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# MAPPING THE MODERN IN TIBET



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## THE ETHICS OF CULTURAL SURVIVAL: A BUDDHIST VISION OF PROGRESS IN MKHAN PO 'JIGS PHUN'S HEART ADVICE TO TIBETANS FOR THE 21<sup>ST</sup> CENTURY<sup>†</sup>

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Let me begin by quoting Mkhan po 'Jigs med phun tshogs (1933–2004, hereafter: KJP), the charismatic Buddhist leader from Serta,<sup>1</sup> a Tibetan area on the border of present-day Sichuan and Qinghai Provinces in the People's Republic of China (PRC):

During this [past] century, the way people think and the way external objects are built have been transformed. Whatever [changes] have come about, this is the nature of things. In the midst of such transformations, we Tibetan people should maintain the worthy traditions of our forefathers so that they do not vanish, including the beneficial aspects of our values, our distinctive system of erudition, and local customs and habits. In addition, we should adopt new [forms of] knowledge of the modern [period], to the degree that they are beneficial in both the long and short term. Each and every Tibetan must think carefully about ways to avoid falling behind the various

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<sup>1</sup> A county within Dkar mdzes Prefecture (Ch: *Ganzhi*) of Sichuan Province, Serta has a number of variant renderings: *Gser rta*, *Gser thar*, *Gser thang*, and *Gser ljongs*.

nationalities of the world . . . Now, there is no time to delay.

We are on the verge of the 21<sup>st</sup> century.<sup>2</sup>

So begins KJP's provocative but relatively unknown work, *Heart Advice to Tibetans for the 21<sup>st</sup> Century* (*Dus rabs nyer gcig pa'i gangs can pa nmams la phul ba'i snying gnam*), composed in 1995.<sup>3</sup> In it, KJP articulates a path

<sup>2</sup> The Tibetan for this reads: *dus rabs 'di'i nang mi'i bsam blo'i 'khyer so dang phyi rol gyi dngos po 'dangs skrun sogs la 'pho 'gyur ci rigs shig 'ong rgyu ni dngos po chos nyid red/ 'pho 'gyur de'i khrod nas nga tsho bod mi rigs kyi bsam blo'i dge mshan dang/ thun min gyi rig gzhung/ yul srol goms gshis sogs pha mes kyi srol rgyun bzang bo nmams mi nub par rgyun 'dzin bya rgyu dang/ deng rabs kyi rigs [sic] pa gsar ba 'phral phug gnyis kar phan pa'i cha nmams bdag gir byas te 'dzam gling gi 'gro ba mi'i rigs 'dra 'dra'i nang nas rjes lus su mi 'gyur ba'i thabs la bsam blo zhib tshags shig gdong rgyu ni bod mi re res kyang mi byed du mi rung ba zhig red... da lta mi 'gyang bar ma 'ongs ba'i dus rabs nyer gcig pa'i nang du 'byor grabs yin* (Mkhan chen 'Jigs med phun tshogs 'byung gnas (KJP) 1995: 3–4. For more information, see note 3.) There are what seem to be local variations in spellings and grammatical forms in this text and others discussed here, which, for the most part, I will leave intact without amending or noting in each case.

<sup>3</sup> The full title is: *Dus rabs nyer gcig pa'i gangs can pa nmams la phul ba'i snying gnam Sprin gyi rol mo*. Composed in 1995, it was published thereafter in both facsimile and paperback formats, though no publication information is provided. The main body of the text is 109 pages long in the paperback version sold in the PRC and 111 pages (55 folios) in the facsimile version at the Library of Tibetan Works and Archives in Dharamsala, India. (The latter appears to be mislabeled at the outset such that pages 3–4 lack a folio number. Taking this into account, there would be a total of 56 folios.) As supplementary material, the main text is followed by a brief introduction to KJP, also composed in 1995, found on 109–13 in the paperback version and 113–16 (2 folios) in the facsimile version. This text is also included in volume 3 of KJP's collected works without the supplementary material: Mkhan chen 'Jigs med phun tshogs 'byung gnas (KJP) 2002. Chos rje dam pa yid bzhi nor bu 'Jigs med phun tshogs 'byung gnas dpal bzang po'i gsung 'bum. In 3 volumes. Hong Kong: Xianggang xin shiji chubanshe,

forward for Tibetans based on their inheritance from the glory of Tibet's imperial past in conjunction with new forms of knowledge. For him, keeping pace with other nationalities entails preserving Tibetan culture and upholding Buddhist ethical values, alongside improving the standard of living for Tibetans in the arenas of economics, technology, and infrastructure. This vision of progress, which KJP encapsulates at one point as the “synthesis of the ancient and modern” (*gna' deng zung du sbrel*),<sup>4</sup> represents a Buddhist approach to the challenges signaled by the turn of the millennium, a key moment that for him, on the one hand, risks the decline and disappearance of Tibetan culture and, on the other hand, holds out the possibility of Tibetans making a grand contribution on the world stage.

In articulating a vision of progress, *Heart Advice to Tibetans for the 21<sup>st</sup> Century* participates in an ongoing contest over what ‘modernity’ means in Tibetan areas of the PRC.<sup>5</sup> In their recent study, *On the Margins of Tibet: Cultural Survival on the Sino-Tibetan Frontier*, Kolas and Thowson make the

205–72. For the duration of this article, all references will be to the stand-alone paperback edition.

<sup>4</sup> I choose to translate *deng* (as in *deng rabs*) as “modern” rather than “contemporary” for the reason that, in *Heart Advice to Tibetans for the 21<sup>st</sup> Century*, KJP makes a deliberate attempt to synthesize the value-laden categories of “modern” and “ancient” so often placed in opposition. As will be discussed below, in his synthesis, KJP equates the “modern” with science and technology and the “ancient” with Buddhist values and erudition. On the juxtaposition of *modernus* and *antiquus* in European history and its implications for the study of religion, see Gustavo Benavides 1998. Modernity. In Mark Taylor (ed.), *Critical Terms for Religious Studies*. Chicago: The University of Chicago Press.

<sup>5</sup> Lauran Hartley mentions *Heart Advice to Tibetans for the 21<sup>st</sup> Century* as a monastic voice in contemporary debates over what constitutes ‘modernity’ among Tibetans outside the Tibetan Autonomous Region (TAR) in her article: Lauran Hartley 2002. ‘Inventing modernity’ in Amdo: Views on the role of traditional Tibetan culture in a developing society. In Toni Huber (ed.) *Amdo Tibetans in Transition: Society and Culture in the Post-Mao Era*. Leiden: Brill, 13n23.

point that Tibetan culture and identity within the PRC are being negotiated “under specific conditions provided by the Chinese state and influenced by government policies and regulation” such that “in the process of developing modern expressions of Tibetanness, Tibetan culture is contested and reconstructed on Chinese rather than on Tibetan terms.”<sup>6</sup>



Figure 1: Hillside topped by Sgyu 'phrul temple at KJP's Buddhist Academy in Serta. Photo: Holly Gayley.

While it is certainly true that public discourse is to a large extent controlled by the state and dominated by CCP rhetoric, contrary to this assessment, in the following I argue that KJP employs a subaltern strategy of appropriating aspects of the dominant discourse and reframing them for counter-hegemonic

<sup>6</sup> Ashild Kolas and Monika Thowsen 2005. *On the Margins of Tibet: Cultural Survival on the Sino-Tibetan Frontier*. Seattle: University of Washington, 178.

ends. In the process, he redefines the very language of progress (*yar rgyas*) to promote a Tibetan vision of modernity in explicitly Buddhist terms.

In this paper, I examine the strategies employed by KJP to develop a modern expression of 'Tibetanness' within a Buddhist framework. I characterize KJP's approach as modern to the extent that it represents a reflexive response to epistemological challenges posed by CCP rhetoric and state policy, including the vociferous attacks on the "old society" during the Maoist period as well as the "four modernizations" of the Dengist Era that equate modernity with the economic development.<sup>7</sup> And I analyze his endeavor as a form of *epistemic resistance*, by which I refer to KJP's attempt to maintain a Buddhist interpretive schema in the face of rapid social change and persistent ideological challenges. The first half of this paper examines KJP's articulation of a unified approach to the path forward for Tibetans in the 21<sup>st</sup> century and the special role he assigns to Buddhist ethics as the custodian of progress. The second half of the paper treats modes of dissemination for KJP's advice, including a range of textual and audio-visual materials. I provide a survey of the many ways that KJP's message continues to reach Tibetan audiences in the years since his passing in 2004 and explore the surprising role of Tibetan pop music in keeping KJP's image and advice in circulation. Finally, in the conclusion, I explore to what extent KJP's message and its modes of dissemination might be considered modernist.

Among the most revered Buddhist teachers by Tibetans in the PRC in recent times, KJP has been the subject of only one academic article to date. In it, David Germano credits him with no less than "stemming the flow of authority and value toward Chinese modernity, on the one hand, and refugee

<sup>7</sup> For a discussion of the role of reflexivity in "multiple modernities," see S.N. Eisenstadt 2000. *Multiple Modernities*. *Daedalus* 129(1): 1–29. The "four modernizations" relate to the arenas of agriculture, industry, technology, and the military; see Marti 2002. *China and the Legacy of Deng Xiaoping: From Communist Revolution to Capitalist Evolution*. Dulles, VA: Brassey's, Inc.

Tibetan communities, on the other.”<sup>8</sup> KJP played a major role in the Buddhist revival in Tibetan areas of the PRC beginning in the 1980s, following the Chinese invasion in 1950 and devastation to Buddhist institutions in the years leading up to and including the Cultural Revolution (1966–76). He is best known for founding an ecumenical Buddhist academy in Serta, certified in 1987 as “Serta Larung Buddhist Academy of the Five Sciences” (*Gser thang bla rung dgon rig lnga'i nang bstan slob grwa*) but more commonly referred to as Larung Gar (*Bla rung sgar*).<sup>9</sup> Unprecedented in scale among monastic institutions in Tibetan areas of the PRC, Larung Gar currently houses approximately eight thousand monks and nuns, despite a crack-down in 2001 in which armed police evicted residents (demolishing two thousand nun's quarters) and KJP's subsequent ill health and death in January of 2004 in a military hospital in Chengdu. Germano has already introduced the broad sweep of KJP's activities—his reform and revitalization of Buddhist monasticism as well as his prophetic role as a *gter ston* or “treasure revealer”. My focus instead will be the content and influence of his advice to Tibetans at large. While concentrating on his *Heart Advice to Tibetans for the 21<sup>st</sup> Century* (hereafter *Heart Advice*), I draw on other material where appropriate, including publications and speeches by KJP, interviews with and texts by Larung Gar cleric-scholars (*mkhan po*), as well as popular songs with lyrics by or about KJP.

### Unified Approach to the Path Forward

In *Heart Advice*, KJP calls for a united outlook (*blo sems chig sgril*) as the basis for progress and articulates a path forward (*mdun lam*) for Tibetans as a

<sup>8</sup> David Germano 1998. Re-membering the dismembered body of Tibet: Contemporary Tibetan visionary movements in the People's Republic of China. In Melvyn Goldstein and Matthew Kapstein (eds) *Buddhism in Contemporary Tibet: Religious Revival and Cultural Identity*. Berkeley: University of California Press, 57.

<sup>9</sup> On the founding of Larung Gar, see Germano 1998. The official name is also sometimes rendered as: *Gser thang bla rung dgon rig lnga'i nang bstan slob gling*.

people.<sup>10</sup> This is an appeal to collective action in which KJP asks the population as a whole—male and female, young and old, lay and clerics—to consider the greater good of the Tibetan people. Specifically, he asks experienced elders and intelligent youth to band together with lamas to guide the general populace in this endeavor.<sup>11</sup> Instead of detailing a plan of action, however, KJP is more concerned with establishing ideological underpinnings for progress as rooted in Tibetan history and a Buddhist episteme. To do so,

<sup>10</sup> In KJP's discussions of progress in *Heart Advice*, the key term is *mdun lam*. According to the TTC, *mdun lam* can mean either “the path going forward” (*mdun phyogs kyi 'gro lam*) in a spatial sense or the “the conditions of the future” (*ma 'ongs ba'i gnas tshul*) in a temporal sense (Krang dbyi sun 1985. *Bod rgya tshig mdzod chen mo* (TTC). Pe cin: Mi rigs dpe skrun khang: 1380). Goldstein gives the definition of *mdun lam* as “future prospects” (Melvyn Goldstein 2001. *The New Tibetan-English Dictionary of Modern Tibetan*. Berkeley: University of California Press: 569). I choose to translate this term in a more literal way as “path forward” in order to retain the sense of path (*lam*) as a method or course of action (as in *thar lam* or *sgom lam*) as well as the directionality of forward (*mdun*), which in this case would be understood temporally. KJP's usage of this term can be understood primarily as a course of action—the path forward for the future—in which Tibetans should exert themselves through a unified outlook (*blo sems chig sgril* gyis *ma 'ongs pa'i mdun lam la 'bad rtso*l, KJP 1995: 5). But he also uses the term to refer to a future condition—the future prospects of the Tibetan people—toward which Tibetans should not remain indifferent (*ma 'ongs pa'i bod mi rigs kyi mdun lam gyi don du ji mi snyam du mi 'jog*, 12).

<sup>11</sup> KJP asks the following three groups to join forces in leading the general populace (*dmangs tshogs*): “experienced elders motivated by the virtuous thoughts and concern for the Tibetan people as a whole” (*bod mi rigs spyi la phan sems che zhing blo dkar gzhung drang gi rgan po nyams myong can mams*), “intelligent youth who—in synthesizing the ancient and modern—are capable of ethical discernment” (*gna' deng zung du sbrel te bzang len ngan 'dor byed nus pa'i gzhon nu blo gros can mams*), and “lamas and tulkus who have extensive knowledge of both the religious and secular and have the ability to influence [others] toward the path of virtue” (*chos srid gnyis ka la shes rgya che zhing mi sems legs pa'i lam du sgyur ba'i nus pa dang ldan pa'i bla sprul*, KJP 1995: 4–5).

KJP prescribes a set of values, centered on preserving Tibetan culture and upholding Buddhist ethics, which both defines Tibetans as a people and also serves as the foundation for the path forward into the 21<sup>st</sup> century. What I hope to show in the following is the inimitable way that KJP links culture and ethics in his construction of Tibetan identity and in his articulation of a unified approach to the path forward.

In order to articulate a unified outlook, KJP must first delineate a common ground of what it means to be Tibetan. Being a Rnying ma teacher and *gter ston*, it is not surprising that KJP turns to the imperial period of the seventh to ninth centuries for a shared Tibetan identity: as a time of political unity and military expansion, as an origin point of Tibetan civilization with the introduction of Buddhism, and as a source of common ancestry (symbolically conceived). In the opening pages of *Heart Advice*, KJP harkens to the “religious kingdom of Tibet” (*chos ldan bod kyi rgyal khams*) in the imperial period when “commonplace and distinctive systems of erudition” (*thun mong dang thun mong ma yin pa'i rig gzhung*) were first propagated by “our ancestor” (*rang re'i mes po*) Srong btsan sgam po.<sup>12</sup> The term for “erudition” here is *rig gzhung*, which can also be translated as “civilization.”<sup>13</sup> In KJP’s usage, this term refers to the erudite, textual and trans-regional dimension of Tibetan culture, which he traces to the time of Srong btsan sgam po and Khri srong lde’u btsan, after which the rest of Tibetan history is glossed over as various periods of flourishing and decline. In this way, KJP emphasizes the

<sup>12</sup> KJP 1995, 2.

