Reconstructing Tradition and Social Engagement in Buddhist Studies:

The Foundation for the Preservation of the Mahayana Tradition

by

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Abstract

This dissertation responds to a state of affairs in Buddhist Studies in which forms of Buddhism their practitioners call "traditional" have been excluded from research, stereotyped in negative ways, or deemed modern. Two sub-fields of Buddhist Studies are affected: studies of contemporary Buddhism and of Buddhist social engagement. Overlooking traditional-identified forms of Buddhism when studying contemporary Buddhism or categorizing them as recently created or fundamentally reshaped in modernity has led to not exploring their histories, features, and activities, which differ from those of other contemporary Buddhisms. Overlooking traditionalist Buddhists' socially beneficial activities when studying social engagement has led to portraying modernists' engagement as all of Buddhists' engagement and not identifying features of engagement particular to traditionalists. Buddhist Studies' effective erasure of traditionalism has led both sub-fields to produce incomplete pictures of today's Buddhisms and Buddhists.

To address these gaps, ethnographic and textual research was undertaken on the Foundation for the Preservation of the Mahayana Tradition (FPMT), a large transnational Buddhist organization that describes its Buddhism as traditional. Research determined the bases on which people in FPMT label their Buddhism "traditional" and used these to develop a stipulative definition of "traditional Buddhism" that avoids past stereotypes and enables scholars to distinguish traditional from other forms of Buddhism active today. The dissertation proposes adding "traditional Buddhism" to the categories used in Buddhist Studies to describe contemporary Buddhism. Adding a category for traditional Buddhism, parallel to modern Buddhism and other categories, will make understudied types of Buddhism more visible, increasing research on them and improving understanding. The dissertation then addresses scholars' view that social engagement is undertaken only by modernist Buddhists by showing that FPMT is socially engaged and describing the impetus, nature, and features of its engagement. It then posits that a category of "traditionalist social engagement," with particular characteristics, can usefully be added to the study of engaged Buddhism. The dissertation thus finds its place within scholarship on contemporary Buddhism and Buddhist social engagement, adding data and advancing theoretical discussions in these areas as well as contributing new research on FPMT, an influential and globally active, but little-studied, Buddhist organization.

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Abbreviations

BGR	Buddhist Global Relief.
CEO	Chief Executive Officer.
COO	Chief Operating Officer.
FDCW	Foundation for Developing Compassion and Wisdom.
FGS	Fo Guang Shan.
FPMT	Foundation for the Preservation of the Mahayana Tradition.
LKPY	Loving Kindness Peaceful Youth.
LYWA	Lama Yeshe Wisdom Archive.
NGO	Non-Governmental Organization.
NKT	New Kadampa Tradition.
Skt.	Sanskrit.
Tib.	Tibetan.

Glossary

***Note**: Definitions in this glossary relate only to this dissertation. The terms described may have different meanings and connotations in other contexts.*

16 Guidelines. "The 16 Guidelines for a Happy Life" is a set of teachings that have Buddhist origins but have been secularized to suit non-Buddhist audiences. The 16 teachings fall into four categories: meaning (love, inspiration, principles, courage); thinking (humility, tolerance, forgiveness, delight); acting (kindness, balance, financial integrity, wise speech); and relating to others (respect, gratitude, loyalty, generosity).[1]

Bodhichitta (Skt.). Literally, "enlightenment-mind." Bodhichitta is the mind continuously aiming at awakening or enlightenment in order to benefit all beings. The term is often translated as "universal responsibility," a phrase much used by the Dalai Lama. In Mahayana Buddhism, bodhichitta is the defining quality of a bodhisattva (a being striving for, and close to, Buddhahood). Giving rise to bodhichitta is what makes a bodhisattva a bodhisattva.

Bodhisattva (Skt.). A being striving to attain enlightenment for the sake of all beings. Although the term is sometimes used broadly for anyone with great compassion, it specifically refers to beings who have bodhichitta continually present in their mindstreams, driving all their thoughts and actions.

Bodhisattva Vow. A vow to attain enlightenment or Buddhahood for the sake of all sentient beings. When pluralized ("bodhisattva vows"), the term refers to a set of ethical precepts which are considered foundational to attaining bodhichitta. Tibetan Buddhism counts 18 major precepts and 46 or 48 secondary precepts, depending on the source from which the precepts are drawn.

Cosmology. A worldview or social imaginary. Charles Taylor defines "social imaginary" in a way that represents "cosmology" as used here. Taylor calls it "the way that we collectively imagine, even pre-theoretically, our social life."[2] A cosmology takes in how people understand their physical, social, and spiritual universe including its components, inhabitants, nature, past and future, causal forces, mundane and transmundane aspects, and meaning. Cultures and religions generally express their cosmologies in sacred and moral teachings, archetypes, images, stories, and rituals as well as in what they understand as science and fact.[3]

The Buddhist cosmology the dissertation references is portrayed in Buddhism's wheel of life (Skt: *bhavachakra*; Tib.: *srid pa'i 'khor lo*). The wheel of life shows the system, known as samsara, in which living beings circle life after life, being reborn in different realms of greater and lesser suffering under the control of karma and delusion. Virtuous or skillful actions of body, speech, and mind produce good outcomes on this wheel, such as happiness and rebirths in human or higher realms; unvirtuous or unskillful actions produce suffering and low rebirths. By relying on Buddhist teachings and extinguishing the delusions that drive actions, beings are said to be able to attain freedom from the wheel of life: liberation or enlightenment.

A second way "cosmology" is sometimes used in Buddhist contexts, including within FPMT, is to label the geography of the universe as it was imagined in ancient India. In this

[1] Alison Murdoch and Dekyi-Lee Oldershaw, *16 Guidelines for a Happy Life: The Basics*. Great Britain: Essential Education, 2008.
[2] Charles Taylor, *A Secular Age* (Cambridge, MA, Belknap Press of Harvard University Press, 2007), 146.
[3] Taylor, *A Secular Age*, 171-175.

picture, the earth is flat and covered with an ocean surrounded by a ring of mountains. A central mountain called "Meru" is surrounded by continents and sub-continents. The dissertation does not discuss this geography and the term "cosmology" here does not refer to it.

The usage of "cosmology" to label samsara follows academic usage rather than FPMT's usage. Scholar of Buddhism Roger R. Jackson, for example, uses "cosmology" in this way.[4] The details of Buddhism's cosmology, as it is understood in the dissertation, appear in numerous canonical sources. Jackson provides a summary.[5]

Degenerate Times. In Indian culture, parts of which Buddhism has retained, the "Kali Yuga," sometimes called "degenerate times," is the current era, presented in Buddhist teachings as featuring cultural decay, moral wrongdoing, conflict, and the decline of the Buddhist teachings.

Dharma (Skt.). The teachings of the Buddha.

Eight Mahayana Precepts. These are eight vows generally taken for a 24-hour period as Buddhist practice, often on special days, to purify past wrongs and create merit in order to progress along the path to enlightenment to be able to help all beings. The eight vows are: not killing; not stealing; not engaging in sexual activities; not telling lies; not taking intoxicants; not sitting on high thrones or beds; not eating after noon; and not wearing perfume or jewelry or singing, dancing, or playing music.[6]

Five Lay Precepts. Five vows taken for life that today are often taken during a ceremony in which individuals take refuge in the three jewels as a way of affirming their commitment to Buddhism. Individuals taking refuge are not generally required to take these vows, or they may take some but not all. The vows are to avoid killing, stealing, sexual misconduct, telling lies, and drinking alcohol.[7]

Four Immeasurables. Four states of mind to which Dharma practitioners are taught to aspire: immeasurable loving kindness, compassion, sympathetic joy, and equanimity.

Ganden Tripa (Tib.). Literally, holder of the Ganden throne. "Ganden Tripa" is the title of the leader of the Geluk sect of Tibetan Buddhism. The role is merit-based and does not necessarily go to a tulku (reincarnate lama).

Geluk/ Gelukpa (Tib.). (Sometimes spelled Gelug/ Gelugpa). The newest of the four largest sects of Tibetan Buddhism, founded by Lama Tsongkhapa. "Geluk" is the name of the sect; a Gelukpa is a person adhering to it.

Geshe (Tib.). The highest level of educational qualification in the Geluk education system.

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[4] Roger R. Jackson, *Rebirth: A Guide to Mind, Karma, and Cosmos in the Buddhist World* (Boston: Shambhala Publications, 2022), 2, 17. Martin Baumann uses "cosmology" in the same way. Martin Baumann, "Protective Amulets and Awareness Techniques, or How to Make Sense of Buddhism in the West," in *Westward Dharma: Buddhism Beyond Asia*, eds. Charles S. Prebish and Martin Baumann (California: University of California Press, 2002): 59.

[5] Jackson, *Rebirth*, 17-107.

[6] Lama Zopa Rinpoche, "Kopan Course No. 03 & No. 04 (1972-73)," *Lama Yeshe Wisdom Archive #022*. 1972-73. https://www.lamayeshe.com/article/chapter/appendix-one-eight-mahayana-precepts.

[7] "Which Vows Are Which? A Beginner's Guide," *Mandala* (June 2006). https://fpmt.org/mandala/archives/mandala-issues-for-2006/june/which-vows-are-which-a-beginners-guide/.

Gyantse Kumbum (Tib.). A large and renowned stupa in Gyantse, Tibet, built in 1427, approximately 35 meters in height, with nine levels and many interior chapels.

Himalayan. People and cultures with ancestral origins in greater Tibet or other Himalayan areas influenced by Tibetan culture and Buddhism. Areas in which Himalayan people are found today include culturally Tibetan areas occupied by China as well as India, Nepal, and Bhutan. People referred to as "Himalayan" include those who are ethnically Tibetan, Bhutanese, Sherpa, Tamang, Gurung, Lhopa, Dolpopa, Kinnauri, Ladakhi, Zanskari, Monpa, and so on.

Kali Yuga (Skt.). See "Degenerate times."

Kyabje (Tib.). Literally, refuge lord. An honorific title for a highly respected lama.

Lam Rim (Tib.). "Stages of the Path" or "graduated path." The phrase refers to a way of presenting the sutric teachings of the Buddha as in an ordered series. Each of the main sects of Tibetan Buddhism has its own *Lam Rim* text and way of teaching the graduated path to enlightenment. All of the texts follow, in varying ways, a text by the Indian Buddhist master Atisha called *A Lamp for the Path to Enlightenment* (*Bodhipathapradīpa* (Skt.)). In the Geluk tradition, "*Lam Rim*" is also short for *Lam Rim Chenmo* (in English, *The Great Treatise on the Stages of the Path to Enlightenment*), a *Lam Rim* text composed by Lama Tsongkhapa (d. 1419) and used by Gelukpas.

Lama (Tib.). The Tibetan translation of the Indian term "guru." In Tibetan Buddhism, a lama is usually a teacher. Qualifications to be called "lama" vary by sect and geographical or cultural context. As a result, the term does not entail any single qualification. In the dissertation, the term "the lamas" refers to Lama Yeshe and Lama Zopa Rinpoche (the latter referred to throughout the document as "Rinpoche") together.

Lama Tsongkhapa (1357–1419). An influential Tibetan Buddhist monk, philosopher, and tantric yogi. He initiated the Geluk lineage and is author of significant philosophical and tantric commentaries as well as the work *Lam Rim Chenmo* (in English, *The Great Treatise on the Stages of the Path to Enlightenment*), which is widely used in FPMT.

Lay Person. An individual not ordained as a monk or nun. Lay people are not priests in Tibetan Buddhism, although they may play many religious roles: Dharma practitioners, lamas, yogis, Dharma teachers, oracles, and so on.

Lineage. "Lineage" refers to an unbroken line of transmission of Buddhist teachings and practices. Lineages are generally believed to go back to the Buddha or other enlightened being and to have been transmitted across generations from guru to disciple. In Tibetan Buddhism, recognized lineages have been documented for many centuries. Concerning Tibetan understandings of lineage, scholar of Tibetan Buddhism Annabella Pitkin writes, "Lineages are human chains of teacher disciple relationship through which ideas and practices are taught from one generation to the next, ideally bridging both time and geographic distance."[8] The term "lineage" thus has two main referents: the series of teachers and disciples that constitute the line;

[8] Annabella Pitkin, *Renunciation and Longing: The Life of a Twentieth-Century Himalayan Buddhist Saint* (Chicago, University of Chicago Press, 2022), 4.

and the teachings and practices that these individuals practice, master, and pass on. Lineage can refer to the line of transmission of broad set of teachings and practices, like the "Geluk lineage," or to the line of transmission of an individual teaching or practice, such as the "lineage of Geluk Mahamudra."

Maitreya Buddha. The Buddha of love as well as the future Buddha. In Tibetan Buddhism, it is said that Maitreya will appear on earth when the current Buddha's teachings have completely disappeared. He will then lead those connected to him to enlightenment. In the meantime, he is said to reside in Tushita heaven.

Monastic Law Codes. The sets of vows that monks and nuns take when they are ordained.

Monk. An ordained male.

Nalanda Tradition. The phrase "Nalanda tradition" is used by the Dalai Lama and others to refer to the philosophical tradition of texts, commentaries, and debates, primarily related to ontology and epistemology, that underpins all Tibetan Buddhism. The Dalai Lama and Thubten Chodron, in a jointly authored book, explain the Nalanda tradition as "the classical Indian Buddhist tradition stemming from the great monastic universities such as Nālandā, Odantapurī, and Vikramaśīla. This is the Buddhist tradition the Tibetans and to some extent East Asians inherited from classical India."[9]

Nalanda University. Nalanda was a large monastic university in medieval India, located in what is now Bihar state. It was established in the late 5th to early 6th century C.E. and operated as a centre of scholasticism for approximately six hundred years. At its peak, it is said to have hosted as many as 30,000 monk and nun students, not only from the Indian subcontinent but also from Greece, Persia, China, and Tibet. In 1203, the monastery and its vast library were destroyed by Muslim invaders. Nalanda's last abbot and some surviving monks are said to have fled to Tibet. The ruins of Nalanda are now a UNESCO heritage site.[10]

Nun. An ordained female.

Paramita (Skt.). The paramitas are the perfections of body, speech, and mind in which bodhisattvas are expected to train. In Tibetan Buddhist traditions, six paramitas are identified: generosity, ethical discipline, patience, joyous effort, concentration, and wisdom.

Padmasambhava (Skt.). Also known as "Guru Rinpoche" or "precious teacher" in Tibetan, Padmasambhava is said to have been a great yogi who visited Tibet in the 6th century to help establish Buddhist teachings there. He is viewed in Tibetan culture as an important figure in the transmission of Buddhism to Tibet and as the founder of the Nyingma lineage.

Puja (Skt.). A Buddhist practice that honours or calls on a Buddha or other sacred figure. In FPMT, this term is used broadly to refer to rituals and other religious services.

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[9] Bhikṣu Tenzin Gyatso and Bhikṣuni Thubten Chodron, *Approaching the Buddhist Path* (Somerville, MA: Wisdom Publications, 2017), xix.

[10] James Blumenthal, "The Seventeen Pandits of Nalanda Monastery." *Mandala* (July-September 2012). https://fpmt.org/mandala/archives/mandala-for-2012/july/the-seventeen-pandits-of-nalanda-monastery/; Jeremy Russell, "Nalanda—Site of the Great Monastic University." *Teachings from Tibet*, August 8, 2018. https://teachingsfromtibet.com/2018/08/08/nalanda-site-of-the-great-monastic-university/.

Realization. Lama Yeshe Wisdom Archive defines "realization," in Buddhist contexts, as follows: "A mind that holds a stable, correct understanding of a Dharma subject, such as emptiness, that effects a deep change within the continuum of the person. … Realization begins with a conceptual understanding then progresses toward a non-conceptual direct experience where the mind and its object become indistinguishable, like water into water."[11]

Rinpoche (Tib.). Literally, "precious one." It is a term of respect for any reincarnate or other highly respected lama. When used on its own in the dissertation, it refers to Lama Zopa Rinpoche.

Seven Point Mind Training. A well-known set of Buddhist teachings in the category of "mind training." The Seven Point Mind Training is attributed to Indian luminary Atisha (d. 1054) and was written down by Tibetan practitioner Geshe Chekawa (d. 1175). Many English translations are available of this set of teachings as well as commentaries on it.

Stupa (Skt.). In Buddhism, a stupa is a structure near or around which Buddhist practices may be done. Stupas can have various shapes and sizes and often contain relics or other sacred items. They are symbolic representations of the enlightened mind.

Thangka (Tib.). A Tibetan Buddhist painting on cloth, generally depicting a buddha, bodhisattva, deity, yogi, or other respected being, along with his or her mandala and entourage. Thangkas are often used in meditation or other practices.

Three Jewels. The Buddha, Dharma, and Sangha, Buddhism's three main objects of refuge or reliance.

Tulku (Tib.). A reincarnate lama, i.e., an individual considered to be the reincarnation of an earlier individual who has passed away, generally a lama or other advanced practitioner.

Venerable / Ven. A respectful title for an ordained person (a monk or nun).

Yogi (Skt.). In Buddhism, an advanced practitioner, generally of tantra. Female yogis are often called "yoginis" but here the term "yogi" is used for both men and women.

[11] "Realization." *Lama Yeshe Wisdom Archive*. https://www.lamayeshe.com/glossary/realization. Accessed September 9, 2024.

Figure 1. “Tradition in Modernity.” Lama Zopa Rinpoche, Khen Rinpoche Geshe Chonyi, and senior Kopan monks during Padmasambhava incense puja, Kopan Monastery, Nepal, March 2020. Photo by Ven. Lobsang Sherab.[12] Used with permission.

Introduction

Background

March 2020. On a hill above the Kathmandu valley in Nepal, a lama dressed in red and yellow sits cross-legged on a dais. Amid the scent of incense and the sound of chanting, he leads a ritual aimed at helping the world cope with Covid-19.

Within hours, an American employee of the lama’s international organization, the Foundation for the Preservation of the Mahayana Tradition (FPMT) writes an article in English about the ritual and uploads it, along with photos, to FPMT’s website. With the touch of a key, she also emails the article to thousands of people around the globe and posts it on Facebook, reaching several hundred thousand people who follow the lama’s Facebook page. Within a couple of days, an FPMT employee in Austria has edited a video of the ritual and placed it on the lama’s YouTube channel; the American employee in turn embeds the video into the online article. From whichever of these sources people find out about the ritual, they receive information on Buddhist practices—rituals, prayers, meditations—they can also do to help ease the pandemic and to use it to train their minds in compassion. This information is soon translated

[12] “High Lamas in Kathmandu Perform Coordinated Incense Puja to Mitigate COVID-19,” *Lama Zopa Rinpoche News, FPMT*, March 28, 2020. https://fpmt.org/lama-zopa-rinpoche-news-and-advice/lama-zopa-rinpoche-news/high-lamas-in-kathmandu-perform-coordinated-incense-puja-to-mitigate-covid-19/.

into many languages, and Buddhists of varying cultural backgrounds around the world do identical practices by following liturgies produced by a central office in the US.[13]

In this flurry of activity are mingled acts conventionally viewed both as traditional and modern. Doing rituals to combat illness is an ancient practice that forms part of the lama's lineage. The lama himself, Lama Zopa Rinpoche (1945-2023),[14] (referred to here as "Rinpoche") practiced and taught Tibet's Geluk lineage; he has been called an heir of the great lamas of the past by Tibetan religious leaders such as the Dalai Lama. The monks in the photo are ordained with vows going back, potentially, two and half millennia. The monastery—Kopan—where the ritual took place is known for its adherence to tradition when performing rituals.[15] The ritual the lama led was chosen as most effective by a woman considered to be an oracle speaking in the voice of a goddess-protector. The ritual itself harks back to a centuries-old Tibetan custom of petitioning 8th century Indian saint Padmasambhava for help. The motivation of the ritual—benefiting others—is longstanding in Buddhism.

Still, modernity surrounds the ritual. One feature of modernity is surely **globalization**. Rinpoche, though born in Nepal, was a citizen of the US who spoke English fluently; he gave Buddhist teachings mostly in English but sometimes in Tibetan. He flew to Nepal by plane before the pandemic. The oracle fled Tibet to escape its occupation by the modern Chinese army. She now jets around the world giving teachings and advice.[16] The monastery where the ritual took place educates hundreds of young people, teaching the government curriculum as well as Buddhist topics. It also operates a dialysis clinic and other social projects. The funds for these activities come not only from the local faithful but also from supporters around the globe who use contemporary methods to send money rapidly and safely. Also typical of the modern era, according to sociologists of religion, is the **standardization of religious practices**.[17] In FPMT, across languages and cultures, the lama's followers received the same information on practices to ease the pandemic. Wherever they live, they also receive the same Buddhist teachings (in various languages); use the same liturgies and ritual objects; honour the same past luminaries; design shrine rooms and temples with similar aesthetics; and make the same movements when they bow, use hand gestures, and make offerings.

FPMT's **operating methods** are also of the kind oft-perceived as modern: the organization runs in English, not Tibetan, and uses up-to-date management, accounting, legal, communications, and fundraising methods. It relies on the internet to operate virtually, make teachings available globally, and disseminate news and information. It uses social media to bind together a network whose components and members are separated in time zones, space, and culture. Consciously or not, by circulating news, stories, information, and photos like this one, FPMT reinforces a Buddhist worldview as well as narratives about its lamas, lineage, history, social roles, and "family feeling" that all guide, motivate, and connect followers.[18] Modern means have been essential to creating and sustaining its worldwide network.

FPMT is **socially engaged.** The photo may leave the impression that FPMT's only ways of helping others are ritual or prayer. Yet FPMT is also involved in health care, schools, food, elder care, chaplaincy and hospice services, prisoner support, animal care, wellness activities,

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[13] "High Lamas in Kathmandu."
[14] Referred to throughout this dissertation as "Rinpoche."
[15] The monastery's name is Kopan Ogmin Jangchub Choling. It is widely known as "Kopan Monastery."
[16] Her full names are Khandro Kunga Bhuma and Rangjung Neljorma Khadro Namsel Drönme.
[17] See, for example, David Lehman, "Religion and Globalization," in *Religions in the Modern World: Traditions and Transformations*, eds. Linda Woodhead, Christopher Partridge, and Hiroko Kawanami (NY: Routledge, 2002), 416-418.
[18] The expression "family feeling" was often used by FPMT founder Lama Yeshe (1935-1984) to describe how people associated with FPMT should feel for and treat one another. It remains in common usage.

and disaster relief. Many of the monks seen performing a ritual in the photo, for example, spent weeks distributing aid after Nepal's 2015 earthquake. Scholars often claim that Buddhists did not undertake these kinds of activities before the modern era.

The photo's context thus includes technologies, structures, and activities that scholars and others often consider modern. Global fundraising supports the monastic location; the monks pictured participate in social projects as well as study and rituals; a monk took the photo on his smartphone; a woman uploaded it to the internet in a once male-only monastic office; lay people in the US contextualized it in English and posted it on the web; and around the world, people did the same religious practices in response to it. And outside the photo came another response by the lama to Covid-19, also very up-to-date: getting vaccinated.[19]

In sum, although the photo depicts a ritual that people might call "traditional" because it has a long history, the photo's frame is surely modern. Framed in premodern Tibet, the same photo would not raise an eyebrow. Equally, a frame involving smartphones and Facebook would suit a photo of lay people meditating on a beach. But here, frame and photo conflict, prompting questions. Is the Buddhism depicted as traditional as it looks? Can a form of Buddhism even be traditional today? Do adaptations to contemporary circumstances bring an end to tradition, or can ways of being Buddhist change in new times and places while the Buddhism practiced does not? Given the impacts of modernity on all Buddhists, on what bases can one form of Buddhism be considered more traditional than others? And what about helping others: how do rituals invoking long-dead saints intersect with running a dialysis clinic, disaster relief efforts, and schools teaching math and science? Overall, what does it mean for Buddhists to be traditional today?

The Topic and Why it Matters

This dissertation responds to circumstances in Buddhist Studies. Studies of contemporary Buddhism today tend to leave out traditionalist Buddhists, stereotype them negatively in ways that echo the field's Orientalist history, deem them socially disengaged, and/or characterize their Buddhism as new and modern despite its observable differences from modernized Buddhisms. This state of affairs has led to a lack of research on Buddhists who consider their Buddhism traditional and a consequent lack of data to challenge such portrayals. Unresearched topics include the factors that distinguish their Buddhism from other contemporary Buddhisms as well as their social engagement. Yet even though depictions of contemporary Buddhism effectively erase traditional-appearing forms, Buddhists who call their Buddhism "traditional" exist in substantial numbers, maintain flourishing organizations, and operate numerous social projects.

Gaps in data and analysis affect two sub-fields of Buddhist Studies: studies of contemporary Buddhism and of Buddhist social engagement. Overlooking traditional-identified Buddhisms when studying contemporary Buddhism, or categorizing as them new, modern, or modernist, has led to not exploring the history, characteristics, and activities that differentiate them from other contemporary Buddhisms. Overlooking those who practice such Buddhisms when studying social engagement has led to portraying Buddhist modernists' engagement as the entirety of Buddhists' engagement and not examining the extent and nature of traditionalists' engagement, including ways in which it differs from modernists' engagement. The outcome is incomplete and potentially flawed pictures of today's Buddhisms and Buddhists.

This dissertation aims to intervene in both sub-fields by presenting research on FPMT, a transnational organization that describes its Buddhism as traditional. Research examined the bases on which people in FPMT label their Buddhism "traditional": its substantial continuity

[19] "International Office News March 2021." *FPMT News & Media, FPMT*, March 2021, https://fpmt.org/media/newsletters/archives/fpmt-international-office-news-march-2021/.

with the past and its retention, unchanged, of a longstanding core of beliefs, teachings, and practices. The depth of their Buddhism's continuity with the past, and the features they identify as core to tradition, are largely unshared with modernized Buddhisms. Their perceptions of what constitutes "traditional Buddhism" contributed to the development of a stipulative definition of it that the dissertation proposes adding to categories used in Buddhist Studies to describe contemporary Buddhisms, such as modern and postmodern. A parallel category for traditional Buddhism can be expected to make understudied types of Buddhism more visible to scholars, prompting more research and improved understanding. The dissertation then addresses a view common in scholarship that only modernist Buddhists are socially engaged by demonstrating that FPMT also engages socially. The dissertation describes the impetus, nature, and features of FPMT's engagement, and, based this data, posits that a category of "traditionalist social engagement," with particular characteristics, can usefully be added to the study of engaged Buddhism. The dissertation thus finds its place within scholarship on contemporary Buddhism and social engagement in Buddhism, advancing theoretical discussions in these areas as well as contributing new research on FPMT, a globally active, but little-studied, Buddhist organization.

Why FPMT? FPMT seeks to preserve tradition while adapting its practice to contemporary times. It is also socially engaged. These characteristics make it an ideal case study for examining traditionalism today and its intersection with social engagement. As well, it is a large and influential organization, with affiliated Dharma centres, projects, and services around the world. It is also a major publisher of Buddhist texts in several languages with a vast online presence, so its dissemination of Buddhist teachings goes well beyond in-person activities in its more than one hundred Dharma centres. Its affiliates, publications, and online offerings have touched hundreds of thousands of lives. As well, it does not serve only one culture. Its centres and monasteries serve the three main groups practicing Tibetan Buddhism today—people of Himalayan, East Asian, and European descent—as well as others such as South Asians and the increasing diverse populations of Western countries. It is endorsed by the Dalai Lama and is a respected actor in the world of Tibetan Buddhism outside Tibet; its contributions to the survival and flourishing of the Geluk lineage have been publicly acknowledged.[20] Yet because scholars tend to treat contemporary Buddhism as co-extensive with modern and postmodern Buddhism, few have researched it.[21] As a result, FPMT is neither well-known nor well-understood in academia. That is one reason the core of the dissertation begins with a summary of FPMT's history and activities: likely necessary information.

The dissertation thus fills several gaps. For scholars of Buddhism, it demonstrates that a form of Buddhism better suited to be called "traditional" than modern, postmodern, or other labels thrives today. It also shows that forms of Buddhism with significant continuity with the past, transmitting old worldviews and practices, were not all extinguished or modernized as many scholars assume. It defines "traditional Buddhism," allowing a certain form of Buddhism to be distinguished from modern and postmodern Buddhisms as well as from retraditionalized Buddhisms that have old features but not unbroken lines of transmission. On social engagement, it reveals the engagement of one unstudied group of engaged Buddhists; adjusts theoretical

[20] "Long Life Puja and Gratitude Award Offered to Lama Zopa Rinpoche at Sera Je Monastery," *Lama Zopa Rinpoche News, FPMT*, October 18, 2022, https://fpmt.org/lama-zopa-rinpoche-news-and-advice/long-life-puja-and-gratitude-award-offered-to-lama-zopa-rinpoche-at-sera-je-monastery/.

[21] "Buddhist modernism," "modernist Buddhism," and "modern Buddhism" (along with "postmodern Buddhism") are all etic terms—Buddhist groups do not generally use them. Buddhist movements are called "modern" or "modernist" by scholars based on displaying certain features, including the abandonment of longstanding cosmologies, a focus on meditation as the core practice, laicization, and democratic structures. Richard K. Payne, "Editor's Introduction," in *Secularizing Buddhism: New Perspectives on a Dynamic Tradition*, ed. Richard K. Payne (Boulder: Shambhala Publications, 2021), 9-10.

approaches to Buddhist social engagement to take its activities into account; shows that there are Buddhists for whom unmodernized teachings support engagement and do not entail disengagement; and shows that traditionalist Buddhists today may have their own form of social engagement. The latter result adds a new dimension to scholarship because scholars, not having researched traditionalist Buddhists' engagement, have not yet examined the possibility of a traditionalist form of engagement nor identified its possible features. For scholars of other religions or religion as a cultural phenomenon, the dissertation offers data and analysis that can contribute to theorizing on topical issues, including how religious organizations preserve ancient traditions in contemporary circumstances and how they work for the benefit of society.

What does the dissertation offer people outside academia? Those associated with FPMT may be intrigued to read the thoughts and words of their Dharma family around the world on a variety of issues. They may see their own organization from a new perspective, one that contextualizes and describes the development within it of ideas and activities that bring together longstanding Buddhist teachings, contemporary ways of life, and activities to benefit others. As well, the dissertation may contribute to discussions about the ways FPMT's international office and affiliates address certain tensions: between traditional Buddhism and today's ways of thinking and living; central authority and local autonomy; and formal Dharma practice and social engagement. Finally, people associated with FPMT may be glad to see, at last, a scholarly source that recognizes their social engagement. For people outside FPMT, the dissertation describes many aspects of one important Buddhist organization today. A portrait of this type, even though partial, is rare. Readers may find it provides an interesting glimpse into how other people—sometimes their friends and neighbours—think and live.

Dissertation Overview

The dissertation begins with "Chapter 1: Research Scope and Methods." The chapter describes the scope of research, research design and methods, and data sources, and presents the ethnographic sample and its characteristics. "Chapter 2: The Foundation for the Preservation of the Mahayana Tradition (FPMT): Context, Profile, History, Activities, Scholarship" introduces FPMT. Following that are two chapters on tradition: Chapter 3: Tradition and Traditionalism in Buddhist Studies: Scholarship, Debates, and Intersection with FPMT," and "Chapter 4: Tradition and Traditionalism in FPMT." The next two chapters address social engagement. "Chapter 5: Social Engagement in Buddhist Studies," explains how Buddhist Studies has addressed Buddhists' engagement and why traditionalist Buddhists like those in FPMT have been left out of theorizing and research. "Chapter 6: Social Engagement in FPMT" has three sections: profiles of five socially engaged individuals; a history of approaches to engagement in FPMT discussing how these have evolved; and descriptions of many FPMT social projects. "Chapter 7: A Traditionalist Social Engagement?" shows that a traditionalist form of Buddhist social engagement can be identified, and, drawing on data on FPMT, explores features of engagement that can be called "traditionalist." "Chapter 8: Conclusion," draws together research and analysis to conclude that "traditional Buddhism" can be a useful label for forms of Buddhism like FPMT's, that traditionalist Buddhists can be socially engaged on the basis of traditional Buddhist teachings, and that there is, today, a form of Buddhist social engagement suitable to be labeled "traditionalist." The chapter also proposes areas in which further research could generate new knowledge about contemporary Buddhism, ways Buddhists preserve tradition today, and Buddhists' social engagement.

Tradition and Legitimacy

In Buddhist and Buddhist Studies contexts, sometimes a claim that a school of Buddhism, teacher, teaching, or practice is "traditional" constitutes, or is assumed to constitute, a claim that it is legitimate, and further, that it is spiritually effective. When this occurs, tradition and legitimacy may be treated as co-extensive.[22] However, tradition, legitimacy, and effectiveness need not be co-extensive. A certain history may not entail legitimacy, legitimacy may be established based on factors other than history or tradition, and legitimacy may not entail effectiveness.[23] These concepts can all be separated.

This dissertation neither claims that forms of Buddhism labeled "traditional" are legitimate (or effective) nor that forms labeled "modern" or with any other name are illegitimate (or ineffective). It is not intended to either support or undermine any claims to legitimacy or effectiveness. Further, it is not aimed at substantiating FPMT's claim that its Buddhism is genuinely traditional; it shows the views of people in FPMT only. To investigate the genuineness of the traditionalism of a form of Buddhism, in reliance of the definition of "traditional Buddhism" it presents, would also require researching its history. Instead, the dissertation's aim, with respect to tradition, is first to create a stipulative definition that can separate contemporary "traditional Buddhism" from other forms of contemporary Buddhism in a context in which all Buddhists are affected by modernity, and second to understand how one expression of Buddhism that appears to meet the criteria of that definition functions today in certain fields of endeavour.

Before proceeding, it is likely worthwhile to briefly state the definition of "traditional Buddhism" that the dissertation works toward establishing: a form of Buddhism that embodies an unbroken lineage of core teachings and practices handed down over generations going back to premodernity, and that retains Buddhism's cosmology along with teachings and practices expressing that cosmology, given that this cosmology is the basis for those core teachings and practices.

Authorship, Positionality, Scholarship

In Religious Studies, scholars generally indicate whether they are insiders or outsiders to their subject in case their positionality impinges on their purported objectivity, shapes their output in theological ways, enhances or limits their access to information and understanding, or otherwise affects their work. In ethnography, another reason for discussing positionality exists: ethnographic data comes from interactions among ethnographers and subjects. Data are influenced by how ethnographers pose questions, respond to answers, add follow up questions, perceive what they observe, and write down details. Further, ethnographers' backgrounds and experience with the researched milieu can affect the sample (the selection of invitees, their decision to participate, and the sites visited) and through the sample the data, as well as their understanding and analysis of the data.

This dissertation is not entirely a work of ethnography; it relies on other sources of data as well. Nevertheless, readers must be alert to the role of the ethnographer in producing, not just

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[22] What is legitimacy? McMahan discusses the concept in broad ways, mingling ideas about meriting the label "Buddhism," being popular, communicating with multiple audiences, being faithful to the past, gaining political support, and attracting prestige. David L. McMahan, *The Making of Buddhist Modernism* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2008), 254-257. "Legitimacy" in this dissertation, however, refers only to the perceived validity of Buddhist teachings and practices on the basis of their presumed origination from a particular exalted figure, such as the Buddha, and their uninterrupted transmission to the present.

[23] e.g., McMahan, *The Making*, 254-246.

gathering, ethnographic data. That role does not necessarily make the data unreliable. Data collection offers some safeguards. For example, in this case, many people were interviewed to ensure that conclusions were supported by comments from multiple interviewees. As well, interviewees, including some of FPMT's leaders, saw the research results and had an opportunity to comment on them. Finally, information obtained through ethnography was often confirmed by published sources.

Nevertheless, my own background should be disclosed. Like many Buddhist Studies scholars, I cross the boundaries of insider and outsider. I am connected to the world of Tibetan Buddhism, having studied the Tibetan language, spent time with lamas and in monastic environments, and lived among Tibetan and other Himalayan Buddhists. I am also no stranger to FPMT. I first encountered Tibetan Buddhism and Rinpoche in 1996 at one of the famous "November courses" at FPMT's Kopan Monastery. Since then, I have sometimes learned and practiced Dharma within FPMT affiliates, although I have also done so in other environments. Many years ago I was the volunteer manager for several months of Root Institute's school in Bodh Gaya, one of the sites I observed during this research, and more recently I worked for a year for FPMT's international office. I also have a divinity degree from Maitripa College, an FPMT affiliate. I have friends within FPMT, read some of its publications, and respect its lamas. Yet as the years have passed, my contact with FPMT has been intermittent and I have never joined or regularly attended any of its Dharma centres. My contact with FPMT was also limited to certain places and times. I had no contact with certain regions, like Southeast Asia, East Asia, and Australia, nor was I present in FPMT's early days in the 1970s and 1980s. I have also, in recent years, reinforced my connections to my Christian roots. This kind of mixed belonging may be a postmodern norm; it contributes to seeing myself as neither a complete outsider nor complete insider to Buddhism, the Himalayan world, and FPMT. It means that the milieu I researched was not foreign to me, but I was also not fully a part of it—although I was often perceived as such by those I encountered because of my background.

What are the effects on my research of my background with FPMT? Most important is the help it provided. It gave access to places, individuals, and viewpoints that other researchers have sometimes been unable to access, opening doors that otherwise might have remained closed. The greatest benefit of being an insider—compared to outsider—is often better access to people, places, and understanding.[24] Before beginning research, my background helped me obtain a letter of support from FPMT's international office. Several interviewees said they would not have spoken to me without that. There is no question it contributed to the success of the research. My background also helped me to establish an initial list of invitees, create suitable questions, select useful sites to visit, connect empathetically to interviewees, and understand what I heard and observed.

There are also hazards in having such a background. One was encountered by Mitra Barua while researching, as a monk, his fellow Theravada Buddhists in Toronto. He found that some people would hesitate to speak on the grounds that that they felt he already knew

[24] Mitra Barua, researching his fellow Theravada Buddhists in Toronto, similarly discusses the privileged access to information his insider role gave him. D. Mitra Barua, *Seeding Buddhism with Multiculturalism: The Transmission of Sri Lankan Buddhism in Toronto* (Montreal & Kingston: McGill-Queen's Press-MQUP, 2019), 19. Andrew Quintman, a well-known scholar of Himalayan Buddhism, makes a similar point about the greater access to "knowledge and understanding" that comes from being an insider. Insiders have "a kind of context that is very difficult to get purely as an outsider who is a historian, critic or scholar," he indicates, although they need to balance these benefits by maintaining "a critical approach." Quintman asserts that it is very useful, and common today, for scholars to be insiders and apply both insider and outsider perspectives. Chintan Girish Modi, "Andrew Quintman: 'The Notion of Sacred Geography is Fascinating to Me.'" *Hindustan Times*, July 13, 2024. https://www.msn.com/en-in/news/India/andrew-quintman-the-notion-of-sacred-geography-is-fascinating-to-me/ar-BB1pKjdX?ocid=BingNewsVerp.

everything. Such a response could make finding interviewees challenging or create gaps in information provided. As far as I could tell, I did not encounter this obstacle. No one seemed to think I already knew everything! Interviewees assumed I had background knowledge of FPMT's people, places, events, and activities—reasonable given what I told them about myself. But none avoided interviews or particular questions on the grounds that I "already knew." Barua also notes concerns among interviewees that he would judge them—as a fellow Buddhist and a monk—for what they told him of their activities. Again, this concern did not seem to arise, partly because I was not asking about personal matters and partly because I was not an authority figure. Barua discusses the challenge of holding two roles simultaneously in the community he researched: being an official and a researcher.[25] His dual roles presented a complexity I scarcely faced: in the places I visited I had no official role. I participated occasionally in events, but as an ordinary visitor, and was never treated, like Barua in his monastic robes, as worthy of special respect. Thus, I did not face his "dual identity" challenge. There are degrees to the insider role.

The main hazard arising from my background was the possibility that my limited and perhaps dated knowledge of FPMT, specific to only certain times and places, would cause me to be influenced by preconceived ideas. To protect against that, I was careful to let interviewees speak for themselves and to maintain an open mind toward what I observed and was told, especially when it diverged from my memories or assumptions. With that approach, my background knowledge was an asset, particularly by enabling me to understand interviewees' many unelaborated terms, names, and other references.

Readers might ask if my background detracted from the critical distance that "objective" scholarship demands. However, simplistic equations of insider status and theology can be dismissed; this study brackets out theological questions. More to the point given the type of scholarship it represents, scholars in general no longer perceive disembodied objectivity as possible or even necessary. Sufficient critical distance for sound scholarship can be attained without invoking notions of pure objectivity. Nevertheless, one point is worth acknowledging: for researchers to describe their subjects accurately, a certain distance is helpful. In my case, sources of that distance include detachment, at this time in my life, from FPMT, scholarly training, and an absence of agendas. I do not seek to demonstrate that FPMT is without flaw or that its Buddhism is the best or most authentic kind. I do not evaluate FPMT, the genuineness of its Buddhism's traditionalism, or the benefits of its socially oriented activities.

The main approach I follow is described by American Buddhist Studies scholar (and Zen priest) Duncan Ryūken Williams. Williams writes that the goal for scholars of religion is to sympathetically research and present the traditions they examine, without advocating, for or against, their teachings, without endorsing or undermining their philosophical or theological claims, and without seeking to legitimize or delegitimize them. This sympathetic approach allows scholars to enter into, and grasp, their worlds, while retaining an outsider standpoint. Williams presents it as "a middle path between advocacy and 'objective' reporting." On this path, they can draw on their own understanding, on critical perspectives, and on historical contextualizing, and readers can also enter into the worlds they portray.[26]

One more work of Religious Studies inspires my approach: Robert Orsi's *History and Presence* (2016). Based on eye-witness accounts gathered during ethnographic fieldwork, Orsi writes of experiences of the inbreaking sacred among Catholics. He does not redescribe the experiences, suggesting that redescription is rooted in Protestant and secular biases. To assert that the sacred does not exist or cannot break into ordinary life, he notes, requires belief just like the

[25] Barua, *Seeding Buddhism*, 14-22.
[26] Duncan Ryūken Williams, "At Ease in Between: The Middle Position of a Scholar-Practitioner," *Journal of Global Buddhism* 9 (2008): 160-162.

opposite claim. Further, redescription requires ignoring eye-witness reports that in other circumstances would be accepted. Orsi maintains that non-redescription is neutral: the researcher's own beliefs are set aside and empirical data is deemed potentially valid. His is a postmodern method; it gives primacy to the voices of subjects without implying that they have misunderstood or misdescribed their experiences, and without attempting an "objective" analysis of what "really" happened.[27] I did not, like Orsi, gather data on experiences of the sacred. However, my data, like his, reflect a worldview in which sacred beings exist and can affect this world; the real can be invisible and the invisible real. In FPMT, this worldview comes from longstanding, mainstream Buddhist teachings. It is not folk tradition nor crafted by FPMT's lamas. It was central to all Buddhism before the modern era.[28] It includes: considering the Dalai Lama and some other lamas to be Buddhas or Bodhisattvas with clairvoyance and other powers; karma; past and future lives; heavens and hells; ghosts and spirits; and enlightenment. It also includes belief in the effectiveness or power of phenomena like divination, oracles, rituals, pujas, holy objects, blessings, and prayers. My research addresses some of the effects of this worldview. Like Orsi, I treat my subjects' worldview with neutrality and respect, and do not impose secular, materialist, or social constructivist explanations on phenomena they do not consider suited to such explanations.

In sum, I am a partial insider researching particular aspects of FPMT from an outside standpoint, neither affirming nor denying the Buddhist worldview that informs its activities. This kind of position and approach is common among scholars of Buddhism today. On its foundation, they produce much sound scholarship. Like those scholars, I formed my conclusions based on data and analyses. Readers must judge the success of my efforts for themselves.

[27] Robert A. Orsi, *History and Presence* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 2016), 6-10, 65, 109-110, 250-252.
[28] Jackson, *Rebirth*; Stephen F. Teiser, *Reinventing the Wheel: Paintings of Rebirth in Medieval Buddhist Temples* (Seattle: University of Washington Press, 2006).

Chapter 1.
Research Scope and Methods

Scope

This study began with two initial hypotheses. The first was that people in FPMT who call their Buddhism "traditional" have identifiable grounds for doing so in their Buddhism's history and/or features that (a) distinguish their Buddhism from modern forms of Buddhism; (b) allow it to be preserved, transmitted, and practiced today; (c) show that adapting ways of practicing a form of Buddhism to contemporary circumstances need not entail modernizing it or abandoning what they consider traditional; and (d) can be applied to other groups' Buddhisms to categorize these as traditional if they share similar histories and features. Hence, research was expected to identify the grounds on which people in FPMT call their Buddhism "traditional" and to permit the construction of a definition of traditional Buddhism, useful to scholars, that can parallel Buddhist Studies' definitions of modern and postmodern Buddhism. The second initial hypothesis was that FPMT, a group that identifies its Buddhism as traditional, is socially engaged, which demonstrates that traditional Buddhism may be no impediment to social engagement, and that social engagement is not undertaken only by modernist Buddhists. These were the initial two hypotheses; additional hypotheses arose as research progressed.

In common with other ethnographic studies gathering qualitative data, research on FPMT was inductive. It used the two initial hypotheses as a starting point, then gathered information and perceptions from which themes, patterns, insights, and additional hypotheses emerged. The first added hypothesis was that there are two main factors that can be called on to usefully designate a contemporary form of Buddhism "traditional": it has an identifiable lineage recognized by insiders, meaning it comprises a set of teachings and practices that have been handed down in an unbroken line over many generations; and it has certain features, with the main one being its retention of Buddhism's longstanding cosmology rather than its replacement by the modern scientific-rationalist-naturalist discourse as occurred in the creation of modern Buddhism.[29] As research progressed and traditionalism was discussed with interviewees, these two factors were mentioned over and over and the possibility that they were core to traditionalism became a subject of conversations.

The initial hypothesis concerning social engagement presented a useful research question because scholarship on Buddhist social engagement, which is extensive, virtually always leaves out FPMT and other traditionalist groups on the assumption that traditionalism precludes engagement. Scholars then leave traditionalists out of data collection, analyses, and theorizing. However, even a brief glance at the websites, annual reports, and other documents produced by at least one traditionalist group, FPMT, is sufficient to demonstrate social engagement. Hence, the study added further hypotheses: that the doctrinal foundation of FPMT's engagement is traditional Buddhist teachings, not modernized ones or Western discourses; and that FPMT's engagement displays traditionalist features. If it does, there may be a traditionalist form of Buddhist social engagement not so far identified by scholars. It may then be appropriate to add a category of "traditionalist social engagement" to scholarship on engaged Buddhism and encourage scholars to investigate whether this pattern of engagement arises among other traditionalist Buddhists.

[29] By cosmology, the dissertation refers to what Buddhist texts call "saṃsara" and not other forms Buddhism's cosmology takes, such as the geographical cosmology of the universe centred on Mount Meru. See Glossary.

The dissertation enters into conversation with several topics in Buddhist Studies: tradition, contemporary Buddhism, modern Buddhism, Buddhist social engagement, and transnational organizations; it also addresses how these areas interact. It shows how including FPMT in scholarship in these areas deepens and reshapes scholarly conversations.

This dissertation does not examine all aspects of FPMT. It is not a summary of all FPMT's activities nor an evaluation of its strengths and weaknesses or of the benefits of its social engagement. Such evaluations would require different methods and data. For the most part, the dissertation also does not investigate the costs or financing of FPMT's activities. Another area it avoids is evaluating the accuracy of FPMT's claims to preserve tradition. It examines how one expression of traditional Buddhism—defined in a particular way—manifests today rather than whether it is genuinely traditional. Finally, it does not examine FPMT's culture, social structures, internal power relations, or challenges. Even though these may be fit subjects for ethnographic research, they were not part of this study.[30]

Relevant Literature

Buddhist Studies began as a product of the European enlightenment and colonialism.[31] Textual study came first, aimed at revealing what original Buddhism taught, and not how Buddhists, past or present, lived. José Cabezón, in a well-known 1995 article on the discipline of Buddhist Studies, discussed this history, referring to the main 20th century paradigm of Buddhist Studies as "chirographic-textual-philological."[32] He added that the field was changing, noting that, "critics have, from within the discipline itself, begun to challenge … the monopolization of the field by the written text… There is today a call for the increased investigation of alternative semiotic forms—oral and vernacular traditions, epigraphy, ritual, patterns of social and institutional evolution, gender, lay and folk traditions, art, archaeology and architecture."[33] In 2000, Cabezón reprised his overview.[34] One observation he made was that North American Buddhist Studies now ranged well beyond "doctrine and written texts." He wrote that its new style:

> sees methodological diversity as an advantage… not fearful of different approaches ... wants its scholarship to be intelligible to other fields, and … actively cultivates conversations with those fields. This highly interpretive, discursively open, theoretically informed, intertextual, and dialogical style … is the result of various historical forces that radically changed the way Buddhist Studies was conceptualized … from a field defined in terms of place—Asia, South Asia, India, etc.—to one defined in terms of a religion (Buddhism); from a Buddhism conceptualized as an undifferentiated whole, to one

[30] Two US-based scholars, Drs. Ann Gleig and Amy Langenberg, are researching sexual abuse / violation in contemporary Buddhist groups. It is understood that their planned book will include discussion of a case of sexual harassment by a lama who sometimes taught in FPMT Dharma centres and who harassed women associated with FPMT. This dissertation does not explore this topic. Information on their research can be found on the website of the *Religion & Sexual Abuse Project* (https://www.religionandsexualabuseproject.org/). FPMT's website provides information on the case in question and how it was addressed (https://fpmt.org/fpmt/announcements/updates-regarding-dagri-rinpoche/).

[31] José Ignacio Cabezón, "2020 AAR Presidential Address: The Study of Buddhism and the AAR," *Journal of the American Academy of Religion* 89, no. 3 (September 2021): 793.

[32] José Ignacio Cabezón, "Buddhist Studies as a Discipline and the Role of Theory," *Journal of the International Association of Buddhist Studies* (1995): 239.

[33] Cabezón, "Buddhist Studies as a Discipline," 261-262.

[34] Cabezón, "2020 AAR Presidential Address," 793–818.

> conceived as a collection of parts (art, philosophy, practices, etc.), each relating to one another and to other fields in complex ways.[35]

Buddhist Studies now encourages methodological variety. One newer method is ethnography. Ethnographic studies were rare when Cabezón wrote his 1995 article but have grown in number as scholars have come to value lived traditions.[36] This study, which addresses living Buddhists, their activities, and their perceptions, thus fits well into Buddhist Studies today.

Ethnography aims to produce narrative accounts of a culture using various methods, including textual research, but is primarily based on fieldwork, a qualitative method. Fieldwork involves interaction with research subjects to hear their words and observe their actions in their own environment. It enables researchers to identify their subjects' activities and ways of thinking, understand patterns and meaning, and explain these to others. Foundational is the idea that the actions, words, and viewpoints of insiders to a culture constitute essential data for understanding that culture; textual or other sources do not provide the same depth of understanding. In this sense, ethnography is the opposite of redescription, in which outsiders impute meanings different from what insiders express. In ethnography, insiders speak. At the same time, their narratives are analyzed for coherence, consistency, shared themes, and points of heterogeneity. The narratives are also related to their activities and to relevant textual material produced by both insiders and outsiders.

A significant body of literature exists on ethnographic research and writing. Without attempting a full review of it, I briefly discuss work that influenced my own. On the practice of ethnography, I found three works particularly useful. These were: "The Fieldwork Encounter, Experience, and the Making of Truth: An Introduction" (2009) by John Borneman and Abdellah Hammoudi; "Writing Ethnography: The Poetics and Politics of Culture" (1999) by Margery Wolf; and *Qualitative Literacy: A Guide to Evaluating Ethnographic and Interview Research* (2022) by Mario Luis Small and Jessica McCrory Calarco. After discussing useful points in each, I give a few examples of ethnographic research and the lessons they offered.

Borneman and Hammoudi's 2009 article summarizes the "crisis of representation" that occurred after the appearance of Edward Said's *Orientalism* and other works that questioned the authority, objectivity, and accuracy of Western scholars of Eastern life, thought, and religion. These works made ethnographers cautious about representing others, self-reflexive about their own biases, and hesitant to claim authority. Understanding grew that ethnographers' subjectivities shape their data, analyses, and representations: ethnographers do not gather data that exists objectively in the world but generate it in interaction with their subjects. They then use it construct narratives. These narratives can be questioned: do the milieux portrayed exist "out there" or are they fictions crafted by ethnographers?[37] Whether fieldwork can yield genuine knowledge was debated. Although most researchers now agree that fieldwork can produce valid knowledge as long as self-reflexivity is present and positionality acknowledged, recent decades' hesitations about validity prompted an increasing reliance on textual sources such as documents, reports, magazines, and online material. Although for some researchers, texts now replace "old-fashioned" fieldwork because they are perceived to be less affected by subjectivity, Borneman

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[35] Cabezón, "2020 AAR Presidential Address," 815-816.

[36] A recent work that discusses the growing valuation of scholarship on lived traditions in Buddhist Studies, resulting in ever more ethnography, is Carola E. Lorea & Rohit Singh, "Introduction: Rethinking Tantra Through Ethnography," in *The Ethnography of Tantra: Textures and Contexts of Living Tantric Traditions*, eds. Carola E. Lorea and Rohit Singh (Albany: SUNY Press, 2023), 4.

[37] Portrayals are considered "realist" when they are presented as objective, not taking into account ethnographers' own influence. Ethnographies of the early and mid-twentieth century tended to be realist. The opposite is a self-reflexive approach, which admits to empathy and subjectivity. I consider my approach self-reflexive.

and Hammoudi emphasize the deeper understanding offered by fieldwork, in part because it permits researchers to bypass the elites who are the main source of textual material.[38] Borneman and Hammoudi's encapsulation of this debate has influenced my choice to do fieldwork and to supplement (not replace) it with analyses of the written material FPMT produces. It has also guided me to be attentive to ordinary followers and not only key informants, often members of FPMT's elite.

Wolf (1999) emphasizes the difficulties of gaining sufficient experience of a culture to understand it. Her discussion was one factor in my decision to research FPMT, given limited time. I know FPMT of old and am familiar with its Buddhist worldview. Without prior knowledge, coming to understand any cultural group during a few months of interviews and site visits would be challenging; Wolf emphasizes that ethnography that goes beyond superficialities requires significant exposure. She also makes important points about issues of power. My research did not focus on power relations. Nevertheless, keeping in mind her reminder that structures of power cannot be overlooked even when research targets other issues, I made efforts to include in my research ordinary, younger, recently arrived, and diverse FPMT voices to counterbalance those of FPMT's longtime followers and established elites. She also discusses the impact of postmodern critiques on the ethnographic process and product, underlining that the power of researchers gives them responsibilities toward the people they research. Responsibilities arise, for example, when collecting data, ensuring confidentiality, and crafting representations of the researched group. She stresses writing in ways the group can understand, inviting feedback from its members, and where possible, ensuring research benefits them.[39]

Following these recommendations, I have sought to avoid academic jargon. I also sent an early summary of research results to research participants with an invitation to respond—which about five percent did. As for benefiting FPMT, my main way has been to attempt to produce a more accurate account of the organization than appears in some earlier scholarship, and, especially, to show scholars and others the extent of its social engagement, which scholarship to date overlooks. I summarized these potential benefits to FPMT's international office before beginning my research, and their letter of support was presumably based on their confidence that the research would indeed be beneficial.[40] That letter is a reminder of power relations in research: I felt I needed a letter of support to effectively research FPMT, giving FPMT's leadership the power to decline or accept. In providing the letter, they trusted me to be accurate and fair. In interviewing also, power relations exist. Not everyone responded to my email requests; some people did not respond or responded and declined. In person also, each individual

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[38] John Borneman and Abdellah Hammoudi, "The Fieldwork Encounter, Experience, and the Making of Truth: An Introduction," in *Being there: The fieldwork encounter and the making of Truth*, eds. John Borneman and Abdellah Hammoudi (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2009), 1-24.

[39] Margery Wolf, "Writing Ethnography: The Poetics and Politics of Culture." in *The Insider/Outsider Problem in the Study of Religion: A Reader*, ed. Russell T. McCutcheon (Great Britain: The Bath Press, 1999), 354-363.

[40] Not all scholars of religion favour this approach, which involves a relationship with research subjects. Some have concerns that it erodes the distance scholars need to be objective and put their data from fieldwork into a critical perspective. Such scholars demand distance and avoidance of empathy out of fear that deliberately making ethnographic accounts readable by subjects, having empathic relations with them or concern for them, or feeling responsible to them may destroy critical distance and make scholarship subject to the approval of the researched group, potentially ruining it. (See the discussion by Richard Newton in Richard Newton, "Afterword: Revisiting Classics and Plotting Futures for the Field of Religious Studies," in *Fieldnotes in the Critical Study of Religion: Revisiting Classical Theorists*, edited by Richard Newton and Vaia Touna (London: Bloomsbury Academic, 2023), 147-148). In response, I note that my work has not been subject to the approval of FPMT or anyone associated with it. I also do not believe that empathetic relations, writing in a manner that subjects can read, or allowing them to comment on research results entails this outcome. I side with ethnographers who believe that they should have the openness to subjects to permit them to read and challenge research that involves them. Newton in fact views this as where critical scholarship of religion ought to land today. Newton, "Afterword," 151.

had to decide if they wished to talk to me and what to say. Yet they also offered me a level of trust which included handing over power. In the end, it is the writer of the study, not its subjects, who has power. As Wolf indicates, this power entails responsibilities. I hope I have met mine in beneficial ways.

Finally, the book by Small and Calarco, though aimed more at readers than writers of ethnography, usefully illuminates pathways to good quality data collection and writing. Some of their recommendations are common: being self-aware and self-reflexive; situating the study in relevant literature; specifying research limitations; and producing clear, engaging writing—all of which I have tried to do.[41] Their focus, though, is how to generate good data in the context of researcher impact on data through questions asked, responses to answers, follow up, and conscious or unconscious selection of what to observe and place in field notes. Five methodological issues exist.

First, they emphasize exposure. Good fieldwork provides the researcher with sufficient contact with the subjects and their milieu; more contact—meaning more exposure rather than a larger sample size or number of sites—produces better data. This need for exposure was one reason to spend several weeks visiting, and often residing at, FPMT sites and undertaking interviews, as well as to revisit some sites and talk to more people a year later.

Second, they discuss "cognitive empathy" to understand the culture studied. My pre-existing familiarity with FPMT gave me empathy, but "cognitive empathy" also comprises ease of understanding—being in tune. What struck me as I began interviewing was how useful it was that I recognized unexplained references: names of influential people in FPMT; Buddhist terms, teachings, or practices; place names; and the connotations of references to events, times, people, and places. Not understanding references would create a barrier to establishing empathetic encounters. My background enabled me to meet interviewees on their own ground; to quickly grasp their meaning.

Third, the two authors discuss the need to allow heterogeneity in the sample to appear. No population is without some diversity in perspectives. Successful research and later narration reveal diversity. If none appears, either sufficient data may not have been collected, or the researcher may be overlooking nuances. As I collected data, viewpoint heterogeneity did indeed appear, which I have tried to show.

Fourth, the authors emphasize the need for follow-up. Follow-up includes going beyond securing answers to initial questions to noticing as data reveals new questions, hypotheses, or directions and pursuing those. I discuss below how my research made space for follow-up.

Lastly, they recommend "palpable" writing: concrete details, quotes, and examples to help readers grasp the milieu portrayed—another recommendation I have tried to follow.[42]

Overall, Small and Calarco's book was tremendously useful for understanding what makes research good, rather than just how to research.

Approach to Research

Ethnographic research designs vary. They can include collecting details of a small number of individual cases, repeatedly interviewing the same individuals over several years, interviewing only key informants, conversing with subaltern individuals or groups, gathering stories of past events in individuals' lives and their perceived present impact, traveling with pilgrims, participating in a religious sect's activities, or examining letters, diaries, newsletters, magazines,

[41] Mario Luis Small and Jessica McCrory Calarco, *Qualitative Literacy: A Guide to Evaluating Ethnographic and Interview Research* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2022), 4, 119.
[42] Small and Calarco, *Qualitative Literacy*, 10-12.

blogs, and so on. Likely the rarest form of ethnographic research is large and/or random sample surveys, but even these can have a place.

Small and Calarco note that many important ethnographic studies focus on only a few respondents or a single organization, site, or activity.[43] Examples of research on a single organization or site in Religious Studies, examined as possible models for this study, include Karen McCarthy Brown's *Mama Lola: A Vodou Priestess in Brooklyn* (2010, originally 1991),[44] Suha Taji-Farouki's *Beshara and Ibn 'Arabi: A Movement of Sufi Spirituality in the Modern World* (2007),[45] and, in Buddhist Studies, Jeff Wilson's *Dixie Dharma: Inside a Buddhist Temple in the American South* (2012).[46] These books represent in-depth research: interviews and participant observation over several years at single sites. A work based on in-depth research over a long period at multiple sites is David Palmer and Elijah Siegler's *Dream Trippers: Global Daoism and the Predicament of Modern Spirituality* (2017).[47] These are important ethnographies from which to learn because of their profundity, which comes from long exposure to subjects. They also offer a key methodological lesson: deep research into the entirety of a religious group or set of groups takes years.

Ethnographic models reliant on briefer periods of research were thus also examined. Here, I contrast three. The first two I address as a pair; they are similar in certain ways. These are William Rory Dickson's *Living Sufism in North America: Between Tradition and Transformation* (2015)[48] and Ann Gleig's *American Dharma: Buddhism Beyond Modernity* (2019).[49] Both works seek to portray a substantial portion of a particular religious expression throughout the US, undertaking interviews, participant observation at several sites, and textual analyses; essentially the same method I propose. Yet differences between them offer useful lessons. The third work, Jessica Falcone's *Battling the Buddha of Love: A Cultural Biography of the Greatest Statue Never Built* (2018),[50] I address for a different reason: this dissertation often refers to it because it is the only book published to date that focuses on FPMT. Hence, my work cannot avoid being in conversation with it.

In his research for *Living Sufism in North America*, Dickson conducted interviews with ten key informants—Sufi Shaykhs—and participant observation at approximately ten Sufi centres around the US. The sample took in more than half of his target population of Sufi centres and leaders in the US and most types of Sufism found there.[51] His research was time-limited, but because his aim was tightly defined—to understand how Sufi tradition was, at a given point in time in a given region, both preserved and transformed—a few months of ethnography accomplished it. The strength of this research was the coverage of a significant section of Sufi leaders and groups in the US, achieved by focusing on leaders and doing short periods of

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[43] Small and Calarco, *Qualitative Literacy*, 15, 168 fn. 56.
[44] Karen McCarthy Brown, *Mama Lola: A Vodou Priestess in Brooklyn* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2010).
[45] Suha Taji-Farouki, *Beshara and Ibn'Arabi: A Movement of Sufi Spirituality in the Modern World* (Oxford: Anqa Publishing, 2007).
[46] Jeff Wilson, *Dixie Dharma: Inside a Buddhist Temple in the American South* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 2012).
[47] David A. Palmer and Elijah Siegler. *Dream Trippers: Global Daoism and the Predicament of Modern Spirituality*. (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2017).
[48] William Rory Dickson, *Living Sufism in North America: Between Tradition and Transformation* (Albany: State University of New York Press, 2015).
[49] Ann Gleig, *American Dharma: Buddhism Beyond Modernity* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 2019).
[50] Jessica Falcone, *Battling the Buddha of Love: A Cultural Biography of the Greatest Statue Never Built* (NY: Cornell University Press, 2018), Kindle.
[51] Dickson, *Living Sufism*, 7-11.

participant observation.[52] Despite such extensive coverage of his target population, he notes several "limitations to the generalizability" of his findings: under-representation of immigrant-based groups; little coverage of African-American Sufism; and not researching groups at different points in time to learn about trends and processes of change.

Dickson 's aims included understanding how oft-mentioned categories like "traditional," "Islamic," "universal," "secular," and "New Age" applied to actual Sufi groups. His research showed him that the categories obscured the realities of the groups: their diversity, pluralism, and ways of combining past and present; and effects of societal trends and interactions among them. Instead of being able to place groups in clear-cut categories, he found "a spectrum of approaches" to Sufism with its ends "closer to the middle" than expected. Modernizing tendencies and counter-tendencies existed, but no one way of adapting to modern North American conditions dominated.[53]

Gleig, in *American Dharma*, sought to identify how Buddhism in general, including a number of its aspects, was evolving across meditation-based convert Buddhism in the US.[54] Her research included participant observation at a small number of Buddhist events and Dharma centres in politically and socially progressive locations and sectors of US Buddhism—a sample much smaller than the vast population of US Dharma centres, and also one biased in certain directions.[55] Although she visited fewer sites with less variation among them than Dickson, she did more interviews.[56] She also examined websites, social media, and popular Buddhist magazines. But whereas Dickson included data that challenged his early hypotheses concerning secularization, Westernization, and modernization/ postmodernization, Gleig appears to have focused on data that supported her hypothesis of steady postmodernization.[57]

Gleig's chapters describing new ways Buddhists understand and practice Buddhism in her sample usefully show activities, ideas, and issues. This was likely the initial aim of her work: to document activities and ways of thinking that could reasonably be called "postmodern." The chapters in which she does this make a solid contribution to understanding some areas of contemporary US Buddhism. However, where Dickson hesitates to generalize and cites biases in his sample that limit its reflection of his target population, Gleig draws conclusions about the status and future of a wide swath of US Buddhism without discussing sample size or biases. She concludes with a "central claim" that "American Buddhism is witnessing a shift from the modern

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[52] Dickson, *Living Sufism*, 7-8.

[53] Dickson, *Living Sufism*, 208-214.

[54] Aspects she addressed include Buddhism's relationship to psychology, politics, and social change; ways to meditate; racial and other forms of diversity in Dharma contexts; online Buddhism; and generational change.

[55] It seems she visited three Zen- and/or Theravada-based centres, one in the north-east of the US and one or two in the San Francisco area. Two of these she identifies as "the East Bay Meditation Center in Oakland, California, and the virtual network of Buddhist Geeks" She also participated in at least one conference and some other Buddhist events. Gleig, *American Dharma*, 48. More detail on places, persons, and events would be useful.

[56] Gleig, *American Dharma*, 12-14, 211-213.

[57] Dickson easily found data that did not support his hypotheses concerning increasing Westernization, secularization, and modernization. Data showed that these phenomena were present but continually interacted with the retention and reinstatement of longstanding aspects of Islam. Sufism was not visibly "progressing" in any one direction but showed circulations along several axes. Gleig selects data that support only one direction of movement, from modernism to postmodernism (including post-colonialism and post-secularism), so her data apparently substantiate her hypothesis about progress toward postmodernization. She does not mention countervailing data, such as blogs or articles online or in popular Buddhist magazines on modernist or traditionalist themes, nor do ethnographic research at the many Dharma centres, like those documented in Jeff Wilson's *Dixie Dharma*, that are modernist and have not adopted postmodern ideas and activities. Such data would not likely show that postmodernization does not exist—Gleig shows it exists. Rather, it would likely show that postmodernization is not pervasive, nor a clear or inevitable trend across the population.

to the postmodern."[58] This claim derives from her view that a certain pattern is "emerging."[59] Its baseline, modernism, Gleig finds in earlier studies of US Buddhism.[60] Certain approaches among the Buddhists she studied she then counts as the emergence of postmodernism. So far, so reasonable. Where the method falters is the contention that this process, found in a small and selective sample, establishes the unidirectional trend of large, variegated, and geographically scattered sector of US Buddhism. Gleig's broad claims contrast with Dickson's narrower and more cautious conclusions based on a more diverse sample that included a larger proportion of the target population.[61]

Gleig's selective sample, added to her apparent eschewal of countervailing data, seems to obscure the presence of modernist and traditionalist Buddhists in large numbers in her target population, and the possibility that they are not moving toward the postmodern. One way Gleig could convince readers that postmodernization is the inevitable future of this population would be to sample a greater variety of Buddhists, Dharma centres, lineages, and locations and examine a broader range of textual material, akin to the research that Palmer and Siegler did on contemporary Daoism. Another would be to reveal, in a broader sample, early markers of postmodern attitudes that might later blossom into the activities Gleig calls "postmodern and postcolonial." She might also present data establishing that such activities are desired by younger cohorts across variegated Buddhist groups and locations.

It is also possible, though, that, were data gathered on more of the population, the data would, like Dickson's and Palmer and Siegler's, show diverse approaches to traditional, modern, and postmodern attitudes and activities. Data on Sufism and Daoism show no dominant trend. Gleig might have found the same in Buddhism had her research been similarly expansive. Conversely, her data, useful in itself, supports conclusions about postmodern attitudes and activities among some Buddhists: the aspect of her book that contributes most to scholarship.[62]

A final comment on Gleig's *American Dharma*: the book assumes that all US meditation-based convert Buddhism (which includes Tibetan Buddhism) was modernized in the modern era—its basis for becoming postmodern now. Yet the assumption that until recently it was all modern (a product of "Asian Buddhist modernism") can be questioned. For example, as discussed in Chapter 3, Gleig classes all Tibetan Buddhism in the US as modern, but on shaky grounds. Whether all Theravada and Zen in the US is modern can also be debated. In the assertion that all Buddhism in these categories has been modernized, Gleig follows other prominent scholars; studies of contemporary Buddhism commonly make such claims.[63]

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[58] Gleig, *American Dharma*, 5-6.
[59] Gleig, *American Dharma*, 298.
[60] Gleig, *American Dharma*, 37-47.
[61] A small sample, under some conditions, can represent a large population with a certain probability. But relevant conditions seem unmet here. Hundreds of varied Dharma centres are part of Gleig's target population. Gleig appears to have undertaken participant observation at three, all similar in style. This sample does not reflect the diversity of the population. Her interviews and textual research are broader but appear to be selected to highlight postmodern ways of thinking and acting rather than to reflect the population's variety of ways of thinking and acting. This possible sampling bias means that Gleig's findings, while applicable to groups within the sample, may not be generalizable to the population. Gleig's research design was likely deliberate in that she sought to identify postmodern ways of being Buddhist—a reasonable aim. Issues arise only when generalizing to "American Buddhist meditation-based convert communities" and "American Buddhism."
[62] Another option would be for Gleig to state that, although her sample is not generalizable to the population, she believes postmodernization is emerging throughout the population, but establishing this requires further research.
[63] These include Donald S. Lopez Jr., Martin Baumann, and David McMahan. Their publications on this topic are discussed in Chapter 3. There is a view, taken for granted in much scholarship, that all religion in modernity is inevitably modernized. One example: Justin Ritzinger, analyzing the rise of modern Buddhism in Republican China, states that "Clearly there are ways in which modernity compels religious change. The rise of the nation-state, bureaucratic governance, modern science, and industrial capitalism are massive changes that leave no area of culture

However, the extensive data that would be needed to support them are not provided.[64] Whether all contemporary Buddhism has been modernized and became modern or modernist is a question relevant to this dissertation and is thus further discussed in upcoming chapters.

Falcone's *Battling the Buddha of Love* is also based mainly on ethnography. A significant portion of Falcone's ethnographic research was among Indians in Kushinagar, India.[65] Of greater interest here is that on FPMT. The challenge in examining her method is that she provides only partial information on it. She writes that she undertook participant observation, did interviews with FPMT people in various locations and roles in the US and India, and collected textual information; she also participated in FPMT activities and, in prior years, had studied Dharma at FPMT centres in the US. She was at least partially an FPMT insider. Having spent most of two years doing research, she did not lack exposure to FPMT.[66] She indicates that her data from this research informs her book. Nevertheless, she offers no details on the numbers and types of people in FPMT with whom she interacted. It seems, for example, that she spoke only with Westerners, despite the number of Asians involved in FPMT. This gap may be what led her to designate FPMT an entirely "nonheritage" organization, an issue discussed below. Her interlocutors also seem to have been weighted toward new arrivals to FPMT or people not closely associated with it, potentially skewing data. Yet lack of detail on her sample means readers cannot know the relationship between the sample and FPMT's population.

Regarding the questions she asked, Falcone again says little. Her focus was a large statue FPMT planned to build in Kushinagar. Yet her book also characterizes FPMT. Her characterizations, though, do not appear to come from ethnographic or textual data. For example, she does not seem to have asked FPMT's people about their understanding of their Buddhism's traditionalism. Instead, using her own definitions, she concludes that FPMT's Buddhism is untraditional, a conclusion discussed below in Chapters 3 and 4.[67] By not identifying with whom she spoke, the extent to which the sample reflected the population, or what questions she asked, Falcone leaves the reader uncertain of the validity of her conclusions. The lesson is that methods and data sources should be explained. If generalization from sample to population takes place, why the sample is thought to reflect the population requires an explanation.

Another aspect of Falcone's work merits mention. Falcone advocates in her dissertation, book, and articles against FPMT's planned statue, on the grounds that its construction "was a terrible injustice about to be perpetrated on some small farmers … thousands were about to lose their lands and livelihoods without proper compensation."[68] Although this prediction did not come true, advocacy is allowed in academia. Nevertheless, Falcone's opposition to the statue produced a methodological issue: an apparent bias against FPMT.[69]

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untouched." This kind of generalization is not uncommon. But generalizations do not account for all cases. Sometimes modernity's pressures to change are resisted. Justin R. Ritzinger, *Anarchy in the Pure Land: Reinventing the Cult of Maitreya in Modern Chinese Buddhism* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2017), 7.

[64] Gleig, *American Dharma*, 22-34.

[65] According to its frontispiece, Falcone's book received an award from The American Institute of Indian Studies. This award was surely for its depiction of the people of Kushinagar. My critique does not cover the portion of the book devoted to Kushinagar, but only that devoted to FPMT.

[66] Falcone, *Battling*, 19, 23-26, 77.

[67] Falcone, *Battling*, 91-95,

[68] Jessica Falcone, "Waiting for Maitreya: Of Gifting Statues, Hopeful Presents and the Future Tense in FPMT's Transnational Tibetan Buddhism," Ph.D. Diss., (Cornell University, 2010), 21.

[69] The bias is presumably the result of her disappointment with FPMT, frustration that its representatives did not respond to her concerns about the statue, and lack of faith in its form of Buddhism, all of which she discusses in her 2010 dissertation. Falcone, "Waiting for Maitreya," 15-20, 26. Falcone states her positionality and stance on FPMT's statue project but may not have perceived the impact of these on her analysis.

Falcone repeatedly denigrates FPMT and its people. Yet her comments are not based on any data she presents. She faults individuals supporting and working for the statue for exhibiting an "indifference" to local Indians that reflected, in her eyes, a "failure of love"—an imputation that overlooks their stated motivation to help local Indians.[70] She calls these individuals "thoughtless," "ideologically hypocritical," and focused on giving a "karmic boon" to financial supporters but not to local people.[71] The statue itself she deems "a symptom of neoliberal globalization," arising from FPMT's "unexamined faith" in "global capitalism" and part of "a model of progress that relies on tired, trickle down approaches to neoliberal economic development."[72] These imputations ignore FPMT's frequently stated religious motivations for the statue. Falcone does not show that the statue project was motivated by "neoliberal" beliefs nor show that people in FPMT had the beliefs or motivations related to capitalism or neoliberal economic development she ascribes to them. Other comments not based on data and seemingly revealing bias include: frequently calling FPMT an "empire";[73] claiming it transmits only "a veneer of ancient wisdom"; stating that its claim to preserve tradition is "a conceit, or perhaps an ideological statement of intent," that it is creating new traditions from "a pastiche" of old and new, and that it only "purports" to follow the Geluk lineage; referring to its lamas as teachers who "crave a monastic and educational empire"; referring to Rinpoche as "empire-building" and a "jet-set" lama who promoted the statue to gain "immortality" for himself; and suggesting that FPMT promotes an "excess of guru devotion" that misleads people.[74]

The main methodological issue is making claims without substantiating them with data when the stated methodology is reliance on data. A second issue is making unnecessarily derogatory comments about research subjects. A third concerns redescription. Falcone's comments redescribe the stated beliefs of FPMT leaders or insiders, suggesting that these cover for other beliefs she presumes they actually held. Redescription as a method in Religious Studies has been questioned.[75] It is suspect when, in the absence of supporting data, it replaces subjects' stated beliefs with scholars' guesses. Falcone's redescriptions appear to lack substantiating data, override subjects' voices, and paint a potentially inaccurate picture of FPMT.[76]

What lessons can be drawn from these works? First, all reveal the value of ethnographic research. It allows exploration of subjects' perceptions, thoughts, opinions, and feelings, including on unforeseen topics, and it offers opportunities to observe behavior in subjects' own environments, permitting identification of nuances, underlying issues, disagreements, patterns, and new hypotheses. Surveying, on the other hand, would provide brief answers to

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[70] Falcone, *Battling*, 306-333.

[71] Falcone, *Battling*, 130, 167, 370. In her dissertation, Falcone mentions that FPMT's goal is for the statue to benefit those who see it (i.e., local Indians) and those who donate to it. Falcone, "Waiting for Maitreya," 2. In her book, she drops the mention of FPMT's goal for those who see it to benefit and suggests that FPMT aims to benefit only donors. Falcone, *Battling*, 130, 167. This change obscures FPMT's oft-stated motivation to help the people of India.

[72] Falcone, *Battling*, 274, 288, 380.

[73] Falcone, *Battling*, 41, 42, 43, 44, 76, 340.

[74] Falcone, *Battling*, 76, 91, 95, 96, 190, 306-333, 325, 340, 340 fn. 6.

[75] Richard King, for example, calls this kind of explanation of religious belief and behaviour "epistemic violence" for its erasure of insider voices. Richard King, *Orientalism and Religion: Post-Colonial Theory, India and 'The Mystic East'* (New York: Routledge, 1999), 4, 199, 213. Redescription can be useful in some circumstances. Nevertheless, questioning of it is particularly intense when a Western scholar redescribes Eastern religions and cultures, which is the case when Falcone redescribes Buddhist beliefs held in FPMT.

[76] Only two people associated with FPMT interviewed during fieldwork mentioned Falcone. One indicated that he felt Falcone misunderstood FPMT but did not elaborate. B121C25 December 2022. The other, who had been involved with the statue project, said that Falcone's discussion of the compensation paid to families in Kushinagar for land for the statue turned out to be inaccurate. Compensation (which came from the state government, not FPMT) was far greater than she suggested, and the amount of land purchased far smaller. A121P03 November 2022. If true, Falcone's concerns about mistreatment of Kushinagaris were, in the end, largely groundless.

straightforward questions, but leave little space for unexpected information to appear, for motives and perspectives to be explored, for conversations about meaning, or for new questions to develop. A related lesson is that modest interviewee sample sizes and participant observation at a few sites can meet research objectives if these are not overly broad. That the works discussed all supplement ethnographic with textual data also shows the usefulness of this added step.

Second, when time is limited, research questions should be kept within limits; if they are not, answering them requires more data than it is feasible to collect during available time. Capturing multiple aspects of a religion or various expressions of it over time is best left to scholars able to interact with subjects over long periods: examples include *Mama Lola*, *Beshara*, and *Dream Trippers*. Dickson's work on contemporary Sufism is an example of a successful research project whose scope was limited to suit a shorter time period.

Third, if the aim is to generalize findings from sample to population, the sample should reflect the population in relevant ways. Researchers should provide information on the sample—numbers, location, and characteristics—so readers can see its nature and the extent to which it risks sampling bias. They should also explain why they consider the sample to reflect the population.

Fourth, care should be taken to avoid making unsubstantiated assertions. These can skew portrayals and conclusions. Academic work requires neither commendation nor vilification of subjects, nor does it demand that limited research lead to sweeping conclusions. It is best to rely on data and avoid making claims based on opinions, impressions, or hopes. Finally, two approaches to research have pitfalls suggesting care is required in their use: advocacy and redescription.

Research Design

The above lessons suggest that certain research designs should be avoided. Designs to avoid as too broad include comparing FPMT to other Buddhist groups along several axes the way *Dream Trippers* compares three kinds of Daoism, attempting a complete history of multiple aspects of FPMT the way Taji-Farouki does of Beshara, or analyzing the entirety of FPMT's social structure and activities over time the way *Mama Lola* does for a Vodou group. Hence, a narrower topic was selected; only particular hypotheses were explored.

Given that a survey would not produce the type and depth of information sought, surveying was avoided. Research began with a literature review and some textual research and historical contextualization. This phase was followed by ethnographic fieldwork. Fieldwork started with the development of a sample. Because the objective was to generalize to FPMT from the sample, efforts were made to ensure it could reflect the population, even if uncertainty in this regard remained. Details of the sample are given below to show why generalization is considered appropriate. Details also show where constraints on generalization exist.

Approximately six months of fieldwork, in two phases, followed: a first phase of online interviews by Zoom of thirty individuals, including key informants and ordinary FPMT followers; and a second phase involving several weeks of site visits in India, Nepal, and England for additional interviews, informal conversations, and observation, with second visits to some sites the following year. Further textual research was done to gather documentation, mainly from primary sources, concerning FPMT's activities and teachings related to tradition and social engagement. The final stage was analyzing this material and integrating it into a narrative.

Data Sources

Borneman and Hammoudi discuss two important kinds of data: from fieldwork and from texts. Whereas fieldwork was long considered the gold standard in the study of cultures, in recent decades it has sometimes been problematized due to its subjectivity, and textual research has gained popularity. Borneman and Hammoudi note that both are useful, but stress that fieldwork, such as interviews and participant observation, deepens understanding. The more time one spends with people, they write, the greater one's familiarity with the meanings and tensions behind their words. Textual analysis is therefore best used to supplement, not replace, fieldwork. Fieldwork can also challenge texts, which tend to be produced by officials or elites; ordinary people may think differently.[77] Following the two scholars' advice, this study relied on fieldwork to deepen understandings of FPMT and add detail to information in textual material.

The data needed to accomplish research aims included both information and perceptions, and these had to be understood in the context of FPMT's social milieu. Necessary information included how FPMT discussed tradition and social engagement and what FPMT did in the way of social projects. Perceptions included how people associated with FPMT understood tradition and social engagement and the meanings these had for them. The need to gather both information and perceptions led to seeking data from different sources using different methods.

For factual information about FPMT, such as its history, organizational form, statements on tradition and social engagement, and activities, the main source was texts produced by FPMT and affiliated entities/ projects/ individuals. These texts included websites, annual reports, videos, photographs, newsletters, FPMT's former in-house magazine *Mandala*,[78] non-academic histories, and so on. A different textual source supplied a mix of information and perceptions: a small number of academic studies that include FPMT or its affiliates or examine Tibetan Buddhism in ways relevant to FPMT. The third main source was fieldwork. Of these forms of data, only that arising out of fieldwork was new and original. However, other data complete the picture and place the dissertation into conversation with relevant scholarship.

The following section describes the ethnographic portion of the research.

Research Methodology

Qualitative research does not impose a single method; rather, scholarship emphasizes that the methods selected should suit the aim of the research, providing good quality data that responds to the research question.[79] The research undertaken in this study relied on recognized methods—in-depth interviews and site visits that included more interviews, informal conversations, and participant observation—deemed optimal for gathering the data needed to fulfill the research objectives.

Ethnographic research took place in two phases, both approved by the University of Manitoba's Research Ethics Board. Prior to its start, FPMT's international office was contacted and provided with detailed information on the proposed research. A letter of support was

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[77] Borneman and Hammoudi, "The Fieldwork Encounter," 8-18.

[78] FPMT launched a newsletter called *Wisdom* in 1983. In 1987 the newsletter became *Mandala* magazine. *Mandala* ceased publication in 2021 after its 77th issue. FPMT's news and stories are now published on its website, FPMT.org.

[79] Small and Calarco write that questions in the design of ethnographic fieldwork can include "how many people are interviewed, for how long, how they are selected, whether one or multiple field sites are selected, how often they are observed, in what capacity, and many others." Because different research objectives call for different ways of obtaining data, there is no universal optimal research design; methods should suit objectives. Small and Calarco, *Qualitative Literacy*, 15-16.

requested, with the idea that such a letter would encourage people to participate in the research and encourage FPMT affiliates with social projects to permit visits. The letter was received March 10, 2022, and copies accompanied all email invitations to participate in research. They were also shared with the managers of Dharma centres, Kopan Monastery, and social projects visited before making plans to undertake research at their sites and also shown to individuals at those sites who were interviewed in person.

The first phase of ethnographic research involved online interviews with thirty individuals associated with FPMT around the world. These individuals included knowledgeable key informants as well as other people associated with the organization and its lamas. The interviews were semi-structured. They used a prepared list of questions—a script that was the same for everyone—but allowed conversations to shift directions organically and to explore points interviewees made.[80] Still, these conversations were always brought back to the questions to ensure these were all addressed. The interviews usually lasted 60-90 minutes, with some lasting longer. Most took place in the fall of 2022 and early winter 2023; four occurred later in 2023. The second phase of the research involved site visits to FPMT centres and social projects in India, Nepal, and England in February and March 2023 to observe activities, interview key informants and others, and learn from informal conversations. Site visits offered significant exposure to people involved in FPMT in their own environments, enhancing understanding of their worldview, perceptions, and motivations. Site visits also permitted exploration of unanticipated circumstances and information. Again, formal interviews lasted 60-90 minutes or longer, depending on how much exploration beyond the same set of fixed questions occurred; informal conversations fluctuated in length. In both phases of research, interviewees varied in their citizenship, place of residence, ethnicity, years of experience with FPMT, and personal characteristics. Sites visited also varied: there were significant differences among them in their surroundings and activities to help others. Some sites were visited a second time in February or March 2024, and some additional informal conversations occurred at that time.

To maintain confidentiality, each interviewee (as all research participants, formal and informal, are called here) was assigned a unique code and data concerning their relevant characteristics was tracked. Informal conversation interviewees who were not identified by name also had codes but these were matched to descriptions rather than names (such as "course participant" or "staff"). The key that matched names to codes was destroyed once research was complete. For one interviewee, with his agreement, a name remains associated with an interview; FPMT's CEO, Ven. Roger Kunsang. Ven. Roger agreed to be quoted by name and quotes and comments attributed to him appear throughout the dissertation; these were double checked with him by email. The only other interviewees whose names appear are five people who agreed to be profiled in Chapter 6. Their names appear as do photos, with the individuals' permission, for four of the five. These profiles were approved by the individuals they portray. All other interviewees are anonymized (i.e., quoted or cited without identifying details) or their views are grouped to prevent identification and maintain confidentiality.[81]

The two phases of research provided substantial data on perceptions within FPMT of FPMT's traditionalism and social engagement, as well as useful information on FPMT.

Population, Sample, Method: Phase 1

The population from which the sample was drawn consisted of those associated with FPMT at the time of the research, such as by being a member, teacher, or attendee at an FPMT Dharma or

[80] The script is found in Appendix 1.

[81] All interviewees signed a consent form (the same one). A blank consent form appears in Appendix 2.

retreat centre, a volunteer or staff member at an FPMT centre, project, or service, a student or practitioner of Dharma connected to FPMT, or a donor to FPMT. In addition, individuals had to meet other criteria at the time of the research: they had to be over the age of 18, able to communicate in English at least at a basic level, and not be direct beneficiaries of FPMT-affiliated social projects.

Given the size of this population, its unclear boundaries, and the fact that FPMT does not record individuals in it nor even estimate their number, it was not possible to select a random sample. Instead, non-probability sampling occurred: members of the population did not have an equal chance of being in the sample. The main objective was to ensure that the sample offered maximum information by being diverse and not weighted toward any single sub-group within FPMT. Such sub-groups might include the founding generation, Western converts, monastics, or residents of a single country or region. The sample also had to include key informants. However, there were relatively few individuals who, as individuals, were required; there are many knowledgeable people in FPMT. The exception was FPMT's CEO, who was interviewed. A small number of other senior people in FPMT were also interviewed.

To establish a sample that would allow generalization to the population with reasonable confidence, a list of potential participants was constructed by balancing relevant characteristics: age group, gender, ordination status (layperson or monastic), ethnicity, region of origin and residence, years of experience with FPMT, and role in FPMT (such as leaders, teachers, translators, advanced students, ordinary Dharma students, volunteers, and staff). The list was considered diverse enough to reveal variations in views and their association, if any, with personal characteristics, with enough key informants to provide required information.

The initial list included people who could be identified and for whom email addresses could be found, since information on the research and invitations to participate were to be sent by email. It was selected by searching websites and other FPMT materials for names and contact information, asking for recommendations from individuals in FPMT, and drawing on prior knowledge of FPMT. This initial group was thus "purposive": selected on the grounds that its members could be reached by email and had characteristics, knowledge, or experience relevant to the research and the need for diversity. There was also a "convenience" aspect to the initial list in that an accessible email address was a qualification for inclusion. The list developed further as a "snowball" aspect came into play; some interviewees recommended others and connected them to the researcher. Snowball recommendations had to be vetted as some were beneficiaries of social projects and thus not part of the target population. However, most snowball recommendations were contacted, and some agreed to be interviewed. Snowballing was not effective for members of Dharma centres in Southeast and East Asia, unfortunately, as none from that group agreed to be interviewed when contacted, a limitation discussed further below.

On the list were approximately 85 individuals: an initial 75 followed by about 10 "snowball" additions. Invitations to participate were sent by email beginning in early October 2022 and included information on the research project, its list of prepared questions, the letter of support from FPMT's international office, a consent form, and an invitation to an interview on Zoom. The target was 30 online interviews. In order to participate, individuals had to respond to the emailed invitation, provide a signed consent form, and agree to the interview either being recorded or the subject of detailed note-taking. Some individuals who did not respond to the first email received a repeat invitation, an attempt to keep participants' diversity profile approximating that of invitees. Those willing to participate were interviewed by Zoom. Audio recordings and Zoom transcriptions were saved; automatically produced video recordings were deleted at the close of the interview. Detailed notes were also taken.

During the main period of online interviews between October 2022 and late January 2023, 26 interviews took place, and five written responses to the questions along with one self-

recorded response were received. Later in 2023, four more interviews were completed with people unavailable earlier, including FPMT's CEO, producing a total of 30 online interviews and six responses in other formats. This group constitutes the Phase 1 sample.

Population, Sample, Method: Phase 2

The second phase of ethnographic research consisted of visits to sites of socially engaged FPMT affiliates to observe their activities, conduct in-person interviews, and hold informal conversations with leaders, staff, volunteers, Dharma students, and others. The first aim was to observe social projects in different environments; the second was to discuss the same questions as in Phase 1 with people who met the same criteria. Site visits gave more opportunity than online interviews for supplementary conversations as data were gathered and insights gained, and for exploration of patterns as these were observed in action.

For Phase 2, the population was considered to be first, the various Dharma centres, monasteries, and NGOs affiliated with FPMT and undertaking socially oriented activities and second, all FPMT-associated adults living, visiting, or working in these, excluding direct beneficiaries of the social engagement. The primary selection was of sites; people were selected for formal interviews and informal conversations on the basis of their presence at selected sites. Sites were selected on the grounds that they could provide diverse and useful data and that visiting them was feasible within the time available: a sample both purposive and convenient. The initial target was three sites, but four were actually visited. They are: the Bodh Gaya region of India, where Root Institute for Wisdom Culture and Maitri Charitable Trust operate several social projects; Kopan Monastery in Nepal and its various social projects; Jamyang London Buddhist Centre in England; and Jamyang Buddhist Centre Leeds in England. This sample was not intended to represent all of FPMT's socially-oriented activities; representativeness is not a coherent concept in this case. Can a school represent a hospice, for example? Instead, the sample was meant to illustrate some of what FPMT does.

The population of individuals for in-person interviews and conversations was, as above, those available at the sampled sites. The sample combined purposeful sampling, in which interviews were sought with key informants who were leaders and knowledgeable people at the sites visited, convenience sampling, meaning speaking with people encountered at the sites who met the criteria and were willing, and snowball sampling, as interviewees recommended other potential interviewees.

At each site where research took place, those present were informed of the research before it began; no conversations, formal or informal, took place without interviewees being made familiar with the research. Some invitations to participate were verbal and face to face, others were made by email (sending the same documents as had accompanied online interview invitations), and a few were sent by WhatsApp, a form of communication common in India, Nepal, and England. When sending relevant documents by email ahead of time was not feasible, interviewees were given hard copies before the interview. In-person interviewees signed hard copies of the consent form before being interviewed. In addition to face-to-face interviews, two interviews took place on WhatsApp during this phase and these interviewees sent consent forms by WhatsApp or email. As with Phase 1, more people were invited to participate than did so. During Phase 2, 25 formal in-person interviews were completed as well as two formal interviews by WhatsApp. In addition, informal conversations on the research topics were held with 22 individuals whose identifying data was tracked, and informal conversations with approximately 29 others whose identifying data was not tracked. Notes were taken of their comments and of some, but not all, of their characteristics. Most formal interviews were audio recorded using a

digital voice recorder although a few, at the request of interviewees, were not; no video recording occurred. Detailed notes were taken as well. Informal conversations were not audio recorded; notes were taken after the conversation.

Estimating overall time of exposure to subjects and social projects at the sites visited is not easy. The first in-person visit was to FPMT's centre in Delhi in February 2023. This centre, Tushita Delhi, had no social projects, but I spent a day there and was able to formally interview two people in person as well as hold two informal conversations. I then spent almost three weeks in Bodh Gaya, and visited each of Maitreya School, Shakyamuni Buddha Health Clinic, and Maitri Charitable Trust multiple times, spending more time at the school than the other projects. I also spent a day at Maitri's village school and accompanied its mobile clinic to a rural area on another day. While at Root Institute, every day included talking, formally or informally, with people involved with FPMT and sometimes its social projects. I also participated in and observed various other activities and events, such as pujas. From there I traveled to Nepal, where I spent nine days in late February and March 2023. I did not stay at Kopan Monastery but visited multiple times. I spent several hours there each time I visited. I also toured Kopan's social projects in the Kathmandu area, and briefly visited its nunnery, although few nuns were present given the time of year. Traveling to England, I was able to stay at Jamyang London for ten days in March 2023. I spent time every day during that period participating in its activities and talking with staff, volunteers, and visitors. My visit to Leeds, later in March 2023, was briefer. I spent four days in Leeds and visited the centre on three different days for several hours each time, conversing informally with people, helping with a jumble sale, and doing formal interviews. Finally, I returned to Root Institute for several weeks in January and February 2024. At that time, I was not formally conducting research but nevertheless updated some information collected the previous year, visited Maitreya School again several times, spent time at Maitri Charitable Trust, and held informal conversations with visitors, volunteers, and local leaders as well as undertaking three formal interviews with individuals profiled in Chapter 6. In March 2024, I also briefly revisited Jamyang London, updated some information through conversations with its leaders, and undertook a formal interview with one individual profiled in Chapter 6. The fifth individual profiled was initially interviewed in March 2023 with a follow up conversation in 2024 by WhatsApp. Overall, substantial time was spent at FPMT sites and in communication with people associated with FPMT.[82]

Follow Up

One useful step in ethnographic research can be follow up, in which research results are tested, further explored, and expanded in various ways by building on earlier data. Participants may add to their earlier input, further questions may be asked of them as unanticipated insights emerge, events may occur that prompt supplementary questions, and so on. Follow up can increase the trustworthiness of research results.

Within the two phases of research described above, follow up occurred as information and insights came to light. For example, during Phase 1 of the research, it became apparent that FPMT might have a specifically traditionalist form of social engagement—an unanticipated finding. FPMT helps others in immediate, material ways just like modernist Buddhists do, but unlike them, people in FPMT often also, in reliance on traditionalist beliefs, attempt to benefit others in their future lives through teaching spiritual values that reduce mental delusions like

[82] The dates of visits are as follows. Delhi, February 3, 2023; Bodh Gaya, February 4-22, 2023; Kathmandu/ Kopan Monastery, February 24-March 5, 2023; London, March 6-16, 2023; Leeds, March 17-21, 2023; Bodh Gaya, January 25-March 5, 2024; London, March 7-March 13, 2024.

greed and anger and improve karma—doing pujas for them or exposing them to holy objects, blessings, and the like. This early discovery of some ways that traditionalism affected FPMT's engagement led to exploring other ways during interviews and site visits, as well as to noticing ways traditionalist beliefs were given physical form at the sites of social engagement, such as by giving blessed water (in addition to medicine) to medical patients. The result was a hypothesis that a traditionalist form of social engagement existed and FPMT exemplified it. In this way, early data influenced later research.

Certain kinds of follow up also took place after the two phases of research. One was the distribution in early October 2023, to all interviewees for whom I had email or WhatsApp addresses, of a draft copy of preliminary ethnographic research results. A commitment had been made to them that they would receive draft results without having to wait for the dissertation. While this step was taken to fulfill a commitment, it proved useful in another way: it attracted feedback from approximately five percent of interviewees. [83] The feedback was reassuringly positive about the accuracy of the results. Most responders stated that they felt the results described FPMT well. In addition, some offered useful information and suggestions, and in one case, raised a question about how a term was used.[84]

A final follow up was a second visit to some of the sites visited in Phase 2. After extending ethics approvals, I returned to Bodh Gaya, India, and London, England in February and March 2024. These visits were not a new phase of research; only casual conversations and observation occurred. However, they enabled me to check some of my understandings and conclusions and glean some further information. They also enabled me to develop the profiles of individuals that appear in Chapter 6. The people with whom I talked during this second visit are not added to the numbers presented below; most were the same individuals and already counted. Approximately ten informal conversations took place with additional individuals, but as these were informal only, and the individuals' characteristics were not tracked, they are not added to the numbers tallied below.

Information gathered during fieldwork was supplemented with textual research. The goal of examining written material was not to substantiate interviewees' comments but to add to them. Nevertheless, data from different sources were often mutually supportive.

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[83] One question I informally asked three different people, during my 2024 visits to FPMT sites, was why they had not responded to the summary I had earlier sent them. I had not asked people to respond but had indicated I was open to comments. Answers included that they had not read it because they did not feel they had time; they were involved in teaching Dharma, running Dharma centres, overseeing social projects, and other forms of Dharma practice; or that they did not feel that academic research, no matter what aspect of FPMT it addressed, mattered to them. It would not affect their view of FPMT or their own activities. Interviewees added that they had not read any other academic research on FPMT and were not aware of how scholars discussed FPMT, tradition, or modernism in Buddhism nor familiar with scholarship on Buddhists' social engagement. Even at Root Institute, no one I talked to knew of a thesis, discussed below, by scholar Kory Goldberg, or his academic articles discussing Root Institute and its school, not even individuals who Goldberg had interviewed and who remembered him. It seems that few people in FPMT are interested in what academic scholars say about FPMT or its activities.

[84] One interviewee questioned the usage of the term "cosmology" to describe the universe as portrayed in the Wheel of Life, pointing out that the term FPMT used for this is "samsara." The interviewee noted that "cosmology" within FPMT generally refers to the human realm that Buddhist texts describe as a flat earth covered with ocean; the ocean is contained by a ring of iron mountains, of which the central mountain is Meru. Within FPMT, I did not find that this latter cosmology is widely viewed as true picture of the universe, whereas the former cosmology ("samsara") is taken seriously. The usage of "cosmology" for the universe depicted in the Wheel of Life is an outsider or academic choice. Academics tend to use "cosmology" to mean worldview or social imaginary; Roger Jackson, for example, uses "cosmology" for this particular depiction of the universe as well as other cultures' parallel depictions of it. For Buddhism, he also adds "saṃsāra-karma-mokṣa cosmology" to specifically identify the cosmology's physical-moral elements. Jackson, *Rebirth*, 2, 17. The interviewee's comment, in any case, was a reminder to define the term "cosmology" to avoid confusion. The definition appears in the Glossary.

The Sample and its Impact

Interviewees' form of participation can be used to place them in two groups: those identified individually whose characteristics were noted, and those with whom conversations, often in small groups, were held, but who were not identified individually. The latter group comprised staff, volunteers, residents, visitors, and participants in activities at sites visited.

Another categorization is also relevant: formal interviews versus informal conversations. A formal interview was one which followed the script earlier developed, although discussions often roamed beyond that. Most formal interviews were recorded, although a few in-person interviews were not at the request of interviewees. Informal conversations, on the other hand, did not follow the questionnaire. These conversations arose naturally during observation of or participation in FPMT's activities. Later, notes were made of remarks that touched on the research topics and these became data. Those involved were made aware that research was being done but did not sign consent forms given the informality of the situation.

The following tables describe interviewees.

Ethnographic Research Participants: Numbers

Table 1: Ethnographic Research Participants: Numbers

Formal Interviews	
Zoom	30
WhatsApp	2
In-person	25
Written responses	5
Self-recorded responses	1
Total number of individuals formally interviewed	63
Informal Conversations	
Identified individuals	22
Non-identified individuals	29
Total number of individuals participating in informal conversations	51
Total identified research participants	85
Total research participants	114

Ethnographic Research Participants: Characteristics

Who participated in the research? How diverse were interviewees? Data in the three tables below reference the 85 identified research participants and show how many fall into each of the categories related to personal characteristics and relationship to FPMT. The meaning of the information is discussed below the tables.

Table 2: Identified Participants: Country of Origin & Residence

Country of Origin	
Tibet / Nepal	8
India	9
SE or E Asia	1
Europe	39
Americas/ Australia/ NZ	28
Total	85
Country of Residence	
Nepal	9
India	13
SE or E Asia	1
Europe	39
Americas/ Australia/ NZ	23
Total	85

Table 3: Identified Participants: Personal Characteristics

Age Group	
<35	14
35-50	20
51-65	23
65+	28
Total	85
Gender	
Male	39
Female	46
Total	85
Ordination Status	
Lay	58
Ordained	27
Total	85
Race/ Ethnicity	
White	66
South Asian	9
East Asian	1
Himalayan	8
Person of colour / mixed race not elsewhere classified	1
Total	85

Table 4: Identified Participants: Relationship to FPMT

Years Associated with FPMT	
<10	23
10-20	16
20+	46
Total	85
Current Role in FPMT	
Senior leaders, volunteer and staff	7
Local leaders, volunteer and staff	27
Dharma Teachers	12
Other (Volunteer, Member, Dharma student, etc.)	39
Total	85

The three tables display information on several points. First, on country of origin and country of residence, there were interviewees from most areas of FPMT activity.[85] Nevertheless, some areas had few or no interviewees. Individuals involved in FPMT in Latin America were invited but did not participate, leaving this group out of the final sample.[86] There was a risk that non-English speaking Europeans would also be left out, but several from various countries participated, so the group had a solid place in the sample. The largest group having few interviewees was in Southeast and East Asia. FPMT has sizable Dharma centres in Hong Kong, Singapore, Malaysia, and Taiwan, with most members being of East Asian ethnicity. However, only one individual active in those centres participated, along with one earlier active but now living in the West. The list of invitees included several individuals from these centres, and more were approached through snowballing, but little willingness to participate was found. This result limits the applicability of the research to FPMT affiliates in those regions. Another group whose participation might have been on low is those of Himalayan ancestry. Kopan Monastery, including its nunnery, has many hundreds of residents, but only a few were interviewed. However, those interviewed were key informants drawn from Kopan's leadership. They provided useful information and viewpoints that were likely shared by others with similar origins.[87]

The "country" figures are related to the race/ethnicity figures found in Table 3. Just as the Southeast and East Asian country category has few members, so does the corresponding race/ ethnicity category. In Western countries, FPMT's followership is generally perceived to be

[85] One note on the "country" figures: a number of interviewees were not living in their country of origin. Even where the tables show similar numbers of interviewees in a region of origin and of residence, these are often not the same individuals. People from Asia sometimes live in Western countries and vice versa, for example. In some cases, this movement is a result of involvement in FPMT. Another note: Tibet appears as a region of origin but not residence. This is because there were interviewees born in Tibet but none currently living there. FPMT does not have affiliates in Tibet.

[86] I later received information on a social project from one Latin American individual but did not formally interview him because research ethics protocols had expired. He is not included in the above numbers.

[87] At Kopan Monastery, which has about 200 Himalayan adult monks and 350 boys, and about 300 Himalayan nuns (adults and girls), I spoke with three members of the leadership team, some people involved in social projects, an individual involved with the nunnery (all Himalayan), and a small number of Westerners who work, study, retreat, or live at the monastery. In Tibetan monastic culture, monastics would typically express the same views as their monastic leaders, one reason the research did not reach out further.

predominantly of European ancestry but also includes people from other backgrounds. The list of invitees included several individuals with Asian or African ancestry living in the West. A few ethnically Asian people involved in FPMT in the West participated, but only one person living in the West, within the identified group of interviewees, had non-white-non-Asian ancestry; among the informal, non-identified contacts, one was a Black individual living in Canada. It is not easy to know if one participant out of 85 or two out of 114 reflects the numbers involved with FPMT; it may, but it also may be low.[88]

How does the sample compare, ethnically, with the FPMT-associated population? The question is challenging because the size and composition of the population is unknown. However, certain facts are relevant. Most of FPMT's lay-oriented centres are in Western countries, and observation of some of those centres in past experience, as well as information available about them (such as on websites and in *Mandala*, FPMT's former magazine) suggests that most people who participate in Western centres are white. Because of the weight of Western centres in FPMT, that most people associated with centres are white is not likely to be disputed. This white majority could be as high as 80% or 90% of those who have some involvement with an FPMT centre, despite FPMT's thriving East, Southeast, and South Asian centres. However, the majority would be smaller if other ways of being associated with FPMT were counted, such being a monastic, working, volunteering, donating to, or otherwise supporting an FPMT centre, service, or project, attending an FPMT course without being involved in a centre, being influenced by publications, teachings, or videos from FPMT or affiliated sources (like the Lama Yeshe Wisdom Archive), having attended an FPMT course or other teachings or Dharma activities, online or in person, in the past, and remaining attached to the teachings or teacher, or considering one or both of the lamas, or other FPMT teachers, to be among one's own teachers. Given the amorphous nature of this population, one can only speculate on its ethnic mix. Probably white people remain in the majority although not at the level of 80-90%: perhaps 60%.

The next largest ethnic group, if counted as one group, comprises people of Asian ancestry. Dharma centres in Hong Kong, Singapore, Malaysia, and Taiwan involve many people of East Asian ethnicity. Kopan Monastery and related organizations include well over 1,000 people of Himalayan ancestry as well as some of non-Himalayan Nepali, Indian, and other backgrounds. FPMT has centres in India and Nepal that attract people of South Asian ancestry. And in Western countries, people with a variety of Asian ancestries are involved with FPMT's activities. There are also an unknown number of people involved in FPMT with other backgrounds, such as Israelis, Africans and people of African ancestry, and Latin Americans with mixed (indigenous, African, European, and/or Asian) ancestry in North, Central, and South America. Given the size of the various groups of people involved in FPMT, the most important gap in the sample is people of East Asian ancestry. Otherwise, figures show that, while representativeness is not ascertainable, interviewees likely reflected to a reasonable extent the geographic, racial, cultural, and ethnic mix of those associated with FPMT.[89]

Interviewees' gender was relatively balanced, but other personal characteristics reflected the research requirement to interview key informants with knowledge and experience of FPMT. More than half of those interviewed were over 50 years old. One reason is that those most knowledgeable about FPMT skew older and thus invitees were often in the older age groups; it is

[88] No one among participants in Canada, the US, Australia, or New Zealand self-identified as indigenous; this dearth probably reflects a low number of indigenous people from Western countries involved with FPMT.

[89] It is possible that the sample had a smaller proportion of white people than the population because efforts were made, such as through snowballing, to ensure non-white participation; this is not a particular concern because enough European-descent individuals were interviewees to ensure substantial inclusion. Overall, more granular research, particularly in languages other than English, that could gain the participation of more individuals of East Asian heritage and in Latin America, might expand understandings of the whole of FPMT.

also possible that FPMT's followership in general is not particularly youthful. However, this varies by affiliate. The figures on experience with FPMT show that the participants similarly skew toward long experience. Out of the 85 identified participants, 62 or 73% had more than ten years of involvement with FPMT. The predominance of older and more experienced participants was mitigated in part by deliberate attempts to contact younger individuals newer to FPMT through snowballing and during site visits. The figures in Tables 3 and 4 show that these efforts were successful: 14 of 85 identified participants, or 16%, were under the age of 35, and 23 identified participants or 27% had been associated with FPMT for fewer than ten years. And although the characteristics of non-identified individuals were not tracked, many of those were young and new to FPMT, such as those participating in an "Introduction to Buddhism" course at Kopan Monastery. The age profile and period of involvement in FPMT of participants may reflect the realities of FPMT: those attracted to its form of Buddhism who stay longer than an introductory period, it appears, tend to remain for a long time, and interviewees commented that FPMT's population profile tends to be older.

