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Tibetan Indigeneity: Translations, Resemblances, and Uptake

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Why does it seem natural for Tibetans to be included in a volume about indigenous experience today? The term *indigenous,* after all, is not widely used by Tibetans either within Tibet or in exile. And why, considering the wide-ranging, perhaps even "viral" nature of the concept of indigeneity, has its "uptake" not happened to a significant degree among Tibetans? These questions would have made little sense before the 1980s, when the term *indigenous* was rarely used to describe people anywhere in the world. Today, a transnational social movement has made "indigenous peoples" both a legal term and an identity claimed by many peoples with diverse historical situations. It is widely understood to imply, among other things, firstness, nativeness or original or prior occupancy of a place; attachment to a particular territory or homeland; marginalization within a culturally or ethnically different wider society; and often, a history of colonization. As such, it has been used in international conventions, academic works, and activist organizing around issues of sovereignty, dispossession, human rights, and environmental stewardship. Basic demands of the indigenous rights movement include respect for collective rights to land, recognition of cultural difference, and the right to self-determination. Many indigenous struggles are centered around the reappropriation of land, artifacts, and knowledge, and are predicated on a mutual acknowledgement of a historical debt created by dispossession. At the same time, indigenous identity has also come to be associated with a set of ideals of environmental stewardship, connectedness to nature, spirituality, and egalitarianism—ideals that do not similarly adhere to

groups more closely identified as "ethnic minorities" and that present both strategic opportunities and challenges.

Despite the transnational indigenous rights movement's success in creating a set of ideas about what constitutes indigenous status, attempts to provide a single, overarching definition have been controversial. A United Nations report by Special Rappateur Miguel Alfonso Martínez (1999) stated the "obvious fact" that in postcolonial Africa and Asia, "autochthonous groups/minorities/ethnic groups/peoples . . . cannot . . . claim for themselves, unilaterally and exclusively, the 'indigenous' status in the United Nations context." Not surprisingly, this generated considerable opposition from the many groups in postcolonial Asia and Africa who claim an indigenous identity. The UN Working Group on Indigenous Populations has thus avoided a strict definition, instead allowing groups to identify *themselves* as indigenous. There are limits, however, to the ways the term can be stretched. A claim of indigeneity in itself is not enough; that claim must be recognized and legitimated, if not by the corresponding state, then at least by some other audience to which activists wish to speak.

The term *indigenous* invites Tibetans, as it invites many other groups, to be interpellated by it (cf. Castree 2004: 153), and certainly something about the historical, political, and social situation of Tibetans invites others to call them "indigenous." Yet for the most part, neither ordinary Tibetans nor those who might be expected to speak in a public "indigenous voice"—that is, activists, public intellectuals, and community leaders (Tsing this volume)—have claimed the term or the commonality that it suggests with other indigenous peoples. The English word *indigenous* appears only rarely in the copious English-language material produced by the Tibetan government in exile. Tibetan terms describing nativeness, such as *sa skye rdo skyes* ("born of this soil and rock") or tribalness, such as *tsho wa* and *de wa,* are used in everyday speech in Tibet, but they are not deployed to mobilize claims about sovereignty, human rights, national inclusion, environmental stewardship, or to demand rights that accompany the recognition of cultural difference. *Sa skye rdo rkyes* is typically used to indicate one's belonging to a particular village, neighborhood, or town; for example, an elderly couple in Lhasa complained to me about having to rent a threadbare government apartment by stating: "those people one sees buying houses in Lhasa today [i.e., other Tibetans] aren't *sa skye rdo rkyes* Lhasa people. They're all outsiders." Nativeness, at least in current usage, references a scale that is smaller than collective claims making about political or cultural rights. When Tibetans do make claims to political and cultural rights

or ask for recognition of environmental stewardship, they do so based on their identity as "Tibetan," rather than as being *sa skye rdo skyes*.[1] In this sense, they do not currently participate in what Niezen (2003) calls indigenism—the social movement of those indigenous groups who deliberately built translocal and transnational alliances with other indigenous groups to achieve their own goals.

In this chapter, I explore the lack of uptake of an explicitly "indigenous" identity even in the presence of a set of characteristic self-representations that bear what I call a family resemblance to indigenous formations around the world. More specifically, Tibetan claims and representations about environmental stewardship and ecological wisdom resonate strongly with other indigenous formations. This has long been the case in exile, but these representations and associations have only recently emerged in China. At the same time, the political claims of sovereignty that characterize the transnational indigenous movement present a stumbling block for the articulation of an explicitly indigenous identity. For Tibetans in exile, indigeneity is too weak a political claim. Within Tibet, it is too strong under the current political situation; instead, identity claims in the People's Republic of China (PRC) are only considered legitimate if expressed through the category of *minzu* (nationality), which is framed within the larger discourse of *minzu tuanjie,* a phrase meaning both "amity between the nationalities" and "national unity." Bulag (2002) aptly describes minzu tuanjie as a "hegemonic management device to maneuver in the context of China's diversity." Tibetans in Tibet live with the ideology of multiculturalism *(duoyuan wenhua)* but also, simultaneously, repeated state denunciations of "national splittism" *(minzu fenlie)*. The only acceptable cultural difference is that which upholds national unity, and does not split the nation. In analyzing indigeneity, I suggest we need to pay attention to *both* the specific terminology used and the family resemblance of "indigenous" characteristics; under specific historical and political circumstances, the two may not always converge.

My understanding of indigeneity is based on a theory of articulation (Clifford 2001; Hall 1996; Li 2000), a term that Stuart Hall, following Antonio Gramsci, uses in its double sense of both speaking and of a connection or linkage that can be forged under some conditions, but is "not necessary, determined, absolute, and essential for all time" (Hall 1996: 141). A theory of articulation: "is both a way of understanding how ideological elements come, under certain conditions, to cohere together within a certain discourse, and a way of asking how they do or do not become articulated, at specific conjunctures, to certain political subjects" (Hall 1996: 141).

This shifts attention away from questions of "invention" or authenticity, and toward an understanding of indigeneity as a contingent, structured positioning. Tania Li (2000) uses a theory of articulation in a comparison of two groups of farmers in Central Sulawesi, Indonesia, to explore why one has persuasively articulated a collective tribal or indigenous identity, whereas the other has not. Li's notion of a "tribal slot," as a conceptual frame of indigenous recognition is similar to what Tsing (2003) calls the "tribal allegory." Tsing suggests that two distinct story lines—of tribes and peasants—have shaped administrative policies and academic programs concerned with rural peoples. Peasant allegories are associated with populist concerns of class and economic equity. Tribal allegories, by contrast, are concerned with cultural difference, ecological wisdom, and intimate connections with nature. The collective articulation of an indigenous identity requires a particular conjuncture, context, or encounter to make use of an available tribal slot or allegory.