<sup>13</sup> The TTC glosses this term as *rig gnas kyi gzhung* (Krang dbyi sun 1985: 2686), combining the terms *rig gnas* (culture or science) and *gzhung* (scripture or text). This gloss suggests that *rig gzhung* refers to the literary aspect of Tibet’s cultural inheritance, which agrees with KJP’s usage in *Heart Advice*. Accordingly, I translate the term *rig gzhung* as either “erudition” or “civilization.” When it stands for Tibet’s system of scholarship and textual study, I translate it as “erudition.” When it is used more broadly to refer to the sweep of learning across Tibetan history, I translate it as “civilization.”

shared history and cultural inheritance of Tibetans, eliding periods of political fragmentation, regional and doctrinal differences, and other religions such as Bon. For him, the imperial period provides a rallying point and source of pride (*nga rgyal*) and inspiration (*spobs pa*) for Tibetans. KJP states, “It is not mere hyperbole to praise our own nationality; [one] must realize that we are truly a people with a magnificent history.”<sup>14</sup>

One can only imagine that, in promoting ethnic pride in this way, KJP endeavors to reverse the label of backwardness (Tib: *rjes lus*, Ch: *luohou*) assigned to Tibetans and other minorities in state-sponsored media and publications.<sup>15</sup> Stevan Harrell suggests that Han representations of ethnic others as ‘backward’ should be understood as a part of the ‘civilizing project’ characteristic of colonialism and other forms of inter-ethnic domination.<sup>16</sup> In Harrell’s terms, such a project goes beyond economic markers like poverty to assert the cultural and moral superiority of the ‘civilizing center,’ which acts ‘paternally’ as a modernizer upon peripheral peoples. These peoples, in turn, are cast as culturally, ethically and intellectually inferior (primitive, savage, superstitious, etc.) and thereby marked as suitable subjects to be dominated,

<sup>14</sup> The Tibetan reads: *nga tsho'i mi rigs 'di ni rang gis rang bstod pa'i ngan g-yo tsam ma yin par riabs chen gyi lo rgyus dang ldan pa'i mi rigs shig dngos gnas yin pas shes par bya dgos pa zhiig go* (KJP 1995: 3).

<sup>15</sup> Dru Gladney argues that the construction of Han Chinese as ‘modern’ is made possible through the representation of minorities as ‘primitive’ and bolstered by a theory of social evolution derived from the American anthropologist Lewis Henry Morgan. Dru Gladney 2004. *Dislocating China: Reflections on Muslims, Minorities, and Other Subaltern Subjects*. London: Hurst & Company, 38 and 60.

<sup>16</sup> The ‘civilizing project’ of Han Chinese vis-à-vis ethnic minorities is discussed at length by Stevan Harrell 1995. Introduction & the history of the history of the Yi. In Stevan Harrell (ed.) *Cultural Encounters on China's Ethnic Frontiers*. Seattle: University of Washington Press; and mentioned also in William Safran 1998. Introduction. In William Safran (ed.) *Nationalism and Ethnoregional Identities in China*. London: Frank Cass Publishers.

educated, reformed and assimilated. Indeed, KJP's emphasis on Tibet's long history as a *civilization* dating back to Strong bisan sgam po may be an attempt to subvert the tendency among minorities in China to develop a "stigmatized identity" or "sense of themselves as backward, uncivilized, dirty, stupid, and so forth" based on this type of CCP rhetoric.<sup>17</sup> In other words, KJP poses a challenge to the Han 'civilizing project' vis-à-vis ethnic minorities, by asserting that Tibetans have long been civilized.

Following the same logic, KJP asserts the moral worthiness of Tibetans, harkening to a longstanding nobility of character. Tibetans are depicted by him as "a pious people who for several thousands of years have intrinsically remained noble in demeanor—imbued with bravery, fortitude, kindness, and candor."<sup>18</sup> Extending this into a Buddhist framework, the principle of compassion is depicted as integral to the fabric of Tibetan culture. For example, when discussing the socialization of children, KJP recounts the adage that Tibetan infants learn how to say "Ama" (mother) and "Mani" (shorthand for Om Manipadme Hūm, the mantra of the bodhisattva of compassion Avalokiteśvara) at roughly the same age.<sup>19</sup> Additionally, Tibetans are characterized as compassionate, honest, and courageous based on the perceptions of outsiders, i.e. how Tibetans are known throughout the world.<sup>20</sup>

<sup>17</sup> Harrell 1995, 6.

<sup>18</sup> The Tibetan reads: *mi lo stong phrag du ma'i sngon nas dpa' mdzangs brtul phod dang ldan zhing/ byams brtse drang bden can/ ya rabs kyi spyod pa la ngang gis gnas pa'i chos ldan gyi mi rigs*. KJP 1995, 2.

<sup>19</sup> The adage as found in *Heart Advice* reads a *ma dang ma ni mnyam shes*, which KJP glosses as "Infants learn how to say 'Mommy' and recite 'Mani' at approximately the same time" (*byis pa mams a ma zer shes pa dang ma ni 'don shes pa phal cher dus mnyam 'ong*). KJP 1995, 97.

<sup>20</sup> KJP states, "Our Tibetan relatives, while living scattered across the whole world, have had the opportunity to associate with people from various countries over an extended period of time. Many [of them] praise Tibetans as a noble people, imbued with compassion, altruism, honesty and courage." The Tibetan reads: *rang re'i bod rigs*

By asserting the ethical character of Tibetans based on their reputation outside of China (to which KJP would have been exposed during his travels abroad in 1990 and 1993), KJP pits Western fantasies of Tibet against the "internal orientalism" of Han representations, CCP rhetoric and state policy toward Tibetans and minorities more generally.<sup>21</sup>

However, a common history and ancestry is not enough to constitute Tibetan identity in KJP's view. Rather, the principal markers of 'Tibetanness' are cultural and ethical and, therefore, can be lost due to assimilation. The issue of cultural survival is explicitly raised by KJP when he calls for the preservation of Tibetan language (*skad yig*), erudition (*rig gzhung*), and customs (*yul sro*), likening esteem for these to the "life force" (*srog*) of a people, without which they are no longer a discrete nationality (*mi rigs*). He states:

If we ourselves do not act as stewards of our people's knowledge, it will be quite difficult for anyone else to help in preserving it. At the point at which we, lacking any regard for

*spun zla mams 'dzam gling hril bor 'thor te gnas tshe yul de dang de'i mi mams kyi yun ring du 'grogs pa'i nyams myong la bod zer ba snying tje phan sems can/ drang bden dang/ spobs pa can ya rabs kyi mi rigs shig red ces bangags brjod byed pa ches mang du 'dag* (KJP 1995:10).

<sup>21</sup> I borrow "internal orientalism" from Louisa Schein, who coins the term as an extension of Edward Said 1979. *Orientalism*. New York: Vintage Books. Specifically, she employs the term to refer to "domestic othering" or "a relation between imagining and cultural/political domination that takes place interethnically within China." Louisa Schein 1997. *Gender and Internal Orientalism in China. Modern China* 23(1), 69-98

73. Schein focuses on the role of gender in exoticizing minority cultures, especially in the context of cultural tourism. Here I extend her usage of the term to include derogatory portrayals of minorities that continue to be found in state-sponsored media and publications (such as the White Papers discussed later in this paper). Regarding the Western fantasies about Tibet, see Donald Lopez 1999. *Prisoners of Shangri-la: Tibetan Buddhism and the West*. Chicago: The University of Chicago Press.

our own people's qualities, become simply an imitation of others, our civilization for the most part will begin to disappear from the face of the earth. There are [already] visible signs [of this] . . . For any people, once their language, erudition, and customs vanish, they have actually turned into another nationality. Thus, everyone should cherish their own people and the knowledge of their people. It is like the life force of a nationality. What could be more important?<sup>22</sup>

In KJP's estimation, it is up to Tibetans as a people, whether or not they embrace their heritage and make a concerted effort to maintain the factors he defines as quintessentially Tibetan, given here as language, erudition, and customs.<sup>23</sup> To remain indifferent to these and merely imitate the customs of another nationality is presented as the road to extinction: Tibetan culture would vanish and Tibetans would turn into another nationality, presumably (though unstated) Han. This is clearly an anti-assimilationist message, in which the loss of Tibetan language and rejection of the Tibetan character (*bod kyi gshis ka*)

<sup>22</sup> The Tibetan reads: *rang rigs kyi yon tan la rang rang gis bdag po ma byas na gzhan gyis skyob dgos tshe dka' las rang yod/ gang gi tshe mi rigs rang nyid kyi yon tan la brtsi 'jog ci yang med par dgos med du gzhan gyi lad mo kho nar 'cha' ba de'i tshe mi rigs de nyid kyi rig gzhang sogs phal cher sa'i go la 'di'i steng nas yal ba'i mgo rtson pa dang rtags bstan pa yin... mi rigs gang yin yang rang gi skad yig sogs rig gzhang dang/ yul srol gons gshis thams cad nub zin pa'i 'og tu mi rigs de nyid kyang gzhan zhig tu 'gyur tshar ba red/ des na rang rigs dang rang rigs kyi yon tan mams la thams cad kysis phangs seems ches cher bya rgyu 'di ni rigs de nyid kyi srog lta bu yin pas ci bas kyang gal che'o (KJP 1995: 10–11).*

<sup>23</sup> Here KJP emphasizes that the survival of a culture depends mainly on the attitude of its constituent members, i.e. whether or not people have esteem (*brtsi 'jog*) and high regard (*mthong chen*) for their own culture. In the larger passage from which the above quote is drawn, he bemoans the demise of other minority languages that have fallen into disuse despite institutional preservation efforts such as the existence of a research center (KJP 1995: 11).

among urban Tibetan youth is considered to be a grave situation (*gnas tshul tshab po che*) and source of extreme disappointment (*ba cang blo pham pa'i gnas*). KJP expresses his dismay as follows: "If Tibetans do not even wear our own dress and also do not use our own language, at that point, we will have cast aside the name 'Tibet'."<sup>24</sup>

It is KJP's emphasis on cultural and ethical criteria in defining 'Tibetanness' that sets his formulation apart from state definitions of ethnicity. The official criteria used by the Nationalities Commission to determine ethnic groups or 'nationalities' (Ch: *minzu*; Tib: *mi rigs*) beginning in the 1950s was based on Stalin's formulation of 'four commons' (common language, common territory, common economic life, and common psychology as expressed in culture), although in practice establishing a shared history and ancestry was an important means to resolve problematic cases, and religion was also an operative category for early PRC anthropologists who worked to classify nationalities.<sup>25</sup> As an indicator of its importance to framing KJP's discussion in *Heart Advice*, the term *mi rigs*—which can be translated as "ethnicity", "nationality", or "people"—occurs more than twenty times in the first dozen pages of *Heart Advice*, not including contractions based on this term, such as *bod rigs* (*bod kyi mi rigs*) or *rang rigs* (*rang gi mi rigs*). Indeed, throughout *Heart Advice*, KJP uses "Tibetan nationality" (*bod kyi mi rigs*) more frequently than poetic epithets for Tibetans like that found in the title, "those of

<sup>24</sup> The Tibetan reads: *gal te bod rang gi chas gos kyang mi byed/ skad yig dag kyang mi spyod na de'i tshe bod ces pa'i ming bor tshar ba red* (KJP 1995: 99).

<sup>25</sup> On the emergence of the category of *minzu* (from the Japanese *minzoku*) and the process of ethnic identification after the founding of the People's Republic of China, see Thomas Heberer 1989. *China and its National Minorities: Autonomy or Assimilation?* London: M.E. Sharpe, Inc; Harrell 1995; and Gladney 2004. Harrell argues that Stalin's criteria were not strictly applied by the Nationalities Commission; rather the process of identifying *minzu* served "to confirm or legitimate distinctions for the most part already there in Chinese folk categories and in the work of scholars who wrote before Liberation" (Harrell 1995: 66).

the Snow Land” (*gangs can pa*). I read this as an indication of his engagement with the CCP discourse of nationalities, even as he endeavors to refashion its terms.<sup>26</sup> As Stevan Harrell has pointed out, the irony of efforts by the Chinese state to define, classify and regulate *minzu* has led to a “sharpened, focused, [and] perhaps intensified” ethnic consciousness among minorities in China.<sup>27</sup> However, Harrell’s insistence that the public discourse only admits minority voices which speak in favor of the state’s ‘civilizing project’ (or at least in its terms) overlooks the possibility of appropriating and redefining the dominant terms of discourse in minority publications such as *Heart Advice*.<sup>28</sup>

In articulating a unified approach for Tibetans, KJP also cleverly redefines the notion of ethnic unity (Ch: *minzu tuanjie*), a key term for the CCP in regulating the diversity of nationalities in China. The Chinese, *tuanjie*, is translated into Tibetan by combining terms for “harmony” and “unity” (Tib: *mithun sgril*). Slogans promoting unity can be seen on billboards in Tibetan areas, such as: “Together we will flourish and develop” (Tib: *manyam du dar rgyas gong ’phel gtong*; Ch: *gongtong fanrong fazhan*) or “Together we strive for unity” (Tib: *manyam du mithun sgril ’bad brtson byed*; Ch: *gongtong tuanjie fendou*). These slogans currently occupy billboards outside the government offices in Rta bo, the county and prefectural seat of Mgo log (Ch: *Guoluo*) in Qinghai Province (see Figure 2), where the main street is coincidentally named *mithun sgril lam* (Ch: *tuanjie lu*). However, rather than advocating unity among nationalities, as implied in the *minzu tuanjie*, KJP asks Tibetans to unite as a *nationality* in common values and collective action for the greater good of Tibetans. Thus, in KJP’s usage, while harmony relates to relations between nationalities, unity is prescribed for Tibetans alone.

<sup>26</sup> KJP’s appropriation of the state discourse on nationalities in addressing a Tibetan audience stands in marked contrast to Tibetan lamas in the Republican Era (Gray Tuttle 2005. *Tibetan Buddhists in the Making of Modern China*. New York: Columbia University Press: 128–55).

<sup>27</sup> Harrell 1995, 27.

<sup>28</sup> Harrell 1995, 34.



Figure 2: Billboards outside government offices in Rta bo. Photos: Stephanie Piro.

