of Sikkim and Derge, and my Buddhist associates, by touching them on the back of the head as they stood in a semi-circle in front of him, with



Figure 9.5. Thirteenth Dalai Lama (centre, wearing spectacles) with Kaniṣka reliquary, Indian Museum, Calcutta, 1910.

heads deeply bowed. It was a solemn ceremony, and all were both awed and pleased to have made so close a contact with the Founder of their religion through the medium of these precious relics.¹⁰⁴

The great power associated with Buddha relics was already clearly apparent to the Dalai Lama, and to that he required no introduction. But what the Tibetan leader had now newly discovered was that the science of modern archaeology, and especially its application to excavations of the ancient Indian sites of the Buddha, was a crucial new source of the most important sacra of his religion. It was with this new realization that he visited Sārnāth one year later on pilgrimage, in the company of his most trusted officer, Dasang Drandul Tsarong (1888–1959), and there sought to acquire his own source of the Buddha's power. Tsarong related the exact details of his and the Dalai Lama's visit at Sārnāth to his son, Dundul Namgyal Tsarong, who recounted them as follows:

One morning, His Holiness was going around the *stupas* at Benares, when he stopped at a certain place where a very old pile of earth resembling an ancient damaged *stupa* was being pulled down by some workmen. He saw that the work was being supervised by a British officer and that he was taking out some bits and pieces from a pot which lay on a table nearby. When His Holiness saw this, he told my father that according to religious books many relics of the Lord Buddha were distributed to various sacred places, and he was quite sure that this was one of them; my father was to obtain some if possible. So Father went over to the guard standing near a table on which the small relics had been placed with great care. He did not know how much money he had in his pocket; but he showed a handful to the man, who then exchanged it for a handful of bone-like objects, without being seen by the British officer. He then gave these to His Holiness, who was immensely pleased with them and took them to his residence. Later a small quantity was given to my father, who treasured the precious relics and took them back to Tibet. Many years later, when my father built his new house on the outskirts of Lhasa, he placed the relics inside images of the three great religious kings which were housed in the main family *lhakhang* (chapel).¹⁰⁵

There is of course no way during this incident that the Dalai Lama could have actually obtained something that had been traditionally considered a relic of the Buddha in ancient times and been ritually interred in a reliquary. There were no excavations at Sārnāth during the years of the Dalai Lama's stay in India. In fact, between 1910 and 1912, a museum was being erected on the site to house the sculpture collection, and what the Dalai Lama undoubtedly took to be fresh archaeological excavations was probably just tidying of the grounds in preparation for the forthcoming opening ceremony and impending viceregal visit.¹⁰⁶

This incident is nevertheless remarkable for several reasons. It demonstrates the lengths to which even the Dalai Lama himself would go to get hold of what he was convinced were relics of the Buddha. It also reveals the source of at least two recent private collections of reputed Buddha relics in Tibet. Finally, it shows the way in which even the most elite of Tibetans could engage themselves with the world of monumental archaeology to which they had just been introduced. Modern finds of reputed Buddha relics by way of excavation were actually very rare across the whole of India and throughout the entire period of the Archaeological Survey's cam-

paigns. But clearly any old pot, pulled from a rubbish heap with something resembling bones in it could, at a place like Sārnāth, be unhesitatingly accepted as relics of the Buddha by premodern Tibetans, apparently without the need for analysis, confirmation, or reflection of any kind. Here I am reminded of a well-known “fake Buddha relic” story that circulated in Tibet, entitled “The Old Woman [who became] Enlightened Because of a Dog’s Tooth” (*rGan mo khyi sos sangs rgyas*). This was, and still is, a favourite tale employed by Tibetan Buddhist lamas, the point of which is to illustrate the primacy of confident faith in practice over conventional views and discriminations, especially notions of authenticity.¹⁰⁷

The Dalai Lama’s “relic” find at Sārnāth must also be seen in a broader Tibetan and Buddhist cultural context. His actions were no different in type than those of other Tibetans visiting India. A late nineteenth-century observer of Tibetan pilgrims’ behaviour at Indian Buddhist sites reported that they

. . . carry off scrapings of the rocks and the soil in the neighbourhood, treasuring up this precious dust in amulets, and for placing beside their dead body, as saving from dire calamities during life, and from transmigration into lower animals hereafter. Authentic specimens of this dust, I was informed, commanded in Tibet high prices from the more wealthy residents, who had personally been unable to undertake the pilgrimage.¹⁰⁸

Such activity is enduring. In recent years, at archaeologically excavated and restored Buddhist sites in India, such as Sārnāth, Lumbinī, and Nālandā, I too have seen Tibetan pilgrims scraping the mortar from between the ancient bricks or collecting soil and pebbles to carry away with them and treasure in amulets, and the like. Tibetan missionary lamas stationed in different countries around the world continue to regularly employ such substances collected at major Indian Buddhist holy sites, especially for use as ritual deposits in newly erected reliquary shrines.¹⁰⁹ Other Buddhists have behaved in exactly the same manner at Indian archaeological sites. After archaeologists undertook excavations during 2000 to try and confirm Tilaurakot as the long-contested location of the Buddha’s home of Kapilavastu, Buddhist monks requested sieved soil from the lowest levels of the excavation trench so that they could venerate it back in their monasteries, because they considered that the Buddha himself may have once walked upon it.¹¹⁰

The particular constellation of monumental archaeology, modern Buddhist revival movements, and the facilitation of more open and modern travel conditions under later colonial rule in India restored and greatly boosted the ancient tradition of international pilgrimage to the holy places of the Buddha during the early twentieth century. Although a few Tibetan pilgrims were occasionally observed at the Buddhist sites, the early visits by the Panchen Lama and Dalai Lama probably greatly encouraged many more ordinary Tibetans to undertake religious journeys to India during the coming decades. This was particularly so after political stability was consolidated once again in central Tibet in 1913, when the Republicans took control of China and left the Tibetans to independently govern their country until the Communist occupation occurred. A very strong increase in the volume of Tibetan pilgrims to India is certainly recorded in the sources from the 1920s onward. This surge of Tibetan pilgrims coincided with even more widespread and sophisticated developments in the modern Buddhist revival taking place in India, developments that were specifically focused upon the Buddha's holy sites. It is in this period and context that India became, for the very first time in Tibetan history, a much more familiar place for a whole spectrum of ordinary Tibetans on the basis of their own first-hand experience there. As a result, a modern and unprecedented Tibetan culture of pilgrimage began to emerge, together with a concomitant new understanding of India as a holy land.



CHAPTER TEN

Encountering the Modern Holy Land

In a few minutes the curator saw that his guest was no mere bead-telling mendicant, but a scholar of parts. . . . He had heard of the travels of the Chinese pilgrims, Fo-Hian and Hwen-Thiang, and was anxious to know if there was any translation of their record. He drew in his breath as he turned helplessly over the pages of Beal and Stanislas Julien. "'Tis all here. A treasure locked." Then he composed himself reverently to listen to fragments, hastily rendered into Urdu. For the first time he heard of the labours of European scholars, who by the help of these and a hundred other documents have identified the Holy Places of Buddhism. Then he was shown a mighty map, spotted and traced with yellow. The brown finger followed the curator's pencil from point to point. Here was Kapilavastu, here the Middle Kingdom, and here Mahabodhi, the Mecca of Buddhism; and here was Kusinagara, sad place of the Holy One's death. The old man bowed his head over the sheets in silence for a while, and the curator lit another pipe.

—*Rudyard Kipling, Kim, 1901*

Introduction

Over the century since it was written, Rudyard Kipling's classic colonial novel *Kim* has, like most important literature, accumulated both its devotees and its detractors.¹ Whatever one may think of *Kim* in the critical climate of postcolonialism, Kipling's depiction of the meeting between the British museum curator—a character based upon his own father, Lockwood Kipling—and the aging Tibetan lama—a real Tibetan pilgrim whom Kipling's father actually met²—certainly captured a moment of encounter between two alternative systems of knowledge about the holy

places of the Buddha, an encounter that was indeed taking place in India at the beginning of the twentieth century. One of these knowledge systems was largely in the hands of colonial orientalist and archaeologists, along with the Buddhist modernists whose religious revival was partly inspired by their works. The other system was in the hands of a tradition-bound but nevertheless culturally creative Tibetan Buddhist elite in Tibet, as well as an itinerant population of mendicants, traders, and pilgrims moving back and forth between Tibet and India. Throughout the first half of the twentieth century, Tibetan Buddhists themselves increasingly began to integrate these two systems of knowledge into a unique hybrid of their own. The results of this process are evident both in the way in which Tibetans came to reconceive Buddhist India and in the new manner in which they performed their ritual journeys there as pilgrims.

During this same period, India also became much more than just the land of the Buddha for Tibetan pilgrims. Pilgrimage to India provided one of the main opportunities for a wide spectrum of Tibetans to personally experience for the very first time a rapidly developing South Asian colonial modernity. Many historians of pre-1950s Tibet have made particular mention of the Thirteenth Dalai Lama's attempts at modernization in central Tibet. However, the Dalai Lama's ultimately abortive efforts touched the lives of only a tiny handful of Tibetans. In contrast to this, I will clearly demonstrate how significant numbers of Tibetans first became exposed to and affected by modernity while visiting in India as Buddhist pilgrims.³

In the development of a new twentieth-century Tibetan relationship with Buddhist India, the phenomenon of Buddhist modernism, especially as it was embodied in the works of the Maha Bodhi Society, played a central role. In this chapter I will investigate some significant influences it had upon Tibetans. For one, several Tibetan Buddhists became instrumental in creating a new generation of pilgrimage-related rituals at the sites of the Buddha which were chiefly occupied by the Maha Bodhi Society. Another, longer-lasting influence is that reflected in the life and works of the first modern Tibetan intellectual, Amdo Gendun Chöphel. This iconoclastic Tibetan scholar and pilgrim-traveller, who sometimes styled himself the "astute beggar," lived in India for over a decade. There he wrote a small text that became the most popular Tibetan pilgrimage guidebook for Buddhist India, and perhaps the most widely read Tibetan pilgrimage guidebook ever written. When Amdo Gendun Chöphel first arrived in India during 1934, he found a sophisticated, modern, and internationalized Buddhist pilgrimage culture already flourishing there. In order to understand how he and a host

of other Tibetan pilgrims in India were influenced by the vigorous Buddhist revival there, we must first investigate some of the major innovations that the Maha Bodhi Society and its allied organisations set in motion.

The Maha Bodhi Society Pilgrimage Industry

Throughout the early decades of the twentieth century, the Maha Bodhi Society gradually developed into a missionary organization promoting a particular modern interpretation of Buddhism worldwide. It also engaged in publishing a journal, books, and an array of pamphlets, undertook temple, monastery, and school building projects, performed charity works, and much more. It continued to maintain its long-running legal and political battle to restore the site of Bodh Gayā to Buddhist ownership, a campaign which eventually bore limited fruit only in 1949, long after the death of its founder Anagarika Dharmapāla. The organization's aims to spread Buddhism among the Indian population were, however, virtually ineffective, and it only succeeded in converting a tiny number of mainly educated, middle-class Indians during the first half of the twentieth century. The Maha Bodhi Society's missionizing became increasingly internationally focused, and a large part of this thrust was directed toward promoting pilgrimage by both Asian and Western Buddhists to the holy places of the Buddha in India. In fact, the Maha Bodhi Society played *the* central role in the development of modern Buddhist pilgrimage in India, a point that has been overlooked by all commentators to date.⁴

The promotion of international pilgrimage was a logical missionary vehicle for the Maha Bodhi Society to employ. The society had very little in the way of a local Buddhist constituency in India, and thus it relied in large part upon support from non-Indian Buddhists living abroad and from visitors to India. International pilgrimage to the ancient Buddhist sites that the Maha Bodhi Society had colonized was also viewed as highly authentic, in that it was seen to have the prestige of a long—albeit broken and revived—historical tradition behind it, one which stretched back to the early centuries of Buddhism. The promotion of international Buddhist pilgrimage was not a new activity for the Maha Bodhi Society during the 1920s and 1930s. It had organized its first such tour to archaeologically recovered Indian Buddhist sites in 1894 and had continued to do so with ever-increasing sophistication over the following decades.

At a very early stage, the Maha Bodhi Society had also attempted to re-create a specific culture of pilgrimage to be associated with the

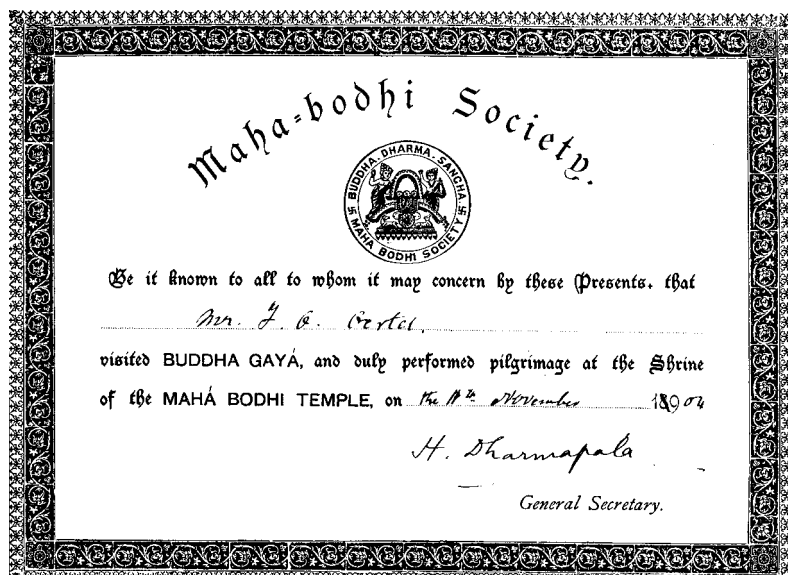


Figure 10.1. Maha Bodhi Society pilgrim's certificate presented to Frederick Oertel by Anagarika Dharmapāla, 1904.

ritual journeys it was promoting. For example, it began issuing printed certificates memorializing each pilgrim's journey to Bodh Gayā and other sites. The specimen shown here (fig. 10.1) was presented personally by Anagarika Dharmapāla to the archaeologist Frederick Oscar Oertel in 1904. Oertel was the executive engineer of the Public Works Department at Benares in 1904–5. He undertook the excavations at Sārnāth that yielded some of the most important Indian Buddhist antiquities ever discovered, including the Aśokan pillar and its famous lion capital. Such pilgrimage certificates were a kind of Buddhist modernist equivalent of the mass-produced talismans and relic-type mementos carried off from important Indian Buddhist sites since ancient times.⁵

The promotion of pilgrimages became of great importance to the Maha Bodhi Society throughout the first half of the twentieth century. Such pilgrimages were, of course, partly a means by which to focus international attention on Bodh Gayā and thereby maintain popular pressure on the Indian colonial authorities to place the site under Buddhist control.

At the same time, the use of pilgrimage can also be seen as true to the ethos of early Buddhist modernism, in which lay Buddhists took up a central role in both the organization and practice of religion, displacing clerics and traditional elites. Buddhist pilgrimage is in fact a truly popular

ritual form in most contexts, in that it does not depend upon the intervention of clerics or ritual specialists of any kind. It was therefore the perfect vehicle for lay involvement in a newly developing form of Buddhism, since the Maha Bodhi Society's organizers and members, and the pilgrims whom they appealed to, were overwhelmingly laypersons. There was also another key dimension of pilgrimage central to the society's missionary aims, and of the success which its emphasis upon this type of ritual obviously demonstrated: the universal acceptance and practice of pilgrimage among different Buddhist communities. Dharmapāla and his followers wanted to forge and maintain an international pan-Buddhist revival movement. In doing so, they needed to establish some common or shared religious ground between those very diverse types of Buddhists to whom they were appealing. Tibetans prized Tantra over all other forms of Buddhism, the Japanese and Chinese followed Mahāyāna teachings, while most South and Southeast Asian Buddhists accepted only Mainstream Buddhism (variously labelled Hīnayāna, Theravāda, or Sthaviravāda) while rejecting all other claims about what the Buddha apparently taught. The common and uncontested practice of pilgrimage could constitute one type of unifying bridge over the deep divisions which exist across the rich spectrum of possible Buddhisms.

The result of these factors was that from the 1920s until the outbreak of World War II, a veritable modern Buddhist pilgrimage industry sprang up around the archaeologically recovered and discursively redefined Buddhist holy land. The Maha Bodhi Society and its members successfully promoted and helped facilitate pilgrimage tours to the main holy places of the Buddha in India by Buddhists from all over the world. As a matter of comfort, the Buddhist pilgrimage season for most non-Indian visitors—including Asian communities such as the Tibetans—fell during the cool season from November to February. Thus, it was precisely during this season that the Maha Bodhi Society established its first modern Buddhist pilgrimage ritual.

Modern Tibetan Buddhists and the New Relic Worship

The Maha Bodhi Society had already established its administrative headquarters at the centre of colonial power and society in Calcutta. The city was, however, remote from the sites of the Buddha and the potent arena for ritual which they offered. With Bodh Gayā remaining under Hindu control and subject to ongoing dispute, the society resolved to establish its main ritual centre at Sārnāth, the site of recent and spectacular

archaeological discoveries of Buddhist remains. The society therefore built its new Mūlagandhakuṭī Vihāra at Sārnāth with the help of large donations received from a generous American Buddhist patron, Mary E. Foster (1844–1930) of Honolulu. Sārnāth was not only a place where impressive remains of ancient Buddhist cultures had been excavated and put on public display, it was also symbolically highly suited to the Maha Bodhi Society's revivalist and missionary aims. The ancient Mūlagandhakuṭī was held by tradition to mark the spot where the Buddha's own personal meditation cell had been located. Furthermore, tradition also held that it was at Sārnāth that the Buddha gave his very first teachings and made his initial conversions, hence beginning the Buddhist religion itself.

The first modern Buddhist pilgrimage festival in India began on November 11 and 12, 1931, with a grand inauguration ceremony celebrating the opening of the Maha Bodhi Society's new Mūlagandhakuṭī Vihāra. Thereafter, a ritual gathering for pilgrims was staged annually at the site during each November or December. At such celebrations the Maha Bodhi Society naturally promoted its own interests, in particular the campaign to return Bodh Gayā to Buddhist control, as well as its general missionary and fund-raising activities. The ritual at the centre of these annual ceremonies was focused upon a unique procession of pilgrims and relics which circumambulated the Mūlagandhakuṭī Vihāra. The ritual form of a procession was deliberately chosen by Dharmapāla for such Maha Bodhi Society events, since he viewed it as one of the oldest of public Buddhist rites.⁶ Dharmapāla's Buddhist revival was driven by the nineteenth-century orientalist fantasy of a pure, primitive Buddhism, and he sought a return to that which was considered or apparently proven to be most ancient, that which harked back to the golden age of the Buddha and his disciples. Thus, along with pilgrimage and relic worship, not only could ancient tradition be invoked to underpin the contemporary revival of procession, it was also a ritual form highly suited to Dharmapāla's emphasis on participation by the lay practitioner.

Processions are a type of ritual in which the ranking order of persons who form the procession is critical to the possible symbolism and social meaning embodied by the activity. Thus, those who rank the order of a procession play the most important role in this respect. The ranking order of the very first Mūlagandhakuṭī procession was originally created by a senior Tibetan Buddhist lay member of the Maha Bodhi Society executive, Sonam Wangfel Laden La (1876–1936) (see fig. 9.5, standing second from left in uniform).⁷ He also added significant Tibetan cultural innovations to these annual events. Laden La is highly worthy of our attention here, since

he provides an excellent example of an early twentieth-century Tibetan Buddhist active in giving shape to the emerging Buddhist modernism of South Asia.

Laden La, who hailed from an ethnic Tibetan lama family in Sikkim, and who was a devout Tibetan Buddhist, rose to become a police inspector and leading public figure in Darjeeling. He is chiefly remembered for his work with both the colonial government of India and the Tibetan government in Lhasa as a key intermediary figure in the negotiation of Anglo-Tibetan relations. Less well known is that Laden La was also one of the first generation of modern Buddhist revivalists and transmitters of Tibetan Buddhism to Western and Indian audiences. This small group of individuals, who were usually fluent in Tibetan, English, and several Indian and Himalayan languages, mostly grew up in the unique social and cultural conditions prevailing in the region of Darjeeling and neighbouring Sikkim during the late nineteenth century.

Darjeeling lay at the southern terminus of an older north-south trade and transit corridor through the Sikkim Himalaya which connected Tibet and Bengal. Due to its cooler upland climate and proximity to Calcutta, the British colonial government had developed Darjeeling intensively throughout the nineteenth century as a strategic "hill-station." It eventually became the summer headquarters of the lieutenant-governor of Bengal—and thus *de facto* temporary capital of India at the time—and an economic centre and health resort as well as a popular vacation spot for British residents in India. Darjeeling and its environs also became one of the most important educational centres in colonial India.⁸ These major transformations in the Darjeeling district, and the new environment that developed there, brought together a unique mixture of peoples from Tibet, Sikkim, Bhutan, and Nepal, and put them into direct contact with the colonial and local populations of Bengal. Darjeeling and its environs acted as a new type of space within which individuals from this cross section of Himalayan peoples, many of whom were Tibetan Buddhist, could become exposed to and interact with the culture of high colonialism from Calcutta. Against this background, Laden La emerged as a significant agent in Tibetan Buddhist engagements with the Buddhist modernist milieu in India.

Like many of his contemporaries, Laden La was closely associated with the Tibetan Buddhist monastery of Yidgah Chöling in Darjeeling, an establishment better known as the Ghoom Monastery. It was there that he received his early education in Tibetan language and Buddhism from the monastery's influential émigré Buriyat founder, the Gelukpa monk Sherab Gyatso (d. 1909), who himself was something of a unique "crossover"

figure between the worlds of Tibet and British India.⁹ Laden La later became one of the chief patrons of the Ghoom Monastery, and he was cremated there upon his death in 1936. His education was not restricted to the Tibetan monastery, however, and he also studied modern subjects in the Jesuit school at Sunny Bank and at both Doveton and St. Xavier's Colleges in Calcutta. It was Laden La who had first introduced the American scholar Walter Evans-Wentz (1878–1965) to the Sikkimese translator Kazi Dawa Samdup, an encounter that resulted in the publication of one of the most famous works on Tibetan Buddhism ever to be published and circulated in the Western world, *The Tibetan Book of the Dead*.¹⁰ Later in life, Laden La himself collaborated closely with two other important but little known early transmitters of Tibetan religion and culture to the West, Losang Mi-gyur Dorje¹¹ (b. 1875) and Karma Sumdhon Paul¹² (b. 1891), who were both also former students at Ghoom Monastery. The three worked together as the principal translators of the Tibetan texts presented in a book entitled *The Tibetan Book of the Great Liberation; or, the Method of Realizing Nirvāṇa through Knowing the Mind*, which was published by Evans-Wentz together with a "Psychological Commentary" by Carl Jung (1875–1961), the famous Swiss psychiatrist who founded analytical psychology.¹³

In addition to facilitating early encounters between Tibetan Buddhism and a Western audience, Laden La was also a very active and dedicated participant in a wide range of modern Buddhist revival groups in India. In 1907, he personally founded and became president of the General Buddhist Association in Darjeeling, one of the first such Buddhist revival organizations to be established in an area populated by Tibetan Buddhists. He was a patron and overseer of at least ten different Tibetan Buddhist monasteries in the greater Darjeeling area. He held a string of leading positions in modern Indian Buddhist revival organizations, including serving as vice-president of the Bengal Buddhist Association, general president of the All India Buddhist Conference, long-serving representative of the Maha Bodhi Society for the northeastern Himalayan region and the society's representative for Tibet in 1931. What is more, he was already a seasoned veteran of organizing modern Buddhist pilgrimage events in India before he did so for the Maha Bodhi Society. Laden La officially assisted in both the Panchen Lama's Indian pilgrimage tour of 1905–6 and the Dalai Lama's Indian pilgrimage tour of 1911. He was in fact awarded high honours by both lamas in specific recognition of his special pilgrimage service to them while in India.¹⁴

Laden La's arrangement of the very first Mūlagandhakuṭī procession, and that used in subsequent events, demonstrated that the new ritual was



Figure 10.2. Inaugural procession of Buddha relics at the Mūlagandhakuṭī Vihāra, Sārnāth, 1931.

truly an expression of a modern international Buddhism. It was an arrangement that was not only multiethnic and multinational but that also accorded significant roles to both laypersons and clerics, men and women, and the young and old alike. The ranking of Laden La's original procession in 1931 (fig. 10.2), from front to rear, and led by Tibetans, was:¹⁵

1. Two upāsakas bearing pitchers of water
2. Flag bearers
3. Tibetan Buddhists and monk musicians
4. Sinhalese Buddhist women
5. Burmese Buddhist women
6. Bengali and other Indian women
7. Bhikṣus from China, Japan, and Ceylon
8. Elephant with Buddha relic casket
9. Mace bearers
10. Bhikṣus
11. Sinhalese Buddhist men
12. Burmese Buddhist men
13. Bengali Buddhist men
14. Boys from the Maha Bodhi Free School

- 15. Caparisoned horses
- 16. Spectators

Despite many unprecedented features, when viewed as ritual events these new festivals at Sārnāth revived the ancient logic of Buddhist pilgrimage to the holy land by making the veneration of the Buddha's relics the central feature of the proceedings. From the pilgrims' point of view, the annual public procession and display of relics of the Buddha, and the opportunity to worship them over several days, were the most important aspects of these events.

We have already mentioned the relationship between an emerging Buddhist modernism in India and a landscape of colonial archaeology. This relationship should not be underestimated, since the development of many modern Indian Buddhist institutions was founded upon the discoveries and works of archaeology. Moreover, organizations such as the Maha Bodhi Society and its members had frequent contacts with the archaeologists themselves, and they invited them to attend their rituals and published their announcements of new discoveries or explanations of findings in their Buddhist missionary journals and pamphlets. All such associations with the archaeologists added to the image that the Buddhist modernists carefully promoted, that is, an image of Buddhism being aligned with scientific knowledge and even itself being rational and thus relevant as a "world religion" for the twentieth century and beyond.¹⁶ And at least some of the archaeologists, in turn, felt that they had done the Buddhist revival a great service by way of their scientific endeavours. In a 1935 address which was published in the society's journal, *The Maha Bodhi*, Daya Ram Sahni (1879–1939), a retired director-general of archaeology in India, stated plainly that "Followers of Buddhism all over the world may well be grateful to the Government of India, to Sir John Marshall and other officers of the Department [of Archaeology] whose researchers have enabled them to resume their holy pilgrimages which have been interrupted for several centuries."¹⁷ This was actually a rather modest statement of what the archaeologists contributed to the Buddhist revival. Scientific archaeology had provided, in fact, the very sacral essence around which much modern Buddhist public ritual was now to be based in India. The relic collections used by the Maha Bodhi Society in their processions at Sārnāth had all been recovered by government archaeologists working at ancient Indian Buddhist sites. The society had been presented with four such relic collections by the Government of India in a series of goodwill gestures between 1931 and 1935.

Three sets of archaeologically recovered relics, those which were ob-

tained respectively from excavations at Taxila, Nāgārjunikoṇḍa, and Mīrpur Khas, were duly enshrined within the actual building of the new Mūlagandhakuṭī Vihāra.¹⁸ The edifice of the Mūlagandhakuṭī Vihāra was a curious blend of the style of the reconstructed Mahābodhi Temple at Bodh Gayā with certain features of Mughal monumental architecture (fig. 10.2). However, in Buddhist ritual and soteriological terms, the enshrinement of Buddha relics within it actually empowered the building, rendering it equivalent to an ancient relic *stūpa* of the Buddha. It was thus a modern re-creation of the type of edifices that had served as the focal point of Buddhist pilgrimage in India since the Aśokan era.

Following the founding of the Mūlagandhakuṭī Vihāra anniversary festivals, the relic displays annually attracted thousands of pilgrims from throughout Asia and beyond. This often included not insubstantial numbers of Tibetan Buddhist pilgrims from the Himalayan regions and from Tibet itself. In fact, as we have just seen, Tibetan Buddhists had been directly involved in establishing the actual ritual staging of the festivals since their inception. Laden La himself was also responsible for the addition of another truly unprecedented innovation to the Mūlagandhakuṭī relic festivals at Sārnāth, one that was itself emblematic of Tibetan Buddhist participation. This was the regular inclusion of performances of Tibetan masked ritual dances.

Devil Dances in the Deer Park

The Tibetan masked dances which were performed at the Mūlagandhakuṭī festival were described by Maha Bodhi Society promoters at the time as “the world famous Lama Dance,” which presupposed that they already had an international reputation during this period. In colonial India in 1931, this was indeed already the case. Since the nineteenth century, many European travellers who visited Tibetan monasteries in Himalayan areas had been fascinated by the performance of spectacular masked ritual dances known as *cham* (*‘cham*).¹⁹ These were widely reported as “devil dances” in the literature of the day, and they came to serve as well-known markers of both the exotic and the somewhat deviant status of Tibetan Buddhism, and of Tibet and Tibetan culture more generally. When Tibet was to be represented in public in colonial India or in Europe itself, the performance of a *cham* became the obvious choice of emblem.

In December 1922, the Government of India had requested that a troupe of Tibetan Buddhist monk dancers from the Ghoom Monastery in Darjeeling perform masked dances in Calcutta as part of the cultural

entertainments attending the visit by the Prince of Wales to India.²⁰ The fifty monks from Ghoom managed to abstract a deritualized fifteen-minute “show” out of the normally complex several days of monastic rites which together usually constitute *cham* as performed in its original ritual context.²¹ A Parsee promoter in Darjeeling arranged for another troupe of monk dancers—probably also from Ghoom—to perform masked dances during the British Empire Exhibition at Wembley in 1924.²² A group billed as “Tibetan monks from Gyantse”—who were actually laymen from Darjeeling dressed as monks—also gave highly publicized and somewhat controversial masked dances for the British public in London in conjunction with the 1924 British Mount Everest Expedition to Tibet. These Tibetan “devil dances” also featured in a popular film about the Everest expedition.²³ It is against this background of the increasing international exposure of *cham* that its unprecedented insertion into the context of a modern Buddhist relic worship revival festival by Laden La has to be appreciated.

Tibetan masked dance performances, as part of new Maha Bodhi Society rituals, may well have been sincerely viewed as serious ritual by the Tibetan participants involved. Be that as it may, they were also clearly used as a kind of gimmick to draw the attention of potential sponsors and sympathizers. European colonials and the educated modern Indian elite were both groups among whom there was a fairly strong interest in and sympathy for Buddhism at the time, not to mention an enduring fascination with Tibet. And it was already the case by the beginning of the 1930s that Tibetan masked dances had been actively promoted as a new tourist attraction for those who could afford to take holidays to the high Himalayan regions of India.²⁴ The “Tibetan dancers and musicians” brought to the event by Laden La were most probably once again monks from his own monastery of Ghoom. While the genuine Buddhist motivations of the monks, their monastery, and its patrons are not at all in doubt, their capacity to act as strategic agents with their own complex concerns should not be overlooked in the case of their masked dance performances in India. As Mona Schrempf has shown, economic motivations have always been one major factor behind the staging of Tibetan masked dances outside of the traditional monastic context for the benefit of non-Tibetan audiences.²⁵ Invitations such as those to participate in Maha Bodhi Society festivals at Sārnāth certainly did provide specific financial opportunities. For example, the Ghoom monks had been well paid in cash for their dance performances for the Prince of Wales in 1922, and this had encouraged them to dance once again for the Calcutta public in order to earn more money before they returned to Darjeeling.²⁶ Following their dances at the Mūlagandhakuṭī Vihāra festival in 1931, the

Tibetan monks brought to Sārnāth by Laden La also performed their ritual dances in various other contexts: once in a special session for a film crew in Sārnāth; again in Allahabad on November 15 at the invitation of the important Indian nationalist politician and future prime minister, Jawaharlal Nehru (1889–1964); and finally once more in Calcutta on December 21 and 22, where they danced four times at the Red Cross Fête at St. Xavier's College in the presence of Lady Willingdon, the wife of the viceroy.²⁷

Thanks to Maha Bodhi Society promotions of Sārnāth via the establishment and regular staging of elaborate new rituals there, the site became increasingly popular with Buddhist pilgrims from throughout Asia. Aside from the specific annual relic festival period at Sārnāth, large parties of pilgrims from Tibet also continued to visit the site during the winter pilgrimage seasons throughout the 1930s and beyond. For example, on January 26, 1936, a pilgrim party which included forty Tibetan Buddhist monks, an important lama, and sixty laypersons from Tibet is recorded as having performed the pilgrimage to Sārnāth.²⁸ The modern Tibetan intellectual Amdo Gendun Chöphel helped further popularize the Maha Bodhi Society's activities at Sārnāth among his fellow countrymen back in Tibet. In his widely read pilgrim's guidebook for Buddhist India, which was first published in 1939, he devoted a section describing the Mūlagandhakuṭi relic collections and their annual worship festival as part of his tribute to the life and works of the society's founder, Dharmapāla.²⁹

Promoting Modern Pilgrimage to the Buddha

Parallel to the development of new ritual events, the Maha Bodhi Society also organized a series of initiatives to generally encourage and facilitate contemporary Buddhist pilgrimage to revived Indian Buddhist holy sites. One measure that the society placed great store in was the building of a network of new and well-appointed pilgrims' rest houses (*dharmasālā*) at the major holy places of the Buddha. Such rest houses were financed by pious donations and fund-raising campaigns and were always heavily utilized by pilgrim visitors, including many Tibetans. Modern rest houses in India also provided a potential setting for certain types of horizontal relations between pilgrims to develop, those which scholars such as Victor Turner have emphasized as occurring during pilgrimages. For example, in 1931 the British Buddhist pilgrim B. L. Broughton observed during his visit to Bodh Gayā that there were not only humble Tibetan worshippers lodging in the local pilgrim's rest house but also "many well-to-do Tibetan pilgrims . . . besides numerous lamas."³⁰

The major and possibly most revolutionary Maha Bodhi Society initiative to encourage modern Buddhist pilgrimage in India was the promotion of pilgrims' use of the Indian railway system. The innovation of modern railways in colonial India after 1850 caused a true economic and infrastructural revolution across the subcontinent which had significant implications for mass pilgrimage and other aspects of Indian religious culture.³¹ With the advent of rail travel, the great Indian holy cities and pilgrimage complexes such as Vārāṇasī and Gayā could attend to their pan-Indian ritual clientele with unprecedented efficiency. During the 1870s, a Hindu Pandit at Gayā stated that there were now fewer ghosts because funeral rites could be performed there so soon after death due to the advent of the railways!³² Some traditional Hindu associations even officially announced that pilgrims could travel by rail without losing the merits of their pilgrimages, which were usually performed on foot as an act of asceticism.³³ Tibetan pilgrims, as we shall see below, also began to make almost identical ritual accommodations with the Indian rail system.

A huge increase in the volume of all types of Indian pilgrimage was thus enabled by way of rail transport. Indian railway companies advertised to actively attract Buddhist pilgrims as well as tourists to tour the holy sites of the Buddha by train. By the early decades of the twentieth century, most of the excavated and restored Buddhist holy places were serviced by rail, and Buddhist modernists did not hesitate to vigorously promote this advantage. By 1935, the Maha Bodhi Society had sought and gained special concession fares from several major Indian rail companies on behalf of Buddhist pilgrims travelling to the Indian sites. They could soon proudly announce that "the propaganda work done by the East Indian Railway has helped increase the number of visitors many times."³⁴ By the winter pilgrimage season of the same year, a "pilgrim special" was organized to transport Tibetan Buddhists by discounted rail travel from Darjeeling directly to Sārnāth.³⁵ During 1938 and 1939, on the back covers of the Maha Bodhi Society's monthly international journal, *The Maha Bodhi*, the central publicity officer of Indian State Railways ran full-page advertisements promoting organized rail pilgrimages to "Visit the Sacred Places Associated with The Master, Lord Buddha."

As these developments progressed, the Maha Bodhi Society began promoting itself and its efforts to a worldwide Buddhist audience as the great patron of a modern form of pilgrimage, one which was now, like the already blossoming colonial tourist industry, a "safe, friendly, and convenient" form of ritual in India:

Thanks to the efforts of the Maha Bodhi Society . . . in almost all the sacred places there are resthouses. Buddhists living at these places are always ready to welcome the pilgrims. The former terrors of the pilgrimage, both imaginary and actual, are no longer there and the visits could be made in perfect safety. We would, therefore, invite all Buddhists . . . to come to the Holy Places and receive that inspiration which has been denied to them for so many centuries.³⁶

Associated with these ritual and logistical developments, the Maha Bodhi Society, ever masters of propaganda, markedly stepped up their publication efforts promoting the Buddhist holy sites and pilgrimage to them. In fact, such publications had already been produced in small numbers since the turn of the century.³⁷ Now a whole new series of journal articles, pamphlets, and guides were published throughout the 1930s.³⁸ A typical example published in *The Maha Bodhi* during 1931 was a long, serialized article by the British Buddhist B. L. Broughton, simply entitled "Buddhist Pilgrimage." Broughton's article, which is somewhat reminiscent of a guidebook, contained a basic north Indian pilgrimage itinerary, with travel descriptions of how to reach sites by rail, bus, cart, and foot travel, as well as references to local features and the Buddhist history of each site. It was completed with quotations of the famous lines from the *Mahāparinibbāna Sutta* about pilgrimage to the four main holy places associated with the life of the Buddha. The subject of the early Chinese Buddhist pilgrim accounts of India had already received coverage in *The Maha Bodhi* at the turn of the century,³⁹ and it too was revived again during the 1930s pilgrimage boom.⁴⁰ The society had sold reprinted editions of the well-known *Travels of Fa-hsien*, translated by Herbert Giles (1845–1935), and *Si-yu-ki Buddhist Records of the Western World*, translated by Samuel Beal (1825–1889), through its Indian offices since at least 1930. It also began directing its publicity efforts toward the tourist end of the pilgrim spectrum as well, releasing a photographic album in English in 1939, entitled *Buddhist Sacred Places in India*, plus a series of souvenir picture postcards of the major Buddhist holy sites.

Changing Tibetan Pilgrimage Ritual

Throughout the first half of the twentieth century, the Maha Bodhi Society completely transformed the pilgrimage culture of a revived Buddhism in India. Within this new context, Tibetan pilgrims to India still visited the Buddhist holy places they had known for a millennium or more. How-

Itineraries:	1905	1911	1920	1920s	1930	1933/4	1930s	1942	1943	1945a	1945b	1940s
Bodh Gayā	■	■	■	■	■	■	■	■	■		■	■
Sārnāth	■	■	■	■		■	■	■	■		■	■
Lumbinī		■				■					■	
Rājgir		■	■			■			■		■	
Nālandā			■					■				
Kuśinagar		■	■			■					■	
Gayā		■	■		■				■	■		
Gorakhpur			■									■
Vārānasī	■	■	■		■			■	■	■	■	
Allahabad					■							
Lucknow					■							■
Delhi	■				■	■						■
Hardwar					■							■
Jālandhara							■					
Mandi					■	■						■
Amritsar					■		■	■				■
Taxila	■											■
Calcutta	■	■		■							■	
Assam				■						■		

Figure 10.3. Tibetan pilgrimage itineraries in India, 1905–45.

ever, they now did so in an emerging Indian colonial modernity, which was a world unlike anything they could have experienced upon the Tibetan plateau or in the Himalayas at the time. What effect did this have upon Tibetans visiting India, and on their ritual process and experiences there as pilgrims? Did they continue to visit the same places in the same manner as before or not? Did their style of worship at the holy places change? Did they travel in different ways? Such questions can best be appreciated by surveying Tibetan pilgrims' accounts and analysing their itineraries in India during the early twentieth century.

Figure 10.3 compares over a dozen itineraries that represent pilgrimages undertaken in India by persons from all different ranks of Tibetan soci-

ety throughout the first half of the twentieth century.⁴¹ Despite their individual diversity, these itineraries collectively reveal interesting trends in travel and choice of destination by Tibetan pilgrims. First, pilgrims almost invariably visited Bodh Gayā and Sārnāth (and the main towns or cities they are located near), both of which had become the major focus of Maha Bodhi Society activities and Government of India restorations. Second, other original ancient Buddhist sites that had been newly excavated and restored, but which the Tibetans had not visited in the past because they were already lost or largely unknown to them, such as Taxila or Kuśinagar, were virtually never visited, the exceptions being those journeys made in the context of official, Government of India-sponsored pilgrimage tours organized for the Panchen Lama and Dalai Lama. Third, almost all stages of these Tibetan itineraries depended upon the use of the modern Indian railway system, and all pilgrims actually undertook the majority of their journeys by train. Fourth, other areas of northwest and eastern India in which Tibetans had traditionally established their own unique Tibetan Buddhist sites, such as at Rewalsar in the Punjab Hills or Hājo in Assam, continued to be visited, albeit as less favoured destinations. Finally, visits to large Indian cities were frequently incorporated into pilgrims' itineraries, reflecting additional commercial and touristic agendas that Tibetans pursued in conjunction with their religious journeys.

Thus, in terms of its sites, itineraries, and mode of transportation, Tibetan pilgrimage in India during the first half of the twentieth century was very much a hybrid tradition. It was shaped in some important new ways by the extensive changes that had occurred since the late nineteenth century but also maintained traditional patterns that had a much longer Tibetan history. As we have seen above in the case of the Maha Bodhi Society's new pilgrimage festival at Sārnāth, Tibetan Buddhist presence in India was not only subjected to the influence of the modern Buddhist revival milieu, it also contributed to and shaped that milieu in its own specific ways.

South Asian Buddhist modernists were also coming under the influence of Tibetan pilgrimage activities in India. A good example of this can be found at Rewalsar, site of the obscure lake in the Punjab Hills which nineteenth-century Tibetans had claimed to be "Zahor Possessing the Lotus Lake" or "Tso Pema," sacred to the founding saint of Tibetan Buddhism, Padmasambhava, as discussed in chapter 8. This very popular pilgrimage destination for Tibetans in India had a small Tibetan temple which had been erected during the nineteenth century. But apart from this, it was the actual presence of Tibetan Buddhist pilgrims there, along with their

ritual traces at the site, such as Tibetan mantras carved upon the rocks, prayer flags, and so forth, which signalled the recently founded Tibetan Buddhist significance of the place to outside observers. Modern South Asian Buddhist pilgrims who happened to visit Rewalsar during the early 1930s described the Tibetan temple there to be a "pitiful sight" and "filthy beyond description." True to the *Zeitgeist* of the predominantly middle-class South Asian Buddhist modernism prevailing in India, such visitors were immediately inspired to restore and revive this apparently neglected and perhaps even endangered ancient Buddhist site. The first such appeal for restoration was published in *The Maha Bodhi* in 1933. It took the form of a poem by a Buddhist pilgrim who signed simply as "C. F. U.," the opening stanza of which reads,

With dawn of Vesakh heralding the day,
I made the pilgrimage Rewalsar way,
And saw beside the sacred Buddhist pool
The dying embers of Gautama's rule.⁴²

A Sinhalese Buddhist, P. P. Siriwardhana, then took up the cause, suggesting a range of measures to restore the "sacred lake" and its Buddhist temple and recommending that "the lake also requires wider publicity in India and Buddhist countries."⁴³ These modern Buddhists of the Maha Bodhi Society milieu accepted the uniquely Tibetan Rewalsar unquestionably as being an Indian Buddhist site, and apparently an ancient one. They sought to immediately incorporate it into the network of restored ancient Indian Buddhist holy places that constituted the basis for their internationalized Buddhist pilgrimage culture. In so doing, they made another addition to the shifting terrain of the Buddha in India.

Rail Travel and Ritual Meaning

The quick adaptation of Tibetan pilgrims to the modern Indian rail system was impressive. The earliest recorded Tibetan pilgrimages by railway in India date from the beginning of the twentieth century.⁴⁴ Rail travel throughout India not only added comfort and convenience to pilgrimage travel, it also obviated most of the real dangers and the associated fears that Tibetans had of premodern travel in India. Virtually all pilgrims newly arriving in India from Tibet had never even seen a train, let alone experienced a railway system. Nothing like it existed anywhere upon the Tibetan plateau, and railways thus had a very high curiosity value among

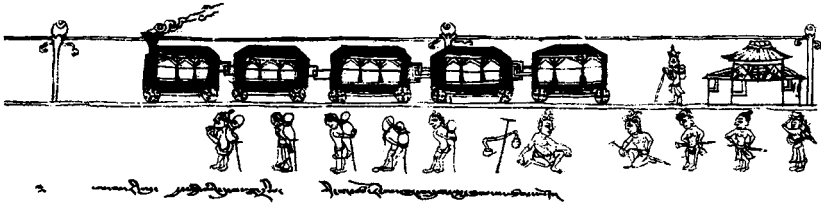


Figure 10.4. Tibetan pilgrim's impression of the Indian railway and "foreigners," early twentieth century.