The "tribal allegory" of Tibetan ecological wisdom and deep connection to nature has been an available narrative for Tibetans in exile since the 1980s, and has more recently emerged in China as well. Tibetans within Tibet are beginning to rearticulate their local environmental knowledge in the language of global environmentalism, and in the past few years, Chinese environmental activists and scholars have begun to actively search for the opportunity to support ecologically friendly Tibetan subjects. In this sense, a Tibetan indigenous formation has existed for several decades in exile, and is now emerging within Tibet. In the next section, I briefly describe how Tibetans have been represented, and represent themselves, as wise in the ways of nature and as stewards of the land. The rest of this chapter turns to the larger political choices and constraints that explain why these "Green Tibetan" articulations do not adopt the explicit language of indigeneity.

Ecofriendly Tibetans

Environmental stewardship is one of the most powerful frames of contemporary indigenous activism; in many places, allying with environmental activists around problems of environmental destruction has given indigenous peoples a powerful voice and platform for mobilization (Tsing this volume). As a result, one of the central images made available by the international indigenous peoples movement is that of the inherently ecological Indian. Assertions of Tibetans' natural ecofriendliness are now an indispensable element of both the Tibetan government in exile and the transnational Tibet Movement's representations of Tibetanness.

According to one Tibetan exile writer, for example, “for centuries Tibet’s ecosystem was kept in balance and alive out of a common concern for all of humanity” (Atisha 1991). Similarly, a brochure produced by the Environment and Development Desk of the Central Tibetan Administration in Dharamsala, India states:

> Prior to the Chinese occupation, Tibet was ecologically stable and environmental conservation was an essential component of daily life. Guided by Buddhist beliefs in the interdependence of both living and nonliving elements of the earth, Tibetans lived in harmony with nature.

Huber’s (1997, 2001) genealogy of the Green Tibetan in exile shows that representations of Tibetans as naturally ecofriendly only began to be produced after 1985. The conjuncture that led to its emergence was the participation of government-in-exile representatives in a series of transnationally organized meetings and events, such as the World Wildlife Fund ([WWF] World Wide Fund for Nature outside of North America)–sponsored Buddhist Perception of nature project, World Environment Day, and the Assai Interfaith Ceremony on World Religions and the Environment. Tibetan assertions of intrinsic ecofriendliness thus appeared relatively late, after the idea of inherent environmental stewardship and knowledge had already been firmly attached to other groups including Native Americans and Kayapo. The congealing of the characteristic of ecological wisdom around a Tibetan identity in exile joined many other cases of indigenous environmental struggles and stewardship in the 1980s and 1990s, and in this sense, was an indigenous formation.

Within China, the emergence of the Green Tibetan as an indigenous formation has been even more recent still. The state’s official position on the Tibetan environment attributes all positive environmental stewardship to Chinese science and modernization, not Tibetan tradition; for example, “it was after the peaceful liberation of Tibet that ecological improvement and environmental protection started there, and began to progress along with the modernization of Tibet.”[2] Tibetan self-representations of environmental stewardship have become possible only in the space created by China’s small but growing environmental movement, and in particular by Chinese staff of transnational conservation NGOs, as well as Chinese social scientists who have become interested in indigenous environmental knowledge (see also Litzinger 2004). Their interest in the relationship between Tibetan culture and nature is itself the result of a contingent convergence of a set of

forces, including their own work with international foundations and development agencies, and more broadly, the promotion of the tourism industry as a major strategy for economic development in Tibet, the rise of youth backpacker culture, and a rising interest in Tibetan Buddhism, particularly among residents of wealthy coastal cities. The presence of environmentalists looking actively for evidence of Tibetan indigenous environmental knowledge and stewardship has in turn motivated Tibetans to rearticulate and translate their claims into the language and form understood by the environmentalists.

One important actor is Conservation International (CI), which launched its first program in China in 2000. A major component was the designation of the Mountains of Southwest China as a "biodiversity hotspot." More than 80 percent of this hotspot coincides with places where Tibetans currently and historically have lived. With many years of experience working with Western environmentalists and scientists in these Tibetan areas, the in-country director has implemented a major Sacred Lands program, the premise of which is that Tibetans already have a long history of environmental stewardship which stems from their religious and cultural traditions. Thus, CI is proposing to employ already-existing environmental wisdom toward the new goal of biodiversity preservation:

> The Mountains of Southwest China is rich in culture as it is in biodiversity. The majority of inhabitants are Tibetans with strong cultural ties to their natural environment. Reflecting the Buddhist reverence for all lives, Tibetan villages and monasteries have for centuries designated mountains, lakes, forests and rivers as holy sites, and have designed local resource management systems to guard the land for exploitation.[3]

The search by this and other similar projects for evidence of local environmental stewardship and reverence for nature has come together with particular local histories, life trajectories, and the agency of Tibetans who have acted as cultural translators to allow a growing number of local villagers, religious teachers, and grassroots organizations to articulate a Green Tibetan identity.

In one case, a cluster of villages in Chamdo, in the eastern Tibet Autonomous Region (TAR), organized a community group for environmental protection after a visit by a new Tibetan environmental NGO, which in turn was being supported by CI. The informal leader of the local environmental protection efforts, who had previously written several

essays about the need to rehabilitate and protect the sacred mountain for religious reasons, wrote several documents for the newly formed community group in 2003, including the following text:

> Our forefathers … always took care of nature and found ways to create a balance in nature. We should pay attention to these rich traditions. … They have much in common with modern science. They are something that we can be proud of. … If promoted, these traditions might be helpful for researchers in their search for understanding nature. [Our forefathers] protected mountains, rivers, trees, boulders, and forests. [translation from original in Tibetan][4]

Although his earlier writing was concerned with specific types of illnesses and disasters that result from the disturbance of local beings and spirits, the more recent documents, which reflect an engagement with environmentalists, is couched in the narrative of environmental stewardship made available and pervasive by transnational indigenous movements. In particular, the appeal to the potential that local environmental knowledge has for informing science is a familiar theme in indigenous experience in many settings (see Cruikshank this volume).

There are a number of differences between the articulations of the Green Tibetan in exile and more recently in China, which I do not have space to discuss. What is important here is that in both cases, these self-representations emerged and were given voice through an engagement with a larger set of narratives of traditional environmental stewardship made available by the global discourse of indigeneity. This narrative, positing a distinct and positive relationship between a group of hitherto marginalized people's culture and natural resource management—a relationship from which the industrialized world could learn from and benefit—positions those who identify with it into a "green tribal slot" that is almost always understood as an "indigenous slot." In this sense, the image of the Green Tibetan, among other characteristics of Tibetan communities such as a history of marginalization and representations of exotic spirituality, is a type of indigenous formation. Nevertheless, the term *indigenous* itself is not typically used as part of the self-representation. This is more than just a matter of semantics. The political stakes are high. The rest of this chapter turns to these political stakes that structure the absence of the explicit language of "indigeneity" in Tibetan identification and claims making.

