Printing as Practice:
Innovation and Imagination in the Making of Tibetan Buddhist Sacred Texts in California

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October 2018

This dissertation is submitted for the degree of Doctor of Philosophy.

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Thesis Abstract

This thesis offers an exploration of how one brings a Tibetan sacred text to being — and to voice — in the unfamiliar, and perhaps unlikely, landscape of Northern California. Through 16 months' fieldwork with a Nyingma Buddhist community based in Berkeley, California I ask how the production of the sacred is undertaken here by American volunteers who are largely neophytes to Tibetan Buddhism. Against a backdrop of the history of Tibetan textual production — largely populated by masters, monastics, and artisans — I explore what kind of work (both physical and imaginative) American volunteers must undertake in order to render themselves effective creators of the sacred in this American industrial setting. Drawing on current research that explores the adaptive capacities of Tibetan Buddhist traditional practices, I will offer a new facet to this flexibility through an investigation of the ways these texts and their surrounding practices are creatively deployed to meet the needs of their American makers.

In this work I follow the sacred objects through their entangled physical and social creation in the various branches of this California community, from the construction of spaces ripe for sacred work, through fundraising, printing, and finally to the distribution of texts to the Tibetan monastic community in Bodh Gaya, India. In the conclusion I return to the question of how an American volunteer becomes an effective creator of a Tibetan Buddhist sacred text in Berkeley California, contributing a unique and rich case to the study of diasporic Tibetan text production. Ultimately, I will demonstrate that the very practice of creating and deploying Tibetan sacred texts offers a frame through which volunteers come to re-interpret and re-shape their spatial and temporal landscape. This dissertation seeks to bridge often disparate fields of study, allowing encounters between (and contributions to) such bodies of work as: the anthropological study of making, craft, and innovation; media and religious practice; the affective temporality of sacred relics; and the cross-culturally unique, agentive qualities of books.

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Preface

I am very grateful to the Cambridge Trust and the Canadian Social Sciences and Humanities Research Council for their financial support of my doctoral degree. The fieldwork upon which this thesis is based would not have been possible without contributions from the Jesus College Cambridge Graduate Research Fund and the Cambridge University Fieldwork Fund. This work was also supported by the Smuts Memorial Fund, managed by the University of Cambridge in memory of Jan Christiaan Smuts.

This dissertation is the result of my own work and includes nothing which is the outcome of work done in collaboration. It is not substantially the same as any that I have submitted, or, is being concurrently submitted for a degree or diploma or other qualification at the University of Cambridge or any other University or similar institution. I further state that no substantial part of my dissertation has already been submitted, or, is being concurrently submitted for any such degree, diploma or other qualification at the University of Cambridge or any other University or similar institution. This dissertation does not exceed the prescribed word limit stipulated by the Department of Social Anthropology.

To Will, your patience, care, and warmth are limitless and without them this thesis — along with many other things — would lie unaccomplished. My colleagues and friends at Cambridge eased the rough edges of this process not only with their invaluable challenges and suggestions but also with well-timed pints, and I am very grateful on both scores.

A Note on Tibetan Terms

There are several Tibetan terms and names used throughout this dissertation — I will principally render these in their more ubiquitous Roman form, where applicable (both in order to mirror the practice of my interlocutors and also for the sake of readability). I have, however, included a transliteration of the Tibetan according to the Wylie (1959) system upon the first mention of each term or name. In rare instances my interlocutors may principally employ the Sanskrit title for a text or phenomenon. I have indicated these instances in the body of the text below, and have also included a transliteration of the equivalent Tibetan term.

Chapter One: Introduction

Whenever you start a project, laying the foundation is essential. In Western ways of thinking, laying the foundation often has to do with careful planning—setting up the right structures and obtaining the necessary resources. But in Buddhist terms, the foundation for success is built within the mind, in your motivation for action. If your intention is strong and clear, the path to goodness and success lies open before you.

\- Tarthang Tulku, *Path of Action*

1.1 Of Books and Binderies

In the coastal hills of Sonoma County, California, a stone's throw from wine country, there is a cavernous warehouse of corrugated metal, incongruous among the sweeping rural properties that are its neighbors. Inside it, American volunteers are busily at work producing Tibetan Buddhist sacred artefacts, principally texts. They are unpaid and in most cases have no prior expertise wrangling the behemoth machinery they tend to. Most of them cannot read the sacred script they labor to create. The machinery itself has been cobbled together and customized over the course of decades. Appropriated from more typical industrial-scale settings, it has been tinkered-with until capable of yielding thousands of texts a year, both Tibetan-style pecha (*dpe cha*) and Western codex format.

The warehouse, called simply "the bindery" by those it houses, is surrounded by a constellation of white tent-like structures whose faces read "Sacred Text Treasury, Building One" and so on. Over the course of the year these tents swell with growing piles of boxes whose sober, matter-of-fact labels declare their contents to be a significant portion of the textual lineages of Tibetan Buddhism. Every winter the tents are relieved of their precious contents as hundreds of boxes make the journey — over land and sea — to Bodh Gaya, India. There they are distributed among the representatives of the Tibetan monastic (and lay) community-in-exile who converge on this site of the Buddha's enlightenment to receive the gifts.

Far from an isolated operation, this warehouse is one part of an organisation whose extensive root system supports colonies in Berkeley, Brazil, the Netherlands, and India. Nearly every node in this system is bent towards the texts that accumulate in the warehouse. Between them they address myriad facets of the process of producing Tibetan sacred objects,

from patronage and fundraising, to recruiting and advertising, and their creation and dissemination. This multifaceted endeavor is made manifest by design of Tarthang Tulku, a Tibetan reincarnate Lama from the Nyingma school who fled Tibet in 1958 and made for California in the late 1960s. It is the community he founded and, through it, his bid for the preservation and fortification of Tibet's Buddhist textual heritage that makes up the focus of my thesis.

In this work I will track the creation and distribution — both physical and social — of these texts and other sacred objects. In doing so I will unpack how Tarthang Tulku and his volunteer followers deploy various strategies for preservation and promotion of these precious objects. In this they marshall all the resources made available to them by the history of the texts and the landscape that bore them, as well as the full measure of considerable creativity text-production has evinced through this history. Making, for the objects in this community, happens as much outside the aforementioned bindery as inside. I will show how even their most contemporary-seeming practices reach for tools proffered by the texts themselves and their long history — for example, the way their strategic appeals to aid-engaged publics recall many centuries of carefully curated patronage networks.

In moving across these various spheres the texts become my focal point, in the sense that they are the methodological and theoretical thread that renders commensurate the otherwise seemingly disparate facets of this community's life and work. Critical though they may be, however, these guiding sacred objects will not be allowed to eclipse their human counterparts. To the contrary, the kinds of work — both physical and imaginative — that volunteers must undertake in order to render themselves creators and handlers of the sacred will be a central focus in the ensuing chapters. Drawing on and contributing to anthropological work on the agentive capacities of things and responding to disciplinary calls for an earnest focus on processes rather than products of making, I will endeavor to show how texts and their handlers amplify one another's agentive capacities. Through sacred objects these makers render their spatial and temporal surroundings actionable. In doing so I will also broach an investigation of the affective dimensions of working with the Tibetan Buddhist sacred, specifically the bodily and imagined experience of prophetic temporalities whose study has to date been principally scriptural.

1.2 Books as Agents: On Theoretical Signposts

The royal fortress of Yumbu Lagang (*yum bu bla sgang*) in the Southern regions of Tibet is said to be the scene where the first Tibetan scriptures made their grand entrance to the world. Here they descended from heaven to land at the feet of (a presumably startled) King Lhathothori Nyantsen (Diemberger 2012; 16-17, Schaeffer 2009; 5). Sources disagree on their exact content, but given that the king could not actually read them, whether they happened to contain sutra or mantra made less of an impression on the illiterate king than their form and obvious gravity. Lhathothori Nyantsen seems to have recognised their preciousness immediately, and set about making them offerings of barley. In return for this gesture the 80-year-old monarch "became like a youth of 16" (Diemberger 2012 translated from the Dba' bzhed; 16). In spite of this extraordinary effect, the books' blessings on the king were limited, due to his inability to access their content. It would be his successor, Songsten Gampo (*srong btsan sgam po*) who would unlock this content and, subsequently, the full magnitude of its blessings through script, translation, and recitation (Ibid.)

This mythic origin story for Tibetan Buddhist scripture is rich. It foreshadows many of the features of the text that will be thematic in this work, among them the texts' influence over even those incapable of reading their contents, and the physical quality of their impact. Here, though, it is the texts' own agentive role in the story that I wish to focus on. These first forward scouts of the Tibetan textual tradition were not dropped from heaven, but rather came down (*babs*) of their own accord (Diemberger 2012). This striking personification is not a unique feature of this particular story. Sacred texts and objects are recurrently invited here and there, dressed, and addressed as persons (Ibid.). These examples are not confined to scriptural descriptions, but are manifest in the practices surrounding the texts.

There is a wealth of scriptural, historical, and pragmatic precedent for the attribution of pronounced agency to the figure of Tibetan books and other sacred objects. My methodological approach and writing process are guided by a recognition of sacred texts' ability to convene networks of support and production (Barrett 2008, Clemente and Diemberger 2013, Diemberger 2014a, 2014b, Ruegg 2014, Schaeffer 2009) not as simple rhetorical flourish, but with real deference to the agentive power of texts. This overt recognition of the agency of Tibetan sacred texts dovetails with, or perhaps precedes, the

anthropological revelation that objects are potent convenors of personhood, relationships, and networks.

There are times when the study of Tibetan Buddhist books effects a very constructive partnership with object-focused anthropology. They seem to bear out, with delightful accuracy, assertion of the agentive capacities of art (Gell 1998, Sansi 2014), the puissant social biographies of things (Appadurai 1988) and the capacity of powerful objects not only to "trap" other agents in their orbit (Gell 1998), but to exert a hierarchical influence over those agents (Strathern 1988, Sansi and Strathern 2016). All of these authors and their arguments, along with a few others, offer valuable tools for illuminating the way books — and especially books as gifts — exercise the ability to create individuals, relationships, and mediate transformation and imagination. I will make use of these theoretical and methodological tools, which allow me the fluidity needed to track these mobile objects across various fields and elucidate how their polyphonic and creative abilities manifest in different contexts.

A further outgrowth of this field of anthropological inquiry comes at the behest of those who call for greater attention to the process of creation (Ingold 2013) and the materials and methods involved (Miller 2009), in order to counterbalance the wealth of product-focused anthropological work on objects and shed light on improvisation in making (Hallam & Ingold 2007). This methodological directive has proved a tool naturally-suited to the project I have taken up. Indeed, it is this idea that ties together all of the various branch organisations and activities in the community, that each can be said to contribute to the process of creating sacred objects. To approach the community members' work in this way draws productive attention to the range of ways sacred objects are referred to and deployed in various settings.

In the ensuing chapters I will draw on the work of Peter Redfield in order to explore how temporal imagination and anxieties may be constructed into the very material and design of an object. Though Redfield (2016, 2017) develops this argument through the "gadgetry" of contemporary aid-work, which may seem a far cry from the world of ancient sacred texts, his insights are poignantly relevant when levelled at sacred texts as gifts. As Schaeffer writes about such texts and their materiality: "The book as a 'thing' is not an inert container which

adds nothing to its contents, rather it is ‘full' of data about — and a principal source for — the cultures in which it was involved. The container, so to speak, had become the content; the material had become the cultural” (Schaeffer 2009; xi). Through these objects and the material flows that generate them, I will argue, their makers and givers mediate their imaginings of the recipient populations and the threats they suffer, but also into these gift-objects they invest their understandings of the physical and temporal landscape and their agentive efforts to transform these fields.

But this seemingly happy partnership between the study of Tibetan sacred texts and the tools offered by object- and making-focused anthropology is not always so blissful. At times Tibetan texts have the distinct ability to trouble anthropological understanding of the power of objects. They do so, rather callously, with regard to some of anthropology’s most treasured “things”: Gifts. In chapter four (and to some extent in chapter seven) I will outline the ways in which the treatment and behaviour engendered by sacred texts as gifts — especially in the hands of their American makers — exerts a curious distorting effect on traditional logics of the gift and commodity, setting on their heads the expected relationships between gifts, givers, and receivers. This project, then, is uniquely positioned to diversify disciplinary discussion of the Buddhist gift, and explore how sanctity and commodification might interact.

Further, while the recent approaches to materiality, creativity, and making in anthropology mentioned above have indeed provided useful tools for my analysis, many of these approaches appear to exclude the volunteers of this community and their work from the very attribution of creativity, craft, or artistry. This reticence appears to follow from a disciplinary uncertainty about the creative or craft-like quality of industrial-scale work and the partnership between human and machine (Ingold 2013). Taking up these threads in more detail in chapter four, I will show how the Sonoma bindery facility — characterised by the cooperative flow of human and machine — is richly invested with creativity and flexibility; its machinery is enchanted by the sacred purpose it serves. The description of a factory space thus enchanted is, I believe, a timely contribution to mounting anthropological interest in craft and making, uniquely coupled with the sanctifying influence of the objects that are my focus.

I should at this point address my use — perhaps seemingly piecemeal thus far — of the terms "book", "text", and "objects" when it comes to the sacred things that guide the narrative of this thesis. In part this obfuscation is due to the fact that the categories denoted by these terms do have here a distinct tendency to lean into one another. It will become abundantly clear in the ensuing pages that sacred text and other sacred objects are deeply entangled in the Tibetan context, with the Tibetan script, sacred in itself, often imparting sanctity to other objects through its incorporation in their form. I will indeed treat such objects (among them flags, banners, and statues) with particular attention in chapter five. Sacred texts (or books) and objects share in more than Tibetan script, though, and are here often subject to similar treatment levied towards the same pursuit of preservation and protection. I will describe the cooperative creation and deployment of an array of sacred texts and objects and therefore, I hope, justify the places where I refer to them together and avoid precipitating an undue glossing of the myriad embodiments of the Tibetan Buddhist sacred.

In an endeavor to bring some clarity to these projects of making, whose tendency to become tangled in one another is something of an analytical challenge, I will draw on the structuring capacities a ubiquitous schema within Tibetan Buddhist philosophy: the tripartite categories of *sku gsungs thugs rten.* This trinity is composed of body (*sku*), speech (*gsung*), and mind (*thugs*), and its divisions recur across many facets of Tibetan Buddhist philosophy, scholarship, and descriptions of Buddha-nature (Dudjom Rinpoche 2002; Dzogchen Ponlop Rinpoche 2003; Namgyal Rinpoche 2004; Diemberger et al. 2014). Most significantly here, this schema categorises sacred material based on objects' ability to act as a receptacle for Buddha body, speech, or mind and the resultant characteristics they possess. While this schema is certainly a useful one, its divisions are far from stable. The particular ways in which they bend to accommodate the work undertaken by this California community — and in particular how this schema becomes entangled with vernacular categories drawn from art and labor — allows a focused investigation of the innovative capacities of such categories, and by extension the sacred objects it organises.

While I will address an array of projects of creation that give rise to several kinds of sacred Tibetan Buddhist objects, *books* of perhaps a more predictable sort are of special importance. They take up the central position in Tarthang Tulku's projects of preservation and renewal

and consequently, of my thesis. This is significant because books, generally speaking, seem to be predisposed to both personhood and agentive import in a way that outstrips most other "things". Even texts that are not keepers of sacred content seem to have the mysterious power to resist commodification (Anderson 1983, Miller 2006) and act as ever-ready containers for 'culture' and subjects of its defense (Diemberger and Hugh Jones 2015, Miller 2006). Through connecting the study of Tibetan texts to these works I aim to unsettle, if only gently, the often taken-for-granted emphasis on Tibet's "cult of the book" as singular explanation for the puissance of these objects.

In taking these sacred books as my guiding point of focus — and in treating them as powerful agents in their own right — I am supported by twin robust pillars of Tibetan Buddhist precedent and practice, as well as a hefty complement of anthropological theory and ethnographic example. But then, how does one practically execute such an approach both in terms of methodology and in writing? How can such an object act as a productive focal device without, as it were, doing all the analytical work at the expense of my interlocutors of more immediate human form?

My aim here is, as Barber suggests, is not to treat texts as a "window" through which to observe other phenomena, but as terrain to be studied in themselves (Barber 2007; 9). The terrain of text, in this context, is deeply saturated with a drive for preservation and protection. Surveying this topography is the very strategy that will shape my engagement with the community's various branch organisations. In fact, I believe it is the only strategy that effectively ties their many projects together. In each sphere I will explore how texts (and other sacred objects) are understood and deployed towards various ends. Through this mobile inquiry I will elucidate an image of flexible, polyvocal texts that act not simply as tools, but as partners, teachers, mediators, victims, and receptacles for personhood, as well as imagination. In each field they exert a different facet of their influence, structuring the personhood and relationships of those that handle, create, or support them.

What books *do* here is enable their makers and handlers not only to understand their spatial and temporal surroundings, but to render those surroundings tangible and actionable. I draw on Bentor, who demonstrates how sacred relics make the body of the Buddha present and

accessible (Bentor 1996), and extend her argument to show how the body of the Buddha is not only made accessible by this community, but purpose built and strategically deployed to effect desired changes. In doing so, not only the body of the Buddha is rendered capable of immediate interaction, but this quality is extended to the landscape and temporal space they inhabit. Books, then, are not only makers and transformers in themselves — I do not attribute to them a monopoly on agency — but rather they facilitate, amplify, and shape the agentive capacities of those who create and handle them, even if, as we shall see, they do so selectively and unevenly.

1.3 Work as Practice, Work as Method: Notes on Methodology and Tarthang Tulku's Community

Tarthang Tulku's web of organisations is referred to as the "Nyingma Mandala" on its various websites and publications. But colloquially "the community" or "the orgs" are more common referents, a practice that I mimic in my writing.[1] "The orgs" is something of a blithe understatement, as the "mandala" is made up of at least 25 organisations. Members often joked with me that every time an intention arises in Tarthang Tulku, a new organisation manifests.

I became aware of this group of practitioners upon discovering a website describing their annual practice of distributing sacred texts among refugee monastics in Bodh Gaya. When I contacted the community, reaching the leadership at Mangalam Research Center first, I had little understanding of how far-reaching and many-faceted this network truly was. Luckily the leadership — after some discussion — was very open to the prospect of hosting an Anthropology PhD student so I long as I was also willing to undertake the volunteer program and thereby make myself useful.

Most of my 16 months in Tarthang Tulku's network (from January 2016 to April 2017) was spent in Berkeley, California where the community was spawned and where much of its work is still concentrated. On arrival I moved into the volunteer housing at a branch called the Nyingma Institute where I lived for six months before moving to live at the Mangalam

[1] I am aware that "community" is a term with a considerable amount of anthropological baggage (see MacFarlane 1977, for example). Here I rely on it principally as an emic term, but also as a comfortable referent for a rather heterogeneous group that is nonetheless fairly clearly circumscribed by active and willing participation and membership to the various branch organisations.

Research Center. I lived always with other volunteers for roommates, though these were an eclectic mix: a Texan mother who had left her job to join the residential volunteer program; a recently graduated California-native with a penchant for longboarding and the local kava bar; a Brazilian nutritionist and personal trainer.

Fig. 1 and 2: The Nyingma Institute. Photos taken by the author.

In Berkeley I spent time volunteering at the Mangalam Research Center, the Tibetan Aid Project, and Nyingma Institute, while also taking classes at both Nyingma Institute and Dharma College. The particular place and responsibilities held by each of these organisations will unfold across the forthcoming chapters as I describe my work for each one (see Appendix 1 for brief summaries). I was also permitted to spend a month working in the Sonoma bindery facility where the sacred texts are printed (and sometimes bound). Volunteers here are generally expected to make longer commitments, but, the community's gracious understanding of my drive to take part in this particular facet of their work, coupled with the demand for extra bindery staff around the annual shipment deadline, eased my passage into this space.

My final three months of fieldwork were spent at the Sarnath branch — Sarnath International Nyingma Institute (SINI) — an organisation whose primary undertaking is to

train Nyingma monks in “English for Dharma purposes”, an endeavor I will explore in chapter seven. Equally importantly, my time in India included a trip to Bodh Gaya to assist in the annual distribution ceremony for the sacred texts in February 2017. The inclusion of both SINI and the distribution ceremony, while they may seem far flung from the other California-based organisations, was crucial in order to encompass the point of interaction between this community’s volunteers and the Tibetan monastic population who — as beneficiaries of the community’s sacred-making projects — amount to a persistent, though largely imagined, presence that oversees the work the volunteers conduct. Over the course of these 16 months I conducted over 30 interviews with volunteers across the various organisations. But, given the committed focus on work and the resulting long hours, the richest sources of insight were often those informal interactions within work spaces; while printing flags, packing boxes of texts, designing promotional campaigns and so on.

It would have been quite possible to design an entire thesis project around the inner workings of the Sonoma bindery alone, or indeed any one of the individual organisations that make up this network. My aim, however, has been in part to evidence the flexibility, agency, and mobility sacred objects exercise in order to act in various contexts — and the way their makers must subsequently emulate this flexibility. Such an inquiry required the construction of a field site that encompassed the divisions between different organisations in order to observe the movement of people and objects across these borders. This tracking of texts across this collection of organisations, therefore, required a fair amount of methodological mobility. Here I will outline this mobile methodology and endeavor to explain and justify it both in terms of the community’s own approach to work and practice (this section) and the kind of anthropological approaches and potential contributions that have guided my work (next section).

During my months as a volunteer I performed myriad duties: I helped to screenprint sacred flags and banners, sewed chevrons to affix to them, reviewed grant applications, designed promotional material, liaised with donors, helped to print, assemble, bind, pack, and distribute sacred texts; I cleaned, I cooked, sorted library books, weeded gardens, and many other tasks besides. While this may sound like an unwieldy amount of ground to cover, geographically and theoretically, the fact is that my experience differed very little from that of

the average volunteer in the Berkeley centers. My movement across the different organisations was perhaps more pronounced than most, but the fact that this network is made up of predominantly non-profit branches and staffed entirely by volunteers demands a high degree of flexibility from its workers. Volunteers must wear many hats, and grow accustomed both to periods where days stretch into one another with little differentiation (making thousands upon thousands of *tsha-tshas*, for example) and to other times when today's work has little bearing on tomorrow's. This necessary resilience is actively and openly promoted by the leadership through their training of new volunteers. It is in fact overtly rendered a part of what the community considers its practice.

Conventional retelling recounts that Tarthang Tulku, in the early days of his American teaching, was troubled by his students' persistent complaints that they "had no time to practice" given their work schedules, hobbies, or other commitments. This bracketing off of "practice time" distilled most often into a sitting meditation practice became the model Tarthang Tulku and his students are determined to avoid — a model they often attribute to other Bay Area Buddhist centres — investing instead their very practice within their daily work for the community. Their approach is deeply pragmatic and cultivates a belief that, as one of my interlocutors put it, "if you need a cushion, music, and incense to meditate, you're not meditating". This pronounced pragmatism also serves as a strategic mechanism for distancing Tarthang Tulku and his group from other Tibetan Buddhist groups and leaders that they believe to be fatally enmeshed in the small-mind of politics and activism. Though they rarely say so overtly, it is possible to interpret this as a subtle but purposeful step away from the Dalai Lama's current approach, a distancing that is pragmatically reflected in the alliances Tarthang Tulku's community draws through its patronage networks and the ways in which its projects are described to a public audience (to be discussed in chapter six).

The entanglement of devotion and work (especially physical labor) is a strategy that has parallels in religious communities elsewhere. Perhaps the most pronounced of these is the Benedictine principle of *ora et labora* (pray and work) (Fry trans. 1982), which has been central to the Benedictine monastic order and its offshoots. No doubt the more proximate influence of the Puritans, whose emphasis on hard work as devotion dubbed the "protestant work ethic" by Weber (2011 [1905]) have had a distinct formative influence on the American

religious landscape, forms a part of the context in which Tarthang Tulku's "work as practice" has matured. Buddhist — or specifically Tibetan Buddhist — precedents are somewhat less evident, but community leadership occasionally refer to the figure of Thangtong Gyalpo (*thang stong rgyal po*), the bridge-builder credited with raising dozens of iron suspension bridges across Tibet and Bhutan (Stein 2013). He is doubly significant to Tarthang Tulku and his students, representing both a commitment to facilitating the spread and travel of Buddhism, but also the manifestation of this effort in physical work.[2]

These features suggest that there is a convergence of influences acting upon this community that serves to situate its commitment to labor as a form of religious practice. This project, therefore, is positioned to contribute to a budding attention directed toward the place of labor in Buddhist practice. I would add, however, one more strand to this contextual tapestry that is less evidently tied to work, but which forms critical backdrop nonetheless. I contend that the way creating sacred objects renders the Buddha immediate and available for interaction (Bentor 1996) for these volunteers bears important similarity to Tanya Luhrmann's assessment of contemporary American Evangelical practice. In drawing scholarly attention to the importance of the availability of doubt to contemporary American evangelical Christianity, Luhrmann explains that the distinctive strategy of modern evangelical practice is the cultivation of an immediate and intimate relationship with Jesus. While Jesus may be rendered close through "playful prayer" for Luhrmann's evangelicals (such as imagined "date nights" with Jesus) (Luhrmann 2012a, 2012b), Tarthang Tulku's students attain a similar result through work. Tarthang Tulku and his volunteers observance of work as practice — and my project — are therefore drawn into a wider trend underscoring the everyday proximity of spiritual practice in the contemporary American religious landscape, a trend that is garnering increasing scholarly attention.

[2] Less acknowledged by this community is the turn toward practical labor in contemporary Chan Buddhism. The rendering of monks as "good citizens" under the Chinese Communist Party (Welch 1965) accelerated an interpretation of the Mahayana Bodhisattva doctrine as "working for the masses" manifest in practical labor (Tymick 2014). Persistence of this shift in Chan Buddhist are still evident in the operation of the Buddhist Association of China, which is tasked with ensuring and "ideal modern Buddhism that contributes to the formation of a modern society and state" (Ashiwa 2009; 65).

Given that what distinguishes this community's approach to Buddhist practice is a relentless, tireless focus on work, anyone, myself included, who wishes to spend any lengthy amount of time with the community must be prepared to contribute. In practical terms, this means that all of the volunteers in the community work a minimum of six days a week, usually nine or ten hours a day. For those truly committed to the community and its projects, to work from early morning to dinner time (or later) seven days a week is not at all uncommon. Much of this work, especially that which deals in the creation of sacred objects — the printing and binding of books, the creation of prayer flags, and so on — is physical and strenuous in nature. This is to say that the community leadership was quite happy to allow me to move between their various branches, but my passage was paid for through hard work and a cultivation of my own capacities for flexibility.

This arrangement, though, did not guarantee access to all parts of this network — indeed, concealment versus openness will become thematic to my own navigating of this community, but also in the way them aim to do their preservation work. I am very conscious of the fact that my passably strong physical condition and ability to keep up with demanding work schedules, allowed me access to (male-dominated) spaces such as the bindery, which has been indispensable to the project I have carried out. That said, as a woman and as a temporary fixture, I was still restricted from one or two more closely guarded projects and spaces, such as the Tulku's residence at Odiyan, and the creation of more potent and potentially dangerous sacred objects.

In a way, the community's own focus on labor and my subsequent research strategy mirror what some have termed a "media turn" in the study of religion (Engelke 2010, Hirschkind 2011, Meyer and Moors 2006) in the sense that the materiality of religion (and how indeed such "stuff" becomes religious) is of central concern. Such a move allows a stepping back from fraught questions of "belief" — which have a tendency to dog the study of religion — toward a focus on practice and its trappings (Engelke 2010; 374, Keane 2009). My work here will, I hope, add another narrative to this field. In addition, the community's own preference for pragmatics and work comes with its own distancing from overt questions about belief. By this I mean that volunteers, especially those on temporary programs, were not expected to explicitly affiliate as Buddhist and therefore my own atheism was not terribly disruptive or

novel. That said, nearly all of the community leadership and senior and long-term membership *is* explicitly Buddhist and several would remind me often that one not "on the path" would struggle to understand their work fully and unlock its potential benefits. My position, then, while not entirely unusual by the community's own standards was nevertheless mildly uncomfortable at times.

Tarthang Tulku's organisations are populated entirely by volunteers; across the Berkeley centers the majority of these are full-time residential workers whose room and board is covered by the community[3] in exchange for their participation in the various projects that create (or support the creation of) sacred texts and other objects. Many of these — particularly those involved in the more protected projects — are long-term members of Tarthang Tulku's following, and the heads of most of the branch organisations have been chosen from among his early students. There is also, however, a rotating complement of volunteers who commit to live and work for the community on six-month to one-year renewing basis. Given this integral practice of six-month to one-year commitments, my proposition to come and study with the community demanded little in the way of an adjustment to their daily life.

Demographically, the students are largely though not exclusively white and range from middle to upper middle class. The population fluctuates in terms of its overall gender balance, there is perhaps a slight female majority most of the time (especially among the younger volunteers) and, at the time I joined, a very small minority of non-binary individuals. Most are college-educated, with a handful also holding graduate degrees. The total number of volunteers in the community fluctuates quite markedly from year to year, but during my time in Berkeley I estimate that the combined downtown branches contained a total of 35-40 full time volunteers. The Sonoma properties — Odiyan and Ratna Ling — had perhaps another 40 between them. The five Berkeley branches — Nyingma Institute, Padma Ling, Mangalam

[3] The community keeps scrupulous financial records that detail how it goes about its upkeep and sponsors its projects. Regrettably, I have limited space here to delve into these particulars. I will, however, address in detail how revenue from the sale of sacred objects may and may not be used, as well as fundraising campaigns and practices that surround the community's text-production. In terms of the acquisition of its property and the maintenance of its members, suffice it to say here that the community relies on a combination of markedly affluent and generous donors, and the revenue from some of its money-making operations. Some of its more academically-oriented projects are also supported by various granting agencies.

Research Center, Tibetan Aid Project, and Dharma College — are all clustered around the center of downtown Berkeley, while Odiyan and Ratna Ling are a two or three hour drive up the coast.[4]

While the bulk of a volunteer's spiritual training happens "on the job", as it were, given the commitment to work as practice, new volunteers are also expected to attend classes. These classes are held (primarily for the public) at the Nyingma Institute, generally considered the site of "outpouring" of the Nyingma Mandala. That is to say, this is where the teachings and practices designed for an American audience outside the community are dispensed. It is housed in what was once a UC Berkeley fraternity house, perched on a quiet hill above the campus. This property was one of the organisations' early acquisitions. Tarthang Tulku had marshalled a group of academics and other teachers with a view to offering courses in Buddhist studies. True to the pragmatic, work-focused bent of his operation, when the teachers turned up to the old fraternity house they were handed sledgehammers, drills, and paintbrushes and instructed to set about building their classrooms. Then, as now, not all took so readily to the multifaceted demands of a life within Tarthang Tulku's fold. Thanks to those that did, however, the Nyingma Institute is now a plush hideaway in this urban landscape. It is entirely painted in colours very familiar to the Tibetan Buddhist palette — deep reds, blues, and golden yellows — which, together with the thick carpets, make the space feel warm and close. It houses many of the community volunteers (women on the first floor, men on the second), most sharing rooms in pairs, sparsely-appointed with a single bed, a wardrobe, and desk for each occupant. Classes are held in the basement in a series of low-ceilinged, darkened rooms. Motorised prayer wheels spin perpetually along the walls, flanking a central altar at the front of the largest room.

Volunteers may choose which of the classes for the public they want to attend, picking from among courses in guided meditation, Tibetan chanting, Mahayana philosophy, Tibetan language, or Kum Nye Yoga.[5] This will be the only place where volunteers practice the

[4] For maps locating the various properties and a brief description of each organisation refer to Appendices 2 and 1, respectively.

[5] This is a practice Tarthang Tulku developed specifically for his students, allegedly because he felt they could not focus and sit still long enough for more traditional seated meditation. It is perhaps best described as a combination of yoga, meditation, and tai chi, merging breathing and reflection exercises with repetitive motions that range from relaxed to energetic. See Appendix 3 for example videos.

elements many of them assume to be more typical of Buddhism — especially seated meditation — and even so these courses are designed not with them in mind, but the general public with a hobbyist interest in Buddhism. Given the lengthy work days and weeks, for some new volunteers the prospect of adding evening classes to this timetable is daunting. Those who "withdraw", though, that is to say those who do only the minimum (though substantial) workload and do not engage the community further, may be gently chivvied towards participation or, failing that, the door.

Fig. 3 The Nyingma Institute Entrance. Photo taken by the author.

I enrolled in several classes, but there was one in particular that affected my time in Berkeley more deeply: the study of the classical Tibetan language. I had begun a study of the language during my pre-field year at Cambridge in one-on-one sessions with an instructor, knowing that I would be able to continue this study upon reaching Berkeley. Nyingma Institute runs beginner and intermediate modules every year but, from what I gather, they are thinly attended and often cancelled all together. While the more senior members of the

community no doubt see the value in making a study of the script that is the focus of so many of their projects, it is the practice of only a handful to do so. Newer volunteers are welcome to study the language if they are especially interested or ambitious, but it is not expected of them. When I joined the beginner module we were five, several weeks later I was the lone holdout. The fact that I find classical Tibetan to be unrelentingly tricksome was made worthwhile by the fact that my teacher, Joseph[6], was a long-time student of Tarthang Tulku's whose wealth of knowledge extended beyond scriptural Tibetan and into every corner of the organisations' history and operations. My dogged, if clumsy, pursuit of translating sutras with him two evenings a week won me a certain amount of grudging respect and patient answers to my questions.

This teacher will re-appear plenty in the ensuing pages, and his input proved as illuminating as that of the language he valiantly fought to teach me. His presence was also critically important in light of the fact that a certain amount of textual engagement was methodologically indispensable for this project. There proved to be a great deal of analytical value in engaging the types and content of texts selected for various art projects and in understanding the textual heritage of the various figures whose names populate the community's buildings, stories, and projects. Joseph's guidance was enormously significant in this methodological undertaking, both in terms of supplementing my nascent knowledge of the language, but also in terms of offering an emic view of the particular value and import of the texts we translated together (and the many other texts I asked him about).

At this point I must retract my steps somewhat, to examine more closely some of the terms I have been using to describe my interlocutors and the network they inhabit. I will use a handful of terms in reference to these individuals, most often "members", "volunteers", or occasionally "students". None of these terms is entirely satisfactory, but while the term "student" accurately denotes the central position of Tarthang Tulku in this network of organisations, it is somewhat contested and worth a further note. Tarthang Tulku, I am told, often claims that he has no students, even while many in his community would call him their teacher. This is in part, it is said, to encourage these would-be students to take initiative in

[6] This and all following names are pseudonyms, with the exception of Tarthang Tulku and his daughters whose public and distinctive profiles make anonymising them (within or outside the community) virtually impossible.

their own teaching — to question and explore of their own accord rather than looking to the guru for a roadmap — and in recognition of the fact that many Americans may hesitate over the servitude implicit in taking Tarthang Tulku as their teacher. (This balking at ritual commitment was frequently diagnosed to be an American weakness by leaders in the community.) However, it also reflects the fact that Tarthang Tulku has been quite clear in his decision not to claim direct lineage transmission to his American pupils. This decision, imbricated as it is with themes of concealment and secrecy, will be discussed in more detail in chapters four and seven.

Appropriate terms for this group of practitioners as a whole are similarly frustrating and slippery. "Community" and "network" each carry their own baggage but will have to take turns carrying the nominative load of this unwieldy collection of organisations. Given that the many branches in this network fulfill quite different functions practically, legally, and financially, there lacks even a centralising technical or "on paper" term for this web of people and projects. The closest approximation, which I will use periodically, is the Tibetan Nyingma Meditation Center (TNMC). This is a commonly-used short form relating to the California non-profit corporation sole "Head Lama of Tibetan Nyingmapa Meditation Center". Legally, this is the church that Tarthang Tulku has founded, and it is surrounded by the constellation of his other organisations, most of which are incorporated as 501(c)(3) non-profits. Functionally, TNMC is the vehicle through which Tarthang Tulku exerts his leadership over the other branches.

I hope that through this description of the more practical aspects of life in this community, I have made a case for "work" as methodology, and indeed the only way to access the "work as practice" model so central to the community's conception of its own place in the Tibetan Buddhist cosmology. While the range of tasks and positions I took on through my time in the various organisations may seem a broad swath of practice to attempt to account for, I maintain that both the guiding influence of the ever-present texts, as well as this community methodology (for it is truly more a methodology than a philosophy) of "work as practice" ties together these various roles. Further, the fluid ability to "wear many hats" is a central part of getting along in this group of organisations, and one that methodology demanded I emulate as best I could. Therefore, *work* became the way both to track the labour performed by texts in

various contexts, and the corresponding work volunteers undertake to complement and support their preservation.

1.4 Taxonomy, Ethnography, and the "Elephant": Notes on the Field Site

I have established how the mobile methodological approach I have adopted sits comfortably alongside TNMC's own commitments to work as practice, and detailed the analytical advantages yielded by such a symmetry. I turn now to the delineating of my field site and analytical aims under the auspices of relevant fields of anthropological inquiry and religious studies — specifically, the study of Buddhism in America and recent developments to the concept of "un-sited" ethnography. The parable of the blind men and the elephant (as told in the Pali *Udana* 6.4) is one that has proved a ripe explanatory device for scholars of Buddhism. In this story the Buddha calls for all the blind men in his kingdom to give a description of an elephant, each having been exposed to only a small part of the enormous animal. The Buddha employs their resultant discord to convey — to a bunch of bickering Brahmins — the futility of reaching conclusions about reality based on a partial view of the unsighted (or unenlightened) (Masefield trans. 1994). There are two particular ways this parable has been used as a metaphor relating to the study of Buddhism, which I will explore here in order to set out and justify my methodological approach, as well as outline the kind of contribution I hope such an approach will yield.

The first elephant to be dispatched is subject of longstanding efforts bent towards "describing the elephant" of Buddhism in America, as surveyed by Gregory (2001). That my chosen field is located principally in the United States and populated by Americans necessarily implicates my work in this daunting field of study. Through an exploration of ethnography and taxonomy in the study of so-called "American Buddhism" to date, I will describe how my work here has the potential to amount to a contribution to such a field, broad and nebulous as it may be. However, such a contribution is not the guiding aim of this project for reasons I will detail below. The second elephant is both more general and more overtly methodologically embedded. That is, the illusory elephant employed by Cook, Laidlaw, and Mair (2009) in their proposition of the "un-sited" field. Their argument both

offers a parallel for the stance I take up in relation to the field of American Buddhist studies, and is also very useful in outlining my methodological approach to the "field".

I turn first to the elephant of American Buddhism, treading carefully to avoid being drawn into some of this field's more defining debates, which have a persistent habit of swallowing surrounding works, especially ethnographic ones. Not least among these debates is the long-running disciplinary conversation over the taxonomies and terminologies appropriate to "American Buddhism", if indeed this is even the right term. Hundreds of pages have been filled since the late 1970s in pursuit of a taxonomic system that will adequately account for all the personalities of Buddhism in America, from the precocious firstborns to the eccentric cousins. Are there two "Buddhisms" (Numrich 1996, 2006; Prebish 1978, Gregory 2001), or three (Prebish 1993, Nattier 1995, Seager 1999)? Can practitioners be sorted, perhaps, into "church-like", "meditational", and "evangelical" (Layman 1976) or as "ethnic" versus "convert" (Numrich 2006), or based on their style of practice ranked based on "traditionalism" or "modernity" (Baumann 2002) or sorted by their mode of transmission to the US (Nattier 1995)?

Scholars have proffered and debated an ever-growing bouquet of classificatory terms for various kinds of American Buddhists, among them: cradle Buddhists, sympathizers, night-stand Buddhists, Dharma hoppers, inquirers, and shoppers. In the face of this staggering variation "Buddhism in America" has been proposed as an alternative to "American Buddhism" in order to better capture the heterogeneity and sidestep the affirmation of a "unique" American Buddhism (Seager 1999).[7] Hundreds of further pages have been devoted to the critique, dismantling, or revision of each schema proposed, and those I have mentioned represent only a more prominent fraction of the writing that makes up this field.

This pursuit of taxonomy, I believe, is connected to the proliferation of survey-style texts on Buddhism in America, which arose around the turn of the 21st century and have continued to be edited, revised, expanded, and reprinted since. The turn of the 20th century was marked by

[7] This is how Seager employs the difference between these two terms, in contrast to the contentious proposition by Helen Tworkov that "American Buddhism" is the province of white, middle-class converts, while "Buddhism in America" belongs to "Asian communities" (Tworkov 1991).

a Euro-American fascination with romantic and often fetishistic accounts of Buddhism, which characterised, for example, the work of the theosophists of the late 1800s (Tweed 1999). A century's passing finds a field no less fascinated by Buddhism, but longing to bring taxonomic order to its unruly sprawl.[8]

In spite of the wealth of such dissertation projects, books, and published articles on the subject, long-term ethnographic study is meager among them. Much of the fieldwork conducted is survey-like in nature (Preston 2002) and scholars are persistently captivated by the project of "describing the elephant" of American Buddhism (Gregory 2001) in pursuit of a coherent and lasting portrait of the whole.[9] Religion in America has long been the province of religion specialists mounting primarily text-based studies, with ethnography becoming a more ubiquitous tool only in the 1990s (Tweed 2002). This late addition of ethnography to the toolkit of ethnographers of American religion led to a certain amount of methodological confusion (Capper 2003). The resultant conversations on positionality and representation at times threaten to outweigh the ethnography itself.

In order to illustrate the pitfalls of the survey approach, we need look no farther than the treatment of Tarthang Tulku and his community in such volumes. In his article "Describing the Elephant: Buddhism in America", Peter Gregory (2001) gives a brief account of four exemplars of the survey-style texts I describe: *The Faces of Buddhism in America* (Prebish and Tanaka eds. 1988), *American Buddhism: Methods and Findings in Recent Scholarship* (Williams and Queen Eds. 1999), *Luminous Passage: The Practice and Study of Buddhism in America* (Prebish 1999), and finally *Buddhism in America* (Seager 1999). All four of these texts reference Tarthang Tulku specifically and give overviews of his work that vary in brevity from one line to several. While Seager's summary (in his revised 2012 volume) is markedly better than the others (and links Tarthang Tulku's work to a trend in preservation

[8] This is evidenced not least by the exponential growth in the number of dissertation topics surrounding Buddhism in America in recent decades. Duncan Ryūken Williams has compiled a list of North American dissertation projects (undergraduate and graduate) relating to Buddhism in the United States since the 1970s (Williams 1999a), as well as North American Dissertation projects relating to Buddhism more generally (Williams 1999b).

[9] There are a handful of ethnographic projects of the scale and depth more familiar to anthropologists — among these are Capper's published dissertation on Guru devotion (2002) and Numrich's study of two Theravada temples (1996). However, there persists a general uneven distribution of writing that characterises the scholarly field of American Buddhism. Much has been written, for example, on America's earliest Buddhist adoptee, Zen, and its trend-defying offshoot Soka Gakkai, but far less on its Tibetan Buddhism (Seager 1999).

work concerning texts among Tibetan schools) all are fleeting and offer only a static snapshot of this dynamic group of practitioners. No doubt brief engagement with specific topics is the price paid for works of considerable scope, but what it lost is not mere descriptive depth and colour. Rather, pieces of this community's practice, excised from its history and calcified, are — when they offer more than simply a succession of key dates — employed to prop up broader conclusions about the "goals" or "characteristics" of Buddhism in America. For example, Fields' (1992) appraisal of American Buddhism as a "do-it-yourself" religion with little concern for support of the monastic population. Or else Lavine's (1998) characterisation of the Nyingmapa as distinctly focused on sitting mediation, in contrast to their more bookish counterparts in the other Tibetan Buddhist schools. Neither of these characteristics are sufficient or indeed accurate with regard to Tarthang Tulku and his students.

Suffice it to say here, that this work is not about "American Buddhism" the phenomenon, though its material and conclusions might conceivably be of use to such a field. Focused ethnographic and long-term studies of American Buddhist practitioners are wanted for among this wealth of survey-focused scholarship. This is a contribution my project is well-suited to make, while unsettling the broad conclusions of such survey works. However, my contention here is *not* that the addition of ethnographic work will serve to refine and clarify a fuzzy description of American Buddhism's elephant. Rather, it is a contribution in fulfillment of the argument that there is no elephant at all (Cook et al. 2009).

This brings me to the "elephant" as discussed — or perhaps dismantled — by Cook, Laidlaw, and Mair (2009). In their chapter, Cook et al. reveal how the promise of multi-sited research — to chase up and re-assemble the cultural formations that increasingly flooded the boundaries around discrete "fields" — conceals and relies upon an implicit holism. In such multi-sited research the "field" is assembled through the sum of connected, local spaces whose links are uncovered and chased up by the ethnographer until the entire picture has been revealed. In this way, the homogeneity and boundedness multi-sited researchers identified and critiqued in the ethnography of "traditional" or "village" field sites is revealed to similarly undergird the multi-sited field (Cook et al. 2009).

There are clear parallels here, I believe, to the pursuit of the survey-style works described above, whose endeavor to relay an impression of the heterogeneity of Buddhism in America often conceals an implicit assumption of their connectedness. The endeavor to both identify and subsequently re-assemble the various localities that make up this whole has proved an endeavor that wilts in the face of longevity. For example, Hickey (2010, after Cadge 2001, 2005) has pointed to the ways in which the ethnic/convert divide in scholarship on American Buddhism degrades in the face of a more diachronic view. I believe, though, that this critique is readily applied more broadly, perhaps even to the construction of taxonomic schemas as a teleological approach.

I describe this critique of the multi-sited approach for the simple reason that my project, on its surface, may appear to fall squarely into such a category. It is composed, after all, of a patchwork of various organisations spanning the boundaries of various spaces, which I move through over the course of my fieldwork. In drawing this field site, though, I hope to design not a multi-sited project, but rather an "un-sited" one (Cook et al. 2009). The distinction, here, is that the un-sited project claims neither to give a "full" representation either of a bounded place or coherent cultural form, but rather embraces the arbitrariness of the delineated field site, which maintains the important acknowledgement of the seamless connectedness of the world (Candea 2007). That is to say, in pursuing a mobile methodology that has allowed me to move through the various branches of this network of organisations, I do not claim to have drawn a coherent boundary around this community in order to offer a complete portrait of what lies inside. Rather, my aim has been to "productively encompass borders" (Cook et al. 2009; 64). Exploring the boundaries between the various organisations — when they are permeable or not, how they are asserted and maintained — and moving across them has proved a methodology well-suited to exploring the flexibility, creativity, and malleability of sacred objects and the processes of their creation.

There are other boundaries implicit in this study that might also be productively encompassed by an un-sited methodology. That is, the boundaries residents in this community assert between themselves and the imagined populations who oversee or benefit from their work. The fact is that my interlocutors position themselves — repeatedly and often — in contrast to "the Tibetans". That is, against the diasporic, ethnically Tibetan Buddhism in

India, Nepal, and Tibet that they aim to support through their work. (Tibetan refugees in North America have a marked tendency to fade from their designation of "the Tibetans".) Very often this positioning entails the Berkeley volunteers taking up a place of subordination, deference, and a distinct undermining of their own ability to act as ritual or spiritual inheritors of this tradition, which rightly belongs to "the Tibetans". The volunteers in Tarthang Tulku's community also frequently contrast their community against other groups of American Buddhist practitioners, though without the deference afforded to the monastics in exile.

Here the taxonomies so common to the scholarship of American Buddhism, previously dispensed, threaten to creep back in. In response my approach has been to treat these practices of division, and their surrounding rhetoric and behaviour, as *ethnographic objects in themselves*. I do so without intending to reify their emic divisions and thereby rely on their implicit over-arching explanatory devices to do the analytical lifting. Rather, the way my interlocutors position themselves in the cosmology of Tibetan Buddhism (and Nyingma specifically) has necessarily shaped my inquiry. It is central in the endeavor to understand how they make their work legible to varied audiences, how they construct their own practice, and indeed their very relationship to Tarthang Tulku. In this way I endeavor to follow Latour's injunction to first render "flat" the field of study such that we might see how depth is asserted and maintained, and how imaginative work generates scale (Latour 2005).

In sum, there are a few practical results of the above-discussion of un-sited research, taxonomies, and methodology. In spite of the "un-sited" qualities of this project, the fact that I spent much of my months of fieldwork among American practitioners of Buddhism has meant that this projects takes place, to a certain degree, under the auspices of the wide-ranging field of study of "American Buddhism". A brief overview of this area of scholarship reveals a dearth of long-term ethnographic work, which my work may be positioned to counteract. This is not, however, my central aim with this project as I wish to avoid the subsuming of this ethnography into either taxonomic debates or survey-style approaches, which I believe share the unintentional homogeneity that afflicts multi-sited research.

Rather, the heterogeneity and flexibility so central to the sacred texts that guide this project is also reflected in the methodology I employ to investigate them and their makers. I introduced this strategy with regard to work and its necessary place as both a practice and a methodology, which allowed me to move through the various organisations that make up this network. Here, I have endeavored to further justify this mobile methodology in describing how an "un-sited" field might be drawn in order to productively — though not comprehensively — encompass a variety of terrain and the boundaries between them. Such an approach has facilitated a focused and comparative investigation of the ways in which one might become a successful creator of a sacred object, and how in turn sacred objects speak, act, and circulate among varied audiences.

1.5 The Tension and Temporality of Texts

Tracking sacred books across the many organisations that make up this network — and parsing the different ways texts speak and behave in such spaces — dovetails with the other principal undertaking of this work. That is, to elucidate how Tarthang Tulku and his community navigate when to protect the sacred through secrecy and concealment, and when to fortify it through broad distribution. Both strategies are apparent in the long history of Tibetan Buddhist sacred texts, employed by turn as mechanisms for the protection and preservation of knowledge traditions, and both are markedly in evidence here. On the surface Tarthang Tulku's array of organisations, whose leadership often declaim their prolific accomplishments in terms of the distribution of sacred objects, appear to be archetypal representatives of the strategic dissemination of sacred material as a means for its protection. I will show, however, that such strategies for proliferation are consistently shaped alongside commitments to secrecy as a means for protection, and an anxiety that dogs the decision of what sacred things to share, and with whom. Further, an investigation of the way both of these strategies are played out across the various projects in this network lends itself to a unique exploration of the affective dimensions of creating the sacred. This is a dimension that often fades from scholarly work as those who labour to create sacred books are eclipsed by the commanding personalities of the texts themselves. I offer an introduction here to the way I endeavor to use an investigation of the strategies of proliferation and secrecy as a way to draw forward the rich experiential dimensions of bringing a sacred object to life.

In a sense, secrecy and spread in pursuit of preservation are two sides to the same coin when it comes to the sacred Tibetan Buddhist objects considered here, though their coexistence is not always easy. The occasional tension between them is one that finds echoes through Tibetan Buddhist history, echoes that seem to reverberate especially around Tarthang Tulku's Nyingma school. In part, this ethnographic work is a treatise on how Tarthang Tulku and his students navigate what parts of the Tibetan Buddhist sacred must be shared (and how to do so), and what must be kept secret. Historical precedent and traditional injunctions must be constantly reimagined in this new American context and among new handlers and makers. In the coming chapters I will explore the moments of both tension and cooperation between the strategies of secrecy and spread, how and when each is deployed, and how the interplay between them is managed by volunteers. Their strategies are not necessarily consistent or always successful, but illuminating this community's work requires a consideration of how its every project is saturated with this dialectic between concealment and proliferation, secrecy and spread.

The colophon of the Perfection of Wisdom (*Prajñāpāramitā*) is a very useful text upon which to pin this discussion. This is because it instructs its readers on how it ought to be treated, and what is at stake for those who heed the instructions:

> "… when, through the Tathāgata's sustaining power, it has been well written, in very distinct letters, in a great book, one should honour, revere, adore and worship it, with flowers, incense, scents, wreaths, unguents, aromatic powders, strips of cloth, parasols, banners, bells, flags and with rows of lamps all round, and with manifold kinds of worship…One should know that those beings are living in the presence of the Tathāgata who will hear this perfection of wisdom, take it up, study, spread, repeat and write it, and who will honour, revere, adore and worship it" (Diemberger 2014, quoting Conze 1973, 299–300).

If we understand the colophon to be the voice of the text itself, even a kind of "mission statement" (Diemberger 2014) the *Prajñāpāramitā* communicates its own power and value quite plainly. Specifically, it impresses upon the reader the critical importance that it be widely spread. This is a poignant distillation of the indispensable position held by texts to the Tibetan Buddhist religion. Sakyamuni Buddha himself instructed his followers — via Ananda — that they should take up the collected corpus of the Buddha's teachings to guide them after

his death.[10] Moreover, these works were to be considered a part of the teacher himself (Smith 2001).

Aside from shoring up the well-recognised centrality of the text to Tibetan Buddhism, the colophon of the *Prajñāpāramitā* evidences proliferation and distribution as a strategy for the preservation of sacred texts. This sentiment represent a significant guiding polestar to Tarthang Tulku and his projects. Indeed, the *Prajñāpāramitā* itself will be a recurring feature throughout this thesis, appearing carved into walls, printed on banners, and widely printed and distributed, always in fulfillment of this ideal of distribution and spread. The practice of preservation through wide dissemination also seems to affix itself more readily to the Perfection of Wisdom in this context partly because of the text's anti-sectarian gravity. Projects to print this particular text can be cast as a bid not just for the fortification of the Nyingma school, but of Tibetan Buddhism more broadly. It will be a prime ambassador for the call to replicate and distribute sacred texts as a strategy for their preservation, in balance against the more guarded texts that are particularly precious to the Nyingma school.

