

## **Restoring the domain of Chenresig Performances of belonging in identity politics<sup>1</sup>**

### **Performances of belonging<sup>2</sup>**

In the summer of 2013, the Office of the Fourteenth Dalai Lama announced that, at the request of the Ladakh Buddhist Association, His Holiness would be performing his 33rd Kalacakra (Wheel of Time) empowerment for World Peace in Leh during the month of July 2014.<sup>3</sup> Considered essential for the current age of degeneration (Mills 2009a: 99), the announcement comes at a time when the region is experiencing a strengthening of the ceremonial relationship between Tibet's exiled spiritual leaders with the monasteries and Buddhists of Ladakh's Leh district, and Zangskar in Kargil district, and is thus significant for several reasons. Recent scholarship examines the attempts of Tibet's exiled spiritual leaders to re-integrate the monasteries and temples of the Himalayan Buddhist hinterland under their monastic hierarchy, in order to strengthen their ceremonial and karmic links with the inhabitants under these temples' protection (Childs 2004; Mills 2003; 2009b). Such attempts aim to ensure the survival of the Tibetan Buddhist culture as transmitted through Sanskrit teachings of the Manayana (Great Vehicle of Buddhist doctrine), and local commentaries amid fears of cultural destruction at the hands of Chinese authorities. Prior to Chinese occupation of Tibet in 1950, Ladakh's monasteries were involved in relationships of patronage with the central Tibet's monastic colleges. These relationships are being revived, with a high volume of Ladakh's monks going for higher religious education in the monastic colleges re-established in exile. In addition, the loyalty of Ladakh's Buddhists to the religious authority of the Fourteenth Dalai Lama has been expressed through the consecration of new statues and stupas (*chorten*)<sup>4</sup> in the region, the public refutation of the worldly protector Dorje Shugden, and attempts to forbid literature in the vernacular (Butcher 2013a; 2013b). Mills argues also that fear for the survival of Tibetan Buddhism has resulted in a ceremonial expansion of religious architecture, ritual technologies, and shrines to local deities affiliated to the Tibetan government (Mills 2006: 200–201). The decision to perform his annual Kalacakra empowerment in the region can be understood to be another in a series of events or strategies to mark the expansion of the Fourteenth Dalai Lama's ceremonial authority into Ladakh, thus impacting upon the religious and political dynamic of the region. This chapter will consider how this is achieved through various ceremonial "performances of belonging".

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<sup>2</sup>I transcribe indigenous terms according to Ladakhi pronunciation. Indigenous pronunciations are transcribed in the main body of text, with written transcription as Turrell Wylie's (1959). A standard system of Tibetan transcription. Harvard Journal of Asiatic Studies, Vol. 22, 261–67 included as footnotes.

<sup>3</sup><http://dalailama.com/teachings/schedule>, accessed 07/08/2013.

<sup>4</sup>*mchod rten*.

Regional identity politics in general focus upon Ladakh's absorption into the Indian Union and technologies of modern governance therein, has been constructed through the normative frames of representative governance (Aggarwal 2004; Bertelsen 1997; Van Beek 1996; 2001). Such analysis is concerned with the concept of "Ladakhi" as a specifically Buddhist identity (or its erasure with the introduction of Schedule Tribe categories) that excludes other religious groups and Buddhist Ladakh's allegiance to the Indian Union (expressed potently with the outcome of the recent general election and calls for territorial separation from the state of Jammu and Kashmir (J&K)). In this chapter, I take a different approach by examining the impact of the exiled government upon identity claims and associations of belonging. Following Martin Mills (unpublished transcript) I approach the problem from the perspective of historical "performances of belonging". Mills seeks to understand the shifting parameters of administrative authority and wider ceremonial protection following the fall of the Tibetan empire in the late ninth century, and how they relate to contemporary claims of Eastern Tibet by the exiled government. Taking Vicki Bell's 1999 analysis of performance as a point of departure, Mills argues all intrinsic identity claims (the claim to *be* Tibetan; to *be* Ladakhi; to *be* Buddhist) have rhetorical rather than substantive existence and thus depend upon "more or less co-ordinated performances of belonging that bring them into public being" (ibid.: 3). In the ancient Buddhist and Hindu kingdoms of Asia, a realm of ritual authority was generally centred upon the temple of a tutelary deity and demarcated by further temples at the boundary, signalling the domain of ritual protection rather than a fixed boundary territory (Burghart 1996). From the time of the Tibetan empire until the present day territories are rendered suitable for habitation through performances of geomantic taming that include the construction of temples and devotional architecture aimed at balancing negative forces. The continuous cycle of offerings and rituals of purification to the temple deity ensure this remains so. Thus, Mills foregrounds these performances of Tibetan identity – what he describes as the interweaving of individual strands, into a "plot" or narrative – over the empirical realism of historical claims. Such analysis can be used to examine the exiled spiritual leaders' attempts to reabsorb the monasteries and temples of the Himalayan Buddhist hinterland, and the inhabitants that come under the temples' protection, into their domain of ceremonial authority. The performances also speak to a wider narrative: a tale of the loss of a unified territory under Chenresig's protection with the fall of the Tibetan empire, and the gradual process of reunification, and now extension, that has occurred since then; an historical process that Ladakh is being drawn into at the contemporary point.