Interviews and informal conversations did not include questions about gender identity or sexual orientation. Several interviewees nevertheless identified themselves, unasked, as LGBTQ+; this factor was not tracked, but is mentioned because it connects to comments interviewees made that one way they viewed FPMT as modern was its openness to LGBTQ+ identities.

More than 30% of those interviewed were ordained, which is higher than the percentage of ordained people in the FPMT-associated population. It reflects two factors: a willingness on the part of ordained people to participate such that higher proportion of ordained people than lay people agreed to be interviewed; and, again, the research requirement to interview knowledgeable people and those in leadership roles. In FPMT such individuals are often ordained. On roles, about half of interviewees had an official role in FPMT whether as a leader, staff person, or Dharma teacher. This proportion reflects an inevitable source of sampling bias: the less involvement people had in FPMT's centres, projects, and services, the less likely they were to be placed on the initial list of invitees due the difficulty of finding their names and contact information. To a lesser extent, it also reflects the requirement for some interviewees to be key informants, particularly at the sites visited where information about social projects as well as opinion was sought. Lastly, individuals in official roles evinced a greater willingness to participate than other invitees.

As described above, the sample, despite being a large and diverse group, may vary from the population. While there is no way of ascertaining its representativeness, in research of this type, representativeness has limited meaning. Recognized ethnographic research methods were used—interviews and participant observation—which allowed substantial exposure to FPMT's various milieux and produced abundant data. Nevertheless, such methods have limits. Unlike a poll or survey, they cannot, within a given level of confidence, provide information on what percentage of the population holds a given view. For example, most interviewees felt that FPMT was modern in its ways of operating, and several contended that it should modernize operating methods even more. While research can record that finding, it cannot estimate what percentage of those involved with FPMT share this opinion. Where results of the ethnographic research are generalized to the population, readers should understand that no confidence interval can be established, and margins or error could be large.

How can one determine if the sample in this case was sufficiently large and diverse to reasonably draw conclusions about the perceptions of people in FPMT and not just interviewees? One way is to ask whether saturation was achieved. Research attains saturation when new interviews provide no new data; all perspectives have been collected. During this research, saturation appeared to occur with respect to perceptions of tradition, traditionalism, and social

engagement; interviews produced a variety of perceptions, but those expressed in later interviews repeated those earlier expressed. However, information about FPMT's activities could be gathered almost infinitely, such as by interviewing more individuals and visiting more, or even all, of the organization's social projects and affiliates. So information gathering did not reach saturation during ethnographic research—but it did not need to. The sample produced the required data on perceptions, and it contributed data on activities that met research requirements.

Most noticeable when analyzing ethnographic research results is that there is little variation across interviewees in views and perceptions on some matters, particularly those related to tradition, but more on others, especially social engagement. Variations appeared to be occasionally correlated with age, but correlation is not easily measured with qualitative data; it can be suggested but not established. Correlation and variations are discussed in the body of the dissertation. Those views widely shared were generally in line with views FPMT expresses in its communications—for example, concerning what FPMT's tradition comprises. Variations were more often observed in areas in which FPMT does not communicate any particular stance, such as whether social engagement is traditional.

Keeping in mind cautions, the sample is taken to be generalizable to the population other than FPMT's followers in Asia of East Asian ancestry. In general, if a view is rarely expressed in the sample, it can likely be assumed to be rare in FPMT. If commonly expressed, it can likely be assumed to be common in FPMT. Thus, an assumption is made that the data say something meaningful about FPMT. This assumption is based on the sample's size and its inclusion of both knowledgeable individuals and a set of people diverse in relevant ways. Nevertheless, the reality is that a small sample of a large population, even if well-selected, can never be taken with certainty to reflect the whole. There is always room for further research.

Effects of Research on FPMT

As discussed above in the section on "Follow Up," preliminary ethnographic research results were shared with interviewees, including FPMT's CEO and other international and local leaders. More than six pages of results in point form were provided.

It cannot be assumed that the results document had no impact. There was little that was controversial in it, but it summarized how interviewees thought on certain topics, and responses to it from interviewees suggested that it was brought into conversations within the organization—it was one of many sources of information contributing to discussions after the 2023 passing of Rinpoche. One example: the document listed some suggestions for modernizations in FPMT. Such suggestions have long circulated. Nevertheless, the document's timing brought these to its readers' attention when FPMT was working through the changes wrought by Rinpoche's loss. One of the earliest responses to it noted that some of the proposed modernizations were being discussed at senior levels in that context. The document did not prompt these discussions, but it highlighted certain suggestions at a time when the organization was open to them.

Mitra Barua, who researched the Sri Lankan community in Toronto, indicates that his research "undoubtedly" impacted that community's later negotiation of tensions between immigrant and Canadian identity, collective and individual practice, and lineage transmission and modernization.[90] Hence, scholarship can affect its subjects. Nevertheless, negative impacts from this research and dissertation are unlikely. None were mentioned when initial results were shared; were there any likely to arise, it seems they would have been revealed then. If the

[90] Barua, *Seeding Buddhism*, 22.

dissertation has an impact on FPMT, it is likely to be positive given that the research brings together information in a way that may be useful to individuals and the organization. It also makes scholars more aware of FPMT's history, structure, understanding of tradition, and socially beneficial activities, potentially improving the accuracy and sophistication of future scholarship on the organization as well as popular portrayals of it.

Conclusion

Ethnographic research generated much data on FPMT and on perspectives across FPMT on the topics researched, thanks to interviewees' knowledge, thoughtfulness, and willingness to contribute. Data were sufficient to perform the required analysis and draw conclusions about not only interviewees but also—cautiously—most of FPMT. The data gathered inform the remainder of the dissertation. Other sources of data—FPMT-related sources and earlier scholarship—further fill out and substantiate its narrative.

Chapter 2.
FPMT: Context, Profile, History, Activities, Scholarship

Introduction

> *Contrasting with the romanticized image of spiritual masters in secluded caves or hard to access monasteries in the middle of the mountains, prominent Tibetan teachers, particularly High Lamas, outside Tibet are often the heads of complex, modern, and resourceful organizations that include traditional monasteries and schools, along with retreat and Dharma centers in both South Asia and Western countries. They provide teachings, empowerments and so forth following the tradition of their school and lineage, and at the same time they often offer courses and teachings to an international audience (both face-to-face and online), and provide social or community services directly or by means of affiliated NGOs. Many of them travel frequently around the world, are active in the social media, have their own Facebook page in English, and have their videos uploaded to YouTube.…*[91]

Jessica Falcone, an anthropologist of religion, calls FPMT "something of a transnational Buddhist empire" originating in "global empire-building by jet-set lamas." This description, wide of the mark, shows how easy it is for scholars to misconstrue today's Buddhist organizations.[92] Scholars of Buddhism usually study teachings, practices, or history; anthropologists like Falcone study people. It is rarer for such scholars to analyze the entities through which people sustain and spread teachings and practices as history unfolds. Nevertheless, Buddhist organizations' ways of operating, teaching, and connecting to society can have significant effects on their members and surrounding communities. FPMT, for example, touches hundreds of thousands of people. Its main leader for decades, Rinpoche, was "internationally influential," according to one scholar. How? By means of an "impressive worldwide network."[93] Yet little analysis of this "worldwide network" has been done, so misunderstandings easily arise.

Before the modern era, monasticism was Buddhism's main institution. Today, two kinds of non-monastic institutions or organizations reflect modernity's impact. They are, first, places where mainly lay people learn and practice Buddhism, commonly called "Dharma centres"; and second, networks that connect, sometimes across vast geographies, Dharma centres practicing the same lineage. These networks developed as Buddhists migrated to new lands, worldwide trade and travel became common, Buddhist publishing increased, the internet eased communications, and raising and directing funds globally became straightforward. FPMT is one of these transnational networks. It is not the largest, although its influence and impact reach beyond its immediate supporters. Its two main lamas, Lama Yeshe and Rinpoche, gained international popularity during their lifetimes and still attract devotion.

Learning about networks and organizations like FPMT contributes to understanding how Buddhists today sustain their lineages and reach out to others. Given that scholars have yet to

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[91] Miguel Álvarez Ortega, "Global Virus, International Lamas: Tibetan Religious Leaders in the Face of the Covid-19 Crisis," in *Religious Fundamentalism in the Age of Pandemic*, ed. Nina Käsehage (Bielefeld: transcript Verlag, 2021), 189. The article includes FPMT in its discussion.

[92] Jessica Falcone, "The Heritage Spectrum: A More Inclusive Typology for the Age of Global Buddhism," in *Interpreting Religion: Making Sense of Religious Lives*, eds. Erin Johnston and Vikash Singh (Great Britain: Bristol University Press, 2022), 199; Falcone, *Battling*, 76.

[93] Ortega, "Global Virus, International Lamas," 194.

produce a comprehensive picture of FPMT, and that studies that include it have not always portrayed it accurately, in depicting FPMT this dissertation takes on multiple roles: it addresses past misunderstandings; builds on useful aspects of earlier work; presents new data on one of the Buddhist world's more influential organizations; illustrates some of the ways Buddhists can both preserve the past and adapt to today; and shows how a traditional form of Buddhism can affect social engagement.

FPMT's Context: Transnational Buddhist Organizations

Transnational Buddhist Organizations: History

Monastic law codes, the monastics who followed them, and monastic communities constituted Buddhism's first institution. Monks and nuns became the preservers and transmitters of the Buddha's teachings, a role they retain today. Nevertheless, the monastic order has long been heterogeneous. Three versions of the monastic law codes arose, one used in Theravada areas, one in East Asia, and another in Himalayan regions. Each monastery, as well, has its own rules that may take precedence over law codes. The result is that the Buddhist monastic order has displayed differences as well as commonalities. And in neither premodernity nor modernity has it had a single international governing body.[94]

Throughout history, Buddhist monasteries have been mainly self-ruling, with few transregional or transnational organizations. Brooke Schedneck maintains that those that arose in the modern era were the first.[95] Nevertheless, anthropologist of Tibetan culture Geoffrey Samuel notes that Himalayan history offers examples of transregional organizing. In pre-1959 Tibet, occasionally smaller monasteries reported to larger ones. More often, a senior teacher or group of teachers had authority over several monasteries—an early transregional network. As well, sometimes sects had leaders with a certain authority over all monasteries forming part of the sect across Tibet, other neighbouring areas, and even Mongolia. Samuel thus finds precedents for today's transnational Tibetan Buddhist organizations.

> Pre-modern lamas had networks and centres extending over long distances, and travelled between their centres in ways not entirely different from the constant touring of many contemporary lamas between their geographically scattered groups of followers. Thus the basic concept of a diverse network encompassing a variety of different constituents in terms of lifestyle and ethnicity is not new.[96]

Despite these precedents, Samuel perceives differences between past and present networks. In particular, he indicates, "modern communications and technology have enabled both a far wider spread … and a greater degree of connectivity than generally existed in Tibet." Local autonomy in the past was significant.[97] Nevertheless, networks did exist, and as a result, he calls today's Tibetan Buddhist networks "an extension of a traditional Tibetan Buddhist mode of operation."[98] In one way, however, past Tibetan networks are not a precise precedent for FPMT: FPMT does

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[94] Brooke Schedneck, "Buddhist International Organizations," in *The Oxford Handbook of Contemporary Buddhism*, ed. Michael Jerryson (NY: Oxford University Press, 2017), 398-400.
[95] Schedneck, "Buddhist International Organizations," 398-399.
[96] Geoffrey Samuel, *Tantric Revisionings: New Understandings of Tibetan Buddhism and Indian Religion* (NY: Routledge, 2017), 309.
[97] Samuel, *Tantric Revisionings*, 308-309.
[98] Samuel, *Tantric Revisionings*, 317.

not re-create any actual network that existed in pre-1959 Tibet. It is a Geluk organization but is not part of the renewal, outside Tibet, of the old Tibetan Geluk network; it does not take in any Geluk monasteries in Tibet nor any of their successor monasteries in Nepal and India. Its main monastery, Kopan Monastery in Nepal, is not a re-establishment of any of the monasteries devastated by the 1959 Chinese seizing of Tibet. Nor was Kopan launched to host Tibetan refugee monks. Instead, it began as a school for Sherpa boys from Nepal, and most of its residents have always been Himalayans from Nepal, not Tibetans.

Notwithstanding Tibetan precedent, modernity has fostered new types of Buddhist organizations. One impetus has been widespread interest from lay people in learning Buddhist teachings, doing Buddhist practices, and forming Buddhist communities. In premodern contexts, lay people visited and performed practices in temples, shrines, or monasteries where monks, nuns, or priests presided; they rarely had their own religious establishments. In most places, few lay people received significant Dharma education or did intense formal practice. Most relied on specialists to do practices on their behalf.[99] Beginning mainly in the twentieth century, lay people in Asia, the West, and elsewhere, wishing to study and practice Dharma in formal ways, have created a new entity: the Dharma centre. As Buddhism spread around the world, such centres proliferated. Because they are lay organizations, monastic law codes and authorities do not govern them, so their leaders and members are free to determine their activities and ways of operating. The centres are generally adapted to surrounding environments; those involved do not resist modernity or withdraw from society.[100] Dharma centres then spawned other entities: retreat centres, translation teams, publishing houses, research organizations, social projects, colleges, and so on. And their leaders have often linked them into transnational networks.

Today's transnational networks that focus on the teaching and practice of Buddhism arose in two main ways. One was through centrally-directed expansion from an initial base: the missionizing model. According to scholar Stuart Chandler, this is how Fo Guang Shan (FGS), a modernist Buddhist network originating in Taiwan, arose. Chandler writes:

> Master Xingyun, the founder of the Foguang Buddhist order, frequently announces to his devotees: ''I am a global person'' … The master began to refer to himself in this manner around 1990, just as his organization undertook an ambitious campaign to expand beyond its base in Taiwan and establish branch temples around the world, an effort that by the close of the millennium had resulted in the opening of nearly one hundred centers on five continents.[101]

Another example of this model is the New Kadampa Tradition (NKT), a Geluk organization. From an initial base in Northern England, NKT deliberately missionized and, in a top-down process, established centres throughout the UK and in some other countries.[102]

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[99] Samuel notes that Tibet was something an outlier in having a substantial number of lay practitioners of various forms of meditation, including tantric meditation; he attributes this to persistent Indian influence, writing, "Tibetans continued the Indian Vajrayāna idea of lay Tantric practice and there were communities of lay practitioners with varying degrees of separateness from lay life." Samuel, *Tantric Revisionings*, 291-292.

[100] On the transnational Chinese Buddhist organization Fo Guang Shan (FGS), for example, Stuart Chandler writes, "The strategy adopted by the master to ensure the continued vibrancy of Chinese Buddhism has been, not to resist modernity, but to embrace many of its pivotal concepts and institutional mechanisms, thereby bringing about a dynamic synthesis of the old and the new." Stuart Chandler, *Establishing a Pure Land on Earth: The Foguang Buddhist Perspective on Modernization and Globalization* (Honolulu: University of Hawai'i Press, 2004), 1.

[101] Chandler, *Establishing a Pure Land*, 1.

[102] Scholar David Kay notes that NKT had a "New Centres Development Fund" through which its head office financed the creation of new centres. FPMT had no comparable fund because new centres were not launched or subsidized by its international office. Kay describes NKT as engaging in top-down missionization to rapidly

FPMT came into being in the other way transnational networks arose: spontaneously. According to FPMT's founder, Lama Yeshe:

> The way … [FPMT has] evolved is not through you or me having said we want to do these things but through a natural process of development. Our organization has grown naturally, organically. … I've never said that I want centers all over the world. Rather, I came into contact with students who then wanted to … share their experience with others, and put together groups in various countries to share and grow with others. … When we started establishing centers there was no overall plan—they just popped up randomly all over the world like mushrooms, because of the evolutionary process I've just mentioned … Now that all these centers do exist… We have to develop properly both internally and in accordance with our twentieth century environment.[103]

Lama Yeshe and his disciple Rinpoche (referred to together as "the lamas") encountered and taught Westerners in Nepal beginning in the late 1960s. From these encounters, the lamas' students created Dharma centres in their home countries. As the centres' number grew, the lamas and their students discovered a need to coordinate activities and share certain responsibilities, such as organizing and paying for the lamas' travel, documenting and publishing their words, training translators and translating needed texts, producing shared educational and liturgical material, supporting social projects, and so on. This need to share responsibilities and coordinate activities prompted them to establish an international office.[104] Lama Yeshe stated that each Dharma centre "is a part of the foundation of the main office; the office manifests from that base."[105] As the international office and network of affiliates grew, FPMT became one of the pioneering organizations in the global transmission of Buddhism.[106]

Although the dissertation refers to these groupings of Dharma centres, central offices, and other bodies as "organizations," they are seldom a single legal entity. Most are networks that comprise locally established legal entities and unincorporated groups linked to a central office in both informal and formal ways, such as by devotion to shared teachers and mechanisms like written agreements.

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establish as many centres as possible. He adds: "The FPMT does not share the same energetic will to expand that drives the NKT; rather, it follows a different model of growth that emphasises the consolidation of existing centres more than the generation of new ones. The FPMT's rate of growth in terms of centres established around the world is thus much slower than that of the NKT. … In terms of the numbers of individual students active around those centres, however, the NKT still has a long way to go before it matches the size of the FPMT." David Kay, *Tibetan and Zen Buddhism in Britain* (London: RoutledgeCurzon, 2007), 79, 95-97, 115.

[103] Quoted in Nicholas Ribush, "Bamboo through Concrete … Growing Tibetan Buddhism in the West—The Story of the Foundation for the Preservation of the Mahayana Tradition (the FPMT)," in *Inner Peace, Global Impact: Tibetan Buddhism, Leadership, and Work*, ed. Kathryn Goldman Schuyler (Charlotte, NC: Information Age Publishing, 2012), 167–168.

[104] Ribush, "Bamboo," 170-176.

[105] Ribush, "Bamboo," 175

[106] Transnational Buddhist institutions of other kinds, that do not primarily disseminate Buddhist teachings and practices, also exist. One kind comprises those, like Sakyadhita International (a Buddhist women's organization), the International Association of Buddhist Universities, and the International Network of Engaged Buddhists, that cross lineages and exist mainly for advocacy and networking. Another kind consists of politically oriented international organizations, of which three are well-known: the World Fellowship of Buddhists (WFB), the World Buddhist Forum (WBF), and the International Buddhist Confederation (IBC). None is widely recognized as speaking for all Buddhists. Tzu Chi Foundation, which has branches on every continent, is a category in itself. Its focus is humanitarian activities. André Laliberté, "Geopolitics of Buddhism," *Journal of Buddhist Ethics* 25 (2018): 397-398, 410, 414.

Transnational Buddhist Organizations: Scholarship

There is little scholarship comparing transnational Buddhist organizations. One account of Tibetan Buddhist transnational groups was published by Samuel in 2005 in a book on Tibetan Buddhism.[107] Two summary accounts of a wider range of groups have appeared more recently. One is by Brooke Schedneck, "Buddhist International Organizations," in the *Oxford Handbook of Contemporary Buddhism* (2017) and the other is by Richard Payne, "Globalizing Tantric Buddhism," in the *Oxford Research Encyclopedia of Religion* (2021). All include FPMT. They are discussed here, along with another article that offers relevant points by Robert Wuthnow and Stephen Offutt, "Transnational Religious Connections" (2008).

Samuel's work, based on ethnographic fieldwork in the 1990s, is an impressionistic rather than comprehensive description of some of the characteristics and issues facing the five largest transnational Tibetan Buddhist networks active at that time: FPMT; NKT; Shambhala International; the Dzogchen Community; and Rigpa International.[108] Noting that it is not possible to estimate numbers of followers in each, he addresses other questions. One is differences among the networks. It is evident that their practices overlap but are not identical. He finds precedents in Tibet for these variations, tracing them to the large repertoires from which Tibetan lamas have long been able to choose, Tibetans' habit of integrating into Buddhism some indigenous practices, and the measure of creativity that respected lamas have always been allowed in Himalayan culture. These factors all mean that in Tibet, Buddhism was not monolithic, even within the same sect, so there is nothing new about variations in practices among or within today's Tibetan Buddhist networks.[109]

Samuel compares the five networks in other ways. For example, they have differing geographic spreads. At the time of his research, NKT was bigger in the UK than FPMT in part because NKT had appropriated FPMT's UK base, Manjushri Institute, and missionized heavily in the UK.[110] The Dzogchen community, he indicates, had a wider geographical spread than FPMT, but fewer followers. Some organizations had strong links to monasteries in Tibet but FPMT did not because its lamas did not have monasteries of their own there before 1959. Only some networks, of which one was FPMT, were active in Mongolia. FPMT had an unusually strong presence in Nepal due to Rinpoche's roots there. Samuel comments on FPMT's social engagement, not mentioning whether others were also engaged; in this group, FPMT may have been at the forefront of engagement. All relied on modern communications, technologies, and forms of travel to maintain international networks and transport lamas around the globe.[111]

Samuel indicates that none of the networks was under the authority of lamas outside the network. Each was self-governing, although advice may have been received from the Dalai Lama or other senior lamas in each lineage. (In fact, FPMT has always followed advice from the Dalai Lama.[112]) His point is that the networks were independent and not subject to "much in the way of hierarchical authority" from the Dalai Lama, other high lamas, lineage holders, sect

[107] Samuel, *Tantric Revisionings*, 288-316.
[108] Today, Dzongsar Kyentse Rinpoche's organization, Siddhartha's Intent, also ranks among the largest transnational Tibetan Buddhist networks.
[109] Samuel, *Tantric Revisionings*, 309-310, 324.
[110] Kay describes this event, and attributes FPMT's small size in the UK to it. Kay, *Tibetan and Zen Buddhism*, 27-28, 37-38. Kay also notes that although NKT had, at the time, more Dharma centres in total than FPMT, its number of active participants was quite small; the average number of regular attendees at centres was 7-8. He estimates that it had, in 2004, 400 centres but only 3000 regular attendees. Since some centres were large, the implication is that many centres consisted only of a teacher and a couple of regular students or helpers, with other individuals cycling in and out. FPMT's centres appear to average larger numbers of committed participants.
[111] Samuel, *Tantric Revisionings*, 303-310.
[112] Ribush, "Bamboo," 181; A121P03, Interviewed by Author, November 2022.

leaders, or the Tibetan government in exile. On each network's level of internal centralization, he indicates that modern technologies create the possibility of more operational centralization and standardization of Dharma teachings and practices than occurred in the Tibetan past, but he also acknowledges diversity within each network, suggesting that the networks are actually decentralized. That he calls each one a "network" and not an "organization" is illustrative: it implies they are not constituted of a central office with branches but of independent but linked entities. One result of this structure, he suggests, is limited stability. Dissenting teachers or members can pull individual centres out of the network, something that occurred in FPMT at least twice.[113] A second challenge to stability is that the main lamas of a network can become overworked as the number of centres and followers grows, so there may be "a natural limit" to each network's size. Generally other lamas or teachers are brought in, but that reduces central control and increases the risk of breakaways.[114]

One area in which Samuel contends that all Tibetan Buddhist networks need to adapt further to contemporary circumstances is gender. Samuel indicates that Western Buddhists expect female lamas and "feminist-oriented teachings" but there is sometimes resistance in non-Western nodes of the networks, potentially creating tensions. He hints that the movement of Himalayan women, including female lamas, into teaching roles can mediate this tension.[115] In the 1990s when Samuel did his research, FPMT had women teachers, and their numbers have only grown since, but it did not have female lamas. This changed with the arrival, from Tibet, of a young woman yogi known in FPMT as "Khadro-la" whom the Dalai Lama, for whom she is an oracle, asked Rinpoche to care for. She teaches in FPMT affiliates as well as undertaking other practices, like divination, for the organization. As well, Himalayan and other women now receive training in Geluk nunneries to become teachers at the highest levels; if there was resistance to women teachers, it has faded. Nevertheless, interviews revealed that many women associated with FPMT still believe that the organization needs improvements in gender equality, a topic discussed below. This is a multi-faceted issue that the presence of female teachers has not completely resolved. Nevertheless, Samuel's comments remain mostly applicable to FPMT.

Schedneck's more recent article on Buddhist transnational organizations—not only Tibetan Buddhist ones—describes them as follows:

> Buddhist international organizations are a dynamic and diverse phenomenon of contemporary Buddhism. The proliferation of these organizations is a significant manifestation of global and transnational forms of Buddhism. …Common characteristics … include charismatic leadership, a large lay Buddhist population, the establishment of local branch centers, and a focus on a particular form of Buddhist practice.[116]

Schedneck's description does not fully suit all the organizations she aims to describe. In this quote and elsewhere in her account, she suggests that all transnational Buddhist organizations are centrally controlled—a head office establishes and directs branches in various locations. This picture may accurately depict some organizations but not FPMT.[117] (Falcone also mistakenly implies that in FPMT a powerful central office runs branches[118]). The portrayal may reflect stereotypes of centrally controlled, top-down, religious organizations.

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[113] Samuel, *Tantric Revisionings*, 309-311.
[114] Samuel, *Tantric Revisionings*, 310-312.
[115] Samuel, *Tantric Revisionings*, 313.
[116] Schedneck, "Buddhist International Organizations," 398.
[117] Stuart Chandler implies this is how Fo Guang Shan (FGS) globalized although even FGS is unlikely to be as centrally controlled as Schedneck's words imply. Chandler, *Establishing a Pure Land*, 1.
[118] Falcone, "The Heritage Spectrum," 199.

Schedneck contends that transnational organizations arise due to the emergence of modern forms of Buddhism, and as a result, "features of modern Buddhism can be seen within Buddhist international organizations, especially a concern for democracy, social justice, and greater roles for laity and women."[119] This assessment is partially accurate, but does not distinguish the modern era, when these organizations arose, from "modern Buddhism," a specific form of Buddhism. All of today's transnational Buddhist organizations arose in the modern era, but not all propagate modern forms of Buddhism.[120] Nor do all share concerns with democracy and social justice, although all appear to offer the "greater roles for laity and women" that Schedneck references, a feature of modernity and not only modern Buddhism. Schedneck's account specifically includes FPMT, but FPMT does not disseminate a modern form of Buddhism, does not display much concern with democracy, and, despite an interest in bettering society, does not emphasize "social justice" as activists understand the term.

Nevertheless, many of Schedneck's other comments are apt, such as that transnational organizations are a feature of contemporary Buddhism, have proliferated, are often global, often have charismatic (past or present) leaders, and comprise large lay populations. She also usefully notes that each focuses on a particular expression of Buddhism; most of these expressions were once place-specific but they now attract people globally in both "native and non-native Buddhist contexts."[121] Many scholars overlook this ethnic and cultural mixing within transnational organizations like FPMT—they tend to only "see" their Western followers. Other features these organizations often share that Schedneck mentions include internal debates concerning how to transmit tradition in ways that retain its essential features while also making its practice "practical" today; use of technology to operate, coordinate nodes, and disseminate teachings and practices; publication houses that produce works by their leaders; and social projects.[122] FPMT has all of these features. Notably, she does not place FPMT among socially engaged Buddhist organizations.[123] Lack of awareness of FPMT's socially oriented activities is common among scholars and is one reason for this dissertation.

Payne summarizes global flows leading to the establishment of transnational Buddhist organizations disseminating tantric Buddhisms in Japan, China, and elsewhere. With regard to Tibetan Buddhist organizations, he differs from Schedneck. He quotes Peggy Levitt describing such organizations as decentralized and usually lacking a single leader or administrative hierarchy that determines policies, activities, and practices, such that each organization is a "diverse, dilute set of partnerships" that changes over time.[124] He then offers FPMT as an example. However, FPMT until 2023 did not lack a single leader and for decades has not lacked an administrative hierarchy. And it has standardized Dharma education programs as well as myriad policies developed and overseen by its international office. Its network is indeed diverse, but the remainder of the description is less apt.

Payne then identifies two characteristics of FPMT as its defining features: tantric practice and the construction of large statues and stupas. On tantra, he indicates that FPMT rarely holds teachings or courses specifically on it, keeping its practice mainly under wraps. This is not

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[119] Schedneck, "Buddhist International Organizations," 399.
[120] Another transnational organization whose Buddhism is not modernist is Siddhartha's Intent.
[121] Schedneck, "Buddhist International Organizations," 398.
[122] Schedneck, "Buddhist International Organizations," 409-412.
[123] She calls various other Buddhist organizations "socially engaged" such as Thich Nhat Hanh's Order of Interbeing, Tzu Chi Foundation, Sakyadhita International, International Association of Buddhist Universities (IABU), and the Goenka vipassana movement. Her definition of engagement is not clear; Sakyadhita and IABU are advocacy and networking organizations only, and the Goenka movement is not engaged by most definitions. Schedneck, "Buddhist International Organizations," 401, 405-411.
[124] Richard K. Payne, "Globalizing Tantric Buddhism," in *Oxford Research Encyclopedia of Religion* (Oxford University Press, 31 August 2021). https://doi-org.uml.idm.oclc.org/10.1093/acrefore/9780199340378.013.1043.

entirely accurate; tantric teachings take place fairly often in FPMT centres and even online.[125] Payne then calls FPMT's statues and stupas, because they occur in various countries, the reflection of FPMT's international scope. While this is not entirely incorrect, more reflective of FPMT's scope, given that the teaching of Dharma is its first priority, are its Dharma centres around the world and its Dharma education programs. He also acknowledges FPMT's social engagement. His highlighting of statues and stupas as if they were FPMT's main activity follows Schedneck, who writes that "FPMT specializes in constructing stupas throughout the world," which implies that stupa construction is its priority. However, its first priority, as its own documentation reveals, is teaching Dharma.

Schedneck's and Payne's articles mainly summarize information gathered from other sources. Their imprecisions are due to lack of information or flawed information in these sources. More scholarship on FPMT and similar organizations would improve these kinds of summaries.

A final relevant article, not specific to Buddhism, is by Wuthnow and Offutt. The two authors discuss the globalization of religions, focusing on international flows. Flows include people (such as refugees, migrants, teachers, workers, volunteers, and pilgrims), money, and cultural resources (such as religious teachings and practices).[126] The article serves as a reminder that part of what FPMT does is raise money and move it from donors to projects and activities: funds from East Asia, Southeast Asia, and the West often flow to help people in India, Nepal, and Mongolia; within those and other areas, wealthier people donate to projects that help poorer people; funds from lay people flow to monasteries and monastics; and funds earned in secular pastimes flow to religious pastimes like the construction of holy objects. FPMT also coordinates flows of teachings, practices, texts, and cultural forms (like art, holy objects, and Feng Shui) from Himalayan and other Asian sources around Asia and to other areas, and of Western ideas and practices to Asia. It moves holy objects from place to place for various purposes. It receives and transmits information: from teachers to students; from international leaders to local entities; from local entities to the international office and from there to leaders and teachers; across the nodes of the network; and to people outside FPMT. It sometimes coordinates the movement of people, such as to teach or attend teachings, lead practices or retreats, work as volunteers or for pay, enter monasteries, attend meetings, and so on. Flows of people, funds, objects, and ideas, Wuthnow and Offutt emphasize, are central to today's transnational organizations. Facilitating flows is one reason FPMT exists.

The flows Wuthnow and Offutt discuss did not occur to anywhere near the same extent in premodernity, or even in the mid-twentieth century. They were due initially to military, political, and economic factors that prompted the global spread of Buddhists and Buddhism. Technological developments have enhanced and entrenched them. This dissertation examines some aspects of these flows. It discusses, for example, how FPMT's international office influences social engagement, both by globally disseminating the lamas' ideas and by raising funds from

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[125] For example, Lama Yeshe Ling, a mid-sized FPMT centre in Burlington, Canada, was showing on its website in June 2024 two sets of upcoming tantric empowerments and teachings. One was Green Tara, which was open, in person and on Zoom, to everyone. Another was an introduction to Vajrayogini practice on Zoom, open to people having appropriate empowerments from any Tibetan lineage. Lama Yeshe Ling is not unusual in FPMT. Such teachings and empowerments occur in many FPMT centres. "Green Tara Preparation and Initiation with Geshe Sonam." Lama Yeshe Ling Tibetan Buddhist Group. https://lamayesheling.org/calendar-item/green-tara-preparation-and-initiation-with-geshe-sonam-saturday-preparation/. Accessed June 20, 2024; "Ascending the Path of Vajrayana—Part Three: Introduction to Vajrayogini." Lama Yeshe Ling Tibetan Buddhist Group. https://lamayesheling.org/calendar-item/ascending-the-path-of-vajrayana-part-three-introduction-to-vajrayogini-6/. Accessed June 20, 2024.

[126] Robert Wuthnow and Stephen Offutt, "Transnational Religious Connections." *Sociology of Religion* 69, no. 2 (2008): 209-232.

supporters around the world and directing them to social projects in India, Nepal, Mongolia, and elsewhere. The dissertation also exposes the similarity of ideas about tradition across FPMT's network. Reasons surely include that the lamas' ideas about tradition have been disseminated throughout the network. Their emphasis on tradition has also been buttressed by flows of donated funds to certain monasteries charged with preserving tradition; flows that are also communicated, along with their reasons, around the network. The result is shared concepts of tradition. Wuthnow and Offutt's article serves to emphasize that FPMT comprises not just entities but flows among them.

The above articles relate to transnational networks in general. Is there scholarship on particular networks? Significant networks that disseminate Dharma include FPMT, FGS, Sōka Gakkai International, Triratna Buddhist Order, Rigpa International, the Dzogchen Community, Diamond Way Buddhism, Siddhartha's Intent, Dharma Drum Mountain, the Goenka vipassana movement, NKT, and Shambhala International.[127] Taiwan-based networks appear to have received the most scholarly attention, with FGS perhaps the most studied.

Transnational Buddhist Organizations: Comparisons

Comparing FPMT to FGS can be helpful, partly because the latter has been thoroughly studied and partly because contrasting two quite different organizations sheds light on each.[128] I draw on a recent work by Jens Reinke, *Mapping Modern Mahayana: Chinese Buddhism and Migration in the Age of Global Modernity* (2021).

FGS developed as a transnational organization during the same time period as FPMT but for different reasons. FPMT arose because Westerners encountered Buddhism in Nepal and decided to share it in their home countries. FGS was developed in Taiwan out of Chinese Buddhist reform movements and was deliberately internationalized to serve a globalizing ethnic Chinese population.[129] Although their origins thus differed, both organizations began with charismatic leaders.[130] Other characteristics they share include having a central office as well as centres and monasteries in many countries; being dominated by lay people but having a monastic minority; being operated in up-to-date ways; and being socially engaged. Both operate health, education, and other humanitarian projects and mostly avoid activism.[131] Both groups' centres interact with their host societies and make efforts to be open and welcoming to non-members.[132]

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[127] It is difficult to estimate these institutions' number of followers. Formal memberships may not exist or may include some followers and not others. The institutions themselves do not all make numbers public. Those with the most adherents are likely FGS and Sōka Gakkai International.

[128] Reinke lists a number of articles on FGS in English and Chinese. Jens Reinke, *Mapping Modern Mahāyāna. Chinese Buddhism and Migration in the Age of Global Modernity* (Berlin: Walter de Gruyter GmbH & Co KG, 2021), 5 fn. 4. He also cites one other significant monograph on FGS: Yu-Shang Yao and Richard F. Gombrich, *Chinese Buddhism Today: Conservatism, Modernism, Syncretism and Enjoying Life on the Buddha's Light Mountain* (2022). Reinke and this work both build on another work published two decades earlier, Chandler, *Establishing a Pure Land* (2004).

[129] Reinke, *Mapping,* 117-118.

[130] FGS was founded in Taiwan by the influential mainland-born monk Ven. Hsing Yun in 1967. He began expanding its operations internationally in 1977. Reinke, *Mapping,* 2.

[131] Reinke, *Mapping,* 28-31. Reinke makes the same argument I do that humanitarian activities done by Buddhists in the context of Buddhist practice, and not only activism, merit being called Buddhist social engagement. However, Reinke attributes engagement to FGS's adaptation to modernity, not to any history of engagement in Chinese Buddhism. Like many scholars of modern Buddhism, he presents premodern Buddhism as typified by monasticism, withdrawal from society, and reliance only on faith-based ways of helping others. Thus, for him, engagement represents a modern movement away from faith, spirits, and other non-material concerns (Reinke, *Mapping,* 9, 28-32, 81, 91-93, 98-101).

[132] Reinke, *Mapping,* 90-96.

FGS is larger than FPMT, perhaps not surprising given its appeal to the large ethnic Chinese population outside mainland China. Aiming to serve the multiple needs of a diaspora, its range of offerings—recreational, and cultural as well as Buddhist—is broader than FPMT's. FGS, according to Reinke, is often more focused on creating and sustaining a modernized, globalized, Chinese identity and community—a "global China"—than on Buddhism.[133] It is primarily a diasporic Chinese cultural organization that includes Buddhism whereas FPMT's main activity is the teaching and practice of Buddhism. FGS centres double as Chinese cultural centres; FPMT centres do not double as Tibetan or Himalayan cultural centres.

FGS offers more services than FPMT, like TV shows, museums, and book clubs. It appears to have more funds to deploy than FPMT, not surprising given the size and reputation for generosity of the population it serves. FGS also appears, from Reinke's remarks, to be more centrally directed than FPMT, which may be connected to having both missionizing origins and significant assets.[134]

Both organizations standardize their Buddhist teachings and practices. Both work to preserve tradition but differ in what they identify as tradition. FGS's idea of tradition relates to "Chinese-ness": the tradition FGS seeks to preserve is a partially imagined Chinese past—pre-Communist rather than premodern—not a form of Buddhism. "Tradition" in FGS comprises the use of the Chinese language; communal rather than individual activities; beliefs or practices labeled "folk"; and Chinese rituals.[135] FPMT, on the other hand, deems "tradition" to mean its Geluk lineage. In Reinke's portrayal, FGS lacks a concept of Buddhist lineage given that its Buddhism derives from a reform movement.[136] Reinke nevertheless suggests that members of FGS retain premodern Chinese cosmological ideas, remarking that FGS is "deeply rooted" in this cosmology.[137] In FPMT, Indian Buddhism's cosmology is retained. Both have thus kept an old cosmology, although the cosmologies may differ as may their level of acceptance by followers, which seems lower in FGS. Still, like FPMT's sites, FGS's sites feature holy objects treated as sacred, not merely decorative. Offerings are made to them, and people prostrate before them, for example.[138] Holy objects are physical expressions of old cosmologies.

The two groups also converge on the modernization of elements like operating methods that neither treats as dictated by tradition. Nevertheless, they understand modernization differently. For FGS, what is modern is lay involvement, community-building, and social engagement, which Reinke contrasts with past monasticism, ritual, and individual, eremitic practice.[139] Tibetan Buddhism historically was community oriented, eremitic only in exceptional cases, and included lay practice and some social engagement, so Reinke's picture of the Chinese past does not capture the Tibetan past.[140] FPMT separates its lineage from the elements it

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[133] Reinke, *Mapping,* 37, 40-41, 74-76, 117-118.
[134] Reinke, *Mapping,* 37-39.
[135] Which features occurred in premodernity and which in modernity can vary by culture and form of Buddhism, as Reinke points out, one reason why modern Buddhism in FGS differs from some other modern Buddhisms. The features on which most scholars base their descriptions of modern Buddhism relate to modern forms of Zen and Theravada in Japan, Southeast Asia, and Western countries. Reinke, *Mapping,* 121-122.
[136] Reinke, *Mapping,* 102, 129-131. Reinke never applies the word "lineage" to FGS. FGS has a history, which he recounts, beginning in Republican China and shifting to Taiwan. FGS grew out of a modernizing movement in Chinese Buddhism in the 19th century called rénjiān Buddhism—Buddhism in the human world—and was shaped by the reformer Taixu, the teacher of Hsing Yun, who founded FGS in 1967. Reinke does not identify any lineage Taixu followed; Taixu seems to have created his own lineage or form of Buddhism that incorporated practices related to Maitreya Buddha with an intent to create a pure land on earth. Reinke, *Mapping,* 2-8, 21-31.
[137] Reinke, *Mapping,* 98.
[138] Reinke, *Mapping,* 17, 25, 68, 108, 109.
[139] Reinke, *Mapping,* 60, 102-103, 113-116.
[140] Whether it accurately reflects the East Asian past is uncertain. Buddhist modernizers in East Asia often negatively stereotyped the Buddhist past as a way to distance themselves from it and portray their Buddhism as suited to

modernizes; lacking the same sense of lineage, FGS may modernize more aspects of Buddhism than FPMT.

The differences between the two organizations and their Buddhisms are observable. FGS's Buddhism originated in the modern era even though some of its followers retain faith in a premodern Chinese cosmology. FPMT's Buddhism dates to the premodern era and retains ancient Indian Buddhist cosmology. On their organizations, FGS, alongside teaching Buddhism, targets one diasporic ethnic group and works to preserve its language and culture while building a global ethnicity-based community. FPMT is non-diasporic, multi-ethnic, and focuses on Buddhism alone; its community is not based on ethnicity but religion. This difference affects their relative size and wealth. FPMT is medium-sized, whereas FGS, appealing to a sizable global ethnic Chinese population, is larger and better-resourced. These differences reveal ways that Buddhisms and Buddhist institutions today can vary. They also highlight certain aspects of FPMT's Buddhism—its premodern roots—and FPMT as an organization—its multi-ethnic and multi-cultural nature, its focus on Buddhism rather than broader cultural preservation, and its consequent smaller size, fewer resources, and narrower range of activity. The comparison shows something else as well: that social engagement crosses types of Buddhism and organizations. If FGS and FPMT are representative, it can be hypothesized that most Buddhist organizations today, whatever their form of Buddhism, relationship to tradition, or ethnic orientation, are engaged. It can also be hypothesized that most such organizations focus their engagement on social services and humanitarian aid rather than activism aimed at re-ordering society, even though most scholarship on Buddhist social engagement treats engagement as mainly the latter activity. These hypotheses are interesting but need to be tested against data.

Transnational Buddhist Organizations: Summary

The above comparison highlights features of some transnational Buddhist organizations. Common features may include establishment by a charismatic leader; adaptation to host societies and contemporary circumstances; up-to-date operating methods; social engagement; and internal standardization of Buddhist teachings and practices. Features which vary may include: expansion strategies; centralization; extent of monasticism; relationship to diasporas; follower numbers; ethnic mix; activities in addition to Buddhism; income/ assets; and concern with preserving tradition. Even among organizations that claim to preserve a tradition, different definitions of "tradition" can lead to different preservation strategies. For other features, such as the role and status of women, little information is available. Much remains unknown about these organizations—they are ripe for additional research.

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modern times and nation-building needs. The stereotype is not necessarily accurate. John Nelson discusses its inaccuracy with respect to Japan, for example. John K. Nelson, *Experimental Buddhism: Innovation and Activism in Contemporary Japan* (Honolulu: University of Hawai'i Press, 2013), 83-86. On lay practice, Tibetans have long celebrated lay meditators including Padmasambhava and his consort Yeshe Tsogyal, Marpa and his student Milarepa, treasure revealers like Pema Linga and Jigme Lingpa, "madman" Drukpa Kunley, chöd originator Machig Labdrön, iron bridge builder Thangtong Gyalpo, and others. Lay meditation in Tibet drew on a history of lay meditation in India represented by adepts like Niguma, Tilopa, and Saraha. Research suggested that many people in FPMT are familiar with at least some of these famous lay practitioners.

What is FPMT?

Structure, Authorities, Commonalities

FPMT is a network comprising an international office and numerous affiliates: Dharma centres, projects, and services. The term "FPMT" is used in two ways. This dissertation uses it to label FPMT's entire network: the international office, affiliates, and individuals associated with the lamas and the network. Others sometimes also use "FPMT" to signify only the international office, but the dissertation uses "international office" for this entity. When applied to the network, "FPMT" is a label lacking any single referent: it refers to the network's many organizations and people. When referring to the network, the term "the organization" also appears here. However, there is no one organization. FPMT is thus a global network of Tibetan Buddhist organizations, activities, projects, services, groups, and individuals associated with the Geluk lineage as transmitted by the late Lama Yeshe (d. 1984) and his Dharma heir, the late Lama Zopa Rinpoche (d. 2023).

The international office, FPMT, Inc., is a non-profit corporation with charitable status, classed under US law as a church. It was incorporated in California in 1989 and donations made to it have been tax deductible in the US since 1990. FPMT's affiliates are legally separate from the international office. Most are also incorporated as non-profit, charitable organizations in their own jurisdictions. They are connected to the international office by means of affiliation agreements that specify the roles and responsibilities of each party and require affiliates to follow policies and procedures put in place by the international office. Affiliates are also anchored in FPMT by bonds of loyalty. Affiliates are established by their initial leaders, not the international office. Affiliation agreements affect how they operate, as do the lamas' or other teachers' and leaders' guidance, but their leaders and members generally put in place, manage, finance, and update their activities themselves in response to local abilities, resources, needs, and conditions. Affiliation agreements also encourage affiliates' autonomy given their need to respond to local needs using local resources. The small size and limited resourcing of the international office also favour local autonomy.

Which entities have influence over the wider network? The lamas were always the centres of authority in FPMT. Although both have passed away, their words and wishes still drive the network.[141] The international office also influences the network. Until the passing of Rinpoche, it was the channel through which his wishes, and his understanding of Lama Yeshe's wishes, flowed. The office is now guided by a board of directors that includes its CEO and members from Kopan Monastery, FPMT's Asian centres, and FPMT's Western centres. Kopan has a level of influence over the international office given that two of the board's six members have roots at Kopan: its Abbot, Khen Rinpoche Geshe Chonyi, as well as Ven. Thubten Pemba, a relative of Rinpoche and the longtime teacher at FPMT's Hong Kong affiliate. Also influential over the office is Ven. Roger Kunsang, Rinpoche's closest assistant for decades and the office's CEO. Notably, the office appears to have more influence outside of Asia than in it. Kopan has a closer relationship with most affiliates in Asia than the international office, according to some interviewees.[142] With less influence but still a role to play are individuals placed between the

[141] This is evident in FPMT's communications related to planning for the future. An FPMT conference on the topic in May 2024, for example, had the stated theme, "Advancing our Gurus' Vision of a World Guided by Compassion & Wisdom." *FPMT Community Stories and News*, *FPMT*, May 16, 2024. Fpmt.org/fpmt-community-news/paving-the-way-for-cpmt-first-regional-consultation-at-kopan-monastery/.

[142] There is variation in Asian centres in this regard. For example, FPMT has two lay centres in Nepal, one in Kathmandu and one in Pokhara. Kopan oversees the Pokhara centre, which is identified on its website as a "branch

office and affiliates: regional coordinators for North America, Latin America, South Asia, East and Southeast Asia, and Europe, as well as national coordinators for some countries such as Australia.[143] Interviewees described coordinators' role as ensuring that information flowed up to the international office from affiliates and down to them from it. Coordinators do not have authority over affiliates. The International Mahayana Institute (IMI) plays a similar coordinating role for monastics and monasteries. Hence, there are two main sources of authority in FPMT: the international office and Kopan Monastery. Outside of Asia, the international office is more influential; within Asia, Kopan is more influential. Nevertheless, their roles interweave: in Asia, the international office plays certain administrative, financial, and guiding roles, and in the West, Kopan has influence, particularly through its seats on the board of the international office. Leaders of affiliates may also influence the international office through positions on its board of directors, communications with individuals on the board or in the office, regional or national coordinators, participation in regional or international meetings, discussions, and other joint activities, or other avenues. Authority thus flows around FPMT to some extent.

Recall that Falcone and Schedneck depict FPMT as centrally controlled: a head office running branches. This picture is not fully accurate.[144] Nevertheless, the network has centrally governed aspects due to affiliation agreements, which form the main tool constraining affiliates' independence. Other tools exist. One is the written agreements that some teachers sign that delineate their relationship with FPMT. Another is informal guidance that teachers, leaders at various levels, or the international office may give affiliates. Another is handbooks and training offered to affiliate staff, volunteers, and members that explain the respective roles of the international office and affiliates. Yet another is policies and procedures, put in place by the international office, that affiliation agreements require affiliates to follow. A final tool is intangible: the loyalty and devotion that people in affiliates have for the lamas along with their wish to sustain FPMT as a network whose nodes implement the lamas' wishes, are harmonious, are mutually supportive, and express what Lama Yeshe called "family feeling." These tangibles and intangibles encourage affiliates to act in accordance with central direction on certain matters. This direction varies by activity: social engagement, for example, is subject to far less central input than Dharma teaching because FPMT standardizes many aspects of Dharma teaching but not social engagement.

One interviewee showed me a (blank) affiliation agreement for Dharma centres. The agreement reveals some ways the international office influences centres. The office approves which groups will attain affiliate status and also their articles of incorporation and by-laws. It also approves the centre's director. It may set quality standards for the centre's activities and inspect to ensure these are met. Centres must provide it with annual reports on activities and finances. They must follow its policies and procedures concerning conduct (ethics, safeguarding, grievances, and so on) and matters related to Dharma teaching. The agreement specifies that each centre remains financially independent, owns its own assets, employs its own staff, and raises its own funds. What the agreement gives affiliates is the right to use FPMT Dharma materials and identify itself as part of FPMT. Centres can also access spiritual guidance from FPMT's lamas, use FPMT-registered teachers and the services of FPMT's departments and regional or national coordinators, and benefit from the international office's publicity and communications. Either party can terminate the agreement with or without cause, so agreements do not entirely prevent breakaways.

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of Kopan Monastery." However, it does not oversee the Kathmandu centre, which interviewees indicated is affiliated with FPMT but not directly with Kopan.

[143] "FPMT Regional and National Offices." *FPMT*. https://fpmt.org/fpmt/regionaloffices/. Accessed March 22, 2024.

[144] Ribush, "Bamboo," 175, 179.

Affiliation agreements allow the international office to change or add policies or procedures affecting affiliates at will: an area of potential tension. New policies, interviewees indicated, are sometimes handed down without much consultation, although some interviewees indicated that dialogue was increasing.[145] One area that appeared to be driven by policies and procedures, rather than being specified in the agreement, was international office approval of staff and senior volunteers; the standard affiliate agreement only specifies approval of directors. Yet one interviewee at a Dharma centre told me in early 2024, "the geshe, translator, western teachers, board members, etc., are all approved only via central office." The same interviewee noted that the process, which was repeated every few years even when individuals remained the same, took time and created stress.[146] With the loss of Rinpoche, whose advice on such matters was typically asked, the requirement for approval may vanish, and decision-making may be delegated to each affiliate's directors or trustees. It is likely that the role of the international office in approving affiliates' staff and senior volunteers will be discussed—among other policies and procedures—at a major meeting of international office representatives, centre directors, and centre spiritual coordinators scheduled for April 2025. Much of the meeting can be expected to concern the evolution of local autonomy.

Although occasionally interviewees involved in centres expressed frustration with the international office, sometimes they also expressed gratitude. One former centre director, for example, felt that the office helped keep centres transmitting the tradition and stopped them from falling into "cultish power dynamics" or diluting the lineage. The individual also felt the office was helpful in keeping the centres "running reasonably well," and did not feel it was overly controlling.[147] Opinions on autonomy and centralization evidently vary.

FPMT is, overall, a mix of centralization and decentralization, with some matters more centrally influenced than others. Affiliates are established, developed, financed, and operated by local people, who marshal and manage their own resources and organize their own activities, but they do so within constraints put in place by the international office and, in Asia, sometimes also in coordination with Kopan Monastery. The most closely overseen areas of their activity are Dharma teaching and practice. Other areas, like asset management, managing employees and volunteers, social engagement, income generation, and interfaith efforts, receive less input. One centre official stated in 2024 that FPMT presents "an odd mixture of grassroots and top-down management."[148] The comment offers a good summary. FPMT is neither a centrally controlled "empire" with a head office running branches, nor a fully decentralized network: it is a mix of centralization and decentralization.

What do the people who form FPMT, globally, share? First, they share respect for the same gurus: historically, Lama Tsongkhapa (d. 1419) and those who transmitted his lineage, and in the present, the Dalai Lama and the lamas. There are other lamas and teachers who teach in FPMT affiliates and attract affection and devotion, but Lama Tsongkhapa, the Dalai Lama, and the lamas play a role akin to shared parents and ancestors. Longtime Dharma students in FPMT usually met Rinpoche or Lama Yeshe or both, took teachings, empowerments, and/or oral transmissions from them, and share devotion to them. Newer students, those less prone to travel, and others for various reasons, may never have done so. Interviewees reported varied senses of connection to them. And many people associated with FPMT have connections with lamas outside of FPMT as well, including non-Geluk lamas. Nevertheless, to be associated with FPMT is to participate in honouring a core set of teachers.

[145] C214D66. Interviewed by Author, March 2024.
[146] C111K02. Message via Messenger, February 2024.
[147] B221D16. Interviewed by Author, November 2022.
[148] C214D66. Interviewed by Author, March 2024.

The second factor shared across FPMT is the Geluk lineage as passed down by the lamas.[149] Sharing this lineage results from having teachings and practices in common. Various means ensure this, primarily standardization of teacher training, teachings, practices, and texts. The international office has overseen the production of much Dharma material used across FPMT, including translations from Tibetan into various other languages and the development of Dharma courses and Dharma teacher training courses for non-Himalayans. Dharma teachers of Himalayan origin in FPMT, and others who speak or learn Tibetan, usually train at Kopan Monastery and/or Sera Je Monastery, using similar texts, liturgies, and so on in Tibetan.[150] All teachers receive training in the same lineage, although their teaching methods and levels of qualification differ. The international office provides a list of people qualified to teach Dharma at various levels from which centres choose teachers. Across FPMT, Dharma teaching and practice is largely standardized (in content although not style) due to the central production or approval of translations, courses, texts, liturgies, and so on, the centrally approved training of most teachers, and central registration of teachers.

Factors that differ among affiliates are those not specified by the tradition or by affiliation agreements: styles of teaching; languages used; whether and how the internet is used for teachings and practices; activities in addition to basic practices and teachings including advanced teachings; empowerments; some pujas; retreats; discussion groups; wellness activities like yoga, chi gung, or secular meditation; activities for children; interfaith activities; socially oriented activities; fundraising; income generating activities; reliance on paid staff or volunteers; presence of monastics; property ownership; aesthetics and usage of space; and so on.

In addition, variation exists in affiliates' internal cultures. Affiliates are not just affected by their Himalayan, Western, East Asian, or other cultural environments. The culture of each centre, monastery, or other entity is also shaped by its history, the people involved, its ways of operating, and so on. Examples of cultural factors that vary include levels of attendance at teachings, pujas, and events; interest in social engagement; involvement of families and children; attitudes toward generosity; preferred objects of generosity; affection and support given to far away or visiting lamas versus local teachers; aesthetics; atmosphere of friendship and supportiveness; and the mix—generational, ethnic, lifestyle, etc.—of staff, volunteers, members, and others. Affiliates can look and feel quite different.

Who is "Associated" with FPMT?

The people I call FPMT "followers" or "associated with FPMT" include Dharma centre members and those associated with other FPMT activities, as well as many others who follow the lamas or other FPMT teachers in their own way. Only a minority of those who connect with FPMT or the lamas by receiving teachings, receiving empowerments or transmissions, donating, attending events, working for pay or volunteering, using FPMT Dharma materials, or reading books/ listening to videos produced by FPMT are officially members of an FPMT centre. This makes counting those associated with FPMT virtually impossible; centres may have data on their members but data on this wider circle of people do not exist. Making some assumptions and excluding beneficiaries of social projects, I estimate that 50,000-75,000 people are currently

[149] Practices vary by individuals, since individuals are free to learn teachings and practices from other lineages, and many do so. They are also free to choose among practices, do practices in their own way, and so on. Hence, sharing FPMT's teachings and practices does not mean everyone is doing the same thing. Nevertheless, FPMT centres and monasteries share core teachings and practices.

[150] Most of FPMT's geshes trained at Sera Je; a few trained at Sera Me or Drepung. These are all Geluk monastic universities. A121N05. Interviewed by Author, November 2022.

associated with FPMT in some way: students of the lamas, members of FPMT centres and monasteries, participants in Dharma activities, participants in online courses, staff, volunteers, donors, and others who view themselves as connected to the lamas or other FPMT teachers.[151]

The reach of FPMT goes far beyond the above group to people not currently involved with FPMT but who have received teachings or learned practices at its centres, in monasteries, or online, perhaps by taking courses while traveling in India or Nepal; learned from or use its books, videos, other online materials, translations, or practice materials; attend a centre or group that uses FPMT's teaching and practice materials but is not affiliated with FPMT[152]; attended FPMT's long-running relic tours and felt a connection to FPMT's lamas through that; follow Rinpoche, LYWA, FPMT, or an FPMT affiliate on social media; are involved in an FPMT social project; or have some sense of connection to the lamas or FPMT for other reasons. Rinpoche's Facebook page alone—in 2024, a year after he passed away—shows 700,000 followers.[153] I estimate the size of this broad group at more than a million given the significant reach and popularity of FPMT's materials and online offerings. I do not count them in this dissertation, however, as FPMT followers, associates, or Dharma students.

These estimates do not include beneficiaries of FPMT's socially oriented activities, nor those who benefit from the people and organizations FPMT has supported financially. People who have done so are uncountable. As well, there are thousands of non-FPMT monastics and teachers—like members of Sera Je Monastery and other monasteries and practitioners or retreatants whose efforts have been supported by FPMT as well as their students—who have benefitted from FPMT's largesse, and on this foundation, study, practice, preserve, translate, and/or teach the Dharma. This group includes, for example, children at schools FPMT supports and their families; patients of its health care projects; prisoners who have received friendship or Dharma materials; and so on. These individuals cannot be considered to be associated with FPMT, but they form part of FPMT's impact.

These estimates highlight the different ways people connect with FPMT and the possible numbers in each category. When this dissertation discusses "followers" of FPMT or "FPMT's people" it includes only the first group, estimated at 50,000-75,000 people.

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[151] Kay writes that "In 1988 – when it had only 41 centres and 6 other projects in 14 countries – FPMT sources estimated that up to 20,000 students were connected to the network." Kay, *Tibetan and Zen Buddhism*, 115. Kay finds this number credible; his book is the only place where I have seen an estimate of numbers associated with FPMT. If 41 centres represented 20,000 students, FPMT's current number of centres could represent 50,000-56,000 students on the assumption is that each centre represents 450-500 people, even though many of FPMT's people are not associated with a centre so centre memberships do not approach those numbers. I have increased the higher estimate to 75,000 given that decades have passed since the 1988 estimate was made. Far more people have now taken FPMT courses and participated in its other activities, whether or not they attend centres. The cumulative number of people who have learned and practiced Buddhism through FPMT has grown.

[152] Examples of such centres include Dharma Friends Israel (www.dharma-friends.org.il) and Ganden Samten Ling in Edmonton, Canada (https://www.gsl-ab.ca).

[153] Rinpoche's tally is well below the 14 million the Dalai Lama's page has attracted or the 2 million of Thich Nhat Hanh; these are the two best known Buddhist teachers in the world today. Nevertheless, Rinpoche's followership substantially exceeds that of certain other well-known lamas, like Sogyal Rinpoche (277,000); Dzongsar Kyentse Rinpoche (144,000); Ling Rinpoche (56,000); Sakya Trizin Rinpoche (64,000); Jetsunma Tenzin Palmo (76,000); and Geshe Kelsang Gyatso, late leader of NKT (28,000). Rinpoche's followership is in the same range as that of the Karmapa, Orgyen Trinley Dorje, the highest-ranking Tibetan lama in exile after the Dalai Lama (828,000) and of Pema Chodron, likely the most popular Western Buddhist teacher, who has substantial outreach beyond the Buddhist world into the realms of self-help and psychology (900,000). It may seem superficial to compare Facebook followers, but their numbers convey information about teachers' relative levels of popularity and influence. (Numbers collected August 8, 2024. Facebook.com.)

Terms for FPMT's People

What to call people associated with FPMT is not straightforward. Neither FPMT in general nor the international office have members. Centres often do, but not everyone who attends their activities, takes their courses, attends practices, donates, reads their newsletters, and so on, is a member, particularly in recent years when much of FPMT's educational activity has gone online. Research showed that centres often have instead an email list to which they send information and social media accounts that people follow. They also have donor lists. The number of people on email, social media, and donor lists greatly exceeds enrolled members and may offer a better estimate of numbers involved in any given centre. Hence, I use the term "member" occasionally to refer to people who are members of a specific centre, but it is not a useful term for people associated with FPMT in general.

I also use "followers," but those interviewed during research stressed that they are not followers of FPMT, but of the lamas or other teachers. To them, FPMT is an organization that exists for practical purposes. Their loyalty is to one or both of the lamas, and sometimes to other teachers; sometimes also to the lineage. The disadvantage of "followers" is that it may imply a lack of independence, a devotion to FPMT rather than to teachers, or a status not quite right. Other possible terms include "devotee" which seems to imply a passionate religiosity, or "FPMTer," a neologism Falcone employs.[154] FPMT insiders often use the term "students" because teachers' followers are considered their students. I use this term occasionally, but it may confuse outsiders. "Practitioner" lays the focus on practicing the Dharma; I use it occasionally. "Sangha" is sometimes used in Buddhist contexts for all those associated with a Buddhist group, but in FPMT it is used only for monks and nuns, a convention I follow. I use "participant" or "attendee" when referring to someone engaging in an activity under discussion, but not as a general word for anyone associated with FPMT.

Scholars vary. Glenys Eddy, for example, in a book that discusses experiences in an FPMT centre in Australia, uses, depending on the individual and the context, "Sangha member" for the ordained, "member" for the formally enrolled, and, in more general descriptions, "participant," "student," and "practitioner," as well as "people" and "individual."[155] In one article she calls individuals associated with FPMT "affiliates." [156] However, in FPMT, this term refers to FPMT's centres, projects, and services, not individuals. I use it as FPMT does.

Given that no single term is ideal, I vary terms according to the situation. Where I refer to all of those associated with FPMT, I generally use "follower," but it should be kept in mind that people follow the lamas, other teachers, or the teachings, not FPMT.

FPMT: A Brief History

Many aspects of the history of FPMT are documented in an academic article by long-time FPMT insider Nick Ribush (2012), non-academic publications like Adele Hulse's *Big Love: The Life and Teachings of Lama Yeshe* (2019), articles in FPMT's in-house magazine *Mandala*, FPMT's archive (the "Lama Yeshe Wisdom Archive" (LYWA)), and on FPMT's website. Hence, this is only a summary.

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[154] Falcone, *Battling*, 14, 20, 21, 26, 32, etc.

[155] Glenys Eddy, *Becoming Buddhist: Experiences of Socialization and Self-Transformation in Two Australian Buddhist Centres* (London: Bloomsbury, 2012), 107-123.

[156] Glenys Eddy, "How Affiliates of an Australian FPMT Centre Come to Accept the Concepts of Karma, Rebirth and Merit-Making," *Contemporary Buddhism* 14, no. 2 (2013): 204. https://doi.org/10.1080/14639947.2013.832495.

The origins of FPMT lie in China's occupation of Tibet. When China, after years of encroachment, occupation, and pressure, seized all of Tibet in 1959, tens of thousands of Tibetans, many of them monks and nuns, fled the country, crossing the Himalayas into India, Nepal, and Bhutan.[157] Among them were the lamas, both young monks. Lama Yeshe, the elder of the two, was Tibetan; Rinpoche, still a boy, was a Sherpa from Nepal who had earlier been sent to Tibet to study in a monastery, a common practice in Himalayan communities before 1959. Both ended up living at Buxa Fort in Northeast India, a former British internment camp in which the Indian government housed refugee monks and nuns. The two met at Buxa, and Rinpoche became Lama Yeshe's student. Both suffered from ill health due to poor food and living conditions and for that reason, in the mid-1960s, left Buxa for Darjeeling and later Nepal.[158]

At that point, events in the Himalayan world intersected with cultural change in Western countries. In the West, fragments of Buddhism had been imported since the mid-19th century by colonial administrators and Orientalist scholars, but in the interwar years, and above all after World War II, awareness of Buddhism spread for several reasons, such as the popularity of books by writers like D.T. Suzuki (d. 1966), Alan Watts (d. 1973), and Herman Hesse (d. 1962) and the growing number of Asian Buddhists and Buddhist teachers living in Western countries.[159] As the 1960s unfolded, people exposed to the counterculture in Europe, Australia, New Zealand, and the Americas were aware of, and often curious about, Buddhism and Hinduism. They were also familiar with Tibet, at least as they pictured it based on books that had introduced it to the Western imagination.[160] As well, in the 1960s, travel to Asia became relatively easy.[161]

In Darjeeling in 1967, the lamas met a Russian spiritual seeker who had been traveling in Asia, Zina Rachevsky. She became their friend, student, and occasional financial supporter. Rinpoche had been learning English and was able to communicate with her and other Westerners. Leaving behind their monastic companions and the final levels of their monastic education, the lamas (with Zina) moved to Nepal, a step approved by the Dalai Lama and their other teachers. The lamas' Western students rented them an old house on Kopan hill outside Kathmandu, where they lived part of the time beginning in 1969 and attracted the attention of more Western travelers. A Black American woman who felt devotion for them, Max Mathews, affectionately referred to as "Mummy Max" (d. 2024), in 1969 sold her possessions and offered them the money to buy the house and land.[162] Over time, more buildings were constructed. At first, the site was a place for the lamas and some of their students to live, but by 1972 it had evolved into a social project as well. With the help of Rachevsky, Mummy Max, and other

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[157] Holly Gayley and Joshua Brallier, "Tibetan Buddhism in America," in *The Oxford Handbook of American Buddhism*, eds. Ann Gleig and Scott A. Mitchell (NY: Oxford University Press, 2024), 230-231. Geoffrey Samuel discusses the same history (Samuel, *Tantric Revisionings*, 297-303).

[158] Adele Hulse, *Big Love: The Life and Teachings of Lama Yeshe* (Boston: Lama Yeshe Wisdom Archive, 2019), 59-110, 116-118.

[159] Scott A. Mitchell, *The Making of American Buddhism* (NY: Oxford University Press, 2023), 8-12.

[160] Samuel writes, "One should not forget that generations of Western scholars and Buddhist enthusiasts had created much of the preconditions [for interest in Tibet]. These included the Theosophists, with their Himalayan masters, however illusory they might have proved to be; Sir John Woodroffe, whose work on Tantra, though mainly Hindu, included a text from the Cakrasamvara Tantra cycle; W.Y. Evans-Wentz, whose translations of The Tibetan Book of the Dead, The Life of Milarepa and other texts, with commentaries by Jung and others, were the first Tibetan texts to attain wide circulation in the West; Lama Anagarika Govinda, the lama of German origins who played an important part in development of Buddhism in Germany and whose books were also widely read in the English-speaking world; the fake English lama Lobsang Rampa, and so on. Tibet was, at the very least, a recognisable label." Samuel, *Tantric Revisionings*, 302.

[161] Samuel discusses this well-known history. Samuel, *Tantric Revisionings*, 299-303. Long-time FPMT Dharma student and teacher Jonathan Landaw also discusses the "East meets West" origins of FPMT in Jonathan Landaw, "Introduction," in Hulse, *Big Love*, 9-11.

[162] Hulse, *Big Love*, 73-152.

Westerners, Rinpoche had launched Mount Everest School in 1969 in Lawudo, Nepal at the request of the Sherpa community there. He soon moved it to Kopan hill. The school was initially for boys from poor families in the Solu Khumbu area—his way of helping a marginalized group with whose circumstances he was familiar. It then welcomed boys from various Himalayan communities. They received food, clothing, shelter, health care, and schooling, paid for with funds raised by the lamas' students.[163] Kopan Monastery developed out of the school. The monastery expanded over the years and remains a key node in the FPMT network. Ribush calls it "the heart" of FPMT, and many in the organization agree.[164]

A quote from Samuel's history of Tibetan Buddhism's expansion to the West describes the situation in which the lamas living on Kopan hill found themselves. Outside Tibet, they had no natural monastic home. They were also not lamas of high standing in the exile community. Lama Yeshe was not considered a tulku and though Rinpoche was, he was a Sherpa rather than a Tibetan and, as tulkus go, of low status. Neither were geshes, and geshes have significant status in Geluk environments.[165] Unlike some other lamas, they did not have a body of Tibetan refugee supporters inherited from predecessor incarnations, who in return for spiritual aid would support a monastery that linked disciples, teachers, and communities. Many Tibetans were critical of Lama Yeshe for his unusual style and, in their eyes, time-wasting teaching of Westerners.[166] As a result, the two lamas were on their own. Samuel writes:

> Although the FPMT was eventually given Dharamsala approval [from the exile Tibetan government], its origin had nothing to do with Dharamsala. … the initiative came from two lamas who had no immediate following among the Tibetans themselves. Lama Zopa was the reincarnation of the Lawudo Lama, a married rNying-ma tantric practitioner from Thami in Sherpa country, but he was trained in the dGe-lugs tradition which has no real presence among the Sherpas... There was no monastic community associated with Lama Zopa's previous incarnation … Lama Zopa and his teacher [Lama Yeshe] thus had no strong ties to any particular Tibetan community. They were free to respond to the growing interest from Western travellers in Nepal, and to develop a following among them. … the acquisition of Western disciples was a natural move in both practical and Dharmic terms.[167]

Samuel also notes that it was not untraditional for charismatic Tibetan lamas to establish new monasteries or communities. In premodern Tibet, he writes:

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[163] The story of how Kopan Hill was acquired appears in *Big Love* as does the story of Lawudo Gompa School a.k.a. Mount Everest Centre for Buddhist Studies. Hulse, *Big Love*, 140-145, 192, 206-210, 215-219, 222-224, 242.
[164] Ribush, "Bamboo," 167.
[165] Lama Yeshe completed most of the geshe education, finishing his Madhyamaka studies in Tibet and studying vinaya at Buxa Duar refugee camp. Like many monks from the first refugee generation, he did not take his final exams because of the disruptions of refugee life. Hulse, *Big Love*, 37-54, 82-86. Rinpoche did not complete his geshe studies and was known as a yogi rather than a scholar. One interviewee called him a charismatic teacher teaching traditional content in a narrative and experiential style, rather than a scholastic teacher, as most geshes are. The interviewee noted that both kinds of teachers, charismatic and scholastic, existed in Tibet; neither is unprecedented. F111G06. Interviewed by Author, November 2022.
[166] Hulse, *Big Love*, 727, 790.
[167] Samuel, *Tantric Revisionings*, 301. Samuel does not discuss why Lama Yeshe had no disciples in the exile community from previous lives to support him. As the story is told in FPMT, in Tibet, he was considered to be the reincarnation of a distinguished abbess. Because she was female, he was not formally identified as a tulku, and although her disciples are said to have helped him in Tibet, none apparently escaped to Nepal or India to help him there. Hulse, *Big Love*, 20-23. In sum, neither Lama Yeshe nor Rinpoche were teachers of high status and large discipleship like some other exile lamas, whose status and students ensured they were financially supported and/or made leaders of monasteries after they left Tibet. Samuel, *Tantric Revisionings*, 307.

> There was something of … [an] entrepreneurial character to the activities of Tibetan lamas. … Within the more centralised areas, the followings of monasteries might be relatively stable over generations, although there was always scope for a charismatic new lama to attract a following and build a community. At the edges … the situation was more open and there was plenty of scope for missionary activity. Consequently, Tibetan Buddhism as a religious and cultural form gradually spread into new territories.[168]

He cites as examples the spread of Tibetan Buddhism to Mongolia, to certain populations now in Russia, to areas of China, and to Nepal. Gelukpas in particular had missionized Mongolia since the sixteenth century.[169] To the lamas and other post-1959 refugees, there was nothing extraordinary about launching a new monastery, accepting non-Buddhist students, and departing for foreign countries to give teachings.[170]

FPMT's lamas were not the only exiled lamas to globalize Tibetan Buddhism. Scholar of Tibetan Buddhism Daniel Cozort discusses the development of this trend. In the 1970s, not only did Westerners express interest in Tibetan Buddhism, but Tibetan refugees sought to connect with non-Tibetans. Why? Their textual, oral, and artistic traditions were all at risk because their numbers were small and they were poor. They could not preserve these on their own. Western visitors, volunteers, donors, and sponsors were already helping refugees. Reaching out to Westerners to also help preserve traditions was natural.[171] Cozort notes that academics played a role by preserving and translating texts and recording and publishing traditional oral commentaries. Similarly, Western Buddhists recorded lamas' teachings and turned them into tapes and books, and later CDs, video, and DVDs. Portions of the income from publications and donations made to Western Dharma centres went to Asia, fostering "a massive building boom of monasteries and nunneries" that enabled monastics to carry on their longstanding role as preservers of the Dharma as well as to train teachers for Asia and the West.[172] FPMT was part of this broader movement to rebuild institutions, save lineages, and produce new generations of teachers. That the movement succeeded Samuel calls "a remarkable achievement."[173] It was accomplished in part by teaching Buddhism to non-Tibetans who offered funds, skilled labour, and other help in return, as people in FPMT did.[174]

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[168] Samuel, *Tantric Revisionings*, 294.
[169] Samuel, *Tantric Revisionings*, 294-295.
[170] Abraham Zablocki points out that Tibetan history provided another form of precedent. Tibetan lamas had long established "patron-priest" relationships with Mongol and Chinese leaders in which foreigners protected and financed monasteries while lamas retained religious authority over both monasteries and patrons. "The patron-priest institution offered Tibetans a model of relationship with powerful outsiders who would simultaneously provide great economic, political, and military aid, and yet continue to regard Tibetan religious leaders as figures of ultimate authority … this authority was derived from Tibetans' status as teachers of Buddhist philosophy, practitioners of meditation, tantric adepts, and, in particular, masters of esoteric Buddhism… with… magical and otherworldly skills. Thus, when Tibetans fled into exile, some of them already understood well how to cultivate relationships with powerful patrons, and in ways that did not lessen their status, but elevated it…. It was not difficult for Tibetans to adapt these patterns … to the experience of exile." Abraham Zablocki, "The Global Mandala: The Transnational Transformation of Tibetan Buddhism," Ph.D. Diss., (Cornell University, 2005), 386.
[171] Daniel Cozort, "Tibetan Buddhism in the United States," in *Introduction to New and Alternative Religions in America*, eds. Eugene V. Gallagher and W. Michael Ashcraft (Connecticut: Greenwood Press, 2006), 140-141.
[172] Cozort, "Tibetan Buddhism," 141.
[173] Samuel, *Tantric Revisionings*, 298.
[174] One form of help was the work non-Tibetans did, generally as volunteers, in administrative, fundraising, and other roles requiring fluency in non-Tibetan languages and various "modern" skills. This kind of labour was common in Tibetan Buddhist monasteries and other organizations in the decades after 1959, although the need for non-Tibetans to do it has now largely passed. Zablocki notes that the monasteries and organizations that thrived (to

Lama Yeshe and Rinpoche toured and taught extensively, and out of their efforts grew Dharma centres, recordings, and funds to support the publication of their own teachings as well monasteries, nunneries, translation, publication of other texts, teachers, social projects, sacred art, and so on—and a global network. Over time, the network that became FPMT contributed to the preservation of the Geluk lineage in several ways: by supporting various priorities of the Dalai Lama; establishing Kopan Monastery, which grew into an important Geluk monastery that acts, in some ways, as the leader of Geluk monasteries in Nepal; contributing significantly to the growth and thriving of Sera Je Monastic University and Gyudmed Tantric Monastery; and training and/or financially supporting numerous individual lamas, teachers, and practitioners. As FPMT grew and its impact on the Geluk system gained recognition, the standing of the lamas and FPMT rose in the Tibetan Buddhist world. From marginalized beginnings, the lamas and their organization developed into important actors. That Sera Je, in 2022, offered Rinpoche a gratitude award and a vast long life puja in which he was honoured for his contributions by Geluk leaders, the Tibetan government in exile, tulkus, geshes, abbots, and monks, reveals the respect in which he came to be held.[175] Yet it was precisely their lack of inherited followers, social standing, and position among Gelukpas and in the Tibetan exile community that gave the lamas, in their early years, the freedom to live among foreigners and hippies, experiment with new approaches to Dharma teaching, build a new monastery from scratch, and grow FPMT into a large transnational organization able to contribute to the re-establishment and spread of Tibetan Buddhism.

It was in the early 1970s that the lamas began teaching Buddhism in formal ways. They gave the first multi-day, full time course in English at Kopan in 1971. By the third, in 1972, more than 50 students attended; at the sixth, in 1974, there were over 250. Courses in English have been taught there ever since, including the celebrated month-long November courses which still average more than 200 attendees. From the beginning through 2022, Rinpoche was the lead teacher. Initially, attendees were almost all from Western countries, but by the 1990s there were also many from elsewhere: people of East Asian ancestry from Southeast Asia, Hong Kong, Taiwan, and Japan; Indians; Nepalis; Israelis; Africans; and others. Courses at Kopan were where most of the lamas' early non-Himalayan students met them and became Buddhists. Many returned home and invited the lamas to come and teach.[176] Their visits then led to groups forming; these groups established centres.

In 1973, Lama Yeshe ordained several Western monks and nuns, calling an organization for them the "International Mahayana Institute" (IMI). The IMI still coordinates the activities of FPMT monastics. In 1974-75, the lamas' students organized their first international teaching tour. The lamas traveled in Nepal and India as well as to Thailand, Australia, New Zealand, the USA, England, Switzerland, and Italy. In their wake, their students created Dharma centres. To coordinate all this activity, the lamas and their students established a central organization, "Foundation for the Preservation of the Mahayana Tradition" in 1975, although it did not attain its current form until later.[177] Lama Yeshe was FPMT's spiritual director. When he died in 1984, Rinpoche became spiritual director, a role he retained until his passing in April 2023.

2005 or so) all had "a support structure of [convert] non-Tibetans … trained in the bureaucratic and administrative realities of modern societies… well-suited to organize publishing ventures, arrange complex global teaching tours, and manage the organization's internet presence." He indicates that lamas' charisma and the appeal of Buddhism alone would not have produced the "remarkable success" these organizations achieved without converts who "devoted their lives" to supporting and developing institutions. Zablocki, "The Global Mandala," 389.

[175] "Long Life Puja."

[176] Ribush, "Bamboo," 166-167.

[177] Ribush, "Bamboo," 164.

The charisma and popularity of Lama Yeshe, who learned to speak "breaking English" even as Rinpoche's English became, if quirky, extremely effective, were important factors in the expansion of the FPMT network, and after 1975, more and more Dharma centers came into being. In some ways, Lama Yeshe was unconventional and was sometimes criticized by Tibetans for this. He wore his monks' robes oddly; he joked; he was a monastic drop-out (he claimed) who did not take his geshe exams. He even referred to himself as a "Tibetan hippie." But his style brought him popularity. FPMT insider Nick Ribush writes that "up until his death he was, after His Holiness the Dalai Lama, the most influential Tibetan Buddhist monk in the world." The comment is likely true. Rinpoche was more traditional in style, though he was also not a geshe but a yogi—unusual for a Geluk leader. But both were equally concerned with lineage preservation; neither were rebels against their tradition.[178]

One early centre was Tushita Retreat Centre in Dharamsala, established in an old house that Lama Yeshe bought with donations in 1972; it had been used by one of the Dalai Lama's tutors, Trijang Rinpoche.[179] Another was Chenrezig Institute, established in Australia in 1974, FPMT's first Western Dharma centre.[180] In 1975, the lamas' students established Manjushri Institute in England—the centre later lost in a dispute with NKT.[181] In the US, Vajrapani Institute, a retreat centre, was established in California in the mid-1970s, and received donations of land on which to build in 1977.[182] At first the students consulted Lama Yeshe on how to manage the new centres, but as time passed and these proliferated, and the lamas were asked for more tours and teachings, his involvement in their operations became impractical. He made those involved in each one responsible for its operations, with directors selected or approved by himself (and later Rinpoche). To replace his active involvement, he gave talks on how to run centres, an approach Rinpoche continued when he took over as FPMT's spiritual director.[183] The international office was given the responsibility of coordinating information flows among the centres and between the centres and the lamas. It also became responsible for ensuring the lamas' wishes were carried out. As Kay discusses in his history of Buddhism in England, managing information flows and ensuring lamas' wishes are carried out are different responsibilities. The latter requires more authority and makes the international office more directive. Tensions between autonomy and centralization have been inevitable.[184]

A clash in England produced a significant event in the history of FPMT whose repercussions helped shaped the organization. In 1976, the lamas' students bought a rundown priory in Cumbria and repaired it over several years, registering its owner as Manjushri Institute, a charity. Lama Yeshe's intent, apparently, was to make it the centre of FPMT's Western operations. Wisdom Publications, founded in 1975 in Nepal to publish the lamas' teachings, soon moved to Manjushri Institute, as did many monks and nuns. A general Buddhist education program was put in place, and also a 10-12 year English-language geshe studies program, validated by the Dalai Lama, for serious Western students. In addition to the lamas, many other lamas taught there. It became FPMT's "spiritual and educational hub." However, conflicts developed between Lama Yeshe and its general Buddhist education teacher, Geshe Kelsang Gyatso, who sought more independence for Manjushri Institute than Lama Yeshe favoured. Students either supported Lama Yeshe and his international network and "bigger plan," or Geshe Kelsang and local autonomy. Many wanted only to run Manjushri Institute, which was, as a large

[178] Ribush, "Bamboo," 165-166.
[179] Hulse, *Big Love*, 226-228.
[180] Hulse, *Big Love*, 381-383.
[181] Hulse, *Big Love*, 447-448, 529-530.
[182] Hulse, *Big Love*, 574-575.
[183] Ribush, "Bamboo," 170-176, 178-179.
[184] Kay, *Tibetan and Zen Buddhism*, 64-65.

old building, a significant responsibility. That it was expected to absorb Wisdom Publications' liabilities was a particular challenge. Negotiations took place, but nevertheless a split occurred after the passing of Lama Yeshe in 1984, in part because his and Rinpoche's loyalists, including Wisdom Publications, had left Manjushri Institute out of discomfort with the conflict. As a result, the charitable entity and building passed into the hands of Geshe Kelsang. From this base, he launched NKT.[185]

The main lessons for FPMT were not, seemingly, that alterations were needed in its balance of local autonomy and central direction. Rather, its leaders felt that the network's structures of authority and shared goals needed to be better communicated. Kay, who studied the split, notes that "FPMT's publications began to include articles outlining the lines of communication and authority within the organisation, and during the following years the *Handbook for the FPMT* was drafted to explain the purpose and shape both of the network and of its member centres." As well, affiliates and geshes were required to sign agreements so that FPMT was not relying on loyalty alone. Written agreements now formalize expectations, lines of authority, and responsibilities, partly to avoid a repetition of the incident, which cost FPMT many UK followers, a valuable building, its UK and Western base of operations, and its momentum in the UK. It also created anxiety for followers who had taken teachings and/or empowerments from both Lama Yeshe and Geshe Kelsang and had to end one of these relationships, when both relationships were viewed, in Tibetan Buddhist contexts, as sacred.[186]

FPMT's international office was moved from Kopan to Italy in 1980.[187] Eventually it was relocated to the US. By 2023 it had become virtual, with staff working from England, France, the US, Nepal, and other locations, although the legal entity remains US-based. That it is located in the West and staffed mainly with Westerners, and runs in English, shows the extent to which it serves mainly the Western and international operations of FPMT. In FPMT's early years, the office existed mainly to coordinate the development of Dharma centres and activities in Western countries. Kopan, though beginning as social project—a school—soon became a full-fledged monastery and nunnery, a lineage-preserver, the base for various branch monasteries and schools in Nepal, a provider of social services, and the enduring core of FPMT. As the years passed, FPMT evolved into a global network as regions other than Nepal and the West gained centres: Southeast Asia, parts of East Asia, Mongolia, India, Latin America, Africa, and Israel.[188] The history of FPMT's expansion into these areas has not been written; writing on FPMT's history focuses on Kopan and Western countries. It is worth noting, though, that FPMT was one of a number of transnational Tibetan Buddhist organizations that expanded into ethnically Chinese areas (i.e., Taiwan, Hong Kong, and Southeast Asia) beginning in the 1980s and 1990s; the presence of Tibetan Buddhist groups there is substantial today and largely unstudied.[189]

What did Lama Yeshe, as initiator, consider the main purpose of FPMT? Initially, it was to teach Dharma to the West although it soon became global. Ribush shares two relevant quotes from Lama Yeshe:

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[185] Kay provides substantial information on NKT and its Buddhism. Kay, *Tibetan and Zen Buddhism*, 37-116.
[186] Kay, *Tibetan and Zen Buddhism*, 55. 61-66.
[187] Ribush, "Bamboo," 170.
[188] FPMT's centres in Singapore and Hong Kong started in 1989, and in Malaysia in 1995, according to their websites.
[189] Zablocki discusses the Taiwan case to about 2000 and references FPMT's involvement there, but there is no single source that addresses the history of FPMT in South and Southeast Asia, despite the importance of these regions to FPMT in terms of the number of followers and their financial contributions to Kopan and many FPMT projects. Zablocki briefly discusses the differing approaches to Buddhism of Western and Chinese Tibetan Buddhists, another largely unstudied area. Zablocki, "The Global Mandala," 187-255.

> Why have we established the FPMT? Why are we establishing these facilities all over the world? I think we are clean clear as to our aim—we want to lead all sentient beings to higher education. … We offer people what we have—the combined knowledge of Buddha's teachings and the modern way of life. Our purpose is to share our experience of this. We know that people are dissatisfied with worldly life… So what we are trying to do is to help people discover their own totality and thus discover perfect satisfaction.[190]

> The way to bring the Dharma to the Western world is to bring the nuclear, essential aspect of the Dharma. Of course, you cannot separate the essence from the Eastern cultural trappings immediately: "This is culture; that isn't." However, what you should do is take the practical points of Dharma and shape them according to your own culture. In my opinion, you should be making a new kind of Dharma dependent on each different place and its social customs.[191]

Elsewhere Lama Yeshe made clear that by education he meant education in Buddhist teachings and practices. The comments reveal his attitudes toward FPMT and tradition, attitudes that have governed FPMT ever since. They indicate that FPMT and its centres exist primarily to educate people in Buddhism to help them overcome suffering and reach "perfect" happiness—i.e., enlightenment.

The quotes also show that Lama Yeshe believed that not everything found in Tibetan Buddhism was "tradition"; some was the "essential" Dharma and some was only "culture." FPMT was to transmit the essential Dharma—the "tradition." Culture could be abandoned or changed as long as the Dharma's essence was maintained. This splitting of FPMT's Tibetan heritage into what counts as essential, to be preserved, practiced, and transmitted, and what is open to abandonment, lies behind the lack of clarity in scholarly discussions of FPMT's traditionalism. Some scholars, seeing FPMT's modern ways of operating and teaching Dharma, call it "modern"; some note its lineage and call it "traditional."

Kay underlines one aspect of FPMT that has supported its growth and influenced its culture. FPMT has followed the Dalai Lama's non-sectarian "inclusive and eclectic approach" to Buddhism, not the more exclusivist approach of NKT.[192] Inclusiveness, in this context, refers to not discouraging followers, especially lay people, from reading books by, taking teachings or empowerments from, expressing devotion to, or doing practices taught by, non-FPMT, non-Geluk, or non-Mahayana Buddhist teachers. Exclusiveness refers to barring followers from these activities, such that they are only permitted to hear teachings, receive empowerments, read books, and so on from their chosen lama and his disciples, on pain of expulsion.[193] Several interviewees commented on FPMT's "non-sectarian" approach; when questioned, they meant FPMT was inclusive in the way Kay uses the term. Not only did interviews show that many people associated with FPMT do practices learned from non-Geluk teachers, but interviewees indicated that FPMT's education programs attract people associated with other Buddhist groups whose own programs are viewed as less comprehensive or authentic.[194]

The inclusiveness of FPMT focuses lineage preservation on Kopan Monastery, where studies and practices remain within the lineage, and on non-FPMT organizations that FPMT helps support, such as Sera Je Monastic University and Gyudmed Tantric College. Placing

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[190] Quoted in Ribush, "Bamboo," 167.
[191] Quoted in Ribush, "Bamboo," 170.
[192] Kay, *Tibetan and Zen Buddhism*, 71.
[193] Kay, *Tibetan and Zen Buddhism*, 70-78. Kay notes that NKT's exclusivist approach was a reaction in part to FPMT's inclusiveness, which NKT's leader thought would harm the Geluk lineage.
[194] e.g., B224J71. Interviewed by Author, March 2023. C124K70. Interviewed by Author, March 2023.

lineage preservation responsibilities on monasteries allows FPMT to free its lay followers, an approach that suits the contemporary world in which individual choice is taken for granted.

FPMT, the Dalai Lama, and the Geluk System

When Tibetans fled to India, Nepal, and Bhutan after 1959, there was no certainty they would be able to save their Buddhist lineages. There were several factors crucial to their eventual success: the strategizing of the Dalai Lama; the tremendous efforts in difficult conditions of the first generation of refugee monastics; and the support they received from exiled lay Tibetans and their Western and East Asian allies. FPMT's lamas and their students became part of that strategizing, effort, and allyship.[195] From the earliest days of FPMT, the lamas worked closely with the Dalai Lama and supported the Geluk system. Devotion for the Dalai Lama and a place in the Geluk system had been part of their lives in Tibet; in exile, they continued this pattern. Despite FPMT's lack of a specific Tibetan predecessor organization, the lamas perceived it as part of the enduring Geluk community within which they and their home monasteries in Tibet had been embedded. They surely drew on this history when they aligned FPMT with, and used it to support, the Dalai Lama and the exile Geluk system. FPMT has raised and contributed substantial funds to the priorities of the Ganden Tripas (heads of the Geluk school) for the development and ongoing flourishing of this system: food funds for Sera Je Monastic University and Gyudmed Tantric College; buildings at Sera Je; sponsoring important teachings and empowerments at which elements of the lineage are transmitted to younger generations; supporting teachers; and occasionally contributing to monastic operating costs. All these actions help preserve the Geluk lineage. They also help FPMT, which relies on Geluk institutions in Asia for many of its highly qualified teachers. FPMT is not independent of the Dalai Lama and the Geluk system like NKT; it is embedded in today's Geluk world, relies on it, and contributes to it.[196] Kay affirms that "FPMT remains self-consciously Gelug in identity and strong links are maintained with Tibetan communities in exile, especially Sera Je."[197]

Relationships with the Dalai Lama and the Geluk system did more than help that system; they shaped FPMT.[198] The lamas were devoted to the Dalai Lama and often guided by him.[199] As well, they acted as his eyes on the West, particularly in the early years of FPMT when information about Westerners' responses to Tibetan Buddhism was not easily available. One interviewee who traveled with the lamas in their early years of touring stated that the lamas "always reported to His Holiness" after each teaching tour, and always operated the tours with his guidance.[200] The interviewee stressed, "Rinpoche always does what His Holiness asks—he would die for that." He added that FPMT has always functioned under the Dalai Lama's leadership, has always acted "in concert" with him, and can be characterized as "a sub-contractor for His Holiness."[201] Ribush, also often near the lamas, seconds this view, writing in his history of FPMT that "from the beginning, Lama Yeshe and Lama Zopa Rinpoche have carried out their

[195] Adele Hulse reports, "Lama Yeshe and Lama Zopa Rinpoche always tried their utmost to support His Holiness the Dalai Lama in maintaining the monasteries and Tibetan communities." Hulse, *Big Love*, 791.
[196] A121F22. Interviewed by Author, December 2022.
[197] Kay, *Tibetan and Zen Buddhism*, 114.
[198] Hulse, *Big Love,* 92-96, 109-110, 791; Ribush, "Bamboo," 181.
[199] One early FPMT student cited by Kay described Lama Yeshe's objective as "creating a world-wide organisation for the preservation of the Mahayana tradition in all countries under the auspices of the Dalai Lama." Kay, *Tibetan and Zen Buddhism*, 63. The comment captures how the lamas and their early students perceived FPMT.
[200] The lamas' practice of reporting to the Dalai Lama and asking his advice after tours is also discussed in Hulse, *Big Love*, 542, 692, 784, 872.
[201] A121P03. Interviewed by Author, November 2022.

Dharma work in close consultation with His Holiness the Dalai Lama."[202] Kay also comments on how closely FPMT and its lamas followed the Dalai Lama's advice, noting the organization developed "under the guidance and patronage of eminent Tibetan geshes and lamas, and particularly the Dalai Lama."[203] Those who have attended events involving the Dalai Lama where Rinpoche was present, including myself, have also observed the affection with which the Dalai Lama treated Rinpoche, hugging him and holding his hand, seating Rinpoche close to him, and heaping praises on him.[204] Ribush also notes that "His Holiness has often praised Rinpoche's vast activities in public."[205] FPMT affiliates and followers have often organized the Dalai Lama's teachings or tours, annually in Delhi for example, and in various locations over the decades. Organizing a visit of the Dalai Lama is a significant endeavour given his popularity and security requirements. The fundraising and effort involved evidence the respect he receives in FPMT, while FPMT's role shows the regard he and his office have for its people.[206]

Kopan Monastery is also part of the Geluk system, and its development and activities are watched over by the Ganden Tripa. Indeed, during my visit to Kopan in 2023, the elderly Ganden Tripa was also visiting for discussions with Rinpoche and Kopan's abbot. In 2024, he spoke by Zoom at FPMT's Geshe Conference to advise on the operations of FPMT after the loss of Rinpoche. Ling Rinpoche, another senior Geluk lama, also spoke at the conference, praised the lamas and FPMT, and offered advice for the future. FPMT's geshes—almost 50 of them—are all trained at Geluk monastic universities.[207]

It is also notable that the first of FPMT's "Vast Visions," Rinpoche's 2007 plan for the organization, is "Offering Service to His Holiness the Dalai Lama." Rinpoche is quoted by FPMT stating, "[I would like] for FPMT to offer service to His Holiness the Dalai Lama as much

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[202] Ribush, "Bamboo," 181.

[203] Kay, *Tibetan and Zen Buddhism*, 71, 114.

[204] I observed this at the Dalai Lama's teachings in Bodh Gaya and Delhi in the late 1990s and early 2000s. Another portrayal comes from a report of what was likely Rinpoche's last face to face meeting with the Dalai Lama, on November 2, 2022. Geshe Ngawang Sangye attended the meeting and gave the following report. "His Holiness … was very, very happy to meet with Rinpoche. His Holiness said, 'Lama Zopa, Lama Zopa, My trustworthy longtime friend.' His Holiness blessed Rinpoche several times … His Holiness was holding Rinpoche's hands and thanking Rinpoche for bringing Buddha's teaching to the West. After this Rinpoche requested His Holiness for permission to ask some questions. His Holiness replied, 'Ask anything, no rush.' Rinpoche then asked some questions about the FPMT and in relation to the future of the organization. Rinpoche also asked about a future book project he is working on about the practice of compassion. His Holiness showed the aspect of being very pleased about Rinpoche spreading this practice around the world and then gave a very special meditation to be included in the book. Rinpoche requested if His Holiness would accept a long life puja offered by FPMT and His Holiness immediately accepted." Ven. Roger Kunsang, FPMT's CEO, also attended this meeting and afterward stated, "His Holiness was really making clear His Holiness's appreciation for Rinpoche's activities." "A Most Precious Meeting with His Holiness the Dalai Lama, November 2, 2022," *Lama Zopa Rinpoche News, FPMT*, November 7, 2022. https://fpmt.org/lama-zopa-rinpoche-news-and-advice/a-most-precious-meeting-with-his-holiness-the-dalai-lama-november-2-2022/.

[205] Ribush, "Bamboo," 181.

[206] Examples are several. Maitripa College organized a visit of the Dalai Lama to Portland in 2013 involving multiple events. "Video & E-Book: His Holiness the 14th Dalai Lama 3-Day Environmental Summit," Maitripa College. https://maitripa.org/dalai-lama-portland/. Accessed May 22, 2024. FPMT's centre in Delhi, Tushita Mahayana Meditation Centre, has hosted an annual teaching in Delhi by the Dalai Lama for many years. Lama Zopa Rinpoche, "Tushita-Delhi Dharma Celebrations, 2004-19." Lama Yeshe Wisdom Archive. https://www.lamayeshe.com/article/chapter/dharma-celebration-2019, Accessed May 22, 2024.
FPMT was involved as well in the Dalai Lama's early Western tours, including having responsibilities for some aspects of a 1981 tour in Switzerland and most aspects of a month-long tour of Spain and Italy in 1982 (Hulse, *Big Love*, 977, 1055-62).

[207] "FPMT Geshe Conference at Kopan Monastery: A Family Feeling of Unity." *FPMT Community: Stories & News, FPMT*, February 21, 2024. https://fpmt.org/fpmt-community-news/fpmt-geshe-conference-at-kopan-monastery-a-family-feeling-of-unity/.

as possible and to be able to fulfill His Holiness' wishes. This is the highest priority for the organization."[208] When Rinpoche passed away, FPMT's leaders met almost immediately with the Dalai Lama, who promised to take charge of finding Rinpoche's reincarnation. Since that time, the Dalai Lama has been advising FPMT on issues with respect to Rinpoche, such as the handling of his body, leadership of FPMT in his absence, and practices disciples should do to promote his swift return.[209] FPMT's closeness to the Dalai Lama, and his influence on the organization, continues.[210]

FPMT's relationship with the Dalai Lama is part of its attraction for some followers. One interviewee stated, "One major benefit of studying with FPMT has been the clear and explicit support of and connection to His Holiness the Dalai Lama. As a young person, I naturally understood His Holiness to be an authority figure within Tibetan Buddhism, so I've appreciated being in an organization with direct ties to him."[211] Many interviewees also indicated that they felt themselves to be students of the Dalai Lama, having attended his teachings, taken transmissions and empowerments from him, watched him online, or simply admired him, adding to the connections between he and FPMT.

FPMT's Affiliates

Overall, FPMT counted, in 2024, a total of 133 affiliates. What does it mean to be an FPMT affiliate? A 2021 issue of *Mandala* indicates the first requirement:

> When a center, project, or service is affiliated with FPMT Inc., it means that it follows the spiritual direction of Lama Zopa Rinpoche. It means that they use FPMT's educational programs and materials.[212]

FPMT's website, as of 2024, offers the following description of affiliates:

> Each FPMT center, project or service is incorporated individually (is a separate legal entity), and is responsible for its own governance and finance. All FPMT centers, projects, and services are affiliated, or pending affiliation, with FPMT Inc. This means that the FPMT center, project, or service has signed a legal agreement to follow the unique spiritual lineage of Lama Zopa Rinpoche and Lama Thubten Yeshe. It also means that they will abide by national law, and FPMT policy – for example that all in a position of authority will follow the FPMT Ethical Policy.[213]

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[208] "Lama Zopa Rinpoche's Vast Visions for FPMT." FPMT. https://fpmt.org/fpmt/vast-vision/#hhdl. Accessed June 6, 2024.
[209] "An Update from the FPMT Inc. Board: Meeting with His Holiness the Dalai Lama on April 26," *FPMT Community Stories & News, FPMT*. May 2, 2023. https://fpmt.org/fpmt-community-news/an-update-from-the-fpmt-board-a-meeting-with-his-holiness-the-dalai-lama-on-april-26/; "Advice from His Holiness the Dalai Lama for Lama Zopa Rinpoche's Swift Return," *Lama Zopa Rinpoche News, FPMT*, October 19, 2023. https://fpmt.org/lama-zopa-rinpoche-news-and-advice/advice-from-his-holiness-the-dalai-lama-for-lama-zopa-rinpoches-swift-return/.
[210] NKT's leader, by contrast, withdrew NKT from the Geluk system and the guidance of the Dalai Lama, setting the stage for isolation and controversies. NKT is controversial for several reasons. See Tenzin Peljor, "New Kadampa Tradition (NKT): Kadampa Buddhism – International Kadampa Buddhist Union (IKBU)." May 2015. https://info-buddhism.com/new_kadampa_tradition.html.
[211] B121M30. Interviewed by Author, December 2022.
[212] "The FPMT Organization," *Mandala* (2021): 67.
[213] "Center Frequently Asked Questions," *FPMT Centers, Projects and Services, FPMT*. https://fpmt.org/centers/faq/. Accessed March 26, 2024.

Thus, affiliates follow the lamas' spiritual direction as passed on by the international office, use FPMT's educational programs and materials, including liturgies, and follow FPMT policies.

The number of FPMT centres, services, and projects has varied over the years and for this reason different numbers appear in different publications. The following numbers appear on FPMT's website and were confirmed by email in April 2024 by FPMT's Chief Operating Officer. As of that date, FPMT had 112 centres at which Dharma teachings and practices were the main activity. "Centres" in this context includes Dharma centres, retreat centres, monasteries / nunneries, and study groups, which are smaller or fledgling centres. Some centres have satellites in other locations; these are not counted separately from their mother centres, so the number of locations offering Dharma activities exceeded 112. The number of centres and their satellite groups grew during the late 20th century and declined slightly during the Covid-19 pandemic. However, declines were mostly related to small centres becoming satellites of larger centres, which reduced the number of centres but not necessarily locations, activities, or numbers of participants.[214] In fact, several interviewees commented that the pandemic helped many centres; online teachings increased attendee numbers substantially.[215]

As of 2024, fifty-one resident Dharma teachers are employed in centres, most of them geshes of Himalayan heritage. Centres without resident teachers rely on invited teachers and their members sometimes travel for teachings or attend online teachings. FPMT has many teachers from various backgrounds qualified at different levels. Affiliates are expected to employ only teachers approved by the international office.[216]

In addition to its centres FPMT officially counts as affiliates twelve projects and nine services. Projects and services are in areas like social engagement, translation, publishing, holy object creation, universal education, and support for Tibetan refugees. FPMT's official count of projects and services does not capture all social engagement: many socially oriented activities operated by centres or monasteries do not appear in this count.

Locations of affiliates are global, although there are areas without FPMT affiliates.[217] FPMT is not active in Tibet or mainland China. Regions or countries in which it has significant numbers of followers include Australia, Nepal, India, Southeast Asia, the USA, and Western Europe. Areas with smaller presences include Hong Kong, Taiwan, Mongolia, Africa, Israel, Russia, Central and Eastern Europe, Japan, Latin America, and Canada. Canada has two FPMT affiliates, a longstanding though small study group in Williams Lake, BC, and a mid-sized centre with a resident geshe and translator in Burlington, ON. The countries with the largest per capita FPMT presence are Nepal and Australia. Kopan Monastery in Kathmandu has hundreds of monks and nuns and oversees several remote monasteries and schools as well as a lay-oriented Dharma centre. A second centre in Nepal is affiliated with FPMT but not Kopan. Australia has approximately twenty FPMT centres and other affiliates.

FPMT centres, services, and projects operate in many languages, usually, though not always, the language of the local community. Buddhist teachings may be given in that language or in another language (generally Tibetan) with translation into the local language. The main language of the international office and international communication is English. Tibetan is also important. For example, in January 2024, an FPMT Geshe Conference to discuss the future of

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[214] "FPMT Centers, Projects and Services," *FPMT Centers, Projects and Services*. https://fpmt.org/centers/. Accessed March 26, 2024. Details were verified with FPMT management.

[215] e.g., C211M20. Interviewed by Author, December 2022; C225D32. Email to Author, January 2023.

[216] "Teachers Resident at FPMT Centers." *FPMT Teachers*. https://fpmt.org/teachers/resident/. Accessed September 4, 2024.

[217] The number of centres, projects, and services by location, as shown on FPMT's website in September 2024 are as follows: Canada 2; US 26; Latin America 7; UK 5; Continental Europe 45; Israel 1; Africa 1; India / Nepal 12; Other Asia 10; Australia/ NZ/ Fr. Polynesia 24. A more detailed breakdown is available at https://fpmt.org/centers/.

FPMT and bring senior teachers—geshes and geshemas—into managerial decisions was held in Tibetan at Kopan Monastery, even though not all those present spoke Tibetan.[218] That Tibetan was the main language used at this important conference underlines FPMT's continuing rootedness in Tibetan religion and culture and the fact that its cadre of senior teachers are mainly Tibetan speakers. Nevertheless, an international meeting of affiliates planned for April 2025 at Kopan—the first significant global, rather than regional, meeting of centre leaders that FPMT will have held since 2014—will likely be conducted mostly in English given that English is the main inter-affiliate means of communication. The use of English reflects not only the influence of the Western components of FPMT, among whom English is the *lingua franca* even though FPMT has many centres in continental Europe, but also widespread knowledge of English among people associated with FPMT in Asia.

FPMT's Main Activities (excluding Social Engagement)

FPMT's social engagement is not addressed in this section; it is presented in detail in Chapters 5, 6, and 7. As well, although an attempt is made here to capture FPMT's main activities, not all of these are listed. For example, Rinpoche promoted interfaith activities, and many affiliates engage in them, but these were not researched and are not discussed.

Dharma Teaching and Practice

FPMT's main activity, from inception to the present, has always been teaching Dharma and facilitating its practice by providing relevant knowledge, guidance, and opportunity. Its Dharma is that of the Geluk lineage as transmitted by the lamas. Teachings and practices are not described here; this information is available on the websites of FPMT and its archiving affiliate LYWA. An older scholarly description that remains mainly accurate appears in Cozort (2003).[219]

Most of FPMT's affiliates are centres. Their purpose is to teach Dharma and offer practice opportunities; people in FPMT perceive that teaching people Dharma and encouraging its practice is the best way to help them and to better society. Rinpoche, for example, made this comment on the role of Dharma centres:

> Dharma centers … help so many sentient beings while they have this most precious human body by awakening them to the unmistaken causes of happiness and suffering through explaining the Buddha's teachings on karma, which is our experience, not merely belief. By offering this education we open their lives to all happiness – not just that of this life, but that of future lives and the ultimate happiness of liberation from samsara and the peerless happiness of full enlightenment.[220]

Nevertheless, over the years, FPMT's activities have broadened beyond the teaching and practice of its lineage. In its early years, FPMT consisted of the lamas, their students, Kopan Monastery, a few centres, and an international office, along with the boys' school and a small medical clinic at Kopan Monastery. This network soon expanded, although the expansion remained mainly in areas related to the preservation, transmission, and practice of the Geluk lineage. More centres and several monasteries arose, for example, such as Western ones. These

[218] "FPMT Geshe Conference."
[219] Daniel Cozort, "The Making of the Western Lama," in *Buddhism in the Modern World: Adaptations of an Ancient Tradition*, eds. Steven Heine and Charles S. Prebish. (NY: Oxford UP, 2003), 225-230.
[220] "Center Frequently Asked Questions."

are not large like Kopan Monastery but they have endured despite the difficulties of monasticism in the West, and offer places of residence and training for dozens of FPMT monastics.[221] FPMT has also long worked to re-establish Buddhism in Mongolia, where it was wiped out during the communist period.[222] Other areas of activity that developed were publishing, archiving, translating, and the creation of holy objects. Another area is what FPMT calls "universal education": Buddhism-derived secular teachings on ethics, compassion, and wisdom. Lastly, FPMT became more socially engaged. Other activities are described here.