However, the potential dangers implicit to the project of recording sacred texts with paper and ink have long been evident to the luminaries of Tibetan Buddhist history. Abundant availability of physical texts, many feared, would undermine the authority and centrality of the master-disciple relationship in the transmission of Buddhist teachings, and allow charlatans the tools to claim false authority (Schaeffer 2009). As such, many teachers carefully controlled the dispensing of sacred texts, insisting that they be taken up only by those under the guidance of a qualified teacher:

> "If orality was a part of the rhetoric of authenticity and efficacy, it was also a powerful defense of intellectual property, against which books were potentially a serious threat. At stake was the propriety of two different technologies for the perpetuation of tradition, and the relative authority of those who promoted one over the other" (Ibid; 3).

It is precisely this matter of the technologies of perpetuation and their appropriate and *timely* use that is at issue here. While Schaeffer outlines very clearly how this discomfort

[10] This is explicitly set forth in the *Mahāparibibbannasutta*, which describes the Buddha's death and his injunction to Ananda that his students should take up the collection of the Buddha's teachings as guidance after his passing (Warren 1985 [1896]: 107).

surrounding the written word and its proliferation informs the Tibetan Buddhist textual tradition as a whole, these themes take on a different and perhaps more pronounced timbre when it comes to the Tibetan Nyingma School. This school, whose name translates to "adherents of the old", claim for themselves a particularly notable stake in the endeavor to preserve endangered textual lineages and their surrounding traditions. It is also centrally reliant on the individual lineages of teacher-student relationships — which Schaeffer points out are threatened in text production — arguably more so than the other Tibetan Buddhist schools, who invest much of their teaching in large-scale academies and training centers. In the next chapter (chapter two) I will track the evolution of this feature of the Nyingma school to its contemporary manifestation in Tarthang Tulku and his students.

The proclivity for secrecy and the carefully controlled distribution of texts also takes on a particularly rich form in the Terma (*gter ma*) or Treasure tradition of Nyingma Buddhism, whereby sacred texts are concealed across the Tibetan landscape, to be revealed at the precise time they are needed and to the person who will dispense them best. Building on a complement of scholarship that has already noted the simultaneous enshrining of traditional authority with an immensely flexible pragmatic deployment of this tradition, I will explore (in chapter five) how Tarthang Tulku's Nyingma community draw on the strategies of concealment and fortification of the Terma tradition in the way they create and distribute sacred material. The manner in which they do so, while clearly continuous with this adaptable tradition, represents a distinctly creative development as these treasures are cached in new landscapes and arrayed against newly conceived threats.

What arises from this ethnographic inquiry into the experiential dimensions of creating sacred texts, are the remarkable ability these objects and the process of their creation have in terms of impressing themes of danger, precarity, urgency, and power upon those who handle them. The California volunteers' understanding of Tibet and Tibetans — past and present — is developed more clearly and profoundly through their work with sacred text than through any classes, lectures, readings, or meditation. This purposeful strategy on the part of their teacher, Tarthang Tulku, reveals his relentless focus on "work" to be more than a construct designed to extract their considerable labour, but in fact the most effective way to bodily convey the dire urgency of this present moment in Tibetan Buddhist history, and the potential

threats that face its future. Much of this urgency is bound up in prophetic temporalities of inevitable decline that pervade a Tibetan Buddhist reckoning of time — in the face of our current era of degeneration the reproduction, distribution, and protection of sacred texts and other objects is one of the most readily available strategies to fortify Tibetan Buddhist teaching lineages against this deepening degeneration (Nattier 1991, Empson 2006).

While much has been written about these prophetic Buddhist temporalities and their Tibetan expressions — work that I will discuss in more detail in the coming chapters — much of this scholarship is scrupulously textually embedded. Collectively it offers a robust and thorough overview of the development and deployment of such temporal understandings; how the periods of decline between peaks are measured in various sutras, how lifetimes, kalpas, and suffering are quantified, and detailed investigations of the disagreements between sources. A very detailed scriptural portrait of cyclic time is well in evidence. What is correspondingly less evident is the affective experience of such a temporal landscape and the way that texts allow for a direct interaction with and imagination of pasts and futures. I will attempt to offer such an exploration, arguing that the creation and interaction with sacred objects in fact plays a central role in the infusion of this temporal sense and urgency in the bodies of makers. It is this missing affective experience of Tibetan Buddhist prophetic temporality that is so readily available in Tarthang Tulku's bindery and other community spaces. I will describe how sacred objects become saturated with such imaginaries of decline and fortification in a way that suffuses their makers' bodies and imaginations in turn. Sacred artefacts act both as tellers of these temporal threats, and as the potential remedy against them.

In pursuing this thread I take up, in part, Schaeffer's endeavor to render more concrete the sense of the process of printing texts, for I believe it is a critical addition to the understanding of what has been called either a "culture" or a "cult" of the book and yet often gives more sense of the books and their contents than the affective cradle of their production. However, while Schaeffer attempts to give such an account by way of historical sources, offering perhaps something of a biography of book production through Tibet's history, my account of text-making is a firmly ethnographically rooted one. Through such an inquiry it becomes possible to assess how the broad themes and tensions Schaeffer invokes impress themselves

upon and are reproduced by the *individuals* that facilitate and preserve this "cult(ure) of the book".

One of the results of taking as focus these kinds of tensions and their resolution, is to slacken ties between this community and the aforementioned family tree of "Buddhism in America" and facilitate a rapprochement, through the pragmatics of their work, between communities that practice text-production both within contemporary Tibet and across the monastic centres in exile. These communities too grapple with questions of how modern technology may or may not be used in the creation of the sacred (Diemberger 2014a), how one should advertise or fundraise on behalf of sacred objects, how to strategically project ideas of "Tibetanness" especially in contrast to those about "Americanness" (Lopez Jr. 1999), and, of course, what kinds of preservative strategies to mobilise and when, whether concealment or proliferation.

Indeed, David Germano has pointed to the institutional revival and flourishing of the Nyingma in Eastern Tibet in recent decades, entangled with a revival of the Terma tradition (Germano 1998). He also points out, however, that the rejuvenation of the Terma tradition and its subsequent enlivening of Nyingma centers of practice has not translated outside of Tibet nearly so effectively, a fact he attributes to the importance of the body of Tibet herself to this tradition (Ibid). While Tarthang Tulku's community is perhaps a dubious direct heir to this tradition, I contend that some of the practices they exercise draw heavily on the history of the Terma tradition. They offer, perhaps, insight into what the Terma traditions' strategies of concealment, fortification against threat, and timely appearance might look like when invested in a different landscape by lay American practitioners. Through tracing how the tension between concealment and distribution is managed across different spaces, then, the challenges that face Tibetan text-production across geographic fields will be rendered commensurate and the rich affective experiences of their producers drawn forward.

1.6 Conclusion

I have given an overview of the themes and theoretical pole-stars that have guided my fieldwork and subsequent writing. Moving forward the distinct sub-headed boundaries

between them that I have set out above will fight to dissolve as themes of temporality, agency, creativity, preservation, concealment, and distribution will be folded into one another. I shall do my best to make apparent their meetings and meldings as they are drawn into the orbit of the potent sacred objects that have been my psychopomp. I intend psychopomp here in the Jungian sense of the mediator between conscious and unconscious. In this way the texts have the fluid ability to operate in both tangible and intangible registers — dealing both in the stark physicality of paper, ink, glue, and money, but also in the ephemeral currencies of imagination, preservation, creativity, and tradition. The ever-ready capacity of the Tibetan Buddhist textual tradition to "speak" with the transcendent voice of the Buddha is poignantly condensed across the many facets of this California community. The volunteers who populate it, also, must learn to emulate this fluid adaptability of the textual lineage they reproduce, learning how to enact these polyphonic capacities of sacred text in innovative ways in the California landscape only newly familiar to this text tradition.

In chapter one, I will strike right to the heart of the community's history by way of its founder, Tarthang Tulku. In retracing the major developments of his life, critical illuminating context for his community's work and methods begin to take shape. I will demonstrate how the different strategies of concealment and proliferation at work in their various projects carry forward a long history of interplay between these approaches, channeled through the figure of the Tulku. In chapter two we will explore — from afar — the community space that most accurately distills the strategy of concealment and secrecy: the Tulku's own residence called Odiyan, the Copper Mountain Mandala. I will show how the process of its building, undertaken through an incredible marshalling of volunteer energy, has remained a narrative touchstone for the community's understanding of work as practice and has exerted a potent transformative influence, rendering this new landscape ripe for the production of sacred artefacts.

In chapter three I turn to the production of these artefacts as we plunge into the industrial cacophony of the bindery space where the sacred texts are printed and assembled. Here I will show how the community maintains two textual lineages at once — the Tibetan texts for their monastic beneficiaries, and Tarthang Tulku's own English texts directed at his own students — and in so doing cast light on the way these two textual lineages have a curious ability to

distort classical understandings of how gifts and commodities ought to behave, tying this to their respective secrecy and openness. In chapter four I take up an investigation of the other sacred objects produced across community spaces, such as flags, banners, *tsha-tshas*, and prayer wheels. These projects represent a ubiquitously accessible route for volunteers' process of coming to know the sacred. It is through this work that volunteers come to access the prophetic temporalities that saturate these objects, and in return exercise their ability to fortify the landscape and the lineage against a precarious present and a threatening future. In chapter five I turn to the fundraising and outreach branches of Tarthang Tulku's community. I will argue that what appears to be one of its more mundane spaces, entangled with pecuniary concern and wrangling aid-work publics, is in fact one of its more innovative projects as they strategically convene the *right* kinds of patronage networks. Finally, in chapter six we will reach the frenetic apex of the trajectory of the Tibetan texts created in the bindery through their distribution at the World Peace Ceremony in Bodh Gaya. Here, the volunteers' imaginative accounts of their monastic beneficiaries resolves into a face-to-face encounter, and their work to position themselves in the contemporary landscape of Tibetan Buddhism becomes starkly evident. We rejoin the bindery texts here, too, in order to observe the different kinds of giving and how they are distributed across different books and different recipients.

Above I have outlined a methodological approach that is mobile and flexible, one that has been specifically designed in order to capture and reflect the parallel fluidity in the focal sacred objects, the processes of their making, and the experiences of their makers. I have demonstrated how this methodology complements Tarthang Tulku's organisations' approaches to work as practice, but also how it draws upon recent anthropological insights to the "field site" in order to shape the kind of contributions I hope to make to the anthropology of religion, of Buddhism, and to the study of Buddhism in America. This mobility is not only a characteristic of my methodology, however, but is also at work in my analytical approach through the unique capacity of this project to bridge fields of inquiry rarely brought together. This research provides a unique encounter between, for example, the noted agentive capacities and histories of Tibetan sacred objects and an increasingly robust anthropological literature on making, craft, and tools. Together they result in an in depth and affective exploration of making Tibetan Buddhist sacred objects that is, as yet, largely un-attended.

Other such encounters — between sanctity and commodification, between Tibetan Buddhist patronage networks and American donor publics, between traditional injunctions surrounding the handling of sacred texts and the design of promotional material — will repeatedly, over the course of the ensuing chapters, shore up the capacity of this project to bridge largely discrete fields and thereby offer unique contributions to each.

Through and alongside the sacred artefacts that make up the focal point of Tarthang Tulku's considerable energy, volunteers' labor leads them to a reconceptualisation of the landscape they inhabit. As they are trained to recognise the potent capacities of the objects they handle, the Berkeley city-scape and its surrounding hills become enlivened and enchanted, invested with the sanctity of text. This enchantment too, through practices of caching and other strategic deployments of the sacred, draws this field in to a familiar cyclic temporality of Tibetan Buddhism. Memories of collapse and precarious futures, also remembered within the bodies of these objects, are invested in the California landscape and the bodies of their makers bringing them into the cosmology and history of their Nyingma school. More than just facilitators of this re-conceptualisation of their temporal and spatial surroundings, sacred texts and objects also offer their makers an avenue to render these surroundings tangible and actionable. The volunteers not only bring the Buddha to body and to voice across their many organisations, but they purpose-build this body and shape this voice strategically and creatively in pursuit of their goals to preserve, fortify, and proliferate.

Chapter Two
The Tulku from Tarthang

If you spend too much time planning, trying to take into account hundreds of variables, you may never get started. But if you stay alert, you can improve and sharpen your behavior as you go along. Instead of relying on models and theories, connect to the work and to your own responses. That way you will not be paralyzed when the evolving reality comes into conflict with your detailed plan of action.

Tarthang Tulku, Path of Action

2.1 Introduction

For some unaccountable reason I had decided to wear a sweater for this July excursion to the Sonoma countryside, and I was paying the price in acute discomfort. Conscious that to strip down to the tank-top underneath my offending layer would be anathema at that particular moment, I settled for fanning myself desperately and cursing my early morning decision-making. It was near lunchtime on July 4th, and I had assembled — along with a large contingent of the Tibetan Nyingma Meditation Center's (TNMC) California members — in the driveway of the sprawling Sonoma retreat center owned by the community, called Ratna Ling. Lining the drive, we awaited what is often the only annual appearance Tarthang Tulku makes to the assembled students who populate the community he founded decades ago. By this time I had been living and working in the TNMC community for six months and had never met nor seen this man who features in so many of its stories and teachings. Clutching a rapidly-wilting flower between my palms I sweated, and I waited.

At long last the subject of our collective apprehension made his appearance. Tarthang Tulku, wrapped in his maroon robe and topped with a maroon knit hat, was perched in the backseat of a golf cart. This golf cart had been thoroughly dressed to suit the occasion, festooned with sparkling streamers and pinwheels in red, white, and blue, and dotted with miniature American flags to match the large one draped over the retreat center's main gate. The jovial 80-year-old waved a cried "Hi hi hi! Thank you!" in a thin voice as he was trundled past the assembled volunteers and bundled into the retreat center's main lodge surrounded by his children and grandchildren. The whole series of events passed in an anticlimactic 90 seconds.

Given the rather extensive calendar of Tibetan Buddhist occasions that the Tibetan Nyingma Meditation Center (TNMC) community observes, it may be surprising that this most American of holidays — the Fourth of July — is the one Tarthang Tulku chooses for his rare and anticipated appearance. It is also one of the very few days "off" across the community's various organisations. (Most festival days are marked, if anything, by a rather sharp uptick in the amount of work volunteers undertake; temples must be scrubbed, altars serviced, chanting schedules drawn up and executed.) I was told repeatedly that Tarthang Tulku sees himself as a truly exemplary beneficiary of American immigration, entailing as it does the freedom to practice and preserve his tradition, while also offering a platform from which he may support the Tibetan diasporic monastic population. As such, no detail is too small on this day when it comes to recognising TNMC's host country and all it offers — a speech penned by Tarthang Tulku and read by one of his students celebrated the "star spangled victory banner" that is the American flag, and we revelled in its religious freedom as we ate American flag-printed sheet-cake off paper plates featuring George Washington's stern profile.

Fig. 4 The golf cart that carried Tarthang Tulku to the 4th of July festivities at Ratna Ling. Photo taken by the author.

Biographies of Tarthang Tulku's life are relatively thin. Autobiographical accounts by the Tulku are presented with a pronounced modesty, and he will often only describe his accomplishments at the urging of his students. This is perfectly continuous with the writing produced about teachers in the various Tibetan schools, which generally falls to the students to spare the teacher from having to self-aggrandise. Autobiographical accounts tend to exude a "studied diffidence, whereas the life written by someone else typically exhibits an equally studied reverence" (Gyatso 1998; 105).

Still, from what is available from a variety of sources, both human and textual, it is possible to discern the guiding trajectories of the Lama's life and of his work.[11] Along these narratives lie gateways to many of the contextual fields that will be necessary background to the forthcoming chapters. Through an overview of Tarthang Tulku's life and the development of his work, then, I will sketch the necessary backdrop that led to the arising of his California community and the particular kinds of work and practice they undertake. In doing so, some of the particular innovations undertaken by TNMC when it comes to the creation and distribution of sacred material will be necessarily contextualised, and the debts they owe to Nyingma history and Tarthang Tulku's history will be paid. This distant outpost of the Nyingma lineage will therefore be drawn a little closer to its forebears and its history by way of the figure that knit them together (and occasionally held them apart).

Fig. 5 Tarthang Tulku — Photo from Kum Nye Tibetan Yoga website (https://kumnyetibetanyoga.wordpress.com/2015/11/06/kum-nye-tibetan-yoga-by-tarthang-tulku-rinpoche/)

[11] Pieces of the story of Tarthang Tulku's life are scattered across the community's various websites and publications as well as my field notes, and I have gathered them here into a timeline. The different sources are in agreement on the major details, for the most part, though some external sources suggest minor differences in dates.

2.2 A Tulku is Identified: Leadership and Teaching in the Nyingma School

The name Tarthang Tulku, which I have used thus far to denote the community's founder, is indeed the one most commonly ascribed to him. It is, though, more a title than a name. In childhood he had another, given to him by a Nyingma master in his native home of Golok (*'go log*) in Eastern Tibet: Kunga Gelek (*kun dga' bde legs*). But this name is now largely overshadowed by the title "Tarthang Tulku" or "Rinpoche" as his students call him. "Tarthang" is the name of a branch of the larger Palyul (*dpal yul*) Monastery — one of the six principal Nyingma monasteries located at the Eastern edge of Tibet (now Sichuan Province) in a town called Dege (*sde dge*).[12] Any international recognition the small branch might have laid claim to has now been eclipsed by the bearer of its name, which effectively means "the Tulku from Tarthang". With one part of the title explained, we are left with the word "Tulku" (*sprul sku*), and herein lies our first port of call for context.

The Tibetan term *sprul sku* translates a sanskrit one, *nirmanakaya* "pure physical body". That is, the pure physical body of Shakyamuni Buddha, which, though physically manifest, is beyond stain and defilement (Ray 1986, 2001, Tulku Thondup 2011). A Tulku is one of a few sorts of manifestation of such a physical body. In practical (and oversimplified) terms, a Tulku is one who has been recognised, often very young, as a reincarnation of a previous teacher or lineage-holder. Such identifications (and the deaths that precede them) are generally accompanied by various auspicious signs that point to the child's true identity (Zivkovic 2010). Tarthang Tulku was taken at three years old by his father, himself a lineage holder, to see a local learned master and recognised Tulku — an incarnation of Naropa — to receive blessings. The master identified Tarthang Tulku as a fellow reincarnate lineage holder (though I never did find out of what specific figure) and instructed the toddler's parents to care for him well.

Typically, young Tibetan Tulkus thus identified were promptly whisked off to a nearby monastery to receive notoriously strict and wide-ranging training that yields young Lamas with a disposition of striking gravity and ritual decorum (Ray 1986, 2001). Tarthang Tulku's father, however, as a physician and lineage-holder in his own right took his son's training

[12] See appendix 2 for maps.

upon himself for several years following his identification, delaying his eventual move to Tarthang monastery at nine years old.

Throughout Tibetan history the role of the Tulku has been one of both civic and religious duty, encompassing a wide range of possible responsibilities from abbatial roles to the uptake of administrative positions within the Tibetan government — indeed, much of the Dalai Lama's government in exile is composed of such identified reincarnate Lamas (Ray 1986, Logan 2004). The "Tulku system", as it is often called, came to full fruition in its conventional state during the period of consolidation of Tibetan Buddhist monasteries. While elements of this practice are identifiable earlier, Ray pinpoints its formal, recognisable beginning to the Karmapa sect's identification of Rangjung Dorje (*rang byung rdo rje*) (1284-1339) as a reincarnation of the Karmapa, Karma Pakshi (Ray 1986; 46-47). Over the course of the ensuing centuries, this succession practice made its way through the other schools and by the 16th century the Gelukpa had adopted it to determine succession of the Dalai Lamas (Ibid; 47). Its practice allowed the monasteries to extract themselves — at least partially — from the sometimes-heavy handed patronage of prominent families that had previously sustained (and therefore guided) their leadership (Ray 1986, 2001, Michael 1982) and take control over their own succession practices (Lopez 2001). However, elements of the Tulku tradition, deeply rooted in the Mahayana Bodhisattva ideal, were already evident in the much earlier traditions of the Siddha and the Nyingma Tertön (Ray 1986, 2001).

As Ray has already pointed out (1986), the political aspect of the religio-political role of the Tulku has been well-elucidated, potentially at the expense of its ritual gravity.[13] While Ray has offered a skilfull antidote to this shortcoming through his careful descriptions of the themes and features of the Tulku's life, there is one particular and rather fleeting point he makes about the role of Tulkus, which I wish to draw to the fore here. Specifically, this is the idea that the Tulkus, through their extensive and thorough training, might act as repositories for the wisdom and "culture" of Tibet, and embody the subsequent ability to promulgate these qualities:

> "Thus the rise of the tülkus as a centerpiece in Tibetan Buddhism fulfilled the need, in a relatively decentralized culture, for spiritual leaders spread

[13] For a rich collection of interviews with contemporary Tulkus in exile see Bärlocher's impressive volume (1982).

> throughout the country who were more of less equivalent in function, embodying in one person and one place the various dimensions of Buddhism" (Ray 2001; 368-9).

Through their careful training, Tulkus ensure the continuity of a lineage and act as emissaries for its spread, their continued identification and training is therefore integral to the continuity of the teaching lineages (Fields 1992). In fulfilling this function the Tulku may act rather like other manifestations of the Nirmanakaya, such as stupas, statues, and relics. The empowerment of these objects (often accomplished via the incorporation of textual material) and their proliferation exerts a powerful capacity to effect transformation that will be thematic in this thesis. That Tulkus may share this capacity, invested as they are with carefully curated and instilled wisdom of their traditions and lineages, will be an illuminating idea if we turn it toward the life and work of Tarthang Tulku. It serves also to position the Tulku as a personified distillation of the dialectic between concealment versus spread as strategies for the protection of sacred objects and knowledge. The Tulkus are ready tools for dissemination, proliferating the teachings as they move through the world. And yet, their very existence depends both upon a highly restrictive (and often secretive) pedagogical system, as well as the rare quality of being a reincarnate lineage holder.

It is notable, too, that Ray's quote above references "decentralized culture" as a particular factor that necessitates the spreading of the Tulkus and their wisdom — we might draw parallels to the diasporic state of contemporary Tibetan Buddhism, a state that could draw again on the bridging capacities of the Tulkus. Of course, there has been much skepticism about the state and function of the Tulku system abroad in recent years, which has led both Tibetan and Euro-American scholars to wonder whether the exponential proliferation of Tulkus in exile might not have an exploitative facet (Tsering Wangchuk 2017, Dzongsar Jamyang Khyentse Rinpoche 2016) or indeed contain distinct attempts at political manipulation, as with the controversy surrounding the recognition of the Panchen Lama in the 1990s (Moran 2004).

For the less exalted and therefore more populous Tulkus in contemporary times, though, Pamela Logan has noted that since the early 1990s there has been a recognisable trend of Tulkus in exile turning to charity-work in order to marshall resources for their constituents.

Their Bodhisattva activities include, for example, opening schools or hospitals, and founding charities (Logan 2004). Logan also notes that to engage in such work often necessitates the dissociation from the Dalai Lama's government in exile. To express support for the latter would be to jeopardise one's own access and efficacy in exercising and encouraging charity.

While offering this kind of support may represent a new but continuous facet of the Tulku's enjoinder to serve as compassionate bodhisattvas in the flesh, it perhaps changes the formula for what was once considered a comfortable and non-contradicting unity of religion and civic leadership in the figure of the Tulku. Still, this development of a humanitarian facet to the role of the Tulku offers a crucial space for action contingent on a refusal of political affiliation or posturing. It is a space that Tarthang Tulku and his community will make good use of, while continuing to carefully curate their relationships and public image to ensure its maintenance. Such an alternative arena for action is — as Peter Redfield points out — not at all unfamiliar to humanitarianism as a pursuit, whose organisations often construct themselves as operating within a space and under a mandate beyond the moral and agentive borders of the nation state (Redfield 2010).

These two particular features of the Tulku — 1) his[14] now troubled embodiment of a uniting of political and religious office, dovetailing in an entanglement with humanitarian rhetoric and projects and 2) his capacity to embody and proliferate the collected wisdom of the lineage or tradition — changed though they have been throughout Tibet's history — will become thematic to the personage of Tarthang Tulku and the balances and tensions that pervade his work.

2.3 To Protect and to Preserve: Gathering Buddha's Speech

After his move to Tarthang Monastery (still in his native Golok) at the age of nine, Tarthang Tulku spent the next several years there studying the Nyingma *bka' ma* and *gter ma* under various teachers, receiving the comprehensive and thorough education so central to the Tulku tradition. At around sixteen the young man was reportedly granted permission to leave the monastery and travel through Khams for several years. During this time he enthusiastically

[14] I employ the male pronoun here not as a default, but because the overwhelming majority of Tulkus through Tibetan history have been male.

sought out a wide range of teachers to further his training, eventually finding his root guru, Jamyang Khyentse Chokyi Lodro (*'jam dbyangs mkhyen brtse chos kyi blo gros*). While his education during these years was still principally Nyingma, he also began to engage in study of the other schools' traditions and practices. Indeed, this may well have been fostered by the noted anti-sectarian tendencies of his root guru. Jamyang Khyentse Chokyi Lodro is generally recognised as one of the foremost Nyingma luminaries of this century. He also, however, has deep roots in the anti-sectarian Rime (*ris med*[15]) movement and has received and transmitted teachings from multiple traditions (Aris 1977, Dilgo Khyentse Rinpoche 2017, Gardner 2009). In 1958 Tarthang Tulku followed Chokyi Lodro, leaving Eastern Tibet for Lhasa. Later that same year he matched his teacher's steps again, leaving Lhasa behind for Sikkim.

The accounts of these two displacements in quick succession are offered, in community accounts and documents, with very little context. They suggest only the enthusiastic rovings of a committed student visiting various pilgrimage sites. Their timing, however, is significant when considered in the context of Tibet's — and especially Eastern Tibet's — political climate at the time. By the mid 1950s Central Tibet (and the Tibetan Government in Lhasa) had forged a manageable coexistence — if an uneasy and fleeting one — with the Communist Party under the aegis of the 17-point agreement (Shakya 1999; 126). While this agreement promised, among other things, deferred socialist reform for Central Tibet and the maintenance of Lhasa's existing elite, the Eastern regions of Kham and Amdo were considered legally under Chinese jurisdiction. These areas were therefore not shielded from the socialist reforms ushered in by what Mao dubbed the "High Tide of Collectivisation", bent on bringing socialist reform to "national minorities" (Ibid; 139). These reforms met with sporadic but escalating resistance in the Eastern regions of Kham, and refugees began to congregate around Lhasa in the months of 1956, bringing stories of cadre violence, bombed monasteries, and murdered civilians (Ibid; 141). In spite of the Eastern regions' early capitulation to the CCP following the fall of the Guomindang, the resistance ignited there in the mid 1950s was arguably the spark that grew to a conflagration in the form of the 1959

[15] Translating literally to "without bias", *ris med* was a movement among the Nyingma, Kagyu, and Sakya schools against both the fraught sectarian history of Tibetan Buddhism, and the dominance of the Geluk school with regards to the establishment of the Kanjur and Tanjur. It aims to demonstrate the fundamental sameness of understanding that unites Tibet's Buddhist teachings, in spite of their distinctions (Ringu Tulku 2007). Though others prefer to speak of a more general "cultural revival" in the 19th century, decrying misuse of the term Rime (Van Schaik 2011; 283).

Lhasa uprising (and the Dalai Lama's subsequent flight to India) (Ibid; 139). The landscape through which Tarthang Tulku was moving at the time, then, would have been one of incredible precarity and tension belied by the strikingly muted accounts in TNMC sources.

The dissociation from politics is a quality that many of Tarthang Tulku's students would insist is notably Nyingma. It is the *gsar ma*, the other three schools of Tibetan Buddhism, they told me, who were consistently entangled with the socio-political hierarchy and governance of Tibet, while the Nyingma kept out of the fray and focused on practice and study. They are not alone in their assessment of Nyingma practitioners. Tulku Thondup Rinpoche writes of his school that the Nyingmapa are "the least interested in organizational structures, hierarchical formalities and theoretical dialectics" and are instead "more interested in devoting their lives to being simple and natural" (Tulku Thondup Rinpoche 1986; 41).

Tulku Thondup's assessment perhaps lists toward an idealised crafting of Nyingma history and character. However, within it is a seed of truth relating to the pedagogy and persistence of the Nyingmapas through Tibetan history. Specifically, as practitioners devoted to the early transmission texts, their lineage of teaching had to be maintained through what is sometimes called the "dark period" (842-978 CE) between the two broad waves of textual transmission. This era was characterised by a collapse of the centralised political authority that had driven the highly standardised translation efforts of the previous century (Germano 1994). Their teaching lineages persisted, the Nyingma claim, through reliance on lay lineage holders who carefully protected the practices and ensured their transmission (Germano 1994, 2002b; Tulku Thondup Rinpoche 1986; Fields 1992). Tarthang Tulku is such a non-monastic lineage holder — sometimes described as a "householder Lama" — he has married, had children, and joins this long-lived and highly respected category of practitioner credited with the sustenance of the Nyingma tradition through periods of acute endangerment.

This system of relatively autonomous lineage transmission with the teacher-student relationship at its core was better suited to persistence in a decentralised context than the highly formal monastic institutions that would arise later and characterise the *gsar ma* training. Such an approach — based on flexibly and mobile lineages — arguably also entails less in the way of rigid governing hierarchies like those that make up the leadership of the

other schools. Thus, while it cannot be said that Nyingma history is one of conscientious and complete abstention from political participation, historical features of the Nyingma approach to transmission and leadership do entail a certain amount of flexibility well-suited to decentralised or diasporic contexts lacking in concentrated structures of state (or clerical) authority.

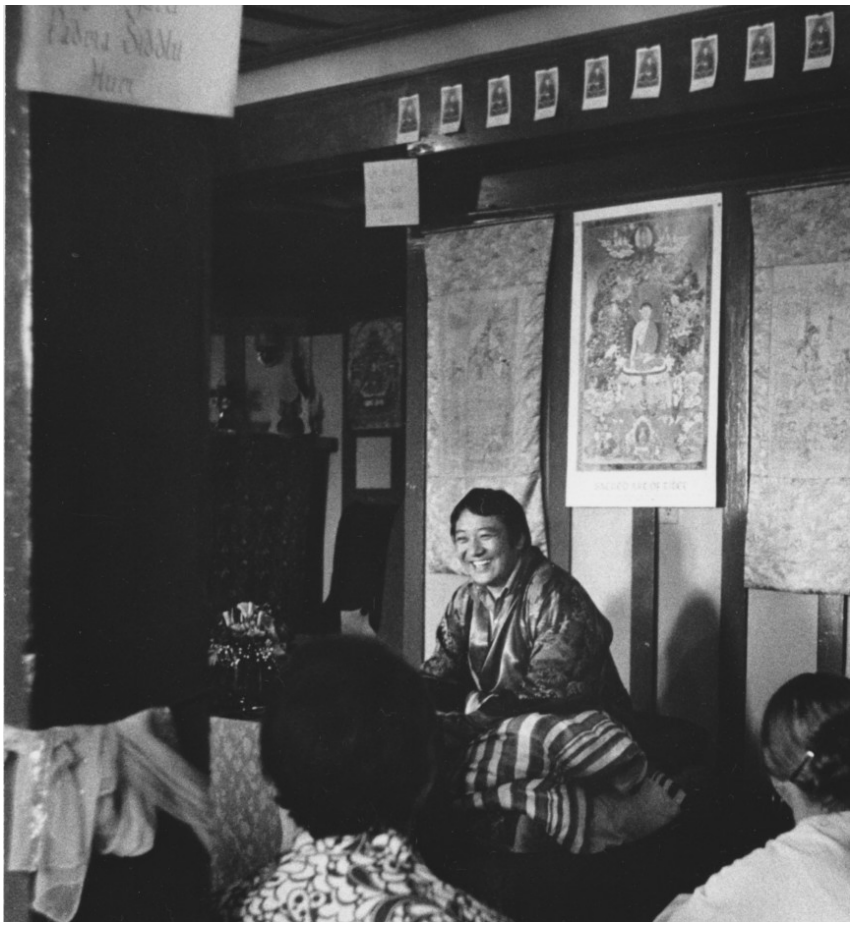


Fig. 6 Tarthang Tulku teaches at the Nyingma Institute — Photo from: http://grace.ernestlowe.com/?p=373

However, what is perhaps more interesting than whether or not the Nyingmapa can be christened "apolitical" or otherwise based on their history, is the very fact that my interlocutors are driven to make this claim regularly and overtly. Further, such a claim is born out in their work — especially in the careful curation of networks of patronage (which I will discuss in chapter six). This fact calls forward the newly emerging facet of the Tulku's contemporary role in its marked similarity to humanitarianism. Redfield (2010) describes this positioning as a kind of negative form of politics: "a strategic refusal with moral inflections, actively problematic and generative" (Redfield 2010; 53). Both for the secular humanitarian

organisations Redfield describes, and the Tulku's in Logan's (2004) appraisal, this position necessitates the construction of an alternative space outside or apart from political machinations.

While this assessment offers much in terms of understanding the approach undertaken by TNMC's members, in describing them I would perhaps employ the adjective "pragmatic" just as readily as "strategic". This may seem a pedantic quibble over terms, but I intend it in part to reflect their pervasive commitment to work. Further, I do not wish to allow their assertion of apoliticality to analytically collapse back into a political move in itself, for this belies their commitment to this characterisation. In doing so I would fall into the trap Candea (2011) illuminates, having "trumped and discarded" their interpretations of their own actions, rendering such interpretations untenable and absolving myself of the need to treat this "political" as ethnographic category. I take quite seriously, then, this claim to apoliticality and its fulfillment — it is indeed an ethnographic object of many facets, with ritual, historical, and pragmatic justifications, all of which are held in balance by those who make such a claim.

While the concurrent bloodshed and book-burning may not appear explicitly in accounts of Tarthang Tulku's movements to Sikkim, Bhutan, and then later India and the United States, it is at this point in the stories when the Tulku's work takes on a distinct valence of urgency and concern for preservation of the textual tradition. This urgency was recognised outside of the Tibetan religious authority structures too. In fact, Indian scholars of Sanskrit were reportedly deeply impressed by the consistency of Tibetan translations and their ability to reliably reconstruct missing Sanskrit texts from their Tibetan translations. This valuable feature of the now endangered texts was what interested Sanskritists perhaps most about the monastic community now in exile. In 1962 the Indian government asked the Tibetan authorities for one representative from each school to be appointed to teach at the Sanskrit University in Varanasi (Fields 1992). Dudjom Jikdral Yeshe Dorje (*bdud 'joms 'jigs bral ye shes rdo rje*), the leader of the Nyingma school in exile at the time, more commonly known as Dudjom Rinpoche, charged Tarthang Tulku with the task of acting as Nyingma representative. Rick Fields' staggeringly broad survey of American Buddhism spares a few lines on this topic in specific description of Tarthang Tulku (though not the other schools' representatives):

> "One of the most active and energetic of these teachers [appointed to Sanskrit University] was the representative of the Nyingmapas. Tarthang Tulku was a tall, rangy man from the East Tibetan province of Kham, home of the Khampa horsemen and nomads, and it was easy to picture him riding over the broad Tibetan plains. His father had been a Nyingma lama, doctor, and astrologer, and Tarthang had been recognized as an important incarnation from Tarthang monastery. For thirteen years he had traveled widely through the wildest sort of country, studying with twenty-five different gurus of all four schools, but concentrating on the Nyingma teachings" (Fields 1992; 288)

This rather dashing and romantic portrait of the Nyingma Tulku does indeed capture the impactful energy characteristic of Tarthang Tulku from an early age. In his post at the Sanskrit University, he first began to channel his considerable energy into the project of urgent preservation of sacred texts. Tarthang Tulku began to pour his teacher's wages into the purchase of a small press and published any texts he could get his hands on. He dubbed his small operation Dharma Mudranalaya (Dharma Press). Thus, this campus saw the relatively modest genesis of what was to become an international industrial-scale production project based in California.

The impetus to sustain and proliferate the wisdom of Tibetan Buddhism, necessarily a driving concern for the large-scale printing project undertaken by Tarthang Tulku and his students, also takes on a valence of urgent need for protection against a looming extinction. The need not only to proliferate texts, but to preserve them lies on a foundation of the antecedent history of Tarthang Tulku's Nyingma school. While the large-scale destruction of textual material under the auspices of the Cultural Revolution is certainly reason enough for the rhetoric of protection and salvation that has arisen around these works, it is in fact a stance familiar to luminaries of the Nyingma school, deeply entangled with the compilation of the Nyingma Gyübum (*rgyud 'bum*) and the sectarian strife that surrounded its assembly.

The famous text tradition in Tibet came about as a result, broadly, of two waves of translation activity, which rendered (mostly) Indic Buddhist texts into the Tibetan script specifically designed to receive them. The first of these waves took place in the 8th and 9th centuries, and the second from the 10th to the 14th, respectively known as the "earlier transmission" and the "later transmission" (Germano 2002a) or else the "earlier spread" (*bstan pa snga dar*) and the "later spread" (*bstan pa phyi dar*) (Diemberger 2012). The

Nyingma school is affiliated principally with those texts hailing from the early wave of translation in the Royal Dynastic period, as is evidenced by the very name *rnying ma*, which translates to some approximation of "adherents of the old", in contrast to Tibetan Buddhism's other three principal schools known collectively as "adherents of the new" (*gsar ma*) (Smith 2001).

The distinction between categories of textual adherents became principally relevant from the 10th century, when the aforementioned consolidation of monastic power entailed a consolidation, too, of what was to be the orthodoxic Tibetan Buddhist canon. Thus, debates over the alleged authenticity and provenance of texts kindled fiery polemic that was often directed at the material of the early transmission so dear to the Nyingma school (Kapstein 1989, Germano 2002b). In spite of persistent efforts on the part of Nyingma scholars, the majority of the early transmission texts were rejected from the (Geluk-led) formulation of the Kanjur (*bka' 'gyur*) — the orthodoxic Tibetan Buddhist canon — on the basis that their Indic originals were no longer extant and could not be verified (Smith 1970), leading some *gsar ma* adherents to label these texts Tibetan "forgeries" (Kapstein 1989).

Rather than allow the rejected manuscripts to fall into obscurity Nyingma luminaries of the 15th century, principally Ratna Lingpa (*rat na gling pa*) (1403-1478), gathered threatened manuscripts wherever they could be found and compiled what would become the first iteration of the Nyingma Gyübum (*rgyud 'bum*) - The Collected Tantras of the Ancients (Smith 1970). Thus, from centuries of sectarian debate over authenticity and a threat to the persistence of early transmission texts due to the orthodoxic dominance of the *gsar ma* schools, Nyingma masters positioned their textual tradition to act as a repository for such threatened material. Preventing its extinction and ensuring proliferation, the Nyingma stance as preservers of endangered sacred material therefore far predates Tarthang Tulku and his mission, offering a historically continuous role for this Tulku to step into even while the threats, texts, and trainees may be markedly different.

In addition to the temporal gulf between their transmission and translation, many of the texts from the earlier transmission were and are considered qualitatively different in terms of their content. Hailing, as they do, from the final period of Indian Buddhism these texts are

"marked by elaborate ritual and yogic systems that were highly visual in orientation, strongly antinomian rhetoric, and an emphasis on the human body" (Germano 2002a). Such texts largely undergird the Great Perfection practice or Dzogchen (*rdzogs chen*) of Nyingma Buddhism. Deeply suspect among the other schools, this practice, composed of highly esoteric texts, professes to be the most expedient yet precipitous path to total awareness (Smith 2001). Initiates are carefully guided and pursue this path at their peril — such practices if undertaken incorrectly or too quickly threaten catastrophic consequences for both student and teacher (Fields 1992; 305). This particularly precipitous route, then, requires careful guarding and the strictest control over the initiation and progression of its adherents.

Herein lies a tension that suffuses Nyingma Buddhism, which I alluded to in the introduction to this thesis, and will surface repeatedly in the ensuing pages: that is, the simultaneous valuing of proliferation and dissemination of sacred texts, compounded by the Nyingma history of safeguarding endangered texts on the one hand, and the persistent anxiety over monitored and guided access to potentially dangerous sacred material on the other. These two commitments, though not always in direct opposition, guide Nyingma engagement with and deployment of their textual resources. To be clear here, the Nyingmapa also treasure the texts contained within the orthodoxic Kanjur, meaning its adherents have always juggled multiple canons of quite different nature and history. Such concerns will be not only especially acute, but expressed in new ways in this California setting, as Tarthang Tulku and his students grapple with the various kinds of text they create and their neophyte creators.

2.4 The Terma Tradition: Creativity, Spread, and Secrecy

In their endeavor to navigate an array of strategies for the preservation of sacred material Tarthang Tulku and his students are not striking alone into new territory, but have the cumulative history of the Nyingma school to draw from. Nyingma history is indeed one of innovation and creativity, especially as it pertains to their texts. This creativity is perhaps nowhere better evidenced than in the Terma (*gter ma*) tradition so central to Nyingma practice. There exists a great amount of scholarly work on this rich tradition, in face of which I will be able to offer only the briefest of introductions. I do so, however, with particular goals: I aim to evidence not only the opportunity the Terma tradition affords for creative

reformulation of Nyingma scripture and practice — an opportunity embraced by this community — but also how this tradition offers strategies for managing the aforementioned tension between dissemination and protection.

Through a brief discussion of the Terma tradition I will further my suggestion from the introduction that the timely revelation of sacred secrets — that is, concealment and spread in turn, mediated by a careful consideration for timing and the figure of the teacher — is an approach that contributes to the management of anxieties that surround the spread and protection of the sacred. Further, there are elements and strategies central to the Terma tradition that it is necessary to outline here, in order to contextualise TNMC projects that will be discussed in the ensuing chapters. For example, their practice of caching sacred objects in particular locations, and strategically burying others can only be fully understood against (even this brief) backdrop of the Nyingma Terma tradition. Finally, I will also underscore the centrality of the Tulku as teacher to the Terma tradition in an endeavor to convey a clearer sense of the responsibility and position Tarthang Tulku takes up in regard to his students.

Texts, for Nyingma scholars, are divided into two broad categories based on the manner of their transmission; Kama (*bka' ma*) are texts that claim uninterrupted transmission from student to teacher since their translation into Tibetan, whereas Terma (*gter ma*) are texts that, according to Nyingma scholars, have been "hidden" following their transmission to Tibet, before being re-discovered by practitioner who, in doing so, earns the title Tertön (*gter ston*) or "treasure revealer" (Germano 2002a). It was the later category that became especially contentious during the compiling of the Kajur, given its emphasis on continuity and clarity of origin (Smith 1970).

The Terma are not simply lost, but rather consciously and strategically concealed by Padmasambhava, perhaps the Nyingma's most beloved figure and recognised by its adherents as a second Buddha. For the Nyingmapa it is Padmasambhava, in his transcendent wisdom and future-looking capacities, who intuits when and where a particular texts will be required, and ensures that they are discovered by the right individual at the opportune moment.[16] In

[16] This image of Padmasambhava is not uniform across all the Tibetan Buddhist schools, his legacy is complex and he cuts quite a different figure across sources — see footnote 21.

fact, many especially prolific Tertöns are retroactively recognised to be reincarnations of Padmasambhava's students (Tulku Thondup Rinpoche 1986). In part, this relies on a recognised capacity of practitioners who have progressed to the higher reaches of attainment to be able to control the circumstances of their rebirth — a quality that is also expressed in the figure of the most accomplished Tulkus (Lopez 2001, Moran 2004). What's more, Termas may be revealed in the form of a physical text concealed in rocks, lakes, or caves, but the inscrutable Padmasambhava is also in the habit of concealing Termas in the very minds of his followers. These may be revealed to the bearers upon, for example, the discovery of a scroll with a few key words on it that in turn unlock a dormant Terma (Tulku Thondup Rinpoche 1986, 2011). Through the lens of the Terma tradition proffered by Nyingma masters, the very landscape of Tibet is transformed and enchanted, its valleys, lakes, and mountains are filled with these treasured awaiting their timely uncovery (Smith 1970).

One of the consequences of this method of transmission is that the lineage involved may be drastically shortened. Rather than being passed from generation to generation of students and teachers, a text may strike out in a direct line from its initial Tibetan discovery to its re-appearance in a contemporary source (Tulku Thondup Rinpoche 1986, Smith 1970). This capacity of the Terma tradition to produce texts that are "new", at least in the sense that they are newly rediscovered, and yet claimed as missives directly from Padmasambhava has been a key feature in the production of new textual material and practices for the Nyingma school (Germano 2002c). Complex and subtle though the actual process of Terma transmission may certainly be, it has facilitated, paradoxically, a deeply pragmatic flexibility in the Nyingma approach to its own canon and practice:

> "What is important to remember… is that Tibetan Buddhism, and especially the form followed by the Rńin-ma-pa, is intended first and foremost to be pragmatic, and putting into practice of the insights realized by all the Buddhas and Bodhisattvas of the past. the explanation for the multiplicity of metaphors and tutelaries lies in the fact that there must be at some time and at some place some form or some practice suited to every sentient creature" (Smith 1970; 13).

Pragmatism and flexibility — here are the two qualities often ascribed to the Terma tradition and to the Nyingma school by extension. This allowed for the recording, and

therefore fortifying, of the teachings, yet while offering a way to circumvent the implicit tension in the fact that recording teachings in this fashion makes it considerably more difficult to control their transmission (Schaeffer 2009). Germano describes how Dzogchen in particular has offered a space for the innovative rendering of tantric material: "the entire process constituted nothing less than a stunningly original and distinctively Tibetan reinvention of Buddhist tantra in a large body of canonical and commentarial Tibetan language texts, many of which are philosophical and literary masterpieces" (Germano 1994; 205). Through the various features that distinguish it the Nyingmapa arguably maintain a position at the periphery that allows the space for reinvention

The history of this school, then, is one that compiles and keeps an alternative (or additional) textual lineage, whose collection of texts claims at once the weight of "ancientness" and yet retains the capacity for chameleonic renewal, and that walks a line between preservation and dissemination on the one hand, and secrecy and protection on the other.

Related to this creative capacity of the Terma tradition, is its focus on the timely appearance of sacred texts as a possible avenue of resolution for the tension between dissemination and secrecy or controlled access. This emphasis on the timely access to specific teachings, which is a feature also of the Nyingma student-teacher relationship, values both the proliferation and dissemination of certain teachings and also the protection and selective dispensing of others. One result of this understanding of transmission, is the laying of great responsibility at the feet of the teacher. In the context of the broader Terma tradition, it falls to the eminently capable Padmasambhava to discern when, where, and to whom texts ought to be revealed. In the teacher-student relationship, however, the burden passes to the much more worldly figure of the Tulku. To evaluate a student's readiness is no small feat even when embedded in monastic or Tibetan scholastic settings with pupils raised under the auspices of Tibetan Buddhism. When a teacher takes on American students, though, neophytes to the tradition, texts, practices, and even the language the tension is exacerbated. In the coming chapters I will describe how Tarthang Tulku grapples with the different components to his position, between placings texts — even carefully protected ones — in the hands of those who can best use them to perpetuate the tradition, and his responsibility both to protect and foster his

American students who must create these texts, many of which they have no business studying.

Fig. 7 Tarthang Tulku teaching in Berkeley — Photo from the Digital Tibetan Buddhist Altar (http://tibetanaltar.blogspot.com/2009/09/tarthang-rinpoches-perfection-of.html)

2.5 A New Valley: Nyingma in America

When Tarthang Tulku arrived in California in 1969 he would have been confronted with a population already quite taken with Buddhism — Zen teachers in particular had carved out a sizeable foothold for themselves in San Francisco and the surrounding areas (Fields 1992). Meditation centers, temples, and Buddhist centres were flowering across America with a sizeable concentration of blooms in the West coast state. The charismatic and energetic Tulku set about collecting followers to him, by all accounts a magnetic teacher in spite of his relatively limited English. Tarthang Tulku, though, had plans beyond leading meditation classes, and the urgency that had kindled his printing project in Varanasi had only grown. It would not be long before Dharma Mudranalaya, the printing operation, sprang back to life with renewed vigor. The Tulku's work in California though, as I will show, is a multifaceted project that draws together the aforementioned themes of proliferation, protection, and creativity. Through his careful ministrations, and with the help of his students, the California landscape is transformed into one made ripe for the production of sacred texts, but also a site

worthy of continuity with the Nyingma tradition of caches of sacred material, fortified against threat and endangerment.

As I suggested in my introductory chapter, Tarthang Tulku's name appears in several survey-style texts about American Buddhism where he is generally credited with the introduction of Nyingma Buddhism to America. Little else is said, except perhaps to mention the names of one or two of his organisations and the book-printing work, perhaps even his determined introduction of the *Vajra Guru* Mantra[17] to America. Rick Fields' brief description of the budding community, while recognisably Nyingma, is markedly different than the community with which I spent a year and a half. Fields describes a community, and a leader, with an unwavering focus on the centrality of meditation — specifically seated meditation — undertaken in four-hour long classes led by the Tulku. Critical also were the practices of prostrations and chanting, the former in particular being a notable preliminary act in Nyingma practice before embarking on the *Vajrayana* way; typically 100,000 prostrations were expected before such an initiation (Fields 1992). Also notable are the claims that his students all made a study of Tibetan language — and some even began to work on translations with their teacher (Ibid; 38). As we shall see, the community's approach to Tibetan language training and Tarthang Tulku's own approach to translation have changed markedly since this description.

Amy Lavine's chapter too, in "The Faces of Buddhism in America" places this, the first American Vajrayana community, in a position of complementary opposition to the rather bookish Gelugpa and Sakyapa, characterised again by their focus on meditation. She too references the preliminary practice of prostrations that Tarthang Tulku's students set about as a prelude to tantric training. Generally, Tarthang Tulku's Nyingma contribution to American Buddhism, in Lavine's estimation, lay in the fact that "Kagyu and Nyingma Lamas focus more of their teaching on meditation instruction and tantric initiations so as to introduce a new generation of students into the complex rituals of their heritage" (Lavine 1998; 114).

[17] The mantra — *oṃ āḥ hūṃ vajra guru padma siddhi hūṃ* — is a particular fixture of ritual life in this community, chanted daily in many of its branches. This mantra is particularly affiliated with the beloved Nyingma guru Padmasambhava, and is meant to invoke Guru Rinpoche's blessing (Sogyal Rinpoche 1990).

These accounts nestled into survey works of American Buddhism and largely focused on the community's early days, give an impression perfectly consonant with the authors' more general conclusions about Nyingma Buddhism, and American Buddhism more broadly. First, that Nyingma simply is meditation focused and must be so in order to be Nyingma. Second, that American Buddhists primarily view Buddhism as a "do-it-yourself" religion. Americans want to practice themselves, Fields argues, and spare little thought for the accumulation of merit or the support of the monastic community in perhaps a more traditional lay-Buddhist role (Fields 1992). While I do not contest the appearance of these features of Nyingma practice in Tarthang Tulku's early years of teaching Americans, a more in-depth and diachronic exploration of Nyingma practice in this community troubles this assessment quite profoundly.

The image of Tarthang Tulku's community painted by both Lavine's and Fields' accounts is one of a group of American students poised on the verge of tantric practice, making preparations to submerge themselves fully in this practice-based, meditation-focused tradition under the careful guidance of their "rangy" and "energetic" teacher. The future promised by this image, one of a Californian community of Dzogchen practitioners expert in prostrating and meditating, is certainly not the one realised by the present-day community. Rather, I was told repeatedly, laughingly, that Tarthang Tulku didn't believe Americans could properly do sitting meditation, nor did he seem to think it was particularly beneficial for them to attempt it. This attitude towards seated meditation is one fully accepted and reflected by the older students in Berkeley. I have mentioned already that there are meditation classes designed for the public that are made available to the volunteers, but there is no corresponding guided practice that is designed for or expected of volunteers, at least not in the sense of the now-ubiquitous sitting meditation.

There were a small handful of younger volunteers, myself included, who did feel inclined to instigate a daily practice of sitting meditation. We begged the use of a neglected storage room in one of the center's properties and enthusiastically set about gathering, magpie-like, the trinkets to furnish our space. Cushions and blankets pilfered from classrooms lined the floor, a dusty table from the attic of another building became our altar, lined with scraps of brocade fabric off-cuts from the prayer-flag sewing projects. Our proudest acquisition was the Buddha

statue, rather brazenly pinched from the lobby of the Tibetan Aid Project building by the boldest of our little cohort. Our respective directors at the different centers — all long-time students — observed this process with skeptical resignation. They did not outright refuse us, but made it quite clear they found this experiment to be of limited value. “But what does it actually do?” my director at the time asked me, “is it helpful for anything?” I prattled something about it being an effective way to prepare and focus the mind for the work day ahead. He simply shrugged and smiled indulgently. Our experiment fizzled within a few weeks.

Clearly, then, the taken-for-granted focus on meditation characterised as Nyingma here has not followed through — at least not with regard to the hours of sitting meditation that populate descriptions of Tarthang Tulku’s early community. What has persisted, however, is the practice-based and pragmatic flexibility in evidence already through this chapter. Further, I am not suggesting that the enthusiastic prostrating and meditating have gone and left a practice-vacuum in their place. Rather, Tarthang Tulku has changed his strategy, it seems. In place of these “traditional” practices has arisen an approach that is uniquely designed for this community, one that embodies all of the potential for creativity and pragmatism repeatedly associated with the Nyingma school, as well as the inexhaustible energy of their founder. This approach is most often summed up in the phrase “work as practice”.