### **Chenresig's Promise**

As stated above, the ancient Buddhist and Hindu kingdoms of Asia, concepts of territorial domain were more fluid than that of the modern nation-state. They took the form of a realm or domain of ritual authority centred upon the temple of a tutelary deity and demarcated by further temples at the boundary, signalling the domain of protection. Such territorial demarcations were often separate from

political territories that functioned as sources of tax collection.<sup>5</sup> In addition, Tibetan historiography functioned to illustrate the ethical, ceremonial, and mythico-legal foundations of state and authority that emerged from the encounters between divine kings (*chosgyal*)<sup>6</sup> and reincarnated teachers or tantric experts (*tulku*,<sup>7</sup> respectfully addressed as *rinpoche*)<sup>8</sup>, with particular celestial and tutelary deities (*choskyong*)<sup>9</sup>. Tibetan governance and law were (and to an extent still are) shaped by eleventh century apocryphal state histories with mythical explanation of times and events to be “revealed” at the appropriate time. These “revealed” texts known as hidden treasures, or *terma*,<sup>10</sup> were hidden in the minds of tantric adepts (known as *terton*)<sup>11</sup> for revelation once the local population had sufficiently matured both intellectually and spiritually to receive them. The most significant revealed texts relate to the Cult of Chenresig, in which the celestial *bodhisattva* of compassion Avalokitesvara (henceforth referred to by the Tibetan Chenresig) is established as the patron deity and protector of the Himalayan Buddhist region and its inhabitants. Such definitions and performances of territory and ceremonial protection have significance for understanding the current relationship between Ladakh and the exiled spiritual.

In Himalayan Buddhism, karmic causality and connection are expressed through the concept of *tendrel*,<sup>12</sup> explained doctrinally as a theory of causality and dependent origination, but manifested locally through the reading of omens and the emergence of karmic links across the ages (for example between teacher and disciple). Political legitimacy and religious sovereignty were perpetuated by manifestations of *tendrel*: the ritual activities and textual compositions of various incarnate rulers, teachers, and tantric specialists across time, and their abilities to tame the negative forces in the landscape, thus allowing the Buddhist teachings to flourish. Perhaps the most powerful example of *tendrel* is the Cult of Chenresig described in the revealed texts.<sup>13</sup> The positive karmic connection between Tibet and Chenresig is described in the biographies and activities of the first and second Buddhist Kings (Srongtsen Gampo and Trisong Detsen), and the activities of the Tantric adept Padmasambhava, or Guru Rinpoche. The Fourteenth Dalai Lama has described the celestial presence of Chenresig as a “master plan” for the Tibetan nation, of which the Dalai Lamas form a crucial part (Laird 2006: 138):

We believe that Chenrizi took this special sort of role in Tibet, and through his special blessings a special group of people develops [...] that’s our belief. Tibetans are specially descended with this energy from Chenrizi. Energy, blessing, positive karmic connection – Tibetans

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<sup>5</sup>For a fuller discussion, see Burghart 1996.

<sup>6</sup>*chos rgyal*.

<sup>7</sup>*sprul sku*.

<sup>8</sup>*rin po che*.

<sup>9</sup>*chos skyong*.

<sup>10</sup>*gter ma*.

<sup>11</sup>*gter ston*.

<sup>12</sup>*rten ‘brel*.

<sup>13</sup>*spyen ras gzigs*.

are all linked directly with Chenrizi in this way. (HH Fourteenth Dalai Lama, cited in Laird 2006: 22)

Various *terma* treasures authorised during the eleventh century detailed biographies of the human manifestations of Chenresig, sent to fulfil his oath to the historical Buddha Shakyamuni in which he promised to subdue and sanctify the snowy land of Tibet “to allow Buddhism to spread within it” (ibid.: 37). Working through various human manifestations across time up to the present day, Chenresig blesses and governs the inhabitants of his realm of protection. The texts describe how the Tibetan race began with Chenresig manifesting as a pious monkey to mate with a rock demoness. Chenresig then appears at karmically determined moments when his monkey-descendants have matured enough to receive the next stage of the teachings, eventually manifesting as Tibet’s first Buddhist king Srongtsen Gampo. Gampo’s biography details his ritual conquering (*dulwa*)<sup>14</sup> and geomantic taming of the territories within the frontiers of the ancient Tibetan empire. This was achieved through the application of a series of concentric geomantic architectural schemes (temples and *chorten*) in the form of mandalic structures that “nailed down” the malevolent forms of the landscape where they were constructed, allowing the auspicious geomantic elements to be brought forward, thus generating the presence of Buddhahood in the landscape (Mills 2007). The schemes were organised into a series of twelve temples forming three concentric squares around central Tibet, stretching into the surrounding territories as far as the Kham region of Tibet in the east and Kashmir in the west, thus defining the frontiers of King Gampo’s ritual and administrative power and, by extension, the frontiers of Chenresig’s protection (ibid.: 30). Once completed, the Jokhang – Gampo’s tutelary temple to the Chenresig and representation of the Buddha’s presence in Tibet – was constructed at the centre of the scheme in Lhasa (Samuel 1993: 168; Mills 2007). The act of taming negative forces worked to protect the domain from famine, natural disaster, invasion or war, and facilitated control of the territory under the temples’ protection (Mills 2007: 14). Thus, kingly sovereignty became associated with the powers of the deity, and the myth of Gampo’s life and his construction of the Jokhang are central to understanding Tibetan conceptions of political and religious identity, and of legitimate Buddhist governance.