Publishing, Archiving, and Translating

Lama Yeshe and one of his early students, Nick Ribush, together founded Wisdom Publications in 1975. Its first publication was a set of the lamas' teachings entitled *Wisdom Energy*, which sold extremely well. Wisdom Publications was moved to England in 1978 and to the US in 1989, where it has operated ever since, publishing about twenty-five books per year. It is still affiliated with, and has a "special commitment" to, FPMT, and publishes the lamas' teachings. It also now publishes other Buddhist, Tibetan, and spiritual material—popular, literary, and academic—in books and increasingly online. It is one of the top Dharma publishers in the world and has published hundreds of titles. According to an email received from Ribush in October 2023, more than 7 million of its books are in print.[223] Other publishers are also affiliated with FPMT: several non-English-language publishing houses established by the lamas' followers, including Ediciones Dharma in Spain; Chiara Luce Edizioni in Italy; Editions Vajra Yogini in France; Diamant Verlag in Germany; Maitreya Uitgeverij in Holland; and Bodhicitta Publications in Taiwan.[224] FPMT's Education Service branch also publishes Dharma texts.

In 1996 Ribush and others established the Lama Yeshe Wisdom Archive (LYWA), to keep, transcribe, and digitize teachings and other materials, like recordings and photographs, of the lamas.[225] LYWA also publishes significant amounts of material in book form and online. From inception through 2022, over a million hard copies of LYWA books were sold or otherwise distributed, mostly but not all in English. LYWA's website LamaYeshe.com contains thousands of pages of the lamas' teachings as well as free books to download or read online. LYWA reports that LamaYeshe.com averages nearly 3,000 unique visitors per day. LYWA also maintains a "Teachings from Tibet" website (teachingsfromtibet.com) to publish teachings of other Tibetan Buddhist masters. It also produces podcasts, has a YouTube channel, produces e-books and audiobooks, and uses Amazon print-on-demand, as well as having a broad social media presence.[226] Because LYWA often provides books and other material for free, some interviewees

[221] Ribush, "Bamboo," 180.
[222] Other lamas and transnational Buddhist organizations have also reached out to Mongolia to help re-establish Buddhism there, such as the Dalai Lama and Namkhai Norbu Rinpoche, along with the latter's Dzogchen Community (Samuel, *Tantric Revisionings*, 305).
[223] Ribush, "Bamboo," 179; Carina Rumrill, "The Beginning of the Future for Dharma Publishing: Daniel Aitken Talks about the Wisdom Experience," *Mandala* 1 (2020), 38; Judith Rosen, "Wisdom Publications in Transition at 25." *Publishers Weekly* (Dec. 6, 2013), https://www.publishersweekly.com/pw/by-topic/industry-news/publisher-news/article/60287-wisdom-publications-in-transition-at-25.html.
[224] Ribush, "Bamboo,"179-180.
[225] Ribush, "Bamboo," 180.
[226] *Lama Yeshe Wisdom Archive Key Stats 2022*. Lama Yeshe Wisdom Archive, 2023. In addition to printed books, as of 2022, LYWA had published 47 e-books, 120 podcasts with over 125,000 listens, and 327 videos on YouTube with over 1.2 million views. It had sold about 120,000 e-books and print on demand books; produced 26 multi-media publications attracting about 4000 views; produced twelve audiobooks with about 35,000 listens; and developed a strong presence on Twitter, Pinterest, Instagram, and Facebook, with the largest following, about 135,000, on

called its activities "social service" or "social engagement." Given its impact in spreading Dharma to people who cannot afford expensive books or courses, this is not a misnomer, although it is not identified in this dissertation as one of FPMT's social projects.

Although the publications of Wisdom Publications, LYWA, and FPMT's Education Services generally appear first in English, many also have been released in other modern languages, increasing their availability and usage.

FPMT's international office also published a magazine for many years. It launched a newsletter called *Wisdom* in 1983, which in 1987 evolved into *Mandala* magazine. *Mandala* was primarily an in-house publication but was read outside FPMT as well. (One interviewee told me that he recalled that in the late 1990s and early 2000s "you could even find *Mandala* at the Chapters branch in downtown Toronto."[227]) In addition to profiling FPMT-related people and activities, it presented Buddhist teachings, covered events, and interviewed Buddhist leaders and scholars like the Dalai Lama, Geshe Lhundub Sopa, Jetsunma Tenzin Palmo, Anne Klein, Jeffrey Hopkins, Thubten Chodron, José Cabezón, Roger Jackson, and Robert Thurman. Its digital content grew over the years, and print publication ceased in 2021 after seventy-seven issues; much of its content remains available online. Since 2021, news, articles, blogs, and podcasts have been published on FPMT's website, FPMT.org.

FPMT is also involved in translation. It has a translation services branch and a translation fund; these aim at ensuring the translation from Tibetan of Geluk philosophical and practice texts. Translations are usually published by Wisdom Publications or FPMT's Education Services branch.[228]

This outline is provided in part to demonstrate FPMT's impact. One of FPMT's aims is to transmit the Dharma, and its ways of doing so are not limited to teachings in centres. Through archiving, translating, and publishing, FPMT's impact on Buddhists and others, associated with FPMT or not, is global and substantial: one reason FPMT is influential in the Buddhist world.

Universal Education

Lama Yeshe initiated FPMT's universal education in 1983. It now forms one of FPMT's "Five Pillars of Service" under the rubric "Universal Education for Compassion and Wisdom." "Universal education" refers to secularized teachings derived from Buddhism but not specifically Buddhist, aimed at reducing individual suffering and societal conflict.[229] Their impetus was Lama Yeshe's wish to make traditional wisdom relevant and available to everyone. Universal education combines basic Buddhist teachings with Western philosophy and psychology to train adults and children in life skills and values: mindfulness, compassion, ethics, and so on.

FPMT's main universal education course is *16 Guidelines for Life.* It teaches ways to think, act, relate to others, and find meaning in life. The *16 Guidelines* were developed by FPMT practitioners based on instructions for lay people attributed to an early Tibetan king.[230] One of FPMT's affiliates, a global charity, "The Foundation for Developing Compassion and Wisdom"

Facebook. According to an email from LYWA in October 2023, LYWA's most popular book has been Lama Yeshe's *Becoming Your Own Therapist*, first published in 1998, with over 150,000 copies in print.

[227] C111K02. Message via Messager, March 2024.

[228] "FPMT Translation Services: A Report on Projects," *Education and Preservation, FPMT*, October 18, 2023. https://fpmt.org/charitable-activities/projects/education-and-preservation/fpmt-translation-services-a-report-on-projects/. This report describes translation projects underway in 2023 as well as past translations and publications.

[229] "Rejoicing in the Ongoing Universal Education Activities of FDCW," *Education and Preservation, FPMT*, March 31, 2021. https://fpmt.org/charitable-activities/projects/education-and-preservation/rejoicing-in-the-ongoing-universal-education-inspired-activities-of-fdcw/.

[230] Murdoch and Oldershaw, *16 Guidelines*, vii.

(FDCW), is FPMT's "secular hub." FDCW oversees universal education across FPMT, developing and delivering universal education programs and resources for schools, universities, community groups, hospices, and other organizations. FDCW evaluates its courses and supports research on their impacts so that their development and use are continually shaped by evidence.[231] It also runs conferences and events and trains facilitators in many countries. Interviewees generally praised universal education; many had taught it. One interviewee's comments were perhaps typical: she called universal education a "fantastic" response from FPMT to the reality that people today had to be reached in varying ways.[232] FPMT invests significant funds in universal education.

Scholar of Tibetan Buddhism Christopher Emory-Moore claims FPMT's universal education teachings detraditionalize its lineage and create modern Buddhism, calling them "a full-scale reform of traditional doctrines."[233] This comment requires clarification. FPMT keeps universal education separate from its lineage, distinguishing between the lineage and "universal" teachings and practices derived from the lineage but omitting aspects of it.[234] As one interviewee involved in FDCW emphasized, for universal education, "there is no lineage."[235] Emory-Moore's comment may cause misunderstanding: universal education does not affect FPMT's lineage.

Holy Objects

Certain projects and activities of FPMT merit mention given their scope. One is "Maitreya Project," a project launched in 1990 to build a very large statue of Maitreya Buddha in India and smaller Maitreya statues in various locations. The large statue has not yet come to fruition. It has been controversial because of its size. its expense, and the amount of land the statue and accompanying infrastructure and social projects would require. Another project begun as a fundraiser for the statue was called "The Maitreya Project Heart Shrine Relic Tour" but was generally known as "the relic tour." It consisted of many years of tours, around the world, of sets of Buddhist relics. These projects, and those pertaining to other holy objects in FPMT, are described in this section.

Maitreya Project

FPMT's website states:

> The Maitreya Project was the inspiration of … Lama Thubten Yeshe following his first visit back to Tibet in the early 1980's. In the Buddhist pantheon, the historical Buddha Shakyamuni is considered the fourth of eventually 1,000 Buddhas who will manifest on this earth and each of whom will initiate a cycle of spiritual teachings. Maitreya Buddha is predicted to be the fifth Buddha who will appear on earth. … Building large statues of Maitreya Buddha has traditionally been considered auspicious in order to reduce the period of "spiritual darkness" when Shakyamuni Buddha's teachings have disappeared

[231] C211V18. Interviewed by Author, November 2022.
[232] C211M20. Interviewed by Author, December 2022.
[233] Christopher Emory-Moore, "Present Peace, Future Freedom: Children's Meditation Instruction in Two Diasporic Tibetan Buddhist Lineages." *Religious Studies and Theology* 39, no. 1 (2020): 68-72.
[234] e.g. C211M20. Interviewed by Author, December 2022. Other interviewees made the same point.
[235] C211V18. Interviewed by Author, November 2022.

> and before the appearance of Maitreya Buddha whose teachings then will again provide the means for spiritual development to people of the time.[236]

The project was initiated in 1990 with the intent to build a 500' statue of Maitreya Buddha in Bodh Gaya, India that would endure up to 1,000 years as a gift to the Indian people in thanks for the Buddhist teachings, which came from India, and for welcoming Tibetan refugees. The statue was intended to karmically benefit everyone connected with it: those seeing it, donating to it, working for it, and so on. Rinpoche indicated that they would be born, in the future, as followers of Maitreya. Falcone, in her 2010 Ph.D. thesis on the statue project, described how FPMT's people perceived its benefits.

> Staff from the Maitreya Project International (MPI), which is the FPMT affiliate now responsible … claim that the statue will establish a direct karmic connection between Maitreya himself, the long-awaited Buddha of Loving-Kindness, and the donors (and viewers) of the statue. Buddhist devotees from all traditions believe that the Maitreya Buddha will manifest on earth in the very distant future, long after Buddhist philosophies have been forgotten, long after the inevitable decline of humanity and long after the gradual resurgence of human physique and psyche that will follow the great decline. When humanity is ready, Maitreya will be reborn on earth, and help those lucky enough to be alive at the time to achieve quick liberation from samsara.[237]

In addition to helping individuals, the statue was expected to help the surrounding area. One interviewee involved described it as a way of creating a positive, beneficial society throughout the region, one of India's most challenged ones. The statue would benefit the environment or energy, while FPMT would also put in place primary health care, a full service hospital, schools, and a renewed Nalanda University that would restore India's Buddhist tradition, giving lineages back to India near where they had originated.[238]

The statue project began with the acquisition of land in Bodh Gaya, where the Buddha is said to have attained enlightenment. The statue was, however, not built there. Due to difficulties there, the project was moved to Kushinagar in the neighbouring state of Uttar Pradesh, where the Buddha is said to have died. The land FPMT owned in Bodh Gaya was donated in 2020 to the Dalai Lama, who is overseeing the creation of a university on the site; a smaller Maitreya statue is expected to be placed there.[239] For the large statue in Kushinagar, sufficient funds, as of 2024, have not been raised, so the project has been deferred.[240]

The statue plan includes placing 1,000 smaller Maitreya statues in various locations. As of 2024, two 24-foot Maitreya statues have been put in place, one at an FPMT retreat centre in California and the other in Kushinagar. There are also plans to create 100 life-sized statues of Maitreya, of which, as of writing, 26 had been made and placed at FPMT sites.[241] I observed one at Maitreya School in Bodh Gaya; see Figure 20.

Rinpoche wrote a letter in February 2014 explaining some aspects of the project to create the smaller statues. He stated:

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[236] "Maitreya Projects," *Holy Objects Fund, FPMT*. https://fpmt.org/projects/fpmt/holy-objects-fund/maitreya/. Accessed February 12, 2024.
[237] Falcone, "Waiting for Maitreya," 2.
[238] A121P03. Interviewed by Author, November 2022.
[239] "Important Update on the Maitreya Project in Bodhgaya." *Holy Objects, FPMT*, April 23, 2021. https://fpmt.org/charitable-activities/projects/holy-objects/important-update-on-the-maitreya-project-in-bodhgaya/.
[240] A122K33. Interviewed by Author, February 2023.
[241] "Maitreya Projects."

> The more statues of Maitreya Buddha there are in the world the more it helps to minimize or stop wars, famine, diseases, tsunamis, fires, hurricanes, earthquakes, etc. in this very dark period when so many people suffer so much. Due to the result of building many Maitreya statues, this decreases the very dark time of so much suffering. So this is my reason for building many Maitreya statues.[242]

Falcone's dissertation (2010), article (2012), and book (2018) describe controversies surrounding the large statue. In Bodh Gaya, Falone indicates that controversy centred mainly on the sums FPMT sought to spend on a holy object in a poor area, and to a lesser extent on the size of the statue and its impact on the skyline given that it would be taller than the stupa marking where the Buddha is said to have gained enlightenment. Abraham Zablocki, also discussing the planned Bodh Gaya statue, notes other concerns his research uncovered: environmental issues, fears that the project would increase rather than decrease inequalities in the area, and local dislike of the idea, as "medieval," that holy objects create merit for future rebirths.[243] In Kushinagar, according to Falcone, controversy centred on the state government's planned forced acquisition of farmland for the project and the price to be paid for this land.

Although dissertation research did not include the statue project, interviewees occasionally commented on it. All supported it, but some expressed hesitations about whether such a costly statue was needed to attain the desired benefits, whether it would have been better to allocate more funds to social projects, and whether the project, including public relations, had been well managed. Nevertheless, interviewees were disappointed the statue was not built.

One opinion typical of strong supporters of the project came from an FPMT nun. She described its aims to me in 2024 as she had understood them from Rinpoche's comments:

> The project was thwarted by people [i.e., farmers and officials] who wanted only money. But it wasn't fundamentally aimed at benefitting people financially. It was to stop wars and the spread of weapons. Ukraine for example. Israel and Gaza. Weapons are flooding Europe and the Middle East. Everyone is producing weapons. The whole world will be fighting. Rinpoche said after the pandemic, 'We've gone from the age of sickness to the age of weapons.' He tried to stop that happening with Maitreya Project. But look what happens when people only want money. There's a progression; famine will be next. Ukraine and Russia are bread belts. India and Nepal are not exporting food because they fear famine. Wars will be fought over food. This was all predicted: from sickness to weapons to famine. It's not something Rinpoche made up. The Maitreya statue was meant to prevent this and also to shorten the time before Maitreya comes, bringing a better world.[244]

Her words capture one view within FPMT. Others had different views. One was expressed by a member of an Australian FPMT centre with whom I spoke in February 2024. He told me he believed in karma and rebirth but was still not convinced that such a large statue made sense. He said, "it was a lot of money for a statue and I thought maybe there were better things to spend some of the money on."[245] In 2023, a nun from Europe whom I met in Nepal told me she had supported the statue because it would have created significant karmic benefits. However, in

[242] "Maitreya Projects."
[243] Zablocki, "The Global Mandala," 259, 290-294.
[244] G213S54. Interviewed by Author, February 2024.
[245] B122S91. Interviewed by Author, February 2024.

retrospect, she felt the plan was too ambitious and consumed funds that could have been productively used elsewhere. As well, she feared that its public relations challenges and ultimate deferral may have damaged FPMT's reputation.[246] These comments illustrate some opinions within FPMT, although their representativeness is unknown.[247]

One noticeable aspect of the statue project is that it involved relatively few people associated with FPMT. Donations, of course, came from many people, connecting them to the project, although larger donations were rumoured to have come mainly from Rinpoche's East Asian followers.[248] And many people prayed and dedicated merit for its success. But the number of staff and volunteers directly involved was small. The project's deferral thus affected mainly a small group of individuals—major donors, a few staff and volunteers, and Rinpoche. This is one effect of FPMT's decentralization: occurrences in one affiliate do not necessarily impact the rest.

Rinpoche's strong wish to build Maitreya statues underlines the regard he had for holy objects and his belief that these would benefit beings in vast ways in the short, medium, and long term. Substantial funds were spent on efforts to build the large statue. Had it been built, the cost for the statue, infrastructure, and related social projects would have been in the tens of millions of US dollars.[249] That all the funds needed were not raised suggests hesitation among followers. What people pay for reveals what they value; Rinpoche may have valued large statues more than his followers even though they have financed many other holy objects, showing their faith in them. However, they also value monasteries and monastics, Buddhist teachings and teachers, social projects, translations, publishing, and other activities. They may not have been willing to finance holy objects to the extent that they were unable to finance these as well.

Maitreya Project Heart Shrine Relic Tour

Between 2000 and 2015, FPMT organized and ran tours of the globe of sets of Buddhist relics, with the stated intention of raising funds for the large Maitreya statue.[250] Relics (post-death remnants such as bones) were said to be from more than thirty past Indian and Tibetan masters and had been lent or donated to Rinpoche by the Dalai Lama and other lamas. Local Buddhist and other groups from within and outside FPMT hosted the relics in each location for several days at a time. The relics were carried and set up in displays by FPMT people traveling with them. Often FPMT monks or nuns were present to offer blessings. The tours traveled widely and attracted many visitors, introducing them to the Maitreya project, Buddhism, and FPMT.

Rinpoche taught that, when relics are approached with respect, they are the basis for generating merit and purifying past negative acts. Hence, supporters of FPMT understood visitors to be blessed, in ways that would help them in this and future lives, by viewing the relics, making offerings to them, prostrating to them, and so on. Rinpoche also suggested that the locations hosting the relics would receive blessings that could reduce or prevent disasters.[251]

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[246] C213F58. Interviewed by Author, February 2023.
[247] Only Western interviewees mentioned the statue. I did not hear the views of Himalayan or South, Southeast, or East Asian individuals, and since the project was not part of my research, I did not seek them out. Comments on the statue project were limited in number and cannot be assumed to be representative of people throughout FPMT.
[248] Zablocki indicates that he was told by the CEO of the project, in the early 2000s, that "roughly 50% of the donations received so far have come from Chinese Buddhists." He adds that one reason is that Maitreya Buddha is a particularly important figure in Chinese Buddhism. Zablocki, "The Global Mandala," 284.
[249] According to Zablocki, the budget as in late 1990s was $US 200 million. Zablocki, "The Global Mandala," 266.
[250] Falcone, *Battling*, 29, 29 fn. 13.
[251] "Relics Explained by Lamas." *Mandala* (December 2002-February 2003): 55. https://fpmt.org/wp-content/uploads/sites/2/2002/12/relics_explained_by_lamas.pdf.

Zablocki (2005), McAra (2009), and Falcone (2018) all provide detailed descriptions of the relic tours.[252] The tours were an important and long-running FPMT activity that increased the lamas' and FPMT's profiles and spread their influence. The tours also revealed the respect other lamas had for Rinpoche and their willingness to support his activities; it was they who lent or gifted relics perceived as extremely precious. Finally, like the Maitreya statues and other holy objects, the tours demonstrate Rinpoche's and FPMT's traditional beliefs and priorities.

Other Holy Objects

Holy objects are important in FPMT. They are often referred to as "holy objects for world peace." Rinpoche stated:

> My wish is for FPMT to build many holy objects everywhere, as many as possible. Making it so easy for sentient beings to purify their heavy negative karma and making it so easy for sentient beings to create extensive merit. Which makes it so easy to achieve the realizations of the path and so easy to achieve liberation and enlightenment.

On stupas, Rinpoche described the benefits as follows:

> Since there is unbelievable benefit, such as liberating sentient beings, then I thought we should aim to build 100,000 stupas (minimum size, one story, up to the distance from the earth to the moon) in different parts of the world and for the organization to do this … Especially, to build in countries where there are no holy objects and in countries where people have no opportunity to see holy objects. Just by seeing holy objects it purifies the mind and one collects extensive merit.[253]

FPMT's plans for holy objects follow Rinpoche's wishes. His vision included building 100,000 stupas and 100,000 prayer wheels around the world, placing large (e.g., 55' by 40') thangkas in the bigger FPMT centres, building statues of Padmasambhava in many places around the world, and building the 1,000 statues of Maitreya mentioned above.[254]

The largest and most expensive holy object people in FPMT have so far constructed is the "Great Stupa of Universal Compassion" in Australia. The stupa is fifty metres square and nearly fifty metres high, and its website calls it "the largest stupa in the Western World." Inside is a temple and other facilities; outside are gardens. Its estimated cost was $AUD 20 million.[255] It stands as a testament to the importance FPMT gives to holy objects.

FPMT's Status in 2024

Transnational Buddhist organizations are products of the modern era. While most grew quickly in their early years, ongoing growth is not inevitable. Organizations can grow, stabilize, shrink,

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[252] Zablocki, "The Global Mandala," 279-282; Falcone, *Battling*, 136-153. Sally McAra, *A 'Stupendous Attraction'*, Ph.D. Diss., (University of Auckland, 2009), 197-220.
[253] "Holy Objects for World Peace." *FPMT*. https://fpmt.org/fpmt/vast-vision/#hobjects. Accessed February 12, 2024.
[254] "Holy Objects for World Peace."
[255] "About the Great Stupa." *The Great Stupa of Universal Compassion*. https://stupa.org.au/great-stupa/. Accessed February 18, 2024.

or undergo other changes. For example, they can shift from a "charismatic" to a "post-charismatic" phase when their founders pass away. Or scandals can threaten their existence.

The most significant event in FPMT's recent history has been the passing of Rinpoche in April 2023. However, other events and trends have also affected the organization, including the Covid-19 pandemic and certain social changes.

FPMT's situation changed with Rinpoche's passing in April 2023. The entities and individuals that form its network have been assessing its effects ever since. Major upheavals have not occurred because Rinpoche's wishes still inform their activities. Leaders, lamas, and other teachers faithful to Rinpoche, including a large cadre of geshes, still guide affiliates and individuals. Many staff and volunteers knew Rinpoche and continue to implement his ideas. As well, Rinpoche's wishes were expressed in two sets of policies, "Rinpoche's Vast Visions" and "The Five Pillars of Service" that still guide FPMT. Kopan Monastery's strong management devoted to Rinpoche, solid support from donors, and important place in both the Geluk system and Nepal ensure its staying power. The result many be stability with only incremental change.

One area affected by Rinpoche's departure is governance. Some changes in how the international office relates to affiliates can be anticipated. The office's small size and limited resourcing prevent easy expansion of its role to take on all of the guiding and decision-making tasks for which Rinpoche himself earlier took responsibility. The result will likely be greater autonomy for affiliates. These and other changes will likely be discussed at a major international meeting of affiliates planned for April 2025.[256]

Also affected by Rinpoche's departure may be the attractiveness of FPMT affiliates to potential new Dharma students. David Snellgrove, a scholar of Tibetan Buddhism, once commented that its success derived mainly from the presence of Tibetan lamas.[257] If true, the loss of Rinpoche's visible presence and the absence of a single charismatic successor may gradually affect FPMT's attractiveness and thus follower numbers. Buttressing affiliates' ability to attract newcomers will be other factors: the inspiration still offered by the lamas via books and videos; FPMT's reputation for transmitting an authentic lineage and for having high quality teachers and education programs; the attractiveness of Tibetan Buddhism generally; and centres' ability to provide community and a variety of wellness, social, and other activities. As the quote from Snellgrove underlines, though, centres will always need well-trained and personable teachers. Their ethnicity is seldom relevant; what matters is their ability to help and support students by effectively teaching Dharma and providing personal guidance. One risk for FPMT is over-emphasizing Rinpoche through promoting his recorded and published teachings while under-emphasizing living teachers, their teachings, and FPMT's education programs. On the one hand, FPMT seeks to memorialize Rinpoche and keep his teachings and blessings available. On the other, newcomers and others will likely be equally or more interested in living teachers with whom they can immediately connect.

Social factors may also impact FPMT. FPMT's continuing success depends in part on Kopan's monastery and nunnery. So far, Kopan remains a desirable place for Nepali families to send young people to be educated. Yet societal changes are affecting the monastic world in India and Nepal. Refugees rarely come from Tibet now. Nepal is the main source of Himalayan monastics, yet as Nepal modernizes, fewer families may want their children to attend monastic schools. Kopan's nunnery is one of several important providers of advanced Buddhist education to women. Women are thus an important resource for Tibetan Buddhism and ensuring their

[256] "Paving the Way for CPMT 2025 Meeting: First Regional Consultation at Kopan Monastery." *FPMT Community: Stories & News, FPMT*, May 16, 2024. https://fpmt.org/fpmt-community-news/paving-the-way-for-cpmt-first-regional-consultation-at-kopan-monastery/.

[257] David L. Snellgrove, *Indo-Tibetan Buddhism: Indian Buddhists and Their Tibetan Successors* (London: Serindia Publications, 1987), 520.

facilities and education matches that of men is increasingly important. Non-Himalayan monks and nuns—Western and Asian—now also train in Himalayan institutions. As FPMT becomes ever more multi-cultural, people of all backgrounds can be expected to train as geshes or other levels of Dharma teachers; lineages may slowly become less the sole responsibility of Himalayan monastics and more of monastics of varying ethnicities trained in the Himalayan system. Himalayan monasteries, including Kopan, will remain vital to lineage preservation, but in time may come to depend more on attracting women and non-Himalayan monastics. So far, the Geluk system that grounds FPMT remains stable, but social forces, especially a decreasing number of people wishing to become monastics, may slowly bring change.

Social forces also affect the attractiveness of FPMT centres. Centres are still growing in South Asia, where there is a strong interest in Tibetan Buddhism. Growth in Mongolia, Latin America, and Africa is uncertain. East and Southeast Asia have growth potential. In Western countries, the number of FPMT centres seems to have stabilized. The years of rapid growth have ended. Some centres are expanding their services and activities, like Jamyang London and Jamyang Leeds in the UK, but overall, stability is typical. Centres seek to ensure they have the elements in place to pay their bills, provide teachings and host practices, maintain and improve their facilities, offer social services that meet changing needs, and so on. As just discussed, their flourishing may depend in part on the skills and personalities of their teachers.

Another social change affecting centres, hastened by the pandemic, is society's shift to online learning. Centres lacking technical expertise or teachers willing to teach online can lose members as individuals access teachings from other centres or sources. It is almost inevitable that, as Dharma becomes widely sourced online and in-person activities become only special events, that some centres will shrink, close, or amalgamate with larger centres. Centres have been the main delivery mechanism for Dharma during a certain historical period. As times change, centres that survive in physical form will be those that offer popular teachers with whom attendees can not only learn but also interact, enjoyable discussion and practice groups, supportive environments, and multiple life-enhancing activities. Supportive and friendly in-person communities will be necessary for physical centres to survive.

Another challenge for centres is generational change and increasing participant diversity, which require updating and renewing teaching styles and activities. Centres are being challenged to respond to a changing environment by ensuring they welcome all sectors of diverse societies and suit their offerings to young people and evolving demographics. Those that do not do so risk a gradually shrinking number of attendees.

Some loss, shrinking, or amalgamation of Dharma centres can be expected given these social forces, but this evolution is not wholly negative. FPMT's success is not measured by its number of centres but by the number of people it reaches and the quality of their learning and practice. FPMT is well positioned to thrive in the online environment and its publications and videos are widely accessed. Its Dharma education and teacher training programs are well-established and heavily used. While they will likely continue to be updated and supplemented, their core is in place. FPMT has also produced many popular Dharma teachers as well as being able to call on lamas and geshes from across the Geluk system. It also has a translator training program that has produced many translators for its centres. Geshes, other teachers, and translators sustain FPMT by providing the people and resources needed for the teaching and practice of Dharma in-person and online, and the development of new programs. They are an ongoing source of strength. FPMT's publishing, archiving, and translating activities are thriving and also a source of strength. Hence, although FPMT may undergo change, it can be expected to remain able to widely disseminate Dharma.

Beyond disseminating Dharma, what other activities of FPMT may evolve? FPMT's international office may be challenged to keep providing the same level of financial support to

certain organizations, groups, and projects. These include: organizations that preserve the Geluk lineage; non-FPMT organizations that help people coping with poverty, including monastics, children, and the elderly; and FPMT's own social projects. (These are also challenged to raise their own funds, as they are not primarily supported by FPMT's international office). FPMT also tries to financially help FPMT's own aging monastics, Dharma teachers, and others who have devoted their lives to the organization. Maintaining the level of donations required will be more difficult without Rinpoche's involvement. FPMT affiliates have always balanced transnationalism with localism. Centres serve local communities while they also contribute to the international office, regional coordination efforts, and projects elsewhere. If localization increases, some activities dependent on transnational fundraising could be at risk. This prospect will likely drive the international office to ensure affiliates continue to feel bound to the network by stressing commonalities, ties of loyalty, "family feeling," and services the network offers.

Evolution may occur in ways FPMT operates. The international office and affiliates have been challenged by circumstances and supporters to further professionalize management to meet the highest contemporary standards in areas like transparency, ethics and safeguarding, internal communications, and public relations. FPMT began as a "hippie" organization little concerned with formalities, but over the years it has had to professionalize, and this, interviewees suggested, remains a work in progress. Some interviewees also commented that FPMT still has gender inequalities. Others stressed that the majority of FPMT's Dharma teachers are now women and they felt proud that Kopan nunnery now provides advanced education to women. Overall, with many women in teaching and leadership roles, it is possible that gender imbalances are easing. Nevertheless, FPMT may need to continue to pay attention to gender.

Finally, a child identified as Rinpoche's reincarnation will likely soon be found. The Dalai Lama has indicated that he will oversee the search, identify and recognize the child, and supervise his or her education.[258] As I observed while visiting FPMT's affiliate in Bodh Gaya in January and February 2024, many of FPMT's followers regularly perform prayers for Rinpoche's swift return. Prayers are also extensively done at Kopan Monastery.[259] It will take many years to know if the identified child will be the same kind of leader and teacher as Rinpoche. If so, he or she may inspire renewed expansion and change in FPMT. Whatever happens in the future, FPMT's activities in coming years will likely include communications and practices related to the identified child.

Among transnational Buddhist organizations, FPMT is now probably in the middle in size, but has had above average influence because of the respect it receives for its closeness to the Dalai Lama, its own highly-regarded lamas, the quality and popularity of its publications and education programs, its large network of affiliates, and its followers' generosity in supporting social projects and Geluk institutions. It is thus an important organization in the Buddhist world. It will likely continue to be so. Even if societal trends shrink its physical network somewhat, the bulk of its centres and other affiliates will remain, and its publications, videos, and online offerings will likely grow in popularity as the online habit spreads. Hence, FPMT can be expected to evolve, but also to endure and flourish.

[258] "An Update from the FPMT Inc. Board."
[259] "FPMT Geshe Conference."

Scholarship on FPMT

Background

One initial question is whether scholars study FPMT's Buddhist teachings. They do not. FPMT's teachings are those of the Geluk tradition, which draws on Indian canonical texts and later commentaries as interpreted by Lama Tsongkhapa and his successors. Many scholars already study these teachings. Given there is no FPMT-specific expression of them, they are already addressed by this scholarship. Specific to FPMT, and thus potentially generative to study, are ways of adapting teaching methods, practice styles, organizational forms, and other activities to contemporary environments, but these do not affect Buddhist teachings. Falcone suggests that FPMT changed Geluk teachings, but the examples she cites relate to these other matters, not to teachings themselves.[260] Hence, scholars have not specifically studied FPMT's Buddhist teachings.

What does scholarship on FPMT address? There is relatively little of it, but what there is often provides useful information in several areas. Nevertheless, it remains fragmented, incomplete, and sometimes inaccurate. No scholars have examined the organization in its entirety or pulled together others' analyses to create an overall picture. Scholarly conversations leading to a coherent body of work are lacking. Even when scholars have addressed similar topics, such as FPMT's holy objects, they have done so in isolation. Falcone and Kory Goldberg, for example, both did fieldwork on FPMT's activities in India around the same time and sometimes, it seems, in the same place. Both reflect on community reactions to FPMT's plans to place holy objects in non-Buddhist environments.[261] Yet neither mentions the other. Sally McAra, in her research on FPMT's "Great Stupa of Universal Compassion" in Australia, cites a brief popular article by Falcone that criticized FPMT's Indian statue plan.[262] Yet she does not cite Falcone's more comprehensive dissertation on the topic. And Falcone, although publishing her book after McAra's thesis appeared, does not cite McAra or compare the Indian and Australian cases. Nor, in her article (2012) or book (2018) on the Maitreya statue does she cite Zablocki's 2005 dissertation, which extensively discusses the Bodh Gaya iteration of the project—a lost opportunity.[263] That scholars have not responded to or built on others' work means that assertions about FPMT have gone undebated and progression in scholarship is not evident.

One example of this state of affairs is a persistent mischaracterization of FPMT as having a strong central office that creates and directs "branches." Falcone repeatedly calls it an "empire." Ruth Fitzpatrick (2010) refers to one FPMT Dharma centre as a "branch" of FPMT.[264] "Branch" implies a central, controlling organization. Goldberg, in his 2011 dissertation and a 2013 article, writes that FPMT "is truly a global organization with branch centres and members

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[260] The examples she offers are methods and styles of teaching and practices, language of teachings and practices, "institutional culture," the layout and usage of space in Dharma centres, lay participation, and the ethnicity of practitioners. That these are areas of difference between FPMT and the pre-1959 Tibetan past as well as some ethnic Tibetan temples today is indisputable, but they do not change Geluk teachings. Falcone, *Battling*, 92-95.

[261] 2007-2008, as well as periods before and after, with geographic overlap in Bodh Gaya.

[262] McAra, "A 'Stupendous Attraction'," 126, 239.

[263] Falcone, the scholar who has published the most on FPMT, seldom cites others' work on it. On guru devotion, she cites Daniel Capper; he did not study FPMT but another Tibetan group (Falcone, *Battling*, 306). She also mentions Ruth Fitzpatrick once, who researched one FPMT centre, criticizing Fitzpatrick for insufficient attention to race (Falcone, "The Heritage Spectrum," 2022). These seem to be the only interactions among scholars whose work relates to FPMT.

[264] Ruth Fitzpatrick, "Green Tara in Australia," in *Buddhism in Australia: Traditions in Change*, eds. Christina Rocha and Michelle Barker (NY: Routledge, 2011), 53.

in North America, Europe, Australia, and Asia."[265] The remarks all overstate central control. Payne (2021), as discussed above, takes the opposite stance.

Earlier descriptions of FPMT are actually more accurate. Peter Moran (2004) gives a good, if brief, description of some aspects of FPMT and Kopan Monastery in the 1990s, implying that the network developed organically and is only loosely linked.[266] In a well-known book originally published in 2005, Samuel gives a pocket history of Tibetan Buddhist transnational organizations, calling them "global networks" and not implying central control.[267] Similarly, Ribush's 2012 chapter on FPMT underlines that its international office does not create, control, or direct affiliates.[268] Later analyses did not draw on these earlier works nor apparently examine FPMT's own materials, such as annual reports. It is not useful to portray a relatively decentralized network as a closely controlled church—a negative stereotype and one that overlooks one way that FPMT affiliates adapt to their environments and attract different kinds of people: through adjustments made on the ground given their significant autonomy.

A small amount of scholarship exists on FPMT's social engagement and traditionalism; this scholarship is discussed in Chapters 3 through 7, which are specific to those topics. Most remaining scholarship on FPMT, or that includes FPMT, falls into two categories. The first addresses FPMT's holy objects. It explores controversies surrounding holy objects and sheds light on how FPMT seeks to manifest Buddhism's cosmology in physical form and how it handles conflict with others who do not share its cosmological views.

A second category of scholarship concerns why and how people raised with modern worldviews develop faith in Buddhism's cosmology and elements that flow from it, like devotion to gurus. That this topic interests scholars reflects their awareness—stated or not—that FPMT's teachings and practices are not modern. Scholars of modern Buddhism do not investigate why or how people come to believe its teachings—because the teachings align with modern worldviews. Scholarship on this question is discussed here not to explore people's reasons but to show that research suggests it is feasible for ordinary people living mainstream lives today to hold old worldviews. That they do so undermines the secularization thesis by showing that traditional ideas and practices can co-exist with modern lifestyles.

Both these topics appear to attract scholars' interest because they concern encounters between tradition and modernity. FPMT's propensity to put holy items even in non-Buddhist environments derives from its traditional cosmological views; conflicts arise when neighbours have other views. Belief in Buddhism's cosmology today fascinates because it contradicts modern faith in science, materialism, and naturalism.

FPMT, Tradition, and Holy Objects

Although Falcone has published more than any other scholar on FPMT's proposed large statue of Maitreya Buddha, Zablocki's work preceded hers; he devoted a chapter in his 2005 Ph.D.

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[265] Kory Goldberg, "Buddhists without Borders: Transnational Pilgrimage, Social Engagement, and Education in the Land of Enlightenment," Ph.D. Diss., (Université du Québec à Montréal, 2011), 4; Kory Goldberg, "Pilgrimage Re-oriented: Buddhist Discipline, Virtue and Engagement in Bodhgayā." *The Eastern Buddhist* 44.2 (2013): 97. In another article, Goldberg repairs his comment, writing "The FPMT is an international network of Buddhist centers." Kory Goldberg, "Constructing and Contesting Sacred Spaces: International Buddhist Assistance in Bodhgayā," in *Buddhism, International Relief Work, and Civil Society*, eds. Hiroko Kawanami and Geoffrey Samuel (NY: Palgrave Macmillan, 2013), 181 fn. 7.

[266] Peter Moran, *Buddhism Observed: Travelers, Exiles, and Tibetan Dharma in Kathmandu* (London: Routledge, 2004), 70-75.

[267] Samuel, *Tantric Revisionings*, 303, 308.

[268] Ribush, "Bamboo," 170-176.

dissertation to the Bodh Gaya statue, based on textual analysis and ethnographic research. He explores, more than Falcone, the way old and new ideas interacted in the statue plan and in the criticism it attracted.[269] Zablocki describes FPMT's Buddhism as conserving religious tradition, avoiding modern reinterpretations of doctrines or practices, and "resolutely determined to maintain traditional orthodoxy in both practice and belief." He stresses the central place in FPMT's teachings of Buddhism's cosmology—the doctrine of rebirth, lower realms one to which one could fall after death, and so on—as part of the organization's traditionalism, and underlines the role that this cosmology played in the plan to construct the statue.[270] In doing so, he provides a useful description of the project and its motivations that contrasts with Falcone's efforts.

The only book written to date on FPMT is by Falcone, who has also published shorter pieces on the organization. Her 2018 book focuses on FPMT's efforts to build the statue of Maitreya Buddha, accompanied by social projects, in Kushinagar, India, in the 2003-2012 period, and on the responses of nearby residents. Falcone undertook ethnographic fieldwork both with people associated with FPMT and Kushinagari farmers mainly in 2005-2007 with some later follow up; earlier she had done fieldwork at other FPMT sites.[271] Falcone's analysis of the statue project merits discussion because it reveals one challenge scholars face: understanding FPMT's religious motivations and their basis in Buddhism's cosmology—equivalent to understanding the traditionalism of its Buddhism.

Falcone opposed the statue project. Her opposition was due to FPMT's attempts to proceed despite the concerns of many Kushinagaris. She feared that the negative impact of farmland being used for the statue and its social projects would outweigh their social and economic benefits, and that local people would not be paid the full value of their land if the state government enforced its purchase for the project: Kushinagaris' main concerns.[272] She also claimed to have understood FPMT sufficiently to explain its reasons for undertaking the project. Yet it is not clear she understood FPMT; reasons may include sampling bias and insufficient exploration, during fieldwork at FPMT sites, of relevant questions.[273]

Falcone describes FPMT's motivations for building the statue as several. One motive she ascribes to FPMT is faith in "top-down international development strategies" and "neoliberal economic development and global capitalism." In this vein, she presents the statue project as neo-liberal, capitalist, and colonial. Another motive she presents is "guru devotion" that led supporters of the project to attempt to implement Rinpoche's dream of a large statue by ignoring the harms she believes they knew it would cause.[274] Third, she suggests that, to the extent that FPMT was motivated by karmic benefits, it aimed to give these only to donors.[275]

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[269] Zablocki, "The Global Mandala," 261-262.
[270] Zablocki, "The Global Mandala," 275-276.
[271] Falcone, *Battling*, 6.
[272] One interviewee, who had been involved in the project, reported that when land was finally bought in Kushinagar, the price paid surpassed the market value by a substantial amount, effectively making the families who sold land rich. Hence, Falcone's fears did not materialize. A121P03. Interview with Author, November 2022.
[273] This shortfall in understanding the cosmology most people in FPMT believed in, and which was the basis for the project, may have been due to Falcone's ethnographic sample. Although she appears to have spent substantial time in FPMT centres, her book, including the quotes from her interlocutors, leaves the impression that she spoke mainly with visitors, newcomers, or people not deeply involved in FPMT. It does not appear she created a balanced sample of newcomers, longtime practitioners, young people, older people, ordained people, and lay people. Nor does she seem to have spoken with South Asian, East Asian, or Himalayan people involved in FPMT. This may have biased her sample.
[274] Falcone, *Battling*, 273-285, 306-307.
[275] Falcone indicates that FPMT expected karmic benefits from the statue to flow to the statue's Buddhist donors and worshippers, whereas local people, who were not Buddhists, would benefit only from social projects at the statue's site (Falcone, *Battling*, 20-21). This assessment is misleading. FPMT taught that karmic benefits would flow to all who saw or engaged with the statue in any way, and karmic benefits for local Indians, not donors, were its main

On the first of these motivations, despite demonstrating that she had information on FPMT's religious aims, Falcone criticizes FPMT's for what she believes were their material reasons for constructing the statue: to offer economic opportunities to local people based on faith in top-down economic development. However, her ethnographic data do not show that people in FPMT had either this aim or this faith.[276] FPMT promoted the statue's economic benefits to religious skeptics, but Rinpoche's words and FPMT's own publications show that these benefits were not the project's impetus nor the main interest of donors. The project was motivated by religious, not economic, beliefs. Falcone imputes economic beliefs and motives on FPMT's people. Oddly, though, she also claims the project was meant to benefit the karma of donors, but not local Indians—a claim that acknowledges awareness of belief in Buddhism's cosmology.[277]

For guru devotion, on the other hand, Falcone presents useful ethnographic data as well as drawing on work by another ethnographer, Daniel Capper.[278] She shows that guru devotion played a role the project, especially Rinpoche's devotion for Lama Yeshe, whose idea the statue was. Devotion for the lamas also motivated their followers.[279] This dissertation does not discuss guru devotion much, so Falcone's work showing its role in FPMT's activities is helpful.[280]

Falcone adds to her discussion of guru devotion her own idea: that people were misled by devotion into supporting a project that they would otherwise have rejected. The assertion that guru devotion led to irrational support for the project overlooks faith in Buddhism's cosmology, according to which the statue would improve the karma of those who saw it for centuries to come. These perceived benefits Falcone does not take into account—she does not, in her fieldwork, seem to ask her interlocutors about their cosmological beliefs, nor explore what beliefs impelled them to support the statue.

Hence, Falcone does not err on the importance of guru devotion but errs by not considering cosmological beliefs as a motivation for the statue. She thus overlooks Rinpoche's and others' core aim: karmic benefit. Zablocki describes this motivation better and underlines its traditionalism, noting that the rationale given by Rinpoche and others in FPMT explained the statue in terms used throughout Buddhist history—to create merit and foster loving-kindness in those seeing or connecting to it.[281] Guru devotion did not cause people to ignore what Falcone considers a fact—that the statue's harms exceeded its benefits. For statue supporters, this was not a fact because they did not evaluate only material factors. In their eyes, the statue's spiritual benefits exceeded any material harms. The connection to guru devotion is that they had faith that Rinpoche was sufficiently wise to assess present and future harms and benefits. That this was their perspective contradicts her conclusion that supporters of the project felt "indifference" to

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impetus. As Falcone mentions in her introduction, the statue was intended to mainly benefit India. On the question of karmic benefits, Rinpoche is quoted as saying, for example, "Any sentient being who remembers, sees, touches or hears about the statue … all those sentient beings will ultimately achieve full enlightenment. By the way, they will also achieve ultimate happiness, liberation from samsara and temporary samsaric pleasure while still in samsara. So it is … most unbelievable, the benefits that the Maitreya Statue will bring. It will bring happiness to numberless sentient beings; this is what they will receive from the statue." "Important Announcements Regarding Maitreya Project," *Holy Objects, FPMT*, November 7, 2012. https://fpmt.org/charitable-activities/projects/holy-objects/important-announcements-regarding-maitreya-project/.

[276] Falcone, *Battling*, 31, 274, 284, 288.

[277] In her 2010 dissertation, Falcone mentions that FPMT's goal is for the statue to benefit those who see it (i.e., local Indians) and those who donate to it (Falcone, "Waiting for Maitreya," 2); in her book, she drops the mention of FPMT's goal for those who see it to benefit and suggests that FPMT aims to benefit only donors (Falcone, *Battling*, 130, 167). This change obscures, in the book, Rinpoche's and FPMT's motive to help the people of India.

[278] Falcone, *Battling*, 227-240.

[279] Falcone, *Battling*, 31, 170.

[280] Notably, Falcone considers FPMT's Buddhism to be modern, not traditional, yet guru devotion is rarely observed in modern Buddhisms.

[281] Zablocki, "The Global Mandala," 287-288.

local Indians that reflected a "failure of love."[282] For them, the statue expressed love. Falcone's conclusion that guru devotion misleads people, leading to poor decisions, perpetuates a negative stereotype that paints devotion to gurus as prompting irrational choices. Capper's findings, discussed below, by contrast suggest that guru devotion in Tibetan Buddhism is generally rooted in rationality and helps people make good decisions, undermining this stereotype.[283]

Falcone's book's main weakness, its faulty explanation of the reasons to construct the statue, derives from a flawed understanding of FPMT. Falcone deems FPMT's Buddhism to be untraditional because the majority of its followers are "nonheritage" Buddhists.[284] The statue project, in her eyes, resulted from a modern and Western deviation from the traditional Buddhism of "heritage" Buddhists. Her implication is that Tibetans, past or present, would not have built such a statue. Yet before 1959, Tibetans built many large statues. The construction of large holy objects is common across the Buddhist world, as Zablocki underlines.[285] Because Falcone deems FPMT's Buddhism untraditional, she disassociates the statue from this routine Buddhist activity and redescribes it as the outcome of modernity, capitalism, colonialism, globalization, and Western influence.[286] Had she appreciated the role played by FPMT's traditional Buddhist worldview and not been misled by her ethnicity-based classification of FPMT as non-heritage and therefore modern, she could have better analyzed the tensions that can arise between traditional religious beliefs and modern environments, tensions Zablocki acknowledges.[287] Tensions arose mainly because FPMT's beliefs were not shared by local residents who wanted not karmic but economic benefits. Falcone presents the tension as one between an FPMT seeking top-down, large-scale economic development and local farmers wanting bottom-up, small-scale economic development, imputing her own ideas on both sides and overlooking that the tension was not between different models of economic development but different worldviews: traditional versus modern, religious versus materialistic.[288] She also misses

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[282] Falcone, *Battling*, 306-333.

[283] Daniel Capper, "Why do Americans Practice Tibetan Buddhism?" Ph.D. Diss., (University of Chicago, 2001), 228-231.

[284] Falcone, *Battling*, 89-94.

[285] See, for example, Denise Patry Leidy, *The Art of Buddhism: An Introduction to its History and Meaning* (Boston: Shambhala Publications, 2009) and Dorothy C. Wong, "Colossal Buddha Statues along the Silk Road." *Acta Via Serica* 4, no. 2 (2019). Wong writes, "Beginning in the northwestern region of India, and spreading through Central Asia and the rest of Asia along the Silk Road, the making of colossal Buddha statues has been a major theme in Buddhist art. The colossal Buddha statues predominantly feature Śākyamuni (the Historical Buddha), Maitreya (the Future Buddha), and Vairocana (the Transcendent Buddha)." (Wong, "Colossal Buddha," 1). Abraham Zablocki, who researched the transnationalization of Tibetan Buddhism, also discusses "monumental architecture" as traditional in Tibetan Buddhism; the construction of large holy objects is "standard" and "expected behavior" for lamas. Zablocki, "The Global Mandala," 258-259.

[286] Falcone, *Battling*, 125, 274, 283, 288.

[287] Zablocki, "The Global Mandala," 394.

[288] Falcone describes the local farmers, who oppose the project, as "modern" and oriented toward economic development as long as it benefits them. They do not share FPMT's religious beliefs about the karmic, non-material benefits of the statue. They dismiss the idea that, by opposing it, they are traditionalists opposed to modernity. Instead, they view the statue as traditional and themselves as modern. Falcone dismisses this reasonable stance, even though she acknowledges the statue "could… be deemed on the traditional, religious end of things in contrast to farmers eager to modernize." Falcone nevertheless designates both parties "modern" with the difference between them being their preferred model of economic development. She deems the statue modern for several reasons: she perceives it as modern neoliberal economic development; it as well as its accompanying social projects are "engaged Buddhism" which she calls a "contemporary movement" not part of Buddhism's past; FPMT followers are mainly nonheritage Buddhists and she suggests only heritage Buddhists embody traditionalism; and the statue is an outcome of modern Buddhism in which Buddhism accommodates mainstream Western values so much that it is converted to "neoliberal globalization." She sums up by commenting that "there is no clear-cut delineation between the traditional and the modern in Kushinagar" because both the statue project and the local people are motivated by modern ideas. Falcone, *Battling*, 22-31, 49-50, 55, 61-64, 90-96, 121, 270-271, 286-287. This approach prevents her

the opportunity to examine how social engagement—the health and education projects meant to accompany the statue—may have been FPMT's way to negotiate these tensions.[289] Overall, though she notes that "holy objects are important to FPMT,"[290] she misunderstands why.[291]

What can we learn from Falcone? Falcone makes two contributions. First, no one else has attempted to write the history of the statue project in its Kushinagari phase, although Zablocki provides data and analysis on its Bodh Gaya phase.[292] A complete history of the statue project in both locations may never be written given the paucity of publicly available information. Hence, the work of Falcone and Zablocki will likely stand as the main non-FPMT sources of information. Falcone's second contribution is her account of responses in Kushinagar. She tells the story of Kushinagari resistance sympathetically: valuable social history. Further, she offers one fair critique of the statue project: its FPMT overseers did little local consultation. Whether consultation was their responsibility, or that of the state government as they believed, she does not explore.[293] In the two other holy object projects discussed here, consultation occurred in one and not the other. Research that compares these projects, and the role of consultation, would be valuable.

Goldberg also examined the construction of a holy object by FPMT. His Ph.D. dissertation focused on a school operated by FPMT affiliate Root Institute for Wisdom Culture in Bodh Gaya, Maitreya Universal Education School. In his work, he discusses the Buddhist imagery and items found at the school.[294] On arriving, he was struck by their prominence. Not sharing FPMT's cosmological beliefs, his reaction reveals the bewilderment felt by outsiders when faced with its religious culture, which combines social projects aimed at immediate, visible benefits with attempts to interact with local people in ways that lead to them to enlightenment. Holy objects are not aimed at converting people to Buddhism, but at creating imprints that bear fruit for them in future lives. Goldberg does not find the same kinds of objects or objectives at schools in the area run by modernist Buddhists. FPMT is rare, he contends, in combining mundane and transmundane objectives in social projects.[295]

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from discussing how FPMT's self-declared traditionalism and premodern religious worldview, from which the statue project derives, conflict with the explicitly-stated modern and secular values of the Kushinagaris as well as herself.

[289] Falcone notes she heard a report that the Dalai Lama only agreed to support the statue project once social projects were added to it, suggesting that, in his eyes, these were mitigations to satisfy those for whom material benefits outweighed karmic ones (Falcone, *Battling*, 121). Social projects could then be interpreted as mediating elements that permit traditional activities to occur in modern environments. She does not explore this possibility. Zablocki alludes to, but also does not examine, this possibility. Zablocki, "The Global Mandala," 259.

[290] Falcone, *Battling*, 74.

[291] Interestingly, Goldberg makes a similar error, attributing FPMT's fondness for holy objects to a Tibetan desire to preserve links with the past, rather than to FPMT's worldview in which these objects are expected to reduce future suffering for all connected to them. In this he draws from the views of another anthropologist rather than the views of his interlocutors inside FPMT. Goldberg, "Buddhists without Borders," 82-83, including fn. 66.

[292] Zablocki, "The Global Mandala," 256-299.

[293] In a popular article, although not in her book, Falcone reveals that she was aware that FPMT staff working on the statue understood the Uttar Pradesh government to be responsible for land purchases and any issues that arose from them. There, Falcone writes "the Maitreya Project has argued that the questions of compensation and ethics are not their responsibility until the Uttar Pradesh government officially hands over the land." (The state government's responsibility derived from the nature of the Memorandum of Agreement between the FPMT affiliate and the state government.) Hence, placing responsibility for issues around the land purchases on FPMT alone, as Falcone does in her book, may be inappropriate. Jessica Falcone, "The Buddhist Lama and the Indian Farmer: Negotiating Modernity and Tradition in the Development Plans for Kushinagar, India." *Info-Buddhism.com*. https://info-buddhism.com/The_Buddhist_Lama_and_the_Indian_Farmer-Negotiating_Modernity-and_Tradition-Falcone_Jessica.html. Accessed February 12, 2024

[294] Goldberg, "Buddhists without Borders," 253, 261-287.

[295] Goldberg, "Buddhists without Borders," 261-287.

In a later article, Goldberg further explores holy objects at the school. He writes that "Buddhist objects are on display throughout the school in greater quantity, quality, and size than objects and images from the other local religions … embraced by the school's students," adding that the school is not fully "universal" in that Buddhist imagery outranks and outnumbers items from other religions—mostly Hindu.[296] He finds that the teachers, parents, and other local adults accept Buddhist elements because they view the school as beneficial, but they do not feel affection for them. On the other hand, his data also show that local people do not exhibit any sense that these Buddhist objects are colonizing or missionizing elements. They view Rinpoche, the symbolic source of the objects and of the school's funding, as a benefactor, not a colonizer or missionary.[297] This is because they perceive the school as helping students in material and psychological ways to overcome poverty. They do not believe the objects, or FPMT's Buddhist-derived universal education teachings, help students in transmundane ways.[298]

When their acceptance of Buddhist elements turns to contestation at one point, it is for reasons unrelated to colonization or missionization. Quiet contestation arose when a large stupa was built in the schoolyard. The teachers expressed resentment to Goldberg (though not to FPMT's administrators, he writes, out of concern for their jobs[299]) because they would prefer that the substantial funds it required be spent on the school's material needs. They also indicate the stupa takes up space that could otherwise be used for games.[300]

Like Falcone's discussion, Goldberg's shows that FPMT's holy objects do not always suit others. People in FPMT who adhere to Buddhism's cosmology perceive almost infinite, if invisible, benefits. Others with a different worldview perceive money spent, space taken up, or environments affected by objects that offer none of the material benefits they value. In the school, social engagement mediates this conflict: the teachers accept the stupa, as they have always accepted Buddhist items, because the school provides material benefits.

Anthropologist Sally McAra produced a dissertation (2009), a book chapter (2010), and an article (2007) on "The Great Stupa of Universal Compassion" that an FPMT affiliate built over the course of several years near Bendigo, Australia.[301] It is a replica of the *Gyantse Kumbum* stupa in Tibet which scholar of Tibetan Buddhism David Snellgrove called "the chief wonder of the Tibetan Buddhist world."[302] Like Falcone and Goldberg, McAra examines the reactions of

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[296] Goldberg, "Constructing and Contesting," 161-163, 175-187.
[297] Goldberg, "Buddhists without Borders," 24.
[298] Goldberg, "Constructing and Contesting," 177-179.
[299] I asked one administrator in 2024 who had been involved in the stupa's construction about negative reactions from school staff at the time. "No one said anything to me," he responded. Staff were not consulted about the stupa's construction, and although they spoke to Goldberg, they evidently did not speak to people associated with FPMT. A122K33. Interviewed by Author, February 2024.
[300] Goldberg, "Constructing and Contesting," 170-174, 177-179. When I visited the school in February 2024, I asked teachers if the stupa was in the way of games. They said it was not. Observation also suggested this was true as long as only current games were considered; there was a large open area between it and the school where the children played, and there was playground equipment on both sides of the stupa as well as elsewhere in the yard. However, there was not sufficient space left for cricket or football (soccer). One interviewee indicated, though, that the stupa was more important because of the great merit the children received by seeing and circumambulating it. Sadly, there was a piece of unused land beside the school that could have been leveled and used for sports, but Root Institute could not afford to buy it given the high price land had come to fetch in the area. Regarding the teachers' comments at the time the stupa was built, it is possible that their objections, expressed as concern for play space, related just as much to resentment about how funds were allocated or dislike of religious or Buddhist symbols. Goldberg's data show that among staff at the time were both deeply faithful Hindu teachers and secular teachers. However, some donors are more willing to offer funds for holy objects than mundane ones. I was told that Root Institute had received funds specifically for a stupa and these could not be diverted to other uses.
[301] Sally McAra, "Buddhifying Australia," in *Buddhism in Australia: Traditions in Change*, eds. Christina Rocha and Michelle Barker (NY: Routledge, 2010), 63.
[302] "About the Great Stupa."

local people—both Anglo- and Aboriginal-Australian—to a holy object, in this case a "multi-million dollar, multi-storey religious structure designed to last a millennium." She examines how local reactions contrast with "enlightenment-oriented ideals" within FPMT. In Bendigo, the community was largely supportive: people viewed Buddhism positively; wanted Bendigo to become more culturally diverse to overcome its reputation as "a monocultural, provincial backwater"; and hoped the stupa would promote tourism. Elites, writes McAra, thus understood the stupa as "enriching" Bendigo. Like Kushinagaris and Bodh Gaya schoolteachers, they were interested in material rather than karmic effects.[303]

McAra notes that the stupa project succeeded because its "proponents participate in and align themselves with hegemonic discourses about Buddhism and about cultural diversity."[304] This alignment with local discourses about Buddhism as positive and peaceful, and with the value of multiculturalism, did not occur when FPMT sought to build holy objects in India, where such discourses were either absent or not hegemonic.[305] In Bendigo, FPMT's affiliate already owned the land it used, so although it needed government approval to build, there were no concerns around land acquisition or use as occurred in India.

The Bendigo stupa had no accompanying social projects. This factor led a few people to oppose it, preferring that funds be spent on social needs.[306] However, most of the light opposition McAra documents related to its foreignness, not its lack of social elements, presumably reflecting Australia's existing social infrastructure. Nevertheless, the stupa was promoted to, and accepted by, local people and the local government on the grounds of material benefits. For people in FPMT, though, the motive was always, as the project leader stated, "to create positive impressions on people's minds so that ultimately they can become enlightened."[307]

Local consultation occurred in Australia, unlike in India. Why? McAra's work shows that in Australia the local government had to approve construction, so project proponents were required to build local support.[308] In Kushinagar, land acquisition was done by the state government, but officials seem to have shown little concern for local opinion. Goldberg's work shows a different situation: an object being erected on land belonging to an FPMT affiliate where governments had no role so there was no forum for opinion. That laws and norms differed in each project reveals that it is not FPMT alone that determines the influence of local views. By not comparing the projects, all three scholars missed opportunities to reflect on factors influencing the creation of Buddhist holy objects in non-Buddhist environments as well as ways FPMT negotiates conflicts between expressions of tradition and contemporary responses.

This scholarship draws attention to certain points: the priority FPMT places on holy objects, one expression of its traditional Buddhism; the conflicts that can arise between objects that express a traditional cosmology and people who do not believe in it; the ways these conflicts are negotiated, such as by calling on popular discourses or offering material benefits; and the outcomes of conflicts—not all are resolved in FPMT's favour. It appears that scholars are attracted to these conflicts even though they do not always seem to understand their roots in a clash of worldviews.

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[303] McAra, "A 'Stupendous Attraction'," iv, v, 27, 144, 165.
[304] McAra, "Buddhifying Australia," 71.
[305] Some indigenous Australians resisted the stupa (although others supported it) because they perceived it harmed "the songlines which they said intersected" at its site—apparently a conflict between religions. Some Christians also opposed the stupa for religious reasons (McAra, "A 'Stupendous Attraction'," iv, 150, 151, 161-164). In India, religion did not seem to be a significant source of conflict for FPMT. Conflicts focused on land and money.
[306] McAra, "A 'Stupendous Attraction'," 23, 124, 145.
[307] McAra, "A 'Stupendous Attraction'," 126, 156, 147, 164-170, 226, 229.
[308] McAra, "A 'Stupendous Attraction'," 147-148.

FPMT and Traditional Beliefs Today

Lama Yeshe was one of the earliest Tibetan lamas to teach Westerners. In 1982, when interviewed about the challenges of doing so, he said, "For many Westerners, Buddhist philosophy contradicts their worldview."[309] That many Westerners accept a worldview that contradicts worldview they grew up with is the impetus for a cluster of scholarship that investigates why and how they adopt traditional Buddhism, especially its cosmology. This scholarship focuses on Westerners, but today, modern discourses are global, so its conclusions may apply across cultures. The scholarship is relevant to FPMT because Buddhism's cosmology underpins its activities. As one interviewee stated, "if you don't accept past and future lives, FPMT's practices don't make sense."[310]

David McMahan's influential book on the intellectual roots of modern Buddhism, *The Making of Buddhist Modernism* (2008), denies the possibility that traditional Buddhisms can survive the modern era outside ethnic or lifestyle enclaves; the only Buddhisms that can fit modernity are those that replace old discourses (primarily Buddhism's cosmology) with modern ones (primarily scientific-rationalist-naturalist). McMahan concedes that Tibetan Buddhism has been adopted by some Westerners and addresses this conundrum in two ways. He first contends that traditional-seeming forms of Buddhism are not actually traditional. They are only "conservative" forms of modernism. This is because they fit modern discourses without actually using them to replace old ones. He cites three ideas or discourses they may fit: "the typical modernist hope for a rational religion"; "the longing for 'magic and mystery'"; or "the desperate struggle for survival of … enchantment in the face of … brute military force and imperial aggression." Modern Westerners accept traditional Tibetan Buddhism because, by fitting these discourses, they find it modernist—just a conservative or enchanted modernism.[311] McMahan thus eliminates the conundrum by declining to recognize traditionalism's existence. Nevertheless, he highlights two possibilities for why people today might accept Buddhism's cosmology: because they find it rational; or because they fit it into Romantic discourses of magic and mystery. McMahan may go too far in suggesting that these possibilities make unmodernized Tibetan Buddhism a form of modernism—it does not fit his definition of modernism as the replacement of old discourses with new. Yet other scholars, discussed below, also suggest that Buddhism's cosmology can fit modern discourses of rationality. On Romantic discourses, Zablocki, whose work preceded McMahan's, likewise suggests that some non-Tibetans are attracted to traditional Tibetan Buddhism by "representations of Tibet as a sacred repository of mystical insight and magical power."[312] Yet it is not clear these reasons offer any actual explanation for accepting a new worldview. Even if Buddhism's cosmology is rational or Romantic, it is still strikingly different from the dominant Western one.

Despite the respect scholars have for McMahan's analysis of modern Buddhism, not all share his view that traditional Buddhisms cannot exist in modern contexts. A number seek instead to understand why and how people today practice these Buddhisms.

One scholar who undertook ethnographic research to find an explanation is Capper, who produced a Ph.D. dissertation (2001), book (2002), and article (2004) on why Westerners practice traditional Tibetan Buddhism.[313] He finds various reasons, such as benefitting from its

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[309] "Taking the Essence: An Interview with Lama Yeshe." *Mandala* (July-December 2016): 17.
[310] C111K02. Interview with Author, October 2022.
[311] McMahan, *The Making*, 247.
[312] Zablocki, "The Global Mandala," 367.
[313] Daniel Capper, "Enchantment with Tibetan Lamas." *Journal of Contemporary Religion* 19, no. 2 (2004): 137-153; Daniel Capper, *Guru Devotion and the American Buddhist Experience* (Edwin Mellen, 2002); Daniel Capper, "Why do Americans."

meditations, respecting its moral teachings, and wishing to belong to a community. He also discovers that Western Buddhists find Buddhism's cosmology a convincing explanation of "the origins and purpose of the universe, the meaning of suffering, and what happens upon death."[314] Overall, the most important explanatory factor he identifies is that people perceive benefit in relationships with lamas, including reduced confusion about life, an end to feeling life is meaninglessness, overcoming despair, making good life choices, and having higher levels of confidence, self-esteem, personal autonomy, and well-being.[315] Overall, they report that psychological healing and positive self-transformation result from their devotion to lamas and Buddhist beliefs and practice, meaning these are, for them, rational and practical.[316]

Capper's work applies to FPMT as well as to the group he studies. It helps explain why convert Buddhists in FPMT might accept a premodern cosmology. When interviewees were asked about their background with FPMT, many gave responses similar to those documented by Capper: the lamas' compassion and impressive personalities; the cosmology's coherence and meaningfulness; and the beneficial effects they received from Buddhist practice and association with lamas.[317]

Samuel also asks why Western Tibetan Buddhists, including those in FPMT, adopt Tibetan Buddhism and its cosmological beliefs. Although he (inaccurately) seems to consider these beliefs uniquely Tibetan, he writes the following:

> Part of the attraction of Tibetan Buddhism … is that it represents a self-confident, sophisticated … alternative to Western science. Tibetan Buddhism incorporates an understanding of the nature and structure of the universe, the nature of mind and body, the nature of other living species, of life and our place within it, and of many other matters. It incorporates a theory of karma … it includes divinatory procedures on the basis of which one can make decisions, and it includes a sophisticated medical system. Tibetan Buddhism can be seen as an ecologically aware philosophy... lamas enter into dialogue with Western theoretical physicists … Western followers of Tibetan Buddhism … seem to have little problem in accepting large sections of the Tibetan understanding of the world. … [including] the law of karma, the intermediate states between death and rebirth, the spirit-protectors, and gods of the mountains, rivers, and lakes.[318]

Samuel advances three points. The first is that many people come to Tibetan Buddhism to explain experiences which modern science does not, such as unusual events in meditation or apparent memories of past lives. For such people, Buddhism's cosmology is more, not less, rational than modern science. His second point concerns widespread interest in alternative systems of health care. Accepting such systems encourages acceptance of other alternative systems. His third point is the declining moral authority of science and technology. As these become associated with problems rather than progress, other worldviews gain legitimacy. The stature of the Dalai Lama and Buddhism's reputation for compassion add to Buddhism's moral authority. Its moral authority in turn makes the idea of devotion to a guru, who represents that

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[314] Capper, "Why do Americans," 234; Cozort, "Tibetan Buddhism," 141-142.
[315] Capper explores extensively, drawing on psychological theories, why depending on a guru leads to greater personal autonomy (Capper, "Why do Americans," 234-249).
[316] Capper, "Why do Americans," 228-231, 239, 240, 242; Cozort, "Tibetan Buddhism," 142.
[317] As one interviewee noted, "The teachings made sense, the *Lam Rim* was like a road map to spiritual perfection… but it was really the lamas … when I met the lamas, I felt like I'd come home. I thought I would like to be like these guys." A121N05. Interviewed by Author, November 2022.
[318] Samuel, *Tantric Revisionings*, 330.

authority, acceptable. Samuel's points all relate to some people's sense that Western forms of knowledge are incomplete and the lifestyles they promote morally dubious.[319]

Still, Samuel feels these points merely open people to possibilities and there is a more decisive attraction: a powerful "technology of the self." Tibetan Buddhism, he asserts, helps people remake the self and reconceptualize the self and world. He posits that, when people practice this "technology," they experience shifts in certain perceptions. The self comes to be perceived as "an emergent and fluid phenomenon"; community takes in "non-human species and the spirit world as having consciousness and value," counteracting nationalism, racism, ecological irresponsibility, and so on; and time extends beyond this life. These shifts change what people see as significant.[320]

In sum, Capper and Samuel offer different reasons for contemporary individuals' acceptance of traditional Buddhism and its cosmology. Despite offering different reasons, both emphasize the rationality of the acceptance. Neither explains the steps through a person immersed in dominant understandings of the world adopts a different worldview. Glenys Eddy addresses this question in her fieldwork in Dharma centres in Australia, including an FPMT centre. In *Becoming Buddhist* (2012), she writes that "the karma-rebirth doctrine" is central to FPMT's belief system and practices, and concludes that all participants at the centre she studied accept the bulk of it.[321] In a subsequent article, "How Affiliates of an Australian FPMT Centre Come to Accept the Concepts of Karma, Rebirth and Merit-making" (2013), she describes how people make "an interpretive shift from previously held notions about cause and effect and the nature of this-worldly existence, toward a Buddhist appreciation of these concepts."[322]

How does this occur? She cites *Lam Rim* (Stages of the Path) literature as "foundational" in FPMT, noting that "meditations done in classes [related to the Lam Rim] include reflections upon karma from a variety of perspectives: about the rarity of human life and its preciousness as an opportunity for spiritual advancement; reflection on the uncertainty of when one will die; reflection that after death, one will be reborn according to one's karma." Meditations on these topics aim "to generate the view of self as a psycho-physical complex of five aggregates… both interdependent … and subject to continual change, affected by karma, and bound to the cycle of rebirth." Her data suggest these meditations encourage acceptance of the cosmology.

Eddy discusses how most people arrive first at FPMT centre open to Buddhist ideas, perhaps for the reasons Samuel enumerates. Then they go through a period of conditional acceptance during which they ask questions and test Buddhist teachings and practices for their contribution to solving problems, providing meaning, giving ethical guidance, and processing life experiences. Sometimes people go through a period of partial or metaphoric acceptance. Most (not all) people who stay gradually accept the cosmology because its parts, like mind having a certain nature as well as karma, rebirth, and a kind of universe that makes these ideas reasonable, interlock to create a plausible system. Further, those who stay often come to believe that Buddhist teachings and practices improve their outlook and mental health because the system accurately depicts the universe.[323]

Cozort (2003), discussing FPMT's education programs, similarly points to the importance FPMT gives to *Lam Rim* literature. He does not explain why FPMT stresses it, other than calling it "practical."[324] Nevertheless, it teaches Buddhism's cosmological elements. Without the *Lam Rim*, Eddy suggests that few Westerners would grasp this cosmology. Maria Sharapan, who

[319] Samuel, *Tantric Revisionings*, 331-332, 338.
[320] Samuel, *Tantric Revisionings*, 339.
[321] Eddy, *Becoming Buddhist*, 133-136.
[322] Eddy, "How Affiliates," 204.
[323] Eddy, "How Affiliates," 208-217; Eddy, *Becoming Buddhist*, 131-136.
[324] Cozort, "The Making," 225-232, 236-238.

researched FPMT's online *Discovering Buddhism* courses, also describes how, through reflection on the *Lam Rim*, online discussion, reading, and other practices, people discover how the pieces of the cosmological system fit together.[325] She shows Dharma students coming to accept traditional Buddhist teachings through learning, questioning, debating, and applying teachings to their own lives, a process similar to that Eddy describes and similarly based on the *Lam Rim*.[326] She also notes that newcomers to FPMT are seldom discouraged by its rituals; people attend FPMT centres not just to learn meditation or philosophy, but also because the rituals, chanting, artwork, and atmosphere attract them.[327] She does not examine how rituals and art, for example, contribute to accepting Buddhism's cosmology, but they may play a role given that they depict or engage with deities, other realms of existence, and so on. The examples Sharapan provides supplement Eddy's and Cozort's work and help fill the gap left by Capper and Samuel concerning the processes by which modern people accept Buddhism's cosmology.

An article by Falcone (2017) on the path to faith in Western FPMT centres also depicts this process. The article presents ethnographic data on opinions on reincarnation. Positive opinions, she suggests, result in part from skepticism and questioning to which FPMT teachers are open.[328] Her data show acceptance of traditional Buddhism's cosmology among most long term centre members after hearing Buddhist teachings, undertaking Buddhist practices, feeling free to be skeptical, and hearing responses to questions.[329]

On the basis of ethnographic data and earlier studies, Kay (2004) briefly discusses why Tibetan Buddhism's belief system may be accepted by British followers. He concludes that, while flexible, monist, open forms of spirituality characterized by personal authority and expressive individualism attract people comfortable with modernity's subjectivity, moral relativism, and absence of fixed meaning and *telos*, people join groups like NKT and FPMT as a reaction against these features of modernity. They seek a meaningful and logical cosmos, an absolute truth that can be understood scientifically, moral realism and rules, teachers with merited authority, and an established spiritual path with a goal. Their individualism is "individual responsibility" rather than individual expression. Reading Kay, one can conclude that FPMT, because it is inclusivist, is more open to individual choice, authority, and expression than NKT; thus it attracts those who reject monist spiritualities but not other aspects of modernity. The more exclusivist and directive NKT attracts those seeking a greater escape from contemporary confusion.[330]

A chapter by Zablocki (2017) also briefly discusses Western attraction to traditional Tibetan Buddhism including its philosophical teachings, "shamanic" practices, and gurus. Zablocki contends that Tibet has a "mystique" that forms an initial draw. However, Tibetan Buddhism's spread, his data show, derives mainly from two factors: the efforts of Tibetan lamas and others to propagate it; and the fact that "non-Tibetans have found real meaning and value" in it due its impressive lamas and "diagnosis of the problem of human suffering" and "methods for

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[325] Maria Sharapan, "'Not Instant Soup!': Negotiating Belief in a Tibetan Buddhist Forum." Conference Presentation. *Buddhism Australia: International Conference on Buddhism*. 6th International Conference Buddhism & Australia, February 2017. http://www.buddhismandaustralia.com/ba/index.php/%E2%80%9CNot_instant_soup!%E2%80%9D:_Negotiating_belief_in_a_Tibetan_Buddhist_forum_by_Maria_Sharapan.

[326] Maria Sharapan, "Discovering Buddhism Online: A Translocative Analysis of Tibetan Buddhist Forum Discussions," *Online-Heidelberg Journal of Religions on the Internet* 13 (2018): 93.

[327] Sharapan, "'Not Instant Soup!"

[328] Jessica Falcone, "A Transnational Tulku: The Multiple Lives of FPMT's Spanish-born Lama Osel." *Revue d'Etudes Tibetaines* 38 (2017): 220, 234-237.

[329] Falcone, "A Transnational Tulku," 220, 223-224, 231-234.

[330] Kay, *Tibetan and Zen Buddhism*, 111-113.

ending this suffering." Zablocki largely sets aside discourses of mystical Tibet and interest in the "Free Tibet" movement as attractions; he finds draw to be rational and practical.[331]

Sociologist Ruth Fitzpatrick (2011) discusses women performing Green Tara practices in Tibetan Buddhist settings, including an Australian FPMT centre. Fitzpatrick finds that one reason educated Western women admire Green Tara, a Buddhist deity, is that to them she represents compassionate action, which they equate to social engagement.[332] Writes Fitzpatrick: "traditional religious practices are reframed and reapplied to suit the contemporary needs of Australian individuals. … one reason why Buddhism persists in modern societies."[333]

The work of Eddy, Sharapan, and Falcone complements that of Capper, Samuel, and Zablocki by addressing how Westerners come to accept a traditional cosmology. Fitzpatrick's work describes how some integrate traditional beliefs into contemporary lives. She illuminates the seamless acceptance, among people raised in non-Buddhist cultures, of traditional Buddhism, not just amid today's ways of life but in support of them.

This scholarship makes several points. First, it shows that accepting traditional cosmological beliefs today can be rational. Acceptance derives from the intersection of factors in the broader society, individuals' lives, and individuals' experiences and reasoning when they encounter Buddhism. It is mainly rational, not Romantic: not based on magic and mystery. Second, holding traditional beliefs is evidently compatible with contemporary, mainstream lifestyles and does not require living in ethnic or lifestyle enclaves. Third, convert Buddhists do not seem to follow gurus credulously, as Falcone suggests when discussing FPMT's Maitreya statue. They apply skepticism, ask questions, and expect benefits, generally meaning-related, psychological, emotional, and social, from lamas and Buddhism. Scholarship thus does not support contentions that rational people living mainstream lives today cannot believe in Buddhism's cosmology or practice traditional Buddhism, nor that traditional Buddhism cannot survive in contemporary times. Nevertheless, the compatibility of traditional Buddhism with today's lives and circumstances has not been widely accepted in Buddhist Studies.

Disputed Points

Where do scholars differ in their claims about FPMT?

Schedneck and Samuel disagree on the history of transregional organizing. Schedneck finds it entirely modern; Samuel maintains that some existed in the Himalayan and Mongolian past, giving today's transnational organizations precedents. These perspectives may not, however, represent true disagreement but only differences in definitions. The two scholars would likely agree that cross-regional links existed in Tibet and Mongolia, and that twentieth-century lamas likely drew on their awareness of these to conceptualize and legitimate their new international organizations.

Another disagreement concerns FPMT's level of centralization. Levels of centralization in transnational Buddhist networks affect how costs of teachers, central offices, monasteries, holy objects, charitable giving, and social projects are shared, how easily affiliates can break away from the network, how much adaptation to local circumstances occurs, and, importantly, how much variation occurs across the network to reflect local cultures, beliefs, priorities, and

[331] Abraham Zablocki, "Contemporary Tibetan Buddhism," in *The Oxford Handbook of Contemporary Buddhism*, ed. Michael Jerryson (NY: Oxford University Press, 2016), 144, 152-153.
[332] Fitzpatrick quotes an FPMT participant in the ethnographic study as saying that Green Tara is "not sitting around knitting baby socks. She's very dynamic. She's a female Bodhisattva so affecting change in the world by very dynamic means. So compassionate, but very active as well." (Fitzpatrick, "Green Tara," 56).
[333] Fitzpatrick, "Green Tara," 58.

lifeways. Questions of centralization also affect reputation: portrayals of top-down control conjure up images of cults, fundamentalism, and authoritarianism. As discussed above, Falcone presents FPMT as an "empire," "running" branches, evoking these images.[334] Payne, on the other hand, suggests that FPMT lacks centralization entirely. Reality falls in the middle. FPMT is not a single entity with branches. Its international office did not create and does not run its affiliates. Nevertheless, affiliates' freedom exists within boundaries set by agreements and loyalties. FPMT is thus a mix of centralization and decentralization. Differences in scholars' view on this point likely reflect a lack of information or data, and are resolvable by referring to facts.

Another disagreement concerns whether FPMT is a Western network.[335] The scholars discussed here are Westerners and most, like Cozort[336] and Falcone,[337] treat FPMT as a Western and "non-heritage" organization.[338] These labels do not acknowledge the large number and important roles of others in FPMT. Dharma teachers, especially the more senior ones, are mostly Himalayan and even when not, are deeply trained in a Himalayan system and convey Himalayan forms of Buddhism.[339] FPMT has a mainly but not completely Western-staffed international office, but with a board of directors including senior Himalayans. The majority of its followers are Westerners, but to call it "Western," "heritage," or "convert," nevertheless overlooks strong Himalayan and other Asian influences in FPMT, large numbers of Asian followers, and ethnic diversity in Western centres. It also over-emphasizes ethnic difference: today, modernization in Asia, along with global circulations of people, technologies, and discourses, is reducing cultural differences in ways of practicing and living Tibetan Buddhism.

Samuel refers to Tibetan Buddhist networks, including FPMT, as comprising "both Western and Asian elements" with each one featuring "a diverse network encompassing a variety of different constituents in terms of life-style and ethnicity."[340] Zablocki similarly notes that globalized Tibetan Buddhist organizations like FPMT take in ethnically Western, Himalayan, Chinese, and South Asian followers; they are financially supported mainly by now-established

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[334] Falcone, "The Heritage Spectrum," 199.

[335] Many scholars divide today's Buddhists into "heritage" and "convert" Buddhists, with "heritage" Buddhists being those whose ancestors, generally Asian, practiced Buddhism and converts being those, generally of European ancestry, whose ancestors practiced other religions. Problems with these designations are well-known. They once captured styles of practice but, as time has passed, they are primarily ethnic designations. Yet not all Western or white Buddhists are converts; their parents may have been Buddhists, and not all Asian Buddhists are "heritage" Buddhists. And what are the children of mixed marriages? As well, ethnically East Asian people in FPMT often have Buddhism among their ancestral practices, but chose now to follow a different kind of Buddhism, Tibetan Buddhism: are they heritage or convert Buddhists? What about South Asians whose ancestors respected Buddha as an incarnation of Vishnu? The heritage/ non-heritage binary fit Western countries during a particular historical period—up to 2000 or so. Now, as Buddhisms globalize, ethnic and religious lines blur, each Buddhist group comprises people from many backgrounds, and so-called heritage and non-heritage Buddhisms adopt elements of each other's worldviews, beliefs, and practices, its value is far from clear.

[336] For example, Cozort describes it as a "Western movement." His view, however, is based on FPMT in its early years when it was indeed largely Western. Cozort, "The Making," 225.

[337] Falcone treats FPMT as a Western, "nonheritage" organization. She deems FPMT a "relatively nonheritage Buddhist group that is mostly peopled with nonheritage practitioners." It "generally serves," she claims, "a nonheritage Buddhist consumer base." The meaning of Falcone's modifier "relatively" is not clear. It appears to mean "mostly." Falcone, *Battling*, 28, 90 fn. 16, 94.

[338] Kopan Monastery, Falcone states, is a "relatively semiheritage" organization because, although it is home to hundreds of Himalayan monks and nuns, it also runs courses in English for temporary visitors of varied ethnicities. Falcone, *Battling*, 94. Yet Kopan is a Himalayan organization and the revolving presence of others, peripheral to its monastic activities, does not change that. Indeed, as Moran found in the 1990s and I observed in 2023, its Himalayan operations are generally kept away from non-Himalayan visitors. Moran, *Buddhism Observed*, 74.

[339] Cozort, "The Making," 221-248.

[340] Samuel, *Tantric Revisionings*, 308.

Tibetan refugees, ethnically Chinese supporters, and Westerners.[341] Holly Gayley and Joshua Brallier also note the presence of East Asians in many Tibetan Buddhist organizations today, and emphasize that the longstanding "ethnic/convert" binary obscures followers' heterogeneity.[342]

Buddhist Studies scholars have long classified Buddhists and Buddhisms as "heritage" or "convert" (or similar terms), but these terms do not apply well to FPMT, which better fits Samuel's and Zablocki's descriptions. Such classifications also overlook a point Zablocki underlines: that Tibetan Buddhism as a whole, as it globalized, became multi-cultural, multi-ethnic, and multi-national. FPMT's diversity is typical of Tibetan Buddhism today.[343] The binary of "convert" and "heritage," useful in the twentieth century, now obscures reality. It also distracts from the need to research the nature of globalized forms of Tibetan Buddhism like FPMT's in a world in which Asia is no longer less modern or wealthy than the West, cultures share discourses, relationships are deepening between Himalayan and ethnic Chinese Buddhists, Western Buddhists are increasingly diverse, and "heritage" Buddhists are adopting forms of Buddhism that are not their heritage. FPMT participates in what Zablocki calls a "global mandala" of Tibetan Buddhism. More research on this mandala is needed and an outdated convert/ heritage lens hinders rather than helps.

Another area where scholars differ is on the value of redescription: assigning materialist reasons to FPMT's activities and setting aside, as not real or relevant, the religious reasons its own people offer. I do not classify as redescription examining material outcomes from FPMT's activities, such as by evaluating the health benefits of its clinics. I would classify as redescription the suggestion that FPMT's only motivation for its activities is to produce measurable, mundane outcomes; this overlooks insider views. The only scholar who redescribes FPMT to any extent is Falcone, who dismisses FPMT's stated religious reasons for constructing a large statue and imputes materialist reasons.[344] When other scholars address FPMT's activities, as Zablocki does when discussing the same statue and Ortega does when discussing responses to Covid-19, they do not redescribe them.[345] The question is methodological but has evaluative repercussions. Falcone's negative evaluations of FPMT are based in part on redescribing. Scholars are not barred from the practice but care is required to avoid mischaracterizations.

Another disagreement appears in a work edited by Nina Käsehage (2021) on religions' responses to Covid-19. Käsehage categorizes Tibetan Buddhism, including FPMT's version, as a militant fundamentalism. She offers this definition. "'Fundamentalism […] refers to a discernible pattern of religious militance by which self-styled 'true believers' attempt to arrest the erosion of religious identity, fortify the borders of the religious community, and create viable alternatives to secular institutions and behaviors.'" Fundamentalists share "criteria … essential for a 'strong religion' – as the opposite of a 'mainstream religious establishment' with 'conventional religious authorities' – … [including a] claim for 'purity.'" Käsehage believes Tibetan Buddhism fits this definition, even though she writes that Ortega's work reveals its leaders' responses to the pandemic to be "balanced and peaceful."[346]

Ortega appears to disagree. He documents Rinpoche's response to the pandemic: implementing and recommending various Buddhist practices as well as government guidelines, offering online courses free of charge, and asking his students to follow the Dalai Lama's

[341] Zablocki, "Contemporary," 143, 156.
[342] Gayley and Brallier, "Tibetan Buddhism in America," 232.
[343] Zablocki, "The Global Mandala," 391.
[344] Falcone, *Battling*, 306-333.
[345] Ortega, "Global Virus, International Lamas," 194-196.
[346] Nina Käsehage, "Introduction," in *Religious Fundamentalism in the Age of Pandemic*, ed. Nina Käsehage (Bielefeld: transcript Verlag, 2021), 12.

recommendations, which included relying on science, not "magic."[347] Käsehage's characterization does not match Ortega's depiction. Notably, FPMT takes a non-exclusivist rather than purity-focused approach to Buddhism, openly accepts all lifestyles, and displays an organic rather than missionizing approach to spreading Buddhism.[348]

Probably the aspect of FPMT most easily labeled "fundamentalist" is its culture of guru devotion. Yet even Falcone, who emphasizes guru devotion in FPMT, does not label the organization "fundamentalist."[349] Nevertheless, in informal conversations during research, two interviewees mentioned that the devotion some people in FPMT display gives the organization a fundamentalist appearance. Guru devotion may be one reason why Käsehage classifies Tibetan Buddhist groups as fundamentalist. However, a more important reason appears to be traditionalism. For example, she defines fundamentalists as people who "create viable alternatives to secular institutions and behaviors." FPMT does this. However, doing so does not entail fundamentalism but traditionalism, and traditional Buddhism, embodying an old cosmology, does not entail all other behaviours Käsehage associates with fundamentalism. Overall, her work is a reminder of how traditionalist Buddhist groups like FPMT can be perceived. Displaying premodern beliefs, practices, and forms of conduct, no matter how contemporary and mainstream are a group's ways of operating and followers' lifestyles, easily leads to being labeled "fundamentalist" when concepts better kept apart are mingled: fundamentalism, doctrinal conservatism, and traditionalism.

Is scholarship negative, positive, or neutral on FPMT? Most is positive or neutral. While scholars like Goldberg and McAra hesitate to support some FPMT decisions—they evidently wish to spend money on social projects, not holy objects—they do not criticize the organization, its people, beliefs, or activities.[350] Most scholars express positive views of the activities they have researched, portraying these as beneficial. Goldberg compliments FPMT's school in Bodh Gaya. Fitzpatrick, studying women in Australia, reports that they found FPMT's practices

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[347] Ortega. "Global Virus, International Lamas," 190-196.

[348] Kay discusses the label "fundamentalism" with respect to NKT. He tends toward using the term for NKT given what he describes as its narrow "organizational and ideological exclusivism" which insists on purity of lineage and disallows reading books, taking teachings, doing practices, and so on, from teachers other than Geshe Kelsang or his immediate disciples, "coupled with a critique of more open and eclectic approaches towards spiritual practice." (Kay, *Tibetan and Zen Buddhism*, 95, 98-99, 110). Ortega does not mention NKT (Ortega, "Global Virus, International Lamas," 190-197).

[349] Falcone, "Battling," 306-317. In the book, Falcone uses terms like "fundamentalism" and "extremism" only to refer to Hindu nationalism in India, not to refer to FPMT or its Buddhism.

[350] McAra writes of her "ambivalence" about the Great Stupa: "On the one hand, whatever good intentions motivate the project, I cannot help but also see how the structure's size, carbon footprint and expense also index the conspicuous construction … of a globalised system where the differences between the powerful and the disenfranchised, the rich and the poor, are widening. On the other hand, if the stupa is completed I would love to visit it and would rejoice in the perseverance of those who strove to complete the bold task of attempting to create a durable symbol of their highest ideals. (McAra, "A 'Stupendous Attraction'," 24). Goldberg is neutral when describing negative local reactions to a smaller stupa. He concludes an article on the topic by writing: "the building of the stupa at the Maitreya School … demonstrates how Buddhist cultural imports that mark the land can have social, cultural, financial, and spiritual implications for local people. The discourses and practices informing these donor–recipient relationships tend to represent the latter as 'backwards,' 'indigent,' and in need of 'liberation' by the privileged Buddhists from developed countries. In this way, the presence of Buddhist monuments is not only indicative of transculturality, but also shows how multilayered power relations form the often invisible backdrop to the establishment of religion in Bodhgaya, and other postcolonial societies." Goldberg, "Constructing and Contesting," 170-174, 179. The comment is critical, but only of a postcolonial situation; it draws on an earlier comment ("the monument's intended symbolism of enlightened consciousness is not shared by or self-evident to all") and notes only that FPMT's activities inevitably occur amid power imbalances—a scholarly assessment that does not seem to constitute redescription nor condemn FPMT. Goldberg, "Constructing and Contesting," 174.

inspiring and empowering.[351] Sharapan states that her research subjects, who take FPMT's courses, report feeling gratitude and loyalty to FPMT. She praises FPMT for having "a good record" as well as "the Dalai Lama's endorsement, an impeccable structure," and useful activities."[352] Only Falcone is overtly negative. However, other scholars do not support her opinion.

Scholarship reveals two additional debates: whether FPMT's Buddhism can be labeled "traditional"; and whether FPMT participates in what scholars call "engaged Buddhism" or "Buddhist social engagement." Upcoming chapters address these debates.

Scholarship on FPMT: Summary and Conclusions

Does scholarship further understanding of FPMT? Yes, with provisos. Useful data and analyses exist alongside misunderstandings. Nevertheless, no cogent and fully useful body of work has appeared; scholarship is fragmented and later work does not build on earlier work. As well, little of the scholarship appears to have impacted Buddhist Studies, where prominent scholars and publications do not incorporate its findings. Creating an improved portrait of FPMT that can also contribute to Buddhist Studies and promoting the inclusion of traditional forms of Buddhism and scholarship on them into the field is thus a valid aim. To do requires pulling together scholarship already produced, addressing flaws, and filling in gaps: a project this dissertation endeavours to advance.

Notably, scholars have not studied FPMT to understand an obscure sect. In the main, they have sought to show how its Buddhism fits into contemporary lives. The existence of this scholarship, which depicts how old elements of Buddhism are handled today, contradicts the view of scholars who describe FPMT's and similar Buddhisms as modern or modernist. If these Buddhisms did not embody a premodern cosmology and did not prompt their practitioners to express this cosmology in their activities, the scholarship's topics would evaporate. The question of why scholars do not label Buddhisms with long histories and premodern worldviews "traditional," and why it might be useful to do so, is addressed in the next chapter.

[351] Fitzpatrick, "Green Tara," 54-59.
[352] Sharapan, "Discovering Buddhism Online," 91-92.

Chapter 3.
Tradition in Buddhist Studies: Scholarship and its Intersections with FPMT

Tradition is not the adoration of ashes, but the preservation of fire. — Gustav Mahler[353]

Introduction

The study of contemporary Buddhism has long been the study of modern Buddhism. It has overlooked Buddhisms that appear, or whose practitioners identify them as, traditional.[354] Since 2015 or so, some scholars have begun to "see" such Buddhisms but to classify them as modern under rubrics like "modernism," "multiple modernities," "transBuddhism," or "global Buddhism," alongside the claim that all traditions were invented in modernity. Even more recently, a few scholars have ceased to differentiate Buddhisms in these ways, but nonetheless they have still maintained that all contemporary Buddhism grew out of modern and postmodern circumstances—none is old, traditional, or the substantial continuation of its premodern forbears. The result is that scholarship has obscured in the past and still obscures today the existence of Buddhisms that might merit the label "traditional."

Why do few scholars recognize "traditional" as a type of contemporary Buddhism? In Buddhist Studies, "tradition" is defined in ways that ensure no traditional Buddhism can exist today outside of old-fashioned enclaves. "Tradition" refers to a stage in history within a three-stage historiography. It is the premodern or medieval era between the classical and modern eras. "Traditional" describes the features typical of medieval Asian society and religion. The three-stage historiography contains an implicit assumption I call the "correspondence assumption." It presents each historical era as permitting only one form of Buddhism—the one matching the era. This assumption is one reason why few scholars even see traditional Buddhism today; Buddhisms that do not match their era are assumed to be unable to exist. The correspondence assumption has a corollary I call the "lifestyle corollary": that individuals' lifestyles and the type of Buddhism they practice must also correspond. Hence, only people who live a premodern lifestyle can practice a traditional Buddhism; those living a modern lifestyle can only practice a modern Buddhism, and so on. The correspondence assumption and lifestyle corollary are seldom explicit in scholarship, yet often present. Presumably what lies behind them is the reasonable view that religion is inseparable from society and culture.[355] However, the assumption that traditional Buddhism cannot be practiced today is challenged by the claims of some Buddhists

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[353] Quoted in Ephraim Meir, "Reading Jewish Theology and World Religions from the Perspective of a Dialogical Theology from a Jewish Vantage Point," *Contemporary Jewry* 40, no. 1 (2020): 126.

[354] The Buddhisms that replaced "tradition" have long been called "Buddhist modernism," "modernist Buddhism," "modern Buddhism," or reformed/ reformist Buddhism, terms used without distinction. This dissertation uses "modern Buddhism," "modernist Buddhism," "modernized Buddhism," and "Buddhist modernism": all have the same referent. Martin Baumann, a scholar of contemporary Buddhism, writes that the "main features of this reformist Buddhism included an emphasis on rationalist elements in Buddhist teachings accompanied by a tacit elimination of traditional cosmology; a heightened recognition and use of texts; a renewed emphasis on meditational practice; and a stress on social reform and universalism." Baumann, "Protective Amulets," 55. Scholars who comment on the tight focus of the study of contemporary Buddhism on this form of Buddhism include Johan Harding, Victor Hori, and Alexander Soucy, who discuss how the field treats the study of contemporary Buddhism and of modern Buddhism as one. John S. Harding, Victor Sōgen Hori, and Alexander Soucy, "Introduction: Alternate Buddhist Modernities," *Journal of Global Buddhism* 21 (2020): 2-3.

[355] What is wrong is not this presumption but to also assume that societies and cultures are so monolithic and restrictive that they cannot accommodate multiple forms of belief and practice within one era and location.

that their Buddhism is traditional and by the substantive observable differences between their Buddhisms and modern-origin ones. Nevertheless, scholars' definitions and assumptions support a discourse of tradition in which tradition is only found in the past and in backward enclaves, making it not worth studying. The discourse conceals the existence of Buddhists today who identify their Buddhism as traditional yet live modern and mainstream lives.[356]

In recent years, this discourse has been challenged due to its Orientalist echoes, perpetuation of stereotypes, and the now-obvious existence of Buddhisms with features long categorized as "traditional," like ritual, alongside features long categorized as "modern," like lay meditation. Some of these Buddhisms are old and some are recent creations. Yet scholars have not replaced the discourse of tradition with a serviceable understanding of tradition that would enable differentiation. Why not? Because the stereotype of tradition is derogatory and because, scholars continue to assume, real tradition cannot survive modernity. Hence, calling any Buddhism "traditional" would both insult it and be inaccurate given that all Buddhisms are, it is implied, created or re-created in the modern or postmodern eras. Thus, scholars' tendency is to place all Buddhisms into undifferentiated categories as modern, modernist, one of "multiple modernities," or with other universalizing terms. The approach fails to abandon stereotypes of traditional Buddhism; these remain in place. It also fails to acknowledge forms of Buddhism that may be usefully defined as "traditional" because they are old and were not created or re-created in the modern or postmodern eras. And it prevents research into the kinds of histories and characteristics that might distinguish forms of Buddhism from each other and enable deeper analyses of them. The result of classifying all Buddhisms, in essence, as modern, is that Buddhisms like FPMT's are inadvertently left out of scholarship on contemporary Buddhism.[357] And data that could challenge this approach are never gathered.

Buddhist Studies' discourse of tradition has a history. Orientalist scholars and Asian Buddhist modernizers in the nineteenth and twentieth centuries spoke of "tradition" and "traditional" as a set of negatively-valued features of premodern Buddhisms: superstition, irrationality, hierarchy, ritual, withdrawal from society, and so on. The field of Buddhist Studies followed them, and today most scholars still consider the referents of "tradition" and "traditional" to be features typical of premodern Asian religion and society that Buddhist modernizers repudiated. Behind this claim lies a common assumption that the very definition of modernity or the modern era is the rejection of tradition, and that the "traditional" and the "modern" are incompatible and dichotomous. This assumption has led to the view that traditional Buddhism was replaced with modernist Buddhism as societies modernized, and only modernist Buddhisms spread beyond Asia. The low profile in scholarship of Buddhisms that differ in their histories and characteristics from modern Buddhisms has allowed this view to persist.

This chapter analyses the discourse of tradition, including its history and influence on scholarship, and describes current attempts to overcome its flaws. It concludes that just as the categories of "modern" and "postmodern" are useful for the study of Buddhism today, so "traditional" can be. And just as scholars can stipulatively define "modern Buddhism" and "postmodern Buddhism" they can also stipulatively define "traditional Buddhism." Given that a serviceable definition can help scholars to analyze a set of Buddhisms they can label "traditional," observe how they differ from Buddhisms labeled in other ways, and explore how

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[356] Richard K. Payne, "Conscious and Unconscious Dynamics in the Secularizing Discourse," in *Secularizing Buddhism: New Perspectives on a Dynamic Tradition*, ed. Richard K. Payne (Boulder: Shambhala, 2021), 288. Payne also discusses the privileging of the modern, Western, and secular over the traditional, Eastern, and religious in scholarship on Buddhism in Richard K. Payne, "Editor's Introduction," 3-6. It is also discussed in Harding, Hori, and Soucy, "Introduction," 4-6.

[357] An example is *The Oxford Handbook of American Buddhism* (2024). Despite its title, it focuses on modern and postmodern Buddhists, and scarcely mentions US Buddhists who understand their Buddhism to be traditional.

and why traditional Buddhism still thrives, the chapter offers criteria for labeling contemporary expressions of Buddhism "traditional."

What is Tradition?

Merriam Webster defines "tradition" in several ways:

> 1a: an inherited, established, or customary pattern of thought, action, or behavior (such as a religious practice or a social custom)
> b: a belief or story or a body of beliefs or stories … that are commonly accepted as historical though not verifiable … *the bulk of traditions attributed to the Prophet…*
> 2: the handing down of information, beliefs, and customs by word of mouth or by example from one generation to another without written instruction
> 3: cultural continuity in social attitudes, customs, and institutions…[358]

Definitions 1a and 1b refer to "a tradition" i.e., they use the term to label particular traditions. Buddhism is "a tradition" because it consists of established patterns of thought, actions, stories, beliefs, etc. Definitions 2 and 3 describe what is commonly understood to constitute tradition: the handing down over time and thus continuity of processes, practices, institutions, or ideas. The dictionary goes on to define "traditional" as "handed down from age to age," and "adhering to past practices or established conventions."[359] The *Oxford English Dictionary* defines "tradition" similarly. First, tradition is a set of established beliefs, practices, or customs (i.e., "a tradition" such as Buddhism); and second, it is the transmission of these from generation to generation.[360] "Traditional" it adds, refers to being "long-established." It does not refer to being premodern.[361]

Much scholarship on religion and culture aligns with these dictionary definitions. The Buddhist Studies definition of "tradition" as premodernity and as social and religious features typical of premodernity is an anomaly, not representing colloquial usage. Even in scholarship, it does not seem to represent majority usage, as is discussed below.

"Tradition" in the Study of Religion and Culture

Paul Heelas, a well-known scholar of contemporary spirituality, identifies two main scholarly positions on modernity and tradition. The first is that modernity erases tradition. Modernizers do not hand on the culture, institutions, practices, and values of the past, often portraying these as negative. Heelas calls this the "radical thesis." It casts tradition as static and "inviolate"; any accommodations to new circumstances signify its abandonment.[362] One scholar who largely accepts the radical thesis is philosopher Alasdair MacIntyre, who laments the loss of tradition which he presents as unable to survive modernity. Although he acknowledges that some fragments of tradition persist, he presents these as piecemeal leftovers from a more coherent past

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[358] Merriam-Webster Dictionary, "Tradition," accessed April 20, 2022. www.merriam-webster.com/dictionary/tradition.
[359] Merriam-Webster Dictionary, "Traditional," accessed April 20, 2022. https://www.merriam-webster.com/dictionary/traditional?src=search-dict-hed.
[360] Oxford English Dictionary, "Tradition," accessed April 29, 2024. https://www.oed.com/search/dictionary/?scope=Entries&q=tradition.
[361] Oxford English Dictionary, "Traditional," accessed April 29, 2024. https://www.oed.com/search/dictionary/?scope=Entries&q=traditional.
[362] Paul Heelas, "Introduction: Detraditionalization and Its Rivals," in *Detraditionalization: Critical Reflections on Authority and Identity*, ed. Paul Heelas (Cambridge, Mass, Blackwell, 1996), 2-7.

that lack its core: its narratives, meaning, and *telos*.[363] Sociologists Ulrich Beck and Elizabeth Beck-Gernsheim offer a similar view tempered by the suggestion that shreds of tradition live on in the subconscious.[364] Historian Eric Hobsbawm is well-known for asserting that cultural practices called "traditional" today are recent inventions; little real tradition survives modernity.[365]

Heelas calls a different approach the "co-existence" thesis. It argues that ''the modern/post-modern" is not as detraditionalized as some scholars claim, and traditions can be maintained in the modern and postmodern eras. Modernity may not eliminate tradition; modernity is a cultural space in which tradition—narratives, values, laws, customs, habits, and so on from the past—can persist alongside new practices. Periodizing modernity and tradition as "before-and-after" Heelas considers a failure to handle "the multivocal complexities of our times."[366] Various scholars agree. These include Talal Asad on Islam, Jeffrey Stout on cultural and political traditions, and William Rory Dickson on Sufism. The three represent slightly different understandings of how tradition y flourishes in modernity.

Asad presents religions as having a core of authorized orthodoxies that instruct practitioners about the correct form and purpose of practices. This is what must be handed down unchanged over generations for the religion (or form of religion) to remain traditional. Religions also have non-core elements that can be adjusted. Asad thus finds it possible for tradition to persist in modernity, but not because the tradition can change and still be the tradition, but because an unchanging core is kept relevant by accommodations that are not the tradition itself. Asad stresses that some accommodations may be heretical if they alter the core: they damage what he defines as tradition.[367]

Stout contends that traditional cultural and political ideas and practices can survive modernity. He defines tradition as a set of complex understandings, inherited from the past and transmitted by education, stories, rituals, exemplars, art, and so on, that produce and reproduce practices, narratives, ethical norms, and values within a community. They affect how people think, talk, and behave, and include accepted ways of reflecting on these factors such that some can change with the times.[368] Hence, Stout perceives that tradition is perpetuated in modernity through gradual, community-authorized change. Even the core of tradition can change to some extent, a view different from Asad's.

Dickson, in his book on North American Sufism, notes that the word "tradition" refers to what is passed on from generation to generation: in religions, this generally includes normative discourses formed of narratives, customs, beliefs, texts and their interpretations, and practices and instructions concerning their correct form and purpose.[369] He indicates that tradition is not static; traditions are adjusted in order to manifest the past in new conditions. He shows that in Sufi sects, insiders consider that tradition permits change; they perceive tradition to be upheld as long as a valued core is retained even if some peripheral activities are altered. He points to the

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[363] Alasdair C. MacIntyre, *After Virtue: A Study in Moral Theory* (Notre Dame: Notre Dame UP, 2nd ed. 1984), 1-5.
[364] Ulrick Beck and Elisabeth Beck-Gernsheim, "Individualization and 'Precarious Freedoms': Perspectives and Controversies of a Subject-oriented Sociology," in *Detraditionalization: Critical Reflections on Authority and Identity*, ed. Paul Heelas (Cambridge, Mass: Blackwell, 1996), 23-48.
[365] Eric Hobsbawm, "Mass-Producing Traditions: Europe, 1870-1914," in *The Invention of Tradition*, eds. Eric Hobsbawm and Terence Ranger (NY: Cambridge UP, Canto Edition, 1992), 263-283.
[366] Heelas, "Introduction," 2-3, 7-11.
[367] Talal Asad, "The Idea of an Anthropology of Islam." *Qui Parle* 17 no. 2 (2009): 20.
[368] Jeffrey Stout, *Democracy and Tradition* (Princeton NJ: Princeton UP, 2003), 1-15.
[369] Dickson's monograph contains a useful brief discussion of "tradition" and its preservation, citing Asad and MacIntyre. Dickson's position appears to be widely held in Religious Studies. The idea that a tradition is only preserved if it replicates a full set of premodern features, and displays no adaptations to modernity, does not seem common outside of Buddhist Studies. Dickson, *Living Sufism*, 5-6.

role of authorities—leaders or teachers—to show how they transmit traditions in changing times by altering some teachings and practices. Teachers identify what they consider to be the core of their tradition, and mold non-core elements to enable transmission of the core. Their changes are accepted by followers as authorized. Dickson's particular contribution is his emphasis on how changes to tradition occur: with approval by authorities who are accepted as speaking for the tradition.[370]

The three scholars thus offer slightly different ideas about how tradition is preserved and transmitted. Dickson and Stout present the idea that traditions—even aspects of their core—can evolve as long as changes are authorized by authorities or communities. Asad offers the view that tradition's core is unchanging while peripheral matters evolve. The important points, on which all three concur, are that contemporary, mainstream people can practice traditional forms and that their ways of adapting their practice to changing environments do not rupture their traditions' ongoing transmission. Ruptures can occur—Asad's comments on heresy underline that—but none of the three would hold that peripheral adaptations constitute rupture, or that replacing some old features with new ones need constitute, in itself, the end of tradition.

Recall Heelas's two ways to conceptualize tradition. MacIntyre, Hobsbawm, and Beck and Beck-Gernsheim exemplify the radical thesis that tradition consists of premodern features abandoned in the modern era. This thesis does not allow for the persistence of tradition today and ensures that all claims to tradition will be considered mere discourses. Dickson, Asad, and Stout exemplify the co-existence thesis that tradition is a process of handing down core aspects of cultural forms over generations, with peripheral elements adjusted to circumstances. This thesis permits the flourishing today of traditions dating back centuries and does not require asserting that claims to traditionalism be mere discourses; some may have valid historical referents. In Buddhist Studies, the co-existence thesis would acknowledge that traditional Buddhisms can exist today. Buddhists' claims to practicing a traditional Buddhism can then be evaluated against criteria. One obvious criterion, given the examples of Asad, Stout, and Dickson, would be unbroken transmission, going back generations, of what insiders identify as a core of narratives, teachings, practices, and so on. If this and other potential criteria are met, scholars may then classify a given Buddhism as traditional, notwithstanding peripheral alterations. Yet the co-existence thesis, common in the study of some other religions, is rarely encountered in the study of Buddhism.[371]

Sociologist Nikolas Rose can be cited to conclude this discussion of scholarship outside Buddhist Studies. Based on his analyses of understandings of selfhood, past and present, he calls theories that define modernity as mutually exclusive with tradition a "historicist fable." The fable, as he describes it, includes several ideas: that tradition cannot survive modernity except in ever-declining traces and embattled enclaves; that ideas and practices called "traditional" are products of modernity; that tradition is negative and oppressive; and that modernization frees individuals from the oppression of tradition. Rose writes that theorists like Karl Marx, Max Weber, and Emile Durkheim overstated differences between the modern and earlier eras and the

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[370] Dickson, *Living Sufism*, 5-7, 186-188.

