The Transformation of Tibetan Identity

Mang Jia
Linfield College

Follow this and additional works at: https://digitalcommons.linfield.edu/soanstud_theses
Part of the Race and Ethnicity Commons, Regional Sociology Commons, and the Social and Cultural Anthropology Commons

Recommended Citation
https://digitalcommons.linfield.edu/soanstud_theses/11

This Thesis (Open Access) is brought to you for free via open access, courtesy of DigitalCommons@Linfield. For more information, please contact digitalcommons@linfield.edu.
THE TRANSFORMATION OF TIBETAN IDENTITY

A THESIS OF THE DEPARTMENT OF SOCIOLOGY IN CANDIDACY FOR GRADUATION
WITH HONORS

BY MANG JIA

SOCIOLOGY AND ANTHROPOLOGY DEPARTMENT
OF LINFIELD COLLEGE

MICNNINVILLE, OREGON

MAY 2015
THESIS COPYRIGHT PERMISSIONS

Please read this document carefully before signing. If you have questions about any of these permissions, please contact the DigitalCommons Coordinator.

Title of the Thesis:

The Transformation of Tibetan Identity

Author's Name: (Last name, first name)

Jia, Mang

Advisor's Name

Thomas Love

DigitalCommons@Linfield is our web-based, open access-compliant institutional repository for digital content produced by Linfield faculty, students, staff, and their collaborators. It is a permanent archive. By placing your thesis in DigitalCommons@Linfield, it will be discoverable via Google Scholar and other search engines. Materials that are located in DigitalCommons@Linfield are freely accessible to the world; however, your copyright protects against unauthorized use of the content. Although you have certain rights and privileges with your copyright, there are also responsibilities. Please review the following statements and identify that you have read them by signing below. Some departments may choose to protect the work of their students because of continuing research. In these cases, the project is still posted in the repository but content will only be accessible by individuals who are part of the Linfield community.

CHOOSE THE STATEMENT BELOW THAT DEFINES HOW YOU WANT TO SHARE YOUR THESIS. THE FIRST STATEMENT PROVIDES THE MOST ACCESS TO YOUR WORK; THE LAST STATEMENT PROVIDES THE LEAST ACCESS.

✓ I agree to make my thesis available to the Linfield College community and to the larger scholarly community upon its deposit in our permanent digital archive, DigitalCommons@Linfield, or its successor technology. My thesis will also be available in print at Nicholson Library and can be shared via interlibrary loan.

OR

I agree to make my thesis available only to the Linfield College community upon its deposit in our permanent digital archive, DigitalCommons@Linfield, or its successor technology. My thesis will also be available in print at Nicholson Library and can be shared via interlibrary loan.

OR

I agree to make my thesis available in print at Nicholson Library, including access for interlibrary loan.

OR

I agree to make my thesis available in print at Nicholson Library only.

Updated April 2, 2012
NOTICE OF ORIGINAL WORK AND USE OF COPYRIGHT-PROTECTED MATERIALS:

If your work includes images that are not original works by you, you must include permissions from original content provider or the images will not be included in the repository. If your work includes videos, music, data sets, or other accompanying material that is not original work by you, the same copyright stipulations apply. If your work includes interviews, you must include a statement that you have the permission from the interviewees to make their interviews public. For information about obtaining permissions and sample forms, see http://copyright.columbia.edu/copyright/permissions/.

NOTICE OF APPROVAL TO USE HUMAN SUBJECTS BY THE LINFIELD COLLEGE INSTITUTIONAL RESEARCH BOARD (IRB):

If your research includes human subjects, you must include a letter of approval from the Linfield IRB. For more information, see http://www.linfield.edu/irb/.

NOTICE OF SUBMITTED WORK AS POTENTIALLY CONSTITUTING AN EDUCATIONAL RECORD UNDER FERPA:

Under FERPA (20 U.S.C. § 1232g), this work may constitute an educational record. By signing below, you acknowledge this fact and expressly consent to the use of this work according to the terms of this agreement.

BY SIGNING THIS FORM, I ACKNOWLEDGE THAT ALL WORK CONTAINED IN THIS PAPER IS ORIGINAL WORK BY ME OR INCLUDES APPROPRIATE CITATIONS AND/OR PERMISSIONS WHEN CITING OR INCLUDING EXCERPTS OF WORK(S) BY OTHERS.