Power in Tibet was fragmented following the fall of the Tibetan Empire in the ninth century until 1642, when the Fifth Dalai Lama, with the assistance of his Mongol patrons, consolidated power in the central regions of U, Tsang, and the Western region of Ngari, thus establishing his government the Ganden Podrang. Known as the “Great Fifth” by Himalayan Buddhists, the Fifth Dalai Lama linked his spiritual heritage with Srongtsen Gampo from whom he claimed spiritual descent as his incarnation; a continuation and strengthening of the Cult of Chenresig, and a powerful mandate for legitimate rule (Ishihama 1993; Mills unpublished transcript: 2; Samuel 1993: 527). Power operated

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<sup>14</sup> *dul ba*.

through the principle of *chösri zungdrel* (the sovereign rule of Religious and Temporal Combined)<sup>15</sup>, and the Dalai Lamas, being the legal inheritors of the Ganden Podrang, were *chösri nyidan* (the Holders of the Religious and Temporal Combined).<sup>16</sup>

As stated earlier, however, the boundaries of kingly political administration and ceremonial protection were not necessarily coterminous, and the Dalai Lamas exercised their ceremonial authority in regions outside their direct administration. They held ceremonial protection over the wider land of Tibet, perpetuating the boundaries of Gampo's geomantic subjugation that went beyond the government of the Ganden Podrang's effective political frontiers (Mills, unpublished transcript: 5). The boundaries of religious law were defended by *Chenresig's* wrathful protector deities: principally the transcendental protector Palden Lhamo and the worldly protector Pehar (French 1995: 131132; Mills 2006: 199; 2009b: 252). The government would distribute *sachu* (earth-water)<sup>17</sup> ceremonial vases, buried in the ground in the territories under the government's protection in order to ensure the friendship of the deities, promote good fortune, and prevent disaster. Each year, in order to maintain the relationship of *chosri zungdrel*, the government would organise long-life offerings to the incumbent Dalai Lama; thus, they were joined in a ceremonial relationship that allowed for the continued subjugation of geomantic influences and the binding of local deities as protectors, associated with the performances of the Tibetan Empire's Buddhist kings. By emphasising his association with *Chenresig*, linking his spiritual lineage to that of the imperial kings, and establishing rites of pacification associated with the deity (Ishihama 1993), the Fifth Dalai Lama was re-emphasising the deity's karmic and tutelary connection in line with his oath to Shakyuni in the emergence of the latest phase of *Chenresig's* master plan.

The extension of calls for an independent or autonomous Tibet that includes Kham and Amdo also forms part of this discussion. For reasons of space, I cannot elaborate; however, Mills has discussed Eastern Tibet's resistance movement's offering of a golden throne to the Dalai Lama in exchange for a long-life empowerment in 1957. He asserts that this act, as a performance of belonging, re-established the ceremonial connection between the Dalai Lama and the Eastern territories, thus legitimating the exiled government's claims to these territories (Mills, unpublished transcript). Rule by geomancy and blessing thus operated the political power of the kingly state during the Tibetan imperial period, the ceremonial power of the Ganden Podrang, and still forms part of the exiled government's statecraft, administered by the Central Tibetan Agency's Department of Religion and Culture. The Dalai Lama is no longer the head of the Head of the exiled Tibetan state, having removed the Dalai Lamas' status as *chösri nyidan* in 2011. *Chenresig's* wrathful guardians continue to protect the exiled government and are summoned during state exorcisms. Pehar, the possessing deity of the

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<sup>15</sup>*chos srid 'zung 'brel.*

<sup>16</sup>*chos srid gnyis ldan.*

<sup>17</sup>*sa chu.*

oracle-monk of Nechung and personal protector of the Dalai Lamas, continues to be consulted regarding matters of state.

### **The Exiled Government**

Since the 1960s, political scientists investigating the exiled Tibetan situation have been largely concerned with the modern character of the exiled Tibetan identity as constructed through the dynamics of nationalism, democracy, and globalisation encountered in exile, and how such dynamics produced or reified a Tibetan “culture” that is modern in character (Anand 2005; Houston and Wright 2003; Huber 1997; Lopez 1998; Misra 2003). Other Tibetologists scrutinise the operational and ceremonial performances of exiled government in greater detail (Dreyfus 2005; Mills 2006, 2009; Samuel 1993). They question the extent to which such transformations can be considered a complete rupture from the past. Dreyfus (2005) and Mills (2006, 2009a) have argued that whilst transforming the administration of governance according to a liberal democratic system, the Dalai Lama has simultaneously returned to a religious agenda of ceremonial governance built upon the vision of the Fifth Dalai Lama. Much of the ceremonial content remains: the Department for Religion and Culture takes responsibility for the ritual practices of the pre-1950s Ganden Podrang such as distributing *sachu* vases in refugee communities (Mills 2006: 200), and, as stated above, the transcendental and powerful worldly protectors maintain an integral role within the ceremonial structure of Tibetan government, in which they continue to defend the political administration and protect the exiled inhabitants and Buddhist temples. Significantly, upon the advice of the Nechung oracle, and in response to seismic results produced by the Indian geological survey, earthquake stupas were constructed close to the exiled government’s office and the Dalai Lama’s residence (Mills 2006: 200, 2009a: 106; Samuel 1993: 159).