[371] A small number of Buddhist Studies scholars, whose work is not well-known, instantiate the co-existence thesis. One is John Holt on Laos. Another is Frank Usarski on Tibetan Buddhism in Brazil. Usarski, citing scholars of the history of religion, writes: "Tradition can be defined as a continuum of communication along the line of generations … for the sake of maintaining the identity of a cultural system over time. …it is up to the believers, or at least their 'opinion leaders' … to judge whether the present state of their tradition is 'in tune' with a set of alleged 'fundamentals' considered crucial for the authenticity of their system." Frank Usarski, "(Re) Making Tradition in an International Tibetan Buddhist Movement: A Lesson from Lama Gangchen and Lama Michel," in *Historicizing "Tradition" in the Study of Religion*, eds. Steven Engler and Gregory Price Grieve (Berlin: De Gruyter, 2012), 346. On Laos, see John Clifford Holt, *Spirits of the Place* (Honolulu: University of Hawaii Press, 2009), 4-7.

incompatibility of tradition and modernity. Further, the narrative they fashioned that there are non-overlapping stages of history, each producing beliefs and conduct specific to its stage, is false.[372]

Rose makes a key point: discourses stating that premodern cultural forms are necessarily abandoned or fundamentally transformed in modern circumstances are not history. They are stories. And they are ideological, exalting modernity and disparaging the past as well as old beliefs and practices today. Even when scholars lack ideological aims, they may perpetuate these stories. Scholars of Buddhism do so. As described below, they often treat as fact a narrative in which "tradition" is a stage in history—the premodern era—as well as a set of features of Buddhism and society considered viable in that stage but not today. Rose underlines the fallacy of this narrative. Not only is it false, it has had a negative effect on Buddhist Studies, inadvertently denigrating today's traditional Buddhisms and prompting scholars to overlook their practitioners.

"Tradition" in Buddhist Studies

Two recent compilations illustrate the status of traditional Buddhism in Buddhist Studies: *The Oxford Handbook of Contemporary Buddhism* (2017) and *The Oxford Handbook of American Buddhism* (2024). Both focus on modernized forms of Buddhism and neither makes more than occasional mentions of traditional Buddhism.[373] Summarizing this common approach, Harding, Hori, and Soucy write, "the academic study of modern or contemporary Buddhism, the youngest sibling in the Buddhist Studies family, has continued to be active and productive in the early twenty-first century." They, like most scholars, treat "contemporary" and "modern" as mutually inclusive and mention no parallel study of non-modern Buddhism.

In Buddhist Studies' discourse of tradition, premodern Buddhism's lack of fit with modern discourses prompted Asian Buddhists to reform it. Modernizers drew on, as Donald Lopez describes them:

> Orientalists, colonial officials, Christian missionaries, or Asian secularists, … found Buddhists to be benighted idolaters, crushed by centuries of superstition, exploited by an effete and corrupt monastic order. Such charges were made with remarkable consistency in European accounts of societies as different as Ceylon, Tibet, China, and Japan. Rather than seeking to defend the Buddhism that they knew, many of the leading figures of modern Buddhism sought to accept the claim that Buddhism had suffered an inevitable decline since the master passed into nirvana. The time was ripe to remove the encrustations of the past centuries and return to the essence of Buddhism.[374]

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[372] Nikolas Rose, "Authority and the Genealogy of Subjectivity," in *Detraditionalization: Critical Reflections on Authority and Identity*, ed. Paul Heelas (Cambridge, Mass: Blackwell, 1996), 295, 303-306.

[373] Summarizing the study of contemporary Buddhism, Harding, Hori, and Soucy write, "the academic study of modern or contemporary Buddhism, the youngest sibling in the Buddhist Studies family, has continued to be active and productive in the early twenty-first century, establishing itself as a distinct sub-discipline." They treat "contemporary" and "modern" as mutually inclusive and mention no parallel sub-discipline examining non-modernist forms of Buddhism. Harding, Hori, and Soucy, "Introduction," 2.

[374] Donald S. Lopez Jr., "Introduction," in *A Modern Buddhist Bible*, ed. Donald S. Lopez Jr. (Boston: Beacon, 2002), xxxi-xxxii.

This discourse presents modern Buddhism as a revival of Buddhism's essence that removed non-Buddhist "encrustations" that were labeled "tradition."[375] Tradition is thus located only in the past, lacks positive characteristics, and consists of negative characteristics. Lopez summarizes the referents of "tradition" as those perceived by Buddhism's modernizers to be "ritual, superstition, and sacerdotalism… deviat[ions] from the original teachings."[376] Martin Baumann calls "traditionalist Buddhism" "the form that places emphasis on ritual and devotional acts of merit-making and holds specific cosmological worldviews." He adds:

> Traditional … Buddhism started with the reign of Aśoka and lasted until the beginning of revival or reformist Buddhism in the late nineteenth century. ... During this period, merit-making rituals, deva, and spirit cults became integral to Buddhism, both in the course of Buddhism's geographical spread across Asia and by laypeople entering the long-range problem of rebirth and immediate needs of this life.[377]

In this discourse, modern Buddhism is the true heir of the Buddha's teachings: Buddhism stripped of the false to reveal the true.[378] Tradition consists of illegitimate features mainly related to Buddhism's cosmology. This view delegitimizes this complex cosmology involving past and future lives propelled by karma, as well as longstanding elements and practices based on it: rituals; gurus with powers; holy objects; prayer; the notion of merit; moral realism; etc.

Few scholars have noted that it is theological to claim that "tradition" is degenerate whereas modernized Buddhisms recover and express Buddhism's essence. Nor have many commented on the paradox involved in assuming that the expressions of Buddhism that developed in Asia and embody the cosmology present in Buddhism from its earliest times lack a lineage back to the Buddha, whereas modern Buddhism, which abandons or psychologizes this cosmology, and was developed by mixing selected Buddhist teachings with modern discourses, has a lineage back to the Buddha.[379] This paradoxical claim of modern Buddhism's lineage persists even though, as Lopez stresses and other scholars reiterate, modern Buddhism was "new" and "created" in modernity; many of its characteristics "originated not with the Buddha but with Buddhist reformers in the nineteenth century."[380]

Scholars once took for granted that science and rationality would extinguish religion.[381] This is the secularization thesis, which presents modernity as co-extensive with rationality and religion as co-extensive with irrationality; rationality, in the modern era, extinguishes religion. Given that modernized forms of religion evidently circumvent the forces of secularization, scholars have generally abandoned the thesis in its broad form, limiting its application to unmodernized forms of religion. This application is apparent in the study of Buddhism, where

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[375] Harding, Hori, and Soucy write, "Asian reformers, ranging from Anagarika Dharmapala to Taixu, Western converts, such as Colonel Olcott and Christmas Humphreys, and scholars, including Thomas William Rhys Davids and Max Müller, restructured Buddhism to reflect the specifications of the dynamic, emerging category of world religion." Harding, Hori, and Soucy, "Introduction," 1.
[376] Lopez Jr., "Introduction," xiv.
[377] Baumann, "Protective Amulets," 55, 56.
[378] "What was different about modern Buddhism was the conviction that centuries of cultural and clerical ossification could be stripped from the teachings of the Buddha to reveal the essential Buddhism." Lopez Jr., "Introduction," xxxvi.
[379] That the cosmology was present from early times is affirmed by Jackson, who notes that early texts show that the concept was central in them. Jackson, *Rebirth*, 27-42. One group of scholars has pointed out a related paradox, that Western-influenced modern Buddhism is sometimes deemed more authentic than Asian forms of Buddhism. Harding, Hori, and Soucy, "Introduction," 1.
[380] Lopez Jr., "Introduction," xl, xxxi.
[381] Dawson, Andrew. *Sociology of Religion* (Norwich: SCM-Canterbury Press, 2011), 36-62.

tradition continues to be defined as co-extensive with irrationality such that its abandonment in modernity is taken for granted.

Buddhist Studies' three-stage historiography was put in place by Orientalist scholars who differentiated the Buddhism they believed old texts portrayed from Buddhisms they observed. Based on texts, they constructed a Buddhism they labeled "classical" or "canonical," and then deemed Buddhisms they saw to have degenerated from it: to be "polluted by all manner of cultural influences, making them more and more distant from the original teachings of the Buddha."[382] These Buddhisms they labeled "traditional." Their third stage consisted of the modernized Buddhisms developed in the nineteenth and twentieth centuries. Modernization they presented as a return to purity.[383] This historiography legitimates modern Buddhism by delegitimating tradition.

The three-stage historiography was spread by Asian Buddhist modernizers who sought to establish a place for Buddhism in modernizing societies.[384] They used it to position modern Buddhisms as new and progressive, yet still native and thus able to support social reform and nationalist, anti-Christian, and anti-colonial movements.[385] Modern Buddhisms were also the ones that appealed to Westerners before and into the 1970s. They learned and then taught these, sometimes further modernizing them.[386] They also adopted the three-stage historiography, claiming their Buddhisms retained classical Buddhism's essence and discarded valueless "cultural baggage."[387] The historiography entered Buddhist Studies when Heinz Bechert published seminal works on modern Buddhism beginning in 1966. It has remained ever since.[388]

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[382] Lopez Jr., "Introduction," xxxv. Another summary of this history is found in Victor Sōgen Hori, "Buddhism and the Secular Conception of Religion," in *Buddhism in the Global Eye: Beyond East and West*, eds. John S. Harding, Victor Sōgen Hori, and Alexander Soucy (NY: Bloomsbury, 2020), 22-23.

[383] One scholar who describes this story is Lopez. Lopez Jr., "Introduction," ix, xxxi-xxxii. Another is Emory-Moore. Christopher Emory-Moore, "American Buddhism, Modernity, and Globalization," in *The Oxford Handbook of American Buddhism*, eds. Ann Gleig and Scott A. Mitchell (NY: Oxford University Press, 2024), 23.

[384] Baumann, "Protective Amulets," 55-56.

[385] These were generally East Asian, Southeast Asian, and Sri Lankan Buddhist scholars, teachers, and leaders, not Tibetan or Himalayan. Modern Buddhisms grew out of only some forms of Buddhism.

[386] Baumann, "Protective Amulets," 56-57.

[387] Not only scholars but many modernist Buddhists define "tradition" this way. For example, Gleig describes the American vipassana teachers who founded the Insight Meditation Society—Joseph Goldstein, Jack Kornfield, Sharon Salzberg, and Jacqueline Schwartz—as "discarding what they saw as Asian 'cultural baggage' and rendering the dharma in a form that was most accessible for an American lay audience. As Kornfield explains, 'We wanted to offer … insight meditation, as many of our teachers did, as simply as possible without the complications of rituals, robes, chanting and the whole religious tradition.'" Gleig, *American Dharma*, 54.

[388] Baumann, in 2002, wrote: "Scholars like Heinz Bechert, Stanley J. Tambiah, George D. Bond, and Richard Gombrich and Gananath Obeyesekere have divided the history of Buddhism in South Asia into three periods: (1) canonical or early Buddhism, (2) traditional or historical Buddhism, and (3) reformist, protestant, or modern Buddhism." He discusses the features of each stage as scholars then understood them. Baumann, "Protective Amulets," 55. Bechert's stage theory had thus become widespread by 2002. Lopez's important 2002 summary of modern Buddhism challenged its simplistic chronology but still used it. Lopez Jr., "Introduction," ix-x. That the stage theory remained popular is shown by its implicit usage by McMahan in his 2008 *The Making of Buddhist Modernism* (McMahan, *The Making*, 6-14) and its explicit usage by Gleig in *American Dharma* (2019), both prominent works. Gleig, for example, entitles one section "Three-stages of Buddhism: Canonical, Traditional, and Modernist," noting that many other scholars use the historiography. Gleig, *American Dharma*, 19-22.

Buddhist Studies' Discourse of Tradition: Early, Middle, and Recent Approaches

The Early Period

Heinz Bechert, the pioneering scholar of modern Buddhism, brought the three-stage historiography into Buddhist Studies. Relying on it, he defines "tradition" as Asian premodernity and the features he believes typical of it. He writes:

> I propose a threefold distinction of "canonical," "traditional," and "modern" Buddhism. "Canonical" Buddhism … is the Buddhism found in the *tripitaka*, the canonical scriptures in Pali. These scriptures … represent the particular form of Indian Buddhism on which later Ceylonese and Southeast Asian Buddhism is based. … "Traditional" Buddhism is the totality of beliefs and practices of Buddhists in the periods after the final codification of the canonical scriptures and before the beginnings of the modern period. … "Modern" Buddhism is a common designation of all forms of Buddhism that have developed under the impact of the changes which have taken place in the modern period; these include "modernistic" forms of Buddhism as well as "traditionalist" responses to the challenge of outside influences.[389]

This comment sets out the three-stage historiography, basing "tradition" on features of Theravada regions and the canonical or classical period on texts. Bechert describes tradition in two ways: as a period of time and as "the totality of beliefs and practices" of Buddhists during this period. He does not distinguish Buddhist beliefs and practices from other societal ones: to him, everything in a society he calls "Buddhist" is Buddhism. Later he adds to "tradition" Buddhism's cosmology, which he suggests is irrational, as well as inattentiveness to social improvement.[390] He implies that traditionalism means no adjustment to modernity at all. All Buddhisms in modern times must be modern.[391]

It may not have occurred to Bechert that a form of Buddhism could be adapted to modernity yet perceived by practitioners as traditional on the grounds that it retained the entirety of a recognizable set of teachings and practices dating to premodern times, with adaptations to new times being only peripheral. Overlooking this possibility, he calls two other kinds of Buddhism in modernity "traditional." What is legitimately traditional, he asserts, is modern Buddhism. He contends that it comprises "forms of continuity of traditional modes" of Buddhism. "Traditional" here means "in continuity with the past." He supports the assertion by saying that traditions can evolve and that the emergence of modern Buddhism is "traditional" because "Buddhist religious traditions are basically 'open to change.'" Regarding Buddhisms in modernity that adherents call "traditional," Bechert declares they are new: "'traditionalist responses to the challenge of outside influences" only. The ironic result is a claim that modern Buddhism is traditional and traditional Buddhism is modern.[392] Bechert erases the possibility that Buddhists could bring their Buddhism from premodern times into the present with core teachings and practices intact—a possibility scholars of other religions like Asad and Dickson take for granted.

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[389] Heinz Bechert, "Sangha, State, Society, Nation: Persistence of Traditions in Post-Traditional Buddhist Societies," *Daedalus* (1973): 85.
[390] Bechert, "Sangha," 91.
[391] Bechert, "Sangha" 85-93. He does not differentiate "modern" from "modernistic," the latter meaning what most scholars call "modern Buddhism" or "Buddhist modernism."
[392] Bechert, "Sangha," 85-93.

One feature of modern Buddhism Bechert emphasizes: its abandonment of Buddhism's cosmology, which includes not just realms of invisible beings but also past and future lives driven by karma. This cosmology and practices related to it forms a significant part of what earlier constituted Buddhism. Bechert underlines this aspect of modern Buddhism which refocuses Buddhist attention on "the building of a better world."[393] In sum, ideas Bechert advanced that Buddhist Studies adopted include that:

- Traditional Buddhism is defined by having premodern features, including Buddhism's cosmology and practices based on it.
- Modern Buddhism is defined by having modern features, particularly a scientific-rationalist-naturalist cosmology that focuses Buddhists' attention on this life and world.
- Any Buddhism adapted at all to modern circumstances is modern, not traditional.
- Modern Buddhism, not traditional Buddhism, is the true heir of earlier Buddhisms.
- Buddhist tradition *qua* tradition ceased to exist in modernity, because:
    - "Tradition" refers to the period before the modern era;
    - "Tradition" refers to premodern social and religious features;
    - Traditional Buddhism became modern Buddhism, its sole descendent; and
    - Buddhists who call their Buddhism "traditional" are mistaken.

The Middle Period

One of several volumes on contemporary Buddhism that appeared in the 1990s and early 2000s exemplifies ideas about tradition in Buddhist Studies around the turn of the millennium: *Westward Dharma: Buddhism Beyond Asia* (2002).[394] The book includes chapters by many well-known scholars and is representative of the discourse of tradition at the time.[395]

Westward Dharma reveals a progression in the discourse. The meaning of "tradition" did not change from Bechert's, but instead of applying it only to the past, scholars applied it to Buddhisms in the present they thought remained in the past. The most frequent usage in the book, by far, of "traditional" is to label Buddhisms practiced by people in Asia or of Asian ancestry[396] such that "traditional" entails "Asian."[397] One example is Michel Clasquin's chapter

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[393] Bechert, "Sangha," 91.

[394] Similar works from the same period include *Luminous Passage: The Practice and Study of Buddhism in America* (1999) by Charles S. Prebish and *The New Buddhism: The Western Transformation of an Ancient Tradition* (2002) by James Coleman.

[395] This description of usages excludes the common use of "tradition" to mean a sect, lineage, religion, etc.

[396] Not an accurate usage given that, at the time, modern Buddhism was known to have developed initially in Asia, and, in the West as well as Asia, much of the Buddhism practiced by people of Asian ancestry was modern.

[397] e.g., B. Alan Wallace, "The Spectrum of Buddhist Practice in the West," in *Westward Dharma: Buddhism Beyond Asia* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2002), 41; Martin Baumann, "Buddhism in Europe Past, Present, Prospects," in *Westward Dharma: Buddhism Beyond Asia,* eds. Charles S. Prebish and Martin Baumann, (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2002), 101; Richard Hughes Seager, "American Buddhism in the Making," in *Westward Dharma: Buddhism Beyond Asia*, eds. Charles S. Prebish and Martin Baumann (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2002), 112, 115; Charles S. Prebish, "Studying the Spread and Histories of Buddhism in the West: The Emergence of Western Buddhism as a New Subdiscipline within Buddhist Studies," in *Westward Dharma: Buddhism Beyond Asia*, eds. Charles S. Prebish and Martin Baumann (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2002), 79; Syvia Wetzel, "Neither Monk nor Nun: Western Buddhists as Full-time Practitioners," in *Westward Dharma: Buddhism Beyond Asia,* eds. Charles S. Prebish and Martin Baumann (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2002), 276; Bruce Matthews, "Buddhism in Canada," in *Westward Dharma: Buddhism Beyond Asia*, eds. Charles S. Prebish and Martin Baumann (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2002), 122, 124, 127; Frank Usarski, "Buddhism in Brazil and its Impact on the Larger Brazilian Society." In *Westward Dharma: Buddhism*

on South Africa, in which he refers to FGS as offering a "traditional Chinese practice of Buddhism" and Buddhism in a "traditional Chinese form."[398] Yet scholars usually describe FGS as modern or modernist given the 20th century origins, and focus on this life, of its Buddhism.[399] Calling it "traditional" reflects only the association with China. Similarly, B. Alan Wallace uses "traditional" to describe Buddhist practices done in Asia by Asians but not to describe Buddhisms in the West regardless of characteristics.[400] This ethnic approach created an implicit typology: Buddhism was either Asian and traditional/ premodern, or Western and modern. Martin Baumann explicitly promotes the typology for analyzing contemporary Buddhism.[401]

The next most common usage of "traditional" is to label features of Buddhism and society perceived as premodern—and usually associated with Asia. Here, "traditional" is often given negative connotations. Its referents include: patriarchy; male monasticism; unhybridized or unwesternized Buddhism; "worship and ritual"; "formal monastic training"; "accruing merit for oneself" and "monasticism, traditional beliefs, and customs"; "rituals and … material implements"; "ceremonial life of the Japanese temple"; "devotional practices"; "scholar-monks" and the monastic education system; "cosmic worldviews and Asian cultural and social norms"; "going on alms rounds"; and Buddhism's now, according to one author, outmoded "training sequence of ethics, meditation, and wisdom."[402]

The book also occasionally suggests tradition can persist in modernity and be practiced by people of any background, but in these contexts, "traditional" is accompanied by an adjective that implies that traditionalism remains Asian and, when practiced by Westerners, is modified in unspecified ways.[403] For example, Richard Seager refers to "progressive traditionalism" in the West and Judith Simmer-Brown refers to the Buddhism of one British group as "neo-traditionalism."[404] These authors do not specify what is "progressive" or "neo," so the modifiers appear to be aimed solely at reconciling the Buddhism concerned with its practitioners' ethnicity.

Westward Dharma only rarely references the possibility that a form of Buddhism not practiced solely in the past and/or by Asians could be "traditional." Lionel Obadia refers to

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Beyond Asia, eds. Charles S. Prebish and Martin Baumann (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2002), 165, 166, 167.

[398] Michel Clasquin, "Buddhism in South Africa." In *Westward Dharma: Buddhism Beyond Asia*, eds. Charles S. Prebish and Martin Baumann (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2002), 157, 159.

[399] On FGS, see Chapter 2.

[400] Wallace, "The Spectrum," 42-46, 48.

[401] Baumann, "Protective Amulets," 54-59.

[402] Baumann, "Protective Amulets," 59; Baumann, "Buddhism in Europe," 101; Prebish, "Studying the Spread," 79; Wallace, "The Spectrum," 39, 41, 42; Wetzel, "Neither Monk," 275; Gil Fronsdal, "Virtues without Rules Ethics in the Insight Meditation Movement," in *Westward Dharma: Buddhism Beyond Asia*, eds. Charles S. Prebish and Martin Baumann (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2002), 300; David L McMahan, "Repackaging Zen for the West," in *Westward Dharma: Buddhism Beyond Asia*, eds. Charles S. Prebish and Martin Baumann (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2002), 228; Seager, "American Buddhism,"107; Michelle Spuler, "The Development of Buddhism in Australia and New Zealand," in *Westward Dharma: Buddhism Beyond Asia*, eds. Charles S. Prebish and Martin Baumann (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2002), 148; Karma Lekshe Tsomo, "Buddhist Nuns: Changes and Challenges," in *Westward Dharma: Buddhism Beyond Asia*, eds. Charles S. Prebish and Martin Baumann (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2002) 266; Thomas A. Tweed, "Who Is a Buddhist? Night-Stand Buddhists and Other Creatures," in *Westward Dharma: Buddhism Beyond Asia*, eds. Charles S. Prebish and Martin Baumann (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2002), 23.

[403] Franz Aubrey Metcalf, "The Encounter of Buddhism and Psychology," in *Westward Dharma: Buddhism Beyond Asia*, eds. Charles S. Prebish and Martin Baumann (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2002), 356; Clasquin, "Buddhism in South Africa," 161; Fronsdal, "Virtues," 289.

[404] Seager, "American Buddhism," 111; Judith Simmer-Brown, "The Roar of the Lioness: Women's Dharma in the West," in *Westward Dharma: Buddhism Beyond Asia*, eds. Charles S. Prebish and Martin Baumann (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2002), 315.

Tibetan Buddhism in Israel as "traditional."[405] Two other scholars call individuals "traditionalist" because they practice unmodernized Buddhisms.[406] This usage acknowledges that traditional forms of Buddhism can be practiced today by people of all ethnicities. However, it is the least frequent way the book references tradition.

Hence, two overlapping usages dominate. Both associate tradition with the past; when seen today, it is understood to exist only among Asians who are implied to replicate or inhabit the past. "Tradition" is usually portrayed as negative and best left behind. If Westerners practice it, it must be changed in unspecified ways to make it new or progressive.

The Recent Period: *The Making of Buddhist Modernism*[407]

McMahan's *The Making of Buddhist Modernism* (2008) is the most significant monograph to date on modern Buddhism and a major contribution to the study of contemporary Buddhism.[408]

The book presents a theory—McMahan calls it a fact—concerning why any Buddhism "succeeds or fails" today: "the fact [is] that a tradition that is introduced into a new cultural context … must re-create itself in terms of the prevalent intellectual discourses, as well as the tacit background understandings of a society."[409] Based on this theory, McMahan analyzes modern Buddhism's intellectual roots to show how Buddhists re-created Buddhism to fit modernity's discourses and understandings, allowing it to survive and thrive today.[410] The implication is that any Buddhism not re-created in this way will fail. Only modern Buddhism succeeds, because only it has been "enlisted in preexisting concerns and debates inherent in western modernity." Only it fits "the metanarratives of American and European culture, and … those of an increasingly globalizing modernity." Only it addresses "the modern West's—as well as the modern East's—deepest existential, social, and philosophical concerns."[411] McMahan does not consider the possibility that traditional Buddhism may do so also. He takes for granted that one way of adapting to modernity is the only one. The claim is more radical than that a form of Buddhism must <u>fit</u> a modern discourse. It is that, to survive the modern era, any given Buddhism must be fundamentally transformed by replacing a core Buddhist discourse—Buddhism's cosmology—with a core modern one—the scientific-rationalist-naturalist discourse. And although he defines modern Buddhism as "forms of Buddhism that have emerged out of an engagement with the dominant cultural and intellectual forces of modernity," re-creation, not mere "engagement," is his requirement.[412] His stance exemplifies Heelas' "radical thesis" in which modernity extinguishes tradition.

As McMahan describes it, modern Buddhism comprises Buddhisms incorporating three modern discourses—Protestant monotheistic, scientific-rationalist-naturalist, and Romantic.

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[405] Lionel Obadia, "Buddhism in the Promised Land: Outlines of the Buddhist Settlement in Israel," in *Westward Dharma: Buddhism Beyond Asia*, eds. Charles S. Prebish and Martin Baumann (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2002), 182.

[406] Simmer-Brown, "The Roar," 309; Ian Harris, "A 'Commodius Vicus of Recirculation' Buddhism, Art, and Modernity," in *Westward Dharma: Buddhism Beyond Asia*, eds. Charles S. Prebish and Martin Baumann, (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2002), 377.

[407] As discussed above, I consider the terms "modern Buddhism," "modernist Buddhism," "Buddhist modernism," and "reformed Buddhism" to be co-extensive.

[408] Google Scholar, as of August 29, 2024, showed 1430 citations for the book.

[409] McMahan, *The Making*, 15.

[410] The book begins with an excellent summary of works by Bechert, Richard Gombrich and Gananath Obeyesekere, and Lopez, which I do not repeat. I discuss Lopez's work later. McMahan, *The Making*, 6-8.

[411] McMahan, *The Making*, 8-9.

[412] McMahan then adds more detail to this definition. Drawing on earlier scholars, he describes characteristics of modern Buddhism which he presents as resulting from this engagement. McMahan, *The Making*, 6-8.

These embody "modernity's inescapable axioms to which any bid for inclusion in the modern project must respond: individualism, egalitarianism, liberalism, democratic ideals, and the impulse to social reform."[413] When modernizers blended their Buddhisms with these discourses, he writes, they subjected them to "detraditionalization." The resulting Buddhisms were "westernized, demythologized, rationalized, Romanticized, Protestantized, or psychologized."[414] Replacing Buddhism's cosmology with the scientific-rationalist-naturalist one removed Buddhism's moral rules, because these are derived from Buddhism's presentation of the cosmos, whose nature determines the karmic results of actions. Rules were replaced with the Romantic idea that morality is self-determined. The abandonment of Buddhism's cosmology also spurred the abandonment of rituals, practices, and holy objects whose rationale is found in aspects of this cosmology like karma, merit, blessings, post-death destinations, invisible beings and energies, and invisible connections between beings, objects, and events. These abandonments shift authority from leaders, teachers, and religious adepts to individuals. Buddhism's focus also moves to this life and this world, and material forms of social engagement replace devotional or faith-based ways of helping others.[415]

What features, in McMahan's eyes, characterize modern Buddhisms? He offers the following portrait:

> [They include] attempts to synthesize … Buddhist and western thought… modern conceptions of democracy, freedom, justice, egalitarianism, and human rights… scientific principles, such as experimental verification and rigorous reasoning … evolution and scientific notions of causality … [presenting] Buddhism as a force for peace, justice, and democracy … Buddhist-sponsored social programs … Buddhist peace and justice movements. … [Retaining] traditional values [but] attempting to adapt and modify them to the modern world … simplifying liturgy and making it more accessible to common people. … more opportunities for women's religious vocation … greater lay involvement… meditation for all… [no] spirit mediumship, magic. … trying to disentangle popular spirit worship from the dharma. Monks… exclusively concerned with the people's spiritual well-being and not … fulfilling people's mundane needs and desires… attempts to sort out the core practices and principles taught by the Buddha from later cultural accretions.[416]

McMahan passes lightly over the question of whether lineages, as understood by Buddhists, were ruptured by Buddhism's modernization. Regarding lineage, he calls modern Buddhism "a novel, historically unique form of Buddhism," "an actual new form of Buddhism" and "a new Buddhism": phrases that suggest rupture.[417] Further, his book can be considered to describe the real lineage of modern Buddhism: a mix of old Buddhist teachings combined with modern and Western worldviews and discourses. Nevertheless, like Bechert, McMahan treats modern Buddhism as the heir of the past. One reason is the old stereotype he adopts: "tradition" consists of "cultural accretions."[418] If this is all tradition comprises, it can be discarded without affecting lineages. He also cites precedent, writing that Buddhism was often adapted to new

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[413] McMahan, *The Making*, 13.
[414] McMahan, *The Making*, 8, 15, 23, 86.
[415] McMahan, *The Making*, 13-14.
[416] McMahan, *The Making*, 35-36.
[417] McMahan, *The Making*, 3, 5, 21.
[418] McMahan uses the term "cultural accretions" several times. McMahan, *The Making*, 5, 36, 37, 106. Generally, he refers to others' perceptions that "tradition" consists of "cultural accretions" rather than his own opinion.

circumstances in the past."[419] Therefore, modern Buddhism, he implies, is as legitimately Buddhist, and as connected in a lineage-like way to the past, as earlier Buddhisms.[420] The shared argument of Bechert and McMahan that modern Buddhism is the heir of earlier Buddhisms suggest that both sought to support its legitimacy.

McMahan's book reflects how most scholars of contemporary Buddhism viewed traditional Buddhism in the early 2000s. It is defined by what Buddhist modernizers abandoned, present only in the Asian past or enclaves today, unviable among modern people, and consists only of "cultural accretions." McMahan tries to dismiss the stereotype pervading *Westward Dharma*—Asian/ traditional versus Western/ modern—stating, "the contrasts I have drawn … are largely ones between western and Asian Buddhist practice, but this should not imply that we can identify western with modern and Asian with traditional."[421] He does not succeed in dismissing the stereotype because he defines "tradition" as premodern features of Asian society and religion. This definition and the stereotype are co-extensive; one cannot be rejected while the other is retained. McMahan inadvertently perpetuates the stereotype.

Two factors ought to undermine McMahan's contention that modern Buddhism is the only Buddhism that persists in modernity. The first factor is that some Buddhists and Buddhist leaders, such as many Tibetans and Tibetan Buddhist leaders living in exile in India and Nepal, deliberately chose to preserve tradition and took firm steps to achieve this aim. Their actions were the opposite of the leaders of some other forms of Buddhism who deliberately modernized their Buddhisms or created new Buddhisms. Agency matters; modernity does not magically transform cultural forms notwithstanding the actions of those involved. Some Buddhist leaders took action to modernize; some took action to prevent modernization. These actions had consequences. The second factor is the visible presence of traditional Buddhisms in modern environments. These factors do not affect McMahan's perspective. Although he allows that some Buddhisms display typically traditional features and lack some typically modern features, he defines them not as traditional but as a variation on modernism. By not accepting them as traditional, he upholds his argument, yet he does so at the price of claiming that no traditional-appearing Buddhism can be traditional. However, by calling such Buddhisms "modernist," he contradicts his own definition of modernism; they have not replaced Buddhism's cosmology with the modern scientific-rationalist-naturalist discourse, an act fundamental to his portrayal of Buddhist modernism. Nor have they incorporated other modern discourses.

One indication of his approach appears early in the book. There, he attempts to capture ways of being Buddhist today by constructing portraits of (invented) people. Only one is labeled "traditional": "Lobsang."[422] "Lobsang" is a male Tibetan refugee who lives in India; he is a Geluk monk; lives in a monastery; does rituals extensively, including to solve worldly problems and earn money; studies, memorizes, recites, and teaches texts; practices tantra; is poor; is close to his family; does not meditate; and believes in past and future lives and in invisible entities like ghosts, Dharma protectors, evil spirits, and bodhisattvas.[423]

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[419] McMahan, *The Making*, 18-19.

[420] McMahan does not go as far as Bechert in suggesting that modern Buddhism has a lineage and Buddhist traditionalism does not. McMahan uses "lineage" in ways that show he grasps what traditionalists mean by the term but indicates that an emphasis on lineage is a feature of traditionalism that modernism does not share. Perhaps for that reason, he does not explicitly seek to show that modernism has a lineage. Perhaps more meaningfully, he also argues that lineage is not the only source of legitimacy. McMahan, *The Making*, 245, 246, 254-255.

[421] McMahan, *The Making*, 41.

[422] A Tibetan name, common among adherents to the Geluk school because it was the name of its founder, Lama Tsongkhapa (d. 1419). (Losang and Lobsang are alternative renderings of the same name).

[423] McMahan, *The Making*, 28-38.

"Lobsang" exemplifies scholars' depictions of tradition. He is a person, so the label "traditional" is assigned to people and not the Buddhism they practice—McMahan does not claim Lobsang's Geluk lineage is traditional but Lobsang himself. McMahan's implicit correspondence assumption and lifestyle corollary means that, living in Asia and in an old-fashioned enclave—a monastery—Lobsang necessarily practices a traditional Buddhism. Yet what is of interest to scholars should be Buddhisms, not lifestyles.[424] A Westerner, by definition modern, is assumed to be unable to practice traditional Buddhism so McMahan presents only Lobsang, a Tibetan, as practicing traditional Buddhism. Focusing on the person also leads him to mix personal or social factors into his description of Lobsang's traditional Buddhism, yet Lobsang's family relationships and poverty are not aspects of his Buddhism.

Regarding his Buddhism, McMahan indicates that Lobsang does not meditate (by McMahan's definition), implying Gelukpas or Tibetan Buddhists "traditionally" do not, a debatable claim based only on stereotyping. McMahan states that Lobsang practices tantra, which means he does meditate; McMahan appears to define meditation only as what modernists call "mindfulness."[425] McMahan then mixes the Buddhism Lobsang practices with seemingly peripheral issues. For example, that monks receive donations in return for rituals is a custom found across Buddhist Asia. It dates to premodernity. But do insiders perceive it as core to Geluk practice? Likely not. On the other hand, some of Lobsang's beliefs and practices are core to his lineage: he studies and practices Geluk teachings, he does rituals and tantric practices from that lineage, and he believes in Buddhism's cosmology, which is part of the lineage. In sum, McMahan is not wrong to classify Lobsang's Buddhism as "traditional." Nonetheless, McMahan's presentation reveals a particular understanding of "tradition": any conduct, related or unrelated to Buddhism, core or peripheral to lineage, that resembles premodern life in Asia.[426] The presentation also reveals McMahan's reliance on the correspondence assumption and lifestyle corollary: Lobsang lives in a traditional enclave so his Buddhism must be traditional; Lobsang's lifestyle is traditional so his Buddhism must be traditional; those who live in modern environments or have up-to-date lifestyles do not practice traditional Buddhism but always modern Buddhism.

McMahan goes on to present his ideas about "the continuum of tradition and modernity."[427] In this discussion, as well as his portrayal of Lobsang, McMahan presents the features he considers constitute traditional Buddhism, a mix of stereotypes, social aspects of premodern Asia, and longstanding elements of Buddhism. These features include Buddhism's cosmology, holy objects believed to have power, male domination, limited individual freedom, education that affirms normative truths rather than promoting free inquiry, powerful authorities, moral realism and fixed rules, lack of social engagement, meditation being rare, the main lay practice being merit creation through donating to monks, and rituals, particularly those related to the supernatural, healing, exorcism, and funerals, being monks' main practice.[428] The list incorporates stereotypes. For example, the idea that social engagement was rare, as discussed in

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[424] Hori points out this confusion between "groups of people" and "styles of Buddhist practice" with respect to typologies, and others have also made the point that typologies sometimes assign styles of practice based on ethnicity. McMahan here assigns traditionalism to Lobsang based on his ethnicity, enclave status, and lifestyle, creating a correspondence between the person and the style of practice. Victor Sōgen Hori, "How Do We Study Buddhism in Canada?" in *Wild Geese: Buddhism in Canada,* eds. John S. Harding, Victor Sōgen Hori, and Alexander Soucy (Montreal & Kingston: McGill-Queen's Press-MQUP, 2010), 16.

[425] Tantras in Tibetan traditions involve meditation, not just ritual with "quasi-meditative elements" as McMahan contends.

[426] Tibetan monasteries like the one in which McMahan places Lobsang are now part of modern life, not enclaves of premodernity. They retain lineages while modernizing other aspects of life.

[427] McMahan, *The Making*, 23.

[428] McMahan, *The Making*, 16-17, 33-41.

Chapters 5 and 6, is a stereotype that may not apply to Tibet. As well, meditation was not rare in Tibet.[429] It is also debateable whether the main focus of lay people in Tibet was merit creation. As well, McMahan does not differentiate features deriving from the classical period from those that originated or were further developed in the medieval ("traditional") period. Buddhism's cosmology, for example, dates from classical times.

Among the features McMahan lists are several that reflect premodern social life, not Buddhism, such as patriarchy and limits on individual freedom. This is important to underline because it explains why their later weakening may not alter what Buddhists call "Buddhism" or "tradition." It also relates to another issue: minor versus important features as insiders understand them. McMahan gives no feature more or less weight. This approach creates the impression that changes to any feature transform traditional Buddhism into modern Buddhism.[430] Lastly, he does not list all aspects of premodern Buddhism. He leaves out Buddhism's rational, universalist philosophies, which date to classical times but were further developed through centuries of debate and commentary in "traditional" times. He also does not mention many products of "traditional" Buddhism: vast amounts of translation, art, architecture, and literature as well as related skills and technologies. He thus assigns to "tradition" features he views as unsuited to today's world and overlooks others still in use. In doing so, he embodies Heelas' "radical thesis" and obscures a more co-existent reality. He also makes "tradition" a set of features opposite to those found in modernist Buddhisms. And although he has recently altered some aspects of his presentation of modern Buddhism, he has not updated his presentation of tradition.[431]

How does McMahan describe Buddhisms today whose practitioners call them "traditional"? He classifies them as modern or postmodern. He gives two examples: Zen and Tibetan Buddhism.

In his book's chapter on the postmodern era, McMahan discusses a form of Zen in the US that teaches a longstanding lineage and self-identifies as traditional. Although he indicates it is less "recent" than some other modern Buddhisms, he still categorizes it as modern Buddhism: just one of the "more serious forms."[432] He appears to acknowledge the existence of traditional Buddhism today as well, but denigrates it as sexist, hierarchical, and dogmatic along with implying—in keeping with the book's theme—that it is unviable today.

The "serious" Zen and similar Buddhisms he describes as follows.

> [They] unite rootedness in tradition with … efforts to engage contemporary culture and thought both critically and openly. … Perhaps these modernizers, rather than ardent traditionalists, are the ones who will be able to develop a Buddhist modernism (or postmodernism) that can form viable Buddhist responses to the problems of (post)modern culture—its narcissism, consumerism, militarism, and so on—as well as of traditionalism: its sexism, hierarchism, and dogmatism. … Zen Mountain Monastery … offers an example of such a balance between tradition and adaptation … Despite the central focus on meditation, Zen Mountain Monastery's programs extend into all areas of lay life in a way that does not dilute the identity of the organization as a Zen Buddhist institution. Its adherence to traditional lineage and institutional affiliation gives it credibility with serious Buddhists … This combination of a strong traditional identity, a

[429] For a discussion of the role of meditation of various types in premodern Tibet, see Andreas Doctor and Tom J.F. Tillemans, "Meditation Revisited." in *Wading into the Stream of Wisdom: Essays in Honor of Leslie Kawamura*, ed. Sarah Haynes (Berkeley: Institute of Buddhist Studies and BDK America, 2013), 352-359.
[430] McMahan, *The Making*, 255-259.
[431] David L. McMahan, "Buddhism and Multiple Modernities," in *Buddhism Beyond Borders: New Perspectives on Buddhism in the United States*, eds. Scott A. Mitchell and Natalie E.F. Quli (Albany: SUNY Press, 2015), 181-196.
[432] McMahan, *The Making*, 264-265

> charismatic leader, and the developing of innovative ways of reaching out to the general public has made the monastery one of the most successful American Buddhist organizations. It offers formal and rather traditional instruction in Zen monastic training and houses a number of ordained monastics. It offers extended residential meditation retreats as well as short weekend sessions … The monastery has various outreach programs; its prison program teaches meditation in prisons, and its Zen Environmental Institute sponsors nature retreats, research opportunities, and programs of ecological activism. [It] … has an online radio station, a monthly print journal, an online art gallery, and a gift shop … that sells books, art, meditation cushions, bells, and statues. It also produces videos, podcasts, tapes, and interactive multimedia. What makes this organization a possible model for a viable adaptation of Buddhism in postmodern America is … the way it adapts to currents of American culture and adjusts its teachings and methods to the discourses of modernity while maintaining central elements of tradition—monasticism, liturgy, meditation, and emphasis on lineage.[433]

McMahan thus affirms that the Zen monastery practices a longstanding lineage but does not take that as signaling traditionalism. Nor does he take features he calls "traditional," such as a "traditional identity," monasticism, hierarchical leadership, liturgy, and "emphasis on lineage" as signifying traditionalism.[434] Why not? He also observes features he considers modern: engagement with contemporary culture, openness to ideas, critical thought, lay practice, "innovative ways of reaching out to the general public," meditation and retreats for lay people, social engagement, book sales, and technology. He thus sets aside lineage transmission and longstanding features as relevant to the question of traditionalism or modernism and focuses on adaptation to American culture. He also suggests the monastery adjusts "teachings and methods to the discourses of modernity," but the adjustments are not of the kind he earlier treated as essential to the creation of modern Buddhism, such as the replacement of Buddhism's cosmology with the scientific-rationalist-naturalist discourse. Old teachings and practices have been left intact and adjustments are only to ways these are offered. As well, some activities that McMahan considers new may not be so, given that his comparators are stereotypes, not this lineage's own history. For example, he assumes that its earlier expressions lacked critical thought, engagement with the surrounding culture, lay involvement, openness to ideas, and socially beneficial activities. These assumptions may be inaccurate. Today's activities may not represent change. Overall, the Buddhism he describes as "modernist" does not meet his own standards for modernism.

On Tibetan Buddhism, McMahan begins by categorizing it as modern Buddhism in the West and traditional Buddhism among Himalayans. This categorization is not solely based on stereotypes. He finds Tibetan Buddhism modern in the West because, he claims, Westerners psychologize its cosmology, transforming deities, spirits, and the like that "traditional Himalayan Buddhists" understand as conventionally real into symbols and archetypes; an "inevitable" part

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[433] McMahan, *The Making*, 264-265.

[434] The monastery's website states this "traditional identity": "The Mountains and Rivers Order (MRO) is a Western Zen Buddhist lineage established by the late John Daido Loori Roshi and dedicated to sharing the dharma as it has been passed down, generation to generation, since the time of Shakyamuni Buddha. Although the MRO is distinctly American, much of the training, liturgy, and practice forms used in the Order come from the tradition of Zen as it evolved in ancient China and Japan. Daido Roshi trained with Hakuyu Taizan Maezumi Roshi at the Zen Center of Los Angeles and received dharma transmission from him. Because Maezumi Roshi was a lineage holder within the Soto school of Zen and had received Inka (seal of approval) from two Rinzai teachers, training and practice in the MRO draws from both these traditions." The intent to pass on longstanding, unbroken lineages is evident. "The Mountains and Rivers Order." *Zen Mountain Monastery*. Accessed April 22, 2024. https://zmm.org/about/about-mountains-and-rivers-order/.

of modernization "essential to the admittance of Tibetan Buddhism into the West."[435] Few would dispute that psychologization signifies modernism. But on what does McMahan base his assertion that all Tibetan Buddhism in the West is psychologized and that psychologization is essential for Western acceptance of it? Neither claim can be supported by data. Although psychologized presentations of Tibetan Buddhism exist, such as Shambhala's, ethnographies discussed in Chapter 2 (as well as this dissertation's research) show that unpsychologized Tibetan Buddhism is also widely practiced. McMahan mistakenly categorizes all Tibetan Buddhism in the West as modern on the grounds that some modern forms exist. Here he may be affected by stereotypes about the West, the correspondence assumption, and the lifestyle corollary: he takes for granted that modern Westerners always practice modern Buddhisms.

Later in the book, McMahan again addresses Tibetan Buddhism, categorizing it under modernism" and calling it a "conservative" form of modern Buddhism. His implicit definition of "conservative" refers to retaining premodern beliefs or practices.[436] He does not mention, likely due to the correspondence assumption, that doing so today suggests the Buddhism in question might be better categorized as traditional, given that such beliefs and practices imply that the scientific-rationalist-naturalist discourse has not replaced Buddhism's cosmology. Again, he overlooks his own definition of modern Buddhism.

In addition to "conservative," he uses the words "traditional" and "traditionalism" for Tibetan Buddhism, but always modifies them. He writes, for example, that Tibetan Buddhism maintains "more traditional elements than other modernizing forms"; that Tibetan Buddhism in the West "has perhaps allowed for more traditionalism"; that "some strains of Tibetan Buddhism have not been as quick to embrace the world-affirming, egalitarian, and democratic reinterpretations of the path as have other forms of Buddhism"; that Tibetans and other Asians may have an interest in "conserving traditional aspects of Buddhism," and that Westerners as well may want a Buddhism not fully modernized.[437] Despite these comments, he asserts that all Tibetan Buddhism in the West today is modern because, in it, lay people meditate, again overlooking his own definition of modernism.[438] Does lay meditation signify modernism? Its presence in modernized Buddhisms does not entail the presence of modern discourses. It is also not unique to modernity or modern forms of Buddhism.[439] As well, reliance on lay meditation to signify modernism confuses the people practicing Buddhism with the Buddhism practiced. That lay people now do practices that in the past were more often done by monastics does not affect the practices, the teachings they embody, or their transmission over generations. It should be Buddhism whose traditionalism or modernism is at issue, not people.

McMahan underlines that the modern era is characterized by social changes that have increased lay meditation, produced modern outgrowths of Tibetan Buddhism like Shambhala, and spurred some lamas, including the Dalai Lama, to promote secularized versions of Buddhist practices to non-Buddhists. Yet these phenomena do not entail, as he contends, that all Tibetan Buddhism has been modernized. Such a claim relies on the correspondence assumption, not data.

Later in his book, on postmodern developments, McMahan again addresses Tibetan Buddhism, presenting it as postmodern because he perceives it fitting into a postmodernizing

[435] McMahan, *The Making*, 55-56.
[436] e.g., He discusses the "conservative" nature of Tibetan Buddhism in a chapter called "Meditation and Modernity" under the sub-title "Modern Transformations of Meditation." McMahan, *The Making*, 180, 183, 187.
[437] McMahan, *The Making*, 247, 249.
[438] McMahan, *The Making*, 186-187.
[439] Zablocki, "Contemporary," 147.

society. He applies the correspondence assumption again: forms of Buddhism must match their historical stage.[440]

What he defines here as "traditionalist" Buddhism is not necessarily old lineages that have been preserved. Rather, it is any Buddhism that includes "ritual, dogma, nonscientific worldviews, and belief in supernatural beings." This ahistorical definition of tradition—part of Buddhist Studies' discourse of tradition—leads to treating, as the same phenomenon, Buddhists practicing longstanding lineages (not retraditionalization) and Buddhists who add decontextualized rituals or old cosmological elements to modernized Buddhisms (retraditionalization). He also labels as "retraditionalization" the increasing interest he believes longstanding lineages hold for North Americans and Himalayans, who now, after apparently modernizing their lineages (an unevidenced claim) have returned to "conserving traditional aspects of Buddhism in the face of modernism," an act which he believes makes Tibetan Buddhism "postmodern." This line of reasoning is odd; main Tibetan lineages were not modernized and are not now being retraditionalized. They were preserved all along. His categorization of them as retraditionalized and postmodern seems based mainly on the correspondence assumption.[441] It also confuses people and Buddhisms in its implication that postmodern people must be practicing a postmodern Buddhism and that modern people in the modern era must have modernized lineages—in spite of evidence they did not.

McMahan's claims uphold and extend the old historiography. Because in the modern era, the correspondence assumption states that only modern Buddhisms exist, and because his book posits that only by repudiating Buddhism's cosmology can Buddhisms survive the modern era, he assumes that today's traditional-appearing forms of Buddhism did not exist during that era, and thus have appeared only after it. He thus presents these Buddhisms as either postmodern creations or as surviving modernity only within ethnic enclaves, moving out of these in postmodernity. This narrative is unevidenced. He presents it not because data support it but because it is the natural outcome of two ideas: his theory—which he calls fact and is the theme of the book—that only modernized Buddhisms can survive the modern era; and the correspondence assumption with its lifestyle corollary. Theory and assumption both prevent McMahan from perceiving that some unmodernized Buddhisms have thrived in modernity and postmodernity. They also lead him to portray the seemingly traditional Buddhisms he observes as postmodern because their admirers have, he posits, postmodern attitudes. But the attitude of believers is not the basis on which he earlier categorized Buddhisms.

McMahan also contends that Buddhisms their practitioners call "traditional" today are not traditional because none has every feature on his list of traditional features. Nor are they without some features he treats as modern and assumes are unique to modernized Buddhisms. Yet no traditional-identified form of Buddhism today could conceivably have all the features he considers traditional and none of the features he considers modern, given the range of social and religious features he lists and his failure to distinguish core from peripheral features. Further, this method does not rely on his earlier-stated definition of modern Buddhism, which requires the replacement of Buddhism's cosmology by a modern worldview.

That unmodernized Buddhisms may survive the modern era undermines McMahan's theory and the correspondence assumption and lifestyle corollary. This may be a further reason why McMahan requires Buddhisms, to be categorized as unmodernized or traditional, to display his full set of core and peripheral premodern Asian social and religious features. Were he to

[440] Postmodern Buddhism he seems to define, without specifics, as Buddhism shaped to accommodate postmodern culture. McMahan, *The Making*, 242.

[441] Whether more North Americans are attracted to traditional forms of Buddhism in postmodernity than in modernity is debatable. McMahan offers no data. My own observations, admittedly anecdotal, would tend toward the opposite view—that attraction to traditional Buddhisms in Western countries may now be stable or declining.

classify unmodernized Buddhisms as traditional, he could no longer maintain that, outside of enclaves, Buddhisms in modernity must be modern and in postmodernity must be postmodern. He would have to accept that multiple kinds of Buddhism can be practiced by modern and postmodern people living all kinds of lifestyles, revealing that the correspondence assumption and its lifestyle corollary are invalid—as is his assertion that only modernized Buddhisms can survive modernity.

It is ironic that, at the end of his book, McMahan calls an unmodernized form of Zen "modernist." He deems its success as due to its practitioners maintaining "central elements of tradition," including a lineage, while adapting styles of practice to their surroundings.[442] By his own definition, this Zen is not modernist. It is likely best categorized as "traditional" given its preservation of an old lineage and of core, longstanding aspects of its earlier iterations, including Buddhism's cosmology.

McMahan is not wrong to portray modern Buddhism as he does: he documents well how a certain kind of Buddhism was constructed in the nineteenth and twentieth centuries. It replaces old with modern discourses just as he explains. This portrait merits retention. Where then does he go astray?

The weakness is his approach to traditional Buddhism. He begins by calling a theory a fact: the idea that that only modern Buddhisms can survive modernity. This claim automatically invokes the correspondence assumption: all Buddhisms in the modern era must necessarily be modern. To the correspondence assumption, he adds the lifestyle corollary: Buddhisms practiced must match lifestyles, so people with modern lifestyles—which to him means mainly Westerners—must be practicing modern Buddhisms. These are all assumptions; McMahan offers no data to substantiate them.

There is another factor McMahan overlooks: agency. Some Buddhist leaders deliberately modernized their Buddhisms to suit them to new circumstances. But Tibetan Buddhist leaders in exile in India and Nepal fought to avoid modernization and to pass on their lineages untransformed. These different strategies had different results. McMahan assumes that modern circumstances automatically modernize Buddhisms. Perhaps sometimes they do. But many modern Buddhisms were deliberately created: Taixu in China and Trungpa in North America are examples of leaders who created new, modern forms of Buddhism. McMahan, relying on assumptions, understates the role of agency. Some Buddhists modernized their Buddhisms. Some deliberately, often with great effort and sacrifice, passed on their Buddhisms to new generations unmodernized. To overlook this history borders on insulting.

By taking assumptions as facts, McMahan labels all Buddhisms practiced in the modern era, except in old-fashioned enclaves, "modern" regardless of their history and features, even when they do not fit his definition of modern Buddhism. When they do not, he categorizes them as modern based on less relevant features not necessarily unique to the modern era or modern Buddhism, like lay meditation. Some Buddhisms today he calls "postmodern," with little explanation other than that they are practiced in postmodern circumstances. He recognizes that Buddhisms with long, unbroken lineages exist and have features he calls "traditional" (because Buddhist Studies' discourse of tradition defines them as such) but, without taking lineages or histories into account, he cannot distinguish between these Buddhisms and retraditionalized modern-origin Buddhisms.

He also fails to escape Buddhist Studies' troubled discourse of tradition: he builds on it even though he appears to understand its flaws. But without being able to include history or lineage in his understanding of "traditional Buddhism" he can only rely on the discourse's stereotype. Why is he so averse to considering history or lineage? To do so would be to admit

[442] McMahan, *The Making*, 264-265.

that modern Buddhisms may not be the true heirs to the past that he asserts, early in his book, that they are. To put lineage into definitions of tradition might undermine this stance. However, his ways of defining "modern" and "traditional" produce inconsistency in his presentations of traditional, modern, and postmodern Buddhism. The solution is to recognize that his theory that for a Buddhism to survive modernity, its old discourses, particularly its cosmology, must be replaced with modern discourses, is not supported by data. The next step is to abandon the correspondence assumption and lifestyle corollary. Having done so, it is possible to see what McMahan's theory and assumptions obscure: that forms of Buddhism best labeled "traditional" can be practiced today.

Today: Beyond *The Making of Buddhist Modernism*

McMahan defines modern Buddhism as a form of Buddhism in which Buddhism's cosmology has been replaced with a modern worldview, with various consequences for belief, practice, and conduct. While, in his 2008 book, he acknowledges variations in modern Buddhism, he does not emphasize them. He later began to do so when it became evident that modern-origin Buddhisms often had differing features, including devotional and faith-based features.[443]

McMahan could have embraced modern Buddhism as one type of Buddhism with varying expressions due different influences and ways of reshaping old elements. The type he described in 2008 is widely practiced, so his analysis remains relevant; as well, when scholars talk about "modern Buddhism" or "Buddhist modernism" they often mean this type of Buddhism. Had he done so, he would have made space for noticing that, whereas some Buddhisms practiced today can usefully be categorized as modern, others may be better categorized in other ways. Within each category would fall multiple Buddhisms whose features may vary but whose relationships to the past and to modern discourses would be similar. Justin Ritzinger seems to take this approach in his work on modern Chinese Buddhism. Ritzinger shows that faith-based features can exist in modern-origin Buddhisms. He considers that these features, though defined in the discourse of tradition as "traditional," are modern because they arose in modernity and hybridized old beliefs with modern discourses like socialism, anarchism, and utopianism. They only "appear nonmodern." He thus makes a distinction that other scholars overlook between modern-origin and premodern-origin faith-based features. The distinction allows him to uphold the integrity of the category of modern Buddhism: it contains Buddhisms of modern origin only. He calls these "alternative modernities" to underline their modern origins but acknowledge their variety and faith-based elements.[444] Importantly, Ritzinger does not identify modern-origin Buddhisms as traditional on the grounds of having such features. Even more importantly, he avoids classifying traditional Buddhisms as modern, and including them in the same category, merely because they display some adaptations to modernity.[445]

McMahan took a different path. In a 2012 article, he writes that "just as modernity is multiple … so too the ways that Buddhists adopt various modern ideas, practices, and

[443] Some of this scholarship is discussed in Harding, Hori, and Soucy, "Introduction," 1-2.
[444] Ritzinger, *Anarchy*, 3-12. Faith-based practices often reference an old cosmology, one reason they are viewed as traditional. Ritzinger notes that Taixu retained or returned to some old cosmological beliefs. However, he hybridized these with modern science and a this-world focus, creating a hybrid cosmology "melding" modern and Buddhist worldviews to produce a modern-origin, mainly but not entirely this-life focused form of Buddhism. Ritzinger, *Anarchy*, 188-199.
[445] Of the Buddhisms adapted to conditions in Republican China, the Chinese Pure Land tradition as promoted by Shi Yinguang might best fit this dissertation's definition of traditional Buddhism. See Justin R. Ritzinger, "Parsing Buddhist Modernity in Republican China: Ten Contrasting Terms," in *Buddhist Modernities*, eds. Hanna Havnevik, Ute Hüsken, Mark Teeuwen, Vladimir Tikhonov, and Koen Wellens (NY: Routledge, 2017), 52-61.

technologies may vary."[446] He still defines modern Buddhism as Buddhism that replaces old with modern discourses, but stresses the idea of "multiple modernities" in which Buddhisms classified as modern can vary from each other and from his 2008 description.[447] Notably, "modernities" still means "modern," although it allows faith-based features. Unfortunately, McMahan does not restrict his category to modern-origin Buddhisms. By not considering history and lineage, he puts all extant Buddhisms into one modern category, including traditional ones that Ritzinger would exclude because his "alternative modernities" includes only modern-origin Buddhisms. McMahan still describes "tradition" according to Buddhist Studies' discourse of tradition: religious and social features typical of medieval Asia. But contemporary Buddhisms displaying any such features he categorizes as modern because all Buddhisms, he posits, were re-created in modernity. He thus keeps the correspondence assumption and lifestyle corollary, but sets aside any role for Buddhism's cosmology, which he earlier presented as distinguishing modern from traditional Buddhism.

In a 2015 article McMahan again calls on "multiple modernities."[448] He writes, "there are, in effect, multiple modernities: ways of being modern that creatively blend elements of indigenous cultures with the globalizing forces of modernity." He writes:

> While in the early phases of the Buddhist engagement with modernity—the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries—reformist Buddhists vigorously attempted to translate Buddhism into the discourses of Western modernity and were willing to jettison large swaths of Buddhist thought, practice, and culture in order to modernize in Western terms, more recently there are more complex intertwinings of Buddhism and modernity that require a more pluralistic conception.[449]

Conception of what? Modern Buddhism. Seeing variety in contemporary Buddhism does not lead McMahan to notice that some forms of Buddhism have not been modernized; all, in his eyes, were. In 2008, Buddhism's cosmology had to be gone for him to call a Buddhism "modernist." Now, it can be present. But a shift has occurred: the cosmology he now deems to be "of course… a modern reinvention" or "combining modernity with received practice and belief." It no longer signifies tradition because it has, apparently, modern origins.[450] In one sense, he agrees with Ritzinger: modern Buddhism can contain devotional elements. But in another sense, he disagrees, because he fails to notice that not all Buddhisms embodying Buddhism's cosmology or other faith-based elements originated or were radically reshaped in modernity. He contends that Buddhism's cosmology was abandoned across the board. Later, elements related to it like spirit worship or amulets were recovered or newly added. By assuming this process of modernization and retraditionalization accounts for all "traditional" appearances today, he avoids classing any Buddhism as traditional and places all contemporary Buddhisms into the "multiple modernities" category. Importantly, he is not just asserting that all are in some way adapted to modern conditions; he is asserting that they are all fundamentally modernized, even when they appear traditional, their practitioners consider them traditional, they retain Buddhism's cosmology, and they transmit longstanding lineages intact. With regard to much Tibetan Buddhism, this is a significant erasure of history.

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[446] David L. McMahan, "Buddhist Modernism," in *Buddhism in the Modern World*, ed. David L. McMahan (NY: Routledge, 2012), 173.
[447] McMahan, "Buddhist Modernism," 173.
[448] McMahan, "Buddhism and Multiple," 181. McMahan notes that he did not originate "multiple modernities."
[449] McMahan, "Buddhist Modernism," 183.
[450] McMahan, "Buddhism and Multiple," 181-195.

One example: McMahan writes that Tibetan Buddhism retains "received practice and belief" and most of its monasteries "still follow the traditional curriculum developed over many centuries, perform rituals to honor and appease deities, and perform divinations." Yet he calls Tibetan Buddhism "modernist," one of the multiple modernities. On what grounds? That some Tibetans, along with scholar Robert Thurman, present it as scientific. McMahan acknowledges that Tibetans did not in fact modernize their Buddhism but observes that it is often perceived as modern because some people align it with the modern science discourse. This presentation is not, in McMahan's eyes, accurate, and he notes that it affects few Tibetan Buddhists, but to him it still means Tibetans "refashion their tradition" to create "new ways of being Buddhist and modern." He does not say how an image among non-Tibetans causes or signifies this. He cites no other data on modernization in Tibetan Buddhism.[451] The argument is hard to take seriously.

The effect of calling all Tibetan Buddhism today "modern" is to diverge from serviceable definitions of modern Buddhism; obscure the viability of unmodernized Buddhisms today; overlook the agency and activities of Tibetan Buddhists who worked hard to preserve lineages; block the creation of a category of traditional Buddhism that would be useful in analyzing contemporary Buddhisms; uphold, in the face of data showing the opposite, the inaccurate claim that the only way Buddhisms can survive today is for their proponents to replace Buddhism's cosmology with modern discourses; perpetuate unproven assumptions of necessary correspondence between historical stages, lifestyles, and Buddhisms; reinforce Buddhist Studies' flawed definition of "tradition"; and dismiss the claims of insiders without investigating their accuracy: a problematic form of redescription.[452]

Other scholars have nevertheless adopted "multiple modernities," such as Harding, Hori, and Soucy (2020). Like McMahan, they implicitly define modern Buddhism as Buddhism re-created by incorporating modern discourses. They define tradition based on features like devotion, faith, belief in rebirth, ritual, and hierarchy; assume that where traditional features are observed in modernity they are reinventions or "new formulations"; and classify any traditional-appearing Buddhism as modern within the multiple modernities paradigm, not allowing for the possibility that unmodernized Buddhisms may exist.[453] Their work reveals McMahan's influence on the study of contemporary Buddhism.[454]

Gleig's *American Dharma* (2019) builds on McMahan's *The Making of Buddhist Modernism*, extending its analysis to postmodern Buddhism.[455] She also adopts the three-stage historiography, adding a fourth stage, postmodernity, and presenting "tradition" as the era between the classical and modern eras and as a set of premodern features of Buddhism and society.[456] Although her book's discussion of Tibetan Buddhism is brief, it offers a useful frame for examining scholars' practice of calling all Tibetan Buddhism "modern," given its relatively recent publication and reliance on the few other scholars who have addressed the topic.

Gleig places Tibetan Buddhism into the three-stage historiography at the modern stage. To do so, she draws on Lopez's "Introduction" (2002) to *A Modern Buddhist Bible*, a precursor to McMahan (2008); a chapter by Sarah Jacoby and Antonio Terrone (2012) which analyzes the

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[451] McMahan, "Buddhism and Multiple," 189-191.

[452] McMahan has published additional reflections on contemporary Buddhism more recently, but, on this topic, these do not seem to add to the publications discussed.

[453] Harding, Hori, and Soucy, "Introduction," 4-7.

[454] Gleig gives a useful description of the "multiple modernities" paradigm, citing scholars who use it. She notes its tendency to classify as "modernist" Buddhisms that may not fit definitions of modern Buddhism. She adds that some scholars use the paradigm to claim that modernity's narratives produced all Buddhisms active today. Gleig, *American Dharma*, 282-283.

[455] Gleig, *American Dharma*, 6.

[456] Gleig, *American Dharma*, 19, 20-21, 49.

relationship between Tibetan Buddhism and modernity; and an article by Georges Dreyfus on the Dalai Lama.[457] All are discussed here.

Tibetans before 1959, Gleig writes, drawing on Lopez, did not modernize their Buddhism because they did not modernize society the way other Asians did. Gleig follows Lopez in suggesting that the rogue Tibetan monk Gendun Chopel (d. 1951) was a modernist Buddhist because he left Tibet, explored South Asian cultures, mused on the compatibility of Buddhism and science, and supported the internationalist Mahabodhi Society.[458] These comments suggest a definition of modern Buddhism not based on the Buddhism practiced—were it based on that, Gendun Chopel would not be a modern Buddhist—but on lifestyles: the lifestyle corollary of the correspondence assumption.[459] Even when Buddhism itself is Lopez's referent, his examples relate to ways of practicing—such as by lay people—rather than to the Buddhism practiced.

On Tibetan Buddhism, Gleig reflects the stance of Lopez, who does not much differentiate having a modern lifestyle, addressing modern concerns, and practicing a modern Buddhism, even though he presents modern Buddhism as a distinct form of Buddhism—"a Buddhist sect"—not just a modern lifestyle.[460] Lopez does provide a definition of modern Buddhism, akin to McMahan's.[461] He also stresses that it breaks with premodern Buddhisms; its creators abandoned much of earlier Buddhisms' contents by deeming these "cultural and clerical ossification."[462] As a result, his work presents contradictions. He classes the Dalai Lama as a modernist Buddhist on the grounds that he speaks out on "many of the concerns of modern Buddhism, including the compatibility of Buddhism and science, the rights of women, concern for the environment, and the role of Buddhism in the promotion of world peace."[463] Yet the Dalai Lama's interest in these topics tells us nothing about the Buddhism he practices. His Buddhism does not fit Lopez's definition of modern Buddhism, has not undergone breaks with the past, and has not been stripped of elements present in premodernity like Buddhism's cosmology.

Lopez reveals his idea of "tradition" in scattered comments: "ritual and magical elements"; "hierarchy"; "community"; monks chanting scriptures, performing rituals for the dead, and maintaining monastic properties; monks not "concerned with the needs of lay people in this life"; monks receiving charity from lay people rather than offering them material help; veneration of relics and images; sectarianism; sexism; and "rituals of consecration, purification, expiation and exorcism."[464] Like McMahan in 2008, Lopez does not mention features he might

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[457] Gleig, *American Dharma*, 29-30.
[458] Gleig, *American Dharma*, 30.
[459] Gayley and Braillier seem to assume that Gendun Chopel's modern lifestyle made his Buddhism modern. Gayley and Brallier, "Tibetan Buddhism in America," 241.
[460] Lopez Jr., "Introduction," xxxix.
[461] "Modern Buddhism rejects many of the ritual and magical elements of previous forms of Buddhism, it stresses equality over hierarchy, the universal over the local, and often exalts the individual over the community…. Modern Buddhism seeks to distance itself from those forms of Buddhism that immediately precede it … [It is seen as] compatible with … such concepts as reason, empiricism, science, universalism, individualism, tolerance, freedom and the rejection of religious orthodoxy." Lopez Jr., "Introduction," ix-x. He later adds, "The essential practice of modern Buddhism was meditation….This silent practice allowed modern Buddhism generally to dismiss the rituals of consecration, purification, expiation and exorcism … as extraneous elements that had crept into the tradition… Silent meditation allowed modern Buddhism … to transcend local expressions, which required form and language….its very silence provided a medium for … making Buddhism, above all, an experience." Further on, he adds another defining feature: "Suffering was often interpreted by modern Buddhists to mean not the suffering of birth, aging, sickness and death, but the suffering caused by poverty and social injustice. … One of the constituents of modern Buddhism is, therefore, the promotion of the social good." He also notes modern Buddhism's dismissal of the value and power of holy objects. Lopez Jr., "Introduction," xxxvii-xxxviii, xxxii, xxxiii.
[462] Lopez Jr., "Introduction," xxxvi.
[463] Lopez Jr., "Introduction," xxxi.
[464] Lopez Jr., "Introduction," ix, xi, xxxii, xxxiv, xxxii-xxxv, xxxvii, xxxviii, xxxviii.

regard as positive, such as social roles played by monasteries,[465] production of philosophical commentaries, the spread and sophistication of tantra, exchanges of knowledge along the Silk Road, translation achievements, and so on. Also lacking are comments on how lineages were preserved and transmitted. The transmission of lineages, and what that involved over centuries and across geographies, cultures, and languages, goes unseen when only a stock of derided features is "tradition"—but this is Buddhism's discourse of tradition. In sum, Gleig is not wrong to view Lopez as presenting today's Tibetan Buddhism as modern, but Lopez's grounds for doing so should perhaps raise doubts.

Gleig goes on to cite an article by Dreyfus, one of the most credible scholars today on the Dalai Lama and Tibetan Buddhism. Gleig here describes the Dalai Lama as "the most well-known Tibetan spokesperson for Buddhist modernism." Yet the article by Dreyfus argues against the view that the Dalai Lama is a modernist Buddhist. Dreyfus agrees that, in the West, the Dalai Lama is associated with some modern ideas, but he contends that "depictions of the Dalai Lama as a Buddhist modernist fail to capture a large part of his actual practice and thinking."[466] Dreyfus responds to a claim by Lopez that Dalai Lama is "the leading proponent of Buddhist modernism" by emphasizing that "there is much more to the Dalai Lama's ideas and practices than Buddhist modernism. Overattention to the 'modernist' label would obscure the complexity of his positions."[467] According to Dreyfus, "the Dalai Lama's actions … show that in many ways he is a traditionalist Buddhist master whose ideas and practices are quite different from the irenic version of Buddhism that many associate with him." Dreyfus adds: "the Dalai Lama is not, for the most part, a reformist of his own tradition, which he tends to uphold firmly."[468]

According to Dreyfus, when the Dalai Lama appears to be a modernist, he is using "an idiom" to suit his audience. He does not modernize Buddhism itself. Dreyfus gives examples of the Dalai Lama's traditionalist beliefs and activities, such as his faith in Buddhism's cosmology and reliance on ritual, oracles, and divination.[469] Dreyfus also considers tradition not a historical period or set of premodern features, but the lineages the Dalai Lama practices. The article refutes rather than supports Gleig's contention that the Dalai Lama has modernized Tibetan Buddhism and thus undermines the idea that Tibetan Buddhism in general has been modernized.[470]

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[465] Much scholarship now shows that medieval monasteries in many parts of Asia were socially engaged. Richard K. Payne and Fabio Rambelli discuss scholarship on this issue. Richard K., Payne and Fabio Rambelli, "The Economic Study of Buddhism," in *Buddhism Under Capitalism*, eds. Richard K. Payne and Fabio Rambelli (London: Bloomsbury, 2022), 1-22.

[466] Georges Dreyfus, "From Protective Deities to International Stardom: An Analysis of the Fourteenth Dalai Lama's Stance towards Modernity and Buddhism," in *The Dalai Lamas: A Visual History*, ed. Martin Brauen (Serinda Publications, 2005), 177.

[467] Dreyfus, "From Protective Deities," 173-174.

[468] Dreyfus, "From Protective Deities," 172, 177, 178. During this dissertation's research, a senior Himalayan monk interviewed made comments supporting Dreyfus's view, indicating that the Dalai Lama does not mix science and other modern ways of thinking with Buddhist practices. A213P62. Interviewed by Author, March 2023

[469] Dreyfus, "From Protective Deities," 176-179.

[470] Comments by the Dalai Lama during public teachings on April 19, 2024 reveal his view that he upholds tradition: "'Jé Tsongkhapa and I came from the same region of Tibet. …When I look back, I have tried to preserve the Dharma traditions that flourished in Tibet. I've spoken up to protect the environment, to secure peace in the world and to encourage inter-religious harmony. So I can say that someone from near to Jé Rinpoché's birthplace has made some contribution to the good of the world. … Those of us gathered here are all followers of the same Buddha. We uphold the Nalanda Tradition, the complete teaching of the Buddha, which we kept alive in Tibet, Mongolia and the Himalayan regions. I've had dreams that clearly indicate I am an incarnation of King Trisong Detsen and I have done my best to preserve the tradition established under his direction. … Tibetan Buddhism derives from the instructions the Great Abbot Shantarakshita brought to Tibet. It includes those passed down to us from Nagarjuna and Asanga. The understanding of the workings of the mind and emotions to be found in this tradition is both scientific and of practical value. This understanding of the mind and emotions has the potential to provide a solution to many of the world's problems. I am determined, as long as live, to carry out the aspirations of the Dharma Kings

Gleig then cites Jacoby and Terrone on the modernizing activities of Chögyam Trungpa Rinpoche, writing that Trungpa created Shambhala as a modernist form of Tibetan Buddhism. It is not controversial to call Trungpa's psychologized interpretations "modernist," as Gleig and Jacoby and Terrone do.[471] Jacoby and Terrone, however, go further.

> Many of the most popular aspects of Tibetan Buddhism in its globalized form share more with features that scholars have termed 'Buddhist modernism' than they do with traditional forms of Buddhism practiced in Tibet. Tenets of 'Buddhist modernism' that feature prominently in the new globalized form of Tibetan Buddhism include demythologization, the 'secularization' of Buddhism as a philosophy instead of a religion, a de-emphasis on ritual, image worship, and 'folk' beliefs, and a focus on Buddhism as an egalitarian religion that accords with democracy and social activism … The Tibetan Buddhism that Tibetan lamas have exported … consists less of rituals propitiating the rich pantheon of divine and demonic forces that make up a sizable portion of Buddhist practices among Tibetans, and more of mindfulness training techniques.[472]

Notable is the phrase "many of the most popular aspects of Tibetan Buddhism." There are popular forms of Tibetan Buddhism—Shambhala is one—that fit their description. But there are also many that do not. Jacoby and Terrone imply that traditional forms are rare, but this is not an accurate picture of Tibetan Buddhism today.

The two scholars then discuss what they describe as a secularization process Tibetan lamas undertook "to make Tibetan Buddhism more palatable to those unfamiliar with Tibetan culture," and "to make Buddhism accord better with the modern secular values they encountered." They reference Trungpa, Dzogchen Ponlop Rinpoche, and the Dalai Lama in this context as modernizers who are "stripping of (sic) the cultural artifacts of Tibetan Buddhism from its essence." Like Lopez, they characterize the Dalai Lama a modernizer of Buddhism. This characterization errs for the reasons Dreyfus presents. The Dalai Lama does not strip off parts of Tibetan Buddhism, his interests in science and democracy do not alter his Buddhism, and when he teaches in ways suited to his audience, he is not altering lineages. The two scholars also hint at agreement with the view that cosmology, ritual, and so on are cultural accretions, not Buddhism, despite their presence in virtually all Buddhisms from classical times to the modern era. In this, they echo Buddhist Studies' discourse of tradition.

Finally, they judge the traditionalism of today's Tibetan Buddhism by comparing what some lay Western Tibetan Buddhists do (not all) with what some lay Tibetans do (not all).

> The gap between Tibetan Buddhists and non-Tibetan converts to Tibetan Buddhism remains wide. Non-Tibetan Buddhist converts, the vast majority of whom are non-monastic, tend to focus on meditation practices and Tantric liturgies that are most often the preserve only of monastics or other full-time religious professionals in Tibet.

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of Tibet. As I've already mentioned, I've received clear indications that my consciousness belongs to the same continuum as Trisong Detsen's. Therefore, I am determined to maintain his legacy. And at this time I feel there is an opportunity for the wisdom of the Nalanda Tradition to contribute to the welfare of humanity. … Like other religious traditions, Hindu and Christian for example, Buddhism of the Nalanda Tradition emphasizes the importance of lineages of transmission.'" "The Hundred Deities of the Joyous Land." *His Holiness the 14th Dalai Lama of Tibet*. April 19, 2024. https://www.dalailama.com/news/2024/the-hundred-deities-of-the-joyous-land.

[471] Gleig, *American Dharma*, 30.

[472] Sarah Jacoby and Antonio Terrone, "Tibetan and Himalayan Buddhism," in *Buddhism in the Modern World*, ed. David L. McMahan (New York: Routledge, 2012), 104-105.

> Alternately, ethnically Tibetan lay Buddhists tend to focus on accumulating good karma for a better future rebirth via reciting mantras, turning prayer wheels, circumambulating sacred Buddhist sites, maintaining household shrines, making periodic offerings to their family's lama and his monastery, sponsoring rituals for deceased relatives, and celebrating Tibetan Buddhist holidays.[473]

The reference to non-Tibetans may be based on observation of Shambhala. It does not address the whole Tibetan Buddhist landscape. In FPMT, for example, the practices the two scholars describe as typical only of lay Tibetans are done by lay and monastic Himalayan and non-Himalayan Buddhists alike. As for "meditation practices and Tantric liturgies," the two scholars imply it is untraditional for lay people to do these—debateable given that lay Tibetans have, throughout Tibet's Buddhist history, done them.[474] It is also a misunderstanding, as discussed above, to suggest that the kind of person doing a practice determines whether the practice is traditional or modern. When differentiating modern from traditional Buddhism, a focus on ways of practicing or type of practitioner (gender, ethnicity, ordination status), rather than on teachings and practices, fosters confusion and perpetuates stereotypes.

Jacoby and Terrone, like McMahan, imply that "tradition," although belonging to the past, persists in ethnic enclaves, i.e., among Tibetans. It does not exist in the West where, in their eyes, lamas altered Tibetan Buddhism just as earlier Asian Buddhist modernist leaders altered their traditions: by replacing Buddhism's cosmology and the practices derived from it with ritual-free meditation. Yet as Chapter 2 describes, in many Tibetan Buddhist communities, lay and monastic, Western and Himalayan, such alterations have not taken place.

Tibetan Buddhism is becoming ever more popular among non-Tibetans, write Jacoby and Terrone. Such Buddhists practice tantra, they indicate, but they downplay the possibility that tantric practice might signal belief in Buddhism's cosmology, suggesting that tantra can have "cultural" parts removed and thereafter be only mindfulness—but still be tantra.[475] They may mean Westerners practice tantra without accepting Buddhism's cosmology by understanding its liturgies and rituals as symbolic, or by dropping these elements, but they leave this unclear, making their remarks confusing. The remarks also do not apply across the board: in FPMT, for example, tantric practices are not altered in this way.

The two scholars conclude that the Tibetan Buddhism practiced by non-Tibetans has been modernized by removing "cultural" elements—Buddhism's cosmology and related practices—so there is no traditional transnational Tibetan Buddhism.[476] The conclusion is not supported by data. Dreyfus's work counters it, as do the practices of FPMT and other transnational Tibetan Buddhist groups that have not made longstanding teachings and practices "more palatable" or more in accord with "modern secular values." Further, the claim relies on a discredited ethnic stereotype of Tibetans as traditional and Westerners as modern as well as a dubious claim that Buddhism's cosmology is mere culture rather than being foundational to canonical Buddhism. Gleig cannot be faulted, however, for using the article to support her view that today's Tibetan Buddhism is modern. It is the article itself that is flawed.

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[473] Jacoby and Terrone, "Tibetan and Himalayan," 105-106.

[474] Zablocki emphasizes that pre-1959 Tibetan Buddhism made room for many styles of practice including "married householder adepts." Monasticism was popular but was not the only way people undertook formal forms of Buddhist practice like tantric meditation. Zablocki, "Contemporary," 147.

[475] Jacoby and Terrone, "Tibetan and Himalayan," 105, 108.

[476] Jacoby and Terrone call certain Buddhist practices "cultural" three times in their relatively short section on contemporary Tibetan Buddhism, yet never explain why they consider such practices cultural and not Buddhist. Could this be the result of a modernist lens? Jacoby and Terrone, "Tibetan and Himalayan," 105, 106.

What then is Gleig's argument? It is that Gendun Chopel, the Dalai Lama, and various other lamas modernized what is broadly known as Tibetan Buddhism. This argument has little basis. Some lamas teach in modern ways. Tibetan Buddhists have produced various secularized teachings and forms of meditation, like FPMT's universal education, that can be called "modern" or "postmodern," but these do not alter established Tibetan lineages. There are also new interpretations like Shambhala can be called "modern." However, asserting that Tibetan Buddhism in general has been modernized or became modern in the modern era goes too far. Tibetan Buddhism's main lineages, practiced by Tibetan Buddhists of many ethnicities, have not been modernized by the definitions of modernization of McMahan and others.

Gleig places Tibetan Buddhism in the historiographic category of "modern," presumably to reinforce her contention that the three-stage historiography and correspondence assumption are valid. If they are, they provide a foundation for her argument that Buddhism in the US, among white "converts" at least, entered the third, modern stage and is now progressing to a fourth "postmodern and postcolonial" stage as the result of a "cultural shift from the modern to the postmodern."[477] That unmodernized forms of Tibetan Buddhism thrive today, and not only in enclaves or among Himalayans, undermines the three-stage historiography and its assumptions as well as her suggestion that a fourth, postmodern stage does or will include most or all Tibetan Buddhism. Gleig's work shows the weakness of the historiography: it makes no space for traditional Buddhism to exist even though data show that it does.

Gleig is not alone in treating Tibetan Buddhism today as modern. Emory-Moore (2024) takes the same stance, contending that "religious detraditionalization" is "well under way" in Tibetan Buddhism even though guru/ disciple hierarchies and faith in spirits remain. Emory-Moore understands these features to be part of traditional, not modern, Buddhism, but perceives that the Dalai Lama's interest in science, his production of self-help books, and his promotion of modern education make Tibetan Buddhism modern.[478] Dreyfus's work shows the flaws in Emery-Moore's argument.

There are a few scholars who counter problematic portrayals of Tibetan Buddhism, but their works are not well known. For example, Frank Usarski studies Buddhism in Brazil. He argues for a lineage-based rather than features-based definition of tradition, with the core contents of lineages that merit preservation identified by insider leaders. On this basis, he contends that traditional Tibetan Buddhism continues to be practiced and transmitted today.[479] Annabella Pitkin underlines that, in Tibetan Buddhism, "tradition" refers to lineages transmitted through guru-disciple relationships. Such lineages "have continued to function" in modernity, she writes.[480] Some of the scholarship described in Chapter 2 also underlines the presence and describes the features of traditional Buddhism today. Disconnections between sub-fields in Buddhist Studies means that scholars of contemporary Buddhism are not necessarily aware of scholarship on today's Tibetan or traditional Buddhisms, leading them to assume that modernized forms of Buddhism comprise all Buddhism today.

Two additional works on Tibetan Buddhism merit mention. *The Oxford Handbook of Contemporary Buddhism* (2017) includes an article by Zablocki, "Contemporary Tibetan Buddhism." The article's ethnographic data give it more credibility that some of the more speculative scholarship discussed above. Zablocki summarizes the status of the three main constituents of Tibetan Buddhism today: that inside Tibet; that practiced in Nepal and India by

[477] Gleig, *American Dharma*, 48-49.
[478] Emory-Moore, "American Buddhism," 26-27.
[479] Usarski, "Re(Making)," 346-347.
[480] Pitkin, *Renunciation and Longing*, 3-7, 10.

Tibetan refugees and other Himalayans; and that practiced by non-Himalayans—Western, Chinese, and South Asian—generally in transnational networks like FPMT.[481]

Zablocki discusses how Tibet's Buddhism has been preserved since 1959. "Tibetan exiles," he writes, "have shown meticulous concern for recreating 'authentic' monasteries" in Nepal and India to preserve their heritage: "Buddhist teachings, practices, initiations, and so forth that they brought with them from Tibet." The monasteries rely on several inputs: funds donated by Tibetan refugees who have succeeded in business in South Asia; funds, skills, translation, publishing, and so on provided by transnational networks like FPMT; and members now coming mainly from Himalayan areas of India and Nepal. These monasteries have grown considerably in size and number since the 1970s. On their aims, Zablocki writes, "all of the abbots of the new monasteries regard the preservation of Tibetan religion, in its orthodox forms, as one of their principal tasks. … the new monasteries are clearly engaged in propagating, with as little alteration as possible, the *Tibetan* forms of Buddhism. … monastery reconstruction efforts in South Asia are explicitly understood as attempts to reaffirm the views and practices of Tibetan religious culture."[482] Zablocki affirms that this focus has meant that Tibetan Buddhism has not been syncretized with modern discourses as have some other Buddhisms.[483] He lists changes he observes but notes these are peripheral to lineages: geographic scope; ethnic diversity; styles of practice such as new models of retreat; and new types of literature in various languages (he appears to mean popular Dharma books). He also identifies two shifts within monastic life: improved opportunities for women and a turn in patronage relationships from Mongolia and mainland China to overseas East Asia and the West.[484] These changes together lead, he indicates, to "new ways of being Tibetan Buddhist."[485] However, he emphasizes that major lineages remain unchanged because the Himalayan leaders who oversee them, teach them, and guide monasteries and transnational networks prioritize preservation. His ethnographic research enables him to circumvent Buddhist Studies' discourse of tradition. It also enables him to reveal the role of decisions and actions—agency—in the transmission of Buddhism. In the Tibetan exile situation, transmission has occurred without modernization because the leaders who control key institutions made that happen: the opposite of what occurred in some other parts of Asia where leaders consciously modernized older Buddhisms or created new ones.

Finally, a chapter by Holly Gayley and Joshua Brallier entitled "Tibetan Buddhism in America" appears in *The Oxford Handbook of American Buddhism* (2024). The two authors do not directly state that today's globalized Tibetan Buddhism is either traditional or modern; they highlight adaptations but also note that lineages are being transmitted. Adaptations they observe include aesthetics; new institutional forms like Dharma centres; new kinds of educational institutions and programs; more lay than monastic practice; and greater flexibility in guru/disciple relationships. Teachers, they find, alter "the outer form" to sustain the core; add new activities like psychological work to old practices; or modernize the way Dharma is taught to newcomers. Teachers nevertheless emphasize "continuity" and longstanding, unaltered ways to perform advanced practices.[486] Gayley and Brallier seem to espouse a core-periphery model: core teachings and practices are not modernized, but peripheral matters are.[487] They nevertheless avoid terms like "modernization" and "tradition," perhaps because the discourse of tradition

[481] Although his ethnographic research took place twenty years before my own, the results are similar in many ways.
[482] Zablocki, "Contemporary," 151-153, 155-156. Italics original.
[483] Zablocki, "Contemporary," 152.
[484] Tibetans in past centuries missionized Himalayan areas now in India, Nepal, and Bhutan, as well as Mongolia and parts of China, whence they attracted financial and political patronage. Zablocki, "Contemporary," 148.
[485] Zablocki, "Contemporary," 143.
[486] Gayley and Brallier, "Tibetan Buddhism in America," 233-241, 242-246.
[487] Gayley and Brallier, "Tibetan Buddhism in America," 243-244.

makes them a poor fit. In any case, like Zablocki, they affirm that lineages have been preserved and not modernized. Their work also highlights a new response to Buddhist Studies' discourse of tradition: avoiding terms related to "modern" and "traditional."

Flaws in Buddhist Studies' Discourse of Tradition: Responses

Has no one criticized Buddhist Studies' discourse of tradition? Recently, some scholars have pointed out the stereotypes it embodies.[488] Their ways of resolving the discourse's problems, however, merit questioning.

A recent edited collection reflects on the discourse: *Secularizing Buddhism: New Perspectives on a Dynamic Tradition* (2021). In its introduction, editor Richard Payne turns to the *Oxford Research Encyclopedia of Religion* (2018) to define "traditional": the term refers to a "bygone era" characterized by a religiously ordained and socially accepted moral strictures.[489] Payne's definition aligns with Buddhist Studies' discourse of tradition in its focus on features alone, ignoring transmission. Payne does not seem aware that this kind of definition is ineluctably tied to the stereotypes he criticizes. He highlights these stereotypes as they appear in "three dichotomies—secular/ religious, modern/ traditional, Western/ Eastern" that permeate the study of contemporary Buddhism. He quotes Natalie Quli adding another dichotomy, passive/ active, a stereotype of Asians and Westerners. Payne later adds two more: convert/ immigrant and progressive/ conservative,[490] in which "convert" implies whiteness.[491] One aspect of these discourses, Payne writes, is a tendency to group various concepts— religious, traditional, Eastern, Asian, immigrant, non-white, and politically conservative—and their opposites.[492] The groupings also encode ideas, he contends, of deviancy: "rational" modern Buddhisms are normal and "religious" traditional Buddhisms are deviant.[493]

His point is that modernist perspectives have created "traditional Buddhism" as a discursive object that is "authoritarian, hierarchical, irrational, ritualistic, rigid." It is an amalgam of elements modernizers denigrate, not any lived Buddhism. Modernist Buddhists and scholars both valorize modern Buddhisms by associating them with historical progress and political progressivism. These Buddhisms are presented as having "surpassed"—not just replaced—traditional Buddhism.[494] Payne states that the discourse of tradition, which distorts the realities of

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[488] Hori, for example, analyzes the discourse in a 2020 article, noting how, in the Orientalist phase of Buddhist Studies and even more recently "the East-West binary stereotype provides a flawed explanation for modernization: the West is the engine of progressive change while the East is the repository of fossilized tradition." Hori, "Buddhism and the Secular," 11-12, 22-25.

[489] Payne, "Editor's Introduction," 5.

[490] "Conservative" Payne takes to mean authoritarian, hierarchical, and patriarchal, and not open to innovation, gender equality, and same-sex relationships. Payne "Conscious," 301-302. This definition differs from McMahan's, which refers to doctrinal conservatism.

[491] Payne, "Editor's Introduction," 3, 14-15; Richard K. Payne, "Conscious," 287, 301.

[492] Thomas Yarnall (2003) adds depth to Payne's comments by noting a tendency of Westerners to construct themselves as innovative, socially engaged, and progressive, which leads to constructing Asians as ancient, traditional, looking toward the past, passive, disengaged, and politically conservative. This is a negative assessment, but it may also be given a positive valuation, with Asians portrayed romantically as keepers of timeless wisdom. He notes that these stereotypes fostered the idea that Buddhist social engagement is new and needed the prompt of Western ideas to draw out notions latent in Buddhist teachings. Thus, it cannot have occurred before Westerners added their activist ideas to Buddhist teachings. Thomas Freeman Yarnall, "Engaged Buddhism: New and Improved? Made in the USA of Asian Materials," in *Action Dharma: New Studies in Engaged Buddhism*, eds. Christopher Queen, Charles Prebish, and Damien Keown (London: RoutledgeCurzon, 2003), 309-310.

[493] Payne, "Conscious," 311.

[494] Payne, "Conscious," 287-289, 291-292. Payne, "Editor's Introduction," 5.

today's Buddhism, nevertheless shapes "how Buddhism is thought about in the West."[495] It also steers scholars toward studying modern (deemed progressive), not traditional (deemed oppressive), forms of Buddhism, one reason why few scholars study today's traditionalist Buddhists.[496] Payne implies that the discourse should be abandoned and better ways to understand contemporary Buddhism adopted, although he does not himself offer one.[497]

Scott Mitchell and Natalie Quli (2015) offer one possibility. They represent a nascent movement in Buddhist Studies—hinted at by Gayley and Brallier above—that retains the definition of tradition used since Orientalist times, observes problems with it, and resolves them by avoiding terms like "modern" and "traditional." They give several reasons for this approach, such as that the terms obscure diversity in how Buddhists mix old and new elements, embody claims about authenticity, and express stereotypes.[498] The terms express "vantage point and political purpose," not accuracy. Buddhists use "traditional" for ideological purposes to describe Buddhisms that have modern origins so the terms are never historically accurate; because they are merely rhetorical, their historical accuracy is not worth investigating. The two scholars add that all Buddhisms today are modernized whatever their mix of old and new features—that is why "traditional" is never an accurate term. Hence, terms like "traditional" and "modern" are not objective or useful. Their solution is to expand the definition of "modern Buddhism" to accommodate old and faith-based features: all Buddhisms today are thus classed as modern.[499]

Mitchell and Quli's argument's origins lie in certain observations and assumptions. One is that many Buddhisms today, whatever their histories, have some faith-based features that the discourse of tradition deems "traditional." This makes distinguishing between "traditional" and "modern" based on features alone difficult. The classification challenge could be resolved by including continuity with the past in definitions of traditionalism. However, the two scholars dismiss that avenue on the grounds that all historical claims are by definition ideological, false, and aimed at legitimation, making them not worth exploring. This stance is, in itself, potentially ideological: it redescribes insiders' understandings, suggests insiders are all dishonest or mistaken, and assumes that historical claims can never be accurate making it pointless to research them. (The latter claim is hard to understand given the recentness of the relevant time period.) This dismissal of history and insiders' voices seems ill-justified. Another assumption the authors express is that all Buddhisms today are modernized: a common scholarly claim whose nature is seldom specified. Is it intended to be a statement of fact or an assumption? If a statement of fact, what data support it? What if one expression of Buddhism has been passed down, unmodernized, from premodern times? As soon as the statement is questioned, it is shown to be assumption, not fact. That Tibetans have worked immensely hard to pass on their traditions intact and unmodernized, and that insiders and observers often confirm their success, casts the assumption into question. It may accord with many cases but need not accord with all. Respect for insiders, including insider scholars, suggests that their claims should not be dismissed without examination. And there is no reason to avoid history. As for the concern that "traditional" and "modern" embody stereotypes, they only do when the discourse of tradition is retained. Overall, Mitchell and Quli acknowledge the difficulties posed by the discourse of

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[495] Payne, "Conscious," 287-288. The accuracy of these categories in the past is debatable.
[496] Payne, "Editor's Introduction," 3-5, 9.
[497] Payne, "Conscious," 285, 297, 310-312.
[498] "Tradition," they indicate, implies hierarchy, monasticism, Buddhism's cosmology, karma, rebirth, ritual, superstition, chanting, and merit-making, while "modern" implies democracy, lay practice, and "rupture and discontinuity." Scott A. Mitchell and Natalie Quli, "Buddhist Modernism as Narrative," in *Buddhism Beyond Borders: New Perspectives on Buddhism in the United States*, eds. Scott A. Mitchell and Natalie E.F. Quli (Albany: SUNY Press, 2015), 197-198, 203, 214.
[499] Mitchell and Quli, "Buddhist Modernism," 213-214.

tradition but the alternative they propose continues to obscure the existence today of unmodernized Buddhisms with long lineages by assuming, without investigation or data, the impossibility of their existence and declaring them, if not "modern" (because they avoid the term) modernized and in the same category as modern Buddhisms.

Mitchell and Quli represent the latest scholarly approach to contemporary Buddhism: placing all Buddhisms in one universal category of modernized Buddhisms by contending that the term "traditional Buddhism" has no valid basis; it is mere discourse. Yet, in this presentation, the universal category is not mere discourse. It is assumed to have a valid basis, given the assertion that all living Buddhisms are of modern origin or have been fundamentally modernized. Hence, claims that all Buddhisms today are modern are intended as statements of fact. It is hardly reasonable to call claims of traditionalism mere discourses but claims of modernism fact. Further, the implication of their argument is that if a Buddhism exists that did not originate in modernity or remains unmodernized, it is traditional. They only dispute whether such a possibility exists. Countering their assumptions are data that suggests it does—and that such Buddhisms can be labeled "traditional."

Mitchell and Quli seek to resolve the problem of categorizing Buddhisms on features alone by ceasing to categorize, but the unhelpful result is placing all Buddhisms in one "modern" category by asserting they are all modernized. The categorization problem arises from Buddhist Studies' discourse of tradition's definition of traditional Buddhism. Abandoning this discourse, and its definitions and stereotypes, would solve the problem in a way more conducive to further research and improved understandings. History can be researched and considered when classing a religious expression as traditional, as it is in other fields of Religious Studies. Only by distinguishing unmodernized Buddhisms that preserve longstanding lineages from modern-origin and modernized ones can scholars effectively study how and why the former persist—a question that bears on the secularization thesis, the correspondence assumption, the lifestyle corollary, contemporary culture, Buddhists' conduct, and other questions. Calling unmodernized Buddhisms "modern" or categorizing them with modern-origin and modernized Buddhisms by assuming sameness removes meaningful questions from scholarly consideration.

Mitchell and Quli are not alone. Emory-Moore (2024) follows them, stating that "traditional" and "modernist" are only narratives used by Buddhists for rhetorical purposes like "audience attraction and identity formation."[500] He suggests that talking about the "real sociohistorical properties and processes" to which these labels refer is only "talk about talking." Despite this stance, he suggests some Buddhisms were modernized and others were not—a comment indicating he perceives identifiable differences in history and features among Buddhisms, even though he disputes the need for different labels.[501]

A similar approach is found in a chapter by Nalini Bhushan and Abraham Zablocki, "TransBuddhism: Authenticity in the Context of Transformation" (2009). The two authors term all Buddhisms today "transBuddhism" on the grounds that globalization is changing them all and creating "a new Buddhism" that supersedes the concepts "modernist" and "traditional." Bhushan and Zablocki arrive at their label from a different direction than Mitchell and Quli. The latter respond to the problematic discourse of tradition and the fact that most modernized Buddhisms today contain elements the discourse calls "traditional." Bhushan and Zablocki respond to flows and interpenetrations they perceive in a globalized world that they assume continuously reshape all Buddhisms. Examples they give of interpenetrations include: Buddhists of varying ethnicities

[500] In the main case he discusses, NKT, he is likely correct. As he himself notes, NKT calls its Buddhism "modern" for reasons that have little to do with either history or features. However, the NKT case is unique in certain ways and generalizing based on it is not well justified. Emory-Moore, "American Buddhism," 31-32.
[501] Emory-Moore, "American Buddhism," 31-32.

in varying places now practice lineages previously practiced by one population in one place; Buddhists may study or ordain in more than one lineage; Buddhists may socialize or share rituals across sects; temples may bring together multiple sects; international organizations unite diverse populations; Hindus, Christians, or others may study with Buddhist teachers; and "a bidirectional flow of ideas, texts, and sensibilities between Asia and the West" means that some Westerners teach Buddhism or lead monasteries in Asia, books on Buddhism written in English for Western audiences are also read by Asians, and Western ideas enter Asian Buddhists' teachings.[502]

Bhushan and Zablocki make useful observations, but these do not entail, as they seem to think, that all Buddhisms are fundamentally or constantly reshaped, nor do they signify that it is useful for scholars to place all Buddhisms in one category as a single "transnational religion" and "new paradigm of Buddhist religiosity" in which "Buddhists have embraced change as a strategy for preservation."[503] The single category makes all Buddhisms one on the grounds that many Buddhists adapt some aspects of their ways of being Buddhist to new times. Yet the two authors do not investigate what is being adapted, how adaptations vary, and whether adaptations relate to Buddhism's core or periphery as understood by insiders.[504] The approach is not data-based; it is speculation only. It also overlooks that some Buddhists preserve lineages by rejecting modern discourses while other Buddhists establish new lineages by incorporating modern discourses: a different strategy in the face of contemporary challenges.

Bhushan and Zablocki's approach resembles McMahan's "multiple modernities" approach as well as the approaches of Gayley and Brallier and Mitchell and Quli. All rely on the old discourse of tradition and its stereotype of traditional Buddhism and claim today's traditional-identified Buddhisms do not fit the stereotype so they are not "traditional." All retain the correspondence assumption and lifestyle corollary. All put every Buddhism today into a single, universal category by assuming all have been modernized in ways that are fundamentally the same. Further, all abandon Lopez's and McMahan's useful definitions of modern Buddhism and even counter Gleig's contention that postmodern Buddhisms are developing. After all, distinguishing postmodern from traditional and modern requires definitions; the "one category" approach makes doing so impossible. It creates a dead end for scholars. Nevertheless, Bhushan and Zablocki's work expresses an important truth: Buddhism is now global. Buddhists around the world absorb information from Buddhist teachers, schools, and sects that are not their own. Global flows of people, money, ideas, technologies, and cultural practices affect the ways they think, act, and practice Buddhism. The practice of Buddhism today cannot be fully understood without taking into account these flows and interpenetrations: scholarship on white North American Buddhists or Tibetans in India or Thailand's Dhammakaya Foundation will be diminished if the ever-evolving global context is overlooked.

That the practice of all Buddhisms is affected by times and surroundings is indisputable. The correspondence assumption and lifestyle corollary reflect this anodyne observation. However, not every aspect of every Buddhism is altered when times and places change. And not every Buddhism is changed in the same way. Some are remade in the way that McMahan and others depict as producing modern Buddhism. Some are not. Differentiating forms of adaptation is possible and allows scholars to explore why some Buddhisms undergo less change than others: a generative topic. Classifying all of today's Buddhisms as one on the grounds that all display some form of change short-circuits this inquiry. Further, the basis for non-differentiation in the

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[502] Nalini Bhushan and Abraham Zablocki, "TransBuddhism: Authenticity in the Context of Transformation," in *TransBuddhism: Transmission, Translation, and Transformation*, eds. Abraham Zablocki, Nalini Bhushan, and Jay L. Garfield (Amherst: University of Massachusetts Press, 2009), 1-8.

[503] Bhushan and Zablocki, "TransBuddhism," 9-10.

[504] Falcone mentions Bhushan and Zablocki's approach, indicating she agrees with it, but that she prefers the label "global Buddhism" to "TransBuddhism." Falcone, *Battling*, 44.

scholarship discussed is not data but the discourse of tradition with its stereotype of traditional Buddhism, correspondence assumption, and lifestyle corollary. Together these exclude possibilities that data show may exist.

Nevertheless, Buddhist Studies has seized on this approach. It is evident, for example, in *The Oxford Handbook of American Buddhism* (2024).[505] The editors, in their introduction to this new collection, state an assumption as a fact: that modernity now shapes all Buddhisms—no unmodernized Buddhism remains. They take this position in order to solve a problem: binaries that associate "traditional" with "Asian" and "modern" with "Western." The real problem, though, is bad definitions, not the possibility that some Buddhism today might fit a less stereotypical definition of "traditional." A better definition would resolve it without erasing that possibility.[506] For despite the editors' stated aim of capturing Buddhism's diversity, the book leaves out traditional Buddhisms, either ignoring them or, when occasionally mentioning them, subsuming them under modern Buddhism.[507] The first chapter, for example, which the editors declare the foundation of the book, treats all Buddhisms in the US as modernized, including all Tibetan Buddhism.[508] The assumption that traditional Buddhism does not exist, and its consequent omission from a 2024 work presented as showcasing Buddhism's diversity, illustrates the current state of scholarship.

Buddhist Studies and Tradition: Summary, Status, Recommendations

In recent years, scholars have recognized faults in the discourse of tradition, particularly its embodiment of stereotypes. They have also noticed that many modern-origin Buddhisms, with mostly modern features, also display faith-based features, often new "retraditionalized" ones. Such Buddhisms do not perfectly fit the definitions of modern Buddhism presented by scholars like Lopez and McMahan, nor do they fit stereotypes of traditional Buddhism. Hence, scholars have found them difficult to categorize. Were they willing to abandon the discourse of tradition and define "traditional Buddhism" to take into consideration both history and cosmology, and to allow it to undergo peripheral adaptations to ensure the preservation and transmission of a longstanding core, they would have the means to avoid defining recently developed Buddhisms as traditional. And were they to allow definitions of modern and postmodern Buddhism to also take into account their modern origins and full or partial repudiation of Buddhism's cosmology, they would not have difficulties categorizing newer Buddhisms either. However, faced with uncertainty about how to classify Buddhisms using ahistorical, stereotype-based definitions,

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[505] On traditionalism, the editors say little. They cite a group of modernist Buddhists who "preserve the stories of those who came before," referring to this as undoing "binary categories such as traditional/modern." They say virtually nothing else about tradition/ traditionalism. They appear to reject Buddhist Studies' discourse of tradition by assuming that traditional Buddhism does not exist. Ann Gleig and Scott Mitchell, "Introduction," in *The Oxford Handbook of American Buddhism*, eds. Ann Gleig and Scott Mitchell (NY: Oxford University Press, 2024), 2, 7, 8.
[506] FPMT has a substantial presence in the US.
[507] The contents of the book, the editors state, are intended to take in all Buddhisms and Buddhists in the US. Their description of its contents reads: "Heritage Buddhism, digital Buddhism, Taiwanese Humanistic Buddhism, Buddhism as labor and service, Pure Land Buddhism, white Buddhism, Buddhism as community, Buddhism through creativity and art, Buddhist practice as ritual, reading, and mindfulness, collective karma, Ecodharma, American sutras, Buddhism in the twenty-first century, temple Buddhism, Buddhism as resistance and refuge against racism, socially situated Buddhism, therapeutic Buddhism, hybrid Buddhism, Buddhism as fuel for and retreat from capitalism, Black, Brown and white Buddhists, multigenerational, first-generation, and convert Buddhists, gendered Buddhists, survivors of abuse in Buddhism … the multiplicity… [is the Buddhism] the *Oxford Handbook of American Buddhism* particularly seeks to reflect and retrieve." The term "traditional" is absent and none of the terms listed seems to represent or capture traditional Buddhism. Gleig and Mitchell, "Introduction," 8.
[508] Emory-Moore, "American Buddhism," 17-35.

instead of improving the definitions they place all Buddhisms today into one universal category of modernized Buddhism, called "modern," "modernities," and so on. Sometimes they indicate they are abandoning terms like "modern" and "traditional," yet they still implicitly retain these concepts by defining all Buddhisms as modern. It is only "traditional" they abandon. One reason they offer is that claims to traditionalism are mere rhetoric whose accuracy is not worth examining, even though the history in question is recent enough that investigating claims is feasible. In this way they erase the possibility that a type of Buddhism may exist today that may fit serviceable criteria for traditionalism. They also silence Buddhists who claim their Buddhism is traditional because it comprises longstanding lineages. All this leads to inadvertently leaving traditional Buddhism out of scholarship based on the assumption that scholarship on modernized Buddhism covers the field.

Asserting that all Buddhisms today are modernized overlooks meaningful differences in the kind and extent of their adaptations to contemporary times and striking differences in their cosmologies that have pervasive effects on belief and practice. This approach, because it obscures deep differences among Buddhisms, blocks rather than advancing understanding. That scholars adopt it largely to circumvent flawed definitions surely means the solution is to fix the definitions, not to cease differentiating radically different forms of Buddhism. Only when Buddhisms are distinguished on the basis of useful definitions can their differences, the reasons for these differences, and the effects of these differences be analyzed.

What is the fundamental definitional problem? It is defining tradition based only on the presence or absence of a set of premodern social and religious features. Some features Buddhist modernizers repudiated as "traditional" are indeed found in Buddhisms that their practitioners call "traditional," like Buddhism's longstanding cosmology. Nevertheless, not all the premodern social and religious features that scholars perceive as signifying "traditional Buddhism" persist in today's traditional Buddhisms, nor need they for "tradition" to be preserved. Only calling Buddhisms "traditional" if they replicate an entire set of features typical of Asian premodernity and lack all adaptations to new circumstances has significant disadvantages: it retains a flawed definition and problematic stereotypes; overlooks understandings of tradition as able to persist in modernity common in the study of other cultures and religions; closes the door to seeing difference; and speaks over insiders by overlooking the possibility that some claims of preserving tradition may not be only rhetoric.[509]

FPMT represents a case study of Buddhists who identify their Buddhism as traditional. As the next chapter discusses, people in FPMT define tradition as lineage: the unbroken transmission across generations of core teachings and practices that have not been replaced with modern discourses. Insiders' views on this question are worthy of investigation in part because they may offer Buddhist Studies an understanding of "traditional Buddhism" that addresses the field's challenges in a more useful and generative way than defining all Buddhism today as modern.

Defining "traditional Buddhism" and creating a category for it are not new undertakings in Buddhist Studies. What is new is creating a definition, and putting in place a category, without relying on a discredited discourse and inaccurate stereotypes, and without assuming that traditional Buddhism cannot exist in modernity or be practiced by modern people. A useful definition differentiates Buddhisms that are, in meaningful ways, different. Buddhisms may all be adapted to contemporary times in some ways, but the depth and extent of their adaptations

[509] Some scholars have noted that calling traditions "invented" in opposition to insider views constitutes "perpetuating the very imbalance of discursive power that was problematic in the first place—while ignoring the influence of Buddhist agents in their own self-presentation." Lina Verchery, "An Alternative to the 'Westernization' Paradigm and Buddhist Global Imaginaires," in *Buddhism in the Global Eye: Beyond East and West*, eds. John S. Harding, Victor Sōgen Hori, and Alexander Soucy (Great Britain: Bloomsbury Academic, 2020), 152.

differ radically. What that means for scholarship is that some can more usefully be classed as "traditional" than others; in a parallel way, some can more usefully be classed as modern or postmodern. Identifying Buddhisms this way, on the basis of helpful rather than unhelpful definitions, aids analysis and understanding.