Indigeneity or Independence? Tibetans in Exile

People are not indigenous naturally, but rather by convention and recognition by others; although mutable, the conventions of indigeneity at any particular given time matter a great deal. For Tibetans in exile, the most important convention is the active disavowal by many indigenous groups of secessionist claims.

That one of the central claims of indigenous groups is sovereignty and self-determination has caused a great deal of concern among states that indigenous peoples' demands are threats to their territorial integrity. To allay these fears while convincing reluctant states to accede to their demands, many indigenous leaders have proclaimed that their intention is not to "divide states." Analyzing the draft declaration of the UN Working Group on Indigenous Rights, David Maybury-Lewis finds that it "makes it clear once and for all that secession and separatism are not on the mainstream agenda of indigenous peoples. What they want is a recognition of their rights within existing states" (1997: 56). Similarly, Ronald Niezen suggests,

> Indigenous peoples … do not as a rule aspire to independent statehood, even though this is a concern mistakenly (or strategically) invoked in response to their claims to self-determination. … Indigenism can thus be distinguished from ethno-nationalism by the consistent reluctance of indigenous peoples, at least up to the present, to invoke secession and independent statehood as desired political goals. [2003: 203–204]

There are several interrelated reasons for this. First, complete independence would absolve former hosts of treaty obligations. Also, the international nature of the indigenous peoples movement, in which disparate groups are invited to see themselves as part of a global community, means that they "do not need statehood to possess international status" (2003: 203–204). Furthermore, most groups that claim indigenous status are too small and have too few resources to be able to establish economically, politically, and militarily viable states. And finally, independent statehood "would in most cases be antithetical to indigenous peoples' traditional political values," not because they are inherently averse to the use of bureaucracies, but rather because their goals have been geared toward securing "traditional" political identity rather than statehood (Niezen 2000: 142).

Indeed, the fact that indigenous groups generally demand sovereignty without secession is one of the reasons indigeneity has been celebrated

as a radical challenge to modern political organization. The argument for nations within nations, and rights to self-determination nested within state citizenship rights, is considered one of the great innovations of indigenism (Dirlik and Prazniak 2001; Niezen 2003). However, this convention of separating sovereignty from secession is precisely why Tibetan exiles have been reluctant to explicitly identify their struggle as an indigenous one. Official exile history describes Tibet (anachronistically) as an independent country whose history stretches back through an unbroken period of thousands of years, up to the Chinese invasion (or, according to the PRC, "peaceful liberation") of 1951. Emphasis is placed not only on a long history of sovereignty and the presence of all of the trappings of statehood but also on Tibet's immense geographical size (the Tibetan cultural region is about the size of Western Europe) and its population of roughly 6 million.[5] In other words, the government in exile and transnational Tibet Movement emphasize several characteristics that are quite different from those of most indigenous peoples. In its transnational scope, the Tibet Movement resembles transnational indigenous organizing, but rather than linking its issues to those of other similarly positioned peoples, it focuses on human rights violations and independence specifically for Tibet.

This brings up the thorny political question of whether complete independence is indeed what is currently being demanded. The PRC has consistently and adamantly opposed independence, viewing it as a deal breaker in all negotiations. Thus, in 1987 the Dalai Lama proposed the "Middle Path," an option of autonomy without independence. This would retain the territorial integrity of the PRC and put China in charge of Tibet's foreign policy while giving the government of Tibet "the right to decide on all affairs relating to Tibet and Tibetans." In the mid-1990s, the government in exile held a Referendum asking Tibetans in exile to choose from among four options: complete independence, the Middle Path, satyagraha (passive resistance), or self-determination; the result was majority support for the Dalai Lama's Middle Path. However, the Referendum was marked by much confusion and controversy. Some Tibetan argued that without the input of Tibetans inside Tibet, the referendum could not be legally binding. Others charged that the resulting vote was not truly indicative of a lack of desire for independence, but rather that Tibetans voted that way only to say "whatever the Dalai Lama says is fine with me."

More recently, Western legal experts working with the Tibet Movement have pointed out that the Referendum was deeply flawed, because self-determination should be considered a universal right of all "peoples," a

category for which Tibetans have been determined in other international fora to qualify, rather than one among several options for political status (Herzer 2002). As a result, there has been a shift in rhetoric among some elements of the Tibet Movement toward a focus on self-determination, saving debates about specific political form for later. According to one former government-in-exile minister in 2004, "independence under the present circumstances is something the Tibetans only demand. Self-determination on the other hand, is a right, a principle that the modern world accepts . . . it is evident that self-determination may be a very important idea, one that can unify our many voices and also find global and legal resonance."[6]

These appeals to self-determination as a globally and legally recognized right come very close to the narratives of sovereignty and self-determination made available by the indigenous peoples movement. The Dalai Lama has also further softened his position, declaring that he is now "completely committed to renouncing independence." Since the late 1990s, he has dropped several conditions that were difficult for China to accept. His calls for genuine regional autonomy have also shifted in focus to cultural heritage, again in language that is strikingly reminiscent of global indigenous voice: "Tibet's religious and cultural heritage is extremely rich. Thus to protect the heritage, Tibet needs some rights of self-government" (Sautman 2002).[7]

However, to date the Chinese government has adamantly rejected these pronouncements, instead denouncing the Dalai Lama as a hypocrite and reactionary "splittist," someone whose true and malicious intent is to "split" the Chinese nation. According to the Chinese government, the Dalai Lama's "Middle Way" is merely a ruse. Indeed, the association of the Dalai Lama with "splittism" is so strong that display of his photographs was once again banned in Central Tibet in the mid-1990s, and as part of "patriotic education" campaigns, monks and nuns have been required to personally denounce him and to "draw a clear line" between themselves and the "Dalai clique" (Tibet Information Network [TIN] 1996). Celebrations of the Dalai Lama's birthday have also been banned, and public denunciation has continued into the present, in cycles of lesser and greater severity. The opening of the Qinghai–Tibet Railway in 2006 drew promises from Beijing of a "fight to the death struggle" against him and his supporters.

Though the Dalai Lama now appeals for real political autonomy rather than independence, the government in exile continues to adhere to the definition and demand for "greater Tibet," which includes not just the TAR alone—the area currently accepted as "Tibet" by the Chinese government— but rather the entire "three provinces of Tibet" (Amdo,

Kham, and U-Tsang), including parts of five provincial-level units in China, with roughly twice the total land area and twice the Tibetan population as lives in the TAR. The insistence on political autonomy not just for the TAR but for greater Tibet has been one of the largest obstacles in attempted negotiations between the government in exile and the Chinese government, with the latter completely rejecting this possibility.