In the early stages of exile, the Dalai Lama expressed to his government representatives a karmic link between himself and his desire to ameliorate the current sufferings of the Tibetan people that could be explained as *tendrel*:

Being a child from a remote part of Tibet and having the responsibility to lead the entire Tibetan population at this difficult and troublesome period is connected with my karma and the prayers of the Tibetan people [...]. (HH Fourteenth Dalai Lama 09/09/1960, cited in LTWA 2011: 12–13)

During a 1976 speech to his representatives, the Dalai Lama reiterated his commitment to Tibet as the field of Chenresig’s protection:

Keeping faith in the Dharma and speaking from the spiritual perspective, nothing is superior than making prayers to the Great Compassionate Avalokitesvara. I am not saying that I am Avalokitesvara [...]. However, I have a special connection with Lord Avalokitesvara through my manifold previous karma and aspirations. (HH Fourteenth Dalai Lama, 23/03/1976, cited in LTWA 2011: 119)

Whilst the Dalai Lama is no longer head of the exiled government, constitutionally he retains a leadership role, as is expressed thus in Article One of the *Charter for Tibetans in Exile*, redrafted in April 2011 following the dissolution of *chönsri nyidan*, in which the mythical legitimacy of the Dalai Lama as Tibet's protector is emphasised:

Article One: Protector and Symbol of the Nation

His Holiness the Fourteenth Dalai Lama, human manifestation of Avaloketeshvara, is the guardian and protector of the Tibetan nation.<sup>18</sup>

These statements, taken together with the sustained performances of ancient statehood in which Chenresig continues subjugate and pacify the domain and its inhabitants, show how identity claims and their relationships to space are produced through specific performances of belonging, and that can be considered to form part of Chenresig's "master plan".

### **The Influence of the Exiled Spiritual Leaders**

How do these performances related to identity claims in Ladakh? Historically, Ladakh was as an independent kingdom maintaining political independence and a separate identity from Tibet. From the fall of the Tibetan empire in the ninth century until 1834, when the region was annexed by the Dogra rulers of Jammu, Ladakh was ruled by royal dynasties descended from Tibetan kings. The early kingdom seems to have enjoyed religious independence; however, developing no teaching lineages of its own, from the fourteenth century on Ladakh's religious landscape became increasingly under the control of the Drigung and Drukpa Kagyu, and the Gelukpa Buddhist colleges of Central Tibet, to whom the kings offered patronage, sending monks to the central Tibetan monastic colleges for advanced training. The influence of the individual orders waxed and waned in the favours of their royal patrons, and Ladakh did attempt greater independence from Tibet, particularly during the reign of Sengge Namgyal (1570–1642) and his ill-advised war with Tibet's Mongol military protectors. However, Ladakh came under authority of Tibet's monastic colleges in matters of religion and literature. This influence continues in exile.

The increase in influence is evidenced in two areas: extension of the field of Chenresig's protection through ceremonial activity, and attempts of exiled Tibetan monastic authorities to incorporate Himalayan Buddhist territories external to Tibet under the exiled spiritual leader's symbolic and ceremonial authority. I found the monastic authorities to align their identity with that of Tibetan Mahayana Buddhism in terms of religion, grammar, and education. In addition, the current Ganden Tripa, throne holder of the Ganden Monastery and head of the Gelukpa school of monasticism, is Sras Rinpoche, Ladakhi spiritual leader and abbot of Ridzong and Samtenling monasteries, again emphasising the strengthening connection between Ladakh's Geluk monasteries and the exiled colleges.

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<sup>18</sup><http://tibet.net/2011/04/22/charter-drafting-committee-issues-draft-preamble-and-related-article/>, accessed 07/11/2012.