Tibetan visitors (fig. 10.4). Trains became known as "moving houses" and the railway line itself as the "iron road"; even up to the 1950s newly arrived Tibetan pilgrims report being amazed and puzzled by the exotic appearance and mysterious motive power of rail transport.⁴⁵ Nevertheless, Tibetan pilgrims appear to have consistently adapted to this new mode of transportation with ingenuity. For example, while walking through the bazaar in Delhi in 1906, the Scottish traveller Jane Duncan (1848–1909) met a group of Tibetan clerics and lay persons from Lhasa who were planning to perform a pilgrimage to Bodh Gayā by train. Duncan wished to photograph the group, and in return the Tibetans requested her to write a letter in English to the local stationmaster in order to ensure that their travel arrangements on the railway could be properly made.⁴⁶ The Bönpo lama Khyungtrül Jigme Namkha Dorje (1897–1955) undertook a series of extensive pilgrimages to Buddhist sites throughout India by rail between 1922 and 1925, even though he was unable to speak any Indian languages. He also took the trouble to record all the fares, station names, and train times as he travelled, presumably for future reference by himself and other would-be Tibetan pilgrims.⁴⁷

In all the Tibetan pilgrims' accounts of India, it appears that the ease afforded by the railways impressed them more than anything. Lhasa aristocrat Rinchen Drolma Taring (1909–2000) performed a pilgrimage to the Mahābodhi Temple at Bodh Gayā during the winter of 1930–31. Having just endured a particularly arduous crossing of the Tibetan plateau and the Himalayas using traditional means of transportation such as mule and walking on foot, she travelled subsequently to the holy sites by Indian rail and motorcar and was moved to announce, "I love Tibet. If only it had trains or motorcars, I think it would be the nicest country in the world."⁴⁸

The rapidity and apparent ease with which early twentieth-century Tibetan pilgrims abandoned the traditional mode of walking to the holy places and adopted the railways instead, marked the beginning of a note-

worthy modern change in ritual behaviour which is still apparent in contemporary Tibetan pilgrimage activity. Pilgrimage, as a form of ritual action in the Tibetan tradition, is essentially a type of asceticism open to all kinds of persons. On a pilgrimage, one temporarily forgoes comforts and accepts privations, one undertakes vows to visit specific holy places and to observe certain abstentions, and, most important, one performs “ritual work” with one’s body by walking around a holy place, not only in terms of the specific acts of circumambulation at individual sites but also in the progress of walking around a whole circuit of different holy places in terms of a longer pilgrimage itinerary. The meaning of *nékor* (*gnas skor*), the common Tibetan term for “pilgrimage,” covers both of these dimensions equally. This ritual work of circumambulation and prostration performed by the pilgrim’s body is understood as “cleansing” or removing certain types of embodied moral and cognitive defilements that hinder progress toward salvation.⁴⁹ Although early twentieth-century Tibetan pilgrims had recently abandoned walking to and between the Indian holy sites in favour of taking trains, they instead had to struggle with the rigors of railway travel in India, and thus they also began to conceive of those activities as valuable ritual work yielding soteriological fruits. As one pilgrim remarked of a long family pilgrimage undertaken by railway around Indian Buddhist sites,

It was a strenuous trip, with crowded trains, heat, searches for accommodation every night, and arguments with *kulis* who helped us with our luggage. But these hardships accumulated merit and removed bad karma. We felt we had gained something very valuable in our lives.⁵⁰

The easy availability of modern transportation, among other factors, has contributed to a notable decline in Tibetan willingness to endure the more strenuous dimensions of ascetic travel while on pilgrimage, a trend which continues in even more pronounced ways today.⁵¹

Ritual Adaptation

Pilgrimage, as practiced by Tibetan Buddhists, is not strictly a single ritual but rather what might be thought of as a ritual ensemble. At its centre is *nékor*, with a periphery composed of a diverse range of other possible ritual acts that augment the perceived transformational value of the pilgrimage as a whole. These additional rites amplify the ascetic dimensions of a pilgrimage in various ways, helping the pilgrim to maximize the experience

of sacred sites and sacra that are worshipped individually. When we compare the whole range of rituals performed by early twentieth-century Tibetan pilgrims at Indian Buddhist holy places with those evident at the same sites in past centuries, it is apparent that some ritual practices have remained conservative while others have developed in new ways. New rituals have been adopted over time, while other types of rites appear to have been only occasionally and strategically deployed in particular circumstances. For comparative purposes, the available accounts describing rituals performed by early Tibetan pilgrims in India are unfortunately patchy at best. However, we do have a significant amount of detail about earlier practices at Buddhism's premier holy site, the Mahābodhi Temple and its environs at Bodh Gayā, and this is what will now be compared with Tibetan ritual from the modern period of revival at the same site. We also have a second point of comparison, since Tibetan pilgrim accounts of Bodh Gayā also recorded those rites performed there by other non-Tibetan Buddhist worshippers.

We know with certainty that, prior to the nineteenth century, Tibetan pilgrimage at Bodh Gayā commonly entailed such acts as circumambulation of the Mahābodhi Temple, making a range of prayers, presenting various offerings to both the Mahābodhi image and at the temple itself, including flowers, wealth (especially gold), and "thousand offerings," and also the collection of various natural substances deemed as local sacra, especially earth, stones, and water from the site, in order to transport them back to Tibet.⁵² We know that all of these rituals—or variations upon them—were still performed by Tibetans at Bodh Gayā during the first half of the twentieth century, and they are still performed today. Some early Tibetan accounts also describe the offering of lamps by other Buddhist worshippers at Bodh Gayā, sometimes in the form of a single offering and sometimes as a multiple one, where lighted lamps were placed in rows upon supporting bases or altars.⁵³ While the offering of lamps is certainly a feature of Buddhist ritual life in Tibet itself, early Tibetan pilgrims appear not to have offered lamps at Bodh Gayā Temple, and it is striking that we find no mention of it in the accounts from the twelfth to the nineteenth century.⁵⁴ However, in modern times we find that offering lighted candles at the site was the very first ritual act to be performed by Buddhist modernists inside the Mahābodhi Temple at the end of the nineteenth century. In an act of defiance against the temple's Hindu occupants, the Buddhist revivalist Dharmapāla reinstalled—albeit temporarily—a statue of the Buddha upon the central altar and lit a candle in front of it.⁵⁵ After centuries of not offering lamps, we find that during the early twentieth century the offering

of lamps at the Mahābodhi Temple, and also at other sites such as Sārnāth, is suddenly recorded as one of the most ubiquitous rituals performed by Tibetan pilgrim visitors, and it remains so today. Indeed, Tibetan pilgrims frequently offered not just one or two lamps or candles at Bodh Gayā, but many hundreds or even thousands of them at a time.⁵⁶ In a parallel example of adaptation, we find that thirteenth-century Tibetan accounts mention the common worship by other Buddhists at the site of carved stone footprints of the Buddha within the Mahābodhi Temple precinct, and this has continued into the modern era. Originally, these footprints were bathed in water and medicated perfumes, and the sanctified runoff from these ablutions was used for washing and ointments.⁵⁷ No Tibetan accounts from the twelfth to the nineteenth centuries mention that Tibetans themselves ever engaged in such worship.⁵⁸ However, during the early twentieth century, the worship of the stone footprints figures as a very popular Tibetan pilgrims' ritual at the site, often by making impressions of them onto cloth using dye or ink and then carrying away these prints.⁵⁹

In both of these cases—offering lamps and worship of the Buddha's stone footprints—Tibetans appear to have recently adapted to existing non-Tibetan Buddhist ritual traditions at Bodh Gayā. However, alongside this recent adaptation we find that other fundamental and ancient Buddhist rituals at the site appear to have made no impression upon Tibetan patterns of worship there. For instance, an almost universal feature of Buddhist ritual at Bodh Gayā since ancient times has been the specific worship of the Bodhi Tree. Such worship can be found depicted in ancient carved stone panels dating from about two thousand years ago. Xuanzang described how worship of the Bodhi Tree at Bodh Gayā was performed in the seventh century by directly bathing the tree with scented water and perfumed milk.⁶⁰ Exactly the same procedure is reported as being performed by other Buddhists in the Tibetan accounts of Bodh Gayā from the eleventh through thirteenth centuries.⁶¹ The same ritual, with variations, was continued by South Asian Buddhists at Bodh Gayā during the nineteenth and twentieth centuries.⁶² Although Tibetans did consider the Bodhi Tree sacred, and even collected its leaves and branches to carry back to Tibet with them as relics, they have never participated in this most common of Buddhist rituals at Bodh Gayā. It is only since the Tibetan exile community settled in India that the situation has very slowly begun to change.⁶³ The ritual divide between Tibetan pilgrims and other Buddhists at Bodh Gayā in the early twentieth century was also reinforced by other culturally specific Tibetan ritual actions. These included bedecking the Mahābodhi image with Tibetan salutation scarves (*khatag*) and hanging large numbers of

prayer flags inside the Mahābodhi Temple,⁶⁴ as well as the use of meat as an offering substance (see below), or the deposit by pilgrims of bodily substances, such as hair and fingernail parings, at some locations around the shrine.⁶⁵

The Tibetan religious elite, with a keen sense for the strategic, public use of ritual actions and symbols, have always availed themselves of the chance to employ the setting of the great Indian holy places of the Buddha for their activities. In the twentieth century, this first occurred when Tibet's most highly ranked lamas arrived on pilgrimage in India for the first time in Tibetan history. During his 1905–6 visit to Bodh Gayā, the Sixth Panchen Lama meditated for half a day while seated atop the excavated and restored Vajrāsana throne underneath the Bodhi Tree.⁶⁶ He did so before a very large crowd of Buddhist worshippers, and the potent and explicit symbolism of his act—recalling the Buddha's awakening while reputedly seated at this exact spot—cannot have been lost on any of those present. The Panchen also ordained groups of Tibetan monks and raised the ordination level of others during his stay at Bodh Gayā. Exactly this type of strategic, public ritual use of revived Indian Buddhist sites by leading Tibetan lamas, who perform rituals before large groups of their followers, has continued and increased right up to the present day, as will be discussed in chapter 11.

We have observed above the hybrid nature of early twentieth-century Tibetan pilgrims' itineraries in India. A similar type of hybridity was also characteristic of the rites that together constituted their pilgrimages as larger ritual ensembles. They were marked by a certain degree of enduring cultural specificity, on the one hand, and by openness to adaptation and innovation, on the other. There is virtually nothing outlined above about the nature of early twentieth-century Tibetan pilgrimage in India that is not also true of contemporary Tibetan pilgrimage to the same sites. The early twentieth century was a period in which new patterns of Tibetan pilgrimage were laid down in relation to an emerging colonial modernity and the modern development of Buddhism in India, and these same patterns are still those being followed today.

Tibetan Experience of Modern India

A crucial but often completely unacknowledged cultural feature of long-distance pilgrimage in many contexts is the concomitant experience that pilgrims have of foreign societies and their lifeways. As we have seen in previous chapters, this has always had an impact upon Tibetans visiting India, and many of the accounts cast such experiences in a negative light.

They emphasize the fears and the problems presented to pilgrim visitors by India as a foreign land, rather than revealing excitement or curiosity for the exotic and novel aspects which must have also been encountered at times en route. As previously considered, this apparent lack of interest in contemporary Indian culture and society and its negative portrayal in the sources may have been a result of the intensive religious focus of earlier Tibetan journeys as well as of the nature of the hagiographical genre of traditional literature in which accounts of pilgrimage are so often embedded. Such texts often unashamedly seek to glorify their lama subjects as spiritual heroes whose powers triumph over all obstacles, both inner and outer, and the Indian world becomes something like a set of props with which they can prove their superiority. By contrast, when we turn to accounts of Tibetan pilgrims in the early twentieth century, they tend to express a more positive curiosity, and even at times wonder, concerning the new world of modernizing India.

It must be carefully appreciated that throughout the first half of the twentieth century, the Tibetan plateau was still a truly premodern environment in all possible senses of that expression: social, political, economic, and technological. While a very few modern material trappings were to be found in the elite circles of Lhasa society or the trading centres of far eastern Tibet, the vast majority of Tibetans from all classes across the plateau had no contact with them whatsoever. Prior to visiting India, Tibetan pilgrims had never seen such things as automobiles, railways, motorized boats or ships, and airplanes, let alone used a telephone, listened to the radio or phonograph, sat in a movie theatre or stayed in a room with electric lighting. It was pilgrimage to India that enabled the first widespread Tibetan contacts with the material culture of modernity.

Such unprecedented experiences were in fact already captured in fictional form at the turn of the century by Rudyard Kipling in his novel *Kim*, in which he describes the aging Tibetan lama-pilgrim's frightened awe upon his first visit to an electrically lit railway station one evening. Real life was certainly no different. We find that a lama from the Nyingmapa monastery of Dzogchen in distant eastern Tibet, on a pilgrimage to Bodh Gayā in 1903, simply "marvelled" at his first sight of electric lights and the bustling multiethnic crowds in the first Indian railway station he arrived at in Siliguri. And "even more marvellous" still was the steamboat that then ferried him and his Tibetan party across the Ganges.⁶⁷ The British liaison officer for the Sixth Panchen Lama's pilgrimage tour of Indian Buddhist holy sites in 1905 recorded the following incident when the Panchen and his party first arrived in India:

There was a little difficulty over the electric light the first night. Noticing a light burning in the Lama's sleeping apartment rather late, and hearing a good deal of talking and moving about, I asked permission to enter, and on doing so saw his younger brother standing on a chair in the middle of the room industriously puffing away at the central light with a pair of bellows. The poor thing had been unable to get the lamps to go out, and the Lama could not get to sleep in the blaze of light.⁶⁸

When a highly educated incarnate Gelukpa lama from eastern Tibet travelled over the Himalayas from Lhasa by mule en route to Bodh Gayā in the 1940s, he arrived at the Indian border post where he noted, "It was there that I saw my first telephone. . . . But this was no more than the first stage of my entry into a universe of wonders and surprise." Car sickness, air sickness, and cravings for Coca-Cola and ice cream followed in short order for the premodern highland pilgrim, while his amazement at the huge crowds speaking an unintelligible language continued throughout his journey in India.⁶⁹ Even the most simple technological features of Indian life could prove a complete mystery to newly arrived pilgrims, and the Tibetans circulated humorous and ironic anecdotes about themselves and their countrymen having such encounters in India, for example, concerning the humble rickshaw:

Until we saw them carrying a passenger, we didn't understand what rickshaws were for. There was nothing like them in Tibet. There is a story of a young man who had just arrived from Tibet with his uncle en route to Bodhgaya. As they got off the bus, the uncle asked his nephew to fetch an empty rickshaw. After a long and fruitless search he returned to say that he couldn't find a single one without someone already on it. He didn't understand that every rickshaw has to have a puller or driver!⁷⁰

These examples may appear quaint and amusing to us as we read them from our postindustrial, digital perspective. Yet they are only a part of the picture of Tibetan pilgrims encountering modernity in India. Although we often read clichés about the hidebound conservatism of the Tibetan religious worldview and establishment during the early twentieth century, and also the very real resistance to modern change that did manifest itself among the monastic elite at that time, in general, ordinary Tibetans have never exhibited Luddite tendencies. Rather, they have always enthusiastically and creatively embraced modern material culture and its pos-

sibilities, and it was often pilgrimage to India which first allowed this to happen. For instance, the Bönpo lama Khyungrül Jigme Namkha Dorje (1897–1955) performed pilgrimage to a wide range of Indian Buddhist sites throughout the 1920s. Between visits to the holy places, and as part of his wider missionary activities, he undertook the reproduction of Tibetan religious books in north Indian cities using the modern printing technology available there.⁷¹ During his 1924 pilgrimage to Bodh Gayā and other shrines, the progressive Tibetan military chief Dasang Drandul Tsarong availed himself of the tax-free trading regulations between Tibet and India at the time, purchasing large quantities of modern furniture as well as one hundred and fifty of the latest precision-made German Mauser pistols to take back to Tibet.⁷² In their turn, Jigme Taring (1912–91) and his wife Rinchen Drolma Taring undertook a journey from central Tibet to Bodh Gayā in 1930–31, during which they shopped for modern gadgets such as typewriters and gramophones to carry back to Tibet.⁷³ These examples express, of course, the privileges of a small minority of elite Tibetan pilgrims, the aristocrats and incarnate lamas who commanded superior resources while on pilgrimage to India. The reality for most Tibetan pilgrims in India during the early twentieth century was, however, far more modest, involving sleeping rough, riding third-class on overcrowded Indian trains—often without tickets—and then being forced to beg for the means to make the return journey home to Tibet afterward.⁷⁴

Even when aspects of technological modernity did finally get some very limited exposure in places like Lhasa, elite Tibetans who encountered them there immediately thought of how they could be harnessed to provide some new and unique forms of pilgrimage experience of Buddhist India and South Asia. A fascinating example of such openness and creativity in relation to new forms of modern representation is that stimulated by the introduction of film screenings in Lhasa by the resident British diplomatic representatives. In 1937, Political Officer Basil Gould (1883–1956) reported of film screenings at the British Mission: “A senior monk official recently suggested that it would cause much satisfaction in Lhasa if arrangements could be made to take a cinema record of holy Buddhist place[s] in Burma, India and Ceylon and to show [them] in Lhasa.”⁷⁵

Tibetan-Indian Interactions

Another dimension of Tibetan pilgrims’ experiences that has never been well or even realistically represented in the traditional Tibetan sources is the nature of the nonreligious cultural interchanges between Tibetan

visitors and their Indian hosts. Seldom do we gain even the most superficial insight into the ways in which, for example, different identities were negotiated, or how appearances and habits were mutually understood and engaged with.⁷⁶ We do find indications of at least one common cultural interchange between early twentieth-century Tibetan pilgrims and the Indian environment that is worthy of note here, that of diet.

Not only did Tibetans—especially pastoralists—often find it difficult to go without their customary meat-based diet while travelling in much of India, they also had to face modern religious intolerance to it. Many of the orthodox Hindus whom Tibetans commonly encountered at Indian holy places were strict vegetarians, and in Hindu India, as in a great many other societies, dietary differences have long been used to construct indigenous ethnic classifications upon which attitudes to outsiders are based. At Bodh Gayā in 1903, a visiting Tibetan pilgrimage party reported of the local Hindu population there that, “they called “Blighty” [i.e., *bilāyatī*, “foreigner”] after us, because we were yellow, and wore Tibetan dress, and ate meat.”⁷⁷ However, Tibetan pilgrims also encountered exactly the same attitudes from conservative Buddhist modernists, many of whom had become strict vegetarians. The Maha Bodhi Society, for example, had promoted nonviolence and vegetarianism as central pillars of its modern form of Buddhist social ethics, and this led to inevitable cultural conflicts. Already in the 1920s, Maha Bodhi Society founder Dharmapāla had publicly berated “beef-eating Tibetans” on pilgrimage to Bodh Gayā for offering meat at the altar of the Mahābodhi Temple—something they probably did because they had little else but their personal food supplies to present as offerings.⁷⁸ Tibetan pilgrims adapted to the ethnic labelling and criticisms they encountered in India by secretly carrying and eating their traditional air-dried meat, which did not need to be cooked, and thus did not attract the attention of such “fanatic and ill-intentioned vegetarians.”⁷⁹

An Astute Beggar in the Holy Land

In the context of an increasing ritual, logistical, and literary promotion of pilgrimages to the redefined holy places of the Buddha by modern international Buddhist missionaries and Indian railway companies during the mid-1930s, a young Tibetan intellectual named Amdo Gendun Chöphel first arrived in India and began a series of extensive journeys around the subcontinent. It is a reasonable speculation that, next to the much revered and admired figures of the Thirteenth and Fourteenth Dalai Lamas, Amdo Gendun Chöphel is probably one of the most celebrated of twentieth-century

Tibetans.⁸⁰ He certainly enjoys the status of a modern culture hero of sorts among the current generation of Tibetan intellectuals, both in Tibet itself and within the exile community. He has often been admired by Westerners for his keen interest in the world that lay beyond that of parochial Tibetan concerns, and for his sometimes iconoclastic stance and ironic humour.

Although Amdo Gendun Chöphel is well known to contemporary Tibetans for his works on early Tibetan political history, Madhyamaka philosophy, erotic love, and travel accounts of India and Ceylon, plus a range of other subjects represented in his oeuvre,⁸¹ our interest in him here is as the author of the first modern Tibetan pilgrimage guidebook to the Buddhist holy places of India. Amdo Gendun Chöphel was not the first or the only erudite and literate Tibetan pilgrim to visit India. However, he left behind a legacy that no others had before him. During his twelve-year sojourn in South Asia, he became involved in the milieu of the Indian Maha Bodhi Society. As a consequence, more than any other Tibetan of his day, he transmitted a Buddhist modernist perspective on India as a holy land of Buddhism to his fellow Tibetans, mainly in the form of his modest but popular *Guide to India*.⁸² This work is of enduring importance for an understanding of modern Tibetan pilgrimage in India because it has remained popular and continues to be widely used even today. Since I have already published an edition and translation of the *Guide to India*, the present discussion will be restricted to crucial aspects of its transmission of a new and modern understanding of Buddhist India to a twentieth-century Tibetan audience.

Many fundamental questions concerning both Amdo Gendun Chöphel as a pilgrim and his *Guide to India* have so far not been fully considered. For example, why did he even write a guidebook to the Buddhist holy places of India in the first place? What were the sources and inspirations for his guidebook? What message did he hope to convey to his Tibetan readers? And, of most importance to our present discussion, what qualifies his text as being “modern”? By considering such questions here, I hope to cast Amdo Gendun Chöphel’s writing in a somewhat more complex light, one that clearly demonstrates the great influence upon him—and subsequently upon his Tibetan readers—of the Buddhist modernist milieu.

Meeting the Modern Indian Guru

Accounts of early Tibetan conversions to and instruction in Buddhism, whether set in India or Tibet, often feature a decisive encounter between a Tibetan protagonist and an Indian guru figure. This is precisely what appears to have happened in the life of Amdo Gendun Chöphel. In 1927, the

young man from the region of Amdo in far northeastern Tibet undertook the long journey to the holy city of Lhasa in central Tibet. He was already ordained as a Buddhist monk, and he began a course of higher Buddhist studies in the huge Gelukpa monastery of Drepung on the outskirts of Lhasa city. Although Amdo Gendun Chöphel studied higher-level philosophy and was a formidable debater, he was a rather nonconformist student who had little interest in attending regular classes and monastic ceremonies. While staying in Lhasa during 1934 and earning his living by painting, Amdo Gendun Chöphel had a fateful encounter with the Indian scholar-activist Rahul Sankrityayan (also known as Kedarnath Pandey, 1893–1963). Sankrityayan had travelled to Tibet on a quest to recover ancient Indian Sanskrit manuscripts that had survived for centuries in Tibetan monastic libraries. The foreign visitor's presence in Lhasa represented an ideal opportunity for the curious Amdo Gendun Chöphel to expand his horizons.

Rahul Sankrityayan was a remarkable figure who led a long and complex intellectual, religious, and political life, and he holds a notable place in modern Indian nationalist history. A portion of his considerable energies and passions were devoted to the Indian Buddhist revival movement, of which he was a leading participant during the 1930s.⁸³ His influence upon Amdo Gendun Chöphel's views of India as a modern Buddhist sacred terrain and the curious Tibetan's activities in India should not be underestimated. Sankrityayan's own conversion to Buddhism began with his relationship to Bodhananda Mahasthavir (1874–1952), who was the first modern Indian Buddhist monk to be ordained in India itself. Bodhananda hailed from a Bengali family that had settled in Uttar Pradesh, where he—like Rahul Sankrityayan—was born and grew up. Bodhananda had been ordained as a Buddhist monk in 1914 by Kripasharan Mahasthavir or Mahathero (1865–1927). Kripasharan Mahasthavir was the founder of the Bauddha Dharmankura Sabha (later the Bengal Buddhist Association) in Calcutta, a pioneering Bengali Buddhist revival institution whose members had been involved with the Sixth Panchen Lama's visit to India in 1905–6. In 1916, Bodhananda himself went on to establish the Indian Buddhist Society in Lucknow, and it was there at its headquarters, in the following year, that Rahul Sankrityayan first made his acquaintance.

In 1920, Sankrityayan performed a pilgrimage to the Indian Buddhist holy sites that the Maha Bodhi Society was actively reviving and promoting at the time; following this pilgrimage, he composed a verse eulogy (*mahātmya*) of the main places connected with the life of the Buddha. He was then active between 1922 and 1924 in the movement organized by the Maha Bodhi Society to legally reclaim the temple site of Bodh Gayā for

Buddhist ownership. In 1930, he undertook the first of several expeditions to Tibet in search of Sanskrit manuscripts, and immediately after his return to India he was ordained a Buddhist monk. Sankrityayan the monk then became more heavily involved with the Maha Bodhi Society, undertaking international missionary works for them in Europe during 1932. As a devoted scholar and writer, he began a long career as a translator of Pāli Buddhist texts into Hindi, and he also wrote a series of popular books and articles introducing Buddhism to the Indian public. Thus, Sankrityayan, along with his contemporaries Jagdish Narain (1908–76) and Anand Kausalyayan (1905–88), became one of the most important and influential Indian Buddhist modernist figures of the 1930s.⁸⁴

When Amdo Gendun Chöphel first met Rahul Sankrityayan in 1934, he must have been impressed by the Indian scholar-traveller and modern Buddhist monk. He promptly left his life in Lhasa behind and went off travelling together with his new Indian acquaintance, initially in Sankrityayan's employ as an assistant in his search for Sanskrit manuscripts. In November of the same year, Amdo Gendun Chöphel journeyed with Sankrityayan to northern India by way of Nepal. For the following twelve years, with the exception of one scholarly expedition back to the Tsang region of Tibet during 1938—in the company of and at the bidding of Sankrityayan—Amdo Gendun Chöphel remained in South Asia for an extended period of travel and personal study during which he experienced many facets of the rapidly changing world of late colonial India, from its Buddhist holy places to its brothels.

The Pilgrimage Years

It was Rahul Sankrityayan who initially guided Amdo Gendun Chöphel on a pilgrimage of north Indian Buddhist holy sites during the beginning of his sojourn in India. A rare glimpse of their shared journey during the winter of 1934–35 was given by Sankrityayan in one of his later autobiographical writings:

We arrived finally in India. The geshé [Amdo Gendun Chöphel], who was born in some remote valley of the Yellow River, was very moved by the idea of seeing the natal land of the Lord Buddha. The dream which he had nourished for such a long time finally realized itself. I took him with me to visit the holy places of Buddhism in India. Everywhere we went . . . he explained in verse the life of Śākyamuni and sketched the places.⁸⁵

The aging pandit's fond reminiscences sound very positive, yet Amdo Gendun Chöphel's own description of his arrival and initial stay in India is rather less than enthusiastic:

[Travelling] in a south-westerly direction through Nepal, we crossed over to Chandragiri and before long met up with the Indian railway. On the eighteenth day of the tenth Tibetan month of my thirty-second year [= December 1934], I drank the waters of the Gangā, and for the entire winter of that year I stayed in the city of Pāṭaliputra [i.e., Patna] and experienced a sadness which was like falling into the middle of a lake of vermin.⁸⁶

Amdo Gendun Chöphel is the only preexile-era Tibetan author I have read to date who actually reveals some deeper level of emotional response to his pilgrimage and other travel experiences in India. The conflict between his urge to explore the outside world, including pilgrimage around the great sacred sites of India, and the longing for his distant "homeland" (*pha yul*) of Repkong was poignantly expressed in a poem he wrote in English while still in India during 1941:

My feet are wandering neath alien stars,
My native land,—the road is far and long.
Yet the same light of Venus and Mars
Falls on the small green valley of Repkong.
Repkong,—I left thee and my heart behind,
My boyhood's dusty plays,—in far Tibet.
Karma, that restless stallion made of wind,
In tossing me; where will it land me yet?

. . . I've drunk of holy Ganga's glistening wave,
I've sat beneath the sacred Bodhi tree,
Whose leaves the wanderer's weary spirit lave.
Thou sacred land of Ind, I honour thee,
But, oh, that little valley of Repkong,
The sylvan brook which flows that vale along.⁸⁷

After his early introduction to Indian Buddhist sites in the company of Sankrityayan, Amdo Gendun Chöphel set off on his own explorations. Between 1935 and 1939 he travelled extensively throughout the subcontinent in search of further ancient holy places and new sources of information,

either alone or together with the occasional Tibetan companion. Due to his often extremely modest means, he usually resorted to the cheapest or simplest forms of transportation—third-class rail, the buffalo cart, rickshaw, or walking—and he noted down the train fares at each stage of his journeys to reach places associated with Buddhism in India.⁸⁸ He also spent more than a year in Ceylon, visiting and later describing all of its major Buddhist sites and religious history in detail in several of his writings. Since Amdo Gendun Chöphel did not possess proper travel documents, some of his journeys were only possible by way of elite connections: his trip to Ceylon was facilitated by the private secretary of the Mahārāja of Sikkim.⁸⁹ These journeys, undertaken over some years, constituted the field research upon which a good part of Amdo Gendun Chöphel's *Guide to India* was based.

Inspirations for the *Guide to India*

The writing of the *Guide to India*, which was first published in 1939, took place over an extended period of time⁹⁰ and was heavily inspired by the particular cultural niche of 1930s India in which Amdo Gendun Chöphel circulated. But why did Amdo Gendun Chöphel even write a popular guidebook to the Buddhist holy places of India? It is of course tempting simply to assume that as an educated Tibetan Buddhist he would naturally be interested in the Indian holy land which was traditionally revered as the fountainhead of Tibetan religion and high culture. Yet there is no biographical evidence that he maintained any strong earlier interests in the ancient holy places prior to meeting his influential Buddhist friend Rahul Sankrityayan. On the other hand, there is every reason to think that Sankrityayan introduced him to all the inspiration he required in regard to such matters, not only by way of his personal example, since Sankrityayan had already composed his own *mahātmya* for the Buddhist holy sites, but also crucially through the world of the Maha Bodhi Society of 1930s India.

The extent to which Amdo Gendun Chöphel's involvement with the Maha Bodhi Society inspired and influenced the composition of his *Guide to India* and some of his other literary works should not be underestimated. This point has so far been completely neglected by his Tibetan and Western biographers, who have generally assumed—in the palpable atmosphere of hero worship that seems to surround him—that the *Guide to India* was another example of his “native Tibetan genius.” A good parallel example of the Maha Bodhi Society and its representative Sankrityayan being a source of inspiration for the works of Amdo Gendun Chöphel is his translation from Pāli into Tibetan of the now well-known Buddhist

scripture entitled *Dhammapada*.⁹¹ Apart from the *Dhammapada*'s historical absence from the Tibetan Buddhist canon, the fact that he chose to translate this particular text into Tibetan was due to a new Buddhist missionary translation program sponsored by the Maha Bodhi Society during the 1930s. Indian Buddhist modernists had deemed the *Dhammapada*, which is a relatively short collection of aphorisms, to be a highly accessible and pithy text with which to convey what they regarded as the essential message of the Buddha's ancient teachings. In fact, the 1930s translation and promotion of the *Dhammapada* by Buddhist modernists completely parallels—and was no doubt inspired by—the late nineteenth- and early twentieth-century creation of the *Bhāgavad Gītā* as the so-called Hindu New Testament among educated Indians and Europeans in the context of the modern Hindu revival movement.⁹² Amdo Gendun Chöphel's original Tibetan translation of the *Dhammapada* merely followed that of this Buddhist modernist guru, Rahul Sankrityayan, who in 1938 had already published his own Hindi version of the text, together with the original Sanskrit and Pāli, as part of the Maha Bodhi Society's *Dhammapada* translation and publication program. This program helped establish the *Dhammapada* as the single most translated Buddhist scripture in history.⁹³

While in India, Amdo Gendun Chöphel in fact eventually joined the Maha Bodhi Society. It was through the Calcutta headquarters of the society, where he worked for a time, that he had his *Guide to India* first published in 1939 and subsequently marketed in the society's international missionary journal, *The Maha-Bodhi*.⁹⁴ It is well known that Amdo Gendun Chöphel was disillusioned by what he saw as the heavily conservative and self-serving elite of his own Buddhist institutions and society in Tibet. In contrast to this, he took Anagarika Dharmapāla, the Maha Bodhi Society, and even some of the Theravāda monks with whom they associated as presenting more positive models of what a socially engaged modern Buddhism could be.⁹⁵

It is clear that Amdo Gendun Chöphel was much impressed by the figure of Dharmapāla when he wrote the *Guide to India*. When offering his Tibetan readers a capsule biography of the activist, he refers to him earnestly as a "great soul" (*mahātman*) selflessly working for all Buddhists "by way of a hundred difficulties and without regard for life and property." Dharmapāla's efforts to reestablish modern Buddhist centres at Sarnāth and elsewhere were described by his Tibetan admirer as "the beginnings of the later propagation of Buddhist teaching in India." The use of the Tibetan historiographical terminology "later propagation of Buddhist teaching" here to invoke a parallel with the so-called later propagation (*phyi dar*) of

Indian Buddhism to Tibet from the eleventh to thirteenth centuries would certainly not have been lost on his educated Tibetan readers. Dharmapāla's works, and particularly the long-running campaign for repossession of the contested site of Bodh Gayā, were described sincerely by Amdo Gendun Chöphel several times in the course of the *Guide to India*.

Whatever Amdo Gendun Chöphel may have thought of Dharmapāla, right from the beginning of his visit to India he entered into and maintained close contacts with the missionary milieu of the Maha Bodhi Society's modern pilgrimage industry. Since he enjoyed full access to the mass of existing Maha Bodhi Society publications promoting Buddhist pilgrimage to India, it is no surprise to find ample evidence of their influence and adaptation throughout the *Guide to India*. The style of his descriptive content and itinerary in places, the extensive references to the Indian railway network, the citation of the Chinese pilgrims' accounts, references to archaeological works, and even the quotation of the passage from the *Mahāparinibbāna Sutta* on pilgrimage to the four sites of the Buddha's life which he employed were all standard features of earlier Maha Bodhi Society publications which he could have accessed either in the library at the society's Calcutta headquarters where he worked or in the private collections of his associates in India. To cap it all off, the *Guide to India* even closes with a two-page outline of the Maha Bodhi Society's "good works" together with a missionary appeal for support directed toward potential Tibetan members and patrons.⁹⁶

It should be seriously considered that the Maha Bodhi Society itself, through one of its active members—such as Sankrityayan himself or one of its agents and sympathizers in Sikkim⁹⁷—actually requested Amdo Gendun Chöphel to compose the *Guide to India* for its missionary publications program. It clearly would have suited the society's aims to have its message extended northward over the Himalayas to a Tibetan Buddhist audience in this manner. We do know his *Guide to India* was indeed successful as missionary propaganda among Tibetans. In Lhasa during the 1940s, its Tibetan readers came across the Maha Bodhi Society appeal at the end of the work and immediately sought to subscribe as members.⁹⁸

Re-Presenting Buddhist India in Twentieth-Century Tibet

As a result of all these influences, many important aspects of Amdo Gendun Chöphel's *Guide to India* were very much a product of the Maha Bodhi Society pilgrimage industry in 1930s India and also of its wider roots in both Buddhist modernism and the colonial archaeology of Indian

Buddhism. Yet Amdo Gendun Chöphel did have his own strong Tibetan background and agenda with which to interpret and utilize such influences, and these are also evident in his work.

A central aspect of Amdo Gendun Chöphel's intentions in writing the *Guide to India* was his desire to appeal directly to a Tibetan pilgrim audience that still carried much of the traditional cultural baggage about India that had accumulated over the previous centuries. As already demonstrated in the case studies presented in chapters 5 through 8, premodern Tibetan Buddhists associated a wide range of sites in India with the Buddha and Buddhism, although many of these places had no precedents whatsoever in any other versions of Buddhist historical geography; from this perspective, they represent purely invented traditions. Furthermore, many sites that the Tibetans visited in India were associated with a welter of popular tales and speculations that were also not attested in the canonical traditions of Tibetan Buddhism. Fully aware of this state of affairs, throughout his *Guide to India* Amdo Gendun Chöphel advanced sharp and sometimes humorous criticisms of his fellow Tibetans and their reinvention of Buddhist sites in India, for example:

When some pilgrims arrive at an unknown site and see a marvellous temple, without any evidence whatsoever they take it to be authentic, proclaiming "This is such-and-such and so-and-so holy place of the Buddha." They call out the news to one another, and thus the holy places that are becoming famous are even increasing annually. . . . At first, talk is muddled. Following that, if people have faith they insist on whatever was said, and are unable to distinguish a true holy place from a false one.⁹⁹

While other traditionally minded Tibetan commentators have normally expressed critical concern about the erosion or lack of pilgrims' faith (*dad pa*),¹⁰⁰ here instead we find Amdo Gendun Chöphel viewing faith itself as an impediment to the attainment of correct knowledge. His critical views on faith are well known, and he would often make comments such as, "I don't know what faith is. This thing called faith is experienced perhaps out of liking. Or sometimes it is experienced out of attachment."¹⁰¹ The importance of critically informed knowledge, rather than faith in received traditions and the conservativeness which this breeds, was a theme which was to occupy Amdo Gendun Chöphel in several of his other related works of the late 1930s. For example, in his article entitled "The World is Round or Spherical" (*'jig rten ril mo 'am zlum po*), published in 1938, he argued

vigorously against the twentieth-century Tibetan Buddhist acceptance of a “flat earth theory” which still persisted in the face of all the modern geographical knowledge which had become available. In this article, he singled out Tibetans as particularly intransigent on this point compared to other Buddhists throughout Asia: “Even among all the Buddhist believers of Ceylon, Burma, Siam, Japan, China, and so forth, there is not even one who does not believe that it is round. However, even now in our own land of Tibet they insist on the position that it is not.”¹⁰² Together with his argument against the Tibetan flat earth theory, Amdo Gendun Chöphel presented what is most likely the very first modern Tibetan map of the globe based upon Cartesian projection.

Amdo Gendun Chöphel was not just a critic who sought to directly challenge all the features of the traditional Tibetan knowledge system that he perceived as being flawed. He was also a didact. His *Guide to India* was a pithy effort to refocus Tibetan understandings of India—and consequently Tibetans’ ritual practice there as pilgrims—by introducing his readers to his newly acquired, modern knowledge of Buddhist India. Although Amdo Gendun Chöphel’s project may perhaps appear fairly innocent and rather modest from our present-day perspective, from the viewpoint of Tibetan society during his own era it was certainly somewhat deviant and subversive. It must be recalled that during the first half of the twentieth century, attempts to establish forms of modern education in Tibet had been consistently opposed by the conservative elements dominant within the monastic elite of the ruling Gelukpa school of Tibetan Buddhism, even at times with the threat of force.¹⁰³

To understand the nature and extent of Amdo Gendun Chöphel’s project to re-present a modern Buddhist version of India to twentieth-century Tibetans, we can fruitfully focus upon three related aspects of the *Guide to India* which were, in almost all respects, unprecedented when compared with prior Tibetan presentations of India: his particular selection of Buddhist sites in India;¹⁰⁴ his guidelines for establishing the authenticity of Indian Buddhist holy places; and his system of spatial representation of India and its Buddhist sites.

Sites

Amdo Gendun Chöphel commences his work by orienting his readers toward two schemes of holy places associated with the legend of the Buddha. The first scheme he mentions is that of the “four (great) holy places” (*gnas*

bzhi po/gnas chen bzhi po), which are associated with the Buddha's birth (Lumbinī), awakening (Bodh Gayā), first teaching (Sārnāth), and final passing beyond suffering (Kūśinagar). While these four places were long known to Tibetan Buddhists, they were seldom grouped as a distinctive set of four and indicated as the specific focus of Buddhist pilgrimage in India. Amdo Gendun Chöphel first invokes them in a quotation from a now well-known passage in the Pāli *Mahāparinibbāna Sutta* (which he was probably paraphrasing from an English translation), widely recognized as the locus classicus for the tradition of pilgrimage in Buddhism.¹⁰⁵ Similar passages from Sanskrit texts, while certainly occurring in native Tibetan writings,¹⁰⁶ are not generally found quoted in the vast Tibetan literature on pilgrimage and in works on Indian Buddhist sacred geography. This passage is, however, very commonly cited in the writings of Anagarika Dharmapāla and also in many other Maha Bodhi Society publications.

A second scheme of sites is then introduced in the *Guide to India*, the scheme of "eight great holy places" so frequently invoked in Tibetan texts dealing with Buddhist India since at least the twelfth century. As we have already discussed in chapter 3, despite the frequent reference to this scheme in Tibetan literature we know that in actual practice Tibetan pilgrims in India never visited or mentioned more than one or two of the individual places that constitute this group of eight, and that the expression "eight great holy places" (*gnas chen po brgyad*) very often served rather as a kind of empty category or shorthand referring to the land of the Buddha in general. However, Amdo Gendun Chöphel did more than merely invoke the "eight great holy places" category, he enumerated his own list of them.¹⁰⁷ Then he provided details on how to actually visit each individual site within the context and conditions in which he himself encountered them during the 1930s, that is, as archaeologically identified and excavated, often even officially restored, and frequently the focus of modern Buddhist revival activities. Judging from all the available Tibetan records, Amdo Gendun Chöphel was in fact the very first Tibetan pilgrim in history ever to systematically visit all eight of these sites (compare fig. 10.3 here). In common with the first scheme of four holy places of the Buddha which Amdo Gendun Chöphel mentioned, the "eight great holy places" were also systematically treated as a group in the publications of the Maha Bodhi Society which described and promoted Buddhist pilgrimage, and these same publications—not to mention their authors and readers—were accessible to Amdo Gendun Chöphel during his residence in India.¹⁰⁸

Amdo Gendun Chöphel also introduced his Tibetan audience to a wide

range of early Buddhist sites scattered throughout India at places where there is no prior historical record of earlier Tibetan pilgrimage visits. These sites included ancient Sāñcī, Kauśāmbī, Takṣaśilā (Taxila), Ajañṭā, Ellorā, Nāgārjunikoṇḍa, and so forth. These were all places that had been rediscovered by colonial scholars of Buddhism during the modern period, but about which the Tibetans themselves mostly had no prior knowledge whatsoever or which—in the case of the very few known to them through certain texts—were seldom even mentioned in Tibetan Buddhist sources. As a supplement to these recently rediscovered ancient sites, Amdo Gendun Chöphel also recommended visits to four modern museums (at Patna, Mathura, Lahore, and Taxila) in which archaeologically recovered ancient Buddhist remains could be viewed by visiting pilgrims.

In stark contrast to his rather thorough introduction of the recently rediscovered ancient sites of Indian Buddhism, Amdo Gendun Chöphel completely rejected the invented Buddhist sites in the Punjab, Bengal, and Assam that had been so very popular among Tibetan pilgrims during the past several centuries. He pointed out that Zahor was located in Bengal—and not in the Punjab Hills as Tibetans had come to assume—and merely mentioned the name of Rewalsar in passing in his account of general travel routes through the foothills of the western Himalayas. Likewise, he clearly described the true significance of Amritsar as the sacred centre of the Sikh gurus and the religion that they founded. He took the trouble to explicitly point out the falsehood of the Tibetan Kuśinagar in Assam, redirecting pilgrims instead to visit the archaeologically identified site of Kuśinagar near Gorakhpur. Concerning those many sites of Hinduism that Tibetan pilgrims had begun to increasingly patronize since the time of the Third Panchen Lama, Amdo Gendun Chöphel simply ignored them all, including the great sacred river Ganges, which is merely cited as a convenient geographical reference point in his route descriptions. The only exception is his mention of the Jagannāth Temple in Puri, which he correctly identified as a Vaiṣṇava centre lacking in Buddhist associations.

Authenticity

Since the didactic project of the entire *Guide to India* pivots upon the question of identifying authentic Buddhist holy places in India, Amdo Gendun Chöphel raised this issue at points throughout his work. After chiding Tibetan pilgrims for their spurious identifications of Buddhist sites, he presented a general method for establishing the authenticity of a holy place, taking the Rṣipatana at Sārnāth as his example:

Therefore, distinguishing features ought to be properly analyzed. For example, if we illustrate this with regard to the place where the wheel of the Buddhist doctrine was [first] turned: Initially, it is necessary to know what the name of that place is in Tibetan. It is Drangsong Lungwa. Then it is necessary to know what earlier Sanskrit that Tibetan word was translated from. It was R̥ṣipātana. Then there is the question of what R̥ṣipātana is called nowadays: it is called Sārnāth. After gradually compiling such [evidence], and finally identifying the city which is in the vicinity [i.e., Vārāṇasī] and that it is within the confines of the Asī and Varāṇā rivers as well, then one holy place should be recognized there.¹⁰⁹

A few earlier Tibetan scholars had previously also raised the problem of establishing the authenticity of holy places using correct means of identification.¹¹⁰ However, in such rare instances the critical method is left implicit and applied to arguments about specific sites only. Amdo Gendun Chöphel, on the other hand, explicitly offered in abstract a systematic, step-by-step procedure as a distinct methodology—in this case, a Tibetan toponymy—that was addressed to a much wider audience in the context of the guidebook genre. Furthermore, in keeping with the nineteenth- and early twentieth-century European scholarship on Indian Buddhism, Amdo Gendun Chöphel also cites the authority of the Chinese pilgrims' accounts when describing the Buddhist sites he selected. He would have encountered this novel authority marker constantly while he was studying in India. The use of the Chinese accounts had become the prime modus operandi in much of the early archaeological rediscovery of Indian Buddhism, particularly in the efforts of Alexander Cunningham.¹¹¹ What is more, the Chinese accounts were enthusiastically adopted as well by Buddhist modernists in India. Writing on the excavations at Pāṭaliputra in the journal of the Maha Bodhi Society in 1897, the well-known Indian archaeologist Purna Chandra Mukherji made the by then routine observation that “the easiest way of identifying local monuments, hitherto neglected, is to follow Fa-Hian.”¹¹² The great explorer-scholar of ancient Central Asia, Marc Aurel Stein (1862–1942), referred to Xuanzang as “my adopted ‘Chinese patron saint’” in his book, *On Alexander's Track to the Indus*. Throughout this survey of Buddhist remains in the Swāt Valley, Stein never fails to praise the Chinese account's reliability for use in relocating sites and the exact fit between Xuanzang's descriptions and the places he himself visited.¹¹³

Details of Buddhist sites provided by Amdo Gendun Chöphel were in fact often also derived from the Chinese pilgrim's accounts, although these same details were clearly obtained by him secondhand from European

orientalist scholarship in which they had already been subjected to heavy interpretation. For instance, in his description of Sāṃkāśya, Amdo Gendun Chöphel—employing a phrasing which could come straight out of the pages of Cunningham or Stein—states, “The figure of an elephant, which was the capital of an Aśokan stone pillar seen here in the past by the [Chinese] monk Xuanzang, exists here as if it was the exact spot [Xuanzang visited].”¹¹⁵ But in his original account of Sāṃkāśya, Xuanzang never reported seeing an elephant on the pillar capital at all, but a lion, as did Faxian before him. The identification of the elephant with what Xuanzang saw there was actually made in a detailed discussion by Cunningham,¹¹⁵ and Amdo Gendun Chöphel clearly copied it.

Space and Representation

In Tibetan works on the geography and holy places of Buddhist India which were composed up to and even during the twentieth century, the system of spatial representation employed was based upon the often sophisticated use of Buddhist cosmological referencing and ritual patterns. Primarily, India was described as either a central part of or identical to Jambudvīpa, the southern cosmic continent of the Buddhist world system. Moreover, the Vajrāsana at Bodh Gayā, the most important of all Buddhist holy places for Tibetans, was also considered as both the religious and geographical centre of the world. Even when the religious centre was thought to have shifted to Tibet (due to the living tradition there following the demise of Buddhism in India), Tibetans continued to maintain the notion of Bodh Gayā's geographical centrality. A second premodern feature of spatial representations of India was the pervasive use of the mandala or psychocosmogram as a model. In all detailed Tibetan discussions of the Tantric *pīṭha* network, whether explicitly described as being arrayed around Jambudvīpa or around “India” (Gyagar or Phagpaé Yül), the mandala was most frequently utilized in various ways as the spatial reference system. Similarly, both simple and complex non-Tantric Tibetan geographical representations of India used a basic five-point mandala of the cardinal directions plus the central zenith-nadir axis. A third feature common to traditional presentations of India as a type of space is the enumeration of geographical features and travel routes according to prescribed directions of ritual movement, especially clockwise or right-handed circumambulation.