The lack of a solution and apparently deteriorating situation in Tibet has further angered exile activists who openly disagree with the call for autonomy. There is even dissent against the Dalai Lama's message of nonviolence, with some youth leaders claiming that "about 60 percent of Tibetan youth want to take up arms against China" and that "the future will be bloody" if the situation is not resolved during the lifetime of the current Dalai Lama (Chanda 2002). The Tibetan Youth Congress (TYC), counting 20,000 members and calling itself "the largest Tibetan NGO," demands of its members that they "serve one's country . . . under the guidance of His Holiness the Dalai Lama" but, simultaneously, that they "struggle for the total independence of Tibet even at the cost of one's life." Among TYC's recent campaigns have been a hunger strike in Geneva in 2004 to protest "UN negligence" on the issue of Tibet, and a call to boycott all Chinese-made goods.

Although groups such as TYC agree that Tibetans are indigenous in the sense of native, prior occupants of a place, they refuse the idea that this place can be properly called China. Yet the current trend in the transnational indigenous movement is precisely for indigenous peoples to speak to and even represent the larger nation-state of which they are a part. The refusal to speak in registers that link smoothly with the narratives of other indigenous rights groups around the world—for example, calls for sovereignty without separate statehood or national inclusion in a multicultural nation—helps explain why Tibetans in exile have not made much use of indigenous status as a claim-making political tool. Even though the official government-in-exile position now emphasizes the familiar indigenous themes of self-determination and sovereignty, there is considerable resistance to these themes from certain fragments of the exile population, as well as suspicion from the audience it was meant to appease—the Chinese government.

National Protests of the 1980s and the Circulation of Discourses

China's political isolation severely curtailed contact between Tibetans inside Tibet and the refugee community for more than two decades

after 1959. Only in the early 1980s were Tibetans allowed to go on pilgrimage and visit relatives in South Asia. During this time, parents began to send their children to schools run by the exile government. After the proindependence demonstrations in the late 1980s, however, travel to India was restricted once more, and families with children there were pressured to bring them back to Tibet. Despite increasing difficulties crossing the border in the 1990s and after, many Tibetan children continue to escape to India to study in Tibetan government-in-exile schools. Of these, a significant number eventually return to Tibet either because their parents are pressured to bring them home, or in some cases because they returned to visit their families and found themselves unable to leave again.

As a result, discourses and ideas (as well as material goods and people) circulate in complex networks between Tibetans in exile and in Tibet, as well as being shaped by notions of Tibetanness produced by Western and Chinese representations. Elliot Sperling's analysis of the rhetoric of dissent in political pamphlets produced in Lhasa around the time of Tibetan nationalist demonstrations in 1987–89 shows "clear evidence of familiarity with information and materials originating with exile Tibetans within dissident circles in Tibet" (1994: 269), but also picking and choosing from among these ideas. In particular, the pamphlets drew heavily on exile materials dealing with the question of human rights, while disregarding other exile discourses, such as the Dalai Lama's statements renouncing independence in favor of the Middle Path. In addition the Tibetan pamphleteers also used vocabulary specific to Chinese Marxism as well as vocabulary shared by many anticolonial movements around the world. Again, the global discourse of indigeneity was not invoked.

The 1987–89 protests resulted in nearly a hundred deaths (including children) from police gunfire, some three thousand arrests followed by imprisonment and usually accompanied by torture, and finally, the imposition of martial law in Lhasa for more than a year (Barnett 1998). The state responded with a two-pronged strategy: a tightening of political control, including increased surveillance to facilitate a shift from "passive" to "active" policing (targeting potential protestors before demonstrations), and a rapid program of marketization that has created new Tibetan class divisions. Given the severity with which "attempts to split the nation" are punished, Tibetans within Tibet must maneuver very carefully when making cultural or political claims. In contrast to the demands of many exiles, as well as the rhetoric of the Lhasa pamphleteers in the late 1980s, many if not most Tibetans living in

Tibet today believe that complete independence is an impossible dream. Do Tibetan leaders, intellectuals, and others who accept (or are resigned to) their status as citizens of the PRC invoke a discourse of indigeneity? How does indigeneity translate into the Chinese context and is it useful for Tibetans? The rest of the essay turns to these questions.

Translating Indigeneity in China

Like the governments of Indonesia (Li 2000), India (Karlsson 2003), and other postcolonial Asian countries, the PRC government has long insisted that the category of "indigenous peoples" is irrelevant because all of the nation's citizens are equally indigenous. China's official position has been that, "as in the majority of Asian countries, the various nationalities in China have all lived for eons on Chinese territory. Although there is no indigenous peoples' question in China, the Chinese Government and people have every sympathy with indigenous peoples' historical woes" (Kingsbury 1998: 417–418). Although China has sent representatives to UN working groups on Indigenous populations, its own ethnic minorities have not been allowed to participate as ethnic representatives, again because China does not consider them indigenous (Gladney 1997).

Despite this official position, the English-language term *indigenous* is in fact being used by a few scholar-activist circles in China. Of these one of the most visible is the Center for Biodiversity and Indigenous Knowledge (CBIK), in Yunnan, which has had long-standing ties with U.S.-based scholars as well as support from international organizations such as the Ford Foundation. Executive director of CBIK Xu Jianchu has published numerous papers about indigenous knowledge and its cultural and environmental importance, with members of various minority minzu in China, and with Western social scientists.

The question of translation, both literal and figurative, is thus of great interest here. If "indigenous knowledge" is used when speaking to an international audience, what concept is used when speaking to a national one? CBIK's Chinese name is "Center for Research on Biodiversity and Traditional Knowledge." *Indigenous* becomes *tradition,* a general term that can be used in reference to both the Han and non-Han. In fact, however, CBIK's research focuses exclusively on non-Han groups, a fact that is explained on its website in this way (in Chinese): "CBIK's Traditional Knowledge Program is concerned with the impact of socioeconomic changes upon the future of China's Southwest minority minzu." While using *tradition* in its name as a gloss for *indigenous,* the

center is also building an understanding of *minority minzu* as being equivalent to *indigenous* as used in global contexts. This appears on the surface not so different from the way adivasi is "indigenous" in India or the way masyarakat adat is used as the translation for indigenous in Indonesia. However, I argue that the specific histories and forms of national classification projects make a difference, and that, at least for now, the category of minzu cannot do the work of indigeneity for Tibetans in the PRC.

Minzu and Autonomy

The genealogy of minzu cannot be separated from the history of nationalism and the transition between the Manchu Qing empire and what is now the PRC. The Qing covered a huge territory that included not just Han dominated areas, but also vast parts of inner Asia. Unlike the Miao, Yi, and other groups of distinct peoples who were not large or widespread enough to compete with the Qing, five constituencies—the Manchu, Mongol, Chinese, Tibetan, and Muslims—were seen as representing particularly powerful and distinct cultural traditions. Tibetans and Mongols were given special treatment by the Qing vis-à-vis groups such as the Miao, a historical difference that continues to have effects today (Tuttle 2005).