Generally speaking work as practice is a philosophy (or perhaps more accurately a methodology) that invests practice completely and fully in the fulfillment of work. This arose, students tell me, largely as a result of Tarthang Tulku’s bemusement at being told over and over by Americans that they had no time to practice because they worked too much. These divisions, between “work time”, “practice time”, and “my time” seemed to Tarthang Tulku so artificial and unproductive that he set about excising them. Eventually, this project subsumed the Tulku’s approach to teaching his American students. If they could do away with these divisions, “work time” might also be “practice time” and “my time” — then how could one ever want for time to practice? Sitting meditation, with its careful bounded spaces, positions, and instructions did not prove the best tool for Tarthang Tulku’s American students, already prone to bracketing off their practice.

Tarthang Tulku's attitude towards translation, too, seems to have changed significantly by the time I arrived in Berkeley. Very few members of the community studied Tibetan language, and those that did were far more likely to have been a part of the community for many years. New volunteers rarely took up the practice, nor was this seen as an insurmountable barrier to participating in the creation of sacred texts and objects. The sponsorship of scholarly translations of Dzogchen texts in particular seemed to inspire conflict in TNMC's founder. During my time at Mangalam Research Center, perhaps the most scholarly-engaged community branch, a known scholar of translation who specialised in Dzogchen texts moved in to live at the center, ostensibly to act as a kind of academic in residence and pursue his translation work with ties to the center. His residence was, however, abruptly cut short within a few days of his arrival when he was asked to leave. It took several months of asking around before it was finally explained to me that Rinpoche had changed his mind (as he is wont to do). He did not feel, apparently, that the timing or the circumstances or both were right for the rendering of these precious, guarded texts into English. The exact reasoning is unclear, as it was not openly discussed especially with junior volunteers. What is evident, however, is that the practice of translation, especially as is pertains to these specific texts, is a source of anxiety and indecision.

This careful concealment of some work, however, is balanced by the effusive production of textual material that shapes, and indeed constitutes, the community's own approach to Nyingma practice. Work as practice, as we will see, comes to suffuse every facet of the making projects undertaken by this community, from printing to fundraising to distribution. It is a unique expression of long-established trends in Nyingma history, designed for this population by their Rinpoche. All of the tools and strategies he has developed for them — from his English books to Kum Nye Yoga — are predicated on the understanding that these students need different tools. Quite apart from being well-suited to their training needs, however, work as practice simultaneously, pragmatically, gives productive form to the air of urgency that surrounds Tarthang Tulku's approach to text-production. Their practice-infused work, which overflows the boundaries of "work time", becomes a powerful tool in fortifying the tradition against uncertain futures informed by destructive pasts.

Through work as practice, then, another familiar feature of the Tibetan Buddhist approach to holy books is facilitated — that is, the drawing of the past into the present in a manifestation of cyclic time that shapes temporal experience. The ongoing revitalisation of Buddhist culture since the Cultural Revolution is sometimes characterised as the "era of the further spread of the doctrine" (*bstan pa yang dar*), as opposed to the earlier spread (*bstan pa snga dar*) that saw the influx of the texts that would become the Nyingma canon, and the later spread (*bstan pa phyi dar*) after the 10th century, which constituted the basis for the orthodoxic Tibetan Buddhist texts (Diemberger 2012). This framing implicitly ties together the persecution of the Cultural Revolution with the oppression of Tibetan Buddhism through the "dark ages" under the rule of the much-maligned Lagdarma (*glang dar ma*) in the 9th century (Ibid).

Not only does this establishing of parallel narratives of threat recall past eras of destruction, it also implicitly calls upon the Nyingma strategies employed to successfully maintain the lineages through this period. The aforementioned treasure tradition, with its capacity for flexibility so crucial to the Nyingma resurgence and differentiation from the *gsar ma* schools, is a key part of this recall. The texts in this capacity take on a particular agentive role both as rescued and rescuers:

> "The rescued books not only were endowed with the power traditionally attributed to them as sacred objects and vessels of sacred teachings, they became empowered by the epics of concealment, survival and rediscovery. These echoed narratives about Buddhist teachings that were hidden during the imperial period to escape anti-Buddhist persecution and were revealed centuries later by treasure-revealers (*gter ston*)" (Diemberger 2012; 23).

It stands to reason, then, that there has been a renaissance of the treasure tradition in Tibet, particularly among the Nyingmapas, since the late 1970s (Germano 1998). The specifics of the Terma tradition, as Germano rightly points out, are critically embedded not just in the bodies of practitioners, but in the body of Tibet herself, the tradition has not seen the same revitalisation outside Tibet among diasporic communities (Ibid). Tarthang Tulku is not a Tertön, he has not pulled concealed texts from river beds and rocks. And yet, I will demonstrate over the course of the ensuing chapters, that many of the strategies, memories,

and hopes that undergird this tradition and its contemporary resurgence also inform the projects Tarthang Tulku and his students undertake in California.

While Tarthang Tulku has not drawn Tibetan texts from valleys, he does perhaps endeavor to put them there. In continuity with the Nyingma history of caching sacred material (especially in valleys) to fortify against threat and decline, Tarthang Tulku has invoked the full potential of the creative capacity of the Nyingma approach to his lineage. Alongside the work of proliferation and distribution, he has, in fact, discovered, shaped, and sanctified a new valley far from the reach of the PLA. In California, he and his students have spent decades now filling this carefully prepared space with sacred texts and forms; their caching activity will be one of the central foci of the next chapter. As the era of the further spread folds the temporal plane in on itself, it brings close not only past oppression both recent and distant, but invokes also imaginings of the Kali Yuga, the precipitous decline that must be fortified against. In the resultant, precarious present the Nyingma history of sustaining the lineage becomes acutely urgent, an effect that is invested in all facets of this community's work as practice.

2.6 Conclusion

What will be evident from this chapter, I hope, is the myriad ways in which the contemporary context of Tibetan Buddhism — and Nyingma Buddhism specifically — has creased and folded the temporal and spatial landscape around this community. Historical narratives of oppression fold themselves into a precarious present and uncertain future, calling to the fore the various tools in the Nyingma arsenal: the Tulkus with their capacity to store, spread, and bridge the lineage, and various practices of concealment alongside those of proliferation and spread.

In the face of a continued threat, often cast in the community as a potential extinction, Tarthang Tulku and his students must find a way to shape these tools and deploy them anew, confronted as they are with this landscape so far from the body of Tibet. In doing so they work to selectively choose, and sometimes struggle between, strategies of concealment and protection, and those of proliferation and spread.

I have also used this chapter in order to introduce not only the themes of Tarthang Tulku's life, but how these resonate with features of the history of his school, its pedagogy and its methods for preserving holy books. What results is the realisation that Tarthang Tulku — both as a teacher and as a Tulku — cuts a crucially important figure when it comes to safeguarding the knowledge traditions within which he has been educated. TNMC sources frequently describe Tarthang Tulku as one of the last Lamas to have received a comprehensive Tulku's education *within* Tibet. This characterisation lends gravity to their teacher, but also a yearning nostalgia and an undercurrent of warning that underscores their preservative efforts. The Tulku, in a very similar way to the sacred texts whose creation he sponsors, appears as both the threatened victim of extinction, as well as the potent tool for counteracting such threats, endowed as he is with the ability to proliferate his school's store of knowledge.

The very brief history of the Nyingmapa I have offered here — selective and incomplete in many ways though it may be — has been intended to sketch the outline of a continuous historical role played by Nyingma scholars, which Tarthang Tulku and his students have readily stepped into. That is, as figures who often occupy the fringes when it comes to sectarian debate and orthodox canon, and position themselves and their own textual tradition as ready repositories and defenders for maligned, discarded, and threatened sacred material. Certainly the community's frequent invocation, through their nomenclature for example, of figures such as Ratna Lingpa shores up my suggestion that they see themselves as heirs to a longstanding tradition of text-protection within the Nyingma school. It is not only this position that they draw forward from the history of their school, however, but also the range of strategies and methods credited to the Nyingma in pursuit of the persistence of their knowledge traditions — from the mobility and flexibility of their pedagogy, to the capacity for renewal that saturates the Terma tradition.

In taking up these methods and putting them to use in vastly different spaces, this network of organisations and those who populate it must navigate when such strategies, from secretive caching to rampant proliferation, ought to be deployed. Tarthang Tulku's own life offers context for these negotiations, and the tension or symphony between spread versus secrecy is refracted through this figure, emerging in the varied character of his organisations, students,

and training methods. It is to these organisations, students, and training methods that we now turn, and as we track the ways sacred texts and objects are treated and understood in the various community spaces, we add shading and colour to the work books and their makers must do to resolve tension between the strategies meant to preserve and promote them. We will begin, in the next chapter, with what is perhaps the most closed and secret space in this community: the Tulku's own residence often called the "spiritual heart" of the community. It is a place called Odiyan, the Copper Mountain Mandala.

Chapter Three
Secrecy and Enchantment: The Copper Mountain Mandala of Odiyan

Consider Odiyan: thirty years ago, in terms of the mandala, there was nothing here but empty space. Now the shapes and forms of temples and stupas, richly crafted, have come into being. We have found ways to express the perfection of our being, exercising our creativity while drawing on a profound heritage of art and history.

\- Tarthang Tulku, *Path of Action*

3.1 Introduction

In a cartographic sense, Odiyan Retreat Center unfolds over roughly 1,000 acres in the Cazadero community of Sonoma County, California. Its street address places Odiyan on the almost comically ubiquitous "Tin Barn Road". The name does little justice to this particular part of the Californian coast, where famous beaches give way to ominous cliffs of black rock and swelling thickly-wooded hills. The appendage "retreat center" fixed to Odiyan's name is somewhat misleading as the property is not open to retreatants, nor even most members of the Nyingma community who have helped to build and support it. It is almost always just called "Odiyan", but "retreat" perhaps denotes that this is the home of the community's founder and leader, Tarthang Tulku, who has seldom left the property in the last decade. Odiyan, though, is far more than a palatial residence for the Tulku. It is a physical manifestation of the community's dearest aspirations; for preservation of Tibetan sacred forms and nurturing the Dharma in America. Odiyan is a complicated and powerful part of the Tibetan Nyingma Meditation Center's (TNMC) legacy, and a rich meeting place of the community's successes and frictions, the development of its methods, and its deployment of secrecy as a strategy for preservation of the sacred.

The process of Odiyan's construction and consecration was a powerful and formative part of TNMC history and remains a rather enigmatic feature of its present landscape. In spite of its centrality, for most members of the TNMC community Odiyan will remain physically inaccessible and remote while being rhetorically brought close through the stories of Odiyan that are told so often within the community. Both the building of this site and the retelling of its stories are a part of a critical process of transforming the landscape this community inhabits, rendering it sacred (or perhaps revealing its sanctity) and, as such, generating an appropriate place for sacred work and practice.

The focus on landscape and its transformation acquires distinct significance when considered through the lens of the centrality of topography to secretive and preservative Nyingma practices, as well as its contemporary revitalisation that is equally invested in landscape. While such practices have enjoyed a recent revival, especially in the Eastern regions of Chinese Tibet (the cradle of the Nyingmapas) they earn less traction outside the region, severed as they are from the body of Tibet within which its secrets are protectively invested (Germano 1998). However, an investigation of Odiyan will evidence how, even in this distant Californian terrain, secrecy as a tactic for preservation of the sacred is not only still available, but still deeply imbricated with landscape. Such unfamiliar topography, though, must first be prepared in order to function both as an acceptable container for the caching of sacred materials, as well a fitting place for their creation. Central to this endeavor is a set of strategies that rely upon the invocation of the body and history of Tibet in all her puissance and spiritual legitimacy. Odiyan bears significant weight in this project and through its impression upon the terrain, via such time-honoured tools as the mandala, the enchanted potential of this landscape is revealed and harnessed.

Likewise, this process of recasting California's topography entails a change in the way volunteers understand their surrounding terrain, as through their work they come to recognise its enchanted and enchanting capacities. As the natural elements in their surroundings are reconstituted, so too are the perspectives of the volunteers. Such an approach to space and landscape necessarily owes debts to anthropological developments that have seen a shift in understanding from space as an abstract container in which agents act to space as a medium that is entangled in action and meaning-making processes (Tilley 1994). It will become rapidly clear that the cartographic orientation I offered in opening this chapter is woefully insufficient. Understanding Odiyan and its position requires a flexible, relational understanding of space that treat it as origami-like (Doel 1999) where — through the interactions between people, places, and things — space is creased, folded, manipulated, and massaged, unsettling cartographic understandings of near and far, of center and periphery (Massey 2005). Nor are topography and landscape used interchangeably here. Topography, the patchwork composition of rocks, mountains, rivers, trees, valleys and so on, offers the canvas on to which landscape is projected (Ramble 2017). Thus, in large part, this chapter recounts the process of impressing a landscape over topography.

Odiyan's role as both enchanted and enchanting is bound up in its operation on various levels of space and place. In the ensuing sections I will endeavor to draw these layers apart to facilitate a closer look at the spatial and transformative dimensions of this central place that is Odiyan. I will begin with the most immediate and perhaps flattest dimension of Odiyan's spatiality, that is, its physical raising through the labour of its volunteers. It is through this labour that the enchantment of the landscape begins to be revealed to its makers. Then, through the potent use of Tibetan Buddhist tools — most centrally the mandala — this spatial plane is creased, folded, and re-conceptualised, bridging the gap between the body of Tibet and this Sonoma terrain and enchanting the very layout of this community's organisations. Finally, into the fissures of this creased and folded plane, the sacred forms of Tibetan Buddhism are invested with a view to their preservation and protection, calling on the strategies of secrecy familiar to Nyingmapa history and bringing them to bear on this new landscape.

3.2 Raising Odiyan: Work as Practice and its Fruits

The property on which Odiyan now stands was purchased in 1975 by the Head Lama of Tibetan Nyingmapa Meditation Center — the non-profit corporation sole and church at the center of this group of practitioners. It was bought[18] from one of the original Sonoma European settler families. In the early years before construction had finished, the property enjoyed visits from H.H. Dudjom Rinpoche (*bdud 'joms 'jigs bral ye shes rdo rje*) and H.H. Dilgo Khyentse Rinpoche (*dil mgo mkhyen brtse*), two prominent emissaries of the Nyingma school and an important gesture of recognition of Odiyan as an outpost of the lineage. While the initial process of consecrating the land is somewhat shrouded — as one student told me "Lamas don't usually advertise this [process]" — it almost certainly involved at least the burying of sacred substances and the erection of sacred flags, according to one of my directors in Berkeley. However, as we shall see the process of sanctifying Odiyan's space has certainly not been limited to those early activities, but persists in ways that bear an important shaping effect on this community and its surroundings.

[18] Likely (based on hearsay, as I have not been able to secure a precise accounting) the necessary funds came from particularly affluent individual student donors, perhaps supplemented by some funds more broadly raised by the community's fundraising projects.

In the course of my year and a half with TNMC the closest I would ever bodily get to Odiyan was a vantage point behind another of TNMC's properties. If you stand on the ridge behind Ratna Ling's bindery on a clear day and look out across the treescape, you might catch the glancing of sunlight off bright metal from the opposing ridge. This is the golden roof of Odiyan's Cintamani temple, just visible across the valley. But before I ever spied Cintamani's shape in the sun I had a good sense of Odiyan's layout and architecture. That is because the other branches of the community around California are nearly wallpapered with its photos — huge aerial shots of the property, images of its buildings, the grounds, close-up shots of the flowers and trees. The component of Odiyan life conspicuously missing from these photos is people. Not a single one that I saw betrayed the presence of human inhabitants at Odiyan. I suspect this was a conscious choice to display only nature and architecture and was meant to offer an unobscured picture of the sacred forms carefully built into Odiyan's every shape.

Fig. 8 The view of Odiyan from Ratna Ling — the silhouette of Cintamani temple is just visible at the horizon on the far right. Photo taken by the author.

It is not only the photos that spoke so commandingly of Odiyan's presence. The retreat center featured too, with undeniable regularity, in the stories told by volunteers with any kind of longevity in the organisations. Thus, my ethnography here is densely populated even while the photos of Odiyan are not. Many of their stories are entangled, not just with the

preservative, curative, and transformative power of Odiyan — all of which will be treated in due course — but with the very physical process of raising Odiyan. While there are many aspects of Odiyan that are highly guarded, the *labour* that brought it into being offers access to even these neophyte volunteers in a way that will a recurrent theme in other chapters.

Yi-Fu Tuan draws a distinction between space and place in the context of religious geography, conceptualising their difference as entangled with a hierarchical gulf between the elite and ordinary observers. The elite, Tuan claims, are concerned with space in all its implied cosmic order, while ordinary folk are preoccupied with the more immediate and capricious place that must be placated (Tuan 2010). Odiyan readily embodies both space and place in Tuan's conceptualisation, but in this section I begin with its more place-like dimensions. By this I mean the immediate and physical realities of its construction against an unpredictable Sonoma backdrop. Tuan's identification of this plane with the ordinary, as opposed to the elite, will be born out too, though only in a limited sense. For although Odiyan represents one of the most secret and guarded spaces of the community, those typically excluded from it gain access through the very labour and materials that make it up. However, through the very construction and recognition of Odiyan as a place, volunteers are gradually coaxed to recognise Odiyan and its surroundings in the more cosmic sense Tuan associated with space. The implied equivalence, therefore, between Tuan's elite versus ordinary and TNMC's leadership versus average volunteers is only a partial fit. Tuan's distinction, though, is still useful, as the volunteers' exclusion from Odiyan's more secret space-like dimensions is both justified by and juxtaposed against their involvement with Odiyan as a *place*, specifically by way of their labour.

Tarthang Tulku's Odiyan is named for the semi-mythic land of *Uddiyana* (Orgyen, *U rgyan,* in Tibetan) all but unanimously understood as the originating realm for the Nyingmapas' most cherished Guru Rinpoche, Padmasambhava (Huber 2008) as well as much of their "esoteric canon" (Davidson 2002). Earthly and otherworldly geography lean into one another in the sources surrounding *Uddiyana*. Some accounts place it firmly in the physical world; there is much debate over precisely where it is located, but nominations include Orissa, Bengal, South India, or perhaps the most popular suggestion, the Swat Valley (Davidson 2002, Sanderson 2007). Other sources, especially Nyingma ones, emphasise its mythic facet

as the residence of Padmasambhava and his retinue (Davidson 2002), including hosts of dakinis for example (Bogin 2014).

Fig. 9 Aerial shot of the property at Odiyan. Uploaded to Google Maps by Stephen Rodas.

Both of these features of Odiyan's nomenclature — its invocation of Padmasambhava and his associated secret tantras and its position *outside* Tibet — are centrally important to the roles Odiyan fulfils in the community's work. It is best to start, however, as the structure itself started, rising brick by brick out of the rolling Sonoma hills. Odiyan's construction began in the mid-seventies and has continued at a steady march since then. Its main temple and surrounding structure (usually referred to as the "rim structure") were completed around the mid-eighties, but further bouts of construction saw the appearance of gardens, lakes, stupas, and other temples. Even now, I am told, it is rare for Odiyan's residents to be without a construction project. The magnitude of this work has changed somewhat, and the production of huge Bodhisattva statues and the raising of temples has given over to the creation of smaller figures and more modest stupas.

In the short decades since the building of the rim structure, the process has been elevated to something approaching mythic status. Building Odiyan represented one of the early rallying points in the TNMC timeline, and the resultant push to bring in new volunteers to contribute labour meant that Odiyan was the entry point for many volunteers still with the community

today. During the stretch of my fieldwork in India I spent a great deal of time talking to Harvey, a salt-and-pepper goateed veteran of the book distribution who, in deference to his troublesome knees, carried a foldable stool around Bodh Gaya upon which he would teeter rather precariously as we chatted. We spoke often about Odiyan and in once such conversation Harvey recounted the process of building the property's largest stupa. At Tarthang Tulku's direction, the community leadership reached out to old students or potential new volunteers, seeking their help in raising the enormous structure. They answered the call by the dozens, Harvey among them. Harvey estimated around 150 made their way to Odiyan's campus and were somehow fed and housed by its modest kitchens and accommodations (a feat not to be understated). The stupa, he told me, was raised "in the blink of an eye". It is called the Enlightenment Stupa: it stands 113 feet high and was built in 1980 in the space of three months.

My intrepid Tibetan teacher was also one of those who worked at Odiyan, though he was already a consistent feature of the Berkeley branch Nyingma Institute before he was shepherded in to the workforce at Odiyan. In our interview he told me about the moment he was invited to go work at the Sonoma property:

> "As is very much part of Tarthang Rinpoche's tradition there is a lot of work activity and one day I was putting in some of these creosote beams that you see here in the back garden and he [Tarthang Tulku] comes strolling out and says, 'I would like you to come to Odiyan'. And that moment was again a very special moment just like that first moment of meeting him. But it had a much more sort of luminous and blissful quality, it was just like, oh, wow, this is really wonderful. And so I said sure!" (Interview 25/8/2016)

Note in particular from this account not only the reverence with which Tarthang Tulku and Odiyan are spoken about, but that the very experience and retelling of this interaction are couched in work. This is typical of Odiyan and the stories that surround it — rarely are they recounted without being anchored to a particular kind of labor or construction project. Stories about Odiyan are temporally marked by phases of construction ("This was around the time the rim structure was completed…" "Just before Cintamani was empowered….") or else personally marked by the particular job an individual was charged with ("At that time I was working in the foundry…." "I remember we were sewing a new set of prayer flags…").

The stories from those who poured their effort into Odiyan's building offer a touchstone for the monumental possibilities available through commitment to work as practice. The tangible, visible results of such labour are gradually mythologised in a corpus of stories very similar to those above, which are often used to cajole, inspire, rebuke, or teach volunteers across the other organisations. In addition to this, however, it also evidences the exceptions to secrecy and restriction that are structured through labour. In spite of its restricted access, when the need to build the stupa arose, for example, even those peripheral contacts were called upon and traipsed to its sacred grounds.

Herein lies the juxtaposition that gives rise both to Odiyan's accomplishments and the tension that can accrue at its borders. Stories of the gruelling work and triumphant success in the building of Odiyan often invoke a kind of Durkheimian collective effervescence (Durkheim 1912) that sees the unification of their group through the successful raising of Odiyan. Indeed, Odiyan as well as many of the community's other triumphs, rely upon the assembly of such collectives and their freely given and considerable labour. Smyer Yü identifies such expressions of collective effervescence as both routine in Tibetan consciousness, and also centered on the persons of charismatic Lamas, especially Tulkus (Smyer Yü 2012). Such collective expressions are perhaps not yet equally routinised with regard to Tulkus and their American students, and therefore tension can result when this effervescent, collective energy that raised Odiyan abruptly gives over to carefully guarded hierarchical access. The confrontation between the strategies of secrecy and protection, which suffuse some parts of the community, and the collective and communal verve that is relied upon to bring such spaces into existence is an encounter volunteers must attempt to manage with varying degrees of success.

My friend Felix was deeply involved in the construction of Cintamani temple and spent long months pouring concrete, casting bronze, or engaged in other construction work. His access to the site, however, ended abruptly when the temple was empowered by Tarthang Tulku. Felix was not among the handful of Odiyan residents permitted to enter the temple following this ceremony. I asked him whether he had felt put out by this sudden restriction, which would, I thought, have been understandable given his role in raising the very bones of the structure. His reply was the gentlest of rebukes and an acute sense of understanding about

his own deficiencies. I will indulge, here, in a lengthy excerpt from that reply, which I find strikingly illustrative:

> "Um... it's hard to say [if I was upset]. When I first got there I was very naive. I was typical of my social strata coming from a liberal place, an educated background — there's an arrogance there. So when I first got there you couldn't go to certain places on the land, you couldn't go to the stupa, there weren't too many rules but there were some. And I remember, you know, you had to be introduced to the stupa and it was like two months before you could go over there and you could only go over there initially with somebody to show you. And at first I was really like, well that's not cool, what do you mean? This is America, I can go wherever I want!
>
> ...If you come to something like that with your own ideas and you don't have any background... I literally knew nothing about it. So I was going to walk up to the stupa on my own and make of it whatever I could dream up, or bounce it off whatever reflections in my past that could resemble anything like that. But it's really an alien thing to the culture, it doesn't exist. So what was I going to do with that except mess it up? In terms of like, what it's supposed to symbolise and the symbolic significance of it, it's been passed down for thousands of years now. So I was going to mess that up!
>
> So it was really good that I was introduced to it and I kind of learned a little bit there. It was like, okay, there is a reason to keep things in a sense secret or hidden until the right time until it's appropriate and done well and it's respectful too, for both people. Because you know it could be dangerous in some circumstances for you to take something in that you might misconstrue. We're actually extremely sensitive beings, interior wise, so that could be particularly harmful". (Interview 17/9/2016)

Starkly evident in this passage from Felix is an acute sense of his own shortcomings and even the possible threat *he* might pose to these sacred objects, not to mention the harm they might cause him. This is a narrative often communicated to new volunteers to explain their exclusion from various practices and spaces on an everyday level, but also on a grander scale to contextualise the community's general deferment of its own spiritual training in favor of fortifying the Tibetan lineage holders. This theme of secrecy and protection not only as a bid for preservation but also to protect these vulnerable neophytes is one I will pick up again in the next chapter regarding sacred text production.

The capriciousness and changeability surrounding Odiyan are a feature of more than its layers of accessibility. The very structure, its materials, and design are all saturated with its

driving concerns for preservation and fortification. This is most poignantly manifest in a staggering feature of Odiyan's architecture: in deference to a region known for its earthquake-related precarity, Odiyan's core structure has been built upon rubber pads. These function as base isolators, which would allow the massive ornate structures of steel, bronze, and concrete to weather an earthquake of significant magnitude: "the whole thing could shake and come back to within like a quarter inch of where it was" one worker told me. This impressive feat of design and engineering fulfills Tarthang Tulku's adamant instruction that Odiyan should be able to survive for 1,000 years. Calling to mind again the fact that much of this work was and is done by volunteers with little to no previous experience in construction and one begins to see how such a feat would inspire long-lived commitment to this teacher and his methods in the hearts of those who were a part of this project.

The imagination of precarity and destruction that saturates the core structures at Odiyan bears out Tuan's characterisation of place (as opposed to space) as unpredictable, needing subjugation or placation. More than this though, the physical construction of this earthquake ready palatial cache of sacred forms — and the stories told about it — establish a connection between work (as practice) and preservation or fortification against threat. Further, the process of manual creation, through which this connection is impressed upon volunteers, allows for an acute, affective sense of the precarious position of Tibetan Buddhism's material and intellectual contents, which this community endeavors to impress upon its workers. In the coming chapters I will outline in greater detail how these threats rendered tangible draw volunteers into temporalities of prophetic destruction that tie their work to a larger narrative of Tibetan Buddhist history. The very characterisation of Odiyan's surrounding terrain as pregnant with threatening forces establishes a narrative connection to Tibet's own landscape — understood as riddled with demons to be subjugated in order to make way for the establishment of its first monastery (Dalton 2011) — which I will explore presently. For the moment though, I want to emphasise how, through Odiyan we find an example of the way an uncertain, threatening future is rendered tangible and immediate, impressed bodily upon volunteers through work while at the same time rendered actionable via the fortifying tools offered by sacred Tibetan Buddhist forms as well as through their labour.

While the darker side of unpredictability may be capriciousness, its lighter facet is the spontaneous, almost miraculous, experiences that many who have worked at Odiyan report. In my interview with my Tibetan teacher, Joseph explained this magical facet of working at Odiyan thus:

> "There's a lot of mysticism or mystical experience that Odiyan evokes that is utterly inexplicable rationally or in anything. I mean it is a very magical realm, extraordinarily magical. Just by its architecture and presence and the spiritual empowerments that have been placed there, prayer wheels and prayer flags, empowered objects, and of course Rinpoche's continued presence and influence, it creates a field for the spontaneous emergence of spiritual experience without any particular effort on the part of the student or the practitioner. Things just happen in an off moment". (Interview 25/8/2016)

Descriptions like this one, as well as the stories of monumental labour projects that met with miraculous and seemingly impossible success, evidence the role Odiyan plays in revealing the enchantment of their surroundings to TNMC volunteers.

The construction of Odiyan is a crucial focal point in the history and story arc of TNMC. In that crucible the relationships between those who participated — to each other and to their Lama — were forged, resulting in a model that is continually invoked through stories across the organisations. They worked harder and faster than they ever knew to be possible and they watched the fruits of that labor rise up in front of them in the form of Odiyan, the Copper Mountain Mandala. In terms of the TNMC timeline this would have been one of the first real, profound, and tangible illustrations of the viability of work as practice. What is also clear in these retellings of Odiyan's founding, together with contemporary stories, is that for Tarthang Tulku's students labor has long been their principal route of access to even the more secret and protected spaces and objects of their own community and their avenue for discovering its spatial and temporal terrain. Still, access granted through the ubiquitous work as practice is never permitted to render mundane either the process or products of this labor, as we shall see, nor does it lend itself to complete access but finds the volunteers regularly encountering secret and protected places from which they are guarded. The collective effervescence that is recounted, encouraged, and relied upon, is harnessed in order to construct highly protected and sometimes secretive spaces in an encounter that is both Odiyan's strength and its most potentially tenuous aspect.

3.3 Odiyan as Mandala: Transformed and Transformative

In raising these sacred structures and populating them with potent forms, volunteers have accumulated a corpus of stories that inform their guiding methodology of work as practice. In this way the experience of constructing Odiyan is stretched beyond those who physically attended to it, reaching even those who will never set foot on its property. So too does this laborious engagement with Odiyan offer insight to, as well as justification for, the more secretive parts of their founder's operation. The qualities are indeed relied upon in order to cultivate the flexible and fluid ideal of work as practice that the leadership hopes to engender, toward which stories of Odiyan are consistently levied. *Through* this work, however, the enchanting and enchanted qualities of Odiyan are revealed to volunteers and its space-like dimensions become apparent as this property is drawn into a wider cosmology. It is to this orientation — in relation to Tibet and to the rest of Tarthang Tulku's organisations — that I now turn in order to elucidate the folding influence Odiyan exerts over the spatial and temporal landscape. Through specific features of its construction and nomenclature, for example, distant eras, figures, and sites are invoked in order to lend their potent and transformative influence to Odiyan's and Tarthang Tulku's endeavor to foster both a protective cache for the Tibetan Buddhist sacred and a trellis against which an American Tibetan sangha might grow.

Given the secrecy evident in Odiyan's construction and functioning, it may come as no surprise that the frequent designation of "monastic" attributed to Odiyan sits strangely for many, just as strangely as its titular designation as a "retreat center". Indeed, in spite of the recognisable strategies from Tibetan Nyingma Buddhism's past and present that are deployed through Odiyan, the (even partial) restriction of such a large space is unusual. While Odiyan is not entirely closed, to become a resident does require an application process and a six-month minimum work commitment. Extremely high work standards and relative isolation of Odiyan's community contribute to a small and self-selecting group of individuals that reside there. Casual or recreational visits for the public or even other community members are prohibited, though Odiyan has held an "open day" roughly once every ten years since its initial completion (the novelty of which inspired a New York Times article in the mid-nineties (Steinfels 1996)).

Fig. 10 The Copper Mountain Temple at Odiyan. Photo from Odiyan's website (http://odiyan.org/index.php/about/).

It is possible, and indeed seems likely, that this unprecedented level of protection is due to the same anxieties Felix relayed about the ill-preparedness of the volunteers and the potential repercussions for both the manifestations of the sacred and the volunteers themselves. However, while Odiyan may not sit comfortably within a pervasive impression of the warmth and hospitality of the Tibetan monastic tradition, there is another critical role played by monasteries upon which score Odiyan excels in its duties. That is, the role of the monastery as a primary locus for the preservation and perpetuation of Tibetan Buddhist culture, both material and intellectual (Lopez 1988). Not only as centers for the ordination and training of monastics, but also as large-scale producers and collectors of sacred art, relics, and other objects, monasteries act as a lynchpin in the maintenance of the store of Tibetan Buddhist knowledge and practice. By this metric, Odiyan has earned its characterisation as monastic several times over. The creation of Tibetan Buddhist art, statues, buildings, and texts offered a powerful and enduring way to preserve these forms[19], and one that Tarthang Tulku's organisations have embraced fully. Much of this work is undertaken at Odiyan, and sacred objects created elsewhere in Tarthang Tulku's network are often designed specifically to reside at the sweeping Sonoma retreat. Such work renders Odiyan a veritable cache of Tibetan Buddhist forms, tucked away in the Northern California mountains and valleys.

[19] Wen-Shing Chou has also demonstrated how the commissioning and design of art objects (images in particular) served as an effective tool for the 13th Dalai Lama to exercise spiritual and temporal authority amid shifting geopolitical terrain (Chou 2014). In other words, Buddhist art offers an avenue through which the Buddhist universe may be re-imagined or re-constituted in an act that is at once preservative and innovative.

But Odiyan is not simply a passive repository for Buddhist relics. Rather, the very accumulation of such objects within this carefully designed space renders Odiyan a powerful agent that exerts its influence over the people and land that surround it. From its early days the work of Tarthang Tulku and his students in America contained a significant component of transforming space, bound up in the necessity of preparing the correct conditions to foster such a community and the difficulties inherent in doing so away from the Tibetan landscape that nurtured Nyingma teachings through periods of threat and destruction. Sacred forms, elements, and art are critical tools in this process of "preparing the ground" and Odiyan is a particularly large-scale instance of the way this community engages in a mutually-transformative process with the spaces they inhabit.

The sorts of objects in ready supply at Odiyan have long been used in missionary pursuit by those who would propagate Tibetan Buddhism (Huber 2008). Stupas, for example, which are in abundant evidence at Odiyan, do more than passively mark pilgrimage routes but rather bear a part of the load in terms of sanctifying the landscape itself (Bentor 1996, Farkas and Farkas 2009, Germano 1998, Huber 2008, Tucci 1932). I will treat such objects and the innovative functions they fulfil here in more detail in chapter five, but what is salient for the moment is the clear and deep entanglement of the sanctification and transformation of landscape with the spread of Tibetan Buddhism.

It is difficult to overstate the cultural salience of landscape, and mountains in particular, in Tibet (Huber 1999). In a landscape whose many peaks, valleys and lakes are pregnant with an array of spiritual or demonic presences, both traveling though and exercising agency over landscape become critically charged capacities. Indeed, the ability to marshall such presences to the service and defense of Buddhism has been a central element of its spread through Tibet and surrounding areas (Huber 1999, Smyer Yü 2012). In particular I wish to emphasise, following the influence of Toni Huber, the *shifting* quality of sacred Buddhist terrain; a diachronic investigation of pilgrimage sites and practices, for example, reveals that even sites with considerable longevity are a part of the ebb and flow of this (often strategic) shifting of sacred landmarks (Huber 2008). I take up Huber's consequent recommendation to investigate more deeply the figures and mechanisms that do the heavy lifting when it comes to this flexible terrain (Ibid; 16-17). It is this kind of ready shifting already latent in the Tibetan

Buddhist landscape, which Tarthang Tulku makes good use of in his formulation of Odiyan, utilising its full elasticity to bring the cradle of Nyingma history and practice closer to this cartographically remote valley.

There is a dimension of this topophilia (Tuan 1974), however, with particular ramifications for Tarthang Tulku as a Nyingma Tulku. Dan Smyer Yü has written convincingly on the centrality of charismatic Nyingma Lamas — especially Tulkus — to Nyingma revival in recent decades and their specific, indispensable relationship to landscape. This aforementioned richly populated Tibetan landscape has led Smyer Yü to term Tibet's topography as possessing a "territorial charisma" reliant on its humanised and animated aspects and that, when channeled by capable human agents, reinforces the charisma of the Lama or Tulku. Nyingma Tulkus and their charisma, Smyer Yü argues, are often deeply connected to and draw support from the landscapes upon which their communities are situated (Smyer Yü 2012).

While Smyer Yü also identifies the globalising aspects of recent Nyingma revival, he deploys this largely in reference to the spread of Tibetan Buddhism to adjacent territories, the centrality of landscape therein, and the pervasiveness of pilgrimage to these Nyingma Tulkus embedded in their animated Tibetan landscapes. What I suggest here is that many of these themes are identifiable in the colonisation of terrain Tarthang Tulku has perpetrated via Odiyan, stretched as they are across far greater distances than Smyer Yü has addressed. And yet, Tarthang Tulku has been confronted with a landscape whose charisma and animacy were not a given before his arrival, which therefore required a revealing of its puissance before it could be subdued and subjected to the Tulku's aims (for example, via the persistent re-casting of the threat of earthquakes). Even so, the anxious secrecy that pervades the raising of such a space in California means that Odiyan has not become the kind of pilgrimage site Smyer Yü identifies as the charisma-enhancing seat of the contemporary Nyingma Tulku. Thus, while the potency of landscape does not appear to travel from Tibet to California wholly and intact in service of the Tulku, there remains enough of this symbiosis between Tulku and topography to sufficiently enchant Tarthang Tulku's American network, shoring up its sacred work and drawing it into a wider Tibetan Buddhist cosmology.

In order to do so, this community must avail itself of one of the most potent tools bent towards the enchantment and subjugation of landscape through Buddhist history; the mandala. The mandala, might here be sufficiently summed up in Huber's description of it as a "hierarchical and spatial organising principle" (Huber 1999; 26). The mandala's Tibetan name *dkyil 'khor* contains the two key elements that make it up: concentric circles (*'khor*) and squares (*dkyil*) (Brauen 2009). The resultant design might be made up of a range of different materials from coloured powder to geographic elements, and might be levied toward the organisation of a staggering range of things from city archetypes, palace floorplans, resource networks, policy design or, more commonly, the human body and the cosmos and their interpenetration via the mandala (Huber 1999, Tucci 1961, Brauen 2009).

For my purposes there are two aspects of the mandala of central concern: first, the mandala as a key player in the spread of Tibetan Buddhism (Macdonald 1997) via what is sometimes referred to as the "mandalization" of a landscape (Huber 1999), and second the mandala as a poignant distillation of the tension between secrecy and spread with regard to sacred forms and teachings. The importance of the mandala in the subjugation of the Tibetan landscape is perhaps most memorably demonstrated in the narrative of the *Pillar Testament (bka' chems ka khol ma)*, which describes the body of Tibet itself as a supine demoness who must be subdued through the imposition of a series of temples and stupas arranged in a mandala over her terrain (Dalton 2011). The location of key Tibetan monasteries more generally are often chosen according to mandala-like characteristics in the landscape — for example, the particular location of mountains, lakes, or rivers (Xu 2010) — allowing for its physical and corporeal impression over the topography.[20] This move has been a central one in drawing the already animate and powerful Tibetan landscape under Buddhist dominion, putting its previous occupants to work as defenders of either Buddhism more broadly, or of the particular *gter ma* secreted away in their abodes (Smyer Yü 2012, Huber 1999).

With regard to the second point, the mandala and its use offer an illustrative instance of the anxiety that still suffuses the distribution of sacred secrets. While there are myriad types of

[20] The critical placement of sacred forms and temples in the pursuit of "converting" a landscape is also reflected in the Mani Kabum (*mani bka' 'bum*) the legendary account that details King Songsten Gampo's (*srong btsan sgam po*) exploits, in particular his founding of the Buddhadharma in Tibet (Kapstein 2013).

mandala of varying degrees of secrecy, often the creation of mandalas (whether physical or through visualisation practices) is a highly guarded practice opened only to students deemed prepared by their teachers (Brauen 2009, Tucci 1961). And yet the stunning visuals of many forms of mandala practice have captivated observers for decades and has prompted the proliferation of much misunderstanding. H.H, the Dalai Lama has written a foreword to Martin Brauen's visually striking volume on the mandala — in it he explains that while most mandalas are intended to be kept secret he has judged that the availability of misleading information on this practice is presently more dangerous than a partial lifting of the veil of secrecy, and he has therefore sanctioned further writing on the topic (H.H. the XIV Dalai Lama 2009). This is an acute contemporary iteration of the tension between secrecy and spread that I have been addressing. But the intended or idealised secrecy of the mandala also helps, perhaps, to further understand Odiyan's restrictiveness — for it is, as we shall see, a mandala in more ways than one.

Odiyan's embodiment of the type of mandala I have described comes most immediately from its very layout. The property, its natural and man-made features, have been selected and structured using the storied Samye (*bsam yas*) monastery as guiding model. Samye, raised in 779 CE, was Tibet's first Buddhist monastery and its construction went hand in hand with the other landmark moment for Tibetan Buddhism; the ordination of its first monks (Lopez 1988, Farkas and Farkas 2009). These two events, pillars for the arising of Tibet's Buddhism, were both presided over by Padmasambhava, the Indian tantric master by now familiar to readers and especially beloved of the Nyingmapas. The invocation of Tibet's first monastery in the construction of Odiyan is bluntly poignant — it establishes a symmetry that casts American soil as the new realm to be subdued and prepared for the introduction of Buddhism. Accounts of the building of Samye detail how the local deities, abhorring the introduction of this new religious system, dismantled each night the work that had been accomplished during the day. Padmasambhava is credited with a leading role in the process of placating the disruptive local spirits, relegating them to peripheral roles in the Buddhist mandala and there are many sites across Tibet recognised as places where he performed such subjugations (Dalton 2011).[21]

[21] Dalton's characterisation of Padmasambhava as Tibet's "demon tamer *par excellence*" (Dalton 2011; 66) and central figure in the narrative of Tibet's conversion to Buddhism is based on several textual sources, including but not limited to 'Copper Island' the biography of Padmasambhava by Nyangrel Nyima Özer (1124-1192) and the Dunhuang manuscript Pelliot Tibétain 307 (Dalton 2011; 68). This image of Padmasambhava is contested

Through the invocation of Samye, Padmasambhava takes up this role as subjugator wielding the form of the mandala alongside his position safeguarding and revealing the secrets of Tibetan Buddhism.

Fig. 11 Aerial photograph of Odiyan's property. From the Center for Land Use Interpretation website. (http://www.clui.org/newsletter/spring-2003/sonoma-county)

At the heart of Odiyan's mandala is the Copper Mountain Temple, about which Odiyan's website says this: "More than a building, more than a symbol, it contains in its structure and contents the seeds for comprehending the whole of the Buddhadharma" (Copper Mountain Temple, accessed 2017). There are three more sacred structures to the West, South, and East (Vajra temple, Cintamani temple, and Enlightenment Stupa, respectively). To the north — the direction of the "outpouring" of the mandala — is the Vairocana garden. Aside from these temples there are eighteen gardens, eight orchards, four man-made lakes, four vegetable gardens and 108 stupas that mark a pilgrimage route across the property (Sacred Land,

however, and the *dBa' bzhed* as well as other historical sources — especially from the Dynastic Period — feature scant mentions of this figure who looms so large in other tellings of Tibet's Buddhist conversion (Wangdu and Diemberger 2000). While I have not been able to delve thoroughly into the multiple contested facets of Padmasambhava here, pragmatically his characterisation as demon-tamer and subduer of landscapes is the one that is most salient and consequential for this community, as it is for many Nyingmapa.

Accessed 2017). Each detail of the property's construction has been carefully planned to represent or enunciate sacred forms.

Odiyan, though, does more than impress the mandala upon the Sonoma terrain rendering it Buddhist landscape, it is also a part of a larger mandala itself. The collective group of organisations founded by Tarthang Tulku are often illustrated, understood, and explained as forming a mandala together, thereby reinscribing the community's own form on its surroundings in a spatial way:

Fig. 12 Graphic of the Nyingma Mandala. From the Tibetan Aid Project website "Affiliated Organisations" page (http://www.tibetanaidproject.org/about-us/affiliated-organizations/91.html)

The graphic above is one that has existed in many different iterations through the community's lifespan and it gives an impression of the way the different organisations under TNMC's banner are mapped out in relation to one another. Not all of the organisations in the network are represented here, but these four are arguably the core components and some of the oldest branches. The North, in green, is the point of outpouring from the mandala — the path through which teachings are dispersed. In the TNMC mandala this space is occupied by the Nyingma Institute, the vehicle through which Buddhist teachings are delivered to American students. From the East, in blue the path to enlightenment is said to begin. Here is situated Dharma Publishing, which produces the books that are an entry point to the teachings for so many members of the community. The South, yellow in colour, is associated with the earth and its resources. The Tibetan Aid Project is the community's branch responsible for fundraising and collecting the donations that support the community and its text projects.

Finally the West, in red, is associated with the fulfillment and blossoming of the teachings. This space is occupied by Odiyan, understood as the corporeal expression of Tarthang Tulku's intention to create a home for Buddhism in America. This graphic and the composition of Tarthang Tulku's organisations into a mandala-like orientation at once establishes the spiritual centrality of Odiyan as its "flowering", and evidences the way the mandala as a tool facilitates the reconstitution of the spatial relationship between parts of the community, revealing and promoting the enchantment of this California terrain to TNMC volunteers and inscribing their community into the very landscape that sustains it.

The association with Padmasambhava goes further than his invocation by way of Samye and the mandala, but is present in the nomenclature of Odiyan and its subsequent components. Naming, as will be repeatedly in evidence throughout this thesis, is a crucial piece in the process of inscribing meaning, especially when it comes to one's surroundings (Ramble 2017). I have already explained that the very name 'Odiyan' calls out to *Uddiyana*, the residence of the Guru Rinpoche himself. This realm is significant not least for its location *West* of Tibet. Padmasambhava too, is the concealer and dispenser of secrets of the *gter ma* tradition. Padmasambhava is said to reside still at Odiyanna, continuing to disseminate teachings (Bogin 2014).

There is also temple Cintamani, whose name is sanskrit for "wish-fulfilling gem" (*yid bzhin nor bu*). This jewel is sometimes depicted in the hands of the Bodhisattvas Avalokitesvara and Ksitigarbha, allowing them to fulfill the wishes of sentient beings (Buswell Jr. and Lopez Jr. Eds. 2014; 193).[22] As a name Cintamani invokes a potent tone of hope through its wish fulfilling capacities. Indeed, the embedding of this jewel into the Sonoma landscape is a powerful bid toward the rooting of not only this American Nyingma community, but an imagined robust American sangha. Through nomenclature, then, both the powerful strategies of secret treasures and their all-important protector are called across space — entangling California's landscape with Tibet's through the invocation of Odiyan — and across time, recalling the history of treasures like Cintamani and specifically their ability to affect and empower even the spiritually illiterate, fostering a home for the lineage.

[22] The gem Cintamani is also sometimes said to have been inside the chest that fell at the feet of King Lhathothori Nyantsen (Sørensen 1994, Jansen 1990).

This critical positioning of Tibet and its history as a source of legitimacy and potency for Odiyan's work arguably has a reflective precursor in Tibet's own history. Specifically, the veneration of India's geographical and spiritual landscape in Tibet (Huber 2008). There are two central features to this relationship between India and Tibet, as described by Toni Huber, which are in evidence at TNMC via Odiyan. First, topographical landmarks feature heavily in it, featuring analogous techniques of spatial creasing and manipulation deployed in order to bring India and Tibet closer. Most poignantly Huber describes accounts of magical subterranean passages that connect particularly auspicious places in both landscapes, or even boulders and mountains that have flown from one to the other (Ibid). The passageways Tarthang Tulku establishes between Odiyan and Tibet are, admittedly, not quite as literal as a connecting tunnel, but are likewise effective in their tapping of the spiritual puissance and legitimacy of Tibet's powerful landscape. Second, the deferential and adulatory regard for India's sacred landscape in Tibetan history is, Huber points out, based more on fantastic spiritual panacea encountered through text rather than bodily experience. That Odiyan draws its power from the established spiritual prowess and potency of Tibet's history and landscape is reflected again and again in the relationship of deference established by TNMC volunteers between themselves and Tibetan practitioners. It is an adulation that, for most volunteers, is based on potent imagined and fantastical visions of pre-1950s Tibet (often based on or fueled by considerable independent research).

Through the particular features of Odiyan — its design, names, and the powerful objects that fill it — the property is drawn into a layered cosmology that repositions Odiyan both with and against Tarthang Tulku's other organisations, and draws upon the legitimising ritual and spiritual primacy of Tibet's landscape and history. In doing so the enchanted and enchanting potential of this California terrain is revealed, and subsequently harnessed via the mandala. Its influence is deployed in order to render this topography ready for the creation of sacred objects, but also for no less lofty an ambition than the growth of a robust American Tibetan Buddhist sangha. Channeling, as it does, some of the more powerful aspects of Nyingma history it becomes clearer why Odiyan occupies a secretive and highly protective space, relative to the other parts of the community. The elements used in this transformative practice, such as the mandala, are not unfamiliar ones in the endeavor to proliferate Buddhism (specifically via the geographical terrain) but the reach of their capacities for

enchantment are stretched a considerable distance to encompass this unfamiliar landscape populated by Buddhist neophytes.

3.4 Barbed Wire: Secrecy and its Discontents

Now that I have outlined the creasing, folding, and reconstituting of the landscape that occurs through the medium of Odiyan, I will spend a little more time here on the way the secretive and preservative strategies it invokes are tucked into the folds of this reconceived and enchanted landscape and what is achieved through this strategy.

Tuan employs the term topophilia to describe the potent blend of love and fear that saturates the relationship between person and place (Tuan 1972). Zurick (2014) recognises the aptness of this term for describing the devotional love directed Tibet's geographic features, entangled with a fear of the occasionally wrathful figures who populate it. Through Odiyan, though, the spatial and temporal gulf between Tibet and California is creased and folded, bringing such a relationship forward and investing Odiyan's surrounding landscape with both the devotion and anxiety implicit in Tuan's topophilia. The spatial and temporal through lines that connect Odiyan (and TNMC) with Tibet rely on their common use of secrecy as a strategy for protection, as well as the shared tools and forms for sanctification I have described. Other facets of the community will embody the flip side to this coin, the strategy of prolific dissemination as a means of preservation. When it comes to Odiyan, however, the meeting place between these characterising elements of TNMC life is poignantly manifest in the experience of volunteers through encounters they must learn to interpret and manage. In this section I will offer several examples to illustrate how TNMC volunteers navigate this intersection of secrecy and hierarchy versus collectivity and openness.

First, I wish to recall the poignant passage above from Felix who describes his restriction from Odiyan's Cintamani temple and his eventual access to the Enlightenment Stupa. A feature evident in Felix's explanation is his emphasis on the *timely* revelation of sacred forms and places. While he was not permitted to enter the temple he could visit the stupa, though only after he had been deemed prepared and was introduced to it formally by another

member. He, and others with similar stories, do not mention the history of the *gter ma* specifically, but they have an unmistakable learned understanding of its features. As is typical of this community's pedagogical methods, these principles have not been taught overtly through lectures, but impressed upon them through the physical dimensions of their experience and labor.

I wish to underscore again Felix's acute understanding of his own deficiencies, his ritual and intellectual unreadiness that legitimised, in his own understanding, the decision to keep Cintamani temple secret and restricted even from its makers. "What was I going to do with that except mess it up?" Felix asked of Cintamani temple. Felix's explanation is not one he came to spontaneously, but one routinely given to volunteers in order to justify their exclusion from various spaces, objects, and activities on their basis of concern for both their safety, and that of the space or object in question. Plainly, TNMC in its pedagogy grapples with the selfsame reticence about the advent of printing that struck early Tibetan teachers who feared that easy-access might unseat their expertise (Schaeffer 2009)— a phenomenon I touched upon in the last chapter.

It is worth underscoring this concern for carefully controlled access that, as I have described, is a particular feature of the Nyingma focus on the teacher-student relationships that constitute its mobile lineages. This is because by almost every metric, Tarthang Tulku and his network of organisations appear to have embraced fully and enthusiastically the strategies of proliferation and wide dissemination in pursuit of protecting Tibet's sacred texts and objects. Indeed, the network's many public channels reference often and at length the staggering numbers of books, statues and art objects that have been created and distributed under their banners. Yet, the undercurrent of anxiety and the commitment to careful control and timely dispersal of the sacred still flows through much of this work. Odiyan, especially around its coarser edges, is an especially useful place for identifying the strategy of secrecy in preservation where it acts as counterpart and antidote to the values of proliferation. Through such places as Odiyan volunteers at TNMC are reminded that open access is not a unilateral strategy in Tarthang Tulku's bid for Tibetan Buddhism's survival, and their own access must be carefully controlled for their own benefit, and for the benefit of the material and intellectual trove they aim to protect.

I do not suggest that these two strategies — of protection and dissemination — are necessarily at odds with one another. Rather, they can and often do work readily as two sides to the same coin. However, there are certain places where these two sets of values can find themselves in uncomfortable confrontation. The border around Odiyan is a place where such tensions have a pronounced tendency to spark. I noticed this chafing perhaps more pointedly at Ratna Ling. Both volunteers and retreat attendees at Ratna Ling are often reminded that their contributions go directly toward supporting Odiyan. In other words, toward a cause whose fruition is remote and often vague in the eyes of new volunteers. I often spoke with the Ratna Ling workers about this, as it was a frequent topic of discussion among them. The tone of these conversations wavered between confusion and indignation, circling back often to the sense that they were contributing substantially to a place whose output they were at best unclear about, or at worst wary of.