Improving the definition of traditional Buddhism and accepting that it is a form of Buddhism that flourishes in modernity are not the only steps forward. Understanding contemporary Buddhism also requires letting go of the correspondence assumption. An assumed correspondence between historical periods and Buddhisms prevents scholars from even seeing traditional Buddhism today. So does its lifestyle corollary: that people who live a given lifestyle must be practicing a corresponding form of Buddhism. Research on FPMT, discussed below, undermines these assumptions by bringing into scholarship voices that scholars have so far ignored or dismissed: those of traditionalist Buddhists.

Chapter 4.
FPMT, Tradition, and Traditionalism

FPMT and Tradition: Scholarship

Two related trends have developed in scholarship on contemporary Buddhism: a hesitation to differentiate today's Buddhisms in any way and a tendency to call them all "modern." In other areas of Buddhist Studies, however, scholars do categorize Buddhisms as traditional, modern, or postmodern. Their bases for categorization vary—this is not an area where scholars agree. Three ways of categorizing FPMT's Buddhism appear in scholarship: deeming it traditional, offering a mixed categorization, and deeming it untraditional. Scholars who deem it traditional are mainly those who study Tibetan culture or Tibetan Buddhism and base their designation on lineage preservation. Scholars who offer mixed categorizations generally recognize FPMT as a modern organization but its Buddhism as traditional. Scholars who classify FPMT's Buddhism as untraditional are those who focus on aspects of FPMT other than its Buddhism *per se*—styles of practice, ethnicity, operating methods, and so on—and then use these to define its Buddhism. These varied approaches prompt questions: what are the bases on which Buddhisms should be classified? Does the type of overseeing organization or practitioner determine the traditionalism or modernism of their Buddhism?

Cozort was among the first scholars to discuss FPMT, doing so in two chapters on Tibetan Buddhism in the West. He underlines the primary motivation of the exile lamas who established FPMT and similar organizations: preserving tradition. Their touring and teaching generated students, Dharma centres, and, importantly, funds for publications, translations, monasteries, art, and so on. They succeeded in preserving Tibet's lineages in part by spreading them internationally. FPMT participated in that movement. This context underlines FPMT's aim: not modernizing a lineage but safeguarding one.[510] Cozort describes one way FPMT preserves and transmits its lineage: teacher training programs. FPMT's teacher training programs in English for lay people and monastics, launched in the 1990s, supplement monasteries' production of teachers. He notes the programs' overlap with Geluk monastic training and indicates his expectation that, because course content is traditional, training will produce teachers who teach traditional Buddhism, even if they use modern styles and methods. He indicates that teacher training is one way FPMT preserves its lineage.[511]

Does Cozort call Tibetan Buddhism, of the type spread by FPMT, "traditional"? Yes. He refers to it as "traditional Asian Buddhism." It is the presence in it of Buddhism's cosmology that to him signals traditionalism; when Buddhist teachers abandon the cosmology, he considers that they depart from tradition.[512] Hence, he categorizes FPMT's Buddhism as traditional.

Kay, in his work on Britain, focuses on NKT but also contrasts it with FPMT. He notes the different strategies each employs to sustain tradition. Both adapt styles of teaching and practice to modernity. Both claim to pass on the pure Geluk lineage. Kay himself defines "tradition" as lineage and "traditional" Buddhism as that which preserves a longstanding lineage including its core contents: "doctrine, practices, mythology, symbolism and iconography." These generally relate to cosmology, although he does not use that term. He considers both FPMT and NKT "traditional" while acknowledging their adaptations: translating texts, teaching in English, and structuring study programs in ways suited to Westerners. He contrasts their "conservation

[510] Cozort, "Tibetan Buddhism," 141.
[511] Cozort, "The Making," 221-222, 225-232, 236-244.
[512] Cozort, "Tibetan Buddhism," 148-149.

through adaptation" with the approaches of lamas whom he views as having "over-adapted, and thereby destroyed, the purity of their respective traditions," giving the example of Trungpa. For Kay, tradition is lineage. Modernization ruptures lineage. Kay's view that "traditional Buddhism" can be defined based the retention of a lineage and its core features, including Buddhism's cosmology, is the same as understandings in FPMT.

Samuel, an anthropologist of Tibetan culture and religion, also deems FPMT's Buddhism traditional. He begins his discussion of transnational Tibetan Buddhism by stating that it has been one of "the most successful of traditional religions in adapting to this new global context." He is clear that adaptation to modernity does not destroy tradition if core teachings and practices are retained. That Tibetan lineages have remained traditional, in his eyes, is shown by the fact that refugee lamas like those who established FPMT teach the same doctrines and practices as their predecessors in Tibet and as lamas and monasteries of the same lineage in India and Nepal. Even in the West, he notes, FPMT's people adopt Buddhist cosmological beliefs: to him, evidence of traditionalism.

One reason Samuel believes Tibetan lamas have been able to transmit old lineages intact is that Tibetan Buddhist teachings fit into modern discourses without being altered. This is because "Buddhist philosophy (Mahayana in particular) can be viewed as harmonious with contemporary science, and … Buddhism has been presented as an essentially non-violent, non-hierarchical and ecologically friendly tradition."[513] Another reason is that the lamas select practices suited to various audiences from among the wide variety Tibetan lineages offer. Overall, he concludes that transnational Tibetan Buddhist groups, including FPMT, exhibit "a strong emphasis on tradition" and are "much more 'traditionalist' and much closer … to a literal Tibetan model" than early presentations of Tibetan Buddhism crafted by Westerners like Anagarika Govinda and John Blofeld.[514] The comment distinguishes between modernized forms of Tibetan Buddhism and the forms transmitted by FPMT and similar organizations. Notably, like Kay, Samuel *de facto* defines traditional Buddhism based on the presence of both lineage and Buddhism's cosmology.

Samuel offers another way of defining tradition: precedent. However, when he discusses precedent, he refers to FPMT as an organization, and some of FPMT's activities, rather than its Buddhism. He underlines that missionization to foreign areas, establishing new organizations, and creating transregional networks have premodern precedents. Adapting the way lineages are offered and practiced in new cultures and circumstances also has precedents.[515] Samuel is unusual in arguing that transnational organizations, and not just their Buddhisms, are traditional. Derek Maher agrees. He suggests that FPMT, and similar transnational organizations, are traditional because, although each updates teaching styles, "they all train western adherents and supporters in topics traditionally studied by Tibetan monks." He casts them as "quasi-monastic institutions that are today's successors to premodern Tibetan monasteries and carry on the latter's traditions." He thus supports Samuel in the view that FPMT and its Buddhism are both traditional.[516] Nevertheless, most scholars present these organizations as modern because of their modern origins and up-to-date operating methods, and because precedent, while overlapping with their definitions of tradition, is not equivalent to them.

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[513] Samuel, *Tantric Revisionings*, 288.
[514] Samuel, *Tantric Revisionings*, 288-289, 294-295, 304, 328. Both authors he mentions were Western Buddhists, but both blended Tibetan Buddhism with other traditions as well as Western ideas. They constructed hybrids that Samuel calls "idiosyncratic" rather than "traditionalist."
[515] Samuel, *Tantric Revisionings*, 308-310.
[516] Derek Maher, "Tibetan Monastics and Social Justice," in *The Wiley-Blackwell Companion to Religion and Social Justice*, eds. Michael D. Palmer and Stanley M. Burgess (Malden: John Wiley & Sons, 2012), 275-277.

Ortega examines FPMT in the Covid-19 pandemic. He treats Tibetan Buddhism, including FPMT's, as traditional and examines how traditionalism shaped responses to the pandemic. Tibetan Buddhist leaders, including Rinpoche, recommended following scientific advice and public health orders as well as doing prayers, rituals, and meditations from their lineages. Rinpoche also gave lineage teachings on the roles of mind and karma in illness and suffering. FPMT moved teachings and transmissions online and made some online courses free of charge.[517] Hence, FPMT's people remained part of mainstream society, accepted its strictures, and also implemented lineage practices. In this manner, they demonstrated how traditional Buddhism can be lived in modernity: by practicing it while benefitting from, not eschewing, scientific and material progress.

These scholars all present FPMT's Buddhism as traditional.[518] None takes FPMT's ways of adapting to contemporary circumstances as evidence that its Buddhism is not traditional. They mainly rely on lineage and cosmology to define traditionalism. None makes reference to Buddhist Studies' discourse of tradition, and none seeks to avoid categorization. In this way, their publications are precursors to this dissertation, showing that its approach and conclusions, while in contrast to work on contemporary Buddhism, are in accord with scholarship on Tibetan Buddhism.

The next three scholars also do not hesitate to categorize but they offer a mixed approach and more varied ways of defining traditionalism.

Zablocki perceives traditionalism in many of FPMT's features, such as its cosmology and resultant fondness for holy objects. These features led to its attempts to construct its large Maitreya statue, a project he labels "traditional" because it grew out of "the traditional Buddhist valuation of monumental architecture" and the perception, cosmologically-based, that "religious structures can become sources of spiritual benefit for others." He views the advanced technologies and up-to-date administrative techniques the statue relied on as irrelevant to its traditionalism. He underlines the importance, in Tibetan culture, of "exact transmissions of religious lineages" and perceives that transnational organizations like FPMT meet this standard. Even in new cultures and circumstances, and despite new ways of operating, he believes that FPMT keeps its Buddhism traditional.[519] He adds that ethnic Tibetans in India and Nepal to whom he spoke about FPMT and similar organizations acknowledged their adaptations but did not perceive changes in their Buddhism. Hence, whereas Falcone cites ethnic Tibetans on differences between their ways of being Buddhist and FPMT's, Zablocki cites them on "Buddhism" alone; on that topic, they find no difference. This result suggests that the kinds of differences Falcone identifies are not relevant to Tibetan perceptions of the traditionalism of Buddhism. It is because Tibetans define traditionalism by the transmission of lineages that they believe FPMT and similar groups practice traditional Buddhism.[520]

Zablocki does not himself use lineage to define traditionalism. Rather, he relates traditionalism to features even though he notes that the features-based definition of tradition is based on Theravada not Tibetan circumstances. He observes that contemporary transnational Tibetan Buddhist organizations like FPMT mix old and new features as they preserve lineages. At this point, he moves beyond defining "Buddhism" (teachings and practices) and considers

[517] Ortega, "Global Virus," 194-196, 212-213.
[518] Schedneck alludes to FPMT as "traditional" because it erects "Buddhist monuments." Although this is not a common definition of tradition, she is not unreasonable in connecting the construction of Buddhist statues and stupas to tradition given that these express Buddhism's cosmology. Nevertheless, modernist groups sometimes also erect monuments, such as for nationalist reasons; the activity is not unique to traditionalists (Schedneck, "Buddhist International Organizations," 406).
[519] Zablocki, "The Global Mandala," 371, 392-393.
[520] Zablocki, "The Global Mandala," 347, 371.

FPMT as an organization. He decides FPMT is partly traditional and partly modern; thus the "modernism/ traditionalism trope" merits abandonment. Hence, even though Tibetans separated FPMT's Buddhism, finding it traditional, from the organization's modern ways of operating, and even though Zablocki feels FPMT's Buddhism itself is traditional, he then groups FPMT and its Buddhism together and deems them "hybrid," because they display both modern and traditional characteristics.[521] This difficulty of separating an expression of Buddhism from surrounding structures affects other scholars as well.

Eddy, in a book on Australian Buddhists, defines traditional and modern Buddhism using features, including Buddhism's cosmology or its absence: traditionalism includes "adherence to the doctrine of karma and rebirth … performance of devotional practices and merit-making … to acquire better conditions in this and future lives, whereas the modernist emphasis … appears to be for improving … this life."[522] Using this standard, she considers FPMT's Buddhism traditional. She repeats the analysis in a later article that stresses that traditionalism entails "monasticism, ritual, merit-making and Buddhist cosmology" while modernists abandon the cosmology and focus on this life. She deems the worldview of FPMT's Buddhism traditional and Asian rather than modernist and Western, reinforcing the old ethnic stereotype but still usefully noticing the importance of cosmology.[523] However, the stereotype leads her astray; she classes the Australian centre's meditation and textual study as modern despite their cosmological context and longstanding place in Tibetan Buddhism. Why? Because earlier scholars, citing Theravada history, called meditation and study "modern."[524] Eddy's lapse reveals the weakness of relying on features alone; features can be taken out of context and some, like meditation and study, cross all eras, in Tibet if not Theravada regions.

Sharapan adopts a more sophisticated stance. FPMT, she contends, teaches "traditional Tibetan Buddhism." Studying FPMT's online courses, she believes they transmit "original Tibetan Buddhist concepts and practices." People taking the courses, her research shows, value them explicitly for their traditionalism. This appreciation for tradition she calls "retraditionalization," a reaction against modern Buddhism. Following McMahan and Gleig, she deems retraditionalization an aspect of postmodern religion.[525] She thus separates FPMT's Buddhism—"traditional"—from its socio-cultural position—"postmodern."

Sharapan again deems FPMT "postmodern" but its Buddhism "traditional" in a 2019 article authored with Nick Swann. The two scholars consider postmodernism in religion to be the maintenance of tradition while adapting to consumerism and innovating with new technologies; thus FPMT's cultural position and ways of being are postmodern while its Buddhism is traditional in part because it includes "religious belief."[526] Its Buddhism it also traditional because it takes in "meditation … karma purification, visualization, mantra recitation, tantric, devotional and prostration practices – all contrasting sharply with the modernist secularization, de-ritualization and scientific understanding of Buddhism." What is postmodern in FPMT is its online course purchasing processes as well as its online courses themselves, which cater to consumerism, its reliance on new technologies, and its sacralization of online space.[527]

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[521] Zablocki, "The Global Mandala," 363-381, 393, 397.
[522] Eddy, *Becoming Buddhist*, 7.
[523] Eddy, "How Affiliates," 204, 205.
[524] Eddy, *Becoming Buddhist*, 7.
[525] Sharapan, "Discovering Buddhism," 94-95.
[526] Maria Sharapan and Nick Swann. "Negotiating Tradition in a Postmodern Society: Tibetan Buddhism Online," in *Mediated Intercultural Communication in a Digital Age*, eds. Ahmet Atay and Margaret U. D'Silva (NY: Routledge, 2019), 132-135.
[527] Sharapan and Swann, "Negotiating Tradition," 139-144.

Notable in Sharapan's work is classing FPMT's Buddhism as traditional, but its technological, social, and intellectual environment, and its adaptations to that environment, as postmodern. This separates FPMT's Buddhism from its surroundings to present a subtler analysis than is offered by scholars, like Zablocki, who fuse the two.

The following scholars present FPMT's Buddhism as untraditional, new, or modern, generally by highlighting factors peripheral to its Buddhist teachings and practices.

Marie-Dominique Even (2009) studied FPMT in Mongolia. She indicates that FPMT has been a modernizing force there because its Buddhism replaces the Buddhist-inflected shamanism that survived communist rule when the Geluk lineage did not.[528] Yet Matthew King's descriptions of the Buddhism practiced in pre-revolutionary Mongolia reveal that the teachings FPMT now shares in Mongolia, as Even describes them, reinstate those of Mongolia's pre-communist past; only styles of teaching are new.[529] For example, a nun may teach lay people instead of teachers and students being monks.[530] Even perceives FPMT's Buddhism as modern because it replaces shamanism; others might call it "traditional" because it reiterates the lineage once prevalent in Mongolia. Notably, it is circumstances that Even calls "modern," not FPMT's Buddhism itself. Her approach shows the conundrums that arise when "traditional" is implicitly defined as "old" or "preceding." Better definitions circumvent struggles over age and precedent, and focus attention on the nature of the Buddhism being transmitted.

As mentioned earlier, the only book centred entirely on FPMT is Falcone's *Battling the Buddha of Love* (2018). It relies on Buddhist Studies' discourse of tradition, not taking into account recent scholarly conversations which undermine it. The book presents FPMT as "Western." On the basis of this ethnic designation, Falcone calls its Buddhism a "pastiche" and deems it a new, invented form: "innovative"; a "new brand of Tibetan Buddhism." Its practices, in her eyes, "diverge substantially from its antecedents" making FPMT "primarily an innovator and transformer of religious practice." And she feels that FPMT only "purports" to transmit its lineage. She suggests FPMT's Buddhism belongs in the "modernist" category.[531]

Why does Falcone make these claims? Several reasons. First, she defines traditionalism as replication of the past, "frozen in time … the absence of change." In this she follows Buddhist Studies' discourse of tradition. She later attributes FPMT's success to its adaptations to modernity but views these adaptations as proof it is not preserving tradition. Yet the changes she notes do not alter Buddhist teachings and practices. They include changes to location; languages of teachings and practices; ethnic and cultural background of practitioners; relative time dedicated to prayer and meditation; order in which practice and study take place (with Westerners often doing practices before study instead of the reverse); and numbers of lay and female practitioners. Second, her idea of tradition requires replication not just of premodern Tibet, but also of the styles of practice of exiled Tibetans today—a requirement unique among scholars that overlooks evolution in institutions, attitudes, and conduct among second and third generation ethnic Tibetans. Third, she requires that, for FPMT's Buddhism to be classed as traditional, the majority of its followers should be heritage Buddhists (i.e., Himalayans). In this she follows the stereotype that unites traditionalism and ethnicity. For Falcone, FPMT, for ethnic reasons, is automatically untraditional.[532] Fourth, Falcone attributes FPMT's efforts to build a

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[528] Marie-Dominique Even, "Spirituality versus Ritual? On Modern Tibetan Buddhism in Post-Communist Mongolia." Conference Presentation. ffhalshs-00274087f, 2009, 10-12. https://shs.hal.science/halshs-00274087/file/Even_Spirituality_Rituals.pdf.

[529] Matthew W. King, *Ocean of Milk, Ocean of Blood: A Mongolian Monk in the Ruins of the Qing Empire*. (NY: Columbia University Press, 2019), 1-20.

[530] G213S45. Interviewed by Author, February 2023.

[531] Falcone, *Battling*, 27, 28, 91, 92, 96, 287-288.

[532] Falcone, *Battling*, 61-64, 75-76, 90-96, 211, 216-218.

large Maitreya statue in India to Western, neoliberal impulses rather than traditional Buddhist ones. Her case against the statue relies on classifying FPMT as Western and modern, and on overlooking the longstanding Asian Buddhist practice of constructing large holy objects. Categorizing FPMT as untraditional allows her to not blame traditional Tibetan Buddhism for the disliked statue. Since FPMT does not meet her conditions for traditionalism, she categorizes its Buddhism as modern, over-ruling insider perspectives heard during her ethnographic research.[533]

In a 2022 chapter on typologies in today's Buddhism, Falcone reiterates her claims. FPMT, she writes, "substantially translates and transforms traditional Gelukpa Tibetan Buddhist practice, even while preserving certain cultural phenomena like altars and Tibetan art." She subsequently proposes identifying traditional or modern Buddhism based on the heritage (defined now as enculturation rather than ethnicity) of followers. She writes that heritage institutions are those whose "institutional practices … have gone through relatively little change over the past 100 years (and/ or viewed as mainstream or core versions of that particular strand of a tradition). A relatively nonheritage Buddhist institution would be one that is so innovative that it is popularly perceived as a new Buddhism."[534] She stipulates that heritage-majority institutions transmit traditional Buddhisms and those not dominated by heritage Buddhists transmit modern Buddhisms. The categorization retains stereotypes about Asians and Westerners.

Using this approach, Falcone deems FPMT a "relatively nonheritage" institution. The designation, in her usage, shifts from focusing on followers' backgrounds to focusing on Buddhist practices that, she considers, have undergone significant changes and are "popularly perceived as a new Buddhism." (Yet she does not provide evidence that FPMT's Buddhism is popularly perceived as new—by whom?) The changes she attributes to FPMT consist mainly of factors peripheral to the Geluk lineage: patterns, order, and styles of practice, amounts of prayer, aesthetics, "routines and rhythms of life," "social landscape," gender relations, lay meditation, administrative procedures, and so on. On the basis of these factors, she concludes that FPMT disseminates a new Buddhism. As evidence, she indicates that today's Tibetan-Americans find FPMT centres unlike Tibetan temples, not explaining why this data point is relevant.[535] Falcone's methods of arriving at her opinion that FPMT's Buddhism is not traditional thus include implying that the cultural roots of practitioners determine the traditionalism of their Buddhism, claiming that descendants of Tibetan exiles finding FPMT's centres different in style from their own demonstrates that FPMT has changed Geluk teachings and practices, and pointing to factors peripheral to the Geluk lineage to show FPMT has broken that lineage and created a new Buddhism. Determining traditionalism on the basis of heritage reflects stereotypes that scholars now widely view as problematic, and Falcone also relies on features and activities, other than Buddhist teachings and practices, to call FPMT's Buddhism modern—a methodological jumble.

McAra also discusses FPMT and tradition. McAra claims FPMT's Buddhism is modern. She writes that "FPMT participates in and contributes to the phenomena collectively labelled modern Buddhism, despite its emphasis on upholding a particular Tibetan tradition." She adds that FPMT "uses discourses and a material culture of traditionalism but is, nonetheless, a hybrid modern organization." FPMT only portrays itself as "the curator of an endangered tradition" and only appears "traditionalist." It claims to preserve and transmit a lineage, retain Buddhism's cosmology, and conduct rituals related to the cosmology, such as to propitiate spirits, but its traditionalism, she feels, is an illusion. Modern features she cites relate to the organization's twentieth century origins; global operations; location outside of Tibetan cultural contexts; partially non-heritage body of followers; adaptation of ways of teaching and practicing for

[533] Falcone, *Battling*, 76, 286-288.
[534] Falcone, "The Heritage Spectrum," 211, 213-214.
[535] Falcone, "The Heritage Spectrum," 214-218.

"individualistic" Westerners; perceived rational doctrines; and founding lamas' usage of the phrase "science of the mind" for Buddhism. She adds that "FPMT is, through its very emphasis on preserving tradition, a participant in Buddhist modernism" because, as she sees it, this is a modern way to assert authenticity.[536] She also classes FPMT and its followers as modern because, even if they do "apparently traditionalist practices," they do them for what she perceives as modern reasons: to develop compassion or to attain enlightenment via scriptural study and meditation. Like Eddy, she labels these practices "modernist" despite their cosmological context and long history. McAra adds that the Dalai Lama, influential in FPMT, is "usually cited as one of the major modern Buddhist thinkers of Asian origins." [537] Dreyfus, discussed in Chapter 3, effectively counters this reason for categorizing Tibetan Buddhism as modern. McAra thus designates FPMT's Buddhism modern on numerous but unconvincing grounds, none which relate to its core teachings or practices.

McAra's designation leaves unexplained FPMT's followers' reasons for committing millions of dollars and years of effort to building an enormous stupa in Australia: her own research topic. What she calls FPMT's "enchantment" with holy objects like stupas, she writes, complicates but, to her, still fits this model of modern Buddhism, although she does not explain how. Modernist Buddhists do not typically build large stupas. McAra thus characterizes FPMT's Buddhism as modern not only on weak grounds but in the face of activities that shout "traditional Buddhism." She also demonstrates the confusion that arises when FPMT as an organization and FPMT's Buddhism are treated as one: these two phenomena must be separated for any reasonable assessment of the traditionalism or modernism of either.

What can be learned from these works? First, scholars do not hesitate to categorize FPMT's Buddhism, whether as traditional, modern, or postmodern, just as they do not hesitate to categorize other Buddhisms. Categorization is widespread, not controversial, in many areas of Buddhist Studies. Second, when scholars assume that FPMT's Buddhism and the organization itself must be similarly categorized—as if they are one—confusion results. However, doing so is unnecessary and, in fact, meaningless. Its premise—that the status (modern or traditional) of the organization and of its Buddhism must be the same—is mistaken. Third, when scholars suggest that FPMT's Buddhism is "modern" or "modernist," they are not relying on prominent scholars' definitions of modern Buddhism. For example, McMahan defines it mainly as the modern-day replacement of Buddhism's cosmology with the scientific-rationalist-naturalist discourse, leading to new teachings and forms of practice. Jacoby and Terrone define Tibetan Buddhist modernism as created by making Tibetan Buddhism "palatable to those unfamiliar with Tibetan culture" and suited to modern secular thinking by abandoning Buddhism's cosmology.[538] FPMT's Buddhism does not fit these definitions. Because the definitions of modern Buddhism on which the above scholars rely are idiosyncratic and unpersuasive, so are their judgments.

The final lesson of these works is that definitions need clarifying and scholars need to apply them consistently. In categorizing a Buddhism as traditional, there are two main approaches: features, including cosmology but also various religious and social features of premodern Asia, which is the definition found in the discourse of tradition; or lineage and features that are core to lineage, with non-core features being allowed to vary. The former is less desirable because it involves the stereotypes and weaknesses already discussed. In categorizing a Buddhism as modern, it seems be best to stay with the definitions put in place by Lopez,

[536] McAra, "A 'Stupendous Attraction,'" 78-80.
[537] McAra, "A 'Stupendous Attraction,'" i, iii, 73-77.
[538] Jacoby and Terrone, "Tibetan and Himalayan Buddhism," 105.

McMahan, and others. In categorizing a Buddhism as postmodern, Gleig has put forward useful ideas.[539]

When classifying Buddhism as traditional, modern, or postmodern, scholars have long overlooked insiders' views. For example, even those who whose categorization of FPMT agrees with FPMT's own do not rely on views from inside the organization. Scholars do not appear to think that insiders' views might be useful. Yet this dissertation relies in part on these.[540] Do all insiders agree on the nature of traditional Buddhism? Within FPMT, there is a high degree of agreement, as is discussed below. Across Buddhist sects and schools, similarities appear but potentially also differences. The idea that traditionalism can only exist in the past—the discourse of tradition including its correspondence assumption—is not commonly found. Neither is the lifestyle corollary. Insider teachers and authors seem to agree that tradition is practiced today by many kinds of people. Linking tradition to both cosmology and lineage is common.[541]

Scholars raise one concern with insider views: claims to traditionalism may be nothing more than rhetoric aimed at claiming legitimacy and authority. Nevertheless, ignoring all insiders on those grounds can lead to overlooking meaningful information. Scholars are capable of investigating history and setting aside specious claims. And there are advantages to listening to insider voices. Doing so may help scholars avoid Orientalist and ethnic stereotypes and leave the flawed discourse of tradition behind. It also may help scholars focus on the Buddhism being practiced rather than peripheral issues that insiders do not view as essential to their Buddhism. Insiders may thus be able to contribute to a stipulative definition of traditional Buddhism that usefully distinguishes it from other forms of Buddhism. Such a definition will make contemporary traditional Buddhism and its practitioners visible to scholars and enable these to be studied like other Buddhisms and Buddhists. It will also advance research into how and why unmodernized Buddhisms remain active, and how they affect their adherents' activities, including their social engagement.

FPMT and Tradition: Ethnographic Research Findings

Understandings of "Tradition" and "Traditional" in FPMT

FPMT self-identifies as an organization that preserves tradition. It does not make statements on what it means by "tradition," nor does it put into words how it preserves tradition while adapting the transmission and practice of its Buddhism to contemporary circumstances. Ethnographic research thus explored what tradition means to people associated with FPMT and how they understand FPMT's ways of sustaining and propagating tradition. Research found significant agreement on topics related to tradition, far more than on social engagement, the other major topic researched.

"Tradition," to interviewees, referred to the Geluk lineage, specified to be a complete lineage containing all the Buddhist teachings and practices necessary to attain enlightenment. Interviewees described it as having come down from the Buddha through his successors to the lamas; as such, they viewed it as a living lineage or tradition that the lamas embodied and passed

[539] Gleig, *American Dharma*, 9-12, 288-298.
[540] Nevertheless, those connected with Tibetan Buddhism, such as Cozort, likely draw at least in part on Tibetan ideas, which, as Pitkin mentions, tie concepts of tradition to lineage. Pitkin, *Renunciation and Longing*, 3-7, 10.
[541] On Theravada, see Bhikkhu Bodhi, "Manifesting the Buddha Dharma in a Secular Age." in *Secularizing Buddhism: New Perspectives on a Dynamic Tradition*, ed. Richard K. Payne (Boulder: Shambhala Publications, 2021), 166. One example of a discussion of the lineage of modern vipassana is Jack Kornfield, *Living Buddhist Masters* (Santa Cruz: Shambhala, 1977). On Chinese Buddhism, see Reinke, *Mapping*, 2-8, 21-31.

on. Their definition of "tradition" essentially followed dictionary definitions—a set of teachings, practices, narratives, empowerments, realizations, and so on, transmitted over generations in an unbroken line going back centuries. They called a Buddhism "traditional" when it embodied a tradition defined in this way. For this reason, they perceived FPMT's Buddhism to be traditional.

Interviewees did not view their lineage as having originated in Tibet despite Lama Tsongkhapa's place as head of it. The lineage, they indicated, came from ancient India. Some referred to it as the "Nalanda tradition" or the "Nalanda tradition as practiced in Tibet," a tradition going back to the Buddha. However, they added that it was only in Tibet that this tradition was handed down, complete, to become the living lineage that FPMT received.

A few interviewees added that FPMT's tradition meant the Geluk lineage specifically as transmitted by the lamas. They did not believe that the lamas had altered the teachings or practices of the Geluk lineage, but they felt there were styles of presentation particular to them and thus to FPMT. One example they gave was FPMT's emphasis on the *Lam Rim*.[542] Nevertheless, they did not view their tradition as being preserved only by FPMT. Instead, they considered that FPMT contributed to the support of the Geluk lineage's primary preservers: the three main Geluk monastic universities and two Geluk tantric colleges now located in India.[543]

Relying on this tradition is how interviewees felt the purity, authenticity, and effectiveness of teachings and practices were assured. Many stated that one reason they were attracted to FPMT, or remained part of it after initial exploration, was the value they placed on its traditional Buddhism. Various interviewees contrasted FPMT's Buddhism with spiritual paths to which they felt the term "tradition" did not apply: modernized forms of Buddhism like American vipassana or modernized Zen; New Age teachings; or cults created by one individual. Other than cults, they did not dismiss these spiritual paths as negative. Many had practiced vipassana or Zen, and some had read New Age books or heard New Age teachers. The prevalent view was that these alternatives may offer benefits but lack "authenticity" and thus do not have the same trustworthiness or effectiveness as FPMT's "authentic" traditional Buddhism. One interviewee who had been involved in an FPMT centre for a handful of years said, for example, "I also listen to New Age teachers … you can draw from many teachings. I think their essence is much the same. The outer world is the projection of your inner consciousness and what ultimately matters is what you do for others…. But then you should follow an authentic teacher… the idea of tradition and the idea of authenticity are the same, right?"[544]

Other interviewees also commented on tradition and its value. One said that tradition was "FPMT's treasure": other Buddhist organizations might do more social projects, but FPMT's strength lay in its lineage of teachings, practices, yogis, the profound Geluk view, bodhichitta motivation, and teachings. She felt people in FPMT should be proud of its traditionalism.[545] Another contended that FPMT's Buddhism had "a firm foundation, a solid lineage—this teacher's teaching came from this teacher, who got it from that teacher… I can follow the lineage back to its beginning. The history makes it solid. Legitimate. Valid. Effective."[546] Another said that relying on FPMT's teachings, practices, liturgies, and so on kept him on track; his Buddhist practice didn't "go astray" because it was grounded in Geluk tradition thanks to Rinpoche's grounding in that tradition and connections to Geluk institutions.[547] Yet another called FPMT's

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[542] See Glossary. It should be noted that minor modifications in how practices were done that led to variations among monasteries of the same school were long accepted in Tibet.
[543] The three main monastic universities are Sera, Ganden, and Drepung; the two tantric colleges are Gyudmed Tantric Monastery and Gyuto Tantric Monastery.
[544] B121A15. Interviewed by Author, November 2022.
[545] C211M20. Interviewed by Author, December 2022.
[546] B221C01. Interviewed by Author, October 2022.
[547] C111K02. Interviewed by Author, October 2022.

tradition "the most unbelievably complete and sophisticated system of mental development to total omniscience" and "beyond precious" such that "losing it would be an unspeakable tragedy."[548] Another stated that to deviate from tradition was dangerous, adding, "the lineage has been tried and proven over a very long period, and there are many great realized beings who are the result of that. Of that tradition." He went on to say that, because FPMT transmits Buddhism's traditional teachings, people can trust its teachings and practices.[549] Most interviewees spoke of preserving tradition as FPMT's most important task: developing secularized teachings for non-Buddhists was useful, but the real job of FPMT was preserving and transmitting the Geluk lineage because that was what taught people "how to become Buddhas."[550]

How did "tradition" become FPMT's identity? Interviewees who recalled the naming of FPMT, and Hulse's history *Big Love*, make clear that Lama Yeshe, who named FPMT (originally in English) gave careful attention to each word in its name. He chose "tradition."[551] He indicated that the name meant that the organization aimed to preserve longstanding Mahayana teachings from Tibet. This was at a time when Tibet's Buddhism, under threat within Tibet, was not yet established outside of it. FPMT's CEO explained:

> In the very early times of FPMT… Lama Yeshe came up with this name, the Foundation for the Preservation of the Mahayana Tradition. It was Lama Yeshe and Lama Zopa Rinpoche's background … they were trained in a tradition … that has a lineage going back to the time of the Buddha, 2500 years approximately… through the Nalanda tradition, etc. So those two lamas, who they were, was that living tradition. That is something that they had studied, in a sense became, found very, very beneficial, and wanted to communicate to others so that others could benefit…. Lama Yeshe and Rinpoche trained in that tradition, in that living tradition, spiritual tradition. [Preserving it is] exactly the task, the mission, that Lama Yeshe has given us to do. If we find this beneficial, for our minds, for ourselves, then this lineage, this tradition, this living tradition, is something that we can also become part of.[552]

According to one FPMT translator, the Tibetan terms that are translated, in FPMT, as "tradition" are ལུགས་སྲོལ་ (lugs gsol) and སྲོལ་རྒྱུན་ (srol rgyun).[553] The two words refer to continuity over time; in Dharma contexts, to customs, teachings, texts, narratives, and practices handed down over generations.[554] These Tibetan terms likely shaped how the lamas understood the English word "tradition." The terms support the idea that they viewed "tradition" and "lineage" as equivalent. The name "FPMT" signaled to them that the organization was not constructing a new or modernized form of Buddhism but preserving an old one.

"Traditional," "traditionalist," and "traditionalism," research showed, are terms little used in FPMT. The most common way interviewees framed their lineage was as "Geluk," not as "traditional." Thus, whereas "tradition" is an emic term meaning "lineage," "traditionalism" and "traditionalist" are mainly etic terms. Nevertheless, interviewees understood them and, when asked, defined them. FPMT's CEO said, for example, "'Traditional' is that we are inheriting a

[548] A121P03. Interviewed by Author, November 2022
[549] A121U13. Interviewed by Author, November 2022.
[550] A121P03. Interviewed by Author, November 2022
[551] Hulse, *Big Love*, 471-472; A121P03, A121N05 Interviewed by Author, November 2022.
[552] Ven. Roger Kunsang. Interviewed by Author, April 3, 2023.
[553] These terms do not appear in the Tibetan translation of FPMT's name even though "tradition" appears in the original version, which was in English. The Tibetan translation of FPMT is ཐེག་ཆེན་འཛིན་སྐྱོང་ཚོགས་སྡེ (theg chen 'dzin skyong tshogs sde), which can be translated literally as "Organization for holding and protecting the Mahayana."
[554] C11K02. Personal message, February 2024.

tradition."[555] Others made similar comments. One Canadian interviewee said, "traditional means following the tradition … the teachings have the purity and integrity of the original teachings of the source, the lineage goes back to the source… an other-worldly inspired source."[556] Another said "traditional" meant that FPMT is "not making it up."[557] Interviewees all affirmed that they thought FPMT's Buddhism was traditional. No differences appeared in their concepts of "tradition," "traditional," or the relationship of FPMT's Buddhism to tradition based on their ethnicity, heritage, citizenship, age, ordination status, or other factors: this was an area of widespread agreement. The one disagreement that arose is discussed below.

For all interviewees, "traditionalism" within FPMT did not mean replicating every aspect of premodern Tibetan social, cultural, or religious belief and conduct. Hence, interviewees did not perceive any contradiction between practicing a traditional form of Buddhism and living contemporary lifestyles, nor did they feel that practicing FPMT's form of Buddhism in modern ways (such as in Dharma centres with lay majorities and gender equality) meant that their Buddhism was untraditional. From a scholarly standpoint, this means they do not support the correspondence assumption or lifestyle corollary—these two notions made no sense to them. One, for example, described his idea of traditional Buddhism in an email:

> When I assess whether … an aspect of Buddhism is 'traditional,' what concerns me most is the authenticity of the message, not the form (in terms of language, cultural, and other parameters) in which it is conveyed… whether the core principles of Buddhism (Dharma) are being taught … by the upholders of the lineage. Everything else is secondary—such as the language (Pali, Tibetan, English, Vietnamese etc.), cultural practices (art, music, etc.), manner of instruction (retreat in the mountains, home, online zoom classes, etc.). These [are] secondary aspects… Dharma is the essence. Which is the reason why, I believe, FPMT is one of the best examples of a Buddhist organization, which embodies all of the above and also evolves according to the needs of its students, supporters, teachers, donors, and all the stakeholders.[558]

A similar comment came from an FPMT centre director:

> The main thing for me, when I say preserving the tradition, preserving the lineage, preserving the authenticity and the purity of the lineage … we have to separate what is cultural … the cultural part might not be needed. But then what is related to the essence of the teachings, and we cannot do without … we have to do our best to preserve… tradition is so important and Lama Yeshe … was really clear that this was so important when he insisted on FPMT taking this name: the preservation of the Mahayana tradition.[559]

Interviewees thus indicated that FPMT's Buddhism retained essential features from the past but did not feel that every premodern feature was essential. Essential for what? Teachings and practices that were "reliable," "trustworthy," and "effective." Tradition and lineage were not ends in themselves. Interviewees valued them because they believed they embodied teachings and practices that helped people purify and develop their minds, create positive karma, gain good

[555] Ven. Roger Kunsang. Interviewed by Author, April 3, 2023.
[556] B221D16. Interviewed by Author, November 2022.
[557] G224C84. Interviewed by Author, March 2023.
[558] B121A15. Interviewed by Author, December 2022.
[559] A121F22. Interviewed by Author, December 2022.

rebirths, and attain enlightenment. Tradition had to be preserved so people in the future could do the same.

That tradition was understood to have a particular aim meant that anything that did not support, or was not needed for, tradition's effectiveness in accomplishing that aim could be abandoned or altered. For example, interviewee after interviewee, from all backgrounds, deemed gender inequality only "cultural." A senior Himalayan monk, for example, stated that Buddhist women had had access to education and full ordination in the Buddha's time but were subsequently "neglected because of culture." Gender inequality could therefore be discarded; it was not lineage.[560] One centre director stated that all negative features people associated with tradition were only cultural. Therefore, none had to be accepted. The example he offered was old ways of governing organizations; these could be replaced with modern ways.[561]

Notably, "tradition" and "lineage" were understood to refer to what insider authorities consider the lineage—an amalgam of realizations, teachings, practices, mental states, narratives, concepts, rituals, texts, empowerments, transmissions, past authorities' words and interpretations, precepts, forms of conduct, images, objects, and so on, that together constitute Gelukpas' perceptions of their lineage. No attempt was made in interviews to establish a list of these elements. Instead, interviews explored surrounding features that interviewees perceived as essential to preserving and sustaining the lineage and its practice. Individuals offered different suggestions. These suggestions were not contradictory; rather, various ones came to people's minds during interviews. The features are compiled below.

The features interviewees highlighted as essential generally play one or both of two roles. They can be features deemed vital to preserving tradition, such as guru/ disciple relationships and monasticism, or they can be concepts or practices found within the tradition like Buddhism's cosmology or moral rules. Because these features were cited as foundational to lineage, preserving the lineage and retaining the features come to much the same thing, although the lineage also contains teachings and practices not listed here, per the above. Some of these features were mentioned more than others—monasticism was frequently mentioned as key to preserving tradition, for example. All were suggested by more than one person; there was substantial overlap in suggestions, so the list can be considered to meaningfully represent those features interviewees as a group found critical to traditionalism.

a) Buddhism's cosmology, as represented by the wheel of life, and including belief that:
    i. Rebirth occurs and beings have past and future lives propelled by karma;
    ii. The mind and karma play important roles in suffering;
    iii. The most lasting way to improve society is to help people improve their minds;
    iv. Non-material entities, objects (such as holy objects), and Buddhist practices can impact living beings' minds and karma as well as society as whole;
    v. Buddhism has a soteriological goal: virtue, happiness, good future rebirths, liberation, and enlightenment;
b) Hierarchical guru/disciple relationships, featuring respect and devotion for the lamas, the Dalai Lama, and past lineage holders, which includes respecting their authority to decide how Buddhism is to be understood and practiced, such that:
    i. Individuals are discouraged from designing their own understandings or practices of Buddhism;
    ii. Authorities within the tradition, and their words, are treated with respect;
c) Monasticism, which includes:

[560] A213P62. Interviewed by Author, March 2023.
[561] A121F22. Interviewed by Author, December 2022.

i. Ordination according to monastic law codes and tradition;
ii. Respect for monastic law codes and monasteries' rules;
iii. Monastic institutions with a recognizably monastic way of life supported by lay people;

d) Moral precepts (monastic law codes, and, for lay people, precepts[562]) that are based on moral realism and are thought to help people suit their conduct to the realities of Buddhism's cosmology, reduce these realities' potential to produce suffering, lay the foundation for the success of other Dharma practices, and be soteriological; and
e) The retention of connections to sources of teachings and practices.[563]

Although most interviewees connected these features to traditional Buddhism, several indicated that they were integral to Buddhism itself: "the Buddha's teachings have to be according to tradition or they wouldn't be Buddhism," said one.[564] A practice or spirituality lacking the features listed above—particularly Buddhism's cosmology—was not, in the view of a handful of interviewees, Buddhist, even if labeled "Buddhism." These interviewees did not call FPMT's Buddhism "traditional"; they simply called it "Buddhism," and they did not believe that modernized Buddhisms lacking these features were true Buddhism. As one interviewee put it, "Things don't end at death… that's what makes it Buddhist. If we don't think of that, it's not even Buddhism. It's being kind but it's not Buddhist." She added that calling something Buddhism while removing Buddhism's cosmology is "colonial arrogance" and "colonial materialism that spreads over everything" and is "death to Dharma."[565] Another said, "Belief in karma and rebirth… makes you Buddhist. 'Buddhism without beliefs' is not Buddhism. I would distinguish Buddhism from a practice that is informed by Buddhism… the label [Buddhism] has to have a valid basis."[566] This was an area of disagreement, in that some interviewees held such views but not all. Many felt that modernized Buddhisms were also Buddhism.

What is not tradition? Again and again, interviewees indicated that tradition's opposite was dilution, not adaptation to new circumstances. Dilution they called "a threat." Nevertheless, no interviewee felt FPMT's Buddhism was diluted. One nun who had studied for decades with FPMT, for example, said, "FPMT… is doing a great job in spreading pure Buddhism."[567] Another longtime practitioner simply said, "FPMT preserves tradition well."[568]

Interviewees described dilution in numerous ways: watering down teachings to make them palatable to modern audiences; "compromising the Dharma to meet the needs of Westerners"; spreading "pop Dharma"; removing cosmological elements like rebirth, lower realms of existence, or a path to enlightenment that takes many lives; focusing on one practice like mindfulness as if it alone could secure happiness; mixing the lineage with other religions, modern Western ideas, or New Age thinking; mixing personal beliefs into teachings; monetizing Buddhism through charging a lot for teachings or retreats; giving empowerments to students whom it was traditional to consider unqualified or allowing students to attend tantric teachings without the appropriate empowerment; or, most broadly, changing or abandoning lineage

[562] Lay precepts include the five lay precepts and the eight Mahayana precepts. See Glossary.
[563] "Sources," in this context, refers to lineage holders and other qualified members of the Geluk tradition who provide empowerments, oral transmissions, and teachings, as well as monasteries which hold and teach Geluk teachings and practices. It also refers to ways past lineage holders with whom people practicing in FPMT contexts maintain connections through devotion, prayers, images, and so on.
[564] G225J29. Interviewed by Author, December 2022.
[565] C211M20. Interviewed by Author, December 2022.
[566] B121D19. Interviewed by Author, December 2022. The phrase "Buddhism without Beliefs" refers to a book of the same name by Stephen Batchelor and to the form of Buddhism the book describes.
[567] G225J29. Interviewed by Author, December 2022.
[568] B124R69. Interviewed by Author, March 2023.

teachings, practices, rituals, precepts, images, and so on in ways unauthorized by lineage authorities. Social engagement was cited by one interviewee as a potential dilution if it took time or resources from preserving tradition or drew attention away from traditional understandings of suffering and ways to end it. It was not dilution, he added, if it supported tradition by incorporating Buddhist elements that gave aid recipients karmic benefits.[569]

Modern Buddhism, when interviewees alluded to it, was considered dilution, and FPMT's Buddhism was contrasted with it. For example, one interviewee said when discussing dilution, "the teachers and practitioners of the FPMT do follow faithfully the teachings of the Buddha… They do not make up new ideas and call them Buddhism, as some other groups do."[570] Another interviewee said, "FPMT… is upholding metaphysical teachings (reincarnation, karma, etc.)… I think ultra-modern Buddhist organizations abandon … metaphysical concepts entirely or alter them beyond recognition, which makes other Buddhist teachings illogical."[571]

It is worth underlining that most of what people in FPMT referred to as "dilution" falls into the category of what Buddhist modernizers and scholars call "modernization." This is made explicit in the above quotes, which present modern Buddhism and dilution as overlapping although not necessarily co-extensive.

Those who mentioned dilution felt it was vital to avoid it in order to preserve tradition. They considered this FPMT's most important role.[572] Why? One interviewee wrote in an email:

> If we're able to maintain tradition then in 1000 years from now we'll be able to look at our lineage of LTK [Lama Tsongkhapa] as taught to us by Lama Yeshe and Kyabje Lama Zopa Rinpoche and know that it is clean clear, that the essence of Buddhadharma and the pure teachings of LTK have been preserved. That's why we're quite strict on only allowing FPMT approved teachers to teach in our centers. We are sure of what they've been taught and their traditions so that the teachings don't get diluted or contaminated.[573]

Interviewees indicated that dilution could arise from various sources, but the main one was relying on insufficiently trained or unapproved teachers. The occasional interviewee referred to another source: "degenerate times" or "the Kali Yuga," in which Dharma is said to be under constant threat of pollution. The risk of dilution was described as greater after Rinpoche passed; interviewees viewed him as FPMT's guardian of tradition, adapting to modern culture while ensuring "traditional teaching is safe."[574] That many people interviewed before his passing expressed concern about what would happen after it suggests that one task of FPMT now is to allay these anxieties.

None of the interviewees who used the term "dilution" applied the concept to individuals. In FPMT, individuals can choose their own practices. Nor did they apply the concept to FPMT's secularized forms of teaching, such as universal education; these they understood to not represent or affect the lineage. Interviewees applied the concept of dilution to FPMT activities only when these involved what one interviewee called "actual Dharma." Yet dilution seemed to have blurred boundaries. Even FPMT teachers were not always clear if expressing a Dharma teaching in psychological terms or teaching a Western concept like forgiveness whose relationship with lineage teachings is ill-defined, counted as dilution. If it did, they considered minor dilutions acceptable in teachings or discussions aimed at early-stage Dharma students. Nevertheless, they

[569] A121P03. Interviewed by Author, November 2022.
[570] G225J29. Interviewed by Author, December 2022.
[571] B121M30. Interviewed by Author, December 2022.
[572] e.g., A121U13. Interviewed by Author, November 2022.
[573] C225D32. Email, January 2023.
[574] A121P03. Interviewed by Author, November 2022

felt that teaching in FPMT avoided dilution in situations where the lineage was clearly in play; "actual Dharma"; formal Dharma education and teacher training programs; teachings in monasteries and nunneries; interpretation and translation; rituals that FPMT standardizes; and publications.

In sum, "tradition" and "traditionalism" in FPMT do not refer to replication of the past but to the preservation, practice, and transmission of FPMT's Geluk lineage, keeping essential features, letting inessential ones change to suit evolving circumstances, and avoiding dilution, all with the aim of passing on the lineage in ways that maintain its effectiveness as a path to enlightenment.

Adaptation to new times and places was taken for granted. Interviewees' view, oft repeated, was that "the presentation of the Dharma can change if the core remains."[575] This is a core-periphery model. Occasionally interviewees used those terms. For example, one American Dharma teacher said:

> [Tradition] is carrying on some of what has gone before, but it's integrating it and communicating it in a way that the people that are engaged with it are able to make sense of it. That's really important. You can come back to this idea of core periphery… For example, we teach in English, that's maybe a peripheral change. But you're still trying to transmit the same thing. …I'm sure the tradition has a very clear idea of what realizations they are … providing the opportunity to effect in people's minds, and if this can be accomplished in a female body, or through the English language, or through a practice … that hadn't really worked before then that's OK… One purpose of tradition or lineage is to pass down what works. …The external form matters less than the result.[576]

One interviewee offered the similar idea of "inner and outer": the lamas and FPMT are modern in outer presentation, but their Buddhism, the inside, is traditional. People see modern things—computer screens and so on—but these do not affect the lineage conveyed.[577]

Core-periphery or inner-outer concepts do not mean that every Tibetan cultural element has been cut from FPMT's Buddhism. Interviewees noted that some remain, such as the custom of offering white scarves, Himalayan décor in temples, and, in some affiliates, the performance of rituals rooted in Himalayan popular religion or found on the peripheries of the lineage. And some elements whose place in the core of the lineage might be debated, but that are part of Himalayan culture, like protector-deity images and practices, have not disappeared. Their visibility varies though. In Western centres, they are less visible and perhaps less relied on. FPMT treats these kinds of elements as optional. They persist where leaders, teachers, or others value them or where they express widely held beliefs and attitudes. White scarves, for example, express respect throughout FPMT.[578]

Were people associated with FPMT attracted by its tradition or traditionalism? Some interviewees cited lineage as a reason they connected to an FPMT centre, study group, or monastery. Like the interviewee quoted above, they linked FPMT's lineage or tradition with ideas like legitimacy, authenticity, purity, safety from false teachings, and effectiveness. Nevertheless, for many followers, the main attraction of FPMT has been the lamas or specific local teachers, not FPMT's lineage. Next in importance were cited good teachings (particularly the Geluk approach to Buddhism's philosophical teachings), high-quality education programs,

[575] A121P03. Interviewed by Author, November 2022. The sentiment was expressed by many other interviewees.
[576] B121D19. Interviewed by Author, December 2022.
[577] F113T61. Interviewed by Author, March 2023.
[578] The point was raised by C121J24. Interviewed by Author, January 2023. It was also commented on by A213P62. Interviewed by Author, March 2023.

friendly and supportive Dharma communities, practice opportunities, opportunities to volunteer and help others, and enjoyable events. Monastic institutions may have to transmit a respected lineage to attract monastics (although other factors matter as well), but lay-oriented Dharma centres, West and East, seem to thrive in large part because of other factors. Hence, only a few interviewees mentioned FPMT's "tradition" or "traditional Buddhism" as the main attraction.

Definitional complexities occasionally arose. A few interviewees used the terms "tradition" and "traditional" to refer to phenomena perceived as old. In this case, their valuations of tradition were not all positive. One feature called "traditional" that some female interviewees, and one male, attributed to FPMT was gender inequality. Those interviewees who raised gender inequality did not feel it was essential to FPMT's lineage but depicted it as resulting from culture in Asia and the West, and as persisting today because "tradition… has a natural inertia" and FPMT "is dominated by men." They felt women's contributions to FPMT were under-recognized, women received too little support, and women were poorly represented in in decision-making.[579] That gender inequality was mentioned by several female interviewees but only one male suggests a lack of accord on gender lines about the issue.

Occasionally Western interviewees mentioned another aspect of FPMT they called "traditional" because they perceived it to be old: some of the management methods of FPMT's international office. The most common example was divination. Divination by Rinpoche and occasionally other high lamas was said to have played a role in decision-making in FPMT for decades, not just on spiritual matters but also on financial, organizational, staffing, and managerial ones. Although all interviewees had faith in Rinpoche, who did most divinations, and were comfortable with divination governing some matters, a few Western interviewees mentioned they would prefer certain decisions to be made using professional, democratic, and/or transparent approaches. Some interviewees were more supportive than others of FPMT's "traditional" forms of decision-making.

Understandings of Modernization in FPMT

Transnational Buddhist organizations like FPMT did not exist prior to modernity, although, as discussed in Chapter 3, in premodern Tibet, lamas sometimes oversaw networks of monasteries. Nevertheless, a modern-origin organization that standardizes teachings and practices internationally, creates and operates formal education programs, centrally approves teachers, and maintains an international network of affiliates connected by legal agreements, global communications, shared teachers, flows of funds, and so on, is probably best considered untraditional or modern. Interviewees often made a distinction between FPMT and its Buddhism, stressing that its Buddhism is traditional, but FPMT is not. On this topic they used the word "traditional" in slightly different ways. When applied to Buddhism, it referred to inheriting and practicing a longstanding lineage. When applied to FPMT, it meant being the same, in some fashion, as FPMT's predecessor organizations—pre-1959 Geluk monasteries. Because FPMT differed from these, interviewees called it "untraditional" or "modern."

FPMT's contemporary aspects were frequently described as helping to sustain tradition. One interviewee with a senior role in FPMT, for example, stated, "If tradition is lineage… we can be modern in lots of ways but still sustain a tradition. In Religious Studies, people often don't think that way. They think that if you change anything, it's not traditional. But we see with FPMT that a tradition can be sustained by changing a lot of things around the tradition."[580]

[579] A221R26. Interviewed by Author, January 2023. Others also raised these points.
[580] A221P88. Interviewed by Author, April 2023.

Another interviewee stated that FPMT's Buddhism has not changed from premodern times. He added:

> What has to change according to the times is the methods… used to transmit the teachings. Obviously people of this century have a different lifestyle from those of 2000 years ago, the cultural background can be different among the different countries… and the teachings have to be presented in ways that people can comprehend them. So methods could be modern… but the essence of the teachings will always be traditional in the sense of being truthful to the Buddha's words.[581]

Because they perceived modernization to support tradition, interviewees did not oppose it. No interviewee indicated that modernization in general was negative. One interviewee involved in FPMT since the 1970s stated that he had never heard of any resistance to "modern tools, modern methods, modern ways of doing things … the Dharma is made to spread and these help."[582] Himalayan interviewees also expressed no nostalgia for the past. Interviewees of all ethnicities, ages, and backgrounds believed that modernization was positive and often more modernization was desirable. Some interviewees stated that outer aspects of Buddhism have always changed—while an essential core was retained—in new places and times: there is nothing new about adapting to new circumstances. "Buddhism is always changed according to the culture but without losing anything… that's what FPMT is attempting to do, to take the essence of the Buddhist teachings and not lose anything," said one woman involved in running a centre.[583] Another individual long involved in FPMT likened FPMT's changes in how Buddhism was presented to changes made centuries earlier by FPMT's lineal ancestors: "Atisha modernized Buddhism with *The Lamp on the Path* and Lama Tsongkhapa modernized Buddhism with the *Lam Rim*… They repackaged Buddhism for the time… that's modernizing." In this way, he appeared to legitimize modernization of styles of presentation on the basis of precedent.[584]

One interviewee referred to a quote from Lama Yeshe which seemed to be well-known in FPMT. Lama Yeshe stated the following in his last talk to FPMT centre directors:

> Now, the way to bring Dharma to the Western world is to bring the nuclear, the essential aspect of Dharma. Of course, you cannot separate the essence from the Eastern cultural trappings immediately: "This is culture; that isn't." However, what you should do is take the practical points of Dharma and shape them according to your own culture. In my opinion, you should be making a new kind of Dharma dependent on each different place and its social customs. Since we are Mahayanists, we have a broad view and don't mind if Dharma takes different shapes.[585]

FPMT's CEO expressed a similar view when interviewed, saying, "Buddhism is able to adapt to different cultures and ways of people's living. … For the past 1000 years, it has become the Tibetan tradition according to how they adopted it from the Nalanda tradition. And as it is coming to what we call 'the West' it will adapt also. Similarly adapt in different ways." [586]

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[581] G225J29. Interviewed by Author, December 2022.
[582] A121N05. Interviewed by Author, November 2022.
[583] C11M20. Interviewed by Author, December 2022.
[584] A121P03. Interviewed by Author, November 2022.
[585] "Lama Yeshe's Address to the FPMT Family." Lamayeshe.com, https://www.lamayeshe.com/article/lama-yeshes-address-fpmt-family. Accessed June 13, 2024.
[586] Ven. Roger Kunsang. Interviewed by Author, April 3, 2023.

Hence, interviewees as a group felt that change itself was not untraditional, and a lineage could be preserved while changes in non-essentials took place.

Given this background, what kinds of adaptations and modernizations did interviewees describe? "Modern" in their usage referred to adapting to or incorporating aspects of today's world. Modernizations they identified mainly concerned operating methods and Dharma teaching styles. They included: having Dharma centres aimed mainly at lay practitioners; having many lay teachers and female teachers; relying on Western teaching methods and Western-style Dharma education programs; translating and presenting teachings, texts, and liturgies in modern languages; having up-to-date operating practices; having teachers tour internationally; and using technology, social media, and the internet for operations, communications, Dharma education, practices/ rituals, online discussion groups, and so on, including offering people digital texts, videos, podcasts, and livestreams.

FPMT's CEO felt that the greatest modernization FPMT had experienced was technological, stating "the internet, computers, iPads, we almost can't do without them now. Technology is such a big support or help."[587] Technology was widely mentioned in discussions of modernization: it was understood as a tool to preserve and transmit tradition, positive because it made teachings more easily available than in the premodern past or even in FPMT's early years, when books and translations were scarce.[588] One interviewee pointed to the benefits of online Dharma: "I now am able to sit in the front row every time His Holiness teaches. I'm right next to Richard Gere!"[589] Another interviewee, who had spent time around Rinpoche during the Covid-19 pandemic, noted that Rinpoche happily used Skype, Zoom, and iPads during that time.[590] One Dharma teacher, discussing the benefits of technology, mentioned that she had 20,000 followers on TikTok, where she placed "sound bites" for children and young people on Buddhist topics.[591]

Although no interviewees mentioned disadvantages from FPMT's use of technology for operations, a few perceived online teaching had disadvantages. The main one mentioned was sustaining in-person communities. Concerns were raised that some centres could lose members given the availability of online teachings from popular non-local teachers, although no one reported centres closing for this reason. One interviewee raised a different concern. She felt that online teaching could eventually damage the tradition:

> There is a very strong tradition of Dharma etiquette within FPMT i.e., standing when the teacher enters, prostrations, etc. I think that this etiquette adds strength to the respect for the teacher and the lineage. Also when I know that students have been doing this same stuff for centuries it also helps tie me to the lineage. But I have been attending a lot of online classes, courses and retreats since Covid made that possible and I am noticing a distinct lack of Dharma etiquette … Things like inappropriate clothing, slouching on the couch while listening, eating, getting up and going to the fridge while the teacher is talking…. It seems to me that we are creating a slippery slope to being far too casual with the teachers and by extension, the teachings… Will tradition suffer?[592]

[587] Ven. Roger Kunsang. Interviewed by Author, April 3, 2023.
[588] Some Dharma teaching in FPMT was already online before the Covid-19 pandemic, more moved online during the pandemic, and online and hybrid online/ in-person teachings and other activities were spoken of by interviewees as certain to remain part of FPMT.
[589] A121P03. Interviewed by Author, November 2022.
[590] A211J04. Interviewed by Author, November 2022.
[591] A211L09. Interviewed by Author, November 2022.
[592] B221C01. Interviewed by Author, October 2022.

The comment shows the value many people in FPMT place on tradition and a concern that contemporary ways of disseminating it could affect its reception and practice. The application of technology to teaching, though widely accepted, also evidently sometimes generates anxieties.

An important element of FPMT that interviewees identified as modern was Dharma education. Two aspects were cited as modern. The first was its availability to lay people.

> Part of modernization to me is lay people being able to get a fairly in-depth education, you know, from the Master's program to *Discovering Buddhism* to touring teachers, all of this stuff was much more limited for lay people historically. … People… have a real opportunity to study both at a really beginning level and a pretty advanced level. I don't think if you went to Tibet 75 years ago, that would have been an opportunity for, say, the equivalent of a mechanic in their culture. You might have been able to get one text and just pore over that, if you could even read. You'd probably only be able to read if you'd been a child in a monastery. So girls, no… Now there's opportunity for women too.[593]

The second element was style. FPMT's programs aimed mainly at lay people have a Western approach, with courses at different levels, curricula, texts, and exams. One interviewee involved in developing FPMT's educational programming referred to the courses as, "traditional teachings adapted to the modern world."[594] FPMT has shifted much Dharma teaching from lamas or geshes discoursing from high seats in temples to formal courses, online teaching, videos, question and answer sessions, discussion groups, quizzes, and even, as one person put it, "power points, jokes, parties, art, all of those things."[595] The reported opinion of Rinpoche and FPMT's geshes of these methods was positive: they were happy using "modern tools to make the tradition accessible."[596]

Many interviewees stressed that what FPMT has adapted is presentation, not contents, of educational programs. Contents were called "traditional," in part because they were drawn from monastic training, as one monk studying in a Geluk monastery emphasized:

> The teaching curriculum of the FPMT is designed to be incredibly traditional and is largely based on what you study at a Geluk monastery… FPMT has worked hard to create a curriculum and to have registered teachers teaching the curriculum so that you could go to any FPMT centre in the world and have confidence that what they are teaching is an authentic understanding of the Dharma. [FPMT's education programs] are very, very traditional… the materials they use to teach … both the root texts and then the traditional Indian commentaries. And then teachings are from contemporary geshes mostly on those commentaries … the curriculum is incredibly traditional, like literally to the point of following the same structure as a monastery… But I think the teaching style is quite modern… The whole approach to Dharma is somewhat modern, teaching is more accessible, and study is more active [for lay people] than in the past. So the way we teach it in the West is already contemporary. Then the idea of doing meditation retreats and group retreats, and things like this, is also a wildly modern idea, all carefully organized by the staff at [a centre]… But some other Buddhist centres [not in FPMT] they change not just the style of teaching but actually the Dharma. That's different. … There's a way you can teach something that's a traditional understanding of the Dharma but taught in a way that meets the needs of students, right? … We need to teach the authentic teachings

[593] B121D19. Interviewed by Author, December 2022.
[594] A211J04. Interviewed by Author, November 2022.
[595] C11M20. Interviewed by Author, December 2022.
[596] A211J04. Interviewed by Author, November 2022.

> in a way that is understood by the students in front of us. There's nothing untraditional about changing your style.[597]

The comment underlines that interviewees understood the contents of FPMT's programs to be traditional because of their significant overlap in content with its lineage's monastic education. Nevertheless, delivery styles were considered modern. The monk differentiated this approach from modernist Buddhists' teachings which, in his opinion, were modern in content as well as style.[598]

Not all Dharma teaching in FPMT is Western or modern in style, however. Some teaching, especially from geshes, is traditional in style as well as content. The styles of teachers working in lay-oriented centres vary given their differing backgrounds and centres' varied cultures.[599] That Lama Yeshe had a different style from Rinpoche, and that geshes teach in yet another style, has led FPMT to accept wide variations in style. One interviewee described geshes' teachings as "beautifully organized, everything references everything else… predictable, consistent," in contrast to Rinpoche's teachings, which she called "jazz improvisation" and Lama Yeshe's which she described as "so loving and so funny, and it's soften you all up, and then boom, he'd come in with the hard hitting things that just stop you in your tracks for years": a statement describing her experience of variations even among Himalayan teachers.

Teachers in the Western centres also revealed various approaches. One American, for example, mentioned supplementing FPMT's traditional teachings with "metta" and other teachings borrowed from modern Theravada teachers. This might count as "dilution" but he framed it as "practical." One interviewee who had spent considerable time in FPMT's US centres described particular Western FPMT teachers who shared teachings from traditional texts quite precisely, then explained them in Western ways, then opened the floor to discussing their meaning and application in students' lives. The interviewee believed this process was common among FPMT's Western teachers. And when a lama, geshe, or other traditional teacher gave a teaching, he indicated, "there's almost always a secondary process afterwards, where either a senior Western student then gives some commentary to help people understand … or conversations of people trying to process what they've heard as a community. This is kind of woven into the fabric just because FPMT exists in this space and time … this modern context." He felt the approach was suited to transmitting traditional teachings in ways that encouraged their integration by Westerners.[600] Other interviewees sometimes reflected on the modern styles of teachers, including Himalayan teachers. One approach counted as modern was giving contemporary examples and "explaining why."[601] A Himalayan geshe, teaching in a Western centre, was perhaps representative. He reflected on the difference between how he taught at the centre and how he had experienced teaching in his monastery. He said that, at his centre, he taught the same material he had learned in the monastery—Buddhism's "unmistaken view and conduct." However, in his centre, he "[presented] the essence of the Dharma and the broader meaning behind the teachings … [using] non-traditional words and examples to convey the meaning." He noted that, "this is different from the monastery where … teachings are often in the form of word-by-word commentaries."

Variation also arose in Asia, even in lay-oriented centres. One teacher, teaching in an Asian lay environment, explained that he usually worked slowly through basic Geluk teachings,

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[597] F111G06. Interviewed by Author, November 2022.
[598] He also gave examples of modernist teachers (not associated with FPMT) who taught in the West and whom he perceived had modernized Dharma teachings.
[599] F111G06. Interviewed by Author, November 2022.
[600] B121J14. Interviewed by Author, November 2022.
[601] B121A15. Interviewed by Author, November 2022.

a teaching style usually considered traditional, but taught "essence" not philosophy and encouraged questions and discussion—approaches usually considered modern.[602] In lay-oriented centres in India and Nepal, where Western monastics as well as Indian, Nepali, and Western lay teachers teach, approaches were said to vary, but were often like centres in the West. In Mongolia, said an interviewee who had spent time there, Buddhist teachings for lay people were presented Western-style; for monastics, they followed the Geluk monastic style.[603]

All centre teachers interviewed stressed that much of their teaching comprised practical advice, such as ways of using life's challenges to develop the mind. All also indicated that neither FPMT nor traditional ways of teaching dictated how they taught. Their styles developed in negotiation with their students—and this negotiation can itself be viewed as untraditional. It has resulted in adapting teaching styles to today's people and circumstances, an adaptation centre teachers perceived as necessary to attract students, keep them interested, and enable them to integrate teachings into their minds and lives.[604]

Another area of modernization cited was FPMT's finances. The donations that support FPMT's activities often stem from longstanding Buddhist beliefs in gurus, generosity, merit, and the role of monastics, so donating itself cannot be called "modern." Nevertheless, FPMT relies on modern means to attract and use donations, including a global network of supporters, up-to-date methods to move funds internationally, the charitable status that the international office and many affiliates have which gives tax benefits to donors, and today's financial, fundraising, and accounting practices. Up-to-date methods allow a global network to function and fund operations, Buddhist teaching and practice, monastic institutions, and social engagement.

Many interviewees were proud of the means, such as Kopan's thriving nunnery, through which women in FPMT receive more education, opportunity, influence, and roles in leadership than they had in earlier times. Young nuns share the same curriculum of both secular and monastic education as Kopan's boys; mature nuns can pursue monastic education to its highest levels. Interviewees counted this as modernization because it is a change from pre-1959 Tibet. One interviewee mentioned FPMT's large number of qualified female Dharma teachers, underlining that one of FPMT's significant modernizations was the steps it had taken toward gender equality.[605] Another stressed that "FPMT is full of modern, powerful women… many centres are led by women."[606]

Openness about lifestyle was mentioned by several interviewees as modern. One senior Himalayan monk explained from the Himalayan perspective FPMT's openness about lifestyle. The lamas, he said, felt that their Western followers could keep their own culture: "not everybody has to be acting in the funny Himalayan, Tibetan way." He added that the lamas were "very open-minded, OK with people as long as they are not harmful to themselves and not harmful to others."[607] The lamas' openness, some interviewees noted, made FPMT welcoming to LGBTQ+ practitioners and others whose ways of life are not mainstream. Interviewees reported that not all Buddhist organizations were equally open to LGBTQ+ members. Those who mentioned the issue were pleased by this aspect of FPMT.[608] One American interviewee said:

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[602] A213P62. Interviewed by Author, March 2023.
[603] G213S54. Interviewed by Author, February 2023.
[604] A121D11. Interviewed by Author, November 2022. A213P62. Interviewed by Author, March 2023.
[605] A121F22. Interviewed by Author, December 2022.
[606] B221C01. Interviewed by Author, October 2022.
[607] A213P62. Interviewed by Author, March 2023.
[608] One interviewee disagreed that FPMT was welcoming to LGBTQ+ people. She felt FPMT was "homophobic" and displayed "cis-hetero bias." A211L09. Interviewed by Author, November 2022.

> As a gay man, FPMT's explicit policies about non-discrimination are very important to feeling a basic level of safety… FPMT's tendency to de-emphasize and limit the scope of sexual morality teachings… and praise the work of known LGBTQ+ Western Buddhist teachers (e.g., José Cabezón, Jeffrey Hopkins, etc.) is helpful … I think the modern, liberal notion of making inclusive spaces… will be incredibly important to helping preserve the teachings in the long term."[609]

And a female interviewee described FPMT as follows:

> The lamas, being so unique and Lama Zopa Rinpoche being so incredibly eccentric and radical and not pandering to normal everyday expectations, I think that's … so precious… also I think, looking around at other Buddhist organizations that might have a lot more money or be a lot slicker… I actually think it's a real strength that FPMT is quite eccentric … It started off [that way] with all the hippies and it's quite a welcoming organization for people that just aren't straight. … because Rinpoche is so accepting, you don't have to be straight… [by not straight] I mean neurodiverse, LGBT, weird, poor, or uneducated or whatever, all of the above.[610]

Another interviewee said, "There are a fair number of quite high up LGBTQ people in FPMT. Centre directors, spiritual program coordinators, board members, and so on." At least one centre has attended, as a centre, a Pride parade. Thubten Norbu Ling (TNL), an FPMT centre in Sante Fe, New Mexico, USA, had a float in Santa Fe's 2024 parade (See Figure 2). Many members joined in and TNL's main teacher, Geshe Sherab, attended in support.[611]

Figure 2. "Pride." The 2024 pride parade float from FPMT centre Thubten Norbu Ling (TNL), Santa Fe. Photo: Victor Teng. Used with permission.

In India, another way of welcoming all has occurred. An interviewee there noted that FPMT centres are open to people from any background, country, or community, stressing that Rinpoche had made Muslims and others welcome in FPMT spaces.[612]

Individual choice is often considered characteristic of the modern era. Ethnographic research showed that FPMT does not try to limit choice regarding Buddhist teachings and practices, and, for lay people, does not dictate lifestyles. For example, as one interviewee expressed it, "Rinpoche does not insist that his students stay only with him; they can take other lamas, do other practices."[613] FPMT is not unaffected by the societies in which it operates, and these give individuals substantial freedom. Many people associated with FPMT live or practice in ways that do not look traditional. Indeed, mainstream lifestyles today, around the globe, do not reflect how Buddhists, monastic or lay, lived in premodern Asia. Nor did interviewees feel that practicing a traditional Buddhism required living a traditional lifestyle. As one interviewee said after discussing the value he placed on his practice of traditional Buddhism, "It's not possible for me to think of myself as a traditionalist, because I grew up in the United

[609] B121M30. Interviewed by Author, December 2022.
[610] C211M20. Interviewed by Author, December 2022.
[611] C111K02. Personal communication, July 2024.
[612] B211N21. Interviewed by Author, December 2022.
[613] A211J04. Interviewed by Author, November 2022.

States, and I'm not learning Tibetan and I'm not learning debate, I'm not becoming a monk … so I don't think of myself as a traditional person."[614] He distinguished between practicing a traditional Buddhism and being a traditional person. The case of FPMT suggests that the lifestyle corollary, insisting that only traditional people practice traditional Buddhism, is fallacious.

Buddhists today have choices about lifestyles that their Tibetan lay predecessors, especially women, did not have, and about Dharma practice that most monastic predecessors did not have. How people in FPMT choose to learn and practice Dharma and integrate it with their lives varies: they can join Himalayan or Western monasteries or nunneries, be independent monastics, spend time in retreat as either lay people or monastics, or be lay people whose lives and approaches to Buddhism are contemporary or alternative. Amid these choices they can be socially engaged or not; work in jobs or Dharma centres or not; and so on. This choice of lifestyles and Dharma-practicing styles is itself a modern feature of FPMT. Yet one nun pointed out how untraditional this way of being Buddhist is. "Tradition is to obey the top person," she said, "but FPMT's people don't always do this. It can make leading the organization difficult. FPMT is harder to run than the old monastic system."[615]

Research also revealed that even monastic lifestyles in FPMT vary more than they likely did in premodern Tibet. Not all FPMT's monastics live in monasteries or nunneries. Some live independently or in lay-oriented Dharma centres. Some work in jobs outside monasteries. Many live around lay people or have significant contact with them. Lay people sometimes live or stay for periods of time in monasteries or nunneries. These differences from the past are related to modern circumstances.

Although FPMT's lay-oriented centres generally exhibit a Tibetan Buddhist aesthetic to some extent in the form of images, statues, prayer flags, and décor, many combine Tibetan elements with local ones to fit the surrounding culture. A non-Tibetan look may dominate areas most open to the public, for example, as it does in the two English centres observed during research. Interviewees in these centres indicated that it was important to keep spaces used by the public mainly secular in appearance for the comfort of non-Buddhists. At Kopan, by contrast, Himalayan aesthetics dominate. Overall, interviewees stated that they perceived Tibetan aesthetics as traditional, in the senses of being both premodern and connected to FPMT's lineage. They perceived other kinds of décor as modern. Nevertheless, most viewed aesthetics in general as inessential to lineage; they did not deem changing them to affect transmission of the lineage. However, some interviewees felt that altars and *gompas* (shrine rooms) ought to have some lineage-related aesthetic elements to support practice.

FPMT is involved in two areas that interviewees classed as modern, secular, and scientific. The first is universal education, FPMT's secularized approach to teaching ethics, compassion, and wisdom. It is discussed in Chapter 2. The second is "Science and Wisdom." A number of interviewees strongly supported FPMT's efforts to bring together Buddhist teachings and various kinds of science, such as physics, neuroscience, and psychology, efforts that follow those of the Dalai Lama. As of 2024, the main entity in FPMT exploring connections between science and Buddhism is Jamyang London Buddhist Centre under the leadership of Geshe Namdak, a European geshe with a background in science. Jamyang has a "Science and Wisdom Live" initiative which brings Buddhists and scientists into conversation to explore overlaps and discuss how to apply the wisdom of both Buddhism and science to society's challenges.[616]

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[614] B121D19. Interviewed by Author, December 2022.
[615] G213S54. Interviewed by Author, February 2023.
[616] "Science and Wisdom Live." Accessed August 30, 2024. https://sciwizlive.com/; "Science & Wisdom LIVE: Bringing Science and Contemplative Traditions Together." *FPMT Community: Stories & News, FPMT*, December 21, 2020. https://fpmt.org/fpmt-community-news/news-around-the-world/science-wisdom-live-bringing-science-and-contemplative-traditions-together/.

Nevertheless, science initiatives are not widespread in FPMT, often due to resource and skill constraints. Universal education and science initiatives were not described as traditional but were felt to help make the tradition accessible to non-Buddhists—they supplemented tradition. As one interviewee reported, "FPMT has developed many secular … courses and seminars that include an emphasis on science for example … I think tradition is complemented by modern, secular, and scientific approaches. … such a context can … hit home where traditional examples and methods can fail to really affect the mind.[617]

How is modernization viewed at Kopan Monastery? Even at Kopan, which interviewees referred to as "a traditional Geluk monastery" and "straight Geluk,"[618] and which is the affiliate within FPMT most responsible for lineage preservation and most embedded in Himalayan religious culture, modernization is not rejected. Instead, it is controlled. The leaders of Kopan describe certain modernizations in positive ways. Modernizations they accept are those they deem beneficial to the monastery and its mission, enabling it to fit into a changing world while retaining a monastic lifestyle and preserving, transmitting, and practicing the Geluk lineage.

The main area of modernization at Kopan is education for young people. According to interviewees, boys and girls in Kopan's schools are educated using the Nepali government curriculum so they can receive government certificates. The schools teach English as well as Nepali and Tibetan so students will fit into the contemporary world and be employable. They also receive a foundation in Buddhism. Interviewees indicated that few monasteries in Nepal have done more than Kopan to put in place a high standard of modern schooling. Operating good quality schools that attract students enables Kopan to use its schools to help preserve Himalayan culture and Buddhism. That students learn English is also meant to help those who remain monastics to offer Buddhist teachings beyond their own communities. One senior Kopan monk contrasted Kopan's schools with old-style monastic schools, some of which still exist. These do not teach government curricula or secular subjects, only Buddhist subjects and skills.[619]

At Kopan, monastic education for adult monks and nuns follows the longstanding Tibetan Geluk monastic system. Buddhist practices at Kopan are drawn from the Geluk lineage; one interviewee deeply familiar with Nepal noted that Kopan is known among Geluk monasteries there for its practices' faithfulness to tradition.[620]

Nevertheless, interviewees made clear that Kopan adopts what is helpful from modernity, including computers, accounting and banking methods, international fundraising, and so on.[621] Construction of buildings and stupas also relies on up-to-date methods even though aesthetics reflect tradition. Vegetarianism is also viewed at Kopan as a modernization. It was not widespread in Tibet nor is it required by the Geluk lineage, but Rinpoche strongly promoted it. Meals at Kopan are thus vegetarian. Other examples of modernization include giving nuns education and employment opportunities similar to those of monks and offering Dharma courses in English to visitors, most of whom are Western or South Asian. Kopan's social projects are also modern in execution even if their motivation is traditional. Senior monks and other staff interviewed were happy with the modernization of their operations and methods. In this context, "modern" to them meant being at or above today's standards, including Western standards.

Kopan's leaders expressed the view that modernization of non-lineage matters supported lineage preservation as long as it was carefully done. For example, when I visited, students in its

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[617] C225O31. Email December 2022.
[618] e.g., G213S54. Interviewed by Author, February 2023.
[619] F123S55. Interviewed by Author, February 2023.
[620] C213T63. Interviewed by Author, March 2023.
[621] C113S53. Interviewed by Author, February 2023. F123S55. Interviewed by Author, February 2023. A213P62 Interviewed by Author, March 2023. C213T63. Interviewed by Author, March 2023, C213T63. Interviewed by Author, March 2023.

schools did not have access to wifi although teachers did. Resident monks and nuns had only very limited wifi access. Many monastics have smartphones, which are pervasive in Nepal, but they may not bring them to the religious practices that occupy much of their time. In the Himalayan Buddhist world each monastery has its own rules that supplement monastic law codes. These rules can evolve, a custom that helps Kopan's leaders contain modernization and its effects on monastic life.[622]

Interviewees also underlined that modernizations at Kopan are not mixed with "tradition" but kept separate. Even in Kopan's schools, Buddhist teachings were described as following the "pure monastic curriculum" and were kept separate from the government curriculum. The two streams ran "side by side." In a parallel way, courses in Buddhism for visitors, described by one interviewee as "traditional teaching delivered in a modern way," ran independently of the studies of resident monks and nuns.[623] Visitors and residents lived in different areas of the monastic compound and seldom interacted.[624] These methods kept contemporary influences away from traditional practices and ways of life.

On FPMT as a whole, some interviewees felt there were ways the organization could modernize further to better respond to today's circumstances while still preserving tradition. They applied the concept of modernization to desired changes of all kinds. One area was relations between the international office and affiliates. Some wished for more transparent decision-making by the international office on matters that affected affiliates, such as policies or choices of centre directors. Decision-making processes, particularly before the passing of Rinpoche, were associated with questions of tradition and modernization because of the roles played by guru devotion and divination. In 2024, with Rinpoche having passed away, changes to decision-making processes were being discussed across FPMT.[625]

Also referenced when modernization was discussed were other areas where change was sometimes desired: updating teaching methods to suit younger generations; improving teacher training in areas related to methods and styles of teaching; sharing best practices among teachers and affiliates; further professionalizing management, decision-making, and operating methods; increasing transparency when dealing with problems; reducing hierarchies within affiliates and between the international office and affiliates; increasing affiliate autonomy; caring for FPMT's lay teachers and practitioners when in need as well as monastics; reaching out to, welcoming, and empowering particular groups (disabled people; people with marginalized identities; people of colour; poor and working class people; and young people including those of Himalayan ancestry outside Asia); improving internal communications and public relations; increasing investment in science initiatives; increasing social engagement; and ending sexism and gender inequality.

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[622] Berthe Jansen, *The Monastery Rules: Buddhist Monastic Organization in Pre-Modern Tibet* (Oakland: University of California Press, 2018), 14, 18-21.

[623] One American woman interviewed while she attended a course at Kopan agreed. She described how students in the course, a majority of whom were Western and minority South Asian, reacted to it. She said, "the way the course is taught is modern but the teachings are the old ones. They don't change them for modern sensibilities. For example, they told us that abortion is killing, which a lot of the students didn't like to hear. And students who want to change the world don't appreciate being told Buddhism is about changing themselves. Or that anger is negative. They are used to valuing anger as part of fighting injustice. They like anger. They also don't really get rebirth, they just disagree. There is a big gap between what they expected and what Buddhism teaches. They are used to stereotypes about Buddhism and are quite shocked by the reality." G123I64. Interviewed by Author, March 2023.

[624] C213T63. Interviewed by Author, March 2023.

[625] "FPMT Inc. Board of Directors Update June 2024 Update." *Updates from the FPMT Inc. Board, FPMT*. June 28, 2024. https://fpmt.org/updates-from-the-fpmt-inc-board/fpmt-inc-board-of-directors-update-june-2024-update/.

Modernization in FPMT was spoken of as beneficial because it was understood to help preserve the lineage, not to modernize it. As one interviewee stated, "the modern way of doing things is … to support this traditional lineage."[626]

How FPMT Preserves Tradition

Preserving and propagating tradition overlap in FPMT, in that teaching and practice are aspects of preservation. FPMT's CEO, for example, indicated that the most important way FPMT preserves tradition is by disseminating it so that people learn it, practice it, and embody it. He thus emphasized that everyone who practices the lineage helps to preserve it: "the essential way of preserving a tradition is living it."[627] This process can be called "internal" preservation. FPMT also engages in what can be called "external" preservation, in which it supports institutions and activities outside FPMT that preserve its lineage.

When asked how FPMT preserves its lineage, most interviewees discussed internal ways. One was its Dharma teaching and formal educational programming. An interviewee involved in FPMT's education programs wrote in an email:

> FPMT … preserves this [Geluk] tradition largely by facilitating teachings by geshes and its most advanced programs, the in-depth FPMT Education Programs, are text based, using a modified format of the curricula of the Gelugpa monastic education—which is as traditional as it gets. In addition, most centres have a resident geshe … But also for Western teachers who offer introductory and foundational level courses and programs, these courses and programs are directly or indirectly based on presentations of traditional Gelugpa texts. In this way FPMT … preserves tradition; it is facilitating preservation of texts, curricula, and lineages; translations are commissioned … prepared for publication, etc.[628]

One aspect of education related to preserving the tradition that interviewees cited was ensuring Dharma teachers were trained and qualified, whether they were part of FPMT or invited from outside. FPMT keeps a list of approved teachers at various levels of qualification, and affiliates choose teachers from it. One interviewee described how she felt about choosing teachers from a list: "To be part of FPMT, we weren't allowed to go out and invite the tooth fairy or somebody who said they could cure your chakras. It had to be FPMT-approved teachers and every centre was given a list. Some of our group thought that was restrictive, but most of us felt it was protective. It keeps the teachings pure. You invite the tooth fairy and the chakra lady, you're muddying the waters. You can't keep [the teachings] clear and effective if they're not pure."[629] As well as showing the common association interviewees made between lineage, authenticity, and effectiveness, the comment shows a concern many others also expressed: that straying from the lineage was unsafe. The idea of tradition evoked trust; departing from tradition evoked worry.

Many of FPMT's teachers are now trained in FPMT's own formal training programs, although some older teachers were less formally trained. Numerous FPMT monastics are qualified teachers. Many centres have geshes trained at Sera Je or other Geluk monastic universities. FPMT has been assiduous in supporting Kopan as well as Sera Je and Gyudmed Tantric College, and sponsoring particular teachings, oral transmissions, and empowerments

[626] A121E12. Interviewed by Author, November 2022.
[627] Ven. Roger Kunsang. Interviewed by Author, April 3, 2023.
[628] C225O31. Email December 2022.
[629] B221C01. Interviewed by Author, October 2022.

there, not just to help preserve the lineage in those locations but also to support the production of teachers for FPMT's centres. Another way the lineage is transmitted in FPMT is through the most respected teachers touring internationally so many people receive advanced teachings, empowerments, and transmissions from them. These senior teachers also ordain and teach FPMT's monastics, helping ensure they receive the lineage and can pass it on.

FPMT also produces large numbers of translations and texts (print and digital) and videos, in various languages, presenting lineage teachings and practices. These are used for teacher training, Dharma education, individual study and practice, and teachings and practices in centres.[630] Some interviewees stressed the importance, for preserving tradition, of FPMT's translation services, which translate texts as well as oral commentaries that are made into texts that embody the tradition. Transcription, translation, and publishing are all ways of preserving tradition.

Kopan Monastery is a keeper of tradition. It has responsibilities not shared by FPMT's lay centres. Kopan's leaders indicated that they view their monastery as a traditional one, safeguarding the lineage and longstanding ways of teaching, practicing, doing rituals, and living as monastics. Its leaders take seriously its responsibility to uphold and pass on (by connecting to Geluk monastic universities and tantric colleges) the entirety of Geluk tradition, including complex rituals lay-oriented Dharma centres seldom undertake. Kopan is also a leader in implementing modernizations that support tradition: high quality schools, Dharma courses for new or non-Buddhists, and up-to-date operating methods. Kopan supports the aims of the Dalai Lama; coordinates monastic training and activities with other Geluk monasteries, monastic universities, and tantric colleges; and, being at the forefront of Geluk modernization, helps to steer modernizations identified as useful throughout the Geluk system.[631] Outcomes include a Geluk system adapted to the contemporary world in which people associated with FPMT may participate, such as by receiving teachings and empowerments from senior Geluk lamas or studying at the Geluk monastic universities or tantric colleges. Relying on Kopan, and in return supporting it, is one way FPMT preserves tradition.

FPMT also engages in external preservation. FPMT's CEO cited one factor preserving the lineage so people could continue to "live" it: "the monastic tradition where people study the teachings of the Buddha." Ordained people supported by lay people, he noted, had preserved the tradition from the days of Nalanda Monastery to today. He added:

> One of Lama Zopa Rinpoche's key things in the past 30, 40 years has been to help preserve … monasteries as learning institutions, in particular by offering food, setting up food funds, because the monks rely on the generosity of others for food, for example. And then they are able to give their time fully to the study that's required of them. So that's one aspect of supporting the tradition. That's been a key way for hundreds of years. Generally monks and nuns go to monasteries, live in a community that supports them, and one aspect of their survival is the lay community offering financial support for food

[630] One example an interviewee cited was a Heruka Chakrasamvara Body Mandala commentary given by the late Trijang Rinpoche in 1975. FPMT financed the transcribing, by Tibetans, of the commentary from 1975 audio tapes, followed by the extensive checking and editing required and the publication of the commentary in Tibetan. FPMT is also sponsoring a translation into English, after which the text will likely be translated into other languages. This is not the only transcription/ translation project in which FPMT is involved. There are many. A121F22. Interviewed by Author, December 2022; FPMT Translation Services. "Translating Buddhist Texts: Bringing the Sacred Dharma to the World." *Education, FPMT*. Accessed July 30, 2024. https://fpmt.org/education/translation/.

[631] Modernizations in Geluk monasteries include improvements in the quality of secular (including science) education, improved living conditions, ever-improving translation, text, and video production capacities, offering Dharma education to lay people, and developing Buddhism-derived secular education for non-Buddhists.

> and medicine. Then in turn, those monks and nuns will be able to teach the lay people, returning the kindness of the lay community.

He was referencing FPMT's support for the monasteries most responsible for lineage preservation. FPMT has also at times supported important lamas' teachings or practices, and sometimes other Tibetan lineages, to help preserve Tibetan Buddhism.[632]

FPMT's CEO added that FPMT also supports schools for Himalayan children in Nepal in which Buddhism is taught: another way FPMT helps preserve tradition, threatened as it is there by urbanization and development. Some of these children may end up attending Kopan's or other monastic schools, and ordaining as monks or nuns, also strengthening Tibetan Buddhism. Even if they do not, their knowledge of their religion and culture helps to preserve it and pass it on.

A final way interviewees indicated that FPMT preserves tradition externally is by following the Dalai Lama, who takes overall responsibility for ensuring the survival of Tibetan lineages and particular responsibility for the Geluk lineage. "We do what he says," affirmed one highly-placed interviewee.[633]

In FPMT, is Social Engagement Perceived as Traditional or Modern?

Scholars of Buddhist social engagement debate whether it is traditional or modern. Many, like Christopher Queen, a pioneer of its study, claim it is uniquely modern. Others contend that premodern Buddhists engaged with society in many ways. Maher, for example, suggests that Tibetan Buddhists' social engagement is traditional because it draws on Tibetan monasteries' long involvement in society and social services.[634] The debate is summarized in Yarnall (2003) and Brown (2023).[635] It is worth noting the two major reasons some scholars consider Buddhists' engagement to have originated only in the modern era: first, they rely on stereotypes presenting premodern Buddhists as withdrawn from society; and second, they define "engagement" as progressive activism. Were history taken into consideration rather than being stereotyped, and were engagement defined to include all of Buddhists' socially beneficial activities, the claim that, in premodern Asia, Buddhists were not socially engaged would not withstand analysis.

Important to underline is that "traditional" in these debates usually means only "premodern." Scholars call engagement "modern" if it arose newly in modernity, "traditional" if it has premodern precedents. Yet in FPMT, "traditional" usually means "lineage-related." Further, "modern" among scholars can refer to the modern era or to modernized Buddhism. When they contend that social engagement among Buddhists is modern they tend to mean that it originated in modernity and also that it is done only by Buddhists practicing modern Buddhisms.

Given these varying meanings of terms, interviewees' comments on the traditionalism or modernism of FPMT's social engagement needed to be parsed to ensure clarity. When they called today's engagement "traditional," they usually meant that it had precedents, either before 1959 in Tibet or, occasionally, in ancient India. When they called it "modern" they generally meant that it lacked premodern precedents. Further questioning then clarified their ideas on how it related to lineage.

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[632] One interviewee indicated, for example, that FPMT had spent several years working with Nyingma masters and institutions to ensure the transmission of certain Nyingma lineages at risk of disappearing. B121J14. Interviewed by Author November 2022. It is likely that this occurred at the behest of, or in coordination with, the Dalai Lama.
[633] A121N05. Interviewed by Author, November 2022.
[634] Derek Maher, "Tibetan Monastics," 275-277.
[635] Yarnall, "Engaged Buddhism," 286-344; Donna Lynn Brown, "Beyond Queen and King: Democratizing 'Engaged Buddhism,'" *Journal of Buddhist Ethics* 30 (2023): 18-21.

Interviewees offered a mix of ideas on whether FPMT's engagement was traditional or modern. One reason was that neither the lamas nor FPMT's international office have made statements—at least not well-known ones—on this question. Another reason was that the distinction did not matter much to them. Almost all perceived that engagement was beneficial, meritorious, recommended by the Dalai Lama and the lamas, and supported by their lineage. That was enough for them to undertake and/or support it; its traditionalism was unimportant.

Stereotypes about premodern Buddhists being socially disengaged seemed to be unknown to interviewees. Although many had been exposed to modern forms of Buddhism, they were not generally aware that some modernist Buddhists as well as academics believed social engagement to be a modern-origin activity undertaken only by modernist Buddhists.[636]

Most interviewees were uncertain about how today's engagement connected to the past. Their most common response to the question of whether FPMT's engagement was traditional was that they did not know the kind and extent of socially oriented activities people in their lineage undertook in the past. A few contended that Tibetans were involved in society and helped others. Some knew that monasteries often provided health care and education. A few others said the Buddha was socially engaged. Stories of his openness to allowing women and low caste people to ordain were cited, and reference made to his concern for society. Also mentioned were Tibetan luminaries, like Shabkar, Thangtong Gyalpo, and Thogme Zangpo, whose hagiographies describe their material aid to people or animals. On monastic social engagement, one Himalayan monk noted that historically monasteries were limited in providing material aid because offerings to them could not be gifted to lay people; one reason why, today, Kopan Monastery creates special funds for social projects. The monk was implicitly saying that monasteries rarely gave out material aid in the past because of this stricture, although it did not prevent them from providing health care or education.[637] Some interviewees stated that social engagement today was "a modern add-on."[638] Overall, the majority felt that engagement had at least some premodern precedents even if they did not know much about them.

Among Himalayan interviewees, most thought that today's social engagement reflected certain past monastic activities as well as premodern lay people's generosity. They took for granted its place in Buddhism and their own tradition. A few emphasized that Buddhism taught that the most important ways to help others were those that helped them improve their karma. They supported material aid but stressed the need to keep in mind that offering Dharma, blessings, imprints, and so on were more effective forms of help. They nevertheless did not think that Buddhists' ways of helping had ever focused solely on these faith-based forms of help.

Overall, only a handful of interviewees stated outright that engaging socially was traditional. They gave various reasons. Some called all ways Buddhists help others, past or present, using material or faith-based means, "social engagement." Others said that Buddhists or Tibetans had always helped others in material ways. A typical comment was: "I think Buddhists

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[636] This stereotype arose from observation of Theravada or East Asian countries, in which there were shifts toward modern Buddhism as society modernized that entailed Buddhists reducing offerings to monastics and ritual to contribute to society and increasing material aid to others. One example of this stereotype is found in a work by Jonathan Watts, a scholar of East Asia. Watts writes that traditional Buddhism features "a rigid karmic determinism that produces an attitude of fatalism toward injustice; that is, those who experience suffering deserve it based on bad actions in a previous lifetime." This attitude stops Buddhists from engaging socially. Watts' description is a modernist stereotype of traditionalist Buddhists that does not account for their frequent social engagement. Jonathan S. Watts, "Editor's Note: Rethinking Karma: The Dharma of Social Justice," in *Rethinking Karma: The Dharma of Social Justice*, edited by Jonathan S. Watts (3rd Edition, Bangkok: Silkworm, 2020), 4. Kindle.

[637] A213P62. Interviewed by Author, March 2003. Jansen's work suggests that Lama Tsongkhapa showed his followers how to provide charity in ways compatible with vinaya. Jansen, *The Monastery Rules*, 121-122.

[638] One interviewee with this opinion was B211R07. Interviewed by Author, November 2022.

from all traditions have always helped other beings as that is the essence of Buddhism."[639] Younger Western and South Asian interviewees were prone to saying that Dharma practice automatically led to engaging socially so engagement was traditional. The more broadly interviewees understood the term "social engagement" the more likely they were to regard FPMT's efforts as in continuity with the past.

A few interviewees stated that social engagement was modern, particularly older Western interviewees whose involvement with FPMT dated to the 1970s or 1980s. They drew a line between "religious," "traditional," or "Buddhist" activities, and engagement. The latter they perceived as a secular activity that drew on Western and Christian practices. This opinion was connected to the idea, more common in FPMT's early years than today, that social engagement was not a Dharma practice on the level of formal Dharma practices—a view Rinpoche later downplayed. Some interviewees of this generation retained it. It overlaps with the view of an even smaller minority of older Western interviewees that FPMT should not be engaged but should "stick to the Dharma."

Others who perceived social engagement to be modern gave various reasons: that the organized way FPMT engaged did not occur in premodern Tibet; or that some activities, like tree-planting, operating animal sanctuaries, or universal education were not done in the past. FPMT's universal education efforts were generally described as modern because they lacked the faith-based parts of the lineage even if their teachings, such as on ethics or compassion, came from the lineage. That certain activities were perceived to be untraditional meant, for some people, that social engagement overall was untraditional; others thought of social engagement in general as traditional even if some activities were modern.

Most interviewees did not feel that social engagement was required by their lineage even if the lineage presented it as beneficial and meritorious. Few felt certain they knew exactly how engagement was related to their lineage. Overall, a majority suggested that, even given precedents, social engagement was not traditional the way FPMT's teachings were. But also, given precedents, they did not see it as entirely modern. Interviewees made clear that, in their eyes, FPMT had not exchanged past faith-based means of helping others for present material ones; they generally felt that in the past Tibetans did both and today people in FPMT also did both. What they felt made engagement not entirely traditional was that they did not think their lineage insisted on it. It insisted on helping others but did not specify the means.

No matter how interviewees categorized engagement, none considered it illegitimate. Its legitimacy derived from several factors: their own beliefs that helping others was good; the Dalai Lama's promotion of it; Rinpoche's emphasis on "compassion in action," the lamas' other forms of support for it; belief that the Buddha or some Tibetan masters had been engaged; Bodhisattva vows requiring action to help others; and Buddhist teachings on compassion, generosity, and so on. None cited precedent as a source of legitimacy. The most commonly cited sources of legitimacy were longstanding Buddhist teachings and comments from the Dalai Lama and the lamas. Because guru devotion is one of their lineage's core teachings, they perceived they were fulfilling their gurus' wishes by engaging socially.

What then did research reveal about the perceived connections between social engagement and tradition in FPMT? First, most interviewees felt that their lineal predecessors were not isolated from social or material problems or unhelpful when they arose. They took for granted that their predecessors worked to help others, motivated by Buddhist teachings and using whatever resources and practices were available to them, material and faith-based. They believed premodern Tibetan monasteries participated in society, whether or not their activities would now be termed "social engagement." As a result, most felt that today's engagement was in continuity

[639] C225D32. Email January 2023.

with the past. One Himalayan interviewee summed up the majority view, saying "engagement has been done for centuries."[640] Nevertheless, because "tradition" in FPMT refers to lineage, and almost none viewed engagement as strictly required by their lineage, most did not view today's engagement as precisely "tradition." They viewed it as compatible with tradition, supported by traditional teachings, one way the practice of tradition was expressed, and even sometimes a result of, or a measure of success in, practicing the tradition.

In sum, interviewees perceived engagement to be neither completely traditional nor completely modern. This conundrum results from different understandings of "engagement," "traditional," and "modern," precedents which undermine the idea that engagement is modern but may not make it fully traditional, and certain ways of engaging perceived as modern. As well, given that "traditional" and "modern" were not mutually exclusive categories for them, they often gave the impression that engagement could be both old and modern. The difficulties of categorizing FPMT's engagement as traditional or modern may serve as a useful prompt to scholars: more productive than debating whether Buddhists' social engagement is traditional or modern is to study how and why Buddhists' attempts to benefit others have evolved over time.

FPMT and Tradition: Summary

Prominent scholars like Bechert, Lopez, and McMahan define Buddhist traditionalism based on features alone, not referencing history or lineage. The features on which they base definitions include Buddhism's cosmology, faith, hierarchies, ritual, and attention to merit-making. Such features are considered incompatible with modern discourses, particularly the scientific-rationalist-naturalist one; therefore they assume traditional Buddhism to have disappeared in the modern era. Their definitions are associated with a certain historiography, a correspondence assumption, and a lifestyle corollary. These place tradition entirely in the past, do not differentiate features by importance and thus take for granted that alterations to any extinguish tradition, and present all Buddhisms active today as modern.

These definitions and assumptions exclude numerous possibilities: that traditional Buddhisms may not contradict modern discourses; that, if they do, some people today, including people with mainstream as well as alternative lifestyles, may still practice them; that some features of tradition insiders may believe they can abandon without affecting tradition; that they may adapt ways of practicing to keep their tradition viable today; that Buddhisms need not coincide with historical periods or lifestyles so traditional Buddhisms can be practiced by contemporary people; and that, as a result, not all old Buddhisms have been modernized or extinguished.

Definitions and assumptions, by erasing traditional Buddhisms, preclude collecting data on them. The absence of data then precludes improving understandings. This dissertation fills a portion of this gap in data by researching one group of people who practice a Buddhism they call "traditional"—people associated with FPMT. This research reveals their perspectives.

First, their assumptions about traditional Buddhism differ from those of most scholars. People in FPMT understand "tradition" to mean "lineage" along with the core features of their lineage. They are certain their lineage has been transmitted from centuries past without substantive alterations, take for granted that traditional Buddhism can thrive today, do not believe their adaptations to new circumstances make their Buddhism modern or untraditional, despite living in contemporary environments do not find their tradition's cosmology, teachings, or features impossible to accept, and consider its practice compatible with a variety of lifestyles.

[640] A213P62. Interviewed by Author, March 2023.

In sum, they believe traditional Buddhism can and does exist today, their own Buddhism being proof.

Regarding definitions, in FPMT, the terms "tradition" and "traditional" refer to lineage and to inheriting, preserving, practicing, and transmitting a longstanding lineage of teachings and practices that embodies certain essential features, including Buddhism's cosmology. The lineage's past expressions also had peripheral features, like gender inequality, that they do not consider part of the lineage or essential; peripheral features can be altered or abandoned without affecting what they call "tradition" or "traditional Buddhism." Updating peripheral features, along with adapting ways of operating institutions, teaching, and practicing to new circumstances, they view as having precedents and as supporting tradition, not damaging, altering, or modernizing it.

Research on whether, in FPMT, social engagement is considered traditional or modern showed differences among interviewees. Nevertheless, few perceived a contradiction between social engagement and tradition, and almost all felt their traditional Buddhism supported engagement. Given these perceptions, it is not surprising that FPMT brings together tradition and engagement, a topic discussed in upcoming chapters.

Learning from FPMT: A New Approach to Tradition for Buddhist Studies

To formulate a useful approach to "traditional Buddhism" today, scholars need to abandon common assumptions found in Buddhist Studies' discourse of tradition. These include: that all Buddhisms today are best considered modern, modernist, "modernities," or as belonging in any other single, universal category; that any adaptation to modernity, no matter how peripheral, produces modern Buddhism; that no Buddhism today has a lineage that goes back centuries because all originated in or were substantively remade in the modern era; that it is irrelevant to traditionalism whether Buddhists and their leaders deliberately modernize, or conversely, deliberately preserve, their tradition; and so on—the assumptions described above, including the claim that no Buddhism that can be defined as "traditional" persists today except in enclaves. Abandoning such assumptions along with the correspondence assumption and its lifestyle corollary would contribute to better understandings of today's traditional Buddhism.

Scholarship on contemporary Buddhism would also benefit if scholars accepted that forms of Buddhism that can be usefully labeled "traditional" exist today, analyzed their nature, and considered the views of their practitioners on what makes them traditional. Not all traditionalist Buddhists may define "tradition" and "traditionalism" in the same way but adding to the scant data available on their Buddhisms could generate knowledge about these little studied expressions of Buddhism. Redescribing Buddhisms as modern without taking into account insiders' reasons for calling them "traditional" blocks exploration of differences among forms of Buddhism, prevents examining even recent history, and precludes research into varying patterns of Buddhist belief and conduct.

Scholars may benefit from definitions of traditional Buddhism that draw on input from its practitioners for another reason: such input can help them reduce the impact of stereotypes rooted in Orientalism. A useful definition of traditional Buddhism would be one that does not assign tradition only to the premodern era and old-fashioned enclaves and does not require today's Buddhisms to exhibit every social and religious feature of premodern Asia to be classed as traditional. Such a definition would allow scholars to distinguish traditional from modern, postmodern, retraditionalized, and other types of Buddhism active today. It seems that just one kind of definition meets the need: that which considers both history and features. Only by accepting the possibility that some Buddhisms today have lineages with histories of being passed

down intact over many generations and whose core teachings—including Buddhism's cosmology—have not been replaced by modern discourses can traditional Buddhism be distinguished from other kinds of Buddhism. Without such a definition, advancing scholarship on Buddhisms of this type is difficult.

Although this approach points scholars toward history, it does not require scholars to accept mythical histories used to claim modern-origin Buddhisms are old. Only genuine historical data is useful. Historical data allow scholars to assess if Buddhisms with some old or faith-based features, or whose practitioners call them "traditional," are best categorized as "traditional," "retraditionalized," or something else. The disadvantage of including history in definitions of traditionalism is, first, that efforts to investigate the past are required, and second, that debates may ensue, such as on how much of a longstanding lineage must be retained to call a Buddhism "traditional." However, the past is recent, data are available, and debates are not negative. As well, scholars are capable of considering history without pronouncing on legitimacy. Further, it is noticeable that when it comes to modern Buddhism, they have not hesitated to call on history and affirm legitimacy. Both McMahan and Gleig, for example, appear to affirm the legitimacy of modern Buddhism by reference to history.[641] Although questions of legitimacy can be set aside, there is little reason to begin avoiding history when traditional Buddhism is discussed if it is considered when modern Buddhism is discussed.

What would a useful definition of traditional Buddhism comprise? It would take in forms of Buddhism today that (a) inherit, preserve, and transmit a living Buddhist lineage handed down without rupture from premodern times; (b) retain features from premodern times, including Buddhism's cosmology, that lineage authorities deem core to the lineage; and (c) adapt peripheral features to new times, places, and/or cultures to retain the lineage's viability. It is expected that Buddhisms fitting this definition would be considered traditional by their leaders and practitioners. Modernist and other modern-origin forms of Buddhism, including retraditionalized ones, do not fit this definition. Importantly, where and by whom Buddhisms are practiced is not relevant to this categorization, and neither are features of the organizations that disseminate them. This definition enables scholars to research Buddhisms categorized as traditional to learn why they are practiced now, how their preservation and transmission occurs, how their practices are adapted as circumstances change, and how their differences from other Buddhisms affect belief, conduct, and social impact.

In sum, research shows that scholarship can advance by abandoning common assumptions and stereotypes, categorizing relevant forms of Buddhism practiced today as traditional, and researching these forms in order to base portrayals of them on data.

As well, the study of engaged Buddhism can benefit by ceasing to assume that traditionalist Buddhists are disengaged and by researching engaged traditionalists' activities and motivations. The coming chapters examine how Buddhist Studies has characterized traditionalist Buddhists' engagement, how and why FPMT engages socially, and whether FPMT's activities represent a specifically traditionalist form of Buddhist social engagement.

[641] McMahan, *The Making*, 19; Gleig, *American Dharma*, 15. Much scholarship on modern Buddhism implicitly or explicitly legitimizes it with reference to history, such as by arguing that Buddhism has always changed, claiming that modern Buddhism is in continuity with the past, or aligning it with an imagined classical Buddhism.

Chapter 5.
Social Engagement and Tradition in Buddhist Studies

Introduction

Describing the "social activism and charitable work" of Tibetan Buddhist organizations he considers traditional, including FPMT, Samuel contends it is "relatively weak." Yet when discussing FPMT specifically, he indicates the organization has "been involved in fund-raising for refugee Tibetan monasteries, and has also developed other modes of charitable work." He adds that it operates "hospices, a leprosy centre, a home for the destitute and a clinic."[642]

Why does Samuel deem traditionalist Buddhists' engagement weak? One answer is stereotypes. Stereotypes depict modernist Buddhists as engaged and traditionalists as disengaged. Is it surprising that Samuel equates engagement with modernists?[643] Assuming that traditionalist Buddhists are disengaged prevents scholars from researching their engagement. Both the stereotype and the paucity of data have led to their omission from anthologies intended to show the range of Buddhists' social endeavours. These anthologies leave out not just FPMT but also other engaged organizations rooted in traditional Buddhism like The Dalai Lama Trust, Karuna-Shechen, Tong-Len Charitable Trust, The Bodhichitta Trust, and Lotus Outreach. That FPMT does not appear in such anthologies is one reason Schedneck neglects to classify it as engaged in her summary article on Buddhist transnational organizations and Gleig leaves it out of her survey of Buddhists' social engagement.[644] In even mentioning FPMT's social efforts, Samuel is an outlier. Yet, caught in stereotypes, he seems unaware that FPMT's activities, along with those of other traditionalist organizations, may contradict his statement that these organizations' engagement is "relatively weak."