### *Visiting Spiritual Leaders*

Improvements in communications and travel mean frequent visits from exiled spiritual leaders, who are able to exert more direct influence over Ladakh's Buddhist laity. The temples and monasteries of the Kagyupa and Gelukpa Tibetan Buddhist teaching lineages dominate Ladakh's Buddhist organisation, although the region also has some monasteries of the Sakya and Nyingma schools. The exiled spiritual leaders representing these respective teaching lineages: the Dalai Lama of the Geluk school; the Twelfth Drukchen Rinpoche, head of the Drukpa Kagyu school; and the thirty-seventh Skyabgon Chetsang Rinpoche, head of the Drigung Kagyu school visit Ladakh frequently, with the Dalai Lama and Drukchen Rinpoche visiting almost annually. The Seventeenth Karmapa Rinpoche, head of the Karma Kagyu School visited Leh in 2011. In the summer of 2013, Drigung Skyabgon Chetsang Rinpoche performed a renowned empowerment – the Great Drigung Phowa Chenmo, or the Snake Year Teachings – at Lamayuru monastery to mark the Tibetan Year of the Snake.<sup>19</sup> All of these spiritual leaders are considered to be Chenresig emanations.<sup>20</sup> The visits are an opportunity for religious leaders to impart moral and philosophical teachings, and also to perform ceremonies and tantric empowerments. They are also performances of blessing, in which the performing officiate binds the attendees in a karmically significant link of a teacher/disciple relationship (*tendrel*).

During the course of fieldwork, I observed three major ceremonies given by high incarnate teachers, two of which were conducted in Ladakh. The first was given by the Dalai Lama in September 2010, and the second by Drukchen Rinpoche in October 2010. In August 2010, the Ladakh region suffered a series of cloudbursts, leading to mudslides and flooding that resulted in a significant loss of life, and widespread damage to property and farmland. The Dalai Lama made a special visit to the region following flood on the invitation of the Ladakh Buddhist Association – a local association of lay Buddhists who represent Ladakh's Buddhists in matters of religion, culture, and social welfare – to conduct a prayer festival (*monlam*)<sup>21</sup> for the victims and their families. In his speech the Dalai Lama emphasised the karmic connection between himself and the Buddhist Ladakhis, expressed as master and disciple. He praised the Ladakhis for their faithful relationship, and praised the merit created as a result of praying together. I witnessed a second ceremony performed by Drukchen Rinpoche in October 2010, when he visited the region to oversee the first record-breaking tree planting attempt at Changa Village on the Indus.<sup>22</sup> The attempt was organised by the charity Live to Love, of which he is a patron. Over nine thousand people participated in the record breaking attempt, and more came to receive the long-life empowerment and blessing that followed. This in itself was an example of performance, in which the karmic connection between guru, disciple, the domain, and the teachings is reinforced through the consecration of the performance of planting trees. Whilst undertaken for the

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<sup>19</sup><http://www.kagyupa.net/index.php/en-US/news/406-snake-year-teachings>, accessed 07/08/2013.

<sup>20</sup>Although only the Dalai Lamas are considered to be incarnations of Srongtsen Gampo.

<sup>21</sup>*smon lam*.

<sup>22</sup>Drukchen Rinpoche and the Charity Live to Love successfully broke the tree-planting record again in October 2012, <http://live2love.org.uk/2012/12/05/121-tree-planting-campaign-2012/>, accessed 20/03/2013.

purpose of reducing the negative signs of climate change, it can also be understood as a contemporary form of merit-generation, aim not only for the purification of the local landscape, but also binding those in attendance in a relationship of patronage through a blessed performance of climate protection.

That so many spiritual leaders should wish to come to Ladakh to teach and give blessings is considered extremely auspicious by the local religious leaders, who emphasise this to the public during prayer festivals and public teachings:

Having been born in Ladakh, we should feel very lucky. Why so? Because being more popular with teachers like the Dalai Lama, Drukchen Rinpoche, Skyabgon Chetsang Rinpoche, all other lamas keep coming to Ladakh, and they spend two or three weeks in Ladakh. We are very few people. [All over the world] people are looking for them and they don't have time, like three days to spend in the country, so we should feel very lucky. (local scholar, summer 2012)

[...] to get introduced with Buddhism is not an easy job [...]. So you all are very lucky that you have collected lots and lots of merit, this is how you are near to the Buddhist teachings. Otherwise this is not something that you get wherever you go. It is quite difficult. (local scholar, summer 2012)

Karmic causality, or *tendrel*, is expressed in these statements; by amassing merit, Ladakhis have created the conditions necessary to be blessed with continuous visits.

### *Consecration of Ritual Technologies*

Loyalty of the Buddhist Ladakhis to the religious authority of the Dalai Lama is also expressed through the consecration of new statues and *chorten* in the region. In 2010 the Dalai Lama was invited to consecrate the one-hundred foot gold-plated statue of the Maitreya, or Chamba, the future Buddha that had been constructed in Diskit, the Nubra Valley. Whilst constructed in response to issues the region had been having with water (both shortage and deluge) and due to its presence on the disputed border with Pakistan and continuous threats of war, the statue was also constructed as an offering to the Dalai Lama, and the ceremony was accompanied by a long life ceremony of the Dalai Lama at Samtenling monastery close by. The statue was consecrated on 22nd July 2010, just days before clouds bursts and flooding devastated the region. Despite experiencing heavy rains, the Nubra was spared the devastation that occurred elsewhere. Local residents asserted that this was directly attributable to the presence of the statue.