As an example of this, note the following verses in a song (*mgur*) written by KJP, “Potent, Timely Advice” or *Dbang gi dus gdam*, found in his collected works and also performed by the well-known singer Gdu bhe in a compilation dedicated to KJP, titled *The Conch that Heralds the Fortunate Era* (available as a cassette or video CD, hereafter VCD):<sup>29</sup>

བདེ་མིན་གྱུ་བ་མཐའ་ཆོས་ལ་ཕྱོགས་སྤེལ་དེ་མ་བྱེད།།  
 རང་གཞན་ལུང་ལ་སྦྱོར་བའི་ཆོས་སྤྱོད་གི་ལས་ལེན།།  
 ལས་ཀྱི་མེ་ཏྲེ་གཞིག་པའི་ལྷ་སྐུ་ལ་དེ་བུང་ལ།།  
 གཞན་ལུགས་གྲུབ་མཐའ་ཀུན་ལ་དག་སྒྲུང་དེ་མིང་གཏམ།།

Don’t draw dividing lines between the doctrines of various sects.

<sup>29</sup> Bkra shis rdzogs ldan bsu’i ba’i dung sgra, ISRC CN-G04-00-385-00/V.16. This song also appears under the longer title, *Dbang gi dus gdam bde stong glog dmar ’khrugs pa’i rang ’od*, in KJP 2002, vol. 3, 362–63. According to the colophon, it was composed in 2000. The rendering of the verses here follows the latter.

This is a rejection of the dharma that leads to ruin for both sides.

Hold fast to your inheritance indicated by the flower of karma,<sup>30</sup>

[And maintain] pure vision toward all other schools. This is [my] heart advice.

ཁས་སྐུ་སྐུ་ལྷོ་མ་ལུས་རྒྱན་ཅེན་གྱི་ཕམ།

བྱམས་དང་སྤྱིང་རྒྱུ་ཆེ་ཅེན་པོས་མཉམ་པོ་བྱ་ཆུང་ས་དགོས།

རང་རིགས་གཉིན་དང་གཞན་རིགས་དབྱུགས་སུ་མ་འཛིན།

རིས་མེད་ཉམས་ཐག་འགྲོ་བའི་དེད་དཔོན་ཞིག་སྤྱིང་གཏམ།

All beings of the three realms, [one's] kind parents,  
One should protect impartially with great love and compassion.  
Don't hold one's own people as friends and other nationalities as enemies.  
Be a guide for the downtrodden without bias. This is [my] heart advice.

In these verses, KJP uses Buddhist motifs in order to address the social issues of unity and harmony. In advising against creating rifts between the various schools of Tibetan Buddhism, KJP employs the tantric notion of “pure vision” (*dag snang*) and reflects an emphasis on ecumenism (*ris med*) also popular among lamas in exile. In the second verse, we see KJP more directly engaging with the state discourse on nationalities. Impartial compassion that does not

<sup>30</sup> This metaphor refers to the act of tossing a flower onto a mandala in order to indicate one's tutelary deity (*yi dam*) during a tantric initiation. It implies that Tibetans should remain loyal to their sectarian affiliation while respecting other sects (Ri mgul sprul sku, personal communication).

distinguish between friends and enemies is applied to harmony among nationalities. In this example and others, KJP attempts to simultaneously encompass the discourse on nationalities within a Buddhist episteme while also adapting Buddhist principles to be more fully engaged with social issues (a topic to be more fully explored below).

### Values for the 21<sup>st</sup> Century

By constructing Tibetan identity in cultural and ethical terms, KJP is able to articulate a vision of progress based on values inherited from the past, which are an extension of the “worthy traditions of our forefathers” (*pha mes kyi srol rgyun bzang bo*). Referring back to the quote that opened this paper, these were given as the beneficial aspects of values (*bsam blo'i dge mtshan*), distinctive style of erudition (*thun min gyi rig gzhung*), and local customs and habits (*nyul srol goms gshis*). The first of these three, namely values, occupies the bulk of the text in a section called “values for our Tibetan people in the 21<sup>st</sup> century” (*dus rabs nyer gcig pa'i nang nga tsho bod mi rigs kyi bsam blo'i khyer so*). It details a set of four values, framed as both an inheritance of the past and a unified outlook to be cultivated for the future. The latter two, erudition and local customs, are treated in the concluding pages of the *Heart Advice* in a section on “brief recommendations for points of action” (*spyod pa'i rim pa mdo tsam brjod par bya*).

The emphasis placed on values in *Heart Advice* suggests that KJP is more concerned with the ideological basis for progress than the specifics of its implementation. This can be seen in the internal outline (*sa bead*) given in the text as follows:

### Introduction (1)

- A. Values for Our Tibetan People in the 21<sup>st</sup> Century (5)  
 ལུས་པས་ཉེར་གཅིག་པའི་ནང་ཚོ་འདྲ་མི་རིགས་ཀྱི་བསམ་ཆེད་འབྲུར་གྱི་

1. To always endeavor to [have] a good attitude (5)  
རྟག་པར་བསམ་པ་བཟང་པ་འབད་པར་བྱ།
2. To be genuinely honest without pretext (9)  
ཚེ་ལ་མེད་ཀྱི་དང་བདེན་བྱ་རྒྱུ།
3. To greatly cherish one's people and the knowledge of one's people (10)  
རང་རིགས་དང་རང་རིགས་ཀྱི་ཡོན་ཏན་ལ་ཕངས་ཤེས་ཆེ་བར་བྱ་རྒྱུ།
4. To have conviction in the sublime dharma (12)  
དམ་པའི་ཆོས་ལ་ཡིད་ཆེས་བྱ་བ།
  - a. To have conviction in previous and future lives (12)  
སློབ་མཁུ་ཡིད་ཆེས་བྱ་བ།
  - b. To have conviction in karma and the effects of action (46)  
ལས་དང་ལས་ཀྱི་བབས་བྱ་ལ་ཡིད་ཆེས་བྱ་བ།
  - c. To have conviction in the teacher [Buddha] as a genuine person (58)  
སྟོན་པ་ཚད་མའི་སྤྱི་བབས་བྱ་ཡིན་པ་ལ་ཡིད་ཆེས་བྱ་བ།
  - d. To rouse conviction in sublime dharma as the gateway to full liberation (75)  
དམ་པའི་ཆོས་རྒྱལ་གྱི་འཕགས་ཡིན་པ་ལ་ཡིད་ཆེས་བསྐྱེད་པ།

## B. Brief Recommendation for Points of Action (90)

1. Regarding education (91)  
སློབ་གསལ་གྱི་སྟེང་ལ།
2. Regarding local customs and habits (97)  
ཡུལ་སྤྱོད་གོམས་གཤིས་ཀྱི་སྟེང་ལ།
  - a. Regarding dress and jewelry (98)  
གོས་རྒྱན་གྱི་སྟེང་ལ།

- b. Regarding language (99)  
སྐད་ཡིག་གི་སྟེང་ལ།
- Methods to develop economically (102)  
དཔལ་འབྱོར་འཕེལ་རྒྱས་སུ་གཏོང་བའི་ཐབས།
- Conclusion (104)

Notice that the bulk of the text (pages 5–90) focuses on values or more literally “modes of thinking” (*bsam blo'i khyer so*). We could think of these as guiding principles that orient action and allegiance. For example, a good attitude (A1) and honesty (A2) are orientations that guide ethical action, whereas cherishing Tibetan forms of knowledge (A3) and conviction in Buddhism (A4) are orientations toward sources of authority and cultural practices inherited from the past. What is at stake in this enumeration of values is the worldview that underlies and informs progress, and particular emphasis is given to conviction in a Buddhist episteme. Indeed, KJP spends more than half of the text offering scientific evidence for rebirth, presenting arguments for karmic cause and effect, and emphasizing the rational character of faith in Buddhism.<sup>31</sup>

Not until the final section of *Heart Advice* (page 90 forward) does KJP suggest a series of actions (*spyod pa'i rim pa*) that derive from these values. Only here do we see the full scope of KJP's vision, related not only to advocating cultural preservation and adherence to ethical principals, but also to promoting secular education and economic development. Recall that KJP advocates maintaining the “worthy traditions of our forefathers” in conjunction with adopting “new [forms of] knowledge of the modern period.” In the final pages, he provides a wide range of recommendations expressing this approach: urging parents to send their children to school, endorsing monasteries as the

<sup>31</sup> As interesting as they are, KJP's discussion of these points must await a future project. Here I am mainly concerned with the opening and closing sections of the text, in which KJP proposes a set of values as a unified approach among Tibetans and details specific points of action, based on these values.

stewards of traditional sciences, surveying issues related to the study and promotion of Tibetan language, advocating the compassionate treatment of animals, encouraging Tibetans to wear traditional dress, and proposing avenues for economic development. As may be apparent from the variety of subjects KJP covers in just over a dozen pages, his recommendations read more like a to-do list than a coherent plan of action.

Despite KJP's interest in promoting new forms of knowledge, his message when it comes to values is to hold fast to tradition and not waver. This can be seen most clearly in KJP's slogan, *rang tshugs ma shor/ gzhan sems ma dkrugs*, well-known in Mgo log and occasionally seen hanging on the wall of a pool hall or tea house (see Figure 3). It has also been the subject of a commentary composed by the Larung Gar scholar Rig 'dzin dar rgyas in 2004.<sup>32</sup> This slogan can be translated as "Don't lose self-determination. Don't agitate the minds of others." According to the commentary by Rig 'dzin dar rgyas, the first half of the slogan—which is of most interest to us here, *rang tshugs ma shor*—has two senses for Tibetans at large: to uphold one's moral character and to preserve Tibetan culture. In his words, it entails "not abandoning a good attitude and demeanor as well as ceaselessly endeavoring to

uphold, preserve, and propagate the civilization of one's own people, held in high regard."<sup>33</sup>



Figure 3: Tea house owner with photo of KJP on the wall (left) and pool hall cashier with printout of slogan, *Rang tshugs ma shor/ gzhan sems ma dkrugs* posted above window (right). Photos: Holly Gayley.

Here again, Tibetans are essentialized as a "pious people who hold the three jewels as the source of constant refuge . . . who like to engage in noble conduct, and who naturally having a good attitude, kindness and

<sup>33</sup> The Tibetan reads: *bsam spyod bzang po ma dor zhing/ mi rigs rang gi rig gzhung la mthong chen du bzung nas 'dzin skyong spel ba'i brtson pa bar ma chad du byas pa* (Rig 'dzin dar rgyas 2004: 5). Note that Rig 'dzin dar rgyas' commentary explains the slogan on different levels according to audience. This is the most general explanation, intended for all Tibetans (*gangs can bod mi yongs*).

<sup>32</sup> The Lantern that Illuminates Discernment [According to] the Two Systems (Lugs gnyis blang dor gsal ba'i sgron me) is a commentary by Rig 'dzin dar rgyas, more commonly known as Mkhan po Rig dar, on the slogan *Rang tshugs ma shor/ gzhan sems ma dkrugs*. The full title as it appears on the cover is: *Chos rje dam pa 'jigs med phun tshogs 'byung gnas dpal bzang po mchog gi mjug mtha'i zhal gdams rang tshugs ma shor/ gzhan sems ma dkrugs zhes pa'i 'grel ba Lugs gnyis blang dor gsal ba'i sgron me* [Mkhan po Rig 'dzin dar rgyas, Composed in 2004. No publication information available]. There are two scholars named Rig dar at Larung Gar, one referred to as Gtsang rong mkhan po Rig dar and the other as Mgo log mkhan po Rig dar. This commentary is by the latter.

compassion."<sup>34</sup> The call is to not to lose these qualities. Similarly, by advocating adherence to values inherited from the past in *Heart Advice*, KJP is asking Tibetans not to alter their moral character by adopting inverse attributes from an unnamed other.

Based on KJP's definition of Tibetan identity in both cultural and ethical terms, the slogan contains a clever parallelism whereby to remain steadfast or not lose one's determination (*rang tshugs ma shor*) has a moral valence that is linked to cultural survival. To not waver from ethical principles becomes analogous to not wavering from one's cultural roots. By extension (or inverse logic), people who lack "fondness" (*sha tsha*) for their own people and culture are (in KJP's own words) not only "fools (*blun po*), naive (*col chung*) and senseless (*klad med*)"<sup>35</sup> but also by analogy (through his ethical definition of 'Tibetanness') lacking in integrity.

In asking Tibetans to adhere to values inherited from the past, KJP appears quite conservative. This is likely in response to the forcible nature of re-education campaigns faced by Tibetans within the PRC during the Maoist period and beyond. However, we should not mistake his *Heart Advice* as reactionary or merely traditionalist. His emphasis on the ideological basis for progress, I would suggest, is part and parcel of his strategy of appropriating and redefining the dominant terms of discourse. Normally, one might expect a Buddhist teacher to talk about view (*lta ba*), but instead the focus of this tract is thought (Tib: *bsam blo*; Ch: *sixiang*), which I am translating as "values" in its usage in the compound *bsam blo'i 'khyer so*. This term is employed no doubt due to the importance of correct thinking in Maoist discourse. In his zeal for revolution, Mao sought to re-educate nationalities throughout China as a way to break with a corrupt past and inaugurate new beginnings. By contrast, KJP articulates a vision of progress that maintains continuity with the past, thereby

<sup>34</sup> The Tibetan reads: *dkon mchog gsum gtan gyi skyabs gnas su 'dzin pa'i chos idan gyi mi rigs...* *rang bzhin gyis bsam pa bzang po byams snying rje can ya rabs kyi spyod pa la dga'* (Rig dar 2004: 5).

<sup>35</sup> KJP 1995, 11.

affirming the "four olds" that the Cultural Revolution sought to uproot, namely: old ideas, old culture, old customs and old habits (*bsam blo rmying pa, rig gnas rmying pa, yul srol rmying pa, gomis gshis rmying pa*). Note that if one were to substitute *rig gzhung* for *rig gnas*, these are the very items that KJP retrieves as "worthy traditions" to be maintained as the basis for progress in the 21<sup>st</sup> century.

