

Main Article

The Tibetan Culture Area: Contours and Civilizational Linkages

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Introduction

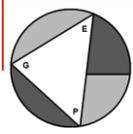
Caryn M. Berg in the *Encyclopaedia of Anthropology*, referring to Clark Wissler, defines a Culture Area as a geographical/cultural region whose population and groups share important common identifiable cultural traits, such as language, tools and material culture, kinship, social organization and cultural history (Wissler 2005). Therefore, groups sharing similar traits in a geographical region would be classed in a single culture area. Berg asserts further in the same article that this concept dwells upon identifying and “defining” a cultural core, and thus deliberating into the fragmented or nearby groups that share these traits that the core upholds or adapts or has adapted to.

Thus, within the contours of the same concept, Irving Rouse offers an insight into the reasons that lead to the emergence of a culture area, whereby people who live close by each other tend to influence each other's culture. They are the inhabitants of the same environment and geography so they easily adapt to it, and they also pass on the culture from one generation to another (Rouse 1957).

Guy Mercier, in his article 'The Geography of Friedrich Ratzel and Paul Vidal de la Blache: A Comparative Analysis' originally published in *Annales de géographie* in French, quotes Ratzel as saying that "in order to understand the role of Man and his destiny", it is necessary "to picture him on the land where is set the scene of his action". Thus, the story of the Tibetan Culture Area or the case study of the Tibetan Culture Area stands much in tune with these famous words of Friedrich Ratzel.

Ratzel, though he made a voluminous contribution to the field of Geography, remains controversial for his linkages with Nazism. He also developed the concept of *Lebensraum* or the idea of Living Space, which contributed significantly to the expansionist policies of Adolf Hitler. Though there are several notions of Culture Area, the concept is also critiqued as being a by-product of the concept of *Lebensraum*.

Thus, several scholars have made diverse and different additions to the idea of what a Culture Area is all about, what sort of categorization can take place using this tool of analysis, and if there is a Culture Area or not. Victoria Razzak provides a lucid discussion of several notions of the Culture Area concept given by different geographers in her article (Razzak 2007: 199-212). She defines Culture Area to be a “geographical region with one relatively homogeneous complex of activities, beliefs, values, and customs these traits may be employed to delimit and map a series of divisions of territory in which the occupants of each division are characterized by distinctive cultural features that differentiate them from those in other areas” (Razzak 2007: 199).



Thus as discussed above, a culture area has a certain “Core”, Razak describes this core as “Cultural Hearths” (Razzak 2007: 200). Thus the creation of a culture area is a result of the “diffusion of dominant cultural traits” of the hearth or the cultural centre to other neighbouring regions (Ibid: 200).

Thus, the concept of Culture Area in its articulate attire is a result of Clark Wissler’s study of the American Indian Ethnology (Clark Wissler 2005), according to Razak (Razzak 2007). She also presents the perspective offered by Melville Herskovits in advancing the understanding of the Culture Area concept; Herskovits asserts that “there is a historical connection between places, including many resemblances between the material culture, folklore, religion and social organization” (Herskovits 1924: 50-63).

What Constitutes the Tibetan Culture Area?

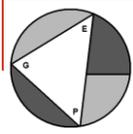
Here, in the context of the Tibetan Culture Area, historical connection is of great importance. Some of the landmarks of the historical connection between Tibet and the greater cultural area are people like the Sixth Dalai Lama who happened to be from Tawang in Arunachal Pradesh, India, and the Kalmyk monk Agvan Dorzhiev¹ whose activism as a diplomatic genius is of relevance.²

Even the *Cho yon* priest-patron relationship between Tibetans and the Mongols is associated with the historical linkage, in the same manner by which the reverence of the present Dalai Lama in all of these places that form a part of the Tibetan Culture Area speaks of the role of history in the formulation of the Tibetan Culture Area, and also in understanding of its present-day viability.