In 2011, a party of Ladakhi visitors to Dharamsala were present during a high *rinpoche's* audience with the exiled government's state oracle, Nechung. The party, considering themselves Ladakhi and thus external to the domain of the possessing deity's protection, did not request any information. However, the deity unexpectedly addressed them; they explained about the flood and asked the deity to pray for them. Nechung responded, advising the men that Ladakh was under threat from earthquakes, and that in order to prevent further disaster, they should construct *chorten* containing the

*chakra chusum mani*, (the mantra of the thirteen *chakras*),<sup>23</sup> and recite the mantra one hundred thousand times. The party returned to Ladakh and organised a committee to collect funds and arrange the necessary prayer festival. A large *chorten* now exists on the road to Nubra above Lamdon School, and was due to be consecrated in 2012 by the Dalai Lama during his visit. I was told that the construction of further *chorten* across the region was underway. As well as consecrating new devotional architecture, I was informed that the Dalai Lama donated holy objects from his private office to enshrine in the various *chorten*. Such activities bring to mind the offering of the Golden Throne by the Eastern Tibetan resistance movement, a performance that has assisted the exiled government's national claims for a Greater Tibet, that encompasses Central and Eastern Tibetan territories. Whilst the exiled government does not make any nationalist claims of Ladakh, it does appeal to a shared Buddhist culture and language, and the need to ensure the survival of Sanskrit teachings through which they understand culture and language to be transmitted.

### *The Shugden Affair*

One defining event in the establishment of ceremonial authority was the Dalai Lama's 1976 renunciation of the worship of the wrathful protector Dorje Shugden and subsequent banning of his worship or presence of his statue in Gelukpa temples, stating that the deity was against the Tibetan cause (Dreyfus 2005; Mills 2009b). This was a controversy that Ladakh's Gelukpa monasteries were unable to remain separate from. Initially, the monastic leaders had understood the Dalai Lama's interdiction to be a matter for exiled Tibetans. However, by the 1990s it became increasingly apparent that support for the deity would result in the removal of access to the teachings and ceremonial protection of the Dalai Lama. The monasteries were not prepared to sacrifice this, even if it meant inviting the potential wrath of Shugden (Mills 2009b: 267). By the turn of the century, Ladakh's Geluk monasteries began deconsecrating and destroying the statues housing the deity. By doing so, the monasteries reaffirmed their allegiance to the Dalai Lama and the supernatural protectors of the exiled government; for example, Mills describes how Shugden's shrine at Spituk monastery (Leh's most prominent Geluk institution) was re-consecrated to the Tibetan government protector Chamsring, and in a nearby protector temple a picture was hung of the Dalai Lama flanked by his two principal governmental protector deities Palden Lhamo and Pehar (Mills 2009b: 265).

### **Religious Authority in Ladakh**

Tibetan spiritual teachers and lineage heads have given Ladakh's monk scholars the responsibility for strengthening religious practice in the region to ensure the survival of the teachings and to preserve the Tibetan Buddhist cultural heritage in Ladakh. Loyalty is also ensured through the monk

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<sup>23</sup>A local *rinpoche* said the *chorten* to be constructed were *Changchub Chorten*.

scholars (*geshe* or *khenpo*)<sup>24</sup> who return from higher studies in the exiled colleges and who, in the face of professed cultural destruction, feel compelled to strengthen Buddhist practice amongst the laity according to the Mahayana teachings.

As stated previously, Ladakh's monasteries were historically involved in relations of patronage with the Buddhist monastic colleges of central Tibet, sending monks to the colleges for advanced monastic training. This outmigration ceased following Chinese occupation of Tibet and the Dalai Lama's flight into exile, but as these colleges have been re-established in exile, evermore monks are travelling to South India or Dehra Dun (in the case of the Drigung Kagyu) for higher education:<sup>25</sup>

In the last thirty years many [Ladakhi] monk students have joined the Tibetan institutions set up at various places in India. I think their number is now around one thousand, so there is great potential. I hope that these monk scholars will help the people in the Himalayas to understand Buddhism and Buddhist culture. (HH Fourteenth Dalai Lama, cited in Ladags Melong Summer 1996: 22)

Such an enterprise is not exceptional to Ladakh: Moran notes how more monks than ever are engaged in study and practice of monastic curricula at the expense of ritual engagement (2004: 100), whilst Childs has investigated how Western support for monasteries, aimed at preserving Tibetan culture, is encouraging an outmigration of young boys from the Nepalese highlands to urban centres where the great monastic colleges are. They return as fully ordained monks with *geshe* degrees and urban sensibilities, disparaging of the village societies, and thus (Childs argues) become the instigators of culture change (2004: 39–41).<sup>26</sup>

Tibetan religious authorities have influenced Ladakh's monk scholars who have out-migrated for higher education. Loyalty is ensured through those who return from higher studies in the exiled colleges and who, in the face of professed cultural destruction, feel compelled to strengthen Buddhist practice amongst the laity according to the Sanskrit teachings. Tibetan spiritual teachers and lineage heads have given Ladakh's monk scholars the responsibility for strengthening religious practice in the region to ensure the survival of the teachings and to preserve the Tibetan Buddhist cultural heritage in Ladakh:

The Dalai Lamas, they always advise that we have a very big responsibility to preserve the Tibetan culture. Because we have already preserved the Tibetan culture for the last ten centu-

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<sup>24</sup>*dge bshes; mkhan po.*

<sup>25</sup>This is a double-edged sword: local monks desire prestigious monastic degrees for the opportunities that they bring to travel abroad; thus monasteries and the laity express concern that monk scholars will not return to their local monasteries to teach. Also, academic monks are not skilled in ritual practice, again causing unease amongst the laity, particularly in rural areas, who value monks for the rituals that they perform rather than their explanations of philosophy.