After the Qing empire fell in 1911, it took an educational campaign by Chinese nationalists to develop concern for Tibetan territory among the Chinese. In other words, it was not inevitable for modern China's boundaries to be the same as those of the Qing empire; rather, considerable work had to be done, some of which included the promotion of discourses of racial, national, and religious unity (Tuttle 2005). Sun Yatsen, leader of the Republican movement that toppled the Qing, developed a theory, rife with contradictions, of *minzu zhuyi,* or "nationalism"; it expressed a racial nationalism embodying ideas of both race as lineage and race as nation (Dikötter 1992). On the one hand, the notion of a Han minzu was developed to mobilize the vast majority of people against the Manchu Qing, with the idea that each minzu should decide its own destiny and not be ruled by others (Gladney 1994). On the other hand, Sun also claimed that a larger "Chinese race" (*Zhonghua minzu*) was distinct from all other "races" in the world, and was itself composed of the five major "races" of the Han, Manchu, Mongol, Tibetan, and Muslim. Later, Guomingdang leader Chiang Kai-shek (1947: 40, in Smith 1996: 329), further stated, "that there are five peoples designated in China is not due to difference in race or blood, but to religion and geographic environment."

The transition between the Qing empire and the modern nation-state led to the emergence of two distinct nationalisms, which Louisa Schein calls Han nationalism—"concerned with the boundaries between peoples within the shifting territory of the Chinese polity, specifically between Han and those they designated as 'barbarians'"—and Chinese nationalism, which "rose in response to incidences of foreign imperialist aggression that prompted a unifying within the physical boundary of China against the outside" (2000: 108). Against the foreign imperialists, all of China's minzu, including Tibetans, were said to be united, and part of the same larger "Chinese race."

However useful this discourse was for the Han, its utility was limited for Tibetans. As Uradyn Bulag points out, in the official names of both the Republic of China (Zhonghua Minguo) and the People's Republic of China (Zhonghua Renmin Gongheguo), the Middle (Zhong) Kingdom (guo) is always hyphenated with *Hua,* a term that is used only to denote the Han: "It is this inseparability of Han or Hua from 'China' that makes minority identification with China so ambivalent or difficult. In English we can write Han Chinese, but it is impossible to hyphenate other nationalities with Chinese. Mongol Chinese or Tibetan Chinese are impossibilities" (2002: 18). In the 1930s, a number of Tibetans, particularly from the eastern area of Batang, tried to shape Sun Yat-sen's work to fit their own interests. Applying the logic of "national autonomy" to their own situation lead to a short-lived and unsuccessful movement of "Khampa rule for Kham," in which the Khampas demanded autonomy from both China and Central Tibet (Tuttle 2005: 149; Goldstein, Sherap, and Siebenschuh 2004).

Minzu was also used by the Chinese Communist Party (CCP), which early on adopted Lenin's approach of allowing self-determination for every minzu. This was codified in Article 14 of the 1931 CCP constitution, which recognized the right to self-determination, including complete separation and the formation of an independent state, for each minority minzu (Smith 1996). Indeed, Baba Phuntsog Wangyal (from Batang) founded a secret Tibetan Communist Party in the 1930s, with the idea of an independent Tibet after a communist revolution (Goldstein, Sherap, and Siebenschuh 2004: 47). Later, when political circumstances made their party untenable, he and several others created a Tibetan branch of the CCP, which he believed "would lead to the restructuring of Kham and possibly the whole Tibetan area . . . as an autonomous republic that would function in a way similar to the autonomous socialist republics in the Soviet Union (2004: 125).

When the CCP came to power, however, it repudiated its promise of self-determination with the declaration that the "concrete conditions"

of China dictated that there would be no option of either secession or a federated system. Instead "autonomous" units, which were to have some measure of cultural and political autonomy, were established at the provincial, prefectural, and county levels, in places where minorities were concentrated. As one of the most populous groups, Tibetans were given the (provincial-level) TAR, roughly consistent with the area directly under the control of the government in Lhasa in the early 20th century, and covering about half of the PRC's total Tibetan population. However, there is in fact little autonomy; the TAR has consistently had much more direct central government involvement in its political, cultural, and economic affairs than other provinces (Yeh 2003). Nevertheless, the TAR is one of the few "autonomous regions" where minorities outnumber the Han; official statistics claim that over 96 percent of the TAR population is Tibetan. However, official documents about the TAR also always describe it as a "multiethnic region," inhabited not only by Tibetans and Han, but also Hui (Chinese Muslims) and smaller groups such as the Lhopa and Menpa. Thus, whereas indigenous cultures are often framed spatially, incarcerated in place or at least tied to specific pieces of land or nature (Baviskar this volume), the PRC's discourse of minzu and autonomy suggest that it is just as "natural" for the Han as the Tibetans to live in the TAR, and for Tibetans to live outside of the TAR.

The Limits of Difference

Soon after the founding of the PRC, minorities were asked to step forward for recognition. More than 400 groups applied, leading to intensive field investigations by research teams of historians, linguists, ethnologists, and economists, who were sent to determine whether the groups that applied were actually distinct minzu, or subgroups of the Han or other minority minzu. The teams made decisions about recognition based on Stalin's definition of a nation, according to which a nation is a group that has a stable community of people, was historically constituted, and is formed on the basis of common language, territory, economic life, and "psychological make-up manifested in a common culture" (Litzinger 2000; Mackerras 1994). By 1979, the team had narrowed the official number down to 55 minority groups, plus the Han, who account for about 92 percent of China's population.

The PRC's official position has always been that it is a multinational state. However, after the Anti-Rightist Campaign of 1957 and throughout the Cultural Revolution, there was a nationwide movement to suppress

difference and achieve cultural homogenization; this period emphasized the ideology that minzu would ultimately disappear, and that the faster the "nationality problem" was solved—by assimilating minorities into the Chinese Nation—the better. Indeed, despite his very early revolutionary credentials, Baba Phuntsog Wangyal was arrested in 1958 and held in solitary confinement for 18 years, for fusing Tibetan nationalism to Communist ideals.

Since the cultural and economic liberalization of the 1980s, difference has again become acceptable and, especially since the mid-1990s, encouraged with the commodification of the "exotic" ethnic other (see Schein 2000). The more lenient political atmosphere and critique of "big Han chauvinism" after the end of the Cultural Revolution encouraged a significant number of Han-identified people to reclassify themselves as belonging to other minzu. Gladney (1997) suggests that since the 1990s it has become "popular to be 'ethnic' in today's China." In some cases those who are marked as minority minzu have indeed been able to take advantage of permission to have more children, pay fewer taxes, and other privileges. This shift has been accompanied by a tendency increasingly to translate minzu into English as "ethnic" rather than "nationality." In the past few years, it has also facilitated the emergence of Tibet chic and mass domestic tourism to Tibet. In trendy neighborhoods of major Chinese cities, one can now find boutiques selling Tibetan trinkets (mostly imported from Nepal and India), similar to ones hawked in boutiques and street fairs in the United States. Tibet sells, as evidenced by Shangri-la wine, Tibet grass brand ginseng-berry juice, Tibetan Fragrant spring sorghum liquor, and the growing popularity of Tibetan medicine—everything from pain-relief plaster to "Tibetan secret" potions for curing impotence. The New Age flavor of this commodification of an exoticized Tibetan culture bears a strong resemblance to the marketing of indigenousness (but not ethnic nationalism) around the world.