Elizabeth Bacon was one of the first scholars to draw a classification of ten different Culture Areas in Asia; this process of classification of the culture areas stretched over two major articles. The first six classifications are published in an article ‘Asia (Ethnology)’ (Bacon and Hudson: 523-525) in *Encyclopaedia Britannica* in 1945 and the next four classifications appeared in 1946 in the article “A Preliminary Attempt to Determine the Culture Areas of Asia” (Bacon: 117-132) in the *Southwestern Journal of Anthropology*. Hence these areas included:

- a) The Paleosiberian
- b) The South- west Asian Sedentary
- c) The Pastoral Nomadic
- d) The Chinese Sedentary
- e) Southeast Asia and Indonesia
- f) The Primitive Nomadic
- g) Korean
- h) Japanese
- i) Indian or Hindu, and
- j) Tibetan

Therefore, there is also a perspective that seeks to assert that any classification of a Culture



Area is a time-bound phenomenon and that a Culture Area is not independent of the notions of time and space. In the case of the Tibetan Culture Area, the point of establishing a connection is through mapping the period of the convergence of a particular area with the tenets of Tibetan Buddhism, since it was after the rise of Buddha Dharma that Tibet emerged as a seat of learning and religion, i.e. the Buddhist religion acquired a distinct character.

For example, there are certain tribal groups apart from the *Monpas* in Tawang who are followers of Theravada³ Buddhism, who do not necessarily constitute a part of the Tibetan Culture Area. Similarly the Lhasa *Kachee*, who are the Tibetan Muslims, many of whom have migrated to Kashmir and Ladakh, are an integral constituent of the Tibetan culture area, since Tibetan Islam has its own distinct character which is a result of the influence of the Tibetan culture. This also helps elucidate a submission that although the cultural or religious symbolism dominates as far as the Tibetan Culture Area is concerned, the phenomenon and classification is offered through a secular approach.

Buryatia, Tuva and Kalmykia

Located in the Eastern part of Russia, in Siberia, and bordering Mongolia, Buryatia is an autonomous republic within Russia. The Russian state in the early days treated the Buryat, the people of Buryatia, as outsiders, the provision for which also found a mention in the Speransky Statue in 1822. Owing to the attitude of the Russian state towards the indigenous communities, Buryats enjoyed only limited autonomy due to the interference of the imperialist forces within the Russian state (Andreyev 2003: 6).

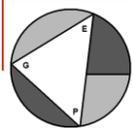
The Buryats are part of the vast pastoralist communities in Eurasia. They are of Mongolian origin and are believed to have migrated a few centuries ago from modern-day Mongolia to the peripheries of Lake Baikal. The Buryats are not a single homogenous community but rather a mixture of a few different tribal groups. As in Tibet, the Bon religion flourished before the arrival of Buddhism. Similar to Mongolia where Shamanism predominated, also in Buryatiya and amongst the Buryats elsewhere, Shamanic belief predominated before their convergence with the Buddha Dharma.

Dorzhiev: A legacy unmatched

Born in 1854 in the Russian Empire, Agvan Lobsang Dorzhiev was one of the most influential Buddhists of his time. His vision and his understanding of international politics, geopolitical alliances and the world order was impeccable in a manner that was characterized by a rare combination of theological and political wisdom. Dorzhiev was born to a Buryat couple at a very remote location in Buryatiya. His parents were pastoralists and were engaged in sedentary agriculture and were less into nomadic venturing.

In 1873, Dorzhiev left for Tibet. In the same year, he reached the centre of Mahayana Buddhist learning—Lhasa. As per the norms of the day, it was crucial to apply for the permission to stay and study in Lhasa from a ruling aristocracy.

Tibetans did not often encourage outsiders travelling into Tibet. Therefore, Dorzhiev's entry



into Lhasa was also a concern to Tibetans as he was a citizen of the Russian Empire. However, Dorzhiev was successful in getting religious training at the Drepung monastery. He returned back to Russia at the age of twenty-one, after two years. He was then ordained into the Dharma as a clergyman. Dorzhiev continued his intellectual exploration and academic deliberation and after about 15 years, he was awarded or bestowed upon him the title of *Tsanit Khenpo* (Master of Buddhist Philosophy).