All of the points just elaborated can be clearly seen, for example, in the Third Panchen Lama's historical-geographical account of India. The Panchen divided the subcontinent into a five-section mandala based upon

the cardinal directions, while the description of all the individual sites proceeds, section by section, locality by locality, in a great clockwise circumambulation (centre > east > south > west > north) of the entire subcontinent. Local and regional geographical descriptions based upon circumambulation direction are also ubiquitous in Tibetan pilgrimage literature.¹¹⁶ In these accounts, the various sites arrayed around a central holy place are listed in the order in which the pilgrim must encounter them while undertaking the circumambulation thus defined. There is often an explicit mythical basis to such spatial representations, since the order of the holy sites around a circumambulation path is determined by the sequence of events recounted in the narrative of the initial "opening of the site" (*gnas sgo phye ba*) by the original lama hero whose actions there constitute the very first pilgrimage, a sequence which all later pilgrims must also reenact themselves. All of the aforementioned features can also be found utilized to varying degrees in traditional Tibetan cartography.

In his *Guide to India*, Amdo Gendun Chöphel completely abandoned all such traditional spatial representations in favour of a completely modern alternative. He began his account of the Buddhist sites in India with Bodh Gayā, just as we might expect a Tibetan scholar to do. However, his entire plan of India which unfolds from there was based upon the Indian railway network of the 1930s, and, far from being a clockwise circumambulation, it followed the rail network around the subcontinent from northeast to northwest, then centre to west and east to south, with a second section returning to the far northwest once again. Amdo Gendun Chöphel provided information on rail connections together with the details of individual Buddhist holy places in his text describing the sequence of sites covered in the first part of his work, and these rail connections form a network linking the holy places together. In his final section, entitled *Rail Fares and Station Names*, he gave a second, more detailed set of practical instructions for Tibetan pilgrims to use in order to travel by rail around all the Buddhist sites of India. Amdo Gendun Chöphel also supplied a hand-drawn map (fig. 10.5), entitled "The Holy Land of India: The Field Where There Exist the Reliquary Shrines Possessing a Core of [the Buddha's] Relics" (*Rgya gar 'phags pa'i yul / mchod rten ring bsrel kyi snying po can bzhugs pa'i zhing*). This map, which is inscribed with over one hundred place names, principally represents Indian railway stations and Buddhist holy places with the railway lines that connect them all into a greater whole.¹¹⁷ This network constituted the entire Indian territory of pilgrimage that was the Buddhist holy land according to Amdo Gendun Chöphel.

The sources of Amdo Gendun Chöphel's seemingly unique railway-

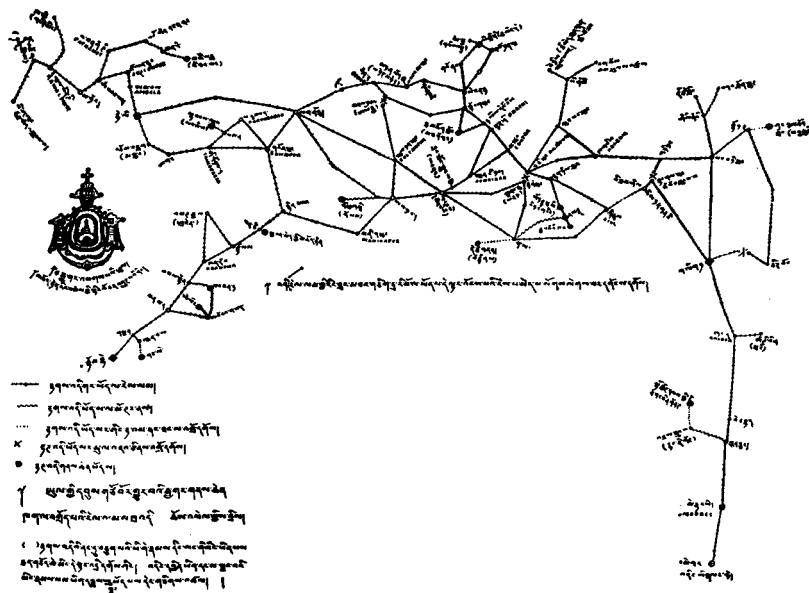


Figure 10.5. Amdo Gendun Chöphel's map of Indian Buddhist sites and the railway network.

oriented vision of a modern Buddhist India are once again to be found in the Buddhist modernist promotional literature that had already appeared in South Asia. For instance, in 1902 Phra Maha Chandrima had composed a "Guide to the Sacred Sites of the Buddhist Holy Land" for the Maha Bodhi Society, in which the passages describing transportation are identical with those penned years later by Amdo Gendun Chöphel in his *Guide to India*.¹¹⁸ An interesting precursor to Amdo Gendun Chöphel's map combining the rail network and the Buddhist holy places was the *Buddhist Pilgrim's Railway Guide Map for India*, published in Rangoon by the Publicity Department of the Burma Buddhist Pilgrim's Agency in 1928. This map also included advice to pilgrims travelling to India and, like the *Guide to India*, offered another small outline map of "Buddhist India."¹¹⁹ Thus, we can easily appreciate here that Amdo Gendun Chöphel was a very faithful transmitter of the Buddhist modernist representational system to his Tibetan readers.

The *Guide to India* also included two more of Amdo Gendun Chöphel's hand-drawn maps, both of which were unlike any previous examples of Tibetan cartography.¹²⁰ The first of these, entitled "Map Which Sets Out a Rough Outline Form of India Together with Neighbouring Countries"

(*rGya gar nye yul dang bcas pa'i rnam pa lam tsam bsdu te bkod pa'i sa khra*) is a simple Mercator-style outline map depicting a region spanning west to east from Afghanistan to Siam, and south to north from Java and Ceylon to Turkistan. It is inscribed with a curious mixture of references, including the names of ancient and modern countries, cities, Buddhist holy places, and geographical features, as well as ancient Sanskrit geographical terminology, such as Dakṣiṇāpatha and Uttarāpatha. A crude border is drawn around the colonial territories that together comprised British India and Burma during the 1930s. The second map, entitled "Landscape of Rājagṛha from Memory" (*rGyal po'i khab kyi ljongs bkod nges 'dzin tsam*), is an inscribed sketch of the hill region surrounding the site of the ancient town of Rājagṛha (fig. 10.6).

This sketch map is provided purely for the convenience of pilgrims, in order to clarify the somewhat complex collection of individual sites in this area described by Amdo Gendun Chöphel. Landscape sketches sometimes accompanied traditional Tibetan accounts of pilgrimage sites, however they were often drawn employing the unusual system of axonometric projection commonly used on Tibetan maps and paintings that depicted landscape. They were also often highly subjective. These traditional sketches, such as those drawn in the early twentieth century by the Seventh Ripa Bagyö (1876–1942) in order to illustrate his travel account of Tibet, Nepal, and India (e.g., fig. 10.7),¹²¹ are frequently obscure and impossible to use for the purposes of practical navigation through a piece of terrain. Amdo



Figure 10.6. Amdo Gendun Chöphel's sketch map of Rājagṛha, 1939.

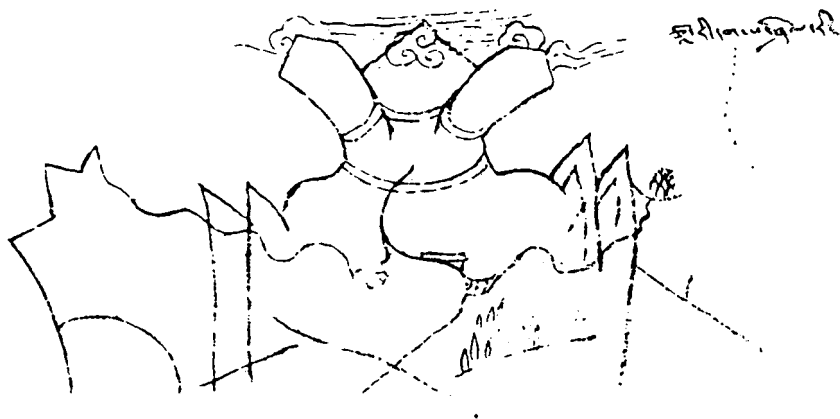


Figure 10.7. Tibetan sketch map of the holy mountain of Tsari Dakpa Shelri, early twentieth century.

Gendun Chöphel's innovation was the use of a conventional, modern European "bird's-eye view" perspective to reveal and clearly identify, from an imaginary point high above the ground, the entire local topography through which a pilgrim would have to progress on foot.

Modern Buddhist India Appropriated

When the curator of the "Wonder House" met the old Tibetan lama-pilgrim in *Kim*, Rudyard Kipling poignantly placed the emerging modern knowledge system concerning the holy places of Buddhist India firmly in the hands of European colonial authority and, at the same time, also tantalizingly beyond the independent grasp of the Tibetan on pilgrimage to India. Several decades after *Kim*, Amdo Gendun Chöphel's *Guide to India* represented a thorough Tibetan appropriation of this same modern understanding of the holy places of Buddhist India that Kipling had alluded to. Moreover, Amdo Gendun Chöphel's work was specifically intended to enable Tibetan pilgrims' independent access to this knowledge system. In doing so, he did not fully exchange one system of knowledge for the other, for his work is really a hybrid one which also preserved many individual Tibetan features and interests. However, it is a hybrid in which the dominant framework of understanding and representation is adapted directly from the very world of modern India in which Buddhism had recently re-emerged and undergone a remarkable revival. It is primarily with these

characteristics in mind that I consider Amdo Gendun Chöphel's *Guide to India* to be the first work of modern Tibetan literature.¹²²

If one considers the many available examples of pilgrimage guidebooks composed by Tibetans over the centuries, it is more or less impossible to say anything about their circulation and use beyond the very limited realm of elite, literate Tibetan clerics who sometimes cite each other's works. To be sure, even written pilgrimage guides may also rely significantly on oral information about holy sites.¹²³ Yet, in his *Guide to India*, it was precisely this oral dimension that Amdo Gendun Chöphel repeatedly criticized as being problematic and mistaken. Perhaps, then, he would have taken some comfort in the fact that his small, mechanically printed booklet containing the first modern Tibetan account of Buddhist India went on to become the most popular Tibetan pilgrimage guidebook of all time. During the 1980s and early 1990s, I found reprinted copies of the *Guide to India* in the possession of Tibetan pilgrims I encountered at various Indian Buddhist sites, and many Tibetan exiles I have talked to or visited either owned a copy or had read or heard about it. The now battered 1984 edition I first obtained in India years ago is prefaced by a short editorial statement in Tibetan explaining that the book was reissued due to the demand created by a great increase in the numbers of Tibetan pilgrims visiting Indian Buddhist sites. It has now appeared in over a dozen reprinted and edited versions, even inspiring other recent Tibetan guidebooks to Buddhist India.¹²⁴ The *Guide to India* has thus remained an important source for considering not only modern Tibetan pilgrimage in India but also the Tibetan reception of and relationship to Buddhist modernism as it emerged in India.



CHAPTER ELEVEN

Exile in the Land of the Buddha

I very much feel a part of this nation not only because of the centuries-old religious and cultural ties that India and Tibet enjoyed but also because I and most of the Tibetans in exile have lived in India for the past 45 years.

—*The Fourteenth Dalai Lama, March 10th, 2005*

Introduction

Just over a decade after the *Guide to India* was first published, and at the time of Amdo Gendun Chöphel's untimely death, colonial modernity—now in its Chinese Communist incarnation—first arrived on the Tibetan plateau. It rapidly began to overtake and transform all existing Tibetan societies. Chinese occupation of Tibet during the 1950s and after once again radically changed conditions for Tibetan pilgrimages to the holy land of India. It also dramatically transformed the meaning of India for Tibetans. From 1959 on, India became a land of exile for Tibetans, with a small but significant Tibetan Diaspora population of approximately eighty-five thousand¹ resident as political refugees within the boundaries of the Indian state. Nowadays, after several generations of refugee children have been born and raised in India, initially optimistic Tibetan exile expectations of a sojourn there have given way to a widespread—albeit seldom publicly voiced—resignation to more permanent residence in their “host country.”

A second and most profound consequence of the events of the past five decades has been the development of two very different modern Tibetan societies. The smaller one, which exists in Indian exile, has become a com-

petitive, aid-dependent, and very gradually and tentatively democratizing society. In this particular Tibetan world, highly reified and preservationist notions of Tibetan “culture” and “tradition” tend to define what it means to be “Tibetan,” while social discourse and behaviour are often shaped by strong pressures toward displaying solidarity and loyalty in the ongoing independence struggle. The degree of Tibetan exile acculturation to Indian society has remained generally low. Acculturation has also been a highly selective process, and one that is now changing among the younger generation of refugees who have either been born, or arrived more recently, in India. Tibetan exile society also has a certain limited cosmopolitan dimension, in terms of a flow of persons, capital, cultural resources, styles, and so on, back and forth between its Indian bases and a now globalized Tibetan Diaspora community.

Within the de facto political boundaries of Communist China, another very different, parallel Tibetan world has developed since 1959. This society still possesses its traditional, local subsistence base in agriculture and pastoralism. However, to this day it remains totally economically dependent upon Chinese state investment for all the forms of modern development it has experienced. And like the rest of China at the present time, it is a society in which free and spontaneous political expression or choice is not yet tolerated, and in which many aspects of life (e.g., freedom of movement and residence, family planning, access to information and education, etc.) are—in spite of recent liberalizations—still heavily determined by centralized state policy regimes emanating from far distant Beijing. To be “Tibetan” (Bod rigs/Zangzu) in China means owning this designation as an official ethnic or “nationality” (*minzu*) label. Such ethnic labelling comes with a state-defined set of parameters for the discourses and practices that Tibetans are expected to both conform to and express themselves through. People designated as “Tibetans” in contemporary China now find themselves just one among more than fifty different officially recognized ethnic groups competing for rights and resources within a complex multiethnic polity.

One of many differences between these two contemporary Tibetan worlds is the role played by India in the life of each community. There are many dimensions to this issue, and it can certainly be investigated fruitfully from the perspective of both Tibetans living in exile and those resident in China. My interest herein is primarily to discuss the outcomes of recent historical changes for Tibetan Buddhist pilgrimage culture in India and various aspects of the Tibetan cultural relationship with India since

the mid-twentieth century. In this chapter, I will focus only upon the long-term Tibetan exile community now in India. I do so primarily because after 1959 there have been relatively few and only irregular Tibetan pilgrimage visits to India from China.

Those Tibetans who remained in Tibet after 1959 initially faced a period of over two decades during which the Chinese Communist authorities totally forbade any travel outside of the region. Thus, pilgrimage to India became more or less impossible. Even across the Tibetan plateau itself, pilgrimage was banned until about 1980 in most areas, being deemed a redundant expression of "feudal superstition" under Maoism; it was even punishable by various sanctions if attempted.² During the post-Mao period of liberalization in China, particularly between 1983 and 1988, there were once again limited possibilities for Tibetans to travel to India on pilgrimage or family visits.³ However, such journeys were often subject to official conditions or restrictions, and even then still fraught with potentially negative consequences. Since the 1987 anti-Chinese riots in Lhasa, and because of both the active Tibetan independence movement in India and the steady stream of individual Tibetans seeking asylum in South Asia, Tibetan travel to India has remained politically sensitive and sometimes tightly controlled in China. As an additional disincentive, Tibetans from China who travel to India and back can also face uncomfortable social stigmas, including prejudice and suspicion from both the exile community and the Chinese authorities.

Ironically, during the very period in which access to India has become so restricted or problematic for the vast majority of modern Tibetans in China, Tibetan activity at India's major Buddhist holy places has become more intense than at any previous point in the history of Tibetan Buddhism. This is due to the great importance that the Tibetan refugee community in India has placed upon the ancient sites associated with the Buddha. The leaders of the exile community have, in fact, actively colonized these sites in ways that are often closely reminiscent of the Indian Maha Bodhi Society's missionary colonization of the same places during the early twentieth century. I think this is no coincidence.

As Donald Lopez has recently observed, since going into exile the Fourteenth Dalai Lama can rightly be regarded as having become the "chief spokesman for Buddhist modernism."⁴ A strong sympathy with and projection of Buddhist modernism is certainly one dimension of the Dalai Lama's complex persona. It often sits rather incongruously alongside his continued involvement with the elaborate cults of protective deities and oracles, divination, and other common aspects of his own Tibetan Buddhist tradition

since these are precisely the types of religious activities normally eschewed by Buddhist modernists. It is a testimony to his remarkable skills as a religious leader that the Dalai Lama manages to tread both paths simultaneously. In this chapter I will demonstrate that the consistent identification of Tibetan exile Buddhism with the “original” and internationally accepted holy places of the Buddha, and the active Tibetan colonization and use of these same sites, has been due in large part to the Dalai Lama’s ongoing contacts with modern South Asian Buddhist revivalists since the 1950s as well as his continued alignment with Buddhist modernism in general. For this religious reason, and due to other social and political factors to be discussed below, the holy places of the Buddha, and even the “holy land” status of India itself, have become crucial cultural resources for Tibetan exile society and its religiopolitical elite. I will investigate exactly how the geography of the Buddha in India has been recognized, valued, and utilized by Tibetan refugees in their efforts to establish and maintain a new society in Indian exile, and how certain Buddhist sites have played a central role in the pursuit of specific political, social, and cultural goals of the Tibetan Diaspora. I will also consider the often very conflicting representations of India which circulate among exiled Tibetans.

Learning for Exile

What much of this book has demonstrated so far is that Tibetan refugees who arrived in India after 1959 could never have encountered the Indian topography with its Buddhist sites as a neutral or unknown space. It was not one upon which they could simply inscribe their own definitions anew. India was already laden with centuries of Tibetan Buddhist definitions and reinventions. Moreover, by 1959, India had once again become a very well-known sacred Buddhist landscape in Tibet due to modern journeys there by Tibetan pilgrims and the stories and memorabilia—such as popular postcards of the reconstructed Mahābodhi Temple—they brought home. This modern India of Tibetan experience had also been heavily redefined by the activities of both European and Asian orientalist scholars and Buddhist modernists. In addition, specific events during the 1950s provided what I believe later proved to be critical experiences for the Tibetan Buddhist elite—experiences which were to strongly define the Tibetan exile colonization of Buddhist holy places in India when the Diaspora actually took place just a few years later. This was especially the case for the then young and untried Fourteenth Dalai Lama, Tenzin Gyatso (b. 1935), and his closest circle of advisors and supporters.

Dungkar Monastery, 1951

The first such episode of Tibetan “learning for exile” was stimulated by the missionary activities of the Indian Maha Bodhi Society. This same organization, as we have already seen, earlier attempted to win the support of the Sixth Panchen Lama and the Thirteenth Dalai Lama, along with various other leading members of the Tibetan Buddhist cultural and political elite in Sikkim and Bhutan. The society’s activities in relation to Tibet during the 1950s were conducted in a highly charged political environment in which, on the one hand, the very future existence of the Tibetan Buddhist state hung in the balance and, on the other hand, India had newly gained its own independence.

During October 1950, the initial phase of the promised Chinese occupation of Tibet began. The fifteen-year-old Dalai Lama suddenly found himself being invested with full powers to rule over his doomed traditional state. Almost immediately, however, and under the threat of Chinese advances upon Lhasa, the Tibetan National Assembly arranged for the young Dalai Lama’s exile to Yatung in the Chumbi Valley. Yatung was right on the Tibet-Sikkim border and allowed the possibility of rapid escape into neighbouring India, just a few days’ travel to the south. In this political crisis, the Dalai Lama was suddenly removed from the highly restrictive and sheltered environment of his palace and monastic life in Lhasa, where he was usually surrounded by a host of advisors and aides who strictly controlled his contact with the outside world. A unique opportunity to approach the Dalai Lama suddenly presented itself to the Indian Maha Bodhi Society, which was not slow to take advantage of it.

The society’s late founder, Anagarika Dharmapāla, had previously attempted on various occasions to make contact with the Thirteenth Dalai Lama through the medium of relics of the Buddha (see chap. 9). However, his attempts had completely failed to penetrate the traditional protective screening in place at the court of Tibet’s highest incarnation. In May of 1951, the Maha Bodhi Society’s leaders had every reason to be more hopeful of finally contacting a Dalai Lama from Tibet. Exactly one year earlier, the society had been at the centre of an enormously successful and rather politicized deployment of Buddhist relics in the northern Himalayan region of Ladakh, a former Tibetan Buddhist kingdom that had only recently been incorporated into the union of the newly independent Indian state. Relics believed to be those of the Buddha’s chief disciples, Śāriputra and Maudgalyāyana, had been transported to Ladakh by the Maha Bodhi So-

ciety, an event that had generated huge public interest and outpouring of devotion among local followers of Tibetan Buddhism. The proceedings had been staged in concert with the political designs of Jawaharlal Nehru, the new nationalist prime minister of India. Nehru wanted to send unequivocal signals to the population of the strategically important border area of Ladakh—and perhaps to the other Tibetanized Himalayan peripheries of India—that the Indian nation they had just joined was sympathetic to and would even ritually support their Buddhist cultural identity.⁵

During the Dalai Lama's half-year sojourn at Yatung in 1951, leading Tibetan clerics had been approached by representatives from the Maha Bodhi Society headquarters in Calcutta. They were sent a set of relics believed to be those of the Buddha, together with the relics of Śāriputra and Maudgalyāyana which had already been used in Ladakh.⁶ The Maha Bodhi Society had repatriated these same relics to India from the Victoria and Albert Museum in London, and they had not only been displayed with great success elsewhere in India but also to vast crowds of worshippers in Sri Lanka, Burma, and Nepal.⁷ A monk from the Maha Bodhi Society transported the relics to the Dungkar Monastery in the Chumbi Valley where the Dalai Lama was residing in exile from Lhasa. A grand reception and public religious ceremony in the Chumbi Valley were planned, featuring the handling of the relics by the Dalai Lama himself.

In planning this ceremony, the Dalai Lama's guardians and the Maha Bodhi Society were actually orchestrating the young ruler's first major, international debut in what has become a very long and distinguished career as one of the world's most famous religious leaders. This event occurred at one of the most critical political junctures in modern Tibetan history. The notorious Seventeen Point Agreement for the Peaceful Liberation of Tibet, which effectively ceded control of the central Tibetan state to the Chinese, had just been signed by a Tibetan delegation in Peking. The relic ceremony at Dungkar Monastery can be viewed as the first example of a long tradition of modern, public, and internationally focused Tibetan Buddhist ritual events staged throughout the career of the Fourteenth Dalai Lama that have equally served other vital, mundane objectives of the Tibetan elite. The normally inward-looking but now endangered Tibetan state desperately needed to forge links with its only sympathetic neighbour, India, and to begin projecting itself out to the rest of the world for support. From a religious point of view, at least, the ceremony was a triumph of ritual efficacy and symbolism. As the Dalai Lama held the golden reliquary from the Maha Bodhi Society out in front of himself with both hands (fig. 11.1),



Figure 11.1. Fourteenth Dalai Lama holding Buddha relics with a Maha Bodhi Society monk (standing left of Dalai Lama with glasses), Chumbi Valley, 1951.

he united the most powerful ancient sacra in all of Buddhism together with his own person as the living embodiment of an enlightened being, and thereby formed a doubly potent source of religious empowerment.

In keeping with other earlier Maha Bodhi Society relic festivals that had been staged at the revived holy places of the Buddha in India, the event at Dungkar Monastery was a huge success and attracted thousands of Buddhists from Tibet, Sikkim, and Bhutan, as well as participants from India. The power of making ritual connections with the remains of India's Buddhist past, and the great centripetal force which ancient Buddhist relics could exert upon the South Asian and Tibetan public, cannot have been lost on the young Dalai Lama nor his closest circle of advisors. It would not be long before this point was graphically reiterated for them.

Buddha Jayanti, 1956

Initially, throughout the 1950s, great uncertainty prevailed among Tibetans about how the occupying Chinese would—as they had already vowed—incorporate Tibet socially, culturally, and politically within their new and burgeoning Communist polity. During these years, there was an upsurge of journeying to India by Tibetans of all classes, most ostensibly for the purpose of pilgrimage. While such Tibetan travellers did visit and worship at the famous Buddhist holy places, many were also preparing for the worst, and they used the opportunity and excuse of pilgrimage to bring out their families or safely deposit their wealth in democratic and friendly India and neighbouring Himalayan states.⁸ Some never returned to Tibet from these visits, beginning their exile in the holy land of the Buddha somewhat earlier than the main wave of refugees after the spring of 1959. Visits to India during the period peaked in late 1956 and early 1957, when the celebrations to mark the Buddha Jayanti, the 2,500th anniversary of the Buddha's birth, were staged in India and attended by a great many Tibetan pilgrims.

Pilgrimages have long been used by Tibetan Buddhists, and particularly by elite lamas or clerics, as ritual occasions that can easily incorporate and serve their political and mundane interests.⁹ The Dalai Lama's pilgrimage to India for the 1956 Buddha Jayanti was probably one of the most politically important pilgrimages in Tibetan history. On the one hand, the Tibetans desired urgent and direct diplomatic exchanges with the Government of India due to the steadily unfolding crisis of Chinese occupation in Tibet. A visit to India by the Dalai Lama and other leading Tibetans to attend the Buddha Jayanti would allow for personal and unmediated meetings with Indian leaders, but particularly with Jawaharlal Nehru, whom

the Tibetans then viewed—mistakenly as it turned out—as the only serious possible ally in dealing with the Chinese. On the other hand, various powerful Tibetan political figures already resident in India and Sikkim urgently sought access to the Dalai Lama to help plan and execute an anti-Chinese campaign. An invitation for the Dalai Lama to make the pilgrimage to India was accordingly masterminded by those with the strongest political interests in his visit. These included the Maharaj Kumar of Sikkim, Pelden Thondup Namgyal (1923–82), who was then president of the Maha Bodhi Society of India and who had already suggested that Tibetans disguised as “pilgrims” visit Burma and Thailand to receive secret American training as armed resistance fighters.¹⁰ He personally travelled to Lhasa to invite the Dalai Lama to attend the Buddha Jayanti, and thus also gained a chance to gauge current Chinese attitudes and intentions toward his own Tibetan Buddhist kingdom.¹¹ The Sikkimese ruler worked in concert with the politically influential figure of Gyalo Thondup (b. 1928), the Dalai Lama’s elder brother, who was already in exile in India, and also Prime Minister Nehru himself, who once again appears to have collaborated with Indian Buddhist modernists to use their religious events in order to facilitate his political goals.¹² The Government of India strengthened the Maha Bodhi Society’s invitation by telegraphing a formal request that the Dalai Lama attend as its guest.¹³

The Maha Bodhi Society and the Indian government were eventually compelled by Chinese pressure to also invite the Seventh Panchen Lama to attend the Buddha Jayanti together with the Dalai Lama. After Chinese permission for the Dalai Lama’s visit was finally granted, both lamas performed pilgrimage to the main Buddhist sites of their Indian holy land for the first time, with large numbers of Tibetan devotees following in their wake.¹⁴ Their tour included the sites of Ajaṇṭā, Sāñcī, Nālandā, Sārnāth, and Bodh Gayā. At times, the pilgrimage itself must have been a profound personal experience for the young Dalai Lama, and he recalled it just a few years later as “a source of deep inspiration,” and that “a feeling of religious fervour filled my heart, and left me bewildered with the knowledge and impact of the divine power which is in all of us.”¹⁵ He also had the opportunity to directly address many thousands of Tibetan pilgrims who had gathered at Sārnāth and Bodh Gayā during his visit (fig. 11.2).

The pilgrimage experience in India of both Tibetan religious leaders was in fact overshadowed throughout by the underlying intent of the visit in 1956, which was intense, behind-the-scenes political activity.¹⁶ Even the public events which attended the Buddha Jayanti were often highly po-



Figure 11.2. Fourteenth Dalai Lama's first ritual at Bodh Gayā, 1956.



Figure 11.3. Fourteenth Dalai Lama presenting Xuanzang's relics to Jawaharlal Nehru, Nālandā, 1956. Courtesy of Friedrich Naumann-Stiftung.

liticized. For example, the Dalai Lama's presentation at Nālandā of relics of the seventh-century Chinese pilgrim Xuanzang to Prime Minister Nehru (fig. 11.3) cast the Tibetan leader in the role of a cultural and religious representative of China toward India. Nevertheless, for the twenty-one-year-old Dalai Lama, the Buddha Jayanti celebrations clearly demonstrated that the restored and revived Buddhist cultural heritage of India, and especially its sacred geography and relics, represented an unprecedented cultural and even political resource.¹⁷ This was not only a resource that was apparently maintained and celebrated at the highest levels of the modern Indian state, but also one that could attract both considerable local and international attention from sympathetic quarters, many of which may have appeared modern and progressive at the time to the young Dalai Lama. Moreover, it was certainly a resource—and one of apparently few—that Tibetans, as Buddhists, could themselves legitimately draw upon while present in India.

The Geopolitics of Exile

Between the late eleventh and thirteenth centuries, when Tibetan Buddhists first visited India in significant numbers, their intentions there as

foreign students and worshippers were always relatively short-term, and they never established themselves in India as a regular or enduring presence. Twentieth-century Tibetan refugees in India first arrived there with a similar outlook. But, as the decades of exile have worn on, the edifices, institutions, and even cultural patterns of the Tibetan Diaspora community in India have certainly become both regular and enduring. This is not merely a result of the necessity of exile due to continuing political conditions. The social and cultural features of Tibetan exile society in India are very much built upon conscious goals and strategies on the part of the community's political elite. Such goals and strategies include the preservation of Tibetan "tradition" and "culture"—now overwhelmingly defined in terms of religion, as Buddhist; nation-building and the cultivation of a new "Tibetan" national identity which is also now explicitly Buddhist; fostering and maintaining loyalty and solidarity among the originally disparate refugee community; furthering some form of political struggle for Tibetan independence or for a degree of autonomy from China; and appealing to financial donors and political supporters worldwide for ongoing assistance. The Tibetan government-in-exile has sought to realize its policy agenda largely by way of the institutional structure and operation of its Central Tibetan Authority. This it does via a number of mechanisms, but especially by way of the exile education system, the terms and benefits it defines for membership of and participation in the refugee community, its monopoly over the production and circulation of information and representations, and its close management of cultural and religious activities. In doing so, it has continually resorted to the explicit colonization and use of the famous holy places of the Buddha in India as key sites at which it might effectively realize its core goals and strategies. To begin to appreciate why this has been the case, one has to consider the nature of the geography of Tibetan exile in India.

Tibetan exile society in India is a deterritorialized one. As guests in a foreign state, Tibetan refugees ultimately have no territory that they can claim or call their own. Their Indian hosts have generously provided a network of "settlement" spaces as the minimum basis within which living Tibetan communities can at least be maintained with some degree of integrity. However, these settlements are very widely scattered geographically—over some thousands of kilometres—from one end of the subcontinent to the other (fig. 11.4). Moreover, they are also intentionally nonassimilative, which has given them the character of small Tibetan islands or bastions dotted across the Indian landscape. The vast majority of the "Indian" space beyond these tiny, borrowed settlement islands is regarded as foreign, uninteresting, or even potentially hostile by most Tibetan refugees.

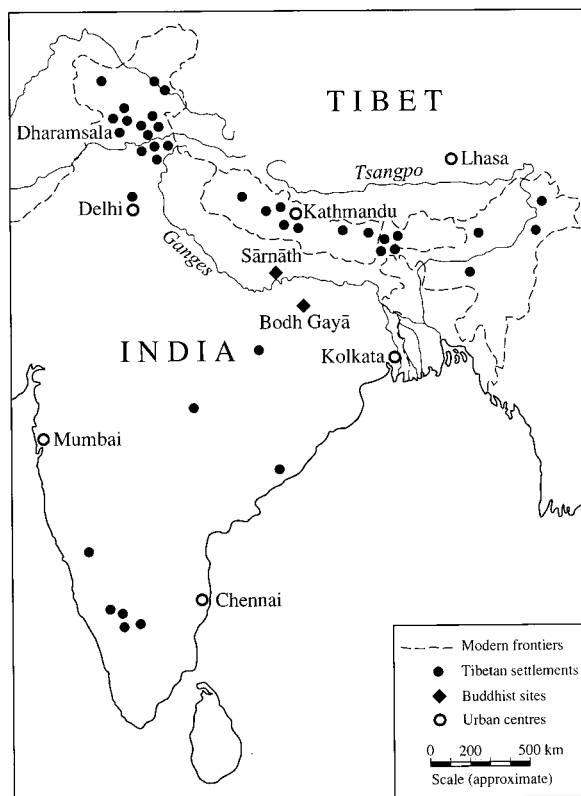


Figure 11.4. Tibetan refugee settlements in South Asia.
 Drawn by Norma Schulz and Toni Huber.

Keila Diehl has recently captured—from the perspective of the capital-in-exile at Dharamsala—a good sense of the Tibetan map of India as a geography of exile, and it is one which my own and other scholars' experiences of living and travelling with Tibetan refugees in India confirm as applicable to the wider exile community:

For most Tibetan refugees living in Dharamsala, their capital-in-exile is an island, linked by grinding diesel buses across unfamiliar landscapes to specific and familiar destinations, including Delhi [where there is a large Tibetan refugee settlement], Buddhist holy places such as Riwal-sar and Bodh Gaya, and other Tibetan settlements scattered throughout India. The refugees harbour no great curiosity to explore their host country or eagerness to participate in its civil life; rather, most (except the youngest) interact as little as possible with its realities.¹⁸

In many ways, Dharamsala is not at all typical of most Tibetan exile settlements, and therefore it offers a distorted perspective to those attempting to understand Tibetan refugee life in India as a whole.¹⁹ However, Diehl correctly indicates that, apart from the settlements, the major Buddhist sacred sites in India constitute the only other crucial loci of Tibetan exile geography. This is the network of places that Tibetan refugees readily recognize and treat as being “their” territory, and as special places very distinct from “the rest” of India.

Prior to the Diaspora, the geography of the Buddha in India was a somewhat known and desirable one for Tibetans of all backgrounds and ranks. It was the only special dimension of the vast Indian subcontinent with which Tibetans formed a lasting, positive, and in-depth historical relationship.²⁰ Today, these same familiar and highly valued elements of the Indian cultural landscape are closely associated with core constituents of modern Tibetan exile identity. These constituents include Buddhism and its soteriological goals, the refugees’ self-appointed mission of preserving Tibet’s “tradition” and “culture”—in particular its Buddhist religious heritage—and also a sense of historical continuity with important events and actors in the Tibetan past, since the perception is that most of their religion and high culture were obtained from this very same environment by much earlier Tibetan visitors to India.

New Tibetan Beginnings at the Sites of Buddhist Origins

In a vital sense, a completely new Tibetan exile society in India began to be forged directly at the purported places of origin of the Buddhist religion, and this not long after the refugees arrived in their host country. In fact, the very first public religious and political acts that the Dalai Lama performed after reaching India in 1959 were undertaken on a pilgrimage to Bodh Gayā and Sārnāth, in the company of many newly arrived Tibetan refugees. The events that took place then and there marked the beginning of the long-term, often profound religiopolitical significance which Bodh Gayā and Sārnāth have continued to have for Tibetan society in India.

At Bodh Gayā in 1959, the Dalai Lama performed the ordination—for the first time in his life—of a large group of Tibetan monks, thus initiating a whole new generation of the Buddhist clergy in exile at the very site where the Buddha himself had taken up the life of a monk. Immediately afterward, at Sārnāth, the original site of the Buddha’s first sermon, the newly exiled Tibetan leader gave a week-long, personal religious teaching to an assembly of several thousand fellow refugees.²¹ The Dalai Lama has

explicitly stated that at both Bodh Gayā and Sārnāth during the winter of 1959, he was acutely conscious of the powerful symbolic resonance of his activities there with the ancient actions attributed to the Buddha at these same sites when the Buddhist religion was founded.²²

Religious activities were not the only thing that occupied the new refugees at Bodh Gayā during the winter of 1959. The dispossessed Tibetan political elite, and their now stateless countrymen and women, urgently required some form of reconstituted power base and organization in order to help themselves. This too was achieved at Bodh Gayā together with the Dalai Lama's Buddhist ritual activities there. The core of the government-in-exile, named the Central Tibetan Authority, was founded at the site when a new assembly of Tibetan People's Deputies was sworn in, requiring an oath of loyalty to and long-life prayers for the Dalai Lama.²³

Even the very experience of living in exile in India actually began for many Tibetan refugees with pilgrimages to the holy places of the Buddha.²⁴ Tibetan exile participation at the Dalai Lama's first teachings, as well as pilgrimage to all the other Indian Buddhist holy places, was facilitated during 1959 with sponsorship from the Government of India. While Indian officials waited to see how the new refugee crisis emanating from Tibet would unfold, and perhaps even be resolved, they provided free rail transport for all pilgrimages undertaken by the newly arrived refugees.²⁵

Mass Tibetan visits to the Buddha's holy places planned in concert with those of the Dalai Lama, which first began in 1959, were to become well-established and regular events in the Tibetan exile ritual calendar. They have remained so up to this day. Thus, right from the very beginning of their exile, Tibetan refugees were actively engaged in a symbolic and physical colonization of their Buddhist holy land. Those first religious events of 1959 also marked the beginning of a new and unique type of relationship between the Tibetan Buddhist public and the Dalai Lama himself, one that was far more intimate than had ever been permitted during the past in traditional Tibet. The holy places of the Buddha in India have continued to provide an important stage for this more frequent and personal closeness between the Dalai Lama and his exiled followers.

Ambivalence in the Holy Land

The materials discussed so far indicate that, from the beginning of the Tibetan Diaspora, India was an advantageous place within which a newly exiled and disenfranchised Buddhist refugee population might find a degree of balance once again and then successfully attempt to maintain it-

self. The status of India as the Buddhist holy land, together with its major sites, provided Tibetan refugees with familiar and positively valued territory in which to put down some temporary roots and rebuild their social and cultural lives. This is in fact what the data reveal to us, and in the final sections of this chapter I will give examples of exactly how modern Buddhist India has been creatively utilized for Tibetan exile revitalization. However, before treating this material, we should pause to reflect upon what we might call the nonsuccess of India as a second home for Tibetan refugees. There is indeed a "dark side" to their encounter with India as an enforced place of prolonged sanctuary, and it is one that stands in complex relationship to the highly positive holy land status which, at least from external perspectives, India appears to consistently enjoy among Tibetans.

It is well nigh impossible to imagine any of the world's currently displaced refugee communities—be they Afghans, Tamils, Palestinians, Angolans, or Darfurians—enjoying anything even remotely close to the positive international status and successful media recognition which Tibetan exiles have enjoyed now for some decades. This phenomenon is due to a complex of interacting factors. On the one hand, the highly positive image of Tibetan refugees has been externally generated, and we may note the West's old and enduring fascination with both Tibet and Buddhism, the rise of the Dalai Lama's global profile as a religious leader and moral guide,²⁶ as well as Tibetan relevance (real or imagined) for postmodern spirituality movements, not to mention a spate of Hollywood movies and even advertising spots for high-end consumer products featuring Tibet and Tibetans. On the other hand, Tibetan exiles themselves have also strategically played upon outsiders' interests in them and their religion. One could hardly be blamed for thinking that Tibetans in exile represent a very rare case of a refugee "good news" story. Both academic and popular writers on Tibetan exile society in India have frequently described it as being highly "successful" in terms of its economic adaptation to the host country, its ability to generate sponsorship, its high degree of organisation, and so forth. However, such quantitative factors only indicate certain dimensions of "success" or otherwise, and there are alternative indices to which we can resort.

One crucial social aspect of the Tibetan exile community in India is that the attitudes, values, and expectations of its members vary considerably across a social structure which already has three quite distinct generational strata. These include older Tibetans born in Tibet, several generations of Tibetans born and raised in Indian exile, and now also newly arrived younger refugees coming directly from China. In spite of this diversity, there are certain shared attitudes that do cut across these generational

divides. Common examples that are frequently mentioned in the literature are reverence for the Dalai Lama, outward displays of loyalty and unity toward the cause of Tibetan independence, and so on. Another aspect that I find highly significant is the Tibetan refugees' attitude toward life in India and their actual feelings toward their host country. Here, in fact, we again find widespread unity across the generational spectrum: most Tibetan refugees dislike living in India.

After half a century of living there, India is not a place that Tibetan exiles affectionately embrace. Rather, life in India is tolerated as an unfortunate and—as long hoped for—temporary necessity. For most Tibetan exiles, the “host country” status of India has never been converted into that of a cherished “homeland” or a “home away from home,” and this is unlikely to change radically, if at all, in the foreseeable future. While there are of course exceptions, there is a remarkable unity among Tibetan refugees in India about their dislike of India and their desire to live somewhere else. When questioned, one finds that the older generation desire most of all to return before they die to an independent Tibet, or at least a Tibet where the Dalai Lama and they themselves can live with some degree of freedom. Many of the young, however, are equally enthusiastic to depart for “secondary exile” in North America, western Europe, and even Australia or New Zealand. Between 2002 and 2007, I had occasion to make annual visits to India after an absence of some years. Many young and middle-aged Tibetan refugees with whom I spoke in various locations remote from the more cosmopolitan ambience of Dharamsala all expressed—often surprisingly readily—a strong interest in resettling outside of India in a western country. This only reinforced impressions I had gained among Tibetan refugees in India during the 1980s and early 1990s, and there is more than just anecdotal evidence for this trend. For example, at the beginning of the 1990s, an offer was made by the United States government to resettle one thousand Tibetan refugees from India to the United States, in a so-called “green card lottery.” The program attracted an overwhelming response, with forty-five hundred official applicants from among the reported “tens of thousands of Tibetans in India” who wished to leave for the United States.²⁷ This apparently great desire to leave India adds another dimension to the question of the “success” of the Tibetan exile there. While one might attribute this desire to what is usually said of all types of migrants today, that they “want a better life” somewhere else, this has little explanatory force when it comes to understanding what is perceived to be so flawed about the situation migrants wish to leave behind. I would rather begin by asking why Tibetan refugees are so negative about India in

the first place? At least part of the answer must address more deep-seated cultural and psychological issues.

For one thing, widespread Tibetan exile negativity or ambivalence about India has its roots in different sources, some of which are no doubt much older, culturally inherited, and relate directly to issues we have discussed in preceding chapters. We have abundant historical examples of negative experiences of Tibetan pilgrims and travellers in India who often faced a whole range of very real dangers and discomforts, and of how in traditional Tibetan literature and popular imagination degrees of fear, disgust, and avoidance became somewhat iconic of India as a destination and as an "other." In spite of—or perhaps even because of—increasing Tibetan reacquaintance with the realities of modern India during the first half of the twentieth century, this very much older "legendary" negativity about India certainly remained alive in the cultural imagination of the first generation of Tibetan refugees who settled in India. The Tibetan writer Jamyang Norbu related his own encounter with the survival of such refugee "phobias" about India in the following anecdote drawn from his own experience in Indian exile:

One of the most widespread and persistent of phobias that Tibetans have had in the past about travelling to "the great Indian plains" (*gya-thang* or *gya-ding*) was of being abducted and having their "human-oil" (*mi-num*) squeezed out of them. The extraction process was explained to me by a *geshe* (doctor of divinity) from Drepung monastery, when the two of us arrived at the Indian town of Siliguri from Kalimpong. Geshe L . . . was a heavily-built man of around fifty years of age, quite learned, in the traditional sense, yet fairly open-minded as well. As we boarded a cycle-rickshaw and were pedalled away to the New Jalpaiguri railway station by a skinny, hollow-cheeked rickshaw-wallah, *geshe la* appeared ill-at-ease. He turned to me and asked whether I had heard of any "human oil" squeezers operating in the town. I insisted that those old stories were absurd and completely without foundation. But he was not reassured, and seemed to regard my attitude not only as frivolous but dangerously naive as well. He patiently explained things to me. It appeared that in most cases of "human oil" abductions, the victim was first rendered helpless by a drug slipped into a drink or a cigarette. He was then taken to some lonely warehouse or shed where he was stripped naked and hung upside down from the rafters over a low fire. Gradually, he would begin to drip fat—in the manner of a roasting pig—which was collected in a pan underneath, and later bottled, or whatever. I came

to understand from an uncle of mine that the “human oil” scare had been especially prevalent among Tibetans during World War II. At that time, an unprecedented number of Tibetan merchants, traders and muleteers travelled to India to buy consumer goods to sell, at huge profits, in South Western China, where the Nationalist Government was still holding out against the Japanese. The belief among Tibetans then seemed to be that “human oil” was a vital ingredient in a miracle-drug the Allies had discovered for healing battle wounds. An interesting cachet to this story was that in the interests of the war effort there was an official policy of turning a blind eye to such abductions.²⁸

In my own very recent experience, these types of stories are still to be heard among Tibetans living in India today. Such negative and anxious images of India and the Indians were mainly held by the first generation of Tibetan refugees who settled in India and who raised another new generation of exiles, but what of their more worldly-wise children? Indian-born Tibetans experienced other, very different sources of negativity about India which only served to reinforce the older prejudices. For one, awareness of the often-disappointing realities of Indo-Tibetan politics since the 1950s has often cast a long shadow over Tibetan refugee perceptions of India. Some years ago, Dawa Norbu, a Tibetan professor of sociology in India, reported that,

I recently told a Tibetan labourer working on the roads in India that India had recognized Chinese sovereignty over Tibet, and he cried out that we had been betrayed. Not only did the Dalai Lama and the nobility trust India, but, far more importantly, the common people of Tibet did. We were taught to refer to her as “Holy India,” and nearly every scripture we read had a few words of Sanskrit at the beginning. But Pandit Nehru did not come, and we were disappointed.²⁹

Such political disappointment has the potential to resurface again at any time in the Tibetan exile, and occasionally it does so. Nowadays, with India and China increasingly healing old rifts and positioning themselves for possible new pan-Asian superpower alliances, Tibetan exile aspirations and concerns are relegated to a mere irritation on the sidelines of realpolitik.