Although the commodification of Tibetan culture is now encouraged, the deep entanglement of Tibetan culture with religion makes the space permitted by the state's new neoliberal multicultural recognition precarious at best. Monasteries and temples are key tourist destinations, and advertisements for everything from incense to herbal candy to cell phones feature Tibetan monks with the relevant product. At the same time however, since the mid-1990s, all government officials (not just CCP members), their relatives, and students of all ages have been banned from participating in religious practice in Lhasa. More recently, monks and nuns have been banned from setting foot on the campus

of Tibet University because of their alleged "splittist" tendencies (see Barnett 2006 for more details). Religion can be sold to tourists, but its practice by locals is increasingly restricted.

The burgeoning popularity of Tibetan religion among the Han is also of particular state concern. Indeed, officials found the large number of Han Chinese followers of Khenpo Jigme Phuntsok in Larung Gar, Serthar, Sichuan particularly threatening. His status among the Han contributed to their decision to impose strict controls on his institute, evict a thousand of his Han disciples, and demolish several thousand of his followers' homes in 2001. This concern with the growing number of Han disciples of Tibetan lamas reflects not only a general concern with any challenges to state authority (as also with Falun Gong) but also a specific concern about Tibetan religious leaders, especially after Agya Rinpoche, abbot of Kumbum Monastery, and the seventeenth Karmapa left China in 1998 and 1999 for the United States and India, respectively. Both were high-ranking lamas favored by the state, and believed to be loyal to China; their unexpected departure has led to further restrictions on contact between Tibetan religious leaders living abroad and Tibetan Buddhists in China (Kapstein 2004).

The recent "ethnicization" of Tibetan representations in China has thus not erased the importance of minzu tuanjie as a hegemonic device to manage a coercive "unity." Neoliberal economic policies have allowed a valorization of Tibetan culture that contrasts with older representations of Tibetans as barbaric and backward, but these new expressions and claims of cultural difference, and any corresponding rights, can only be made within the bounds of minzu tuanjie. Bulag's analysis of the problem for Mongolians in today's China applies equally well to Tibetans; both groups occupy strategic borders and have international ties about which China is concerned:

> If, from the national minority point of view, their demand for greater autonomy is understood as a plea for acceptance of a more diverse China, one that grants equality to minorities, guaranteeing their cultural dignity and difference, the counterargument from the majoritarian state is that such demands threaten minzu tuanjie and are in effect minzu fenlie. The subtext is that the demand for greater autonomy and rights is either the demand of a handful of reactionaries of a minzu, or is instigated by imperialists in order to undermine China's sovereignty. (Bulag 2002: 13–14)

In each unique context, "indigenous" leaders can hope to make a difference in state policy—whether in demanding greater respect for

collective rights, recognition of cultural difference, or reappropriation of physical, cultural, or other resources—only by speaking in a register that can be heard by, and makes sense to a national audience (Tsing this volume). Within the PRC, minzu is currently the only available frame for talking about cultural difference. This is why CBIK's (English) "indigenous knowledge" program translates into a program (in Chinese) concerned with the traditional knowledge of minority minzu. But note that CBIK's goal is not to reappropriate cultural knowledge for indigenous groups (see Castree 2004) but, rather, only to understand and document it. This allows it to fit well into minzu discourse, according to which (as one very large sign in Lhasa's Jokhang Square proclaims) "What belongs to minzu, also belongs to the world."

To be a successful user of minzu discourse, one cannot make demands altogether outside the purview of state discourse. Herein lies one of the main difficulties in translating "indigenous" concerns into minzu. Whereas many indigenous struggles work around the mutually acknowledged notion of a historical debt or deficit after conquest, the PRC insists that Tibetans were liberated (from local "feudal" overlords), not oppressed, by the PRC. It is no wonder, then, that the notion of indigenousness is rejected by the Chinese state, according to which Tibetans are grateful for liberation, not suffering from the effects of colonization.

The refusal to compare or link the situation of Tibetans with those of other marginalized peoples around the world is a powerful reason why the state has not accepted indigeneity as a palatable alternative to a more explicitly nationalist discourse. Also at issue is the way in which indigenous groups build transnational linkages and alliances with other similarly identified groups to achieve their goals. The Chinese state denies that Tibetans need to struggle for anything that the state does not already provide,[8] and frequently accuses international advocacy groups as well as foreign governments of "meddling" into domestic Chinese affairs whenever the issue of Tibet is raised. Both the severe restrictions on Tibetan cross-border connections, especially those linking to Tibetans on the outside (esp. the Dalai Lama), and current state policies toward Tibetan religion, are rather incompatible with global practices of autonomy for indigenous groups. At the same time, the state adamantly maintains that Tibetans already have autonomy, in the TAR and autonomous prefectures in other provinces; this further discourages articulations of an indigenous identity based on special cultural rights. The official position is an insistence that whatever is now in place is already providing all the special rights and affirmative action (such as lower standards for college entrance examinations) that

Tibetans need and should rightfully ask for. To demand more is to attempt to split the nation.

Tibetan Minzu in Practice

Tibetan imaginations of minzu are shaped in multiple ways, including through regulation of the language of difference and belonging. One example was an attempt in villages around Lhasa, in 2000–01, by local officials to replace use of the term *rgya mi* with *rgya rigs* in everyday conversation. Both terms refer to Han Chinese. However the term *rigs* means type, kind, or lineage, whereas *mi* simply means "person." *Mi rigs,* a specific type of person, is now the standard Tibetan translation of the Chinese minzu; and *bod rigs* is used in addition to the older term *bod pa* (in which "pa" is a nominalizer) to mean "Tibetan." *Rgya nag* is the term historically used to refer to China, as distinct from Tibet. Thus, the term *rgya* refers somewhat ambiguously to both "Han" and "Chinese," as these were historically conflated and there was no need to distinguish between the two. In the contemporary context, *rgya nag* refers not to the entire territory of the PRC, but rather only to the primarily Han areas of the east; in Chinese, its equivalent is *neidi,* "inner land." Tibet is not considered part of *rgya nag,* but it is part of *Zhongguo,* or "China." The attempt to replace *rgya mi* with *rgya rigs* is an attempt to diffuse the sense of Otherness of *rgya,* and foster instead a sense of being part of the same "family," of belonging to a larger China that encompasses many different minzu, or *mi rigs*. *Rgya,* like *bod,* are merely particular kinds of nationalities (rigs) rather than separate "peoples." *Rgya rig* can only refer to Han ethnicity, whereas *rgya mi* runs the risk of being understood as "Chinese person." The latter may carry residual implications of significant difference, and of not belonging in Tibet, whereas the former does not.