It did not take a long time before Dorzhiev built a harmonious rapport with the Thirteenth Dalai Lama of Tibet. He was considered as one of the spiritual and temporal leader's most trustworthy advisors on matters concerning politics, philosophy, religious matters and foreign affairs. At that time, the British sought to expand the horizons of their empire across Tibet⁴ and China regularly transgressed Tibet's borders and adopted rather an emphatic stand on Tibet.

Hence Dorzhiev, then as the foreign minister of the Dalai Lama, proposed for Tibet to align with Russia and make Russia into Tibet's protectorate. Thus soon Dorzhiev travelled back to Russia, carrying the plea of the Thirteenth Dalai Lama and seeking negotiations with the Russian Tsar. In his meeting with Dorzhiev, the Tsar agreed to initiate diplomatic ties with Tibet and also grant protection to Tibet against the Chinese and the British. This new relationship between Russia and Tibet gave Buddhism a major boost to flourish in Kalmykia, Buryatia and Tuva.

A significant number of monasteries were built in these regions during this period which also served as centres of learning and spiritual education. Dorzhiev even convinced the Russian imperial authorities to build a Tibetan Mahayana Buddhist Temple in St. Petersburg. Buddhism was already recognized by the Russian imperial authorities as one of the official religions along with orthodox Christianity, Islam and Judaism.

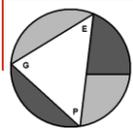
Then mass illness (typhus) gripped Kalmykia. Therefore, Buddhist Lamas advised Kalmyks to withdraw from the collectivized farms in order to contain the spread of disease. This advice did not go too well with the Soviet leadership and was dubbed as a counter-revolutionary act. Hence, large-scale arrests of Buddhist clergymen and nuns took place, especially in the following year in 1935 (Petrova 2013).

Thus Dorzhiev too was transported from Kalmykia to St. Petersburg and eventually arrested in 1937, after being viciously interrogated by the Russian intelligence service for what they perceived as his involvement in an imperialist project against the Soviet Union. He finally died in 1938 in a prison hospital in Leningrad.

Buddhism in the Soviet Union and beyond

It seemed that Buddhism in Russia had completely been annihilated, at this time. Monasteries were destroyed, Nunneries decimated, Buddhist schools closed, clergymen arrested, and many religious rituals banned.

Yet Dorzhiev's struggle to keep alive Buddhism in Russia benefitted from the geostrategical



situation: the large-scale defeats suffered by the Soviets in the Second World War. The Soviets needed to expand their war efforts, increase the public support for the war and mobilized large sections of the Soviet population for the devastating war.

At this point of time, the Soviet government adopted large-scale populist policies in order to win the hearts and minds of the people and garner support. Consequently, they liberalized their stance on Buddhism in the early 1940s. Thus, slowly and steadily Buddhism was once again on the path of revival. In 1946, the Central Buddhist Board of the USSR was set up. All in all, the Dhamma and practice of it was, at least temporarily, not illegal in Soviet Russia.

The geopolitical situation changed after the collapse of Communism; the world order had slowly shifted from a bipolar world towards a unipolar US dominated world. Russia was no longer a force that determined the destiny of nearly half of the globe as it used to do during the Soviet era. Russia seemed to drift toward a silent oblivion during the 1990s. It was within this wave of 'oblivion' that Kalmykia, Buryatia and Tuwa revived their age-old legacy and heritage, and the contact with their reference point. For centuries, the place of identitarian, cultural, architectural, and generally indeed civilizational reference for the Burhyats, Kalmyks and the Tuwans was not Moscow or Leningrad but Lhasa and Tibet in general.