If all this forms the background to Tibetan exile negativity toward India, by all accounts its overwhelming contemporary source is the Tibetans’ actual experience of daily life there as foreign, stateless people. Most Tibetan refugees live in a narrow, structurally bounded social en-

vironment which exerts considerable pressures of economic competition, cultural conservatism, and political conformity, and in which very low degrees of assimilation to the Indian host society have been maintained—something that has been consistently and officially encouraged by Tibetan government-in-exile policies. Keila Diehl has pointed out that preservationist and antiassimilation currents in Tibetan exile thinking are even constructed in terms of traditional religious ideologies, and that India and Indians have thus become demonized projections of dissatisfaction:

Many Tibetans, being human, do project their resentment about displacement and their conceptualization of exile as a source of pollution and suffering onto India and Indians in literal and personalized ways. Although apparently based on the enlightened Buddhist notion of exile as a process of purification, the source of the polluting substance to be cleansed has shifted for many Tibetan refugees away from themselves (that is, from their own karmic baggage from previous lifetimes, as the Dalai Lama suggests) to exile itself, with the result that Indian (and to a lesser extent, Western) influences in exile are sometimes demonized and contrasted with the purity of the remembered and imagined homeland.³⁰

The multiple dimensions of Tibetan exile dissatisfaction with life in the world of their Indian hosts have been increasingly documented by anthropologists,³¹ and such dissatisfaction is apparent to any careful observer who has had long-term contact with Tibetan refugees living in India.³² Of course, one can and does find exceptions to all of these examples of Tibetan dislike of India, just as one can find selective acceptance and enjoyment of its culture and society; a widespread Tibetan exile acceptance of Indian popular cinema being just one instance. Nevertheless, the general trend toward negativity about India is very strong, widespread, and cross-generational, and cannot be discounted. However, in spite of a remarkably high volume of Tibetan exile self-representation in national and international media, this important aspect of their everyday life as refugees remains completely hidden to outsiders and, moreover, is seldom given public voice among Tibetans themselves. In particular, it remains totally screened behind a long tradition of public rhetoric concerning the nature of Indo-Tibetan relations that has primarily been broadcast by the Dalai Lama and the Tibetan government-in-exile. Much of this rhetoric is constructed around the Buddhist holy land status of India.

There is thus a very wide discrepancy between, on the one hand, the

Tibetan exile elite's official presentation of the Tibetan relationship with India, and, on the other hand, the negative or ambivalent sentiments about India held by most ordinary Tibetan refugees. In numerous addresses and interviews given by the Dalai Lama, and in statements emanating from the Tibetan government-in-exile, we find only a purely laudatory attitude toward India expressed on behalf of all Tibetans living in Indian exile. While these public narratives are no doubt genuine in intent, coming from the exile elite they also represent pure political expediency by the dispossessed in their relations with a powerful and indispensable ally.

Highly positive elite Tibetan statements about India invariably play the "holy land" card, frequently a valuable trump in the Tibetan exile pack of cultural resources. This practice dates from the first stirrings of modern political relations between Tibet and India. In 1947, a Tibetan political delegation was sent from Lhasa to Delhi by the Ganden Phodrang government in order to attend the Inter-Asian Conference. The Tibetan representatives addressed their hosts and fellow delegates at the event by stating:

India, being the motherland of Buddhism, has had friendly relations from ancient times with Buddhists, especially we Tibetans. Therefore, our government has sent us here to attend this great Conference to maintain our peaceful relations based on religion.³³

The Dalai Lama, who was only a twelve-year old boy at the time this speech was given, soon learned to reproduce multiple variations upon these same expressions when he was forced into exile after 1959. In his 1962 autobiography, he stated:

Every Tibetan hoped to be able to go one day on a pilgrimage to India. For us, it had always been the Holy Land. It was the birthplace of the founder of Buddhist culture and the source of the wisdom brought to our mountains hundreds of years ago by Indian saints and seers. The religions and societies of Tibet and Indian [*sic*] had developed on different lines, but Tibet was still the child of Indian civilization.³⁴

This statement is actually very typical of premodern Tibetan Buddhist historiography in general, in which, when Tibet is compared with India, the Indian role is often inflated while the Tibetan one is reduced or obscured. Here the Dalai Lama mentions "Indian saints and seers" as the transmitters of Buddhism to Tibet, thus completely omitting the comparatively huge Tibetan input that was actively invested in the same process. The use

of metaphors of kinship, such as parent-child, to express the Indo-Tibetan connection, is also something that the Dalai Lama has perpetuated for decades in his public statements.³⁵ In the same vein, he also regularly invokes the cosy domestic space of a "home" to make the same point about the familiarity of India: "We Tibetans do not feel ourselves to be strangers in India since we regard this country as our spiritual home."³⁶ The fictive kinship of master and disciple, so central to Tibetan forms of Buddhism and to Indian religions in general, is also brought into service: "[The] India-Tibet relationship, therefore, is one of *Guru-Chela*."³⁷

Moreover, for the Dalai Lama, India is always represented first and foremost as a very special place or landscape, a religious or sacred territory, a holy land, one that is endowed with superior qualities, and therefore the most desirable of destinations:

For Tibetans, India is a higher (Arya) land. Many higher beings came from this land. . . . For us here Bodh Gaya is very important. We have very deep-rooted relations, mainly spiritual.³⁸

Reference to a holy land and to the sacred features of its landscape has also been used to construct the image of a mutual Indo-Tibetan admiration based upon sanctity of place. For example, the Dalai Lama states that:

The relationship between our countries goes very deep. Many Indians consider Tibet to be a manifestation of Heaven on Earth—a land of gods and holy places. Both Mount Kailash and Lake Manasarova in south and south-western Tibet respectively, are important places of pilgrimage to devout Indians. Similarly, we Tibetans consider India to be *Aryabhumi*, the Land of the Holy.³⁹

Invoking a holy land identity for India is nothing unique from the point of view of Tibetan cultural history, except that nowadays it has become highly politicized in the hands of the exile leadership who deploy it in the context of regular public displays explicitly designed for both domestic and international consumption. Because of its long history, the image of India as a holy land is a legitimate and immediately—and perhaps even mutually—appealing cultural resource, one highly relevant to the current situation of exile. However, it also functions equally as a necessary rhetorical screen or prop, one which allows all the real but politically less palatable refugee dissatisfaction about India to be effortlessly glossed over or suppressed in public.

The exile Tibetan elite's now standard holy land rhetoric about India is not only deployed to impress Indian or foreign audiences. It is also often aimed at Tibetans themselves, for example, as a part of the Dalai Lama's Tibetan Uprising Day speeches, addressed to large crowds of refugees on March 10 each year. It does not, however, privately impress those ordinary Tibetan refugees who must daily confront the harsher realities of life in India as disadvantaged, stateless persons. And here I mean those who must stand in the clouds of traffic pollution on the sides of India's overcrowded roads selling sweaters, who must pay large bribes to local Indian officials to ensure continued access to essential water and power supplies in their settlements, or who must endure the jealous sneers and racist banter of their poorer Indian neighbours merely because they have managed a little economic progress after a lifetime of hard work and careful husbanding of aid donations.

Subversive public humour, especially in the form of witty songs and sayings, has always been the counterhegemonic weapon of choice for ordinary Tibetans enmeshed in the "redemptive hegemony" of their own Buddhist society.⁴⁰ It can be found nowadays in common Tibetan exile aphorisms about India, such as this one, in which the play on words depends upon the virtually identical phonetic values of *'phags pa*, meaning "holy" (or "noble"), and *phag pa*, referring to the most despised of domestic animals:

In the past, India was the holy land (*'phags pa'i yul*).

Nowadays, India is the land of pigs (*phag pa'i yul*).⁴¹

Familiarity does indeed breed contempt. Yet, the same familiarity has also allowed the Tibetan refugee community to develop a certain degree of cultural mastery and more refined modes of sociopolitical agency as residents of India. If there are successful dimensions to Tibetan exile society in India, they can certainly be identified in the nature and extent of its colonization and utilization of major Indian Buddhist sites.

Winter in the Land of the Buddha

The earliest and by far the most important Tibetan exile innovations at Buddhist holy places in India have always been large-scale public ritual gatherings. What is more, they invariably occur during winter. The timing of the Dalai Lama's initial performance of large-scale Buddhist rituals at both Bodh Gayā and Sārnāth during the first exile winter of 1959 was in no way accidental. Whereas in Tibet the high season for pilgrimage has

always been during the summer—and especially the fourth Tibetan month or “Saga Dawa” (approximately June), when religious merits generated by ritual practice are thought to be multiplied enormously—it is instead the winter months, and especially December through February, in the Middle Ganges region that are the high season for Tibetan pilgrimage to the places of the Buddha. After 1959, annual winter pilgrimages by the Dalai Lama and other leading Tibetan religious leaders in exile to Bodh Gayā, Sārnāth, and on occasion some neighbouring Buddhist sites, became and have remained a central feature of the new ritual calendar of the Tibetan Diaspora community. Moreover, winter is when a series of important, annual Tibetan ritual events are staged around the lunar New Year, reinforcing the significance of a winter pilgrimage cycle in the Tibetan exile. The result has been that many other major public Tibetan rituals staged at Buddhist holy places in India have also been timed to occur during the winter pilgrimage season.

The draw of the Dalai Lama’s presence also further reinforces winter as a favoured time for exile pilgrimages. The annual winter visits of the Dalai Lama to Bodh Gayā or Sārnāth have most commonly been the occasions for his giving public teachings to assembled Tibetan Buddhist pilgrims as well as for his own meditation. As Alex Ström has accurately observed, the Dalai Lama’s personal presence at Bodh Gayā in particular is of considerable religious interest to Tibetans because “on these occasions the two most sacred places converge; the site where the historical Buddha attained enlightenment becomes the residence of the living Buddha.”⁴² Tibetan pilgrims often get the chance to receive personal blessings from the Dalai Lama when he is present at the most important sacred sites of the Buddha.

These winter visits by the refugee community and their religious elite to the major Indian Buddhist sites are unique when compared with other important ritual days, weeks, and months during the Tibetan exile year, that is, those celebrated more specifically within the individual refugee settlements throughout India. A few of these events, such as Tibetan Uprising Day on each March 10 of the Western calendar, are recent ritual innovations related to the political symbolism of a new Tibetan exile nation-building project. They can also be seen as directly relevant to pan-exile sentiments and identities even though they never actually attract large numbers of individuals to any single site of their performance.⁴³ However, most of the remaining annual ritual events that Tibetan refugees in India stage have two distinctive features. On the one hand, they are re-creations or revivals of rituals that were traditionally performed in preoccupation

Tibetan village and monastic communities, for example, the rites of Losar or Tibetan lunar New Year, and the Monlam or Vow/Aspiration (often called "Prayer") Festival. Such events are strongly focused upon and implicated in the social dynamics of the individual refugee settlements in which they are staged. The only exception to this is when the same rituals are celebrated in the most important of all Tibetan refugee settlements, the so-called capital-in-exile at Dharamsala. Performances of certain annual rituals at Dharamsala, especially the Losar and Monlam ceremonies, at which the Dalai Lama himself may officiate or appear, are frequently the goal of pilgrimages by individual Tibetan exiles from throughout India.

Compared to these settlement-based community rituals, and with the singular exception of Dharamsala already mentioned, there is a very crucial difference when it comes to the annual winter pilgrimages to Bodh Gayā and related sites. They bring together, at a single place and time, and in direct personal encounters, a very wide cross section—and often a very large number—of Tibetans from throughout the landscape of exile. They serve to assemble persons who are normally separated from one another throughout the rest of the year. Ever since the winter of 1959, such gatherings at the holy places of the Buddha have always been the most important rituals and sites of real pan-exile social significance for the Tibetan refugees living in India. Moreover, since the earlier Buddhist modernist revival of places such as Bodh Gayā and Sārnāth deliberately re-created them as truly international sites, with the permanent or seasonal presence there of Buddhists from a variety of national or ethnic backgrounds, Tibetan winter pilgrimages to the holy places of the Buddha not only bring the exiles together in larger groups and together with the Dalai Lama and the religious elite, they also bring Tibetans into contact with an international Buddhist community who use these same sites as well.⁴⁴ These centripetal social effects have not been lost on Tibetan exile leaders, who have a range of social, political, and religious agendas they wish to further.

Not only has winter pilgrimage to the Buddha's sites become the most crucial time and space for Tibetan refugee ritual, but a whole array of ritual innovations and elaborations have increasingly been focused upon it during recent decades, as we will see in the following sections.

Great Prayers for World Peace

One well-known annual Tibetan ritual institution that has been subject to increasing innovation is the Monlam or Vow Festival, more commonly referred to as "Prayer Festival" in non-Tibetan sources. The nature and

degree of these innovations in Tibetan exile Monlam celebrations can be well appreciated by comparing Diaspora period events with those that were staged in pre-1959 Tibet.

Monlam celebrations in Tibet have a long history as one of the key rituals of the monastic tradition of the dominant Gelukpa school of Tibetan Buddhism and its Lhasa-based Ganden Phodrang state that ruled over central and western Tibet for three centuries until 1959. The Monlam Chenmo or "Great Vow" festivals were staged immediately following each lunar New Year celebration in pre-1959 Tibet. Historical research reveals that they were subject to various major innovations over time. They came to represent a specific Buddhist appropriation of the old Tibetan New Year rites by the Gelukpa and its Ganden Phodrang government and were clearly rituals of central political importance for the hierocratic Tibetan state.⁴⁵ Giuseppe Tucci and other scholars have pointed out that the core symbolism and rites of pre-1959 Monlam Chenmo rituals were focused upon Buddhist victory over evil and heresy, the forceful expulsion or exorcism of negative forces, and general defence against danger, disaster, and violence. In relation to these rites and symbols, the Monlam Chenmo annually represented and displayed the Buddhist state's monopoly of power and resources.⁴⁶ One of many dimensions of the complex, twenty-one-day-long ritual process of Monlam Chenmo was the performance of prayers over several days by the whole Gelukpa monastic population of the greater Lhasa region and the distribution of offerings to them by lay sponsors. According to Tibetan Buddhist interpretations, both the prayers of the assembled monks and their sponsorship by the laity were believed to generate great amounts of religious merit. Interestingly, nowadays it is almost entirely these aspects of Monlam—the sponsored prayers of the clergy and their resulting merit—which have come to characterize the ritual as it is performed in Tibetan exile society in India.

According to elderly Tibetan clerics I spoke with in northeastern India, the first Monlam Chenmo to be revived in exile was a ceremony staged at Bodh Gayā during 1961. A group of at least several hundred Gelukpa monks gathered there for mass prayer under the direction of Treejang Rinpoche (1901–81), the junior tutor of the Fourteenth Dalai Lama, and the admission of monks to the degree of Geshe was performed for the first time outside of Tibet.⁴⁷ Other Monlam Chenmo were then established at individual refugee settlements where exile Gelukpa monastic communities had been founded. Thus, the former, centralized Gelukpa Monlam Chenmo of Lhasa became fragmented in India due to the widely scattered geography of exile. The three great Gelukpa monasteries often held separate celebrations

in their different reestablished monastic centres throughout South India, while there have been much smaller Monlam Chenmo in various other settlements with a Gelukpa presence.⁴⁸ George Dreyfus describes this fragmentation of the exile Monlam Chenmo into a number of separate but parallel rituals at different sites in terms of the loss of “its relation to the symbolic centre of the Tibetan universe,” that is, Lhasa.⁴⁹ The overall loss of religious, political, and social potency of this formerly crucial ceremony was strongly felt by various parties in the exile community. Thus, during the early to mid-1980s, the Monlam Chenmo became subject to interesting innovations. Its focus shifted away from Dharamsala and the other major reestablished exile Gelukpa monasteries and eventually relocated and concentrated instead at Bodh Gayā, the symbolic centre of the Buddhist universe.

In February 1983, the first large-scale, pan-Tibetan exile Monlam Chenmo was staged at the Mundgod refugee settlement in Karnataka, South India, the site of the reestablished Drepung Monastery (the original Drepung Monastery had been Tibet’s largest single religious institution). The Tibetan government-in-exile’s Council for Religious and Cultural Affairs decided to stage a mass Monlam at this time because 1983 was the Dalai Lama’s forty-ninth year, and thus considered one of the highly inauspicious “obstacle years” (*dgung skeg*) which occur after every twelve years in an individual’s life. The mass performance of the Monlam rituals were supposed to protect the Dalai Lama from harm due to misfortune and negative forces in accord with the traditional symbolism and meaning of Monlam Chenmo in pre-Diaspora Tibet.

The mass Monlam of 1983 attracted huge number of pilgrims from the South Asian Tibetan exile community, plus others—for the first time—from Tibet itself, and from various other host countries of the global Tibetan Diaspora. What is more, monks from the other schools of Tibetan Buddhism in exile were invited to join the Gelukpa clergy for this special event. Following the great success of this particular Monlam, the Council for Religious and Cultural Affairs was urged by a Tibetan refugee from Canada to institutionalize highly organized, mass pan-exile Monlam ceremonies for preservationist and social purposes according to the following proposed program: to hold “the Monlam Chenmo at one auspicious location; [to] establish a special Monlam Chenmo fund with worldwide committees and fund-raising activities; to invite His Holiness the Dalai Lama to officiate at the Monlam Chenmo; to recreate this annual opportunity for Tibetan Buddhist monks and lay disciples to congregate.”⁵⁰ The 1983 Monlam and the aspirations it obviously triggered set the bench-

marks for development of a new generation of these large-scale Tibetan exile rituals.

In December 1985, the Tibetan exile community staged a Tantric Buddhist ceremony known as Dükhor Wangchen or the "Great Kālacakra Initiation" at Bodh Gayā, a ceremony that was conducted by the Dalai Lama himself. This particular staging of the ritual attracted up to a quarter of a million participants, making it the largest known Tibetan Buddhist ritual gathering in history.⁵¹ Dükhor Wangchen has become the most common mass, public Tibetan Buddhist ritual of the modern era, and its strategic stagings at the holy places of the Buddha will be discussed further below. The organizers of the 1985 Dükhor Wangchen decided to combine it with a special staging of the Monlam Chenmo at Bodh Gayā. This special six-day Monlam event began on December 16, and thus it uniquely occurred several months before the actual Tibetan lunar New Year. The daily prayers were attended by over eight thousand Tibetan monks and nuns and the daily teachings by over a hundred thousand lay persons. Present were not only the Dalai Lama and thousands of monks from his Gelukpa school but also leading lamas and groups of monks from the other three main schools of Tibetan Buddhism, the Nyingmapa, Sakyapa, and Kagyüpa. Also invited on the final day were Buddhist monks from Japan, Mongolia, Sri Lanka, Thailand, Vietnam, and India, who reflected the international reality of Bodh Gayā as the central holy place of Buddhism. Moreover, the ritual itself was uniquely named the "Prayer for World Peace" by its Tibetan exile organizers, and its final phase was symbolically set directly under the Bodhi Tree.

The fact that the 1985 Monlam Chenmo at Bodh Gayā was named "Prayer for World Peace" is highly significant, since it coincides precisely with a major shift in Tibetan exile self-representation. Throughout the 1980s and 1990s, an increasingly sophisticated Tibetan exile discourse on world peace and the projection of an essentially nonviolent Tibetan national identity and history were deliberately cultivated by the Tibetan government-in-exile and its supporters and publicly represented in various ways.⁵² This and other novel and distinctly modern Tibetan identity projections which arose at this time, such as environmentally sensitive "green" or "world healing" dimensions of Tibetan culture,⁵³ can be seen as a direct derivation from precedents set by Buddhist modernists and international Buddhist movements. The newly exiled Tibetans had good examples to follow in their South Asian neighbours, who had, for example, already made Buddhism emblematic of the modern nation, of struggles against colonial oppression, and of social reform. New international Buddhist groups, such

as the World Fellowship of Buddhists (founded 1950) and World Buddhist Sangha Council (founded 1966), began forming around the time of the Chinese colonisation of Tibet and the subsequent Diaspora. The Tibetans began participating in some of their activities.⁵⁴ These international organizations understood their mission “as a contribution towards a solution of the problems of the world today.” The World Buddhist Sangha Council, in particular, felt its obligation was “to oppose war and to contribute towards achieving world peace by spreading the Buddha’s message of compassion and wisdom against violence and materialist thinking devoid of moral values.” Various forums of Buddhists for World Peace were later staged as a result, and Tibetan exile leaders such as the Dalai Lama participated in them. For example, in October 1983 the Dalai Lama was invited to inaugurate the Universal Peace Conference held at the Jaina Sanctuary of Mount Abu in Rajasthan, India.⁵⁵

The Monlam was not the only Tibetan exile ritual to become very specifically identified with—and, what is more, even claimed to be conducive to creating—world peace at this time. The same label was also applied to the Dükhor Wangchen ceremonies from 1985 onward.⁵⁶ Alex Ström is correct when he argues that explicit Tibetan identification of these rituals as being for world peace “serves to reinforce the perception of Tibetan religion as a unique and significant resource which may serve a universal purpose.”⁵⁷ Identical claims of universal significance by many religious groups have been commonplace during the modern era. A good contemporary example, one which closely parallels Tibetan declarations about their rituals benefiting world peace, are continuing claims since the 1970s by the international Transcendental Meditation (TM) movement. TM followers maintain that practice of their form of meditation by urban dwellers or during mass, public meditation sessions can reduce crime rates and generate harmony as a result of the so-called Maharishi Effect.⁵⁸

Given that the combined religious ceremonies at Bodh Gayā during December 1985 were so spectacularly successful, it did not take long before this reconception of the Monlam as a ritual dedicated specifically to world peace moved out of the dominant Gelukpa milieu and was taken up by other schools of Tibetan Buddhism in Indian exile. Throughout the 1980s and 1990s, the other three main schools of Tibetan Buddhism each developed their own new Monlam festivals based upon the model of the exile Gelukpa ritual, and they also dedicated them to world peace. What is more, they have also chosen to stage their Monlam ceremonies at the major holy places of the Buddha in India.

A successful, California-based Tibetan Buddhist mission, the Tibetan Nyingmapa Meditation Centre (TNMC), was founded in 1969 by Tarthang Tulku (b. 1935), a former monk teacher of the Nyingmapa school in India who emigrated to the United States. Under Tarthang Tulku's direction, it was the TNMC that first established what it called the "Monlam Chenmo World Peace Ceremony" in 1989 at Bodh Gayā.⁵⁹ These ceremonies have been held annually at Bodh Gayā ever since, attracting up to ten thousand followers of the Nyingmapa school, both practitioners and sponsors alike. Tarthang Tulku's Nyingma Institute also offers to stage pilgrimages to Bodh Gayā for foreign Buddhist sponsors of the Monlam Chenmo World Peace Ceremony, and sometimes distributes free Tibetan Buddhist texts to Tibetan exile monks and nuns who attend the event. The Nyingmapa organizers of the Monlam Chenmo World Peace Ceremony have made explicit claims that these rituals contribute to world peace precisely because the prayers involved are performed at the site of Bodh Gayā:

Bodh Gaya's energy radiates through our world today, a living light that can be directed toward good purposes, harmony among all beings, and peace on earth. Pilgrimage and prayer at such a place opens new possibilities, reaffirms faith, and removes obstacles.⁶⁰

Such statements about the inherent qualities of the site reflect those often repeated by the Dalai Lama himself when explaining his enduring partiality for the major holy places of the Buddha, and for Bodh Gayā in particular:

We believe the place in which a person attains a high level of spiritual development has been blessed by him. . . . Just as an ordinary man or woman creates a certain atmosphere in a room in which they live, so have great beings in holy places. As you can draw conclusions about a person from the atmosphere of his room, so you can in Bodh Gaya about the Buddha himself. This is the basis of making pilgrimage: to draw some positive force from a blessed place.⁶¹

The Sakyapa school of Tibetan Buddhism has also developed its own annual ritual, named the "Great Sakya Monlam Prayer Festival for World Peace." These ceremonies have not been conducted at Bodh Gayā but rather at Lumbinī, another major ancient holy place of the Buddha rediscovered and restored during the modern era. The site of Lumbinī was chosen because

the exiled Sakyapa school was granted land there by the government of Nepal in 1968. The monastery of Tashi Rabten Ling, which they founded at Lumbini in 1975, has functioned as the venue for the Great Sakya Monlam Prayer Festival for World Peace each January or February since 1993.⁶²

The Kagyüpa school in Indian exile claims to have begun its own annual Monlam ceremonies somewhat earlier than either the Nyingmapa or the Sakyapa. A senior meditation teacher of the Karmapa lineage of the Kagyüpa school, Kalu Rinpoche (1905–89), first began travelling with groups of monks from his monastery near Darjeeling to conduct Monlam prayers at Bodh Gayā during the winter of 1983. After his passing, this practice was maintained by other leading lamas of the Karmapa lineage, and in 1993 it became called the “Kagyu Monlam Chenmo.” The Karmapa are just one of several Kagyüpa lineages in Indian exile, and in 1996 the original Kagyu Monlam Chenmo they founded was expanded to include monks from the other exiled Kagyüpa lineages in order to establish the more inclusive “Kamtsang Kagyu Sangha Monlam.”

During the winter of 2000, Ugyen Trinley Dorje (b. 1985), who is widely recognized as the Seventeenth Karmapa incarnation, dramatically fled Tibet for exile in India. Incumbent Karmapa Lamas have usually been recognized as among the highest ranking religious figures in Tibetan Buddhism. Ugyen Trinley Dorje’s presence in India again changed the Kagyu Monlam Chenmo. The Karmapa lineage in Indian exile is actually split into two rival factions, with each faction recognizing its own Seventeenth Karmapa candidate. The annual Kagyu Monlam Chenmo has since become an opportunity for the supporters of Ugyen Trinley Dorje to legitimate him in public, surrounded by large numbers of Kagyüpa lamas and monks, and particularly also the Dalai Lama, who has been especially invited to attend the events since Ugyen Trinley Dorje went into exile. In 2001, Ugyen Trinley Dorje set his seal on the Kagyu Monlam Chenmo by renaming it “Pal Nyammay Kagyupay Sangha Monlam Chenmo” or “Great Vow of the Glorious, Incomparable Kagyüpa Monastic Community.” In recent years the event has brought together over seven thousand Kagyüpa monks and sponsors each winter.

While the Kagyüpa have followed both the Gelukpa and the Nyingmapa in using Bodh Gayā as the venue for their own Monlam Chenmo, until quite recently they have not so explicitly branded it as an event dedicated to “world peace.”⁶³ However, along with the Nyingmapa and the Dalai Lama, the Kagyüpa organizers of the ceremony also explicitly identify the sacred qualities of Bodh Gayā itself as generating the world-encompassing benefits which they also claim for the performance of the ritual:

Kagyü Monlam is an incredibly auspicious occasion; it is the opportunity to be in the presence of many of the great masters of the lineage and to receive their blessings for an extended length of time. It is the chance to perform prayers with them for the benefit of the entire world in the very place where the Buddha Shakyamuni attained enlightenment, a place where the results of any action are greatly multiplied.⁶⁴

Bodh Gayā and the modern Monlam Chenmo ceremonies staged there have also been used to help maintain religious unity among the diverse and scattered Tibetan Buddhist community in exile. While the Gelukpa are by far the most dominant of the different Tibetan Buddhist schools in Indian exile, they have, largely due to the impulse of the Dalai Lama himself, generally sought to foster good relations with, and between, the three other major Tibetan Buddhist schools. This recent ecumenism directed from the position of hegemony is less a religious phenomenon and rather more a concern for the promotion and maintenance of a broader unity within the exile community as a whole, and, in more recent times, especially for the sake of its public display. Ecumenical Tibetan Buddhist gatherings orchestrated by the Dalai Lama have most often been strategically staged upon the sacred ground of Bodh Gayā, precisely because it is a shared and therefore more neutral space. This has been true as well of the occasional meetings of the leaders of the four schools called by the Dalai Lama during the first decades of exile. Similarly the Monlam Chenmo for World Peace ceremonies, held at Bodh Gayā since 1985, have continued to bring the leaders of the different schools and their followers together for public displays of unity.⁶⁵ In late January 2005 at Bodh Gayā, the Dalai Lama met with both the Sakya Trizin (b. 1945), who is head of the Sakyapa school, and the widely accepted Seventeenth Karmapa Ugyen Trinley Dorje. In the presence of a Tibetan exile public and the assembled media, the three leaders of Tibetan Buddhism in exile offered prayers for world peace together in front of the central statue of the Buddha inside the Bodh Gayā Mahābodhi Temple, Buddhism's "holiest of holies."⁶⁶

Reinventing the Wheel

Apart from the unique, hybrid Bhoṭ Bagan temple erected by the Third Panchen Lama in 1776, the earliest permanent Tibetan religious edifice to be established on the great plains of India was a small Gelukpa monastery with a mainly seasonal monk population built directly at Bodh Gayā sometime during the late 1930s or early 1940s.⁶⁷ It was followed by another

modest Tibetan monastery at Sārnāth in 1955.⁶⁸ Although these were pioneering foundations from the point of view of Tibetan Buddhism itself, they were not at all unique at the time that they occurred. An international community of Buddhists from Japan, China, Thailand, Burma, Sri Lanka, and other Asian countries all established their own temples or shrines and monasteries at the major holy places of the Buddha. The difference between this international cast of modern Buddhists and the Tibetan exiles is that the latter, being actually resident in India as a substantial refugee society since 1959, have been willing and able to erect many more structures and institutions. Accordingly, nowadays the physical Tibetan presence at the holy places of the Buddha has become a rather prominent one.

Since their Diaspora into India, Tibetan refugees have actually built hundreds of permanent Buddhist monasteries, religious educational institutes, temples, and reliquaries throughout the subcontinent in most of their new settlements.⁶⁹ Other significant forms of Tibetan “place-making” are also novel appropriations of Indian space.⁷⁰ Yet very few of these recent monasteries, temples, and shrines are located directly at sites of the Buddha. Nevertheless, the one major project undertaken with the intention to establish an enduring institution and structure at the ancient holy places of the Buddha is perhaps the most significant in the entire Tibetan Diaspora. This is the Central Institute of Higher Tibetan Studies (CIHTS) at Sārnāth. The CIHTS is of particular consequence because it embodies Indo-Tibetan relations in a formal way rather than, as is the case with the refugee settlements, establishing Tibetan institutions which are intended to exist separate from but parallel to Indian ones.

According to the legend of the Buddha Śākyamuni’s life, following his “awakening” at Bodh Gayā he travelled on to the Rṣipatana Deer Park near the ancient city of Vārāṇasī and taught his teachings or Dharma to others there for the very first time. The location where tradition places this event is better known today as Sārnāth. In the Buddhist scriptures, this first transmission at Sārnāth, which represents the very beginning of Buddhism as a religious teaching in a social context, is metaphorically referred to as “setting in motion the wheel of the Dharma” (*dharmacakrapravartana*), and the symbol of the “wheel of the Dharma” or *dharmacakra* has continued to represent the living Buddhist religion since at least the time of the third century BCE Mauryan Emperor Aśoka. The most famous example of the *dharmacakra* is, however, no longer Buddhist; it is unequivocally “Indian” and it adorns the national flag as independent India’s official emblem. Thanks to the particular historical temperament of Jawaharlal Nehru’s nationalist imagination, informed in part as it was by such back-

ground influences as Indian Buddhist modernism and monumental Buddhist archaeology, not to mention Savarkar's *Hindutva* vision of a Hindu India which encompassed Buddhism, the *dharmacakra* of Aśoka became the key symbol of the modern Indian nation-state. In his 1946 book *The Discovery of India*, the young Nehru recounted how,

At Sarnath, near Benares, I would almost see the Buddha preaching his first sermon, and some of his recorded words would come like a distant echo to me through two thousand five hundred years. Ashoka's pillars of stone with their inscriptions would speak to me in their magnificent language and tell me of a man who, though an emperor, was greater than any king or emperor.⁷¹

Nehru also appears to have had a keen sense of the symbolic value for statecraft and nation-building of the results of monumental archaeology pursued during the late colonial period. For instance, he repeatedly promoted state support of the worship of Buddha relics in India's politically sensitive Himalayan Buddhist periphery. Years later, the aging Nehru, who, before and immediately after the initial Tibetan Diaspora had had a wavering and often negative relationship with the Dalai Lama and the Sino-Tibetan problem, suddenly began to strongly support the Tibetan refugees. Nehru's later pro-Tibetan policy shift was a domestic political necessity at the time. Indian public sympathy for the plight of the Tibetans was running very high, with the appearance in India of tens of thousands of Tibetan refugees offering clear evidence of his failed "Hindi-Chini bhai-bhai" politics of "Indo-Chinese brotherhood." Nehru's positive shift in attitude toward the Tibetans was only strengthened following the great national embarrassment of the 1962 Himalayan border war with China and his subsequent abandonment of India's nonalignment policy.⁷² In this latter, more encouraging phase of modern Indo-Tibetan political relations, Nehru was instrumental in the foundation of one of the Tibetan Diaspora's most important cultural institutions, the CIHTS at Sārnāth, a Buddhist university symbolically situated right at the ancient site where the Buddha first "turned the wheel." The CIHTS's own official account of its origins is clear about this:

The Central Institute of Higher Tibetan Studies was envisioned by Pt. Jawahar Lal Nehru in consultation with His Holiness the 14th Dalai Lama with a view to educate the youths of Tibet and the Himalayan border region.⁷³

The CIHTS is a cornerstone institution for the Tibetan exile administration in India, but its significance has always been much wider than its publically stated purpose of educating young Tibetans. Not only does it lie at the heart of a unique Indo-Tibetan relationship, it also (probably unwittingly) represents the realization of a much earlier missionary dream of Buddhist modernists in India. During the 1930s, the Maha Bodhi Society had also planned to establish a Buddhist university-college at Sārnāth. In the true spirit of early twentieth-century Buddhist modernism, the society had wanted to combine Buddhist learning and contemporary secular education within this new institution. However, due to lack of major sponsors, the plan could not be realized at the time. The CIHTS has managed to achieve something similar since its foundation in 1967, although, remarkably, it has turned out to be perhaps less modern and more missionary than the intentions of the Maha Bodhi Society's original plan.

What the CIHTS really stands for, and what it actually does, was poignantly prefigured in comments made by Amdo Gendun Chöphel in his *Guide to India*. He had described Dharmapāla's efforts to reestablish a modern Buddhist centre at Sārnāth as "the beginnings of the later propagation of Buddhist teaching in India." By using the well-known Tibetan historiographical term "later propagation of Buddhist teaching" (*bstan pa phyi dar*), Amdo Gendun Chöphel invoked a parallel between the works of the Buddhist modernists in India and the active reintroduction of Indian Buddhism to Tibet by both Indian and Tibetan agents during the eleventh to thirteenth centuries. This perfectly captures the main aim and function of the CIHTS, which is actually the restoration of Buddhism as a form of Indian culture in contemporary India. This is clearly articulated in the Mission Statement of the CIHTS:

The objectives of the Institute have been carefully thought out by eminent scholars in the Indian Government under the guidance of His Holiness Dalai Lama. The objectives are: To preserve the Tibetan culture and tradition (via CIHTS Educational System); To restore ancient Indian sciences and literature preserved in the Tibetan Language, but lost in the original (via Research Department).⁷⁴

These objectives not only benefit the cause of cultural restoration for Indian nationalists, they also reflect very strongly at the same time the preservationist policies of the Tibetan government-in-exile.⁷⁵ An earlier model for the CIHTS, one not only familiar to Nehru but also known to the Dalai Lama prior to his exile, was the nearby Benares Hindu Univer-

sity (BHU), a key institution of modern Hindu revivalism and nationalism in the twentieth century. The Dalai Lama had visited BHU in the winter of 1956–57, during his attendance at the Buddha Jayanti, and had received an honorary Doctorate of Letters from the university at the time. BHU's earlier nationalist founders had set a strong preservationist agenda for that institution based upon the study of classical Indian literature in Sanskrit, and its mission statement most probably inspired that of the CIHTS.⁷⁶

The CIHTS is in many ways the only true, modern Indo-Tibetan institution, not just in principle but also in practice. Although fully funded by the Government of India, it is nevertheless administered by a joint Board of Governors comprised of Indian and Tibetan authorities who are appointed by both the Indian government and the Tibetan government-in-exile. The institute's Tibetan lay students receive their education from both Tibetan and Indian scholars, even sometimes in conjunction with BHU, and they study an Indo-Tibetan curriculum. Axel Ström, who has undertaken the only academic study of the CIHTS to date, has made insightful remarks about its nature and significance in Tibetan Diaspora society in India:

It was the first academic institution 'in exile.' Secondly, it was a new kind of institution in Tibetan society, namely a non-monastic university for Buddhist studies, where lay students were offered an education formerly reserved for monks. As such, it was also the first institution for higher education in Tibetan society which admitted female students (nuns or lay). . . . The main problem with the CIHTS is . . . that the major objective of the Institute is not the education of Tibetan youth, but the 'restoration of Buddhism in India.' It is for this reason that Buddhist philosophy and Sanskrit [are] so heavily emphasized in the education. Although the curriculum encompasses several secular subjects including Tibetan language, these are given low priority and little time in the nine-year course.⁷⁷

The CIHTS can be fruitfully considered as the unique result of mid-twentieth-century Indian nationalism and Tibetan exile cultural and religious priorities, set against an earlier Buddhist modernist background. It is the only major Tibetan government-in-exile institution that is not situated in Dharamsala or in the Indian capital of New Delhi, although its location at Sārnāth, site of the Buddha's first turning of the *dharmacakra*, perfectly reflects its origins and activities. It is by far the most significant expression of a more permanent Tibetan exile colonization of the revived sites of the Buddha.

The Wheel of Time Turns Full Circle

While completing the writing of this final chapter, I received an e-mail invitation to attend the Dūkhor Wangchen or “Great Kālacakra Initiation” which was offered by the Dalai Lama in January 2006, to be staged in southern India at the Buddhist site of Amarāvati.⁷⁸ Although the timing coincided badly with the busiest period of our university semester, I was sorely tempted to attend because whenever Dūkhor Wangchen are held at the holy places of the Buddha in India vast crowds of Tibetan Buddhists, far in excess of—but including almost all of—the total population of the Tibetan exile itself, have attended such ceremonies.⁷⁹ With up to an estimated quarter of a million participants on occasion, these Tibetan Diaspora Dūkhor Wangchen events at sites such as Bodh Gayā or Sārnāth are the largest known gatherings of Tibetans in any single place, and the biggest rituals ever staged in Tibetan Buddhist societies. The latest venue was the ancient Buddhist *stūpa* complex of Amarāvati, located at a remote spot in the Indian state of Andhra Pradesh. Amarāvati is a place famous in the annals of the archaeology of Indian Buddhism for being the earliest known systematic excavation of a Buddhist site in India.⁸⁰ It is also highly esteemed among Tibetan Buddhists as the spot where they believe the Buddha himself gave the very first teaching of the “Wheel of Time” or Kālacakra-tantra,⁸¹ the complex religious system into which the great Dūkhor Wangchen ceremonies induct participants.

Reading my globally circulated electronic invitation to the Dūkhor Wangchen at Amarāvati, I could not help but be impressed that the event promised yet another example of how dedicated the Tibetan exile religiopolitical elite have remained in their intensive and strategic ritual use of the landscape of the Buddha in India. It also illustrated their highly successful formula for staging such enormous rituals within Tibetan exile society. Dūkhor Wangchen are now well documented in normative Buddhist terms, even if their obvious millennial-style religious dimensions have been largely overlooked.⁸² But to consider these events merely in terms of their religious meanings and functions is facile, for they also have a profound social importance and indeed uniqueness for Tibetan refugee society.

As events which employ the modern Buddhist holy land as a ritual setting like no other, the Dūkhor Wangchen can draw together almost an entire society, along with its closest supporters and coreligionists, and set in motion a remarkably rich interplay of persons, symbols, and discourses with great social significance.⁸³ This is not least of all the case for the

ongoing negotiation of Tibetan “national” identity in exile. These huge rituals provide intensive occasions for a whole host of social relations to be transacted among the normally widely scattered Tibetan exile population (fig. 11.4).⁸⁴ Moreover, the leaders of the refugee community have direct access to more or less their entire constituency as a “captive audience” during Dükhor Wangchen. At the same time, the Tibetan exiles living in India can interact with their fellow Tibetan refugees from other foreign countries or with Tibetans visiting from Tibet, and also with a whole range of Tibetan Buddhists from the Himalayan zone, not to mention other Asian and Western Buddhists and the local Indian host population. Furthermore, the purely religious aspects of Dükhor Wangchen initiations are invariably supplemented and even punctuated by nonreligious content, including political commentary, speeches and forums, explicit displays of the symbols of the exile version of modern Tibetan nationalism, and press conferences in which the Dalai Lama addresses the gathered local and international media.⁸⁵

True to form, the 2006 Dükhor Wangchen at Amarāvati attracted over one hundred thousand Tibetan and international Buddhist participants, along with at least four hundred journalists. It included, both before and after the main religious teachings, a series of public events in which the Dalai Lama met with Andhra Pradesh’s governor, its chief minister, and all other ministers holding leading portfolios within the state government. The state of Andhra Pradesh had made its own investments and large logistical contributions in order that the 2006 Dükhor Wangchen could be successfully staged at the rather remote site of Amarāvati, but not entirely out of pure compassion. The state government had recently initiated a drive to generate new tourist interest in this otherwise little-known and obscure part of India. Predictably, when meeting with the Dalai Lama, Chief Minister Y. S. Rajasekhara Reddy announced his intention “to make Andhra Pradesh an international Buddhist centre and a real hub for Buddhist tourism and pilgrimage,” to which the Tibetan exile leader gave his expected public endorsement, announcing that “Uttar Pradesh and Bihar are popular Buddhist pilgrimage destinations in India and Andhra Pradesh has joined them.”⁸⁶

In addition to all of its internal social and political significance for the Tibetan refugee community as a whole, staging the Dükhor Wangchen at the holy places of the Buddha has now also come to exemplify a vital symbiosis between Indian interests and exile Tibetan ones. The core of this symbiosis revolves not only around the ongoing, modern revitalization of India’s Buddhist sites—a process which the early Buddhist modernists had set in

motion in exactly the same way over a century ago—or the local economic, political, and cultural spin-offs for Indian host communities. The compelling implication of Dükhor Wangchen for Tibetan refugees is that it can propel them periodically and positively into the centre of relevance in contemporary India. It allows them to be valued as a sought-after partner community with whom others can have beneficial alliances, rather than a marginalized, dependent group that represents a long-term burden to the Indian taxpayer and a potential political embarrassment to Sino-Indian relations.

As organizers of the 2006 initiation, the Norbulingka Institute, a Tibetan government-in-exile organ under the direct chairmanship of the Dalai Lama himself, billed the event to the global public in what might be seen as rather profound terms:

His Holiness the Dalai Lama has graciously and kindly agreed to confer the Kalachakra Empowerment at Shri Dhanyakataka [i.e., Amarāvati] in South India, taking into consideration the sanctity of this excellent place where Buddha taught the Kalachakra for the first time. Due to the unique qualities of both the place and the teacher, manifest in the form of His Holiness the Dalai Lama, this is a very rare and privileged opportunity that is most unlikely to occur again in the future.⁸⁷

In other words, Tantric Buddhist history was to be repeated—perhaps for the last time—at Amarāvati, when another manifestation of the Buddha would once again teach the *Kālacakra-tantra* at its exact place of origin; the wheel of time would turn full circle. It may perhaps come as no surprise to learn that the Norbulingka Institute's special mission in the Tibetan exile administration is the "preservation of Tibetan culture."

Behind the normative Tibetan Buddhist representations of the Dükhor Wangchen, the Dalai Lama's annual winter teachings, the Monlam Chenmo for World Peace, and the Central Institute of Higher Tibetan Studies, we find that a pervasive rhetoric of preservation belies the actual reality of innovation inherent in such institutions and events. Not only are they novel in various ways in and of themselves, socially they also periodically shift Tibetan Diaspora society away from being a collection of widely scattered individual refugee settlements, and even farther-flung global outposts, and condense it temporarily into places that represent the symbolic and ritual heart of the revived Buddhist universe in India. In truly new ways, these modern institutions and events acutely refocus the fragmented

and dispersed Tibetan exile world, not only back upon itself, but also in terms of its positioning in relation to the Indian host society.

These new ritual patterns and events typify what Claire Harris has recently observed about Tibetan exile society in India, "that all its cultural forms are, of necessity, closer to 'invented traditions.'" ⁸⁸ This is certainly something to bear in mind when observing contemporary Tibetan pilgrims gathering and worshipping at the holy sites of the Buddha in India today. Rather than guardians of tradition perpetuating unchanged their ancient rites, what we are actually seeing is a distinctly modern Buddhist community engaging with their latest reinventions in a reborn holy land.



NOTES

INTRODUCTION

1. The idea of a miraculous natural rock portal leading to Bodh Gayā is actually quite an old one in Tibet; see DTSP, 2:1063–64 (= Roerich 1976:911). The idea that rock portals connect distant holy places is still current in Tibet; see Epstein and Peng (1999:324, 326).

2. Dalai Lama of Tibet (1997:4).

3. Kapstein (2000:37).

4. See, e.g., Robinson and Johnson (1997:7–8, 170, 175–76) summarizing much accepted Buddhist studies scholarship, and Gombrich (1988:55–59).

5. For example, Kōrōsi's translation of the Sanskrit-Tibetan glossary, the *Mahāvvyutpatti*, and his discovery of the Indian origins of much of the Buddhist canonical literature of Tibet.

6. This scholarship is too vast to meaningfully refer to here. On the important distinction between “Indian” and “Indic” in all such research, see Ruegg (1995:155), and also Tillemans (1993:1) on the “double task” of undertaking Indo-Tibetan Studies.

7. See, e.g., Buffetrille (2000), Blondeau and Steinkellner (1996), Blondeau (1998), Gutschow, Michaels, Ramble, and Steinkellner (2003), Huber (1999), Huber (1999b), Macdonald (1997), McKay (1998a).

8. See, e.g., Bishop (1989), Brauen (2000), Kunst- und Ausstellungshalle der Bundesrepublik Deutschland, Dodin and Räther (1997), Lopez (1998), Schell (2000).

9. Dates for Tibetan historical figures are given at the first occurrence of their names, and most often follow those proposed by E. Gene Smith for the Tibetan Buddhist Resource Center (<http://www.tbrc.org/>) and Martin and Bendor (1997).

10. One exception is treatment of the eighteenth-century relations between Bengal and Tashilhunpo (see chap. 7). However, historians, even Tibetan ones (e.g., Shakabpa 1984:154–55), have dealt with it exclusively from the perspective of the British missions to Tibet, rather than that of the Tibetan missions to India. It is indicative that a recent volume of reprinted historical scholarship on Tibet subtitled “The Medieval Period:

c. 850–1895” (McKay 2003b) features only a single chapter on Tibetan interests in India between the fourteenth and the nineteenth centuries among its more than forty articles.