<sup>26</sup>Himalayan specialists, myself included (Butcher 2013a) have also commented upon the social transformations occurring as a result of the modern Buddhist identity being promoted by Dharamsala's spiritual leaders and religious authorities, for example Childs (2004: 33), Dollfus (1996: 15), and Pirie (2002: 116) describe the form of Buddhist practice emerging from Dharamsala as a "new" form of practice that is which is inimical to many village practices. Space does not permit a fuller discussion.

ries, so the Dalai Lamas knows that we can preserve [...]. His Holiness says “you have a very big responsibility. In Tibet we are not sure, because Tibetans can preserve but they have less opportunity under the communist government [...] therefore it is very important that you Himalayan people can preserve because you are in the democratic country! You can practice, you can learn, you can teach, you can construct schools, institutions for Buddhism, to preserve, to promote the Tibetan language.” (local scholar, October 2010)

As monk scholars return from higher studies, they establish education and Dharma centres around Leh town with the aim of imparting a religious education to the laity. Ladakh has seen a rise in the number of Dharma centres – for example the Sri Nalanda Dharma centre and the Drepung Loseling Education Society – for the purpose of imparting teachings in Buddhist philosophy to the laity. They also gain teaching posts and lectureships at the Central Institute of Buddhist Studies (CIBS), an institution for Buddhist studies that was established in the 1950s to ensure that academically gifted monks received studies in the Sanskrit tradition once travel to Tibet was restricted. The CIBS and Dharma centres give instruction in Buddhist philosophy from the Sanskrit compendium imparted through the ancient Tibetan grammar known as *choskat* (literally religious language).<sup>27</sup> Bhoti, a Sanskrit word meaning “Tibetan”, is also used by Ladakhi Buddhist scholars to refer to the modern Tibetan language, but which conforms to an ancient grammatical treatise. The centres’ directors consider it essential that the laity learns the grammar for the purposes of writing, and it is regularly asserted by spiritual leaders and monk scholars that only through the transmission of the classical Tibetan grammar (*choskat*) can one access the entire corpus of the Buddha’s teachings:

The translation of the doctrine of Buddha which existed in Sanskrit, was divided into two [Chinese and Tibetan] [...]. If we explicitly do research over these two translations today, we will find that both the Mahayana and Hinayana doctrines, together with Tantra, are available in their complete form in Tibetan language only. (HH Fourteenth Dalai Lama 2010: 54)

This is a further area where the exiled spiritual leaders’ influence and authority is evident, and the insistence upon confirmation to the ancient grammatical forms at all times has caused controversy, coming up against attempts by education reformers to standardise literature in the vernacular, an endeavour censured by the Dalai Lama and the exiled government (Butcher 2013b). As stated already however, monastic authorities align their identity with that of Tibetan Mahayana Buddhism in terms of religion, grammar, and education; a pamphlet I obtained from the CIBS states Central Tibet to be the nucleus of Bhoti culture and language for centuries. The pamphlet also describes Tibet’s loss of independence as a “cultural setback not only for the Tibetans but also felt among its cultural satellite regions and ethnic groups of Tibet’s neighbourhood” (Appendix). The message here is clear: the Buddhist culture of the entire Himalayan region (the monastic scholars assert) is guided by the ethical discourses contained in the Buddhist tradition of the ancient Nalanda University, the entire corpus of

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<sup>27</sup> *chos skad*.

which was transmitted to Tibet. Only in Tibet was it to survive in its complete form, thriving under the guardianship of the monastic seats of learning in Central Tibet, themselves protected by the patron deity Chenresig.

### *Educating the Children*

Primary and secondary education is a further area where Dharamsala's influence can be observed, with the Dalai Lama trust regularly providing sponsorship for private schools and local education projects. Private schools are organised around faith groups, the oldest institution in Ladakh being the Christian Moravian Mission School, which is considered to be one of the best schools in Leh. Whilst faith schools are expected to operate within the constitutionally secular state of J&K, and are thus reluctant to publically admit to any religious bias, in practice they find ways to impart religious teachings and the different faith schools recite morning prayers according to their respective faiths. Three of the Buddhist private schools visited – Lamdon Social Welfare Society, Jamyang School (managed by the Sri Nalanda Dharma Centre) and the Ngari Institute of Buddhist Dialectics – impart a specifically Tibetan Buddhist moral education alongside the modern curriculum. Moral education is divided into three components: the “scientific” element that refers to the practice of dialectics and logical investigation into the true nature of reality; the “philosophical” aspect which describes the psychological impact of Buddhism and its significance for cultivating inner peace; the religious aspect refers to performances of prayer and merit accumulation that lead to the cessation of suffering and liberation. Moral education is imparted in Bhoti.