Tibetan Buddhism in Exile

Today Lhasa is replaced by Dharamsala in India which is the home to the Fourteenth Dalai Lama in Exile. Even today large numbers of Buddhists visit Dharamsala to seek blessings of the Fourteenth Dalai Lama⁵ and the Lama Karmapa.⁶ Monasteries in Dharamsala, Bylakuppe and Mundghodare are nowadays filled with students from Kalmykia, Buryatia and Tuwa.

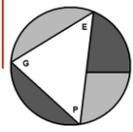
In addition, large numbers of nuns who too travel to India to gain religious and spiritual education. Every year the Fourteenth Dalai Lama addresses large numbers of Russian Buddhists and provides them with special teachings in Dharamsala.

Tibetan Buddhism in Mongolia

Tibetans and Mongols have been a part of the large nomadic empires across a vast stretch of Central Asia. Tibet and Mongolia have distinct if similar cultural characteristics. Nevertheless, it is important to understand how also Mongolia forms a part of the large stretch of the Tibetan Culture Area.

Mongolia and Tibet have been neighbours for centuries; while Buddhism gained momentum in Tibet it remained confined to the borders of Tibet and did not spread across Mongolia. It was only during the time of Godan Khan in 1240 AD, the era of expansionist Mongol policy across Central Asia, that the Mongols first converged with Buddhism. According to Tibetan chronicles, Godan Khan was the first person who invited Sakya Pandita to visit Mongolia.

This visit by Sakya Pandita was deemed an evangelical mission, as the Mongol emperor was convinced of Buddhism and wanted his people to also adhere to the Dhamma (John Powers 2004). Thus, this meeting also marked the beginning of the Priest-Patron relationship between the Tibetans and the Mongols. The Tibetan lamas were given a higher position in the Mongol



king's court as the Mongols considered the lamas as their teachers. Thus, Mongolia became a patron of Tibet while the religious head remained in Tibet.

After Godan Khan passed away, even his later successor Kublai Khan continued the same relationship with the Tibetans. It was in the 16th century AD that the Mongol king Altan Khan granted the title of the Dalai Lama to a Tibetan clergy, Sonam Gyatso. A few centuries later, Younten Gyatso became the fourth Dalai Lama of Tibet and he happened to be the great grandson of Altan Khan, the monarch who initiated this tradition.

Thus, during the initial period of Buddhist influence upon Mongolia, there were about 110,000 members of the Buddhist clergy in Mongolia (Mullin 2012: 188); thus it was only after the Third Dalai and his visit to Mongolia that the first Buddhist monastery was set up: it was enshrined with the name *Erdene Zuu* which means Hundred Treasures.

The person appointed by the Dalai Lama to supervise the monastic administration of the teaching was Younten Gyatso, a Tibetan clergyman and thus he was later recognized as the Khutukhtu (Sharad K Soni 2013). The tradition of Khutukhtus contributed greatly to the spread and the development of Buddhism in Mongolia. Communism and Buddhism co-existed in Mongolia like in Russia, and the communist tide also made its mark in Mongolia.

This was a time of massive religious suppression and Buddhism also was one of the worst victims of this repression in Mongolia. Stalin's Great Purge has had a heinous effect on the centuries-old Buddhist heritage in Mongolia. The Great Purge destroyed the majority of the monasteries in Mongolia and thousands of Buddhist clergymen were killed (Boldbaatar 2005: 386).

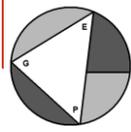
In this context, the revival of Buddhism in Mongolia was led by Lama Kushok Bakula who was also recognized as a Khutukhtu. He was deeply involved in facilitating a revival of the Buddhist tradition in Mongolia and was inclined towards resisting the religious repression. Though neither a Mongolian nor a Tibetan, Lama Kushok Bakula was from the region of Ladakh in India which also forms a part of the larger Tibetan Culture Area. After the collapse of communism in Mongolia, Bakula worked towards rejuvenating the age-old monastic institutions of Mongolia and facilitating their development (Wangyal 2003).