CHAPTER ONE

1. Waddell (1892:33–35).
2. See, e.g., the welcome study by Leoshko (2003).
3. Roth (1987:292) suggested the early worship of Buddha Śākyamuni’s predecessors, such as the Buddhas Konākamuni, Krakucchanda, and Kāśyapa, was more prevalent in the Middle Ganges region than the worship of Śākyamuni himself.
4. Bloch (1950), Lamotte (1988:224–27, 234–38); also Schopen (1997:135–36 n. 3) for references to the *sambodhi* problem.
5. Schopen (1997:115–16), Waldschmidt (1951:389–91, 41.5–7, 41.9).
6. Waldschmidt (1951:442–50).
7. Härtel (1991).
8. See the articles in Bechert (1991–92) on the revised datings and Lamotte (1988:13–14) on the earlier datings.
9. Legge (1886:68).
10. Schopen (1998), Falk (1977).
11. Schopen (1988, 1994, 1997, 1998), Strong (2004), Trainor (1997:32–65). See Ray (1994: chaps. 10–11) on the notion of the immanence in the world of an enlightened Buddha or saint after their final nirvana.
12. See Schopen (1997:116–18, and notes), especially his discussion of the imperative nature of the language employed. See Gombrich (1988:122–23) on the general presentation of pilgrimage as nonobligatory in Buddhism.
13. Waldschmidt (1951:442–50). Other sources often list a set of eight principal *stūpas* in relation to the eight cities in which they were allegedly erected (Thomas 1949:161; de la Vallée Poussin 1930:144).
14. Legge (1886:90).
15. Strong (1983, 1992).
16. Strong (1983:124–25; 244–51); a list of the thirty-two sites is given on pp.123–24 n. 61.
17. Strong (1995:4–6).
18. Leoshko (2003:69–73).
19. Bagchi (1941), Nakamura (1980). While the term *aṣṭamahāsthāna* (Tibetan: *gnas chen po bgyad*) is actually known from Indian Buddhist inscriptions of the Pāla period (e.g. Vogel 1914:6–7), to my present knowledge, the term *aṣṭamahāprātihārya*, which has been widely cited in relation to the eight sites in recent art historical studies on the basis of a reconstruction from Chinese, is not.
20. For the textual sources, see Nakamura (1980), Fang-I Su quoted in Huntington and Huntington (1990:531–32 n. 9), Strong (1995:5–6), Bagchi (1941) and the *Gnas chen po bgyad kyi mchod rten la bstod pa* (= P 2024).
21. Lamotte (1970:xi), Fussman (1994).
22. Lamotte (1970:xii; 1988:332–37), Falk (1977), Snellgrove (1987:311).

23. For example, see Martin (2001:37 n.20) for claims of the historical Buddha visiting Tibet, and Holt (1996:57–63) for Sri Lanka.
24. Strong (1983; 2004: chap. 5), Lamotte (1988:239–42).
25. Lamotte (1988:295), Strong (2004: chap. 6; 231–32).
26. Sørensen (1994:53–56, 489–90).
27. “Mainstream” refers to Buddhist practices, narratives, and doctrines that were already established at the time of the rise of the Mahāyāna, and which continued to persist in various forms parallel to both the Mahāyāna and later Tantric elaborations of Buddhism. Mainstream avoids the pejorative Hinayāna, and the problematic status—in terms of possible anachronistic projections of origins—of the name Theravāda. Paul Harrison first introduced me to this usage.
28. Leoshko (2003:69).
29. Leoshko (1993–94; 2003:69–73), who points out that earlier studies (e.g., Williams 1975; Karetzky 1987, 1992) had initially but incorrectly dated these stelae to the Gupta period. Furthermore, art historians have tended to date the various Indian (or Indo-Burmese) portable plaques depicting the eight events in the life of the Buddha to the Pāla period; see the review by von Schroeder (2001, 1:394–405).
30. Leoshko (2003:73).
31. Marshall (1907:999).
32. Marshall (1907:999–1000).
33. Foucher (1917:147). Foucher’s original French article was published in the *Journal Asiatique* (January–February 1909) and later translated into English and republished again in the 1917 volume *The Beginnings of Buddhist Art*.
34. Foucher (1917:149, and his commentary to plate 19, 1). Other contemporary presentations of the same stele did not resort to Foucher’s emphasis upon pilgrimage. For example, the *Catalogue of the Museum of Archaeology at Sarnath* (1914), compiled by Daya Ram Sahni and Jean Vogel, describes the sculptural depictions simply as “The eight great scenes [of the Buddha’s life].”
35. Vogel (1914:6).
36. Vogel (1914:6–7).
37. For later examples, see Mus (1987), Huntington (1987, 1987a), Huntington and Huntington (1990), Karetzky (1987, 1992).
38. Foucher (1949: chaps. 10, 11).
39. Daya Ram Sahni (1936).
40. Huber (2003a:97–99); see RGYA for a Tibetan translation of the work.
41. Russell (1981).
42. See, e.g., <http://www.buddhismtoday.com/english/holyplaces/001a-intro.htm> (accessed Jan. 9, 2005), <http://www.lamayeshe.com/otherteachers/more/pilgrimage/index.shtml> (accessed Jan. 9, 2005), and <http://members.porchlight.ca/blackdog/places.htm> (accessed Jan. 9, 2005), where the book is reproduced exactly with due acknowledgement to the author, and also the site compiled by Phramaha Thanat Inthisan, of Wat Thai, Washington, D.C., at <http://www.thanat.iirt.net/Wat%20Thai%20Homepage/holyplace.html> (accessed Jan. 9, 2005), where it is repeated verbatim without acknowledgement.
43. Huntington (1985, 1986, 1986a, 1986b, 1986c).
44. Huntington (1985:46).

45. Huntington (1987a:68).

46. Karetzky (1992:206; also 1987:268–69). Prior to Karetzky, Williams (1975) studied the same stele without making any references to pilgrimage and the eight sites, and without resorting to the relevant works by Foucher (1917, 1949).

47. Cook (1994:13).

48. Bentor (1994:24), cf. also Bentor (2003:30).

49. Ricca and Lo Bue (1993:37), and see also Eliade (1954, 1959). For very similar interpretations, see also Cook (1994:13), who is clearly inspired by Huntington (1987a:68).

50. One problem is that the *aṣṭamahāsthānacaitya* cult has been represented in many different and conflicting Tibetan lists or catalogues of eight *stūpas* and sites of the Buddha in India; for a few examples, see Pema Dorjee (1996: chap. 1), texts in the Tibetan canon (P 2024, P 2025), LDEU:74, BCOM:11b-12a, BSO1:331.4.6–332.1.4; 327.3.6–327.4.1, Emmerick (1967:4–7), Tucci (1932:21–24), Essen and Tsering Tashi Thingo (1989:44), Huber (2000:40–41, 111 n.3) and DUNG:1222. Thus, how were/are real Tibetan pilgrims supposed to know which *stūpa* represented which holy place of the Buddha during ritual? A second problem is that only three of the eight types of *stūpa*—the so-called “enlightenment” (*byang chub*), “descent from the gods” (*lha babs*), and “many-doored” (*sgo mang*)—have ever been commonly erected in Tibet as objects of public worship easily accessible to pilgrims; see Tucci (1973:113). Very rarely, small-scale sets of the *aṣṭamahāsthānacaitya* are constructed within monastic compounds but they are rather an aspect of the monastic cult and not at all, in my experience, a public object of popular pilgrimage in Tibet itself. A third problem is that Tibetans overlaid the *aṣṭamahāsthānacaitya* with local cultural meanings which had nothing to do with the Buddha or his legend. Thus, the *stūpa* type often correlated with Buddha’s final nirvana at Kuśinagar became closely assimilated to and universally recognized by Tibetans as the Kadam Chörten associated with Atiśa and the early Kadampa school, and used ritually as a portable bronze altar piece within temples. The *dharmacakra-stūpa* correlated in texts with the Buddha’s *dharmacakrapravartana* in Sārnāth is often built on a monumental scale commonly known as the “many-doored auspicious” (*bkra shis sgo mang*) *stūpa*. These three-dimensional mandalas in the form of temples house Tibetan Buddhist pantheons and have no associations with Sārnāth.

51. In contrast to the claims mentioned here, all the ethnographic evidence about Tibetan pilgrimage strongly demonstrates that the great majority of pilgrims are less concerned with or versed in symbolism and the abstract classifications found in texts. Their knowledge and concerns extend to quite concrete and locally defined aspects of shrines: the actual relics contained in reliquaries; the great lamas who built, consecrated, and who are sometimes entombed within them; the miraculous stories surrounding them; and the reputation of specific sites for sanctifying their worshippers and producing both soteriological and mundane benefits. If any function—be it “place transfer” or something else—is claimed for the *aṣṭamahāsthānacaitya* in Tibetan Buddhist pilgrimage practice, one must be able to historically and ethnographically demonstrate how this is understood and enacted by the majority of local worshippers at any give site.

52. In a directly relevant example, Ehrhard (2004) first presents a Tibetan text describing a local *stūpa* in the Sherpa area of Nepal which explicitly links it to memorializing the Buddha’s enlightenment. He then claims that the monument “reminded

the Sherpas of the enlightenment of the Buddha Śākyamuni in Bodhgaya.” The same unanswered question always hangs over such casual and unsubstantiated claims: Do prescriptive statements in documents composed by literate clerics well-versed in Buddhist scripture have any public circulation and popular ritual meaning for the practice of local religion?

53. Hobsbawm and Ranger (1983), and also now Otto and Pedersen (2005).

54. See Welz (2000:73–74); also Otto and Pedersen (2005) on the critique of appeals to the genuineness versus inventedness of traditions.

55. *Oxford English Dictionary*, 2nd ed., with occurrences dated back to 1297.

56. For examples from Buddhist studies, see Grousset (1932:x, chap. 7) and Lamotte (1988:315); and from Tibetan studies, see Dreyfus (2003:23).

57. Bechert (1966, 1984), Obeyesekere (1970; 1994), Gombrich (1988:chap. 7).

58. See, e.g., Dalai Lama of Tibet (1962:139; 1982:11; 1990:247).

59. On the Dalai Lama as a Buddhist modernist, see Lopez (1998:184–87; 2004:579–80).

60. The incident is reported in Esposito et al. (2002:408–9); also William Dalrymple “Battling for the Buddha,” at http://www.travelintelligence.net/wsd/articles/art_1791.html (accessed Dec. 13, 2004).

CHAPTER TWO

1. On the Thonmi Sambhota narrative, see BKAC:105–23, Sørensen (1994: 167–76, 639–40), and van der Kuijp (1996:47–49). The traditional claim for his once-off adaptation of written Tibetan from an Indian script during the mid-seventh century is not credible in linguistic or paleographic terms; Beyer (1992:41).

2. Smith (1981:192), writing in 1919, referring to an 1918 study of Tibetan narratives by Berthold Laufer.

3. Snellgrove (1987:445).

4. Here I opt for the higher regnal dates of Tree Songtsen (alias Songtsen Gampo in later sources); Karmay (1988a:239) favours c. 622–649, Beckwith (1987:227) 618–641, and Richardson (1998:5) suggests c. 629 and c. 632 for the accession, with a death date of 650.

5. Smith (1981:193, brackets in the original), with reference to the work of Parker (1911) on the Tang Annals. The oft-claimed Tibetan “occupation” and “sovereignty” has no basis in the available historical sources, which only briefly cite the temporary mission—of which Tibetan troops were probably only a minor part—to rescue a Chinese embassy at what must have been Kānyakubja, which was far west of Tihhūt (the Chinese sources only in fact mention “central India”). The idea that Tihhūt became “free” of Tibetan control again in 703 is a misreading of a reference to Nepal and the as yet unidentified P’o-lo-men (Richardson 1998:103) in the Tang Annals; see Pelliot (1961:6, 12, 84), Bushell (1880: 446, 456).

6. In doing so, Shakabpa (1984:28) misquoted an unsourced footnote to Bushell’s (1880:528 n. 15) translation of the Tang Annals, which mentioned a Tibetan force of only “1200 well-armed warriors, together with over 7000 Nepāl horsemen.”

7. DGE6:231–34, referring mainly to the *sBa bzhed*; see SBA1:43–44.

8. Karmay (1988:1, 238), whose statement is quoted almost verbatim (but unacknowledged) from Rolf Stein (1972:64), who himself refers, albeit with the due caution

that “this account is admittedly legendary,” to the *sBa bzhed*; see SBA1:43–44, cf. SBA2:51–53. On the status of the *sBa bzhed* as a historical source, see van der Kuijp (1984:180), Kapstein (2000:24–25), Martin and Bentor (1997:23), Pasang Wangdu and Diemberger (2000), and Huber (2001).

9. Some commentators, such as David Snellgrove (1987:429), have even considered that the Tibetans eventually adopted Indian-style Buddhism over a Chinese alternative because of the “mere fact of the comparative closeness of Buddhist centres in northern India.”

10. An overview of earlier non-Indian literature about Indian geography and culture from different time periods is found in Schwartzberg (1978); see also Beal (1884, 1869), Legge (1886), and Takakusu (1966) on the Chinese pilgrims’ reports.

11. See Foster (1921:27), Khan (1927:162–63, 168–69, 378–79), Ball (1925:112–15, 201–12), Markham (1879:liv, 52–53, 141), Richardson (1998:113, 201, 413, 465, 484), Trotter (1915:389), Stiller (1973), Clarke (1998), Cohen (1964), Pommaret (1999).

12. A passage that perhaps typifies Tibetan border trade activity from an earlier period is found in the fifteenth-century version of the biography of Milarepa (1040–1123). The saint’s father and grandfather are both depicted as petty traders who live north of the Himalaya in Mangyül and Gungthang. They trade with Tibetan herdsman in the northern pastures in summer and travel south to trade somewhere in Nepal (Lhobel) during winter; GTS2:17.

13. Beckwith (1977).

14. See Schwartzberg (1994:609–10, 643 figs. 15.30–15.31) and Bacot (1956).

15. One of the few pieces of ostensibly contemporary evidence with direct testimony of imperial-era Tibetans in India for Buddhist religious purposes is the *Bhoṭa-svāmīdāsalekha*, which reports the dispatch (*brdzangs*) to India of four named individuals, and the further presence and death (*khums*) there of two others; Dietz (1980:186–87), Snellgrove (1987:447, esp. n. 122).

16. Chavannes (1894).

17. In addition to all the notices of Indian translator/teachers (or, rather, those with Indic names) which can be collected from the colophons of early translations of Buddhist texts into Tibetan, see the list of names gathered together in the introduction to the early ninth-century *Two Fascicle Lexicon* (*Sgra sbyor bam po gnyis pa*); text edition in Simonsson (1957:238–40), and translations in Snellgrove (1987:442) and Ishikawa (1990:4). It is of interest that in all the Old Tibetan inscriptions located in Central Tibet, Indian monks are never once mentioned, while a Chinese monk is; see Richardson (1985:83).

18. Kapstein (2000:58–59), Beckwith (1977, 1979), Snellgrove (1987:324–80), and Lo Bue (1997). The possibly earlier *dBa’ bzhed* (Pasang Wangdu and Diemberger 2000) narrative presents Tibetan contacts with Nepal and the Indian teachers encountered in Nepal as far more significant than any direct Tibetan contacts with India itself. Butön’s later overview of the transmissions of Buddhism to Tibet represents Kashmir, Nepal, and India as being of approximately equal importance in the process (Obermiller 1932:212–24).

19. Richardson (1998:89–99).

20. Contrast Karmay (1988:1) who views it in terms of Tibetan religious interest, with Beckwith (1983), who views it in terms of political expediency.

21. Stein (1972:58–59). On a Chinese inscription apparently dating from 657 and found in Mang yul near the Nepal border, see Pasang Wangdu's 1996 article "Notes on a Chinese inscription of the T'ang dynasty," *Tibetan Studies* (Chinese edition), 3, pp. 56–63 (not seen, but cited in Pasang Wangdu and Diemberger 2000:38, 113).
22. Pelliot (1961:6, 84), Bushell (1880:446, 528 n. 15), Snellgrove (1987:317, 416 n. 65).
23. Beckwith (1983:12–13, 1987:9–10), and the references cited therein.
24. Thomas (1927), Whitfield and Sims-Williams (2004:127).
25. It is listed in the early ninth-century *Phodrang Denkarma* (*Pho brang ldan kar ma*) catalogue of translations; Lalou (1953:321).
26. Schopen (1997:139–40 n. 14).
27. According to Lalou (1965:200), the name rGya appears in ancient sources as a Tibetan country name, rGya yul, although its actual location has remained unclear. On rGya as an ancient tribal-geographical designation, see Yamaguchi (1970:122–24, and n.109). Long ago, Hodgson (1972:pt. 2, 67) correctly observed that *rgya* was equivalent to the Chinese *fan*, and that from a Tibetan perspective, "the typical Gyas (Gyami) are the Chinese, though the latter be usually designated specially black Gyas (Gya-nak)." It is also of interest that in some west Tibetan borderland dialects, the term "*gyemi*" (*rgya mi*) is still used for "foreigner" (Childs 2004:117–18, 191). On a local population in upper Ladakh named rGya in Tibetan sources, see Vitali (1996:323–28). Some interpreters persist in defining *rgya* in ethnonymic nominal compounds using other meanings for the syllable *rgya*; see, e.g., Bell (1987:107) for "White Expanse" and Stein (1961:6) for "étendue blanche." It is remarkable how completely the original ethnogeographic significance of Gyagar has been obliterated in favour of Buddhist definitions in modern Tibetan lexicons; see, e.g., BODR:529.
28. See, e.g., the Zhol pillar inscription of the mid-760s and the Sino-Tibetan treaty inscription of 821/822 (Richardson 1985:12, 153; 110, 1.18).
29. On the black and white Mywa in Old Tibetan, see Bacot et al. (1940:51, 112, 149–50, 154). On the black and white Mon ba in Old Tibetan, see Bacot (1956:141). For later references on the black, white, and variegated Klo, see Huber (1999:254 n. 9).
30. Richardson (1985:4, 6).
31. Hsu (1998:11), Backus (1981:29), Richardson (1998:103), Wellens (2006).
32. White was related to the symbolic meaning for "west" in ancient China, hence the "white" Chinese designations for the Tangut state (Kychanov 1978:211). The terms Gyagar/Gyakar, Gyanag, and the later Gyaser (sometimes used to designate Central Asia and even Russia), have been the subject of various, often quite inventive Tibetan etymologies, and it has long been considered that the "white" India and "black" China division was based upon the predominant colour of clothing worn in the respective regions; DUNG:641, 643. Haahr (1969:276–77) put forward his own theory about these terms in relation to ancient Tibetan conceptions of the world.
33. Richardson (1985:88).
34. Richardson (1985:110). On *mon*, which Richardson translates here as "borderlands," see the remarks of Aris (1979:xvi).
35. Tibetan: *lho phyogs na rgya dkar po'i rgyal kham*s, see NYAN:144.
36. The document in question is Pelliot tibétain 958, on which see Macdonald (1962) and Dietz (1988:113–15).

37. On these interpretations, see Hahn (1998:135, 143) and Stein (1985).
38. Macdonald (1962:539).
39. RIN2:34, 74, 98. Other kinds of aphorisms express the superiority in terms of the religious practice of Buddhism in the respective regions, for example: “Indians meditate upon one deity and actualize a hundred deities, whereas Tibetans meditate on a hundred deities but do not actualize even one deity”; Naga and Rigzin (1994:148).
40. Many of the titles concerned can be surveyed in Lalou (1953).
41. Harrison (1990:6–12).
42. The Tibetan is edited and translated by Dietz (1980:186–87).
43. This discrepancy was also noted by Snellgrove (1987:447 n. 121).
44. Snellgrove (1987:450).
45. Imaeda (1981:66–69; plates 29–32). See also Padmasambhava’s journeys between India and Tibet as represented in Pelliot tibétain 44; Bischoff and Hartman (1971:18–20); Eastman (1983). Note that such undated Dunhuang manuscripts have a terminus ad quem of around 1035 CE; van der Kuijp (1996:39). Moreover, Padmasambhava is regarded as “semilegendary” in most contemporary scholarship and cannot be considered as providing any reliable historical reference point; Tucci (1980:6–7), Karmay (1988a:6), Bischoff (1978).
46. For an overview, see Snellgrove (1987:440–45).
47. SUM1, which is illegible in many places, must be read with SUM3.
48. On his life and works, see De Jong (1994:109–18), ZHWA:346–50.
49. Vostrikov (1970:229 n. 669, 230).
50. SUM3:312–13.
51. SUM3:313–17.
52. SUM3:317–23.
53. The commentarial tradition on the twenty-four *pīṭha* followed by Sumpa Khenpo originated from Butön Rinchendrup (1290–1364).
54. SITU:283, 1.3–6, Smith (1968:6 n. 4). A fourteenth-century Tibetan encyclopedia presenting the geography of India exhibits similar features; Smith (2001:220).
55. BTS2:16b–31a; on its composition and author, see Wylie (1962:xiii–xxi), Vostrikov (1970:230–31), Martin and Bentor (1997:154–55). Compare also the nineteenth-century notes on the area of Bodh Gayā found in JAM1:69a, 1.2–71a, 1.6.
56. This work was by Gompojab, author of the *Arising of the Dharma in China* (*rGya nag chos ’byung*), written in 1736, who translated a summarized version of Xuanzang’s account into Tibetan (see MGON) sometime during the first half of the eighteenth century.
57. See the somewhat humorous rhetorical discussion of this issue in DGE1.

CHAPTER THREE

1. See Leoshko (1988:148) referring to Alchi in Ladakh, and Huber (1992a) referring to Tra Yerpa in central Tibet.
2. On this twenty-three folio cursive text and its contents, see Jackson (1989:223–24), who suspects it to be a work by the Chag Lotsāwa Chōjepal, an early thirteenth-century visitor to Bodh Gayā and neighbouring regions of Magadha. It is

possibly Chag Lotsāwa's *Lam yig rgyas pa* cited by Amdo Gendun Chöphel (Huber 2000:42–43), especially since it is held in the Bihar Research Society collection at Patna where he once worked. The *Lam yig rgyas pa* has to date remained unknown, and the brief accounts included in the widely cited biography composed by Chos dpal Dar byang/dpyang (Roerich 1959; CHAM) have been our only source on Chag Lotsāwa's Indian pilgrimage.

3. See BCOM; thanks to Jan Sobisch for access to this rare manuscript, previously cited by Amdo Gendun Chöphel (DGE5, 1:34; Huber 2000:42–43), and the rediscovery of which invalidates my earlier speculation (Huber 2000:112 n. 5). While some detailed descriptions of Bodh Gayā lend BCOM a *prima facie* eyewitness quality, it may be nothing more than reported information from pilgrims blended with elaborated narrative sections from older sources; cautious analysis will be required to establish its exact status. For one, BCOM's general contents and arrangement are very close to the *Rdo rje ldan gyi dkar chag dang lam yig* (as reported by Jackson 1989:223–24)—against which it needs to be compared—while Chomden Rigpae Raldri ends with a chapter on Nāgārjuna and other masters instead of a geography of Magadha. Versions of BCOM's sections on Aśoka and Nāgārjuna can be found in a twelfth-century Tibetan history complete with layout details and 'dom measurements of Bodh Gayā (see NYAN:103–18), while similar narrative materials on the three brahman brothers already appeared in various twelfth- and early thirteenth-century sources (see Sørensen 1994:497–99), and the sections on the Buddha's deeds and the Vajrāsana are heavily derivative of older Buddhist canonical and extracanonical texts. Overall the text is quite technical and rather sterile when compared to other verified eyewitness accounts of Bodh Gayā, and unlike them it gives virtually no feeling at all for the “real life” of Buddhism's famous epicentre of international pilgrimage, nor of nearby sites in Magadha. Additionally, there is no record of Chomden Rigpae Raldri (who signs himself here as “he who has heard/studied much”) ever having visited India. He was active during the second half of the thirteenth century, a time when Tibetans had virtually abandoned going to India, and the text itself provides no direct claims by the author of a visit to Bodh Gayā.

4. For related texts, see the Peking edition (= P) of the Tibetan Buddhist canon: P 2209, P 2210, P 3969, P 3970, P 4127, P 4223, P 4224, and P 4225.

5. On pilgrimage in Tibet, see Ekvall and Downs (1987) and Huber (1999, 1999a).

6. To my present knowledge, the term *gnas/gnas chen po* first occurs in a native Tibetan work to designate Indian Buddhist “holy places” in Sonam Tsemo's (1142–1182) *Door of Entry to the Dharma* (Chos la 'jug pa'i sgo), dated 1167 (BSO1:332.1.1). The passage is the earliest Tibetan treatment I know of concerning the eight major biographical sites of the Buddha's life and the eight *stūpas* associated with them. Nyangré Nyima Öser (1136–1204) also used the same terminology to discuss these sites in the late twelfth century (NYAN:107). The *sthāna* (or *pīṭha*) vocabulary from which *gnas* is derived by later Tibetan writers is clearly not taken from the early classical texts on pilgrimage and the Buddha's holy places, such as the *Mahāparinirvāṇa-sūtra*, in which these same sites are indicated by *prthivīpradeśā*, which the Tibetans translated with *sa phyogs*.

7. Schopen (1987, 1994, 1998).

8. Huber (1999).

9. On *namthar*, see Gyatso (1998) and Robinson (1996).
10. On *chöncung*, see van der Kuijp (1996) and Martin and Bendor (1997).
11. For instance, the important translators Malo Gewae Lödro (1044–1089) and Gölo Khugpa Lhatse (twelfth century) each made three visits to India, although no trace of their travel itineraries and experiences remains; KOZH:346–47, Roerich (1976:36opp.), Obermiller (1932:217). The same is true of Nyen Darma Dakpa, who went to India via Kashmir and Nepal in 1076 and remained in India for a full twelve years without leaving any record of his journey; KOZH:680–81, Roerich (1976:857), Obermiller (1932:219).
12. Haahr (1969: chap. 10), Karmay (1994:409–10), Macdonald (1971).
13. Demiéville (1952), Tucci (1958), and van der Kuijp (1984).
14. Snellgrove and Richardson (1980:146), Tucci (1980:22).
15. A modern Tibetan survey in MTSH lists approximately sixty Tibetan travellers to South Asia during the late tenth- to late thirteenth century period, a figure my own investigations do not exceed. This number is significantly reduced when we discount those persons travelling only to the separate region of Kashmir (Tibetan: *Kha che*), and others whose biographical accounts we suspect of being exaggerated or faked.
16. RWAY:33b, 1–4.
17. On Götsangpa Gampo Dorje's (1189–1258) use of this expression for India, see Tucci (1940:88–89).
18. RWAY:33b, 5–6; 34b, 3–5.
19. Beal (1884, 2:117). I thank Duncan Campbell for kindly checking Beal's translation of this passage against the original Chinese for me.
20. Sections of Xuanzang's travel account in Chinese were recovered at Dunhuang, a colonial territory of the Tibetan empire during the eighth and ninth centuries and source of virtually all the oldest examples of early Tibetan literature which have survived.
21. For example, Ra Lotsāwa's biographer claimed that in the vicinity of ancient Vaiśālī, the lama visited the *Stūpa(s)* of the Five Heaps (it is unclear in the text whether five or only one *stūpa* is intended here, and also whether the Tibetan expression *phung po lnga* is intended to refer to the five *skandhas* or to the topographical nature of the site). However, this site was already in complete and barely distinguishable ruins when Xuanzang visited it four centuries earlier; Beal (1884, 2:94). Apart from Xuanzang's narrative, this site has never been mentioned in any other later pilgrim's account, particularly not in any Tibetan ones, and has never been located by the later scholarship on ancient Indian Buddhist sites. Ra Lotsāwa's *namthar* also records a visit to the nearby *Stūpa(s)* of Āryānanda, and also to the Monkey Pond associated with an episode in the Buddha legend. Once again, apart from Xuanzang's description (Beal 1884, 2:66–68, 76–77), the mere mention of these names in the *namthar* is a unique record. Furthermore, Ra Lotsāwa's *namthar* gives a grand description of Magadha as a "huge country" (Tibetan: *yul gling chen po yangs zhing rgya che ba*; RWAY:32a, l.4), that rather seems to be referring to its seventh-century greatness under the later Gupta empire during Xuanzang's time, and not at all to the modest collection of villages it had become by the eleventh century; see A. S. Altekar's introduction in Roerich (1959:xxx–xxxi) and Schwartzberg (1978:189–92).

22. See Decleer (1992), who rightly expressed his doubts about the veracity of other travel details contained in the text.

23. Rinchen Zangpo first went to Kashmir in the year 975 (Snellgrove and Skorupski 1980, 2:87; 103, 1.1), but no exact date is established for his later visit to the ill-defined destination of “eastern India,” except that he stayed away thirteen years, returning to Tibet in 987 (Vitali 1996:232 n. 330). Nanam Dorje Wangchuk apparently went to India shortly after 993 (KOZH:943).

24. Martin (2001:112–16).

25. Roerich (1976: 1026–28).

26. Snellgrove (1987, 2:491), also Stearns (2001) and Roerich (1976:360) on the same narrative theme.

27. GRA2:173.2, Snellgrove (1987, 2:490–91), also Stearns (2001:82–89).

28. See Decleer (1997).

29. Stearns (2001:213 n. 39).

30. See Roerich (1976:611) and RDO2:417, 1.2–5, on failed attempts to visit India.

31. For examples, see NAMM:15–32, Roerich (1976:729–31, 1026), RDO2: 65a, 1.1–2, 66b, 1.4–6, 70b, 1.3–4, 71b, 1.3–6, 74a, 1.5, 75a, 1.1, Nālandā Translation Committee (1982:37), Decleer (1997:164–67), Stearns (2001:82–84). Less commonly, cowry shells were also used as currency; Snellgrove and Skorupski (1980, 2:87; 103, 1.1).

32. On gold being presented to brahmins and communities of Buddhist monks by Aśoka, see Lamotte (1988:244), and on wealth and money accumulated by early Buddhist monks, see Schopen (1997:3–4).

33. Lhamo Pemba (1996:48).

34. Roerich (1976:1052–53).

35. See, e.g., RWAY:31b, 1.2–32a, 1.1, RDO2:166, 1.2–3, Decleer (1997:167–68), and Roerich (1976:1055).

36. Tibetan: *shi skyid kyi jag pa* and *jag pa shi skyid pa*; see RDO2:166, 1.2–3, DTSP, 2:1227, Roerich (1959:10), PAD5:230.

37. For examples, see RDO2:165–66, RWAY:32a, BSO2:142, Roerich (1976:701, 1028, 1055), DPAB, 1:914, Roerich (1959:28/87–88).

38. For longer itineraries, I have used: Khyungpo Neljor (b. 978/990) in NAMM:15–32, noting that it provides nothing other than a series of place names, some obscure, as settings for incidents which the text narrates, and, as Kapstein (2003) has stated, it appears to be as much literary creation as factual account; Ra Lotsāwa in RWAY:31b, 1.2–36a, 1.6, noting my reservations in this chapter about the veracity of its content; Pelchen Galo (active twelfth century) in ZHAN:362, 1.2–377, 1.5, which abounds in spelling errors and difficult readings that have caused problems for those trying to identify the itinerary; see, e.g., Sperling (1994:809–11). I thank Dan Martin for supplying additional versions of the text to obtain better readings. According to the *Blue Annals* (Roerich 1976:226, 475, 555–56, 469, 713–14, 760, 796), Pelchen Galo lived to be eighty-nine years old and taught the doctrines he acquired in India to a number of important Tibetan students after his return to Tibet from 1130 onward. This places him in India during the 1120s and earlier; Chag Lotsāwa in Roerich (1959:5–39), with reference to CHAM; Orgyenpa Rinchenpal (1229/30–1308/9) in BSO2:132–45. I have also referred to brief itineraries found in

the *Blue Annals* (*Deb ther sngon po*, see Roerich 1976), particularly those of Drokmi Lotsāwa, Shākya Yeshe (993–1077?) (pp. 205–6), Khönphuwa Chökyi Gyelpo (d. 1144) (pp. 228–29; cf. also p. 1066), Nagtso Lotsāwa (pp. 245–47), Marpa Dopa (pp. 383–84), Latö Marpo (pp. 1026–28) and Marpa Lotsāwa Chökyi Lodro (pp. 400–402). On Marpa Lotsāwa, see also the variant versions of this account in Nālandā Translation Committee (1982:11–39), and the earlier version in RDO2:141–67. The first seven texts in the Dorje Dzeöd collection (= RDO2) date at least from the first half of the thirteenth century, being composed by Ritro Wangchuk (1181–1252) and recited to Donmo Ripa (1203–1264/76/88?) who wrote them down, and in which form they were then transmitted. For Rinchen Zangpo's (958–1055) travels I have used Snellgrove and Skorupski (1980) and Tucci (1932a). On the journeys of Josay Nyima and Khampa Yangdrak, two Tibetan envoys sent by the Trophu Lotsāwa to invite the Indian scholar Śākyaśrī to Tibet in 1204, see DTSP, 2:1241–42. For visits to Rāḍha and the Khasarpaṇa Avalokiteśvara and its possible location, see Stearns (2001:209 n. 25) and Nālandā Translation Committee (1982:25). Stearns (2001) supplies various notes from a variety of sources on visits to India by Drokmi Lotsāwa, Taglo Shönu, Gölo Khugpa Lhatse, Gijo Dawae Öser, and others from the early circle of the Lamdré lineage. When one consults collections such as KOZH or DONR (e.g., pp. 153, 178, 212, 246, 261, etc.), there are further, short biographies of early masters who visited India to be found, but no detailed itineraries are provided. The above sources are by no means exhaustive, although I take them to be representative.

39. During the imperial era, “Lhobel” was a kind of generic ethnogeographic designation referring mainly to non-Chinese foreigners and their regions, and the term could also be understood as “barbarian” (perhaps after the Chinese *jong-yi*); Richardson (1983; 1985:111 n. 3), Stein (1981, 1983). In later literature “Belpo” sometimes refers to the Newari of the Kathmandu Valley or to other ethnic groups (or the entire population) of Nepal in general.

40. Snellgrove (1987:505) notes that this northwestern area was initially the primary focus of Tibetan Buddhist attention, and that “the shift of Tibetan interest from northwestern India to Nepal and those parts of India directly to the south (modern Bihar and Bengal) corresponds with the gradual shift of the centre of religious interests from western Tibet to the middle of the country.”

41. Snellgrove and Skorupski (1980, 2:87; 103, 1.3), Schwieger (1996:92), Tucci (1940:88–89). On Mon in Old Tibetan referring to lands to the south, see Bacot (1956:141), Richardson (1985:110).

42. Tucci (1932a: 9b–10b).

43. See the observations by Snellgrove and Richardson (1980:146).

44. On the journey to Dhānyakaṭaka and Potala by Manlung Guru (b. 1239), see Roerich (1976:790–91), Newman (1996:494–95 n. 13), Macdonald (1970), and Tucci (1948–51). Gene Smith informs me that, to date, the original itinerary of Manlung Guru has not been rediscovered (pers. comm., Aug. 23, 2000). On Marpa's visit to the unidentified place of Lakṣetra, see RDO2:141 = 71a, 1–2; 149 = 75a, 2. In the much later and greatly elaborated Tsang Nyön Heruka version of the Marpa biography, we find that Lakṣetra is not identified as a town or city any longer but as a monastic centre with a *vihāra* called Pūrṇacandra and a *paṇḍita* named Jñānagarbha; see Nālandā Translation

Committee (1982:13). Decler (1992:27) has quite rightly rejected the brief claim made in Ra Lotsāwa's *namthar* that he travelled to South India, Sri Lanka, and Bengal.

45. ZHAN:372, 1.7–373, 1.2). Since Lama Shang met Pelchen Galo at the age of twenty-seven, that is, in ca. 1150 (Roerich 1976:713–14), the text must have been composed after that date.

46. See the two versions of the *Gnas chen po brgyad kyī mchod rten la bstod pa* (P 2024, P 2025), noting that in most indigenous Tibetan sources there is no critical distinction drawn between *aṣṭamahāsthāna* and *aṣṭamahāsthānacaitya*.

47. See, e.g., LDEU:74, BSOI:331.4.6–332.1.4; 327.3.6–327.4.1, BKAC:05–123 where the phrase occurs several times, and RDO2:65.

48. See, e.g., BKAC:105–23, where the phrase occurs several times; RDO2:65; DPAB, 2:1086; Sørensen (1994:267–69).

49. Gombrich (1988:54).

50. JIG1, 2:256, 2; I thank Dan Martin for this reference. See also ZHAN:328, 373.

51. SAS1:32b. One can always find *'phags yul* mentioned in certain earlier text titles, such as the *'Phags yul grub chen brgyad cu rtsa bzhi'i byin rlabs skor las lo rgyus rnam par thar pa rnams*, which are attributed by Tibetans to Indian authors.

52. BSOI, GRA1, GRA2.

53. TSHE:110b, 1.1 has *'phags 'khrungs* for Āryāvarta, while he gives *'phags yul* as Sunyabhūmi, Madhyadeśa, and Madhyadeśa. In some sources one also finds the Tibetan expression *'phags pa'i ljongs* as a synonym for *'phags pa'i yul*; see ZHAB:232 = 116b, 1.3.

54. SAS2:5, Tibetan: *rgya gar gyi yul ni / mi rnams 'od gsal lha gnas chad pa yin*; NGA3:5, Tibetan: *'phags pa'i yul gyi mi phal che ba 'chi med kyī gnas nas chad pas*.

55. SUM3:311–12; BODR:522; TSHE:110b, 1.1; BRDA:630 also has the Tibetan synonym *'phags 'khrungs*. KAH2:2 also has Tibetan: *'phags pa'i zhing khams rgya gar*.

56. Quoted in Shiromany (1995:78–79).

57. In DGE2 (translation and plate in Huber 2000:129), the Tibetan inscription on the map of India reads: *Rgya gar 'phags pa'i yul / mchod rten ring bsrel kyī snying po can bzhugs pa'i zhing*. For another modern Tibetan discussion of *'phags yul* see GCOD.

58. Dalai Lama of Tibet (1962:139; 1982:11; 1990:123, 247). The earliest English translation of Tibetan *'phags yul* as “holy land” is found in Jäschke (1881:355).

59. Dreyfus (2003:23).

60. The image is from Buddhaghosa's *Manorathapūraṇī*; see Nattier (1991:57). I thank Paul Harrison and Don Lopez for the reference.

61. Such images were certainly known to early Tibetan Buddhists; see BCOM:2a–2b. For an even earlier Tibetan account of the cosmological Vajrāsana, see NYAN:28–29.

62. See Aris in Richardson (1998:iii).

63. Martin (1994).

64. See, e.g., a perspective on Tibet in relation to India from a lama in nineteenth-century Kham (RDZA:29–32, translation in Snellgrove 1957:3–4), and a twentieth-century Golok tribal view of themselves in relation to both China and Tibet (Aris 1992:15).

65. See, e.g., the cosmological texts in Tibetan from Dunhuang; Dietz (1988).

66. *'Dzam bu'i gling gi snying po'i dbus su gyur*; see Dietz (1980: 186–87).

67. The Tibetan distinction *sa tshigs* (meaning “way station”) and *yon tan* or “qualitative” is also found. Martin (1994:25 n. 31) has recently pointed out that even in quite early Tibetan Buddhist writings, there had been a tendency by some authors to identify Tibet as the (or “a”) “qualitative” centre.

68. Roerich (1959:12/63). Verhagen (2002:144) quotes an etymological note by Situ Panchen Chökyi Chungné explaining how the Tibetan spelling *dBus 'gyur 'chang* relates to the name Magadha.

69. See the quote in Kapstein (2000:151).

70. Schoening and Sørensen (1988:41). Vajrāsana or Dorjeden here and in many other instances in Tibetan literature is intended as a place name, referring to the site of the Mahā Bodhi shrine at Bodh Gayā where the Buddha attained his awakening.

71. SHIN:1, 343, 558.

72. Quoted from Pasang Wangdu, Diemberger, and Hazod (1996:47) and slightly edited for style. A *pagtse* (*dpag tshad*) is a measure of approximately three kilometres.

73. Quoted from Buffetrille (2000:256) and slightly edited for style. For another contemporary Tibetan example, see Buffetrille (2000:334).

74. BLO5:8b, 1–2.

75. ZHUC:454, 1.1; 456, 1.2). The same is also found in Bönpo Tantric commentaries (see Ramble 1999:14). In Tibetan Tantra, the notion of Vajrāsana as the “outer” site of the *bodhimaṇḍa* in the world is expanded to include it having an “inner” equivalent as the Akaniṣṭha realm, and also a “secret” one as the *vajrakāya* of the practitioner.

76. SUM3:310, BTS1:37–38.

77. LHUN:10.

78. See, e.g., the second chapter of the *Samvarodaya-tantra*, which mentions birth in Madhyadeśa as the superior human birth (Tsuda 1974:168, 2:8–9).

79. Guenther (1959:15).

80. LDEU:191 and Kapstein (2000:151) citing the *Ma ṇi bka' 'bum*, such notions being clearly reinforced by Chinese models of centre-periphery and civilization which were adapted by the Tibetans; Aris (1979:15–22). See Huber (1999) on later Tibetan attitudes toward peoples of the far eastern Himalaya. Martin (1994:521, 525 n. 31) indicates a more complex twelfth-century notion of both India and Tibet as centres of various kinds.

81. Zürcher (1972, 1:266).

82. See, e.g., RDZA:29–32, translation in Snellgrove (1957:3–4).

83. Tibetan: *yul gling chen po yangs zhing rgya che ba*; RWAY:32a, 1.4. On eleventh-century Magadha, see A. S. Altekar's introduction in Roerich (1959:xxx–xxxi), and Schwartzberg (1978:189–92).

84. NYAN:118, BSO2:133–134, 137, Martin (1994:525 n. 31), Decler (1997:177).

CHAPTER FOUR

1. See the early ninth-century *Phodrang Denkarma* (*Pho brang ldan kar ma*) catalogue; Lalou (1953).

2. Karmay (1981), Snellgrove (1987:451–63).

3. Goudriaan and Gupta (1981:17), Dyczkowski (1988:49–55).

4. Tsuda (1974:273).
5. Sanderson (1987:15).
6. David White (pers. comm.) refers to the *Tantrāloka* chap. 29, verses 39, 59–65, also especially Dyczkowski (2001).
7. *Piṭha* has only very occasionally been literally translated by Tibetans as *den* (*gdan*) or “seat.” On *pīṭha* translated as *gnas* and *grub pa'i gnas* in the late twelfth or early thirteenth century, see GRA3:299.1.4; 299.3.6. On *gnas* used for Indian holy places of the Buddha in the twelfth century, see BSO1:332.1.1, and NYAN:107. It remains a question whether the general Tibetan use of *né* was secondarily derived from the translation of the specifically Tantric term. This Tibetan *sthāna* (or *pīṭha*) vocabulary is clearly not derived from earlier sources, e.g., the *Mahāparinirvāṇa-sūtra*, where *prthvīpradeśā* (*sa phyogs* in Tibetan) is used.
8. For translations and analysis of *pīṭha* materials in Buddhist Tantras, see Snellgrove (1959, 1:66–71; 2:22–25), Tsuda (1974:93–96, 102–6, 260–63, 269–73), Tsuda (1978:208–31), Sanderson (1990; 1994:95, 99–100 n. 20), and English (2002:258–61) for Umāpatideva’s *Vajravārāhī sādhana*. For non-Buddhist *pīṭha* lists, see Sircar (1973) and Dyczkowski (2001:55 ff.).
9. Figure 4.1 is based on Tucci (1989:38–41, table on p. 45), with reference to Tsuda (1974:260–62) and English (2002:201, table 23). Note that Tucci (1989:40) gives the body referent for *Himālaya* as “pupils of the eyes,” whereas the *Samvarodaya-tantra* and related texts read *'doms pa/meḍhra* or “penis” (Tsuda 1974:94, 183, 262 n. 2).
10. Tsuda (1974:260–62, 271–72), Chandra (1987:16–17), Kazi Dawa Samdup (1987:102–5).
11. Huber (1997b:251).
12. See examples in Snellgrove (1987:289), Snellgrove (1959:69 n. 2), and Dyczkowski (2001:67).
13. See Salomon (1985:206–9) and citations therein.
14. See, e.g., Snellgrove (1959:69–70), Davidson (2002:210).
15. See Sanderson (1990, 1994), and his student Elizabeth English (2002), who cites other relevant but unpublished lectures and conference papers of his (1993, 1995, 2001) which I had no access to.
16. Sanderson (1994:95); see also the response by Davidson (2002:202–11).
17. Sircar (1973), Dyczkowski (2001), Snellgrove (1959, 1:66–71; 2:22–25).
18. BUST:57, l.2, and also ZHUC:448, l.6. On *Changra Mukpo* in *Liyül* in apocryphal Tibetan histories, see Sørensen (1994:303–4 n. 921).
19. On *Liyül* in Nepal and confusion between Nepal and Khotan in Tibetan sources, see Thomas (1935:3–389), Brough (1948), Macdonald and Dvags-po Rin-po-che (1981:103), Wylie (1970:19–20, 24), Decleer (2000:42–43).
20. For these same reasons, claiming a fixed set of geographical identifications for the twenty-four *Vajrayāna pīṭha* using single Tibetan sources is untenable. For an example of this, see Boord (1994), and compare also the discussion of their locations in Klaff (1979:98–107). It is also naive to claim that the geographical identification of the *pīṭha* is unproblematic; see, e.g., Dowman (1985:278).
21. On this well-known problem, see White (1996: chap. 4, esp. 107–10), Kvaerne (1977:6), English (2002:9–10).