### Buddhist Ethics as the Custodian of Progress

Let us now look more closely at how the values prescribed by KJP are linked to his vision of progress. We have already discussed KJP's dual emphasis on cultural preservation and upholding Buddhist ethics as the basis for the path forward into the 21<sup>st</sup> century. This section delves more specifically into what KJP might mean by the "synthesis of the ancient and modern" and examines the special role of Buddhist ethics as the custodian of progress. In *Heart Advice*, KJP emphasizes the ongoing relevance of Buddhist ethics to contemporary social problems, thereby salvaging 'ancient' values as the necessary complement to 'modern' technology and science.<sup>36</sup>

In what could aptly be termed a modernist approach, KJP widens the sphere of Buddhist ethics from governing an individual economy of merit (as the means toward a favorable rebirth) to serving as the cornerstone for social welfare, expressed in reference to communities, nations and human civilization as a whole. Note how KJP describes a good attitude—synonymous here with the ethical principles of love and compassion—as beneficial for oneself and for society:

If a single person has such love and compassion, [he or she] would be free of disturbance and always remain in a state of

<sup>36</sup> The genealogy of the discourse on Buddhism and science has recently been treated in Donald Lopez 2008. *Buddhism and Science: A Guide for the Perplexed*. Chicago: The University of Chicago Press.

happiness. Wherever [that person] goes and whoever [that person] associates with, [he or she] would also bring benefit to others, [experience] harmony among friends, and garner praise from everyone. [His or her] every aspiration would naturally be fulfilled . . . Moreover, if all the members of a household have a good attitude like that, then no matter how utterly destitute, [they] will pass the time in a happy and joyful state as it is said that “the root of all well-being is a joyful mind.” In the same way, if [all the members of] a community have this attitude, that is one community [which experiences joy]. If [all citizens of] a nation have [this attitude], then that is one nation [which experiences joy]. And if everyone in the world had [a good attitude], then without a doubt well-being and joy would come to the entire world.<sup>37</sup>

In this passage, a good attitude is identified as the basis of both individual well-being and social harmony in ever-widening circles: in one’s family,

<sup>37</sup> The Tibetan reads: *de ‘dra’i byams dang snying rje de nyid mi gcig la yod na sems khong ‘khrugs pa med par rtag tu snang ba dga’ ya le gnas shing/ yul gang du phyin kyang gzhan phan ‘byung ba/ grogs su dang ‘grogs kyang mi mthun pa med pa/ skye bo kun gyis bstod bkur bengags pa’i gnas su gyur te rang gi bsam don thams cad ngang gis ‘grub... yang de ‘dra’i bsam pa bzang bo de khyim tshang gcig gi khyim mi yongs la yod na khyim tshang de dbul bo [sic] tha chad ji ‘dra zhiig yin yang rung ste/ bde ba thams cad kyi rtsa ba sems skyid pa zhes pa ltar du thams can [sic] dga’ dga’ skyid skyid kyi ngang nas dus ‘da’ ba zhiig ‘ong/ de bzhiin du bsam pa de grong tsho gcig la yod na grong tsho gcig dang/ rgyal khab gcig la yod na rgyal khab gcig/ ‘dzam bu gling gi mi yongs la yod na ‘dzam gling hril po bde zhiig skyid pa zhiig ‘ong ba la the tshom med (KJP 1995: 6–7). In the larger passage from which this is excerpted, KJP mentions the benefits of love and compassion both for this life and the next. As such, his social vision does not preclude the soteriological import of ethics. Quite the contrary, KJP goes to considerable length in *Heart Advice* in order to defend rebirth as the cornerstone of Buddhist ethics.*

community, and nation, and finally on a global level, where nothing short of world peace and prosperity would result. This vision is modernist in its emphasis on the ‘this-worldly’ social dimensions of Buddhist ethics. Unlike the more typical language of compassion towards all beings in the six realms of Buddhist cosmology, KJP emphasizes the collective fate of human communities and more specifically of Tibetans as a people.<sup>38</sup>

Indeed, the Buddhist ethical mainstays of love and compassion (*byams pa dang snying rje*) are cast as vital to the fate of the world. According to KJP, with the advance of technology and the advent of modern weapons, the world has reached a dangerous threshold where one errant general could destroy the planet.<sup>39</sup> This allows KJP to globalize the issue of cultural survival by highlighting the precarious position of human civilization as a whole in the current era. He states:

If we look back at recent history, the damage and losses that have occurred around the world in general and within specific countries, all have solely been the result of acting with an improper mindset that wishes to harm others in order to benefit oneself. At the outset of this century, during World War I and II, there were countless casualties. When America dropped the atomic bomb on Japan, hundreds of thousands of lives were lost in a single instant. More recently in the Gulf War, terrifying modern weapons were used. How many hard-won

<sup>38</sup> In *Heart Advice*, while KJP promotes universal compassion toward all nationalities, he also advocates special affection towards Tibetans, stating, “We should think about not just our own Tibetan people but also all people and living beings universally. [Nonetheless] we should especially generate affection for our own people, who share the same flesh and bone like relatives.” The Tibetan reads: *rang re bod mi tsam du ma zad skye ‘gro spyi la dmigs te bsam dgos/ sha rus gcig pa’i rang rigs kyi spun zla mams la dung sems lhag par bya rgyu* (KJP 1995: 6).

<sup>39</sup> KJP 1995, 15.

valuables and priceless lives were lost . . . . Specifically, if we reflect on the present course of the world, an infinite number of terrifying modern weapons which never existed before have been manufactured and fill the earth from top to bottom. At this juncture of time, if we cut the thread of love and compassion, all hope for prosperity, civilization and human life in the world as a whole is lost.<sup>40</sup>

In this passage, the classic source of suffering in Buddhist doctrine—desire for one's own gain at the expense of others—is cast as the cause of social calamities, such as modern warfare and the loss of human life on a massive scale. KJP goes on to assert that the absence of love and compassion—when countries or ethnic groups have little regard for each other—is at the root of all oppression (*brnyas boos*) and tyranny (*btsan dbang*).<sup>41</sup> By emphasizing the importance of love and compassion to humanity at large and having essentialized the Tibetan character as moral, KJP employs a dual strategy of heralding the specialness of the Tibetan people and also taking an inclusive,

<sup>40</sup> The Tibetan reads: *rang res 'das zin pa'i lo rgyus de tshor phyi mig cig b'tas na 'dzam gling spyi dang byc brag la god chag byung ngo cog thams cad rang gi don du gzhan la 'tshe bar 'dod pa'i b'sam pa ma rung bas byas pa 'ba' zhig ste/ dus rabs 'di nyid kyi stod du 'dzam gling 'khrug chen dang po dang gnyis pa byung ste skye bo b'grang gis mi langs ba zhig dmar gsod byas/ a ris ljar phan gyi steng du rdul phran 'bar mdel 'phangs te mi 'bum gyi tsho srog dus geig la brlags/ nye char msho khug tu 'khrug pa langs te deng rabs kyi mshon cha ya nga ba rnam spyad nas dka' sdug gis bsags pa'i nor rdzas dang rin thang bral ba'i skye 'gro'i tsho srog ci tsam zhig 'phro brag tu btang... khyad par du yang 'dzam gling spyi la mshon na da lam ngon med deng rabs kyi mshon cha 'jigs su rung ba grangs kyi mi chod pa zhig bzos te sa 'og sa steng sa bla thams cad bkang nas yod pa'i dus 'di 'dra'i skabs su byams dang snying tje'i dpyang thag chad na 'dzam gling hrii po'i dpal 'byor/ rig gzhang/ skye 'gro'i tsho srog dang bcas pa la re thag gling nas chad tshar ba red (KJP 1995: 7–8).*

<sup>41</sup> KJP 1995, 8.

global perspective, preserving Tibetan culture in and for the world. In this regard, he follows the rhetoric emanating from Dharamsala, and it is no coincidence that this work was composed in the wake of his visit to India in 1990.<sup>42</sup>

For KJP, Buddhist ethics are important for social welfare in other ways as well. Without them, he asserts that improving material standards of living can lead to a more agitated and crude state of mind, ever inflamed by desire and aggression.<sup>43</sup> As we have seen above, in his view, a good attitude leads to happiness despite a destitute standard of living. The inverse is also true. KJP asserts that to seek out one's own wealth and comfort, based on the poverty and destitution of others, leads to suffering despite a high standard of living. In terms reminiscent of Bhutan's pursuit of Gross National Happiness, KJP suggests that progress requires a balance between material prosperity and ethical values that produce psychological well-being. In his own words, "What is called 'progress for humankind' necessitates the improvement of external prosperity and internal values in concert."<sup>44</sup> In an interview, the Larung Gar scholar Tshul khrims blo gros elaborated on this point by distinguishing between material life (*dnagos po'i 'tsho ba*) and mental life (*sens khamns kyi 'tsho ba*), noting their apparent disjuncture in contemporary lifestyles which offer more comforts along with more stresses. He mentioned the rising suicide rates in China as a sign of the sometimes inverse relationship between material prosperity and psychological well-being.<sup>45</sup> In KJP's presentation, Buddhist ethics are a necessary complement to improved material standards as a means to ensure the psychological well-being of the individual alongside the welfare of society as a whole.

<sup>42</sup> On self-representations emanating from Dharamsala on this point, see Kolas and Thowson 2005, 44–45.

<sup>43</sup> KJP 1995, 15.

<sup>44</sup> The Tibetan reads: *mi'i rigs yar rgyas zer ba de phyi'i longs spyod dang/ nang bsam blo'i 'khyer so gnyis ka'i cha nas je bzang du 'gro dgos pa* (KJP 1995: 16).

<sup>45</sup> Tshul khrims blo gros, personal communication.

If taken at face value, many of KJP's assertions seem idealistic to say the least. But when analyzed in the context of a battle of epistemes, *Heart Advice* can be seen as a compelling response to Maoist and CCP rhetoric as well as to the encroachment of global market capitalism in the last two decades. This battle is about allegiance to a worldview that in turn regulates social behavior. Correspondingly, it is a battle over allegiance to authority between the secular state and religious leaders. From this perspective, what KJP is defending is not simply one or another Buddhist tenet but an entire episteme, or what counts as true in one's worldview. By suggesting ways in which Buddhist principles bolster progress and accord with scientific research, KJP contests the stigma of backwardness (*rjes lus*) and superstition (*rmongs dad*) with which religion has been associated in Maoist discourse.

This discourse is not just a thing of the past. In the eyes of the state, religion continues to be viewed as an impediment to progress, particularly to the degree that it governs social life.<sup>46</sup> Note the 2001 white paper titled, *Tibet's March Toward Modernization*, that labels theocracy "an extremely decadent social system that contradicted the progressive trend in the modern world," "seriously hindered social progress," and "relegated Tibet to the state of extreme poverty, backwardness, isolation and decline, to the point verging on total collapse."<sup>47</sup> Contra such CCP rhetoric, KJP positions Buddhist ethics as an important complement to economic development and as the custodian of progress ensuring that the benefits of technology are harnessed for the greater good. In this way, he redeems the categories of 'religion' and 'tradition' from being signifiers of backwardness and advances Buddhist ethics as essential to the path forward, not just for Tibetans but for the whole world.

<sup>46</sup> Kolas and Thowsen 2005, 179.

<sup>47</sup> Information Office of the State Council of the People's Republic of China 2001 (November). *Tibet's March Towards Modernization*. Beijing, available on <http://www.china.org.cn/e-white/index.htm>.

### Modes of Dissemination

KJP clearly has a message. One that, as we have seen, articulates a path forward (*mdun lam*) for Tibetans in explicitly Buddhist terms. The questions remains: How is his message reaching ordinary Tibetans? Known as "the wish fulfilling jewel" (*yi'd bzhin nor bu*), an epithet reserved for the highest lamas, KJP is widely known and revered in Tibetans areas throughout the PRC, and his photograph appears on amulets, pins, laminated photos, and posters for sale as far away from Serta as Lhasa. KJP also serves as the centerpiece in photo montages of prominent Rnying ma masters available in shops around the Bar skor in Lhasa as well as Tibetan neighborhoods in Xining and Chengdu (see Figure 4). Given his importance and renown, to what degree have Tibetans at large—those to whom his *Heart Advice* is addressed—been exposed to KJP's message, so formidably set out in this text? This section treats the various modes of dissemination for a contemporary lama's advice and tracks the multiple ways in which KJP's legacy has remained palpable to Tibetans in the years since his passing in 2004.



Figure 4: Close-up of poster montage of prominent lamas, mostly from the Rnying ma lineage but also including key figures from other lineages. KJP is at the center directly beneath the Jo bo Śākyamuni image. Below him are his niece Rje btsun ma Mu mtsho and Mkhan po Tshul khriims blo gros, who both reside at Larung Gar. Photo: Corey Kohn.

It is important to explore the multiple channels through which KJP's advice is reaching audiences, because *Heart Advice* has become an elusive work, no longer readily available in bookstores. Like other books unofficially published in Hong Kong or by one of the small publishing houses in Chengdu, *Heart Advice* has no ISBN number, thereby limiting its distribution. Outside the large minority publishing houses, small-scale publishing of Tibetan texts is idiosyncratic, and frequently the only way to find a work is to obtain it from the monastery that produced it or even in some cases directly from the author. Moreover, many Tibetan books, readily available in proximity to their date of publication, tend to circulate for a time and then sell out. By 2005, ten years after its composition, it was challenging indeed to find a single copy of *Heart Advice* in bookstores in Qinghai and Sichuan. Thereafter, I was told that dog-eared copies of the text still circulate among Tibetan university students. Though it is quite likely that closer to the year of its publication, in the late 1990s, *Heart Advice* was more readily available (as is the case for more recent Larung Gar publications), nevertheless it remains an important task to inquire about mechanisms through which KJP continues to reach his audience.



Figure 5: Commentary by Rig 'dzin dar rgyas (left) and collected works of KJP alongside recent publications by Tshul khrims blo gros (right). Photos: Corey Kohn.

KJP's message is being disseminated via an array of textual sources including his own collected works (*gsung 'bum*), stand-alone texts that continue to be published by Larung Gar, and commentaries and original compositions by Larung Gar scholars (see Figure 5). It should be noted that advice to the laity is a prominent feature in KJP's overall corpus. Significantly, one out of three volumes in KJP's collected works, published in 2002, is dedicated by and large to advice, including *Heart Advice* among a series of more pithy verse and prose texts.<sup>48</sup> The prominence of advice to the laity is mirrored in the works of the most prolific Larung Gar scholar, Tshul khrims blo gros, who has several works that echo and amplify KJP's message. These are more widely available in bookstores due to their recent publication and legitimate status with ISBN numbers. Following KJP's lead, Tshul khrims blo gros dedicates an entire volume of his collected works to advice to Tibetans at large, including his independently published *Timely Advice: The Mirror that Clarifies the Two Systems* (*Dus su bab pa'i gtam lugs gnyis gsal ba'i me long*) which provides advice to householders on an array of topics including dress, hygiene, education, cultural preservation, ecumenism, karmic cause and effect, and compassion towards animals.<sup>49</sup> Beyond this, his *Explanation of Rebirth*

<sup>48</sup> In KJP's three volume collected works (KJP 2002), Volume One is dedicated to a host of ritual texts, largely pertaining to Mahāyoga deities; Volume Two consists of esoteric instructions dedicated to the Great Perfection (*rdzogs chen*); and Volume Three contains advice to laity as well as songs of experience (*nyams ngur*), prophecies (*lung bstan*), pure visions (*dag snang*), and KJP's *man thar*, composed by Tshul khrims blo gros, Bsod nams dar rgyas, and Bstan 'dzin rgya mtsho. Terms for advice in Volume Three include "heart advice" (*snying gtam*), "counsel" (*gros 'debs*), and "oral instructions" (*zhal gdams*) as opposed to those terms that imply more esoteric content like *dnar khrid* and *man ngag* found in Volume Two.