Steph, a friend of mine who volunteered at the retreat center, is a natural skeptic with a dry wit outstripped only by her caring and warmth. I interviewed her as we sat on the floor of her staff cabin, sharing a bottle of wine and taking the occasional pause to drive off a racoon intent on the bowl of cat food Steph had set out for the local stray. In one part of a very candid interview, Steph described finding a postcard in the office at Ratna Ling that implored people to donate to allow Odiyan to plant more trees on its property, four dollars would buy you a bag of bulbs. She explained how this encounter prompted her to think about how much of the product of her own labor was going toward supporting projects like this one at a place she would never access:

> "I feel like my money goes to Odiyan to keep building Odiyan stuff. But I just don't know how it's appropriated and I don't know how things go and for me Odiyan's pretty, right, but it's not even available to the public to enjoy. And we don't even as volunteers get to go there. So why am I working so that you guys have the money to keep planting trees and painting every year?" (Interview 6/11/2016)

She went on to explain that occasionally she was envious of the bindery workers at Ratna Ling, because their labor went so plainly into the manufacturing of objects that would end up overseas in the hands of refugee monks. This seemed a more comfortable, unequivocally

positive form of volunteer work, where the prospect of supporting Odiyan with its fences and walls was somewhat discomforting.

By contrast, for the newer volunteers at the downtown Berkeley centers, learning about Odiyan was often a fragmented process. They came to know Odiyan as I did, through the photos on the walls and the answers to the questions those photos inspired, as well as through stories and teachings by the older members of the community. In spite of its constant presence by way of these photos and stories, for short-term volunteers Odiyan remained often distant and vague throughout their volunteer tenure and their feelings toward it ranged from curiosity, to puzzlement, or even indifference. But for those who had made a longer and more sustained commitment to the community Odiyan's persistent presence demanded some accounting for, a process that occasionally yielded friction.

One friend of mine at the Berkeley centers offered a poignant example of this friction. This particular friend had been with the community on and off for over a decade, participating in various projects across the downtown centers. Taylor is quick, clever, and unafraid to speak her mind even with the more senior members of the community. When she first came to the community, she and others told me, she took to work as practice with alacrity and spoke of her teachers with a great respect — a respect that extended to Tarthang Tulku, though without any particular closeness. In spite of her dedication to the community's work and its particular form of practice, Odiyan offered a distinct point of tension for her that concentrated in particular on the razor-wire fence that bounds Odiyan's property where it meets the road:

> "If I have any discomfort with the community that's where it is. So like that weirdness, like, freaking razor-wire man! Visible from the road! It's like, guys, of course people are going to get the wrong impression. People associate razor-wire with either government area-51 type things or prisons! That's the only time you see razor wire!! So why would you put that up? I know they had people breaking in and stuff so it was a deterrent but... common sense people! And people out there tend to get really isolated and not understand how their actions will be perceived by normal people. [They are] out of touch, I guess. So yeah, the razor wire just bothers me. Every time I get the opportunity to like mention it I'm like dude, people, someone just like... put the fence further from the road, does it have to be right there?? Like in your face all shiny??" (Interview 11/10/2016)

Reportedly, there were one or two instances of curious locals trespassing on the property. The fact that the barbed wire fence itself does not actually enclose Odiyan's property, but only follows its border directly at the roadside, would seem to shore up Taylor's interpretation of the fence as principally intended as a deterrent. Still, this visible and some might say hostile marker is positioned directly where the enigmatic property encounters the surrounding Sonoma community. Barbed wire is, at times, a poignant symbol of how Odiyan and TNMC's other Sonoma branch, Ratna Ling Retreat Center, interact with this wider context. Resentment at Odiyan's restrictedness is not limited to volunteers within the community, but is shared by those members of the public who misinterpret its designation as "retreat center". Ratna Ling has arguably fared even worse, as its industrial-seeming bindery facility has piqued the ire of a vocal group of local residents. Those residents filed a lawsuit against Ratna Ling claiming the bindery represented a breach in rural land-use regulations for Sonoma County.[23] The secrecy and protection exercised around certain parts on TNMC's network, then, inspire friction not just within its volunteer population, but occasionally at the places where its work meets a wider public, where it is often not clearly understood.

Fig 13 In spite of the lawsuit's failure, a handful of signs like this one still peppered the roads surrounding Ratna Ling's property. Photo taken by the author.

[23] The litigating body of locals — called Coastal Hills Rural Preservation (CHRP) — has been unsuccessful in their legal efforts and Ratna Ling's work has carried on interrupted. I attended the appellate court hearing for this case in August of 2016, at which CHRP's appeal was dismissed. It is worth a brief note that this encounter between Ratna Ling and CHRP represents something of a clash of different interpretations of "preservation", for both groups cite it as their cause, one for the textual heritage of Tibetan Buddhism, and the other for the rural integrity of the Sonoma landscape.

Like other members of the community, though, Taylor undoubtedly understood the power that is conveyed on objects and spaces through restriction of access to them and behaviour surrounding them. When pressed on the issue she admitted that she knew part of her frustration came from her own prior ideas about space and access:

> "Well I get the idea of like, it's not disney world. It's not like go in and gawk at it. If you're going to treat it as sacred it does have to be special, and to make it special it's a sometimes thing. I get that … I do think it's over-protected. I feel like it's over protected. But then I'm also a Westerner so I haven't been socialized that way. But yeah with my socialisation I think it's overprotected". (Interview 11/10/2016)

This is a recurring theme in the community where it is clear that Tarthang Tulku's writings communicate to them in no uncertain terms that their "Western" upbringing has inculcated them with habits that must be confronted and undone if they are to thrive in and benefit from the spaces created by the community. Still, in spite of this conscientious student's awareness of the importance of maintaining sacred space, she felt that the community overall was damaged by the restrictive, or even hostile image projected by the physical manifestation of this barrier that Odiyan presents to the world in the form of the razor wire. Her indecision and frustration with regard to Odiyan was felt by many other members of the community who no doubt found it difficult to reconcile the image of Odiyan projected by the tree-planting postcard and Odiyan's own website, with the coarse barrier that divides even the rest of the community from Odiyan.

Throughout this chapter I have offered a range of responses to the boundedness of Odiyan among TNMC volunteers. They run a gambit from deferential, respectful and adulatory to suspicion, uncertainty, and self-deprecation. Many of the voices above identify their own "Western" socialisation as the partial culprit of their discomfort. They do so with little prompting and in ways that are clearly reinforced through the community's pedagogical methods. These are methods that encourage a deference to the Buddhism practiced by the recipients of their texts and also consistently remind these neophytes of the potential dangers they might pose to delicate sacred objects and spaces and vice versa. Still, it is also possible to recast their misgivings, reading them as the affective result of a jarring encounter between the two preservative strategies practiced by TNMC: open dissemination and secretive

protection. While both of these strategic approaches to sacred materials are represented in this group of organisations, Odiyan represents a locus where they are placed in direct and pronounced contact.

3.5 Conclusion

Odiyan is the space within this community landscape that most poignantly distills the way strategies of secrecy and concealment are deployed toward the protection of sacred Tibetan Buddhist forms. The ways in which this is done here require a concerted and careful manipulation of the spatial and temporal landscape. Tools such as the mandala, stupas, and pointedly selected nomenclature are all employed in order to reveal and promote the enchanted and enchanting qualities of Odiyan and its surroundings, through a rapprochement with the landscape and history of the Nyingma school in Tibet.

The story of Odiyan, though, is not only one of strategic secrecy, but how this strategic secrecy is accomplished only through the more open and creative community practices, specifically those surrounding labour (or work) and its connection to practice. Through labour, and through the restrictions placed on the volunteers as labourers, many members of this community find their only route of access to this highly protected space. Though even this access is limited, and through it they come to learn in a bodily way about the potency of secrecy. Their collective effervescence and productive cooperation is repeatedly relied upon in order to carve out the secret spaces tucked away in TNMC's geography. Such a method entails encounters that must be managed, between individuals and sacred secrets, or more specifically, the barriers that keep them from these secrets.

The concept of Odiyan as the center of the mandala that is the broader network of organisations, at once affirms Odiyan's sacred status as "flowering" of the mandala, but also draws all of the other organisations into the sacred realm alongside Odiyan. The potent connections Odiyan establishes between the Sonoma landscape and the distant body of Tibet allow for its enchanting influence over the rest of the TNMC network by way of the mandala and other such familiar tools. Through these ties, fundamentally rooted in topography and the manipulation of space, Tarthang Tulku and his students are drawn into a broader cosmology

and Tibetan Buddhist history that bolsters its work toward the preservation of Tibetan Buddhist forms.

It is these very connecting channels, however, that necessitate the careful secrecy and protectiveness exerted at Odiyan's edges — a protectiveness that finds echoes in other pockets of this community's work, populated by more delicate objects. In this, Tarthang Tulku's collective finds itself rehearsing parts of an long-lived Nyingmapa script on the dual commitment to protection and dissemination, secrecy and spread. Odiyan represents a poignant and occasionally tense collusion of these two strategies, entangled in pursuit of the central and mutually dependent goals of creating a cache for the preservation of sacred forms, as well as a lodestone for the growth of their American sangha. In the next chapter protection and spread will meet again, this time saturating the two textual traditions maintained through Tarthang Tulku's efforts.

Chapter Four
Buddha Speech: Enchanted Making in the Bindery

If you understand the connection between work and Dharma practice, the tension that so many people feel between time on the job and personal time instantly vanishes. If you know from your own experience that you are learning from your work and also serving others, you want to work more and more. Work becomes the place where you find fulfillment, and the idea of "needing time off" starts to seem like a contradiction. Everything you do gives you enjoyment and increases your understanding. Even if your work is routine and repetitive, you can take on the role of artist or skilled craftsman, because you are doing what you love best.

\- Tarthang Tulku, *Path of Action*

Books aren't just commodities; the profit motive is often in conflict with the aims of art. We live in capitalism, its power seems inescapable — but then, so did the divine right of kings.
Any human power can be resisted and changed by human beings.
Resistance and change often begin in art. Very often in our art, the art of words.

\- Ursula K Le Guin

4.1 Introduction

In the last chapter I explored how Californian topography is rendered Buddhist landscape through one of the Tibetan Nyingma Meditation Center's (TNMC) most central spaces, the Tulku's residence at Odiyan. The construction and sustenance of their Copper Mountain Mandala draws together the community's driving concerns for preservation and its commitment to work as practice rooted in predominantly physical labour. Through Odiyan's existence, TNMC exerts an enchanting influence over the surrounding landscape, rendering it ripe for meritorious practice, and the growth of an American Buddhist sangha.

I will turn now to the projects of making ongoing under the auspices of this enchantment. There are a many such projects undertaken across the community's different spaces, including the creation of books, statues, flags, prayer wheels, and meditation cushions, to name just a few. Consequently, the first challenge is how best to parse and group together these objects, and under what kind of headings. Members of the community might colloquially rely on such categories as "art", "texts" or "images", but the distinctions between these are slippery, their materials and methods flowing into one another, and the English titles chosen suggest, perhaps, criteria that do not apply.

In sorting these projects of making I will invoke a schema central to Tibetan Buddhist philosophy and practice. This is the tripartite division *sku gsung thugs rten* (sometimes referred to as the Three Secrets, Three Gateways, or the Three Seats) between body (*sku),* speech (*gsung*), and mind (*thugs*). This trinity is a polyvalent one and its divisions have echoes through Tibetan Buddhist practice, philosophy, and understanding of Buddha-nature (Dudjom Rinpoche 2012; Dzogchen Ponlop Rinpoche 2003; Namgyal Rinpoche 2004; Diemberger et al. 2014).

Most notably for my purposes, however, the categories of *sku gsung thugs rten* apply to the physical objects instrumental to practice. The Buddha-body is made manifest through elements such as statues, images, and *thangkas*. Buddha-speech is invested in texts — the collected works of Tibetan Buddhism are relics of the speech of the Buddha and important lineage masters. The final category, of mind, is typically understood to be reflected in relics: remnants of the bodies and trappings of the Buddhas or teachers. But aside from these literal remnants, the concept of relic also underpins the two preceding categories. Body and speech are understood as a *part* of the figures they index in the way that a relic is a remainder of such a person, rather than mere symbolic representation (Diemberger et al., 2014).[24]

This chapter, therefore, will treat the manifestations of Buddha-speech produced by this community, and in the next chapter I will turn to the other two categories, entangled as they often are here. Speech, here, serves not only as a useful tool for marking out our subject matter in the form of books, but also guiding our attention to what must be done in order to make various kinds of books *speak* in the contexts where they circulate.

This community's books are created in a bindery warehouse in Sonoma, California under the dual banners of Yeshe De and Dharma Publishing. These are the two publishing branches of TNMC, one English and one Tibetan, one for sale (though not for profit) and one for charitable distribution. It is this production of the two kinds of texts within one space that provides an especially interesting opportunity for exploring how this community

[24] It is important to note, however, that the use of *sku gsung thugs rten*, while offering a useful framework, does not resolve entirely the slippage between these categories. There is often a degree of mutability between them — reliquary ash might be mixed with the ink used to pen a sacred text, a stupa may contain sacred text, or a tsha-tsha might be rendered relic through contact with some great teacher, as well as through ritual and empowerment (Diemberger et al. 2014). I will address this slippage further in the next chapter.

distinguishes between different expressions of the sacred — how they are made, treated, and who they are made for. If "textual traditions can be seen as a community's ethnography of itself" (Barber 2007; 4), this community engages in twin ethnographic projects.

Two textual traditions are at play, distinguished legally by the boundary between Yeshe De and Dharma Publishing, distinguished linguistically by their publication in Tibetan versus English, and crucially distinguished by their intended recipients: the refugee monastic community versus the American students both inside and outside the community. They are not, however, distinguished through categorisation as sacred and mundane, or even as gift and commodity, I will argue. Rather, they are teachings that have been equally and lovingly crafted for different recipients. In their production can be read the community's understanding of and hopes for these two populations.

I will first describe the bindery space, the process of printing a book within it, and the resultant interface between its workers, machines, and materials. Through this description I will extend the narrative of enchantment that began with my description of Odiyan. The enchantment of the bindery, both through the particularities of the space itself and the way labour is approached within, generates an ideal space within which to engage in work as practice. In this process the modern industrial machinery that is used for the purposes of rescuing cultural heritage is transformed in itself (Diemberger 2014), in this case becoming the very apparatus for spiritual training. In part this is an attempt to study, as Ingold entreats, the process of making, rather than a compendium of the made (Ingold 2013). But I will also explore how strict criteria for success and failure in making might coexist with these experimental qualities. Contra Ingold I will propose that a model in the mind of a maker, quite apart from precluding creativity and flexibility in the making process, might demand it.

I will then turn to the different kinds of books produced in the bindery under the auspices of the two organisations that print there. This is not to shift focus away from the making to the product made, but rather to turn from physical making in the bindery, to the social making undertaken by the community's books and the way that texts constitute personhood (Barber 2007). Books here are not secondary objects that signal practice, but primary components that make and sustain religious practice (Morgan 2016). Through this description I will show how

the books produced in the bindery offer a unique unsettling of the categories of commodity and gift. This unsettling is revealed not only in the process of their making, but in the ways in which they circulate, trapping and distributing the various persons that are assembled therein.

4.2 The Bindery at Ratna Ling: Conditions for Making

The bindery facility shares the sweeping Sonoma property with a retreat center, and the property is collectively referred to as "Ratna Ling". These twin monikers, "the bindery" and "Ratna Ling", evoke the two facets of book-printing with the Tibetan Nyingma Meditation Center. The former is the most-used label for the corrugated metal building where book-making is done, and implies the western codex format of book-making. This is a curious habit of the community, given their roots in printing pecha- (*dpe cha*) or pothi- (from the Sanskrit *pustaka*) style (unbound) Tibetan books. Though nearly all of the books printed there now are in codex (including all of Tarthang Tulku's own books), this has not always been the case. When I asked the bindery workers about this shift, I was told that the monastics preferred the ease of transport, storage, and use associated with the codex format and therefore requested it specifically.

It is true that the unbound pecha can be somewhat unwieldy and more difficult to store, especially for recipients who may travel great distances with these volumes. Still, this request troubles the common understanding that the pecha format is more sacred and fit for ritual reading than its codex counterpart, which is better suited to agnostic scholarship (Diemberger et al. 2014). However, the pecha format has not been relegated to disuse, but rather is now reserved for particularly prized books or editions that become coveted gifts at the distribution ceremony. In spite of the continued value attached to the pecha style of printing, it is the codex style that supplies the bindery's popular nickname.

The other name associated with this property, "Ratna Ling", brings close the history of text preservation so dear to the Nyingma lineage. It is derived from the name of Ratna Lingpa (1403-1479), a child-prodigy and identified as a reincarnation of Langdro Konchok Jungne (*lang gro dkon mchog 'byung gnas*), one of the 25 disciples of Padmasambhava (Leschly 2007). Padmasambhava is said to have appeared to the 27-year-old Ratna Lingpa in a vision,

offering him a choice between three scrolls. Ratna Lingpa instead requested all three. His precocious wish granted, Ratna Lingpa acquired in one lifetime the termas (secrets) that would have taken any other three lifetimes to obtain. Whether this early unwillingness to privilege one text over another is related to his later deeds is unclear, but it was Ratna Lingpa who gathered together the major Nyingma tantras excluded during the compiling of the highly influential Kanjur (Ibid.) into a collection often understood as the first iteration of the Nyingma Gyübum (Dudjom Rinpoche 2002).

Bindery staff is carefully monitored and membership is a guarded privilege. This and Odiyan are the only spaces in the community where Tarthang Tulku maintains direct input over the volunteers selected. During my time at Ratna Ling I was one of two women working on the book-printing project. The other was a long-time resident of Odiyan who had been raised with frequent contact to the community and Tarthang Tulku. The rest of our small crew were men, predominantly white — though not entirely — and aged anywhere from 25 to over 50. All save myself were permanent fixtures of the Ratna Ling or Odiyan communities. The bindery team fluctuates in size, both over the course of the year and across years, in response to the intensity of shipment demands.

Access to the bindery team seems to be regulated by a set of changing, somewhat opaque criteria, no doubt thanks in part to Tarthang Tulku's direct influence. This has at times meant a complete ban on women working in the bindery. At other times only women over a certain age are granted access. There are even accounts of nearly all-female bindery teams. None that I spoke to seemed able or willing to guess at an explanation for the teacher's changeable rules on the gender of the bindery staff. It seems likely that there are competing moralities and influences that vie for place in the staffing of the bindery.[25] It is eminently possible that there are specific traditional injunctions attached to specific texts or calendrical periods that guide Tarthang Tulku's decisions, but if so these are not made clear to everyday workers in the community.

[25] I feel certain that I would not have had access myself had I not benefited from at least one senior member of the community speaking on my behalf.

The bindery at Ratna Ling is a balancing act. Its workers, its products, methods, and machinery are all constantly reconfigured according to competing codes of behavior. Though, the cumulative effect is perhaps not one of instability, but of flexibility. The components that make up the bindery, both human and machine, can be and are frequently re-oriented to meet the set of challenges posed by a particular text or shipment season. Though the casualties of this flexing are often human (and disproportionately female) the result has been many thousands of books that are judged to have met the stringent conditions required to make an embodiment of the Buddha's speech.

Fig. 14 The bindery at Ratna Ling. Photo from the Yeshe De Text Preservation Project Facebook page.

4.3 Enlivened Machines: The Apparatus of Practice

From the port at Oakland the Tibetan books bound for distribution cross the Pacific in anywhere from 10 to about 25 shipping containers. The shipment I helped to prepare was a relatively small one of only 11 containers (amounting to roughly 100,000 individual volumes). By the time I arrived the vast majority of the printing had been finished, though there remained plenty of steps in the pursuit of drawing a text from raw materials.

Work in the bindery is an unending process of coaxing machines, materials, and humans into communication with one another. This intimate cooperation is critical material for the enchantment of bindery work and products. Relationships between persons and things become both the fodder for practice and the means for practice's expression. The use of

modern tools in order to more expediently fulfil encoded and expected behaviours surrounding Tibetan texts is in fact an idea that is contiguous with a historical Tibetan approach to new printing technologies (Diemberger 2014). These technologies have, in the process, come to absorb some of the sacredness of the objects they help to bring into being: "The adoption of new technologies rather than representing an agent of secularization seems to have become, at least in some contexts, enchanted by the objects they have been applied to" (Ibid.; 224). This enchanting is certainly evidenced in the bindery. Its machines and materials become partners in spiritual training: absorbing the personhood attributed to sacred texts, they are understood to "talk back" to practitioners. This re-casting of work as spiritual training serves to enchant even the most mundane bindery tasks. Workers' interactions with machine and material are enlivened, joining as partners in the ebb and flow of work as practice.

The workflow of the bindery bears significant resemblance to Ingold's description of correspondence, wherein making is characterised by experimentation and cooperative growth. A maker must dip into the generative currents of her materials, encouraging their fission and fusion through her own sensory awareness (Ingold 2014). However, Ingold himself is somewhat suspicious of the ability of human and machine to engage in such productive correspondence, envisioning mechanisation as the narrowing of haptic interactions to the point of fingers on buttons. Further, Ingold's practitioner is distinguished from the apprentice by way of a preconceived model of the finished product. While the latter might rely on such an inelegant tool, the former engages in an elevated and improvisational process of correspondence. The suggestion seems to be that a mental model not only mistakenly applies a "finality" to the act of making, but also undermines (and even precludes) its aforementioned creative and improvisational quality (Ingold 2014).

But should it really be that the presence of a model, even a strict one, inhibits improvisation in the making process? In the case of TNMC's bindery, the creation of a *successful* sacred book demands the accurate reproduction of text in order that it fulfill the requirements of an embodiment of Buddha-speech. Indeed, failures are starkly visible. With regard to sacred material, any text that fails to meet the standards of accuracy is not only discarded, but must

be burned so that the offending object is erased.[26] The sanctity of Tibetan script requires that the projects of making in the bindery happen always under the auspices of a model of the accurately reproduced text, as well as a design model conceived of and scrutinized by the makers' Lama.

Far from precluding creativity in the making process, though, these constraints often lead to extraordinary flexibility in making. Similarly, Yarrow and Jones found that in the case of Scottish stonemasons who likewise work toward a prefigured model, a template may define the end-point, but does not determine the manner of its fulfilment (Yarrow and Jones 2014). Given the changeability of both the maker and the conditions of making, problems continually arise that demand creative and skillful solutions (Portisch 2010). I hope to offer not only a portrait of this flexibility and creativity, but also the intimate engagement between workers, materials, and machines in this space. An interface that is expressly cast as an intimate and integral part of Buddhist practice for bindery volunteers. This description will in turn give rise to questions of what is being produced through this arrangement, and where, if anywhere, we might assign the designations of art(ist), labourer, and skill.

In full swing, the bindery amounts to an assault on the senses: a cacophony of clunking, whirring, beeping, grinding, and shrill alarms. Tibetan art is famously colourful, and the Bodhisattvas that oversee the bindery floor are no exception, lending their sensory input to the din. The smells of paper, ink, hot glue, and incense smoke vie for position. In the run-up to the shipment deadline the bindery floor becomes a maze of pallets stacked with books waiting to be boxed, or boxes waiting to be trucked away. Floor space is at a premium and requires careful arrangement to allow the volunteers to continue their dance with the machines.

To the relief of my abused senses, this din resolved itself to a baseline after the first few days, yielding the center of my attention to the bindery machinery itself. The blue and gray equipment forms a kind of track along which books-to-be are ferried from stage to stage of

[26] While the TNMC community burns its failed attempts at texts, there are in some cases ceremonies of de-sanctification which can render the offending material inert. These are not carried out in Tarthang Tulku's community, to my knowledge, perhaps because of the unavailability of anyone besides Tarthang Tulku with the ritual authority to carry out such a ceremony.

their creation. The whole effect is something like an industrial version of the children's board game *Mousetrap*, where a marble is sent rolling and bumping through various apparatus.

Fig. 15 Texts on the bindery floor. Photo from the Yeshe De Text Preservation Project Facebook page.

In the back of the bindery is the press-room — here, the laboriously type-set material is translated from computer screen to paper through the medium of hulking presses and their press-men (they are all men, at least at the moment). The presses issue huge sheets that contain a number of what will become individual pages, often 8 or 16 of them. These large sheets are machine-folded into a bundle in a very particular pattern to ensure the correct order of the pages. This bundle is referred to as a signature (or a sig, for short). Each signature is numbered and one edge is printed with both its number and a barcode, making the sig legible to both the bindery workers and machines.

A completed book will be composed of one of each number sig (for example, one each of signatures 1 through 10). Assembling the signatures into books is accomplished through the collating machine (pictured in figure 17). The collator is in essence a long encased

conveyor-belt with “pockets” lining either side. Stacks of signatures are fed into these pockets according to their number (one pocket for each sig number), the pockets are equipped with barcode scanners so the machine tracks that the signatures are placed the right way round in the right pocket. The machine then plucks one signature from each pocket, stacking them into a full book. The barcode scanners ensure that each stack has one of each signature. If there are duplicates or missing signatures the incorrect stack is ejected from a side-channel, depositing the signatures into a waiting box to be re-sorted into the correct pockets.

In a standard industrial bindery facility the collating machine pockets would be fed in turn by other machines, allowing for a rapid seamless assembly. At the Sonoma bindery, though, the relatively small operation with a modest staff and cobbled together equipment means that the pockets are refilled by hand. This means the collator is run on what the manufacturers would call “idling mode”, though, for the collator crew the speed feels anything but idle. Pallets are stacked at the ready alongside the collator belt, forming a corridor for volunteers to dash up and down, grabbing handfuls of each sig and feeding them into the correct pocket. Any error — failing to fill a pocket quickly enough, putting a signature in the wrong pocket, inserting a signature the wrong way — will set off a flashing red alarm and shut down the collator all together.

Fig 16 The bindery floor. Photo from the Yeshe De Text Preservation Project Facebook page.

Feeding the collator was one of the first jobs I had during my time in the bindery. My friend and assigned “buddy” Dean introduced me to it and we ran it together, each tending half the pockets. Dean is tall, lithe, and graceful, while I am none of these things. He loped along his line in stride with the machine and often covered the pockets I was missing as I scrambled to keep pace with the metal monster. While Dean looked relaxed and in rhythm, I’m sure I looked like I was playing a sweaty, frantic game of whack-a-mole.

Once the signatures are stacked in the appropriate order, the edge to become the book’s spine is slathered with glue and a cover is wrapped around it and then run through a spiral chute where they are blasted with air to dry the glue. The pages and cover, both oversized and with rough edges, are then sent through the trimmer to be pared down to size. The freshly-trimmed edges may then be dyed to match the cover (usually red). From there they are stacked on pallets in preparation for boxing and shipment, or else storage. Just before the gluing (and hence the actual binding) the pecha-style books diverge, as they are not covered or bound. Rather they are trimmed to size following collation, a thick-stock front and back cover are applied, and they are hand-wrapped in orange or red cloth. To print, collate, and trim pecha pages — a very different size from codex pages — required a laborious re-calibration of all of the machinery settings in order to produce this format, to which its manufacturers are not generally accustomed.

Given the somewhat patchwork nature of the industrial setup in the bindery, workers are frequently required to develop workarounds in order to further their relationship with machines and materials and generate texts that speak. This somewhat improvisational arrangement coupled with the enchantment of this space and the work it contains — afforded both by the sacred products generated and the treatment of labor as spiritual practice — result in a space that does not sit comfortably in either descriptions of alienating and impersonal Fordist (or even post-Fordist) factory spaces, nor with the more romantic cum nostalgic descriptions of engaged craft.

The relationship between worker and machine in the bindery stubbornly defies scholarly appraisals of mechanised production. Such accounts often describe how workers are marginalised, de-skilled, and alienated, with the pernicious machinery playing a key role in

their subjugation (Adamson 2010). Given Ingold's endeavor in "Making" to bring animacy to the understanding of making and to enliven the flows of material that converge and diverge in such projects, his approach might have offered an alternative. It is odd, then, that he should then deny such animacy to a maker's interface with machines and in turn deny haptic skill to the machine's operator. In turning toward the type-writer, Ingold's provocative recasting of making as correspondence turns to something of a lament for the lost majesty of the pencil. He describes what he suggests might be a narrowing of the interface to the fingertip pushing buttons, precluding the "handsier" haptic interactions at the heart of Ingold's preferred projects of making. Perhaps the misapprehension lies in the idea that machines — the keyboard or the forklift — are "closed" objects to be manipulated, rather than animate things to be corresponded with, to use Ingold's distinction (Ingold 2014). In this Ingold lends his voice to a chorus of those who attempt to locate the precise line where a tool, which extends the agentive capacities of its wielder, becomes a machine that subjugates, homogenizes, and systematizes (Yarrow and Jones 2014, Sennett 2009, Braverman 1974, Marx 1990 [1867]).

Fig. 17 The collating machine at the bindery. Photo from the Yeshe De Text Preservation Project Facebook page.

This nefarious capacity of machines to rob individuals of agency and personality is addressed most directly via the term "de-skilling", as it is used in studies of both art and labor. The devaluation of skill perpetrated by industrialised labor has often been credited with

the alienation and social disenfranchisement of its workers (Castel 1996, Muehlebach 2011, Yarrow and Jones 2014). Studies of modern art approach what is termed the de-skilling and re-skilling of artists in terms of the "immaterial skills of conceptualisation" in an executive role under the auspices of modern division of labour (Roberts 2010, Sansi 2016). In this understanding of the making process, not only are the bindery workers robbed of what Roberts calls "artisanal skill" (though they are offered a mechanical proficiency in its place), but through the division of labour in artistic production, they miss out on the title of artist altogether. Tarthang Tulku, or even past authors of these texts, fit more neatly into this role of the managerial artist, where the bindery workers are relegated to mere execution. This recasting of the production of art is intended, says Roberts, to mark out art's indebtedness to the labour of the collective and place the artist's abilities on a level with the factory worker (Roberts 2010). However, there remains a hierarchy in terms of creativity in this arrangement where labourers, while mechanically proficient, are facilitators who bring an artist's conceptual vision into being with little attention to their creativity and contribution to design.

In spite of their demonstrable creativity, then, the volunteers in the bindery neither seem to fit comfortably the narrative of the labourer subjugated by their mechanical counterparts, nor the contemporary artist, or even the artist's facilitating appendage. Are they perhaps better understood as craftspeople? The notion of a craft, often conceived as an antidote to the alienation of mechanisation with the craftsperson as the distillation of unalienated labour, the unification of head and hand, mind and world (Yarrow and Jones 2014) has a relative amount of mileage when levied at the bindery. Yarrow and Jones' (2014) amendments to the scholarly body of work on craft explore how intentional detachment — distinct from industrial alienation — is strategically deployed by stonemasons in order to master highly skilled practices that are paradoxically erased through their successful execution. The bindery volunteers share a great deal with Yarrow and Jones' stonemasons; not least in terms of the narratives of modern disenchantment and alienation, combatted through the celebration of tradition, which underpin the way both groups approach and value their work.

And yet, once again, for these stonemasons the celebration of tradition becomes centrally hinged to the specific *tools* and methods they use. While machines still hold a place in their process, they are characterised as functional necessities yet emotionally distant. It is *tools*, by

contrast, that are understood to facilitate this celebration of traditional stonework, through offering a repertoire of abilities still considered to belong properly to the mason (Yarrow and Jones 2014).

Fig. 18 Volunteers at work under the watchful eye of the bindery Bodhisattvas.
Photo from the Yeshe De Text Preservation Project Facebook page.

What it missed in this characterisation of machines in all the sources discussed above is made stark in the bindery. There in evidence is the loving or frustrated adjusting, tweaking, pleading, praising correspondence a volunteer has with her machine. Bindery workers know well that no machine responds quite as well to the ministrations of one other than her most constant partner. Barriers in the bindery must be approached with creativity and flexibility. For the maker, the flows of animate material that make up and pass through machines are most certainly open — their surfaces and interiors are crowded with potential points of contact for interface. Further, it is these machines themselves that facilitate the celebration and perpetuation of tradition so central to the bindery, and they are caught up and enchanted through this function they fulfill.

In fact, this intimate interface is explicitly referred to within the community as an ideal space for spiritual practice precisely because it necessitates flexibility and creativity. This environment, filled with its carefully constructed array of finicky machinery, emerges often within community discussions as an excellent place for the implementation of work as practice. It is one of the few places left in the community where the large-scale manual labour projects that characterised its early days are still the norm. While the accounts of Odiyan's

labour projects I outlined in the last chapter are, though powerful, largely nostalgic, the bindery offers what might be considered a direct heir to this work.

In this community's guiding strategy of work as practice, barriers in work are used as an important focal part of the practice.[27] In most of the office- or desk-work carried out in the Berkeley centers, these barriers can be somewhat slippery. The most common might be distraction or a propensity to procrastinate. But it can be difficult, practitioners find, to pinpoint the moment or reason one's attention wandered away from the task at hand. Still the student is encouraged to gently bring their attention back to work each time, as one might return to the breath after a distraction in sitting meditation.

In a space like the bindery, however, wandering attention can lead to far more immediate and potentially dangerous consequences. For example, when working with the collator a slip in concentration will quite literally lead to a flashing red light and bellowing siren. In order to stop the alarm one must backtrack and find the exact moment where focus slipped — usually manifest in a backward facing signature or misplaced pile. This kind of direct and immediate feedback is rare, and a very valuable tool for work as practice. Counterintuitively, this space that, sensorily speaking, could not be more distant from a meditation hall, emerges as a touchstone for this community's form of practice.

One of the press-men — Ted — was enlisted to give a presentation at a large TNMC gathering on the subject of work as practice. His talk encapsulates the way volunteers' relationship with the bindery apparatus is understood within the community, and the way it becomes a reference point for explaining work as practice. "The machines talk back to you", Ted explained in his lecture as he outlined the way the machines offer feedback, which, if heeded, can be a constant corrective for work as practice. He described in particular an experience with a broken dolly that needed to be maneuvered into a very tight space. Ted

[27] This practice of making advantageous use of barriers is one with recognisable roots in Nyingma Dzogchen — that perilous and precipitous route to enlightenment understood as the pinnacle of practice by the Nyingmapa — which likewise entreats practitioners to directly confront weaknesses, flaws, and blockages as a means to attainment (Smith 2001).

wrestled with this dolly for months before it occurred to him that perhaps he could fix it. His battle with the dolly, he explained, mirrored the progression of the four noble truths:[28]

1. The truth of suffering: The dolly is broken
2. Attachment is the cause of suffering: I forget about the problem when it is not in front of me and/or I imagine that someone else will fix the dolly. I am stuck in my routine.
3. There is escape from suffering: Maybe I can fix the dolly?
4. Escape from suffering is in the path: I will take responsibility and fix the dolly.

Note in particular here that the path to liberation lies in the act of taking responsibility. This is a recurring theme in the community and is tangled up in the idea of work as practice. One long-time student told me firmly: "other people have vows, we have taking responsibility". This talk given by the press-man was recorded and has been shown to new volunteers since then in an effort to teach them about the practices of the community such that they might come to adopt work as practice more readily. Through its use the bindery and its machinery become the archetypal arrangement for work as practice. Of course, work as practice can be implemented anywhere, with any kind of work, but these machines that talk back offer a clear and accessible way to describe its process.

While perhaps a unique expression of it, this interface with bindery apparatus is continuous with the Tibetan Buddhist approach to printing technologies, seeing these tools as a means to more expediently spread the Buddha's word and generate merit. This re-casting of work as spiritual training serves to enchant even the most mundane bindery tasks. Workers' interactions with machine and material are enlivened and the creativity of this relationship is emphasized as workers join machines in the ebb and flow of work as practice.

4.4 Not-Commodities: Enchanted Products

This enchantment of both the bindery space and the relationships within it has a deep impact on the books that are produced therein. The nature of the impact becomes clearer in examining the distinguishing features of the two kinds of books that move through the bindery. These are, broadly speaking, the Tibetan sacred texts made for free distribution in

[28] The four noble truths are often understood as the foundation or essence of Buddhist teachings, broadly: 1) the truth of suffering; 2) the truth of the cause of suffering; 3) the truth of freedom from suffering; 4) the truth of the path as a means to freedom from suffering

India, and Tarthang Tulku's own books, usually published in English, sold online and in the community's book store. Dharma publishing, tucked in an office loft-space above the bindery floor, publishes and distributes the over 50 books credited to Tarthang Tulku. As a space, therefore, the bindery plays host to the creation of two kinds of book — two distinct textual traditions that are maintained and diffused in very different ways.

What is particularly engaging about this dual arrangement in the bindery is that it strikes to the heart of one of the longest-running conversations in our discipline: that surrounding the gift and the commodity. At first blush the bindery might seem a straightforward testament to the classic juxtaposition of gift and commodity. After all, one is sold and one is given. How could it be plainer? These two categories, the sacred texts and Tarthang Tulku's own books, demand different kinds of treatment that are in evidence in bindery work. These distinct codes of behaviour would seem to mark them out not only as gift and commodity, but as sacred and mundane.

However, a closer inspection of how the two kinds of books are produced reveals that, for the community, their Rinpoche's books are anything but mundane, and there is a deep discomfort with the idea of their being commodities. Further, the way volunteers engage with these two different kinds of book represents an interesting distortion of conventional understandings of the gift and the commodity. While troubling the boundaries between gift and commodity is not novel per se — as it has long been understood that such distinctions have a tendency to blur (Carrier 1994), and that gifts in particular have a tendency to leak through boundaries set around them (Osteen 2002) — to engage with these categories as "analytic play" (Tsing 2013) remains a rich enterprise. Particularly as there is limited work on how sanctity and commodification might combine (Geary 1988).

This is not to say that Mauss' juggernaut in the form of "The Gift" (1925 [1990]) did not collide with the study of Buddhism and its practitioners, for it surely did. The facets of this encounter have been admirably summarised and appraised by Nicolas Sihlé (2015), for example, in a project that I will not rehearse here. But what his summaries and arguments demonstrate is that much of the scholarly attention to Buddhist gifts (or non-gifts as the case may be) has revolved around the quality of reciprocity — its degree of presence in various

kinds of exchanges — often with specific focus on alms, donations, dāna, and the like. Rich and engaging though it may be, this is not the field of discussion to which I hope to contribute. Not least because *books* as gifts, due to their entanglement with teaching lineages and clerical hierarchies, are not readily subsumed under the other categories typically discussed under the auspices of the Buddhist gift (such as donation of food, money, or the sponsorship of ceremonies typically offered to the clergy by lay patrons). Rather, for my purposes here the book as gift is principally a bid to structure an imagined or desired recipient. In this vein, with particular attention paid to Mauss' other principal trait of the gift — degrees of alienation between different gifts and commodities — I aim to explore how books as gifts (and their makers and givers) exercise their agentive capacity to create and shape relationships.

Like Tsing's matsutake, commodities made in the bindery are unavoidably drawn into the the social field; the bindery, as an enchanted space rather than a strictly industrial one, facilitates the production of books that are "fundamentally social creatures" (Tsing 2013; 33) and do not behave like proper commodities even when they are bought and sold. This enchantment is compounded by the dissolution of work-life boundaries — through the mechanism of work as practice — which warps the traditional understanding of alienation from the products of one's own labour (Negri 2011, Lazzarato 2006 [2002]). The result is a not-commodity whose retention of the personhood of their makers and writers charges them with a "giftiness" that weathers the processes of commodification, rendering its buyers students rather than customers.

In this section I will focus in particular on Tarthang Tulku's books in order to explore the making of these not-commodities, both physically and socially, and the relationships that they engage in both inside and outside the community. The volunteers' relationship with these not-commodities will also be juxtaposed against the bindery gifts of an ostensibly more predictable sort — that is, the Tibetan sacred texts bound for free distribution.

Tarthang Tulku's books have offered an avenue into the community for many members. For the younger volunteers who have never had — and will likely never have — direct contact with Tarthang Tulku, often they find access to him through his texts. Even those older

volunteers who were present when Tarthang Tulku taught actively, maintain their connection to their Rinpoche though his books, as he very rarely holds formal teachings these days. It is excerpts from Rinpoche's own writings that form the material for morning readings across the various organisations. The material is used to focus one's intention for the day in the opening gesture of Buddhist practice and, in a parallel gesture, parts of this writing have also opened each of my chapters. In the stories that circulate through the community, the act of contemplating or reading Tarthang Tulku's books can facilitate unbelievable feats of work in the same way chanting mantras is said to do. Joseph was especially emphatic about the indispensable importance of Tarthang Tulku's texts, perhaps exacerbated by his position as gatekeeper between myself and the Tibetan texts we translated together. "I know your research is about the traditional texts" he told me, but insisted that it was Tarthang Tulku's books that impact the volunteers' daily lives and bring the teachings home, "for most of us the interaction with the traditional texts is fairly slim".

In fact, the generative process for Tarthang Tulku's books is one that more closely resembles teaching than typical Western authorship. The Tulku will invite two or three of his closest students to hear him speak at length on a particular topic. The topic of his lecture might be, for example, the virtues and deficiencies of the American work ethic, or how one should approach barriers in work. Each of the attending students is expected to write his or her own account of the teachings given and return the next day with their summary. Each will read this summary back to their Rinpoche, who will then launch into the next installment. The process of turning these sessions into a finalised book is one of careful massaging and constant checking in with Tarthang Tulku. Some of the books, I'm told, emerged directly from Tarthang Tulku's small teaching sessions during the days of Odiyan's construction. Approximate versions of this approach to authorship are not at all uncommon in the Tibetan Buddhist textual tradition, as many famous teachers will have their teachings compiled and circulated by their closest students (Gyatso 1998).

The content of these books represent Tarthang Tulku's understanding of how Tibetan Buddhist teachings can be best tailored for American students. They are therefore, much more than an afterthought, fundraising project, or watered down version of true sacred texts. Rather, they are considered Dharma material in their own right. This understanding is

reflected in the way that the books are exchanged. While they are sold — both online and through the community's own bookstore in downtown Berkeley — everyone I spoke to about this was very clear to me that their revenue does not go to community upkeep. Dharma Publishing (while legally distinct from Yeshe De, which distributes the Tibetan texts) is in fact a non-profit publishing company. In practice what this means for the community is that all of the revenue from Tarthang Tulku's books and the courses and webinars based on them is directed into Yeshe De for the printing of the sacred texts. Dharma Publishing makes its annual contribution to Yeshe De in the form of paper.[29] It purchases (or helps to purchase) the thousands upon thousands of sheets of high-quality, acid-free paper upon which the texts are printed.

At Ratna Ling I spoke with Cliff, a man of entrepreneurial inclination who had founded and run a successful start-up in New York before defecting to TNMC. At Ratna Ling he was promptly dragooned into modernising Dharma Publishing's methods. Cliff told me candidly that Dharma Publishing's revenue just doesn't come from the books in the way it used to: "No one buys books anymore" he joked in our interview. When I pressed him on this and brought up the relentless rate of publication in spite of flagging sales he was quick to clarify that he did not want to downplay the importance of these books. Even if book sales may be flagging it was important that once published the books would be "out there forever" and that the community has a reliable way to entextualise and proliferate the teachings Tarthang Tulku produces every month or two in the form of a new book.

The relationship between Tarthang Tulku and his American students saturates these books from their conception through their production. This saturation is not easily undone through the remoteness of commodification, nor is it meant to be. As Tsing says "there is a gift in the matsutake even before it leaves the commodity sphere" (2016; 125). These books are intended to invite sustained relationships between their buyers/readers and sellers/makers, disrupting the typically truncated exchange that has often been understood to characterise commodities. Through these texts students continue a decades-long conversation with their

[29] Yeshe De is not the only branch organisation that contributes financially to the distribution ceremony. In fact, all the organisations are expected to make a donation in a kind of tithing arrangement. This will be treated in more detail in the "cost of production" chapter.

teacher, but this conversation is a public one, where outside readers are actively encouraged to return.

The enchantment of labor that happens through work as practice is not confined to the bindery space or to regular work hours. As is evidenced through the writing process of Tarthang Tulku's books, and the way they are employed in the community after their printing, volunteers' engagement with these books extends far beyond the benefits of being involved with their physical manufacturing. Rather they are invited to carry their entanglement with these books with them outside the constraints of a workspace. Through work as practice, and explicitly through Tarthang Tulku's writing, practitioners are actively encouraged to question the (artificial) boundaries they have erected between "work time" and "my time". The enchantment that underpins labor in the community, transforming it to a personal practice that belongs to the worker, does not just dissolve the boundaries between work and life, but wonders if they were ever truly there.

This investment of the worker's own creativity and experience into a product bears some resemblance to descriptions of "immaterial labor", heralded as a fundamental shift to contemporary modes of production (Sansi 2015). In this understanding, not only has the product of capitalist labour shifted to the immaterial, but the labor itself has torn free of the constraints of the factory space, carried home in the minds and hand-held technology of the worker (Lazzarato 2006 [2002], Sansi 2015). Workers are explicitly invited to identify with the products of their labour such that the products of labor are no longer alienated, but rather it is the prospect of a sphere of life beyond the reach of work that is rendered remote (Sansi, 2015: 115). The idea that a dissolution of barriers between work and life should go hand in hand with workers being induced to "take responsibility" resonates profoundly with the approach to work TNMC volunteers are expected to assume. They take responsibility not only for the successful production of the objects the community gifts and sells, but also for their own personal and spiritual growth through the process of labour.

This is not to paint a picture of the methodology "work as practice" as merely an exploitative tool designed to sap volunteers of their labor potential. Rather, I mean to show that both a disillusionment with the idea of labor as simply a means for pursuing individual

interests outside work (Castel 1996) — and the subsequent arising of a post-Fordist subject who finds pleasure and self-worth in offering labour for free (Muehlebach 2011) — form the context in which TNMC is embedded. Perhaps this embedding is exacerbated by proximity to California's Silicon Valley — that distillation of precarious and impersonal gig-economy employment against which TNMC members position themselves often. In this context, though, we do find pretense for this dissolution of divisors between "work time" and "my time". Indeed, many of its volunteers cite a search for *meaningful* work as their incentive for joining the community. Further, the devoted act of producing and disseminating a teacher's writings is a perfectly continuous historical role for the student of a Lama such as Tarthang Tulku to undertake (Gyatso 1998), and many of the volunteers see it as such.

This entanglement between the Lama, his students, and his books should demonstrate that these items cannot easily be considered commodities, certainly not pure or alienated ones. Many of the older students are in fact very reticent to use terms like "sell" or "commodity" at all in reference to Rinpoche's books, but also the prayer flags and other items available through Dharma Publishing. I asked one of Tarthang Tulku's longest-running students in the community how it was decided what items could be sold or not and how the revenue was used from items like Tarthang Tulku's books. Audrey has been involved in nearly every kind of art project the community has undertaken from flags to books, statues and everything in between. She has worked everywhere from the foundry, to the bindery, and the sewing room. When I asked her about the for-profit items made in the community, she immediately asked me to be sensitive about using the word "sell".

It was a long time before Rinpoche agreed to sell any kind of prayer flag, Audrey told me. The initial designs were intended for use at Odiyan and in Audrey's account those who saw them and worked on them began to beg Rinpoche for sets of flags they could have. This posed something of a problem for Tarthang Tulku, as it raised the possibility of a situation where the uneducated would be able to interact with and handle sacred materials. This represented a risk to the student, to the sacred object, and to the teacher that had allowed their coming together. Tarthang Tulku's response was to design a set of flags that, while still powerful and sacred, were carefully curated to invoke only peaceful and positive results. Audrey wrote about this in an e-mail to me:

> "Whenever we handle the representations of the sacred, we generate karma even if we do not know exactly what we are doing. Obviously, there are peaceful and wrathful deities, Buddhas and esoteric and tantric images. Of course, all the representations should be handled with respect, but he [Tarthang Tulku] believes that when we do not know the recipients, cannot guarantee that everyone will treat the images and texts appropriately, then we should only offer availability of the images that will not cause negativity. Tibetans really believe that if certain "powerful" images are treated inappropriately, they could cause harm to the persons who mishandle them. So, he simply does not make available images that might fall into the 'could cause harm if handled disrespectfully' spectrum" (22/6/2017)

Audrey was also careful to explain that in this instance the one who purchases the flag is better considered a student than a consumer, even if they have simply walked into the Dharma Publishing bookshop in Berkeley, completely oblivious to the larger community. Audrey actually wrote the word "customer" in scare quotes to reinforce this point.

And yet the impact of commodification on delicate items is still in evidence. Audrey clarified that not a single piece made in Odiyan's foundry has ever been sold — not a statue, not a medallion, nothing. Plenty have been given away to students, but the process of commodification has never been imposed on these pieces, or on Odiyan by association. Even those items that are sold, however, are designated firmly as non-commodities. Tarthang Tulku famously tells his students that they "cannot eat the Dharma" and therefore the profit generated by all of these items — books, flags, *thangkas* — is directed back into the project of printing and distributing Dharma.

Tarthang Tulku's books are not necessarily thought of as simply a kind of translation of Nyingma wisdom into an American dialect. Rather, they are perhaps more accurately thought of as very carefully selected cuttings from a larger tree. They have been chosen and arranged so that they may speak effectively in this context, but also do so safely for new students. With Tarthang Tulku's own books, safety is of particular concern given that these will circulate beyond the Lama's direct influence and that of his senior students. These books must be written and distributed with the possibility in mind that their readers might approach them with little guidance or prior training.

Given that those who purchase such objects are students, even in the context of the fleeting interaction of acquiring a prayer flag from a bookshop, the teacher, Tarthang Tulku, takes on significant responsibility and risk. The teacher is charged with the safekeeping of the student, in deference to their greater store of knowledge and experience, Audrey reminded me. A fact which is exacerbated here by the often complete lack of prior knowledge among American students of Buddhism.

We could read this same dynamic further up the hierarchy in Nyingma Buddhism. Take, for example, the Terma tradition, wherein the teacher (Padmasambhava) takes responsibility for when students are ready to encounter certain materials/teachings by choosing to reveal them only at particular times and to particular recipients. By exposing the material the teacher also takes on a risk. Gell (1998) points out that God's presence as inherent to icons, as works of human agency, represents a risk. God is at least in part at the mercy of these human creators and keepers. Similarly, the teacher invests themselves in the materials they pass on to students, surrendering this part of themselves to the treatment of those students. When the recipient in question is untrained and unsupervised, the teaching given must be correspondingly robust yet benign. Here we might recall the anxiety in the last chapter surrounding the carefully controlled access to sacred forms and objects designed to ensure the safety of both those forms and the student in question. While that concern is still certainly in evidence here, Tarthang Tulku has crafted not only sacred objects that are safe for his students (whether immediate or more distant) but in fact a textual lineage designed both with and for them.

4.5 Sacred Texts: Dangerous Gifts

The resultant open invitation offered by Tarthang Tulku's texts stands in stark contrast to the delicacy and secrecy of sacred texts. Here once again the traditional logic of alienation and the gift/commodity dichotomy is set somewhat on its head. The bindery volunteers are frequently alienated from the seemingly more straightforward gifts they produce in the form of the holy books distributed at Bodh Gaya. By straightforward I mean that they are, in fact, given freely rather than being considered gifts in spite of their commodification. Volunteers' interactions with these objects are strictly controlled — to a greater or lesser degree

depending on the particular text in question — arguably precisely so that their own personhood does *not* become affixed to these objects in spite of their status as gifts.

I contend, though, that this difference in treatment afforded by the two kinds of texts is not a simple matter of sacred versus mundane, but rather a more nuanced understanding of delicateness, danger, and anxiety or protectiveness surrounding the most esoteric texts. I have already demonstrated the sacredness and value assigned to Tarthang Tulku's own books, and the way that they have been carefully produced in order to retain connections to the community in spite of their commodification. I believe the critical concern for the delicacy of texts and the safety of their readers is further evidenced by the differences in treatment demanded by different Tibetan books.

While I worked in the bindery at Ratna Ling a small handful of Odiyan workers came each day to help with the final push before shipment. I was eager to talk to these folks, having had little direct contact with Odiyan's residents until then. Rose was one of these workers, and I liked her instantly. She is tough, all plaid and worn denim with heavy work-boots and sunburnt skin, but she tolerated my many questions with patience and a wry smile. One day as we worked on a line together, packing pecha into boxes, she mentioned a printing run of the Nyingma Gyübum (*rgyud 'bum)* that they had worked on a few years before. I knew that the Gyübum was a particularly revered and protected collection of works and immediately pressed her for details.

This is one of those moments where the friction generated by uninitiated Americans printing sacred material becomes particularly acute. The Gyübum is a guarded set of texts even within the Nyingma lineages, and many monastics and devotees would live out their lives without holding a copy. Rose explained that the tension in the bindery had been high during that printing run, especially for the woman who had been directing it. Anxiously she warned bindery workers over and over not to study the text too closely as they printed it. Those who had studied even a little bit of Tibetan should absolutely not try to read or even sound out the words on the pages they handled. To allow a student to progress too quickly and access esoteric texts too soon reflects very poorly on the teacher, and it is said that to read a texts like the Gyübum before one is ready can be enormously dangerous.

Though the secrecy and esoteric gravity of a text are important factors in the way it is treated in the bindery, there are other factors as well. While I worked in the bindery the crown jewel of that year's shipment was a version of the 8,000 line *Prajñāpāramitā.* The *Prajñāpāramitā* is a critical text for Mahayana Buddhism generally, a far more ubiquitous one than a collection like the *Gyübum*. It is often read by undergraduates studying Buddhist philosophy or hobbyists with a casual interest in Buddhism and there are myriad different translations in many languages and several versions of varying lengths. Perhaps in part it is so valued for just this reason, for its accessibility and ability to reach beyond the confines of Buddhist academies or *gompas* without losing any of its gravity.