Defining Buddhist Social Engagement

There are practical reasons to begin with a definition of Buddhist social engagement. It is not feasible to use FPMT's own. FPMT's communications refer to "social service" and "charitable projects" that include some activities scholars do not call "social engagement." Interviewees also cannot be a source of a definition. They sometimes called all of FPMT's activities, no matter how typically "religious," "social engagement." As one stated, "I've heard Rinpoche say a number of times over the years that this social service fund or social service activity of FPMT … is listed separately on the website but … the whole organization is really social service, not just these specific … aspects of it. … The fundamental intention of FPMT is to help others in every possible way, physically and mentally."[645] Examples of what interviewees called "social engagement," in addition to social projects, included teaching Dharma, volunteering in Dharma centres, doing faith-based practices aimed at helping others, and making food offerings to ghosts. Because one goal of this dissertation is to enter into conversation with scholars, it must address the same kinds of activities they do. Hence, the dissertation needs to delimit, in ways different from those of FPMT, the activities it refers to as "social engagement."

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[642] Samuel, *Tantric Revisionings*, 307.
[643] Samuel, *Tantric Revisionings*, 334.
[644] Schedneck, "Buddhist International Organizations," 401, 405-411; Ann Gleig, "Engaged Buddhism," in *Oxford Research Encyclopedia of Religion* (28 June 2021). https://doi.org/10.1093/acrefore/9780199340378.013.755.
[645] A121N05. Interviewed by Author, November 2022.

Background to Definitional Debates

Beginning in the late nineteenth century, many Buddhists replaced Buddhism's cosmology with a scientific-rationalist-naturalist worldview, an act fundamental to the creation of modern Buddhism. For Buddhists who accepted the replacement, it reduced concern for future lives and increased concern for this life. It also reduced their use of faith-based means to accomplish aims and increased the use of material, including political, means. Activists and scholars have long labeled such means "Buddhist social engagement" or "engaged Buddhism," profiling them in well-known anthologies. These anthologies focus mainly on social reform movements, not the broader range of altruistic and charitable activities Buddhists undertake.[646] Scholars have generally presented the reform movements as being rooted in late nineteenth century Buddhist modernization in Asia, further developing in Chinese/ Taiwanese Buddhism in the early and mid-twentieth century, spreading around Asia in the post-World War II period, being energized, in the 1960s, by Vietnamese monastic involvement in peace movements, and being supplemented by Buddhists in Western countries beginning in the 1970s.[647]

This historical narrative closely associates engagement with modernized Buddhisms, an association that has resulted in few scholars acknowledging that either premodern Buddhists or traditionalist Buddhists today might engage socially. Recall the stereotype of traditional Buddhists as unconcerned with society and passive in the face of suffering. The stereotype includes the idea that traditional Buddhism's tools for helping others, or promoting better material conditions, were (and remain) only faith-based: magic, prayer, ritual.[648] Further, as discussed in Chapter 3, scholars often believe that traditional Buddhism is no longer active today, a belief that impedes research on traditionalists' engagement. Scholarship thus focuses on engagement by modernist Buddhists.[649]

Two Kinds of Definitions

Scholars' definitions of "Buddhist social engagement" or "engaged Buddhism" fall into two categories.[650]

Queen describes Buddhist social engagement as the application of Buddhist teachings, such as compassion and interdependence, to the resolution of social problems, particularly by "collective action to address systemic causes of suffering and promote social advancement in the world."[651] Thomas Yarnall, in a well-known article, describes it as Buddhists' active

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[646] Buddhist social engagement was discussed in academia initially at a 1990 American Academy of Religion panel on Buddhist liberation movements. Earlier, it had been described and analyzed in activist but not academic publications. Christopher Queen and Sallie B. King edited the first Western scholarly work on engagement, *Engaged Buddhism: Buddhist Liberation Movements in Asia* (1996). Queen then edited another volume, *Engaged Buddhism in the West* (2000). It was followed by a volume edited by Queen, Charles Prebish, and Damien Keown, *Action Dharma: New Studies in Engaged Buddhism* (2003) and King's *Socially Engaged Buddhism* (2009). These books, which brought together analyses of a selected set of twentieth-century Asian and Western Buddhist social reform movements, formed an influential core of works on Buddhists' social engagement. Brown, "Beyond Queen and King," 11-13.

[647] This history is summarized in Brown, "Beyond Queen and King," 11-13; Gleig, "Engaged Buddhism"; and Jessica L. Main and Rongdao Lai, "Introduction: Reformulating 'Socially Engaged Buddhism' as an Analytical Category." *The Eastern Buddhist* 44, no. 2 (2013): 7, 14, 22-26.

[648] Brown, "Beyond Queen and King," 41-45.

[649] Brown, "Beyond Queen and King," 18-21.

[650] These terms are not differentiated here because overlaps in scholarly usage make differentiation impractical. Many scholars now take the same approach. Brown, "Beyond Queen and King," 10.

[651] Christopher S. Queen, "Introduction: A New Buddhism," in *Engaged Buddhism in the West*, ed. Christopher Queen (Somerville, MA: Wisdom, 2000), 3.

involvement in (rather than renunciation of) the material world to reduce suffering by engaging with and transforming social, political, and economic institutions and systems.[652] These definitions share a focus on the material world and on collective action to transform societal structures. They contrast social engagement with stereotypes that depict traditionalist Buddhists overlooking social and material problems. Put in place by boomer-generation Anglo-American scholars and combining Buddhist teachings with Western discourses like socialism, these definitions have long dominated scholarship on engagement. Prominent scholars like Queen have shaped "Engaged Buddhist Studies" to focus on Buddhists involved in activism and have tended to deem the humanitarian activities that appear to form the bulk of Buddhists' social endeavours not eligible to be counted as Buddhist social engagement. They have also tended to deem some Buddhists ineligible—those whose Buddhism is traditional or who are not considered "liberal and progressive." Such definitions can be called "exclusionary."[653]

Buddhist Studies has recently seen greater attention given to a second kind of definition: an inclusionary one. Paul Fuller (2022) argues for defining engagement the way prominent Buddhist leader Thich Nhat Hanh does: "Buddhism . . . involved in life." Fuller's definition only requires, to call an activity "Buddhist social engagement," that it be done by Buddhists and aim at reducing suffering in material rather than faith-based ways.[654] Taking a similar approach are John Nelson (2013) and Alexander Hsu (2022), who write that, to end the practice of overlooking some Buddhists and social endeavours, all Buddhism-inspired socially oriented activities, whatever type of Buddhists undertake them, should be counted as socially engaged.[655] Another scholar promoting this approach was the late James Blumenthal, who studied engagement among Dalit Buddhists. In 2011, he wrote in a popular article:

> Engaged Buddhism, the application of the teachings of the Buddha to … sufferings and problems in the world, is quintessentially Buddhist. … its practice dates back to the Buddha himself. When the Buddha took steps to help prevent his native Shakya people from entering a war over water rights, he was acting in ways we describe today as engaged Buddhist. In the 3rd century BCE, when Ashoka, the great Buddhist king, set up the first animal clinics and the first homes for the elderly … he was acting as an engaged Buddhist. Engaged Buddhism is often conceived as referring to social and political activism in the name of Buddhism … But when I think of engaged Buddhism, I think of everything from Free Tibet demonstrations to hospice care … from soup kitchens to all the intellectual and practical activities people engage in to undermine the structures of violence in society.[656]

Defined broadly like this, many premodern Buddhists could be considered engaged, as could traditionalist Buddhists today. This kind of definition moves the study of engagement toward the study of all Buddhists and their socially oriented activities rather than limiting it to the study of modernist Buddhists' progressive activism. An article by the present author, "Beyond Queen and King: Democratizing 'Engaged Buddhism'" (2023) summarizes the shift in definitions and its

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[652] Yarnall, "Engaged Buddhism, 286.
[653] The history and details of this way of defining Buddhist social engagement are described in Brown, "Beyond Queen and King," 8-17.
[654] Paul Fuller, *An Introduction to Engaged Buddhism* (London: Bloomsbury Academic, 2021), 1-7.
[655] Nelson, *Experimental Buddhism*, 83-86; Alexander O. Hsu, "Coming to Terms with 'Engaged Buddhism': Periodizing, Provincializing, and Politicizing the Concept." *Journal of Global Buddhism* 23, no. 1, (2022): 17-26.
[656] James Blumenthal, "Engaged Buddhism: Compassion in Action." *Mandala* (April-June 2011): 44.

background; definitions continue to be debated.[657] Although some scholars wish to retain the older definition because it reflects their own ideals, the article shows that others have been using the newer definition for some time—they classify a broad range of Buddhists and activities as engaged notwithstanding whether the Buddhists are modernists or the engagement activist.[658]

The Dissertation's Definition

The definition of Buddhist social engagement used in this dissertation falls into the second category. Quoted from Brown (2023), it is as follows.

> Two features are widely considered basic to Buddhist social engagement. First, it comprises activities, by people who self-identify as Buddhists, aimed at reducing others' this-life material or psychological sufferings (versus leading them to transmundane liberation) in areas modernity allocates to the secular sphere, such as health, education, and the economy. It does so with political, social, or material means, not with means reliant on faith such as prayer. Second, it is believed by its agents to be a spiritual practice. … these two features form a foundational definition of Buddhist engagement.[659]

Crucial in this definition is that social engagement aims at material[660] outcomes, using material means, including social, political, medical, psychological, and educational ones. Activities can include providing food, clean water, health care, education, emotional support, or disaster relief, organizing for social change, building community, working for peace, improving opportunities of women or marginalized groups, rescuing animals, or helping the environment. Faith-based means like prayers, rituals, or blessings may accompany material means, but for the term "social engagement" to be applied, material ways of overcoming material sufferings must be present and goals must include alleviating suffering in this life. The word "social" also directs attention to activities aimed at benefiting groups and not just occasional individuals.

Although the scholars who established the first type of definition believe that to be Buddhist engagement, activities must constitute progressive political or social activism, the Buddhist world is diverse and only some Buddhists share their opinions on how best to help others.[661] One reason is that the approach these scholars value derives from non-Buddhist understandings of the causes and cures of suffering. Another is that the majority of socially beneficial activity undertaken by Buddhists today seems to consist of humanitarian, not activist, efforts. Criteria demanding progressive activities aimed at certain kinds of social transformation may exclude humanitarian activities or encourage irresolvable debates about the extent to which certain activities, like education, are socially transformative or merely humanitarian.

Despite ongoing debates, the core themes identified above—that Buddhists' social engagement involves material forms of help targeting material goals, generally to aid groups rather than individuals, done by Buddhists who perceive them to be a Buddhist practice—appear

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[657] The debates are summarized in Brown, "Beyond Queen and King," comments posted on the article, and responses to it as well as comments posted on the responses. The published responses include: Christopher Queen, "Engaged Buddhism at Sixty-Five: Nuancing the Consensus." *Journal of Buddhist Ethics* 30 (2023): 69-81; and Sallie B. King, "Are Ethnocentric/Nationalist Buddhists Engaged Buddhists? Certainly Not." *Journal of Buddhist Ethics* 30 (2023): 83-92. That debates continue is shown by the presence of a session on the question at the November 2024 meeting of the American Academy of Religion.

[658] Brown, "Beyond Queen and King," 25-33, 47 fn. 43.

[659] Brown, "Beyond Queen and King," 9-10.

[660] I include "psychological" in "material" to avoid regularly repeating "material and psychological." What is excluded is not ordinary mental health goals but transcendental goals beyond this world and/or this life.

[661] Hsu, "Coming to Terms," 17-23. Main and Lai, "Introduction: Reformulating," 2.

to be part of all scholars' definitions. Thus, the definition chosen ensures this dissertation enters into scholarly conversations on engagement.

The definition has implications for the study of FPMT because it treats as engagement activities some scholars of engagement might exclude. Such activities include:

- Social services and humanitarian aid;
- Activities by Buddhists who have politically conservative or nationalist beliefs or who promote the strengthening of specific cultures. Among Western followers of FPMT, conservative or nationalist beliefs appear rare, but in Asia, efforts to preserve or strengthen particular cultures, such as Himalayan cultures, occur;
- Activities benefiting animals;[662]
- The provision of material necessities, such as food, medical care, or secular education to poverty-affected monks and nuns, as well as children at monastery-run schools. This point might be disputed by some scholars because they may view such aid as not falling into the secular sphere. However, in monastic as in lay environments, providing material help, while sometimes having faith-based goals, also has material goals. It seems unreasonable to count giving necessities to poor lay people as engagement but not giving the same necessities to poor ordained people or to children from poor families attending monastic schools; and
- Faith-based activities that supplement material goals and means, such as prayers for engagement's beneficiaries.

I use this definition to select the activities described here as "social engagement."

Scholarship on Social Engagement in FPMT and Other Traditionalist Groups

Publications on Buddhist social engagement—the anthologies mentioned above and other prominent works—have long overlooked FPMT and other traditionalist groups, focusing on modernist Buddhists.[663] For this reason, and likely because scholars implicitly accept the stereotype depicting traditionalists as disengaged, those who summarize or analyze engaged Buddhists' activities have not called on the limited scholarship that shows FPMT is engaged. There is a disconnect between scholarship on Buddhists' engagement and scholarship that analyzes FPMT and other Tibetan Buddhist groups.

The most important recent survey of engaged Buddhism and scholarship on it is Gleig's "Engaged Buddhism" (2021) in the *Oxford Research Encyclopedia of Religion*. This lengthy and useful survey attempts to comprehensively summarize engaged movements, past and present, as well as relevant scholarship. Its sole mentions of Tibetan Buddhists concern the "Free Tibet" movement and the Karmapa's promotion of vegetarianism and concern for the environment.[664] Yet political activism for Tibet is not generally undertaken by Buddhist organizations. FPMT, for example, is not involved, nor are most other Tibetan Buddhist organizations, nor the exile monasteries. These organizations are generally socially, not politically, engaged. Not mentioning their engagement derives from the way prominent Western scholars present engagement: as, to quote Gleig, "an expression of Buddhist modernism."

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[662] See Brown, "Beyond Queen and King," 9 fn. 4. The inclusion of animals is not a disputed point in Buddhist Studies. The study of Buddhist ethics often includes animals.

[663] Scholars who research engaged Buddhism like Queen, King, Main and Lai, Gleig, and Fuller generally assume that social engagement is undertaken only by modernist Buddhists. This issue is discussed in Brown, "Beyond Queen and King," 23-25, 42-45.

[664] Gleig, "Engaged Buddhism."

A paucity of scholarship on traditionalists' engagement may also contribute to its invisibility; only a small amount exists on FPMT's engagement, for example. Lack of scholarship, however, does not entail lack of data. A great deal is easily found on organizations' websites. It is not primarily lack of data that leads to overlooking traditionalists' engagement. Exclusionary definitions of engagement, stereotypes about traditionalists, and a tendency to rely on well-known anthologies to decide what counts as engagement and who counts as engaged are more significant factors.

FPMT's engagement does appear in a few works. Two decades ago, Kay noted that FPMT was engaged, writing:

> FPMT Dharma centres also provide 'temporal benefits' … [Projects] such as the Maitreya (sic) Leprosy Centre in Bodhgaya and the FPMT hospice centres in Australia also aim to actualise Lama Yeshe's wish that his network should impact beneficially upon its wider society. Such engagement in social welfare activity is also in line with the explicit recommendations of the Dalai Lama, and newsletters from Jamyang Centre include messages from him encouraging the FPMT to develop its work in the social domain … in areas like education, health and community problems.[665]

Samuel, also almost two decades ago, listed some of FPMT's social projects to show that FPMT was engaged.[666] Ribush references a few of FPMT's social projects.[667] Maher mentions that FPMT and other transnational Tibetan Buddhist organizations "operate numerous service organizations in India and elsewhere, many of them educational or medical in their mission."[668] Falcone alludes to FPMT's school in Bodh Gaya and Zablocki to its school, leprosy clinic, and medical clinic there.[669] Jessica Main and Rongdao Lai, in a well-known article on Buddhist social engagement, also mention FPMT's "schools and clinics."[670] Falcone and Zablocki both, in their discussions of FPMT's planned Maitreya statue in India, indicate that social projects are part of the plan.[671] These mentions, though brief, inform attentive readers that FPMT is engaged.

One scholar examines an FPMT social project in detail: Goldberg. He researched FPMT's school in Bodh Gaya. One of his articles on it appeared in a well-known journal's special issue on Buddhist social engagement alongside, and discussed in, another oft-cited article, so it is surprising that the school has gone unnoticed.[672] It is even more surprising given that Goldberg characterizes it as "attempting to empower the lowest rungs of Indian society," explicitly fitting it into scholars' definition of engagement as progressive activism on the grounds that the school has, in the opinion of his interviewees, a socially transformative aim, and they perceived themselves as socially engaged when working there.[673] That schools can be socially transformative is acknowledged by scholars of engagement. Gleig's 2021 summary, for example, mentions schools among the engaged activities of Humanistic Buddhists.[674] The

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[665] Kay, *Tibetan and Zen Buddhism*, 114-115.
[666] Samuel, *Tantric Revisionings*, 307.
[667] Ribush, "Bamboo," 179.
[668] Derek Maher, "Tibetan Monastics," 277.
[669] Falcone, *Battling*, 114, 129; Zablocki, "The Global Mandala," 265.
[670] Main and Lai, "Introduction: Reformulating," 30.
[671] Zablocki, "The Global Mandala," 265; Falcone, *Battling*, 19-20.
[672] Goldberg's discussion of FPMT appeared in a special "Social Engagement Issue" of *The Eastern Buddhist* in 2013 in which Main and Lai's oft-cited article also appeared. Main and Lai mention Goldberg's article in their own. Main and Lai, "Introduction: Reformulating," 29-30.
[673] Goldberg, "Pilgrimage," 96-98.
[674] Gleig, "Engaged Buddhism."

visibility of Goldberg's article and the school's fit with all definitions of engagement might have been expected to raise awareness of FPMT's activities. It did not.

Is there scholarship on the social engagement of other traditionalist Buddhists? It is limited. One organization with roots in traditional Tibetan Buddhism is Karuna-Shechen, established in 2000.[675] Its impact is impressive.[676] Nevertheless, I could not find a single scholarly work that describes it.[677] Maher mentions an organization called Tong-Len Charitable Trust run by a Tibetan monk. It operates schools, clinics, and other services for marginalized Indians in the Dharamsala area of India. He also references other Tibetan-run social projects in India. His mentions seem to have passed unnoticed.[678]

One organization rooted in traditional Buddhism is highlighted in several publications on engaged Buddhism: Buddhist Global Relief (BGR), founded by American monk Bhikkhu Bodhi. BGR, according to its website, works to alleviate hunger and poverty and improve opportunities for girls and women. Its characterization offers a lesson on today's scholarship. Queen (2018) appears to have been the first scholar to mention BGR and likely led other scholars to notice it. Gleig (2021) mentions BGR[679] as do Jay Garfield (2021)[680] and Fuller (2022).[681] Queen, however, hides Bodhi's traditionalism. He presents Bodhi as a Buddhist modernist, contrasting him with American monk Ṭhānissaro, whom he deems traditional and presents as opposing Buddhists' social engagement.[682] The first curious aspect of Queen's presentation is that, by Bodhi's own standards, he is a traditionalist, not a modernist. He defines "traditionalism" as "acceptance of the classical Buddhist framework of rebirth and karma, understood as a moral force with consequences extending beyond the present life."[683] He accepts this cosmology.[684] He also calls himself a "traditionalist" because he holds to Buddhism's "transcendent orientation," not replacing it with "social and political reform."[685] The second curious aspect concerns Ṭhānissaro. Queen describes him as rejecting social engagement.[686] Yet Ṭhānissaro rejects only political activism that replaces Buddhist ideas with Western ones. He describes activism as an attempt to impose "our" ideas in ways that do not address karma and that may exacerbate the negative mental states that Buddhism teaches produce suffering. He promotes benefiting others and encouraging social change through humanitarian service and environmental work based on Buddhist teachings on generosity, virtue, and universal goodwill. Efforts of this type, he contends, benefit others immediately and foster positive mental states that, over time, expand

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[675] "Karuna Shechen." karuna-shechen.org/en/. Accessed June 29, 2024.
[676] "Our Impact." Karuna-Shechen. https://karuna-shechen.org/en/our-impact/. Accessed June 29, 2024. Other unstudied traditional Buddhism-origin organizations include The Dalai Lama Trust, Tong-Len Charitable Trust, The Bodhichitta Trust, Lotus Outreach, Gaden Relief Projects, and Benevolent Organisation for Development Health & Insight.
[677] John Makransky mentions Karuna-Shechen in a footnote in a 2022 article, writing only, "For a recent example of an excellent Asian Buddhist service organization, see Karuna-Shechen." Karuna-Shechen is also referenced by Brown, who indicates it does not appear in scholarship on engaged Buddhism. Other than that, no mentions in academic publications could be found. John Makransky, "Applied Buddhism: Past and Present." *Canadian Journal of Buddhist Studies* 17 (2022): 8 fn. 7; Brown, "Beyond Queen and King," 30 fn. 29.
[678] Maher, "Tibetan Monastics," 275-276.
[679] Gleig, "Engaged Buddhism."
[680] Jay L. Garfield, *Buddhist Ethics: A Philosophical Exploration* (NY: Oxford University Press, 2021), 181-182.
[681] Fuller, *An Introduction*, 16-17, 173.
[682] Queen, "The Ethics," 506-507.
[683] Bodhi, "Manifesting," 166.
[684] Bhikkhu Bodhi, *Facing the Future: Four Essays on the Social Relevance of Buddhism: The Wheel Publication No. 438/440* (Kandy: BPS Online Edition, 2011), 23, 31-32, 64-66.
[685] Bhikkhu Bodhi, "A Call to Conscience," *Tricycle* (Fall 2018). https://tricycle.org/magazine/buddhist-political-engagement/.
[686] Queen, "The Ethics," 506.

individual and social benefit. It is these kinds of ways to address material problems for which he finds support in Buddhist teachings.[687] His approach is traditionalist in not replacing Buddhist discourses with modern Western ones, but he does not oppose engagement as Queen contends.

By obscuring the traditionalism of one monk and the openness to engagement of the other, Queen may inadvertently mislead his readers. Both monks are traditionalists; both support engagement. Yet Queen's portrayal has been accepted by other scholars. They also do not mention Bodhi's traditionalism or Ṭhānissaro's support for engagement. Gleig, for example, portrays Bodhi as an engaged modernist and Ṭhānissaro as seeking "to destabilize or delegitimize engaged Buddhism" because, she claims, he puts his "canonical" focus on Buddhist teachings ahead of "Western concerns of justice," an interpretation that overlooks Ṭhānissaro's support for forms of engagement that Buddhism teaches will help society. She also overlooks similarities between his and Bodhi's views: both monks avoid activism and promote humanitarian engagement.[688] Fuller does the same, calling Bodhi "modern," contending that engagement relies exclusively on modern Buddhist ideas, and excluding traditionalist Buddhists from the possibility of being engaged.[689] Queen and the scholars who follow him perpetuate the stereotype that engagement is only done by modernists on the basis of modernized Buddhist

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[687] Ṭhānissaro Bhikkhu, "Wisdom Over Justice." *Lion's Roar* (November 3, 2017). https://www.lionsroar.com/wisdom-over-justice/; Ṭhānissaro Bhikkhu, *Buddhist Romanticism* (California: Metta Forest Monastery, 2015), 290-291; Richard H. Robinson, Willard L. Johnson, Sandra A. Wawrytko, and Ṭhānissaro Bhikkhu, *The Buddhist Religion: A Historical Introduction*. Fourth Edition (California: Wadsworth Publishing, 1997), 301-302; Ṭhānissaro Bhikkhu, *Justice vs. Skillfulness*, July 31, 2016. https://www.dhammatalks.org/books/Meditations8/Section0032.html.

[688] Bodhi published a book on social engagement (2011, originally 2000) which places the main causes of "our grave social and communal problems" in "a primordial blindness rooted in the delusion of self" and "the same greed, hatred, and ignorance responsible for private suffering" rather than primarily blaming social structures. He situates engagement within Buddhism's cosmology and focus on liberation of the mind and presents social engagement as one path to the main goal, "self-knowledge and mastery of the mind." (He deems social service as part of the path to wisdom, rather than wisdom as part of the path to social service; Garfield, in his assessment of the ethics of engagement, deems the former a traditionalist approach and the latter a modernist one. Garfield also notes that Bodhi grounds his engagement, in unmodernized teachings. Garfield, *Buddhist Ethics*, 189-190, 195-196. Bodhi subordinates engagement to "mastering our minds through methodical training aimed at self-knowledge and self-transformation." He does not recommend political activism. Bodhi's approach to engagement is thus quite different from that of modernist Buddhists. BGR is not an activist organization, as its website shows, but one involved in social service. Bodhi, *Facing*, 65-68, 173.

[689] Fuller does not mention that traditionalist Buddhists are engaged. He refers to Bodhi while alluding to "modern engaged Buddhists," not clarifying if "modern" means "contemporary" or practitioners of modern forms of Buddhism. He also leaves traditionalist Buddhists off an extensive list of kinds of Buddhists who can be engaged. Fuller, *An Introduction*, 16-17, 57-62, 68, 171-173. Fuller, in addition, contrasts modern, engaged Buddhists with so-called Buddhist tradition which is disengaged, writing, "Traditions of social service in Buddhism . . . are often based on . . . the idea of averting misfortune in the present life or in expediating an auspicious future rebirth . . . engaged Buddhism removes the karmic motivations of social engagement and offers a Buddhist solution to . . . problems without the idea of . . . a better rebirth." The comment suggests that his mental picture of engaged Buddhists excludes traditionalists, present as well as past. He also concludes that the core doctrine of engagement is the modernized Buddhist understanding of interdependence. In early Buddhism, he contends, the core doctrine was impermanence, in Mahayana it was emptiness, and in engaged Buddhism today, it is interdependence. This statement makes social engagement unique to modern Buddhists who accept this modernized teaching (62-66, 171-172). This stage approach can be dated to early work by Queen (e.g., Queen, "Introduction," 11-25). Insistence that the modern interdependence doctrine is core to engagement is widespread. Queen mentions it in 2002, for example. It automatically equates engagement with modern Buddhism. Christopher Queen, "Engaged Buddhism: Agnosticism, Interdependence, Globalization," in *Westward Dharma: Buddhism Beyond Asia*, eds. Charles S. Prebish and Martin Baumann (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2002), 341.

teachings and Western discourses, and that traditionalists are disengaged because traditional Buddhism does not support engagement.[690]

Inadvertently, these scholars foster another outcome. By not analyzing or including the traditionalist views on social engagement of Bodhi and Ṭhānissaro, Queen, Gleig, Garfield, and Fuller overlook the possibility that there could be specifically traditionalist ways to engage. They assume the ways modernists engage represent all Buddhist ways to do so. A potentially fruitful area of research then goes unexplored.

To summarize, in recent years several anthologies and other prominent works on Buddhist social engagement have been published but these leave out or mischaracterize traditionalists' engagement. Yet traditional Buddhism's absence is not due to lack of data. Data on Bodhi are available but have not prevented the erasure of his traditionalism. On FPMT, there is scholarship that demonstrates its engagement as well as much primary data. Information on the activities of other traditionalist organizations is at researchers' fingertips online. Data is not the issue. Rather, like Samuel at the start of this chapter, scholars are swayed by stereotypes. Traditionalists, their rationales for engagement, and their activities are then left out of scholarship, and the possibility that particularly traditionalist forms of engagement may exist is passed over.

[690] Gleig frames her article with the claim that engagement is an activity limited to modern Buddhists, thus leaving the impression that all the figures and movements she profiles are rooted in modern Buddhism. She also refers to certain modernist Buddhists as "traditionalists" in a mix-up over the term "traditionist," used by Yarnall to describe modernists who believe engagement occurred in premodernity in contrast to other modernists who believe it arose newly in the modern era. Replacing his term "traditionist" with "traditionalist" creates the impression that certain modernists are traditionalists and obscures the existence of engaged traditionalist Buddhists (Gleig, "Engaged Buddhism," paragraph ending with fn. 129.).

Chapter 6.
Social Engagement in FPMT

Prologue: Five Engaged Individuals

Ethnographic research is about people. Although I have tried, throughout this dissertation, to include quotes, profiling a few individuals adds a human touch. These five profiles have all been reviewed and approved, for public consumption, by the individuals concerned. No individual can represent FPMT, but these profiles offer readers an idea of the kind of people who are associated with FPMT and socially engaged.

Adriana Ferranti: Engaged Mystic

Maitri Charitable Trust is one of the organizations visited during ethnographic research. I spoke with its director, Adriana Ferranti, initially by Zoom in late 2022, and then in person several times in February 2023 and February 2024 when I visited her base of operations—the land and buildings owned by Maitri where she both lived and worked—just outside Bodh Gaya, India.

Figure 3. "Adriana Ferranti." At a booth promoting leprosy awareness, World Leprosy Day, January 28, 2024, Bodh Gaya, India. Photo: Donna L. Brown.

Maitri is an Indian charitable trust managed by Adriana, its founder and long-time director. When I spoke with her, Adriana was already over 80 years old: a small woman with a determined look, a straight back, and a shining demeanor. She had lived in this area, first in the small city of Gaya and then on the land she had purchased and developed for Maitri, for more than thirty years, overcoming obstacles and challenges in one of the most deprived and difficult regions of India. Now, late in life, she wondered how much longer she would have the energy to continue but had no plans to quit. Who would help the patients if she retired? Or the many unwanted animals she took care of? Adriana soldiered on.

I asked what brought her to this life.

Adriana grew up in post-war Italy and described her family as enduring the hardships of that straitened time without complaint. From them, she learned to value duty, work, and simplicity. It was this simple life, adequate but without luxuries and shaped by values rather than consumption that formed her.

As a young adult, the values embodied in the ever-wealthier, luxury-loving society that developed in Italy beginning in the 1960s came into conflict with the lessons of her early life. For a time she joined Italy's world of consumption and pleasure, enjoying what the more relaxed lifestyle and better economy of the 1960s and early 1970s offered. She lived the life that lay in front of her: socializing, working, a 4-year marriage. Yet she came to feel that the money and enjoyments she experienced and saw around her failed to deliver happiness, whether for herself or others: it was "useless." She did not know what her path in life was, but this was not it. At age 30, in 1972, she became a seeker, looking for a life that was meaningful—not "useless." Nothing in her background or education could help her, and for years she struggled, reading a lot and

dedicating herself to this inner search. Reflecting on that time, she says simply, “I had to find out who I was.”

In 1977 she had a mystical experience in the basilica of San Bernardino in L’Aquila. While being shown around, as part of a group, she wandered off alone. Suddenly she saw the saint’s head in relic holder hovering over the tomb containing his body—but when she mentioned it, no one else had seen it. For others, it wasn’t there. “You had a vision,” pronounced a scholar of the site. Indeed, she felt a connection to the saint because her grandmother’s name was Bernardina, as is one of her own names. The experience led her to Christianity for a time. But Christianity did not answer all her questions, particularly the crucial one: why things happen.

Not long afterward, she came across a booklet called “Reincarnation and Karma” by Hindu guru Yogananda. It struck her immediately. Looking back, she says, “Finding out about karma was an incredible liberation for me. Karma explains why. And makes clear that it all depends on me. My difficulties are caused by my own actions. To get out, I had to act.” From then on, she visited various emerging Hindu and Buddhist centres in Italy, but none called out to her until she saw a poster for a Tibetan Buddhist event in Milan. It was not at an FPMT centre but attending it showed her she had found her place: Tibetan Buddhism. She soon met FPMT stalwart Nick Ribush, then a monk, who told her to go to Istituto Lama Tzong Khapa (ILTK) in Pomaia, Italy, an early FPMT centre. That was 1979. Attending classes there with both Lama Yeshe and Rinpoche, she knew she was home. “Rinpoche revealed himself to me—it was incredible,” she reminisces. Another mystical experience was guiding her. She took lay vows with Lama Yeshe, became a vegetarian, and studied Buddhism.

She still had not found a role in life that expressed who she was. That came in 1980—while she was watching TV, no less. A documentary on Africa showed a priest dressing the sores of a leprosy patient. “I knew,” she said. “I knew instantly, like a lightning bolt. A revelation. This was my role, my path, who I was.” How to move forward was another story. She felt India was the place to go, and in 1982 was able to take a course in leprosy management at a research centre in South India, giving her the training she needed. There were challenges with visas though, and for a time she was director of ILTK at the request of Rinpoche, who could not be refused. She also had to obtain government authorization to work with leprosy patients in a particular area of India. Rinpoche suggested the Gaya/ Bodh Gaya region. In 1989, armed with authorization, she was able to begin offering leprosy services she coordinated from Kathmandu while waiting for an Indian visa; she set up a home and office in the city of Gaya in 1990 once her visa came through. By 1998, she had procured land and constructed buildings just outside Bodh Gaya. Site and buildings were soon blessed by Rinpoche—and a forest planted to improve the environment and cool it in hot season. “The work came naturally to me,” she recounts, “so I was happy, but it was incredibly difficult. There were problems with electricity, telephone, all those things. I was on my own, doing everything, even driving the jeep for mobile clinics. It was a hard life, but I had a sense of purpose.” Initially she worked under the auspices of Root Institute; soon she established an independent charitable trust.

A further inspiration was Mother Theresa. Adriana felt a kinship with the Catholic saint, because, like her, she felt called to give her life, in love, to others—although when recounting this story, she laughingly made clear she did not put herself on the same level of saintliness! In Kolkata in the 1990s, Adriana met her idol and received her blessing, a moment of deep meaning. She also had a high regard for Mahatma Gandhi and his vision for an India of simple and spiritual living in a tolerant, multifaith society. She even designed the buildings at Maitri in the style of Gandhi’s ashram. Sadly for her, today’s India is far from Gandhi’s vision.

Since those early days, she has lived at Maitri's site overseeing health and education programs and services as well as putting in place a stupa and other elements meant to provide blessings and imprints, often at the request of Rinpoche. Funds have come from various countries and sources, including, at times, Rinpoche. She reported, though, that fundraising had always been difficult. "Money was often not enough. Just by sheer faith is how I carried on. There was never any security. But I thought that as long as I was doing what I had to do, the funds would be provided. That's what seems to have happened, since I am still here!" So she never worried about money as long as, checking within, she felt certain she was doing the right thing. She added, "I knew somebody was watching over me. I just didn't know who."

Figure 4. "A Thank You." Adriana Ferranti receiving thanks for her work from the Dalai Lama, Bodh Gaya, India, January 2023. Photo received from Maitri. Used with permission.

Adriana has faced many difficulties over the years: legal issues concerning Maitri's land; troubles with officials, permits, and visas; fundraising challenges; difficulties training and keeping staff; the complexities of delivering needed health care during the pandemic; theft and corruption; and problems specific to being a woman running an NGO alone in India. And each time one of her favourite rescued animals dies, she feels heartbroken. Yet she committed herself to serving the people of this area for life. Like a mother with a child, she reported, "walking away is not an option."

Maitri is Adriana's Dharma practice. It is often a practice of patience, of carrying on working for others despite challenges.[691] She is unusual in FPMT in devoting her life entirely to social engagement, rather than treating social engagement as a supplement, aspect, or expression of other, more formal Dharma practices. Her influences are Christian and Gandhian as well as Buddhist and her methods of helping others up-to-date. Nevertheless, her devotion for Rinpoche, her implementation of his wishes, her faith in mystical experiences, the presence of many faith-based elements at her site intended to help others' futures, her determination to care for animals and help them attain better rebirths—all reflect traditional as well as modern ideas concerning how to help others.

[691] Adriana Ferranti. Interviews with Author, November 2022, February 2023, and February 2024.

Kabir Saxena: Educator

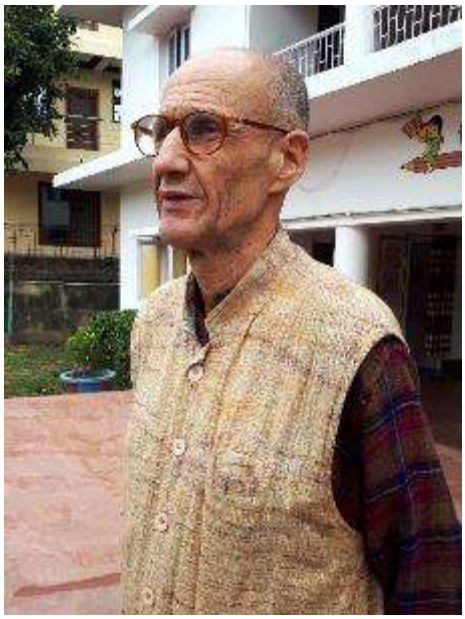

Figure 5. "Kabir Saxena." In front of Maitreya Universal Education School, Bodh Gaya, India, February 2024. Photo: Donna L. Brown.

I met Kabir Saxena in Delhi in January 2023 and again in Bodh Gaya in February 2024 and interviewed him both times. Now in his sixties, he has been involved in FPMT and its social projects in Bodh Gaya since he was in his twenties.

Kabir was born in India to an English mother and Indian father. From age ten until he completed university, he lived in England. His father, an Indian diplomat, supported Mahatma Gandhi's dream of social equality and human-centred development in India, and the Mahatma's hopes and ideals shaped young Kabir. His gap year after high school involved traveling the sub-continent volunteering in Gandhi-inspired projects to better the lot of India's poor. He also attended a talk by Jiddu Krishnamurti in Mumbai, and was later deeply impressed with his views on education as a path to spiritually-informed social development. While studying history at Oxford, Kabir studied modern India, researching Gandhi and India's freedom movement from the 1920s to 1947.

When at university, Kabir took a course in Buddhism at FPMT's initial centre in the UK, Manjushri Institute, in 1977. In 1979, he met his future teachers, the lamas, and in 1980 attended the famous November course at Kopan Monastery. Even while studying Buddhism, he held to his hope to undertake socially oriented development projects in India. He felt a call when he read an article in *The Guardian* about struggles over land in the Bodh Gaya region, where, not a kilometer from the holiest place in Buddhism, one landowner owned hundreds of acres while landless peasants starved. The article prompted an abiding interest in helping people in the area better their lives. He made his first visit there shortly afterward, in 1981.

That Kabir was an Indian citizen and spoke Hindi made him an asset when Lama Yeshe wanted to establish social projects in India. FPMT in its early years had only a handful of Indian supporters familiar with local conditions, customs, and regulations, and able to work with people in their own language. Since then, more South Asians have become part of FPMT, but Bodh Gaya is still a challenging place to live, and Kabir, with his education, background in Dharma and Gandhian thought, and willingness to stay and work in the area, has been invaluable to the lamas and FPMT.

Kabir was happy to return to Bodh Gaya in 1983 when Lama Yeshe asked him to buy land there and establish a socially engaged Dharma centre as a way of thanking India for the Dharma and the help it offered Tibetan refugees. Indian donors gave funds, and Root Institute came into being. Though now Root's well-treed campus is surrounded by monasteries and other buildings, at the time, it sat among farmers' fields: a couple of small mud-walled buildings amid a flat field dotted with freshly planted trees that, it was hoped, would soon provide shade. One of the first social endeavours Kabir oversaw was installing needed water pumps in local villages. Another was creating a sewing centre and hiring a local woman to teach others to sew; the women then made handicrafts to sell. A third was planting fruit trees in nearby villages. Still, a variety of buildings and other facilities at Root itself had to be put in place. Kabir, less interested in construction than social work and Dharma practice and teaching, handed off this phase of

Root's development to others. However, even while only intermittently spending time in Bodh Gaya in the late 1980s and 1990s, he remained a trustee of Root Institute and other social projects there. He helped Maitri Charitable Trust, of which he was also a trustee, and was particularly involved in the development of a charitable school, Prajna Vihar school, run by Christians and Buddhists together.

In 2002, Kabir returned to living mostly in Bodh Gaya to help with teacher training at Maitreya Universal Education School, in which he has been intermittently involved ever since, training teachers and students in FPMT's universal education teachings.

As of 2024, Kabir lives at Root Institute, overseeing Root, Maitreya School, and Root's clinic. At the school he teaches FPMT's *16 Guidelines* but is also planning for the future. He is pleased that the school has endured so long and offers children a good education but is anxious to make it better. "What we want," he tells me, "Is to make it an excellent school from which children can benefit the surrounding society. We don't want them to just get an education and leave for the big city. We want them to have spiritual training that inspires them to stay here and make Bodh Gaya a better place for themselves, their children and grandchildren, and their neighbours. A significant number of our students are from farm families. Most parents want their children to get desk jobs so they have an easier life. Does that help society? We are not aiming only to help the children make more money or have an easier life. Those aren't bad things. But on their own they are not social development. We are aiming to help all of society. In a farming area, that might include encouraging organic farming, permaculture, sustainable farming, forestry, higher value crops like fruit, healthy development that preserves the environment and water tables…" Kabir stops for a breath. His enthusiasm is apparent. He quotes a celebrated American farmer-activist. "My mantra these days is from Wendell Berry. He says: 'Slow down. Pay attention. Do good work. Love your neighbours. Love your place. Stay in your place. Settle for less, enjoy it more.'"

I ask how Buddhism relates to that vision. He responds, "We Buddhists can't live here in Bodh Gaya, in our comfortable centres and monasteries, and not help the people around us. There is a lot of suffering here. The lamas told us to help people however we could. And material needs come first. Sure, I'd like to teach Dharma locally but we can't give Dharma until material needs are met. So the lamas, Buddhism, Gandhi, Krishnamurti, Wendell Berry… they are all part of why I'm involved in FPMT's social projects and want to work to make them better. I'm also inspired by the children, with their vitality and eagerness to learn and explore. They are not jaded. They enjoy learning about compassion and meditation. It's invigorating!"

Kabir believes Maitreya School can do more to benefit society, not just the children who attend. One route to broader benefit, he believes, is more Buddhist teachings. "The school now is not really a Buddhist school, even if it is run by Buddhists. The universal education teachings are derived from Buddhism but are basic. Rinpoche wanted a Buddhist school here in Bodh Gaya. So in time we hope to establish a Buddhist studies stream in the school. We can't go too fast though. Right now, the universal education teachings help the children to be calm and well-behaved. Beyond that, parents just want them to have a sound education aimed at good jobs. They are not asking for Buddhism! Change takes time."

I ask him, "If Buddhist teachings come only in the future, what can be done now to link giving children a good education to benefitting society?" Kabir answered, "Universal education helps. It brings out the children's good heart. We see at the school that it makes them more kind. But solving social problems takes more than that. It takes creativity. Creativity is the immediate path from a good education plus a good heart to changing society. Creativity is what will allow our graduates to find ways to improve their communities. So we have to help their creativity to flourish, through games, drama, art, crafts, learning about trades, interacting with nature, with land and soil and plants, and seeing beauty. That will help them learn to be enterprising, to take

initiative, to be innovative. Holy objects at the school help, for sure. Those will have positive long-term effects. But we can't wait. We need to build heaven here and now. If we encourage the children's creativity, they will bring beauty into their world."[692]

Ven. Sangye Tenzin: Head, Department of Health

I met Ven. Sangye Tenzin, now head of the Department of Health of Kopan Monastery and Nunnery, during my research in Nepal in March 2023, when he showed me around Kopan Monastery's clinic and the Maya Daya Dialysis Clinic he managed for Kopan. I spoke to him again by WhatsApp in March 2024. Now in his early 50s, he has been involved in Kopan Monastery's health care projects for more than thirty years.

Figure 6. "Ven. Sangye Tenzin." Maya Daya Dialysis Clinic, Nepal, March 2023. Photo: Donna L. Brown

Sangye was born in a Buddhist, Sherpa family in Nepal in 1973 in a village close to the Tibetan border. When he was quite young—five or six—he saw some nuns performing a puja and declared that he wanted to be a monk; he was fascinated by the music of the drums and bells. Although he claimed he later forgot the incident, it may have represented his deepest wish: he was happy when, at age nine after two years in an ordinary school in Kathmandu, his parents sent him to Kopan Monastery. They chose Kopan over other monasteries because an uncle of the family knew Lama Yeshe.

Looking back, Sangye told me he thought he was fortunate. "At Kopan back then the facilities were basic. But Kopan offered a better education than most other monasteries. They only taught rituals. But we studied Nepali, Tibetan, and English. And we did ordinary subjects like math and social studies as well as Buddhism. It was a good education so I was lucky."

I asked him how he ended up working in health care. He answered, "After finishing Grade 10,[693] in 1996, I didn't go on to do geshe studies. Our respected abbot, Lama Lhundrup, called me in and asked me what I was interested in. Then he told me that serving sick people with proper motivation was the best Dharma practice. He asked if I would work at the clinic Kopan was running for monks and nuns. So I did that. I also started working at Maya Daya, the clinic we ran for local people at the foot of Kopan hill. At the beginning, I was taking sick monks and nuns to the hospital when they were referred there, making sure they got treatment, and staying with them and caring for them. I was also working as cashier and dispenser for Maya Daya and learning about medicine there. Over the years, I've had many roles in our clinics so I've had a kind of apprenticeship in medical care. Now I have a lot of experience, so I'm in charge of Kopan's health care team and all of Kopan's medical and dental services."

That experience helped him when Kopan Monastery decided to update and upgrade its medical services. "By 2021, there was a need for change. We had run Maya Daya clinic since

[692] Kabir Saxena. Interviews with Author, February 2023 and February 2024.
[693] Most students in Nepal and India finish school after Grade 10.

1992 when Kyabje Lama Zopa Rinpoche requested us to help the local people in this way, following up on the small clinic Ven. Gyatso operated. In those days, the area had no medical services and local people were really poor. They couldn't afford doctors or medicine. Maya Daya clinic helped thousands of them. But by 2021, there were many clinics and pharmacies nearby, and, because of economic development, they could pay for common treatments and medicines. So we consulted with people in the medical system to know how to serve the community better. At that time also, we at Kopan had had a long relationship with Dr. Ram Kumar Shrestha, a Nepali neurosurgeon. His father was a contractor who was responsible for a lot of construction at Kopan, including the main gompa. So Dr. Ram had been coming to Kopan since he was a child; he was a friend of Kopan and I knew him well. He had just launched Karuna Hospital in Kathmandu. It was new and modern. So we decided on a joint project that I was asked to manage. We created a dialysis clinic attached the hospital—Maya Daya Dialysis Clinic. Kidney disease is common in this area—we were told there were 3,000 new kidney patients in Nepal every year, and not enough dialysis services. So Kopan financed, through donations to Kopan Helping Hands, top dialysis equipment. Kopan runs the dialysis services. The government pays most of the cost because treatments are for destitute people. Karuna Hospital provides free space and some services like water. A monk and nun from Kopan operate the dialysis clinic and I oversee it. It's still a pilot project but it's going well."

I asked Sangye what responsibilities he had in addition to Maya Daya Clinic. He had many! From 2006 until the start of the pandemic, he organized and oversaw numerous medical camps in which volunteer doctors provided eye care or general care in rural areas of Nepal, often hill areas difficult to reach. "That made me feel good," he said. "We could see how happy it made people to get basic medical care or common medicines that otherwise they had no access to." Now he was running the clinics at the monastery and nunnery that provided medical and dental care for Kopan's hundreds of monks and nuns as well as for the visitors who attended meditation courses. He also oversaw the clinic in Solu Khumbu where Kopan had a branch monastery and a school for lay children. Another responsibility was a project at Kopan to maintain and lend out end-of-life equipment to families in need who were caring for a dying person: oxygen concentrators, wheelchairs, medical beds, and the like. That project was going well, he told me. He had also instigated training for a group of Kopan monks and nuns as health assistants. One nun had also trained as a pharmacist. Kopan was operating several children's schools that needed health care staff, he said, and more trained staff were also needed for the dialysis clinic and Kopan's own clinic. His plan was to gradually train more monks and nuns in health care, an area where Kopan could continue to offer tangible benefits to the surrounding community. He was also on the committee of three senior monks managing Kopan Helping Hands, the department of Kopan Monastery which coordinated and funded the monastery's charitable and social services. In this role he helped decide how to aid individuals and communities in need. "Being able to support people that way has been satisfying," he said. Finally, he was Kopan's General Secretary, although he laughed off my comment that he was a powerful official: he said he only signed papers. It was clear that his focus was working for people, not being a monastic administrator.

One motivation for Sangye's ongoing involvement in health care was Lama Zopa Rinpoche's encouragement. "Rinpoche told me that helping poor and sick people has tremendous benefits and creates huge merit," he reported. "He always said that serving others by providing health care was fabulous, and he asked me to continue doing this work and to keep expanding our services." I asked him if Buddhist teachings also motivated him. "I don't concentrate on Buddhist philosophy," he answered. "I concentrate on doing my job, my duty. I want to do good, that's all. I feel that helping someone is a good thing. And having a compassionate motivation. Other than that, I don't think too much about Dharma."

To close our conversation, I asked Sangye if he was happy. His response was warm and positive. "I've been in charge of health care for Kopan for a long time. During that time, our services have really developed and expanded. We've been very successful. So I can say yes. I'm very happy with what I've been doing and what Kopan has accomplished!"[694]

Ven. Yiwong: Helping without Entanglement

I met Ven. Yiwong, a 60-something nun, one morning in late February 2024 in Bodh Gaya. She had just finished leading—beautifully—a 15-day set of special prayers and pujas for Tibetan New Year aimed at swiftly bringing Rinpoche back in a new incarnation. The event—devotional, musical, aesthetically exquisite—seemed a world away from FPMT's social projects. Nevertheless, she was happy to talk about social engagement.

Figure 7. "Ven. Yiwong." Bodh Gaya, India, February 28, 2024. Photo: Donna L. Brown

I asked Yiwong first about her background and influences. Born in London, England, she was brought up a Christian, and even read the Bible from cover to cover as a young teenager. By age 14, though, she had stopped believing in God, which shocked her family. She also became a vegetarian, which did the same. In one sense, she had faith in nothing, she reported, but she nevertheless believed in not harming others. She also realized she was searching for something without knowing what. She had heard of people traveling to Kathmandu by bus and wanted to go too—this was the mid-1970s—but her parents persuaded her to first attend university. She chose languages so she could study abroad. That led to months and years of traveling Europe. In 1980, visiting Prague with a group of German friends, she had a shocking experience: a young woman, part of the group, jumped out a hotel window. Yiwong saw her broken head and body on the sidewalk. In that moment, she understood that life was precious—and could end quickly. It was a powerful experience that made the search for "something" more pressing, although at that point she tended to seek it in the arts, especially theatre and opera.

As Yiwong was finishing university, Britain declared war on Argentina. She was horrified; she did not believe in war. When the British torpedoed a ship and hundreds of young Argentinian soldiers died, she felt sick. How could she be part of a society that could do that? She graduated, took the money she had saved, and bought a plane ticket to Delhi. She shook her head telling me the story—at 22, to buy a one-way ticket and go alone to India, looking for she knew not what. When I asked what gave her the nerve, she replied, "Imprints!"

India and Nepal, at the time, were hippie destinations, and she joined right in, at least to the extent of staying in guesthouses, hanging out with backpackers, and spending hours in cheap restaurants. She considered visiting the standard attractions: the Taj Mahal, Goa, Rishikesh, and Mother Theresa. They weren't what she sought, but she didn't know how to find that. Before she could go there though, she collapsed in the street one day in Varanasi, ill, and ended up cared for by a devout Hindu family. As she recovered, she spent long days sitting beside the Ganges, watching pilgrims bathe and priests cremate the dead. The devotion of the family and the rhythm of life and death along the Ganges opened her heart to something bigger. When another traveler

[694] Ven. Sangye Tenzin. Interviews with Author, March 2023 and March 2024; "The History of Kopan Monastery: Clinic," *Facebook*, May 13, 2020. https://www.facebook.com/sun.ten1/videos/3842052229169616. 00:07:53-00:20:40.

invited her on a trip to Nepal, to maybe take a course in Buddhism at Kopan Monastery, she went. Walking into Kopan, she saw a Buddhist nun for the first time ever. She hadn't realized there were Buddhist nuns. And the nun was drinking coffee and eating cake! She thought: I could be a nun…

She didn't initially sign up for the course, but she wanted to spend a couple of days at the monastery—it was more peaceful than Kathmandu. Then the course started and, without really planning to, she stayed. When Rinpoche walked in and started teaching, she told me, "I felt like I was seeing Jesus." Rinpoche's English was hard to understand because of his coughing, a holdover from years of ill-health, but she found him mesmerizing. He taught the whole course, morning to night, himself. A couple of days into it, a nun asked if anyone knew how to type: they were transcribing Rinpoche's words. Yiwong volunteered. That decision led to years of working for FPMT's Wisdom Publications. At the end of the course, she took refuge and became "One hundred percent Buddhist!" She had found what she was seeking: "It was always Rinpoche," she said. She was sure they had a past life connection.

Family issues took Yiwong back to Britain, but Lama Yeshe's sudden passing in 1984 hit her hard. Once again, an unexpected death reminded her that life was precious and could end in a moment. She asked Rinpoche to ordain her, and soon she was a nun. Her path was mainly one of Dharma-related work, study, practice, and eventually teaching Dharma to others. Nevertheless, like many people in FPMT, at times she was involved in social projects.

In 2004, Yiwong went to Mongolia. Rinpoche had been invited, along with other prominent Geluk lamas, to help restore Buddhism there in the post-Soviet period; Buddhism had been largely wiped out in the late 1930s by the destruction of monasteries and murder of monks by the communist government. When the Soviet Union collapsed in 1991, the Russians departed, leaving behind a Mongolia with little infrastructure, deep poverty, and Buddhism in tatters. Rinpoche gave significant funds for monasteries, a nunnery, Dharma centres, and social projects. He asked Yiwong to teach Dharma in Darkhan, near the Siberian border, at FPMT's Golden Light Sutra Centre. Darkhan was a small city, desperately poor, with lots of alcoholism. It was deathly cold in the winter. The poverty was so bad Yiwong's translator requested her not to ask people about their lives; she would not be able to resist trying to help and could not teach Dharma if she got caught up in doing so. She was needed, he said, to teach Dharma. She taught in Darkhan for many months. Eventually, after weeks of coughing up blood from going outside in the cold without adequate protection, she was forced to leave.

She recalls one success: she had copies of the 4th chapter of the *Sutra of Golden Light* printed in Mongolian and widely distributed for free. The local people snapped them up. "It changed the whole city," she reports. "All the benefits listed in the sutra that the sutra says will happen if you recite it happened in Darkhan. When I went back a few years later, the government thanked Rinpoche and I. They said that it was reciting the sutra that made the city a better place. They even gave me a medal. And the city is a better place. Alcoholism and domestic violence have fallen. There's more work. It looks better. People used to say it was terrible and now they prefer it to Ulaan Baatar, which they used to think was far better!"

On social engagement, Yiwong expressed strong support for FPMT's many efforts, awe at Maitri's long-running leprosy and other medical work, and real joy at the schools in India that the lamas' followers have developed: Maitreya School, the Alice Project schools, and Akshay School, all incorporating FPMT's universal education. "The schools," she said, "give the kids a vision for a better life that they can actually have even if right now they live in poverty or in difficult families. They feel cared for; they feel the good motivation of the people running the school. The schools work because those people have pure motivation, a pure wish to help. And the staff and children are blessed by the lamas, including His Holiness the Dalai Lama, Rinpoche, and others who visit them. Rinpoche loved the kids, he visited often, gave them gifts,

chanted prayers with them. He instilled in them something precious, a sense of their own dignity and worth. The blessings and education help awaken their Buddha minds. Then their feeling of being cared for and inspired also inspires those who work for the schools, so there's a kind of virtuous circle."

Nevertheless, she describes how her views on social engagement evolved over time. "I used to be naïve," she told me. "I had a rosy picture in my mind of how simple it was to help people. You gave them things; they used them well, their situation improved, they were grateful. But it's not always so easy." She shakes her head. "In Mongolia, we would give things to poor people, really poor people, who lived in the underground sewers because they were warm. We would give them *gurs* (tents) which many people live in there. And shoes, coats … they would sell them to buy alcohol. One couple we were trying to help sold their baby to buy alcohol. Addiction is like that, and they were so desperately poor. Some people would cheat or steal. In those conditions, people can't easily be motivated to help their own future or even their own children. So trying to benefit them felt exhausting and futile. I got to the point of wondering how it could even be done. I learned how hard it is to help others. We don't know their karma, their past, present, or future. This is the problem when ordinary people run social projects. We can't know if we are doing the best thing and the outcome is uncertain."

Yiwong paused to think, then added, "I heard a story from Singapore once; some people in FPMT bought crabs and were liberating them into the ocean. They cut the string that tied the crabs' claws before they let them go. One fellow, when he freed one crab's claws, the crab pinched his finger and made it bleed. Because the crab didn't understand it was being helped and didn't know how to respond! Social projects can be like that. We tell ourselves a story: poor things, we are good, we will fix the problem. That's just a story. Realistically, karma can get in the way. We don't judge people for their karma, or stop trying to help, but we can't forget karma is involved. Sometimes we try to fix people's lives and then feel frustrated when it doesn't work. It is better to practice and teach Dharma, and not get caught up in endless social work that's not always helpful. We can try, and there are times it does help, like Maitri's health care projects and the schools. But we cannot forget about Dharma. The best social service, Rinpoche said, is *Lam Rim* realizations."

"Why?" I asked.

"*Lam Rim* changes your mind. Without it, you don't want to help or you get disappointed. Or you don't want to keep vows. You don't understand why you wouldn't just have a good time. *Lam Rim* changes what you want. The other thing, though, is that if you really practice the *Lam Rim*, you can become like Rinpoche. We feel bad if our help is misused or we don't get the results we want. He never did. He didn't mind because he saw a bigger picture. By giving, he was connecting to people for future lives. And he saw a window of opportunity to do something positive, create some benefit, that we didn't see. So he wasn't bothered by anything negative going on. He could see benefits that we couldn't. He knew exactly what he was doing, giving—pouring in help, keeping being kind—even though people were cheating or whatever. Social work is more multi-faceted than we think. It involves karma, helping for the sake of future lives, or for things happening later on that Rinpoche could see coming and we couldn't. A bodhisattva knows that the act of giving brings benefits no matter what we see, so he is not caught by our stories. We don't have a bodhisattva view but when we have *Lam Rim* realizations, we will know what to do, what will actually help."

Lunchtime. As I gathered up my notes, I asked Yiwong what her motivation was for social involvement. "Bodhisattva vows," she answered. "We take a vow to benefit others. Once we take a vow to do that, we can't just walk by people who are poor, sick, dying… Giving and helping is what we took a vow to do. Remember the hungry tigress? Buddha offered her his body

and the benefits were huge. We are supposed to be like that." She smiles. "But Dharma practice is still most important. So soon I'm going into retreat. First things first!"[695]

Ven. Wangyel: Playing the Long Game

Ven. Wangyel declined to be photographed.

I met Ven. Wangyel—a British monk of mixed race in his mid-30s who had ordained not quite a year before we spoke—in March 2024 in London, England. When we talked, Wangyel was living and working at Jamyang London Buddhist Centre, organizing spiritual activities as well as being involved in other aspects of running the centre. Jamyang London is one of the largest centres in FPMT with a wide range of Dharma and socially oriented activities.

Wangyel was not raised with religion but recalls many philosophical discussions with his father. Wanting to understand reality and find answers to "the big questions," he felt an affinity, growing up, with both philosophy and mysticism—but studied mathematics in university. Its rationality appealed to him as did the philosophy it embodied and the way it could generate infallible calculations on the basis of abstract concepts, even precisely defining infinity. But at some point he became disillusioned with its purely intellectual approach, which did not provide the answers he was seeking. He still valued rationality, but felt he needed a better philosophy.

He began reading about Buddhism, which combined reason with the mysticism that had long intrigued him. He found the reasonings Buddhism presented for the continuity of consciousness "convincing and compelling." It was a key moment. "If consciousness continued after death," he told me, "I realized I had to use my time wisely." He felt he should work in a Dharma centre. That led him to Jamyang London, where he started both working and studying Buddhism. The attraction of Jamyang over centres offering other forms of Buddhism was FPMT's education programs. "FPMT has excellent long term study programs," he explained. "Many centres offer short courses, but FPMT has comprehensive, deep, multi-year education programs that tie all the topics together—psychology, metaphysics, ethics, and so on. Dharma is a kind of unified theory of everything, so Dharma education can't be piecemeal. It has to explore all the topics and tie them together. FPMT's courses do that."

When I asked him if he felt, looking back after several years of serious Dharma study and practice, that he had made the right choice, he was clear. "Absolutely. Tibetan Buddhism was always the place I was going to end up if I didn't die first. Hand on heart, following the Buddhist path is the best thing I can do with my life!" He added, "When I first came to Jamyang, I wasn't a very happy person. Now I am. I feel productive; I am making a contribution. I witness people coming here and their suffering decreases. They become more content and balanced. Seeing that gives me purpose. My earlier life was more superficial."

I asked him if he felt his work at Jamyang was social engagement. He responded seriously. "Service to Jamyang is service to society. The purpose of Dharma is to eliminate suffering. Suffering comes from the mind, not just external conditions. Helping people to understand their minds is what helps them to find contentment. And because there is interdependence, if one person is happier, that affects other people as well. Also, in the Buddhist worldview, time is endless, so Buddhist social engagement puts primary importance on the long term, not on temporarily alleviating suffering. If people are hungry you give them food, but the most helpful thing you can do for society is to put people on the path to enlightenment. People perceive social engagement as things like hospitals, but the Buddha wanted to cut the root of suffering. What we call social engagement tends to be immediate, visible, material ways of benefiting others, but in Buddhism, material and spiritual help, short term help for now and long

[695] Ven. Yiwong. Interview with Author, February 2024.

term help for later lives, are combined. We want to improve people's immediate situation and their future lives. That is real Buddhist social engagement."

When I visited London, Wangyel was involved in Jamyang London's Equity, Diversity, and Inclusion (EDI) initiatives, facilitating its "Black and Curious about Buddhism" group, one way the centre was exploring how to offer Buddhism to a wider range of people. Although hesitant to speak of his own experiences, he indicated he had faced racial biases in Buddhist contexts: lack of awareness; comments based on ignorance. I asked about barriers Black people might experience in accessing Buddhist teachings. He responded, "Marginalized people face barriers everywhere, including Buddhist centres. There is history. There is unconscious bias. People hesitate to join a community if they don't see anyone like themselves there. It's easier to imagine yourself in a community if you see yourself reflected in it. That's the way humans are. It's not enough for Dharma centres to just say the doors are open. We can't be passive. We need to proactively welcome people in."

As part of that effort, Wangyel was working in the spring of 2024 with a prominent Black American scholar of Buddhism and longtime FPMT practitioner, Dr. Jan Willis. He had interviewed her about her book, *Dreaming Me: Black, Baptist, and Buddhist—One Woman's Spiritual Journey*, as one of Jamyang's events; the video had been posted online. She was also coming to Jamyang, at his invitation, to give a public talk on "The Buddha and Social Justice." He was expecting significant attendance from both the public and people associated with FPMT, as the event was planned to coincide with a conference Jamyang was organizing for people involved in FPMT across Europe on Buddhism and climate change.

"The most useful thing I can do at Jamyang," he told me, "is to integrate social engagement into the existing spiritual education program. That's what having Jan Willis here does. It's spiritual education because she is able to explain how racial and social justice is Dharma. It is also an EDI initiative, showing our community that Black people belong here. It's also part of larger efforts to welcome Black people into the centre. And it will be a positive event for the "Black and Curious about Buddhism" group—she'll meet with them when she's here. Inclusivity work is long game, so every step forward helps."

As I gathered up my things to finish the interview, Wangyel offered a final reflection. "Social engagement here in the West is often about mental health, mental wellness—that's the need. There was a report that came out recently that said the UK ranks quite low among countries for mental health. The main job of a Dharma centre like Jamyang is to help people with their minds. A lot of Jamyang's social engagement, like the various workshops—cloth mending is one example—are mainly about creating connections and helping people overcome loneliness. Buddhism has had a big influence in the wellness world; people don't realize that concepts like emotional intelligence are rooted partly in Buddhism and in the work of His Holiness the Dalai Lama. He's been changing the conversation around mental wellbeing for years, including through his work with scientists in the Mind and Life initiative. Dharma centres can help people work with their minds and also offer activities to overcome loneliness. Helping people in ways that improve their mental wellbeing is social engagement; it is something important Jamyang is doing for society. It makes me happy to be part of that."[696]

[696] Ven. Wangyel. Interview with Author, March 2024.

FPMT's Social Engagement: Background, Evolution, Perceptions

Introduction to FPMT's Engagement

Perceptions of Rinpoche's and FPMT's Engagement: Himalayan

Rinpoche guided FPMT for almost forty years. Soon after his passing in April 2023, other lamas composed prayers urging him to quickly reincarnate. Such "swift return" prayers are common. Written and chanted in Tibetan, they follow conventions of style and content, praising the departed lama for devotion to his teachers, spiritual accomplishments, success in transmitting his lineage, and personal qualities. The prayers composed for Rinpoche by distinguished lamas like the Dalai Lama and Khenzur Jhado Rinpoche fit this pattern. However, the prayer composed by Geluk lama Lelung Rinpoche included a new feature: verses praising social engagement.

བོད་སོགས་སྤྱི་སྣེར་དུ་མར།།
ལོངས་སྤྱོད་བྱམ་པ་སྤེ་ནས།།
ངལ་བའི་གདུང་བ་སེལ་བའི།།
སྤྲིན་བདག་ཆུ་མ་བཟོད་པ།།

Benefactor Lama Zopa,
For the many public and personal needs of Tibetans and others,
You opened the vase of resources
And cleared away the suffering of hardship.

སྨུ་མེད་དུད་འགྲོ་མཚོན་མེད།།
བྱམས་པའི་ཐུགས་ཀྱིས་འཛིན་ནས།།
མཚོན་དང་དབུང་གཉེན་དམ་པ།།
ཆོ་ཆེན་ཆུ་མ་བཟོད་པ།།

One of great mind, Lama Zopa,
You held helpless and voiceless animals
With a mind of loving kindness,
And were their holy savior and protector.[697]

Lelung Rinpoche praised Rinpoche for bringing resources and opportunities to the poor and marginalized, Himalayan and non-Himalayan, and to animals. He voiced the awareness of Himalayan communities that Rinpoche had made FPMT a leader among Tibetan Buddhist organizations in social engagement. Some other lamas and leaders, in their praises of Rinpoche, conveyed the same message. The Karmapa, Ogyen Trinley Dorje, wrote: "He provided thousands of members of the sangha … with regular food and built schools, hospitals, and homes

[697] "A Prayer for the Swift Return of Lama Zopa Rinpoche by His Holiness the 14th Dalai Lama, Tenzin Gyatso with Additional Prayers by Other Distinguished Lamas: Provisional Version 3," *FPMT Education Services* (2023). https://fpmt.org/wp-content/uploads/teachers/zopa/updates-regarding-rinpoche/lzr_swift_return_prayers_v3.pdf.

for the elderly. He was a protector for the defenseless, a refuge for the vulnerable, a fount of generosity, both dharma and material, and a light for the teachings and beings."[698] The head of the Geluk tradition as well as the exile Tibetan government also underlined his and FPMT's social impact.[699] Such acknowledgements reveal Rinpoche's and FPMT's reputation in the Himalayan world for social engagement. Yet that engagement has gone largely unnoticed among scholars and Western Buddhists.[700]

Perceptions of Rinpoche's and FPMT's Engagement: Inside FPMT

A description of Rinpoche posted on Facebook in 2023 by a Canadian working in an FPMT centre illustrates views within FPMT of Rinpoche. The post, entitled "Lama Zopa Rinpoche as an Engaged Buddhist" is quoted here in its entirety because it encapsulates perceptions that research found throughout FPMT.

> Rinpoche's revolutionary bodhisattva aspect I think in part arose from the experiences from his early life and overcoming tremendous obstacles. Despite being a recognized lama, Rinpoche was born into a very poor and underprivileged village in the Everest region of Nepal. The book *The Lawudo Lama* explains how he came to connect with lamas of the Gelug lineage, endured the difficult conditions at Buxa Prison with the first wave of Tibetan monks arriving in India, and eventually met Lama Yeshe and began connecting with Westerners. Throughout this time Rinpoche experienced difficulties such as poverty and ill health including tuberculosis. His later years as the spiritual director of a significant international Buddhist organization were in stark contrast to the early years. One important aspect of Rinpoche's activity was actualizing Lama Yeshe's wish to "repay the kindness of India" in accepting the Tibetans as refugees. This took the shape of social projects in Bihar particularly—including a school for poor children, a leprosy and health initiative called Maitri, and a health clinic and other services hosted by Root Institute in Bodh Gaya. Rinpoche's personal interactions with the poor were quite different from that of other Buddhist benefactors. I observed him clearly many times meeting the eyes, folding his hands in *anjali*,[701] and expressing deep appreciation to the beggars (many of whom had leprosy) around the Bodh Gaya stupa. Another socially engaged aspect of his life was the establishment of educational opportunities for women, especially nuns. Not only did Kopan Nunnery become one of the first institutions to offer the coveted

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[698] "From His Holiness the 17th Gyalwang Karmapa, Ogyen Trinley Dorje," *FPMT* (April 15, 2023). https://fpmt.org/wp-content/uploads/2023/04/His-Holiness-the-17th-Gyalwang-Karmapa-Ogyen-Trinley-Dorje_English.pdf.

[699] "Venerable Yangsi Rinpoche," *Kashag* (April 17, 2023). https://fpmt.org/wp-content/uploads/2023/04/Central-Tibetan-Administration_English.pdf; "Gaden Tripa Lobsang Tenzin," Sera Jey Monastery Tsangpa Khangsten (April 13, 2023). https://fpmt.org/wp-content/uploads/teachers/zopa/updates-regarding-rinpoche/tributes-and-condolences/Ganden-Tripa-Lobsang-Tenzin-Rinpoche_English.pdf.

[700] Regarding Western Buddhists, it is notable that the obituary of Rinpoche in *Tricycle*, likely the best-known American Buddhist magazine, does not mention Rinpoche's social engagement. Joan Duncan Oliver, "Lama Zopa Rinpoche, Renowned Tibetan Buddhist Master, Has Died," *Tricycle* (April 17, 2023). https://tricycle.org/article/lama-zopa-rinpoche-obituary/. *BuddhistDoor Global*, an online Buddhist magazine, also does not mention social engagement in its obituary. Craig C. Lewis, "Revered Buddhist Scholar and FPMT Founder Lama Zopa Rinpoche Has Died," *BuddhistDoor Global*. April 13, 2023. https://www.buddhistdoor.net/news/revered-lama-and-fpmt-founder-lama-zopa-rinpoche-has-died/. The omissions may reveal that Rinpoche's social engagement was little known outside the Himalayan community.

[701] Hindi अञ्जली. A respectful greeting with hands folded together.

> scholastic degree of Geshe to women, it also championed and hosted the *Jang Gunchoe*[702] inter-nunnery debate where top nun scholars delve into difficult topics, in particular Dharmakirti's *Treatise on Valid Cognition*.[703] Rinpoche appointed many Western nuns as key teachers at various Dharma centres, and several of these nuns became well known lecturers on Buddhism. For the old, Rinpoche funded homes for the aged for vulnerable Tibetan refugees in both the North and South of India—sometimes offering and distributing the food himself. His social engagement embodied the Mahayana spirit of embracing all sentient beings—not just human beings—as worthy of relief from suffering and opportunities for happiness. He established animal sanctuaries in India and Nepal to provide lifelong accommodation and care to countless animals injured or marked for slaughter—many of whom Rinpoche rescued himself (often spotting them from the road). His advocacy of vegetarianism and promotion of a vegetarian diet preceded that of many lamas now advocating less harmful ways of eating. These are just a few aspects of Rinpoche's social engagement that are worthy of note. I sometimes think because they happen in other parts of the world, and are maintained in a very low-key way, they go unnoticed in larger Buddhist circles. Or because they manifest in culturally appropriate ways in Asian countries in particular, they are different from the (wonderful) church-inspired initiatives that we see in our own countries. I am only sharing for posterity here and the above examples are not exhaustive, only illustrative.[704]

Notable is the observation that Rinpoche's interest in social engagement derived from two main factors: his "bodhisattva aspect" meaning his compassion for all beings; and his own experience of physical suffering due to his family's poverty, the deprivations he experienced as a refugee, and his ill health. The post also alludes to one of Lama Yeshe's and Rinpoche's reasons for establishing social projects in India: gratitude for the kindness India showed in accepting refugees when China occupied Tibet. It then gives examples of FPMT's social projects. Like many people in FPMT, the author includes support for monasteries in engagement given that they give children from poor and minority backgrounds education and opportunities.[705] The post paints a picture of Rinpoche as many in FPMT perceive him: early among lamas to engage socially and encouraging his followers to do the same. The post notes as well that FPMT's engagement is not well known. Finally, it shows one way that people in FPMT connect engagement to longstanding Buddhist teachings: as their natural expression.

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[702] Tibetan འཇང་དགུན་ཆོས་ (*'jang dgun chos*). Winter debate period, observed in the past in the Buddhist monastic universities of Tibet, where monks gathered from various monasteries and held formal philosophical debates during winter months. The tradition was reinstated in exile Tibetan monasteries in India and Nepal. Nuns now participate, which did not occur in pre-1959 Tibet.

[703] Skt. प्रमाणवार्त्तिक / *Pramāṇavārttika*; Tib. ཚད་མ་རྣམ་འགྲེལ་, *tshad ma rnam 'grel*.

[704] Khedrup Rory Tasker. "Lama Zopa Rinpoche as an Engaged Buddhist." *Facebook*, November 6, 2023. https://www.facebook.com/jkhedrup.rtasker/posts/pfbid025edGKofCToQmg5ukb9ty8uCmnNg2b7bFTUZ1RkFtbaokdDfe7SG5LD9N6R8Chgonl, November 6, 2023. Quoted with permission.

[705] He also includes vegetarianism, which this dissertation does not call "engagement."

FPMT's Approaches to Engagement: Foundations and Development

This section presents the framework for social engagement that guides FPMT.

Name and Mission

Although FPMT's name does not imply that FPMT must engage socially, its "Mission Statement" provides a basis for engagement:

> The Foundation is devoted to preserving and spreading Mahayana Buddhism worldwide … We provide integrated education through which people's minds and hearts can be transformed into their highest potential for the benefit of others, inspired by an attitude of universal responsibility and service. We are committed to creating harmonious environments and helping all beings develop their full potential of infinite wisdom and compassion… [706]

The relevant phrase is "inspired by an attitude of universal responsibility and service." In FPMT's Mahayana context, "universal responsibility" is an English interpretation of the Sanskrit "bodhichitta," meaning the wish to attain enlightenment to benefit all beings. The words "universal responsibility and service" suggest that a bodhichitta attitude, for FPMT, does not refer only to the wish to attain enlightenment and then benefit others by spreading Dharma, but also to benefitting beings immediately by "service." The words hint that, from the standpoint of FPMT, bodhichitta—the core Mahayana attitude—prescribes social engagement, which is thus part of FPMT's mission.

Conceptualizing Social Engagement in FPMT

Within FPMT's network are numerous social projects, and FPMT's international office makes financial contributions to some of these as well as to some projects operated by other organizations. One question is whether FPMT has a social philosophy that guides decisions about social engagement. A second question is whether FPMT's international office has a policy that delimits engagement across its network, allowing or insisting on some activities while barring others.

FPMT does not have a social policy of that type, nor, according to its CEO, does it intend to create one. FPMT's leaders have preferred that affiliates engage socially in ways that suit the needs of those around them in the context of their own resources and capabilities: a bottom up approach. Natural evolution, leading to variety, the CEO has indicated, makes more sense for FPMT than a single, top down vision.[707] This approach keeps any one part of FPMT from imposing a single way of engaging on the variety of cultures, affiliates, and individuals that make up the network. Interviewees generally supported it. One said, for example, "I don't think FPMT as a whole should tell individual centres 'you should be doing X, Y, and Z.' The political situation, the cultural situation, is different in different countries, even different communities in a country. What each centre decides to do, that's the best way."[708]

FPMT, however, does have an implicit social philosophy that guides the funding decisions of the international office and helps shape many of FPMT's activities. This section

[706] "FPMT Mission Statement," *FPMT*. https://fpmt.org/fpmt/fpmt-mission-statement/. Accessed October 24, 2023.
[707] Ven. Roger Kunsang. Interviewed by Author, April 3, 2023.
[708] F111G06. Interviewed by Author, November 2022.

examines the background to FPMT's social engagement, the questions that arose internally over the decades regarding it, and the evolution of FPMT as Rinpoche responded to these questions—an evolution that produced a social philosophy that can be called "traditionalist."

The First Stage of FPMT's Social Engagement: 1969-1984

In FPMT's early years, the role it gave social engagement was undefined. Engagement was peripheral to FPMT's main activities: preserving, practicing, and transmitting its lineage. FPMT's initial activities reflected the priority Tibetan refugees gave to saving their lineages through Dharma study, teaching, and practice; establishing monasteries and monastic universities; caring for lamas; receiving and passing on empowerments and oral transmissions; and finding and printing endangered texts. Given these challenges, lineage preservation outweighed social engagement in the eyes of the lamas, the Himalayan world to which they belonged, and their early Western followers.

This situation did not necessarily reflect Tibetan history. Historical studies show that before 1959 monasteries—Tibet's main religious organizations—were socially active. Weak central government in Tibet meant that monasteries were the only substantial entities that could play a social role. Social endeavours were not their main responsibility—lineage preservation was. And their form of Buddhism taught that Buddhist teaching and practice was the main way to help others and society. Nevertheless, various forms of charity, material aid to individuals and communities, and involvement in education and health care occurred.[709] After 1959, once lineages were re-established outside Tibet, monasteries and new organizations like FPMT entered areas of historic monastic involvement like health care, education, and poverty alleviation. In FPMT, engagement increased gradually. In time, FPMT's leaders came to present engagement as core to FPMT's responsibilities. The stages in this process are described here.

Social engagement in FPMT began before FPMT itself was established. Early projects began either as initiatives requested by one or other of the lamas or as initiatives of Western students. One reason for launching projects was that the lamas and their students, in the 1970s, could not help but observe the needs around them in Nepal and India. As discussed in Chapter 2, Kopan Monastery began as a school Rinpoche launched in 1969 for boys from poor families—it was FPMT's first social project. In 1973, Western students of the lamas who had medical backgrounds established a free clinic at Kopan for the school's boys and their teachers. It quickly began to also serve the surrounding Nepali community given that there was no other health care available nearby. Medicines and other items were donated by Western friends of those involved.[710] For several years, these two projects—the school/monastery and the small clinic—

[709] Jansen notes these were sometimes promoted by highly regarded individuals. For example, hagiographies emphasized the social endeavours of yogis, such as the construction of iron bridges to ease travel by Thangtong Gyalpo. She also describes the social, economic, and political roles monasteries played. Examples include: instructions from Lama Tsongkhapa, initiator of the Geluk lineage, to monastics to give charity to the poor in ways compatible with vinaya (which can restrict monastic giving); monasteries being a social safety net in times of trouble for communities with which they had connections; being involved in administration of justice; being the main providers of education to lay people, including teaching literacy and also arts, crafts, medicine, and other skills; and being Tibet's main source of medical care and medicines. Jansen does not call the monasteries "socially engaged" because her implicit definition of social engagement is limited to efforts to transform the social order, which she indicates monasteries did not do. Nevertheless, by the definition used here, they were engaged; they were deeply involved in material aspects of life and they benefitted surrounding communities in material ways. Jansen, *The Monastery Rules*, 42-43, 121-122, 141-146, 173-174. Maher emphasizes the important social role premodern Tibetan monasteries played, writing that "service to society became a standard element of monastic life." Maher, "Tibetan Monastics," 271.

[710] Hulse, *Big Love*, 245.

were FPMT's only social initiatives. Funds were tight: the lamas had nothing themselves and their students were not well-off either. One interviewee present at the time simply stated, "those were the maximum we could manage because of our resources."[711] In 1992, there was still no clinic in the area, so Kopan formally established Maya Daya Clinic to provide basic healthcare for the local population. Over the years, the clinic, charging only nominal fees for consultations and medicines, benefited thousands of local people as well as monks, nuns, and schoolchildren from Kopan and other monasteries.[712] Root Institute for Wisdom Culture in Bodh Gaya, a Dharma centre established in 1987 after several years of effort, also, like Kopan, began as a social project, in this case at the suggestion of Lama Yeshe. It undertook various activities aimed at helping marginalized people in the region of the Buddha's enlightenment.[713]

Nevertheless, Lama Yeshe did not prioritize social engagement over formal Dharma practice. For example, in 1977 he said:

> If you really want to help sentient beings, you have to do so gradually. First you have to develop yourself along the graduated path to enlightenment; there's a process. Helping others isn't something you can do just because you decide you want to. If you are not skillful you're likely to do more harm than good.[714]

This comment was typical for the time. It shows hesitation about Buddhists engaging socially without first developing a measure of wisdom and compassion. This idea that substantial Dharma practice should precede engagement was widespread in FPMT in its initial decades.

Lama Yeshe passed away in 1984, early in FPMT's development, leaving Rinpoche to be FPMT's Spiritual Director. Lama Yeshe's views created a baseline for the organization in several ways. First, he wished to create social projects to thank India for helping Tibetans. This gave a role to gratitude in social engagement, while his focus on Bodh Gaya demonstrated that he valued efforts to help marginalized people in areas connected to Buddhism. FPMT's activities in India, Nepal, and Mongolia still reference his legacy by helping alleviate poverty and provide opportunity in communities linked to Buddhism or the Himalayas. Second, he stressed education. The following words he spoke in 1983 appear in the social service area of FPMT's website. They show how he thought society would be bettered—through education.

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[711] A121P03. Interviewed by Author, November 2022.

[712] In 2021, other medical services were well established in the area, so Kopan Monastery's management reassessed local needs and closed the clinic, keeping only a small clinic operating within Kopan Monastery for resident monks and schoolchildren. They then re-established Maya Daya as a dialysis clinic at nearby Karuna Hospital, as discussed above under "Ven. Sangye Tenzin: Head, Department of Health." The evolution of the clinic demonstrates adaptation to local circumstances. "Rejoicing in the Addition of Maya Daya Dialysis Clinic to Karuna Hospital," *FPMT Community: Stories & News*, April 12, 2022, https://fpmt.org/fpmt-community-news/rejoicing-in-the-addition-of-maya-daya-dialysis-clinic-to-karuna-hospital/.

[713] See above under "Kabir Saxena: Educator" for details. Root was established in 1987, three years after Lama Yeshe's passing, with the concept and some money coming from Lama Yeshe. Efforts to establish it began in 1983, but it took several years to procure the needed land, which occurred in 1987. Social projects in Bodh Gaya were underway before and was purchased. Hulse, *Big Love*, 1120, 1221, 1222.

[714] Hulse, *Big Love*, 593. This is one of many comments from the lamas in the early years of FPMT. A comment from another influential lama, Geshe Sopa, also sums up the approach that drove FPMT. Geshe Sopa was the first senior Tibetan lama to teach in a US university; he was close to the Dalai Lama and highly respected in FPMT. He said the following to FPMT in 1984 regarding efforts to spread Dharma in Western countries: "We have a saying in Tibetan that the only medicine that can cure the misery of sentient beings is the teachings. Of course, without spiritual teachings there is no real cure of complete permanent freedom from misery or suffering. The real medicine to cure all sickness and suffering is the real teaching. Therefore, if the teachings survive and can spread everywhere, this will be greatly beneficial, a great cure for everyone. So spreading the teachings is one of the best ways to serve all people, all of humanity" (Hulse, *Big Love*, 1255-1256).

> Why have we established the FPMT? Why are we establishing these facilities all over the world? I think we are clean clear as to our aim – we want to lead sentient beings to higher education. We are an organization that gives people the chance to receive higher education. We offer people what we have: the combined knowledge of Buddha's teachings and the modern way of life…[715]

FPMT uses this quote to show Lama Yeshe's desire to benefit society as a whole. The quote's context suggests he was referring primarily to Dharma education.[716] He was nevertheless well-known for also promoting secularized teachings to give non-Buddhists training in ethics, compassion, and wisdom. The way he hoped to heal society's ills was education.[717]

Lama Yeshe, despite promoting some forms of social engagement, may have also limited it in FPMT with his view that Dharma practice should precede it—a comment that implies that engaging socially is not in itself a Dharma practice and that only people some way along the path to enlightenment could engage socially in truly beneficial ways. This separation of engagement from Dharma practice was further implied in an important talk he gave in 1983—his last talk to FPMT. In it, he described how centres should operate. He made no mention of social engagement.[718] His approach thus separated social engagement from formal Dharma practice and Dharma centres. Nevertheless, he left an important legacy: a desire to benefit all of society; stress on education as the way to do so; and a wish for FPMT to help overcome material deprivation among particular groups connected to Buddhism or Himalayan culture.

The passing of Lama Yeshe brought an end to the initial phase of FPMT's development. From then on, ideas about engagement in FPMT were shaped by Rinpoche drawing on Lama Yeshe's legacy. Rinpoche's words over the years allow FPMT's approaches to engagement to be conceptualized in stages. The first stage is the period up to 2007; the second 2007-2014; and the third 2014 to the present. Rinpoche, in 2007 and 2014, addressed two important questions. First, for most Dharma practitioners in most circumstances, was engaging socially a practice that, akin to other Dharma practices, helped them progress toward enlightenment, or was engaging socially inferior in soteriological power to formal Dharma practices and thus potentially a distraction from these? Second, which FPMT affiliates should be socially engaged?

The Second Stage of FPMT's Social Engagement: 1984 to 2007

A complete review of Rinpoche's words on social engagement is not feasible. FPMT's archive, LYWA, contains vast amounts of material; relevant talks cannot easily be found using key words; and no archival category identifies social engagement. Instead of being comprehensive, therefore, this section is illustrative. It examines prominent examples of Rinpoche's remarks along with some briefer comments sampled from LYWA.

Despite how engaged FPMT has become, Rinpoche gave few, if any, formal teachings on social engagement. LYWA publishes hard copy books and e-books, posts his teachings, advice, and other material online, produces podcasts, and makes his words available in other ways. Yet formal teachings on the topic do not appear. What LYWA reveals, however, is that Rinpoche frequently referenced what he called "social service" in communications to individuals, comments when teaching on other topics, dedications, and so on.

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[715] "Lama Zopa Rinpoche's Vast Visions."
[716] "Lama Yeshe's Address."
[717] See, for example, Lama Thubten Yeshe, "Universal Education," *Lama Yeshe Wisdom Archive #009*, September 1983. https://www.lamayeshe.com/article/universal-education.
[718] "Lama Yeshe's Address."

Over the years, Rinpoche regularly thanked individuals who donated to or fundraised for social projects; encouraged people to undertake work beneficial to people or animals; stressed that social projects would bring happiness; dedicated merit to help social projects end the suffering of people and animals; discussed the importance of providing food and other material essentials to monasteries and monastics; underlined the usefulness of financially supporting social services like hospices and universal education; and noted the importance, when material aid was offered, of helping beneficiaries to improve their minds and karma to ensure benefits would endure. Particularly common, for Rinpoche, was dedicating merit for the success of FPMT's social projects. He often mentioned particular activities such as hospice care, prison work, and providing food, shelter, medical care, and universal education.[719] The regularity with which these remarks occurred show that social engagement was often on his mind.

A dedication of merit by Rinpoche at the end of a puja in 2006 is typical of this period. It shows where he placed social engagement in a hierarchy of FPMT's activities that put creating holy objects to help beings' karma first; preserving, practicing, and sharing lineage teachings second; and social projects third. Despite ranking engagement third, it is evident that Rinpoche valued it.

> And due to all the past, present, future merits collected by me, the three-time merits collected by others, then, may … the Maitreya statues be able to actualize in different parts of the world … and as well all the rest of the holy objects different parts of the world, to cause sentient beings quickest way to purify their negative karma, collecting merits and bring to enlightenment as quick as possible, so to receive all the needs … for that. Then as well as the building monasteries, nunneries different parts of the world, to preserve Dharma, spread Dharma for sentient beings, and as well as offering to the Sanghas, those Lama Tsongkhapa tradition the major monasteries where they, places of learning the depth, the most extensive Buddhadharma in this world and … continue offering service to them, food and so forth …. then social services, various social services in this organization, hospice and universal, most important one, universal education … the heart of the education … the children to grow up good human being, compassionate, loving, tolerant, like this, in this world and to not become harmful being, … so become so beneficial like this to the whole world … And universal education and hospice, then all the giving treatment to those who are sick, sicknesses, giving shelter, food and those things, then … different social services … to be developed as many as possible.[720]

He then repeated the need to practice and spread the Dharma as well as implement social projects. He also made clear which kind of engagement was, in his eyes, most important: universal education, Lama Yeshe's path to social change.

A remark to an individual in 2007 on how to serve others demonstrates similar priorities:

> Dharma center is the best form of social service because this is the only thing that really stops the sufferings forever. Dharma centers actually bring much deeper benefit … So, you can help in some way. Also, any social service is very good for you to do, to help others. To have direct physical involvement in benefiting others is very good.[721]

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[719] See, for example, "Teachings at Amitabha and White Tara Initiations and Retreat: Final Dedications," Lama Yeshe Wisdom Archive #1604, February 18-21, 2007. https://www.lamayeshe.com/article/chapter/final-dedications.
[720] "Bodhgaya Teachings: 2006, Day One: Maitreya Buddha Puja Part F." Lama Yeshe Wisdom Archive #1588. December 26-31, 2006. https://www.lamayeshe.com/article/chapter/day-one-maitreya-buddha-puja-part-f.
[721] "Beneficial Practices for a New Student." Lama Yeshe Wisdom Archive, November 2007. https://www.lamayeshe.com/advice/beneficial-practices-new-student.

Although these comments seem straightforward, they do not answer all questions that people may have had about the relationship between formal Dharma practice and engagement. From FPMT's earliest days, engagement had been perceived differently by different people. Some people valued it highly, and established and operated clinics, schools, hospices, prison services, and so on. Others viewed it as secondary, questionable, ineffective in benefiting others, or a distraction from the formal Dharma practices that could produce more profound benefits for others. And even though FPMT has always had social projects, its engagement was largely separate from its Dharma centres. The main role of Dharma centres at the time, with respect to social engagement, was to fundraise for projects in India, Nepal, and eventually Mongolia.

Rinpoche's remarks, to 2007, did not fully clarify where social engagement ought to fit into Dharma practitioners' lives. An example of how this question was left unanswered is a 2001 explanation by Rinpoche published in *Mandala*, FPMT's magazine. In a prominent article purporting to explain "social action," Rinpoche praised it highly and yet indicated that Dharma teaching and practice were better ways to benefit others. He discussed the usefulness of social engagement if one's practice was going badly, the Dalai Lama's support for it, the satisfaction and good qualities it could engender, the merit it created, the benefits others received, and its role in bringing beneficiaries to Buddhism. However, he also indicated that cultivating the mind in formal Dharma practice, operating Dharma centres, constructing holy objects, dedicating merit, doing prayers and pujas, and especially sharing the Dharma with others and facilitating their practice were "the best medicine… the best nurse, the best hospital, the best hospice." Formal Dharma activities, he added, constituted the best way to help individuals and society, being "the way violence, quarrels, economic problems, famine and so forth get stopped."[722] His explanation aimed more to explain why FPMT was less engaged than some other Buddhist groups than to encourage engagement.[723]

One result was a lack of clarity on who in FPMT should be engaged and in what circumstances. Should the lamas' followers engage socially only when they felt their formal practices were going poorly? Why, if social engagement was beneficial in the ways Rinpoche indicated, including for creating merit to fuel formal Dharma practice, was it was less important than that practice? Another question related to life balance. Should everyone who felt their formal practice was going well do only that? Did this approach promote mental and physical health? Or compassion for others' challenges? And how did Rinpoche's advice connect to the views of the Dalai Lama? As far back as the 1980s, the Dalai Lama recommended social engagement for almost everyone, and people in FPMT were often students of his.[724] Rinpoche's words also did not resolve short term/ long term questions. When people were sick or injured, were pujas, prayers, and mantras better than medical care? And if faith-based practices were better, why did FPMT affiliates operate clinics? FPMT's communications did not answer these questions. As a result, individuals made their own decisions, sometimes based on personal advice from the lamas or other teachers.

Noticeable are two conundrums that are embedded in Buddhism itself: first, how to balance material ways of helping others with ways of (invisibly, but according to Buddhist teachings, effectively) aiding them with faith-based means; and second, how to balance helping

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[722] "Aspects of Buddhist Social Service." *Mandala* (December 2001-February 2002): 12-13.

[723] One reason the explanation was shaped in this way was that Rinpoche was asked why some Buddhists do formal practice and others are socially engaged. Given this question, Rinpoche praised preserving, practicing, and sharing the Dharma, and presented social engagement as secondary.

[724] José Ignacio Cabezón, "Buddhist Principles in the Tibetan Liberation Movement," in *Engaged Buddhism: Buddhist Liberation Movements in Asia*, eds. Christopher Queen and Sallie B. King (Albany: State University of New York Press, 1996), 311-313.

others using one's limited powers now with using one's time to do formal practices so that one can help them more profoundly later on. These questions cannot be separated from Buddhism's worldview. During FPMT's first thirty years or so, the lamas, when speaking in general rather than to particular individuals, landed on the side of faith-based ways of helping others and on the side of working toward enlightenment now in order to help others more profoundly later on.

The Third Stage of FPMT's Social Engagement: 2007-2014

In the 2000s, the attention Rinpoche and FPMT paid to material efforts to help others increased. Why? The Buddhist world in general, since the 1970s and especially since the 1990s, has become increasingly socially active.[725] Interviews showed that many people in FPMT have had contact with other forms of Buddhism, Buddhist teachers, and Buddhist organizations. They are aware of what other Buddhists do; they have read popular Buddhist books and magazines; and they are often also familiar with what other religious groups and secular NGOs do. FPMT was not isolated from a growing view throughout the Buddhist world that social engagement was an important way to practice Buddhism.

In this regard, it should be noted that, in the 1960s-1990s, a discourse circulated among Western Buddhists that the spread of Buddhism had the potential to heal the West's social ills—a discourse which discouraged social engagement. Fostering this discourse were the idealism of the hippie generation along with teachings in the 1960s and 1970s from some Buddhists like Thich Nhat Hanh and Robert Thurman.[726] Within FPMT, early teachings of the lamas sometimes supported this perspective. The lamas stressed that the solution to all ills was Dharma, and Lama Yeshe in particular, as discussed above, felt Dharma education could resolve most social problems. By the 2000s, though, the discourse that Dharma alone could solve social problems had faded across the Buddhist world; in its place, developing throughout the 1990s, was a discourse that promoted socially engaged Buddhism.[727] These shifting discourses surely affected FPMT.

Another factor was the Dalai Lama, who had been promoting social engagement among Tibetans and in the West since the 1980s and was developing a social philosophy based on traditional Buddhist teachings.[728] One of the lamas' priorities has always been to carry out his wishes. As well, many people in FPMT feel devotion for him; a number of interviewees indicated that his advice is one reason they support social engagement or are involved in it. The Dalai Lama's promotion of engagement undoubtedly influenced FPMT.

Yet another factor has been the growing wealth of the Buddhist world. Members of the Boomer generation in Western countries who had embraced Buddhism were becoming wealthier. Most Asian countries also grew considerably wealthier in the late 20th and early 21st centuries. Many people in these countries were either Buddhist or open to supporting Buddhist NGOs. In premodern times, Buddhists' donations would have gone mostly to monasteries, monks, and holy objects, but now social projects gained support. One reason seems to be that the wealth in the Buddhist world has created a sense that investment in purely religious activities, while virtuous, could reach a saturation point. Building a temple might be meritorious, but can the same be said of adding ever more precious items to it? In the early 2000s I discussed with a young Tibetan in

[725] Goldberg, for example, who spent much time between 1996 and 2008 in Bodh Gaya, a major Buddhist pilgrimage place in a poor area of India, notes that engagement by Buddhists there began mainly in the 1990s. Goldberg, "Buddhists without Borders," x.
[726] Adrian Konik discusses this discourse. Adrian Konik, *Buddhism and Transgression: The Appropriation of Buddhism in the Contemporary West* (Leiden: Brill, 2009), 125-137.
[727] The development of this discourse is described in Brown, "Beyond Queen and King,'" 12-17.
[728] Cabezón, "Buddhist Principles," 295-320.

Nepal the vast amounts of gold, semi-precious stones, statues, thangkas, brocade, and so on, paid for by East Asian donations, visible in a new temple in the Tibetan neighbourhood of Kathmandu. "This nothing use!" he exclaimed, a response that likely reflected a growing sense in Asia that supporting the sacred has practical limits. Asians continue to support Buddhist endeavours, but these endeavours now include social projects. In Bodh Gaya in 2024, for example, one monastic living there mentioned to me that much East Asian money now supported Buddhist-run schools in the area; it was no longer financing only monasteries, temples, and holy objects.

In the Himalayan world, interviewees also described a movement toward greater social engagement as the 2000s progressed. They attributed it partly to the Dalai Lama's influence and partly to the realization that success had been achieved in saving lineages and re-establishing Tibetan monastic culture in exile, so resources could now be directed to material needs, including those of non-Himalayans. As well, monasteries in India and Nepal had come to be criticized by surrounding communities on the grounds that their formal Dharma practices did not visibly help the poor. Behind this critique is the reality that monasteries in these two countries benefit from foreign donations. Consequently, by the early 21st century, they often appeared richer than the poorer of their neighbours, risking resentment and prompting outreach.

As well, by the 2000s, FPMT's lineage was no longer in danger. Geluk monasteries in Nepal and India were doing well. Kopan Monastery was steadily growing and its infrastructure and programs were progressing satisfactorily. FPMT's teacher and translator training programs, publishing efforts, educational programs, and network of centres were established. As well, the spread of Dharma internationally was slowing; it was becoming apparent that saving the world by disseminating Dharma was, at best, a long term plan. Alternative ways to benefit others had to be found.

A final factor was the beginning of a long-running transition, within FPMT, from the founding generation to younger generations. The Western students of the lamas who launched FPMT were Boomers. For decades, they diligently built FPMT. The Dharma centres they established focused on the teaching and formal practice of the lineage, and on disseminating recorded, photocopied, or published teachings that initially took great effort to make available. Few of this generation perceived social engagement as anything but peripheral to the daunting task of establishing institutions and obtaining, sharing, learning, and practicing Dharma. By the 2000s, though, a transition was underway. Interviews showed that, generally speaking, younger generations have broader notions of how to be Buddhist and an expectation to contribute to social improvement. Appealing to them requires offering a variety of activities, including socially oriented ones. At the same time, the growing ease of accessing Dharma in books, other media, and online has meant that centres need no longer put intense efforts into making recordings and publications available. More time and resources can go into social initiatives.

One potential influence on FPMT that research did not find had spurred its engagement was academic scholarship on engaged Buddhism. This scholarship began to appear in the 1990s. Only one person interviewed was familiar with this scholarship, an American connected to academia. He felt it described a different form of socially oriented activity than FPMT's—that which targeted rapid social change. By contrast, FPMT's activities aimed at gradual societal improvement. Further, the scholarship, the interviewee added, presented the cause of poverty as oppression whereas FPMT presented the cause of poverty as karma, and made efforts to improve beneficiaries' karma alongside providing immediate help.[729] Overall, research did not find evidence that scholarship on engaged Buddhism affected the views of FPMT's people, although,

[729] B121J14. Interviewed by author, November 2022.

by prompting popular Buddhist magazines to profile engagement, it may have increased awareness of other Buddhists' activities.

For myriad reasons, therefore, FPMT participated in a broad Buddhist movement toward greater social engagement. Interest in social engagement in FPMT increased in the 2000s while support for the notion that Buddhists should put off trying to help others until they attain enlightenment decreased. In 2007, FPMT announced a new vision for the organization's future. While in retreat that year, Rinpoche had jotted down, on Post-It notes, a variety of wishes for FPMT. Distilled from these notes were "Rinpoche's Vast Visions": a set of goals intended to guide FPMT's activities for decades to come. The Vast Visions present four priorities: serving the Dalai Lama; creating holy objects to foster world peace; supporting Dharma practice; and offering social service.[730]

On social engagement, the Vast Visions represented a shift in emphasis. They underlined that engagement was a corporate responsibility of FPMT. It was no longer just a meritorious pastime of some individuals, but part of FPMT's role and identity. Engagement was now not limited to people struggling with formal Dharma practice. It was presented as a Dharma practice in FPMT's lineage. FPMT placed a quote from Rinpoche at the top of the social service section of its website on the Vast Visions to underline this important point.

> The conclusion is for all the people to practice the lam-rim, which is the heart of Dharma. Especially to try to put all the effort to live with bodhichitta motivation, in particular to have kindness to others, which is the most essential practice.[731]

How does FPMT position this quote to underline that engagement is a Dharma practice in FPMT's lineage? The quote reiterates one of Rinpoche's most frequent themes, that *Lam Rim* is the main practice that generates bodhichitta. The quote describes a cause-effect relationship from practicing *Lam Rim* to wishing to develop bodhichitta to being kind to others. Placed where it is, it indicates that being kind includes engaging socially. Social engagement then contributes to attaining bodhichitta. The quote and its placement imply that Rinpoche considered social engagement to contribute to progress on the path to enlightenment, and also that the main sutric teachings of the Geluk lineage would, by fostering kindness, prompt engagement. Most notable is the connection made between formal practice and engagement: engagement is inevitable if one practices Dharma; a sign that one is practicing; and a practice that leads to enlightenment.

This quote legitimizes social engagement. Rinpoche's cause-effect chain showed where he believed engagement fit into the Geluk lineage and why it was soteriological like other lineage practices. After the quote, FPMT added Lama Yeshe's words promoting education, suggesting FPMT's leaders prioritized educational forms of engagement.[732] Having laid a foundation with these quotes, FPMT's website then lists categories of socially engaged activities that Rinpoche wished FPMT affiliates to undertake, whether by continuing existing activities, expanding these, or developing new ones. Most of the areas identified are ones in which FPMT was already active.

The first category is universal education, which was already well-developed—the aim was to expand it. The second is healing. FPMT had several health care and hospice programs already so again expansion was the goal. The third is young people, not a category of activity but a target population. Another population is targeted in the next category, parents, mainly to encourage healthy families and well-raised children. Next comes substance abuse. Rinpoche

[730] "Lama Zopa Rinpoche's Vast Visions."
[731] "Lama Zopa Rinpoche's Vast Visions."
[732] "Lama Zopa Rinpoche's Vast Visions."

wanted FPMT to create rehabilitation projects for Buddhists incorporating Buddhist teachings, and for others incorporating universal education teachings. This was a new area for FPMT. After this comes another target population, elderly people. FPMT had long funded and offered services for poverty-stricken elders, mainly Tibetan refugees. Next comes interfaith work, placed into "social services" because of its aim: promoting world peace. Some interfaith work was already being done. The last category was another population, animals, also long a target for engagement.[733]

What story do these categories tell? They give affiliates priorities, although they do not forbid other activities. Noticeable is the concrete nature of most activities prioritized. Abstract issues like climate change, racism, inequality, or injustice are not listed; the focus is on particular beings and their needs: young people needing food, shelter, or education; older people in poverty; the injured, ill, addicted, or dying; and animals suffering or in danger. The main activity targeting society as a whole is education. Also noticeable is the categories' future orientation: they emphasize activities that go beyond meeting current needs to those that will affect future years, karma, and rebirths. Education is emphasized because it affects beneficiaries later in life as well as being perceived to improve their karma and future rebirths. Attention to the sick, elderly, addicted, and dying often includes ways of helping them towards good rebirths, as does care for animals. Finally, the categories do not include some activities common among modernist Buddhists such as activism.

The Vast Visions clarified that social engagement was a core role of FPMT and that it was a Dharma practice. FPMT communications no longer described it as something to do when formal Dharma practice went poorly. Teachings stating that the best way to resolve the problems of individuals and society was doing formal Dharma practice were de-emphasized; the claim that faith-based approaches were the solution to social problems was no longer made. One interviewee who had been involved in social projects for many years said, "Before the Vast Visions, people [in FPMT] would say to me that social work was not Dharma! Dharma was meditation, pujas, study. After the Vast Visions came out, I didn't hear that anymore."[734]

The Fourth Stage of FPMT's Social Engagement: 2014-Present

At an international meeting of leaders of FPMT affiliates in 2014, FPMT's CEO revealed the "Five Pillars of Service": activities FPMT's Dharma centres (not all affiliates) were encouraged to undertake.[735] The activities flowed, he emphasized, from Rinpoche's Vast Visions coupled with advice from the Dalai Lama.[736] Hence, they were authoritative. The Pillars gave centres options for activities they could undertake beyond formal Dharma teaching and practice.

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[733] "Lama Zopa Rinpoche's Vast Visions."

[734] C121A17. Interviewed by author, February 2023.

[735] *FPMT Annual Review 2014: Preserving, Developing, and Spreading the Mahayana Tradition*. FPMT International Office, 2014. 5, 14. https://fpmt.org/wp-content/uploads/fpmt/international-office/FPMT-AR-2014-FINAL.pdf.

[736] According to *Mandala*, the Dalai Lama gave FPMT the following advice that influenced the development of the five pillars: "I also think that if you, as a Buddhist organization, were eventually able to do more in the area of social service, in the fields of education, health, and counseling for the resolution of family and community problems, it would be of great benefit. This would not mean teaching the Buddhadharma, but simply using the techniques or messages of the Buddhadharma to try to solve problems through social service for the welfare of the society. It would not be done as a Buddhist or Dharma activity, but simply to serve and benefit humanity." *Mandala* does not provide a date for when FPMT received this advice. "Social and Community Service: For the Welfare of Society." *Mandala* 1 (2020): 29. See also Carina Rumrill, Michael Jolliffe, and Justin Jenkins. "The Five Pillars of Service." *Mandala* 1 (2020): 16.

The Five Pillars were: Dharma education; universal education; interfaith activities; social and community service; and income generation. The Pillars were intended to comprise all activities of centres, although not every centre was expected to do all of them. They signaled approval of many activities already occurring, entrenched these activities in FPMT's culture, expanded centres' options, and clarified the activities considered to fulfill the aims of the Dalai Lama, Rinpoche, and the Dharma itself.[737]

What changes did the Pillars bring? One role they played was to end the peripheral status of social engagement in FPMT that had remained from the days when it was separated, in many people's eyes, from formal Dharma practice. Dharma centres are core organizations in FPMT, making up the bulk of its network. A few had long been engaged, like Jamyang London, but most did not engage socially much. The Vast Visions had integrated engagement into Dharma practice but not also into centres. The Pillars changed that. Centres were now expected to engage socially if they had sufficient resources.