<sup>49</sup> In the two-volume collected works of Tshul khrims blo gros, the first volume treats assorted philosophical topics, and the second contains eight texts of advice. Mkham po

(*Skye ba snga phyi'i nam gzhang*) extends KJP's discussion of scientific evidence for rebirth in *Heart Advice* by documenting a series of interviews with "those who remember their past lives" (*skye ba snga ma dran pa*) or "returned from death" (*shi yul nas slar log*).<sup>50</sup>

Publications by other Larung scholars follow this trend of carrying forward KJP's message and making it accessible to ordinary Tibetans. I have already mentioned the commentary by Rig 'dzin dar rgyas on KJP's slogan *rang tshugs ma shor/ gzhan sems ma dkrugs*, which bears KJP's photograph on the cover and remains on display (or available upon request) at a number of bookstores due to its more recent publication in 2004.<sup>51</sup> The commentary is based on notes from an oral teaching given by KJP, and its explanation of *rang tshugs ma shor* for Tibetans as a whole loosely follows the opening pages of *Heart Advice*, borrowing phrases and explaining the slogan in terms closely aligned but not entirely overlapping.<sup>52</sup> While offering a more streamlined

Tshul khriims blo gros 2003–2004. *Yang dag lam gyi 'jug sgo blo gсар yid kyi dga' ston*. In 2 volumes. Hong Kong: Fojiao cihui fuwu zhongxin.

<sup>50</sup> Mkhan po Tshul khriims blo gros 2004. *Skye ba snga phyi'i nam gzhang dang Lugs gnyis gsal ba'i me long*. Hong Kong: Fojiao cihui fuwu zhongxin. Published separately as *Skye ba snga phyi'i nam gzhang srid pa gsal ba'i me long* and *Dus su bab pa'i gтам lugs gnyis gsal ba'i me long* using the same ISBN number.

<sup>51</sup> See note 31 above.

<sup>52</sup> Rig 'dzin dar rgyas, personal communication. The section addressed to all Tibetans (*gangs can bod mi yongs*) and followers of the Buddha (*ston pa sangs rgyas kyi rjes 'jug thams cad*) is divided between his commentary on *rang tshugs ma shor* (2004: 4–18) and *gzhan sems ma dkrugs* (18–32). The rest of the book addresses aspiring Buddhist practitioners (*nang pa sangs rgyas pa'i chos nyams su len par 'dod pa mams*) and all who are included as students of KJP (*khong gi slob mar gtogs pa thams cad*). The latter portion of this text was treated by Antonio Terrone in his paper: Antonio Terrone 2006. Authentic treasure revealers and the moral implications of noncelibate tantric activities. Presented in the panel on *Revealed Buddhism: Studies in Gter ma (Treasures) and their Revealers* at the Eleventh Seminar of the International

version of KJP's ideas, it is also more accessible due to its deliberately simple style of Tibetan. Another Larung Gar scholar, Bstan 'dzin rgya mtsho, has also published a book bearing KJP's photograph on the cover, *Notes on Actualizing Buddhahood: An Instruction Manual*, in line with the longstanding practice of compiling notes from the oral teachings of a renowned lama.<sup>53</sup> As we can see from these examples, ensuing publications conveying KJP's advice and teachings are not limited by writings during his own lifetime, since recorded speeches can be transcribed, notes of teachings compiled, and pithy verses expanded into full-length commentaries.<sup>54</sup>

Beyond this, KJP's message to the laity is being disseminated by Larung Gar through a range of audio-visual materials. These materials include audio and video recordings of his speeches,<sup>55</sup> VCDs with footage of his teachings and travels in China and abroad,<sup>56</sup> and CDs containing audio

Association of Tibetan Studies, held from August 27 to September 2, 2006 in Bonn, Germany.

<sup>53</sup> The recently published *Notes on Actualizing Buddhahood: An Instruction Manual (Khrid yig sangs rgyas lag ster gyi zin bris)* was arranged by Bstan 'dzin rgya mtsho (2002) from notes and recordings of instructions by KJP on a short seven-page text he composed at Wutai Shan in 1989, *'Jam dpal zhi sgrub kyi cha lag khrid yig sangs rgyas lag ster*.

<sup>54</sup> As an example of the latter, Tshul khriims blo gros produced a bulky commentary of 110 pages (2003–2004, vol. 2, 7–117) on a pithy three-page text of advice by KJP, titled *Snying gтам snying gi thig le*, in KJP 2002, vol. 3, 1–3.

<sup>55</sup> Cassette recordings of his teachings that I found in circulation include: *'Das kha'i zhal chems* (no ISRC number), containing KJP's last public speech; *Rgyal ba'i sras kyi lag len sum cu so bdun ma* (ISRC CN G-04-01-357-00/A.J6), a set of three cassettes on the 37 practices of a bodhisattva; and *Grub dbang 'Jigs med phun tshogs 'byung gnas dpal bzang po'i gsung mgar dang zhal gdams* (ISRC CN-H12-95-306-00/A.J6), a blend of *zhal gdams* and *mgur* performed by Gdu bhe (alternate spelling: Bdu bhe). Videos of his teachings are also available; see notes 55 and 58 below.

<sup>56</sup> A VCD, titled simply *Chos rje 'Jigs med phun tshogs la na mo*, chronicles his travels and teachings abroad including his 1993 US tour, and another, titled *Rje nyid kyi*

recordings of teachings given by Larung Gar scholars (see Figure 6).<sup>57</sup> Audio-visual materials serve as an important complement to textual sources, first and foremost because the majority of Tibetans in the PRC cannot read Tibetan, due to low attendance rates beyond primary school and the prevalence of Chinese-medium education in government schools outside of the TAR.<sup>58</sup> Recordings of KJP's speeches thus provide ordinary Tibetans—at least the nomad population in and around Mgo log who can understand his dialect—with a conduit for the content of his message in colloquial terms. In addition, audio-visual materials offer an immediate way to encounter KJP, who is no longer available in person, and thus constitute a compelling medium for his continued influence on

*mdzad bsdus*, has footage of his travels in China. Both these feature photographs of KJP on the cover. There is also a VCD recounting the history of Larung Gar, titled simply *Gser thang bla rung dgon rig lnga'i nang bstan slob grwa*, with narration alternating in Tibetan and Chinese. These VCDs do not have ISRC numbers.

<sup>57</sup> An impressive set of 64 CDs containing oral teachings by leading Larung Gar scholars (including KJP himself) on a variety of philosophical topics within the monastic curriculum was released for sale in June 2006 (as far as I could tell) only at Larung Gar. There is also a CD of teachings by Tshul khriims blo gros, titled *Nectar Rain of Sublime Dharma* or *Dam chos bodud rtsi'i gru char*, that circulates independently. Neither have ISRC numbers.

<sup>58</sup> For a discussion of the challenges related to minority language education in China, with special reference to the situation for Tibetans, see Bonnie Johnson and Nalini Chhetri 2002. Exclusionary policies and practices in Chinese minority education: The case of Tibetan education. *Current Issues in Comparative Education* 2(2): 142–53. Kolas and Thowson 2005 provide a survey on the state of education for Tibetans in Qinghai, Sichuan, Gansu, and Yunnan Provinces.



Figure 6: VCD set featuring speeches and devotional songs, released by Larung Gar in 2007 to commemorate KJP on the third anniversary of his parinirvāṇa (front and back cover).

Tibetan attitudes and values. Video footage casts KJP as a highly charismatic object of devotion, showing him thronged by followers (lay and cleric; Tibetan, Chinese, and foreign), including thousands of nomads assembled on the grasslands, clerics crowded into the multi-tiered assembly hall at Larung Gar, lines of reverent Chinese students greeting him at airports in Chinese cities, and Western audiences listening intently to him in large lecture halls in the US during his 1993 visit. As of 2007, Larung Gar has continued to release audio-visual materials featuring recordings of KJP speeches and footage of his activities.<sup>59</sup>

<sup>59</sup> In 2007, the latest release was a two-VCD set commemorating the third anniversary of KJP's parinirvāṇa (no ISRC number), *Chos rje dam pa yid bzhin nor bu dongs pa*

To give an example of the multiple channels through which KJP's advice to the laity is reaching audiences, let me briefly trace the permutations that his appeal for the compassionate treatment of animals has taken in textual, audio-visual and other media. Here I am tracking in particular the impact of his eight-page "A Request Made to All Tibetan Men and Women" (*Gangs can pho mo yongs kyi snyan lam du phul ba'i zhu yig*) in which he asks Tibetans to stop selling cattle and sheep to local slaughterhouses and to vendors who transport livestock to urban centers like Lanzhou and Chengdu. This appeal expands on a brief plea for the compassionate treatment of animals made in *Heart Advice* that takes up less than a page in the section on local customs and habits.<sup>60</sup> In "A Request Made to All Tibetan Men and Women," KJP combines an empathetic tact, providing a graphic depiction of the cruel treatment of animals in slaughterhouses, with an economic tact arguing that nomads squander their livelihood ('*sho thabs*) by selling animals at little profit to butchers. As with his overall approach in *Heart Advice*, here KJP seamlessly melds the Buddhist notions of compassion with the secular language of progress (*yar rgyas*) and economics (*dpal 'byor*), thereby linking the welfare of Tibetans in 'this-worldly' terms with their ethical behavior and prospects in future lifetimes. This text can be found in an edited volume published in 2003, *The Faults of Meat, Liquor, and Tobacco: A Compendium*, alongside discourses by Zhabs dkar, Rdza dpal sprul, Guru Chos dbang and Bdud 'dul rdo rje.<sup>61</sup> It is also included in the collected works of Tshul khrims blo gros, where it is followed by his own passionate appeal for vegetarianism.<sup>62</sup>

*chos dbyings su bsdus te/ lo 'khor gsum lon pa'i rjes dran ched bsgrigs*. The first disk contains several speeches by KJP captured on video, and the second features songs eulogizing KJP.

<sup>60</sup> KJP 1995, 97–98.

<sup>61</sup> Unspecified editor 2003. A request made to all Tibetan men and women (*Gangs can pho mo yongs kyi snyan lam du phul ba'i zhu yig*). In *Sha chang tha ma kha sogs kyi nyes dmigs phyogs bsds*. Hong Kong: Xianggang xin shiji chubanshe, 117–25, an

Significantly, KJP's discourse is also available on a VCD with footage of his original speech given to a crowd of thousands on a snowy winter day in 2000 at Larung Gar during their celebration of the Buddha's descent from heaven (*ston pa lha babs kyi dus chen*). The text was composed for the occasion and KJP recounts it verbatim, providing a running commentary in colloquial terms for his audience of clerics and nomads. The full speech, titled "A Call for Mercy" (*Byams brtse'i 'bod sgra*), is preceded on the VCD by a graphic 38-minute video of footage from Hui slaughterhouses, called "Sentient Beings without a Protector" (*Mgon med pa'i sems can*).<sup>63</sup> It vividly portrays the horrors to which KJP refers in his speech, particularly methods of slitting the throat of cattle and sheep, leaving them to slowly drown in a pool of their own blood. When KJP states in his plea, "In sum, if one were to witness this work, performed by those lacking compassion, your heart would likely shatter into a hundred pieces,"<sup>64</sup> the viewer has already watched the video, which typically elicit tears from nomadic Tibetan audiences (not yet desensitized to violence on the screen). Audio-visual materials like these are an especially effective mode of disseminating ethical advice not only because so many

edited volume that contains short texts discussing the faults of eating meat, drinking liquor, and smoking cigarettes.

<sup>62</sup> Lecture on the precepts regarding eating meat: The mirror that clarifies [ethical] discrimination (*Sha'i kha zas gngang bkag gi bslab bya blang dor gsal ba'i me long*), in Tshul khrims blo gros 2004, vol. 2, 358–405. This text is also found in Unspecified editor 2003, 127–82.

<sup>63</sup> The video *Mgon med pa'i sems can* and KJP's speech *Byams brtse'i 'bod sgra* are contained on a VCD produced by Larung Gar, the cover of which has the simple plea, "Please liberate and ransom the lives [of animals]" (*Tshe thar srog blu byed rogs*) accompanied by an image of yaks grazing on the grasslands (ISRC CN-G04-01-417 00/V.16).

<sup>64</sup> This is quoted from the text which KJP read aloud and explained in the course of his speech. The Tibetan reads: *mdor na bya ba 'di mams mi snying tje can gyis mthong na snying tshal pa brgyar 'gas par 'gyur pa zhig tu snang*. Unspecified editor 2003, 121.

Tibetans, particularly nomads to whom the speech was addressed, cannot read but also because of the immediacy and persuasiveness of video as a medium, here vividly demonstrating the suffering of animals in support of points made in KJP's speech. This VCD remains available at a number of music shops in Mgo log, and I have also seen homemade copies.

As a further extension of this, a poster promoting vegetarianism by Tshul khirms blo gros was distributed in 2006, and many restaurants in Serta hung it on their wall despite the fact that all of them serve meat dishes (see Figure 7). On the poster, his invitation to "join the ranks of those who live on a vegetarian diet" (*dkar zas kyis 'tsho ba'i skye bo'i gral du zhugs par zhu*) has a modernist bent, blending health concerns with Buddhist ethics. The poster features a pastoral scene of grazing animals in which the overlaid prose hails vegetarianism as "the cause of a healthy body" (*lus kham bde thang gi rgyu*) and also "consistent with the path to liberation and awakening" (*thar lam byang chub dang mthun pa*). By contrast, it states, "Consuming meat is the means to defeat, in a single stroke, the welfare and happiness of beings, one's own physical health, and one's path to liberation in future lives."<sup>63</sup> This is an example of the way that Larung Gar scholars are promoting avenues where Buddhist principles and scientific knowledge are compatible in service of promoting ethical values. (In this case, the reference must be to heart disease from over-consumption of meat.)

<sup>63</sup> The Tibetan reads: *dnar zas ni sems can gyi bde skyid dang rang lus ky'i bde thang tsho phyi ma'i thar lam gsum char stabs cig tu 'joms par byed pa yin no*.



Figure 7: Poster promoting vegetarianism distributed by Mkhan po Tshul khirms blo gros. Photo: Corey Kohn.

Other idiosyncratic modes of dissemination have more to do with KJP's message 'catching on' rather than its deliberate promotion by Larung Gar scholars. For example, I previously mentioned that his well-known slogan, *rang tshugs ma shor/ gzhan sems ma dkrugs*, can occasionally be found posted on the wall of a tea house or pool hall in Mgo log (as simple printouts in black and white from a computer). The few by-standers I asked were able to give an explanation of the slogan that matched the main thrust found in the commentary by Rig 'dzin dar rgyas, whether remaining steadfast to one's ethical principles or maintaining allegiance to Tibetan culture. The slogan has even inspired one blog entry (posted October 13, 2006) titled "Contemporary Tibetans Who Have Lost Their Resolve" (*Rang tshugs shor ba'i deng gi bod pa*). The blog was visited by 88 people in its first 48 hours and featured KJP's

photography alongside the entry at the time of posting.<sup>66</sup> On the blog (*zin bris*) of the Scion of Kailash or *Ti se'i bu rgyud*, the essay echoes KJP's emphasis on pride in Tibet's cultural heritage as well as his aversion to assimilation or "imitating others" (*gzhan la lad mo*). But it has a critical edge that KJP's presentation for the most part lacks, reserving a special vindictive for lamas who chase foreign students and Chinese money. Though the nuanced double-meaning of *rang tshugs ma shor*—whereby ethics and cultural survival become entwined—is lost here, a glimmer nonetheless comes through. For the Scion of Kailash, the "roadblock to moving ahead" (*mdun skyod kyi bkag rdo*) is caused by self-serving Tibetans—whether workers, lamas, monks, artists, or common folk—who lack the resolve to value Tibetan culture and strive for the benefit of Tibetans as a people.