Today, there is a vibrant visibility of Tibetan Buddhist heritage in present-day Mongolia. Its monasteries function as alternative centres of learning and the Fourteenth Dalai Lama has made several visits to this region which forms a part of the Tibetan Culture Area.

Ladakh, Lahaul and Spiti

Ladakh has been widely known as "Little Tibet", again for its cultural, ethnic and religious linkages with Tibet. The majority of the ethnic Ladakhi population are followers of Tibetan Buddhism. Even before the arrival of Buddhism in Tibet and the subsequent conversion of Tibetan people from Bon to Buddhism, Ladakh had remained under the influence of the ZangZhung kingdom. ZangZhung as a language is now considered to be extinct.

Geographically, the ZangZhung kingdom is considered to be the Western part of Tibet and it was marked by the prevalence of the pre-Buddhist religion i.e. *Bon* religion. This was long



before the arrival of Buddhism in Tibet from India.⁷ And Ladakh has ever since been under political and cultural influence of Tibet while ecologically too Ladakh forms a part of the Tibetan plateau. The age-old legal mechanism has also been in conjunction with the Tibetan Law, a fact highlighted by Rebecca French in *The Golden Yoke: the legal cosmology of Buddhist Tibet* (1995), as cited by Fernanda Pirie (Pirie 2007: 10).

A closer look at the Tenth century AD timeline of Ladakh's history, one is acquainted with the fact that Ladakh was established as a "small principality" after Buddhism re-entered Ladakh under the Dar clan which witnessed increasingly strained relations between Ladakh's two prominent monasteries belonging to two different schools of Tibetan Buddhism, namely the Drukpa⁸ and the Gelugpa.⁹

Thus a history of Ladakh cannot merely be viewed from a singular nation-state perspective but rather a micro-historical approach needs to be adopted in order to read and understand the Ladakh which has had a centuries-old association with Tibet and the Tibetan people. While it is a borderland area for Tibet, it is also a borderland area for India.

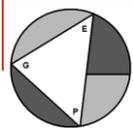
But if one were to further ascertain Ladakh's importance, it can also be viewed as a node that links to major edges, one being India and the other being Tibet. A majority of the Ladakhi people are followers of Tibetan Buddhism, and the architecture in the highlands of Ladakh is reflective of its association with Tibet. For Ladakhis in general, especially the followers of Tibetan Buddhism, Tibet remains a major reference point.

Even the Ladakhi script is very close to the classical Tibetan language, hence strengthening the further association between the two major civilizations. The spread of Buddhism in Ladakh is also associated with the Guru Padmasambhava who is believed to have travelled through Ladakh towards Tibet in about 8th century AD; and thus it was during this time that Buddhism emerged in Ladakh.

But there are also theories which assert that Buddhism also entered Ladakh during the 1st and the 2nd century BC when Ladakh was still a divided polity and different regions within Ladakh were controlled by the leaders of different warring groups, each of whom established an order which could be called a principality. These theories are correct in the sense that this form of Buddhism was largely a result of Ashokan diplomacy while it was Guru Padmasambhava, who as stated earlier, brought Mahayna Buddhism to Ladakh.

Thus after the 2nd century Ladakh largely remained aloof from Buddhist expansion and it was only during the 10th century with the advent of the Namgyal dynasty that Buddhism in Ladakh received state patronage. The state supported the cause of Buddhism in the mountainous region, which by now also was not as divided as it used to be a few centuries earlier.

The architectural reference to the legacy and the contribution of the Namgyal dynasty towards the spread of Buddhism in Ladakh is reflected in the magnificence of the Hemis monastery, which was rebuilt by Singay Namgyal in 1672. Another major monastery in Ladakh is the Thiksey monastery.



Mustang, Nepal

The early imagination of Tibet was characterized as a virgin civilization which stood in oblivion of the modern civilizations beyond its borders; a place in which there was no outside interference. The region of Mustang is representative of that Tibet which lost its glory in 1959. A tiny region in upper Northern Nepal, Mustang was the seat of the Kingdom of Lo, a small kingdom that was a part of the larger Tibetan kingdom and the Tibetan Culture Area.¹⁰

Thus Mustang also remained a kingdom within the Nepalese monarchy until the time when democratic reforms took place in Nepal whereby Mustang no longer enjoys the autonomy that it used to do in the earlier times.