This move toward incorporating social engagement into centres' activities likely arose from the social changes described above, the Dalai Lama's interest in engagement, and certain other circumstances. In particular, in Western countries, the flow of new members into FPMT's centres had slowed. FPMT's CEO emphasized that centres needed to offer many ways, not just formal Dharma practice, to help people make their lives meaningful. When interviewed, he said:

> The Pillars are supposed to guide the centres in how they can benefit others. The traditional way is through the Dharma, teaching the Dharma. But that's limited in Western society at the moment. It's opening up more but it's very limited. So to give the centres more opportunity to integrate into their community and be of benefit to the community, and the world community, then we have interfaith, social work, the rest of it. To guide centres in them understanding that … if you are studying the Dharma, there are these other aspects that will help others.[738]

Formal Dharma teaching and practice still came first, but centres having sufficient resources could become service centres for surrounding communities like some churches; others could undertake smaller or more intermittent social endeavours; those with few resources did not need to become engaged. It is notable that FPMT—post-Vast Visions—took for granted that social engagement was Dharma practice: beneficial to those it targeted and merit-creating for those who did it. Its leaders no longer needed to affirm the value of engagement, its place within FPMT or its lineage, or the lack of contradiction between it and formal Dharma practice. Those issues were settled in 2007. The Pillars had a different objective: to spread social engagement more widely through FPMT's network and especially through its core affiliates, its centres.

Along with the Pillars came more discussion, by Rinpoche, of social engagement. A little over a year before his passing, an interviewee positioned to hear his talks in the previous few years said:

> Rinpoche is becoming more and more vocal about [social engagement] … not outside FPMT but inside FPMT. … when he's teaching at a centre … he sometimes goes to the list of things that we're doing and talks about that…. And … emphasizes charity… you know, long before he had any money he was trying to help people with whatever money

[737] *FPMT Annual Review 2018: Live with Compassion*. FPMT International Office, 2018. https://fpmt.org/fpmt-community-news/news-around-the-world/day-4-of-cpmt-2014-lama-zopa-rinpoches-vast-visions-the-five-pillars-of-service-and-sangha/.
[738] Ven. Roger Kunsang, interview by Author, April 3, 2023.

> he did have, and over time that has meant that money has started to flow into FPMT, so he's been able to help more and more people and do bigger and bigger projects, and you know he lists them, he talks about all of them at FPMT centres… Now that we have a more regular way of blogging, sending out blogs about the different projects, that's improved [communications about social engagement] ...[739]

Hence, after the Pillars appeared, Rinpoche and FPMT's communications increased their promotion of engagement within FPMT.

Dharma teaching—the first Pillar—remains centres' priority.[740] However, some centres have launched socially oriented activities or become community service hubs, and several interviewees indicated that the Vast Visions and Pillars were one reason.[741] Dharma centre-based socially oriented activities now supplement FPMT's freestanding social projects, increasing the amount and variety of engagement across the network. At FPMT's affiliate in Hong Kong, for example, the main forms of engagement are animal liberation and raising funds for other FPMT activities, especially for Kopan Monastery and its social projects.[742] FPMT's affiliates in England, by contrast, rarely liberate animals, which is challenging in Western urban environments, but they run a variety of activities to help their neighbours. In Mongolia, social engagement is a major activity of the centre; the centre in Burlington, Canada, does almost none.

One limit on centres' engagement is that maintaining Dharma teachings and practices requires significant effort and funds. As one interviewee who helped run a centre said:

> It takes so much effort to run a centre… it takes a lot of work to keep it going, like teachings every week… especially centres that don't have a resident teacher but that have touring teachers or cycle through teachers. It's so much work… then to say on top of that you should be doing this other thing, you know it's hard… The priority is to teach the Dharma in a meaningful way and connect it to people's lives and … give people the opportunity to transform their lives through accessing the authentic teachings of the Buddha. That's a lot of work, especially when you have a full-time job on top of it … and its all volunteers doing this. It's an easy argument to make from the outside that [social engagement] can draw new people in and never mind, you're creating the positive karma for a stronger community by doing this kind of beneficial work for others … but you're just trying to get the cushions laid out on a Sunday morning for a teaching and that's a struggle … You also need money to run social projects and you maybe have limited capacity to bring in money… so you're trying to do social welfare work that doesn't take a lot of extra resources, like donating food to a local food pantry… I think a lot of places do that kind of thing but again, it's just the reality of running a centre that it's hard.[743]

One result of the Vast Visions and Pillars is that almost all interviewees perceived social engagement to be unquestionably beneficial and almost none indicated that social problems should be primarily addressed with faith-based means. Instead, interviewees described faith-based means as supplementing material means and ensuring that recipients of aid received long term karmic benefits as well. Most interviewees viewed faith-based means as genuinely helpful,

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[739] A211J04. Interviewed by Author, November 2022.
[740] Ven. Roger confirmed that the Five Pillars were not presented as equal; formal Dharma teaching and practice is treated in them as the first priority. Ven. Roger Kunsang, interviewed by Author, April 3, 2023.
[741] e.g., C221M10. Interviewed by Author, November 2022.
[742] A213P62. Interviewed by Author, March 2023; "Mahayana Buddhist Association." http://www.fpmtmba.org.hk/aboutus.html. Accessed December 27, 2023.
[743] F111G06. Interviewed by Author, November 2022.

though opinions varied on just how helpful. A small number of mainly older interviewees felt that social engagement was a distraction from Dharma practice, and indicated a preference that Dharma centres not do it. One who was not among the older generation expressed the tension that can exist between formal Dharma practice and social engagement: "Buddhism is very inward. So it becomes a distraction to also engage in social causes. If you are trying to have some level of spiritual awakening or awareness, it is difficult… but we still have to go out and help other beings… I feel a little bit conflicted…. On one side I want to do more but then on the other side I also want to focus more on my spiritual practice. I guess I'd like the organization to do more but I don't know if I can be more socially active right now. It's a tough balance."[744] It is certain that many Buddhists, not only in FPMT, perceive tensions between offering immediate help to others and developing their own minds with formal Dharma practices. The tension is mediated in part by teachers' declarations that engagement is soteriological, but only in part: Buddhists rarely express the view that mental development can be achieved only by engaging socially. Interviewees, time and again, stressed that practicing the Dharma in established ways—not harming any other beings, keeping precepts, taming and cultivating the mind with formal Dharma practices, doing prayers and mantras, dedicating merit, and so on—remained the best way to help others in the longer term.

That social engagement is not the first priority of FPMT's international office may be shown by its lack of a "Social Services Department." The office has an "Education Services Department" to lead the creation and dissemination of courses, course materials, practice materials, and so on, because these relate to the lineage and are standardized across the network. The office has no equivalent department to oversee or encourage socially-oriented activities, verify their quality, evaluate their outcomes, and develop recommendations. This is because, although engagement was encouraged and promoted by Rinpoche, it is not led by the international office, but by the affiliates and individuals involved. Whereas FPMT centralizes many aspects of education to ensure quality and availability, engagement is decentralized.

The decentralization of social engagement is understandable. The international office is small; expanding its role in engagement would be difficult. The office serves several different cultures so recommendations on engagement suited to some affiliates may not suit others. There is no desire for top-down management. As well, social efforts have a more distant connection to lineage than education, lowering their priority when the focus is preserving tradition.

The Current Stage: Rinpoche's Teachings on Social Engagement after the Vast Visions and Five Pillars

To illustrate how Rinpoche spoke of engagement in the last ten years of his life, four quotes are presented and discussed here.

The first quote is from 2013, after The Vast Visions were put in place and leading up the announcement of the Pillars. At that time, Rinpoche mentioned engagement in a talk in Mongolia, saying the following:

> I really hope that we can really benefit more and more, do more and more, not only Dharma but also different social services, that is very, very important, different social services, Dharma talks to psychologists, to prisoners, to those who will develop soup kitchen, not only feeding dogs and chickens with food, these are human beings so I would also like to develop better the mind, not only eating food but thinking Dharma, making mind better, the way of thinking, otherwise same as feeding dogs or chickens. …

[744] B121A15. Interviewed by Author, November 2022.

> Most important thing, of course they come to eat food, but I would like to educate them to eat food with Dharma mind… all activities with Dharma mind, so when people come to eat food at kitchen then do with Dharma mind that is most meaningful, otherwise … doesn't help the mind. That and then the alcoholics, there are many social services I would like to develop… Since FPMT began until now …There has been so much success and the organization has developed so much and been able to bring so much benefit, not only through Dharma but also through social services, universal education and so forth, to the world and sentient beings; unbelievable, unbelievable, unbelievable benefit.[745]

These comments show Rinpoche speaking in favour of social engagement. He also, though, emphasizes benefiting beings' minds, given that doing so helps them later in this life and in future lives. He suggests doing so has more impact than giving immediate material help, and one reason to give material help is to have the opportunity to benefit minds.

In the next quote, from 2015, Rinpoche reiterates his wish for FPMT to impact the minds of beneficiaries of material aid. He ranks FPMT activities aimed at helping others, from helping the most sophisticated in understanding to the most basic, from providing advanced Dharma teachings to providing beginner Dharma teachings to providing universal education for non-Buddhists, and finally to giving material aid to those unable to benefit from education. He presents these as different ways of leading beings to enlightenment.

> We offer … different levels [of Dharma teaching] according to different levels of intelligence and capacity … to be able to work perfectly without the slightest mistake for sentient beings. This is why we offer the Masters Program, the Basic Program, Discovering Buddhism, Buddhism in a Nutshell, Living in the Path and so on … besides Universal Education … Then also we offer social services, such as hospices and many other social services. Here it is not only to help the body, but mainly to help the mind. The whole point of FPMT is to bring sentient beings to full enlightenment, to the peerless happiness…this is what FPMT has been trying to do.[746]

A third example of Rinpoche's advice on engagement is taken from a 2020 talk at Kopan Monastery, where Rinpoche lived during the Covid-19 pandemic. He emphasized charity, quoting the *Arya Sanghata Sutra*:

> Anyone who makes charity even the size of a hair to sentient beings …
> Will for eighty thousand eons have much wealth and also much comfort.
> They will have a healthy body and enjoy happiness.
> They will achieve whatever power they wish.
> At the end, they will achieve enlightenment, the great result.

Basing his words on the sutra, Rinpoche told monastics that it was important for them to work to directly relieve the suffering of others. He encouraged their engagement including their efforts during the pandemic to assist poor families in Nepal. He noted that this work, in addition to providing immediate material benefits, helped its beneficiaries to develop faith in monastics. This faith in turn would plant "the seed of liberation" in them by helping them encounter

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[745] The quote is from a teaching given by Rinpoche on September 7, 2013 in Ganden Do Ngag Shedrup Ling, Ulaan Baatar. Mongolia. François Lecointre, Chief Operating Officer, FPMT, Inc. Email, March 13, 2023.
[746] *FPMT Annual Review 2015: Serving the World with a Bodhichitta Attitude*, FPMT International Office, 2015, 2. https://fpmt.org/wp-content/uploads/fpmt/international-office/FPMT_AR_2015_FINAL.pdf.

Buddhism in future lives.[747] Hence, he made points similar to those in his earlier comments: engaging socially helps beneficiaries immediately in material ways but, more importantly, has impacts on their minds that improve their future lives and put them on the path to enlightenment. He added that those who help others financially or with their labour themselves progress along the path to enlightenment because social engagement is soteriological.

A final example is a letter Rinpoche wrote in 2021. The letter serves to summarize his way of understanding social problems and his proposed solutions. In the letter, he indicates that the cause of problems in the world, such as the pandemic and natural disasters, is harming others, which creates the causes for suffering. He cites eating meat in particular, which harms "beings who have a body and mind, who do not wish suffering but wish for happiness, exactly like human beings, like us." The harm done, he states, leads to "so many problems—floods, earthquakes, many things caused by nature, and diseases." If people "stopped eating meat, stopped harming animals" much suffering they experience would end. And he expresses hope that people can come to understand the causes of suffering—doing harm—and thus create peace and happiness in their own lives and the world. Freedom from suffering thus "does not come from the outside, but from the mind." When people are ignorant of the connection between harming others and suffering themselves, educating them is the main way forward.[748]

Rinpoche thus consistently made the same points: social engagement has immediate benefits, but its greater importance lies in the ways it can influence beneficiaries' minds by teaching them ways to prevent their future suffering—or otherwise affecting their minds and karma, such as with blessings—and helping them progress toward enlightenment. Vital to engagement, he perceived, was providing ways to help living beings improve their minds and karma, whether through Dharma or universal education, exposure to holy objects, connections to Buddhism, or other means. He also affirmed that engagement is a Dharma practice.

In sum, although formal Dharma teaching and practice remained FPMT's first priority, social engagement was important to Rinpoche for both its short and long term benefits. Interviewees' comments generally reflected Rinpoche's ideas and priorities. One FPMT official offered the following summary of the status of engagement in FPMT today.

> [Social engagement] is the direction in which we want to go, and obviously, Lama Zopa shows us himself by getting so involved in finding money for these projects and in supporting them. [Engagement] is something that we have to do also, each one on our level or each center a project or service on their level. So obviously we want to do more. … Maybe with FPMT, it's not implied by the name of the organization but when you look at the activities and when you look at the annual report and when you look at the resources that are invested by the organization, then I think it shows the significance and the importance of social engagement. … It's also part of our practice to do it. … we have to practice compassion in action… this is a way to make our practice real.[749]

[747] Rinpoche's remarks appear in a video posted online by FPMT soon after the talk was given, and were also featured in a blog, so FPMT students around the world had access to them. They likely encouraged donations to social projects, and perhaps especially to Kopan Monastery to aid local people during that period. "Kopan Helping Hands Revived for COVID-19 Crisis Relief." *FPMT Community: Stories & News*, May 2, 2020. https://fpmt.org/fpmt-community-news/kopan-helping-hands-revived-for-covid-19-crisis-relief/.
[748] "Suffering Comes from the Mind." Lama Yeshe Wisdom Archive, April 2021. https://www.lamayeshe.com/advice/suffering-comes-mind.
[749] A121F22, Interviewed by Author, December 2022.

FPMT's Social Philosophy

FPMT does not have a social policy delimiting types of engagement its affiliates must undertake or avoid. However, a *de facto* social philosophy is revealed in Rinpoche's statements and FPMT's activities. Its foundation is Rinpoche's view that, as one interviewee long exposed to Rinpoche put it, "the real help is Dharma." However, added the interviewee, Rinpoche and FPMT recognized that "there's no space for Dharma if people are struggling day to day." Material needs exist, and practicing compassion means meeting those needs.[750] Below are three quotes that express the social philosophy that grows out of the prioritization of Dharma alongside the recognition of material needs. The first quote is from an interviewee familiar with Rinpoche's talks in recent years. The second is from an interviewee familiar with the international office's investments in social projects. The third is from an article in *Mandala*—written by the editors and presumably expressing official FPMT views—that explains and promotes the organization's social philosophy.

The first comment comes from an interviewee who, though not in close touch with FPMT's social projects, heard most of Rinpoche's talks in his final years.

> Giving food, giving shelter, giving medicine, those are things that relieve people's suffering right now and Rinpoche tries to always combine them, you know… he's not just giving food and medicine. He's building prayer wheels or he's putting holy images in those places… he never limits it to just the physical help. That's quite important. It's good to help overcome the day to day problems of people but Rinpoche always combines that with this long term help, of making them connect with something positive that will benefit them long term and create the causes for them to have good rebirths … by putting positive imprints. He wants to build holy objects, put images in people's rooms, bring a teacher there to give them some teachings.[751]

The second comment discusses the international office's decisions on funding social projects:

> The ultimate way to reduce suffering is to give Dharma, because that will be the remedy … to relieve all sufferings… And we want to do exactly this. We want to relieve all types of suffering. But if there is someone that is in need, whether sick or poor, we want to help also on that level. So it's not … that we choose one or the other, but in the … social service projects that we do … we're doing both at the same time … in some of these Tibetan communities, in South India, for example, they will need an ambulance and some and support for health. … So we will provide this. But at the same time… in most cases, Rinpoche will say, well, I would like also to help with building a stupa there. So that the elderly will have opportunity to practice and to make their lives meaningful, and so that we help on both levels. And same with schools, we don't just sponsor schools because they need food or uniforms. We just don't answer any request for support for any school. We sponsor schools … that are in some way interested in transmitting … spiritual values … so then these kids are helped on the spiritual level and they are also helped with basic needs. … And with the hospital [in Kathmandu] we are giving a lot of support and paying for machines to heal the sick. But at the same time… [Rinpoche gave] advice on what

[750] A121E12. Interviewed by Author, November 2022.
[751] A211J04. Interviewed by Author, November 2022.

> [holy objects] should be put in the room to help people, and meditations that could help the doctors and nurses, even if they are not Buddhist … to make the job more meaningful and to avoid burnout. So that would be a way to combine these two dimensions related to the relief of suffering: the ultimate one being the spiritual that we want to provide, and the more basic one related to other needs.[752]

The third comment appears in *Mandala*:

> FPMT … [has] a unique way to address the problems and disasters of the world. While offering grants toward initiatives benefiting vulnerable and in-need populations—such as children, animals, Tibetan refugees, the elderly, the sick, and the very poor—is one of the key functions of FPMT … offering … Dharma underlies all of the projects that FPMT International Office administers. … Throughout the FPMT organization, centers, projects, and services are attending to not only the emergency and critical needs of others, but also to creating the causes to lessen individual and world suffering through Buddhist means. … Projects are bringing substantial benefit to the world through practical and spiritual methods.[753]

All three quotes reveal a social philosophy: social engagement is beneficial for others and soteriological for those who do it. Therefore, FPMT's people and affiliates should engage when they have sufficient resources. Engagement is most beneficial when it supplements material forms of help with faith-based ones so that the karmic causes of beneficiaries' suffering are addressed and they are taught or influenced to create the causes of future happiness rather than suffering, or receive imprints or other forms of connection to Dharma that will help them in future lives.

Not every activity in FPMT implements this philosophy. Because circumstances differ, there is variation in whether and how much affiliates undertake social engagement and in how much they supplement material aid with faith-based elements. Engagement in general, or a particular kind of engagement, is not compulsory for affiliates. The philosophy is not imposed on affiliates even though it the international office's investments reflect it. Affiliates have, as one interviewee familiar with international office-affiliate relations stated, "complete independence" in their social engagement.[754] Nevertheless, research suggests that most of FPMT's social projects implement this philosophy, deliberately or not, because it grows naturally out of FPMT's form of Buddhism and Rinpoche's advice. The philosophy is traditionalist in its emphasis on benefiting the minds, karma, and future lives of recipients of material aid.

FPMT's Financial Support for Social Engagement: A Snapshot

As well as encouraging social engagement with words, FPMT does so with funds. Since the 1990s, FPMT's international office has raised money for social projects, contributing to affiliates' and others' activities. FPMT's international office is rarely the only contributor to any given social project; in most cases, it supplements funding raised by the projects' own staff and volunteers. One interviewee indicated that because establishing social projects like schools and hospitals creates significant ongoing commitments, and because FPMT is a religious

[752] A121F22. Interviewed by Author, December 2022.
[753] "Helping the World through Practical Means and Dharma Methods." *Mandala* (January-June 2018): 58.
[754] A121E12. Interviewed by Author, November 2022. He contrasted their freedom with respect to social engagement to the "guidelines and requirements" they had to follow in the area of Dharma education.

organization that does not always have the resources or skills to manage major projects, the organization often is better suited to funding others' projects, such as by sponsoring existing schools and hospitals. Hence, encouraging engagement in line with its values by funding suitable projects is one form FPMT's engagement takes.[755]

The international office operates two funds in the category of "social service." They are the "Social Services Fund" and the "Animal Liberation Fund," the latter being a subset of the former. The funds were created in 2015 to align with the Pillar on social and community service. Before that, the office provided funding for social projects from general funds. The funds support the Pillars' entrenchment of social engagement in FPMT.[756] Donations to them are tax-deductible in the US, although they come from many other areas as well. Not all the funding goes to material aspects of social engagement. Both material and faith-based ways of helping people, animals, and the environment are funded. According to *Mandala*, the Social Services fund, including its Animal Liberation component:

> Helps children, the elderly, sick, and very poor by providing funds to schools, hospices, health clinics, soup kitchens, elderly homes, and orphanages. Sponsorship is given for pujas, practices, prayers, and campaigns to pacify the elements, nurture or restore the health of the environment, and protect those harmed by disasters of earth, wind, fire, and water. Animals are also given protection with grants that sponsor animal liberations and … sanctuary care.[757]

FPMT's website, in a description of the fund and its investments, states that monies have gone to activities in the following categories: children; health care; elderly; refugees and destitute people; environmental disasters; and animals.[758] Most funds go to India, Nepal, and Mongolia.[759]

FPMT's affiliates raise funds for their own socially oriented activities from diverse sources, including individuals and organizations not associated with FPMT, as interviewees involved with social projects affirmed. Given multiple affiliates and sources, it is not feasible to estimate the total funds that FPMT's network spends on social engagement. The numbers below represent the spending of the international office alone on socially oriented activities in a single year, but this is only a portion of the total.

As of writing, the office's most recently published Annual Review was for the calendar year 2022. The Annual Review does not take in FPMT's entire network given that affiliates are legally and financially independent. It shows the income and expenditures of the international office only. Income and expenditures are divided between operating costs and charitable / social service costs. In 2022, approximately $US 5 million was allocated to the latter activities. The report also shows spending priorities. There are two main destinations for non-operating funds: social engagement and what people might call "religious" activities, infrastructure, and objects, although these categories, in FPMT, cannot be strictly differentiated. A snapshot of FPMT's grants in 2022 shows how these two broad destinations compare as well as what type of socially oriented activities receive funds.

In 2022, approximate contributions to social engagement included:

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[755] A121F22, Interviewed by Author, December 2022.
[756] "Social and Community Service," 29.
[757] "Social and Community Service," 29.
[758] "Social Services Fund." *FPMT Charitable Projects*. https://fpmt.org/projects/fpmt/social-services-fund/. Accessed October 26, 2023.
[759] "Social and Community Service," 29.

- $US 220,000 in total for seven children's schools in India and Nepal. Only one of the schools, Maitreya School in Bodh Gaya, India, is run by an FPMT affiliate. The schools all serve marginalized communities and teach government curricula alongside either basic Buddhism (in historically Buddhist communities) or universal education (in historically non-Buddhist communities). Costs to which funds were contributed varied by school, but included food, school supplies, uniforms, salaries, and, in one case, construction of a building.
- $US 240,000 in total for ten homes for elderly and disabled people in Tibetan refugee settlements in India and Nepal. Costs to which funds contributed varied, but included operating costs like food and medical care, and capital costs like buildings and water infrastructure. As well, some funds were directed toward a stupa near one of the homes.
- $US 240,000 in total for projects and activities aimed at poor and vulnerable people in India, Nepal, and Mongolia. FPMT affiliates receiving funds included Root Institute in Bodh Gaya for its clinic; Maitri Charitable Trust in Bodh Gaya for mobile health clinics and health care for mothers and children; and a soup kitchen, medical care, and alcoholism education in Mongolia. Three unaffiliated organizations offering health care also received funds.
- $US 20,000 for animal liberation and care in the US, Nepal, Italy, and France, mainly undertaken by FPMT affiliates.
- The Foundation for Developing Compassion & Wisdom (FDCW) received an unspecified grant for further development and delivery of universal education.
- $US 1.4 million was provided for food, health care, and other material necessities to monks and nuns, almost all of which went monastics and monasteries in India, Nepal, and Mongolia that had little other support, with a small amount also going to help Western monastics in financial need. Approximately $1 million of the total went to an endowment fund for food for the 575 monks of Gyudmed Tantric Monastery in India.

Based on these figures, funds provided in 2022 for social engagement totaled just over $US 2 million. I come to this amount even though FPMT indicates that its "social service" funding was about $700,000. The difference is that FPMT does not count FDCW as "social service" in this context, nor funds used to help impoverished monks and nuns. In my definition, such activities count as social engagement. Figures from 2021 paint a similar picture.[760]

The remaining grants from the international office were allocated to pujas, prayers, and other Dharma practices; the construction or purchase of holy objects like stupas and statues; operating and infrastructure costs of monasteries; education expenses for certain young reincarnate lamas; and translation, publishing, and other activities related to Dharma preservation and transmission. Some funds went to FPMT affiliates and some to other organizations. Not all were within FPMT's lineage.[761] Funds provided in 2022 to these activities totaled just over $US 2 million.[762] A similar pattern of spending was apparent in 2021.[763]

What do the figures reveal? Grants for social engagement approximately equalled those made for activities typically considered religious. Recall that FPMT's CEO defines FPMT as "a

[760] *FPMT Annual Review 2021*.
[761] *FPMT Annual Review 2022: Rejoicing in a Year of Offering the Methods for Peace and Happiness*. FPMT International Office, 2022. https://fpmt.org/fpmt/annual-review-2022/#FPMT.
[762] The approximate amount of grants for religious purposes was: from the Lama Zopa Rinpoche Bodhicitta Fund, $US 1.1 million; from the Holy Objects Fund, $US 79,000; from the Prayers and Practice Fund, $US 356,000; from the Education and Preservation Fund, $US 479,000, less whatever was granted to FDCW, as I have categorized that (unspecified) amount as social engagement. *FPMT Annual Review 2022.*
[763] *FPMT Annual Review 2021*.

religious organization" whose main activity is not social engagement.[764] That approximately half of grant funding was nevertheless allocated to engagement underlines its importance to FPMT.

Spending also shows that the international office prioritizes financial support for activities that integrate faith-based and material ways of helping others. Contributions often combined material and spiritual goals. Food for Gyudmed Tantric Monastery is one example: funds provide sustenance to people in need and also help to preserve the Geluk lineage. Another example is education: FPMT helps in ordinary ways as well as ensuring teachings are given on spiritual values. This prioritizing of social engagement that includes faith-based features shows how the international office implements FPMT's social philosophy.

FPMT's Approaches to Social Engagement: Summary and Analysis

In its first two to three decades, FPMT did not prioritize social engagement. The lamas' followers were heavily involved in activities to preserve and transmit the lineage, including establishing and expanding Kopan Monastery and numerous Dharma centres, producing texts, and ensuring that teachings and practice took place. Teaching Buddhism was seen as core to the organization and social engagement as peripheral—an activity to help people and animals when resources were available, but to some extent a departure from FPMT's main purpose. This early view reflected the challenges faced by Tibetan refugees as they worked to save lineages. Once Tibetan religious life was re-established outside Tibet, Tibetan Buddhism's earlier socially active patterns reappeared in modernized forms, a shift encouraged by the Dalai Lama. In response to his urging and social trends, FPMT increased its social engagement.

The first step was clarifying the organization's stand on engagement. Rinpoche's 2007 Vast Visions accomplished this by stating that socially oriented activities were not, in his eyes, a distraction from Dharma practice. They were a Dharma practice and potentially part of everyone's Dharma practice that contributed to progress toward enlightenment. A second clarification appeared in 2014 when the Five Pillars were put in place. The Vast Visions had integrated social engagement with Dharma practice but had not made engagement normative for FPMT's core entities, its Dharma centres. The Pillars did this. They emphasized that engagement was something centres could and should do if they had sufficient resources. The Pillars thus brought FPMT's network into conformity with Rinpoche's earlier affirmation that social engagement was a Dharma practice. With the Pillars, social engagement was no longer peripheral in FPMT. It entered FPMT's core.

Interviewees positioned to observe the effects of the Vast Visions and Pillars noted that, since 2007, more engagement has occurred in FPMT, especially in the larger centres. When affiliates are not engaged now, it is not usually because their members or supporters believe that engagement is not Dharma or not important. It is because they lack sufficient resources.[765] Nonetheless, most interviewees had been involved in social engagement or had donated to it. In FPMT, engagement is generally popular, well-supported, believed to be meritorious for those involved, and believed to help its recipients. One interviewee made a comment that seemed to sum up widely held ideas. He said:

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[764] Ven. Roger Kunsang. Interviewed by Author, April 3, 2023.

[765] Some interviewees noted that centres are very effortful to maintain, in terms of labour and funds, such that adding social engagement is not practical. They indicated that keeping centres going is their contribution to society because the centres welcome people with psychological and emotional pain and sometimes behavioral issues. The centres, they said, helped reduce people's suffering and harm to others by offering them Dharma and welcoming them into a supportive community. Attempting to provide material aid, some commented, can lead to overlooking this primary responsibility. They felt that doing it should be recognized as social engagement.

> [Buddhist teachings] are meant to generate in us so much compassion for each and every sentient being... that we are really strongly committed to becoming enlightened to help them [by giving Dharma] … but if people have some obstacle to hearing teachings and being able to integrate them… they just need food… you give them food. So the way these are related is the cultivation of bodhichitta; those [teachings] point to all ways to alleviate suffering … to help people have access to teachings that can help transform their mind... so they can affect their karma. Food, holy objects, Dharma teaching, it's all the social engagement of being able to help people.[766]

Perceptions of Social Engagement in FPMT: Ethnographic Research Findings

Introduction

The above section describes and analyzes the words of the lamas and the guidance of FPMT's international office on social engagement— "official sources." By contrast, ethnographic fieldwork captures the perceptions of individuals. FPMT is not just its lamas, leaders, and international office; it also comprises the people who follow the lamas, are members of centres or monasteries, or have other links to the lamas or the network. Understanding their views is useful not just because they constitute FPMT but also because they manage, volunteer in, support financially, and contribute to designing and implementing FPMT's socially beneficial activities. Each instance of FPMT's engagement has been put in place and shaped by individuals on the ground. They negotiate the lamas' guidance along with beneficiaries' needs, local circumstances and laws, resource availability, the needs and interests of staff and volunteers, Buddhist teachings, and so on. This is one reason for not relying, to understand FPMT's engagement, solely on statements from the lamas or communications from the international office. The views of people across FPMT matter also and are presented here.

Is FPMT a Socially Engaged Buddhist Organization?

Most, although not all, interviewees thought that FPMT could be called a "a socially engaged Buddhist organization," on the grounds that its network took in numerous social projects and activities. Comments describing FPMT included "lots of work to impact society and … lots of social benefit,"[767] and "very engaged. Just look at all the amazing projects we have and all the outreach the individual centers are doing."[768]

Some interviewees wondered about the term "social engagement," since it is not one FPMT uses. Two areas of uncertainty emerged. One interviewee was aware that some people use the term to label only social or political activism and thus wondered whether it should apply to FPMT's projects.[769] And some interviewees wondered whether it should only apply to Buddhist groups for whom engagement was the primary activity. They emphasized that social engagement was not FPMT's primary activity. As one individual long involved in FPMT put it, "It's not like we don't have socially engaged projects …. Many, many things are done and sponsored… [engagement is] always really respected, and more than that, really valued. But … [FPMT's] first priority is usually teaching and practicing."[770] Interviewees all felt that the teaching, practice,

[766] B121D19. Interviewed by Author, December 2022.
[767] C121J27. Interviewed by Author, December 2022.
[768] C225D32. Email, January 2023.
[769] B121J14. Interviewed by Author, November 2022.
[770] A221P88. Interviewed by Author, April 2023.

preservation, and transmission of their lineage came before social engagement. Nevertheless, the majority agreed that FPMT was "a socially engaged Buddhist organization."

Does Everyone in FPMT Support Social Engagement?

Interviewees all knew FPMT was socially engaged. As well, all considered engagement to be a Dharma practice as long as it was motivated by a wish to help, although a few believed it was less powerful, for progressing on the path to enlightenment, than formal practices. Few separated ways of helping others into social engagement and other forms of service. Volunteering in a centre, assisting a social project in a Dharma or other setting, donating money to a religious or socially beneficial activity, teaching Dharma, helping people in whatever way—interviewees tended to see all of it as social engagement, as virtuous and merit-making, and as a Dharma practice.

Almost everyone interviewed valued material forms of engagement and had supported FPMT's engagement financially. Many had volunteered or worked in socially oriented activities inside or outside FPMT. A few people attended FPMT's centres mainly to be involved in their socially oriented activities. Particularly in the West, some interviewees felt that centres had to be engaged to attract members; younger generations, it was reported, expect it. On that note, the main difference found in levels of support for engagement among interviewees related to age: younger interviewees often valued engagement more highly than older interviewees. Younger ones were more likely to perceive that social engagement was core to being Buddhist.

Many interviewees, whether located in Asia or the West, and whatever their background, age, or ethnicity, thought FPMT and its affiliates should increase their social engagement. "We should do more," stated one.[771] One reason put forward was that the preservation of FPMT's lineage, uncertain when FPMT emerged in the 1970s, had been accomplished and FPMT's own Dharma education programs were largely in place. More resources could thus be invested in social projects. In addition, in Western countries, some interviewees saw engagement as a useful form of outreach. It attracted people to centres by offering enjoyable, meaningful, and enriching employment and volunteer opportunities, while also benefiting those in need. As well, it exposed beneficiaries and others to Buddhism and helped them receive blessings from holy objects. A final reason was that Rinpoche wanted to increase FPMT's engagement.

The main constraint on expanding social engagement, interviewees reported, was not motivation but resources: money, personnel, time, and skills. Dharma centres especially, encouraged to engage by the Pillars, were felt to generally be better able to manage small-scale, time-limited, or intermittent activities than ongoing projects. One interviewee said, for example, "I think [FPMT] could be doing more social welfare work, but a lot if comes down to being strapped for resources, both emotional and financial."[772] Another said that Rinpoche discussed social engagement a lot—"he talks about a million things he wants to do"—but FPMT and its affiliates had limited resources, financial and human.[773] Some interviewees felt that sustaining even FPMT's existing social projects was challenging, and commented that it was better to keep supporting them than to establish more if doing so risked their sustainability. Some concern was also expressed about finding niches where FPMT affiliates could genuinely benefit others given their skills and resources; interviewees were conscious that good motivation was not enough and often benefiting others demanded specific skills. Not every effort at helping that FPMT affiliates

[771] B121A15. Interviewed by Author, November 2022.
[772] F111G06. Interviewed by Author, November 2022.
[773] A213P62. Interviewed by Author, March 2023.

have undertaken, they noted, had produced the benefits expected. They stressed that FPMT's expertise was in Buddhism, not social work. This practical concern led some interviewees to be cautious about expanding engagement.

Younger interviewees tended to say that FPMT should be more socially engaged, but some older interviewees were less sure and expressed views that Dharma teaching and practice had to come first, or that FPMT was balancing its activities well already. Two older interviewees opposed engagement. They offered two main reasons for their opposition. First, they felt that social engagement was largely ineffective in reducing beneficiaries' suffering because suffering was governed by karma that resulted from delusions. Any benefits from material aid would be brief; suffering would return. They gave examples they had observed in which people helped by FPMT had quickly fallen back into suffering. This was not a refusal to help on the grounds that beneficiaries had caused their own suffering; it was simply a doubt that help would have lasting effects. One interviewee, for example, said, "we can't reduce others' suffering, only they can do that …We can help on a temporary basis by offering material goods or kind words or giving services that they need but cannot really help them ultimately or long term."[774] Second, related to this view, they called engagement a distraction from more effective ways of helping others through formal Dharma practice—doing practices that could influence their minds or karma, and working themselves, or helping others to work, to progress toward enlightenment to be able to later offer more profound forms of help.

Even though only a few interviewees took this approach, their views are important to acknowledge as one strand within FPMT. The views arise from longstanding Buddhist teachings on the origins of suffering in delusions and karma. Younger interviewees expressed more confidence in the value of material aid.

Another practical concern a small number of interviewees raised was that social engagement diverted funds away from taking care of monks and nuns, as well as lay people who had dedicated their lives to teaching Dharma and building FPMT. These interviewees felt that FPMT needed to care more for its own people: as one man phrased it, to do "social work on internal needs."[775] An American woman said:

> In the East you have a structure that supports ordained people and here in the West, what we're doing … is serving lay people by raising money for social projects but traditionally that money would have gone to the Sangha that then doesn't get our support. We have a terrible record for keeping our [Western] Sangha and also taking care of our older practitioners and teachers who gave a lot to FPMT. We do not take care of our own … Maybe the most socially engaged thing [FPMT does] is have a family that's worldwide, a family structure around the globe… this possibility of going anywhere in the world and having a place that you will in some way be taken care of… that would be familiar and you could fit in… because what we are going to face in the next twenty, thirty years is going to need that depth of family... Caring for others [within this family] is really important, it might be the most socially engaged thing we have going on. But we don't always do it.[776]

The interviewees were not dismissing engagement aimed at people outside FPMT but pointing out its opportunity cost. Both interviewees cited felt that some of the funding given to social

[774] C225D32. Email, January 2023.
[775] A121P03. Interviewed by Author, November 2022.
[776] B211R07. Interviewed by Author, November 2022.

projects should be directed to caring more effectively for FPMT's own people in need and this also should be considered social engagement.

In sum, most interviewees valued FPMT's social engagement and wanted more done, but various hesitations were also expressed.

What Does Social Engagement Comprise? What Are the Best Forms of Engagement?

The term "social engagement," in the eyes of interviewees, was not tightly defined: most interviewees understood it to reference FPMT's concepts of "social service" and "charitable project" but there were other understandings as well.[777] Interviewees generally treated the term as referring to helping people as well as animals, birds, fish, and even insects or ghosts, mainly with material and psychological forms of help—food, shelter, medical care, emotional support, education, and so on. However, for some it meant almost any perceived help, such as giving free Dharma teachings in a secular environment, offering blessings to animals, volunteering at a Dharma centre, giving people community, belonging, or emotional support at a centre, teaching universal education, or supporting the production of holy objects. Rinpoche's statements suggest that he himself considered all ways of helping living beings, material or faith-based, to be social service.[778] His definition is one reason people in FPMT define the term broadly.

Many people interviewed considered faith-based activities done in support of material aid to be aspects of social engagement. So, for example, pujas or other practices supportive of the healing of patients served by FPMT-aided clinics were viewed as part of FPMT's social engagement. However, interviewees did not usually view Dharma practices aimed at helping others to be social engagement if they were not done in conjunction with material aid. For example, just dedicating merit to help people affected by a natural disaster was not deemed social engagement even when it was thought to help those it targeted—until it was combined with practical aid. The words "social engagement" were thus tied to material help. Enhancing the benefits of such help by dedicating merit, doing pujas or mantras, or placing holy objects within sight of beneficiaries was then perceived to form part of engagement.

Education, stated some interviewees, is the most important form of engagement because it has the greatest impact; it helps people develop their minds in positive ways, improving their current life in material and other ways and also improving their karma, benefitting them in future lives. They also indicated that schools have been proven to be effective as a way for FPMT to materially help individuals, families, and communities; the FPMT affiliates that run schools have demonstrated their capability, a practical reason to prioritize education. Most interviewees also viewed the teaching of universal education to constitute social engagement because they considered it a service to society as well as a good match with FPMT's capabilities.

Disagreement was evident among some interviewees concerning where FPMT should engage socially. FPMT has significant social projects in Nepal, India, and Mongolia, some of which are in communities with connections to Himalayan culture or Buddhism. Centres also operate projects in their own locations. Liberation Prison Project is unusual in operating internationally. Some interviewees commented that the international office and affiliates should not focus aid, as they often do, on communities connected to Buddhism, Himalayan people and regions, and immediate neighbours. Others disagreed. One interviewee of South Asian background living in the West, for example, said "it's great that [engagement] is focused in

[777] There is no strict boundary within FPMT between forms of help, whether faith-based or secular, material or non-material, or immediately beneficial versus having perceived future life benefits. In both FPMT's "Charitable Projects" and "Social Services" categories material and faith-based forms of help appear.

[778] For example, "Aspects of Buddhist Social Service" 12-14. Rinpoche states there that building holy objects, for example, is a social service because these allow beings to create merit for happiness in this and future lives.

Nepal and India especially in the Tibetan settlements… that's where the focus should be as a Tibetan organization."[779] Another, a white American, said the opposite, suggesting that FPMT's engagement was "insular" and the organization should address "suffering wherever it exists" around the globe. He perceived a global approach to be "modern," and FPMT's focus on communities with which it had connections to be "traditional."[780] The notion makes sense: in premodern Tibet, monasteries typically helped people with whom they were connected through geography, family ties, or religion, a custom FPMT has to some extent continued.

Why Do People in FPMT Engage Socially?

No single reason was given for why FPMT engages socially, or why interviewees themselves supported or practiced engagement. Variations in answers arose in part from the absence, in FPMT, of a single statement specifying Buddhist doctrines promoting engagement.

Rinpoche discussed reasons for engaging at various times and also indicated where he placed engagement on the path to enlightenment, words now posted prominently on FPMT's website, presumably one reason why interviewees were aware of his views. Many interviewees were also aware that a shift had occurred in FPMT; the Vast Visions and Pillars increased emphasis on engagement. Interviewees often referenced these statements as the foundation or validation of their opinion that, for most Buddhists, combining formal Dharma practice and engagement is meritorious. Almost all interviewees, including FPMT's CEO, indicated a belief that traditional Buddhist teachings support social engagement, and most combined, in their own lives, donating to social projects, active social engagement, and formal Dharma pastimes while considering these activities together as their Dharma practice.[781]

Reasons interviewees gave for their support for or participation in social engagement included that it supported the guru (citing Rinpoche's general statements, comments about specific activities, requests to them as individuals do particular forms of social work, or stress on compassion in action), created merit, developed or expressed compassion and generosity, purified karma, fostered a better understanding of suffering, or was required by bodhisattva vows and the concept of "engaging bodhicitta." Buddhist teachings interviewees cited in support of engagement included compassion, bodhichitta, the four immeasurables, the seven point mind training, generosity, loving-kindness, merit, purification, suffering, Buddha nature, interdependence, and karma.

Different teachings motivated different people, and different groups within FPMT exhibited greater or lesser stress on particular teachings. For example, among those of Asian cultural background, teachings on generosity and merit were given weight, whereas among Westerners, teachings on bodhichitta, compassion, or loving kindness were more often cited. These are not absolutes—compassion, generosity, and merit were factors for all groups—but interviews suggested some variation in the weight given different teachings among different groups. Himalayan monks interviewed primarily cited encouragement from the lamas and the Dalai Lama as reasons for engagement but also felt that all monasteries ought to help surrounding communities. As well, they felt they were doing what Himalayan monasteries had always done: helping people to whom they had ties. Many interviewees of all backgrounds cited the Dalai Lama; his promotion of social engagement was known and influential. One widespread view was that practicing the Dharma naturally led to helping others in material as well as spiritual ways.

[779] B121A15. Interviewed by Author, November 2022.
[780] A121D11. Interviewed by Author, November 2022.
[781] Ven. Roger Kunsang. Interviewed by Author, April 3, 2023.

Two quotes are representative. Asked their reasons for implementing or supporting social projects, one interviewee simply said, "to help people and gain merit."[782] Another added:

> I'm giving [to social projects] to get rid of my own miserliness and my attachment to my possessions … generosity is important, its important as an attitude to overcome your own miserliness. Similarly, you know, helping others when they're sick, its all a part of the first paramita [generosity] … that's a way to improve myself. So it's a Dharma practice…. Also, social projects… address a need, like in Bodh Gaya, the free clinic and school, they address a real need … traditional or not, it's about meeting a need in keeping with the times and needs of society.[783]

Broader forces also had an impact. Interviewees were often aware of social projects undertaken by other Buddhist organizations, and some knew that social engagement was common in the Buddhist world, affecting their sense that their centre or FPMT should do it too. Also apparently impactful was a widespread view that to be a good follower of a religion includes materially helping those in need—in the West, a view that draws in part on Christianity. Finally, being socially engaged was sometimes perceived as positive because it was evidence that training in compassion and other Buddhist teachings was working.[784] One interviewee stated that "social engagement can serve as a way to test the depth and consistency of one's Dharma practice and realizations."

Not everyone interviewed cited Dharma as their motivation for being involved in socially oriented activities. Some credited a desire to be a good person or to help others which preceded or was unrelated to their involvement with Buddhism. To be "a decent human being," said one.[785] Another suggested that Western Buddhists supported social engagement because helping others in material ways is strongly emphasized in Western cultures—Buddhism is not the main prompt.[786] Some interviewees said they engaged socially because they enjoyed helping others, gained a sense of belonging and community, found the environment of their centre or project to be positive, advanced their own healing, and found engagement meaningful. Many reported that social engagement contributed to their self-esteem, enjoyment of life, connections with others, and mental health. Affiliate leaders interviewed said that engagement enriched the lives of those involved, not just beneficiaries. Overall, the most commonly expressed reason for engaging socially was simply to help others, with this motivation being reinforced by Buddhist teachings, the influence of the Dalai Lama, and Rinpoche's prioritization of compassion in action.

There was some variation in the kinds of help engagement was understood to offer its intended beneficiaries. A minority of interviewees were satisfied with its visible, immediate effects; the majority felt that the most important impact was long term. They felt engagement would connect its beneficiaries to Buddhism in later lives. They did not seek to convert people to Buddhism, but to foster imprints or associations so that they would meet Buddhism in the future and thus be able to work toward ending their own suffering. How? Material help would encourage gratitude to Buddhists or monastics in robes who had helped; interacting with Buddhists could lead to meeting the same individuals again in later lives for further help; seeing holy objects in the place where help was received would connect beings to those objects; if people felt faith toward those objects, that faith would help purify their karma; and imprints from those objects would ripen in later lives. In whatever way it happened, engagement was viewed as

[782] C225D32. Email, January 2023.
[783] B121A15. Interviewed by Author, November 2022.
[784] A221R26. Interviewed by Author, October 2023.
[785] C211M20. Interviewed by Author, December 2022.
[786] B121J14. Interviewed by Author, November 2022.

connecting beings to Buddhism and Buddhists. One European nun, for example, said, "How do you reach people if you want to help them? You have to offer them something. … Dharma is the best help so we try to help people meet the Dharma indirectly. The impact is not necessarily in this life, that's important."[787] A young monk said simply, "we can't reach people without first meeting their basic needs."[788]

Were there ideas about social engagement that sometimes appear among other Buddhists who engage socially that did not arise? One notion sometimes found in Western culture is that it would be morally wrong to benefit, oneself, from helping others. Hence, it would not be right to engage socially out of a desire to create merit that would assist one's own progress to enlightenment. However, FPMT's lineage does not teach that there is anything wrong with those who support beneficial activities accruing merit. The attitude of the lamas, interviewees reported, was that everyone should benefit from engagement; there is nothing wrong with gaining merit from helping others. One interviewee reported that the Dalai Lama had said that both sides (helper and beneficiary) should benefit from help given.[789] Nevertheless, no one interviewed stated that they supported or helped in social projects mainly to accrue merit; the most common reason given was to help others.

Another area where people in FPMT may diverge from common ideas about engagement is their emphasis on motivation. Buddhist teachings, reinforced by Rinpoche, teach that engagement creates merit only if those doing it have an unselfish attitude, wishing to benefit others.[790] Soteriological benefits depend on good motivation. In this regard, one of FPMT's Dharma teachers discussed whether being socially engaged earned more merit than doing formal Buddhist practices. "It depends on the practitioner," he said. "It depends on their motivation especially."[791]

One idea sometimes attributed to Buddhists is that karma is so inevitable that Buddhists believe that attempts to relieve suffering are pointless or that sufferers have caused their own pain so others should not interfere.[792] Some interviewees were aware of these ideas but stated that to avoid addressing suffering for these reasons is not Buddhist. Interviewees did not dispute the role of karma in suffering, but most found the idea of not addressing others' suffering on karmic grounds laughable.

Karma is taken seriously across FPMT. Almost all interviewees mentioned it, and monastics in particular strongly underlined its role in producing suffering and the consequent need to address it for engagement to have beneficial effects. Interviewees did not use ideas about karma, though, to blame sufferers or avoid helping. Many interviewees countered such ideas by suggesting that those who are suffering may have the karma to be helped so "if you have a good heart… you try and help them."[793] Occasionally interviewees mentioned that, if the karma of beneficiaries of social projects did not improve, their suffering might return despite receiving help. This concern, however, did not discourage them from trying. Instead, it encouraged them to support the inclusion, in their activities, of faith-based elements aimed at improving beneficiaries' karma. Traditional understandings of karma thus shape FPMT's engagement rather

[787] C213F58. Interviewed by Author, February 2023.
[788] F113T61. Interviewed by Author, February 2023.
[789] A213P62. Interviewed by Author, March 2023.
[790] "Aspects of Buddhist Social Service," 14.
[791] A122K33. Interviewed by Author, February 2024.
[792] Jonathan Watts, for example, quoted in Chapter 4, claims that traditional Buddhism features karmic determinism, fatalism, and the view that those who experience suffering deserve it based on past bad actions; the result is disengagement. This generalization stereotypes traditionalist Buddhists and fails to account for their social engagement. Watts, "Editor's Note," 4.
[793] e.g., A211J04. Interviewed by Author, November 2022

than obstructing it. FPMT offers a demonstration that traditional Buddhist teachings, such as on the role karma plays in suffering, need not impede engagement.

A view often found in Western culture, interviewees mentioned, is that money is better spent on the poor than on religion. Interviewees in Asia indicated that, among Himalayan and East Asian groups, this idea is less widespread. Asians associated with FPMT, they felt, were more prone than Westerners to support religious activities as ways of helping others—through contributing to holy objects, religious practices, monasteries, and so on.[794] Interviewees stated that, by contrast, in the West, the idea that those who practice a religion ought to help others in material ways is widespread, including in FPMT, leading Westerners to prefer material forms of help. A related view some interviewees mentioned was that Western donors tended to want to help only the poorest people, whereas when Asian followers gave funds to help people materially, they did not target particular groups.[795] They were more likely to value social projects like schools that were not aimed solely at the poorest families, on the grounds that Buddhism teaches that all beings suffer; too tight a focus on the poor ignores Buddhist teachings on equanimity and on the variety of sufferings beings experience, mental and physical, present and future.[796] However, only a small number of interviewees commented on cultural differences. Because research did not explicitly explore these, the accuracy and representativeness of their comments are unknown. The main conclusion that data support is that people in FPMT vary in their priorities when donating.[797] If there are causes best loved by donors throughout FPMT's network, they are likely those that combine addressing material needs with support for the lineage or faith-based activities, such as providing food to monastics. Similarly, education projects, which also combine material and spiritual objectives, are popular among donors.

One idea sometimes found among Buddhists today is that karma can be collective or social—the term "sociokarma" has been coined to refer to the suffering of some groups.[798]

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[794] One interviewee who had spent considerable time in FPMT's centres that had large East Asian memberships recalled being given substantial donations solely due to being a monastic, adding, "they are huge supporters of Rinpoche's projects. If he suddenly needs money for something, the centres in Hong Kong, Singapore, and Taiwan, all the Asian ones are the ones he would turn to because they have a whole culture of giving. And its very much related to creating merit… if you want to have a happy, wealthy life yourself, you need to create the cause. They have this quite strong in their culture. And the best charity [they believe] is to … Dharma projects." A211J04. Interviewed by Author, November 2022.

[795] Moran, who undertook ethnographic research in Nepal in the 1990s, discusses these points. He found that East Asian Buddhists gave easily to religious projects like temples, statues, and stupas, whereas Western Buddhists preferred to give to social projects whose outcomes were immediate and visible. Moran, *Buddhism Observed*, 72-73.

[796] In FPMT, not all material aid is directed to the poorest people. Many schools, for example, target the poor but do not exclude middle class children; health clinics do not ask about income; and so on. Hence, it cannot be said that FPMT's socially oriented activities exclusively help the poorest sectors of society. The nature of aid, however, is such that most beneficiaries are poor.

[797] An example of differing preferences appears in Goldberg (2011). Goldberg documents varying views among visitors to FPMT's centre in Bodh Gaya, Root Institute, including both Indians and Westerners associated with FPMT, regarding the construction of a stupa in the yard of FPMT's school. The stupa was built because Rinpoche requested it; money was donated for this purpose. However, some visitors quietly commented that they doubted it was the best way to spend money, which they would have preferred go to the school itself. Goldberg, "Buddhists without Borders," 276-280.

[798] Gleig writes, "Others have … reinterpreted karma on a social level. Thai Buddhist feminist Khoonkie, for instance, notes that the violence against women is not a fruition of their 'bad' individual karma but a result of oppressive gender conditioning and sexism. Engaged Buddhists have forwarded a way of thinking about karma on a societal level in which working to counter unjust systems is viewed as taking responsibility for collective karma." Gleig, "Engaged Buddhism." Makransky discusses the difference in ways classical Buddhist texts discuss karma, focusing on the individual, and the expanded way karma is often portrayed today "in light of modern social analysis, focusing attention also on ways that individual patterns of thought and action are socially conditioned, and contribute to the social conditioning of others. Thus … karma is both individual and social, and Buddhist practice must apply not only to the transformation of the individual, but also to the transformation of social structures that

Interviewees did not express this idea. When asked about it, they dismissed it on the grounds that it was not found in Buddhist teachings. They uniformly described karma as individual even if many beings shared the same karma. One interviewee, for example, stated:

> People unfortunately create the karma to be in situations of social injustice. Karma… is why there is poverty, why there is discrimination… it's all coming from deluded states of mind… in the past and … keeping these situations going…. That doesn't mean they don't have the karma to be helped… so if you see somebody who is poor, give them whatever you can, work on taking responsibility to relieve the suffering of others.[799]

Another stated flatly, "Disease and poverty, those are symptoms of those individuals' negative karma. If they hadn't created the cause, negative karma, they wouldn't experience them."[800] Yet another said, "social structures come from individuals' karma… Buddhism… has exceptional techniques for addressing the suffering of individuals and also communities from the individual basis."[801] A different interviewee focused on Buddhism's teachings on the role of the mind in creating karma and thus suffering: "If people have a negative mind, non-virtue mind, they will keep creating their own suffering so giving material things can't satisfy them… they will always be unhappy until their mind changes."[802] Nevertheless, interviewees did not ignore society. Several underlined that the karmic seeds of suffering are within, but "there are environmental conditions that ripen our karma." Outer conditions thus had to be addressed as well as internal causes, one basis for engagement.[803] Given that, despite lacking notions of social karma, people in FPMT work both to help individuals and to better society, the idea of "sociokarma" is evidently not needed to prompt engagement.

Related to ideas of social karma is a view that academic scholars often suggest motivates Buddhist social engagement: a wish to transform society fundamentally through political or social activism to overcome inequality or other injustices experienced by some groups. Interviewees rarely mentioned this aim. They often indicated a wish to change society for the better through educating people to be more ethical, compassionate, and wise, but they did not talk about fundamentally reordering society. Their main aims were alleviating immediate suffering (such as by providing food or health care), improving length or quality of life (such as by providing dialysis to kidney patients, friendship and spiritual care to prisoners, mental skills and community to those suffering from loneliness or depression, or safety to animals), improving opportunities for happier lives (such as by educating children), or providing blessings, imprints, or connections to Buddhism to benefit future lives.

Interviewees sometimes had broad societal aims as well, however. They repeatedly indicated that society would improve through changing people's minds. Almost all expressed the belief that only better minds—less deluded and more compassionate, ethical, and wise—could produce a better society. This view made education—Dharma, universal, and even secular—their priority. They felt education's impact would be enhanced by the effects of holy objects, which they also mentioned as useful for people and animals who could not be reached by education.

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condition individuals into ways of thinking and acting that promote inequality, violence and harm to the natural world." Makransky, "Applied Buddhism," 17. Roger Jackson points out that the social idea of karma is not found in classical sources, where "karma is one's own." Jackson, *Rebirth*, 93.

[799] A211J04. Interviewed by Author, November 2022.

[800] A121N05. Interviewed by Author, November 2022.

[801] B121C25. Interviewed by Author, January 2023.

[802] A213P62. Interviewed by Author, March 2023.

[803] C121J27. Interviewed by Author, December 2022; B121M30. Interviewed by Author, December 2022.

A few interviewees explained lack of political activism in FPMT in other ways. Two categories of reasons were given: Buddhist and practical. One practical reason was that FPMT is often viewed as foreign in its main locales of engagement—India, Nepal, and Mongolia—and activism is unfeasible there given reliance on governments for visas, permits, accreditation of schools, and so on.[804] Interviewees also noted that activism was impractical, for legal reasons, in countries where affiliates were legally established as charitable organizations. Another practical reason cited was FPMT's diversity. One interviewee underlined that causes popular in one region or culture, like Black Lives Matter, may not resonate in others. Even within one affiliate, he stressed, people might have different political opinions, so activism can "be a dividing topic." This made it hard for FPMT as a whole or any one affiliate, "as an institution" to be activist. He pointed out that FPMT is not heavily involved even in the Free Tibet movement, a natural area for involvement were there a wish for activism.[805] Another practical reason interviewees gave for avoiding activism was doubts about its benefit. Several claimed it was "just for show," "glamorous," or "virtue signaling." Some who expressed this view indicated that real benefit for others came from social services, community development, or community well-being activities—"small scale work that changes lives." Others said real benefit mainly came from Dharma teaching and practice.[806]

One interviewee offered another practical reason. He felt that FPMT was already doing what it did best: fundraising globally and offering locally appropriate services. He said:

> There is help in running health clinics even if you never change society. If you're easing the suffering of people who are ill, you're doing important work. I don't think all organizations can be all things to all people. What FPMT does, they do quite well. There's real value in that, even if they aren't … a social justice organization. … It would be a shame to move from community clinics and things like that that have a big impact in local areas … to have FPMT be more politically active… things other organizations and other networks of people are doing quite well… Nobody else would move in and do what FPMT does in the same way.[807]

The interviewee also hinted that FPMT would not likely be able to raise the same level of funds for activism as it did for humanitarian projects.

Buddhist reasons were sometimes cited for avoiding activism. The main one was that it could promote anger, which Buddhism teaches gravely endangers oneself and others. One young monk commented that "political change is good but political action often relies on anger."[808] Although some Buddhists today revalue anger at injustice as harm-free, traditionalists generally

[804] Goldberg notes this as a reason why, despite Bodh Gaya's social problems, there is very little activism among any of the engaged Buddhist organizations there. However, he argues that the projects they run, mainly schools, should be considered a form of activism because they contribute to social transformation. Goldberg, "Buddhists without Borders," 128, 129. FPMT affiliates risk being perceived as foreign virtually everywhere. Even in Nepal, Kopan Monastery can be perceived as either Tibetan (although almost all its residents are Nepali) or Western (because it was founded with Western funds though now likely relies more on Asian funds). In the West, affiliates can be perceived as Tibetan or Asian; in India as Western; in Southeast or East Asia as Tibetan, and so on.
[805] F111G06. Interviewed by Author, November 2022.
[806] e,g., C11K02, G225J29, G224C84. Interviewed by Author, March 2023.
[807] B121C25. Interviewed by Author, January 2023.
[808] C124K70. Interviewed by Author, March 2023.

do not; they rely on canonical teachings.[809] A few interviewees also felt engaging socially was an obstacle to meditation and other formal practices—a distraction or waste of time.[810]

Of all interviewees, only five expressed a wish for more involvement in social or political activism. One European centre member said she had wanted her centre to participate in activism on environmental issues; the centre leadership declined so she became an activist on her own.[811] An American man felt affiliates should be more involved in Pride parades, women's rights, and anti-racism movements.[812] Another American did not necessarily favour activism, but felt that FPMT's engagement should aim more clearly at changing society by addressing oppression and other causes of poverty and marginalization, spending less money on holy objects and more on these issues.[813] One American monk with a history of activism before ordaining had felt a strong desire to get involved in certain protests but ended up not doing so because he was in a monastery on the direct advice of his teacher; he had been told that studying there was the best way for him to benefit others. His comments reveal the tensions that can arise in FPMT between social engagement and formal Dharma study and practice:

> I recognized that … giving it all up to attend a protest … was maybe not the best use of my skills or my circumstances …. Then I allow my practice here and my study here to be one of the ways I contribute… even though it's not actively doing anything, it is what I can do …. And when I give teachings I talk about… social activism … as part of the teachings of the Buddha, and about how we're all compelled to benefit others in any way we can and to relieve their suffering. … As far as being traditional… you never see stories of the Buddha seeing others who are being oppressed or marginalized, and him not taking their side. Or him saying, it's acceptable that this is happening… you never saw him taking the side of the oppressor. … Compassion has to be active; Dharma isn't passive. … Like Desmond Tutu, who is such good friends with His Holiness and you hear him talk about the work he did fighting Apartheid … you know nothing he did was passive, [he was] living compassion in a very active way. I don't think Buddhism calls for anything less. … Even we look at Tara, the reason Tara is sitting with her leg outstretched is because her compassion… is so strong. She wants to always be halfway there so she can help right away.[814]

In addition to explaining why he himself is not an activist, the monk demonstrated the use of traditional teachings—stories of the Buddha—to legitimize activism, a rare approach in FPMT. Another interviewee also said that traditional Buddhist teachings supported activism, calling it a "responsibility" for people who have bodhisattva vows.[815] The European centre member cited shows that there are people associated with FPMT who engage in activism outside FPMT contexts—probably many. Centres do occasionally participate in activist events, such as the Pride march discussed above; as well, one interviewee mentioned that her centre had participated

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[809] Valuations of anger relate to Buddhism's cosmology. If the cosmology is correct, anger's purported destruction of merit is likely to be a concern.

[810] Amod Lele writes: "a significant portion of premodern Indian Buddhist tradition" portrays activism as hindering spiritual progress, although it supports humanitarian work. He cites core Buddhist teachings which state that activism may not resolve others' suffering, and, for those doing it, may negatively affect "the tranquility required for liberation." Amod Lele, "Disengaged Buddhism." *Journal of Buddhist Ethics* 26 (2019): 239, 246-250, 275.

[811] G221R89. Interviewed by author, April 2023.

[812] A121D11. Interviewed by Author, November 2022. One centre participated in a 2024 Pride parade.

[813] B121J14. Interviewed by Author, November 2002.

[814] F111G06. Interviewed by Author, November 2022.

[815] A221P88. Interviewed by Author, April 2023.

in climate marches.[816] That a few interviewees favoured centres engaging in activism, but the majority did not, shows that opinions in FPMT vary.

It is worth noting that interviewees often expressed agreement with activist positions on issues like climate change, poverty, and injustice.[817] None declined to support activism on what might be called "politically conservative" grounds, nor felt that traditional Buddhism entailed conservative politics. One stated clearly, "I don't equate tradition with conservative activity or conservative viewpoints."[818] Many indicated they had been involved in progressive causes at some point—environmental, anti-capitalist, women's rights, queer rights, Free Tibet, and so on. Lack of activism did not signify lack of desire to better society. It signified choosing other ways to do so.

An example that reveals common attitudes in FPMT toward activism is a "Planetary Crisis Summit" held by European FPMT centres in April 2024. The summit is discussed in more detail below. It is cited here to show how people involved in FPMT understand their role in issues that often prompt activism. One participant wrote:

> As Buddhists we should … be an inspiring example of non harm by adopting a lifestyle which cares for nature … Because the causes of all the problems humanity is facing today, really originate from the delusions in our mind. … The solutions to change our misguided attitude already exist in the Buddha's teachings, and therefore as a Buddhist organisation FPMT possesses a tremendous potential which allows us to offer real solutions to the world…. address the actual root of the problems … by generating a loving attitude, caring for the planet, and reducing our own emissions; and …reaching out to society by offering advice about dealing with the deeper [mental] causes of this planetary crisis.[819]

The quote reveals concern for the environment but, due to diagnosing the root causes of problems as mental, it treats their cure as Dharma. The role given FPMT is then to care for the environment in its own spaces and teach Dharma: a traditionalist way of engaging socially.

Does Social Engagement Benefit FPMT?

This research did not attempt to evaluate the benefits to recipients of FPMT's social engagement. Nevertheless, interviewees sometimes commented on the benefits to FPMT.

One benefit mentioned was improvement in the sense of community at the affiliate involved. An interviewee described how being engaged affected his centre:

> [Engagement] is an important part of our practice… it's on the ground doing what needs to be done. Then people come together, and they feel what it's like to be acting from a place of compassion, and that creates a deeper sense of community and cohesion. So the benefits are not just for those we are benefiting but what comes to us by virtue of those sorts of selfless acts… because it feels good and it's good that it feels good because it produces that kind of bonding together.[820]

[816] A221P88. Interviewed by Author, April 2023.
[817] e.g., A121F22. Interviewed by Author, December 2022.
[818] B121D19. Interviewed by Author, December 2022.
[819] Tenzin Michael, "Planetary Crisis Summit," International Mahayana Institute. July 2024. https://imisangha.org/planetary-crisis-summit/.
[820] A121D11. Interviewed by Author, November 2022.

Many interviewees cited engagement as benefiting affiliates by giving valued volunteer or paid roles to members, sometimes providing wages but also opportunities for making friends, doing meaningful work, putting teachings into practice, gaining training and experience, learning about people and issues, and accumulating merit. Younger interviewees in particular indicated that they wanted to volunteer in social projects and expected Buddhist groups to have them.[821] Hence, engagement enhanced the attractiveness of affiliates, including to new and young members.

One monk commented that FPMT does not benefit financially from being engaged. The monk stressed that funds FPMT raises for social projects go to those projects; they do not pay for administration or enrich individuals. Nor do they enrich administrators of non-FPMT projects; another interviewee who had been involved underlined that FPMT maintains close awareness of where money goes and what happens "on the ground."[822] The monk reported that FPMT was able to significantly help people affected by the 2015 earthquake in Nepal because donors had confidence that their funds would reach those in need. He added, "there aren't highly salaried individuals in the organization. Some charities, to convince qualified leaders to work for them, have to pay them a lot of money. And they have to advertise a lot [to raise money]. FPMT is in a different category… donations really reach where you want them to."[823] FPMT puts significant energy into raising money for projects and ensuring it reaches the intended beneficiaries.[824]

Although it does not benefit financially, in the eyes of many interviewees, FPMT and its affiliates are strengthened by engaging socially, and not just by attracting more adherents. Even when FPMT funds unaffiliated social projects, there may be benefits. Those involved in affiliated and unaffiliated projects, and sometimes beneficiaries, at times do Dharma practices for the health (and more recently, swift return) of Rinpoche and for the success of FPMT's activities, which people in FPMT often perceive as helping FPMT. Other faith-based benefits were also cited. From a Buddhist perspective, organizations do not accrue merit, but those who work in them do, and merit from engaging socially was occasionally described as promoting the flourishing of FPMT's teachers and affiliates. As well, some interviewees suggested that, because the Dalai Lama and the lamas recommended social engagement, engaged affiliates and individuals would receive their blessings and those of the Buddhas and Bodhisattvas.

A final benefit identified was reputational. Engagement was said to help affiliates: they become respected members of surrounding communities, overcome perceptions of being foreign, display good citizenship, show themselves as friendly and open, and show they put their teachings into practice. Some interviewees felt that engaging showed non-Buddhists that Buddhists were no less helpful than Christians. Is there evidence that FPMT's engagement has boosted its reputation? In the Himalayan world, the words of "swift return" prayers, discussed above, suggest so. In Nepal, according to interviewees, Kopan Monastery has become respected and influential partly because of its social impact. In Bodh Gaya, Root Institute and Rinpoche are known for social projects that have operated since the 1980s and 1990s; the projects were reported to have benefited these entities' reputations and given them local influence. Goldberg notes that in Bodh Gaya, local people perceived Rinpoche "to be a compassionate social worker working towards uplifting the poor." He adds that Rinpoche was known in Bodh Gaya for "schools, health clinics, vocational training centres, and animal shelters, as well as … increased standards of living and economic prospects." FPMT, a more abstract entity, was not well-known,

[821] e.g. B211N21. Interviewed by Author, December 2022.
[822] C121J27. Interviewed by Author, December 2022.
[823] B111B23. Interviewed by Author, January 2023.
[824] Although more than one interviewee stressed how well FPMT has done ensuring that funds do not go astray or get wasted, one interviewee mentioned situations in two Asian locations where some funds may have been misused by recipients of FPMT's aid. However well FPMT manages funds, such problems can still arise, as with any charity. G213S54. Interviewed by Author, February 2023.

but Root Institute and Rinpoche were appreciated.[825] Ven. Yiwong, profiled in the prologue to Chapter 5, noted that she and Rinpoche were recognized by the government of Mongolia in part for FPMT's social engagement there. Interviewees at the two centres in England reported that engagement helped them build links with their neighbouring communities and enhanced their reputations in those communities and among local social service organizations. A few interviewees, however, mentioned that FPMT's social engagement is not well known and the organization's reputation would be enhanced if it were better known.

Summary: Research Findings

Data show that FPMT's traditional Buddhism does not preclude social engagement. People associated with FPMT consider that many teachings found in their lineage support engagement and that engagement is an important Buddhist practice. Although activism is not widely supported in FPMT, other forms of engagement are, and are viewed as helping beneficiaries and being soteriological for those who implement or contribute to them. Interviewees' comments sometimes reflect what might be considered a traditionalist approach to engagement: prioritizing faith-based ways of helping beneficiaries of material aid to also receive future life and transmundane benefits.

Summary: The Background to FPMT's Engaged Activities

FPMT has always been socially engaged. Nevertheless, changes have occurred over the years in how engagement has been understood in the organization. These changes have gradually increased its social engagement. Engagement moved from being mainly peripheral among FPMT's activities to being within the core. FPMT has a *de facto* social philosophy, which is that, as Rinpoche stated, FPMT should attend to "not only the emergency and critical needs of others, but also to creating the causes to lessen individual and world suffering through Buddhist means. … through practical and spiritual methods." [826] "Practical" methods include material aid. "Spiritual methods" are faith-based elements that supplement material aid to benefit others' minds, karma, and future lives.

In the next section, some of FPMT's socially oriented activities are described. After that, the relationship between tradition and social engagement is taken up again as findings on FPMT's traditional Buddhism and on its social engagement are brought together in a discussion of traditionalist aspects of FPMT's engagement.

FPMT's Socially Engaged Activities

Introduction

FPMT comprises many affiliates, some of which are socially engaged. Their activities vary because, although FPMT standardizes formal Dharma teachings and practices, it does not standardize social endeavours. These are shaped "on the ground." Decentralization in this area is so great that not all of these, one interviewee noted, are even known to the international office.[827] That is one reason why this dissertation does not offer a complete list of all FPMT's social

[825] Goldberg, "Buddhists without Borders," 24, 275.
[826] "Helping the World," 58.
[827] A121E12. Interviewed by Author, November 2022.

projects and activities: none exists, and gathering the data to create one would be beyond the scope of this research.

FPMT's social projects and activities are presented here in four categories: independently established engaged affiliates; freestanding projects run under the aegis of an affiliate; activities incorporated into affiliates' repertoires; and activities run by organizations not affiliated with FPMT but receiving its support.

The first group comprises independent affiliates whose only activity is social engagement. These are generally legal entities, usually charities, with a board of trustees or directors and their own management and staff. They may sometimes benefit from financial contributions from FPMT's international office or from other affiliates.

Next are projects and activities managed by an FPMT centre or monastery. Some are freestanding and some integrated with the affiliate.

Lastly there are unaffiliated organizations. These organizations were not created by any FPMT affiliate nor, usually, by anyone closely associated with FPMT. They are managed by their own trustees, boards, and/or staff. Some have had a relationship with Rinpoche, who often knew people involved in them, visited them, and gave them advice. Nevertheless, they do not necessarily have the connections within FPMT that characterize its affiliated projects.

Certain other types of social projects connected to FPMT are not detailed in this dissertation. These are projects established or operated by people linked to FPMT and its lamas but not formally affiliated with FPMT. Perhaps they should be credited to FPMT given that the lamas were their inspiration and the individuals involved trained in Buddhism in FPMT. However, they are excluded given their lack of a formal relationship with FPMT. Many such projects exist. One is Alice Project Universal Education School in Sarnath, India, established in 1994 by Luigina de Biasi and Valentino Giacomin, and managed by Giacomin, a longtime follower of the lamas. Alice Project also has two smaller branch schools.[828] An interviewee who helped support the school financially indicated that, as of 2023, the schools together were educating over 1000 children annually. The Sarnath school provides a complete primary and secondary education. Some graduates have gone on to university and professional careers.[829] Another independent project is the Global Tree Initiative founded in 2019 by Tenzin Ösel Hita, believed in FPMT to be the reincarnation of Lama Yeshe. It encourages tree planting globally and has many local affiliates. As of 2023, its website indicated that it had coordinated the planting of more than 4 million trees in 67 countries.[830] Some FPMT centres participate in this initiative, raising funds and organizing local tree planting.[831] Akshay School in Bodh Gaya is another unaffiliated project. It is a primary school with more than 200 students established in 2008 by a student of Rinpoche. It incorporates FPMT's *16 Guidelines* into its curriculum.[832] Yet another project is "Enlightenment for the Dear Animals" (EDA). This organization falls under an Australia-based charity, "Tree of Compassion," operated by two longtime students of the lamas. EDA raises funds to support animal rescue and care, including at Kopan Monastery's animal sanctuary and Maitri Charitable Trust in India, both FPMT affiliates.[833] Another non-affiliate is Potential Project, established by Rasmus Hougaard, also a longtime student of Rinpoche. It

[828] "Alice Project Universal Education School." https://aliceproject.org/. Accessed July 14, 2024.
[829] B213A57. Interviewed by Author, February 2023.
[830] "Global Tree Initiative." https://plantgrowsave.org/. Accessed September 3, 2024.
[831] C221M10. Interviewed by Author, November 2022. G221R89. Interviewed by Author, April 2023.
[832] "16 Guidelines in Akshay School." *FDCW Communications*. https://compassionandwisdom.org/16-guidelines-in-akshay-school/. Accessed September 3, 2024.
[833] "Enlightenment for the Dear Animals." https://enlightenmentforanimals.org/. Accessed April 4, 2024; "Tree of Compassion." https://www.treeofcompassion.org.au/. Accessed April 4, 2024; "Branching out with Tania Duratovic." *Vet Practice*, November 8, 2017. https://www.vetpracticemag.com.au/branching-tania-duratovic/.

offers universal education teachings to the corporate world.[834] A final example is the Frome Kindness Festival in Frome, UK, initiated by another student of the lamas.[835]

Also not detailed below are time-limited social efforts undertaken by affiliates, often in response to particular circumstances. These are not easy to trace and only a few examples are provided. One is a 2020 initiative by Panchen Losang Chogyen Gelugzentrum, an FPMT centre in Vienna, Austria. Members raised over $US 10,000 for an organization helping refugees in Lesbos, Greece. They also raised funds for an animal sanctuary.[836] This type of engagement—time-limited efforts that support outside organizations—often suits FPMT's smaller centres. During the pandemic, FPMT affiliates undertook various similar initiatives. For example, in the US, Vajrapani Institute in California offered housing to refugees from a nearby forest fire. Kadampa Center in North Carolina became involved in Covid mask making, expanded a prison pen-pal project, and helped the local Meals on Wheels program. Milarepa Center in Vermont donated to the town food bank. In Malaysia, Kasih Hospice helped coordinate some Covid research and organized the sewing and delivery of 25,000 pieces of personal protective equipment. In Spain, volunteers from Potala Hospice offered emotional support by phone and email to isolated people experiencing grief or despair due to the pandemic. Root Institute and Maitri Charitable Trust in Bodh Gaya both distributed food in the local community.[837] These examples show that the section below understates the engagement of people connected to FPMT.

This section gives an overview of some of the projects operated by FPMT affiliates or funded by its international office. Most descriptions are brief but more detail is presented on the sites visited during fieldwork. The activities described demonstrate that FPMT is socially engaged and show typical forms of its engagement.

Independent Affiliates

Maitri Charitable Trust, Bodh Gaya, Bihar, India

Maitri Charitable Trust is one of the organizations visited, in 2023 and 2024, during ethnographic research.[838]

Maitri is an Indian charitable trust operating in the Bodh Gaya area, one of India's poorest regions. It is overseen by an Indian board of trustees but managed by Adriana Ferranti, its founder and long-time director. She began offering leprosy services in 1989, setting up a home and office in the city of Gaya in 1990. By 1998, she had procured land and constructed buildings just outside Bodh Gaya. She oversees an evolving set of health and education services. FPMT's international office sometimes coordinates donations for her, but she is Maitri's main fundraiser, raising funds from Italy, Spain, Holland, Taiwan, India, Australia, and other areas.

When I visited, Maitri had a main site, mobile health clinics, and a free primary school in the village of Fulchatar, about 15 kilometers away, which I also visited. The main site and mobile clinics were operating in four principal areas: leprosy; tuberculosis; mother / child / young women care; and animal care. At its main site, Maitri was working to treat leprosy and

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[834] "Bringing Dharma into the Corporate World: Rasmus Hougaard Talks about the Potential Project." *FPMT In-depth Stories*, March 23, 2015. https://fpmt.org/in-depth-stories/bringing-dharma-into-the-corporate-world/.
[835] "Kindness Festival 2024." *The Good Heart*. www.thegoodheart.uk. Accessed September 3, 2024.
[836] "Panchen Losang Chogyen Gelugzentrum Aids Refugees on the Greek Island Lesbos." *FPMT Community: Stories & News*. March 17, 2021. https://fpmt.org/fpmt-community-news/news-around-the-world/panchen-losang-chogyen-gelugzentrum-aids-refugees-on-the-greek-island-lesbos/.
[837] Laura Miller, "Centers, Projects, and Services during the Pandemic: Turning a Difficult Situation into a Positive Result." *Mandala* (2021): 54-58.
[838] See also "Adriana Ferranti: Engaged Mystic" above for additional information on Maitri Charitable Trust.

tuberculosis by operating a small free hospital for people with these conditions—supplementing care and medicine available from the government. Leprosy and tuberculosis persisted in the area. Leprosy in particular was often under-diagnosed and under-treated giving Maitri an important role. At both its main site and through its mobile clinics, Maitri also provided care and supplemental nourishment—vitamins, milk, pulses, formula—for expectant mothers, newborns, and young children, and educated girls about their bodies and supplied menstrual products. The mobile clinic reached under-served pockets of the region lacking primary health care centres. I was able to observe, by accompanying the clinic, that poverty and undernourishment still affected many young mothers and their babies. Maitri is also a source of charity for poor families. For example, in the cold months of December 2023 and January and February 2024, it distributed 835 blankets to patients of its clinics and poor people in various surrounding villages. Warm underwear and blankets were also given to many students at Maitri's village school. Winters in this area are quite cold so these are meaningful gifts. Food, supplements, and milk powder were also distributed to several dozen needy families over the winter.[839]

At its main site, Maitri was also caring for dozens of rescued animals, mainly dogs but also other animals like horses and goats. Maitri is famous in Bodh Gaya for taking in stray, injured, and crippled dogs, sterilizing them, and ensuring they have veterinary care. Dozens were living (loudly!) at the site during my visits.

Figure 8. "Maitri's Mobile Clinic." In rural Bihar state, women line up with their children to receive medication and nutrition supplements from one of Maitri Charitable Trust's mobile clinics, February 2023. Photo: Donna L. Brown.

Maitri's village school operated separately from its other activities. The school was a collaboration between Maitri and the villagers: the villagers built and maintained the building, and Maitri provided teachers, books, supplies, and sweaters for schoolchildren. When I visited in February 2023, the school had about 125 students in grades one through four. Both Adriana and the teachers said that all were Hindu and most from so-called "untouchable" castes. The school taught the government curriculum, partly in English. "Moral values" were also taught, the teachers indicated, although these did not follow FPMT's *16 Guidelines*. The teachers followed the government curriculum. Examples of lessons included "kindness" and "respecting elders."

[839] MAITRI E-News December, January, and February. *Maitri Charitable Trust*. March 2024.

The school did not have any visible Buddhist elements because the building was maintained by the villagers, all Hindu, and Maitri itself did not place Buddhist elements there. Unlike at Maitreya School, morning prayers were Hindu only. So the school was at one end of the spectrum for an FPMT-affiliated entity: there were no visible Buddhist influences, practices, or sacred elements, and perhaps the only Buddhist aspect was the requirement to teach moral values. There was a plan for a Hindi-speaking teacher from Maitreya School to visit occasionally and teach FPMT's *16 Guidelines* once logistics could be organized. Placing Buddhist items in the school and having a visiting Buddhist teacher would have been easier were the school not in an isolated location. But it was this location that made operating a school necessary; other schools were too far from the village for small children to walk. The school was successful, according to Adriana and the teachers: the students, when they later attended a government school, were ahead of their peers, and young adults who had attended the school as children had found good jobs, such as in the police, one reason villagers supported the school.

At its main site, Maitri had various faith-based elements aimed at helping others—patients, staff, visitors, and animals. There were lots of sacred images, Hindu and Buddhist, and even a picture of Arabic writing chosen by Muslim patients. This variety was in keeping with Adriana's admiration for Gandhi's multifaith, tolerant vision. A loudspeaker played Buddhist mantras and prayers continually and there was a large stupa, although herding the only semi-tame animals around it for blessings occurred only rarely. Adriana had sometimes requested pujas from Kopan Monastery or divinations from Rinpoche to help resolve problems.[840] Many of the sacred elements at Maitri were recommended by Rinpoche.[841] Adriana's devotion for Rinpoche and implementation of his wishes, the presence at Maitri of faith-based elements, and her determination to care for animals and help them attain better rebirths can be considered traditionalist aspects of Maitri's engagement.

Liberation Prison Project, Raleigh, North Carolina, USA, operating internationally

Liberation Prison Project (LPP) is a charitable organization established in 1996 by Ven. Robina Courtin after an ex-gangster serving three life sentences in a California prison wrote to *Mandala* magazine asking for a free subscription. Ven. Robina, a nun who was then *Mandala*'s editor, responded with magazines and books. She then launched a project through which hundreds of volunteers have supported the spiritual and emotional lives of many thousands of incarcerated men and women around the globe through letters, phone calls, and visits. The project is both spiritual and social, since prisoners are given Buddhist learning and practice materials as well as emotional support and friendship. The prisoners are mainly male, poor, and estranged from their families; their histories include drugs, alcohol, violence, and gangs. LPP supports them in their efforts to improve their mental outlook, overcome isolation, and build meaningful lives.[842] One interviewee who had volunteered with LPP described why it was not just "a Dharma project," saying, "one of its greatest values … is human contact between the Buddhist teacher and the

[840] Information in this section is compiled from interviews with Adriana Ferranti by Zoom in November 2022 and in person in February 2023 and February 2024, and conversations with Maitri staff in February 2023, as well as from observation during visits to Maitri Charitable Trust in February 2023 and 2024.
[841] "Current Programs." *MAITRI Charitable Trust*. https://www.maitri-bodhgaya.org/home/current-programmes/. Accessed April 5, 2024.
[842] "Our Students." *Liberation Prison Project*. https://liberationprisonproject.org/about/our-students/ Accessed December 14, 2023; "Meet the Liberation Prison Project." *Mandala* (October-December 2012), 40-44. https://fpmt.org/wp-content/uploads/sites/2/2012/12/40-44%20Meet%20LPP%20-%20Mandala%20Oct-Dec%202012%20g%20corr.pdf.

prisoner. The prisoners… really value this person coming and talking to them, just some kind of sense of humanity and normality."[843] Another interviewee described his experience:

> I saw how much me being there meant to them. They were so happy to be in a room with someone that respected them. …I started to see that the present environment is so impoverished that they're hungry for all kinds of stuff, right? … They're hungry for connection, for intellectual stimulation, to be treated like a person. So the fact that I could offer them an hour a week … it became fun. We were talking about emptiness. We're talking about all this stuff and they loved it. It was so different from their environment. So it started out as, I'm going to give these people Dharma and it turned into, just my presence helps them to suffer less and feel better.[844]

Tara Redwood School (TRS), Soquel, California, USA

Tara Redwood School (TRS) was founded by Pamela Cayton in 1989, initially as a preschool and in 1996 as an elementary school as well. It is a non-profit educational organization in California. The school aims at educating the hearts and minds of children, giving them strong academic foundations, emotional intelligence, core values, physical skills, and contact with nature. The school's program is a blend of Montessori and Creating Compassionate Cultures (CCC) methodologies; CCC is a universal education program in inspired by Buddhism and the universal education vision of Lama Yeshe. It was developed by Cayton and was the first program in FPMT to pilot universal education. CCC's success at TRS led to the creation of another FPMT affiliate, the online "Institute for Creating Compassionate Cultures," (ICCC). [845] ICCC is associated with FPMT affiliate the Foundation for Developing Compassion and Wisdom (FCDW), which oversees FPMT's universal education activities.

Karuna Hospice Services, Brisbane, Queensland, Australia

Karuna Hospice Services was founded as a non-profit organization in 1992 by FPMT monk Ven. Pende Hawter with the aim of offering the local community a palliative care service based on Buddhist principles. Over time, Karuna has evolved, incorporating Buddhist ideas and remaining affiliated with FPMT, while serving a wide range of patients with professional staff and volunteers of many backgrounds and belief systems. It offers free, home-based, full-service palliative care as well as advocacy, counseling, spiritual support, bereavement support, and meditation teachings.[846]

Cittamani Hospice Service Ltd., Queensland, Australia

Cittamani Hospice Service is a charitable organization in Australia established in 1994 to provide community-based hospice services. It provides professional palliative care and support to terminally ill people and their families from diagnosis to bereavement. To support clients' choices on how they wish to spend their remaining time, Cittamani offers both inpatient and community services. The core is a hospice-at-home program but Cittamani also works in

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[843] B211D16. Interviewed by Author, November 2022.
[844] B121J14. Interviewed by Author, November 2022.
[845] "History." *Creating Compassionate Cultures*. https://oiccctraining.org/about/history. Accessed December 15, 2023; Amanda Bauscher, "Tara Redwood School: Sprouting the Seeds of Compassion." *Mandala* (July-September 2014). https://fpmt.org/mandala/archives/mandala-for-2014/july/tara-redwood-school/.
[846] "About Us." *Karuna Hospice Services*. https://karuna.org.au. Accessed December 15, 2023.

collaboration with hospitals and the medical community to also provide services in health care environments. It has a multidisciplinary team with palliative care nurses, social workers, and community volunteers. It offers medical, social, referral, and advocacy services, respite for carers, spiritual care from Buddhist and other traditions, loans of equipment to ensure care and comfort in home environments, bereavement counselling, and community and professional education in issues of death and dying.[847]

Kasih Hospice Foundation, Selangor, Malaysia

Kasih Hospice Foundation provides, free of charge, home-based medical, psychosocial, emotional, and spiritual support to people nearing the end of their lives. Its services were launched in 1997 by a group of Dharma students from FPMT's Losang Dragpa Centre in Malaysia. They were trained by FPMT monk Ven. Pende Hawter, who established Karuna Hospice in Australia, and a surgeon and palliative care specialist. In 2005, a legal entity was established. Gradually doctors, nurses, and other specialists were hired. Many volunteers also offer their services. The organization now works with several hundred patients every year, assisting them with pain and symptom control as well as providing non-denominational emotional and spiritual support.[848]

La Asociacion Potala Hospice, Madrid, Spain

La Asociacion Potala Hospice in Spain also offers palliative care services. In 2000, Rinpoche recommended organizing a group of people at FPMT's centre, Nagarjuna C.E.T. Madrid, to accompany and support dying people. Like those who established Kasih Hospice, the Spanish volunteers learned from the work done by Ven. Pende Hawter in Australia. After a period of learning and planning, in 2003, they established a nonprofit organization and in 2007, signed a collaboration agreement with a hospital in Madrid to accompany patients in the palliative care unit. Since then, hundreds of people have become volunteers and have completed the training the group offers. Additional volunteer groups were formed in Valencia in 2019 and Barcelona in 2020. Their main function has been volunteering in hospitals with patients, offering non-denominational emotional and spiritual care.[849]

Maitripa College, Portland, Oregon, USA

Maitripa College is a non-profit charitable organization established in 2005 by Yangsi Rinpoche Kesang Tuladhar, a Nepal-born ethnic Tibetan geshe and student of the lamas. A seminary-type institution, it offers two degrees, a Master of Arts and a Master of Divinity, as well as continuing education courses and community programming. Students receive academic education in Buddhist Studies, Tibetan language, psychology, chaplaincy, and other topics alongside Buddhist teachings and meditation training in the Geluk tradition. They also volunteer in the local community. The college is not accredited as a university and thus has remained small, but its

[847] "About Cittamani." *Cittamani Hospice Service*. https://www.cittamanihospice.com.au. Accessed July 15, 2024.
[848] "About Us." *Kasih Hospice Foundation*. https://kasihfoundation.org. Accessed July 3, 2024.
[849] "La Asociacion Potala Hospice Volunteers Provide Support During COVID." *FPMT Community: Stories & News*. June 2, 2021. https://fpmt.org/fpmt-community-news/news-around-the-world/la-asociacion-potala-hospice-volunteers-provide-support-during-covid/.

Divinity degree is accepted as training for chaplaincy by many employers and the American Board of Chaplaincy Certification.[850] A number of its graduates have become chaplains.

The Foundation for Developing Compassion and Wisdom, London, UK

The Foundation for Developing Compassion and Wisdom (FDCW) is a charity established in the UK in 2005 with the Dalai Lama as patron. FDCW develops and delivers universal education—secular training programs and personal development resources—for schools, universities, community groups, hospices, healthcare environments, and other workplaces, as well as running conferences and events. The training and resources combine Buddhist teachings (without faith elements) with Western philosophy and psychology to teach life skills and universal values: mindfulness, compassion, gratitude, courage, forgiveness, ethics, and so on. FDCW's London head office coordinates facilitators who deliver the training, in person and online, in more than 20 countries. Its flagship course is *16 Guidelines* which covers skillful ways to think, act, relate to others, and find meaning in life.[851] FDCW offers numerous other courses as well as facilitator training.[852] It trains people to teach skills to alleviate immediate life problems and to practice active compassion, i.e., social engagement.[853]

Loving Kindness Peaceful Youth (LKPY), operating internationally

Figure 9. "Free Hugs." Fernando Romo Ledezma during a Free Hugs event in 2012 in Parque Rojo, Guadalajara, Mexico. Fernando and others associated with LKPY were offering hugs to anyone who asked. Photo credit: Xavier Jiménez. Used with permission.

In 1999, Rinpoche proposed an international peace project for young people focusing on connection, community, compassion, and mindfulness. Rinpoche later said, "This idea came to me as a result of all the discussion that followed the Columbine shootings. … People and politicians discussed for months and months whether to allow guns or whether not to allow guns. I never saw one person on TV talking about compassion. I was very surprised, for if you change the way your mind thinks, if you place focus on generating compassion, then you are far less likely to harm others in the first place. I started thinking of ways in which compassion could be

[850] The college does not have the regional accreditation most colleges and universities have. It has degree granting authority from the State of Oregon.
[851] The *16 Guidelines* are an interpretation of instructions attributed to a seventh century Tibetan king, Songtsen Gampo. They were developed at the behest of Rinpoche beginning in 2004. The 16 are: humility; patience; contentment; delight; kindness; honesty; generosity; right speech; respect; forgiveness; gratitude; loyalty; aspiration; principles; service; and courage. Murdoch and Oldershaw, *16 Guidelines*, v-viii; Alison Murdoch, "Ideas to Make Life Better." *Mandala* (April-May 2007): 44-47. https://fpmt.org/wp-content/uploads/sites/2/2007/04/ideas_to_make_life_better.pdf.
[852] "Helping People Live their Best Lives." *Foundation for Developing Compassion and Wisdom*. https://www.compassionandwisdom.org/. Accessed December 15, 2023.
[853] C211V18. Interviewed by Author, November 2022.

regularly encouraged in young people, and it was then that I visualized LKPY—an organization that focuses on educating both the heart and the mind with peaceful ideals. … with a focus on compassion, we could help young people's lives grow happier and more peaceful, and assist them in finding true fulfillment through the education of a good heart."[854]

LKPY was established as a non-religious charitable organization in Australia in 2007.[855] LKPY volunteers work with other FPMT organizations, particularly FDCW. The main LKPY project is called HABIT. HABIT groups are gatherings for young people at cafés or other venues that offer them the chance to meet, talk, and develop collaborations to promote peace and positive change.[856] LKPY varies by time and place in its level of activity; one LKPY group that has been very active is Hábitos Guadalajara in Mexico. Launched in 2008, it held group meetings in cafés and other sites, free of charge, every two weeks for approximately ten years, basing discussions on the *16 Guidelines* and other FPMT universal education programming. In 2018, to reach more people, the group updated its format to an internet radio program. The Covid-19 pandemic put a halt to activities, but, as of summer 2024, the individual who has long led the group, a member of FPMT's Centro Khamlungpa in Guadalajara, indicates that activities are expected to resume shortly in cooperation with FDCW.[857]

Freestanding Projects Operated by an FPMT Affiliate

Root Institute for Wisdom Culture, Bodh Gaya, Bihar, India

Root Institute is one of the organizations visited during fieldwork in February of 2023 and 2024. Although it is now known mainly as a Dharma centre, offering Dharma courses and retreats along with rooms, retreat houses, and meals for monastics and other residents and visitors, Root Institute was planned as a social project. It was established in 1987, when Bodh Gaya was still quite undeveloped. Following the lamas' wish to "repay the historic kindness of the Indian people" for being the home of the Dharma and welcoming Tibetan refugees, at the request of Lama Yeshe, Kabir Saxena launched Root by setting up a charitable trust, arranging the purchase of land a kilometer from the Mahabodhi Temple where the Buddha is said to have become enlightened, and overseeing the construction of basic buildings. In its early days, Root ran small-scale social projects like teaching local women to use sewing machines and planting trees.[858] In time, its activities were consolidated into two main projects that, as of 2024, have existed for more than twenty-five years: Shakyamuni Buddha Community Health Care Clinic and Maitreya Universal Education School.

Root Institute itself remains perceived by those who run it as a social project because its aim is to benefit staff and other local people in material ways, employing them, paying fair wages, training and holding onto staff, and purchasing locally. It also seeks to help local people including staff, suppliers, and contractors in faith-based ways. Root has many holy objects at its site, mainly stupas and statues, which are intended to benefit all who are exposed to them. It also has various Buddhist texts written on its walls in English and Hindi so local people can read

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[854] "Helping Young People Develop a Good Heart: An Interview with Loving Kindness Peaceful Youth Director Kasia Beznoska." *Mandala* (January-June 2018): 52-53. https://fpmt.org/mandala/archives/mandala-for-2018/january-june/helping-young-people-develop-a-good-heart/.
[855] "The LKPY Concept." *Loving Kindness Peaceful Youth*. https://www.lkpy.org, Accessed July 15, 2024.
[856] Helping Young People, 52-53; Shyla Bauer, "Loving Kindness Peaceful Youth: The Beginning." *Mandala* (June/July 2007): 16-17. https://fpmt.org/wp-content/uploads/sites/2/2007/06/loving_kindness_peaceful_youth.pdf.
[857] Fernando Romo Ledezma. Email, July 2024; "Fernando's Story." *FDCW Communications*, July 5, 2013. https://compassionandwisdom.org/fernandos-story/.
[858] A122K33. Interviewed by Author, February 2023 and February 2024.

them, and the guardpost at its entry plays mantras and other Buddhist prayers on a (fairly quiet) loudspeaker in the hearing of staff as well as the drivers who await fares near the entrance and local people who walk by. The intent is to help others by relying on a mix of material and faith-based means.

In 2023 and 2024, Root Institute had about 22 staff itself and oversaw about 25 more in its school and clinic.[859] The director, in 2023, was concerned to help them as much as possible. She mentioned, for example, that she was proud that one long time staff member's son was now working at Root; to her this signified Root's "family" environment and commitment to the local community. (A second staff member's son was working there in 2024). Another indication, she felt, of this commitment was that Root paid half-salaries to staff left unemployed for the period Root closed during the Covid-19 pandemic, even though Root had no income during this time and paying even half-salaries was difficult.[860]

Another way that Root is socially engaged is that a portion of Root's own earnings support its school and clinic. As well, a portion of its trustees', director's, and staff's time go toward managing and maintaining the school and clinic. As well, donations from visitors to Root contribute to their operating costs. Hence, these entities depend on Root and its leaders' understanding of its social aims.

Whether Root's residential and Dharma centre operations qualify as social engagement by the definition above is uncertain. Nevertheless, those in charge, including trustees and senior staff, as well as many visitors to Root, expressed a motivation to benefit Bodh Gaya not only through Root's school and clinic, but also through the operations of Root itself.

Maitreya Universal Education School,
Root Institute for Wisdom Culture, Bodh Gaya, Bihar, India

Maitreya School is one of the organizations visited during fieldwork in February of 2023 and 2024. The school educates children from Bodh Gaya and neighbouring villages, a poor area with a reputation for inadequate government-provided education and, since the 1990s, a number of Buddhist-run schools that attempt to fill that gap. It was initially established by Root Institute in 1997 on its own property, hiring local teachers. Root soon purchased land across the road and built a spacious school building with donated funds. Root operated the school for a short time, but in 1998, handed it over by Maitreya Project International (MPI), an FPMT affiliate set up with the aim of building the Maitreya Statue discussed in Chapter 2. In 2009, experiencing financial problems, MPI closed the school and found places for the students in other schools.[861]

Figure 10. "Maitreya Universal Education School." A statue of Maitreya Buddha is visible beside the school. February 2024. Photo: Donna L. Brown

[859] C122R40. Interviewed by Author, February 2024.
[860] C222S43. Interviewed by Author, February 2023.
[861] Goldberg, "Buddhists without Borders," 296-297.

In 2011, after raising funds and renovating the building, Root re-established the school, beginning afresh with approximately 60 children from kindergarten through grade 2.[862]

Raising sufficient funds to operate the school is an ongoing challenge.[863] The school used to be free, with books, supplies, transport by school bus, and uniforms provided, as well as sweaters for each child given Bodh Gaya's cold winters. In 2023, it began charging a small fee (₹1200) (about $US 15) per student per year to families that could afford to pay, with an additional small fee for those taking the school bus. Teachers visited students' family homes to ensure they knew which were the poorest families and exempt them from payment. An annual gift of sweaters to children was dropped when sponsorship of the expense ended: in 2023, when I first visited, sweaters were given to students, but in 2024 they were not. Teachers at the school in 2024, however, said that all children appeared to have a warm layer to wear in the winter months. Similarly, lunch and snacks were provided for a time because sponsorship for these items was provided by another Buddhist organization; when it ran out at the end of 2023, meals ceased. To ease the transition to children bringing their own lunch, in January 2024 Root gifted each family with students in the school 40 kilos of rice, 9 kilos of red lentils, and a litre of cooking oil.[864] Teachers reported that all the children seemed able to bring their own lunch.

Most school staff and the principal were local when I visited, although an FPMT nun from elsewhere India also was teaching at the school, and an Indian long time FPMT practitioner was giving some of the universal education teachings. There are often Western volunteers teaching English or helping in other aspects of the school in the winter months when Bodh Gaya's weather is congenial. In 2023-24 there were three American volunteers (two of European and one of Indian ancestry) redeveloping the school library, one of whom was also teaching English to students and pedagogical methods to teachers. Through the winter of the previous year, 2022-23, an Indian lecturer in economics, on a break from her university, was volunteering at the school. Another Indian volunteer provided some counseling to the children.[865] Goldberg's dissertation, which describes not only volunteers present while he was researching in 2007-2008 but also others in earlier years, shows that it is typical for foreign and Indian volunteers to help the school.[866]

The main impetus for Root to establish the school, according to interviewees, was Rinpoche's wish to repay the kindness of the Indian people. One trustee of Root Institute with whom I spoke also acknowledged that Bodh Gaya is in a poor region and it would be irresponsible to run a Dharma centre there with no attempt to help local people.[867] Another reason given to operate a school is to supplement the government curriculum with universal education teachings to give students a grounding in compassion and ethics, promoting what the lamas called "the good heart." Universal education teachings at the school are expected to help both the students and the region. They are based on the *16 Guidelines*. Interviews and conversations showed that people in FPMT and at the school tend to believe that the Bodh Gaya

[862] Goldberg, "Constructing and Contesting," 180-181.
[863] Over the years, significant funds have been contributed to the school by both Western and Asian donors. Goldberg discusses sources as of 2007-2008 and mentions, for example, that FPMT's Singapore Centre at one point raised $US 150,000 for the school; other major donors were in Taiwan, Hong Kong, and the US. Funds also came from Rinpoche himself (sent from FPMT's international office). Goldberg, "Buddhists without Borders," 97-98. In 2023, interviewees mentioned that there were also significant Indian donors.
[864] Information provided by Root Institute's manager in January 2024. He reported the cost of these items as ₹444,000, or at the time, approximately $US 5,500.
[865] I observed the first volunteer and often conversed with her; the second was not there when I was present in 2023, but I spoke with her in February 2024.
[866] Goldberg, "Buddhists without Borders," 122-125.
[867] A122K33. Interviewed by Author, February 2024.

area will become more developed, socially and economically, if children receive these teachings, perceived to help the area overcome poverty, inequality, inter-caste conflict, and corruption.[868]

In 2023 and 2024, classes at the school went to Grade 8.[869] The intention had been to increase the grade level as students moved up, until year by year the school reached grade 10, the ordinary level of high school completion for students in the area not aiming to attend university.[870] However, as of 2024, the school had temporarily halted the addition of new grades. According to interviewees involved with the school's management, one reason was tight classroom space. Another was a desire to increase the quality of the school before increasing the number of grades. By quality, what was meant was improving the universal education aspect of the school with more teacher training and creativity in implementation, improving some creative arts programs, and bringing the children more into helping out at the school and making decisions about the school. By these means, it was hoped to go further toward connecting education to improving the surrounding society.[871] For the time being, students completing grade 8 move to another school, usually a government-run school, for grade 9 and 10; teachers at Maitreya school told me that virtually all Maitreya students completed grade 10 and a few went further. One interviewee involved in the school stressed that staff felt a sense of responsibility to help the students find and attend an adequate school for the final two years of their education, since not all government schools were satisfactory.[872]

Both years that I visited, the school had about 230 students. Most were Hindu; the principal indicated that about five percent were Muslim. Most were from so-called "untouchable" castes or "other backward castes" and poor to lower middle-class families from farms and villages around Bodh Gaya. A few were from higher castes and the local middle class. This mixture represented Bodh Gaya in certain ways: most people are from these lower castes; there is substantial poverty; and even the middle classes are poor by international or urban Indian standards. The teachers told me that children's parents are mainly farmers, agricultural labourers, cleaners, rickshaw drivers, or work in or own small shops or roadside stands.[873] Staff indicated that it is important for the school to mix classes and castes, not targeting only the most marginalized families, so the school demonstrates that mixing is possible, fosters friendship across social groups, undermines the caste system, and spreads the idea that human beings are all equal and no one "untouchable." Mixing children from different castes and classes also helps prevent the school from being perceived as only for the lowest rungs of society. Universal

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[868] Goldberg discusses this point extensively and places it in the context of education theory. He writes, "the school sees itself as a driving force committed to transforming the substandard educational conditions with the intention of contributing to social improvement." However, he also notes that, although this is the goal of people in FPMT who support and operate the school, it is not necessarily the goal of its local teachers and students. He writes, "the local non-Buddhist teachers and students view the [school] property not as a site for Buddhist related practice, but as an asylum from the impoverished conditions in which they live and as a learning environment that will provide them with the skills required for achieving personal growth and upward social and economic mobility." He adds later though, "many local teachers and students, as well as foreign volunteers, perceive the Maitreya School, a site which encourages social change through inner change, to be an essential component for building a community of resistance against caste and gender violence, as well as internal self perpetuated suffering." Goldberg, "Buddhists without Borders," 16-19, 192-194, 252, 258-259.

[869] When Goldberg researched the school in 2007-2008, it went to Grade 12, although the number of students in Grade 11 was only seven and in Grade 12 was twelve. He refers to these two grades as "pre-college" because Grade 10 is the usual end-point of education in the area. Goldberg, "Buddhists without Borders," 147.

[870] "Maitreya School." *Root Institute for Wisdom Culture*. https://www.rootinstitute.ngo/social-service/maitreya-school. Accessed September 3, 2024.

[871] A122K33. Interviewed by Author, February 2024.

[872] A122K33. Interviewed by Author, February 2024.

[873] Goldberg found the same in 2007-2008. He also discusses issues of caste within the school that he observed and discussed with the teachers. Goldberg, "Buddhists without Borders," 196, 212-216.

education teachings are used to teach the children from a young age to avoid caste discrimination and understand that people are equal. I observed at every visit in 2023 and 2024 that for morning prayers and assembly, the children sorted themselves into lines or rows by height; this ensured children could not choose who to stand or sit beside—a small anti-caste measure.

Maitreya is officially an English-medium school, although much activity occurs in Hindi. The children are taught standard Hindi as well as English; I was told by teachers that at home they often speak a local dialect related to Hindi. One volunteer I spoke with in January 2024, an American elementary school teacher, indicated that the students' English (as I also observed) is not close to fluent even in the higher grades. My informant hoped that the teachers would receive more pedagogical training to improve outcomes. More teacher training likely would require investing funds to pay teachers for their extra time to learn new methods and redesign courses, as well as expenditure on new materials and textbooks; funding is a challenge. Nevertheless, the volunteer was working with some of the teachers in the hope that some pedagogical changes could be made relatively easily, and an interviewee involved in school management indicated that the volunteer's pedagogical training seemed to be helping.[874]

Interviewees reported that the school had a good reputation locally and regularly received more requests for admission than it had spaces available.[875] School staff also stated that many children who had attended the school in the past had gone on to good jobs, such as in the police, army, nursing, teaching, or working in shops serving tourists.[876] Interviewees noted that there are many schools in Bodh Gaya, including government schools (which have a poor reputation), schools run by Buddhist groups (which parents prefer because they are perceived to be better and also charge minimal fees), and private schools (which are viewed as good but charge higher fees). Of Buddhist-run schools, they reported that Maitreya School is among those that parents seek out.[877] One interviewee familiar with schools in Bodh Gaya stated that children in government schools are not as well-behaved as those in FPMT's school, because teachers do not teach them behavior or control them. At FPMT's school they are taught to behave, which improves educational outcomes and also pleases parents.[878]

The school uses the government curriculum and FPMT's *16 Guidelines*. Generally, the latter are taught at the morning assembly, in which all students and teachers participate and which includes discussion, a brief guided meditation, and sometimes prayers or mantra recitation. I witnessed children chanting *Om Mani Padme Hum*, the Buddhist mantra of compassion, and saying a compassion prayer in Hindi one morning. After assembly, I observed

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[874] A122K33. Interviewed by Author, February 2024.

[875] Goldberg's study also found that the school had a good reputation. He notes that schools in the area run by (or in part by) foreigners generally have a better reputation than government-run schools and charitable schools run by local people. He also describes the views of an Indian volunteer, writing: "Shiv is a South lndian with a master's degree in European philosophy who uses his spare time to translate Buddhist Sanskrit texts into his native Malayalam. He has worked in orphanages and schools all over India as an English teacher, and he feels that Maitreya School is one of the best schools, especially considering its socio-economic circumstances." Goldberg, "Buddhists without Borders," 66, 140, 190, 191, 201.

[876] A212D45. Interviewed by Author, February 2023; A122K33. Interviewed by Author, February 2024. Goldberg notes that "some students have become teachers at other schools or found work with foreign-sponsored organizations; many have joined their family's vocation." Goldberg, "Pilgrimage Re-oriented," 117 fn. 48. The families' vocations he refers to would likely be farming or keeping small shops.

[877] The largest Buddhist-run school in the Bodh Gaya area is Prajna Vihar School, established in 1989 by English Buddhist teacher Christopher Titmuss and a Theravada monk, Bhikkhu Anuruddha. According to Titmuss, as of 2022, it had 600 students. Christopher Titmuss, "Our beloved Prajna Vihar School, Bodh Gaya, India. A Photo Collection from 2018–2022." *Christopher Titmuss Dharma Blog*: *A Buddhist Perspective*. December 27, 2022. https://www.christophertitmussblog.org/our-beloved-prajna-vihar-school-bodh-gaya-india-a-photo-collection-from-2018-2022.

[878] A122K33. Interviewed by Author, February 2024.

that students were split into older and younger groups for teachings and discussions related to the *16 Guidelines*.