References to KJP's advice can also be found in Tibetan pop and *rdung len* songs, produced as music videos. In the following, I use 'pop' to indicate vocals backed by MIDI (musical instrument digital interface) with lyrics in either Tibetan or Chinese; whereas *rdung len* refers to a Tibetan vocal style accompanied by the mandolin or alternatively the *sgra snyan*. In one song dedicated to KJP called "Elegy" or *Dran gdung* (lyrics: Lung rtogs bstan 'dzin; vocals: Sher bstan), specific reference is made to KJP's well-known slogan, *rang tshugs ma shor/ gzhan sems ma dkrugs*, while the music video shows images of KJP and Larung Gar.<sup>67</sup> Another, "The Cry of Humble Creatures" or *Nyam chung srog chags kyi smre sngags* (lyrics: Lung rtogs bstan 'dzin;

<sup>66</sup> Originally: <http://www.tibet1.com/blog/user1/lejk/archives/2006/5206.html>. The blog address has changed to: <http://www.tibetabc.cn/user1/lejk/archives/2006/5206.html>. The numbers declined steadily after its initial posting, since only new entries are featured on the homepage of tibet1.com. But there has been a steady trickle since then, showing more than 200 visitors almost a year later. My thanks to Françoise Robin for calling my attention to this blog.

<sup>67</sup> "Elegy" or *Dran gdung* on a VCD produced by G.yu thog mam rgyal dgon titled *Rigs zhen gyi 'bod pa*, translated on the jacket cover as *New Spring Melody* (ISRC CN-H09-07-302-00/V.J6). In this song, the lines of the slogan are reversed.

vocals: Nam mkha'), contains slaughterhouse images similar to the video "Sentient Beings without a Protector" (*Mgon med pa'i sems can*) discussed above. Its refrain "Om Manipadme Hūm, I am a humble creature" is accompanied by footage of yaks with newly severed necks spewing blood, fish writhing on a cutting board after being chopped in half, and beheaded sheep clumped together on a slaughterhouse floor.<sup>68</sup> In this music video, we see both the content and style of KJP's message mirrored, although the lyrics emphasize vegetarianism rather than liberating animals (*tshe thar*) from slaughter. Perhaps the best known pop song dedicated to KJP, alongside other lamas, is "A Weary Mind" or *Yid re skyo* (lyrics: Blo 'jam dbyangs; vocals: Kun dga') in which the singer bemoans no longer being able to hear KJP's advice.<sup>69</sup> Here pop star Kun dga'—sporting army fatigues, an MP3 player around the neck, and a spiked haircut—prostrates to a photograph of KJP on a throne, acting as a role model of devotion for urban Tibetan youth. Performed by well-known singers, these songs and music videos provide a glimpse into a novel mode of dissemination for KJP's image and message, namely commercial and monastery-produced VCDs.

<sup>68</sup> The Tibetan reads: *Om Manipadme Hūm, nga ni nyam chung sems can yin*. "The Cry of Humble Creatures" or *Nyam chung srog chags kyi smre sngags* is found on *Rigs zhen gyi 'bod pa*.

<sup>69</sup> The stanza dedicated to KJP reads as follows:

In the seminal point of the earth, Lower Mdo Kham,

Advice from the revered lama vividly resounds.

Now, all alone, I no longer hear [his] advice.

Unable to meet the lama, [my] mind grows weary.

The Tibetan reads: *smad mdo kham sa yi thig le na/ rje bla ma'i gdams ngag lhong lhong grags/ da gdams ngag ma thos khe kyang* [sic: *kher rkyang*] *nga/ ngas bla ma ma mjal yid re skyo*. This song was released on a CD titled *Re sgug gi mdun lam* and a VCD titled *Re sgug*. See note 77 for more details. Due to its popularity, *Yid re skyo* can also be found on commercial compilations of assorted pop hits.

### VCD Eulogies to the Lama

There are numerous Tibetan pop songs and *rdung len* renditions of lyrics by and about KJP available on cassettes and VCDs, including a number of compilations specifically dedicated to his memory (see Figure 8). Such compilations are part of new trend of VCDs produced by monasteries or devoted patrons in honor of one (or more) Buddhist teacher or lama (*bla ma*). These VCD compilations could be broadly characterized as *eulogies to the lama*—containing both tributes and laments, consonant with folk genres such as “songs of praise” (*bstod glu*), “song of remembrance” (*dran glu*), and “song of sorrow” (*skyo glu*).<sup>70</sup> These eulogies are directed at the lama(s) to whom the VCD is dedicated and also to the monastery itself, to other lamas of renown, and to famed sacred sites such as the Potala, Jokhang, or Samye. Complementing the vocals of each song, music videos combine footage of the lama’s activities and/or special events at the monastery, which are supplied by the monastery, with images of the Tibetan landscape and generic nature shots supplied by the studio (blooming flowers in rapid motion is a favorite). Interspersed with these images, or alternatively overlaid on top of them, are shots of the singer (often but not always in Tibetan dress), filmed in the studio or at one of the parks in and around Chengdu. Significantly, these compilations contain lyrics for the edification (*slob gso*) of the laity—written by monks,

<sup>70</sup> The song lyrics featured on monastery-produced VCDs tend to be exclusively in Tibetan and exhibit a heavy bias toward *rdung len* or alternatively pop music performed by *rdung len* artists (in which a *rdung len* melody is reworked with MIDI and the vocal style remains more or less the same). By contrast, the narration on these VCDs (when introducing the monastery or lama) often feature both Tibetan and Chinese, due to the growing interest in Tibetan Buddhism among Han Chinese. While many monastery-produced VCDs are available in music shops alongside commercial pop and *rdung len* productions, some are limited releases for distribution only at the monastery itself.

scholars, and lamas of the monastery—making them a significant new mode of dissemination for a lama’s advice.<sup>71</sup>



Figure 8. Covers of commercially produced compilations (both VCD and CD) dedicated to KJP.

Due to the ubiquity of VCDs in Tibetan areas of the PRC, compilations of *rdung len* and pop songs dedicated to KJP represent a new and powerful way that his image and message are being promoted. VCDs are routinely played in public buses, restaurants, tea houses and private homes, even in remote towns so long as there is electricity. In China, where major media

<sup>71</sup> That numerous lyricists are indeed monks is evident from the VCDs themselves, which sometimes display photographs of the lyricist on the front or back cover, on the title page of songs alongside a photograph of the singer, or alternatively in a separate clip at the beginning or end of the VCD. For example, the front cover of a VCD compilation dedicated to KJP, *Meeting the Turquoise Dragon* or *G.yu 'brug kha sprod* (ISRC CN-H09-05-301-00/V.J6), features KJP at the center framed by the *rdung len* singers Gdu bhe and Nam mkha' slightly below (Figure 8, center). On its back cover are photographs of the two lyricists, Lung rig rgya mtsho and Ngag dbang blo bzang, both in monastic garb, and the sponsor and producer Blo bzang nyi ma in lay attire. On monastery-produced VCDs, the clerical status of lyricists may also be evident from the titles preceding their names, such as Mkhän for scholar or Sprul for incarnate lama. Indeed, there are several Larung Gar scholars who are known to write lyrics, including Bstan 'dzin rgya mtsho, Rnam 'dren, and 'Chi med rig 'dzin.

venues like television and newspapers are state-controlled, music videos have become an important medium for minority expression. Baranovitch has argued that, because cassettes and VCDs are an inexpensive form of mass media (relative to TV and film), they constitute sites where minorities in the PRC are gaining a “new public voice” and “actively participating in the mainstream representation of their own ethnic identity.”<sup>72</sup> In Tibetan areas, monasteries are significant participants in this process, promoting Buddhism as central to Tibetan identity and influencing values through song lyrics and accompanying images. Due in part to the success of pirating,<sup>73</sup> these VCDs have a wide circulation and are routinely available in music shops at county seats throughout Tibetan areas of the PRC as well as in Tibetan neighborhoods of cities such as Chengdu, Xining and Lanzhou.

As testimony to his enduring legacy, KJP has been the centerpiece of at least a half-dozen compilations (both VCD and cassette)<sup>74</sup> as well as the subject

<sup>72</sup> Nimrod Baranovitch 2001. Between alterity and identity: New voices of minority people in China. *Modern China* 27(3), 361. Though Baranovitch’s study centers on Chinese-medium minority music distributed nationally, his basic point holds true for songs in minority languages with a broad distribution as is the case with Tibetan pop music, whether the lyrics are in Tibetan or Chinese. Literary journals and websites such as tibetl.com are other significant and low-cost sites for Tibetan-medium expressions negotiating issues of identity and modernity for Tibetans. For a pioneering study on the ways in which Tibetans have gained a public voice through pop music, see Tibet Information Network 2004. *Unity and Discord: Music and Politics in Contemporary Tibet*. London: Tibet Information Network.

<sup>73</sup> Anna Morcom, personal communication.

<sup>74</sup> Compilations of *rdung len* and pop songs specifically dedicated to KJP include but are not limited to: *Bkra shis rdzogs ldan bsu’i ba’i dung sgra*, a compilation available in VCD and cassette; *G.yu ’brug kha sprod*, a VCD compilation with songs performed by Gdu bhe and Nam mkha’; the second disk of a VCD commemorating the third anniversary of KJP’s parinirvāṇa (see note 58 above); *Re sgug gi mdun lam* (ISRC CN-G01-04-314-00/A.J6), a CD of songs with lyrics by Blo ’jam dbyangs and vocals by Kun dga’; *Srid pa’i gangs ri* (ISRC CN-G01-2000-307-00/A.J6), a cassette of songs

of numerous songs on VCDs produced by monasteries other than Larung Gar and on the solo albums of well-known singers. Many of these have been released in the three years since his passing in 2004 and consist largely of laments (*gdung dbyangs*), which express grief and pray for his return. Some also borrow stock phrases typical of supplications (*gsol ’debs*) that derive from a liturgical milieu. Here is a representative sampling:<sup>75</sup>

ངའི་སྐུ་མ།

“My Lama”

*Rdung len* song performed by Gdu bhe (lyrics: Spros pa), later covered by Kun dga’ in a pop rendition with revised lyrics by Blo ’jam dbyangs.<sup>76</sup> The lyrics in both rely on a standard supplication refrain that affixes *mkhyen no* to the name of a lama, here variations on the refrain: “Consider me, lama, consider me/ ’jigs med phun tshogs, consider me” (*mkhyen no bla ma mkhyen no/ ’jigs med phun tshogs mkhyen no*). The song appears on solo albums of respective artists.<sup>77</sup> With

performed by Gdu bhe and Dge legs; and *Bkra shis zla ba* (ISRC CN-G04-00-0028-0/A.J6), cassette of songs performed by Gdu bhe, Rig dga’, and Mgon po don ’grub. The latter two are older and appear to predate KJP’s passing.

<sup>75</sup> The following list does not include the wealth of songs that eulogize multiple lamas including KJP, nor songs that eulogize Larung Gar that commonly contain references to KJP.

<sup>76</sup> There is a less well-know version with the same title by Spros pa on the second disk of *Chos rje dam pa yid bzhin nor bu dgongs pa chos dbyings su bsod te/ lo ’khor gsum lon pa’i rjes dran ched bsgrigs*.

<sup>77</sup> The Gdu bhe album is *Gangs ljongs la phul ba’i lha dar* (ISRC CN-G04-01-417-00/V.J6) and the Kun dga’ album is *Lha sa’i bu mo* (alternatively *Re sgug 2*). Three albums featuring Kun dga’ were released in rapid succession, each with the term *Re sgug* in the title or otherwise featured on the cover. (Its translation “waiting” appears in

reference to *Nga yi bla ma*, Gdu bhe remarked that pop is less able to express a sorrowful tone than *rdung len*, which conveys mood through the resonance of mandolin strings.<sup>78</sup> Indeed, the Kun dga' version has an upbeat rhythm to match the colored lights flashing on the shrine packed with photos of KJP to which the pop star prostrates, this time in Tibetan dress.

ཡིད་བཞིན་ཞོར་བུ།

"Wish-fulfilling Jewel"

*Rdung len* song performed by Mgon po don 'grub, with lyrics by Spros pa, on a VCD compilation dedicated to KJP titled *The Conch that Herald the Fortunate Era*.<sup>79</sup> In subsequent lines, this song pairs various attributes of KJP such as "the moon that dispels the darkness" (*mun sel zla ba*), "the source of benefit and well-being" (*phan bde'i 'byung gnas*), or "the embodiment of the three jewels" (*dkon mchog kun 'dus*) with his epithet "wish-fulfilling jewel" (*yid bzhin nor bu*). The same pattern is

English on one album and in the Chinese, *dengdai*, on all three.) Since these three albums were produced shortly after KJP's passing, the reference is likely to awaiting his return (i.e. by taking rebirth) though it may have other connotations as well. The first is a CD dedicated to KJP, *Re sgug gi mdun lam*, featuring KJP's photo on the cover, along with the lyricist Blo 'jam dbyangs (a Larung Gar monk) and Kun dga' himself (Figure 8, right). Songs from this album can be found on two VCDs: one titled simply *Re sgug* (ISRC CN-G01-04-356-00/V.J6), also available in cassette, and the other titled *Lha sa'i bu mo*, which is also referred to as *Re sgug 2* on the cover (ISRC CN-G01-05-334-00/V.J6). Footage for several songs on these VCDs was shot on location in Serta and at Larung Gar.

<sup>78</sup> Gdu bhe, personal communication.

<sup>79</sup> *Bkra shis rdzogs ldan bsu'i ba'i dung sgra*.

followed in several songs, bearing the title *Yid bzhin nor bu* on other VCD compilations.<sup>80</sup>

སྒྲིག་པ་དེ་གི་མིག་ཐུ།

"Tears of Melancholy"

Two unrelated *rdung len* songs dedicated to KJP bearing the same title. The first is performed by Gdu bhe, with lyrics by Ngag dbang blo bzang, on a VCD dedicated to KJP titled *Meeting the Turquoise Dragon*.<sup>81</sup> The second is performed by A blu, with lyrics by Mkhan po Dbang 'phel, on a VCD produced by Ri mgul dgon, a Bka' brgyud monastery in Sde dge.<sup>82</sup> Both express sorrow at KJP's passing, the latter describing "wretched students left behind" (*nyams thag slob bu lus song*), alongside footage of weeping nuns at Larung Gar with heads buried in their robes.

རྗེས་པོ་ལྟོ་ལྟོ་དཔྱད་པ་རིང་མོ།

"Lament of Remembrance"

*Rdung len* song performed by Nam mkha' with lyrics by Sprul sku Mi shigs rdo rje, on *Meeting the Turquoise Dragon*. This follows the same pattern of "Wish-fulfilling Jewel" (above) for

<sup>80</sup> For example, there is a song of the same name on a VCD produced by Larung Gar, commemorating the third anniversary of KJP's parinirvāṇa. See note 58 above.

<sup>81</sup> *G.yu 'brug kha sprod*.