The Kingdom of Lo was founded by Ame Pal who was also the first monarch of Mustang. He too promoted Tibetan Buddhism and thus Mustang's historic linkage with Tibet continued. While in areas like Kalmykia, Buryatia and Tuwa, there is revivalist Tibetan Buddhism, the Buddhist culture of Mustang has survived without a hindrance since its foundation. The criticality of Mustang's geographical position is reflected in the fact that Mustang is the central point in the Himalayas, across the trade route that passes into Tibet.

For centuries, the Mustang king's revenue was generated by the taxes that were levied upon the goods arriving from and into Tibet. It was only in more recent times that Mustang was annexed by the Nepalese and it became a part of Nepal. Yet according to the agreement made at that time, Mustang for many years enjoyed immense autonomy and Nepal acted as Mustang's suzerain. It was only in 2008 that Mustang was no longer recognized as an autonomous kingdom and has since then been made into a district within Nepal.

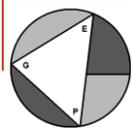
Bhutan

Songstan Gampo, the first King of Tibet somehow remains an omnipresent entity as far as the Tibetan Culture Area is concerned. Bhutan's own tryst with Buddhism and Tibetan Buddhism in particular, begins with the introduction of Buddhism by Songstan Gampo in Bumthang in Bhutan in 7th century AD. Before the arrival of Buddhism in Bhutan, the pre-Buddhist religion was also Bon religion, just as it was the case in Tibet as well.

Bhutan was later annexed by an Indian king called Sindhu Raja in 746 AD, and it was he who invited the Indian saint Guru Padmasambhava to Bhutan. Padmasambhava oversaw the construction of two major monasteries in Bhutan, and is credited with foundation of the Nyingmapa sect of Tibetan Buddhism.

The region of Bumthang in Bhutan was of great relevance since much of Bhutan was divided into factions and principalities. It was only in the 1870s that Bhutan had a clear centralized leadership with the advent of the king Ugyen Wangchuk. During the colonial era, Bhutan's foreign policy remained in the hands of the Colonial government in India, as settled by a Treaty of Punakha.

However, later on in 1947, Bhutan recognized India's independence and accordingly an accord was signed whereby Bhutan gained control of its foreign policy and complete independent action in other areas as well. Even while Bhutan was a monarchy, it had a



National Assembly; but more recently, during the last one-and-a-half decade, the Bhutanese polity has instituted reforms whereby it has embarked upon becoming a constitutional monarchy.

Bhutan is possibly the only country that also recognizes Tibetan Buddhism as the state religion. Dzongkha, the national language of Bhutan, is also part of the Tibeto-Burman family of languages. Therefore, Bhutan forms an integral part of the Tibetan Culture Area.

Sikkim

Home of the Lepcha people, Sikkim, like Mustang, remained an independent kingdom till 1947. As stated earlier, the unitary factor across the Tibetan Culture Area is Tibetan Buddhism and thus Sikkim's tryst with Tibetan Buddhism began when Guru Padmasambhava introduced Buddhism in Sikkim, in the same way as he had introduced it in Bhutan.

The founding monarch of Sikkim was Phuntsog Namgyal who hailed from Eastern Tibet. He founded the monarchical order in Sikkim in the year 1642 AD. It was also Namgyal who converted the indigenous people of Sikkim, namely the Lepchas, to Tibetan Buddhism. The pre-Buddhist religion of the Lepchas was Shamanism. Though it has also been argued that Lepchas are also settlers in Sikkim and they came and settled from Assam or Burma, another important constituent of the Tibetan Culture Area and region of Sikkim are the Bhutias.