Monastic forms of dialectical debate and logical reasoning (*tsanyit*)<sup>28</sup> are practiced in Lamdon and Jamyang schools upon the advice of the Dalai Lama, ostensibly to improve the children's cognitive abilities, but in practice the debates are accompanied by a certain amount of religious ceremony. In June 2012 Lamdon held its first *tsanyit* for students in classes Six to Eight, who recited from religious texts they had memorised. The debates were performed in front of religious iconography and were judged by monk scholars from the CIBS. The scholars apparently expressed pleasure at how well the debates had gone, stating that the Dalai Lama would be very pleased.<sup>29</sup> Jamyang School was inaugurated by the Dalai Lama in 2008 with the aim of providing a further school working to preserve the “common culture” of the Himalaya. The school's principal, Geshe Tsultrim Tarchan, explained that the school project was financed by the Dalai Lama Trust due to the Trust's and the school's common aim to preserve “Tibetan” culture. Like Lamdon, Jamyang School has also introduced Buddhist dialectics from Class Five onwards.

Recently, the Dalai Lama Trust donated funds of approximately ₹1 crore (circa £130,000) to construct a science block at Lamdon school to enable instruction in maths and sciences for Class

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<sup>28</sup>*mtshan nyid*.

<sup>29</sup>I was unable to attend the debate in person. I am very grateful to Elizabeth Williams-Oerberg for sharing this information with me.

Eleven and Twelve (the equivalent of the UK's Sixth Form). The completed block was consecrated by the Dalai Lama during his visit to the region in July 2012, during which time he extolled the benefits of utilising the traditional method of dialectical debate, not only for investigating modern subjects, but also for investigating the true nature of reality:

The proper way to practise the Buddha's teaching is to investigate reality. We must make full-est [sic] use of our human intelligence, and in that context, a scientific approach, which is primarily concerned with examining the external world, is helpful. However, the Buddhist approach does not rely on external instruments, but employs the human mind to investigate reality through concentration and analytical meditation.<sup>30</sup>

Private education institutions such as those discussed attempt to preserve Tibetan Buddhist cultural and traditional values, described as emerging from the wisdom contained in Mahayana Buddhist teachings. Karmic links between Ladakh and the exiled spiritual leaders are further strengthened through performances of donation and consecration.

### **Restoring the Domain of Chenresig**

Given that Ladakhis consider their history in terms of belonging to an independent kingdom prior to 1834, external to the authority of the Tibetan Government-in-Exile, how is it the exiled spiritual leaders can have so much authority? How can such performances of belonging be isolated from Tibetan refugee politics? The significance of this apparent expansion of ceremonial authority has to be understood against the backdrop of Chinese occupation of Tibetan regions, and subsequent fears for the survival of the Tibetan Buddhist compendia, upon whose foundations the spiritual leaders claim Tibetan (and Ladakhi) culture, and identity lie. Thus, there are several analytical postulations to be made here. As seen, the Dalai Lamas' realm of protection historically extended beyond the Ganden Podrang's realm of political sovereignty to the temple frontiers established by Srongtsen Gampo. Historically, as an independent kingdom, Ladakh maintained political independence and a separate identity from Tibet. However, Gampo's temple frontiers extended as far as Kashmir in the West (Mills 2007). Ladakh's kings were descended from the religious kings of Tibet's imperial period, and Ladakh's monasteries maintained a teacher-disciple relationship with the monastic Buddhist colleges of central Tibet where they would send monks for advanced studies. Such historical connections could support the extension of ceremonial authority and ritual loyalty into Ladakh, through an expression of the karmic link or *tendrel* between the Dalai Lamas and other lineage heads with the territorial domain and its inhabitants. Thus, "identity" and "belonging" for Ladakhi Buddhists are conceived – in part – by the temples they rely on for protection, and their karmic link to the lama that established them. Through such activities, the Dalai Lama, as a human manifestation of Chenresig, is extending

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<sup>30</sup><http://dalailama.com/news/post/829-his-holiness-visits-lamdon-school-and-the-ladakhi-muslims-in-leh>, accessed 03/12/2012.

his domain of ritual loyalty, reconfirming his karmic connection – his *tendrel* – and religious authority over the Ladakhi landscape and its inhabitants as patron saviour of Tibetan Buddhist realms.

What I have attempted to do in this chapter is to examine how identity claims are produced through more or less coordinated performances of belonging, in this case performances of ceremony that aim to bless the domain of Ladakh, and link its Buddhist inhabitants into a relationship of master and disciple with various Chenresig emanations, to ensure the survival of the Tibetan culture as transmitted through the Sanskrit Buddhist teachings. The performances are distinct from the democratic performances associated with Ladakh's national identity and place in the Indian Union, and the exiled Tibetans do not make claims on Ladakh in any nationalist sense. Concerned with cultural survival, however, Tibetan spiritual leaders are expanding their domains of ceremonial protection to ensure ritual loyalty and a supply of monks with which to transmit the teachings. The forthcoming Kalacakra, perhaps the most significant event in the Dalai Lama's ritual calendar, will no doubt further strengthen this relationship of ceremonial loyalty.

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