<sup>82</sup> This VCD, titled *Roof of the Red Palace* or *Pho brang dmar po'i rgya phibs* was distributed through Ri mgul monastery, and I have not seen the original case to check for an ISRC number. My thanks to Ri mgul sprul sku for sharing his copy with me.

the first part of the song and then shifts to a series of remembrances about KJP. Like “Tears of Melancholy” it makes reference to those left behind, choked with tears (*mchi mas briangs*), and expresses mourning in explicit terms: “This year when [your] memory arises in the mirror of mind, there is no way to assuage this sorrow of mine.”<sup>83</sup>

བཞུགས་པའི་གདུང་ལོ་ལྟོས།

“Elegy”

Pop song performed by Sher bstan, with lyrics by Lung rtogs bstan ’dzin on *New Spring Melody*; a VCD produced by G.yu thog nam rgyal dgon, to commemorate the first Bka’ brgyud prayer festival (*smon lam*) held in Mgo log during July of 2006 and the opening of their new monastic college (*bshad grwa*).<sup>84</sup> This slow and evocative lament marks the three year anniversary of KJP’s parinirvāṇa and requests him to return to take rebirth. Images of KJP and Larung Gar are peppered throughout, alternating with shots of the singer feigning grief.

སྐྱུང་པའི་གདུང་ལོ་ལྟོས།

“Lament for the Sole Refuge and Supreme Lama”

<sup>83</sup> The Tibetan reads: *da lo rjes dran yid kyi me long du shar skabs/ skyo ba’i rang sems ’di la sos thabs ni mi ’dug*. I have not translated *ring mo* in the title, since it is unclear to me if it should be understood as a variant for *ring po* or a misspelling of *rol mo*.

<sup>84</sup> *Rigs zhen gyi ’bod pa*, produced by the Bka’ brgyud monastery G.yu thog nam rgyal dgon. Notably, one of the dignitaries presiding over the prayer festival was Tshul khriṃs blo gros of Larung Gar.

Pop song performed by ’Jigs byed with lyrics by Sprul sku Klong yangs of Rdo grub chen dgon, a prominent Rnying ma monastery in Mgo log. It appears on *Divine Sound of the Definitive Meaning*, a VCD dedicated to Sprul sku Klong yangs, which bears his image on the cover and features a number of tributes to him as well as songs by him.<sup>85</sup> This one recalls KJP as the “dharma lord and charioteer of the teachings of the early translations” (*snga ’gyur bstan pa’i shing rta chos kyi rje*).

དེ་མཚན་པའི་སྐྱུང་ལ།

“Wondrous Lama”

Pop song by a young artist named Padma, using a melody borrowed (with permission) from a stunning ballad to the Seventeenth Karma pa O rgyan phrin las rdo rje performed by Kun dga’ but with new lyrics composed by the singer himself. With more emphasis on visual appeal than emotional depth, it seems to have become fashionable for up and coming performers to sing about KJP; here the singer mimics Kun dga’s look and vocal style.<sup>86</sup>

སྐྱུང་པའི་གདུང་ལོ་ལྟོས།

“Lament Recalling the Lama”

<sup>85</sup> *Nges don lha yi rang sgra* (ISRC CN-H09-06-353-00/V.J6). Sprul sku Klong yangs is the Fifth Rdo grub chen; his full name is Rdo grub chen Thub bstan klong yangs rig ’dzin rgya mtsho. Much of the footage for this VCD is drawn from the 2004 consecration of the monastery’s new assembly hall.

<sup>86</sup> *Ngo mtshar ba’i bla ma* is contained on a 2006 commercial compilation titled *Mantuloling*, produced in Taiwan (ISBN 7-88082-399-9).

*Rdung len* song written and performed by Rig dga' for his debut solo VCD (in production at the time of writing)<sup>87</sup> calling on KJP to return in the refrain "Kye ma lama, what sorrow without you! Please return, oh lama!" (*kye ma bla ma lags/ khyed med pa'i skyo ba la/ phyir peps rogs/ bla ma lags*). KJP is likened to the eighth-century tantric master Padmasambhava as "the protector and wish-fulfilling jewel, the emanation of O rgyan who spread the activity of the perfect teachings [Buddhism] on the peak of the world, the land of snows [Tibet]."<sup>88</sup>

The number of songs dedicated to KJP found in VCDs produced by both Rnying ma and Bka' brgyud monasteries is striking,<sup>89</sup> not including songs dedicated to multiple lamas which routinely include KJP. This is an indication of KJP's importance for Tibetans and also the extent of his influence, since at least some monk lyricists have been affiliated with KJP as his disciple or by virtue of studying at Larung Gar. In interviews, those who sing the most songs by and about KJP, such as Gdu bhe and Kun dga', expressed devotion to KJP

<sup>87</sup> As a Serta native, Rig dga' studied with KJP, spending time at Larung Gar annually. The producer of three VCDs to date, Rig dga' has been in the process of recording his own first solo album. In these endeavors, he self-consciously promotes Tibetan values and culture, using the profits from his musical ventures to support various charities (personal communication).

<sup>88</sup> The Tibetan reads: 'Dzam gling 'dzin ma'i rtsé mo gangs ljongs su/ yang dag bstan pa'i mdzad 'phrin legs spel ba'i/ O rgyan sprul ba'i mgon po yid bzhi nor (from a printed version of the lyrics received directly from the singer).

<sup>89</sup> To reiterate, this is just a representative sampling, and there are no doubt numerous others. For example, several such songs have been posted on Youtube.com, but without information about their source.

as their teacher and respect for his unparalleled accomplishments,<sup>90</sup> though in general singers are contacted by the VCD producer and may not know the lyricist or lama in person.<sup>91</sup>

Eulogies to KJP recollect him through poignant lyrics, melodies, and images and by extension promote an ongoing cult of devotion to him. In a similar vein to VCDs of KJP's travels and teachings produced by Larung Gar, music videos show KJP as the charismatic centerpiece of a crowd of clerics assembled at Larung Gar and throngs of nomads spread out across the grasslands for rituals and teachings bestowed by him. These images display KJP's extensive religious activities, and the proper affective response to them is modeled by the singers who demonstrate various gestures of reverence and grief. In addition, music videos feature panoramas of the valley of Larung Gar—covered in monastic residences and crowned by the gold-roofed Sgyu 'phrul temple (see Figure 1)—serving as a symbol of the regeneration of Buddhism.

VCD eulogies to the lama also contain lyrics focused on edification for the laity, and it is here that we see KJP's message reaching ordinary Tibetans.<sup>92</sup>

<sup>90</sup> This was expressed to me in conversations with Gdu bhe and Kun dga' respectively.

<sup>91</sup> This point is based on a conversation with Sher bstan in relation to his song about KJP and reiterated to me by Mkhan po Dbang 'phel, producer of a VCD compilation for Ri mgul monastery, who stated that the producer is responsible for commissioning the lyrics and hiring singers. Other *rdung len* singers, like Dar mtsho, insist that she will only perform songs dedicated to lamas with whom she has a connection and for whom she has devotion (personal communication).

<sup>92</sup> Singers themselves see the importance of songs as a means to reach ordinary Tibetan with edifying messages. In a conversation, the Serta native Dar mtsho made the point that many people in her area cannot read but enjoy listening to her songs. She stated flatly that most if not all lyrics she sings are meant to edify: encouraging Tibetans to have respect for elders and faith in lamas, to abstain from eating meat, and to send their children to school. Moreover, like her relative Rig dga', who is a longtime student of KJP, Dar mtsho sees singers as role models who should wear Tibetan clothes, sing in Tibetan language, and use Tibetan gestures.

As found in *rdung len* and pop songs, edifying lyrics do not easily fall into pre-existing genres, though the tradition of using songs to edify is longstanding.<sup>93</sup> One of the commonly found themes in songs with edifying lyrics is the path forward for Tibetans, and the term *mdun lam* appears in a number of titles. In these songs, the path forward is articulated in terms similar to those found in *Heart Advice*, including cultural preservation, ethical conduct, unity among Tibetans, and/or the importance of education. The message is arguably identified with KJP (or traceable to him) when songs echo his ideas and also fulfill one of three criteria as follows: the song is found on a VCD dedicated to KJP's memory; the song belongs to a monastery-produced VCD on which a eulogy to KJP by the same lyricist is found; or the lyricist is Larung Gar monk or scholar.

We can think of songs identified with or traceable to KJP as uneven refractions of his message, since edifying lyrics vary in the degree to which they convey the sophistication, flavor, language or themes found in *Heart Advice* and other speeches or texts containing his advice. As an example of the first type, on a VCD dedicated to KJP, titled *The Conch that Herald the Fortunate Era*, one song, "The Path Forward" or *Mdun lam* (lyrics: Leags khung tshé dbang; vocals: G.yung drung dbang rgyal) promotes the importance of education in rather generic terms with the refrain sung by the Three Highland Girls (*Mtho sgang gi bu mo gsum*): "Kind father and mother, don't tell your dear children not to go to school; knowledge is a jewel ornament."<sup>94</sup> By contrast, another song on the same VCD sounds much closer to the language of *Heart Advice*. "Life Pillar of the Snow Mountain" or *Gangs ri'i srog mkhar* (lyrics: Dbang stod sprul Thub bstan nor bu; vocals: Gdu bhe) asks

<sup>93</sup> Professor Mkha' 'bum of Qinghai Shifan Daxue stressed the traditional role of *glu* as a vehicle for edifying the populace (personal communication). Moreover, since at least the time of eleventh-century songster saint Mi la ras pa, *mgur* have employed folk song styles to convey religious themes, including ethical advice to the laity.

<sup>94</sup> *Bkra shis rdzogs ldan bsu ba'i dung sgra*. The Tibetan reads: *drin chen pha lo ma lo/ gces phrug bu dang bu mo/ slob grwa mi gtong ma zer/ shes rig nor bu'i rgyan yin*.

Tibetans to cherish their inheritance from the past and the knowledge of their forefathers, not letting them needlessly let it slip away. As a more direct conduit for his message, this VCD also contains two of KJP's own songs (*mgur*): "Potent, Timely Advice" or *Dbang gi dus gam* (vocals: Gdu bhe) mentioned above in reference to its Buddhist framing of unity and harmony, and "The Distant Song of Ne'u Chung" or *Ne'u chung rgyang glu* (vocals: Skyid byams). In an evocative rendering in the style of a folk ballad (*dmangs glu*), the latter contains prophetic lyrics that play on the notion of dependent arising (*rtan 'brel*) to hint at possibilities ahead for Tibetans through seeds sown in the distant past.<sup>95</sup>

KJP's message is also echoed in VCDs produced by monasteries in nearby Padma County (Tib: *Padma rdzong*; Ch: *Banma xian*) across the border from Serta in Qinghai Province, exemplifying the second type of songs traceable to KJP, those in which the lyricist also composed a eulogy to KJP that appears on the same VCD. For example, "The Path Forward for the Future" or *Ma 'ongs pa'i 'dun lam* [sic], by Sprul sku Klong yangs of Rdo group chen dgon is reminiscent of KJP's rhetoric. The song encourages youth to study Tibetan history and civilization and "to live up to the name of pious Tibetans" (*chos ldan bod pa yi ming don mtshungs dgos*). While it is on a VCD dedicated to Sprul sku Klong yangs himself, titled *Divine Sound of the Definitive Meaning*, his only other song featured on the compilation is

<sup>95</sup> One verse must suffice to illustrate this masterfully evocative *mgur* by KJP to signal revival:

The blazing of experience and realization in the faithful son

Arose from the condition of compassion of the forefather lamas.

A sign that the teaching and practicing of dharma will flourish,

This is not the workings of dependent arising: it naturally comes about.

The Tibetan reads: *bu dad ldan rgyud la nyams rtogs 'bar/ gong bla ma'i thugs rje'i rkyen las byung/ chos bshad sgrub dar ba'i snga las red/ 'di rten 'brel ma bsgrigs rang 'grigs lags*.

dedicated to KJP.<sup>96</sup> Another example is “The Snow Land [Tibet]” or *Gangs can ljongs* (lyrics: Lung rtogs bstan ’dzin; vocals: Dar mtsho) on *New Spring Melody*, one of the popular new VCDs in 2007 due to its confluence of leading singers and high production value.<sup>97</sup> This song echoes *Heart Advice* by asking Tibetans to preserve the Buddhist teachings and Tibetan civilization for the 21<sup>st</sup> century. Moreover, in line with KJP’s dual emphasis on ethical and cultural markers of Tibetan identity, it casts Tibetans as “possessing uncontrived kindness” (*bcos min byams brtse mnga’*) and “holders of an invaluable civilization” (*rin bral rig gzhung ’chang ba*). There is an undeniable trail to KJP, since the same lyricist wrote both “Elegy” that references his slogan, *rang tshugs ma shor/ gzhan sems ma dkrugs*, and “Weeping Among Humble Creatures” which (as already mentioned) replicates the use of slaughterhouse footage from a video produced by Larung Gar.

Of the third type, the most striking is perhaps “The Way Forward for Tibetan Youth” or *Gangs phrug gi mdun lam* (lyrics: Blo ’jam dbyangs; vocals: Kun dga’), written by a Larung Gar monk who has teamed up with pop star Kun dga’ on several songs and one CD joint-venture dedicated to KJP.<sup>98</sup> It depicts a Tibetan youth in search of the path forward. In successive verses, the youth inquires at the base of a mountain, to a cleric in Serta (here “the golden valley” or *gser ljongs*), and finally to a village elder, receiving answers to his quest which are reiterated in a rap sequence following each verse. The path forward is given successively as remaining loyal to the snow mountains (i.e.

<sup>96</sup> “Lament for the Sole Refuge and Supreme Lama” (*Skyabs gcig bla ma dam pa’i gdung ’bod*) on the VCD, *Nges don lha yi rang sgra* as mentioned above.

<sup>97</sup> *Rigs zhen gyi ’bod pa*, produced by the Bka’ brgyud monastery, G.yu thog mam rgyal dgon. One cannot tell from the front cover that it was produced by a monastery; however it is apparent from the back cover and insert. Moreover, the first track provides a brief history of the monastery.

<sup>98</sup> See note 77 above. This song appears on all three of Kun dga’ albums listed above; the title is rendered variously as *Gangs phrug gi mdun lam*, *Gangs phrug gis mdun lam*, and *Gangs phrug mdun lam*.

Tibet), studying Tibetan culture and its traditional “sciences” (*rig gnas*), and following a unified path forward for all Tibetans (figured as relatives). This message is explicitly associated with KJP through the reference to Serta in the lyrics and by the fact that the music video was shot on location with the singer in front of the stupa at the county seat at Serta and also perched on the hill overlooking Larung Gar. As an example of the lyrics, the middle verse reads as follows:

ང་གངས་ལྷན་གཤམ་པའི་ལྗོངས་ལུ་ལ་མོང་།  
བན་མེར་མེ་ཞིག་ལ་བཟོ་གིང་བྱས།  
ཨོམ་གངས་མི་ཚོ་རྒྱུ་རྒྱུ་ཞིང་ཁྱིམ་དུ་ལམ་གང་ཤིང་ཟེར་ལ།  
ཁྱིམ་དུ་ལམ་ཤིག་པའི་གནས་ལ་སྤོངས་ལ་ལ་ཟེར།

Pop Verse:

I, a Tibetan youth, went to the land, Golden Valley [Serta],

And engaged in discussion with a cleric:

Oh, brothers and sisters of the snow mountains, what is your path forward?