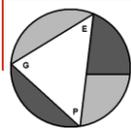
Bhutias are believed to have come from areas that fall in the north of Sikkim, and the Bhutias have traditionally been trading communities. Bhutia society is segregated and stratified on the basis of ownership of land; the most powerful among the Bhutias are those who own the land and they are given the title of Kazis. Yet nowadays, there is large-scale migration of the Nepalese into Sikkim and thus there is greater dominance of the Nepalese in Sikkim. The Nepali migrants, who settled in Sikkim, have also managed to get reservations and affirmative action benefits from the Indian government.

Nevertheless, Sikkim stands as a symbol of Tibetan culture and its civilizational heritage with large and beautiful monasteries. Since after 1959 when large number of Tibetans sought exile in India, the Indian government set up Tibetan refugee settlements across various places in India. One of them was also set up at Dhondupling in Sikkim.

Thus, for a large number of Tibetan refugees Sikkim has served as a refuge where the Tibetan exiled community has set up shops and business establishments. One reason accounting for the flourishing of the Tibetan refugee community is their shared culture, and heritage with the Bhutias and Lepchas of Sikkim, which makes a conducive environment for the Tibetans.

At this juncture, it should also be noted that Tibet still remains a reference point for the Lepchas and the Bhutias and they have also been recognized as Scheduled Tribes by the Indian government. When the 2008 Olympics took place in Beijing, there were large-scale protests inside Tibet.

But there were also protests happening across different parts of the world, many of them being led by the Tibetan Diaspora. In relation with these protests, renowned Indian footballer Bhaichung Bhutia refused to carry the Olympic Torch when invited for the Torch relay, as a



matter of principle and protest against the situation inside Tibet. Such is Tibet's connection with Sikkim and its people.

Tawang

Tawang in Arunachal Pradesh has historically been a part of Southern Tibet. Only in 1914 during the reign of the Thirteenth Dalai Lama was Tawang granted to India, the British Raj to be precise, by the delegates of the Dalai Lama at the Simla conference. At this juncture, an agreement was also reached on the location of the McMahon Line, which was agreed upon as the boundary between British India and Tibet.

While a closer look at Tawang's history reveals that within the tradition of the Dalai Lamas, even the Sixth Dalai Lama was from the Monpa community which is today recognized within the Indian Constitution as a Scheduled Tribe. Today this region presents an overview of Tibetan culture and tradition devoid of genocidal tendencies unleashed by the Chinese Communists in other parts of the Tibetan region which it claims to have liberated from feudal elements.

Among the people who inhabit the region of Tawang are the Monpas and Sherdukpens, who adhere to the tenets of Mahayana Buddhism.¹¹ Thus Monpas and Sherdukpen villages are home to some of the most magnificent Buddhist temple architecture which in the colloquial dialect is referred to as Gompas. There is a couplet by the Sixth Dalai Lama in which he requests the White Crane to lend its wings to him whereby he could then travel to a place not so far from Lhasa, to the valley of Siang. The valley of Siang is inhabited by the Membas and the Khamba tribal groups who are also adherents to the Buddhist faith (Sharma 1983: 34).

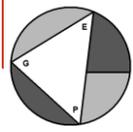
As far as the pre-Buddhist religion in the region of Tawang is concerned, the religion before the arrival of Buddhism was the Bon religion as well. Tawang came in the 11th century under the influence of the Buddha Dharma. Built in the 17th century AD, Tawang is also home to Asia's largest Buddhist monastery. The initial migration into Tawang was made by the followers of Buddhism, who hailed from the bordering regions of Bhutan.

The major religious schools within Tibetan Buddhism, which are largely influential in Tawang, are the Kagyupa¹², Nyingmapa¹³ and the Gelugpa. Although Tawang remains today an integral part of the Republic of India, it has been disputably claimed by the Chinese as part of China since Tawang has historical linkages with Southern Tibet.

Conclusion

As far as Tibet's current condition is concerned, the Culture Area concept has always remained an apt category of analysis to study the Tibetan culture. Though every culture exists in its own context, there is always a reference point, an identitarian reference point.