How do Tibetans understand minzu in practice? Consider the case of Drolma, a well-educated young Tibetan woman who grew up in the urban center of Xining, in Qinghai province:

> When I was young I didn't think there was any difference between Tibetan and Han. I didn't think it was a big deal being Tibetan, since we were just another minzu. But other people wanted to make me different. When I go out with my friends in the city and dress like a city girl, no one believes I am Tibetan. Even when I tell them, they always ask me "which one of your parents is Han, your father or your mother?" . . . They congratulate me for not being like a Tibetan. . . . Whenever a rural

> Tibetan gets on a city bus, people hold their noses and walk away and make very rude comments. … I started to feel: okay, I am Tibetan. I'm not at all like you Han people. … Now I'm proud of being Tibetan. … I think it's very important for us to keep our Tibetan culture.

For Drolma, coming to identify with her Tibetanness was a process of being subject, on the one hand, to negative stereotypes of Tibetans as backward, lazy, dirty, or barbaric, and, on the other hand, a process of being misrecognized as Han. Her increasingly strong feelings of separation and cultural difference from the Han Chinese mean coming to think of Tibetans as something *other than* "just another minzu." The difference she now understands there to be between the Tibetan and the Chinese cannot be contained within the category of minzu. For some Tibetans, then, the concept of minzu is an inadequate container of cultural difference; it does not have the power to do the political and cultural work that "indigeneous" does in other settings.

At the same time that minzu is seen by some as an inadequate marker for difference, others worry about the political dangers of even using minzu discourse at all. Consider, for example, the problem of caterpillar fungus *(L. Cordyceps sinensis)*. Used in Chinese medicine and found extensively in Tibetan pastures above 13,000 feet, caterpillar fungus has become one of the most important sources of household income throughout the Tibetan plateau in the past decade. With prices in Lhasa now at 10,000–30,000 RMB ($1,200–$3,600) per kilogram, increasing numbers of conflicts are occurring over rights to harvest. Although all of the use rights to the high pastures on which cordyceps are found have been legally allocated to local (Tibetan) households and villages, many cases have been reported of government officials "selling" the mountains to private entrepreneurs; of government officials selling harvesting permits to outsiders without local consent and without sharing the profits; and of outsiders, including Han and Hui, harvesting without permission or compensation to local residents. In many ways, this would appear to be a classic problem of indigenous control over land and natural resources. And if minzu is the way in which indigeneity is best translated for a national audience, then Tibetan struggles over their right to control local land ought to be framed by minzu. Yet, it is not. A Tibetan social scientist and Party member who has studied the problem of caterpillar fungus, and who is well-positioned enough to have the ear of some government officials, explained this to me as follows: "The most important thing is to have some new laws preventing outsiders from harvesting caterpillar fungus without permits. Actually,

these are basically Han and Hui. What we need to do is to keep the land for the Tibetans. But we can't say that. We can't say the 'Han,' 'Hui,' 'Tibetan' and so forth. We can't talk about different minzu. We have to find another way to address the problem without mentioning minzu." For him, to even frame conflicts as a minzu question would be to risk being accused of minzu fenlie.

Minzu can only be minzu tuanjie, an always already–existing unity. The case of Woeser, a Tibetan author writing in Chinese, illustrates the hard boundaries of minzu tuanjie and what is considered acceptable difference within the PRC today. The daughter of Party members, college educated with a degree in Chinese literature, and an author who writes only in Chinese, Woeser is, like many others of her generation, a model of national inclusion. Until recently, she held a government position as editor of the official journal of the Literature Association of the TAR. Her most recent anthology, *Notes on Tibet,* is a collection of essays about ordinary people and the absurdities of everyday life in Tibet. The book carefully avoids from any outright demand for political and cultural rights; there is no mention of Tibetan nationalism or independence. For the most part, it stays away from explicit attention to minority issues, but in a few cases, descriptions of everyday life lead her to discuss minzu. For example, in one essay about two Chinese tourists taking unwelcome photographs in the Jokhang temple, she writes

> Phurbu was even more angry and said to him, "No photos..."
> Then the other man was furious. "Why can't we take photos of you? What right have you got to stop us from taking photos?" he said loudly, with his face red...
> ... These two men seem to think they have the right. ... Surely, traveling in the land of one of the [55] minorities you have the right to do what you want. Who can stop you? (TIN 2004: 252)

Another essay describes an incident in which a Tibetan policeman who joins a Chinese policeman in beating two Tibetan men on the street:

> "Why do you beat people?" ... someone shouted from the crowd...
> "'What? Say that again,' the policeman said in Tibetan, wearing an evil look on his face ... [one of the men] was beaten beyond recognition. ... They pushed the crying Tibetan man into their car. ... Together ... [the Tibetan and Chinese policemen] watched as the car drove away. At that moment, I was reminded of the favorite rhetoric of the Party Secretary Ragdi, "Chinese nationalit[y] and Tibetan nationalit[y] are inseparable."

> The face of the Han policeman was full of triumphant pride. (TIN 2004: 249)

Soon after it was published in Guangdong in 2003, the book attracted the attention of censors and was banned, first in the TAR and then throughout China. Because the book praised the Dalai Lama as "the person who is loved, revered, and missed by all Tibetans," Woeser was accused of "exaggerating and beautifying the positive function of religion in social life," and of "indulging in nostalgia for the old Tibet." Further, the contents were said to reveal "a rigid thinking on nationalism and opinions that are harmful to the unification and solidarity of our nation"; the book was "divorced from correct political principles" (Wang 2004). Woeser and her family were subsequently the subject to "thought work" (*sixiang gongzuo*), aimed at having her "make herself a new person" (*chongxin zuoren*). Refusing to denounce the Dalai Lama, however, Woeser instead lost her job and went "in exile" to Beijing, where she currently lives without income, social security, job, or option to apply for a passport to leave the country. As Wang (2004) points out, there are far fewer options for economic survival in Tibet compared to other parts of China:

> For people living in free societies or in today's inland China, the significance of this kind of punishment to Tibetans might not be clearly understood ... Tibet and its society has been structured to completely rely financially on Beijing ... only when inducted as a part of the system can one have a chance to become a professional working in the fields of culture; otherwise, there is even no guarantee of basic survival.