In India, it is common for schools to include religious imagery, so the school is not unusual in having holy objects both inside the building, where there are images of Shakyamuni Buddha, Tara, Maitreya Buddha, the Dalai Lama, Rinpoche, Mahatma Gandhi, Hindu gods, and, when I visited in 2024, Santa Claus. In the schoolyard, there is a sizable Buddhist stupa, a smaller stupa, and a statue of Maitreya Buddha. It is also common in Indian schools, according to Indian interviewees, to begin the day with prayers. As I observed several times in 2023 and 2024, morning prayers at Maitreya School are both Buddhist and Hindu. Following prayers, the children sing the national anthem. They then circumambulate the larger stupa in the yard chanting a praise to Shakyamuni Buddha in Tibetan, a language they do not know, although they have been told the meaning of the words.[879] Hindu pujas are also occasionally done in the school. I attended a Sarasvati puja on February 14, 2024 in which all the teachers and the principal participated along with a Brahmin priest. The children watched the puja and afterward enjoyed *prasad*—blessed fruit and sweets. Indian interviewees said that, for many schools, *Basant Panchami* (Sarasvati Puja) is now a holiday, so pujas are no longer done in the school, being perceived as "not modern." However, Maitreya School still does the puja, which seemed to bring enjoyment to all present.[880]

One activity a group of the schoolchildren undertakes most years is to memorize the *Heart Sutra* in Sanskrit, a short Mahayana text. They then chant it, on stage and in front of the Dalai Lama and the vast audience that he attracts, at his annual teachings in Bodh Gaya. One nun who has observed the event many times told me of the praise their most recent performance had received: the Theravada monks of the Buddhist Temple Management Committee were impressed with the quality of their recitation, their Sanskrit pronunciation, and the confidence a group of low caste children had in performing before thousands of people. The monk who passed on the committee's praise said the children were "quite something!" To the nun, the incident was evidence that Maitreya School gave them confidence, dignity, and poise—qualities that would help them overcome disadvantaged backgrounds.[881]

The diversity of religious activity in the school reflects its ecumenical and unifying intent. Staff indicated that the children and teachers, although not Buddhists, find Buddhist imagery acceptable because it is in keeping with Indian culture. Buddhism is not explicitly taught because the students are not of Buddhist heritage—universal education is intended to be for everyone. Several Root and school staff told me that Rinpoche had visited the school many times and spoke with and offered blessings to students and staff. His visits demonstrated to staff, volunteers, and donors that he valued the school.[882]

One teacher recounted a story to me in January 2024 that to her suggested that the universal education teachings were effective. There were two deaths in 2023 that affected the students: one young student died and the father of another died. One of the grade 6 students, a boy, then suggested that students contribute some money to the family of the student who passed. It was then agreed among the students that funds raised would be shared by both bereaved families. Then the boy whose father had died indicated that, because he and his mother

[879] Goldberg quotes the school principal at the time the stupa was constructed saying that Rinpoche wanted the schoolchildren to circumambulate the stupa every day. Goldberg, "Buddhists without Borders," 277. Interviewees told me the children know they are praising Buddha, despite not knowing the Tibetan words.
[880] Observation and casual conversations with teachers and Root Institute staff. I was told that the puja, aimed at Sarasvati, goddess of education and knowledge, is primarily celebrated in Northern India. The ceremony and offerings to Sarasvati are intended to help students gain knowledge and wisdom.
[881] G213S54. Interviewed by Author, February 2024.
[882] "Maitreya School."

were living with an uncle, and his mother had a job, his family did not need the money and it should all go to the other family. The teacher visited the home of this boy and found that, in fact, the family was quite poor. Although his mother worked, her wages were low. The teacher felt that the two boys—the one who suggested raising funds, and the one who declined funds for his family in favour of the other family—revealed their good hearts. She attributed this to the universal education teachings they had received.[883] Goldberg, studying the school in 2007-2008, heard similar examples of the school's perceived role in developing children's kindness, generosity, environmental awareness, and emotional skills.[884]

Shakyamuni Buddha Community Health Care Clinic, Root Institute for Wisdom Culture, Bodh Gaya, Bihar, India

Shakyamuni Buddha Community Health Care Clinic (SBCHCC) is another organization visited during ethnographic fieldwork.

SBCHCC was launched in 1991 as a destitute home within the grounds of Root Institute, initially housing and providing palliative care to end-stage homeless individuals. The initiative was suggested by Rinpoche after he saw a beggar dying beside the road. However, there was relatively little demand for this service; few people in the area, no matter how poor, were truly homeless, and other organizations provided similar services in any case.[885] Hence, the building Root Institute had constructed for this purpose was turned to other medical uses. Root began offering a community health care program with medical and rehabilitative services and community health education. It also launched mobile clinics. Services have varied over time depending on needs, funding, and staff. The core offering for many years has been homeopathic care supplemented by basic allopathic care.

Figure 11. "Shakyamuni Buddha Community Health Care Clinic." A small stupa is visible in front of the clinic. February 2023. Photo: Donna L. Brown.

At the time of research in 2023, the SBCHCC clinic was still recovering from pandemic restrictions as well as the loss of its main doctor. It was operating six days a week with a number of staff; for some illnesses staff referred patients to government care centres for testing and treatment. Physiotherapy services were also offered, mainly for children with cerebral palsy—many live in the area. Dental and acupuncture services were being put back in place after closing during the pandemic; some services the clinic offered before the pandemic were only gradually being restored as funds became available. When I visited again in 2024, dental care and physiotherapy had been reactivated. Most services and medication were offered for free or at nominal cost. Education programs, mainly in HIV prevention, hygiene, nutrition, and the needs

[883] A212D45. Interviewed by Author, January 2024.
[884] Goldberg, "Buddhists without Borders," 81, 104, 197, 208, 210.
[885] G223L59. Interviewed by Author, February 2023.

of girls and women, were free and again were gradually being restored.[886] Services are funded by donations sometimes supplemented by grants from FPMT's international office.

Faith-based ways of attempting to help were also in evidence. The clinic had a large supply of water blessed by Rinpoche, which staff indicated they gave to all patients in small bottles. Notwithstanding their own religion, all wanted "guru-ji's" blessed water. There were numerous small stupas in the yard that patients passed by as they entered and left. Mantras and prayers were played in the waiting area. A Medicine Buddha thangka was prominently displayed behind the desk of the head doctor. Many images of Buddhas, as well as some of Hindu gods, were displayed on clinic walls.

Mount Everest School, Kopan Monastery, Kathmandu, Nepal

Mount Everest School, a boarding school, was visited during ethnographic fieldwork. As discussed earlier, the school was established in 1969 by Rinpoche in Lawudo, Nepal, as a social project to benefit poor families. It was soon moved to Kopan hill and became the core of Kopan Monastery, educating Nepali boys of Himalayan ethnicity and, in its early decades, a few Tibetan refugee boys. Today, virtually all the boys are Nepali. Thanks to the commitment of Kopan's leaders and supporters, the school has grown steadily.

Figure 12. "Mount Everest School." February 2023. Photo: Donna L. Brown.

At the time of research, Mount Everest School was reportedly among the best, if not the best, of the monastic schools in Nepal. Interviewees told me that monastic schools, when they teach secular as well as Buddhist curricula, are considered by local people to be superior to government-run schools.[887] The school had approximately 330 students at the time of the research; it takes more every year. There are always more applications than places. The school is free and applicants are not screened by ability; applications are accepted on a first come/ first served basis. I was told that the philosophy is that all children can be made good students so screening is not needed. Most come from poor families; prosperous families in Nepal usually send their children to private secular schools. As the school is part of the monastery, it is attended only by boys and they wear monks' robes, although they are not ordained. They study Nepali (generally their first language), Tibetan (the language of their religion), and English (needed for secular life in Nepal and/or teaching/ translating). Girls are educated at Kopan's nearby nunnery, but it was not covered in this research.

When I visited Mount Everest school, it featured qualified teachers, newer buildings, and good facilities, including for science, art (including thangka painting), theatre, and computer

[886] "Shakyamuni Buddha Clinic." *Root Institute for Wisdom Culture*. https://www.rootinstitute.ngo/social-service/shakyamuni-buddha-clinic. Accessed December 15, 2023.

[887] A monastic school was called "traditional" by interviewees if it taught Buddhist and monastic topics but not a government curriculum. Kopan's Mount Everest School, because it teaches both, was called "modern." Some monasteries in Nepal reportedly operate schools considered traditional by this standard.

skills. Students could play table tennis and, in the courtyard, soccer. The school had its government certification to Grade 10 and was working toward getting it for Grade 12. It offered the Nepali government curriculum, some universal education teachings, and, given that the students were from Buddhist families, Buddhist philosophical teachings taught in the traditional manner. The secular curriculum and the traditional Buddhist teachings were treated as separate strands. Full schedules and strict discipline ensured that students received a complete education in both strands. The students had classes and activities from early morning to late evening with one day holiday a week plus an extra day every second week. No concerns were expressed that religious education would leave students less well-educated in secular topics or vice versa; the school's monastic leaders valued both strands. Even the minority of students who would ordain as monks were considered to need secular as well as religious education to be Dharma practitioners, teachers, translators, workers, or leaders in today's world. A nun who had long observed the school indicated that most students left Kopan after Grade 10 to lead non-monastic lives, but in her observation they were well-educated and had developed into kind and responsible people who would benefit Nepali society.[888] A few students every year, at age 14 or so, go to Sera Je Monastic University in South India. A few others go on to higher levels of secular education.[889] It was evident that much effort had gone into operating the school at a high standard.

A young British man whom I met in Bodh Gaya in February 2024 who had been teaching English at the school for several months, and was returning after a short break, told me he was impressed with the students' abilities. "They are quite capable," he said. "At 18 or 20, they cope well in English and they have very logical minds—they're good thinkers. I watched a couple of them, with very little exposure to computers in the past, teach themselves to code from nothing. I was pretty impressed."[890]

In addition to offering Buddhist teachings, the school incorporates religious elements intended to bless and inspire students and teachers, such as morning prayers and images of the Dalai Lama or Rinpoche in classrooms. I was told that Rinpoche visited the school many times, talked with the teachers and students, and blessed them and the site.

Kopan Monastery has also overseen Sagarmatha School in the Solu Khumbu area of Nepal since 2015, as well as a hostel where many children stay. FPMT helps to fund the school, hostel, and a small monastery nearby. Sagarmatha has over 200 lay students, girls and boys, from poor families.[891] The monastery oversees, operates, or financially contributes to several other lay schools for students of both genders as well. These schools are generally aimed at ensuring that children from Buddhist families receive an education, retain their culture, and learn the basics of their religion, especially values and conduct. Without Kopan's intervention, many Himalayan families would find it challenging to educate their children, given their poverty, remote locations, and the poor quality of other educational options.

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[888] A211J04. Interviewed by Author, November 2022.

[889] Information on the school is derived from observation of the school as well as interviews with senior monks at Kopan Monastery, including those involved in managing the school. Individuals interviewed included C113S53, F123S55, C213F58, G223L59, and C213T63. Interviewed by Author, February and March 2023.

[890] A122J92. Interviewed by Author, February 2024.

[891] "Support to 120 Students of Sagarmatha Lower Secondary School." *FPMT Social Services*, November 8, 2016. https://fpmt.org/charitable-activities/projects/social-services/support-to-120-students-of-sagarmatha-lower-secondary-school/.

Kopan Animal Liberation Sanctuary, Kopan Monastery, Kathmandu, Nepal

Kopan Animal Liberation Sanctuary was visited during ethnographic research.[892]

Figure 13. "Animals at Kopan's Animal Sanctuary." February 2023.

Figure 14. "Injured Goat." The goat is recovering after rescue and treatment. February 2023.

Photos: Donna L. Brown.

Rinpoche, for many years, rescued animals from suffering and death, taking them to Kopan Monastery where they lived on the grounds and were cared for by the monks. In 2014, Kopan purchased land a short walk from the monastery with the help of donations from Australian charity "Enlightenment for the Dear Animals" (EDA) to create the Animal Liberation Sanctuary. Since that time, numerous animals have lived there, brought by Rinpoche and others. Cows, sheep, goats, and chickens have been the usual animals rescued; cows remained at the monastery as the sanctuary land was too steep for them. All, in both locations, have pasture, shelter, food, and veterinary care. In 2023 when I visited, the sanctuary was run by a small local staff and appeared clean, organized, and well-stocked with food. There were 67 goats on hand and many chickens and ducks. Every animal, at that time, had had a name given by Rinpoche, who had also blessed each one. He provided instructions on the Buddhist practices that were to be done for the animals' future lives, which staff implemented assiduously, such as mantras chanted to them. They were also led around stupas three times every morning and evening. Interviewees reported that a larger piece of land had been purchased further from Kopan Monastery and the sanctuary was moving there; as of 2024, it had moved. The sanctuary is managed by Kopan Monastery with funds and sometimes volunteers arranged by EDA as well as funds from FPMT's Animal Liberation Fund.

Lamp of the Path NGO, Ganden Do Ngag Shedrub Ling Centre
Ulaan Baatar, Mongolia

[892] Information on the sanctuary derives from observation as well as interviews with Kopan's leaders and conversations with local staff, including C123S56, C113S53, and C213F58, Interviewed by Author, February and March 2023. Information also comes from "Animal Liberation Fund." *Mandala* (January-March 2012). https://fpmt.org/wp-content/uploads/projects/ALF/animal_liberation_fund_mandala_jan_mar_final_2012.pdf.

Since the collapse of communism in 1990, Mongolia has faced significant unemployment and poverty. Buddhism, sourced from Tibet and connecting Tibet and Mongolia, was the main religion before the 1921 revolution, but decades of communism destroyed the monasteries, leaving no religious organizations left to help the populace. The capital, Ulaan Baatar, now has a large population of very poor and homeless people, many of whom are elderly, disabled, or lack families. In response, in 2005 Lamp of the Path (LOP) was established as an NGO to operate social welfare activities on behalf of FPMT's Dharma centre in Mongolia. LOP runs a soup kitchen and provides health care, showers, bedding, and clothing in a poor area on the outskirts of Ulaan Baatar. It also has a basic education and *16 Guidelines* program for children. It is supported by fundraising as well as contributions from FPMT's international office, which also funds food for monks at Idgaa Choizinling monastic college and nuns at Dolma Ling nunnery (established by FPMT) in Ulaan Baatar.[893]

Activities That are Part of the Repertoire of a Dharma Centre or Monastery

Jamyang London Buddhist Centre and Courthouse Community Centre Ltd. (CCC), UK

Jamyang London Buddhist Centre is another of the sites visited.

Jamyang London was established (under another name, Manjushri Centre) in 1978.[894] In 1995, it moved into "The Old Courthouse" in the London borough of Lambeth. The neighbourhood, while now partially gentrifying, is low income. Purchasing and restoring a large historic building in a poor neighbourhood was a community development initiative. Jamyang has brought its heritage building back to life and created community spaces in it as well as a garden courtyard usable by the community.

Figure 15. "The Courtyard of Jamyang London." Prayer flags are visible. In the back is a statue of the Buddha seated; obscured by the prayer flags, under the small roof, is a statue of the Buddha lying down. In the summer the courtyard has a thriving garden. It is often used for community events. March 2023. Photo: Donna L. Brown.

[893] "FPMT Mongolia's Current Projects." *FPMT Mongolia*. https://www.fpmtmongolia.org/current-projects/#. Accessed December 15, 2023; "About FPMT Mongolia." *FPMT Mongolia*. https://www.fpmtmongolia.org/about-fpmt-mongolia/. Accessed September 3, 2024; Massimo Corona, "A Day in the Life in Mongolia." *Mandala* (January 2014). https://fpmt.org/mandala/archives/mandala-for-2014/january/a-day-in-the-life-in-mongolia/; "Lama Zopa Rinpoche's Current Activities in Mongolia." *Mandala* (January-March 2011): 41. https://fpmt.org/wp-content/uploads/sites/2/2011/01/Looking_to_Mongolia.pdf.

[894] The name was changed in 1990.

Jamyang London has long been socially engaged. In 1999, its members established a charity, Courthouse Community Centre (CCC), through which a team of volunteers coordinated Jamyang's socially oriented activities. Jamyang and CCC for some years were somewhat separate; what members categorized as Dharma ran on a different track from what they categorized as engagement. As these have come together in people's perceptions, in FPMT, and in the priorities of Jamyang's leaders, Jamyang and CCC have become integrated. Jamyang London is one of the few centres that implements all five of FPMT's Pillars and is an exemplar of the type of centre able to do so. In that sense, along with Jamyang Leeds, it can serve as a model for other centres, at least those able to generate income that allows for employees as well as volunteers and that have spaces of a size and location to serve neighbouring communities.

Jamyang's ability to undertake many of its activities derives in part from being able to earn income, especially by renting out rooms (the courthouse's former prison cells) on Airbnb. Combined with donations and, until 2023, renting out a small apartment, this income stream has enabled Jamyang to pay its mortgage and bills, employ staff, and engage socially. Over the years, Jamyang and CCC have undertaken many different activities. Members have worked to make the centre an open, welcoming, and supportive part of the surrounding community. The centre identifies loneliness and needs for community and belonging as key issues, more than material need, and its engagement thus aims mainly at connection and community-building through meaningful human interaction. Spreading Buddhism is not part of this; the intent is to make visitors and neighbours comfortable by keeping religion in the background, and to show that Buddhism, Buddhists, and the centre can be part of the life of the community: caring without proselytizing.

Jamyang and CCC's activities include a carers' support group for local people which has met regularly for many years; another support group for people healing from addiction; another called "Dying Well" for hospice support; hosting frequent visits from school groups who are given tours and talks on universal values; community days, when local residents are invited in to visit, explore, spend time in the courtyard garden, and interact with members and each other; hospital and prison chaplaincy; participation in Liberation Prison Project; and children's activities. It has operated or hosted a vegetarian café with social aims at times: in its 2022-23 form, those who could not pay ate for free, the manager provided education on nutrition and trained disadvantaged people in making and serving food, and guests could feel welcome spending time in a physically and emotionally warm environment. The café was a gateway for less well-off community members to feel comfortable in Jamyang. Staff at Jamyang told me in 2024 that they hope to establish it again, this time serving vegan food.

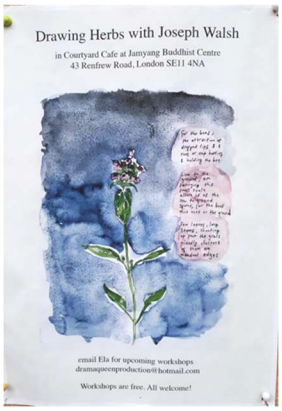

Figure 16. "Drawing Herbs." An announcement for a community event at Jamyang London. March 2023. Photo: Donna L. Brown.

The centre and CCC have also been involved in community and interfaith activities: shared events like walks, visits, and meals in which different faith groups participate to break down barriers. The centre has also run a variety of community events and exhibits in its café and adjoining courtyard aimed at building community, often by workshops that develop skills in cooking, sewing, art, and crafts. These help create community and invite other involvement in the centre. Community groups, including Tibetan groups, also sometimes use its building or its courtyard for events.

Jamyang London is also making efforts to lead FPMT centres to address environmental challenges. It held a "Planetary Crisis Summit" of leaders and members from European FPMT

centres in April, 2024. The aim was to launch conversations within FPMT that could lead to a vision for action on today's "poly-crises" based on, to quote Jamyang's director, "a recognition that there is a lot that we can offer and there's a deep sense of responsibility that we have as a community to enter the public square."[895] Discussions were held on various issues, such as climate change, biodiversity loss, pollution, extinctions, population displacement, social justice, famine, and floods, and how these intersected with Buddhist ethics. After the event, one participant wrote:

> It became clear that Dharma practice and care for the planet are not separate issues … We should not limit our compassion to sentient beings, but we can try to expand it to include all of nature including our planet as a whole. … As Buddhists we should lead the way in the ecological transition, and be an inspiring example of non harm by adopting a lifestyle which cares for nature … the ecological crisis is actually a crisis of the mind. Because the causes of all the problems humanity is facing today, really originate from the delusions in our mind. … without changing our self-cherishing attitude, we cannot expect to succeed in saving our planet. … The solutions to change our misguided attitude already exist in the Buddha's teachings, and therefore as a Buddhist organisation FPMT possesses a tremendous potential which allows us to offer real solutions to the world. Solutions which go beyond green technologies and a mere reduction of CO2 emissions, but address the actual root of the problems … there are two main things we can do: First, being an inspiring example by generating a loving attitude, caring for the planet, and reducing our own emissions; and second, reaching out to society by offering advice about dealing with the deeper causes of this planetary crisis. … We are hoping that together we can continue the process by creating a dedicated group within the FPMT that would … act as a catalyst of future initiatives in other FPMT regions, in centers, monasteries, etc. … creating the vision for a greener, happier future. A planet where the coming generations are still able to enjoy the perfect conditions to practice Dharma.[896]

The comments show both a contemporary interest in environmental and climate issues and a traditional perspective: that the causes of the issues are mental delusions like greed and their cure is Dharma. The role then proposed for FPMT is to care for the environment in its own activities and also to "offer real solutions" by teaching Dharma—no political activism is involved. The proposal exemplifies traditionalist approaches to social engagement.

Some of those interviewed called the social engagement of Jamyang and CCC "secular" because it did not intentionally convey Buddhist teachings, although it often exposed people to Buddhist objects or images and was prompted by motivations attributed to Buddhism. Others felt there was no dividing line between Buddhist and secular activities at Jamyang; rather, it was said that the older generation use the label "secular" to unnecessarily differentiate the practice/ provision of Dharma from social endeavours. As people in FPMT have come to accept engagement as a Dharma practice, it is increasingly rare to hear engagement called "secular."

Jamyang's public areas include a few, but not many, Buddhist items and images. Those interviewed had mixed views on their presence: differing ideas about whether they offered a meaningful level of spiritual benefit and whether non-Buddhists might find them "off-putting" and be discouraged by them from visiting Jamyang or using its services. Nevertheless, they reported few negative reactions. One interviewee mentioned that even if visitors had negative

[895] Jamyang London Buddhist Centre. "Planetary Crisis Summit - Hosted by Jamyang Buddhist Centre London." YouTube. July 17, 2024, Video, 00:01:40-00:01:53. https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=0mlAOUH1fBY&t=3s.
[896] Tenzin, "Planetary Crisis Summit."

reactions, they were still benefited by these elements. Hence, they should be present no matter what reaction they elicited. Most interviewees, however, wanted to avoid negative reactions whatever they believed about the elements' benefits, feeling it was best not to impose Buddhism. As for whether the elements truly offered benefits, views ranged from several definite "yeses" to "maybe, unsure" or "small ones" to moderate skepticism to a definite "no." Most interviewees felt that engagement should not impose or even offer Buddhism. The only exception, reported one interviewee, was help for the dying. The interviewee indicated that such help from someone associated with Jamyang, whether or not the dying person was Buddhist, might include—if the person gave permission—prayers, mantras, putting holy objects in the room, or other Buddhist practices to help make death peaceful and, it was hoped, produce a good rebirth.[897] Faith in Buddhism's cosmology remains even when people acknowledge a need for social engagement to avoid imposing Buddhism.

Although Jamyang has traditional pujas, teachings, and ways of teaching, it also offers some secular teaching and practices—secular mindfulness, yoga, "Science and Wisdom," chi gung, discussion groups, and, in the past, *16 Guidelines* courses—for those who prefer such approaches or are new to Buddhism.[898] Jamyang also works to improve the accessibility of its Dharma offerings with closed captioning of video, improvements to physical accessibility, child care, and other socially oriented measures. Another aspect of Jamyang related to social engagement (in 2023) was a paid diversity, equity, and inclusion coordinator as well as volunteer inclusivity ambassadors. Jamyang trains staff and volunteers in inclusivity and runs affinity groups for the Black and LGBTQ+ communities as well as groups aimed at young people.[899] Efforts are now ongoing to determine how to bring inclusivity into more aspects of Dharma education and practice and how to avoid triggers and micro-aggressions. Jamyang also offers inclusivity scholarships to people who cannot afford those of its programs that charge fees in order to ensure that young people, minorities, disabled people, and others who may lack financial resources are not excluded. Some scholarship recipients later volunteer as inclusivity ambassadors. Consideration is also being given to how to integrate London's Tibetan community into centre activities; Tibetans use the centre but tend to do so separately. These are all efforts to meet varying needs, increase the comfort of visitors and newcomers, overcome barriers to accessing Dharma and community, be explicitly welcoming, and include everyone.

Enhancing accessibility has created more gateways and introductory activities at Jamyang. These multiple entry points and activities were reported to have helped it to grow again after losing many founding members to age, a change of resident teacher, the pandemic, and moving much teaching online. The efforts are expected, over time, to help Jamyang to be more diverse, reflect the population of its neighbourhood and city, attract young people, and build a growing community that is integrated with the neighbourhood and socially engaged in myriad ways. Interviewees felt the new gateways had benefitted the people involved, attracted many new people, and occasionally prompted older members to return. They also noted that Rinpoche had praised Jamyang's affinity groups and other diversity and community-building efforts as ways of helping people in ways that suit varying needs. Jamyang is at the forefront of these kinds of initiatives in FPMT.[900]

Jamyang London's activities reveal how social engagement varies across FPMT because circumstances and cultures vary. In the UK, churches, because they are established, play

[897] A214B72. Interviewed by Author, March 2023.
[898] "Jamyang Buddhist Centre London." https://jamyang.co.uk/. Accessed December 18, 2023.
[899] C124P77. Interviewed by Author, March 2023.
[900] C224C65, C214D66, B224C67, B224R68, B124R69, C124K70, B224J71, A214B72, G224E73, E124C74, B224J75, C224K76, C124P77, and B224S78. Interviewed by Author, March 2023 and March 2024.

government-encouraged and government-subsidized roles in community service and community development. Some Buddhist centres in the UK, including Jamyang, now do the same.

Jamyang Buddhist Centre Leeds, UK

Jamyang Leeds was another organization visited during ethnographic research.

Jamyang Leeds was founded in 1996. For many years, it was located in rented spaces in Leeds city centre, but in 2019 was relocated to "Clyde Works," a large former factory building, empty for several years, in Holbeck, Leeds, considered to be area of social deprivation. The building—an important one in the area because of its size and location—was purchased in part because Jamyang's members wished to create a community service and wellness hub—"Jamyang Leeds Buddhist and Wellbeing Centre"—in a needy area, not just offer Buddhist teachings and practices. Like Jamyang London, Jamyang Leeds revivified a historic building in a poor neighbourhood as a community development initiative. People in both centres reported that restoring a heritage building and contributing to a challenging neighbourhood was a way to make the world a better place. Jamyang Leeds' first step was making their building a safe, supportive, and welcoming place for everyone: staff, volunteers, members, and visitors. When I spoke with a number of them, all reported a sense of belonging and community, whether they had come due to interest in Buddhism, to participate in an event, to help out, to shop, or for other reasons. One interviewee said that people have told him that coming into the building "is like walking into a warm hug."

Holbeck is historically white and working-class, although by 2023 it was increasingly racially mixed as well as home to migrants from Central and Eastern Europe. Most area residents, at the time of research, were renters; many were unemployed, underemployed, and/or poor. Intergenerational unemployment was widespread. A red-light district nearby contributed to crime. One of Jamyang's members' goals was to be supportive of the neighbourhood's working-class and poverty-impacted people; the perception in Jamyang is that race is less the issue needing attention than poverty. Jamyang's engagement targets immediate needs for the well-being and development of Holbeck. Another goal is reducing, by being supportive and welcoming to others, what interviewees identified as the domination of British Buddhist centres by university educated, middle-class people. One interviewee noted that Jamyang resembles UK's churches in its provision of social and community development and well-being services.[901]

The Holbeck location signified Jamyang's commitment to integrating engagement into Dharma practice, a commitment explicitly based on FPMT's Pillars. Unlike Jamyang London, Jamyang Leeds did not have a long history of engagement; its aim to serve the wider community was new. Not all longstanding members were pleased with the change in focus and move to a challenging neighbourhood. Some left. However, the majority wanted the change, and new members, supportive of engagement, joined. By the time of research, few of the founding generation, who had spent time with the lamas in the 1970s and 1980s, remained active even though the centre continued to offer typical FPMT teachings, pujas, and practices. Active members at that point were mainly socially oriented. The shared view around Jamyang when the research took place was that "real Dharma is socially engaged." Dozens of volunteers were involved. Some reported that they helped out at Jamyang because of its pleasant "vibe," not because it is Buddhist.

Jamyang had thus developed its own balance of what its members viewed as traditional Dharma—FPMT teachings and formal practices—with engagement. This balance was predicated on generating income. Jamyang rented out extra space in its vast building to groups that shared

[901] C124J83. Interviewed by Author, March 2023.

its community development goals. Earnings paid its mortgage, operating costs, and small staff. As a result, Jamyang's large main floor hall is used frequently for services that bring people to the area or benefit neighbours: examples include yoga and movement classes for children and adults, sound relaxation therapy, tai chi, chi gung, secular meditation, and numerous training and well-being events run by the National Health Service (NHS).

Figure 17. "Jumble Sale at Jamyang Leeds." Local children play with toys at a jumble sale, Jamyang Leeds. March 2023. Photo: Donna L. Brown.

Jamyang partners with the NHS to offer programs and courses in wellness and mental health. Jamyang has also offers meditation courses and day retreats on compassion and other topics to NHS staff. Other organizations also offer health and well-being workshops and training sessions in Jamyang's space for their own staff, people in the neighbourhood, and others. A school across the street also often uses Jamyang's space. Jamyang provides space for school events and hosts school tours in the hope the children will feel welcome in the building and even find role models there, so the centre can be a support for them. Jamyang has taught courses to people in the neighbourhood, such as one on compassion-based healing for people with trauma-related mental health needs. These courses vary according to need and incorporate universal education principles. Plans at the time of research included an arts and crafts activity afternoon for children, workshops for stress relief, and compassion training for people working with anger. Interviewees indicated that the main floor hall is used by hundreds of visitors every year.

Jamyang also operates a low-priced café. Open to the surrounding community, the café helps connect Jamyang to its neighbours who come in to eat or have a cup of tea. It is not an income generator—there is a struggle to make it break even—but Jamyang's members view it as a community service. They also operate a charity shop selling various items, including clothing, at low prices, and regular, very popular jumble sales to invite the community in and supply clothes, toys, and other goods for £1 each. In the winter, people may also come and relax in the centre and use its wifi for free, not needing to buy anything or do any Buddhist or other activity, when home heating is unaffordable.[902]

The centre has worked to ensure some staff and volunteer positions go to people needing to build confidence, skills, and experience in a supportive environment, so that these roles have a social purpose. Interviewees mentioned that individuals who are Muslim, Black, refugees, young, vulnerable, ex-offenders, ex-addicts, and so on have filled these positions. Interviewees stressed that one goal was to ensure that Jamyang offered people in need, and not just members, safety, caring, belonging, and meaning. They expressed hope that more people from the neighbourhood would, over time, become integrated into Jamyang, including into its leadership.

[902] Jamyang Buddhist Centre Leeds. *Annual Report October 2022 – September 2023, 2023.* https://drive.google.com/file/d/1UV0XSPvKQSrPC1b9zGypN32bdCf6kdYk/view; "Jamyang Buddhist Centre welcomes new director." *South Leeds Life*, January 3, 2024. https://southleedslife.com/jamyang-buddhist-centre-welcomes-new-director/.

The aim? To encourage the neighbourhood and Jamyang to interact in beneficial ways, with Jamyang's Buddhism and local life influencing each other.

Jamyang also undertakes community outreach: training and providing volunteer chaplains to the NHS when a Buddhist chaplain is requested; working with schools to teach universal education; participating in or organizing interfaith events, including temple walks, meals, shared faith events, and shared social service activities; and participating in or supporting other local groups' community development initiatives. It has also organized and participated in tree planting projects as part of the Global Tree Initiative.

Like Jamyang London, not all leaders or members of Jamyang Leeds seek to ensure that participants in their activities are exposed to Buddhism, although some do as long as exposure is "gentle" and unforced. Jamyang's mixing of holy objects and other faith-based items/ activities into engagement is light for an FPMT centre. Some interviewees expressed the hope that, by feeling a sense of peace, safety, and belonging at Jamyang, visitors would be encouraged to explore Buddhist teachings. Buddhist elements present are unobtrusive: a statue, prayer flags, and some images are observable in the public areas but they do not dominate. The café is advertised by an outdoor signboard and called "The Happy Yak," an allusion to Tibet. Most interviewees agreed Buddhist elements were visible mainly to express Jamyang's identity—to ensure its Buddhism was not hidden—and to be aesthetically pleasing. Other reasons mentioned included prompting interest in Buddhism and providing imprints and blessings that would improve the karma of individuals and the community. Some interviewees felt that locating sacred elements at the building would create "positive energy" for Holbeck to supplement Jamyang's more visible benefits. Jamyang's main approach is to ensure that building users are comfortable and not pushed to encounter religion, while being aware that it is a Buddhist space and receiving a sense that Buddhism is welcoming and peaceful.

Figure 18. "Jamyang Leeds Café." March 2023. Photo: Donna L. Brown.

Interviewees had not observed negative reactions from visitors to these Buddhist elements; rather, visitors were said to have praised the building's peacefulness and positive atmosphere. Interviewees noted that Jamyang had surveyed users of the building and found only positive responses to Buddhist items. Interviewees recognized that these responses were only partly due to the space itself; positive stereotypes of Buddhism played a role. So did a common view that Buddhism was secular and not religious. Yet even when visitors asked to see Jamyang's upstairs temple space, crowded with images, they were reportedly impressed, not bothered. Hence, visitor input has reassured members that Buddhist items are not unwelcome.[903]

Jamyang's leadership walks a fine line, keeping some faith-based elements in its public and community areas, making clear to its neighbours that it is a Buddhist site, satisfying

[903] C221M10, B224J80, C224T81, B124M82, C124J83, G224C84, B124C85, and B124V86. Interviewed by Author, November 2022 and March 2023.

members who believe in the positive effects of such elements yet not imposing that view on others, and ensuring visitors feel comfortable. A mural painted in 2023 on a large outside wall of the building embodies this fine line. It features a quote from Rinpoche that can be interpreted as Buddhist or secular.[904] Those of faith can view it as conveying a blessing and others can read it as merely inspiring.

Jamyang Leeds, in its public spaces and socially oriented activities, looks largely secular. Being kind, inclusive, and welcoming—Buddhist values—may require, in the UK, a mainly non-religious appearance. Yet its offerings also reflect FPMT's traditional Buddhism: its upstairs shrine is typical of those in FPMT spaces and it offers FPMT's courses, teachings, pujas, and practices. The lineage is taught and practiced just as in other FPMT centres. Jamyang Leeds is an example of how a traditional lineage can be retained while being surrounded by, and even expressed through, adaptations to a local culture.

Kopan Helping Hands, Kopan Monastery, Kathmandu, Nepal

While visiting Kopan Monastery in late February and March 2023, I was able to discuss Kopan Helping Hands with its leadership team of senior monks. Kopan Helping Hands is not a legal entity; it is Kopan Monastery's coordinating body and social service fund.

Kopan Helping Hands was launched in 2015 when Nepal experienced a disastrous earthquake that killed many people and caused significant damage to buildings, homes, and infrastructure. Kopan Monastery is deeply integrated into Nepal; the country is the place of origin of almost all its resident monastics. That was one reason, interviewees noted, that the monks and nuns were strongly motivated to help. The monastery shut down its regular activities for a month to focus on providing aid. FPMT's international reach brought in funds, senior monks played coordinating roles, and hundreds of monks and nuns helped with giving out drinking water, clearing rubble, preparing meals for people in tent cities, and distributing aid—at the monastery gates, by truck, and on foot. Some monks packed food staples into sacks and hiked with them into remote areas. Some drove trucks. Some repaired roads. That the monks and nuns were working to help their own and similar villages meant they understood needs, could work shoulder to shoulder with those affected, and did their utmost.[905] "Everyone pitched in. Everyone knew this was the time for practical help, not the time to study Dharma," commented one interviewee who had been involved.[906] As the months went by, Kopan Helping Hands provided additional aid to rebuild roads and homes in distant villages. It also helped the monks and nuns of damaged small monasteries to rebuild, providing funds and building materials.[907] FPMT's magazine *Mandala* reported in 2018 that FPMT had raised a total of $US 923,822 for earthquake relief and rebuilding, aid delivered by Kopan Helping Hands.[908]

In 2020, Kopan Helping Hands moved into high gear again during the pandemic to help people whose livelihoods were affected by lockdown. Early in the pandemic, Kopan's monastics distributed rice, lentils, vegetable oil, and salt to hundreds of local families that the district government had identified as in need. Rinpoche soon encouraged Kopan to do more. Monastic

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[904] The quote reads: "Impossible, impossible, impossible. I can't, I can't, I can't. We have to banish that mind from this solar system. Anything is possible. Sometimes you feel that your dreams are impossible, but they are not. Human beings have great potential; they can do anything. The power of the mind is incredible, limitless." Jamyang Buddhist Centre Leeds, *Annual Report October 2022 – September 2023*, 5.
[905] G213S54, C113S53A, and C113S53B, Interviewed by Author, February 2023.
[906] G213S54. Interviewed by Author, February 2023.
[907] Fran Mohoupt, "Kopan Helping Hands." *Mandala Online*, January-June 2016. https://fpmt.org/mandala/archives/mandala-for-2016/january/kopan-helping-hands/.
[908] "Helping the World," 60.

leaders kept working with government to identify needs and to distribute food. They also worked to identify elderly people living by themselves and families without means of support in the Solu Khumbu area to ensure they received food. A Western monk who heard Rinpoche later describing Kopan's efforts said Rinpoche mentioned that one Kopan monk stepped in when Nepalis were afraid to touch the bodies of people who had died of Covid. The monk took their place, preparing the bodies.[909] Meanwhile, Rinpoche gave teachings at Kopan on the beneficial karmic results of charity and emphasized the importance of engaging socially.[910] Kopan Helping Hands provided aid throughout the pandemic.

Kopan Helping Hands has remained in place to coordinate Kopan's social endeavours. At the time of research, these included helping remote villages where people were very poor, often old, and had nobody to care for them. Such villages are not easy to reach: transport might be by mules or pack horses, or involve a long walk from the closest road. Monks deliver food, warm clothing, building materials, and other aid. Other activities include supporting schools in Himalayan areas; providing scholarships for children to attend higher levels of education; helping individual families confronted with overwhelming difficulties; funding a pilot project to lend medical equipment like wheelchairs and oxygen tanks to families providing end-of-life care to relatives; and paying for medical care, prosthetics, or other aids for people with disabilities or special needs who are too poor to obtain these.[911]

Kopan Helping Hands does not require Buddhist elements to be part of its aid. Nevertheless, recipients are aware that aid is provided by a Buddhist organization and they see it delivered by monastics in robes, so aid is associated with Buddhism. As well, goods like food that are distributed, and equipment used, are given blessings by Kopan monks with the intent of helping beneficiaries. And since the monastics do not view that aid recipients' needs are entirely resolvable with material means, given the role of karma, they supplement material aid with faith-based activities: practices and dedications of merit. Do they assume these will produce future life benefits? It seems so. As one monk stated, "It creates karmic links. People who get help are karmically linked to the Buddhists who helped them, so there will be future-life benefits."[912]

Kopan Helping Hands remains in place as the monastery's social engagement decision-making, fundraising, and organizational vehicle.[913]

Maya Daya Dialysis Clinic, Kathmandu, Nepal

I visited Kopan's impressive Maya Daya Dialysis Clinic in late February 2023 with its manager, the head of Kopan Monastery's Department of Health, Ven. Sangye Tenzin, and learned its background from him, later also reviewing a video FPMT had made on the development of Kopan's heath care services.

Maya Daya was the name of a clinic Kopan Monastery operated for the community around the monastery from 1992 to 2021. It was the successor to "The People's Clinic," which an Australian monk, Ven. Gyatso (Dr. Adrian Feldman) established at Kopan monastery in the 1970s. Both he and his fellow monk at the time, Nick Ribush, were doctors and were often able

[909] B111B23. Interviewed by Author, January 2023.
[910] "Kopan Helping Hands Revived."
[911] "Kopan Helping Hands: Helping Families in Need." *Kopan Monastery*. https://kopanmonastery.com/charitable/kopan-helping-hands. Accessed December 15, 2023.
[912] C113S53. Interviewed by Author, February 2023.
[913] C113S53, C213F58, and F123S55. Interviewed by Author, February and March 2023.

Figure 19. "Maya Daya Dialysis Clinic." Entry to dialysis area; Medicine Buddha Statue; Plaque indicating inauguration and consecration by Rinpoche. March 2023. Photos: Donna L. Brown.

to supply the clinic with medications by gathering donations from friends and colleagues in Australia. "Lama Yeshe really encouraged the concept of a clinic… Lama was very keen to look after the village people," Feldman reported.[914] One interviewee who spent time at Kopan in its initial decades said that, soon after its establishment, Kopan came under pressure from its neighbours, who wanted concrete help from the monastery.[915] The People's Clinic played this role: it served local people, monastics, Western visitors, and animals brought in for treatment. At the request of Rinpoche, Kopan replaced it with Maya Daya Clinic down the hill from the monastery in 1992, institutionalizing the monastery's most visible way of helping its neighbours. Well into the 21st century, people in the area struggled to afford doctors and medicine. Maya Daya Clinic helped thousands of them.

By 2021, however, many clinics and pharmacies had been established to serve the increasingly well-off population in the neighbourhood. Economic development and remittances from family members abroad had made common treatments and medicines affordable. Kopan's leaders consulted people in Nepal's medical system and assessed needs. A hemodialysis clinic was required given Nepal's high rate of kidney disease and lack of dialysis facilities. Kopan closed the original Maya Daya Clinic and gave the name "Maya Daya" to a new clinic the monastery launched at the recently-established Karuna hospital in Kathmandu. The hospital itself was established only in 2019; small but modern, it meets international standards in a number of specialties. Kopan Helping Hands, with help from Rinpoche and FPMT, funded dialysis machinery for the Maya Daya Dialysis Clinic. The clinic is operated by Kopan, though located at the premises of Karuna Hospital. Karuna donates the space and some services like water.

[914] FPMT. "Transforming the Mind into Guru Devotion and Renouncing the Eight Worldly Dharmas." Thought Transformation Video Series 26, YouTube, May 11, 2020. 00:00:40-00:07:52. https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=C3XGOwCiMn8.
[915] A121U13. Interviewed by Author, November 2022.

The clinic serves the local community by providing free dialysis treatments for those with chronic kidney disease. Kopan installed ten dialysis machines—all almost constantly in use—and pays their operating costs. It receives a small fee per patient from the government, although this does not cover all costs. Donations cover the rest. When I visited, a nun from Kopan Nunnery and a monk from Kopan Monastery were working in the clinic. For Kopan to be able to support the Kathmandu area in this way was significant given the cost of the machines and the monastery's ongoing commitment to cover operating deficits.

Although operations started somewhat earlier, Rinpoche inaugurated the clinic in March 2022, and conducted a consecration ceremony at which he offered a Medicine Buddha statue to the hospital for the benefit of patients and staff. He also designed a mural for the dialysis treatment room (see Figure 21).[916] There are mantras and images of Buddhas as well as Hindu gods throughout the hospital. I was told that Kopan Monastery also did pujas for patients in the hope that these would help their karma and facilitate their healing. Rinpoche's presence at the clinic's opening was likely perceived by those involved as a particular blessing. The clinic demonstrates how people in FPMT integrate Buddhist beliefs into up-to-date health care.

The Maya Daya Clinic is unusual in being a partnership between an FPMT affiliate, the government, and another organization—Karuna Hospital. It is a pilot project, but Ven. Sangye Tenzin indicated in March 2024 that it was proceeding well.[917] The clinic is a very visible contribution to the people of Nepal that reveals the important role Kopan Monastery plays there.

Hospice Under the Care of Amitabha Buddha (HUCAB), Singapore

HUCAB is a hospice care volunteer group established in 1999 by Amitabha Buddhist Centre in Singapore. The group offers a non-denominational befriending service for terminally ill patients. Befrienders learn the basics of palliative care and psychology to prepare for their role. They then devote several hours a week to visiting patients to be companions, help with feeding, give massages, or join patients in activities.[918]

Centro Khamlungpa, Guadalajara, Mexico

For several years before the Covid-19 pandemic, Centro Khamlungpa in Guadalajara ran a project called "Dana" meaning "giving." Inspired by a visit from Rinpoche in 2015, members wanted to take action to benefit others. They decided to give food to destitute migrants passing through Guadalajara on their way to the US, as well as to elderly people living in very basic personal care homes. The members met once a month and baked large, healthy oatmeal cookies to hand out to migrants, and they prepared rice pudding or Jello to take to care homes. Ingredients and a commercial oven were donated. The project enabled the centre to connect with needy individuals as well as other NGOs, making them part of Guadalajara in ways they had not earlier been.[919] For a small centre like Centro Khamlungpa, the project was a significant commitment to benefiting others.

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[916] "Rejoicing in the Addition."
[917] Ven. Sangye Tenzin. Interviewed by Author. March 2024.
[918] "Hospice." *Amitabha Buddhist Centre*. https://fpmtabc.org/outreach_hospice.php. Accessed July 9, 2024.
[919] Dimitri Limberopulos, "Dana in Mexico: Food, Heart, and Unexpected Friends." *Mandala* (January-June 2018): 63-67.

Buddha House, Adelaide, Australia: Various Programs

Buddha House offers an example of the kinds of socially oriented activities mid-size centres can undertake. Buddha House was established in 1981 by two Australians who had received teachings from the lamas at Kopan Monastery. It has expanded over the years and has a large volunteer base allowing it to offer services to the surrounding community. The centre offers an addiction recovery program, a children's class, a non-denominational pastoral care program for seriously ill people, and a mental health first aid training course.[920] It also provides talks about Buddhism, universal values, and emotional skills to schools, post-secondary institutions, youth groups, and care homes, and supports the Himalayan community in the local area by giving Dharma teachings to adults, holding fun activities for children and young people that include universal education teachings, and helping refugees settle into life in Australia.[921]

Langri Tangpa Centre, Brisbane, Australia: Street Library

Using a small grant received from FPMT's international office in 2019, Langri Tangpa Centre created a Street Library along with a comfortable seating area on the center's property. Street libraries, also known as "Little Free Libraries," are part of a worldwide movement to share books and create community reading spaces. This library specializes in offering donated Buddhist books and postcards. It has several functions: it spreads Dharma into the community by providing free Buddhist and other spiritual books and postcards; it provides outreach, sharing information about the centre and potentially attracting people to it; it helps people curious about Buddhism to explore without having to come into the centre; and it acts as a holy object in itself because the book box is covered with sacred images and symbols and the seating area is decorated with prayer flags. Centre members regard it as a bridge to Buddhism for passers by.[922] The library is a good example of a small project that combines material with spiritual ways of helping others. It also shows how smaller Dharma centres can engage socially in ways that suit their resource availability.

Unaffiliated Funded Projects

FPMT calls unaffiliated social projects to which it offers financial support "charitable projects." Most such projects have connections to Himalayan religion and culture.

Sera Je Food Fund, Sera Je Monastic University, Bylakuppe, Karnataka, India

For six hundred years, the Geluk lineage was preserved in Tibet by three monastic universities: Ganden, Drepung, and Sera. After China occupied Tibet in 1959, Tibetan refugees, with great difficulty given their poverty, re-established these in India. Yet food for monks—children and adults both, including new refugees from Tibet and older monks who had suffered years of

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[920] "Buddha House in Australia Celebrates Its Fortieth Anniversary." *FPMT Community: Stories & News*, December 28, 2021. https://fpmt.org/fpmt-community-news/buddha-house-in-australia-celebrates-its-fortieth-anniversary/.
[921] "Blossoming Friendship Between Himalayan Buddhists and Buddha House." *FPMT Community: Stories & News*. October 3, 2018. https://fpmt.org/fpmt-community-news/news-around-the-world/blossoming-friendship-between-himalayan-buddhists-and-buddha-house/. "Community Services." *Buddha House*. https://buddhahouse.org/bh-services/#community-services. Accessed December 17, 2023.
[922] "Langri Tangpa Centre Created Australia's 2,500th Street Library." *FPMT Community: Stories & News*. January 4, 2021. https://fpmt.org/fpmt-community-news/news-around-the-world/langri-tangpa-centre-created-australias-2500th-street-library/.0.

deprivation at Buxa refugee camp—was a tremendous challenge. Starvation, malnutrition, and diseases related to malnutrition were common, and the struggle for food left monks little time to study and do Dharma practices. In 1991, when Tenzin Ösel Hita, considered to be the reincarnation of Lama Yeshe, entered Sera Je to begin his schooling at the age of six, Rinpoche wanted to give a practical gift to Sera Je. He offered to provide the main meal of the day for all the monks from then on. The offering later expanded to include three daily vegetarian meals and a well-equipped central kitchen, with several full-time cooks as well as managers to oversee food purchasing, preparation, and distribution. This occurred as the number of monks at Sera Je expanded from approximately 1,300 in 1991 to 3,500 into the 2000s.

To take on this challenge, FPMT established the Sera Je Food Fund. It was FPMT's first major fundraising campaign and required significant effort from Rinpoche and FPMT's CEO.[923] Yet Rinpoche's followers supported the Fund's aims: to end the hunger and ill-health of a large group of people and to help them preserve the Geluk lineage. Eventually, FPMT gave Sera Je an endowment to replace the ongoing flow of funds. The endowment, totalling $US 5.3 million, was delivered in two tranches in 2017 and 2018. Since then, Sera Je has managed the fund, paying for food from the interest. According to one of Rinpoche's aides, the fund was "one of the most important successes of FPMT." Officials at Sera indicated that the food fund improved monks' physical health, reduced their stress, improved scholarship, and helped the lineage to flourish.[924]

Lugsam Samduling Home for the Aged and Disabled, Bylakuppe, Karnataka, India
Rabgyaling Old Aged Home, Hunsur, Karnataka, India
Jampaling Elders Home, Dharamsala, Himachal Pradesh, India

Since 2016, FPMT's Social Services Fund has been contributing funds to support homes for elderly and disable people in India and Nepal that provide care for Tibetan refugees who have no family to care for them. FPMT views this as a way to repay the courage and kindness of the Tibetans who fled Tibet in the early years of the Chinese occupation, bringing Buddhist texts with them. The homes FPMT supports are among several operated by the Central Tibetan Administration (CTA), Tibet's government in exile. The homes provide nutritious meals, clothing, and medical care to residents. FPMT has contributed to their operating costs and costs of medical care as well as, at times, the construction of needed facilities. Rinpoche visited them whenever he was able. The homes display pictures of Rinpoche and feature multiple Buddha images, prayer wheels, and prayer flags.[925] As well, at Rabgyaling Tibetan Settlement in Hunsur, near the care home, Rinpoche sponsored the construction of, and later consecrated with monks from Gyudmed Tantric Monastery, a 42-foot stupa to "provide the elders and all other residents of the Tibetan settlement an easy opportunity to create merit and purify negative karma."[926]

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[923] Ven. Roger Kunsang. Interviewed by Author, April 3, 2023.
[924] Tenzin Tsultrim, "Sustaining the Pure Unbroken Lineage of Buddha's Teachings in the World: The Legacy of the Sera Je Food Fund." *Mandala*, January-June 2019, 26-46. The challenges monks faced and the genesis of food funds, including the role of FPMT, are also briefly discussed in José Ignacio Cabezón and Penpa Dorjee, *Sera Monastery* (Somerville: Wisdom, 2019), 480-481.
[925] "Support Continues for Ngari Institute in 2018." *FPMT Social Services*. June 19, 2018. https://fpmt.org/charitable-activities/projects/social-services/support-continues-for-ngari-institute-in-2018/. "Rejoicing in Support Offered to Six Homes Serving Tibetan Elders in 2023." *FPMT Social Services*. September 29, 2023. https://fpmt.org/charitable-activities/projects/social-services/rejoicing-in-support-offered-to-six-homes-serving-tibetan-elders-in-2023/.
[926] "Magnificent New Forty-two Foot Stupa at Rabgyaling Tibetan Settlement." *FPMT Community: Stories & News*. November 29, 2022. https://fpmt.org/fpmt-community-news/rejoicing-in-the-completion-and-consecration-of-42-foot-stupa-at-rabgyaling-tibetan-settlement/.

Ngari Institute of Buddhist Dialectics, Ladakh, India

Since 2014, FPMT has been contributing to the cost of meals for students and staff residing at Ngari Institute in Ladakh, a Himalayan area in India. Ngari Institute is a Buddhist monastery and multipurpose campus located in Saboo, Ladakh, founded by monks from the area who studied at Sera Je Monastery. The Institute runs a children's hostel to allow girls and boys from remote areas of Ladakh to study at good quality schools in the nearby towns of Stok and Choglamsar. It cares for the children, provides extra tutoring, and, because they are from Buddhist families, teaches them Tibetan language and Buddhism, providing them with room, board, tutoring, books, clothing, medical care, and school fees. The children's education project and larger Ngari Institute have been endorsed by the Dalai Lama. As well as funding meals, FPMT also funded part of the cost of building a temple where students, resident monks, and visitors undertake Buddhist practices.[927]

Social Engagement in FPMT: Conclusion

This chapter describes a number, though not all, of FPMT's socially oriented activities. It shows that FPMT is socially engaged. The variety of activities in which it is involved reflects FPMT's decentralization, which allows social efforts to respond to local conditions. In India, Nepal, and Mongolia, FPMT affiliates and other organizations FPMT funds operate both large and small social projects that fill gaps in local services, targeting education, health care, and poverty alleviation. In Western and wealthier Asian countries, socially oriented activities are less focused on material needs and more on psychological ones. Affiliates support people in distress, build community, and share tools for well-being. Education is a priority everywhere. FPMT has some longstanding, sizable, and independently incorporated affiliates, such as Tara Redwood School, Liberation Prison Project, and Karuna Hospice Services. But much of its activity is on a smaller scale and undertaken by Dharma centres. That many are engaged shows that engagement has become integrated into beliefs and activities across FPMT.

Despite differences, patterns are visible across FPMT's social endeavours. As one interviewee commented, "FPMT is engaged in its own way."[928] That way expresses FPMT's social philosophy: helping others by combining material and spiritual methods. The next chapter discusses FPMT's distinct approach to social engagement.

[927] "Support Offered to Magnificent New Temple at Ngari Institute, Ladakh." *FPMT Ordained Sangha*. December 9, 2020. https://fpmt.org/charitable-activities/projects/ordained-sangha/support-offered-to-magnificent-new-temple-at-ngari-institute-ladakh/; "Education of Children." *Ngari Institute*. https://www.ngari-institute.org/education-of-children.html. Accessed September 3, 2024.
[928] B121C25. Interviewed by Author, January 2023.

Chapter 7.
A Traditionalist Social Engagement?

Introduction

FPMT's social philosophy centres on addressing immediate material needs while also putting in place faith-based elements in an effort to better beneficiaries' later and future lives and to put them on the path to enlightenment. The social philosophy embodies traditional Buddhist ideas, particular Buddhism's cosmology. As a result, some aspects of FPMT's engagement express traditional Buddhism. This chapter explores these aspects, which do not commonly appear in the engagement of modernist Buddhists.[929]

Traditional Aspects of FPMT's Buddhism that Affect Engagement

1. Valuing Dharma Teaching ahead of Material Aid (while giving aid)

FPMT's social engagement occurs in the context, as its CEO remarked, of "a religious organization." He added that social engagement does not substitute for the teaching of Dharma because "helping people to understand what the real cause of happiness is and what the real cause of their suffering is and how they deal with their mind is so critical." In other words, FPMT's priority remains Dharma teaching because that is how, in Buddhism's cosmology, people learn ways to reduce their delusions, improve their karma, stop their suffering, gain happiness, and help others. Material aid is not generally presented as sufficient, in that worldview, to resolve suffering because it does not address suffering's causes. Many interviewees stated that "going into the community" to teach Dharma was the best social engagement because it helped people to cease creating these causes.[930] As one interviewee stated, "in medicine we are told to treat the cause while treating the symptoms—not just the symptoms. The cause is more important to eradicate than simply the symptoms. … Sufferings, those are the symptoms of negative karma. We should help people purify the negative karma and create positive karma."[931] Buddhism's canonical teachings depict delusions that lead to creating negative karma as cause of suffering, making teaching Dharma of primary importance. This perspective arose in interviews again and again.

FPMT still has reasons to use material means to help others: teaching Dharma is pointless if unmet needs prevent people from learning; animals need material aid and are not capable of learning Dharma; teaching Dharma does not immediately alleviate physical or psychological pain or alter unmanageable circumstances; engagement connects Buddhists to surrounding communities; it provides opportunities for sharing blessings and imprints; it creates merit and is soteriological; traditional Buddhist teachings support it; the Dalai Lama and the lamas have recommended it; and so on. Yet however strong are these reasons for engagement, FPMT prioritizes teaching Dharma because, in its traditional Buddhist worldview, karma and delusion are the fundamental causes of suffering and Dharma the fundamental cure.

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[929] The modernist approach to social engagement is discussed in Chapter 6 and in Brown, "Beyond Queen and King," 10-17, 23-36.
[930] Ven. Roger Kunsang, interviewed by Author, April 3, 2023.
[931] A121N05. Interviewed by Author, November 2022.

2. Preferring Social Service and Humanitarian Efforts to Activism

Interviewees' comments revealed efforts to straddle two potentially contradictory ideas: the modern one that society can be improved or transformed by political and material means and the traditional Buddhist one that samsara is largely unfixable so the best way to help others is to work for one's own and their good karma, good rebirths, and enlightenment. The two ideas intertwine in the view many interviewees expressed that social engagement can reduce some sufferings, making it worthwhile, but society is meaningfully bettered mainly by changing people's minds in ways that reduce their delusions and improve their motives, conduct, and karma.

Most interviewees shared with modernist Buddhists a wish to change society. However, they differed in their ideas about how. They did not favour activism intended to alter power relations and societal structures, partly because they were concerned activism could foster anger and thus create negative karma, destroy merit, worsen delusions and conduct, and impede progress toward enlightenment, and partly for other reasons, such as doubts that activism was effective, concerns that it was mainly "virtue signaling," or belief that humanitarian and social service activities were best suited to FPMT's capabilities.

Most interviewees favoured the kinds of social services that Tibetan monasteries were involved in before the modern era[932]—health care and education—as well humanitarian aid: poverty alleviation, community building, help for the lonely, imprisoned, sick, elderly, and dying, animal rescue, and so on. Education was often cited as an important way to help people and was often said to be the best way to improve society.

Interviewees wanted to build a better world. On how to do so, generally speaking, they indicated they were influenced by the lamas. Lama Yeshe, in a 1975 talk, indicated that socialism or communism would not solve social problems because changes in societal structures would not reduce delusions. Even universal material prosperity would not end unhappiness because "there would still be attachment, there would still be anger … Problems lie within each individual." Buddhists can better society by fostering "human development."[933] He presented education as the way.[934] Rinpoche as well recommended education as the road to social change. In the Vast Visions, for example, he pushed for more universal education programming "to develop better human beings … bringing peace and happiness in the world."[935] The lamas' views are likely one reason why people in FPMT favour education over activism to better society.[936]

Hence, although interviewees had contemporary ideas about the need to work for social change, they did not believe that society could be made better using only material (including political) means—unlike many modernist Buddhists. Interviewees' strategies can be called "traditional" because they are based on the idea that society will transform only as people's minds transform on the basis of teachings, practices, and blessings that education, faith-based activities, and holy objects can best provide.

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[932] Jansen, *The Monastery Rules*, 153, 173.
[933] Lama Yeshe, *Becoming Your Own Therapist: An Introduction to the Buddhist Way of Thought*, ed. Nicholas Ribush (Boston: Lama Yeshe Wisdom Archive, 1998), 19-22.
[934] See, for example, "Universal Education."
[935] "Lama Zopa Rinpoche's Vast Visions."
[936] An exception to the targeted approach is efforts to promote world peace which Rinpoche sometimes recommended. However, he suggested mainly spiritual means, such as spreading Dharma, reading or reciting the *Sutra of Golden Light*, inviting the Dalai Lama to teach, and arranging interfaith encounters. "Lama Zopa Rinpoche's Vast Visions."

3. Trusting Gurus

Trust in gurus plays a significant role in FPMT: teachings on guru devotion are taken seriously and the organizational culture exalts lamas in general, and especially the Dalai Lama, Lama Yeshe, and Rinpoche. Interviewees often reflected the wish to do as they have recommended. A number, for example, reported that their support for, or involvement in, social engagement occurred because the Dalai Lama recommends engagement, because the lamas valued it, or because one of these gave them specific input on this. Rinpoche's views as they appear in the Vast Visions and Five Pillars have also been influential: numerous people, especially in centres, mentioned that these were one reason for their activities. As well, many decisions regarding social projects were reported to have been made by divination, generally by Rinpoche. Accepting decisions made in this way shows faith in the lamas as well as in faith-based processes they relied on. This level of trust given to lamas can be called "traditional."

One example of trust in the lamas is FPMT's investment in universal education. Lama Yeshe vision for education, which he described in 1983, was as follows:

> The world needs a new system of education … people need to understand the entirety of human reality. Nowadays, most people … don't understand the totality of their being and they don't want to accept spirituality. And many of those that do accept spirituality reject scientific reality. This is a common conflict … there must be a middle way, whereby people are educated both spiritually and scientifically such that they can take care of themselves physically and mentally and free themselves from any kind of material or psychological problem. …. We would completely understand our own psychology and our own physical makeup. … Buddhism definitely has this universal education quality within it but we need to change our clothes… Don't use religious Sanskrit words … but simple scientific language that is free from any religious connotation … We have to get rid of people's old concepts and give them a new imagination; a new, broad way of looking at themselves and the world. … Universal education does not mean we abandon mathematics or other Western subjects. Of course, we keep whatever has value, but to it we add elements that give it more totality, a deeper nature.[937]

Lama Yeshe's vision has inspired many people in FPMT to develop universal education. Examples include the creation of Creating Compassionate Cultures (CCC), the *16 Guidelines*, and other publications, programs, and courses; the establishment and operation of FDCW; independent universal education projects like Alice Project School in Sarnath; and the teaching of the *16 Guidelines* in many environments. Another example is LKPY, the international peace project for young people that Rinpoche proposed. Rinpoche gave specific advice for the organization and its activities. The individual who established LKPY indicated that one of her goals was to be able to say, "I've fulfilled the advice of my guru."[938] A later director of LKPY added, "Knowing that this is a project of Rinpoche's is what motivates me to keep going."[939]

As described in Chapter 6, Centro Khamlungpa in Guadalajara ran a social project for several years. It was inspired by Rinpoche. One of the project's initiators wrote the following in *Mandala*: "In 2015, we had a visit from our most precious guru, the incredible Lama Zopa Rinpoche. And as with all Rinpoche's visits, something happened, something moved. A space

[937] Yeshe, "Universal Education."
[938] Bauer, "Loving Kindness Peaceful Youth," 16-17.
[939] "Helping Young People Develop a Good Heart," 52.

opened and our minds shifted just a little. This time, that space pushed us to act. Old and new students got together at a café to choose a social project … giving food."[940]

Many other FPMT social projects were proposed, initiated, or guided by one of the lamas. Maitri Charitable Trust, for example, was suggested by Lama Yeshe, and it was located in Bodh Gaya on Rinpoche's advice. Its director occasionally requested divinations from Rinpoche to decide how to resolve problems. Root Institute was established at the request of Lama Yeshe. Ven. Sangye Tenzin, head of Kopan Monastery's Department of Health, started working in health care because Lama Lhundrup, then abbot of Kopan, asked him to; he continues working to expand Kopan's health care services in part due to encouragement from Rinpoche. Kopan's monastics, after Nepal's 2015 earthquake and during the pandemic, were encouraged by Rinpoche to provide material aid. Many social projects have holy objects on site because Rinpoche gifted them or suggested they be placed there, such as those at Maitri Charitable Trust and Maya Daya Dialysis Clinic.

The significant role in social engagement played by trust in gurus is not commonly found in modernist Buddhists' engagement. It reflects traditional ideas about gurus' wisdom. In modern ways of thinking, either experts or those in need are assumed to best know needs and how to meet them. Yet it is apparent that those in charge of FPMT's social endeavours have generally given final authority on this question to the lamas. For example, beneficiaries do not usually make decisions about holy objects at the sites of social projects. Holy objects' presence is typically at the behest of Rinpoche or in recognition of his views. Overall, FPMT enacts a different and older epistemology than modernist Buddhists, one that assumes that the Buddha and those believed to channel his wisdom—gurus—know best. The idea can be called "traditionalist."

4. Relying on Traditional Teachings

Most examples of engaged Buddhism described in anthologies rely on Western discourses whose lessons are deemed to be "latent" in Buddhism's longstanding teachings. What they present as "latent" includes goals like gender, caste, race, and income equity as well as means like activism targeting fundamental social change.[941] The Western discourses in question aim at changing social structures to produce a mundane rather than transmundane "collective liberation," as Gleig describes it in her survey of engaged Buddhism. She adds that "engaged Buddhism is an Asian and Western culturally hybrid form of Buddhism that falls under … Buddhist modernism." She contends that its Buddhist underpinnings include the idea of interdependence understood as a cosmic web of positively valued interconnections along with reinterpretations of karma that make sufferings' causes societal.[942] These ideas, however, are of mainly modern origin. Jackson (2022), in his summary of Buddhism's cosmology, underlines that social karma, for example, is not found in classical sources.[943] And the "web of life" doctrine, often described by scholars as the main Buddhist teaching supporting engagement, is a reinterpretation of interdependence first published in 1990.[944] Hence, although engagement undertaken by modernist Buddhists draws on

[940] Limberopulos, "Dana in Mexico," 63-64.
[941] Brown, "Beyond Queen and King," 13-17, 35-36.
[942] Gleig, "Engaged Buddhism."
[943] Jackson, *Rebirth*, 93.
[944] Its apparent initial published source is *Dharma Gaia: A Harvest of Essays in Buddhism and Ecology* (1990) edited by Allan Badiner. Badiner's introduction to *Dharma Gaia* sets out this modern interpretation of interdependence as the web of life that became, in many scholars' understanding, the main Buddhist teaching underpinning social engagement. Brown, "Beyond Queen and King," 12-13 including fn. 8 and 9.

some longstanding Buddhist teachings like compassion, it also relies on Western and modernized Buddhist discourses.

Chapter 6 discusses the Buddhist ideas that inspire people in FPMT. Although karma and interdependence were among the teachings interviewees cited, they did not mention their modern reinterpretations; they were unfamiliar with these. They drew on a range of Buddhist ideas to engage, as well as ideas of helping others not drawn solely from Buddhism. If there was a dominant inspiration, it was likely the recommendations of the Dalai Lama and the lamas, underlining the importance traditionalists give to gurus. Beyond that, influential ideas include loving-kindness, compassion, bodhichitta, merit, and generosity as well as the requirements of bodhisattva vows. These ideas are all traditional: they come from FPMT's lineage. And while, like modernist Buddhists, people in FPMT value benefiting others in immediate and tangible ways, they also speak of benefiting others' future lives. The difference comes from the cosmologies behind engagement. Modernist Buddhists set aside Buddhism's cosmology; hence, their engagement aims at creating this-life, this-world benefits. FPMT's people consider future lives and enlightenment, so their projects include Dharma or universal education, and they supplement material aid with faith-based practices, holy objects, and so on. A traditional cosmological outlook affects how they engage.

In sum, the doctrines that encourage and shape social engagement in FPMT and among modernist Buddhists partially differ. Traditionalists' motivations for engaging, and specific ways of engaging, are based on devotion to gurus, unmodernized Buddhist teachings, and Buddhism's cosmology. Whereas modernists' engagement is sometimes shaped by Western discourses and modernized Buddhist teachings, traditionalists' engagement does not seem to be.

5. Preserving Lineages through Social Engagement

FPMT sometimes supports lineage preservation by addressing the material needs of the people involved in it. This practice is considered social engagement because it provides material aid to people in need.

The largest project FPMT has undertaken to meet material needs related to lineage preservation has been the Sera Je Food Fund. Sera Je Monastic University in India plays a significant role in preserving the Geluk lineage, but, between its re-establishment by Tibetan refugees in India in the early 1970s and FPMT's creation of a food fund in 1991, food was a pressing problem. FPMT's food fund provided regular payments to cover food costs then, in 2017 and 2018, FPMT gave Sera Je an endowment to cover food costs in perpetuity. The fund improved the nutrition and health of monks and freed up their time for Dharma study and practice. This step eased the preservation of the lineage by its core students and teachers.[945] FPMT itself relies on Sera Je to train many of its teachers. This means that supporting the health of monks at Sera Je helps perpetuate the lineage in Asia and also helps FPMT to disseminate the lineage.[946] FPMT has a similar food fund for Gyudmed Tantric Monastery, also in India, which preserves Geluk tantric lineages.

FPMT also regularly funds food and health care for other monastics in need, mostly in India, Nepal, and Mongolia. FPMT thus practices a form of social engagement that alleviates poverty while helping to preserve its lineage. Given that preserving the lineage is the heart of what people in FPMT mean by "traditionalism," giving material aid that promotes that goal can be considered a traditionalist way to engage socially. It also has precedents: donating food to

[945] Tenzin Tsultrim, "Sustaining the Pure," 26-46; Cabezón and Dorjee, *Sera Monastery*, 480-481.
[946] A121F22. Interviewed by Author, December 2022.

monastics has a long history in Buddhism. Food funds that attract donations from around the globe are an up-to-date version of a very old practice.

6. Targeting Minds and Karma

FPMT's social philosophy stresses helping beneficiaries' minds and karma when addressing their material needs. Many of FPMT's socially oriented activities are founded on the traditional Buddhist belief—related to Buddhism's cosmology—that suffering has karmic causes, and that the root of negative karma is individuals' mental delusions. These activities thus reflect traditional Buddhist teachings. One interviewee discussed how karma was related to suffering, and why FPMT's social endeavours include elements aimed at improving people's karma.

> Karma helps me understand why… [poverty and injustice] are happening, and why sometimes a situation that looks like it should be easily resolved isn't easily resolved… Education and building holy objects are about creating the causes for people to have good rebirths in future where they'll be able to continue to work on their minds and are given the conditions to work on their minds. … Rinpoche's main emphasis is what we can teach people without requiring them to become Buddhists, just basic human good qualities that will make the world a better place and create causes for people to have happiness in their future lives, and hopefully continue to be good people.[947]

Another interviewee added:

> There's no point in just doing social work. Unless you take them round the prayer wheel, you take them round the stupa, you say prayers or mantras that they can hear or feel the vibrations… Unless you're injecting Dharma into social work, you might relieve temporary suffering but…that has got to be integrated into planting seeds and slowly bringing people to the path [to enlightenment]. … [Material help] is still good if it helps people, but it has to be done in balance [with spiritual help].[948]

It is this balance of material and faith-based elements that characterizes FPMT's traditionalist engagement.

Education is one expression of this approach. A Himalayan teacher exemplified a widespread view in FPMT when asked what FPMT's social priority should be. He responded, "education is the most important—it is the way to relieve poverty and also the way to connect people with Dharma."[949] Schools to which FPMT's international office contributes must include ways of teaching students ethics, compassion, and wisdom to put them on the road to happier futures in this life, better rebirths, and enlightenment. Such teachings are also intended to allow schools to improve society; the idea is that students and graduates will behave in ethical, compassionate, responsible ways that build a better world. FPMT stalwart Kabir Saxena, for example, quoted in Chapter 6, talked about his hope that Maitreya School in Bodh Gaya would improve society in the Bodh Gaya region.

Many interviewees stressed the importance of the Foundation for Developing Compassion and Wisdom (FDCW). FDCW coordinates secular training in ethics, compassion, and wisdom in many countries and sectors for both children and adults. FPMT's investments in

[947] A211J04. Interviewed by Author, November 2022.
[948] A121P03. Interviewed by Author, November 2022.
[949] F115S28. Interviewed by Author, January 2023.

FDCW reflect the priority it places on helping individuals to improve their minds and thus their own and others' lives.

FPMT's animal care activities reflect the same concern with the mind. The Vast Visions discuss the need to help animals, and people associated with FPMT operate a number of animal rescue projects. They save animals from suffering or slaughter, and whether the animals are given homes or (if wild) released, they are always given blessings intended to help their minds, karma, and future rebirths. Kopan Monastery's animal sanctuary in Nepal is an example. While Rinpoche was alive, he blessed each animal. He also gave instructions for Buddhist practices to benefit their future lives, which staff do. A charity run by the lamas' followers raises funds to support the sanctuary as well as animal care in other affiliates. One interviewee pointed out that at the places where Rinpoche stayed in India, Nepal, or the US, "there's always random animals, random goats and rabbits wandering around that he saved."[950] FPMT's international office also funds animal rescue and care. FPMT's website states:

> Benefiting animals in any way possible is a high priority for the FPMT organization and was one of Lama Zopa Rinpoche's Vast Visions. Rinpoche explained many ways that we can benefit animals, not just by saving them from untimely death and caring for them for the rest of their lives, but also by blessing them with mantras, prayers, and holy objects in order to create merit and purify negative karma.[951]

The quote shows FPMT's social philosophy in action.

Modernist Buddhists may also value education and may also help animals. However, few share FPMT's emphasis on minds and karma—a traditionalist priority.

7. Supplementing Material with Faith-based Means

FPMT's social engagement often includes faith-based elements that reflect Buddhism's cosmology. Were the cosmology not felt to reflect reality, these would not be present. They have meaning and purpose because, in that worldview, they are relevant to healing and happiness. For those who accept it, not using them to supplement material aid, at least in situations where aid recipients do not object, would be irresponsible. A defining feature of modern Buddhism, on the other hand, is the replacement of Buddhism's cosmology by a materialist, naturalist worldview in which there is little reason to add faith-based to material and political ways of helping others.

Rinpoche made clear he wanted compassion to be expressed in both material and faith-based ways. He emphasized that material aid was necessary but not sufficient because it only addressed results, not causes. To treat the causes of suffering, sufferers' karma had to be influenced, so he recommended that holy objects be present at sites of engagement and pujas be done for beneficiaries. Rinpoche's guidance has led most affiliates' social projects to include faith-based components, especially holy objects and images. Placing these where beneficiaries see them, walk by them, or can circumambulate them is common. Projects FPMT's international office funds also tend to include them.

Is it only Rinpoche who felt faith-based elements helped beneficiaries of material aid? Opinions of interviewees varied. Variation was not correlated with age, ethnicity, place of residence, or other factors. Even among Himalayan interviewees, some strongly supported faith-

[950] F111G06. Interviewed by Author, November 2022.

[951] "Animal Blessings and Rescue from Untimely Death in 2023." *FPMT Social Services*. December 5, 2023. https://fpmt.org/charitable-activities/projects/social-services/animal-blessings-and-rescue-from-untimely-death-in-2023/.

based elements in social engagement, and some accepted them but did not prioritize them. Most interviewees indicated they believed they had a certain power to provide positive imprints, vibrations, or energy, and could contribute to people's or animals' healing, tranquility, or karma. Some felt they helped but only because those exposed to them found them attractive, felt good around them, or had other positive reactions that could connect them to Buddhism.

Overall, most interviewees believed that the presence of such elements at sites of social engagement was beneficial even though their reasons for saying so varied. Some interviewees thought that material help benefited others less than holy objects, blessings, pujas, or prayers. For them, material forms of aid were only the first step to helping others, necessary but not as impactful as faith-based activities.

Examples of affiliates mixing material and faith-based aid are legion. An article in a newsletter published by Root Institute in 2007 describes how this mix can manifest in India, where it is socially acceptable for religious material to be present in public spaces. The author describes how Root Institute's clinic balances medical care with "the Guru's vision of creating the necessary imprints for the patients to permanently remove their sufferings, by playing mantras and sutras through loudspeakers and adorning as much of the clinic's walls as possible with Buddha images." She describes hearing "Kirti Tsenshab Rinpoche's holy voice reciting the Sanghata Sutra throughout the clinic environs and at the same time an HIV-prevention film playing on the TV, both quite loud so as to be heard clearly." And she describes seeing "pleasing Buddha images on walls alongside graphic posters depicting the horrors of mouth cancer caused by chewing tobacco."[952] Material and faith-based ways of helping others mingled in the clinic.

Schools in India and Nepal affiliated with or funded by FPMT display holy images or objects intended to give imprints and blessings. Maitreya School in Bodh Gaya, for example, has a sizable stupa and Maitreya statue in its yard. In Kathmandu, Kopan Monastery's dialysis clinic prominently displays a Buddha mural designed by Rinpoche and has a Medicine Buddha statue gifted by Rinpoche. FPMT helped construct a large stupa near the personal care home it supports in Rabgyaling, India to help elderly people create merit by circumambulating. Kopan's animal sanctuary has stupas to bless the animals. In England, interviewees stated that Rinpoche had advised those overseeing affiliates in the West to be sensitive to their environments when displaying objects and images. Interviewees explained that any connection to Buddhism received by non-Buddhists was intended to be organic, occurring perhaps by visitors seeing Buddhists or monastics being helpful, or by visitors choosing to look at a photo or other holy item unobtrusively placed. Nevertheless, subtle images could be seen, as well as prayer flags—the latter, according to interviewees, visitors perceived as not uniquely Buddhist, making them

Figure 20. "School Images." Images in the main hall at Maitreya Universal Education School include Maitreya Buddha, Shakyamuni Buddha, and Green Tara. February 2023. Photo: Donna L. Brown

[952] Thubten Labdron, "Back in Bodhgaya." *Roots of Wisdom: The Newsletter of Root Institute for Wisdom Culture* 25 (June 2007): 2-3.

acceptable. Overall, there are fewer faith-based elements visible at Western sites of engagement. However, there are still some, as Figure 15, showing the courtyard of Jamyang London, demonstrates.

Combining material and faith-based activities is typical of FPMT's engagement and expresses FPMT's social philosophy. It seems appropriate to label this combination "traditional" because it reflects Buddhism's cosmology, an aspect of traditional Buddhism not present in modern Buddhism.

Summary: The Impact of Traditional Buddhism on Social Engagement

Social engagement cannot easily be considered uniquely modern given that premodern monastics and other Buddhists helped individuals and communities in material ways. Scholars stating it has modern origins often rely on inaccurate stereotypes and exclusionary definitions of engagement. However, labeling engagement "traditional" is also challenging. Even humanitarian and social service engagement today has new technical, financial, and organizational features, and sometimes new goals, such as social change. And it remains unclear how engagement fits into recognized Buddhist lineages. It is not without a relationship to lineage: FPMT's lineage's teachings present it as beneficial, meritorious, and soteriological. And lineage teachings and practices, like compassion and generosity, encourage it. That the Dalai Lama and other lineage holders today promote it suggests they understand it to derive from lineages. This situation makes engagement compatible with Tibetan lineages, but not necessarily a lineage practice strictly speaking.

More important than labeling Buddhist social engagement "modern" or "traditional" is exploring how it has changed over time as well as understanding that there may be types of engagement. Most engagement presented in anthologies may best be called "modernist social engagement." The "modernist" label seems to suit engagement that: (a) is undertaken by modernist Buddhists; (b) has a modern cosmological foundation, the scientific-rationalist-naturalist discourse, and thus lacks faith-based elements and concern with beneficiaries' rebirths and future lives; and (c) is motivated by Western discourses and/or modernized Buddhist teachings.

If that type of engagement is modernist, is FPMT's traditionalist? It seems so. It is because FPMT's engagement relies on traditional Buddhism, including its cosmology, that it differs from modernists' engagement. The differing features are described above and include: putting Dharma teachings ahead of engaging socially as the most important way to help others; preferring humanitarian aid and social service to activism; trusting gurus to know best how to benefit others; engaging based on longstanding Buddhist teachings rather than modernized ones or Western discourses; combining engagement with lineage preservation; prioritizing benefitting beings' minds and karma when engaging socially; and supplementing material with faith-based elements. These factors appear to exemplify a traditionalist form of Buddhist social engagement.

Chapter 8.
Summary and Conclusions

The Buddhist Studies Background

The introduction to this dissertation describes a particular state of affairs in Buddhist Studies. In it, stereotypes of traditional Buddhism have led scholars of contemporary Buddhism to define traditional Buddhism as a form of Buddhism characterized by features typical of religion and society in premodern Asia and to assert that it cannot exist in the modern era. This approach forms part of a historiography and is associated with two assumptions: the correspondence assumption and its lifestyle corollary. The historiography categorizes eras as classical, traditional (medieval or premodern), and modern; some scholars add a postmodern era. The correspondence assumption states that all Buddhisms match their era so traditional Buddhism only exists in premodernity or, today, in old-fashioned enclaves; all non-enclave Buddhisms have been modernized; and the core feature of this modernization is the replacement of Buddhism's cosmology with the scientific-rationalist-naturalist discourse. The lifestyle corollary states that lifestyles must match Buddhisms practiced: people who live in modern ways inevitably practice modern Buddhism whereas traditional Buddhism can only be practiced by traditional people.

The historiography, correspondence assumption, and lifestyle corollary lead scholars to either redescribe as modern the Buddhism of Buddhists who identify it as traditional, deeming their claims false, or to overlook traditionalists, treating them as unimportant given that they are assumed to be either non-existent or active only in backward enclaves. As a result, little scholarship explores the differences between Buddhisms insiders call "traditional" and other contemporary Buddhisms, or examines how and why traditional Buddhism might persist today. Data on this form of Buddhism are thus scarce. This outcome is not due to a wish to avoid defining or categorizing: scholars unhesitatingly define and categorize Buddhisms as modern or postmodern. But they do not accept a parallel category for traditional Buddhism today, even though large numbers of Buddhists around the globe practice Buddhisms they consider traditional that differ substantially in history and features from modernized Buddhisms.

Buddhist Studies' erasure of the possibility that traditional Buddhism could exist today preceded the study of engaged Buddhism, which began in the early 1990s.[953] Scholars of engaged Buddhism accepted the erasure and focused on modernist Buddhists, creating a narrative in which engagement originated in modernity and was done only by modernists on the basis of Western discourses and modernized Buddhist doctrines. They may have been influenced by stereotypes that depicted traditionalists as only present in premodern times and as withdrawn from society. Hence, they did not look for engagement by traditionalists, did not include it in theorizing, and collected little data on it. When they observed traditionalists engaging socially, they deemed them modernists because they thought only modernists engaged.

Two gaps in knowledge resulted. The first gap was produced by the failure to consider that forms of Buddhism could exist today best called "traditional" and distinguished from Buddhisms that arose or were radically reshaped in the modern and postmodern eras. This failure has led to a paucity of data on these Buddhisms, no exploration of what criteria might be useful to define "traditional Buddhism," no suitable category in which to place them, and little work on why and how they remain. The gap in knowledge in effect reduced the usefulness of categories of modernism, modernities, postmodernism, and so on: squeezing in Buddhisms that fit poorly

[953] Brown, "Beyond Queen and King," 13.

has made these categories less, not more, useful. The second gap arose in scholarship on Buddhist social engagement. Little scholarship has been done on the engagement of traditionalists and scholars have not explored the possibility that traditionalists may engage in specifically traditionalist ways. Lack of data on traditionalists has distorted the pictures scholars present of the nature and scope of Buddhists' social engagement.

These gaps prompted this dissertation. They also led to selecting FPMT as a case study. FPMT is significant transnational Buddhist organization that has adapted ways of disseminating and practicing an unmodernized Buddhism to contemporary circumstances. It is also socially engaged. It showcases some of the ways a form of Buddhism suited to be labeled "traditional" can function today and can shape its practitioners' social engagement.

Research Process

Research collected and analyzed data on activities and perspectives in FPMT to respond to two initial hypotheses as well as supplementary hypotheses that developed as it progressed. The first initial hypothesis was that people in FPMT who call their Buddhism "a tradition" and "traditional" have identifiable grounds for doing so in their Buddhism's history and/or features that (a) distinguish their Buddhism from modernized forms of Buddhism; (b) allow it to be preserved, transmitted, and practiced today; (c) show that adapting ways of practicing Buddhism to contemporary circumstances need not entail modernizing it or abandoning what they consider traditional; and (d) can be applied to other groups' Buddhisms to categorize these as traditional if they share similar characteristics. Hence, researching and analyzing FPMT was expected to identify viable grounds for calling a Buddhism today "traditional," permitting construction of a data-based concept of traditional Buddhism recognizable to Buddhists, useful to scholars, and parallelling recognized concepts of modern and postmodern Buddhism. The added hypothesis was that there are two main factors that can be called on to designate a form of Buddhism traditional: it has an identifiable lineage recognized by insiders, meaning it comprises a set of teachings and practices handed down in an unbroken line over many generations; and it has certain features, with the fundamental one being its retention of Buddhism's cosmology rather than its replacement by the scientific-rationalist-naturalist discourse as occurred in the creation of modern Buddhism.

The second initial hypothesis was that FPMT was socially engaged, demonstrating that traditionalism does not preclude engagement, and that engagement is not undertaken only by modernist Buddhists. The added hypotheses was that the doctrinal foundation of FPMT's engagement is traditional Buddhist teachings, not modernized ones or Western discourses; and that FPMT's engagement has traditionalist elements. If it does, a category of "traditionalist Buddhist social engagement," not yet identified by scholars, may be appropriate to add to scholarship, encouraging further research on its nature and extent.

Hypotheses were investigated through ethnographic fieldwork that included participant observation, informal conversations, and interviews. Interviews took place using various formats. Observation and conversations occurred at sites in Bodh Gaya, at Kopan Monastery and elsewhere in Nepal, and at two FPMT centres in England. Ethnographic data were supplemented with data drawn from scholarly literature, FPMT publications, social media, and other sources. These research methods are well-established.

Chapter 1 details the research design, process, and sample. More than one hundred people associated with FPMT, many of them key informants, shared their thoughts and opinions. Care was taken to ensure the sample was diverse. Although representativeness cannot be fully ascertained, the breadth and size of the sample suggests that research results can be considered to

apply to the bulk of FPMT and not only the sample. The main limitation in the applicability of results to FPMT as a whole is their uncertain applicability to FPMT's followers of East Asian ethnicity, mainly in Malaysia, Singapore, Hong Kong, and Taiwan. It appears that in-person interviews in those locations would be needed to explore perspectives there; outreach by email and WhatsApp was ineffective.[954] The low representation from this group matters because the group may exhibit perspectives different from those found in the sample. Except in this case, the research design, process, and sample allowed substantial exploration of the research questions among a diverse sample and produced abundant data.

Research Findings

On tradition, interviewees across FPMT gave consistent reasons why they considered their Buddhism to be traditional. Reasons centred around two broad factors—its longstanding lineage of teachings and practices, preserved intact over many generations and practiced and transmitted today, and its retention of Buddhism's cosmology, including beliefs and activities that flow from that cosmology. Both factors distinguish FPMT's Buddhism from modernized Buddhisms, which were newly created or fundamentally reshaped in modernity and which replaced Buddhism's cosmology with the modern scientific-rationalist-naturalist discourse. The factors also distinguish FPMT's Buddhism from retraditionalized Buddhisms that lack unbroken lineages. If the two factors are used to create a definition of "traditional Buddhism," then traditional Buddhism can accommodate changes to styles of teaching and practice, and to other peripheral elements, that allow contemporary people living a variety of lifestyles to practice it. In this scenario, not every aspect of premodern Asian social and religious life need be replicated for a form of Buddhism to be labeled "traditional." Notably, "traditional" applies in this case to Buddhism only, not to organizations propagating it, people practicing it, places it is practiced, or conditions surrounding its practice; these need not be "traditional" for the Buddhism involved to be defined as traditional. FPMT demonstrates that Buddhisms defined as "traditional" based on these factors can flourish in the modern and postmodern eras.

It should be underlined that traditional Buddhisms defined in this way likely all display adaptations to modernity. However, insiders consider these adaptations to be peripheral to the core—the lineage of teachings and practices. As well, the adaptations do not include the replacement of core discourses with modern discourses—the mark of modern or modernist Buddhism in the eyes of prominent scholars like Bechert, Lopez, and McMahan. Hence, that FPMT's Buddhism remains viable demonstrates that some traditional Buddhisms that do not incorporate major modern discourses can thrive today, and not only in old-fashioned enclaves.

In a parallel manner, do Buddhisms scholars classify as modern contain elements that might be considered "traditional"? This research did not examine modern Buddhisms in any detail, so the answer is to some extent speculative rather than data-based. However, works like McMahan (2008) suggest that modern Buddhisms retain many old elements, such as philosophical doctrines, teachings on compassion and other skillful qualities, and longstanding texts, or at least parts of these texts that do not rely on Buddhism's cosmology. Not everything in them is new. What is new is the modern discourses they incorporate in place of Buddhism's cosmology and the changes to teachings and practices that result. Hence, overlap exists between Buddhisms defined as traditional and as modern. Given overlaps, there may be debates about whether particular expressions of Buddhism fall more into the "traditional" or "modern" category. But debates are not negative. What is important to keep in mind is that peripheral

[954] Research timelines did not allow visits to these areas.

adaptations to modernity, when both a longstanding lineage and its cosmology and other core teachings and practices remain, do not make a Buddhism "modern" by the above definition. Further, old texts, philosophical teachings, and practices do not make a Buddhism "traditional" if it arose newly or was substantively reshaped in modernity such that lacks a lineage going back to premodern times (or has it for certain practices or teachings but not core ones) and its core discourse, especially its worldview or cosmology, is modern. "Traditional Buddhism" is thus defined vis-à-vis other forms of Buddhism: it displays stronger claims to disseminating a longstanding, unbroken lineage with an intact core and, in it, Buddhism's cosmology remains prominent and shapes central teachings and practices. Buddhisms called "modern," "postmodern," or by similar terms like "modernities," have less complete connections to the premodern past and are dominated by modern discourses and a modern worldview.

Research thus produces a definition of traditional Buddhism: a Buddhism that embodies an unbroken lineage of teachings and practices handed down over generations going back to premodernity, and that retains Buddhism's cosmology along with core teachings, practices, and forms of conduct expressing that cosmology. Further research may refine this definition, but it appears similar to how other Buddhists who identify as traditional define traditionalism, such as Theravada scholar and teacher Bhikkhu Bodhi.

Recognizing that traditional Buddhism can exist today, and therefore that a category of "traditional Buddhism" can be useful in Buddhist Studies, opens up new areas of research. The activities and perspectives of contemporary Buddhists so far overlooked can be explored. How do their Buddhisms link to the past? What are their features? How do they differ from modern Buddhisms with similar geographical origins? How do Buddhists adapt old Buddhisms to new conditions while safeguarding lineages? How do ways of doing so differ in different parts of the world? Why do contemporary people practice traditional Buddhism? How does holding a traditional worldview affect life in the contemporary world? How does it affect social engagement? Acknowledging the existence of forms of Buddhism best labeled "traditional" can advance knowledge about society and religion today.

On social engagement, the initial hypothesis that FPMT was socially engaged was confirmed. Many interviewees discussed their own engagement; sites of engagement were visited and observed; and data on engagement were gathered from publications. Research showed that modernist Buddhists are not the only engaged Buddhists and that traditional Buddhism is no impediment to engagement. Further hypotheses arose during research. The first was that the doctrinal foundation of FPMT's engagement is traditional Buddhist teachings, not modernized ones or Western discourses. Interviews confirmed this was the case. Interviewees cited many teachings from their lineage that inspire their engagement, not mentioning modernized Buddhist ideas. Western ideas were mentioned but less frequently than traditional Buddhist motivations. Traditional Buddhist teachings form the main doctrinal foundation of FPMT's engagement.

The last added hypothesis was that FPMT's engagement has particularly traditionalist elements that could contribute to constructing a new scholarly category called "traditionalist Buddhist social engagement." Data show that FPMT's engagement displays elements that derive from and express traditional Buddhist teachings, elements not commonly found in modernist Buddhists' engagement. Hence, FPMT's form of engagement can be labeled "traditionalist" which suggests that "traditionalist Buddhist social engagement" may be a useful concept in the study of engaged Buddhism. Although further research is required, a glance at the websites of BGR and Karuna-Shechen, both launched by traditionalist monks, suggests that their engagement shares some elements with FPMT's. The two organizations provide social services, avoid activism, help monastics as well as lay people, rescue animals, spread secularized forms of Buddhist teaching, and emphasize education as the way to better society. Rather than disputing

whether their activities fit definitions of "Buddhist social engagement" on the grounds that they are not activist, as some scholars might, it seems more useful to classify certain forms of engagement as traditionalist with the implication that some other forms, such as activism promoting radical social change, are modernist. Traditionalist engagement relies on traditional Buddhist teachings and includes activities that express Buddhism's cosmology; modernist engagement relies on modernized Buddhist teachings and Western discourses and expresses a modern scientific-rationalist-naturalist worldview.

There is much room for further research on traditional Buddhism and traditionalists' social engagement once certain concepts are accepted: that forms of Buddhism suitable to being called "traditional" exist today; that Buddhisms practiced need not match their historical era or the lifestyles of their practitioners; that traditionalist Buddhists engage socially; that traditional Buddhist teachings can promote engagement; that Western discourses and modernized Buddhist teachings are not essential to engagement; that engagement may take traditionalist forms; that defining engagement in ways that overook traditionalists and their activities perpetuates inaccurate stereotypes and leaves scholarship on engagement incomplete; that theorizing about Buddhist social engagement should take traditionalists' engagement into account; and that adding traditionalists and their engagement to scholarship advances knowledge.

Finally, transnational Buddhist organizations have grown in number, size, and influence in recent decades, yet little research examines the ways they operate, the flows of people, ideas, and funds they embody, the variations in their activities across regions and cultures, their social engagement, or their impacts on Buddhism, their members, and society. The dissertation presents substantial research on one such organization, contributing to this area of scholarship. However, more research on FPMT and other transnational organizations is needed. Such research could generate useful knowledge about how contemporary Buddhism, and religion more generally, now circulates internationally and is practiced locally.

Final Words

This dissertation has three main topics. First, it adds data on, and addresses misunderstandings about, FPMT, a sizable and influential Buddhist organization, advancing the study of FPMT, contemporary Tibetan Buddhism, and transnational Buddhist institutions. Second, it adds data and theorizing on a type of Buddhism active today that can be called "traditional," and constructs a definition of "traditional Buddhism." This definition can be used in the study of contemporary Buddhism to advance research on a type of Buddhism that is currently under-studied. Third, it presents data to demonstrate that traditionalist Buddhists can be socially engaged and that the main bases for their engagement are traditional Buddhist teachings, not modernized ones or Western discourses. The dissertation then brings these three topics together to show that the type of engagement undertaken by the traditionalist Buddhists studied has features that express their traditional Buddhism and thus can be called "traditionalist." Buddhist Studies may benefit from recognizing the existence of traditional Buddhism today, traditionalists' social engagement, and a traditionalist type of social engagement. The finding that a form of Buddhism that can reasonably be called "traditional" is active today challenges current ideas. That traditionalist Buddhists engage socially and that a traditionalist form of engagement exists are new findings.

Research results counter two stereotypes still found in Buddhist Studies: that traditional Buddhism cannot survive modernity because it does not replace old discourses with modern ones; and that traditionalist Buddhists are socially disengaged because their Buddhism is passive in the face of suffering and demands withdrawal from society. By undermining these stereotypes, the research also points to flaws in a historiography, still in use, that puts traditional Buddhism

only in the premodern past. As well, it demonstrates that the correspondence assumption implying that Buddhisms inevitably match their historical era merits abandonment. Finally, it undermines the lifestyle corollary that suggests people living in contemporary ways cannot practice traditional Buddhism. Freeing Buddhist Studies from these unhelpful stereotypes and assumptions removes impediments to seeing the range of Buddhists and Buddhisms flourishing today and aiming to better society. It makes traditional Buddhism and traditionalist Buddhists visible.

In this way, the dissertation offers new data and analyses to Buddhist Studies, contributes to scholarship on transnational Buddhist organizations, contemporary Buddhism, and Buddhist social engagement, and aids the elimination of stereotypes and assumptions that inhibit scholarly progress. It may also contribute to a new wave in the study of today's Buddhism in which sub-fields heavily studied—the origins, beliefs, and activities of modern and postmodern Buddhisms and Buddhists in particular—cede space to sub-fields relegated to date to the margins, such as Buddhist institutions, global Buddhist systems, and traditional Buddhisms and Buddhists.

In sum, the dissertation shows that a transnational organization adapted to today's world can nourish and disseminate a form of Buddhism suited to being called "traditional," that this traditional Buddhism can circulate globally and be practiced in diverse locales by people of varying nationalities, ethnicities, and lifestyles, and that it can inspire social engagement, including a traditionalist form of social engagement. Research on FPMT reveals traditionalist Buddhists in action today: preserving their lineage, adapting their ways of teaching and practicing this lineage to new and varying circumstances, and working to benefit society.

Figure 21. "Mural Designed by Rinpoche." Maya Daya Dialysis Clinic, Kathmandu. February 2023. Photo: Donna L. Brown.

Appendix 1: Script for Ethnographic Interviews

Introduction:

a) FPMT is aware of the study and has indicated its support for it.
b) Consent reaffirmation: We will go over the consent form; ensure it has initials where needed, check consent/ initials for using name if participant wishes this, check name, signature, pronouns present.
c) Withdrawing procedures: The participant may withdraw at any time, with no consequences; no reason need be given. Any comments can be withdrawn up to 30 days after the interview as well.

Questions

1. Tell me, briefly, about your background and involvement with FPMT.
2. What, if any, Buddhist practices and teachings from other Buddhist lineages, teachers, or organizations do you combine with those from FPMT? (speaking broadly, no need for details or private information).
3. Why did you choose FPMT over other forms of Buddhism? What do you feel have been the benefits for you of FPMT?
4. What does it mean for Buddhism to be "traditional"? How and why do you think FPMT preserves tradition? What does it mean to you personally that FPMT tries to preserve tradition?
5. What do you think is modern and not traditional about FPMT? (Examples: gender, lay practice, global presence, online teachings …) How do you see modern and traditional elements working together? Can you think of ways modern elements improve Tibetan Buddhism or make it easier for you to practice it?
6. Describe how you think FPMT's traditional approach to Buddhism affects your life and your Buddhist practice.
7. What kinds of activities do you think are "Buddhist Social Engagement"? Do you think of FPMT as an engaged Buddhist organization?
8. Do you think people's suffering is caused more by society or social injustice, or more by their own actions and karma? What do you think is the best way to reduce others' suffering?
9. Are you involved in any of FPMT's social projects, as a donor, volunteer, employee, or in another role? If so, describe your involvement and its motivations.
10. Do you perceive FPMT's social projects to be part of Buddhist or Tibetan Buddhist tradition or to be something new and modern? What aspects of the past do you think they draw on? What Buddhist teachings? What aspects of modernity?
11. What do you hope to accomplish by being socially engaged (in FPMT activities) or contributing to FPMT social projects?
12. What do you think are the main benefits of FPMT social projects?
13. On what teachings from Lama Zopa Rinpoche or FPMT, other Buddhist teachings, or other factors do you base your ideas about Buddhist social engagement?
14. Is there anything you would like to add concerning FPMT, tradition, modernity, Buddhist social engagement, or other related topics?

Debriefing

a) Please reflect and comment on the interview, and feel free to correct, add to, withdraw, or otherwise comment on any of your earlier comments, share opinions on the research or the interview, or ask questions.
b) Please feel free to express your views on the interview, comment on the research overall, share any other views or information you consider relevant, ask questions, and let the interviewer know if you are satisfied with the experience of the interview.

Appendix 2: Consent Form for Ethnographic Interviews

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Consent Form

Research Project Title: **A Modernist Traditionalism? Social Engagement in the Foundation for the Preservation of the Mahayana Tradition (FPMT)**

Principal Investigator: Donna L. Brown, MA, M.Div., Ph.D. candidate
Email address: brownd1@myumanitoba.ca.
Phone: (XXX) XXX-XXXX
Research Supervisor: Dr. William Rory Dickson, Head, Dept. of Religion and Culture, University of Winnipeg. Email: w.dickson@uwinnipeg.ca.

This consent form, a copy of which will be left with you for your records and reference, is only part of the process of informed consent. It should give you the basic idea of what the research is about and what your participation will involve. If you would like more detail about something mentioned here, or information not included here, you should feel free to ask. Please take the time to read this carefully and to understand any accompanying information.

Purpose of the research: This project examines the intersection of tradition and social engagement in contemporary Buddhism through a case study of the Foundation for the Preservation of the Mahayana Tradition (FPMT). FPMT's International Office is aware of this research project and has indicated support for it.

Because most scholars associate social engagement with "Buddhist modernism," they generally present only Buddhist modernists as socially engaged. This project asks whether traditionalist Buddhists can also be socially engaged, how they engage, how they integrate traditionalism and social engagement, how their traditionalism affects and is affected by social engagement, and what the implications are for theories of tradition and of engaged Buddhism.

The research will be used to produce a Ph.D. dissertation. This dissertation will be publicly available. Other publications may also be produced, including articles in academic journals, articles in popular sources (such as blogs or Buddhist magazines), and potentially a book on FPMT.

Procedures: Participants are selected based on certain criteria. These include that they are 18 years of age or older, are associated with FPMT as a member, volunteer, participant in Buddhist activities, Buddhist teacher, employee, donor, or in other ways, are able to communicate in English, contribute to meeting the research project's diversity requirements, are willing to be interviewed, and agree to have the interview recorded or, if not, to have detailed notes taken. They will be interviewed by the Principal Investigator, Donna L. Brown. Interviews follow a list of open-ended questions and are scheduled to take 60-90 minutes, with an informal debriefing at the end in participants wish. Participants will receive the questions before the interview, and may send answers, or supplements to their answers, to the Principal Investigator by email before and/or after the interview, in written form or as a recording of them speaking. Information sent after the interview should be sent within 30 days of the interview.

Recording: Interviews will be audio recorded, with interviewees' consent. If they do not consent to audio recording, detailed notes will be taken, with their consent. If they do not consent to either, they will not be interviewed. Interviews will take place online, using the University of Manitoba's Zoom. There, audio and video are automatically recorded. The recording will be saved during the interview on the local computer, not Zoom's cloud. Immediately after the interview, the interviewer will delete the video, since the research project does not use video. The audio will be saved to the University of Manitoba's approved, secure cloud storage and be deleted from the local computer. If interviewees wish, they may turn off their camera to avoid video recording, or do the interview by Zoom phone, without video. Interviews will transcribed (written out in a Word file), after which audio recordings will be destroyed. Transcripts will exclude the name of the participant, and replace this with a general descriptor only, designed to prevent identification (e.g. "American monastic living in India"). General descriptors may include: monastic/lay; location; country of origin; gender; length of time associated with FPMT; and/or role in FPMT. In this way, the names of participants will cease to be connected to transcripts/ information once audio files are destroyed. Transcripts will saved to the University of Manitoba's approved, secure cloud storage. They will be destroyed by December 31, 2028.
Please initial beside <u>one</u> of the following three options:

a) *I agree to audio recording of my interview _____ (initial here).*
b) *I do not agree to audio recording of my interview. I agree to detailed notes being taken of my interview_____ (initial here).*
c) *I do not agree to audio recording or detailed note-taking _____(initial here).* **If participant initials here, they will not be interviewed.**

Benefits and Risks: Participants in interviews will not receive payment or other direct benefits for participating in the research project. No risk to participants in interviews is anticipated.

Anonymity: Research and publications produced based on this research will provide confidentiality to interviewees. Participants' names will not appear in any written or oral material, published or unpublished, except with the prior consent of the participant, explicitly given below. Generally, information provided by participants will be summarized and not attributed to any individual. In some cases, individual participants may be quoted or their views described, and in this case, general descriptors will be used (e.g., "one longtime practitioner" or "a lay teacher"). This will done without identifying the participant and without supplying details that would allow others to identify the participant, in order to maintain confidentiality. Participants' gender will only be referred to if it is directly relevant to the topic of comments/ discussion; it will not usually appear in general descriptors.

<u>**One exception may be made with the consent of participants**</u>. If a participant requests to have their name appear in material produced using this research, and wishes to be quoted by name, this option is available. Participants wishing to use this option may read and sign here, or discuss the option further with the Principal Investigator and then sign. If quotes or information is appear in the dissertation or other publications attributed to a named individual, a draft will be provided to them for their review before the publications appears.
<u>No one will be identified by name in the research who has not signed the following</u>:

I <u>want</u> to be named in material produced using this research, oral or written, published or unpublished, concerning information obtained from this interview or sent by me before or after an interview, with my views and words attributed to me by name _____ (Initial here to agree to be named in material that may become public). If my name is used, I would like it to appear as follows: _____ using these pronouns: _____.

Confidential Storage of Data: Digital recordings, interview notes, email communications, transcripts of interviews, and all other communications with participants will be stored on the University of Manitoba's approved, secure cloud storage using the university's research ethics protocols for data protection. Any

hard copies, such as notes taken during interviews until these are scanned and uploaded to secure storage (after which they will be destroyed), will be kept locked in a secure cabinet at the home of the Principal Investigator. Other than the Principal Investigator, only the Ph.D. Advisor, Dr. William Rory Dickson, will have access to data. He will follow the same procedures and protocols to ensure confidentiality. Data will be kept for a period of time after the Ph.D. dissertation is approved for use in preparation of a book and/or research articles. All data not destroyed earlier will be stored securely and destroyed by December 31, 2028.

Withdrawal from Interview or Research. Participants may withdraw from an interview before, during, or after the interview. Participants need not provide any reason for withdrawing. Before an interview, they may cancel their participation by notifying the Principal Investigator by email. During the interview, they may stop the interview at any time, or decline to answer any particular question, without being required to provide a reason. After the interview, they may withdraw any comments made, or the interview in its entirety, any time before March 31, 2023, by contacting the Principal Investigator by email. She will then destroy the comments indicated, or the entirety of the interview if requested, remove the related information from the research, and confirm by email that this has been done. There are no negative consequences for declining to answer questions or withdrawing.

Requirement to Disclose: Should a participant disclose offenses against children or persons in care during the interview, the law may require the interviewer to report these to relevant legal authorities.

Debriefing: At the end of the interview, still on the same Zoom call, there will be a debriefing for a period of up to 15 minutes if the participant wishes. This is not a requirement and there are no negative consequences if the participant does not wish a debriefing. The Principal Investigator will state that the interview is now complete and an informal debriefing period is now commencing in which the participant may reflect and comment on the interview; correct, add to, withdraw, or otherwise comment on any of their earlier comments; share opinions on the research or the interview; or ask questions. The purpose of debriefing is to ensure that the participant has said what they want to say, is comfortable with the information they have provided, has the chance to express their views on the interview, can comment on the research overall, can share any other views or information they consider relevant, can ask questions, and is satisfied with the experience of the interview.

Follow up: The participant, should they wish, may send to the Principal Investigator, by email, further comments or other information or comments after the interview. Such additional comments should be sent within 30 days of the date of the interview. All information sent is subject to the same confidentiality provisions and storage procedures as information provided during the interview.

Dissemination of Research: The research will result in a Ph.D. dissertation which, once approved, will be publicly available. The dissertation will appear online on the website of the University of Manitoba library system, at https://mspace.lib.umanitoba.ca/. Articles or blogs that discuss portions of the research may appear in other publications or online. Research is also expected to result in a book and publications in academic journals.

Availability of Summary Research Results: A brief summary (1-3 pages) of research results will be provided to each interview participant by email, or, upon request, by regular mail. This summary will be provided by June 30, 2023.

Destruction of Confidential Data: Confidential data not destroyed earlier will be destroyed by December 31, 2028.

Your signature on this form indicates that you have understood to your satisfaction the information regarding participation in the research project and agree to participate as a subject. In no way does this waive your legal rights nor release the researchers, sponsors, or involved institutions from their

legal and professional responsibilities. You are free to withdraw from the study at any time, and /or refrain from answering any questions you prefer to omit, without prejudice or consequence. Your continued participation should be as informed as your initial consent, so you should feel free to ask for clarification or new information throughout your participation. The University of Manitoba may look at your research records to see that the research is being done in a safe and proper way. This research has been approved by the Research Ethics Board at the University of Manitoba, Fort Garry campus. If you have any concerns or complaints about this project you may contact any of the above-named persons or the Human Ethics Officer at (001) 204-474-7122 or HumanEthics@umanitoba.ca. A copy of this consent form has been given to you to keep for your records and reference.

Participant's Signature: _____ Date: _____

Participant's Preferred Pronouns : _____

Principal Investigator Signature: _____ Date: _____

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