Thus, to many of those areas that constitute the Tibetan Culture Area, Tibet remains a reference point till this day. As Dawa Norbu has asserted in his work *Culture and Politics of Third World Nationalism* (N.N Osik 1996: 7-8), that in the case of Tibet, neither modernization nor Communism could separate the people from their primordality and primordial culture.



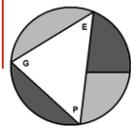
To the same extent, the Tibetan culture is also reflective of the same phenomenon; after years of struggle against Communism and religious repression, there was a revival of the primordial beliefs and culture after the fall of these intolerant regimes. Similarly, this was also the case as far as the Republic of Mongolia is concerned.

Therefore, the analysis of these regions through the Culture Area discourse signifies that it is after all the shared values, history and customs that are dominant in the society and politics of all these regions. Future research shall validate the need for such an extensive discourse approach on the Tibetan Culture Area, as to assert that even newer innovations and developments such as the Tibetan cyberspace are not independent of Tibet's past or present, but is a rather continuation of the struggle and the civilisational attire that has been evolving for centuries.

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Endnotes

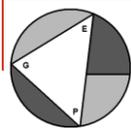
1. Dorzhiev (1854–1938) was a Russian Buddhist monk who belonged to the Gelug school of Tibetan Buddhism. He hailed from the Russian Buddhist region of Buryatia.
2. Dorzhiev was instrumental in the signing of the Tibet Mongolia Treaty of 1913 and was an exception in the then Tibetan polity as far as his skills in diplomacy and international relations are concerned.
3. School of Buddhism that draws its scriptural inspiration from the Tipitaka, or Pali canon, which scholars generally agree contains the earliest surviving record of the Buddha's teachings: see *Buddhist Religions: A Historical Introduction* (fifth edition) by R.H. Robinson, W.L. Johnson, and Thanissaro Bhikkhu (Belmont, California: Wadsworth, 2005), p.46.
4. Younghusband expedition to Tibet in 1903. The British had entered southern Tibet via Sikkim. See P. Landon (1905). *The Opening of Tibet* Doubleday, Page & Co., New York.
5. Dalai Lama is the title which is granted to the head of the Gelug school of Tibetan Buddhism. He occupies a central position within the Tibetan polity and is considered an incarnation of the *Avalokiteswara*. Thus, the Dalai Lama is also considered as the ruler of Tibet, the reverence for whom transcends the boundaries of sects of schools. There have been thirteen dalai Lamas while the present dalai Lama is the fourteenth in the order of the Dalai Lama and his name is Tenzin Gyatso.
6. *Karmapa* is the title granted to the head of the Karma Kagyu school of Tibetan Buddhism. Presently there are two individuals who stake a claim as being the authentic Karmapa. This paper essentially refers to Ogyen Trinley Dorje who has been recognized as the Karmapa by the Fourteenth Dalai Lama.
7. It was in the fifth century BC that some preliminary Buddhist scriptures were brought to Tibet and the translation of these and the spread of Buddhism in Tibet happened during the reign of Songsten Gampo in about 621 BC.
8. The Drukpa school within Tibetan Buddhism is a part of the larger Kagyu school within Tibetan Buddhism. In Tibetan the word *Dugpa* means a thunderstorm.
9. The school within Tibetan Buddhism established by Je Tsongkhapa. The institution of the Dalai Lamas belongs to the Gelug school of Tibetan Buddhism.



10. The Kingdom of Mustang was founded in 1380 by Ame Pal and remained closely connected with Tibet until about 1959.
11. A form of Buddhism which is widely practiced across the Tibetan Culture Area. Another branch of Buddhism being Theravada Buddhism.
12. A school within Tibetan Buddhism. Brought into Tibet by a saint called Marpa.
13. Nyingma is the oldest school within Tibetan Buddhism. The original Buddhist scriptures from Sanskrit were translated into Tibetan and these form a part of the Nyingma school.

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