The edition designed for shipment was a truly beautiful one. Made in pothi style the thick, high quality paper (nearly cardstock) was dyed a solid, deep blue by bindery workers. The ink used to print the actual text was gold, and not just in colour: it contained several emulsified metals including precious gold. This is a close approximation of a traditional method of printing highly valuable sacred texts — indigo dye would be used to colour the paper, which calligraphers would write on in ink of melted gold. Even more opulent versions of this method are described in the colophons of ancient texts, such as a particular version of the Diamond Sutra (*Vajracchedikā Prajñāpāramitā Sūtra*) — one of the sutras contained within the *Prajñāpāramitā* — whose colophon reads: "Among eighty four thousands collections of Dharma this… is written by the power of the virtue of gold ink on good quality lapis lazuli paper to ensure long life to those who support Buddha's teaching" (Helman-Wanży, 2014). The result of Yeshe De's efforts was a volume roughly the size of two bricks laid end to end, each one weighing about ten pounds. It proved a particularly difficult specimen to pack and lift, but when we meet it again in the distribution ceremony it will be the focus of near-frenzy.

From these examples it should be clear that there is significant variation in the way texts are treated and made even within Yeshe De's mandate of producing Tibetan texts. Even different editions of the same text may be treated differently at different times. The blue-gold *Prajñāpāramitā* from above is not the only version of this text that Yeshe De has printed, nor was it even the only version distributed that particular year. But the particularities of the materials involved and the way it had been made rendered it a focal point both for the bindery workers and the monastics who received (or did not receive) a copy.

4.6 What do the Books do? Distributed Personhood, Two Ways

As Diemberger points out, "in many ways sacred books can be considered as sites of the distributed personhood of the Buddha and of those who followed in his footsteps embodying his legacy" (2014; 222). The conventional wisdom of the gift, whereby part of the giver's personhood is affixed to the thing given, takes on a very literal layer when it comes to Buddhist relics. Images, texts, and other sacred objects are understood not as representations of the figures they depict or describe but firmly as a part of them. Having already established that there is a significant amount of gift entangled in the not-commodities that are Tarthang Tulku's books, it follows that these too allow for distributed personhood. But whose?

In order to understand how both the sacred texts and Rinpoche's books facilitate distributed personhood in different ways we must draw on Strathern's development of Gell's work on agency and distributed personhood. Specifically, the idea that such partible persons might represent assemblages of humans and non-humans (Strathern 1988). This development has entailed a shift away from a focus on dissecting chains of agency in search of a singular initiating intent, and a move instead toward a study of relations through which a partible person is produced (Kester 2011). Indeed, the relations between persons, materials, and space have already emerged in this chapter as central in the production of a text that speaks, while, conversely, this very process of production and its products are indispensable to the making of a practitioner. I will pursue this method of studying partible persons, however, without relinquishing completely focus on the way that indexing through a gift may create hierarchies between the agents involved — those who distribute and those who are entrapped by distribution (Sansi 2014, Gell 1998).

I have mentioned already that the volunteers who make the sacred texts at Ratna Ling often find themselves held somewhat at arm's length from the sacred objects they create, a fact which is especially pronounced when the text in question is particularly delicate or dangerous. This is in part for their own safety — the Lama and his senior students fulfill their obligations to keep students safe by carefully controlling their access to sacred materials. It is also important to consider, though, what impact handling by such neophytes might have on the impressionable texts.

As explained, these texts allow for the distributed personhood of the Buddha. In the Nyingma tradition — where teacher-student relationships are a lynchpin of the tradition — these texts also index a lineage. They form a living part of a set of teachings passed in a formalised way through teacher-student bonds that stretch across centuries. Many of these sacred texts have been compiled by lineage masters whose names the Yeshe De editions bear (such as the collected works of Lama Mipham, Patrul Rinpoche, or Jigme Lingpa). Current figures in the Nyingma school, Tarthang Tulku included, can trace their teaching lineages directly to figures such as these.

This teacher-student relationship that is so critical to the Nyingma is one that is entered into with the utmost gravity. The Precious Garland of the Four Themes (*chos bzhi rin po che'i 'phreng ba*) — a Dzogchen text I read with my Tibetan teacher in Berkeley — threatens that for every instant of doubt in one's teacher one lives another life in lower rebirth. It also mentions that to break this relationship results in severe consequences for both teacher and student. The gravity of this relationship and the critical importance of the lineage throws Tarthang Tulku's students' position into question. Frankly speaking they are not equipped to enter into such a relationship and take a place in the formal lineage that is indexed and distributed through these texts.

They do, however, have some kind of stake in the personhood of these texts, having shaped them in the bindery. But theirs is an incidental agency, facilitated by the far more powerful gravity of Tarthang Tulku's own agency. Through their Rinpoche and the opportunity for enriching labor he offers, the volunteers are afforded the opportunity to play a part in distributing the morality of the book. Tibetan sacred texts are indeed "traps for agency" (Gell 1998) and have been for centuries, hearkening back to their production in Tibet, which brought together assemblages of royal patrons, scholars, artists, monks, and civilian donors (Diemberger et al. 2014). The agency of all those involved, however, is not equally indexed through the resultant text.

While the volunteers themselves might travel to India with their carry-on luggage stuffed with as many extra books as they can manage, it is Tarthang Tulku's name in the colophon. And even his name pales next to the masters inscribed on the spines and covers of these

volumes — they too are distributed through the dissemination of these texts. Within these texts the agencies of many monumental figures are arrayed. The volunteers' own personhood is entrapped by the powerful pull exerted by such figures.

It is also important to note that the most famed Nyingma masters, such as those mentioned above, were often recognized as extraordinarily prolific authors. They produced a myriad of texts with the education of their direct students in mind as much as any long-term persistence. This process of teaching as text-production is a critical part of fashioning one's self as a teacher. Set into the context of the lineage, Tarthang Tulku's own writing practices begin to look altogether familiar. The critical difference is that, while Patrul Rinpoche's students would have been experienced Lamas or monks, Tarthang Tulku has been charged with the training of largely inept Americans. This has required an innovative response carried out through the textual tradition. Thus Tarthang Tulku's own textual lineage is brought into being.

In the production and distribution of these texts Rinpoche's students play a much more active (or agentive) role. Produced in collaboration with his students, Tarthang Tulku has created these texts with their enrichment in mind. For those in the community they are enriched not only through the study of these books, but through their production. This applies whether they are directly creating the books in the bindery, or whether their work elsewhere in the community facilitates this making. The opportunity to practice through work is given to these students by their teacher and his two text-traditions.

But this later kind of texts also serve to index the distributed personhood of the community as a whole. As they circulate the relationship between Tarthang Tulku and his students is enacted again and again, inviting more students to take part. In this endeavor the community have invested their concerns for transformation of the American religious landscape. Their frequent concern about meritorious intention and all of its forward-looking connotations is also invested in these books. This is why, like Odiyan, it is crucial that they exist, that they be available, whether they become bestsellers or not. In fact, the precautions Rinpoche and his students have taken to ensure that even strangers to the community can engage with these books safely speaks to their constant forward-looking. They have implicitly considered a

future without TNMC, whether all that remains of this community are the things they have made. And so, into these things they have enshrined all of their intentions, hopes, and expectations. They have taken careful steps to ensure the safety of future students in hopes that these meritorious intentions might one day flourish again.

4.7 Conclusion

The bindery space offers a focused point where the two textual traditions that define this community can be explored. In it the sacred texts and Tarthang Tulku's own books are brought together, and together they work to enchant the bindery, transforming it from industrial zone to a place of spiritual practice. The interplay between practitioner, sacred text, and bindery machinery has come to distill the push and pull of work as practice. It is held up as an exemplary training space for others across the community branches.

It would be tempting, perhaps, to simply describe the minutiae of the different treatment demanded by these two different textual traditions. To point to these particularities of handling as marking a boundary. A boundary between sacred and mundane, between gift and commodity. I propose, however, that these differences in treatment are a response in fact to a scalar understanding of delicacy and robustness in the sacred. In the bindery the categories of gift and commodity spill into one another, unsettling the conventional understanding of the roles of givers, receivers, and makers. It becomes clear that what is made in Tarthang Tulku's books is a kind of not-commodity, which has been invested with the Lama's relationship to his students and his concern for their training, as well as his management of dual commitments to secrecy and spread of sacred material. This investment of their collective personhood is not purged through the selling of these books — rather these not-commodities invite further relationships with their not-customers as Tarthang Tulku's responsibilities as a teacher extends to these distant readers.

Both of these lineages of text move through the social sphere, catching up the agencies of those they come into contact with. The way their personhood is entrapped and redistributed, though, is starkly different between the two kinds of book. The sacred texts exert a powerful hierarchic influence on those entangled with them, ordering them against the backdrop of the

Nyingma history and lineage. This process draws in grander company that subjugates the presence of TNMC's volunteers within the texts, rendering them incidental agents, swept along in this making process. Their access to the morality of the book here lies in the labor of their production — an endeavor that extends beyond the immediate bindery space to all of the supporting branches of the community.

While they equally advance their spiritual training through the production of Tarthang Tulku's books, the volunteers and students claim a larger stake in the assemblage of persons that are invested in these texts. Through them the volunteers become both makers of the texts themselves, and the intended recipients of their contained teaching. The authorship of these texts can be readily understood as a process of negotiation and conversation between Tarthang Tulku and his students. What is more, this conversation stretches to the imagined wider audience who, paradoxically, will become students and not customers through their purchase of these books.

Chapter Five
Fortifying the Buddha: Decline, Disaster, and Sacred Art

These are the dark days of the Kaliyuga, when people mostly pursue material values and mostly ask how they can manipulate experience for their own ends. So it is not surprising that their hearts and minds are not open to the Dharma, or that they lack faith in the higher purposes that being alive can serve. In such circumstances, they cannot readily appreciate the value of a life devoted to bringing benefit to others.

It may be that through your own practice, study, and work, you see matters differently. Perhaps you would like to share what you are learning. But it may be that people are not ready to accept what you have to offer. So how can we benefit those that we meet in our lives: our friends, our family, our fellow workers, or even people we meet in random encounters?

Tarthang Tulku, *Path of Action*

5.1 Introduction

While books — of both the Tibetan and English varieties — may readily be considered the most central aspect of the community's work and purpose, not all of its sacred-making endeavors take place in the bindery. In fact, sacred objects of various forms are continually unfolding in every tucked away corner. While these may not match the scale of the Sonoma book production, careful tending by the volunteers gives rise to a myriad of other kinds of sacred objects: prayer wheels, flags, banners, statues, tsha-tshas, just to name a few.

In this chapter I will address these other projects of making. Within the community they are generally referred to under the blanket term "sacred art", though this is something of an ill-fitting blanket. The distinction between books and art, coupled with the tripartite scheme of *sksu gsung thugs rten* will delineate a category that is distinct from, though related to, the sacred texts of the previous chapter. The projects of making that I will address here diverge from those previously discussed, not least in terms of their accessibility. Odiyan and the bindery both represent arguably archetypal (or perhaps aspirational) spaces within the community. Access to them is carefully monitored and it is very likely that a short-term volunteer in the Berkeley centers will interact with them only through stories, in spite of the centrality of the book-production project. Involvement in what the community calls "sacred art projects" though, is a far more ubiquitous component of community life.

While these objects also fall into the pattern of scalar forms in terms of their sacredness, many of them are of the more robust and benign nature, suitable for wider circulation. As such, they offer a safe way to engage with sacred materials, and are therefore often the entry-point for new members with regard to learning about sacred materials and work as practice. There are other more delicate and therefore guarded sacred art projects, which I will also address in the ensuing pages, but the accessible projects are of particular interest as their making is increasingly formalised as an introductory pathway to work as practice.

The accessibility of such projects means that sacred art is a critical site of coming to know the community. Through this work they learn not only the practicalities of working with sacred material, but the community's mode of practice is also revealed to them in an embodied way, imbricated with projects of physical making as is consistent with their commitment to work as practice. In particular, I will show how the the temporality of these objects, which is deeply interwoven with their physical making, plays a critical role in drawing community members into the community's imagining of the future, informed by a destructive past. This narrative picks up and strengthens the tethers established with Nyingma history and the landscape of Tibet through Odiyan.

The prophetic stories of collapse, against which these objects are fortified, play an important role for members' education and the community's forward-imagining on a larger scale. It is this capacity of Tibetan Buddhist art to both generate and mitigate destructive temporalities that, I will argue, offers a little-explored dimension of the American Buddhist landscape. While the affective experience of sacred temporality — and especially prophetic temporality — has been readily explored in relation to other religious groups, such studies of Buddhism have remained in large part bound to scripture. I will offer a foray into the lived experience of prophetic time in American Tibetan Buddhism and how it is fostered, understood, and acted upon in the Tibetan Nyingma Meditation Center (TNMC) organisations. Through sacred art and its making the community and its guiding teacher feel their way into the surrounding space, and into the uncertain futures they imagine.

5.2 Art, Artists, Buddha "body", and Buddha "mind": Taxonomies and Terms

In the previous chapter, the category of *gsung* or speech within the tripartite division of *sku gsung thugs rten* served as an effective taxonomic device in order to bracket "books" and delve into the multitudinous ways their voices sound. The remaining two elements of this schema — *sku* (body) and *thugs* (mind) — are generally (though not exclusively) manifest in statues or images and tsha-tshas or stupas respectively. While such pieces, and others, will indeed make up the focus of this chapter their introduction will increasingly reveal that, while this tripartite schema is a very useful analytical device, the "categories" it encompasses are far from strictly divorced or stable. Still, the objects in this chapter draw on two principal features of *sku* and *thugs*: namely, 1) the capacity of relics to render the Buddha's body immediate and actionable (Bentor 1996) and 2) their ability to exercise impact upon even those unaware of their very presence. In this section I will address the ways the community's sacred projects are sorted in an endeavor to shed light on the blending of taxonomies that inform their categorisation. In so doing I will shore up my decision to sort TNMC's projects of making in this way — dealing first with books and next with "sacred art" objects — as an analytical move that draws on clear distinctions in the way such projects of making are undertaken and their products deployed, without suggesting a complete separation of these deeply entangled sorts of sacred objects.

I must first address the category "art" as it is used in this context — what this might mean and how its parameters are drawn. The volunteers are not alone in relying on the term "art" to refer to a rather dizzying host of sacred-making projects. In scholarship "Tibetan art" is frequently used to encompass a wide range of objects from painted or woven *thangkas* and wall paintings to metalwork or statues and even buildings (Logan 2002, Henss 2012, Lo Bue Ed. 2011). Some such objects will sit comfortably within the bounds of what constitutes "art" according to volunteers' experience, but others are somewhat more disruptive. The projects in question here typically involve the production of a multitude of copies of one form, reproduced as faithfully as possible. For example, the printing of prayer flags and the shaping of tsha-tshas en masse are frequent and recurring undertakings for groups of volunteers across the various centers. The repetitive and often monotonous particulars of generating these

objects can at times offer a challenge to understandings of creativity and art that volunteers may have held before taking part in their first "sacred art project" under TNMC's banner.

This is not to suggest that the volunteers are representatives of a homogeneous Euro-American understanding of what constitutes art and creativity. Indeed, challenges to an overly narrow understanding of these fields have blossomed in both academic and artistic circles. Anthropologically speaking, recent challenges levelled at the "cult of creativity" and overemphasis on novelty of product within the study of art, but also in the study of making more broadly (Hallam and Ingold 2007), are pertinent to the kind of creativity in evidence through TNMC's approach to art and creation. Contemporary Western art, too, has levied challenges at the novelty of artistic product and the role of the artist as creative authority (Nelson 2016, Hirst 2012).

Fig. 19 Soon-to-be flags, printed and awaiting sewing. Photo taken by the author.

However, while challenges to the cult of creativity in the anthropology of art may be relatively recent, the exercise of creativity in the maintenance of tradition has not gone unnoticed in the various fields of Buddhist studies. Some argue that no such "cult of the original" governs the production of Eastern art, which values the art of the faithful reproduction as evidence of mastery, rather than fakery, and a critical route for preserving a "form" rather than an "original" (Han 2017). In this different approach to preservation — coupled with a shift in focus that emphasises innovative process (rather than product) — it

becomes clearer how repetitive sacred art projects might be fertile ground for creativity. This is the same kind of creativity, uncovered in pursuit of a model, that was present in the bindery labor of the last chapter.

Thus, there are clear channels established for recognising the creativity of process rather than product; however, this understanding still engenders re-learning for many of the community's volunteers. While "art" is used to describe the product, "artist" is almost never used to describe the makers, and volunteers are routinely urged to challenge their own instincts towards ownership and authorship. In its writing the community has drawn a distinction between the "creation" of certain kinds of art (especially *thangkas*) and their own work, which is classed as "respectful reproduction" brought on by the necessity of preservation (Tarthang Tulku and Cook 1987; 28).[30] While the term "artist" might be available to some, even lay practitioners, to earn such a title entails the embodiment of qualities set out in the sutras that guide artistic production — modesty, humility, and devotion to the dharma among others (Ibid). "Artist" in this understanding refers to one who fulfills these exacting conditions and, consequently, is very seldom applied to makers in the community. The training they receive through these art projects simultaneously impresses upon them the innovative capacities of traditional forms and their production — creativity the volunteers must learn to embody — while also divesting them of their own claim to authorship.

"Art" then, as a category, productively encompasses the creativity and methods deployed in order to create the tsha-tshas, flags, and other objects that will populate this chapter. Further, the kind of "art" category at play here is one that implicitly challenges notions of creativity and authorship that volunteers may hold. But in order to delineate a clearer picture of why these diverse objects should be broadly considered together (and in so doing, contrasted against the texts of the preceding chapter) we must turn to the manner in which they are deployed. It is their shared function in this context — that I will draw on the schema of *sku gsung thugs rten* in order to explain — which clarifies their commonality.

[30] Though, importantly, these "reproductions" are still distributed to the monastic and lay populations as tools for practice, and therefore are clearly still ritually efficacious.

Fig. 20 A box filled with sacred materials sits in the lobby of the Mangalam Center. Photo taken by the author.

The objects that manifest Buddha "body" and "mind" are broadly united in their function "to serve as receptacles for offerings and bases for the accumulation of merit… consecrated receptacles serve to localize certain emanations of the Buddhas, making them available for interaction with human beings" (Bentor 1996; 21). It is this functionality that fortifies the somewhat slippery category of "art", uniting the projects I will discuss in this chapter. Their ability to localise and accumulate merit, though, will be deployed in creative ways that stretch traditional understandings of their utility. Further, the objects created here are united in their ability to exercise great impact on the largely unaware American public. Prayer flags on the wind, curative tsha-tshas, and turning prayer wheels extend their blessings to even the most ignorant. This feature, which unites all the forthcoming projects, renders such objects powerful allies in addressing prophetic decline as they render the Buddha's body immediate and actionable.

It is important to note, however, the fluidity of materials and methods across all the projects that generate sacred objects in this community. Text, for example, frequently plays a significant role in the creation of other sacred objects (even those more clearly associated with Buddha "body" or "mind" than "speech"). A flag or banner, even when printed with the entire text of a sutra, may be deployed in a manner that recalls a stupa more readily than a text. This flexibility is not a unique compromise of this American community, rather *sku*

gsung thugs rten categories frequently lean into one another. Nag-po-pa, for example, when enumerating receptacles for Buddha body lists stupas, temples, stone pillars, grooves, wells, springs, pools, horse platforms and wooden pillars. Atiśa, by contrast, lists stupas as receptacles of Buddha mind, rather than body (Bentor 1996). Demonstrably, these categories are both broad and overlapping, and therefore their malleability here is far from an obscuring of formerly crystalline categories.

The structure of this community and the way they approach their various projects has allowed me to draw a distinction between the projects of text production and that of "art" production that draws from — or at least is assisted by — *sku gsung thugs rten*. The boundary, as I have already intimated, is somewhat ephemeral as the materials and methods for each are very much shared. Still, the salient distinction for this community between the Tibetan and American beneficiaries of their work serves to add more pronounced fissures between their various projects, whose relative delicacy or robustness is of paramount concern. In the last chapter I demonstrated how Tibetan texts — as embodiments of Buddha speech — appear somewhat removed from their American makers. Here, we shall see how art projects, in contrast, are marked by an extremely close (and bodily) entanglement with the volunteers.

5.3 Prophetic Time: The Threat of Collapse and Practices of "Caching"

In the preceding chapter I established and evidenced the creativity involved in consistent and continuous production of sacred forms, especially when bringing such projects to fruition in new spaces. I suggest, though, that there is a facet of this creativity — specifically its temporality — whose exploration remains nascent. Improvisation deployed in pursuit of tradition and continuity is well attended, to the point that this exercise ceases to appear paradoxical. Such a focus on the adaptability of tradition perhaps serves to gloss the future-looking facet to the temporality of innovative Buddhist making. I propose, here, to explore how the temporal experience and understanding of this group of contemporary American Tibetan Buddhists is deeply imbricated with prophetic narratives of collapse drawn from Buddhist understandings of our temporal landscape. These understandings in turn are

deeply bound up in Buddhist art and its production — art is the site where these practitioners both come to learn this temporality, and where they exercise their agency in response to it.

I am not suggesting that narratives of decline in Buddhism have not been well-explored, for they surely have. Much of this exploration, though, takes the form of impressive and thorough investigations of the various sutras outlining collapse, its causes, signs, and the particular time scale it will follow (Empson 2006, Nattier 1991). There appears a chasm between such literature and the equally robust scholarship on the embodied experience of temporalities of prophetic destruction, particularly with regard to millenarian christianity and the rapture (Robbins 2004) and Catholic charismatic movements (Csordas 1997) or more generally the experience of Judeo-Christian sacred time as a departure from cyclic "pagan" time (Fabian 1983). A growing attention, too, to secular narratives of decline in the United States (Lakoff 2007) has remained unconnected to Buddhism in America, though its ties to other religious groups have been explored (Guyer 2008). It seems that the justifiably sinewy link between Tibetan Buddhism and concerns for continuity and tradition, have somewhat muted the forward-looking facets of even prophetic narratives and practices. This gap is perhaps even more pronounced when it comes to American Buddhism, since Tibetan Buddhism in America has been subject to a mystification and fetishisation deeply connected to its appeals based on "tradition" (Lopez Jr. 1999).

By collapse I am referring to the numerous prophetic texts and stories across Buddhist traditions that herald the decline and eventual disappearance of Buddhism. Couched within a cyclical understanding of time, we currently occupy a valley between peak periods of Buddhist practice. The peak preceding our time was presided over by Sakyamuni Buddha, and our current decline was precipitated by his death. The next peak will be marked by the appearance of Maitreya, the future Buddha, whose coming is prophesied in roughly 5.6 billion years, give or take 500 million to account for disagreement between sources (Nattier 1991).[31]

[31] This understanding, in its broadest form, is not unique to Nyingma or even Tibetan Buddhism, but is widely spread in different iterations throughout different Buddhist schools and is shared with (and likely drawn from) Hindu understandings of the Kali Yuga. While there are clear continuities between the Hindu and Buddhist ideas of decline, Nattier points out a key difference that the Hindu writings on temporal progression include no upward-moving periods, only successive declines punctuated with periods of "non-manifestation" (Nattier 1991).

Uranchimeg Borjigin refers to the Buddha's prophecy of collapse — specifically, A Sutra Called the Lamp that Foresaw the Future (*ireeduig ish üzüülsen dzul xemeex sudar)* — as a kind of archetypal prophecy from which all other prophetic narratives are derived. In this sutra the Buddha predicts an age of degeneration following his death, during which humans will suffer all kinds of calamities as though they were living "under a knife" (Borjigin 2006; 32). Various sutras identify the calamities as the shortening of the human lifespan from 8,000 years to a mere ten, and describes the mounting difficulties that will face practitioners as the period of decline progresses (Nattier 1991). The prophecy of decline, then, made by Sakyamuni Buddha is a deeply formative one, shaping not only prophetic writing and utterances that follow, but the Buddhist understanding of temporality more generally.

The remedy the Buddha offers his followers, via Ananda, to counteract this calamitous era lies in the text — its worship, production, and proliferation (Empson 2006). This proffering of text-making as a way to combat the threat of the Kali Yuga offers not only the promise of karmic merit for those involved in such projects, but also serves to fortify the textual lineage itself against the impending age when no practitioners capable of engaging with them will be left. Ensuring that large stores of sacred texts and art are made ready for this period, practitioners invest their hope for the appearance of Maitreya Buddha and the return of the sangha.

The projects of proliferating texts can be cast as a kind of caching of sacred material. The production of texts, in addition to offering a way for practitioners to accumulate merit in the face of decline, fortifies the lineage itself against the continued descent of our world into the age of calamities, such that it will be readily available when suitable practitioners appear again. This practice of caching or hiding sacred material until the opportune moment has special precedent in the Nyingma school. As a Terma (or treasure) tradition the idea that sacred material might be stored for future practitioners is a pervasive one. As I have already described, Padmasambhava is said to have hidden many such treasures in valleys and caves in and around Tibet where they remain preserved until such time as a treasure-revealer should uncover them. In this way, Padmasambhava can guide his students' access to sacred material, in the way a teacher is expected to do, even in his absence.

Positioned against this backdrop of prophetic narratives of collapse and caching of sacred material, new dimensions of TNMC's text-practice begin to emerge. The Sonoma valley — enchanted by Odiyan's presence, and by the ongoing text-production — could be cast as such a valley cache for the sacred. Tarthang Tulku has, gradually over the last several decades, proliferated all kinds of sacred material to fill this space. He has also taken care that this material be curated with the safety of neophytes in mind. This may mean his current American students, lacking as they are in a background of Tibetan knowledge. But it may also indicate a looking further forward to a future in continued decline where students lack any guidance or teachers whatsoever.

One might wonder how such an understanding of cyclic, prophetic time and predictions of collapse might come to be internalised by a group of Americans from diverse backgrounds. Here it is important to recognise that apocalyptic narratives have increasingly become a part of Americans' secular understanding of their world. Lakoff describes the arising of the concept of "preparedness" in the US, which brings together a number of diverse collapse scenarios — from terrorist attacks to natural disasters — together under the same banner as "security threats". Preparedness does not wonder whether calamity will happen, but when: "it enacts a vision of the dystopian future in order to develop a set of operational criteria for response" (Lakoff 2007; 253).

Specifically, these criteria focus not on the protection of individuals, but the preservation of key infrastructures from which the system may be rebuilt (Lakoff 2007). Anderson too points out that the goal of "preparedness", as directed at impending but vague catastrophic events, is to "build the capacity of 'resilience' into the very life that is to be secured" (Anderson 2010; 79). This is uncannily similar to the attention devoted to protecting texts in face of the pressing threat of the decline of Buddhism. Even the term "resilience" hangs well with the "robustness" I have been relying upon to describe the sacred texts and objects Tarthang Tulku dispenses to his American audience. If these texts are carefully preserved and fortified, the entire knowledge tradition may be built up again from them.

The "sacred art" projects below are polyvalent — often deployed to treat an immediate need, whether ceremonial or protective, but underlying these immediate functions is a project

of proliferating and caching materials that could foster the regeneration of the sangha following our age of ongoing decline. These prophetic narratives of collapse, both Tibetan and American, serve as important context for the extreme concern for proliferating and caching sacred material. This material contains the seeds of the "key infrastructures" (Lakoff 2007) from which the tradition may be restored. Through projects of sacred-art making, this prophetic temporality bursts the boundaries of the distant future to soak the bodies and present temporalities of their makers.[32] I explore the improvisation invested in these projects of making not (solely) for their role in creative continuity, but rather as distinctly future-oriented objects. Through them, I hope to offer a window into the temporal experience of this American Buddhist community — its anticipation of collapse informed by historical narratives of suffering — in the hopes that the years to come may bring a more robust field of study to bear on the temporality of American Buddhism more broadly.

5.4 Needle as Mantra: Flags and Sewing

The first art project I will address here is the prayer flag: a rough english moniker for the Tibetan *dar lcog* that translates literally to "cloth (attached to) the pinnacle or turret" (Karmay 1998: 413). These colourful pennants are perhaps the most widely recognisable sign of a Tibetan settlement (Ibid; 413). TNMC buildings are no different: their properties are remarkably ubiquitous even in the eclectic Berkeley landscape, painted a goldenrod colour with deep red accents and festooned with prayer flags. Prayer flag-making (including but not limited to such tasks as designing, typesetting, screen-printing, sewing, and beading) is a very common undertaking in the TNMC Mandala, and most volunteers will experience at least one of its stages. I myself participated in the annual screen-printing of flags for Odiyan.

While the *dar lcog* is certainly a potent feature of the Tibetan landscape — and its presence here undoubtedly furthers the processes of enchantment, subjugation, and invocation of Tibet's landscape discussed in my chapter about Odiyan — its relationship to Buddhism in

[32] I should point out, here, that this acute sense of decline, impressed bodily on volunteers through such projects, is not universally manifest as a belief in a specifically Tibetan Buddhist (or even generally Buddhist) narrative of collapse. However, even for those who maintain doubt in the prophecies of Buddhist scripture, the temporality of these objects still exercise significant impact. Their position as tellers-of as well as antidotes-to a precarious present and future are distinctly capable of striking a more general chord with those who have a completely secular conviction that "things are just shit, and getting worse", a statement that I heard many variations on throughout my time in California.

Tibet is somewhat complicated and changing. As will be evident from the above translation, *dar lcog* has no particular religious connotation in Tibetan. Samten Karmay conceives of the mountain deity and the monastery as the two poles of a Tibetan community, the former the province of the laity, and the latter of the monastics (Ibid; 432) . The *dar lcog* — in particular its ubiquitous form the wind horse (*rlung rta)* — have long been primarily associated with lay practice surrounding the mountain deities. With the saturation of Buddhism through Tibet, however, these deities and the practices surrounding them have been increasingly co-opted and colonised by the Buddhist mandala (Ibid; 447) and even the design of the *dar lcog* themselves now often "contain nothing but prayers and *mantra*" (Ibid; 413).

This somewhat liminal position of the *dar lcog* is not a feature of their appearance in the TNMC community. Even while this community *is* a lay one, the prayer flags here — exclusively featuring Buddhist text and imagery — are key players in the process of sanctification and Buddhification. The very term "prayer flag" here is colloquially applied rather loosely to everything from the small pennants that adorn its buildings to the massive banners printed with entire sutras and images of Bodhisattvas. Further, their most-often emphasised qualities are the ability to heal, placate, and transform.[33] This reference to healing is notable, as it ties the prayer flags to another set of terms that will pervade this chapter, those relating to disease, decline, and illness.

TAP's website describes the flags as follows:

> "According to Tibetan tradition, prayer flags imprinted with sacred images and mantras transmit healing energy into the world through the power of the wind. Prayer flags empowered by mantras affect natural, elemental forces on a subtle level, beyond ordinary human perception. As they fly in the wind, the flags exert a protective, balancing influence on the environment and generate benefit for all sentient beings… The Tibetan Aid Project makes prayer flags to generate healing energy and to help support our mission"

The line about the ability of flags to "support our mission" has a dual meaning. The flags made and kept by the community do indeed support its work through their very existence and

[33] This likely draws on the prayer flags' involvement with purification in the Tibetan context, most notably in the *bsang* ritual performed by the laity, in which the aforementioned *rlung rta* are held over a cairn of burning juniper branches, cereals, and aromatic shrubs to be purified, and then scattered to the wind as the mountain deity is invoked (Karmay 1998; 389).

transformative abilities. They are one of the tools employed by the community in order to render the landscape and environment fertile ground for their sacred work. The flags also support the community's work in a more mundane way. That is, through their sale to the public, whose proceeds support the production of texts and art.[34] TAP's website even provides instructions for recipients on how to treat their new flags — directing their owners never to place flags on the ground or wear them as clothing, and suggesting particularly auspicious days to hang your flag (from a 12-foot pole with the chevrons in line with the horizon) (Prayer Flags - TAP Website).

Fig. 21 A prayer flag. Image taken from Tibetan Aid Project Website (http://www.tibetanaidproject.org/tibetan-culture/sacred-objects/prayer-flags.html)

My first hand experience with flag-making was guided by a woman named Catherine, once one of Tarthang Tulku's most dedicated seamstresses, turned director of his fundraising branch, the Tibetan Aid Project (TAP). Catherine is unfailingly warm, if somewhat scattered, with flyaway blonde hair and an impressive collection of chunky jewellery. She joined Tarthang Tulku in the very early stages of his community, and has remained steadfastly committed ever since. While she no longer sews full-time, it is Catherine who directs the printing stages of flag production at least once a year.

The flags we printed during my participation in the project were destined for Odiyan. Over the course of several weeks a small group of us laboured daily in a small parking space behind one of the TNMC branch buildings, using a mechanical setup cobbled together, customised, tweaked, and adjusted over the course of years. On the first day we took delivery, from a slightly baffled truck driver, of a collection of about 20 or 30 large silk-screening

[34] Which flags may or may not be sold is subject to careful consideration in the same way as the texts of the previous chapter.

frames, each one a part of this set of flags. Though flags may and often do contain images, this set was composed almost entirely of text. Carefully typeset, this text had been rendered on screens that, when clamped to the table (depicted in figure 22), were carefully swept with ink, which passed through the delicate characters in the screen and onto the waiting nylon fabric below. The ink was a mix of reds, yellows, and oranges, with added thickening or thinning agents as required, and just a drop from a small vial of water that had resided in the main temple at Odiyan. The various facets of California's weather all wreaked their own sort of havoc on the ink — heat, cold and humidity all changed its viscosity, even in the course of one day. Too thick and the ink would not seep through every cranny of the screen, leaving an incomplete text. Too thin and the ink would run amok, yielding sloppy text that blurred.

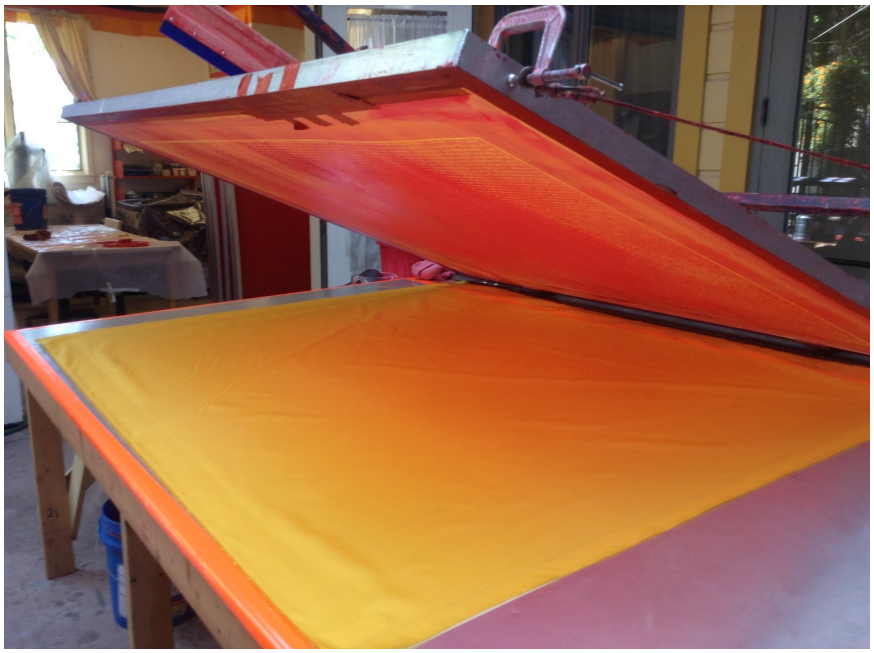


Fig. 22 A silk-screen, mounted and ready to print on a sheet of yellow nylon fabric. Photo taken by the author.

These flags contained passages, I believe, from the Earth Heart Ten Wheel Sutra (*sa'i snying po 'khor lo bcu pa)*. This text is associated with Ksitigarbha, a Bodhisattva whose name often translates to something akin to "earth treasury". While Catherine was not sure of the exact provenance of the text — I had to ask around to track down its name — she did know that the passages, and their associated with Ksitigarbha, had been chosen for their stabilising, grounding effect with the view to prevent earthquakes. The threat of earthquakes is a recurring theme for the art projects at TNMC. Many of these projects are deployed with a

view to placate or subdue impending quakes — a concern that has arisen concurrent with increasing public discussion of a catastrophic earthquake due to hit the Northwest coastal region of the U.S.[35]

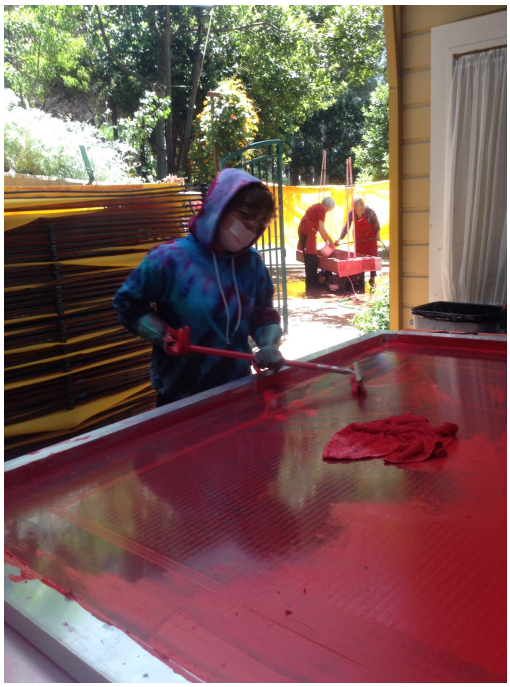
Aside from his ability to quell earthly upheavals, there is another reason Tarthang Tulku might be inclined to invoke Ksitigarbha in the flags' design. That is that Ksitigarbha is best known for his vow not to attain enlightenment before all the hell-realms have been emptied. As such, Ksitigarbha is charged with bringing practitioners to enlightenment in the era of decline between the death of Sakyamuni Buddha and the eventual revealing of Maitreya Buddha. Ksitigarbha will wait to shepherd even the most ignorant and misguided to attainment (Bays 2002, Zhiru 2007). Quite apart from fortifying the earth beneath their feet, this invocation of Ksitigarbha also bolsters the community's own ability to practice with the Bodhisattva's presence as antidote to the barriers to practice presented by this age of decline.

There is a further important detail to this particular set of flags. It is a detail that I noticed early in our printing project in the form of a line in English line at the bottom of the text reading: "Dedicated to the longevity of Tarthang Tulku Rinpoche" and below that still a line of Tibetan text in a much smaller print than the rest of the text. I joked that the typesetters must have struggled with layout on this flag. Catherine corrected me and explained that every flag has such a line at the bottom that functions as a kind of colophon — in this case it is the dedication to Tarthang Tulku repeated in English and Tibetan. The idea, Catherine explained, is that if all other traces of the Tibetan language were to disappear apart from this flag, a linguist would be able to reconstruct the language and interpret the text using this legend. Here again a simple line of text embodies a two-fold bid at fortification; first a securing of the very life of their teacher as a carrier of the tradition, and second to secure the very language of Tibetan Buddhism, insulating it against potential threat.

In their material too, the flags embody resilience — they are made with a burly, durable, somewhat uncooperative nylon fabric, specifically selected for its ability to withstand the outdoors. The thread is tough too, requiring some wrestling during the sewing process, but

[35]A Pulitzer prize-winning New Yorker article published in 2015 detailing this threat petrified a wide readership (Schulz 2015).

likewise made to face the elements. As with many of TNMC's projects, this design decision works both at the pragmatic and the prophetic or spiritual levels. Resilient flags need to be replaced less often, but they also make for more durable receptacles for Buddha's speech and body. This material toughness harkens back to Anderson's (2010) assertion that preparedness is made manifest in the fortifying (or making resilient) of the life that is to be secured. This resilience is built into the flags at the level of their materials as well as content.



Left: Fig. 23 A volunteer cleans the silk-screen at the end of a printing run, using a squeegee to displace the tacky ink. Right: Fig. 24 A clean silk-screen screen dries in the foreground, while newly printed flags dry in the background. Photos taken by the author.

What we produced under the alternating attentions of California's glaring sun and potent fog were a long way from finished flags. Ushering the printed nylon we produced from sacred scrap to full-fledged flag was a task left to defter and more experienced fingers. I had the good fortune of enjoying close proximity to one of the community's most expert seamstresses and Catherine's erstwhile sewing partner from the 1980s. Ada is responsible for much of the sewing in the community these days — both of flags destined for Odiyan and some that make the journey to the Monlam Chenmo (*smon lam chen mo*) in India. My and Ada's work in this medium occupy different ends of a spectrum of flag-like projects. While they differ in many key elements from their accessibility to the kinds of text and images

involved, they are united in their temporality and their urgency, features that are impressed upon makers all along this spectrum. What started as Ada sewing flags part-time for the community on Friday nights soon blossomed into a full-scale operation in the early half of the 1980's. Ada describes working in alternating 12-hour shifts with Catherine — one would sleep while the other sewed — in order to keep the machine running 24 hours a day. They were able to deliver, Ada recounts, 25 enormous King Gesar flags to Tarthang Tulku's sitting room each day.

The frenetic pace of sewing Ada describes is striking and will recall, I hope, discussions of work as practice from previous chapters. Here, however, I wish to draw attention to another facet of this urgency — a feature of the pace of work that is not merely for the benefit of volunteers and their training, but a necessity brought on by the precarity that underscores the production of the Tibetan sacred. That is, the spectre of destruction both past and potential that informs these projects. This is not only evidenced in the recurring rhetoric of "saving" or "preserving" sacred forms, but is also embodied in the very content of the forms curated by Tarthang Tulku.

King Gesar, whose image Ada and Catherine worked feverishly to proliferate, is a warrior king.[36] The Kham versions of the Gesar Epic describe this warrior king as a defender of religion, an envoy of Padmasambhava tasked with the defeat of demon-kings and the restoration of order (David-Neel and Lama Yongden 1933). Gesar too is entangled with prophecy, many of his devotees believe Gesar will return to Tibet once again to suppress violence and return order (Ibid).

This concern for the maintenance of the Tibetan language sufuses the flag-printing projects across the community. During my summer months in Berkeley, Ada's time was utterly consumed with the sewing of a magnificent set of flags that Tarthang Tulku had ordered made for the distribution ceremony. A set of 108 (a very auspicious number) cylindrical flags were to be printed with the entire 8,000 line *Prajñāpāramitā*. The text itself was in shades of gold or blue, adorned with Bodhisattva images, brocade, beading, pennants and tassels. Pictured below, the finished flags were paraded around the stupa by a cohort of monks invited to carry

[36] Gesar is also the title of the community's (intermittent) magazine/journal.

them. Much of Ada's considerable energy and mental capacity was bent to the completion of this project, and she talked about it often. She explained to me that they had brought in another of the community's longstanding members, a linguist, so that this set of flags would incorporate multiple languages that could be used to translate the *Prajñāpāramitā*. The effect in this case is that each individual flag becomes something like a potential Rosetta stone, a key to the language — and therefore the wisdom — of Tibetan Buddhism.

Fig. 25 Completed set of banners, waiting to be paraded around the temple site at Bodh Gaya. Photo taken by the author.

Contained within this single set of flags (and indeed within each individual flag) is a remedy for prophetic collapse on several levels. First, the immediate possibility of a catastrophic earthquake that could literally shatter the foundation of this American sangha that the community endeavors to build. Though these narratives of collapse via earthquake hail from outside the community, they are easily recast within Tibetan Buddhist narratives of the period of decline, which mark out natural disasters as one of the signs of our degenerate time. Second, the flags address the deteriorating ability of practitioners to engage with the teachings in the era of decline through their invocation of Ksitigarbha. Finally, the flags are created with the prediction of the total disappearance of able practitioners and

Tibetan-speakers in mind. Each individual flag, through its colophon, is invested with the ability to single-handedly revive the Tibetan language in the hands of a scholar, presenting the key to the Tibetan language, and consequently to Tibetan Buddhism's store of knowledge.

Often, the colophon of a Tibetan sacred texts amounts to something like the text's mission statement — a place where the text accounts for itself in its own voice (Diemberger 2014). If we accept that a colophon is in effect a book or piece of text speaking, these flags and their creators remember a history of destruction, a present of precarity, and an uncertain future rife with the distinct possibility of threat to the Tibetan language and religion. The prayer flags — though they are only fabric and thread — are fortified against this dangerous future. Through their proliferation in many forms that are designed to reach as many recipients as possible, through their constant careful remaking, through their tough nylon fabric and burly thread, and through the simple line of text impressed upon each of them, which carries the weight of a language and the hopes for the persistence of a lineage.

5.5 Tsha-tshas: Seeds of Healing

We have already encountered the all-important stupa (*mchod rten*), a crucial partner to and product of the labour at Odiyan. Charged with excess printing material from Ratna Ling's bindery they carry out the promise in their name, which translates roughly to "receptacle, support of offerings" (Tucci 1932). They are more than simple containers though, but rather fulfil a long history of the use of the stupa to demarcate and promote the expansion of the Buddha realm so consonant with Odiyan's wider project: "[The stupa] lends splendor to space, and space sanctified it for continuing time. The stupa was an assertion of the consecration of space into the Buddhist Kulturkreis" (Chandra 1932; xxix).

While the stupa holds (and indeed creates) court at Odiyan, it has a frequent partner in the history of Tibetan Buddhist practice — the tsha-tsha — which appears far more often than its larger counterpart outside Odiyan's property. Due to enormous variance in their form and deployment, to give an effective definition of the tsha-tsha is a tall order. Tucci refers to them as "votive stupas", which share ground with stupas as *thugs rten*, acting as "receptacles of spiritual strength" (Tucci 1932; 26). Indeed, the cavity inside the stupa may occasionally be

filled with tsha-tshas at the moment of consecration, but they also act intermittently as relics (or reliquaries), gifts given or received by pilgrims, offerings, or votives (Ibid). They may take many forms, but the ones in this community generally resemble small stupas like the one pictured below. At TNMC tsha-tshas are cast from molds rather than formed by hand — plaster is poured into the molds, then dried, brushed, sanded, and pricked to remove bubbles, then primed, painted and finally coated in a fine gold leaf.

The particular qualities of a tsha-tsha may differ according to its form and the way in which it is empowered. As explained, there has been a significant amount of fluidity and flexibility in the tsha-tshas' history. Even given this quality, though, the uses to which they are deployed by this California community mark a departure. In spite of the strong connection between stupa and tsha-tsha, in my conversations with them their makers would often juxtapose the tsha-tsha against the prayer wheel. In a prayer wheel, the contained scroll of text is wrapped so that the lettering faces outward. When the prayer wheel spins it "activates" the text, sending its energies out into the world. The tsha-tsha, by contrast, contains a mantra that has been rolled so that the text faces inward. This is generally understood to have a "concentrating" effect.

While the meritorious benefits of creating tsha-tshas and the transformative capacities they share with stupas have certainly been preserved, it is this understanding of a "concentrating" effect that guides how tsha-tshas are used here. Specifically, they are understood to have healing and stabilising properties that may be deployed in a focused way as a remedy to suffering or to prevent calamity. It is not unusual for the creation of sacred art or objects to be prescribed as a way to treat pain or illness given their ability to purify negative karma (Lama Zopa 2000). In fact, Ray offers a stunning example of this capacity through a story relayed by Venerable Thrangu Rinpoche about a stupa in his home district in Tibet. This stupa was famous for compassionately taking on the suffering of the district's residents: should there be a smallpox outbreak in the region, the residents would find the stupa covered in black pox, at which time the outbreak would ease (Ray 2001: 361). In this story, however, this curative ability is spontaneously arising on the part of the stupa. What is unique in the TNMC usage of stupas and in particular tsha-tshas is that their curative capacity is not focused on the act of creation itself or on the somewhat unpredictable arising of compassionate healing in

particular stupas, but rather they are *purpose built* and *deliberately deployed* in order to quell oceans, soothe earthquakes, and heal sites of past trauma.

One volunteer explained the difference to me using the analogy of medical remedies for treating a sick body. Where the prayer wheel was the general remedy — lemsip taken to ease a flu — the tsha-tshas are a topical and focused treatment — the cool cloth applied to a feverish forehead. This analogy, quite apart from being very useful, also hints at the imaginaries of sickness and precarity the underlie the use of tsha-tshas. The very reliance on this quality of sacred art invokes precarity, degeneration, and even disease, which plays a significant part in the temporality of such objects.

One of the famous projects still talked about around the community is Rinpoche's recent directive that hundreds of tsha-tshas be made and buried along fault lines in California's landscape. This calls to mind, once again, recent mounting popular attention to California's geological precarity that helps to drive the flag-printing projects and its relationship to prophetic narratives of decline. The analogy of the topical remedy here is pleasingly literal. Tsha-tshas are applied like plasters to the wounds that threaten the landscape.

In the example of the fault-lines tsha-tshas are employed as a preventative measure, but they can also be applied as a soothing treatment following disaster. Tarthang Tulku directed hundreds of tsha-tshas to be loaded onto a ship and dumped into the ocean off the coast of Japan after the tsunami in 2011. Here the effect of the tsha-tshas is one of calming, placating, and healing. In fact, "Planting Seeds of Healing" is the name of a tsha-tsha based project recently undertaken by the Dutch and German chapters of TNMC. This project gathered volunteers to travel to the Nazi WWII concentration camps Bergen-Belsen (in 2014) and Auschwitz-Birkenau (in 2016) to bury tsha-tshas in the earth. The project website explains: "It is said that a tsa-tsa has the power to change negativity and they are traditionally to be buried in order to release the energy of certain places".[37] Through the application of the tsha-tshas the past of suffering and an unknown, but hoped-for future are brought together. Even when the tsha-tshas are being explicitly applied to old wounds they are concertedly future-looking — a fact that is well encapsulated in their dubbing as "seeds" in this context.

[37] http://www.seeds-of-healing.org/about/

Fig. 26 A tsha-tsha of the sort made by Tarthang Tulku's volunteers.
Photo from the Yeshe De Text Preservation Project Facebook page.

Through training and control exerted over their bodies in the process of making sacred objects, volunteers are taught to recognise the sacred through feeling and constructing the shape of its boundaries. It is not only an impression of sanctity that is conveyed through projects that produce the receptacles for Buddha's mind and body, though, but a distinct sense of urgency coupled with imaginaries of disaster. This urgency is impressed physically on volunteers through the seemingly unattainable deadlines they report as standard. Grace explained the intensity of being involved with tsha-tsha making, where Tarthang Tulku had set a deadline for a particular number of tsha-tshas that they knew, categorically, empirically, and emphatically to be impossible. And yet, the team shut themselves up in a shed behind the Nyingma Institute, chanted mantras together and somehow managed to fill their impossible quota: "At one point I was like 'this is not possible…' and then we somehow did it, you know what I mean? It was one of those. I was literally convinced it was impossible. That gives you a little taste because that's a thing you hear a lot around Rinpoche's projects".

This "intensity" that Grace refers to, rather than being simply a result of unpredictable deadlines, appears to be a routine pressure Tarthang Tulku intentionally structures into projects of sacred making. Last minute drastic changes in instructions, or sudden doubling of

quotas passed down from Tarthang Tulku, for example, are such common occurrences across the TNMC organisations that volunteers repeatedly pointed out the pattern to me as Grace did (usually with good humor and wry resignation). Grace and the team of tsha-tsha makers responded to this challenge in the ideal way — through immersive focus, who's power Grace wonders at long after the completion of the project. Through this desperation brought on by deadlines and the resultant heightened focus, volunteers' very bodies become saturated with the urgency that surrounds sacred art and its making in the community. Tsha-tshas in this community emerge as one of a complement of important future-looking and future-making tools. Their use is predicated on an understanding of precarious present (and future) and of a landscape that must be stabilised and placated. Such an understanding is conveyed to volunteers not simply through the ways in which tsha-tshas and other art objects are deployed, but also through the very process of making them, a making process that draws makers into the temporality of prophecy, decline, and urgency. Sacred art projects, then, are a critical tool both in counteracting the envisaged precarious futures, but also communicating the pressing nature of those very futures on volunteers.

5.6 Prayer Wheels: Spinning Remedies

I come at last to the merit-production powerhouse that is the prayer wheel. Their inclusion in this chapter will required some justification on my part, as they are more readily considered instances of Buddha speech. Their juxtaposition with tsha-tshas in the last section is, I hope, a nod towards the prayer wheels' belonging here. I feel a discussion of prayer-wheel making in the community sits more comfortably here than anywhere else in this thesis, due the way prayer wheels are talked about and deployed — namely, with a concentrated focus on their ability to heal, pacify, and transform. These qualities of the prayer wheel favoured by the community tie them more closely with sacred art projects than with text production. Further, in speaking with the makers of prayer wheels, the effects in terms of their acute, bodily understanding of the urgency surrounding sacred objects was undeniably very similar to the language surrounding flags, tsha-tshas, and stupas that is thematic to this chapter. For these reasons I have chosen to include prayer wheels here, in spite of their proximity to text or "speech".

Prayer wheels — which may refer to a small handheld device or a structure several feet tall — are exceptionally powerful merit-fields endowed with the ability to effect "readings" of thousands of mantras at once as they spin. Lama Thubten Zopa Rinpoche describes a text he has translated wherein "Sakyamuni Buddha says that turning the prayer wheel once is better than having done one, seven, or nine years of retreat" (Lama Thubten Zopa 2000; viii). Further, to make or spin a prayer wheel is a significant altruistic gesture, generating as it does such a great amount of merit that is dispersed. Not only this, but prayer wheels are understood, through this powerful capacity, to be able to purify even the most negative karmas and cannot help but impact even ignorant passers-by: "this practice of turning the prayer wheel is a result of unbearable compassion of all the Buddhas for us sentient beings — whose minds are so obscured and dulled with disturbing thoughts, like an ocean covering a whole city, and who are extremely lazy and ignorant — to guide us to enlightenment as quickly as possible" (Ibid; ix). The despairing assessment of sentient beings in this passage, for which the prayer wheel is remedy, is particularly important here and resonates with the stories of collapse and decay that have saturated making projects thus far. Further, the prayer wheels destined to be installed in America have the monumental task of purifying the karma of a population largely ignorant of their very existence and the tradition from which they hail.