With this example, I do not mean to suggest that an oppositional voice is the only "authentically" Tibetan one. Many Tibetans in the PRC participate in structures of power; well-educated cadres (as Woeser was until recently) and CCP members are among the most successful. Not all are critical of minzu discourse or policy; not all stand in the same relationship to Tibetan and Chinese nationalisms. My concern here has been to show that, for those who would even gently question "national unity," or ask for greater cultural rights (such as the right to openly praise the Dalai Lama), respect for cultural difference, or demand any sort of self-determination—that is, for those who use minzu discourse to do the work of "indigeneity"—there is at present, very limited space in which to maneuver.

Conclusion

In this chapter, I argue that indigeneity, as a concept that is "out there" transnationally, has not been taken up to a significant degree by Tibetans either in exile or in Tibet, for different reasons. The notion of nativeness and belonging within a larger existing state does not help exile Tibetans do their political work of demanding a separate, independent country. Within the boundaries of the PRC, terms referring to nativeness do not signify a scale of identification needed to make collective claims about political or cultural rights, and are not recognized by a national audience. Instead, the history of national classification within China makes minzu the relevant category for making claims about difference. And indeed, scholars within China now who use English terms such as *indigenous knowledge* explain their work in Chinese with the term minzu.

However, minzu does not quite do the work of "indigeneity" for Tibetans. On the one hand, in some contexts and for some Tibetans, minzu is too confined, too narrow to contain and express their felt cultural difference and their desire for greater cultural rights and respect. Being a minority minzu means standing in a hegemonically defined relationship of harmoniousness and unity to the majority minzu, the Han; it also means standing in a certain relationship to the other 55 state-defined minority minzu. But thus far, the most important social scale of identification and solidarity for Tibetans is with the category of "Tibetans" (itself an aggregate of many smaller, disparate socioterritorial identifications). Identification does not extend to any significant extent to a scale encompassing the other 55 minority minzu, nor to other indigenous groups around the world. There is no equivalent in the PRC, in other words, to organizations such as the archipelago-wide indigenous advocacy network formed in Indonesia in 1999 (the Aliansi Masyarakat Adat Nusantrara). The only significant networks that link Tibetans with other minority minzu in China are defined by the state, as part of minzu tuanjie. On the other hand, in other contexts and for other Tibetans, phrasing demands for greater rights or defense of local control of natural resources in terms of minzu is too politically risky. Demanding more autonomy or more cultural rights where one is already supposed to have as much autonomy or rights as is needed, invites accusations of national splittism. Thus, it is not an effective tool.

It is in these senses and for these reasons, then, that Tibetans have not been interpellated as indigenous subjects. Nevertheless, I do not suggest that this is a permanent or unchangeable state of affairs, nor

that a more explicit Tibetan indigeneity may not come into being in the future. The articulation of indigenous identity is contingent and without guarantees. Political conditions and national imaginations can change. Indeed, despite the lack of uptake of an explicitly indigenous identity, the growing strength of claims and representations about Tibetan environmental stewardship and ecological wisdom resonate strongly with indigenous formations around the world.

The current tenor of exile discourse, which rejects the assumptions of indigeneity in favor for demands of complete independence, seem unlikely to change in the short term. However, as the Dalai Lama himself stressed during his 2006 Kalachakra teachings in Amravati, India, the future of Tibet depends on the initiative and lies in the hands of those living in Tibet. For Tibetans living in the PRC, the question is not so much an explicit rejection of indigeneity as the very limited space currently allowed for any claims of cultural and historical difference, and for rights based on those claims. Although the Tibet Movement and government in exile play important political roles in the international arena, the ongoing attacks on the Dalai Lama and foreign "interference" as "splittism" and unwanted meddling into Chinese domestic affairs suggests that the best hope for more autonomy and cultural rights for Tibetans may very well lie with Han Chinese citizens, working toward these goals within China itself.

Growing interest among mainstream Chinese in Tibetan culture, religion, and nature is opening up a new space for Tibetans to make claims on local resources and cultural practices. Thus far, these openings are being made without the discourse of indigeneity, but if a political space for it were to become available, indigeneity could open up some strategic possibilities (as well as pitfalls). For example, current efforts by Chinese environmentalists working with international NGOs to codify Tibetan sacred lands as an officially recognized, legal form of community environmental protection in the National Protected Areas Law, fits very well into broader demands for collective rights to land in the global discourse of indigeneity. Another new phenomenon in Tibetan areas, the sale of (use rights to) collective land by government officials to the highest bidder (almost always Han businessmen), against the desires and legal rights of the local Tibetans, raises a new specter of land dispossession, another issue common to many indigenous groups.

As in other parts of the world, then, collaboration between environmental activists and marginalized peoples around questions of environmental protection and land rights could eventually be a catalyst

for successful activism, as well as a new conjuncture in which Tibetan struggles and representations are rearticulated with the explicit language of indigeneity. Indigeneity would be, for cosmopolitan Han activists, both safer and more appealing than the more nationalist Tibetan alternative, while also allowing for a much broader range of possibilities of strategy and action than the current discourse of minzu tuanjie allows. This could facilitate the Tibetan uptake of an indigenous identity. Though by no means a guaranteed or even very likely outcome, such an alliance between Tibetans and well-positioned and (relatively) politically protected Chinese activists, based on the premises of Tibetan indigeneity, may also have the potential to lead to greater Tibetan autonomy.

Notes

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1. In exile, the term *Bod pa* is used for all Tibetans, but within Tibet, it is still common for most people to use Bod pa in reference only to people from central Tibet, in particular the Lhasa and Lhoka areas. Other Tibetans, though recognized as being part of a larger collective group (which is often left unnamed, or sometimes referred to as *bod-rigs*) are referred to by their regional names, for example, Amdowa, Khampa, Tsangpa, Dopa.
2. This is from a White Paper on ecological improvement and environmental protection in Tibet. State Council, March 2003, accessed at http://www.china-embassy.org/eng/zt/zfbps/t36547.htm, December 23, 2006.
3. This is from a CI–China brochure, 2000.
4. "Rules and specific places for the voluntary association of Gongjo Zedingsengdzong to protect the environment."
5. This a contested figure. Although the Tibetan government in exile has consistently claimed a population of 6 million, the PRC reported a Tibetan population within its borders of 4.6 million in 1990, and 5.4 million in 2006; another 150,000 live in exile.
6. Tenzin Namgyal Tethong, "Shaping the future of Tibet—Tibetan Self-Determination and Individual Activism" conference, accessed at http://www.tibetanyouth.org/futureoftibet/interview_tnt.htm, December 23, 2006.

7. "Dalai Lama comments on Tibet issue" Chung-Kuo Shih-pao, Taiwan; March 7, 1999, in BBC/SWB, March 11, 1999; quoted from Saumtan 2002.

8. A German NGO dedicated to fixing and preserving historic houses in Lhasa was expelled reportedly after TAR leaders were angered by a television show in which local residents who were interviewed about their work expressed immense gratitude to the organization. According to one government official, "they wanted to know why the locals were praising the Germans instead of China for all China has done."

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