22. Tsuda (1974:123, 206, 292; 1990), Tucci (1989:173–79), Meiseshal (1974).
23. Sanderson (1985:200–201), Tsuda (1990).
24. Pre-Tantric Indian Buddhism also maintained some rigorous ascetic practices (*dhutāṅga*) which involved dwelling in *śmaśāna*; Strong (1995:69–70).
25. See, e.g., the three different lists of “eight charnel grounds” in DUNG:1081–82, and also the lists in Tucci (1989:173–81).
26. For the *aṣṭaśmaśāna* of the *Samvara-maṇḍala*, see Tsuda (1974:123, 206, 292; 1990:98–99), and variations in Meiseshal (1974:34–37) and Tucci (1989:173–81). For examples of Tibetan visits to alternative *śmaśāna* sites in India, see Tucci (1940:23–24, 43; cf. 67), and RDO2:151, 1.3.
27. See Tucci (1949, 2:542), and in the Tibetan Buddhist canon P 180, P 3517, P 4978, and P 4202.
28. For examples, see Roerich (1976:869, 1028), BSO2:142, Roerich (1959:85), ZHAN:364, 1.7–365, 1.5, ORG1:159, Nebesky-Wojkowitz (1956:41), Dudjom Rinpoche (1991:493), BODR:3047, and DGE2 (translation Huber 2000:51, 55). Western commentators are equally contradictory, e.g., Dowman (1985:30) and Loseries (1993:180). On the pre-Vajrayāna Śitavana near ancient Rājagṛha, see Malalasekera (1938, 2:1154, cf. 1030), Beal (1884, 2:166), and Beal (1869:117), which some Tibetan translators and commentators—as opposed to pilgrims—recognized also (TAR2:19, BTS1:22b, 1.4, DTSP, 1:41).
29. White (1996:78; 2003:chap.6), who is careful to point out the ontological complexity of the Siddhas in Indian Tantra.
30. Davidson (2005:14).
31. This point has recently been reiterated well by English (2002:9–11, table 2).
32. See the comments by Martin and Bentor (1997:26–27) on the pedigree of the earliest Siddha biographies in Tibetan, and also Templeman (1983, 1989).
33. Martin and Bentor (1997:26–27), Digby (1994:105).
34. Dowman (1985:71).
35. Dowman (1985:277).
36. Roerich (1976:844–46).
37. Roerich (1976:869–70).
38. RDO2:137–76, Roerich (1976:400–402), Nālandā Translation Committee (1982:11–39).
39. Roerich (1959:85).
40. The basic itinerary is found in NAMM:15–32.
41. ORG2:390, 1.6–391, 1.7. Regardless of the formal bibliographic reference, the text was composed by Drigunling Sherab Chungné (active twelfth century).
42. The itinerary is found in Tucci (1940:15–26, 87–92), also in RGOD: fols. 6a, 6–7b, 6), and with a brief summary in Roerich (1976:682). See also DONR:292.
43. The Drigunpa sent disciples to Gandhala and Jālandhara already in 1208; see ORG2:390, 1.6–391, 1.7. Disciples of the Karmapa Lama went to Gandhala apparently during the late thirteenth century, and perhaps even on an earlier occasion, and two of them, “rTogs-ldan stag-mgo-ba and gZig-mgo-ba went from mNga’-ris to the holy places of India [rGya-gar]”; Vitali (1996:423 n. 707, 424).
44. On Jālandhara, Nagarkot, and Jvālāmukhi listed as Hindu *pīṭha*, see Sircar (1973:86, 92).

45. The itinerary I have resorted to is found in two different versions in BSO2: 58–105, and Tucci (1940: 41–64, 92–103); see also Roerich (1976:700–701). See Vitali (1996:421 n. 703) on the dating of his travel.
46. BSO2:66–67, 95, 104.
47. See Tucci (1940:69–70, 72); see also Schwieger (1996) on the dating of his travel.
48. Tucci (1989), Stein (1972–74, 1995), Iyanaga (1985), Macdonald (1990), Davidson (1991), Huber (1997b, 2003), and compare also Allen (1984). Also of importance in this context are the interesting Śaiva “sectarian myths” cited by Sanderson (1994:93–94).
49. See GRA3, and Davidson (1991:204).
50. See, e.g., ZHAN:125, 1.2–129, 1.2.
51. Macdonald and Dvags-po Rin-po-che (1981:109–10).
52. See Lamotte (1988:7–9), who summarizes many early Buddhist sources.
53. BSO1:327.2.5–6; see also NYAN:143.
54. Tucci (1989:42–43).
55. Dyczkowski (2001:66, and n.72) with reference to Tucci (1989: 43–45).
56. Also less commonly written Devikoṭṭa and Devikoṭi (and other minor variants thereof) in Tibetan sources, and usually translated as Lhamokhar or Lhamodzung.
57. For example, in the *Kaulajñānanirṇaya* (White 2003:165, 314 n.30, and p. 23 for his tenth-century dating), and in the *Hevajra-tantra* (Snellgrove 1959:70), which is often dated to late eighth- or early ninth-century origins, although Linrothe (1999:242–43, 274) has now demonstrated there are no surviving images of *Hevajra* in India or elsewhere prior to the twelfth century.
58. Devikoṭa is the single-most frequently occurring site in an extensive survey of 107 different *pīṭha* names found in eight different (Buddhist and non-Buddhist) Tantric textual sources; Dyczkowski (2001:79–83, maps 1, 2, 3, 5, 6, 7, 9, 10, 11).
59. Among various possibilities, one convincing historical-geographical location for Devikoṭa, alias Koṭivarṣa or “Devkot,” was in the Varendra region in Pāla times, nowadays in Bengal; see Schwartzberg (1978: plates 4.4, 5.1, 5.2, 5.3), Sircar (1967:104–5), Mitra (1971:237), and Cook (1994:425). On the Devatakoṭa west of the Indus River, see Schwartzberg (1978: plate 4.4). Dyczkowski (2001) locates Devikoṭa on his maps in northwest India, north of Jālandhara near southern Kashmir, but without supporting evidence. Roerich and/or Amdo Gendun Chöphel (Roerich 1976:729 n.2) indicate a Devikoṭa in the Vindhya Hills, while Das (1908: index to pt. 1, p. xlviii) mentions Devikoṭa as being “near Ajunta [Acinta].”
60. BUST:55–56 = 28a, 1.7–28b, 1.1.
61. BLAM:282 = 140b, 1.3.
62. PAD1:276, 1.2–4. The original Tantras themselves do not list two separate sites for Devikoṭa.
63. I take this reference from the excellent study by Stearns (2001:209 n. 25), although I have not yet seen the Tibetan source he quotes: page 54 of ‘Jam dbyang mkhyen brtse’i dbang phyug. 1983. *Gdam ngag byung tshul gyi zin bris gsang chen bstan pa rgyas byed ces bya ba kha’u brag rdzong pa’i bzhed pa ma nor bu ban rgan mkhyen brtse’i nyams len*. In *Sa skya Lam ’bras Literature Series*, vol. 14. Dehra Dun, Sakya Centre, 1–154.

64. Schwartzberg (1978:140, plate 8.B.3). Day (1990 [1927]:189) lists this south Indian Devikoṭa on the Kāverī River as one of many candidates claimed as the site of Soṇita-pura.

65. For example, the sixteenth-century *Kalpद्रुकोśa* lexicon by Keśava lists geographical names including a site called Devikoṭṭa; Sircar (1967:107). However, we do not know if this work reached Tibetans.

66. See Templeman (forthcoming:19 = TAR1:554, 1–4), with slight modifications since I read Kasaramga plus the particle 'am here; and Templeman (1989:37).

67. Templeman (1989:41).

68. On the accuracy or otherwise of information in Tāranātha's reports of Buddhaguptanātha's Indian travels, see the penetrating essays by Simon Digby (2004).

69. See, e.g., ZHUC:447 = 8a, 1.1–2, SUM1: 447 = 8a, 1.1–2, 954 = 6a, 1.6–7, and JAM1:129, 1.4–5.

70. See, e.g., BLO5:13a, 2–4, 17b, 4, and BTS1:38b, 4–39a, 1, which is slightly more cautious, and DUNC:1862. Note that in 1680, one lama traveller, Komtrang Chöje Yeshe Ngödrup (1641–1727), descended from the hills of eastern Bhutan into central Assam, which he described as being “close to the district of Devikoṭa”; ZHAB:229 = 115a, 1.4.

71. This section is partly summarized from Huber (2003), which is a corrected reprint of my original article with the same title first published in *Kailash: A Journal of Himalayan Studies* 16:3–4 (1990): 121–65.

72. Nyingmapa interest in Devikoṭa, which will not be discussed herein, can be found in revealed *terma* guidebooks, for example BDUD.

73. Sakyapa criticisms of Indian *pīṭha* in Tibet began with Sakya Pandita; see SAS1:33b–34a, and Huber (2003) for translations and additional literature on the history of Sakyapa and Kagyüpa polemics on this issue. The only practical result of this debate was that some educated Sakyapa followers shunned places identified as *pīṭha* as their ritual venues.

74. Vitali (1996:422 n. 705).

75. On Drigungpa territories during the thirteenth century, see Petech (1978), Ahmad (1995:111), and Vitali (1996:404–23).

76. BSTA:92–93, RDO2:423–24; Huber (2003, 1997a, 1997b, 1999), Huber and Rigzin (1999), Petech (1978:313–26).

77. Martin (2001:37 n. 20).

78. JIG1, 2:256; I thank Dan Martin for this reference; RDO2:421; BSTA:78.

79. See Roerich (1976:729 n. 2), for what surely must have been a remark from his Tibetan cotranslator, Amdo Gendun Chöphel. See more recently Dungkar Losang Trinley; DUNG:1862.

80. For relevant materials, see PAD1, Roerich (1976:667–68, 676, 682, 686), PAD5: 430, GTS2:122 and translation in Lhalungpa (1977:94), RDO2:137–76, 176–218, Smith (2001:63–64), PAD4:215, 1.7–216, 1.1.

81. See Smith (1968).

82. See MIPH:26a, Ferrari (1958:57), KAH1:306–7.

83. Since the founding of the Gelukpa School, its practitioners took up the study and practice of the *Samvara-tantra* and visited sites which the Kagyüpa had already

identified as Indian *pīṭha* in Tibet; see Kaschewsky (1971:131), Petech (1978:322), de Rossi Filibeck (1988:96), Willis (1985:95–98, 314–18).

84. For relevant materials, see DBYA, NGA3:86, Ferrari (1958:5, 42), Ani Thubten Dayton (1988:8), Bärlocher (1982:498), Gyurme Dorje (1999:122–23).

85. Ishihama (1993), Karmay (1988), and Ahmad (1999).

86. For example, Jamyang Khyentse Wangpo's sequential references to Kharchu and Phabongkha during his pilgrimage itinerary around Central Tibet; Ferrari (1958:5, 42).

87. See Smith (2001:235–72), Samuel (1993:533–43).

88. Details here on Kongtrul's life and milieu, and the development and meaning of Tsadra Rinchen Drak are summarized from Schuh (1976:xlili–lxv; also 233–34), Huber (2003), KON1, KON2, KON3, KON4:481–87, 493–94, 512–28, KON5, KON6:124–211 (covering the years 1842–60), MCH1, MCH2, and Smith (2001:247–50, 258–62), and with reference to PAD2, and PAD3. For KON1, note the documents of 1871 and 1883 (both Sheep years) are jointly composed by Kongtrul and Khyentse, while the third document, probably from Sheep year 1895, is signed by Kongtrul alone.

89. On Tsadra Rinchen Drak conceived as part of a Rimé scheme of twenty-five holy places throughout Kham, see MCH2.

90. Salomon (1990:160).

91. Limited evidence also exists for transfer of toponyms from Chinese or Central Asian territories to central Tibet during the imperial era; see Tucci (1950:62).

92. For example, the “hidden country” (*sbas yul*) Khembalung in Nepal is referred to hyperbolically as the “self-arisen Vajrāsana” (*rang 'byung rdo rje ldan*) in a Tibetan guidebook; Reinhard (1978:31).

93. DTSP, 1:627, 1.1 (= Roerich 1976:530), and Sørensen (1994:483).

94. On the narrative of the Jowo image, see Sørensen (1994:65–73, 492–99). This Tibetan legend should be compared with other narratives of “travelling Buddha” images; see Tambiah (1982; 1984: chap. 16).

95. Sørensen (1994:483), and NGA2:33, 36, 40, 52, et passim.

96. For further examples, see Kahtog Dorjeden and the “second Magadha,” JAM2:16–19; Zhangzhong Dorjeden as the “Second Vajrāsana,” NAMM:31–33, 55, 60, Roerich (1976:731, 733), cf. also Kapstein (1980:139); Tanak Dorjeden, Ferrari (1958:159 n. 603), DPAB, 2:1373, and Kapstein (1980:143); Ganden Dorjeden, ZHWA:844; Nob-gang Pelri Dorjeden, Wangchuk (1999:73); Gongkar Dorjeden, Wylie (1962:166 n. 481), LDAN:132; Narthang Mahābodhi, Templeman (1997:959).

97. I know of Drigung as the “Northern Vajrāsana” (Byang phyogs rDo rje gdan) and as “Magadha” from various interviews over the years with contemporary Drigungpa lamas and pilgrims. For a late fifteenth-century reference to Drigung as the “Second Dorjeden,” see Vitali (1996:122).

98. BSTA:85–86. See Roerich (1976:599) on him as Nāgārjuna, and RDO2:419, 1.4 on him as the Buddha.

99. BSTA:90–91, and RDO2:401, 1.5 for an older reference to Jigten Gampo and Apalālo (Sokmamé in Tibetan).

100. BRI2:24.

101. On other duplicate Śītavana in Tibet, see Huber and Rigzin (1999:135), Dowman (1988:210), Ahmad (1999:335), Walter (2004:26), and Gyurme Dorje (1999:241).

102. For details see DKON:24, 44–45, and plates in the volume, BRI1:12, 16, 19, and BRI2:37. For non-Tibetan reports, see Loseries (1993:180–81), Dowman (1988:116) and Richardson (1998:309).

103. On Indian mountains flying to Tibet, see Ma Lihua (1991:291), and Buffetrille (1996; 1999). On Indian sacred objects flying to Tibet, see Boord (2003:36), Richardus (1998:136), Ferrari (1958:100–101) Waddell (1934:269), Vitali (1990:89; 2001:7), SKAL:12–13, and RATN:81.

104. For Buddha relics and substances from Indian holy places in Tibet, see RDO2:65, DPAB, 2:1086, Sørensen (1994:192, 267–69), SDE2:610, Ehrhard (2004:77), and Martin (1994a:300–301).

105. On Indian deities coming to Tibet, see Snellgrove and Skorupski (1980, 1:99–100) and Nebesky-Wojkowitz (1956:41).

CHAPTER FIVE

1. Caresio (2003:8–30), Winde and Zänker (2003).

2. Vogel (1993:3, 35, 213–15).

3. Griswold (1965), Brown (1988).

4. On Mahābodhi Temple models found in Tibet, see Sankrityayan (1937:17–18), DGE5, 1:34, Huber (2000:42–43), and Von Schroeder (2001, 1:321–359), although nothing is known about their significance for and ritual use by Tibetans.

5. Mitra (1971:70), Härtel (1991). Huntington's (1985:48) statement that Kuśinagar has "remained actively in worship since the time of the Buddha" is completely untenable.

6. Beal (1884, 2:31–33).

7. Aris (1979:113) reported this narrative from eastern Bhutan in the late 1970s. I collected a similar version in the Bumthang Valley in central Bhutan in 1992, with the exception that Karma Pakṣi is said to have rediscovered not just Kuśinagar but the whole range of Magadhan sites later claimed to exist at Hājo.

8. Here I rely on Aris (1979:113), who checked the biography of Karma Pakṣi.

9. On the *duars*, see Singh (1988:299–300, and notes).

10. Aris (1979:112–14; 1986:71–73, 77).

11. Waddell (1934:308–9), Cunningham (1975:422).

12. See Xuanzang (Beal 1884, 2:196). Until now, no ancient remains of Buddhism have been discovered in Assam.

13. "Singori" or "Singiri Parbat" on the maps, Shing gi ri, Shing gi ril, or Singri in Tibetan sources. For its location, see Gait (1906: map "Assam").

14. Shastri (1992, 3:1232–33) on Śṛṅgāṭa in the *Kālikāpurāṇa*, and van Kooij (1972:3) for text dating.

15. Roerich (1976:1030–34, 1042).

16. *Guhyasamāja-maṇḍalopāyikā-viṃśavidhi* attributed to Nāgabodhi is in the *bsTan 'gyur* section of the Tibetan Buddhist canon.

17. Kaschewsky (1971, 1:125–26; 1971, 2: table 419–20), Das (1908:226), Roerich (1976:693).

18. Roerich (1976:693).
19. Huber (1999).
20. Aris (1979:188).
21. On Singri, see SUM3:315, SUM1:951, l.3, Dalton (1856:12), Aris (1995:17–18, 66 n. 15).
22. Lama Chimpa and Chattopadhyaya (1970:47, 330–31).
23. Gait (1893:295–96; 1906), Dalton (1856:9–10), von Glasenapp (1928:120).
24. Templeman (1989:65–66).
25. Dalton (1856:8), Waddell (1934:311).
26. MIPH:23a–26a.
27. MIPH:23b, Aris (1979:219).
28. ZHAB:234–42 = 114b–121b. My thanks to John Ardussi for drawing my attention to ZHAB and supplying a copy.
29. Shastri (1992, 3:1197–1202). The identification is without doubt. The sixteenth-century inscription inside Hājo temple concerning its 1583 restoration by Koch Rājā Nar Nārāyaṇ names the hill as Maṇikūṭa; Gait (1893:292, 296).
30. Edward Dalton's 1855 report (quoted in Waddell 1934:309–14) gives identifications by both Tibetan pilgrims and local Indian shrinekeepers respectively for each site.
31. ZHAB:237 = 119a, l.1.
32. For Tibetan use of the name at Hājo, see ZHAB:234 = 117b, l.2, Dalton (1856:8), Hunter (1885, 5:292), Waddell (1934:311), Huber (2000:79, 101).
33. Talukdar (1988:18–20). The Mahāmuni image was moved by the Burmese in 1784 to Arākān Pagoda in Mandalay.
34. Buchanan (1937:139–40, esp. 146), Malandra (1988:27 n. 2), Hodgson (1972:135). In the early nineteenth century, the name “Mahamoonnee” was also used for both local Śaiva temples and images in Kinnaur which the Tibetans identified as being Buddhist, and also for Tibetan Buddhist sites; Gerard (1993 [1841]:126, 145).
35. Tibetan: *Bod hor kham pa stod mnga' ris man chad*; see Aris (1986:70) for the text of the *Rgyal rigs*, which he dates to 1728, and Ardussi (2004:60 n. 3) who revises the dating to ca. 1668.
36. ZHAB:241 = 121a, l.5–6.
37. Cuevas (2003: chap. 11) gives a biographical sketch.
38. GURU (1990:841–42).
39. GURU (1990:842).
40. DPAB, 2:1086.
41. SDE2:610. See Martin (1994:300–301) for eighteenth- and nineteenth-century examples.
42. Waddell (1934:306–14) reported pilgrims from “eastern Tibet” there during the late nineteenth century, and his local informant at Hājo was also a Khampa (Waddell 1892:35).
43. Huber (1999).
44. BLO3:original folios 4b–6a, Aris transcription, pp. 3–5. The text was collected as a handwritten transcription by the late Michael Aris in Monyul during 1979; Aris (1980:11–12). Thanks to John Ardussi, who traced the transcription in Michael Aris' private papers at Oxford on my behalf, and also to Anthony Aris for permission to use it.

45. In 2004 I was able to locate this site, which is identified by local Hindus as the bowl of Bhīma, one of the Pāṇḍavas. See the photograph in Pathak (2002:19).

46. This was identified by Waddell's Tibetan informants at Hājo as the charnel ground of Śītavana, a site for which there exist multiple Tibetan locations, many of which are within Magadha (see Śītavana in the index). Since Tibetans had reidentified this Assamese landscape as Magadha, its location at Hājo was completely logical from their point of view.

47. The term *yon chab* generally refers to any water that is used in Tibetan Buddhist offering rites.

48. For a detailed account of these late nineteenth-century Tibetan identifications at the site, see Waddell (1934:306–14), also Tucci (1931:702), and the entry “Hajo” in *The Imperial Gazetteer of India* (Hunter 1885, 5:292).

49. Macdonald and Dvags-po Rin-po-che (1981:260–61). Another Gṛdhrakūṭāparavata, and even a monastery of the same name (apparently the Kindol/Kimdol Vihāra), are mentioned as having been identified by Tibetans in the Kathmandu Valley at the time; Macdonald and Dvags-po Rin-po-che (1981:260–61 n. 71), Kaschewsky (1982:439, Abbildung 3) and Wylie (1970:23 n.53).

50. ZHAB:237–38 = 119a, 1.3–119b, 1.2).

51. ZHAB:238–39 = 119b, 1.4–120a, 1.1).

52. SDE1:396–97.

53. Aris (1988:131; cf. also 128).

54. Ardussi (2003:131), citing Chankya Rolpae Dorje's (1717–86) biography of the Seventh Dalai Lama.

55. SUM1:952, 1.5–6; SUM3:317. The claim is geographically impossible. For a detailed account of this pilgrimage route, see Huber (1999).

56. Aris (1995:20–21).

57. In the *Samvara-tantra* lists of the twenty-four *pīṭha* according to the Lūpā tradition, Nyuguchen is the *mahāvīra* who dwells at Kāmarūpa (Tucci 1936:39).

58. Another Tibetan variant of the name Harigirimātho.

59. BLO5:12b, 1.4–5.

60. Sarma (1971), von Glasenapp (1928:120–21).

61. Yet another variant of the name Harigirimātho.

62. Tibetan: *Mngon par byang chub pa'i mdo*, although not found in catalogues of canonical texts, Jampa Panglung Rinpoche (pers. comm., January 2001) has advised me that it most probably refers to the *Mahāparinirvāṇa-sūtra*.

63. Tibetan: *'Dul ba me tog phreng rgyud*, the same title is found in Bu-ston's catalogue (*rgyud*, 156a, 1; see Szerb 1990:159), and is cited in the *Blue Annals* (*Deb ther sngon po*; see Roerich 1976:809). It is also mentioned in Tibetan monastic textbooks on *Vinaya* (e.g., PANC:5), although in the *bsTan 'gyur* it appears under the Tibetan title *'Dul ba'i tshig le'u byas pa* (P 5625).

64. BTS1:35a, 1.1–35b, 1.3.

65. BTS1:35b, 1.4–6.

66. Dalton (1856:10), Waddell (1892:40–41).

67. Dalton (1856:2, 8), Waddell (1934:309).

68. Zürcher (1972:277–80).

69. Csoma de Kőrös (1984:241), originally published in volume 20 of *Asiatic Researches*, 1836–39.
70. Csoma de Kőrös (1984:242, 255).
71. See Princep's note to Buchanan (1838:15).
72. Burnouf (1844:85–86 n. 2), citing Klaproth's earlier editorial note in the posthumous 1836 publication of Abel Rémusat's (1788–1832) translation of Faxian; I thank Don Lopez for this reference.
73. Dalton (1856:2, 8).
74. Quoted "From Mr. Robinson's MS" in Dalton's report (1856:10).
75. Hunter (1885, 5:292).
76. Jäschke (1871:444). The later English version reads: "rtsa-mchog (-groñ) town in West Assam, where Buddha died Glr.: Kamarūpa"; Jäschke (1881:437).
77. The later English version only reads "Gyalrabs, a history of the kings of Tibet" (Jäschke 1881:xxi).
78. Heissig (1959:39–40).
79. Schmidt (1829:313).
80. Kuznetsov (1966:8), Sørensen (1994:56).
81. Duka (1972:174).
82. Aris (1979:311).
83. Waddell (1934:313), Wassiljew (1860:48–49), TAR2:33.
84. Waddell (1892).
85. Carlleyle (1883:55–96; 1885), Härtel (1991:63–64).
86. Huber (2000:43, 61).
87. Siiger (1951:8–9).
88. Aris (1995:67 n. 26), although his statement "the temple of Kāmākhyā at Hajo, nine miles northwest of Gauhati," is incorrect since Kāmākhyā Temple itself is not located at Hajo but at a completely different site near Gauhati.
89. Aris (1995:66 n. 15).
90. Barch (2001:314), Sarkar (1980:92–93). Dhar (1982:19; 1998:309) reports that the southern Tsangla Monpa communities of Kalaktang (or Khalebthang) associate Hajo (which they call "Taingiri") with monkey ancestors who feature in what are clearly their Tibetan-inspired origin myths.
91. According to local tradition, the mosque was erected in 1657 by the then Muslim governor of Bengal. The site also has a tomb ascribed to a little-known Pir, Ghiyasuddin Auliya.
92. These names were recorded by Waddell (1892) and myself in phonetic form, according to the pronunciation of our informants (see table below).
93. Pathak (2002:20).
94. Schwartzberg (1978:345, index entry for Śrīnagara).
95. For Tibetan sources on Śrīnagara and Phüllahari in Bengal and Bihar as sites of Nāropa's life, and Tibetan pilgrimage there, see Roerich (1959:85), Huber (2000:53), also Guenther (1963:7) and Smith (2001:75) for correct dating.
96. For Tibetan identifications of Phüllahari and Nāropa's life in Kashmir, and Tibetan pilgrimage there, see Snellgrove and Skorupski (1980:35, 90 n. 16), Tucci (1940:69, 83), and Ehrhard (2002a:155–56).

	Far left image	Centre left image	Central image	Centre right image	Far right image
Buddhist identity Waddell 1892	Sencha Muni	Sākya Thuba	Dorje Dolō	Munir Muni Mahāmuni	Ugyan Guru
Buddhist identity 2004	Sarse Sempa	Dorje Sempa	Muni Muni Mahāmuni	Orgyen Guru	Guru Rinpoche
Hindu identity Waddell 1892	Hayagrīver mūrti	Basu Dever mūrti	Lāl Kanaiyā Bankat Vihārer mūrti	Mādhav	Dwitiya Mādhaver mūrti
Hindu identity 2004	Vasudev	Chalanta Mādhav	Bura Mādhav	Jagannath	Gauruda

97. For Tibetan identifications of Phūllahari at Hardwar, and Tibetan pilgrimage there, see BLO5:20a, 1.4–5, Gerard (1993 [1841]:129, 150), Kvaerne (1998:77), and Ramble (1999:23–25).

98. Ehrhard (2002a:155–56).

99. BSO3:6a.

100. Aris (1995:49–51), lightly edited here for style.

101. DGE5, 2:176–77; see also a similar claim at DGE5, 2:181.

102. Brooks (1990:17–26).

CHAPTER SIX

1. SASr:32b; see the full translation in Huber (2003:369).

2. For example, see Sākya Pandita quoted by Jigme Lingpa in the late eighteenth century; Aris (1995:40–41).

3. SUM2:232.

4. BLO5:33a, 1.

5. Macdonald (1987:101). Duruṣka in Tibetan sources is often interpreted literally as “Turk,” although in descriptions of India it is merely a generic identity for originally non-South Asian followers of Islam.

6. For examples, see Sumption (1975:177, 180, 185, 203), Morrison (2000:57).

7. Roerich (1959:61–62, 64, 98).

8. From the early sixteenth-century life story of Marpa Lotsāwa (Nālandā Translation Committee 1980:74, 104, 137–38, 143–44). In a contemporary biography of Milarepa (GTS2:559), his own favourite disciple Rechungpa (1083–1161) must pray to his guru to protect him due to his dread of the carnivorous beasts and narrow roads he thinks he will have to face in India.

9. See RDO2:141–67, with only one exception (fols. 165–66), when two robbers begin to chase Marpa, who immediately uses his meditational powers to become invisible and thus neutralize the threat.

10. See also the late fourteenth-century account of Thonmi Sambhota's complaints about the difficult roads and the heat en route to India; Sørensen (1994:176 and n. 498).

11. BKAC:110–23, 223. In other sources, the same phantom monk is named Akaramatiśīla. In a recent English publication by a Tibetan Buddhist missionary organization in California, this phantom monk is referred to as “the first Tibetan to visit Bodh Gayā”; Cook (1994:51).

12. The term first appears in Old Tibetan sources on Central Asia to designate the Qarlug or Karluk (Bacot 1956), referring to peoples of Mongolic or Turkic origin; see also Hoffmann (1950). Hoffmann (1956) first pointed out their role in Tibetan narratives of attempts to invite Atiśa to Tibet.

13. RDO2:417–21, ORG2:390, BSTA:78.

14. The full narrative of these “travels” is found in GYUR:50–61.

15. GYUR 1982:55; italics added.

16. GYUR 1982:61.

17. BLO1:330. The same story line is also found in relation to an early Drigung lama; see BRI1:13. On further travels involving “swift-footedness” to India, see also the biography of Rinchen Zangpo in Snellgrove and Skorupski (1980, 2:89–90, 104–5).

18. Another variation on this theme is visits to Indian Buddhist sites occurring in dreams; see Cousens (2002:134–36) concerning Jamyang Khyentse Wangpo (1820–92) dreaming himself to Bodh Gayā. See Newman (1996:491–92), on “metaphysical” travel to Shambhala, and Tucci (1948–51:179–87) on forms of supernatural travel to Potala.

19. See examples in Shastri (2002), MTSH, Templeman (1997), Tsering (1983), Ehrhard (2002).

20. Śākyasrī Śāriputra is mentioned as the abbot of Bodh Gayā in Tibetan sources. He passed through Tibet en route to China with an imperial delegation sent to invite him to the Ming court. His stay of two months at Changra, in the kingdom of Gyantse, left lasting reminders of Bodh Gayā in the local Tibetan religious life of this part of central Tibet; see TAR3:51–52, JIG2:49–52, Ricca and Lo Bue (1993:19, 23), Ehrhard (1991:15–16).

21. Tibetan historians record the so-called last pandita Varnaratna's activities at the time in relation to the Vajrāsana; see Roerich (1976:797–802), Macdonald and Dvags-po Rin-po-che (1981:259), Ehrhard (2002), and Lama Geshe Chömphe (= dGe-'dun Chos-'phel 1941).

22. Templeman (forthcoming: 23 = TAR1:558, 3–559, 3), Tucci (1931).

23. Foster (1921:27), Khan (1927:162–63, 168–69, 378–79), Ball (1925:112–15, 201–12), Markham (1879:liv, 52–53, 141), Richardson (1998:113, 201, 413, 465, 484).

24. See Trotter (1915:389), Stiller (1973), Clarke (1998), Cohen (1964), Pommaret (1999), and Duka (1972:182).

25. Smith (2001:175).

26. Smith (1968:6).

27. White (2003:23).

28. Decler (2000, esp. the list of Tibetan sources in his bibliography, pp. 58–60), Dowman (1981), Ehrhard (1989, 1990, 1991, 1997), Lewis and Jampel (1988), Macdonald (1987), Macdonald and Dvags-po Rin-po-che (1981), Schuh (1974), Wylie (1970).

29. For example, the lay aristocrat Pholha Drandul (d. 1720) made a pilgrimage to Nepal in 1719 (Peteet 1972:61). Tibetan government legal decrees from the eighteenth

century imply the presence of a significant Tibetan lay population in Kathmandu Valley; Schuh (1974). Eighteenth-century pilgrimage guides also mention Tibetans in the towns and marketplaces of Nepal; Macdonald (1987:102).

30. Snellgrove and Richardson (1980:201), Tucci (1949:74), Tucci (1957), Ahmad (1999:258).

31. Verhagen (1994:213–21).

32. Smith (1968); Decler (2000).

33. Kapstein (2003), and for an early example of the genre, see JOBO.

34. See Ahmad (1999:43–126).

35. For example, in nineteenth-century accounts of Macig Labdrön's past life in India, Kapilavastu (Ser skya) is located south of Vārāṇasī; Gyatso (1985:329). Desi Sangye Gyatso gave a confused outline of east Indian geography on the basis of earlier Tibetan literature and what appears to be his own hearsay knowledge of the area between Bengal and Burma; Ahmad (1999:123).

36. On this site, see the notes in Landon (1928:214), and Slusser (1988:126).

37. See Macdonald (1987:115); Macdonald and Dvags-po Rin-po-che (1981:259).

38. Ehrhard (1997:127 n. 3). On Vikrama Śāh and his relations with Tibet and sympathy for Buddhism, see Petech (1978:323). Richardson (1998 [1959]:35) had earlier incorrectly described this Tibetan journey as "a pilgrimage to Nepal and India."

39. In 1827, Hodgson (1972:134–36) published an account of pre-nineteenth-century Bodh Gayā that his informant, "a well informed old Baudha [i.e., Newari Buddhist]," stated he had written after "I made a pilgrimage to Gayah in my youth." This could conceivably place the account in the 1770s.

40. The Drukpa lineage is in fact a complex of various sublineages active in Tibet and the western Himalaya, as well as a breakaway branch which became established in Bhutan; see Aris (1979:172–81), Smith (2001:81–83).

41. Roerich (1976:669).

42. Bray and Butters (1999), Petech (1977), Schuh (1983), Schwieger (1996).

43. Schwieger (1996), Tucci (1940).

44. Schwieger (1996:99–105), who disputes Petech's idea that the mission was to spread Drukpa influence in Western Tibet.

45. Schwieger (1996:102–3).

46. For materials on this little known figure, see GURU (1990:631), Ehrhard (1991:12–13; 2002a), and BDTT (1981:413–417).

47. Ehrhard (1989), Petech (1977:103–108), Smith (1968:7–17).

48. SITU:283, 1.3–6, and Smith (1968:6 n. 4). Situ Panchen's list is an uncritical mixture of ancient names in classical Sanskrit sources from different historical eras with later place names current in India during his own time, while his own notes reveal that he often had no idea where such places were; see my notes in chap. 2 above.

49. In Tibetan spelling Gar sha, Gar zha, or Gar zhwa, while the name is often written in full as Garsha Khandroling. For a Bhutanese Drukpa pilgrimage to Garsha sometime between 1706 and 1712, see Bray and Butters (1999:53).

50. BDTT (1981:568–574), Petech (1977:101–108). A partial biography of the Seventh Drukchen exists (see RATN), but it only covers the years from his birth up to 1741. The

biography of Kahtog Tsewang Norbu contains various relevant materials, and some of this has been presented in Ehrhard (1989).

51. Marczell (1999:275).

52. BSO₃, which is a seven-folio manuscript preserved in the Toyo Bunko collection, no. 285–2446, fols. 1a–7b, 6 lines, 4 x 18 cm; see Yamaguchi (1970a:90). I am very grateful to Gene Smith for bringing this text to my attention and making a copy of it available to me.

53. The phrasing is unusual, although Panglung Rinpoche (pers. comm., Munich, 2001) also agrees with this reading. “Four times” is in any case incorrect, and also contradicts his own statement in fol. 5a.

54. BSO₃:1a–1b.

55. Schwartzberg (1978: plate 8.A.1b; 211–12).

56. Buchanan (1937:96), Hunter (1875–77, 12:44).

57. Asher (1988), Salomon (1985).

58. Buchanan (1937:104, 106), Hunter (1885, 5:47), Cunningham (1871b:3).

59. Hodgson (1972:135–36).

60. Buchanan (1937:126–27, 146–49, 153–54), Hunter (1875–77, 12:47), Hodgson (1972:135–36).

61. Bloch (1912:148), Buchanan (1937:89–92, 139–60), Trevithick (1999:638–40).

62. What follows is a fairly close paraphrase of the main narrative of the text, omitting the following sections: folio 1v.; the first half of 2r. (quoted already above); a section of poetic verse on folio 6v.; and the concluding verses on folio 71/v. The section divisions and their titles are mine.

63. In 1752, Gorkha forces under Prithvi Nārāyaṇ had begun campaigns to cut off the approaches to the Kathmandu Valley from the north and west, in part to disrupt and take over Newar trade with Tibet; Stiller (1973:104–18).

64. Tibetan: *Yang le shod*. Located at the Śeṣa Nārāyaṇa shrine in Pharping, on the southwestern slopes of the Kathmandu Valley and normally associated with Padmasambhava by Tibetans.

65. Tibetan: *Ta’u si ri*. The Nepalese border post at Tori (or Thori) was also called Bikna Thori in the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries; Hunter (1875–77, 13:220, 223), and Bhikhna Thori on modern maps.

66. The early sixteenth-century biography of Marpa includes a scene in which, returning from India, he is held up for several days at a Nepalese border village where they levy taxes upon travellers; Nālandā Translation Committee (1982:42, 44), Kapstein (2003).

67. Tibetan: *Dzu dzur* and *Ba ma ni*, both unidentified. Note that Tibetan *dzu dzu* (or ‘*dzu dzu*’) can represent Newari *juju*, “a local king” (Jørgenson 1989:71), although it appears as a local place name in this context.

68. Tibetan: *Bha yar*. Bayaha on the east bank of the Gandak River, the Baerah of Rennell’s (1794) map.

69. Many local mendicant trader-pilgrims of north India in the eighteenth century were known to hide their valuable goods such as gold, precious stones, pearls or musk wrapped up inside their long hair; Clarke (1998:54).

70. Tibetan: *Ti ra hu ti*, or modern Muzaffarpur District and town of the same name.

71. Attacks by tigers and other wild animals were still a concern on the journey from Tirhūt to Gayā during the nineteenth century; Hunter (1875–77, 13:30, 12:28). Jesuit traveller Ipolito Desideri (1686–1733) reported seeing a man taken by a tiger here on the roadside in 1722, thus his recommendations for a safe journey are similar to Sonam Rabgye's; Filippi (1937:321–22).

72. Tibetan: *a tsa ra*, commonly a “scholar” (*ācārya*) in Sanskrit, was used as a generic description for mendicant Indian trader-pilgrims who visited Tibet in large numbers during the eighteenth century.

73. Tibetan: *Bhe lar*. Modern Bettiah or Bellour village on Rennell's (1794) map, about two days walk southeast of Baerah (Bayaha) and about a day north of the Gandak River, from where there was river traffic south toward Motihari.

74. Tibetan: *Mu ri dha rir* or *Mu ti ha ri(r)*, marked on Rennell's map (1779: map 4).

75. Tibetan: *gSur dzya spur*. Sheopur is a small village located about halfway between Motihari and Mehsi travelling in a southeasterly direction.

76. Tibetan: *Me si*. Also spelled Maissy and Mihsi on early colonial maps, being the “Meesi” where Ipolito Desideri was rigorously searched by local customs officials in 1722; Filippi (1937:320–22).

77. Tibetan: *sMang gar*. Perhaps a form of Mong gor, the Bhutanese name for the kingdom of Vijayapur located on the southeastern Nepal Terai; Aris (1995:69 n. 49).

78. In 1722, in exactly the same area, Ipolito Desideri encountered a bandit attack and was then pressed by an armed *chokidar* (“Ciocchi-dār”) into parting with his money and possessions, with continual harrasment by various so-called *chokidar* along his route; Filippi (1937:320–22). A *chokidar* was often a kind of private watchman, but in many rural areas of north India during the period they ranged from being something akin to village policeman to highwaymen; Yule and Burnell (1989:205).

79. Tibetan: *Ha dzi spur*. The Hajypour of Rennell's map (1779: map 4), a major town and district of the same name on the north bank of the Ganges opposite Patna.

80. Tibetan: *Pā ṭha na*.

81. Tibetan: *Ha ṭa*.

82. Tibetan: *Nā 'bab*. During 1752, the Second Nawāb or Mughal Governor of Oudh, Safdar Jang (d. 1754), was acting as Wazir at Delhi, and Oudh was then administered by his deputy, Raja Newai Raj; Srivastava (1933).

83. Sonam Rabgye's route south from Patna to Gayā through these places can be traced readily on eighteenth- and nineteenth-century maps of southern Bihar (Rennell 1779, 1794; Buchanan 1937). Since the available maps have only crude scales calculated in miles, I have maintained these same units here:

1. *Bha ra* = Bara, a village about twelve miles southeast of Patna.
2. *Bi tho* = Bettoriah, a village about forty miles south of Patna, and about five miles east of Tickarry/Tikari.
3. *Ca kan* = Chakan, a village about eight miles northwest of Gayā, halfway between Bettoriah and Gayā.

4. *Man spur* = Manpour, a village about five miles north of Gayā.
5. *Ba ra spur* = Burayad, a village about two miles north of Gayā.

84. Our author's description of the ruined Mahābodhi Temple here conforms closely to that reported just sixty years later by Buchanan (1937:153–55), who stressed especially that “immense quantities of material have been removed” (150), and, judging from our Tibetan report, this appears to have already started occurring during the early eighteenth century. See Cunningham (1892: plate 31) for a photograph of the destroyed three-storied entrance pavillion, and Losty (1991; figs. 2–9, 22–24, 26, 28, 30) for various views of the ruins prior to restoration.

85. Buchanan (1937:154) estimated that the Bodhi Tree he saw here in 1811–12 was only about a hundred years old.

86. Tibetan: *Dza gar nātha*. A Nepalese account of the late eighteenth century (ca. 1770s) reports the Mahābodhi Temple was called “Jagat Natha” by the Indian residents of the site; Hodgson (1972:135). In 1811–12, Buchanan (1937:150) described a “hideous Jagannath” image installed in a very recently built temple erected in the northern section of the ruins at Bodh Gayā, which were generally known as the Rajasthan. However, in the southern section of the ruins, in the first floor chamber of the Mahābodhi Temple itself, he described the main image he encountered there as “a monstrous mis-shapen daub of clay,” being of “extreme rudness” [*sic*].

87. Tibetan: *Bra ki. Bairāgī* were originally Vaiṣṇava fighting ascetics, but as used here the term is intended as a general designation for one class of non-Buddhist Indian mendicants.

88. Tibetan: *Ne rany dza na*. The Nilajan, Lilajān, or Phalgu of late eighteenth- and nineteenth-century maps; Rennell (1779: map 4), Cunningham (1871b: map opposite p. 6). Thus, Sonam Rabgye cannot have discovered it using the ancient name he cites here.

89. South of Bodh Gayā Temple, and east along the Nairāñjanā River, Xuanzang reported that the place where the Buddha is said to have fasted had “a figure of the Buddha, which represents him as thin and withered away,” and which was the focus of a local, popular healing cult during his seventh-century visit; Beal (1884, 2:128). Chag Lotsāwa described the same image at the same location during his visit there sometime between 1234 and 1236 (Roerich 1959:81).

90. A distance of seventy or eighty kilometres northeast, meaning his travelling speed was up to about twenty kilometres per day.

91. Cunningham (1871b:29) mentions “numerous masses of brick ruins” at the site of Nālandā in 1861–62.

92. Tibetan: *Bya rgod phung po'i ri*. During the eighteenth century, the name Gṛdhrakūṭaparvata was long forgotten, with the original hill being called Sailagiri (Cunningham 1871a:393–94), although the name Radjejr was still in use but was applied to the entire range of hills in the area; Rennell (1779: map 4).

93. Assuming Sonam Rabgye actually located the correct hill in the range here—this being unlikely, see note below—the reference could be to brick temple basements of the Gupta period found on the summit of the Gṛdhrakūṭaparvata; Huntington

(1986:40). In the thirteenth century, Chag Lotsāwa reported that it was believed that the Buddha's preaching seat was still to be seen on the summit of the hill; Roerich (1959:88).

94. This must refer to the hill of Baibhar-Giri, at the western end of the range, and upon which was built a substantial Śaivite temple, the only one on the Rajgir Hills at this time, which Cunningham (1871b:24–25) found in ruins in 1861–62. The only other major site of religious activity in the Rajgir Hills during the period was at the eastern end of the range, where a hill known as Giribrajā or Giriyaḥ in the early nineteenth century was also covered in ancient remains, such as stone ledges, foundations, pathways, and steps; Buchanan (1937:164–65, 170–74).

95. Tibetan: *Kā pi la wastu* and *Ser skya*.

96. Tibetan: *Wa ra ṇa si*, *Bā na ra shi*, and *Ka shi*. It appears from the wording at this point in the text that Sonam Rabgye did not venture as far as Vārāṇasī but merely reported what he had heard of it.

97. Buchanan's (1937:39–40) 1811 description of weather in Gayā district during the same period of the year in which Sonam Rabgye travelled is almost identical.

98. The sixteenth-century *Vajra Songs of the Kagyü Lamas* (*Bka' brgyud bla ma rnams kyi ido rje'i mgrur*) mentions "three fears" of Marpa's journey to Magadha: crossing the river Gangā; meeting bandits and thieves on the road; and the toll collectors in Tīrhūt; Snellgrove and Richardson (1980:119), Nālandā Translation Committee (1980:145–46). These are identical in order and type to fears two, three, and four listed by Sonam Rabgye, while fear of wild animals such as tigers and snakes is the only point in common with more classical lists of Ten Fears (*'jigs pa bcu*) found in Buddhist *sūtra* texts; see PHUR:662–63, cf. Martin (1994b:55).

99. There were some fabricated accounts. On an alleged eighteenth-century pilgrimage to Indian Buddhist sites by the then dead Sixth Dalai Lama, see Aris (1988:191–95, 223), NGA1:66.

100. Losty (1991), Leoshko (1996; 2003:73–74, 80–85), Malandra (1988), Trevithick (1999).

101. See, e.g., Malandra (1988:10): "The revival of interest in Bodh गया began in 1802, when the Burmese sent a mission to the temple."

102. This article, reprinted in Hodgson (1972:134–36), was originally published as "On the Extreme Resemblance that Prevails between Many of the Symbols of Buddhism and Saivism," *Oriental Quarterly Magazine* 2 (1827): 218 and *Oriental Quarterly Magazine* 3 (1828): 252.

103. See the thirteenth-century account of India by Chag Lotsāwa, Chōjepal (1197–1264), which although more comprehensive in some respects, lacks detail of travel routes and is replete with reports of miraculous stories (Roerich 1959; CHAM). Compare also BCOM, which gives a detailed description of Bodh Gayā together with the usual miraculous stories but is totally bereft of any "guide" beyond the immediate precinct of the temple complex.

104. BLO5:33b, l.1–2. Compare the rendering of Grünwedel (1915:56), who mistranslated the passage to the extent that he even failed to read Sonam Rabgye's name in the text.

105. Aris (1994:9) initially stated he was born in eastern Bhutan in 1716, but later corrected this to western Bhutan in ca. 1717 (Aris 1995:5).

106. Aris (1995:5–7). Namgyel's son is also known to have died while on a pilgrimage to India. The fact that Bhutanese did visit Bihar was already established in what must be the 1650s or 1660s, when Jean-Baptiste Tavernier met Bhutanese musk merchants in Patna; Ball (1925, 2:201).

107. Aris (1995:37–39), with slight modifications of style. Sparham (1999:74) pointed out that Aris mistranslated “north” for the original “west” (Tibetan: *nub phyogs*) in this passage.