The function of a prayer wheel to shape the mind and promote positive qualities of those in its field is certainly continuous with their use at TNMC. However, some of their practices relating to the wheels represent developments on more traditional methods. Often, TNMC prayer wheels will not contain copies of the mani mantra, but rather entire texts or even multiple copies of complete texts. Given the fact that prayer-wheel makers must handle complete sacred texts, their job is a far more guarded appointment than the other art projects across the organisations.

One of the many websites intermittently maintained by the various branches of TNMC is dedicated specifically to the prayer wheel project. The very title of the website — "Prayer Wheels for World Peace" — should give some impression of my decision to include them here. This passage is taken from the "What are Prayer Wheels?" section of the website's homepage:

> "In recent years, the world has seen how quickly knowledge — even when valued and protected by an entire culture — can be brought to the brink of extinction. In response, we have made great efforts to preserve the cultural heritage of Tibet, including the intricate science of dharma wheels, which are in themselves ways of preserving and disseminating the benefits of enlightened knowledge. Having created more than a thousand 4 foot high wheels for our own organization and donated 100,000 of the hand-held wheels to individuals in the Himalayan region, we have come to share the view that dharma wheels have a calming and healing influence on the environment and human beings, qualities greatly needed in our world today".

This passage deftly invokes an understanding of pervasive suffering and decline afflicting our present world — though this sentiment is ambiguous in terms of its secularity or religiosity, a frequent feature of the official channels of communication. The wording here also conveys a great deal of how prayer wheels are understood and valued across the orgs, and they too embody the now-familiar dual approach to protection of the tradition. That is, both through their sacred soothing and healing influence that staves off destruction, and as physical embodiments of the threatened knowledge. More than 100,000 such physical embodiments, the website tells us, are proliferating not only the production of blessings and healing energy, but multiplying the possibility of the survival of the knowledge tradition in face of the past and present threats alluded to.

This site also reflects what many members of the community explained to me — that prayer wheels and their contained texts can be carefully selected and specifically crafted to prevent natural disasters, diseases, barriers to practice, and to foster world peace. They are directly oriented to confront, then, the symptoms of prophetic decline that opened this chapter (though these symptoms are readily and effectively cast as secular when necessary). Prayer wheels, here, are deployed in ways that are markedly different from the texts they contain — and their usage not captured by the basic understanding of the spinning of a prayer wheel amounting to a recitation of a text.

My Tibetan teacher, Joseph, directed the small team that assembled prayer wheels in the basement of Padma Ling in Berkeley. The other members of this team were all men, mostly longstanding members of the community, and others had very limited access to the project and its basement workshop. I was lucky enough to be given a tour one day while at this

particular property to collect some flag-printing equipment. This project is housed in a series of small, dim rooms cluttered with bits of machinery, paper, ink, wires, metal casings and all manner of other odds and ends. Towering reams of paper covered in tiny red Tibetan font caught my immediate attention. Joseph indicated one of these large sheets of paper and explained that the type was in four point font, and would take about 90 sheets to make up a complete *Kanjur*. These sheets would then need to be taped together into one long scroll, which is then wound around a large wooden spool before being fitted into a prayer wheel casing. But prayer wheels come in many sizes and so too do their corresponding texts — there were also microfilm rolls, no larger than a film canister, printed with text measured in microns and only visible through a microscope. Joseph was quiet, reverential, as he led me around the workspace.

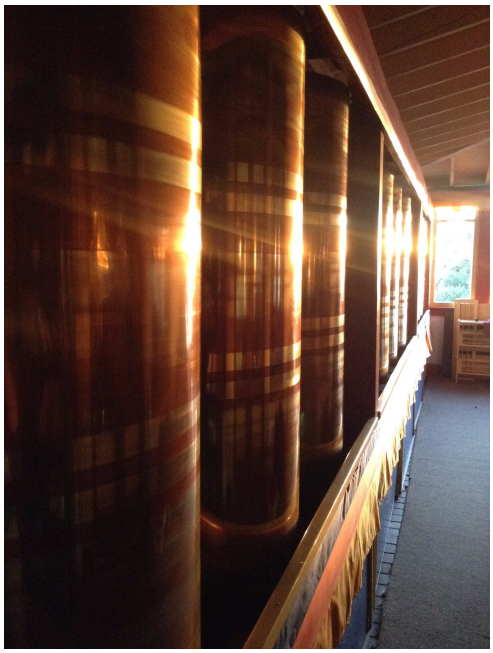


Fig. 27 A row of electric prayer wheels (made in house) that spin on the main floor of the Nyingma Institute. Photo taken by the author.

In a bid to correct what I believe he saw as my unfortunate clinging to "academic" proclivities and inability (or unwillingness) to grasp the true gravity of the material we studied, Joseph frequently used his work with prayer wheels to punctuate lessons delivered in the texts we translated together. This practice of his intensified as I began my work with the flag-printing project. He was adamant that I understand the gravity of the opportunity that I was being offered. In one such lesson he explained to me pointedly that wisdom and merit are

like the two wings of a bird — both indispensable for flight. Wisdom, he insisted, cannot be made manifest without merit-making activity and many academics not “on the path” failed to understand this. Joseph himself told me, in an awe-filled voice, that after so many years in the prayer wheel workshop it was perfectly possible that more prayer wheels had passed through his pair of hands than those of many a high Lama. The significance of this offering made to him by his teacher, and the fact that his position would be a highly restricted one in a monastic context, was not lost on Joseph.

Another community member and a friend of mine, Everett, spoke even more plainly about the power and influence felt by those in the vicinity of the prayer wheels. He had worked part-time on the prayer wheel project for some time — devoting his Saturdays to the quiet winding of scrolls of sacred text instead of, as he suggested, “kicking back with a beer”. He described the awe he experienced when travelling to Bodh Gaya to give away the hand-held wheels he had helped to create. It is through this very process of creation and then gifting that this volunteer came to learn about Tibet:

> “Everybody knows Tibet! We've got to help Tibet! Everybody! So that's in there too. I mean I don't really know anything about Tibet — I learned that here. What happened in 1959? You know, I didn't know anything about that. I wasn't like one of those hippy dippy kids in high school. I was like math-science oriented, I was going into physics, probably astrophysics, that was kind of my orientation. But then something else called me, so... so I didn't know anything about Tibet. But anyway, I learned that here”. (Interview 17/9/2016)

In his description it was plain that Everett had come to learn about and internalise the community’s goals through the physical process of making prayer wheels. Their immediate impact stems from their “giftiness” — the fact that they will be offered freely. The virtue of this act, and of the wheels themselves strikes Everett even before he has come to appreciate the cause that incited this giving. It was not altruistic passion for Tibet as a “cause” that drew Everett to the prayer wheels, rather through their making he came to understand the urgent need of that project.

Joseph expresses this urgency too in his reverential descriptions of his work with the prayer wheels. Quite apart from being a cherished opportunity for merit-making offered by his

teacher, Joseph understands this work as crucial and timely. He joked with me that he sometimes reflects on the course his life has taken to lead him, with all his years of graduate study and professional experience, to spend his days in a basement gluing pieces of paper together. And yet in spite of the seeming banality of the everyday manifestations of sacred work, Joseph sees his part in a larger project of safeguarding the Dharma, deeply necessary because "Those who are on the side of the Dharma are very few and far between and … the tradition has been placed in great peril. And so he [Tarthang Tulku] really impressed upon us that this historical juncture with the endangerment of the tradition in Tibet and the introduction of this newborn infant tradition in the West was a very dicey time, and that anything that we could do to bring more energy and more concentration to it would be of particular value and importance".

Here is plainly written the urgency of fortifying and fostering the tradition, hitched as it was to a conversation about making and the critical importance of this embodied process. In processes of making the community's commitment to work as practice, its imagining of precarious futures, and its commitment to shoring up the lineage are brought together. It is not simply that making prayer wheels reflects these goals and understandings, but rather prayer wheels and their making are partners in creating the sense of a precarious present that must be fortified against pervasive and pressing degeneration. Prayer wheels provide a way for this community to approach a perilous future and precarious present. In doing so, prayer wheels become a more specialised tool — not simply a recitation of Buddha speech for the dispersal of merit, but carefully conceived and levied against specific threats envisioned in the form of natural disasters, disease, violence, and a world that suffers for lack of contact with Tibetan Buddhist wisdom. They at once re-inscribe and fortify against the imagination of precarity, danger, and preservation that guides and shapes this community.

5.7 Conclusion

The urgency that pervades the projects of making at TNMC brings close the prophetic narratives of disaster that help to drive them — instilling their imminence in practitioners more effectively than sermons might. This learning process is acutely reflected in the accounts given above by those who participate in such projects. They describe a process of

coming to appreciate the urgency of the position of Tibetan wisdom at this present juncture, couched within its destructive past and looking toward an uncertain future. Their gradual understanding of this precarity is critically linked to their experience of sacred art making. In relation to these receptacles of Buddha mind and body the maker's body is structured through an understanding of temporal precarity, through which volunteers come to understand their own role as facilitators and fortifiers of the sacred forms of Tibetan Buddhism.

The kinds of prophetic decline (both sacred and secular) that sacred art objects both tell of and act against come to be experienced in an embodied way by volunteers. From the physical properties of the materials they work with, to the places the finished products are deployed, and even the pace at which volunteers must work all serve to ensure that those who make sacred art share in their feeling of urgency and uncertainty, but also their aim to preserve and fortify. The focus on labor, making, and work as practice in the previous chapters will already have given an impression of the critical importance of bodily practices to this community. In relation sacred art making projects, though, this importance is made clearer. Through the practice of work volunteers are taught not simply how to shape the sacred and how to recognise it, but they also learn to shape themselves in relation to this sanctity. It is this dimension of Buddhist prophetic decline, I believe, that is conspicuously absent in scholarship thus far. This is especially true of the study of American Buddhism, so often absorbed with the prospect of Tibetan "tradition" and its appeal for Americans.

This semblance of precarity and fortification echoes back through the previous chapters in this thesis, illuminating the resilience built into Odiyan at the very level of its construction material, the variety of texts proliferated at Ratna Ling made with critical attention to their robustness and accessibility, and the massive scale at which all these projects are undertaken. A scale that speaks to hope instilled by Padmasambhava's prophecies — that proliferation of the word and body of the Buddha might carry the tradition (or at least its seeds) through the age of decline to a new regeneration.

If consecrated objects (or art objects) localise the Buddha's influence so that it can be interacted with (Bentor 1996), TNMC are also exercising the ability to purpose-build these receptacles, optimising them for fortification and durability. The localising has entailed not

only a focusing of the Buddha's presence, but of the implications and abilities of Buddhahood. Capacities of healing and stabilising — and the Buddhas, Bodhisattvas, and symbols that distill these qualities — are purposefully arrayed against ever-present imaginings of precarity and decline. Through the very making of such potent objects volunteers drink in the prophetic temporality of the sacred art, the urgency that suffuses their creation, and their capacity for resilience.

Chapter Six
The Cost of Production

Over the years, I have had to cope with the emotionality of countless students and volunteers. To get the job done I have had to nag, push, ask, and beg, to chase down and chase after, to resolve countless conflicts that have flared into negativity. I have had to watch as our projects and the community paid a big price for mistakes made early on in a project due to a lack of caring or a failure to think things through thoroughly.

My wish is that you take responsibility for the community, or at least for your project, as a whole. Then you can prevent such situations from arising or help resolve them when they do. If you support each other, help each other, and teach other, you can make the community function better and help establish a foundation for transmission of the Dharma.

- Tarthang Tulku, *Path of Action*

6.1 Introduction

I have argued that the enchantment that suffuses this community and its work is at times levied specifically in order to relieve sacred objects from the strain of commodification, charging them with a resilient "giftiness". But what happens when we move into parts of the community where commodification, and financial concern more broadly, become stickier and seem to cling to every surface? Tibetan Nyingma Meditation Center (TNMC) projects are large scale, industrial and expensive. While individual wealthy donors have been critical to its growth they are not enough to sustain Tarthang Tulku's relentless pace of production. Fundraising, advertising, pitching, and selling all must play a role in TNMC's mission to save and foster the Dharma. How can sacred objects, even robust ones, be introduced and made to speak or act safely in these sticky surroundings that are saturated with a worldly concern for the pecuniary?

In this chapter the same texts that moved through the bindery space will become the centrepiece of a high-class fundraising gala, the subject of a documentary-style epic, and background photos on course pamphlets. Each context elicits a different voice from these polyphonic embodiments of Buddha-speech. I will explore how and whether their different registers hang together — comfortably or uncomfortably — and the kinds of work community members must undertake in order to enact the voice of sacred material in ways that are deemed acceptable and respectful. In order to offer some context for the capacity of the text to sound in such fiscally-focused spaces, I will position TNMC's fundraising activity against the backdrop of patronage networks that have long been convened in order to support

major efforts in text production or translation in Tibet. Such a comparative endeavor will throw into sharp relief both the continuities and departures evident in TNMC's approach to patronage.

While most of the organisations engage in some kind of fundraising or outreach there are two that are particularly enmeshed with these concerns. The first is the Tibetan Aid Project (TAP), one of TNMC's oldest branches and tasked from its early days with collecting resources for Tarthang Tulku's projects. The second is Guna Foundation, the branch of the community that creates and distributes films. These two, principally tasked with garnering public attention and support, take up an outward-facing stance unique among the assemblage of TNMC organisations. TAP and Guna offer an important counterpoint to the rhetoric and teaching deployed toward community members, students, and recruits, which has saturated the preceding chapters. Through looking at the projects TAP and Guna undertake I will also explore what happens to the central narratives of work as practice, prophetic temporalities of destruction, and preservation when they are turned toward a broader public. We will find that these narratives change substantially, as does the depiction of the community's own practice and religious status, when directed toward an audience composed of potential donors and supporters.

My focus in this chapter will not be strictly constrained by TAP and Guna as there are instances of their outward-facing themes across the other community spaces, most notably in the recurrent need to design informational materials and campaigns to address the broader public. From the seemingly banal process of creating and distributing a brochure, for example, I will unpack themes of anxiety and creativity surrounding new uses of sacred material, how to make the sacred speak in new contexts, and how a volunteer must transform their aesthetic, artistic, and authorial sensibilities in order to produce the "right" kind of product.

Throughout this thesis I have described how the fluidity and pragmatic sacrifices that characterise working with the community's Tibetan sacred material can occasionally harden into a stark boundary. The ethnography in this chapter will appear teeming with these kinds of hard edges. Volunteers involved with fundraising bump repeatedly and often frustratingly

into constraints to the way they navigate this particular aspect of their projects. However, I hope to show that, quite apart from being an arena of strict control, these endeavors can in fact be cast as some of the community's most creative undertakings. With pamphlets, brochures, websites, and public fundraising campaigns the community is breaking new ground for the embodiments of the Tibetan Buddhist sacred they produce. In doing so, new spaces are uncovered where the Dharma can be made to speak, though the process of drawing out its voice can at times appear uncomfortably discordant.

6.2 Raising (funds for) the Sacred: Patronage and Production

In spite of their aforementioned resilience to commodification, there is an enduring facet of the relationship between the sacred objects of Tibetan Buddhist practice and financial flows — namely, in the patronage networks that have long served to bring such objects into being. Large-scale printing operations in Tibet have often owed a debt to particular monarchs, politicians, or other deep-pocketed sponsors who affixed their names to such projects for a variety of reasons, as well as to especially industrious and faithful individuals with noted ability to draw together their various relational ties into effective patronage networks. Couching TNMC's promotional work in this history of patronage will render familiar some of its elements, while also marking the difference in kind between erstwhile Tibetan networks and these American donors. In particular, the types of actions and rhetoric that draw the support of American patrons appear as a move from merit-making to heritage preservation. Rather than a cheapening of the texts' sanctity, however, their fluency in the language of human heritage points to a new facet of the previously noted innovation that patronage relationships have allowed for (Diemberger 2014b) and a testament to the transcendent capacity of the book to "speak" across genres in an appeal to morality that is both secular and religious (Diemberger and Hugh-Jones 2015).

It is critical, first, to underscore the often under-attended innovative power that has long resided potential in the patronage relationships of Tibetan Buddhism. The traditionally common patronage relationship is one between lay donor and monastic donee. In this bond there is a mutual dependence that does not entirely offset the hierarchical facet of the relationship, wherein monastics are spiritually superior to their lay counterparts. However,

these networks are coloured, too, by overarching hierarchies of political power, and the ambiguities in the encounter between such hierarchies are often strategically manipulated to innovative result (Diemberger 2014b). In fact, there is a notable amount of fluidity in these arrangements; hierarchical relationships between the two parties are prone to shifting, and one or both counterparts might be composed of multiple individuals acting as a cohort (Ruegg 2014).

Herein lies the first departure in TNMC's method of collecting sponsorship. That is, that the initial donees are lay people and not monastics. This difference is addressed, however, through the community's relentless focus on the centrality of the texts as the true recipients of the sought-after donations. Of course, such donations benefit the monastics who receive the textual gifts as well, but very often the focus of community rhetoric lies with the preservation of the texts themselves. In any case, the often-understood directness of the relationship between donor and donee is somewhat obscured here.

The disjoint from what is typically understood as a patronage relationship raises the question of terminology more generally. English terms "patron" or "donor" may carry misplaced semantic baggage (Ruegg 2014). While I am conscious of the slippage between these English terms and the Tibetan relationship they refer to, my choice to use them is a deliberate one. Words like "donor" and "patron" invoke relationships to American aidwork and sponsorship campaigns — an association that, I will demonstrate, is quite appropriate in this context. Using these terms allows me, in my explanation of these fundraising activities, to pay dues to both the long history of networks that support the creation of sacred texts, and also to the rhetoric of aidwork and heritage conservation. In short, the linguistic baggage does some helpful work here.

The commission of printing projects in Tibet by wealthy (often politically powerful) donors has been leveraged publicly in order to accrue merit for oneself or for one who has passed away (Diemberger 2014b), to enact the persona of righteous ruler, to atone for ill-deeds, to consolidate political alliances (Barrett 2008), or to establish connections with particularly renowned sages (Clemente and Diemberger 2013, Schaeffer 2009), to name just a few motivators. In return the monastics, scholars, and artists receive far more than simply cash to

finance their projects. Rather, the room for negotiation in status afforded through these patronage networks offers opportunities for "making significant technological, aesthetic and literary advances in what could otherwise be perceived as a context dominated by the enactment of antiquity" (Diemberger 2014b: 347). The financial and political breathing room offered by a deftly handled patronage network becomes one in which creativity may flourish. Such creativity certainly characterises TNMC's sacred-making projects, not only in the objects themselves and the method of their production, but also the way in which the networks themselves are convened.

Printing projects have historically mobilised expansive networks of support with the uncanny ability to bridge gaps between other forms of relatedness, such as kinship, political allegiances, or religious lineage (Clemente and Diemberger 2013). Texts and their expenses have long been embedded in wider transactional fields as more than simple products or bargaining chips, but as agentive players with the ability to draw together disparate groups of participants toward the purpose of printing. Some features of these networks are still starkly visible in the ways TNMC goes about financing its projects. Large donations from wealthy individuals — as well as more modest offerings from others — have played an important role in the shaping of TNMC's history. It is not at all a stretch to imagine that these donors might be drawn to the meritorious promise of such a large-scale project of sacred creation and benevolent distribution.

However, TNMC has had to re-orient parts of its operation in order to tap into quite different patronage networks to support both the production of sacred texts, and the additional (also meritorious) activity of fostering Tibetan Buddhism in America. TNMC's patronage networks are not composed of the devout, nor necessarily the politically powerful or even very wealthy. Instead, they are made up of the philanthropist, the activist, the humanist, the amateur historian, the yoga hobbyist and many other such figures that populate TNMC's Californian context.

The community's ability to approach and communicate with such networks demonstrates no less innovation than more traditional patronage networks, in fact there are parallels between the current plight of the book and the flourishing of printing in 15th century Tibet

during a time of political upheaval (Diemberger 2014b). The emergent quality of Tibetan sacred texts to exert a moral appeal that resonates in both religious and secular registers has parallels closer than 15th century Tibet, however. Many of the sticky intersections TNMC volunteers will navigate in this chapter are faced too by those who would undertake similar preservative projects in contemporary China. Deng Xiaoping's drastic policy changes at the 1978 Third Party Plenum precipitated the re-enshrinement of the freedom of religious beliefs (Diemberger 2014b) and corresponding emphasis on carefully controlled cultural revival in Tibet, including the resurgence of monasteries, shrines, and rituals (Barnett 1994, Diemberger 2014b, Goldstein and Kapstein eds. 1998, Schwartz 1994).[38] Projects and centers explicitly devoted to the fostering of sacred texts have also resulted from this shift in policy. While such centers are officially designated as secular, in practice they are led by Buddhist scholars, executed by monastics, and funded by private Tibetan traders enacting traditional patronage relationships (Diemberger and Hugh-Jones 2014).

TNMC is not alone in its strategic manipulation and innovation of traditional forms of patronage. The fluidity structured into such relationships is called upon in contemporary Tibetan revival projects across the world. Often those that would deploy such patronage networks face the same challenges of shaping them around the need to make appeals in spaces designated secular. Such a challenge evidences the polyphonic capacity of Tibetan sacred texts to exert their powerful moral appeals across religious and secular registers, and I will investigate how they resonate in turn with the secular themes of heritage, nostalgia, and preservation.

6.3 The Book as a Cause

On a November evening at the Four Seasons Hotel in San Francisco an event months in the making comes to fruition. Two dozen Bay Area chefs, boasting various accolades, work together in pairs to bring to life four-course meals. Every pair caters to a table of 20 diners, each of whom has paid a ticket price of over $300 for the privilege. The tables all bear

[38] The revival of Buddhism in Tibet from the early 1980s has also entailed a burgeoning interest in Tibetan Buddhism among Chinese individuals (Caple 2015, Jones 2011, Smyer Yü 2012, Zhang 2014). Chinese devotees are also increasingly taking up donor relationships with Lamas or monasteries in Tibet, a fact which has instigated a range of somewhat fraught reactions in Tibet (Caple 2015). Some fear that the tide of monastery construction represents a turn toward material development over education and practice (Caple 2011), often tied to a more general narrative of our present era of moral monastic decline (Caple 2015; 473-474).

pointedly Tibetan Buddhism-inspired names: the "Three Jewels Table"; the "Endless Knot Table"; the "Wheel of Dharma Table". On these auspiciously christened tables are served up various emulsified, caramelized, toasted, and tossed delicacies. To wash down the feastly fancies there are fine wines donated by the crate from surrounding vineyards. Once sated the honored attendees have the chance to bid on various lots at auction. For the taking are an eclectic mix of donated goods and experiences ranging from spa getaways, vacations, and magnums of champagne to an "Aristocratic French Bulldog Mailbox" fashioned out of junk metal and donated by a pair of local artists.

This extravagant evening is no simple night of decadence, though. This is Taste & Tribute: a gala hosted annually by The Tibetan Aid Project since 2006 and one of the larger fundraising endeavors undertaken by TNMC. As chefs, donors, and attendees are frequently reminded throughout the event and its planning, their participation here is critical in upholding the "unbroken lineage" of Tibetan Text tradition that must be safeguarded for our future generations. Reminders of this critical cause abound throughout the evening.

"Almost all of the 6,000 libraries and schools of Tibet were destroyed in the 60s and now Tibetan Aid Project has a goal of recreating the book collections and thousands of new libraries spread out in India, Nepal, Sikkim, and Bhutan and tonight, you are going to help us make great strides in making that happen. Let's start the auction with lot number one!" says the auctioneer before launching into the open-throttle tumble of auction-chatter, gesturing as paddles flash about the room.[39] The transition from philanthropist rhetoric to the rapid-fire buy-and-sell of decadent treats is jarring, but perhaps an apt distillation of this evening's event.

This facet of the community's work is a critical one, not least because it reveals an interesting layer of the voice of sacred texts. Here there is subtle interplay of sacred and secular value, each of which are deployed strategically in various situations. Taste & Tribute, and the Tibetan Aid Project more generally, must strike a balance of appeal to the spiritual value of texts, and their secular or humanitarian importance. This often involves what might

[39] This is a clip taken from the "About" page of Taste & Tribute's website.

be seen as a muting of the organisations' own religious affiliations, or at least a selective deployment of them, stressing instead that of the texts themselves and their recipients. No mention is made here of the budding American sangha or of the imminent and ongoing decline of our time that must be counteracted with the production of texts. Rather, a different aspect of the temporality of sacred texts is drawn out, one that invites access to the potent elements of nostalgia and shared heritage, invoking a collective unity bent toward protecting our shared human treasures.

Lowenthal has suggested that approaches to history in recent centuries have rendered the past a foreign country whose tourist traffic is readily fueled by rampant nostalgia (1985: 4). Perhaps it is this very break in continuity with our soil's history and the rendering "foreign" of the past more generally that allows for the arising of a sense of communal, transnational human history to be protected. This element of preservation is key for Lowenthal, becoming so (perhaps perniciously) pervasive in our relationship to the past that it precludes other modes of interaction (Ibid.). While elements of this kind of potentially paralytic nostalgia may feature in the way the Tibetan Aid Project communicates with its audience, Lowenthal's assessment does not account for the possibility of the object of preservation itself — the sacred text — as a powerfully agentive player capable of subverting such interactions.

In this context sacred texts are no longer presented as the key to humanity's relief from mounting suffering, but rather as the lynchpin feature of an embattled and endangered Tibetan culture, which is valuable in its own right in the rhetoric of heritage. Tibet's "culture" is specifically referred to as the object of these efforts frequently. TAP's website lists is goals since the 1980s as "Saving a Culture" ("Our History" TAP Website). In the lobby of TAP's downtown Berkeley building there is a small sign propped on a foyer table that reads: "The Tibetan Aid Project helps rebuild, preserve, strengthen, and perpetuate Tibet's cultural and spiritual heritage for the benefit of the Tibetan people and all humanity". Such smooth adoption of the yearning timbre that has long characterised the American imaginary of Tibet is an ability that Tibetan Lamas in exile have demonstrated in abundance (Barnett 2001, Dagyab Kyabgön Rinpoche 2001, Lopez Jr., 1999, McMahan 2008). That ability, and the readiness of texts in its service, are a part of what has maintained Taste & Tribute's position as a part of TNMC's repertoire of fundraising tools. As a result the Tibetan Aid Project has

developed a particular fluency in both the nostalgic narrative of endangered Tibet, and the moral appeals to the preservation of (secular) shared human heritage.

Fig. 28 A sign on a small table in the entryway of the Tibetan Aid Project. Photo taken by the author.

The use of the term "spiritual" on the placard above — rather than "religious" or "Buddhist", for example — perhaps calls for more focused attention. This term is a part of the strategic and selective invocation of the overtly religious, designed to appeal to an inter-denominational audience. Certainly some would point to its use here as symptomatic of the entanglement of commodification and capitalism with the privatisation of religion and secularisation — "spirituality", they might say, hiding behind its vagueries, has been co-opted by neoliberalism (Carrette and King, 2004). An assessment that might rely in turn on the obscuring vagueness of the term neoliberal.

Rather than a cheapening of the sacred, however, I would argue that, as is the case with Engelke's (2013) Bible Society, the employment of sacred texts here marks an invested belief in the ability of the texts to speak effectively across various temporal registers. In order to evidence the Bible's enduring relevance and "always ready" nature, Engelke's Bible Society, acting as the Book's PR team, strip the outward religiosity — manifest in crosses or images of Jesus, for example — from their communications (Engelke 2013). For TAP, there is no

need to strip all references to religiosity. Quite the contrary, in fact, references to monks and nuns play very well in this arena and lend themselves effectively to the nostalgic verve that accumulates around projects of preservation. They are, however, recast in the terms of "heritage" and are coupled with a subtle downplaying of the community's own religious practice.

This appeal to the cultural value of the book — whether bible or sutra — reveals the presence of the text on multiple temporal levels. It appears as both transcendent and immediately, urgently relevant — the book's "always readiness" is co-constituted with its right-now relevance. These two temporal dimensions that are brought together in the sacred object allow for an understanding of the secular and the religious as mutually constitutive, rather than exclusive (Engelke 2009). The destructive temporality of sacred objects elucidated in the previous chapter are not mutually exclusive with the temporal urgency of the appeal to heritage preservation made on behalf of the book in this context. A distinct sense of immediate need ties together these two articulations of the importance of the sacred text, its need to be rescued and its capacity to rescue in turn.

It is in this cross-temporal appeal that, Engelke points out, the Bible Society are able to exercise creativity in their role as PR agents for the bible: "...as far as the society is concerned, appealing to the language of the market is not a degradation of faith but a sign of Christian innovation — not a surrendering of one's values but the incorporation of another's as understood through a projection of how language works *for* that other" (2013; 97). In a similar way TNMC are able to exercise creativity when it comes to the promotional spaces of their organisations. However, their form of creativity is tied to the convening of patronage networks, a space that, as we have already seen, has a noted history of generating creative manipulation of relationships. This consistency with longstanding behaviours, which tie together the sacred and money, trouble the association that has been made by some between the invocation of "spiritual" as a concept and capitalist commoditization (Carrette and King 2004). Appeals to spirituality or culture can readily be recast as developments in a long-established set of strategic behaviours that allow the financing of the sacred.

Further, the assertion that commoditization renders the sacred vulgar relies on a misplaced assumption that money is inherently secular and rational. In fact the symbolic and sacred dimensions to currency have been well-evidenced (Zelizer 1978 after Brown 1959 and Durkheim 1912). Alms, donations, and offerings continue to play a critical role in lay Buddhist participation, and have a particular role to play in marking and shaping the right kinds of alms recipients (Cook 2010). While their invocation here represents something of a development on traditional networks, reliant on somewhat different motivators for donors, they do not constitute a complete break with such practices. Rather, the creative potential of patronage networks and those who convene them have been successfully levied at the American heritage-, conservation-, and aid-focused public, redefining the role that the sacred text plays as the right kind of donee.

Through this lens, Taste & Tribute emerges as a ready analog for the kinds of patronage arrangements that fostered large-scale projects of translation and printing in Tibet. After all, the chefs' and wineries' engagement with this charitable event is not so far removed from those Tibetan politicians who bolstered their status through association with particular texts, sages, or projects. While these chefs may not be motivated by the prospect of merit-based rewards, participation in such a cause undoubtedly favours their professional standing. Further, every part of the evening is reliant on gifts and donations. From the food and drink to the labor of the servers, this event is a coming together of gifts in order to support the livelihood of the sacred texts.

The agentive power of the text is also relied upon quite directly in order to subvert this potentially cheapening interaction. Tibetan Aid Project, like the Bible Society, aims to generate situations of encounter between, in this case, potential donors and the texts. Such a strategy is critically dependent on the ability of the text to speak in polyphonous voices, to impress its gravity across gulfs in experience and belief. This recalls Lowenthal's (1985) resigned declaration that preservation has subsumed our relationship to the past to the exclusion of all other modes of engagement. The very focus on preservation in this context, however, depends on the ability of the text to be relevant and powerful beyond its idealised past.

This frankly human capacity of sacred texts to impress their sanctity even in secular contexts is what lends to the success of TNMC's fundraising endeavors. While much scholarly attention has been paid to Tibetan Buddhism's "cult of the book" (Schopen 1975 and others), a far smaller cohort of work about the American relationship to the sanctity of text more generally and the uniqueness of the book as a commodity is also important here. In looking more closely at this relationship we can perhaps shed light on why the plight of Tibet and its books in particular have had the capacity to trap the attentions of American publics and donors so enduringly. Laura J. Miller's captivating overview of the history of American bookselling makes a convincing case that books have exhibited a persistent ability to stand apart from other commodities. In their resilient attachment to the spread of "culture" writ large, books retain a sacred quality and are often referred to in religious terms even in secular contexts: "The association of books and book selling with the human mind and with humanity itself continues to militate against a purely instrumental approach to dealing with the printed word" (Miller 2006; 221).

Benedict Anderson too points to the printed word in its distinction from other kinds of commodity: "The book, however ... is a distinct, self-contained object, exactly reproduced on a larger scale. One pound of sugar flows into the next; each book has its own eremitic self-sufficiency" (Anderson 1983; 34). Texts, then, perhaps have a longstanding ripeness for agency that reaches beyond the Tibetan context. The plight of Tibetan texts manages to draw together both the contemporary focus on heritage and preservation, as well as a long-standing receptiveness to the idea that the printed word plays a special role in the housing and proliferation of "culture". Sanctity and heritage, then, coexist within the figure of the text and the work that brings it into being. This coexistence is mutually constituting, though it may not always be entirely comfortable. This coexistence is in evidence in contemporary Tibet too — for example, Derge Printing House, perhaps the most famous home of Tibetan sacred text printing, has been designated a (secular) national cultural treasure by the Chinese government, even while pilgrims still travel miles to circumambulate the building (Logan 2002).

In TAP's extravagant Taste and Tribute event we can see an extension of the innovative capacities of the patronage networks that have long brough sacred texts into being. The

audience of potential donors here, though, are appealed to on different terms. Namely, concerns for heritage and conservation require the accessing of a different temporality of sacred texts in appealing to donors. What remains consistent, however, is the centrality of the agentive power of Tibetan sacred texts, and indeed of texts in general. Once set into the history of the American relationship to the written word, the capacity of Tibetan sacred texts to speak in this register owes as much to the cultural entanglement of books in America as it does to an appreciation of Buddhism's "cult of the book".

6.4 Patronage in the Age of Aid

I turn now to the ways in which the curation of support networks has served to facilitate a new kind of agentive role for sacred texts. That is, as innocent and embattled victims of violence, deserving of support and protection. In the overt fundraising realms of the community, sacred texts have at times stepped in to fill the role of the refugee — innocent and defenceless (in spite of their powerful nature), unique, irreplaceable, and invaluable. Allowing sacred texts to express their agency and voice in this new capacity relies upon the careful curation of surrounding networks of support, and devoted attention to the way texts and other sacred elements are deployed in these contexts.

Allowing space for this new facet of the texts' agency is related to the ways TAP (and TNMC more broadly) stress the universalising heritage value of the text in certain venues. This transcendent value forms the basis for allowing the personhood of the book to step from its entanglement with the personhood of the Buddha and adopt the figure of a victim that is more familiar to American donor publics. An exploration of the history of Tibetan Aid Project's central fundraising projects is a testament to the way such practices in the community have been fitted to a wider context of philanthropy and aidwork. Aesthetically-speaking, TAP's building is one of the places where the recipients of the sacred texts are prominently displayed and referred to. The Tibetan Aid Project building, for example, is overseen by large photos of monks, nuns, and children clutching sacred books.

Many of the photos show cherubic children with texts in an utterly winning sympathetic duo. Conspicuously represented also are women — a frequently-made reference to TNMC's

practice of distributing sacred texts among nuns, who have long suffered unequal access to such material (Coberly 2004, Gutschow 2004, Lopez Jr. 1999, Tsomo 2004). These two figures are far from representative of the average recipient of one of TNMC's books. They are, however, populations that express the ideal kind of victimhood that is often referred to in lobbying for human rights (Burman 1994, Manzo 2008, Niezen 2003, 2010, Niezen and Sapignoli 2017). That is, the innocent child and the underserved woman make for very compelling and sympathetic figures around which to gather aid. New to this image, though, are the texts nestled into the laps of these deserving innocents. Over the course of TAP's history the focus gradually shifts from those holding the texts to the texts themselves, and yet the rhetoric surrounding their protection remains remarkably consistent.

Fig. 29 The lobby of the Tibetan Aid Project building. Photo taken by the author.

In TAP's early days in the late 1960s and early 1970s, when the focus of their operation was still the rendering of critical basic supplies to the Tibetan population in exile, their central public campaign was the "Pen Friend Program". This program allowed donors in the United States to send money and supplies directly to individual members of the Tibetan refugee

community. An old poster for the program is crowded with the faces of Tibetans; many of those depicted are children. “Could you help these people?” the poster asks, “Just 10 dollars each month can support a Tibetan refugee”. This very familiar appeal to a patron’s ability to drastically change a life — often specifically a child’s life — for hardly more than “the price of your morning coffee” (Children International[40]) or the pocket-change sum of “fifty cents a day” (a prolific UNICEF campaign[41]) was very consistent with the style of accounting-based fundraising that has been typical of NGOs in recent decades (Manzo 2008).

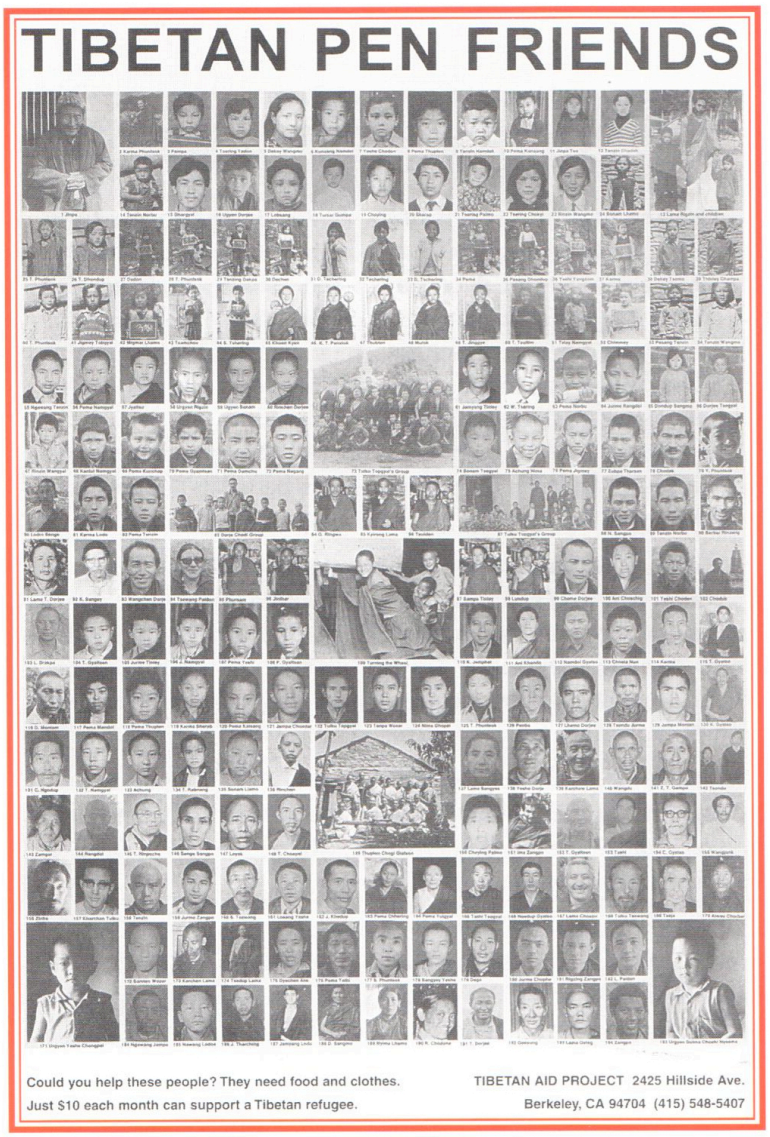


Fig. 30 A poster from the “Pen Friend Program” run by the Tibetan Aid Project. Photo from the Tibetan Aid Project website.

[40] https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=AZTC0JTQkzw
[41] https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=TdqWwNhBeZM

By the mid 1970s though, TAP had begun to supplement its Pen Friend Program with the distribution of sacred texts, donations to rebuild monasteries and fund sacred ceremonies, and other such causes oriented more specifically toward the rehabilitation of the Buddhist landscape of Tibet ("Our History" TAP website). Gradually the transition from humanitarian relief to heritage preservation rhetoric evolved, until the latter began to dominate the organisation's outreach. The conspicuous appearance of individual faces, however, remained a constant. In fact, this critical role of the individual in engaging American donors was transferred to the agentive and threatened texts themselves — as can be seen in the above description of Taste & Tribute. Once, fundraising campaigns promised that a donor's monthly gift of ten dollars could change the life of a refugee. Now, the same kind of accounting processes are levied toward the salvation of texts and libraries:

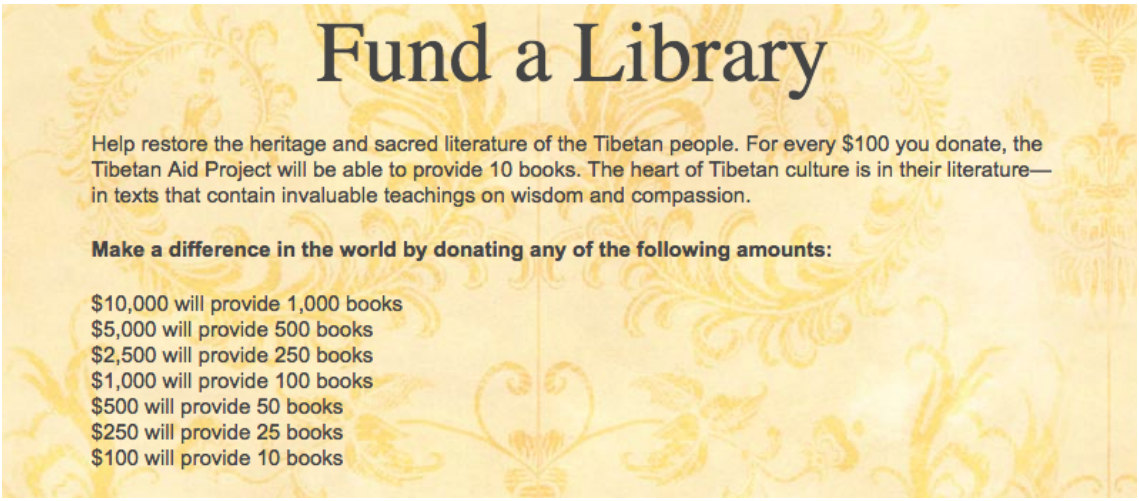


Fig. 31 An image captured from the Tibetan Aid Project website, which describes how donors' funds are used.

Dharma Publishing, one of TNMC's other branches focused on the distribution and printing of Tarthang Tulku's texts, even initiated an "Adopt a Dharma Book" campaign[42] that relied on similar strategies of aidwork embedded accounting to encourage donation from sponsors, but also tied this donation explicitly to the potential for merit and the ritual recognition of donors at the distribution ceremony in Bodh Gaya. The very idea of adopting a sacred book offers a poignant illustration of the meeting place TNMC occupies between aidwork conventions and rhetoric, and the embattled, precarious, but agentive nature of sacred texts, which are as

[42] While the website for this program is still live (http://www.adoptiere-dharma-buch.de/index.php?lang=en) it does not seem to be in active use.

deserving of protection as the humans who receive them. This shift in the focal recipient of TAP's work, while maintaining a consistent rhetoric and approach, is a testament to the way that the agency of these texts remains relevant across contextual values. Gracefully the sacred texts stepped into the place of the refugee, and the ways in which these texts are presented through the community's fundraising work offers a deserving, threatened, and invaluable subject. Their flexibility is especially evidenced in the fact that the texts manage to appeal simultaneously as personified victims, and also important artefacts of human heritage.

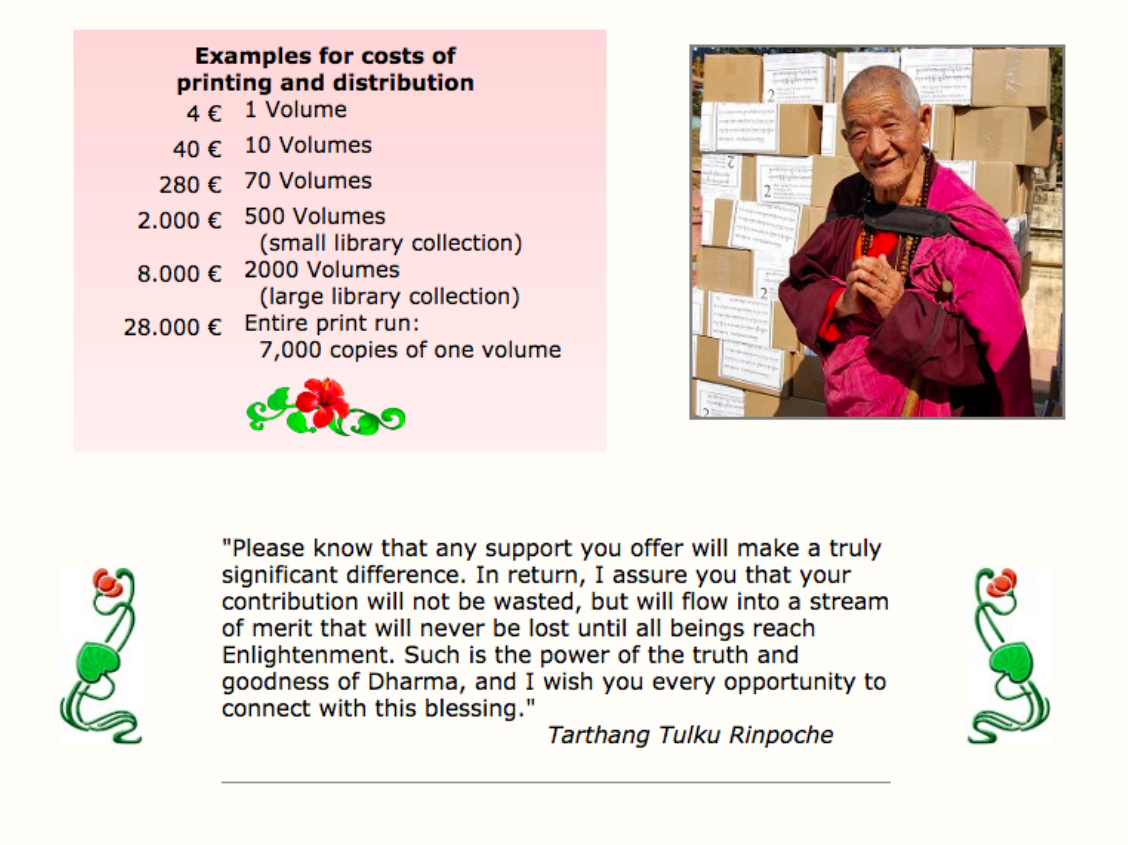


Fig. 32 Image drawn from Dharma Publishing's "Adopt a Book" campaign website. (https://www.adoptiere-dharma-buch.de/en/donate_tibetan_books.php)

Allowing the sacred texts to occupy this role once filled by the Tibetan refugee requires more than fundraising that focuses on the books. Rather, it is an endeavor that colours much of the community's outward-facing work. Maintaining a focus not only on the texts, but on their power, value, and deserving nature requires stringent attention to the relationships the community fosters. Networks of support and affiliation exist not only to financially support TNMC's work, but they are also a significant avenue through which the organisations

determine their public image and that of the texts. What kinds of networks and sponsors their work can and should be associated with becomes a matter of utmost concern.

This anxiety is perhaps represented nowhere quite so clearly as Guna Foundation. Guna is the (non-profit) filmmaking branch of the community. As a foundation its stated aim is: "to present a window into the beauty, spirit, and knowledge of Tibetan Buddhism. Guna Foundation's work supports the preservation of this wisdom tradition so that it may become the heritage of all humanity" ("About Us" Guna webpage). In practice this means that Guna has produced and distributed three films of impressive production value given the complete reliance on volunteer work. All of these films take the preservation work carried out by the community as their subject. The first film, released in 2011, follows the restoration of Swayambhu Stupa in Nepal, sponsored by Tarthang Tulku and led by his youngest daughter (Gellek 2011). The second film details the World Peace Ceremony in Bodh Gaya, founded by Tarthang Tulku and the site at which Yeshe De's sacred texts are distributed (Gellek 2013). The most recent film, which was in enthusiastic circulation during my fieldwork, is titled "The Great Transmission" and offers an overview of Tibet's textual tradition — its importance, endangerment, and Tarthang Tulku's efforts to revive it (Gellek 2015).

These explicit links to Tarthang Tulku and his organisation, however, are intermittently stressed in the distribution material for the films. Public information about the foundation itself — most notably the foundation's website — makes open and prominent reference to the fact that Guna's central aim is to document the achievements of Tarthang Tulku's network of organisations. This explicit connection, however, appears slightly more muted in the promotion of the individual films. Even their abstract's on Guna's website make no mention that, for example, The Great Transmission takes as its specific subject Tarthang Tulku's preservation work, rather than the state of Tibetan text-printing more widely. One less familiar with the current landscape of Tibetan printing could be forgiven for walking away from the film with the impression that Tarthang Tulku and his students struggle valiantly to preserve this tradition single handedly in spite of the neglectful indifference of the rest of the world.

During my time in Berkeley, Guna and the wider community were hard at work promoting this new film, and one of the resultant public screenings took place at the Letterman Digital Arts Center on the Lucasfilm campus in San Francisco. While much of the audience for this event came from the organisations' own community membership, there was also a respectable turnout of unaffiliated individuals. Many of these appeared to be locals who checked the Lucasfilm screening schedule regularly. Following the screening, Guna's co-director (Tarthang Tulku's middle daughter) read a letter from her father to the assembled, by way of introduction to the Q&A session that would follow. In his missive Tarthang Tulku explained that only time would tell if Buddhism will stand up to the questioning of broader minds shaped by modernity, but that he has faith in the internal value and truth of the tradition. In the interplay of overt religiosity and strategic secularity that surrounds Guna and the other promotional branches, this was a moment of explicit religious affiliation. Significantly, though, it was couched in the legitimising source of the Tibetan Lama, delivered by his daughter, and shrouded in the familiar appeals to Buddhism's comfortable coexistence with modernity and its rigorous skepticism.

During the Q&A period there occurred an interesting moment when one of the audience members (unaffiliated with the community) laid bare the film's focus on the community's own work and its incidental glossing of parallel efforts by others. In a film about the preservation of Tibetan Buddhism and its transmission to the Western world, the questioner wondered, why had HH the Dalai Lama not featured at all? This is perhaps not an unexpected question given the film's subject matter and editorial choices, and the community's panel were prepared for it. The first respondent pointed out that there had been a brief flash of a Dalai Lama appearance in one of the shots (lasting perhaps a few seconds). The second pointed out that, since the Dalai Lama is a reincarnation of the Bodhisattva Avalokitesvara, the handful of images of the Bodhisattva could really be considered appearances by the Dalai Lama. Finally, the film's director explained that to address the Dalai Lama properly Guna's team would have been forced to devote quite a large portion of the film's one hour time frame, which they were unable to do given that they had wanted to focus on her father's accomplishments.

These answers, which navigate very carefully (or sidestep entirely) the community's position in a wider framework of Buddhism in America, hint at one of the most persistent points of tension in Guna's work: how and where to dispense their films in such a way as to foster the right kinds of connections with the right kinds of patrons and practitioners. This Lucasfilm event was one of the points of distribution where TNMC leadership had direct control — over the guest list, the venue, the framing of the film, and the responses to viewers' questions. The same is true of a promotional event like Taste & Tribute where the community's organisers maintain a hold on the narrative and the way in which their work and the sacred objects they produce are presented. Guna's films, however, have to swim in mainstream commercial channels outside the direct reach of the guiding hands of its makers. They are not always able to curate the spaces and audiences their films will reach. In order to ensure that their work and the sacred objects that are their focus are allowed the opportunity to speak in the correct way, Guna's team devotes careful and painstaking attention to the channels through which they dispense their work. This necessity causes considerable friction and anxiety for those involved.

A friend of mine within the community, Alex, worked for a time as Guna's distribution coordinator and was therefore responsible for seeking out opportunities for screenings or broadcastings both nationally and internationally. Alex is a young California-native with a chaotic head of curls and an infectious laugh. Our relationship was formed as much through rock climbing together on the evenings and weekends as it was through our work and our time as roommates. The above-mentioned Lucasfilm screening was one of the larger projects Alex was involved in during my time there. However, behind this successful screening were many rejected or passed over opportunities Alex endeavored to arrange. For my emotive friend, these sudden and often unexplained rejections could be a hard pill to swallow. This was especially true a handful of times when Alex and other Guna staff had made inroads to a few well-known and highly publicised platforms that would have greatly boosted the reach of Guna's films, only to have their efforts halted abruptly, sometimes even drawing admonition from leadership.

But reach is not the only nor even the primary concern of TNMC leadership when it comes to Guna's films. As highly polished products they are both an example of and an investigation

into the accomplishments of this community. The films also feature sacred symbols, text, and artwork, something that has long caused the community to think very carefully about how their products can be distributed without guarantee of appropriate treatment for such symbols. Alex though, perhaps owing to a mild stubborn streak, was reluctant to take these rejections at face value with little explanation. When pressed, many of these rejections were attributed to the particular character or affiliations of the venue or platform. One outlet had published a couple of articles that were overtly critical of the Chinese government, another was too overtly associated with the Dalai Lama, and yet another was too Chinese-culture focused. Despite the occasional manner of their delivery, these rejections are not flippant or incoherent. Rather, a great deal of care is exercised in determining which networks are acceptable to associate with and what kind of assistance Guna will accept. These professional and social relationships are key to the foundation's image and also reflect how they understand their work and the sanctity of the objects they produce.

What is at stake here in drawing on the wrong kinds of networks of patronage and association? At least in part it is the community's resolute apolitical status. To yield this position would not only involve the community in conversations they are reluctant to engage in, but would also detract focus from the sacred texts and cast a shadow over the innocence and unassailable deserving nature of the books. This might account especially for the graceful avoidance of any venues or channels too closely associated with HH the Dalai Lama, whose engagement with Tibet's cause is sometimes viewed by other Buddhist groups as too overtly worldly and political. TNMC has consistently exhibited and expressed a commitment to focusing on the embattled texts and sacred objects themselves. Leaving others to do the politicking, this group will focus their considerable energies on the proliferation of the sacred.