Your path forward is to study the [traditional] sciences.

གངས་མིའི་ལ་རྒྱ་སྤྱོད་བའི་གངས་ལྷན་ལ་ཚོ་ལ་ལ་གསོལ།  
གངས་མིའི་ལ་རྒྱ་སྤྱོད་ཤིག་པའི་གནས་ལ་སྤོངས་ལ་ལ་ཟེར།

Rap Refrain:

A request to Tibetan youth, who remain loyal to the snow mountains:

Study the sciences allied to the snow mountains [i.e. Tibet].<sup>99</sup>

<sup>99</sup> In order to make sense of the lyrics, I have made a number of corrections from their transcription on the Tibetan subtitles from the music video: *bgrod gling* to *bgro gleng*,

Echoing the cleric's advice on the importance of studying Tibetan culture and its traditional sciences, the rap sequence is accompanied by footage of monks and nuns at Larung Gar engaged in debate. Surely this combination—edifying lyrics composed by a monk, a rap sequence performed by a Tibetan youth donning a “Rock Eagle” T-shirt, and images of traditional debate in the monastery courtyard—signals an idiosyncratic yet significant moment in the process of forging a distinctively Tibetan modernity, particularly the version valorized by KJP, namely synthesizing the ‘ancient’ and ‘modern’.

Messages of edification on the theme of the path forward are found on monastery-produced VCDs even where there is no discernable trace back to KJP. For example, “The Path Forward for Tibetans [into] the Future” or *Ma ’ongs bod kyi mdun lam* (lyrics: Thug dga’; vocals: Rig dga’)<sup>100</sup> calls for unity among Tibetans in exerting themselves to become “modern people” (*deng rabs can*). Though not explicitly associated with KJP, it conveys similar themes to what is found in *Heart Advice*, asking Tibetans to “endeavor to preserve worthy customs” (*srol bzang skyongs la rem*), “endeavor to engage in noble conduct” (*ya rabs spyod bzang rem*), “endeavor to promote harmony among Tibetans” (*bod mi’i mthun lam rem*) and “endeavor to study [Tibetan] culture or sciences” (*rig gnas slob sbyong rem*). Though it has a slightly more strident tone, the lyrics depart from KJP’s vision only in its insistence a single language (*skad yig gcig*) and single dress (*cha lugs gcig*), which implies sacrificing regional distinctions in dialect and dress in an attempt to forge unity. Without knowing the background of the lyricist, it is impossible to determine whether these similarities suggest any direct influence from KJP.

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*gangs red to gang red, gangs ri’i tsho to gangs ri tsho, khved kyis mdun lam to khved kyi mdun lam, rigs pa’i gnas to rig pa’i gnas, la rgya sbyong to la rgya skyong.*

<sup>100</sup> This song can be found on a VCD produced by Ser shul theg chen dar rgyas gling, titled *Kun phan zhi bde’i lam ston* (ISRC CN-H09-06-308-00/V.16).

Though they differ in emphasis and sophistication, songs about the path forward for Tibetans tend to draw from a similar set of themes.<sup>101</sup> This suggests that either KJP’s ideas have influenced numerous clerics in Rnying ma and Bka’ bryud monasteries in Tibetan areas of Sichuan and Qinghai Provinces (due to monks and nuns staying at Larung Gar and then returning to their home monasteries) or that a monastery-inspired discourse on progress is a broader trend, of which *Heart Advice* is a particularly cogent and compelling expression. Whichever is the case (and likely the answer is a bit of both), songs articulating the path forward for Tibetans are becoming a recurring feature on monastery-produced VCDs. The use of songs as a medium for conveying advice to the laity should come as no surprise, given that within the longstanding tradition of *mgur*, songs to edify the populace have frequently integrated religious themes with lyrical folk styles.<sup>102</sup> Moreover, *rdung len* in its modern Amdo expression emerged from the monastery Bla brang bkra shis ’khyil and became popularized in the 1980s.<sup>103</sup> After only a decade of Tibetan

<sup>101</sup> The quality of such songs ranges widely depending on the poetic skills of the author, vocal range and performance style of the singer, and budget for footage and editing the music video.

<sup>102</sup> Though *mgur* as a genre predates the introduction of Buddhism into Tibet (Padma ’bum 1997. Tun hong yig rnying gi mgur la dpyod pa’i sngon ’gro. In Helmut Krasser (ed.) *Tibetan Studies: Proceedings of the Seventh Seminar of the International Association for Tibetan Studies*, Graz 1995. Wien: Verlag der Österreichischen Akademie der Wissenschaften), from the eleventh century forward, Jackson suggests that *mgur* “came increasingly to refer to *religious* songs with an experiential component: they might be either reports of spiritual realization or instructions based upon such realizations, or a combination of the two” (1996: 372). Here is not the place to debate whether *mgur* are predominantly religious in nature; my point is simply that the edification of the laity by lamas through songs is longstanding. On a similar point, see note 93.

<sup>103</sup> For a brief account of the emergence of *rdung len* as a genre, see Mkha’ ’bum 2005. Bod kyi dmangs khrod glu gzhas skor gyi dpyad pa thar thor. *Mang ishogs sgyu rsal* 1(88), 79–92.

music videos,<sup>104</sup> monastery-produced VCDs have become a significant site for negotiating modern expressions of 'Tibetanness' in Buddhist terms. Not only have these VCDs become a means to promote KJP's image and message, but his legacy is helping to shape this emergent area of cultural production, due to the proliferation of songs and VCD compilations dedicated to him.

### Buddhist Modernism?

To conclude, let us consider to what extent the message of *Heart Advice* and its echoes in *rdung len* and pop music can be considered modernist. Bruce Lawrence has distinguished between modernity (the trappings of the modern world, such as mass media and technology) and modernism (the values and mindset deriving from it, particularly individualism and I would add scientism and humanism).<sup>105</sup> One of the valuable points that he makes with this distinction is that the use of mass media and other technology to disseminate religious messages does not, in and of itself, guarantee that the message is modernist. In light of Lawrence's distinction, one might be tempted to conclude that KJP is not a modernist, since the very thing that he advocates in *Heart Advice* is to make good use of the trappings of the modern world—to harness technology toward economic development and improved standards of living for

<sup>104</sup> Anna Morcom dates the first VCDs of Tibetan music in the PRC to 1998 (personal communication).

<sup>105</sup> Lawrence defines modernism as "the search for individual autonomy driven by a set of socially encoded values emphasizing change over continuity; quantity over quality; efficient production, power, and profit over sympathy for traditional values or vocations, in both the public and private spheres." Bruce Lawrence 1995. *Defenders of God: The Fundamentalist Revolt against the Modern Age*. Columbia SC: University of South Carolina Press, 27. For a brief analysis of Lawrence alongside other writers on religious modernism, such as Joseph Kitagawa, see Charles Jones 2003. Transitions in the practice and defense of Chinese Pure Land Buddhism. In Steven Heine and Charles Prebish (eds.), *Buddhism in the Modern World: Adaptations of an Ancient Tradition*. Oxford: Oxford University Press.

Tibetans—but to do so while maintaining a Buddhist episteme. However, to conclude thus would not adequately account for the revisionist element of KJP's approach in *Heart Advice*.

If we consider labels of 'traditional' and 'modern' to be discursive representations rather than transparent descriptions of social realities,<sup>106</sup> we can see that KJP is operating at the level of discourse in order to articulate an alternative modernity. In other words, he attempts to reconfigure categories, such as progress, and thereby reposition Tibetans vis-à-vis other nationalities of the world. By valorizing a "synthesis of the ancient and modern," KJP implicitly rejects the bifurcation of 'traditional' and 'modern' into mutually exclusive categories, a dichotomy that would condemn Tibetans to an impossible choice: to attempt to recreate an idealized pre-1950 Tibet or to assimilate into a wholly Chinese version of modernity. In KJP's terms, the first option would not be a "path forward" and the second would mean the extinction of Tibetan culture and Tibetans as a discrete nationality. In light of this, it would be more apt to think about *shades of modernism* in recognition of a gray zone in which leaders like KJP are attempting a synthesis that transcends this dichotomy.

KJP is surely to some degree a modernist.<sup>107</sup> Though he rejects a model of outright assimilation, neither does he promote a regressive isolationism. For

<sup>106</sup> Prasenjit Duara suggests this tact in his discussion of campaigns against religion in China since the May 4<sup>th</sup> movement: Prasenjit Duara 1995. *Rescuing History from the Nation: Questioning Narratives of Modern China*. Chicago: The University of Chicago Press, 90; as do anthropologists investigating alternative modernities, such as Bruce Knauf, who states that "modernity emerges as a discursive space within which notions of what it means to be traditional or modern are contested and negotiated." Bruce Knauf 2002. Introduction to Bruce Knauf (ed.) *Critically Modern: Alternatives, Alterities, Anthropologies*. Bloomington IN: Indiana University Press, 33.

<sup>107</sup> Germano's assessment of KJP that "the modern other may simply be too foreign for the traditional Terton to digest in Buddhist format" (1998: 94) refers to the content of

KJP, education is a vital means for preserving Tibetan culture and moving forward into the 21<sup>st</sup> century. And it should involve not only the study of Tibetan language and literature—without which for him “the path forward for Tibetans is finished”—but also learning other languages, so that a connection can be forged with outsiders and as a means to develop intellectually (*shes rig*) and economically (*dpal ’byor*).<sup>108</sup> Moreover, he promotes the study of science and technology to enable Tibetans to become more involved in commerce, manufacturing, construction, etc.<sup>109</sup> In these ways, though KJP sees materialism as insufficient to guarantee social welfare, he also does not seek to turn back the clock toward an idyllic, pastoral subsistence economy. Instead, in pragmatic terms, he insists that education provides the opportunity for a higher standard of living, so that Tibetans do not fall behind (*rjes lus*) in comparison with other nationalities.

Beyond this, in *Heart Advice*, KJP emphasizes the rational, social, ethical and ‘this-worldly’ dimensions of Buddhism, which are among the hallmarks of Buddhist modernism.<sup>110</sup> Evidence for this can be found in his arguments for Buddhist ethics as the foundation for social welfare, in his attempts to show the compatibility of Buddhism with scientific research, and in his emphasis on the rational character of Buddhist faith. Needless to say, his recommendations for the path forward concentrate on the ‘this-worldly’ fate of Tibetans as a people rather than soteriological or eschatological concerns, and the same could be said for *rdung len* and pop songs about the path forward found on monastery-produced VCDs. Indeed, the urgency of KJP’s concern with the preservation of Tibetan culture and adherence to Buddhist principles

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his revelations of treasures (*gtar ma*) and seems to predate, if not the publication of *Heart Advice*, at least the author’s knowledge of it.

<sup>108</sup> KJP 1995, 92–4. The Tibetan reads: *bod kyi mdun lam zad tshar ba red*.

<sup>109</sup> KJP 1995, 102–107.

<sup>110</sup> For a recent study of Buddhist modernism, see David McMahan 2008. *The Making of Buddhist Modernism*. Oxford: Oxford University Press.

derives from what he sees as a critical historical juncture for Tibetans and humanity at large.

However, KJP does not go as far in his social vision or empiricism as his Southeast Asian counterparts, like Ariyaratne in Sri Lanka or Buddhadasa Bhikkhu in Thailand, for whom respectively social work provides a path to liberation and ritual is rejected as irrational.<sup>111</sup> Indeed, when discussing the role of clerics as stewards of traditional sciences, KJP insists that the work of monks and nuns is primarily to study and only after that to engage in worldly work for society. And while Larung Gar is progressive in its set-up as an ecumenical educational institute, let us not forget that as a *gtar ston*, KJP is steeped in the visionary and ritual dimensions of Tibetan Buddhism. Furthermore, although he puts Buddhism in conversation with science, he does so principally to confirm rather than question its tenets. Thus, in the terms introduced by Luran Hartley, we might be tempted to say that KJP is a *conservative modernist*, who is “unwilling to toss much—if any—of the old.”<sup>112</sup>

Yet even this characterization falls short of capturing the way that KJP re-envision Buddhist principles and institutions in the process of asserting a Tibetan version of modernity. Recall that KJP recasts Buddhist ethics in social terms, bringing them into conversation with the state discourse on nationalities and global concerns over weapons of mass destruction. Moreover, by assigning the role to clerics as stewards of traditional sciences, KJP refocuses monasticism on scholastic pursuits over adherence to ritual. Though he harkens

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<sup>111</sup> Regarding the social vision of Ariyaratne and the aniconism of Buddhadasa Bhikkhu, see George Bond 1996. A.T. Ariyaratne and the Sarvodaya Shramadana Movement in Sri Lanka. In Christopher Queen and Sallie King (eds) *Engaged Buddhism: Buddhist Liberation Movements in Asia*. Albany, NY: State University of New York Press; and Donald Swearer 2003. Aniconism versus Iconism in Thai Buddhism. In Steven Heine and Charles Prebish (eds) *Buddhism in the Modern World: Adaptations of an Ancient Tradition*. Oxford: Oxford University Press.

<sup>112</sup> Hartley 2002, 5.

back to the 'ancient' roots of Tibetan civilization, KJP does not treat 'tradition' as if it were a static entity to be reproduced wholesale. Rather he constructs a version of the past that is useable for the future, simultaneously defining what is worthy and distinctive about Tibetan culture and underscoring the importance of preserving it for the 21<sup>st</sup> century. Thus it might be more apt to consider his approach to be reformist and constructive rather than conservative per se. KJP embodies a modernism that seeks continuity with the past, while nevertheless advocating reform, embracing scientific knowledge, and promoting economic development.

Though less radical than some Buddhist modernists elsewhere in Asia, KJP's reformist and modernist legacy may prove to be far-reaching. As we have seen, in new modes of dissemination, his message is being promoted not only through select speeches available on tape and video but also through a host of songs and VCD compilations eulogizing him. As a result of the proliferation of images, songs and VCDs referencing him—available not only in Mgo log but as far as Lhasa—KJP is himself becoming a symbol of Tibetan identity. Suffice it to say that he has spawned somewhat of a modernist movement among Larung Gar scholars with recent publications by Bstan 'dzin rgya mtsho on mind-science and by Tshul khriims blo gros defending rebirth with scientific research.<sup>113</sup> In these examples among others, we can see that KJP has created a significant cultural space within the PRC for Tibetan modernity to be negotiated in explicitly Buddhist terms.

<sup>113</sup> My thanks to Jann Ronis for calling to my attention *Klad chen dang sems kyi 'brel ba la dpyad pa* by Bstan 'dzin rgya mtsho. I have not yet had the opportunity to view this text and check the colophon for a date of composition. Previously, I mentioned the work by Tshul khriims blo gros, *Skye ba suga phyi'i nam gzhag srid pa gsal ba'i me long* (2004).

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