108. Only Gayā [as opposed to Bodh Gayā] is named by Jigme Lingpa (Aris 1995:37–39), while there is no mention of the Bodhi Tree, which was at this time growing well and heavily worshipped by Hindu pilgrims in the Bodh Gayā compound. The places of “both live and dead offerings” and the “footprint” could well refer to the two major religious sites of Hindu Gayā, the Durgā temple of Gayeswari Devi and the Viṣṇupada Temple housing an image of Viṣṇu's footprint respectively; Cunningham (1871b:2), Asher (1988). A “stone image of Avalokiteśvara” could have been anywhere in Gayā at the time. In the nineteenth century, Alexander Cunningham (1871b:1) observed that, “Statues, both Buddhistical and brahmanical, are found in all parts of the old city, and more especially about the temples.” In 1811–12, Francis Buchanan (1937:101) observed that the Viṣṇupada Temple in Gayā town contained Buddhist images that had been brought there from Bodh Gayā. An undiscerning observer could easily mistake the various standing images of Viṣṇu in Gayā's temples for that of Avalokiteśvara; see the photographs in Asher (1988). Furthermore, Jigme Lingpa's report mentions “an area surrounded by a continuous wall,” although during the eighteenth and early nineteenth centuries the Bodh Gayā temple had no such wall surrounding it, whereas the Viṣṇupada Temple in Gayā was situated within an enclosure. A “stone *stūpa*” mentioned at the site by Jigme Lingpa does not provide any reliable evidence for a Bodh Gayā identification either. The form of the main shrine building of the eighteenth-century Viṣṇupada Temple (see the photo in Asher 1988:75) could have easily been taken to resemble what was expected to be an ancient Buddhist *stūpa* by an eighteenth-century pilgrim from the Himalaya, as was the case in misidentification of domed Assamese temples already discussed in chap. 5.

109. Turner (1800:267) reported late eighteenth-century Tibetan belief that the site of Buddha's enlightenment was the ruined city of Gaur, capital of Bengal during the Mamlūk reign (thirteenth to sixteenth centuries). Gaur had absolutely no Buddhist history or associations, and Tibetan knowledge of and interest in it came via the Gosains (see chap. 7). As a centre of Muslim imperial power, Gaur had attracted all types of mendicants seeking charity and patronage, and later the abandoned ruins of the city became a haunt of Hindu mendicants such as the Gosains, who passed through the area on their annual pilgrimage cycle from the Ganges Doab to holy places and pilgrimage fairs to the east and south.

CHAPTER SEVEN

1. I follow the Tibetan system of enumeration for the Panchen Lama lineage, whereas many authors follow the Chinese system that incorrectly designates Losang Pelden Yeshe as the sixth incumbent; see, e.g., Cammann (1951) or Goldstein (1997).

2. To mention but a few examples, see Turner (1800), Markham (1879), Bysack (1890), Camman (1951), Das (1984 [1882]:116–41), Lamb (2002), Petech (1950), Richardson (1962:64–68), Richardson (1996:2–3), and Teltscher (2006). See also the well-researched recent contribution by Clarke (1998) which discusses the Gosains and the Panchen Lama.

3. Grünwedel (1915), Bernbaum (1980), Newman (1991, 1996).

4. Bogle reported of the Third Panchen Lama's mother that she was a "near relation of the Rajahs of Ladak," although his father was explicitly said to have been Tibetan; Markham (1879:84). Richardson (1998 [1959]:355) stated she "was a member of the royal family of Ladakh," and elsewhere that she "was from Kashmir" (1996:2). The Panchen's biography does not make his family relations very explicit, however it is likely that his mother was one Nyida Wangmo, the first wife and queen of the Ladakhi king Dekyong Namgyel (r. 1729–39), who was perhaps originally from the royal house of Lo Monthang (i.e., Mustang in northern Nepal) and who bore children by several different husbands; see Petech (1977:96, 99, 107), KOZH:976, DONR:809, and Markham (1879:139). I hope to return to this question in another publication.

5. BLO4:321b, l.1–3 = p. 652. Both Das (1984 [1882]) and Petech (1950:335–37) have loosely paraphrased this and the following sections regarding the missions to India, although both have omitted many details, and Das has also added his own content and interpretations which are not supported by the original Tibetan.

6. See Petech (1950:334, and n. 4), quoting Magnaghi, *Relazione inedita di un viaggio al Tibet del P. Cassiano Beligatti de Macerata*. Florence, 1902.

7. Petech (1950:334–35), Markham (1879:87–88, 124–25).

8. Turner (1800:331).

9. Markham (1879:124–25), Clarke (1998:64).

10. Markham (1879:87–88).

11. Petech (1950:334–36).

12. Petech (1950:334) implies that the Panchen Lama initiated the contact with Benares, although we have no sources to support this point.

13. Markham (1879:88).

14. This seems to be the meaning of the Tibetan: *zla ba phyed kyī lam na rdo rje ldan 'dug pas der 'byor te*. Das (1984 [1882]:122) gives the very liberal gloss "travel in wooden conveyances," and, in n. 56, "Palanquins."

15. For the Tibetan Shi bo re de here, Das (1984 [1882]:122) has reconstructed Sanskrit Śivārddhi, although I am unable to confirm the validity of this.

16. BLO4:343b, l.1–344b, l.3 = pp. 696–98. One little known result of the visits to Bihar by the Tibetan envoy Drongtse Chömdzé Losang Tsering is that he encountered a British colonial officer, Colonel John Cumming (d. 1786), in Bihar, a meeting which was reported back to the Panchen Lama; see Lamb (2002:55 n. 1, 257 n. 15).

17. BLO4:345a, l.6 = p. 699. One really has to wonder how a replica model of the Mahābodhi Temple could have been made at this time given that, as we have seen in chap. 6, the actual temple itself was substantially ruined and had been totally neglected for centuries. Von Schroeder (2001, 1:321–63) dates the manufacture of all known Indian models of the Mahābodhi Temple and other Buddhist temples which have been found in Tibet to the Pāla period, and none are inlaid with gemstones. Also, why should a

local Hindu ruler living far from what was at the time an obscure rural ruin in southern Bihar have such a model manufactured? I am rather more convinced that what the Tibetans received was a replica of some famous Hindu shrine, but one which they willingly interpreted as being of the Mahābodhi Temple.

18. BLO4:345b, 1.2–3.

19. In his *Narrative of the Holy Land* (*'Phags yul gyi rtogs brjod*), the Panchen identified at least eight locations within subcontinental India (a ninth, Suvarṇadvīpa, he located in South East Asia) which belonged to the twenty-four Vajrayāna *pīṭha* of the *Samvara-tantra* scheme:

Reference in BLO5	Geographical location	<i>Pīṭha</i> identity	<i>Maṇḍala</i> level	<i>Vajrakāya</i> position
9a, 5	Pāṭaliputra/sKya bo'i bu	Nagara	body	<i>Me rtsibs</i>
12b, 4	Kāmarūpa/Ka ma ru	Kāmarūpa	speech	<i>Shar rtsibs</i>
13a, 2	Tripura/Ti ra pu ra	Devīkoṭa	mind	<i>Rlung rtsibs</i>
14b, 5	Rameśvara/Rā me śva ri	Rameśvara	mind	<i>Lho nub kyi rtsibs</i>
15a, 1	Maru/Ma ru wa, Me war, Tsi ta war, Bi wu wa, Ā bu	Maru	body	<i>Rlung rtsibs</i>
15a, 2	Gujarat/Gu dzi ra tha	Saurāṣṭra	body	<i>Nub rtsibs</i>
16b, 5–6	Nagar Thaṭha/Na khar ṭha ṭha	Sindhu	body	<i>Bden bral kyi rtsibs</i>
17a, 3–4	Ghāzni/Ga dza ni	Qḍdiyāna	mind	<i>Nub rtsibs</i>

20. Lamb (2002:262); an exactly parallel passage is not found in Markham's edited version of Bogle's journal, but compare Markham (1879:134).

21. British Library, India Office Collection, Mss Eur E226/60, nos. 83 and 102, covering the period July 20, 1775, to December 1, 1778.

22. Turner (1800:268).

23. BLO5:12a–b.

24. British Library, India Office Collection, Mss Eur E226/60, no. 87/12.

25. BLO4:373a, 1.3–4. No plural is given in the original, although Petech (1950:344) gives “sent out some men” for Tibetan *mi gtong ba mdzad*.

26. Turner (1800:xiii), Markham (1879:1 n. 1).

27. On proxy pilgrimages by Tibetans, see Waddell (1934:319), Hedin (1909:202) and Huber (1999b:214).

28. Mau, located on the Yamunā River fifty kilometres west of Prayāga in the 18th century, has no known Buddhist history or associations.

29. Turner (1800:267–68).

30. Gerard (1993 [1841]:129, 150).

31. Gayāśiras, the “head of Gayā,” is an ambiguous and disputed site. Xuanzang visited a “Mount Gaya” southwest of the town, and some early Tibetans, such as

Pelchen Galo, identified it as Gayagori or “Gayā Head Hill.” Cunningham (1871b:3) and Barua (1931–34) identified it with the hill of “Brahmajuin” or “Brahma-yoni” near Gayā town, while Jacques and Asher consider that it is not a hill at all but rather a small shrine located next to the main Viṣṇupad Temple in the town of Gayā itself; Asher (1988:88 n. 5). Clearly, there are very divergent Buddhist and Hindu identifications.

32. BLO5:9a.

33. Templeman’s (1997:958) claim that Nagar (his “Nagara”) Thaṭha and Hiṅṅ Lāj were Buddhist pilgrimage sites is untenable, particularly from a Tibetan perspective. Neither site is mentioned in the early Indian Buddhist and non-Buddhist *pīṭha* lists; Dyczkowski (2001:79–83). Equating Nagar Thaṭha with Nagara is problematic since it has been identified at multiple locations by different Tibetan authors, but never in western India; see, e.g., BLO5:9a. Hiṅṅ Lāj was a purely Hindu site of worship; Briggs (1982 [1938]), White (1996), and Hart (1840).

34. White (1996:109; chap. 3). Briggs (1982 [1938]:72–73) also mentions a Jain branch of the much later Kānphaṭa tradition.

35. White (2003:22–23, 258).

36. Digby (2004), Templeman (1997).

37. For translations, see Lama Chimpa and Chattopadhyaya (1970), Grünwedel (1914), whose work is very problematic and to be used with due caution, and Templeman (1983, 1989, forthcoming).

38. Digby (2004:44).

39. He makes this clear, for instance, in his history of Buddhism in India (Lama Chimpa and Chattopadhyaya 1970:320), and in Buddhaguptanātha’s biography (Templeman, forthcoming: 3–4 = TAR1:535, 5–536, 1), by identifying the Naṭeśvarī, Buddhaguptanātha’s lineage, as holders of Vajrayāna teaching. However, Tāranātha’s claim remains, to date, a unique and unproven one.

40. This issue depends entirely upon how “Buddhism” is defined. See Gombrich (1984:83) for one example of exactly what such a survival or continuity of Buddhism must technically be in the estimations of the Buddhist tradition itself.

41. White (1996:107–8, 403 nn. 144, 148), Digby (2004).

42. For instance, Buddhaguptanātha’s claimed circumambulation of the “eight great pilgrimage sites” (TAR1:558–59) was clearly impossible since the remains of most of them had been buried deep beneath the soil for many centuries. His claimed visit to Kukkuṭapādagiri (Tibetan: *Ri Bya rkang*) beggars the imagination, since it is best known to Buddhists by way of the Mahākāśyapa legends in the ancient Aśoka literature, while its location has been unclear since the time of the Gupta-era Chinese pilgrims and never conclusively identified up until today; Beal (1884, 2:142), Beal (1869:132–33), Cunningham (1975:387–88), Cook (1994:125).

43. BLO5:12b, Lama Chimpa and Chattopadhyaya (1970:314 n. 2), DTSP, 2:1241–42, Roerich (1976:1066).

44. See Lama Chimpa and Chattopadhyaya (1970:319), and BLO5:12b.

45. Bysack (1890:52 n. 2) observed, “Among the Saivas, or followers of Siva, the *Udasis*, or non-householders, prevail more than in any other sect, and they pass under the designation of *Sannyasis* or *Gosaims*, though the latter appellation is appropriated

in Bengal by the *Vaiṣṇava gurus*, specially the followers of Chaitanya, the descendents of Advaita and Nityananda.”

46. Cohen (1964) Clark (2004:12–15), Clarke (1998).

47. McKay (1998).

48. Cohen (1964:176).

49. Chattopadhyaya (1984:viii) Turner (1800:270–72), Duncan (1797), Briggs (1982 [1938]:3 n. 2).

50. Salomon (1985).

51. Notable exceptions are found in the *Buddhacarita* of Aśvaghoṣa (ca. first century CE) who, as a native of Śāketa and admirer of the Sanskrit epic poets, was fully conversant with the brahmanical context in which he lived and the ritual and mythic importance of the river for Indians; see *Buddhacarita* 2:39 and 22:11 (Johnston 1995, pt. 2:27; pt. 3:64).

52. See, e.g., Sørensen (1994:55, 192, 267).

53. In Tibetan: *Phyi pa'i phyi gtsang / nang pa'i nang gtsang*.

54. See, e.g., Roerich (1959:63, 95, 98), RWAY:31b, 1.2–32a, 1.1, RDO2:166, 1.2–3, Decler (1997:167–68), and Roerich (1976:1055).

55. Snellgrove and Richardson (1980:11), Nālandā Translation Committee (1980:137–38, 145), Nālandā Translation Committee (1982:123–24).

56. RWAY:31b, 1.2–32a, 1.1.

57. Roerich (1959:58–59).

58. Tibetans derived and adapted common comparative expressions invoking the Ganges from Sanskrit *sūtra* literature, such as “like the sands of the river Ganges” (*gaṅga-nadī-vālukā-sama*) (Harrison 1990:321), and “greatest on this side of the River Ganges” (Roerich 1976:441, 667; DTSP, 2:782). Tibetan lamas also regarded the Ganges as originating in Tibet, due to an idealized and distorted but widely accepted traditional geography and hydrography of the Manasarovar/Mount Kailash region based upon the *Abhidharmakośa* cosmology; e.g., BLO5:11b, 3. Hence, Mount Kailash or Kang Tisé in western Tibet is erroneously referred to as “father of the Ganges” (Gang gā'i yab); see also Huber (2003:401–5), Huber and Rigzin (1999:140–43).

59. GTS1:436a, 1.3; see also 436b, 1.5.

60. BLO4:321b, 1.1–3 = p. 652; cf. Petech (1950:336–37). On early nineteenth-century Burmese collections of water from Indian sites related to the Buddha, see Buchanan (1937:139–40).

61. Eck (1982:39).

62. Clarke (1998:61–63, also figs. 1 and 3).

63. Turner (1800:269).

64. Kvaerne (1998:77).

65. DGE5, 1:40, Huber (2000:6).

66. Brauen (1982:326), Wangchuk (1999:102), Salomon (1985:426–34). Schopen (1994) has compared the similarity of cultural patterns between the Buddhist *stūpa* cult and that of the Indian *tīrtha* cult.

67. O'Connor (1931:99); see also Combe (1926:155).

68. Sax (1987).

69. See: “Dalai Lama condemns Christians, Muslims,” <http://www.cnn.com/2001/WORLD/asiapcf/south/01/25/india.lama/index.html> (posted Jan. 25, 2001, accessed Feb. 22, 2004).

70. Schwartzberg (1978:14, plates 3.A.2.c, 3.D.3.b), and Poddar (1957) under the entry on Gaṅgāsāgara where many *Purāṇa* references are available, and Hunter (1875–77, 1:102–6). Pilgrimage visits to the site by Indian mendicants take place regularly in January.

71. See, e.g., Sircar (1973:19), where it appears twenty-fourth in a list of forty-two Siddha *pīṭha* in a text from the *Kubjikā-tantra* literature, and where it is also mentioned in two other Tantras (1973:84). Dyczkowski (2001) does not mention the site in his discussion of *pīṭha* in the classical *Kubjikā* tradition.

72. Templeman (1989:33; TAR1:556, 1.1–4), Lama Chimpa and Chattopadhyaya (1970:268), Tucci (1931:698–99), also BLO5:11b–12a.

73. Dowman (1985:123–27).

74. Hunter (1875–77, 1:105), Poddar (1957), who state the *murti* was later housed in Calcutta.

75. Turner (1800:268), BLO5:11b–12a.

76. Aris (1995:52–55).

77. Rennell (1794).

78. Hunter (1875–77, 1:104).

79. Turner (1800:268).

80. On Tibetan pilgrims at Hardwar, see Gerard (1993 [1841]:129, 150), Kvaerne (1998:77), Ramble (1999:23–25).

81. See BLO5:20a, 1.4–5. Phūllahari was usually located near Nālandā monastery in southern Bihar by Tibetans; Roerich (1959:85), Huber (2000:53). The Panchen Lama was probably inspired by the sixteenth-century hagiography of Nāropa by Lhatsun Rinchen Namgyel (1473–1557), which places Nāropa’s birth at Śrīnagara in Bengal; see Guenther (1963:7), and Smith (2001:75) for correct dating. The Panchen then confounds Hardwar with another Śrīnagara, this one being the old capital of Garhwal which lies on the Ganges upstream from Hardwar, between Rudraprayag and Devaprayag.

82. Markham (1879:138).

83. Markham (1879:138).

84. See Markham (1879:134; cf. also 196–97), where this general thesis about earlier Tibetans having religious establishments in India is repeated by Bogle as if he were convinced of it.

85. See Lama Chimpa and Chattopadhyaya (1970:331, 333). For added mention of Bhamdvam (Bhamda) and the Vindhya Hills, which refers to Baghela or Bhaṭṭa, see Templeman (1983:92, 96; forthcoming: 22, 25–26), Digby (2004:22–45).

86. Tibetan: *Ko ki* or *Ko ki’i yul*. For a definition of this region followed by various Tibetan authors, see Tāranātha in Lama Chimpa and Chattopadhyaya (1970:330).

87. BLO5:33b, 1.4–6.

88. BLO5:8b, 32b, 9b.

89. BLO5:9b, 1.5. The earlier Tibetan name is Tsha ba gsum, and the Panchen uses Gau som pu ri for the eighteenth-century site he considers it to have been identified

with. Both Tāranātha and Butön place Trikaṭuka in the Pāla period; Lama Chimpa and Chattopadhyaya (1970:267), Obermiller (1932:158).

90. British Library, India Office Collection, Mss Eur E226/85[a], “Letter from the Teshoo Lama to the Governor, Received the 29th March 1775.”

91. The Panchen Lama made constant references to religious rather than commercial matters (other than responses to British requests and queries) in India. He reported to the Chankya Hutuktu in Peking on religious freedom in India, sought information on Shambhala in India (Markham 1879:134, 168), and requested rare ritual objects, such as right-turning conch shells, from India for his monastery; Imperial Records Department 1930:327, letter 1472 of April 29, 1779, cf. Petech (1950:336). In 1775, the Panchen wrote of his awareness that the British were the new overlords who now controlled Bodh Gayā; BLO5:27a, 1.1–2.

92. Consistent suggestions by scholars that the Panchen Lama sought commercial and political advantages via Anglo-Tibetan relations are untenable. Tibetan sources reveal no evidence of this, and British reports represent an overeager and at times naive interpretation of Tibetan activities in terms of their own commercial interests. The Tibetans themselves neither proposed nor developed any new commercial enterprises or political initiatives toward the British. Even the Panchen’s letter to bring about peace between Bhutan and the British East India Company was no unique political initiative, but mere discharge of a high lama’s expected role as mediator in disputes, something clearly desired by the Bhutanese at the time. Dependence upon British narratives has generated misleading and exaggerated statements about the Panchen. For example, Cammann (1951:74 and nn.87, 88) maintained the Panchen “was anxious to promote trade with Bengal . . . because of personal ambition” and that he enjoyed a monopoly over all trade in western Tibet. These unfounded remarks are based upon Samuel Turner’s reports to Warren Hastings, but Turner never even met the Panchen, who died before the Englishman arrived in Tibet.

93. Markham (1879:lxix, 52–43, 141).

94. Markham (1879:198).

95. Markham (1879:198).

96. Markham (1879:198–99). Teltscher (2006:5) suggests that the British also sought access to the Qing court via the Panchen Lama; see also Cammann (1951:68).

97. Markham (1879:199, also 134).

98. Dalrymple (1808), Markham (1879:lxxv, 79, 90, 165, 207–8 n. 2), Bysack (1890:73–92), Richardson (1962:67–68), Clarke (1998:65–66).

99. The Panchen Lama’s praises for Purangir’s services are personally expressed in a *lam yig* document dated 1774; Das (1972 [1915]: app. 3, pp. 4, 43).

100. Markham (1879:164–65).

101. Markham (1879:168).

102. British Library, India Office Collection, Mss Eur E226/85[a], “Letter from the Teshoo Lama to the Governor, Received the 29th March 1774.”

103. A letter from the Panchen Lama to Warren Hastings in thanks for granting permission to build the temple was received in Calcutta on April 8, 1776 (Imperial Records Department 1930:12). See also British Library, India Office Collection, Mss Eur 226/85 (d).

104. Also marked “Ghusary” on older maps; Bysack (1890:50), also Turner (1800:269).

105. In a ledger entry dated June 1776, Bogle recorded payments made to Purangir Gosain “at the opening of the Teshoo Lama’s monastery”; British Library, India Office Collection, Mss Eur E226/60, nos. 83 and 102, covering the period July 20, 1775, to December 1, 1778.

106. The *bigha* varies between 0.2 and 0.7 hectares, depending upon historical period and locality in India. Cammann (1951:66) notes the Bengali *bigha* as equal to about 1,600 square yards.

107. See the *sanad* documents in Bysack (1890:94–99). See also Lamb (2002:371) for a letter from the East India Company giving formal permission for the land grant, transmitted to Bogle on December 1, 1777. See also British Library, India Office Collection, Mss Eur 226/85 (c), in which it mentions “a hundred begas of ground have been marked out.”

108. See Turner (1800:449–52) for a copy of this letter, received February 12, 1782; see also Imperial Records Department (1938:131–32). Losang Jinpa is referred to in the British documents as the “Chanzo Cusho” (Tibetan: *Phyag mdzod sKu zhabs*), although his full title was Chandzö Chenmo Drungpa Hutuktu (Richardson 1998:355).

109. See the *sanad* documents and translations in Bysack (1890:94–99).

110. Bysack (1890:50) has a physical description of the building and its contents, plus two photographs (see plate 1, at the end of the volume).

111. Bysack (1890:89)

112. For example, Purangir and some of his followers accompanied the Samuel Turner embassy to Tashilhunpo in 1783; see the *lam yig* issued by the Tashilhunpo court in Das (1972 [1915]: app. 3, pp. 4, 43). While in Lhasa during 1793, Daljit Giri reported that there was a Gosain from Bhoṭ Bagan on daily duty at Fort William to assist in the translation of official documents arriving in Calcutta from Tibet; Cammann (1951:141).

113. The *lam yig* document describing this journey is in Bysack (1890:99, and plate 2 at the end of the volume).

114. Ledger entries for May and June 1778, in British Library, India Office Collection, Mss Eur E226/60, nos. 83 and 102, covering the period July 20, 1775, to December 1, 1778.

115. The letter text is in Turner (1800:419–33). Raj Chand Rai is mentioned in the land grant documents reproduced in Bysack (1890:98–99).

116. Within three years of opening Bhoṭ Bagan, Warren Hastings informed the Panchen Lama in a letter written on May 10, 1779, that: “The *vakīl* desires to acquire a plot of land on the bank of the Ganges at Benares and to build a *gonpa* thereon after the model of the *gonpas* of Uttarakhand. [The Governor-General] Has therefore written to the Raja of Benares [Chait Singh] to grant the *vakīl* a piece of land for the purpose”; Imperial Records Department (1930:332), entry 1485. Due to the well-known fraught relationship between Hastings and Chait Singh, it seems unlikely that the former’s attempt to aid Purangir would have been well received at this time in Benares. However, according to the last Giri Mahant of Bhoṭ Bagan, Purangir had two disciples, one of whom, Daljit Giri, succeeded him as the second abbot of Bhoṭ Bagan, while the other, Bhim Giri, was given charge of a *maṭha* in Benares by his guru; *Appeal* 1948:121.

117. Bysack (1890:50, 52)

118. Of related interest, see the claim about Orgyenpa Rinchenpal (i.e., Sengopal, 1230–1308/9) and the so-called Tibet gate (Bod kyi sgo) of the Mahābodhi Temple complex; see DPAB, 2:915, also PAD5:319.

119. Due to rumours that Bhoṭ Bagan held deposits of Tibetan gold, Purangir was murdered by thieves in 1795, sometime before May 3, since this was the date inscribed on his tomb; Bysack (1890:55, 89–92).

120. See Bysack (1890:92).

121. See Markham (1879:138 n.1) quoting from a handwritten note on Bogle's manuscript by Alexander Dalrymple (1737–1808). Bysack (1890:73), who had oral informants in Calcutta at the time he wrote, also reported of the site, "There were also guest-houses (as the traditions of the place confirm), in which people from Tibet, some of whom were important enough to have been introduced to Warren Hastings, were lodged." This must refer, in part at least, to the period before 1785, after which Hastings resigned his post as governor-general.

122. Turner (1800:269).

123. See the *lam yig* document for Daljit Giri's journey of 1793 in Das (1972 [1915]: app. 3, pp. 5, 43–44).

124. Bysack (1890:53).

125. See *Appeal* 1948:77, 80.

126. Based upon Das' detailed identifications of the five images given in Bysack (1890:52–55), although Das failed to describe the sixth image of Padmāpāṇi. Tibetan *lam yig* ("passport") manuscripts found at Bhoṭ Bagan were published by Bysack (1890:55, plate 2 at the end of the volume) and Das (1972 [1915]: app. 3, pp. 4–5, 43–44).

127. This is Bysack's (1890:54–55) gloss of the Bengali inscription, which he states was "in very ungrammatical and corrupt language."

128. Bysack (1890:92).

129. See Lopez (2004:563), Hopkins and Yuthok (1992), and the painting reproduced in Anon. (2004: front inside cover of the journal).

130. DGE5, 2:160.

131. See Miller (1993:226).

132. Bysack (1890:92), and *Appeal* 1948:63–64.

133. *Appeal* 1948:126.

134. The committee was headed by Satish Chandra Giri, Mahant of Tarakeshwar, an important Śaiva monastic centre and place of pilgrimage at Serampore. By this time, the prestige of the whole Giri establishment in Bengal had been much reduced due to a notorious adultery and murder scandal involving the previous Tarakeshwar Mahant in 1873; on its representation in nineteenth-century art and theatre in Bengal, see Jain (1999) and Sarkar and Mackay (2000).

135. See *Appeal* 1948:83–84, for a copy of the appointment document. See also Roy Choudhury (1967:153) and Anon. (1929:284).

136. The entire case is detailed in *Appeal* 1948.

137. Testimonies in *Appeal* 1948 indicate that Ratan Narayan Giri was accused of falsely claiming to be the disciple of Trilokh Chandra Giri.

138. Around 1958, an Āśrama *saṃnyāsin*, Dandi Swamin Deva Ashram, settled at

Bhoṭ Bagan and became the Mahant. His disciple and my informant, Dandi Swamin Prakash Ashram, took over the position in 1991; interview with Dandi Swamin Prakash Ashram, Bhoṭ Bagan, Howrah (Feb. 20, 2005).

139. Recent Calcutta newspaper articles by Soumitra Das (2001) and Suphal Sarkar (2005) have brought Bhoṭ Bagan back to local public attention.

140. *Appeal* 1948:65, 90.

141. Bysack (1890:54), and *Appeal* 1948:121.

142. Bysack (1890:54).

143. While in Peking, Das himself saw very similar statues being manufactured in the workshops at the Buddhist Huangsi or “Yellow Temple” north of the Antaman Gate. The pedestal of this image bears a Bengali inscription containing the name “Bholá Giri of Lhasa in the country of Bhoṭakshetra [i.e. Tibet]”; Bysack (1890:53).

144. *Appeal* 1948:80, 91, 121, 125–26.

145. The images held in the police lockup are of Tārā, Cakrasaṃvara with consort, Guhyasamāja with consort, and the image with a nimbus which Sarat Chandra Das identified as Vajra Bhṛkutī; see Bysack (1890:53–54), *Appeal* 1948:121, and Das (2001).

CHAPTER EIGHT

1. Richardson (1998:530) and Richardson (1974:27–38) for an overview of the Gorkha war period.

2. DEBZ:245.

3. After the Tibetan version in DEBZ:151–54; see also BODK: document 50, facsimile 50–1, 50–2.

4. See Richardson (1974:52) and Chayet (1985:66). While Qianlong was a Buddhist (Benard 2004), the extent to which he followed Buddhist principles is another matter. For example, he was well known as a devoted hunter (e.g., Hou Ching-lang and M. Pirazzoli 1979, Elliot and Ning Chia 2004), which would have seen him fail even in the fundamental stages of taking refuge (*skyab 'gro*) and engaging in the preliminary practices (*sngon 'gro*) as these are understood in mainstream Tibetan Buddhist teachings.

5. Kawaguchi (1909:613–51) gives a detailed account of the difficulties of crossing the frontier in 1902 and the dangers of the alternative routes.

6. See Petech (1972a), Engelhardt (2002), McKay (1998b).

7. A full appreciation of the period has to take account of the “forward” policy of the British toward Tibet and its impact on Tibetan and Chinese attitudes to the outside world; McKay (2003).

8. See Waller (1990).

9. On the life and works of Chandra Das, see Das (1969), Chattopadhyaya (1984), and Waller (1990).

10. Das (1969:61, 78).

11. Drongtse Khyabying was also known as “Sengchen Dorjechang”; on his character, and unfortunate death, see Das (1969: 61–83, 88–89), Waddell (1905:8–9), Bell (1987:56–57), Petech (1973:85), and Shakabpa (1984:193), McKay (1997:123–24), and McKay (2002).

12. Littledale (1896:469).

13. Bell (1928:208).

14. On the Jarong wars, see Mansier (1990), Martin (1990), and Greatrex (1994), and on Gampo Namgyel of Nagrong see Tsering (1985). See also Bacot (1912) and Bailey (1957) on the southern displacement of Khampas into the far eastern Himalaya and Assam during the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries.

15. See Oppitz (1968; 1974).

16. See Dorje (1999:321), Huber (2005), KARM.

17. See Trotter (1915, 1:165, 168).

18. See, e.g., Oppitz (1968; 1974:235), von Füller-Haimendorf (1964:24–27), Sherring (1906:193–94), and Francke (1900:31).

19. See, e.g., the autobiography of Jetsun Lochan Rinpoche (1865–1951), who uses rGya gar Khams pa to identify Tibetans living in the Hill States of the Western Himalaya during her childhood (Havnevik 1999:143, 181; 1998).

20. Gerard (1993 [1841]:117, cf. 127).

21. See, e.g., the childhood reminiscences of Jetsun Lochan Rinpoche, who was born and grew up as a mendicant Tibetan beggar and *ma ni pa* in Mandi, Kulu, and neighbouring regions; Havnevik (1999:141–207; 1998).

22. The only early Chinese pilgrim to visit all these areas was Xuanzang, and he mentions nothing significant there, except that there were some Buddhist inhabitants in his time, as there are still today; Beal (1884, 1:175–78).

23. For example, at the time that Götsangpa (Tucci 1940:20–24) and Orgyenpa (Tucci 1940:43–44) visited there in the thirteenth century, they describe Jālandhara as a distinct region or a “country” (*yu*l), which is literally how it is discussed in the Vajrayāna commentaries in Tibetan. Within this country they recognized a whole range of sacred sites, one among them being Jvālāmukhī, a place which is not necessarily the most important for them. In the seventeenth century, Taksang Repa (Tucci 1940:66) specifically identified the Jālandhara *pīṭha* at Nagarkot, a one-day march from the separate site of Jvālāmukhī. In the eighteenth century, the Third Panchen Lama identified the Jālandhara *pīṭha* directly with Jvālāmukhī. Discussing Hindu identifications, Sircar (1973:86) mentions, “the goddess at Nagarkot-Kangra as Jālandharī which is the same as Jvālāmukhī. . . . The Jālandhara Pīṭha is now located near Jvālāmukhī.” Concerning “Jooalamookhee” (i.e., Jvālāmukhī) in the early nineteenth century, see Gerard (1993 [1841]:130).

24. See, e.g., the comments by Tucci (1980:6–7), Karmay (1988a:6), and Bischoff (1978).

25. See Martin (2001:33–37).

26. Faxian and Xuanzang both located Uḍḍiyāna in the region of Swāt (Legge 1886:28–29; Beal 1884, 1:119–35), and Tibetans seem to have accepted the same location. Buddhaguptanātha (1514–1610), however, located Uḍḍiyāna in Ghāzni in the 1530s and 1540s (Templeman TAR1:539, l.6). Guenther (1996:4 n. 6) maintains that, “The identification of Uryyan with the Swāt Valley (now in Pakistan), first proposed by E. A. Cunningham and then repeated by Giuseppe Tucci and subsequent scholars is groundless.” He considers it could be in Bactria due to certain aspects of the Padmasambhava cult, being somewhere in the “Near Middle East and the Iranian

lands extending into Turkestan and Central Asia. . . . This makes Urgyan the name for a vast, but vaguely defined and definable, region" (p. 4). Chandra (1980) suggested that Uḍḍiyāna could be in South India.

27. Tucci (1980:148).

28. See Karmay (1981).

29. See, e.g., the fourteenth-century *Chronicle of Padmasambhava* (*Padma bka' thang*; see ORG1:235 ff.), in which Zahor and Uḍḍiyāna are often presented as closely neighbouring regions. However, in another passage in the same work (ORG1:88), one of many which reveal the composite nature of the text, Zahor is enumerated as one of the nine great regions of India and located in the southeast, just as it is found in the Sarmapa histories of Vajrayāna. Other later Nyingmapa histories are equally ambivalent about the location of Zahor; see Dudjom Rinpoche (1991:888–89, 973) who categorically states it is separate from India, but then locates it within India.

30. Tucci (1940:80). According to the Tibetan hagiographies (for a Tibetan Buddhist capsule portrait of the saint, see Tulku Thondup Rinpoche 1986: chap. 2), there were two separate attempts to burn Padmasambhava, one in Zahor and the other in Uḍḍiyāna, and I assume that Taksang Repa was referring to the latter here.

31. The first scholar to notice the alternative Tibetan geographical identifications was Jäschke (1881:485).

32. Snellgrove (1957:173).

33. The Third Panchen Lama, following all earlier Sarmapa precedents, locates Zahor in southeastern India near Bengal in his late eighteenth-century geography of India; BLO5:19b, 5.

34. Gerard (1993 [1841]:130).

35. Gerard (1993 [1841]:131). Francke (1926, 1:122) reported of the site in 1910, "The Tibetans believe that his [i.e., Padmasambhava's] spirit still dwells in the tree on the little floating island of the lake. In their view it is his initiative which moves the island about," and that waternuts at the lake were collected by Tibetan pilgrims as sacred souvenirs. A small Tibetan temple existed there at the time, apparently founded in the early part of the nineteenth century by Kinnauri Buddhists. This was the only Tibetan Buddhist institution at the site prior to the advent of the Tibetan Diaspora after 1959.

36. See Havnevik (1999:141–53).

37. An eyewitness account of Rewalsar in the early 1930s by a Buddhist pilgrim describes it as being totally neglected; Siriwardhana (1933:511). Similarly, Amdo Gendun Chöphel passes it over completely in his famous guidebook for Tibetan pilgrims to India; see Huber (2000:71, 118 n. 50). However, the Bönpo lama Khyungtrül Jigme Namkha Dorje, visiting Zahor Tso Pemachen in 1931–32, reported many pilgrims, especially Khampas; see DPAL:591, 1.2–3. On modern Tibetan interest in Rewalsar, see Cantwell (1995). The only Tibetan pilgrim guide to Tso Pema/Rewalsar I am aware of is a modern justification for its identity as Zahor based upon quotes from the *Chronicle of Padmasambhava* (*Padma bka' thang*) and inserted by Dahor Losang Rabgye in his heavily edited 1968 version of Amdo Gendun Chöphel's guidebook for India; DGE3:53–61.

38. Francke (1926, 1:123).

39. Tucci (1940:14), Bharati (1978:82). On Bönpo pilgrims at the Golden Temple and Amritsar, see Ramble (1999:24), Kvaerne (1998:78).

40. Amdo Gendun Chöphel also mentioned this; Huber (2000:68–69). Other Tibetans identified Drimé Kunden's palace at Bettiah in northern Bihar; Huber (2000:75, 101, 119 n. 54).

41. Ramble (1999:24–25).

42. Ramble (1999:25).

43. Martin (1994b:17), Martin (1999:268–69), Karmay (1975:174–75).

44. Combe (1926:173).

45. This is made clear in the account of the Tibetan pilgrimage given in Combe (1926:173–74), in which the “Lahore” that the pilgrims eventually reach is in fact the “Zahor” of Zahor Tsho Pemachen at Rewalsar.

46. Tucci (1940:14–15), Feeley (1987:59–60). Lockwood Kipling sculpted a number of terracotta plaques depicting scenes from his son Rudyard's novel *Kim*, and these were photographed for use as illustrations for the book's first edition of 1901. At least two of them depict the Tibetan lama whom Lockwood Kipling met in Lahore; see Leoshko (2003:31, plate 2.1; 122, plate 4.9).

47. Naksang (2003:5), Dutta (2000:62–63).

48. Grewal (1997:72); see also the same confusion in Dutta (2000: 62–63).

49. Vogel (1902:39) and Francke (1926, 1:122–123), who reports his own observations at Rewalsar in 1910 and quotes the earlier findings there of Duncan.

50. For some initial studies focused upon this theme, see, e.g., Anand (2002), Marczell (1997) and Ström (1995, 2001).

CHAPTER NINE

1. On Cunningham and his assistants, see Chakrabarti (1988:48–119) and Imam (1966); see also Leoshko (2003).

2. Quoted in Trevithick (1999:648).

3. Quoted in Anderson (1991:179 n. 30).

4. Anderson (1991:181).

5. Shoemaker (1912:275). The reference here is to the relic discovery by Spooner at the site of Kaniṣka's *stūpa*. The context of the comments is that the relics left India, apparently to the indifference of the Indian public, after being presented by the viceroy of India to Burmese Buddhist monks from Mandalay.

6. Anderson (1991:181–82).

7. Byron (1933:316–18). Ashby (1937:159) also admired the well-laid out park around the temple in 1907, praising the works of Lord Curzon.

8. From W. Del Mare, *India of Today* (London: Adam and Charles Black, 1905), quoted in Aitken (1995:129). The British journalist and Buddhist sympathizer, Perceval Landon, was disgusted by these same inscriptions when he first saw them in 1905; Landon (1907:245).

9. Cunningham (1892:vii). Despite the widespread beliefs of modern Buddhists in line with Cunningham's early assessment, there is no firm archaeological evidence of Buddhism before the Aśokan era.

10. Bechert (1984:275). See also his earlier work (Bechert 1966), in which he initially discussed the phenomenon of Buddhist modernism, or “Buddhistischer Modernismus”

in the original German. Bechert's ideas about Buddhist modernism and its historical roots overlap in some important respects with Gananath Obeyesekere's notion of Protestant Buddhism, a term he first used in 1970 to describe the appropriation by local Sinhalese Buddhists of elements from Protestant missionary Christianity, and a usage which was later adopted by Richard Gombrich; see Gombrich and Obeyesekere (1988:6–7; chap. 6), Gombrich (1988: chap. 7). I find the terminology and discussions by Bechert and Obeyesekere most suitable for considering this historical period. More recently, Donald Lopez proposed the term "modern Buddhism" to label an extension of the late nineteenth- and early to mid-twentieth-century period and primarily South Asian context which concerned Bechert and Obeyesekere. Lopez now states that "modern Buddhism is a global phenomenon and has, in effect, developed into an autonomous Buddhist school, with its own sacred canon . . . and saints" (Lopez 2004:552 n. 2; Lopez 2002: esp. the introduction). See also the thoughtful essay on modernity and Buddhism by Ivy (2005).

11. Lopez (1998:185), and see also Lopez (2004).

12. On Dharmapāla, see Bechert (1966), Dharmapala (1965), Gombrich (1988), Gombrich and Obeyesekere (1988).

13. On developments at Bodh Gayā during the nineteenth century, see Trevithick (1999), Leoshko (1996), and Imam (1966:82–91). Losty (1991) documents the prerestoration state of the site.

14. On the restoration and controversy, see Malandra (1988:10). On the type of models used to inspire the reconstruction, see Rowland (1938), Guy (1991), Leidy and Thurman (1997:54, plate), Leoshko (1988:12, 129), Oldham (1937), and Weldon and Singer (1999:46–47). On the death and replanting of the Bodhi Tree, see Scidmore (1903:138) and Cunningham (1892:32).

15. See especially his works *The Light of Asia* (1890) and *India Revisited* (1891).

16. See Jaffe (2004) on Shaku Kōzen's (alias Kozen Gunaratana) associations with Dharmapāla. I thank Richard Jaffe for pointing out the Japanese connection in his reader's report of June 2006.

17. Prothero (1996:160).

18. Lopez (2004:553).

19. Gombrich and Obeyesekere (1988:217). Ironically in this context, he was also critical of Tibetan pilgrims at the site (Dharmapala 1923a:64).

20. On Olcott, see Prothero (1996), Obeyesekere (1994), and Gombrich (1988:185–89). On the use of the term "Protestant Buddhism," see Gombrich and Obeyesekere (1988:6–7; chap. 6).

21. Pedersen (1997:170–71); my translation from the German.

22. Many of his articles and addresses on this theme are found collected in Dharmapala (1965) or can be read in early issues of the Maha Bodhi Society journal; see also especially Almond (1988: chap. 3 and pp. 126–41) on Victorian comparisons of Buddhism and Christianity.

23. For some well-known examples from the early twentieth century, see Paine (1998) and French (1995).

24. Filippi (1937:326).

25. Inden (1990).

26. Almond (1988:72).
27. See, e.g., Jäschke writing in the late 1870s (1881:355).
28. Arnold (1891:223–24). In the 1770s, George Bogle had already observed of Tibetan pilgrimages to India that they were “like the Hajj at Mekkah”; see Markham (1879:198).
29. Quoted in Dharmapala (1908:25); and from Arnold (1891:233).
30. Quoted in Eck (1982:17).
31. Quoted in Dharmapala (1965:330).
32. See, e.g., Waddell (1894:51–53).
33. See, e.g., Barua (1931:34), Grousset (1932:x, chap. 7) and Lamotte (1988:315).
34. First published in 1894; see Dharmapala (1965:557–62).
35. Dharmapala (1965:326, 625, 801, 688; 607).
36. Dharmapala (1897:52).
37. Dharmapala (1965:625).
38. Dharmapala (1923b:5–7).
39. Ashby (1937:157).
40. See, e.g., the testimony of Rakra Thetong (1992:20).
41. See, e.g., Scidmore (1903:116).
42. Savarkar (1938:27). Thanks to Paul Morris for introducing me to Savarkar’s work.
43. Savarkar (1938:175–84).
44. The 1908 revision of the *Tibet Trade Regulations* (1893) was the first treaty to include explicit mention of “Tibetan subjects trading, travelling, or residing in India”; Richardson (1962:279). Several articles in the 1954 Sino-Indian agreement explicitly concern Tibetan pilgrimage to India; Richardson 1962:294–97, see article 3, section 2, article 4, section 1, article 5, section 4, Notes Exchanged, sections 10–11).
45. McKay (1999).
46. White (1971:48–49), who was probably acting on the advice of his assistant Frederick O’Connor, and is here taking the credit for the decisions himself. On the “extremely self-laudatory” style of White’s memoirs, see McKay (1997:37).
47. Telegram from White to O’Connor dated September 9, 1905; see Foreign Office (1906–7, pt. vii:46), and White (1971:48–50). A marginal note in a relevant file by R. E. Holland, dated December 5, 1905, stated “It was clearly laid down that the main object of getting the [Panchen] Lama to India was to impress him”; see National Archives of India, Foreign Department 1906, Secret E, March 228–45. I thank Alex McKay for this reference. See also O’Connor (1931:102–5), Lamb (1966:16–31), Landon (1907), McKay (1997:25–27), and Richardson (1962:126) on the visit and its political background. Mary, Countess of Minto (1934:21–22), records the Panchen Lama’s meeting in Calcutta with her husband the Earl of Minto, viceroy of India. The only Tibetan eyewitness account of the visit I am aware of is by the official Tibetan-English translator Karma Sumdhon Paul (alias Karma Babul); see Richardus (1998:82–88).
48. The emperor stated: “In going to India without previously obtaining my leave you acted very wrongly. I am, however, glad to hear that you are soon returning to Tibet, and that you will continue to serve me loyally as before. In these circumstances no punishment will be imposed.” Quoted in an official telegram; Foreign Office (1906–7, pt. viii:71).

49. Quoted in a telegram from the viceroy, dated January 16, 1906, discussing his meeting with the Panchen Lama; Foreign Office (1906–7, pt. vii:12).

50. For the planned itinerary, see the telegrams of December 4 (p. 147) and December 6 (p. 149) 1905, in Foreign Office (1906–7, pt. vi). The initial itinerary included “Sanchi (in Bhopal),” the site of famous ancient Buddhist *stūpa*, but this was later omitted. See the Panchen’s detailed daily itinerary in India in Satis Chandra Acharyya (1907) and O’Connor (1906).

51. The names and titles of the principal retinue are found listed in O’Connor (1906:19) and Satis Chandra Acharyya (1907:7), who also lists the main Government of India staff attending. McKay (1997:26) indicates that the final figure of three hundred in the retinue that left Tibet for India was a compromise from the Panchen’s original request for a retinue of over one thousand persons.

52. See Dilip Kumar Bhattacharya’s capsule biography of Satis Chandra Vidyabhusan (also known as Hari Mohan Vidyabhusan in some sources, and noting that “Vidyabhusan” is a title) in *Banglapedia* (http://banglapedia.search.com.bd/HT/S_0132.htm, accessed Aug. 18, 2004). His major publications using Tibetan language sources include his *History of Indian Logic* (1921), editions of the *Sragdharāstotra* (1908), *Amarakośa* (1911–12) and *Kamadhenu* (1912), a translation of the *Prātimokṣa-sūtra* (1915), *A Bilingual Index of Nyāya-bindu* (1917), and his editorship of Kōrōsi Csoma Sándor’s translation of the *Mahāvvyutpatti* (1910–16).

53. O’Connor (1906:6) and (1931:98).

54. O’Connor (1931:102).

55. For example, compare the details of Satis Chandra Vidyabhusan’s report on Takṣaśilā (Satis Chandra Acharyya 1907:9; also O’Connor 1906:8; 1931:102), with Beal (1884:136–45; 1869:30–33) and Cunningham (1871a:88–104).