It is no surprise, then, that Guna refuses to yield the centrality of the plight of the texts to a possibly diluting panoramic view of the wider context. One long-time member of the community pointed out to me that TNMC subtly sponsors much work dedicated to getting sacred Buddhist texts across the border into Tibet, a feat that is virtually impossible without "flying under the radar". Ever-pragmatic, TNMC's leadership will bear the confusion and frustration of the occasional volunteer who yearns for a more aggressive stance because "yeah, it would be great to liberate Tibet but what's for us more important is to liberate all

sentient beings". For others still, the dissociation between their work and the political engagements that characterise other campaigns surrounding Tibet is simply that the "political" is mundane, worldly. One of the volunteers teaching English to Tibetan monks at Tarthang Tulku's outpost in Sarnath told me that, as a descriptor for Tarthang Tulku's work, "political is too small, small-mind".

The unwillingness to expose their sacred work to what they often view as the "political" dimensions of the transnational conversation about Tibet renders their decision to cast this work in terms of heritage and preservation an astute strategic one. The rhetoric of heritage and preservation allows for the maintenance of a level of urgency that characterises the community's approach to its sacred work, it allows the text to speak effectively across religious and secular boundaries, and provides a way for TNMC to skirt "political" conversations that might detract from its focus.

It is in this strategic treatment of their professional relationships that the latent creativity of patronage arrangements is put to use for this community. As much as possible, outward-facing branches of Tarthang Tulku's network delicately curate their support networks in order to present a very carefully considered impression of the organisation and its goals. Through the creative arranging of specific kinds of supportive relationships, their work has allowed the sacred texts to step into a new agentive role where they are able to speak in the language of heritage and universal value. Maintaining this specific approach to preservation in promotional work has necessitated pruning and shaping of TNMC's networks of patronage and affiliation. The shaping of these networks, then, has emerged from TAP's early days, when texts first took up the central position once occupied by refugees, as a critical site where the community is able to form the public image of its work.

6.5 Everyday Aesthetics of Design: Buddha's Beauty

TNMC's strategic and flexible engagements with the networks that support and fund their projects allow the sacred objects they produce to exert their influence across a range of contexts for diverse audiences, revealing new facets to their agentive abilities. This creativity, though, does not come without its cost: specifically, how the sacred symbols and objects are

depicted in these new kinds of spaces is of constant concern. How might one represent or reference a sacred text on a flyer? A pamphlet? A Facebook post? Allowing books to speak in new contexts requires certain compromises, but what kinds of compromises can be made and when are a matter for serious discussion.

For the Bible Society (Engelke 2013) these debates arose around what constituted a capitulation to secularity that failed to serve the bible faithfully. For TNMC, though, the concern is not necessarily for a danger of over-secularising, but rather what kinds of uses might be disrespectful to the texts and symbols themselves. I have previously discussed the unique position TNMC occupies, given the wide dissemination of their products among uninitiated consumers. This anxiety recurs here, given that such promotional materials must faithfully reflect the value of the community's work and the critical importance of books to their cause, while also being precisely designed to reach audiences outside the community in settings beyond their direct control.

In part this section will be an account of my own ineptitude in dealing with sacred materials in these kinds of publicity-related contexts, especially in the early days of my fieldwork. Happily, I was in good company when it came to my shortcomings, and would often share stories with other new members about incidents where we had been chided or gently rebuked for the incorrect use of a photo or symbol. In fact, this process seems to be precisely how all of the members in the community come to learn when and how to employ sacred tools in this kind of work. There are no set rules here, and even stated guidelines often prove flexible. Community leadership have had to build instincts from a wealth of experience (and failure), the difference between my experience and theirs being that often their scolding came directly from Tarthang Tulku. In spite of the cumulative experience that is invested in the community leaders as a collective, the standards and tools for advertisement change rapidly and they are repeatedly forced into new territory. Guesswork and improvisational flexibility are necessary parts of this process, as members discuss and debate the implications and potential harms to sacred material in the worlds of advertising, social media, and fundraising.

In the early months of my fieldwork I was asked to design a promotional postcard-sized handout advertising a new course that was to be offered at the Mangalam Research Center. I

enjoy tinkering with design-work when I have the odd opportunity and this task gave me a welcome excuse to delve into the center's archive of photos. I produced a two-sided card with some basic information, coupled with a few of what I considered to be especially striking photos chosen from one of the organisations' Facebook pages. What followed was an hour-long sit down with the director of the center who pointed out systematically the potential misuses of sacred (or sacred-adjacent) material that I had committed. He was very gentle in his explanations but it was an opening into a whole set of difficulties that were tangled into the most basic and quotidian tasks.

First, the photo I had used on the cover of the postcard depicted a red-covered book with a Tibetan title nestled into a bunched pile of bright yellow silk. Ian immediately leaned close to determine the title on the book's cover. As a general rule, he explained, they try not to use photos of sacred texts in their advertising materials out of respect. Even this is only a guideline that is surrounded on all sides by gray areas — for example, the various Facebook pages run by the organisations are populated with photos of sacred texts in action in various settings and arguably these Facebook pages are a significant part of the community's promotion. However, the photo that I had selected happened to be what Ian called a "prayer book" rather than a sacred text or sutra and here therefore decided after some hesitation that it would be fine.

Somewhat more problematic was the second photo that I had chosen for the back of the postcard. This one showed an open prayer book in a pair of hands that also held a small tsha-tsha of the kind the community produces in large quantities. I had turned up the transparency on this image and partially overlaid the text listing the details of the course on top of it. I had blindly introduced two potential problems with this design. The first was that the open book displayed Tibetan script (though when printed to size this was perhaps too small and faded to be potentially legible) and therefore could, in the eyes of some, render the postcard itself a sacred item deserving of very particular treatment. Second, Ian worried that the overlaying of other text on top of the photo of the open book might be the digital equivalent of stacking something on top of a sacred book: a distinctly disrespectful act.

In the end the postcard went to print looking fairly similar to my initial draft and with the two photos still in place. The fact that in this case Ian decided that these images could be used, however, does not undermine that this kind of conversation takes place constantly around the community relating to the implications to sacred material resulting from everything from font and colour choice to the type of paper used. In fact, in another promotional flyer I had designed for the same program, my use of triangular bullet points was deemed inappropriate and changed. Not aesthetically so, but as Ian explained to me, "Rinpoche is very sensitive about geometric shapes, especially triangles".[43] This sensitivity had cropped up several years earlier when a group of students designed maps for distribution. Triangles are a common indicator of landmarks in cartography, but Tarthang Tulku was not comfortable with their use. The solution the students found was to simply lop the tops off the triangles, yielding little trapezoids instead.

These concerns for appropriate aesthetic representations of the sacred were not simply particularities insisted on by Ian either. I consulted with Grace about my designs, as she is responsible for much of this kind of work for Guna. She too pointed out the use of the photos, asking if Ian had cleared them to be positioned and faded in this way. For her, an intuitive understanding of how photos and symbols associated with sacred material should be used had become a part of her design repertoire alongside her understanding of digital design principles. She joked with me about learning gradually not to crop or arrange things in "interesting ways" to ensure that the resultant product can manifest respect for the symbol in use.

I committed the physical equivalent of my digital photo misstep in my interview with Grace. As we settled in, I placed my recording device on top of a stack of books on the table between us. Quickly, gently, Grace's hand darted out, "Do you mind if I put it not on the book?" she asked. As I flustered an apology she reassured me "No, it's cool — just a habit

[43] This sensitivity seemed to surround the relationship between triangles and the number 3. Certain numbers are recurring in Buddhist scripture and are therefore often designated special significance. Three is often understood as a reference to the triple gem — Buddha, Dharma, Sangha — as the foundation of Buddhism. This is perhaps its most critical association, but the number three appears in other parts of Buddhist belief as well, for example in the three root causes of suffering. It is also possible that Tarthang Tulku's wariness of triangles stems from the fact that the category of mandala that is centered around interlocking triangles is one of potent destruction (Brauen 2009).

I've picked up from being here. No putting things on sacred things! And I think there's like mantra stuff inside". Navigating the sometimes difficult-to-spot distinction between the everydayness of sacred material in the community and the respect it nevertheless demanded took considerable practice. The book upon which I had placed my recorder was an English one and not in any particular pride of place. It lay unassuming on a coffee table next to a rather kitschy lamp, making no great spectacle of its sanctity. At least not to my untrained eyes. And yet, it still compelled respect and proper treatment from those members of the community with long-accumulated experience in recognising even those hints of sanctity amid the tapestry of the everyday.

In spite of this careful attention evidenced by both Ian and Grace, in these projects is also an interplay of care and compromise. While Ian told me that the printed drafts of the postcard I had created should go into the burn pile to be disposed of in a manner befitting material bearing Tibetan script, we were about to have hundreds of these cards printed and distributed to businesses across Berkeley. Not only could there be no guarantee they would be treated respectfully once out of our hands, we could be fairly certain they would suffer a less dignified disposal. However, pragmatics and meritorious intention are a powerful combination that allow for quite a bit of creative lateral movement when it comes to these guidelines. While Ian and I might have respectfully placed our used drafts in Mangalam Center's burn-pile, the fact was and is that it is very difficult to legally arrange a large-scale burn in drought-ridden California. The burn piles had been mounting for quite some time, as only so much of the material could be repurposed to other appropriate uses.[44]

My field notes are heavily populated with examples of similar gaffes committed by other new volunteers and myself. My roommate Alex, in designing a flyer for TAP, used a photo that featured someone carrying a box of sacred materials. But in the photo the box is upside down, made obvious by the label with both Tibetan and English script. This seems to have caused TAP leadership some consternation and they suggested Alex photoshop the label the right way up. In another instructional video they created (for internal community circulation),

[44] Extra sacred text material — provided the script is whole and unmarred — might be used, for example, to fill and empower the stupas constantly under construction at Odiyan. But there are a limited number of such uses and they are best suited to cast off material from the bindery, that is, parts of sacred texts, rather than the photos discussed in this section.

there was much discussion about whether a stupa under construction was visible in the background. The depiction of incomplete sacred material was a recurring matter of contention in these kinds of conversations. Much of this painstaking care exercised by the longer-standing students hails directly from Tarthang Tulku's example. Ian shared with me a wonderfully illustrative story:

> "Of course we followed Rinpoche's lead on all of this... you know he's this very interesting blend. He's very conservative in some ways and completely a pioneer in other ways and willing to strike out in new directions. But especially when it comes to things like texts and images he's been extremely cautious...he's always been very hesitant about using any sacred images in promotion really, and one time — we used to do this big glossy catalogues for Dharma Publishing books, they would always have these essays about the history of the Dharma and they were like totally not cost effective, they were educational tools — so on one of them he put an image of the Buddha on the cover and apparently he changed his mind after he'd done it so we wound up sending them out with a little brown paper cover stapled over the cover to hide the image of the Buddha because he didn't want it going through the mail in this sort of secular society". (Interview 5/7/2017)

Ian did, however, juxtapose this story and Tarthang Tulku's "conservative" nature against his very progressive willingness to adopt all kinds of technology toward the purpose of creating and disseminating sacred material. Still, concern for appropriate respect for the sacred has been repeatedly enforced for his closest students who, incidentally, would have been the ones stapling the hundreds of brown paper covers over the image of the Buddha after Tarthang Tulku changed his mind.

It will be unsurprising to the reader at this stage to hear that the work-focused TNMC volunteers are a pragmatic bunch. Certainly the scale of their work often demands it, but this dialectic between deep respect for their sacred material and a commitment to pragmatics is starkly evident when it comes to promotional work. Ada and I spoke about some of the advertising practices the community engages in. She was frank about their emphasis on the distribution of texts to Tibetan women as an effective strategy for encouraging donations. She was intermittently uneasy about some such practices though, and directly referenced TAP's propensity to use photos of children receiving texts in its promotional material because, as she said, "it sells". This image is not reflective of TNMC leadership's idea of the figure who can most readily benefit from such a gift. Someone Ada estimates is "at least one generation

older". Here we can see in action this dialectic I am referring to — Ada's acute understanding of the need to "be realistic" but also her and Rinpoche's reluctance when it comes to the photos of children receiving books, which is perhaps not an accurate reflection of the aims and gravity of the texts.

Even apart from the minutiae of these designs, there were frequent more general discussions about the type of aesthetic and appeal the volunteers were aiming for. Recurrent was a commitment to represent the "traditional" elements of their community while still maintaining a contemporary appeal. How much of a particular organisation's affiliation to "traditional" Buddhist sanctity and forms and how this was balanced against contemporary aesthetics varied widely, but it was always a concern. For Tibetan Aid Project, for example, where the very idea of tradition and its preservation earns much traction, the website[45] and promotional material retain strong influences of Tibetan Buddhist aesthetic (or at least what community members understand to be a Tibetan aesthetic) by way of boldly coloured red and gold brocade backgrounds, crowded imagery, and elaborate scrollwork fonts — a result that is fairly at odds with the modern digital aesthetic.

Guna, on the other hand, whose invocation of contemporary digital technology in order to showcase the community's value (and its self-styling as a serious documentary film studio) resulted in a sleeker more modern digital aesthetic with plain backgrounds and stark pops of high-quality images.[46] This sliding scale of the relationship between two aesthetic poles is a testament to the flexibility and creativity this community exercises. There is no small amount of anthropology-work involved in their endeavors, for they must carefully study their audiences in various quarters, re-orienting the way they present themselves and their work in various situations. Ubiquitous across all of the different balances, of course, are the texts, capable of speaking effectively across all such venues only if the volunteers are careful enough in presenting them respectfully.

While community members repeatedly referred to an ideal of refraining from using images of and references to sacred texts in promotional work, in practice these appeared relatively

[45] https://www.tibetanaidproject.org/
[46] https://gunafoundation.org/site/

often. For months I struggled to understand if there was some set of factors I was missing that governed how and when this overarching rule could be broken, but no such clarity arose. I believe, though, that there is a critical reason that the texts occurred so frequently in this material where they didn't belong quite so comfortably. Namely, this is the agentive power and transcendent speaking voices that is a guiding feature to the community's work. As I have described already, even the component materials for sacred texts have the ability to exercise impact on those who encounter them. So too do Rinpoche's texts. To exclude the texts and sacred materials completely from the promotional dimensions of TNMC's work is to muffle the powerful voices that this community at once preserves and relies upon. Still, they must maintain a careful balance between accurately and respectfully representing the gravity of the texts, and do so in a way that will appeal across a wide variety of donors. Careful consideration of aesthetic design, from the minutiae of bullet point symbols to the higher level of concern for how one might accurately represent a commitment to tradition through promotional material is a critical part of maintaining this balance.

6.6 Conclusion

In this chapter I have delved into what is arguably the community's most commercial facet by focusing on the fundraising work it undertakes. I hope that what has emerged is not a necessary cheapening or selling of the sacred through reduction to its heritage value or blandly broad "spirituality". Rather, my intent has been to outline how this particular set of activities, framed properly, emerge as one of their most innovative and creative undertakings.

I do not intend to portray the association here between creation of sacred objects and financial concerns as unique in itself. To the contrary, patronage networks are an integral part of the history of Tibetan Buddhist texts. Placing TNMC's work against this history renders familiar the careful and calculated way the various organisational branches curate personal and professional relationships outside the community both in order to foster their work financially, and in order to disseminate a carefully constructed (and malleable) image of the community to the public. Through this lens we can better understand the kinds of work being done through an event such as Taste & Tribute, and the continuity such an event bears to the history of Tibetan Buddhist patronage networks. Bringing these arrangements to bear on the

rhetoric of philanthropy and heritage has allowed the fostering of a new dimension of the agency of Tibetan sacred texts and has reinforced that the personification of these books has traction even outside their scriptural role as manifestation of the Buddha's speech.

And yet, in spite of this continuity the community exhibit clear ingenuity in their ability to articulate their cause in the languages of heritage value and contemporary aidwork and fundraising. By necessity, leadership in the community have developed an astute sense of what sorts of appeals will be effective in different contexts, and are able to emphasise different elements of their own work and community in response. A part of this fluency, too, is not only due to the creativity of individuals, but invested in the ability of the sacred texts themselves to speak effectively in various registers to diverse audiences. While inclusion of sacred texts and other objects generates no small amount of anxiety and debate over how they should be respectfully employed, it is the agentive and polyphonous capacity attributed to the texts themselves that make them indispensable to this fundraising process. In fact, it is these very qualities that afford sacred objects the capacity to subvert what could be a worldly pecuniary interaction in order to generate a meaningful encounter with sacred texts, whether they are valued in terms of their secular heritage or their sacred gravity.

Chapter Seven
"We Make it Rain Books": The Monlam Chenmo

Following in the footsteps of the great Dharma masters of the past, we can dedicate our efforts to the future. Even if we cannot trace the immediate benefits, we can be confident that we are planting the seeds of goodness for the future. After all, a seed is nothing much to look it, but in time it can produce wonderful fruit and beautiful bouquets for others to enjoy.

Tarthang Tulku, *Path of Action*

7.1 Introduction

In the last chapter we diverged briefly from the projects of physical making that have guided us thus far in order to explore the patronage networks and strategies that are leveraged to bring sacred objects into being. In this chapter we rejoin the sacred texts as they take their leave from the Californian spaces that house their making, and find their way into the hands of their intended recipients. I will take up again the narrative of these entangled gifts and not-commodities, invested as they are with the community's (and Tarthang Tulku's) anxieties and hopes. Through them we will meet the principal subject of these potent expectations — the Tibetan monastic community in India — whose imagined presence oversees much of the community's work.

The distribution ceremony for sacred texts takes place annually in Bodh Gaya, India. During these few brief days, TNMC — as my friend in the bindery described it — "makes it rain books". Bodh Gaya itself is a fitting choice as venue for this event, not only because it is the famed site of the Buddha's enlightenment, where a descendent of the original bodhi tree still spreads its spade-shaped leaves over pilgrims, but because this site has deep anti-sectarian meaning. It is a place in common, not only between the Tibetan schools of Buddhism, but indeed all schools of Buddhism.

After a description of the ceremony that encompasses the book distribution, its history and significance, I will recount my own journey from Sarnath to Bodh Gaya with a group of TNMC members undertaking a pilgrimage to the distribution. Their approach, both spatially and conceptually, to the distribution as an event affords a prime opportunity to explore the way TNMC members' imaginings of the sacred texts and their monastic recipients are enacted in the spaces of interaction between these groups.

Upon arriving, narratively and analytically, at the site of distribution, we will dive into the cacophony that is the Monlam Chenmo at Bodh Gaya. Here, the previously discussed narratives of labour, enchantment, art, gifts, agency, preservation, and prophetic temporalities will come together in the frenetic crescendo of the distribution ceremony. This is not to say that this is the apex of the social lives of these texts, for they will go on to journey widely and to speak in different voices to different listeners: lay, monastic, monk, nun, Tibetan, American, and so on. It does, however, represent a critical moment for the TNMC community. It is the site in relation to which their community practices and ideology are continually revisited and (re)made, and where they extend their entreaty, through gifts, to the assembled monastics.

7.2 The Monlam Chenmo

What I have been referring to as the "distribution ceremony" is in fact couched within a larger ceremony, the Monlam Chenmo (*Smon lam chen mo*). Though typically translated as "Great Prayer Festival", Tarthang Tulku's students also call it the "World Peace Ceremony". Their choice of alternate title foreshadows the particular purpose to which this event is deployed. The Monlam is not particular to Tarthang Tulku's students, nor is it specifically Nyingma or necessarily tied to the distribution of texts. Rather, it is an annual practice undertaken by all four Tibetan schools of Buddhism. The context offered by this protean festival's history is well-worth dwelling on here in order to elucidate its present Nyingma iteration.

According to most accounts the first Monlam was convened under the direction of Tsongkhapa — a critical originator of the Geluk school — in the early 1400s. The Geluk Monlam is typically held at the Jokhang temple in Lhasa (Rigzin 1993, Schwartz 1994). In execution it is a large-scale gathering (or festival) of monastics, who come together in prayer over the course of several days. Proceedings comprise secular as well as religious components, including circumambulation of the temple, prayer sessions, and offerings of all kinds, including victory banners, butter lamps, jewels, and bells (Rigzin 1993). It is conceived, therefore, as a powerful antidote to the world's ills, a collective enacting of the curative and transformative powers of Buddha speech, disseminated through a chorus of monastic voices. The Monlam is also a socially significant event, offering a rare occasion for

many members of one school come together and reaffirm ties between different lineages, teachers, or monasteries (Schwartz 1994).

Fig. 33 Offerings at the Nyingma Monlam Chenmo. Photo taken by the author.

There is a facet to the Monlam, though, that is decidedly more politically entrenched. Tsongkhapa's formulation of this festival tied it to pre-existing rites that marked the new year, in its threatening liminality, as a time where evil must be subdued anew. Such a framing connects the Monlam to Sakyamuni's subjugation of Brahmanic teachers at Sravasti (Rigzin 1993). Thus, subjugation of evil and subsequent celebration played out through the Monlam take on a specifically Buddhist valence, symbolising "the triumph of Buddhism over other doctrines — first in India, then once again in Tibet. The Monlam links archaic rituals for restoring and protecting society to the more recently acquired aim of preserving and defending Buddhism" (Ibid; 87). The long-standing link between the Monlam and the preservation of Buddhism will be enthusiastically borne out in the present Nyingma version, acting as the perfect context within which to situate its distribution of texts.

Entanglement with governance and political hierarchy has not been limited to the Monlam's founding years. Particular features of this and other rituals in Tibet's history have, for example, been employed to consolidate the Tibetan state in Lhasa (Dalton 2006), to

legitimise political hierarchy between Buddhist schools and the emergence of a Ganden government in the seventeenth century (Schaeffer 2006) or more recent expressions of strategic political commentary (Barnett 2006). In fact, the celebration of the Monlam in Tibet has traditionally been understood as a significant reflection of and contribution to the Tibetan government's characterisation as *chos srid gnyis ldan* — religion and politics together. Government officials are expected to attend in order to convey their commitment to the religious establishment, while the monastics in turn demonstrate their endorsement of the political administration (Barnett 1994, Schwartz 1994).

In recent decades this dimension of the Monlam, which allows for political commentary and action, has been in powerful evidence in ways that are a testament both to this social puissance of this particular ceremony, and the malleability of Tibetan Buddhist ritual more generally. The Geluk Monlam of 1988 in Lhasa became a critical and deadly site for contestations over the recent religious reforms and a poignant demonstration of the failure of the liberalisation politics of the 1980s (Barnett 1994, Schwartz 1994). The Monlam can be, and has been, a critical and contested undertaking with a charged history, made powerful by its very ability to facilitate gathering and collective action. The Monlam, like the sacred objects I have already discussed, exerts its effects in multiple registers, strengthening socially and politically as much as it does so karmically.

The Nyingmapa's own practice of an official annual Monlam Chenmo appears to have arisen somewhat later than its counterparts in other schools. According to the current gathering's reckoning, Dilgo Khyentse Rinpoche and Dodrupchen Rinpoche each individually convened large-scale chanting ceremonies in the early 1980s. This practice was then formalised by Tarthang Tulku in 1989 who, with the support of other senior figures within the school, moved it to Bodh Gaya and set its scheduling for the first ten days of the twelfth month of the Tibetan calendar.[47]

While Tarthang Tulku may have originated the formal version of this Nyingma Monlam Chenmo, its arrangement and execution has now been largely taken over by the Nyingma community within India and Nepal. Its organisation is principally undertaken by a governing

[47] Falls in mid to late January by the Gregorian calendar.

body called the "Nyingma Monlam Chenmo International Foundation" whose head offices are at Namdroling Monastery in Mysore. The board of trustees and advisory committee are populated by prominent members of the Nyingma lineages inside India and Nepal, and Tarthang Tulku is not among them. That said, the organisation in its public missives still offers deference to Tarthang Tulku and he is widely recognised as the Nyingma Monlam's founder.

And, of course, the Monlam Chenmo is entangled with the distribution of sacred texts, whose funding and organising falls principally to TNMC (though with the support of nearby monasteries). Tarthang Tulku's direct influence is also written plainly over many elements of the Monlam Chenmo — from the selection of the text chanted, to the distribution of gifts, the beautification of the site, to the ordering of ceremony proceedings. Despite the fact that Tarthang Tulku has not attended the event for several years now, his exacting presence is felt keenly throughout the proceedings.

The curative potential enshrined in Tsongkhapa's initial conceptualisation of the Monlam Chenmo is still very much a part of the Nyingma ceremony's purpose. From the association website:

> "The effect of world torn apart by warfare, tyranny, oppression and genocide- the blood-soaked testament of negatives, prejudice, greed and ignorance, which have shattered humanity, resulting in denial of their rights and defaming their values had deeply adverse impact on the Buddha Dharma in general and the living tradition of the Nyingma in particular" ("Vision", Nyingma Monlam Chenmo)

The prophetic temporalities discussed earlier are enacted here, as are the hopeful and effortful measures taken to fortify the tradition against the world's deterioration. It is taken as read that this destructive future is not only imminent, but rears its head in the present day wearing the many and varied costumes of human greed, ignorance, and hate.[48]

Spatially, the recitation of prayers takes up the central position in the Nyingma Monlam, asserted through its proximity to the stupa and the bodhi tree. The bulk of the book distribution, by contrast, is carried out in a dusty parking lot outside the center of town. At the

[48] The three poisons (*dug gsum*), which give rise to all human suffering.

temple site, the devotees are arranged in a familiar cyclical orientation with the impressive stupa at Bodh Gaya — the bodhi tree appearing to lean into its foundation — at its center. In the cardinal directions are seated high Lamas. These are particularly revered guests whose presence lends a gravity to the occasion and demonstrates the commitment of major monasteries and lineages to this ceremony as the definitive Nyingma Monlam. Around and between the canopied chairs occupied by these auspicious guests are seated the many hundreds of other monastics.

Fig. 34 Monks chanting at the Nyingma Monlam Chenmo. Photo taken by the author.

While the four sides are largely occupied by the seated monastics, there is a small wedge at each corner allocated for prostrations. Here polished wooden boards are set up for practitioners' use, often coupled with knee pads and hand pads that allow the supplicant to slide easily along the board in the ebb and flow of prostration practice. These corners are

primarily occupied by the laity, some of whom I came to recognise as they took up the same positions hour after hour, day after day, in a truly athletic performance of devotion.

Also primarily occupied by lay attendees was the square, paved walkway that encloses the grounds where the monastics sat and chanted. Two walkways, a lower and an upper, served different purposes — the former for ritual circumambulation of the stupa (and the bodhi tree) and the latter for navigating the temple site. Traffic on both — and especially on the circumambulation walkway — moved in a clockwise direction, as is proper for circumambulating a sacred site or object. Lining the inner boundary of circumambulation path are rows of prayer wheels affixed to metal rods. Devotees extend a hand as they walk, setting the wheels spinning and magnifying the meritorious act of their circumambulation. Still others carried their own hand-held prayer wheels or mala beads, which they manipulated while they walked. There is another circumambulation track directly adjacent to the stupa, between it and the assembled monastics. Here pilgrims brush their fingers along the branches of the bodhi tree and the stone foundation of the temple — some leaving bits of gold leaf, money, flowers, or *kataks* as offering. They prostrate and press their foreheads to the marble floor facing the stupa and the tree, perhaps scooping up a fallen leaf to take home.

Tarthang Tulku's sustained influence over the text that is principally chanted at the Monlam is a substantial form of input. His choice shapes the tone and content of the festival's proceedings. At Tarthang Tulku's direction, all the assembled voices are raised in the recitation of the *Ārya-mañjuśrī-nāma-saṃgiti* (hereafter MNS) whose tibetan name is *'Phags pa 'jam dpal gyi mtshan yan dag par brjod pa*. The goal across the nine days of the event is to attain 100,000 recitations of the MNS. (That is, 100,000 individual recitations, not collective ones.) This text is "probably the most revered and recited tantric text among all the Tibetan Buddhist sects" (Wayman 1985; 36). Manjusri, the bodhisattva named in its title, is the embodiment of the Buddha's wisdom, usually depicted wielding a flaming sword of transcendent wisdom in one hand, used to cut through illusion and ignorance, and, fittingly, a copy of the *Prajñāpāramitā* in the other (Keown 2004).

Tarthang Tulku has written an introduction to one of the chanting handbooks used at the ceremony. In it he explains that early on some of the monks did not understand his choice of

text. The reason for their reticence, though not stated explicitly, is perhaps related to the fact that this text is understood to be a rather advanced teaching. While the text is short (about 160 verses) it contains the condensed wisdom of all the Buddha's teachings (Wayman 1985). Tarthang Tulku's explanation of this choice lies principally in its relevance across lineage lines. Indeed, Davidson calls it "perhaps the most popular canonical ritual text this tradition [Vajrayāna] ever produced" (Davidson 1981; 1). Its choice reveals again Tarthang Tulku's *ris med* training and his dedication to planning an event with anti-sectarian relevance. This is also in keeping with the longer tradition of annual Tibetan Buddhist festivals — especially those surrounding the new year or the Buddha's birthday — where rivalries would be temporarily set aside in favour of communal celebration (Tucci 2000).

The MNS is also a particularly potent text in terms of the merit produced through its recitation. The Nyingma Monlam's companion book from 2012 compiles a list of citations on the magnitude of the MNS' power, such as: "'It is more virtuous to recite the names of Manjushri for a single time that reciting the names of other Buddhas equivalent to the number of sand particles of the Ganga River for eons or more" (XXIII Annual Nyingma Monlam). This will, I hope, give some impression of the staggering collective virtue understood to be produced by thousands of monks reciting this text over and over for several days.

The temple site and surrounding areas have been the site of a persistent project of beautification by Tarthang Tulku and TNMC. Among the additions made by the community's efforts are a set of butter lamp houses (some of which are kept burning year-round), public toilets, a garden adjacent to the temple site containing a peace pell and plaques that spell out the entire *Prajñāpāramitā,* and the aforementioned prayer wheels that line the circumambulation path. TNMC's and Tarthang Tulku's mark on this Bodh Gaya site is not contained by the few short days of the Monlam Chenmo, but evidences a long-term commitment to the site's transformation and beautification. This transformation work is not merely aesthetic, but important ancillary work to the Monlam's bid for preservation.[49]

[49] It is worth noting that the diasporic Tibetan community in India offers its own context here, for "preservation" has also been central to this community. Hess reports that many feel that while Tibetan culture remains "intact" in India, it is threatened by the increasing diffusion of the diaspora to Europe and North America (Hess 2009; 145). The Tibetan monasteries and nunneries in India — 121 monasteries and 16 nunneries by the 1998 Tibetan Diasporic Survey (Hess 2009; 149 quoting Central Tibetan Administration 2000 vol 1:71) — have a particular stake in this conversation about preservation, and (monastic) Buddhism's place within it (Strom 1997, Korom

Fig. 35 A copy of the blue and gold *gyertongba* displayed at the main temple site in Bodh Gaya. Photo taken by the author.

In spite of Tarthang Tulku's physical absence, and the stepping-back of his community from its erstwhile organisational roles, their presence is still acutely felt. Not least, this presence exerts itself in the choice of text whose recitation becomes the focal point of the event. This text and the event as a whole draws forward themes of precarity and fortification from previous chapters. Indeed, this gathering is the culmination and greatest expression of all of the communities strategies for shoring up the lineage. Not only does it promote continuity in an immediate sense, through the social consolidation of prominent Nyingma relationships, but it is a powerful ritual antidote to the perceived threats to Tibetan Buddhism. The monastics themselves offer this antidote, armed with every tool TNMC can give them from books and prayer wheels to banners and butter lamps.

1997, Samuel 1982). Accounts suggest that the monastic institutions in India have drawn almost all of their new initiates from the "newcomer" Tibetan population in India. That is to say, very few Tibetans born in India are choosing a monastic life (Hess 2009; 149). The Bodh Gaya Monlam, then, couched within the illustrative past and present of this ceremony, also represents an encounter between different experiences and understandings of "preservation" as a cause.

7.3 The Pilgrims

The beautification efforts by Tarthang Tulku and TNMC reach beyond the Bodh Gaya temple site to touch many places in India and Nepal. These sites too are carefully curated in order to display Tarthang Tulku's anti-sectarian commitment to the revival and persistence of Tibetan Buddhist landmarks. I saw a few of the sites that have drawn these restorative attentions en route to Bodh Gaya from Sarnath, a journey that I undertook with a group of other community members who had come to India for this purpose. The group of about 20, drawn from all the community's international branches and representing several different countries, took part in what was alternately called a retreat or a pilgrimage.

Our road began at the Sarnath International Nyingma Institute (SINI). SINI embodies a unique iteration of TNMC's overtures to the persistence of the Dharma. It sponsors and hosts cohorts of Tibetan monks who attend the institute for three years to study English in a program called "English for Dharma Purposes". The monks will spend six months a year for three years at SINI, returning to their home monasteries during the summer months (or perhaps travelling to Nepal or Dharamsala to supplement their training). At SINI they take part in daily language lessons, as well as other workshops and focus groups. These additional sessions allow the resident monastics to study more diffuse elements of "Western" culture — such as business, politics, global events or geography. The aim is not just to improve the monks' language skills, but to promote literacy across a range of globally-relevant topics. In so doing, SINI seeks to unlock the potential global teachers who will move across boundaries and borders with ease, spreading the universal relevance of the Dharma outside monastic enclaves.[50]

I spent nearly three months at SINI, being useful in whatever ways I could from tutoring to cleaning to doing pieces of writing for various events. Tsering, SINI's director and Tarthang Tulku's youngest daughter, is a magnetic personality with the natural leadership qualities many in the community aspire to. She is warm, genuine, and caring, drawing dedication and

[50] While several of the monks do harbour ambitions or studying and teaching abroad in English-speaking countries, others pursue ends closer to home. Several explained to me that they want to be able to navigate India's multilingual train system more readily, for example, where a few words of English at least are often held in common. SINI's staff and teachers are not at all put off by goals on this order of magnitude and are quite happy to foster them.

hard work from her charges almost instinctively. I asked her about the expectations she held for SINI's monastic students. What did they hope would come of these English lessons, business training and the like? How likely were they to find the kind of global representative of the Nyingma lineage this training seemed to invite? Tsering explained that the kind of "rock star" teacher (her term, not mine) that might push forward the spread of the Dharma in this age — one who has not only the necessary skills and knowledge but also a healthy measure of charisma — is incredibly rare. Each one, however, has the capacity to bring great change to bear on Buddhism's place in the world; consider the impacts of such luminaries as Thich Nhat Hanh, Pema Chodron, D.T. Suzuki, and the Dalai Lama. If SINI can unlock the potential of even one such emissary from the Nyingma school, rendering them able to communicate with the English-speaking world, they will have accomplished a significant feat.

This goal of the universally relevant Dharma communicated through charismatic and dynamic monks arises from the place in the community where East/West and traditional/modern dichotomies are invoked arguably more than anywhere else. A large banner on the home page of SINI's website reads "building a bridge of goodness between the East and the West". Students and visitors and the center are often encouraged to consider the "power of sharing between the East and the West". SINI's power of bridging is not only deployed towards the understood gulf between the East and West, but also toward the gap between explicitly labeled "tradition" and "modernity" — endeavoring to draw forward elements of tradition that will help us in our ailing modern state:

> "In the midst of a time of increasing chaos and uncertainty, finding an authentic spiritual path is becoming rarer. Modern society, whether it encroaches upon the lives of nomads or monks of Tibet, or the farmers or businessmen of India, or even as it runs through the cities of the West, has made it difficult for practitioners to take on an authentic spiritual path. Fueled by excessive materialism, mass education, the pervasive influence of media and politics of war, simplicity and authenticity in the spiritual domain is quickly disappearing.
>
> At SINI, I hope that we can find ways to engage in supporting the heart of the Dharma, transcending the cultural differences—to generate the altruistic wish to benefit all beings and recognizing our inherent goodness and infinite potential. This, I believe, will allow us to truly build bridges of goodness that

> not only unite us geographically and culturally, but also bridge the gap between tradition and modernity". (Director's Message, SINI 2017 Brochure)

The aims expressed in these excerpts compare readily to those of the Monlam described above. Through SINI and the Monlam we are offered insight into the gravity of the hope invested in these monastics by the TNMC network. They, and the tools they carry, are the magic bullet for the ills we face. Moreover, these ills — materialism, war, media — are the horsemen of a corrosive modernity often associated with the "West". Those who suffer from these ailments of modernity are in the most acute need of the wisdom these monastics have to offer. Since we are, for the most part, ignorant of our own need, the monks will come to us, armed with English for Dharma Purposes.

The retreat that I followed from SINI to Bodh Gaya is a part of this bridge-building mission. Its participants were drawn largely from something of a liminal category of community members. That is, these were mostly not residential full-time volunteers at the centres but rather part-time volunteers, regular attendees of classes for the public, relatives of the more deeply involved, or any combination of the aforementioned. They occupied a space somewhere between volunteer, (public) student, or donor, rather than the kind of full-time residential workers that have been my focus thus far. This program, though containing familiar elements of work as practice, is the closest the community comes to a more widely recognised "retreat" for its own members.[51] The retreatants spent the initial days of their program on SINI's bright campus. Here they attend a series of talks given by its monastics who, for this occasion, take up the mantle of teacher instead of student. The topic of these lectures is the Four Noble Truths, the subject of the Buddha's own first teaching given just down the road from SINI.

The topic of the Four Noble Truths, apart from being particularly pertinent to the retreat's venue, is also considered a foundational teaching in Buddhism across all schools. That is not to say that there is not fodder for advanced study contained within it, but it is commonly framed as a base teaching to introduce new initiates to Buddhism. This gesture helps to locate the TNMC community retreatants in relation to their monastic teachers. While the monks

[51] Of course, Ratna Ling retreat centre hosts such retreats, but as a profit-venture to support its labour projects and for consumption by external groups, not its own members.

may take up a student's role in terms of English language abilities and their ability to engage with global affairs, they are firmly superior in terms of religious education and this fact is impressed upon visitors, volunteers, and retreatants.

Following several days of talks, small-group discussions, workshops, yoga, and meditation sessions, the group took to the road. Piled into a large coach bus we lurched gradually towards Bodh Gaya, visiting several important Buddhist sites along the way, including Vulture Peak[52] and the remains of Nalanda University.[53] We also stopped at a section of old road said to have been a part of the route Sakyamuni and his students would take to and from their annual rains retreat. Here is another place where the TNMC community has deployed its impressive reserves of energy, restoring the old road and constructing a stupa every kilometre for a distance of 13 kilometres.

The pilgrimage sites from Sarnath to Bodh Gaya did indeed reflect some of the most significant sites in Indian Buddhism's history. They also, however, represented significant examples of Tarthang Tulku's beautification projects. At each site the TNMC guides pointed out the work sponsored or carried out by the community: the addition of massive peace bells, stupas and other sacred art, or perhaps more pragmatic contributions such as bathrooms or funds for restoration and cleaning. The journey evidenced, as it was designed to, the fruits of TNMC's protective and preservative labor, which is deployed beyond its central book project. The pilgrims are the audience for this display of meritorious activity, which is directed at them both as students and as donors. The retreatants also participate in another significant feature of the pilgrimage; that is, its function as a technique in the "Buddhification" of a landscape, through the explicitly Buddhist recognition of what are often local landmarks (Lopez Jr., 2001). Tarthang Tulku's work facilitates this Buddhification both through the adornment of the landscape with Buddhist forms, and through the circulation of pilgrims through that landscape.

[52] Said to have been frequented by Sakyamuni and his followers on retreat and the site of some of his famous teachings (including the *Prajñāpāramitā*).
[53] Where eminent luminaries of Indian Buddhism were trained.

Fig. 36 SINI's pilgrims and monks repair one of the rains retreat stupas, found to be missing its top. Photo taken by the author.

This casting of the pilgrims in succession as students and then as donors is significant, for it serves to locate the relative position of the monks — as teachers and recipients — in the way members of the TNMC community imagine themselves and their work. The retreatants' role as principally subordinate, or perhaps supporting, is thrown into sharp relief here where they interact with the monastics themselves. While the retreat is certainly understood and advertised as contributing to the spiritual growth of those who attend, this is largely due to the opportunity they are afforded to *support* the monastics (and to learn directly from them).

What is perhaps less immediately apparent is the relative position between the monks and the full-time volunteers at SINI from whom the monks learn English. The teacher-student relationship is generally, and indeed specifically within Tibetan Buddhism, a straightforwardly hierarchical relationship. The entire framing of SINI's work and the urgency of its mission, though, serve to trouble and, I argue, entirely reverse this hierarchical positioning of the teacher as superior to the student. The urgent need to teach these monks English for Dharma Purposes is in fact directly predicated on their ritual and spiritual superiority over their English teachers. Here, as across the community, providing resources to Tibetan monastics takes priority over teaching Dharma to English-speakers. Their training is largely deferred until the roots of the lineage — the monks — can be safeguarded. The monks

are thus positioned as the ideal and legitimate source for Dharma teaching. This capacity of the deference to, and ritual superiority of, the monastics to subvert the balance of power in what are generally straightforwardly hierarchical relationships is an important feature of the interaction between these two groups. It will recur when we reach the exchange of the textual gifts between them under the auspices of the Monlam, which further entrenches the spiritual and ritual superiority of the monastics.

7.4 The Book Distribution

SINI's monks, though, are only a fraction of the population in which TNMC invests its hopes. The distribution of sacred texts represents the culmination of these hopes and with it we have at last reach the act of gift-giving that has shaped so much of the narrative thus far. In this final section I will explore how these different gifts are given, to whom, and how. A gift given, Fennell tells us "embodies and perpetuates empathetic dialogue between giver and recipient, facilitating and documenting each party's imaginative participation in the life of the other" (Fennell 2002; 93). Imagination is at play here; surely, it has guided the makers to this very point. But these sacred gifts do not merely convey an empathetic imagination, they implore the monastics to be the *right* kind of recipient. Towards this entreaty the community have concentrated all of their considerable efforts in an endeavor to create the environment necessary for the fortification of the Nyingma school (and by extension, global well-being).

The frame of the Monlam is significant to the effectiveness of the texts as gifts. The performance, style, and context of the exchange are indispensable to the apprehension of the gift's distinctiveness (Smart 1993). It is not the spirit of the text as gift here, upon which the Monlam turns, but rather the construction of a particular kind of spirit in the recipient. That is, the spirit of the pious monk who can make the best use of this textual gift for the benefit of the lineage, of Buddhism, and of humankind. Yan's assertion, then, that the spirit *conveyed* by the gift, not the spirit *of* the gift constitutes its social force (Yan 1996: 216-17) is illuminating in this moment. By way of these and other explorations of the reciprocity or obligation entailed by gifts I will suggest that the traditional gift-related rationale is distorted by sanctity and ritual hierarchy once more, resulting in what is better understood as hopeful entreaty than an obligation.

While, the gift of books is the lynchpin in the entreaty to Nyingma monastics at the heart of the Monlam, this entreaty to efficacious behaviour is a longstanding feature of the Monlam itself. The original Geluk formulation of the festival envisioned the festival as clearly positioned in opposition to the current period of decline and preparing for the eventual arrival of Maitreya. Aside from the wealth of collective merit produce by the festival's activities, it was also intended to encourage correct behaviour among the monastics, thereby fending off the degenerative features of the Kali Yuga (Tucci 2000). This feature is in plain evidence in the Nyingma Monlam, stated overtly in the official guide to the festival, for example, in this missive from the office of the Dalai Lama concerning the Nyingma Monlam:

> "Every year, on this occasion, vast and elaborate clouds of offerings are made to the Buddhas and their offspring throughout the ten directions. Extensive offerings are also made to to the Sangha, the Spiritual Community. The aim of such activities is to halt the general decline in values and behaviour and to encourage appreciation and the value of the Dharma in the short term, and the ultimate attainment of complete Buddhahood" (XXII Annual Nyingma Monlam).

The ritual fortifications against the symptoms of decline have often been linked to the more worldly curative measures, specifically borne out in the distribution practices during the Monlam. Tucci recounts how on the occasion of the Monlam the government would offer medicinal plants, silk cloth, and food or money to mitigate against illness, violence, and famine respectively (Tucci 1980 [1970]). Herein lies the now-familiar practice of traditionally-embedded innovation: the Nyingma Monlam takes up this long practice of distributing objects to the monks in order to stave off the symptoms of decline. Rather than (or sometimes alongside) food and medicine, though, in a demonstration of long-held commitments to the preservation of endangered texts, Tarthang Tulku has chosen to give books. To him, I believe, this is the most powerful antidote that can be given.

Fig. 37 & 38 Texts nestled in stupas at the main temple site in Bodh Gaya. The text pictured is called the *debther*, and is a kind of annual report on the Monlam, distributed each year to all attendees. Photos taken by the author.

Peter Redfield argues that when an object is used as an intermediary or a tool for change, the object is assumed both to be transformative and mobile, but also in it can be read assumptions about the future horizon (Redfield 2017). While Redfield describes the "gadgetry" of contemporary aid work projects with this passage, his approach is nevertheless valuable here. In the previous chapter we saw how the rhetoric of aid work has at times been strategically useful for the production of the community's sacred objects. Through Redfield we might find connections to this world again in the moment of giving. Without a doubt sacred texts and objects are considered powerfully transformative and mobile — their transformative capacities have been relied upon again and again in other community spaces. So too have we begun to explore the anticipated horizon that is invested in their making. Redfield's gadgets attempt to mediate the aftermath of utopian projects, operating in a space of "urgent meantime" and their designers imagine what a receiving population needs to survive in a less-than-ideal world (Ibid).

Such a framing has a significant amount of mileage here. It is a less-than-ideal world that leads to Tibetan-illiterate Americans printing sacred texts. It is a less-than-ideal world that leads to their chaotic, mass distribution in a dusty lot. The "urgent meantime" here is a window that must be seized between the trauma of exile and the depths of decline, and this characterisation helps to contextualise the strategies for urgent production employed by the community. Here, as with Redfield's gadget-makers, such circumstances justify the "do what

we can" approach. And yet, the texts distributed at the Monlam diverge at this point from Redfield's narrative. Unlike Redfield's gadgets, which are levied entirely at alleviating the pains of this urgent meantime, sacred Tibetan texts, through their transcendent capacities, are *both* the urgent solution to what people need to survive in this meantime, *and* the antidote to what ails the world.

Here, then, I have sketched two significant qualities of the sacred objects that are in powerful evidence in their circulation at the Nyingma Monlam. That is, 1) their dual capacity to heal now *and* then (or perhaps, now and always) and 2) the entreaty that is conveyed to the monastics through their giving, which implores that they be the *right* kind of recipient. I will outline below how these two features emerge amid the thrum of the Monlam.

The bulk of the book distribution happens away from the Mahabodhi (main temple) site in a dusty parking lot outside the centre of town. There are, however, a few items that are given at the temple, and the way in which these particular tomes change hands is significant. Primarily, the exchange of sacred texts at the temple site occurs in the form of ceremonial offerings of texts to those high Lamas seated at the the four sides of the stupa.[54] It is this instance of giving that I wish to juxtapose against the larger-scale distribution of the bulk of the texts and other objects. Of foremost importance are the figures — both giver and receiver — involved in this exchange. The year I attended the Monlam these ritual offerings were carried out by Tarthang Tulku's three daughters. There were other things offered to the Lamas of the four sides — in particular monetary donations. The community volunteers present, together with the pilgrims, were each allowed to have a *katak* blessed by the Lamas. Access to them, then, was not cut off to other community members but it is significant that the giving of texts to these luminaries was carried out by Tarthang Tulku's daughters.

I discussed their particular role in this exchange with Doug, a fixture of the Monlam volunteers for over fifteen years and, luckily for me, tolerant of questioning. I didn't need to prod him about Rinpoche's daughters, though; he told me with ernest sincerity (a departure from his usual wry resignation) that it was essential for them to carry out this act of offering. Not only would the volunteers likely bumble their way through it, failing to attain the sisters'

[54] The year I participated one of these texts offered was the *Gsang ba snying po* (Gyuhagarbha).

poise, he told me, but they were the best and most fitting route of transmission from their father.

This positioning of the three sisters as the most ritually efficacious givers does two things of significance. First, it marks out Tarthang Tulku as the primary giver for these texts (which are a proxy for the thousands of volumes distributed throughout the week), pointing to his status as a legitimate source for transmission where his students are not. The high Lamas who receive the gifts are ideal representatives for their respective monasteries or lineages. Remembering the urgency and preservation that suffuses the making of these texts, and the prophetic temporality of destruction that structures this making, the high Lamas emerge as powerful counteractive figures nestled as they are within this ceremonial space that is oriented entirely for curative potential. They are not the only receivers of these texts, but the act of ceremonially directing gifts to and through these figures marks them out with the hopefulness and fortification that is the counterpoint to the aforementioned destructive prophecies. Second, this exchange serves to further the alienation between the volunteers and the sacred texts that began with their work in the bindery. Though they may handle and distribute hundreds or thousands of texts during the Monlam, the American students are, usually or ideally, held back from his more formal channel of giving, marking them out once more as essential but ancillary parties in this lineage they facilitate but for which they are unable to act as ritually effective conduits.

However, the vast majority of the giving of books happens without the ceremony and gravity that characterises the offerings to the high Lamas. Rather, the prevailing sense is one of frantic energy. The lot where the distribution happens is perhaps a ten minute tuk tuk ride from the temple site, a left off the main road and a right just past the Tibetan refugee market. It is a long rectangular space of packed dirt and dust with a large tent at the far end, which covers a long plastic table. By the time we, the TNMC volunteers, arrived at the site it was already lined with rows on rows of pallets stacked high with boxes of books. The stark labels on the boxes are a subtle testament to the bureaucratic (and occasionally political) difficulty volunteers have encountered over the years of transporting such a large amount of Tibetan sacred material to and through India. In capital, bold letters each box reads: “PRINTED MATTER — MANUFACTURED IN THE US — NO COMMERCIAL VALUE — NO

PROMOTIONAL VALUE — NO FOREIGN EXCHANGE — 100% RELIGIOUS, EDUCATIONAL PURPOSES — UNSOLICITED GIFTS FOR MONKS" along with the US federal government nonprofit ID number and telephone number for Dharma Publishing.

Fig. 39 Local workers help to prepare the texts for distribution. Photo taken by the author.

After decades of repetition, news of the distribution has largely spread through word of mouth to the various monasteries, nunneries, gompas, and shedras. If they find their way to Bodh Gaya in mid-January, a bunch of Americans — and their Tibetan teacher — will be giving out sacred texts for free by the thousands. Many of the larger or closer monasteries and nunneries send a delegation every year to collect whatever new editions Tarthang Tulku has sponsored. Monasteries from all over the Buddhist world are represented (though India, Nepal, and Bhutan are by far the most common).

On the appointed day of the distribution monastics (and some lay people) begin to gather at the gate outside the lot hours before the staff have arrived. When the gate is lifted there is a mad dash to reach the tented table at the far end of the distribution lot. Seated there ready to

hold court is Lama Palsang, married to Tarthang Tulku's middle daughter and currently co-director of the Nyingma Institute. Delegating and organising the distribution in Bodh Gaya is one of his key responsibilities. This falls to him not just because, as a Tibetan, he speaks the language, but his training and experience in the monastic world give him a better understanding of where various texts might be best-placed. Lama Palsang is aided by a small team of monks who together adjudicate the claims of the hopeful donees.

Left: Fig. 40 An Indian worker walks out to meet the impending rush of monks and nuns, attempting to slow their advance.
Right: Fig. 41 Monastics assembled in a tight line awaiting their turn to petition Lama Palsang. Photos taken by the author.

Each monk or nun will wait in line for the chance to petition Lama Palsang and his team. He asks about their monastery, its location and size, the number of students, the facilities for housing books, and the collections already owned. Almost no-one walks away with nothing, but not all will be granted the coveted prizes at each distribution ceremony (like our recurring friend the blue and gold *Prajñāpāramitā*). When a decision is made, Lama Palsang or one of his team fill out a form, marking the number of each text the applicant is to receive. A red-robed arm snaps into the air, waving the form vigorously until a volunteer leaps up to seize it, affix it to their clipboard, and usher the monk or nun into the rows of mountainous pallets.

First, the monk or nun is towed to a spot next to the tent where their photo is taken. (These photos have appeared before in this thesis — above the small altar in the bindery, and displayed in the Tibetan Aid Project lobby, deployed in particular moments and spaces either as a motivating and enchanting influence, or as a draw for public donations.) From the photoshoot, the appointed volunteer leads the monk or nun along the rows of pallets, pointing to a box here, or extracting a volume from a box there. Some orders are small enough to be carried in arms, others require the hire of a tuk tuk, and still more needed trucks, cars, or convoys of tuk tuks to transport. A small temporary ecosystem arises around the distribution lot to help manage all of these tasks. Tuk tuk drivers appear in fleets, packing tightly into the already labyrinthine space. Younger boys materialise with sacks and cord, offering to help pack the boxes for a small fee. Outside the lot food and drink stalls cater to the monks and nuns who had been waiting in the sun and dust for most of the day.

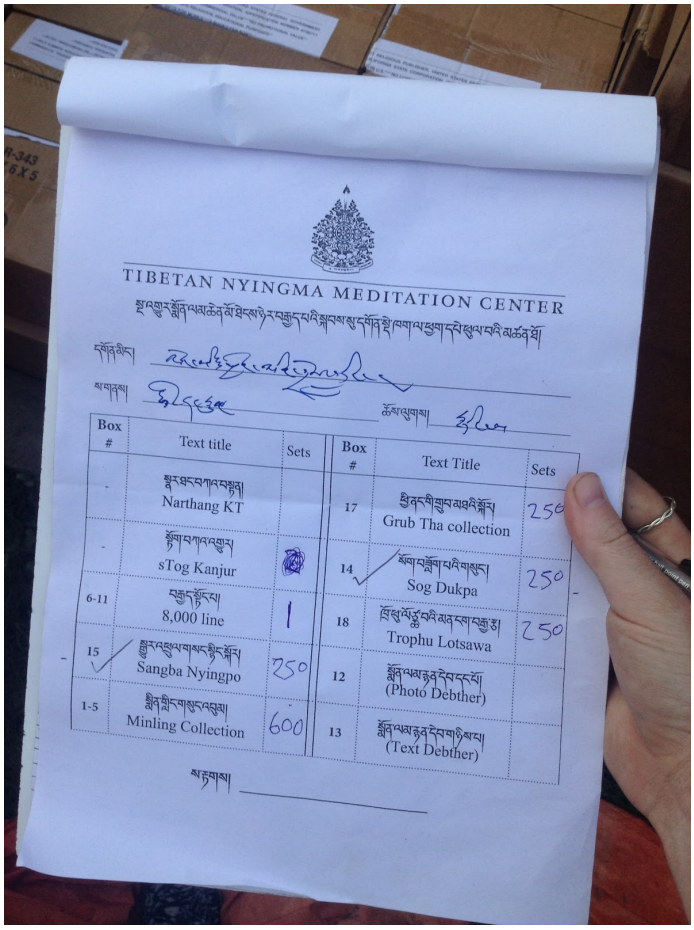
Fig. 42 A large order of books bundled in tough plastic sacks bound with twine, awaiting pickup. Photo taken by the author.

By the time I arrived in Bodh Gaya for this undertaking I had reached the final months of fieldwork and was by then no stranger to the pragmatics of dealing with mass-quantities of sacred material. Rules must bend for the greater good of a large project driven by urgency and overshadowed by prophetic temporalities of destruction. If the risk inherent in an

industrial-scale text-printing project is that occasionally a forklift will tip its sacred cargo to the warehouse floor, it is a justifiable risk. However, even in spaces like the bindery, the sanctity of material was a constant feature of work and we were impressed with persistent reminders of its impact on our work, as the reader will remember from the bindery chapter. Across all of the organisations, the critical importance of these sacred materials to monastic practitioners is stressed again and again.

How odd then, that the place where the sanctity of these elements should be easiest to lose is in the very act of handing them to their intended recipients. Here the sacred texts are made anonymous through their brown cardboard packaging, and the frantic pace and energy of the distribution precludes any solemn gravity to the act of passing boxes from hand to hand. Boxes of texts end up in the dust on the ground, crammed into every conceivable nook and cranny of a tuk tuk, and tossed physically from person to person. At least, that was my initial impression. However, after one adjusts to the chaotic tempo familiar marks of deferential behaviour appear and the delicate balancing act between pragmatics and ideal practices re-emerges.

I had the (mis)fortune of handling orders from both Mindroling (*smin grol gling*) and Namdroling (*rnam grol gling*) — two of the largest and most important monasteries to the Nyingma lineage, now relocated to India. Delegations from both places were granted an enormous number of texts. Indeed, several of the collections on offer that year were editions produced by one of the two lineage power-houses. The texts alloted to Mindroling amounted to over a thousand boxes and took hours to assemble. The Mindroling contingent, though, had come prepared with a large cohort of young and energetic monks. They arranged themselves in a bucket-brigade style and began passing boxes along the line — counting aloud enthusiastically — and depositing them in a growing pile just outside the distribution lot. One young monk became a little too zealous in his chucking of the boxes until one of them slipped through his hands to land in the dirt just as a senior monk passed. This imposing figure tutted loudly and sucked his teeth as the abashed young monk hurriedly scooped up the box and raised it to his forehead before passing it along and resuming is place in the line with rather more solemnity.



TIBETAN NYINGMA MEDITATION CENTER

Box #	Text title	Sets	Box #	Text Title	Sets
-	Narthang KT		17	Grub Tha collection	250
-	sTog Kanjur		14	Sog Dukpa	250
6-11	8,000 line	1	18	Trophu Lotsawa	250
15	Sangba Nyingpo	250	12	(Photo Debther)	
1-5	Minling Collection	600	13	(Text Debther)	

Fig. 43 Form detailing the number of books to be given to Mindroling Monastery
— note the particularly large number of copies of the Minling collection granted. Photo taken by the author.

Small instances like this cropped up all over the distribution site. It was not hard to pick them out because I was not the only one watching for them. Indeed, the TNMC volunteers delighted in these moments and recounted them to each other in spare minutes between filling orders. These instances demonstrated not only the ritual decorum of the monks, even under immense pressure, but also indicated that the objects made and given by this very community were being taken seriously as sacred objects and treated accordingly. No one was disappointed or put off by the occasionally cavalier treatment of the books, but moments that re-established their status were noted and emphasised.

Fig. 44 A large team of monks (I believe from Mindroling) assembles a substantial donation. Photo taken by the author.

Such behavior was particularly pronounced with one text: our erstwhile friend from the bindery chapter: the 8,000 line *Prajñāpāramitā* printed in gold ink on blue paper. To the volunteers it is called the blue-gold for short, to the Tibetan attendees it was the *gyertongba* (*brgyad stong pa*). Somehow word had spread about the jewel of this year's shipment, and it was easily the most sought after gift. The printing run for these specimens had been a small one, and not all the attendees would get one — not even a majority.

Many of the monks I shepherded through the pallets would ask for a copy, even if their form signed by Palsang denied them one. Members of the laity too had started to congregate at the distribution site, flocking to Palsang every time he left the safety of the tent. These hopefuls also gravitated to the pallet that held the blue-gold, which made the volunteers nervous enough to post one of the Indian employees at the pallet to hand copies of the *gyertongba* only to those shepherded by a volunteer. This was not altogether surprising — I had been told stories of larger distributions in previous years where volunteers had been forced to make a human chain of linked arms in front of the pallets to stop the assembled

from simply grabbing what they could reach. The year I participated was markedly less desperate, though many were certainly willing to try their luck at loitering near the stack of *gyertongba*, asking any volunteer who walked by for a copy. Those who did receive one, especially those who received nothing else (occasionally having made the pilgrimage on foot), were much more apt to raise the tome to their foreheads and give a small bow to the attending volunteer. This is a familiar gesture for sacred texts, but not one that was repeated nearly so often for the other boxes of volumes in this context.

The unequal distribution of the focus of recipients' attention is an indication that the differentiation between these sacred texts that emerged in the bindery is reflected in their distribution as well. While the texts may be homogenised in many ways in this setting, through their nondescript packaging, their sometimes cavalier treatment, and their literal equal footing in matched rows of pallets, there are also signs that different texts invite different treatment. The recurrent theme of the tension between strategies of secrecy and spread is again crystalised in this frenetic interaction. Much of the burden of judgement lies here with Palsang, who decides what may be given to whom. Luckily for Lama Palsang, in many cases he may turn to the colophons or histories of the texts themselves, which may state clearly how they ought to be treated and shared. The *Prajñāpāramitā*, as I mentioned in my introduction, gives clear directions for its own wide proliferation (Warren 1985 [1896], 107). For the *gyertongba*, then, its selective distribution was owed not to the secrecy or delicacy of its contents but to the particular preciousness of this edition, as signaled by its fine materials. There were indeed other versions of the *Prajñāpāramitā* — editions from previous shipment years — which were less lavish, less guarded, and subsequently less coveted.

One particular set of texts at the distribution offered a prime example of the strategy of broad distribution in action: the Narthang Kanjur and Tanjur. Designed for this distribution year and composed of 108 volumes, a copy of what volunteers called "the NKT" was granted to virtually every recipient who could wrangle its many boxes. In this TNMC joins its project to a long history of the Kanjur and Tanjur (in its myriad different versions) playing a central role in the diffusion and maintenance of Tibetan Buddhism. Following the compilation of its first versions in the later 13th to early 14th centuries, the collection is described as having traveled around Tibet, alighting at myriad monasteries to spread the Buddha's speech (Eimer

1988, Stanley 2014, Schaeffer 2009). Absent from this distribution, however, was the Gyübum, that most potent and protected set of tantras that caused such consternation in the bindery. In fact, no one I spoke to could remember a year when the Gyübum was distributed among the texts in the Bodh Gaya lot. Its dissemination, then, must take place through more carefully managed channels. In spite of the homogenising cacophony of the distribution, the thematic tension and vacillation between secrecy and spread, proliferation and protection, undergirds the different texts that crowd the pallets, shaping how and to whom they are given.

Fig. 45 Monks stand by a pallet of books at the distribution lot. Photo taken by the author.

The repeated recognitions of gestures of respect and appreciation serve to remind those involved that this exchange, rushed, dusty, and overwhelming though it may be, is bound up in a larger story of transmission that spans generations. While Tarthang Tulku, and his daughters by extension, may act as viable conduits for lineage transmission, the volunteers remain ancillary to this kind of exchange. As such they take charge of the pragmatic side of these gifts, rather than its ritual aspects. Once again their gifting here, as we have seen, does not entail the usual proximity between gift and giver. In the bindery it was the very gravity and content of the texts themselves that rendered distant their American makers, subjugating them in the hierarchical array of makers to whom a sacred text is attributed. Here, at the

distribution in Bodh Gaya, another facet of the volunteers' subjugation appears with sharpened clarity — that is, their deferential attitude to the monastics themselves. The urgency that guides the frenetic pace of making projects in California is repeatedly associated with the privilege of solidifying the diasporic sangha. Those in the community understand very clearly that their own training is won largely in the service of these more urgent needs, and to be at least in part deferred in order to fortify the roots that will allow the lineage to persist.

This deference has an impact on how the volunteers may take up the role of giver, and how the corresponding role of recipient is structured. General expectation of gift exchange is that a debt is laid at the feet of the recipient (Gregory 1982). The particulars of how this is accomplished and articulated, whether through Mauss' "Hau" (Mauss 1925), long-term balance (Weiner 1980), exchange and power (Blau 1967) or otherwise may be up for debate, but invocation of a debt or obligation toward a kind of equanimity is pervasive. Parry has pointed out the ways in which the commonly accepted principle of Mauss', the need for reciprocity entailed by the gift, becomes problematic with regard to *danadharma*, even while his more-maligned "spirit" of the gift holds water (Parry 1986). We may find a similar inversion here; the overlay of a ritual hierarchy and the pervasive deference felt and expressed by the American givers prevents the monks from falling wholly into debt in the often expected way. Rather, as Yan (2002) describes, this backdrop of ritual superiority and deference serves to confer status on the gifts' recipients, rather than its givers.

And yet, the receiving monks are not entirely immune to the capacity of the gift to entail a response, though here it may not be reciprocity. I mean this not simply in the sense of a "soteriology of reciprocity" (Trautmann 1981) that sees a deferred karmic return to the giver (Parry 1986). If we were to stop at the object of the text itself as gift this meritorious return might fulfill the expected reciprocity, but its spirit here can only be understood fully in the context of the Monlam (reflecting Smart's (1993) call to explore the performance and context of the giving as integral to the nature of the gift itself). Through deferential giving to ritual superiors what might otherwise be powerful obligation becomes instead a kind of hopeful entreaty that impresses itself on the figure of the recipient. An entreaty to worthiness, which asks the monks and nuns to be the kind of recipients who can make the *best* possible use of

such a gift. Such a call to right behaviour is shored up through the couching of gift-giving within the wider context of the Monlam.

Hoped for, too, is a long-deferred possibility that this act of giving might, whether this generation or several generations in the future, facilitate the growth of a strong and vibrant American sangha by way of Tibetan teachers. This is, I want to be clear, a hope rather than an expectation that could inspire obligation. Not only are the volunteers unlikely to reap the benefits of English-speaking Nyingma teachers as a result of their actions, it has already been made clear they are prepared for the eventuality that their community may no longer exist at such time. It is, then, a gift whose spirit hopes, entreats, and imagines, rather than expects or demands.[55]

Fig. 46 A tuk tuk packed to capacity with boxes of sacred texts. Photo taken by the author.

[55] This entreaty, then, does not introduce what Sihlé (2015) refers to as a "strong reciprocity", which would trouble the expectation that monastics are worthy recipients based on their position, rather than any conditional return or result that follows from the gift (Caple 2015). This worthiness of the monastic position is, I contend, still intact here in spite of the entreaty that monks affect the role of a virtuous recipient, for the entreaty follows more directly from fears of a general moral decline in Tibetan Buddhism and an endeavor to fortify the monastic practice against such a decline than a demand for reciprocity.

7.5 Conclusion

Those that I call "givers" in the above section are themselves, of course, recipients of gifts as well. In fact, this position of recipient perhaps characterises their role within the community more accurately than one of giving, in spite of the distribution ceremony. As has already been demonstrated by the emphasis placed on the gifts to the high Lamas and assembled monastics, which are carried out by Tarthang Tulku's daughters and other monastics, the American students cannot easily represent a smooth avenue for transmission that pervades the exchange of texts in the Tibetan Buddhist context.

This element of transmission is particularly entangled with the giving of gifts of Buddha speech and body. The American volunteers are not guarded from other kinds of giving — from the giving of money (the betty offering), or flowers, of offering *kataks* and so on. But here again their inability to qualify to be a part of the formal transmission lineage makes them liminal participants in this act of offering. Liminal here may seem an odd way to describe a group of people who have poured a truly staggering amount of time, energy, and devoted care into the production of these items. Indeed, it is not meant to undercut the importance of their contribution, for the whole project turns on it. This is a fact recognised by Tarthang Tulku, among others. Yet still, we must compare the two instances of giving that occur in Bodh Gaya — one at the temple site and one in the lot. The act of giving too, is much more formal in the temple context, marked out by ceremony and all the proper gestures of making offerings — bowing, prostrating, blessing and so on. The mass-distribution by contrast, has very little of this kind of ceremony about it. If the iteration of giving that happens at the temple site is the ritual upholding of a lineage transmission, the parking lot distribution is perhaps the pragmatic side of mass-gifting. Pragmatics drive its location, form, and execution.

The fact that it is pragmatic does not mean gifts are not being given. It does not make the gifts less important — indeed in some cases they are exactly the same books. Pragmatics are near and dear to the heart of Tarthang Tulku's operation, and there is a kind of sanctity of pragmatics that pervades the projects he sponsors. But this pragmatic approach is often the domain of his American students, whose work ethic Tarthang Tulku values for this reason. The American volunteers, then, are still acting as some kind of giver as they point to various

boxes on the distribution site. But this might be characterised as incidental giving in the same way that the volunteers are incidental agents in the making and giving of the books. Ancillary is perhaps the best, most accurate term to describe their place in the flow of these sacred gifts — essential but supporting the transmission taking place between initiates.

The Monlam, with its notable power to draw together and assemble — socially, politically, ritually — has exercised its uncanny ability over the contents of my thesis. Each of its themes have been arrayed under the auspices of the Monlam like the monks and nuns under the Bodhi tree. From the spatially and temporally transformative capacities of sacred objects, the distortion of gifts and commodities through sanctity, the prophetic temporality invested in the making and deployment of sacred objects, and the protean efficacy of the rituals and networks of Tibetan Buddhism, each is brought to its crescendo here. Though, perhaps this should not be at all surprising, representing as it does the cumulative result of the considerable attentions and efforts of Tarthang Tulku and his students. Through the Monlam and its assembly of all the receptacles of Buddhas speech, body, and mind they have to offer, the community makes its multi-valenced bid for preservation and fortification of the lineage of teaching, of the sangha, of Tibetan Buddhism, and for "world peace" and the well-being of all of us who will never witness the concert of prayers at Bodh Gaya.

Conclusion
Signed, Sealed, Delivered: The Text Dispersed

America is a land in which very little is sacred, a land where the focus for most people has to do with material possessions, simple pleasures, and various kinds of fantasy. For someone trained in the Dharma, it is deeply disappointing to begin to understand how far the Western way of life departs from a Buddhist way of thinking.

Still, here we are. All we can do is devote ourselves to what we believe has value, hoping that in time the culture will evolve toward other forms of understanding. If you accept this approach, then whatever others may think or see when they look at the projects to which we have devoted our lives, you will see in our accomplishments the value of the sacred at work.

- Tarthang Tulku, *Path of Action*

When one first steps into the world of Tibetan Buddhist texts it can be hard to imagine how this densely populated field could possibly sustain another narrative. The contents of these tomes, their genesis, proliferation, and spread have been analysed with remarkable depth over the course of their long history. I owe debts to many of these scholars, and their corpus of work forms a scaffold that has helped to sustain my project. The depth of textual analysis many such scholars have levied at the contents of these texts is one I cannot aspire to and do not intend to. The narrative I would add to this rich field is not one of elaborate, royally patronised translation and printing projects, which loom large in the history of Tibetan Buddhist sacred texts. Rather, this story is more improvisational in character and content, seeking out text production "in the margins", in a way. These are texts produced in less-than-ideal circumstances, in unfamiliar lands, by inexperienced hands.

Tarthang Tulku's project removes the process of sacred text-production from the ritual and social hierarchies and surroundings that have traditionally supported it, inciting a distillation of questions about what it takes to produce a "successful" sacred text, or moreover, a successful sacred-text maker. What emerges in a strikingly tangible way is the agentive capacities of sacred texts themselves, and the remarkable way they move with fluidity through social fields, speaking and acting effectively in a myriad of registers. The flexibility and agentive capacities of texts, and the creative potential that saturates their making is perhaps not a novel realisation. Such creativity is very often revealed in hindsight when one looks back on the compilation of texts — the Nyingma Gyübum for example (Germano 2002) — or in the adaptations precipitated by the development of printing technologies (Schaeffer 2009). In the context of TNMC, however, large-scale changes in virtually all fields

of sacred text production — location, technology, labourers, patronage — have occured together, allowing a rich and focused exploration of the adaptability of Tibetan Buddhist sacred texts in "real time".

Another critical effect of this observable unfolding of a sacred text printing project lies not only in the privileged view of the agentive capacities and creativity of these objects, but also in that it adds an affective, experiential dimension to their process of making. This is a dimension of the experience of makers in particular, which is often subsumed by the behemoth personalities of the books themselves, and amounts to a gap in our study of these rich objects that I have aimed to address here.

Many of the through-lines of this thesis have their roots in Tarthang Tulku — the timbre of urgency that saturates the volunteers' relentless work, the dual commitments to secrecy and proliferation and strategies for preservation, but also his anti-sectarian (*ris med*) training that incites a cross-school endeavor to fortify Tibetan Buddhism. The coalescence of all of these contextual elements form the crucible in which TNMC and its guiding commitments took shape. Through it we can see how Tarthang Tulku takes an innovative approach toward fulfilling the potential invested in the Tulku as a personage — as personified containers for the knowledge of a lineage and the ability to both protect and spread that knowledge.

But these contextual elements that have led Tarthang Tulku toward the urgency and commitment that guides his work are based far from Central California's mingled palms and pines. I have described how Odiyan — and the tools that both make it up and fill it — facilitate a creasing and folding of the spatiotemporal landscape, bringing Tibet's body and history close and enchanting (or perhaps revealing the enchantment) of California's landscape, making it ready for the production of sacred objects. Its ordering capacities are exerted not just over the topography, but over the very arrangement and relationships that hold Tarthang Tulku's myriad organisations together in a structure that reflects the mandala. Through the very process of construction that impresses Odiyan's mandala upon the landscape, the community volunteers come to recognise this rapprochement, allowing them to re-conceptualize both their surroundings and their labor. It is through this labor that they gain access to this space and its secrets, perhaps the most protected part of this network. Odiyan,

in this light, also served to introduce the strategic secrecy upon which the community occasionally relies in its bid for protection and preservation, a strategy occasionally at odds with the effervescent collective and voluntary work relied upon to bring such secretive spaces to being.

The balance between openness and secrecy spills over into the cacophony of the Ratna Ling bindery, to become a significant feature in the sorting of different gifts and not-commodities produced within it. In fact, the endeavor to balance and strategically deploy the strategies of secrecy and proliferation has been very illuminating when in comes to discerning the two textual traditions maintained through the bindery: the Tibetan texts for distribution at Bodh Gaya, and the English books for the community's (primarily) North American and European audience. A close inspection of the bindery facilitated an exploration of the practicalities of creating sacred Tibetan artefacts in a Californian factory staffed with largely Tibetan-illiterate volunteers.

We saw how the very machinery offered by the bindery space is enchanted and drawn into the narrative of work as practice, absorbing some of the agentive and sacred qualities of the objects they help to produce. The volunteers' relationship to these two textual traditions is markedly different, and their proximity to each is carefully managed. Such careful and selective investment of the makers' participation in the object they produce offers a curious and rich subversion of traditional understandings of alienation, commodities, and gifts. Ultimately what are produced are two kinds of (somewhat misbehaving) gifts: 1) the "not commodities" that are Tarthang Tulku's books, which carry the weight of this teacher's relationship to his students and have the potent ability to render their "buyers" students rather than customers and 2) the Tibetan texts that, while seemingly gifts par excellence in the Maussian (Mauss 1925 [1920]) sense by some metrics, are able to act successfully as gifts in part because the spirit or personhood of their American makers is carefully kept from them. The way these two traditions are maintained, understood, and distributed allows us to read the hopes, fears, and expectations that saturate the understanding of both groups of recipients.

Such an exploration of the relationship between the texts and their makers during the printing process — how they draw close, then step apart in turn, mediated by the machinery

that provide the partners for work as practice — allows a closer exploration of the affective and experiential dimensions of bringing embodiments of Buddha's speech to life and to voice. This dimension was even more pronounced through the exploration of the other more ubiquitous sacred objects created across the community spaces. Tsha-tshas, statues, flags, and prayer wheels revealed to us how the volunteers' process of coming to know the Tibetan Buddhist sacred — to understand and internalise the urgency and precarity with which their making is underscored — relies on TNMC's particular approach to work.

Monumental tasks, impossible deadlines, and long work hours are not shallow exploitation here, or even solely a response to the amount of work that must be done, but rather are elements specifically designed to impress urgency bodily and intimately upon volunteers. Through this process the sacred objects mentioned become first tellers of imminent precarity and past threat, but also the very objects necessary to fortify against the decline they foretell. In this fortification the objects, demonstrate the range of their creativity and flexibility. Extending on the capacity of sacred objects to render the Buddha present and available for interaction (Bentor 1996), TNMC volunteers purpose-build this Buddha-body, maximising its preservative and fortificatory capacities in everything from the materials to scriptural content, and deploy them in unique ways to directly address threats and hurts from earthquakes to the holocaust.

Perhaps unexpectedly, creativity and flexibility in the sustaining networks for Tibetan sacred texts and objects is disproportionately evident in the sorts of patronage arrangements that support this network of organisations. Here the volunteers must shepherd the texts and objects they create into a relatively new arena, where they both rely on and shape the "always readiness" (Engelke 2013) of the text and its subsequent to speak across contexts. In the patronage networks convened by TNMC, facets of the text — such as its heritage value and the antiquity of its lineage — are drawn to the fore in order to compel the collection of donors, activists, aid-workers, and yoga hobbyists that populate their California audience. But these networks also form a critical part of the way TNMC defines and orients itself — that is, through the associations it chooses to maintain — establishing itself in relation to both American Buddhism and other Tibetan Buddhist communities, as well as their strategies or practices. Through all of this, volunteers must quickly develop a keen sense of how sacred

texts — and their various elements such as script or images — can be safely and respectfully put to work in this new field. Their corpus of knowledge on the subject must be mobile and adaptable, as strategies for advertising and fundraising and the tools available change rapidly around this community, wedged as it is into the landscape of Silicon Valley.

At long last we reached the Monlam Chenmo to further the narrative of the texts as gifts and bring it to its crescendo, at least within the blanket of Tarthang Tulku's organisations. The contextual frame of the Monlam itself — its ability to facilitate re-affirmation of social and ritual ties (Barnett 1994), and its status as a powerful antidote to the world's ills and the decline of the Kali Yuga (Rigzin 1993, Schaeffer 2006) — provides the backdrop necessary for understanding the gifts of texts and objects that take place therein. Against this backdrop, the differences in treatment afforded to different texts, which began to emerge in the bindery, becomes visible. In the way different texts are given, by the givers and receivers involved, the dual commitment to secrecy and proliferation, the deferential position adopted by TNMC volunteers, and the potent entreaty to the monastic community that is contained within these gifts are all drawn together.

Through the narrative of this thesis I have endeavored to take recent anthropological attention to the processes of making, creativity, and craft and apply these attentions in order to elucidate new facets of the social and material lives of Tibetan Buddhist sacred objects. In doing so I have drawn focus to the way expectations, hopes, and fears are built into these objects via their very materials in a process that also shapes the experience and understanding of their makers. While the creative and innovative capacities of Tibetan sacred texts are well-established, here their elasticity has also allowed them to be purpose-built and deployed to meet newly conceived threats and imagined futures. The agentive capacities of sacred texts, then, furthers our understanding of the incidental agency of objects — here, volunteers and the objects they create amplify one another's agentive capacities, each allowing the other to extend their sphere of influence into new spaces.

But the application of a focus on processes of making to this context has also yielded a contribution to the very body of scholarly knowledge that supplied those strategies, troubling some of its assumptions. In the bindery we saw how the enchantment of this industrial space

— precipitated by both the sacred material and the approach of work as practice — enlivened the bindery machinery, joining it in the responsive flow of making in this space. As such, the kind of machinery deemed elsewhere a hindrance to "correspondence" or "craft" becomes an integral part of the process. I hope this will serve as a provocation to more closely examine the role machines and their makers — and the creative potential that invests the space between them — might play in the emerging anthropological landscapes of making and creativity.

With this explicit focus on books, their materials and making, I have added another narrative to what Engelke (2010) has termed the "media turn" in the study of religion. Indeed, by combining this mounting interest in the encounter between new media and religion with scholarship on the flexibility inherent in traditional Tibetan patronage relationships, I have endeavored to make a contribution to our understanding of how sacred texts exert their moral appeal through an ever-growing array of media. The diverse forms of media through which Tarthang Tulku's volunteers exert this appeal — films, brochures, webinars, and websites to name a few — are certainly central. However, I also intend to shore up a growing recognition of the unique ability of books to act as containers for culture across contexts (Diemberger and Hugh-Jones 2015), a feature I believe is connected to their marked proclivity for agency and distinct refusal to act as typical commodities (Anderson 1983, Miller 2006).

In addition, the media turn has precipitated something of a step back from fraught questions of "belief" in the study of religion, and toward a more explicit focus on practice (and its related materiality). After all, as Engelke points out, religious stuff is not religious until it is made so (Engelke 2010; 375). This is a shift reflected in my approach in this thesis, for quite clearly the pragmatics of making a sacred thing have been my focus. This focus on practice does not follow solely from a theoretical approach, however, but also from the community's own staunch pragmatism. In this my research combines a shift toward the pragmatics of religion with another emerging feature of contemporary Buddhism: its emphasis on labor and the quotidian embedding of practice — an intersection that I believe is ripe for further investigation.

This thesis will also, I hope, offer the kind of detailed ethnographic and fieldwork-based investigation of a Tibetan Buddhist community in American that has been somewhat lacking in the study of American Buddhism. In doing so perhaps I can offer an antidote to some of the broad diagnoses affixed to "Buddhism in America", or even to Tarthang Tulku and his students specifically, in the kinds of survey-style texts that populate this field of study. The experimental dispensing of the "elephant" in favor of an "un-sited" approach (Cook et al. 2009) has yielded a portrait of a mobile, dynamic, and innovative group of practitioners that differs markedly from extant accounts, underscoring the potential benefits of such a methodology moving forward.

I have aimed to situate TNMC, however, not just in an American context, but within the contemporary practice of printing sacred texts. The guiding thread of the sacred texts enabled me to travel widely across the branches of this California Nyingma community. Even where texts were not physically present their influence rendered commensurate this sometimes disparate-feeling collection of organisations. This approach was also intended to render this community comparable to strategies for text preservation through Nyingma history, and also in the contemporary landscape of sacred text production both inside and outside Tibet.

In their movement across the community spaces, these texts have carried with them dual commitments to secrecy and proliferation as strategies for preservation. One of my aims has been to demonstrate how these two strategies might be deployed in close proximity and to attempt to illuminate how and when each is relied upon. They appear at times in concert and at times in conflict, always needing to be reimagined for their neophyte handlers. I have endeavored to show how this reimagining draws on a long Nyingma history of innovative use of both secrecy and proliferation, and in doing so add another chapter to this story. Overseeing their deployment is the distant but ever-present figure of Tarthang Tulku. His influence permeates every corner of this network and every decision made within it in the same way that his quotes — sometimes praising, sometimes rebuking — have opened each of my chapters. Across all these contributions I have endeavored to bring together discrete bodies of study to a rich and productive point of encounter.

In moving through such spaces, the guiding texts exert their familiar ability to create individuals, relationships, and convene networks. And yet, the ways in which they do this occasionally make apparent the tension between concealment and proliferation — especially when it comes to texts as gifts, which index a lineage transmission from which these volunteers are carefully excluded. They take up instead their own textual lineage, created with and for them by Tarthang Tulku, which they may proliferate freely and that contains no small vestige of the sanctity appointed the texts given to their monastic counterparts.

Through the poignantly illustrated imaginaries of threat and decline, their community and work is also drawn into the temporal field of Nyingma history, recalling its strategies for survival that are deployed anew here in innovative ways. From the urgency of their work and the changeability of their instructions they learn to embody the fluid, ever-ready capacities of the objects they create, but also come to understand the threat to them in an embodied way, impressed upon them more fully and emphatically than any lecture or reading could do. This is taught to them not only through the way they work, but the very materials they handle — intended to be strong and long-lasting — and the things they produce. These products are treated as "rosetta-stone-like" distillations of the language and lineage that endeavor to ensure its survival. Through their work they endeavor to draw a new valley into Nyingma Buddhism's landscape, investing the Californian topography with sacred texts, objects, history, and imagination.

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Appendix 1: List of Organisations

What follows is a list of current organisations under Tarthang Tulku's (and/or TNMC's) banner. This list is not fully comprehensive, as there have been multiple "generations" of organisations since the community's inception, not all of which are still in existence. It does, however, list and offer a brief description of all of the organisations of particular relevance to this thesis along with links, where possible, to their websites.

Berkeley:

Nyingma Institute: Founded in 1972, this organisation is one of the older branches in Tarthang Tulku's network established only a few years after the Lama's arrival in Berkeley. Taking up the northern position in the community's mandala — the avenue of "outpouring" — Nyingma Institute offers classes to the public on a range of subjects including meditation, Buddhist philosophy, Classical Tibetan language, and Kum Nye Yoga. These classes are explicitly Buddhist in contrast to some of the (intentionally secular) offerings at other organisations. The building that houses the Nyingma Institute also houses many of its volunteers (and it is where I lived for the first six months of my fieldwork). https://nyingmainstitute.com/

Nyingma Trust: This branch is responsible for "sustaining the community". Pragmatically speaking this means the Nyingma Trust manages the funds that support the volunteers' room and board and endeavors to compile savings to continue doing so through the future. http://www.nyingmatrust.org/index.html

Mangalam Center for Buddhist Languages:
The most typically "academic" of the collection of organisations, Mangalam hosts and conducts research, lectures, classes (such as Tibetan and Sanskrit intensive courses attended principally by local University students) and other such programs. Its function can change rather markedly based on the grants or projects currently ongoing. https://mangalamcenter.com/

Center for Creative Inquiry (CCI):
CCI is a rather nebulous branch and difficult to account for. Its most recent initiative — Full Presence Mindfulness (FPM) — seems to be the primary way in which CCI is currently active. FPM offers trainings of 6 to 8 weeks in length based on a series of six books published by the community called the "Time, Space, and Knowledge" series, in which Tarthang Tulku "presented a new vision of reality, known as the Time Space Knowledge Vision. As he wrote, it had as its goal 'the liberation of the modern Mind.' [This vision is] secular and highly experiential".
http://www.creativeinquiry.org/develop/ https://www.fullpresence.org/

Dharma College: Also offers courses for the public although distinct from those offered by Mangalam and Nyingma Institute. They described as "practical and experiential" and advertised as secular, although based on Tarthang Tulku's translation of the wisdom of "skilled spiritual masters in Tibet". https://dharma-college.com/

Tibetan Aid Project: Also one of the earliest organisations established by Tarthang Tulku, TAP was originally conceived in order to marshall funds and basic necessities for the Tibetan refugee population. As the Tibetan community's situation in exile stabilised, TAP turned its fundraising efforts toward supporting the growing book-printing work. TAP also sponsors ceremonies and offers financial support for monastics. https://www.tibetanaidproject.org/

Padma Ling: A somewhat enigmatic branch, Padma Ling is more of a residential compound for some of the more senior downtown Berkeley students. It also housed the making of prayer wheels during my time in Berkeley, a project that is as restricted in access as the property that houses it.

Guna Foundation: This organisation is a non-profit film studio that produces films based on the community's work. It has produced three such films to date, which are screened at various events both within and outside the community. https://gunafoundation.org/site/

Dharma Publishing Bookstore:
A shop in Berkeley that sells books — including, but not limited to, the English books produced by community — as well as small art pieces, meditation cushions, statues, flags, and other such objects.

Light of the Buddha Dharma Foundation International (LBDFI):
Sometimes colloquially referred to as the "missionary branch" within the community, LBDFI is dedicated to reviving the Dharma in India. It does so via such activities as promoting pilgrimage, beautifying significant Buddhist sites in India, and sponsoring a range ceremonies across India and in the US. http://lbdfi.org/

Sonoma:

Ratna Ling Retreat Center:
Ratna Ling Retreat Center — a sweeping and beautiful property in Sonoma County — offers retreats to the wider public. It hosts retreats based on Tarthang Tulku's teachings, but other organisations/groups often host their own retreats (yoga groups, corporate retreats and so on). The retreat center also shares the property with the community's bindery facility, as well as Dharma Publishing headquarters. Staff as well as retreatants are housed in a constellation of cabins that surround the main lodge (those for volunteers are a great deal simpler that the luxurious versions enjoyed by retreat guests). http://ratnaling.org/

Dharma Publishing: This is the community's non-profit publishing branch, responsible for publishing and distributing Tarthang Tulku's English books, as well as select crafts and other products (cushions, mantra cd's, recorded webinar teachings), and takes a managerial role in the printing of the sacred texts. Dharma Publishing, as the modern incarnation of the press Tarthang Tulku first established in Sarnath, is closely related to Yeshe De Text Preservation Project, which carries out the actual printing. Its offices are also at Ratna Ling, directly above the bindery Floor. http://dharmapublishing.com/

Yeshe De Text Preservation Project:
Yeshe De is the branch — closely related to Dharma Publishing — which carries out the logistics of typesetting, sourcing, supplying, printing, packing, and shipping all of the books (English and Tibetan) created under the auspices of Tarthang Tulku's network.

Odiyan Retreat Center:
Located across the valley from Ratna Ling in Sonoma County, Odiyan Retreat Center sands on a roughly 1,000 acre property. Odiyan is the residence of Tarthang Tulku, as well as a small complement of Volunteers. As described in chapter two, this property and the configuration of temples, stupas, gardens, and other structures (built almost entirely by community volunteers) that make it up are a critically important part of this community's bid to foster the Dharma in America. http://odiyan.org/

India:

Sarnath International Nyingma Institute (SINI):
SINI plays host to a cohort of monks from Nyingma monasteries across India and Nepal. At SINI they receive a unique education whose primary focus is to teach the monks English, but also aims to educate them on a broad and varied swath of subjects including geography, history, business, taught to them by community volunteers and visiting scholars. SINI also hosts a other programs including the occasional retreat, or school group.

Other (International Branches):

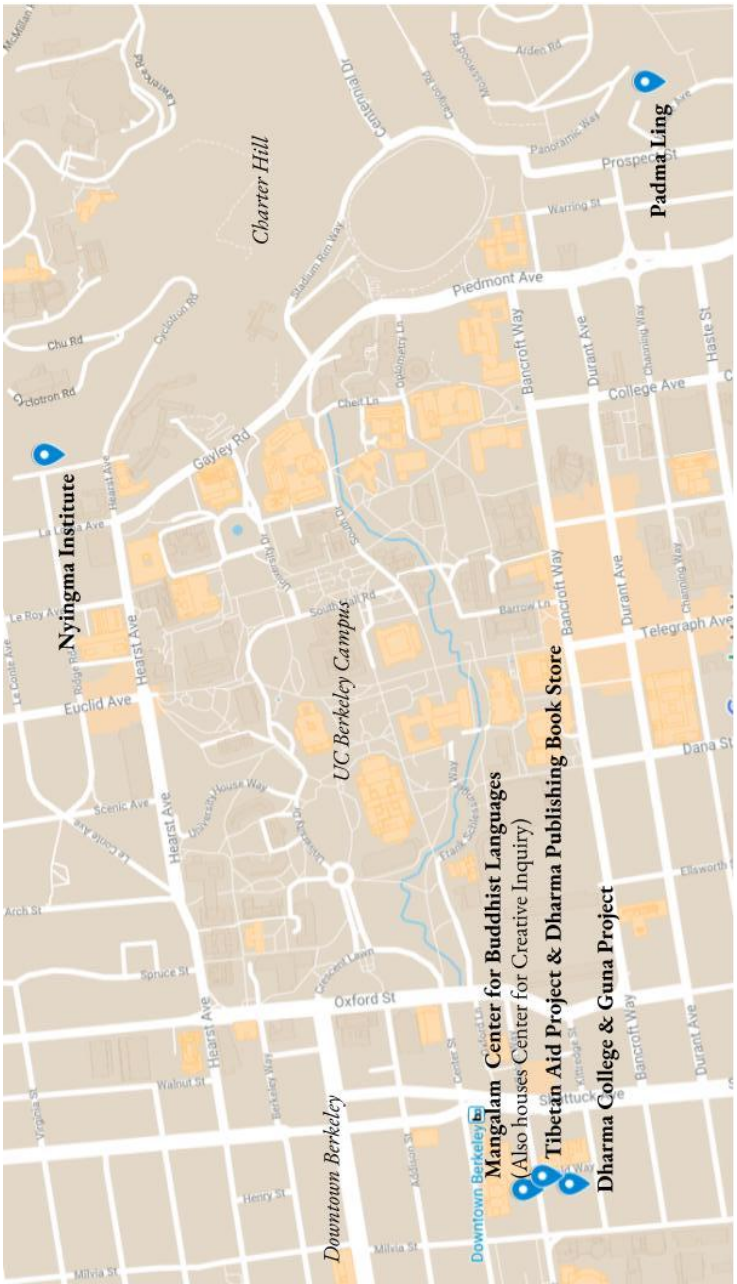
Nyingma Zentrum Germany
Nyingma Centrum Nederland
Kum Nye Yoga Group (UK)
Instituto Nyingma do Rio de Janeiro
Instituto Nyingma do Brasil (São Paulo)
Editora Dharma (São Paulo)
Yeshe De Text Preservation Project – Brazil
Kum Nye Yoga Group (Buenos Aires)

Appendix 2: Maps

Head Lama of TNMC Branches

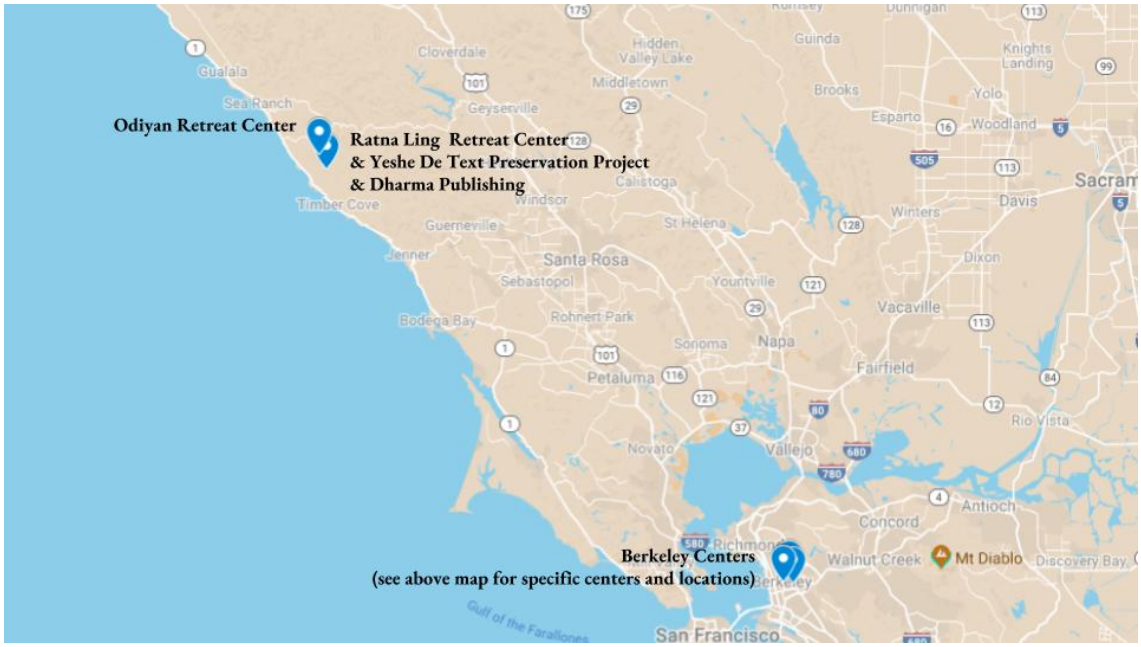
Note that not all of the various projects, branches, or initiatives under Tarthang Tulku's banner have their own offices or buildings and are run on a more ad-hoc basis out of the other centers. Those represented on the maps below are housed in properties owned by the organisations. Maps in this section are created via google maps, annotated by the author.

Downtown Berkeley[56]*:*



[56] *Note that this reflects the arrangement of organisations during my fieldwork. Since that time the Tibetan Aid Project and Book store have been relocated to share the property where the Nyingma Institute is located.*

California:



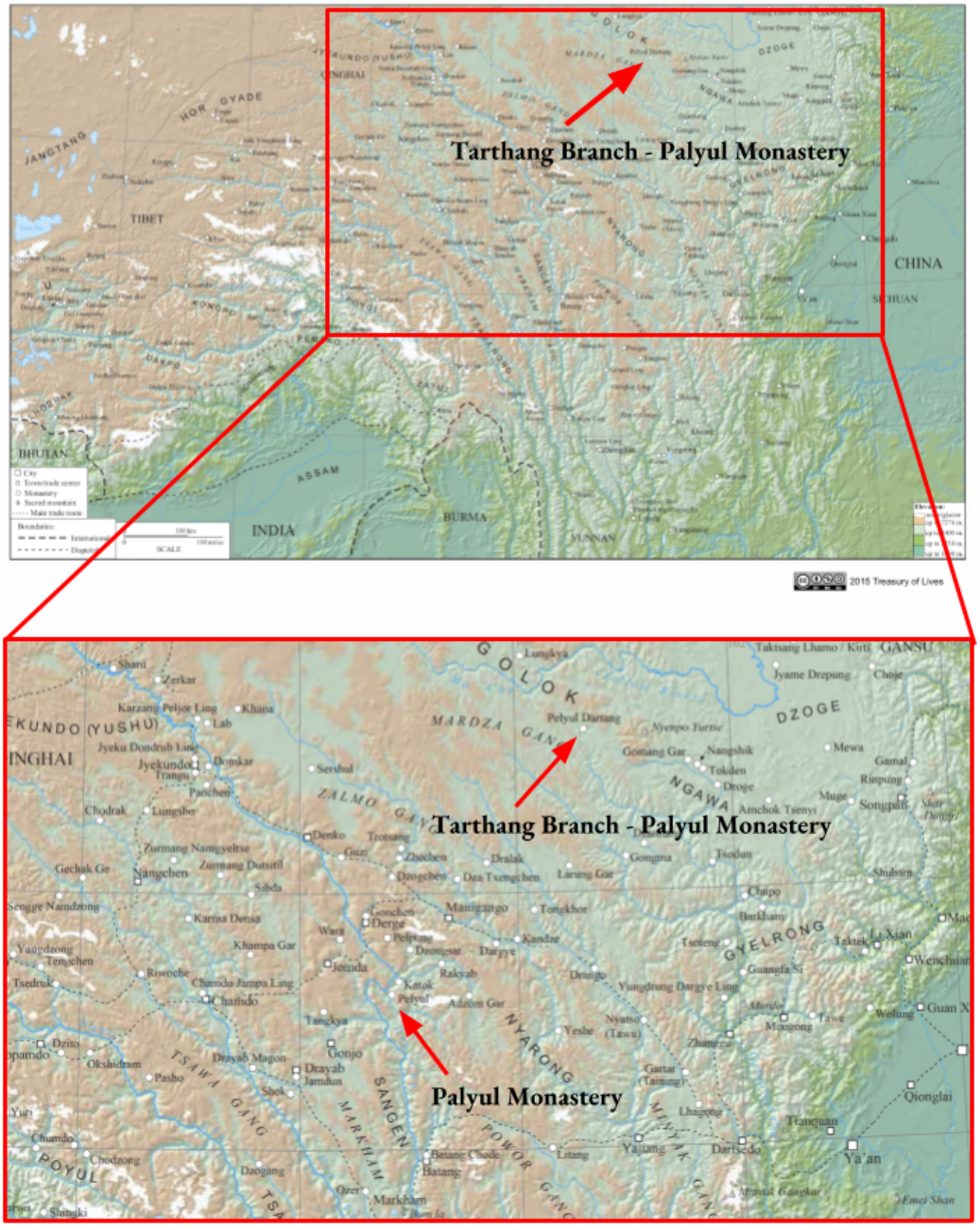
Global:

Note that the above is not a comprehensive representation of all of TNMC's groups and projects, but indicates the major centers that hold property and represent a sustained concentration of volunteers (though the maps above exclude, for example, the various yoga groups, which are more peripheral and intermittently active).

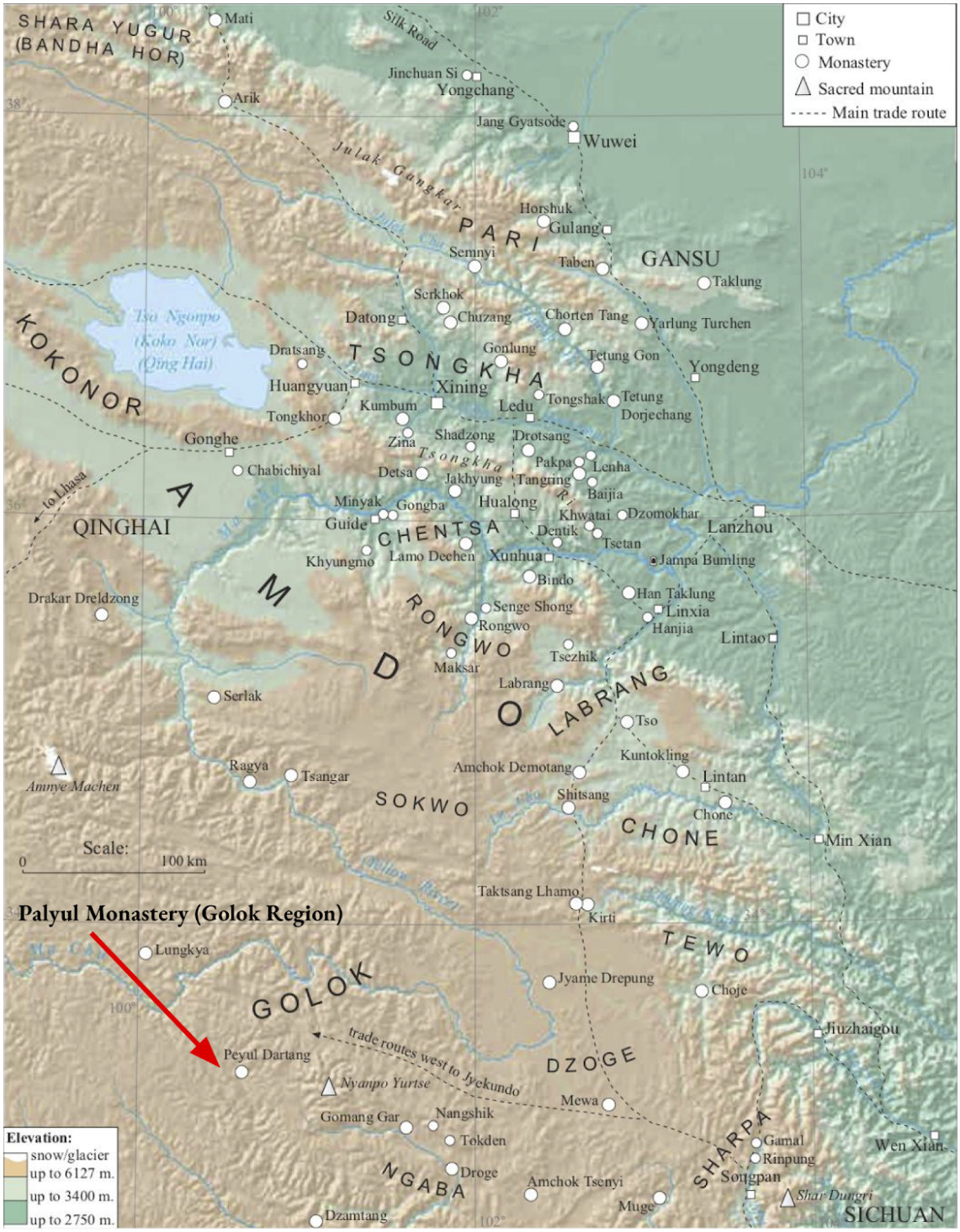
Relevant Tibetan Regions

The maps below indicate the region where Tarthang Tulku was born, his monastery at Tarthang, and the principal monastery of which Tarthang is a branch (Palyul). Maps are drawn from the Treasury of Lives website map tool (https://treasuryoflives.org/place#5/34.271/89.604) annotated by the author.

Kham:



Amdo:


City
Town
Monastery
Sacred mountain
Main trade route
SHARA YUGUR (BANDHA HOR)
Mati
Silk Road
Jinchuan Si
Yongchang
Arik
Jang Gyatsode
Wuwei
Julak Gangkar
PARI
Horshuk
Gulang
Semnyi
Taben
GANSU
Taklung
Serkhok
Datong
Chuzang
Chorten Tang
Yarlung Turchen
Tso Ngonpo (Koko Nor) (Qing Hai)
KOKONOR
Dratsang
TSONGKHA
Gonlung
Tetung Gon
Yongdeng
Huangyuan
Xining
Tongshak
Tetung
Dorjechang
Kumbum
Ledu
Tongkhor
Gonghe
Zina
Shadzong
Drotsang
Tsongkha
Pakpa
Lenha
Chabichiyal
Detsa
Jakhyung
Tangring
Baijia
to Lhasa
AMDO
Minyak
Gongba
Hualong
Khwatai
Dzomokhar
QINGHAI
Guide
CHENTSA
Dentik
Lanzhou
Tsetan
Khyungmo
Lamo Dechen
Xunhua
Jampa Bumling
Bindo
Drakar Dreldzong
Han Taklung
Senge Shong
Linxia
RONGWO
Rongwo
Hanjia
Lintao
Tszehik
Maksar
Labrang
Serlak
LABRANG
Tso
Kuntokling
Amye Machen
Ragya
Tsangar
Amchok Demotang
Lintan
SOKWO
Shitsang
Chone
CHONE
Min Xian
Scale:
0
100 km
Taktsang Lhamo
Palyul Monastery (Golok Region)
Kirti
TEWO
Lungkya
Jyame Drepung
Choje
GOLOK
Jiuzhaigou
trade routes west to Jyekundo
Peyul Dartang
DZOGE
Nyanpo Yurtse
Mewa
Gomang Gar
Nangshik
Tokden
Gamal
Rinpung
Songpan
Wen Xian
SHARPA
Droge
Amchok Tsenyi
Shar Dungri
NGABA
Muge
Dzamtang
SICHUAN
Elevation:
snow/glacier
up to 6127 m.
up to 3400 m.
up to 2750 m.

Appendix 3: Related Videos (and Other Media)

Guna Foundation, Film Trailers:

Prayers of the Ancient Ones: https://vimeo.com/62200768
Light of the Valley: https://vimeo.com/26184090
The Great Transmission: https://vimeo.com/166082152

Taste & Tribute 2010, Summary Video

https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=p3b3h5bNKY4#action=share

Volunteer Testimonials, Dharma Publishing (YouTube Playlist):

https://www.youtube.com/user/yeshede/videos?view=0&sort=dd&shelf_id=0

Yeshe De Crowdfunding Campaign Videos (2017)

https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=4Qqcwd3x2Pw
https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=nxvs_NoWe7U
https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=K_16r_kJnUw

Dharma Publishing Webinar/Retreat Invitation

https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=BhKi8id1XPY

Interview with Arnaud Maitland (Director of Dharma Publishing) on the subject of Kum Nye

https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=HHA3JmRntB4

Kum Nye Dancing

https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=auppy3AYF_U
https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=UMEFkIqUVTY

Vajra Guru Mantra

https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=WM1OrskD4p4

Creation of a Statue of Guru Padmasambhava (Dharma Publishing)

https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=_uJ48F24hDI&t=135s

See the Dharma Publishing YouTube Page for more:

https://www.youtube.com/user/DharmaPub108/featured