56. See the comments by Härtel (1991:65–66).

57. See, e.g., the comments and literature cited in Lamotte (1988:318–19). See also Xuanzang, who clearly identified the Aśokan pillar itself as the site of the first sermon (Beal 1884, 2:46).

58. Satis Chandra Acharyya (1907:10).

59. Prior to its 1956 standardization at 37.32 kg, the Indian *maund* was a highly variable weight measure; see Yule and Burnell (1989 [1886]:563–64). My calculation here is based upon the old bazaar *maund* in India, which was 72.33 pounds.

60. Satis Chandra Acharyya (1907:10); also O’Connor (1906:9; 1931:103).

61. See the testimony of Karma Sumdhon Paul in Richardus (1998:85).

62. On the *Kālacakra* prophecy, see Newman (1991). See also the important article by Martin Brauen (see Brauen-Dolma 1985) who was the first scholar to consider Tibetan religious phenomena as possible millennial movements.

63. Jagou (1996:15–16), Tuttle (2002:283).

64. Cunningham (1871a:369).

65. Tibetan: *chos kyi 'khor lo bskor ba'i gnas*. During the 1930s, Amdo Gendun Chöphel claimed to have identified the site of the Buddha’s first teaching as the Caukhaṇḍī *stūpa*, another location within the precincts of Sārṇāth; see Huber (2000:57).

66. On the beginnings of conflict between Anagarika Dharmapāla and the Giri Mahant of Bodh Gayā, see Kinnard (1998).

67. For accounts of the events, see Satis Chandra Acharyya (1907:11–12), O'Connor (1906:10–11; 1931:103–5), Richardus (1998:86), and Landon (1907:241–57), whose frontispiece for the book is his watercolour painting of the Panchen Lama conducting a service seated upon the Vajrāsana throne at the Mahābodhi Temple.

68. Anon. (1906:48).

69. Anon. (1906:48).

70. White (1971:50). Perhaps White's opinions here reflect his dislike of and competition with his assistant Frederick O'Connor; see McKay (1997:37–38; 2003a:27). While O'Connor appears more sympathetic to the Buddhist position, more likely his official duty of carefully cultivating the Panchen Lama and the Maharaj Kumar of Sikkim as British political allies throughout their Indian visit obliged him to appear to be positive in line with their interests, and to also later become involved in the Buddhist Shrines Restoration Society in Calcutta.

71. White (1971:51).

72. See http://search.com.bd/banglapedia/Content/HT/M_0320.HTM (accessed Aug. 18, 2004), and http://search.com.bd/banglapedia/Content/HT/M_0044.HTM (accessed Aug. 18, 2004).

73. For a copy of the article by Sen with the letter by Koot Hoomi in *The Indian Mirror* (Calcutta), vol. 22, April 14, 1882, see <http://www.blavatskyarchives.com/sen.htm> (accessed Aug. 18, 2004).

74. On Blavatsky, Tibet, and Tibetan Buddhism, see Pedersen (1997). See also Markham (1879) and Turner (1800) as probable sources of inspiration for Blavatsky's fraudulent claims about her stay near Tashilhunpo and for the Indian Mahatmas in Tibet, who were probably modelled after the Gosains mentioned in both of these works.

75. See <http://www.parami.org/duta/bangla.htm> (accessed Aug. 18, 2004), and http://search.com.bd/banglapedia/Content/HT/K_0295.HTM (accessed Aug. 18, 2004).

76. The Bauddha Dharmankura Sabha or Bengal Buddhist Association still exists today, and its vihara is located at 1 Buddhist Temple Street (formerly Lalitamohan Das Lane) in Calcutta.

77. Das had already obtained over two hundred volumes of Tibetan and Sanskrit texts from his expeditions to Tibet in 1879 and 1881–83, and he had begun study of them by the time he founded the Buddhist Text Society. On his life and his career as a Tibetologist, see Das (1969), Waller (1990: chap. 7), and Chattopadhyaya (1984).

78. Ahir (1991:12–14).

79. Das (1902:vi, xv).

80. Satis Chandra Acharyya (1907:13–14); also O'Connor (1906:12).

81. Satis Chandra Acharyya (1907:18), where the complete text of the address is reproduced in English translation.

82. O'Connor (1906:13–14); also Satis Chandra Acharyya (1907:15–16), who gives a name list of the local Buddhists who had a private interview with the Panchen on January 10.

83. The foundation document for the establishment of the Buddhist Shrines Restoration Society is given in Satis Chandra Acharyya (1907:19).

84. Satis Chandra Acharyya (1907:19).

85. Ahir (1991:97).

86. Telegram from the viceroy dated January 16, 1906, in Foreign Office (1906–7, pt. vii:12).

87. McKay (2003a).

88. McKay (2003a:36, 42).

89. McKay (2003a:40).

90. Singh (1988:256).

91. See the eyewitness account of David-Neel (1965:49–50), who, as a modern European Buddhist herself with a deep fascination for the “magic and mystery” of Tibetan Buddhism, was uniquely placed to appreciate the dynamics of these events.

92. Satis Chandra Vidyabhusan noted that the Panchen was a very reserved, circumspect, and balanced individual, although he specifically added this telling exception: “It must not however be thought that he is incapable of being stirred by emotion. On several occasions when visiting places sacred to Buddhism he displayed great interest and enthusiasm. At Sarnath and Budh-Gaya in particular he spoke eloquently to those who were with him about the importance and sanctity of ancient relics and historic places”; Satis Chandra Acharyya (1907:17). Frederick O’Connor recalled that, in saying his final farewells at the Siliguri railway station, “the poor Lama shed tears at parting”; O’Connor (1931:106).

93. The three-week pilgrimage lasted from the third to the twenty-fifth day of the twelfth Tibetan month of the iron-dog year (= ca. February 1911). The full itinerary is given in TALA:205–6, but the initial part of it is confused, and I think the mention of Kapilavastu there should be discounted as an error. The beginning of the passage states that after boarding the train at Silaguri, “[he] gradually went to [lit. “set foot in”] and made extensive offerings at, Kapilavastu (Ser skya’i grong), Kuśinagar, and so forth.” In any case, the site of Kapilavastu was not properly identified in 1911 (Härtel 1991:70–80). In contrast to this confused passage, the rest of the narrative clearly identifies the other sites and the order and dates of each visit without mention of Kapilavastu. Unfortunately, during this research I have not had access to the full official 1940 version of the biography compiled by the Phurchok Yongzin, although comparison with it here would be a worthwhile exercise.

94. McKay (1997:48–51).

95. Bell (1987:127); also Bell (1924:131), which adds of the Dalai Lama’s time in India, “[his] chief interest centred on the places of pilgrimage where Buddha had lived and taught and died.”

96. Strong (2004).

97. Bendor (1994, 2003), Martin (1994a).

98. Dharmapala (1965:620).

99. Kawaguchi (1909:25).

100. Kawaguchi (1909:193–94, 575).

101. Kazi Dawa Samdup was resident secretary of the Darjeeling Branch of the Maha Bodhi Society from 1897 until his death in 1922. He served as an interpreter/translator to both the Tibetan and the Indian colonial governments, and was headmaster of the state school in Gangtok and also Tibetan lecturer at Calcutta University. He produced the first ever English-Tibetan dictionary, a unique and innovative work in its day that was published in Calcutta in 1919. Dawa Samdup is often inaccurately

described as a “Lama” in western literature. His own Buddhist teacher was a Bhutanese Kagyüpa hermit-lama named Nyendrak Zangpo alias Lopön Tsampa Norbu, who lived in the Buxa Duar region between southern Bhutan and Assam, where Dawa Samdup worked as an interpreter for the Government of India from 1887 to 1893. Dawa Samdup is best known for his pioneering English translations of Tibetan Buddhist texts which were published in collaboration with Walter Evans-Wentz (*The Tibetan Book of the Dead*, 1927, and *Tibetan Yoga and Secret Doctrines*, 1935) and John Woodroffe alias Arthur Avalon (*Śrī-cakraṣaṃvara-tantra. A Buddhist Tantra*, in *Tantric Texts*, vol. 7, 1919), as well as for his assistance to Buddhist-inspired European travellers in Sikkim, such as Alexandra David-Neel. Rather contradictory assessments of him have appeared in western literature; Snellgrove (1987, 1:155 n. 17) described him as the “most heroic (and self-effacing) translator from Tibetan into English who has ever appeared in our scholarly world,” while David-Neel (1965: chap. 1) portrays him as a violent schoolmaster with an alcohol problem; see also Evans-Wentz (1935:104–8), Evans-Wentz (1954:90–92), and Kazi Dawa Samdup (1987:vii–ix).

102. This question requires further research and perhaps can be answered only by way of thorough searches of the archives of both the Maha Bodhi Society (Calcutta) and the former Ganden Phodrang (Lhasa).

103. For a photograph of the Kaniṣka reliquary, see Ministry of Information and Broadcasting (1956:149, plate 46).

104. Bell (1987:109).

105. Tsarong (2000:33), esp. plate 21, showing the statues of the three early religious kings into which the alleged Buddha relics were placed.

106. For an overview of the reports on archaeological campaigns at Sārnāth, see Härtel (1991:66 n. 12); also Daya Ram Sahnī (1914).

107. A nineteenth-century version of the story is recorded in RDZA:275–76.

108. Waddell (1934:309).

109. See, e.g., Mumford (1989:97). A Tibetan Buddhist monk, Lama Karma Samten, reported that he used substances he collected from the major Indian Buddhist holy sites to empower a new reliquary shrine he erected in New Zealand (pers. comm., 1988).

110. See “In the Footsteps of the Buddha,” *Higher Education & Research Opportunities in the United Kingdom*, http://www.hero.ac.uk/uk/research/archives/2001/in_the_footsteps_of_the_b834.cfm (accessed Oct. 20, 2005).

CHAPTER TEN

1. Kipling (1901:11–12). The same passage has been recently quoted in discussions of scholarship on Buddhist art; see Abe (1995:64–67) and Leoshko (2003:30). Premodern Tibetans actually had access to the Chinese pilgrim’s accounts. During the first half of the eighteenth century, Mongolian scholar Gompjob translated a summarized version of Xuanzang’s account into Tibetan (see MGON), while the section on India in the Tsenpo Nomonhan’s *Dzam gling rgyas bshad* of 1820 depended heavily on a version of Xuanzang; see BTS2:16b–31a. Mongol scholar Losang Tamdrin (alias Lobsang Tayang, 1867–1937) translated Faxian’s account into Tibetan during the early twentieth century; BLO2; RIN1.

2. On Lockwood Kipling and the lama, see Tucci (1940:14–15) and Landon (1907:68, 69), and on Kipling senior's influence on the composition of *Kim*, see Feeley (1987:59–60). On the influence of early Tibetan studies on Rudyard Kipling, see Mahadevprasad Saha in Das (1969:iii).

3. Moreover, many of the first modern items, products, and fashions that appeared in elite circles in Tibet at the time originated from India; see Jamyang Norbu, "Newspeak & New Tibet: Part II, The Myth of China's Modernization of Tibet and the Tibetan Language," http://www.tibetwrites.org/articles/jamyang_norbu/jamyang_norbu13.html [accessed Oct. 15, 2006].

4. In a typical example, a scholarly survey of Buddhism widely used in university teaching in the English-speaking world only states that the twentieth-century increase in Buddhist pilgrimage to India was "due largely to the availability of modern transportation, the relative stability of Indian politics, and the health of the Asian economy" (Robinson and Johnson 1997:50).

5. Dharmapala (1965:xxxviii). On earlier Indian Buddhist pilgrimage talismans carried from India to Tibet, see Huber (1992a).

6. Dharmapala (1965:523–26).

7. On Laden La, see Anon. (1931a), Anon. (1937a), Evans-Wentz (1954:86–89), and Rhodes and Rhodes (2003, 2006). I am grateful to Deki Rhodes, granddaughter of S. W. Laden La, and her husband Nicholas Rhodes for discussing the Laden La family history with me, and for supplying me with copies of relevant documents.

8. See Dodin (1997) and Singh (1988) for useful background notes on nineteenth- to early twentieth-century Darjeeling.

9. In Tibet, Sherab Gyatso served as a tutor to the Fifth Panchen Lama, Losang Chökyi Wangchuk (1855–82) at Tashilhunpo Monastery, where he was known under the Tibetan title and name Sokpo Tsipa ("Mongolian Astrologer") Thubten Gyatso; Das (1972 [1915]: app. 4, pp. 7, 46–47). He was also later called Shabdrung Lama. After imprisonment and torture by the Lhasa authorities for his associations with British agents Sarat Chandra Das and Orgyen Gyatso (d. 1915) in 1881–82, he escaped to Darjeeling and was given work as a teacher at the Bhutia Boarding School. Later he was recruited as an occasional British agent in Darjeeling and as a secretary on the Younghusband Expedition; McKay (1997:123), Rhodes and Rhodes (2006:20). A touching personal description of Sherab Gyatso as a teacher at Ghoom Monastery is given by Karma Sumdhon Paul (Richardus 1998:79–81). See the photographs of both Sherab Gyatso and Orgyen Gyatso in Waddell (1934:45) and Rhodes and Rhodes (2006: plates 3–4).

10. Evans-Wentz (1927:xxi), Cuevas (2003: chap. 1), Lopez (1998: chap. 2).

11. Losang Migyur Dorje was a close personal pupil of the founder of Ghoom Monastery, Sherab Gyatso. According to Evans-Wentz (1954:91–92), who worked closely with him on the Tibetan texts presented in the *The Tibetan Book of the Great Liberation*, as a young student Lozang Migyur Dorje spent five years assisting Sarat Chandra Das with the compilation of his well-known *Tibetan-English Dictionary* (published 1902), sometime between 1889 and 1899. However, he is not mentioned at all by Das in his detailed acknowledgements in the preface to this work (1902:v–ix). Lozang Migyur Dorje later assisted the Russian scholar Georges Roerich (or Jurij Rerich, 1902–60) for a further four years on his monumental Tibetan-Russian-English dictionary project at

the Urusvati Himalayan Research Institute in Kulu. He was appointed lecturer of Tibetan at Calcutta University in 1935 and went on to publish *A Tibetan-English Primer* (1938).

12. Karma Sumdhon Paul (alias Karma Babu) worked as a translator and assistant for various British colonial officials in both India—he accompanied the Sixth Panchen Lama's Indian pilgrimage in 1905–6—and Tibet. He was also employed by a number of other Europeans, including missionaries, before meeting and working for the Dutch orientalist Johan van Manen (1877–1943) at the Asiatic Society of Bengal. Karma Babu went on to become Tibetan lecturer at Calcutta University in 1924 and later published an English translation of the story of *Drimé Kunden* (*Dri-med Kun-Idan*) from the Tibetan; see Richardus (1998:73–159) and Evans-Wentz (1954:89–91).

13. Evans-Wentz (1954). On the modern psychological interpretation of Buddhism in such works, see esp. Pedersen (1997).

14. Das (1972 [1915]: app. 11, pp. 36–39), where the original Tibetan documents and gold medals of Laden La's awards are reproduced.

15. Narain (1932:9). For a photograph of the Tibetan monk musicians leading the procession, see Anon. (1931: opposite p. 525).

16. For a good discussion of this point, see Lopez (2004).

17. Daya Ram Sahni (1936:156).

18. On the Maha Bodhi Society's acquisitions of the three sets of reputed Buddha relics, see Anon. (1920:257–59), Anon. (1930:126–28), Anon. (1931:521), Anon. (1933), Daya Ram Sahni (1933:1–4), and Blakiston (1935:563–66).

19. Schrempf (1997).

20. See Richardus (1998:69–70) for a Tibetan eyewitness account of the proceedings.

21. Richardus (1998:70).

22. Hansen (1996:728).

23. See Hansen (1996) and Rhodes and Rhodes (2006:41–42); also Schrempf (1997) on the history and discourse of Tibetan 'cham performances in the West.

24. See, e.g., Anon. (1928a).

25. Schrempf (1997).

26. Richardus (1998:70).

27. Narain (1932:9, 11) and Rhodes and Rhodes (2006:63–65), who also reproduce Nehru's congratulation note to Laden La from their November 15 meeting in Allahabad (p. 71). The programme for the 1932 Sarnāth event lists the "world famous Lama Dance" as item number six in the ceremony; see the back page of *The Maha Bodhi*, 41:1–2 (1933).

28. Anon. (1936:89).

29. Huber (2000:58–61).

30. Broughton (1931:221). On pilgrims' rest houses being established by the Maha Bodhi Society, see Anon. (1937).

31. See, e.g., Ahuja (2004).

32. Johnson (1996:152).

33. O'Malley (1941:238, 242).

34. Anon. (1935:606).

35. See the advertisement in *The Maha Bodhi* 43, no. 10 (1935): 515.

36. Anon. (1935:606).
37. For example, Saddhananda (1898), Anon. (1898a), Anon. (1899), and, in particular, Chandrima (1902).
38. For example, Gunavardhana (1930), Hewavitarane (1936), Daya Ram Sahni (1936), and Narain (1937).
39. For example, Anon. (1898b), Naojiro Kitamura (1899), and Anon. (1917).
40. For instance, Narain (1930, 1934, 1937).
41. Sources for fig. 10.3 are as follows (with minor Indian place names omitted from the itineraries): 1905 (Richardus 1998:87); 1911 (TALA:205–6; Bell 1987:96, 106–7, 138; Shakabpa 1984:237); 1920 (Kvaerne 1998:75); 1920s (Watkins 1996:64–65, 275 nn. 17, 19); 1930 (Kvaerne 1998:77–78); 1930s (Tucci 1940:14); 1933–34 (Ehrhard 2003:100–103); 1942 (Gompo Tashi Andrugtsang 1973:10); 1943 (Wangchuk 1999:64); 1945a (Siiger 1951:8–9); 1945b (Carnahan and Lama Kunga Rinpoche 1995:113–14); 1940s (Ramble 1999:23–25). Various other very brief itineraries merely confirm the patterns illustrated here; e.g., Hanbury-Tracey (1938:158–59).
42. C. F. U. (1933).
43. Siriwardhana (1933:512).
44. Kipling's lama-pilgrim in *Kim* was also prepared with his "te-rain" timetable to visit the holy places of Buddhism (Kipling 1901:15).
45. Dewatshang (1997:104). The first Tibetan neologisms for railway and train were in fact "iron road" (*lcags lam*) and "rail" (*re li*).
46. Duncan (1906:71–72).
47. Kvaerne (1998:75). Another Bönpo pilgrim did the same in the 1940s (Ramble 1999:23).
48. Byron (1933:327), where "motorcars" reads "motors" in the original.
49. On the traditional Tibetan ritual theory of pilgrimage, see Huber (1999: chap. 2) and Huber (1999a).
50. Sakya and Emery (1990:330).
51. See, e.g., Huber (2002).
52. See, e.g., Roerich (1976:731, 1055), GRA2:173.2, Stearns (2001:82–89), Roerich (1959:13–64), and BLO4:321b, 1.1–3 = p. 652.
53. See, e.g., Roerich (1959:71–72), and the brief mention in BCOM:16a.
54. The only early Tibetan account even mentioning the offering of lamps by a Tibetan pilgrim is that of Ra Lotsāwa, although they were used to worship the Buddha's footprint and not in the temple itself, RWAY:35b, 1.1–2; see also 34b, 1.1–2 for a description of the Buddha's footprints, although this may not be a reliable account; see chap. 3 above.
55. Kinnard (1998:819).
56. See, e.g., Ashby (1937:159), Combe (1926:156–57), Richardus (1998:86), Byron (1933:325), O'Connor (1906:10), Satis Chandra Acharyya (1907:11), Landon (1907:251), Gompo Tashi Andrugtsang (1973:10), Byles (1963:31), and Gombo (1985:239).
57. See Roerich (1959:71–72), and the brief mention in BCOM:15b. Ra Lotsāwa made the interesting observation in the eleventh century that during the summer monsoon, the water runoff from the Bodhi Tree and the tops of the temples and shrines was both

consumed and used for bathing; RWAY:34b, 1.5–6, although this may not be a reliable account; see chap. 3 above.

58. The possible exception was Ra Lotsāwa, who apparently worshipped the Buddha's footprint during an eleventh-century visit; RWAY:35b, 1.1–2, although this may not be a reliable account; see chap. 3 above.

59. See, e.g., Combe (1926:156–57), Richardus (1998:86) and Satis Chandra Acharyya (1907:11). A Tibetan painting lineage is reported by Desi Sangye Gyatso to have evolved by the same ritual method of taking printed impressions on cotton of a Buddha image at Bodh Gayā (Jackson 1996:386, cf. 52).

60. Beal (1884, 2:117).

61. RWAY:33b, 1.5–6, Roerich (1959:67).

62. Scidmore (1903:138); also Cunningham (1892:32).

63. This appears to have changed somewhat after the Tibetan exile population settled in India; see, e.g., Avedon (1986:173) reporting on Tibetan rites at the Bodhi Tree in January 1981.

64. Scidmore (1903:145), Landon (1907:251).

65. Byron (1933:323), Huber (2000:46–47).

66. O'Connor (1906:10), Satis Chandra Acharyya (1907:11), and Landon (1907:253–55, frontispiece).

67. Combe (1926:155). See also another similar account from the 1930s in Richardus (1992:206).

68. O'Connor (1931:97–98).

69. Khyongla Rato (1991:187; also 188–89). Byron (1933:315) reports other Tibetan pilgrims experiencing car sickness due to the unfamiliar sensation of this modern form of transportation.

70. Dewatshang (1997:103).

71. Kvaerne (1998:78). Note the Drongtse Khyabying had wanted Sarat Chandra Das to bring him a lithographic printing press from India to Tashilhunpo already in the early 1880s; Das (1969:78–79).

72. Taring (1970:68).

73. Byron (1933:314). During the private pilgrimage to the Indian holy sites in 1945–46 by the two leading finance ministers of the Tibetan government, Shakabpa Wangchuk Deden (1908–89) and Shukoba Jamyang Khedrup (1905–91), they also inspected military bases and installations, visited factories and mines, attended Indian independence rallies, and conducted commercial affairs; see Carnahan and Lama Kunga Rinpoche (1995:113–15).

74. Based upon Japanese accounts, Berry (1995:279) describes large groups of Tibetan pilgrims, gathered in Kalimpong and Darjeeling after completing their journey to Bodh Gayā, begging for food supplies to enable them to recross the Himalaya back to Tibet.

75. Hansen (2001:101).

76. There are, of course, rare exceptions; see the remarks by Chag Lotsāwa on how Indians at Bodh Gayā recognized him as a Tibetan by the corns on his feet caused by a lifetime of wearing boots; Roerich (1959:74).

77. Combe (1926:155–56).

78. Dharmapala (1923a:64).

79. Interviews with Tibetan pilgrims reported in Large-Blondeau (1960:220). Negative Indian perceptions of Tibetan meat-eating were also pronounced when Tibetans were forced to live in India as refugees; Saklani (1984:370), Ström (1995:36–37).

80. See Dejin Zangmo (1978), Karmay (1980), Dhondup (1978), Stoddard (1985a, 1985b, 1988), Ruegg (1989), the introduction to Hopkins and Yuthok (1992:11–31), Rakra Thetong (1992), Lopez (1994, 1994a, 1995, 2004), Bogin and Decleer (1997), Mengele (1999), and Huber (1997c, 2000, 2003a). For readers of Tibetan, see RIK1, BLAC, RAKR, HOR1, KIR1, KIR2, ZAMG, KHAN, NORB, and RDO1.

81. Different lists of Amdo Gendun Chöphel's published, unpublished, and attributed works can be found in Dhondup (1978:18), KIR1:44–48, Stoddard (1985a:329–36) and HOR2, 3:541–44. These have been updated by Mengele (1999: chap. 4) and Huber (2003a).

82. The full Tibetan title of this work is *rGya gar gyi gnas chen khag la 'groḍ pa'i lam yig*. For a complete publication history of the Tibetan versions and an annotated English translation of this work, see Huber (2000).

83. On Sankrityayan's life as a Buddhist, see Ahir (1989:67–76), and also Ahir (1991) on the context of the Indian Buddhist revival in which Sankrityayan converted.

84. Sankrityayan disrobed and married in 1938, although he continued his interest in Buddhism throughout his life and kept publishing translations of Buddhist texts well into the 1950s (Ahir 1989:74–76).

85. Quoted from R. Sankrityayan, *Jinkā maim̐ kṛtagya* (Ilahabad: Kitab Mahal, 1957), p. 208, as cited in Stoddard (1985a:172); my translation from the French.

86. DGE5, 1:40. Note that Amdo Gendun Chöphel's "thirty-second year" mentioned here is equivalent to his thirty-first year in Western reckoning.

87. Anon. (1941:294–95).

88. Stoddard (1985a:185).

89. Dhondup (1978:13).

90. See Huber (2000:13, 31 n. 22) for a discussion of the composition and dates of the *Guide to India* (= DGE2).

91. DGE4.

92. Flood (1996:124).

93. Hecker (1993).

94. See *The Maha Bodhi* for 1940 (48:1–48:8, January–August).

95. It is reported that Amdo Gendun Chöphel was also highly impressed by Theravāda monks he met with in Ceylon (Dhondup 1978:13). He suggested modern reforms of the Tibetan monastic system, advocating the monks be given salaries instead of agricultural estates for their support, and that they be forbidden to engage in business and required to study instead (Goldstein 1989:453).

96. Huber (2000:106–9).

97. For example, Lama Yongden, a cosmopolitan Sikkimese Buddhist monk who was the companion-servant (and later adopted son) of the well-known French traveller and Tibetologue Alexandra David-Neel (1868–1969). His public statement to the Maha Bodhi Society on behalf of Tibetan Buddhists at the opening of the new Mūlagandhakuṭi Vihāra at Sārṇāth in 1931 reads like a modern Tibetan "prophecy" concerning the composition of the *Guide to India*; see Anon. (1931:518), and the photograph of Lama Yongden follow-

ing p. 70 of David-Neel (1983). Another likely inspiration for Amdo Gendun Chöphel to write, publish, and then later also revise his *Guide to India* was the ethnic Tibetan Christian missionary and pioneering Tibetan language newspaper editor with whom Amdo Gendun Chöphel had regular contacts, Gegan Tharchin (alias Khunu Tharchin or Tharchin Babu) (1890–1976); see Stoddard 1985:160–62, 175; Tsering 1998; Norbu 1998. Tharchin was well known for assisting Tibetan pilgrims en route to the Indian Buddhist holy places by printing leaflets and maps to assist them and allowing them to stay at a warehouse across the street from his press; see Berry (1995:287).

98. See, e.g., the testimony of Rakra Thetong (1992:20).

99. Huber (2000:86–87), with slight modifications for style.

100. For example, see the comments in a guidebook for pilgrims written in the 1760s; Macdonald and Dvags-po Rin-po-che (1981:273), original Tibetan in Macdonald (1975:143). See also KAH1:535–37, and compare statements by the present Dalai Lama on proper motivation and mindfulness while on pilgrimage; quoted in Russell (1981:22).

101. Mengele (1999:67).

102. DGE1:11.

103. Goldstein (1989:420–26).

104. For completeness, Amdo Gendun Chöphel included sections on Buddhist sites in Ceylon and Southeast Asia in his *Guide to India*, although I will not treat them here since they were never the object of any regular Tibetan pilgrimage.

105. Huber (2000:40–41).

106. Probably derived from translations of the Sanskrit *Mahāparinirvāṇa-sūtra* (e.g., Waldschmidt 1951:389–91, 41.5–7, 41.9) or more likely the Mūlasarvāstivāda *Vinaya*; see, e.g., LEGS, the First Dalai Lama's commentary on the *Vinayasūtra*.

107. Huber (2000:40–41), noting that Amdo Gendun Chöphel gives one of many Tibetan variations on the scheme, substituting Nālandā for Vaiśālī.

108. See, e.g., Daya Ram Sahni (1936).

109. Huber (2000:86–87).

110. See, e.g., the comments by Situ Panchen on the identity of Svayambhūnāth (Decler 2000:42).

111. Cunningham (1848, 1871a, 1871b, 1892). Leoshko (2003) gives critical discussion of how the Chinese accounts were employed by Cunningham.

112. Mukherji (1897:62).

113. Stein (1929:2, 15, 50).

114. Huber (2000:64–65).

115. Cunningham (1871b:277–78).

116. For examples, see Macdonald (1987:104) on Kathmandu Valley, Huber (1999:61–71) on Tsari, and Huber and Tsepak Rigzin (1999:129–37) on Mount Kailash.

117. Amdo Gendun Chöphel's original 1939 rail map is reproduced in KIR2:384. He redrew (see fig. 10.5) it in 1950 for his second revised edition of the *Guide to India* (= DGE2). A different redrawn but unattributed version dated 1952 (Tibetan: *chu 'brug lo*) and printed at the Shamsi Press, Gayā, was sold to pilgrims at the Tibetan temple in Bodh Gayā during the 1950s; reproduced in Large-Blondeau (1960:216, 219). Another more crudely redrawn version appears in Dahor Losang Rabgye's heavily edited 1968 Dalhousie edition of the *Guide to India*; DGE3.

- 118. Chandrima (1902).
- 119. Anon. (1928:230).
- 120. On premodern Tibetan cartography and use of maps, see Aziz (1975, 1978), Huber (1992), Schwartzberg (1994), and Ford (1957:61).
- 121. RIPA:193.
- 122. Huber (1997c; 2000:19–26). Previous commentators have attempted—unsuccessfully I feel—to capture the “modern” nature of the *Guide to India*; see, e.g., Smith (1969:213) and Stoddard (1985a:187). In stark contrast to the influence of modernity evident in the composition of the *Guide to India*, Donald Lopez (1994a:178) noted the lack of any such influences in Amdo Gendun Chöphel’s later work.
- 123. See, e.g., Huber (1999:60–61).
- 124. See the list given in Huber (2000:123–26), to which we could now add further reprinted editions. See also RIK₂ for a work closely based upon the *Guide to India*.

CHAPTER ELEVEN

- 1. Published estimates vary between 60,000 and 120,000 Tibetan exiles in India. I rely here on Saklani’s (1984:41) estimate based upon Government of India and Tibetan government-in-exile sources, and the latter maintain 85,000 as their most recent estimate (<http://www.tibet.com/exileglance.html>, updated Jan. 20, 2005, accessed Mar. 24, 2005). Grunfeld (1996:191–93) argues for generally lower figures.
- 2. For a good account of the Communist prohibition of Tibetan pilgrimages between the late 1950s and early 1980s, see Peng Wenbin (1998).
- 3. On Tibetans from China on pilgrimage to India in 1983, see Anon. (1983:6) and Nyandak (1983:11), and at the 1985 Kālacakra initiation, see Ngawang Chopel (1986:4) and Ström (1995:177).
- 4. Lopez (1998:187).
- 5. Shaksपो (1988:442–43). Nehru had himself made gifts of Buddhist items associated with the main holy places of the Buddha in India to the highest local incarnate lamas in Ladakh when he had visited the region in 1949, and at which time he had promised to arrange Buddhist relics to be sent there for public worship.
- 6. Shakabpa (1984:304); Harrer (1953:285; 1955:42–43).
- 7. On the history of this relic discovery and its importance for the modern Buddhist revival, see Cunningham (1854) and Nyanaponika Thera (1987: app.).
- 8. See, e.g., Norbu and Harrer (1960:242), Tsarong (2000:125, 131–33), Conboy and Morrison (2002:36).
- 9. On the Dalai Lama’s repeated claims to want to perform “nonpolitical” pilgrimages to China, see Goldstein (1997:112), and “Dalai Lama ‘wants to visit China’”, <http://news.bbc.co.uk/2/hi/asia-pacific/4792708.stm>, accessed Sept. 10, 2006). For an ancient example of the same type, see Decler (1997:161–62, 174–75).
- 10. Knaus (1999:132).
- 11. Taring (1970:212), Tsarong (2000:123–25), Shakyia (1999:148 ff.).
- 12. Jetsun Pema (1997:52–53), Conboy and Morrison (2002:27), Knaus (1999:131–32), Shakyia (1999:148 ff.).
- 13. Gampo Tashi Andrugtsang (1973:45).

14. For eyewitness accounts of the Dalai Lama's 1956 pilgrimage, see Dalai Lama of Tibet (1962: chap. 8), Dalai Lama of Tibet (1990:123–34), Jetsun Pema (1997:52–57), Norbu (1960:251–55), and Gampo Tashi Andrugtsang (1973:44–46). On Tibetan lay pilgrimages to India during the Dalai Lama's 1956 visit, see Ekvall and Downs (1987:94–95).

15. Dalai Lama of Tibet (1962:150–51).

16. Concerning political developments surrounding the pilgrimage but not mentioned in the Tibetan accounts, see Shakya (1999:148–59), Smith (1996:460 n. 27), Conboy and Morrison (2002:27, 36, 266 n. 17), and Knaus (1999:131–32).

17. On the deep personal inspiration that the Dalai Lama reports he gained from these events, see esp. Dalai Lama of Tibet (1962:150–51).

18. Diehl (2002:38), and similar comments by Ström (1995:173–74).

19. For one thing, as the primary residence (*gnas*) of the Dalai Lama, Dharamsala is thus an indigenous Tibetan holy place in its own right. On Tibetan cultural constructions of “place” in Dharamsala and its “sacred geography,” see Saklani (1984:144–45), Furer-Haimendorf (1990: chap. 6), Ström (1995:173–74), Diehl (2002), and Anand (2002). The other highly significant factor in Dharamsala is the long-standing and frequent presence of Westerners there.

20. The only exception might be Calcutta in which there was a small but longer-term pre-Diaspora population of Tibetans involved in trade and other activities.

21. Dalai Lama of Tibet (1990:172–73).

22. Dalai Lama of Tibet (1962:228; 1990:172–73).

23. Tethong (2000:72–74).

24. The processes and patterns of Tibetan exile pilgrimages in India still await in-depth research. For relevant short studies and notes, see Ström (1995:172–81), Stablein (1978), Gombo (1985:239–40), Cantwell (1995), and Gold (1988), plus a short film by Cousens (1992).

25. Sakya and Emery (1990:330).

26. For example, a recent survey revealed that “Every third German regards the Dalai Lama as the wisest man of our time”; Falksohn (2006:95).

27. Ström (2001:41), and Monica Flores “An Interview: Tibetan Refugee in Austin, Texas,” *World Tibet Network News*, Friday, February 16, 1996, at http://www.tibet.ca/en/wtnarchive/1996/2/16_1.html (accessed May 13, 2005).

28. Norbu (N.d.), “Body-Snatchers: Enduring Phobias and Superstitions in Tibetan Society,” *High Asia: Journal of Contemporary Writing on Tibet, the Himalayas, Central Asia and Mongolia*, at <http://www.amnyemachen.org/journal/body.html> (accessed May 5, 2001).

29. Norbu (1987:148).

30. Diehl (2002:114).

31. See, e.g., Ström (1995:36–37; 92–93; 2001:39, 41), Saklani (1984:356–62), Norbu (2001:220–21), and Diehl (2002:110–23).

32. See, e.g., Sparham (1999:74).

33. As quoted in Shakabpa (1984:291).

34. Dalai Lama of Tibet (1962:139).

35. Dalai Lama of Tibet (1997:4).

36. Saklani (1984:365); see also the Dalai Lama of Tibet (1982:11) on the notion of the holy land of India as a shelter for the homeless Tibetans.

37. Anon. (1995:3).

38. The Dalai Lama quoted in Shiromany (1995:78–79); see also Dalai Lama of Tibet (1990:123).

39. Dalai Lama of Tibet (1990:246–47).

40. See Goldstein (1982), Aris (1987). The phrase “redemptive hegemony” is borrowed from Catherine Bell (1992) and was inspired by her reading of Antonio Gramsci.

41. *Sngon ma rgya gar 'phags pa'i yul red / deng sang rgya gar phag pa'i yul red.*

42. Ström (1995:174).

43. In addition to Tibetan Uprising Day on March 10, we can also mention Democracy Day of Tibet, celebrated on September 2, and the commemoration of the Dalai Lama's Nobel Peace Prize award, celebrated on December 10.

44. On the annual winter teachings and audiences given by the Dalai Lama to Western students of Buddhism at Bodh Gayā since 1981, see Dalai Lama of Tibet and Cabezón (2001).

45. Tucci (1980:147–53, 268 n. 17), Richardson (1993:20–55), and Rigzin (1993:8–18).

46. Tucci (1980:151–53).

47. I thank Donald Lopez for information on this first *dge bshes dam bca'* in Indian exile.

48. On Monlam Chenmo in the refugee settlement of Clementtown, see Ström (1995:128–31).

49. Dreyfus (2003:259).

50. Nyamdak (1983).

51. Ström (1995:175), Ngawang Chopel (1986:4).

52. Concerning ongoing historical distortion and strategic “amnesia” in recent Tibetan exile attempts to represent Tibetans as essentially nonviolent, see McGranahan (2006), Huber (2005a), Sperling (2001), and Jamyang Norbu, “The Forgotten Anniversary: Remembering the Great Khampa Uprising of 1956,” at http://www.tibetwrites.org/articles/jamyang_norbu/jamyang_norbu18.html (accessed Jan. 10, 2007).

53. See, e.g., Huber (1997e) and Schrempf (1997).

54. On the early participation of the Dalai Lama's brother, Thubten Jigme Norbu, at the 1952 World Buddhist Congress in Tokyo, see Norbu and Harrer (1960:247).

55. Huber (1997d:304–5); the quoted passages in this section are from Bechert (1984:284–85). On the Universal Peace Conference, see Anon. (1983:6).

56. The earliest Tibetan statements claiming a world peace value for such Tibetan rituals date from 1985; see Dalai Lama of Tibet (1986:145) and Tenzin Dorjee (1985:12).

57. Ström (1995:209).

58. See, e.g., Campbell (1993). See also a TM movement discussion of “research” on crime rate reduction due to Transcendental Meditation at <http://www.t-m.org.uk/research/46.shtml> (accessed Apr. 30, 2005).

59. See *World Peace Ceremony, Bodh Gayā* (1994).

60. See “Monlam Chenmo World Peace Ceremony” at <http://www.nyingma.org/tnmc/tnmc.html> (accessed Mar. 31, 2005).

61. Quoted in Avedon (1986:167). A similar statement is reported in Decleer (2000:42); see also Dalai Lama of Tibet (1962:150–51).

62. See <http://www.chogyetrichen.com/aboutus/> (accessed Mar. 31, 2005).

63. At the 2003 event at Bodh Gayā, the sign welcoming the young Karmapa Lama to the ritual ground read “May your life be long and your blessing manifest as world peace.” Thanks to Tsultrim La for showing me his many photographs of the event.

64. See “History of Kagyu Monlam” at <http://www.kagyumonlam.org/history.html> (accessed Mar. 31, 2005).

65. Such meetings of the four schools appear to date back to 1963, with a very important one promoting autonomous religious institutions for each school occurring at Bodh Gayā in 1966; Saklani (1984:148).

66. See “Karmapa, Dalai Lama and Eminent Representatives of All Tibetan Lineages Gather in Bodhgaya” at <http://www.kagyuoffice.org/> (accessed Mar. 31, 2005).

67. Ahir (1991:110) states the monastery was founded in 1938, without any source. Snellgrove (2000:93–94) visited Bodh Gayā in February 1954 and reported its foundation ten years earlier, and that it had “a community of Tibetan monks, some 50 strong . . . their number sinks to fifteen or less by mid-summer.”

68. See “Mahabodhi Society of India honours a Tibetan philanthropist,” at <http://www.tibet.com/NewsRoom/gengoser1.htm> (last updated Oct. 7, 2003; accessed Dec. 10, 2004). The 1955 foundation is attributed to the Gelukpa monk-teacher Thubten Chundgné, alias “Gen Gose,” who later also helped establish the Central Institute for Higher Tibetan Studies at Sarnāth.

69. See <http://www.tibet.net/religion/eng/> (accessed May 5, 2005), and Marczell (1997:610).

70. It is a strong cultural pattern for Tibetans to erect specific structures or devices in places of settlement so as to “tame” them and to order a place in cosmological and geomantic terms. The resulting new sacred geography is not only based around fixed or enduring aspects (e.g., prayer flags, mani walls, carved mantras, shrines, cains, circumambulation paths, etc.) but can include specific mobile and ephemeral aspects. These include the physical presence of very high-status religious figures, including the Dalai Lama and the Karmapa Lama, who are also ritually treated as holy places (*gnas*), as well as the periodic ritual projection of mandalas upon local Indian places during certain Tantric ceremonies. For some initial studies, see Anand (2002), Marczell (1997) and Ström (1995, 2001).

71. Nehru (1956:39).

72. Shakya (1999).

73. See “History of CIHTS” at <http://www.smith.edu/cihts/pagesenglish/history.htm> (accessed Dec. 10, 2004).

74. See “Mission Statement” at <http://www.smith.edu/cihts/pagesenglish/history.htm> (accessed Dec. 10, 2004).

75. For official statements of this policy, see the 1981 document quoted in Fürer-Haimendorf (1990:53) and the contemporary one found at <http://www.tibet.net/religion/eng/> (accessed Feb. 3, 2005).

76. Point number one of BHU’s “Objectives of the University” is: “To promote the study of the Hindu Shastras and of Sanskrit literature as means of preserving and

popularizing the best thought and culture of the Hindus”; see <http://www.bhu.ac.in/> (accessed Mar. 18, 2005).

77. Quoted from Ström (2001:146, followed by 144–45).

78. See <http://www.kalachakra06.com/> (accessed Apr. 30, 2005).

79. Dükhor Wangchen were staged at Bodh Gayā in 1974, 1985, and 2003, and at Sārñāth in 1990. For lists of the Dalai Lama’s public performances of Dükhor Wangchen, see <http://www.tibet.com/Buddhism/kala.html> (accessed Mar. 31, 2005) and <http://www.tibet.net/hhdl/eng/kalachakra/> (accessed Mar. 31, 2005).

80. The initial surveying and excavation of Amarāvati took place under the direction of Colin Mackenzie (1754–1821), who first encountered the ruined monument in 1789.

81. On Amarāvati and competing Tibetan locations for Śrī Dhānyakaṭaka, see Macdonald (1970). The archaeological rediscovery of Amarāvati only became known in Tibet by way of Amdo Gendun Chöphel’s modern travel writings about India; see Huber (2000:79, 85, 120 n. 59) and DGE5, 1:117–22.

82. Most documentation of Dükhor Wangchen to date can be defined as missionary, aimed at educating and inducting would-be—and mainly Western—participants into the Tibetan Buddhist religious meaning and practice of the ceremony as a type of Tantric initiation. For examples, see Ngawang Dhargyey (1975, 1981, 1985), *Kalachakra Initiation: Madison, 1981* (1981), Tenzin Gyatso and Hopkins (1985), Mullin (1992), and Kalsang Yeshe (1991). Alternatively, I see Dükhor Wangchen’s current popularity as strongly rooted in a millennial-style worldview that offers both utopian visions and future soteriological promise to a community living in the shadow of a major crisis of loss, displacement, and disempowerment. Its recent prominence can usefully be compared with a rise of Tibetan interest in similar millennial-style religious phenomena in the recent history of Tibetan societies, including “transfer of consciousness” (*’pho ba*) and “hidden countries” (*sbas yul*); see Brauen-Dolma (1985), Kapstein (1998).

83. Ström (1995:171–212) offers the best—albeit brief—account of social and cultural dimensions of Dükhor Wangchen in the Tibetan exile so far available. Short descriptive accounts are given by Haas and Minke (1976), Ngawang Chophel (1986), and Gold (1988).

84. A casual survey which I conducted among young (fifteen- to twenty-five-year-old) Tibetan participants at the Sārñāth Dükhor Wangchen in 1991 revealed that many of them, while at least briefly citing religious motivations, attended the event for the following reasons: meeting friends or relatives; holding parties together; small-scale business opportunities; because they had never attended before; family pressure for them to attend; and also simply “not to miss out on what every other Tibetan in India was doing at the time.”

85. For example, at the close of the Dükhor Wangchen at Sārñāth in 1990–91, the Dalai Lama lectured on the first Gulf War and the nature of the Iraqi dictator Saddam Hussein; I thank Di Cousens for a full transcript of the Dalai Lama’s press conference address at Sārñāth, January, 2, 1991. The Dalai Lama also makes pointed political references to and statements about the Chinese occupation of Tibet directly in the religious teachings he gives to the mass of participants at Dükhor Wangchen; Ström (1995:190–91, 201), Shakyā (1999:393), and I also observed this at Sārñāth in 1990–91. A number of Tibetan refugee organizations, such as the Tibetan Youth Congress and the Information

Department of the Tibetan government-in-exile, are present to display and disseminate materials that represent the exile version of Tibetan history and politics; see Ström (1995:179). Various performances of regional Tibetan “folk culture” and displays of popular and national symbols (the flag, snow lion and wild yak dancers, etc.) have been incorporated into Dükhor Wangchen since the mid-1980s.

86. See “I Am Fortunate To Be in Amaravati: H. H. the Dalai Lama,” <http://www.dalailama.com/news.12.htm> (published online Feb. 1, 2006; accessed Aug. 13, 2006), and “State Chief Minister Joins H. H. the Dalai Lama after Teachings,” <http://www.dalailama.com/news.15.htm> (published online Feb. 1, 2006; accessed Aug. 13, 2006).

87. See “Announcement of the 30th Kalachakra Empowerment by HH the 14th Dalai Lama” at <http://www.kalachakra06.com/> (accessed Apr. 30, 2005).

88. Harris (1999:76), referring to Hobsbawm and Ranger (1983).



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- BDTT Khetsun Sangpo (= mKhas btsun bZang po, b. twentieth century). 1981. *Biographical Dictionary of Tibet and Tibetan Buddhism*, vol. 8: *The bKa'-brgyud-pa Tradition* (pt. 2). Dharamsala, Library of Tibetan Works and Archives.
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- BKAC sMon lam rGya mtsho, ed. 1989. *bKa'chems ka khol ma*. Lanzhou, Kan su'u Mi rigs dPe skrun khang.
- BLAC Bla chung A pho, Shes rab rGya mtsho (1905–75). 1973. Untitled Tibetan entry. In *Biographical Dictionary of Tibet and Tibetan Buddhism*, vol. 4., ed. and comp. Lama Khetsun Sangpo. Delhi, pp. 634–57.
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- BODK *Bod kyi lo rgyus yig tshags gces bsds*. 1995. ed. sGrol dkar et al. Lhasa, Rig dngos dPe skrun khang.
- BODR *Bod rgya tshig mdzod chen mo*. 1986. 3 vols. Beijing, Mi rigs dPe skrun khang.
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