IF APPLICABLE, I HAVE INCLUDED AN APPROVAL LETTER FROM THE IRB TO USE HUMAN SUBJECTS.

Signature __ Signature redacted __ Date 5/19/2015

Printed Name Mang Jia

Approved by Faculty Advisor __ Signature redacted __ Date 27 May 2015

Updated April 2, 2012
## CONTENTS

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Section</th>
<th>Page</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>INTRODUCTION</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>LITERATURE REVIEW</td>
<td>5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>THEORY</td>
<td>9</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>METHODS</td>
<td>17</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Sample</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Interview with a Simi-structured Questionnaires</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Field Observations</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>RESULTS</td>
<td>19</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>THE POLITICIZATION OF TIBETAN IDENTITY</td>
<td>19</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>THE RECOGNITION OF SECULARIZATION</td>
<td>30</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>RELATIONSHIP OF SECULARIZATION</td>
<td>34</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>WITH RATIONALISM AND MODERNIZATION</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>SECULARIZATION AND SCHOOL EDUCATION</td>
<td>45</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>CONCLUSION</td>
<td>50</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>REFERENCE</td>
<td>57</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>INTERVIEW QUESTIONS</td>
<td>61</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
The Transformation of Tibetan Identity

I. Introduction

Before the Chinese Communist’s invasion of Tibet with military force in 1951, most of the Tibetan peoples often defined their own identities in terms of religious beliefs, ties to traditional culture, and geographic locations. For instance, they introduced themselves by expressing which monasteries they belonged to and which religious sects and spiritual Lamas that they followed. Therefore, their goals of worldly life and essence of both group and individual identities were deeply submerged in the religious culture. After the Chinese invasion, Tibetan identity shifted mainly into a certain degree of secularization, making it different from their traditional religious identity as consequence of the political shift. The focus of my research is to understand the wider forces that led Tibetans to secularize and politicize their national identity – which is an aspect missed by most Tibetologists, who continue to overemphasize the traditional, religious foundation of Tibetan identity. By secularization, I am specifically referring to the non-religious disposition and politicization of Tibetan identity, which emphasizes the importance of socioeconomic, secular cultural, and political promotion of Tibet above religious or spiritual promotion.

First of all, it is important to give basic evidence for my belief of the existence of secularization among Tibetans and its significant increase since 1951 under Tibet’s political shift. I will give three examples to argue that secularization of Tibetan identity is not only real, but it is
also increasing. First, Chairman Mao Zedong’s Cultural Revolution (1966-1976) propagandized this revolution as one initiated by the oppressed people for class equality and elimination of the oppression of he called “dark feudal society”. Thus, his communist ideology gained a notable following among many Tibetans. Yet those followers of Mao who were destroying traditional Tibetan culture (religion, rituals and traditional customs) never hesitated to say that they were Tibetans. This implies that for them, to be Tibetan was not necessarily to identify with Tibetan traditional culture - mainly represented by Tibetan Buddhism. They gave a different definition for Tibetan identity, centered in terms of political and secular values. For instance, there were many Tibetans like Phawang Puntschog who defined themselves as Tibetan Communists instead of identifying with religion.

Second, as result of the Tibetan Central Government’s exile to India under the leadership of the Dalai Lama in 1959, Tibetans’ religiously anchored cultural identity gradually became the means for certain political ends; this identity was no longer something that could have an end in religious purpose itself. For instance, on September 21, 1987, the Dalai Lama addressed his Sino-Tibetan resolution proposal called “Five-points Peace Plan” to the US Congressional Human Rights Caucus, and China immediately denounced Dalai Lama’s proposal by claiming “the status of Tibet was a question which simply does not exist” (Smith, 1996: 602). After China’s denial and denouncement of the Dalai Lama, monks from the two major monasteries-Drepung and Sera- near Lhasa city staged political demonstrations in Lhasa Barkhor Street on September 27, and October 1, 1987 with slogan of support for the Dalai Lama and
independence for Tibet. In March 2008, before China’s Olympic Games, Tibetan people from all over the Tibetan areas demonstrated with slogans of freedom and human rights for Tibet, a political uprising led by monks at first in Lhasa and later joined by lay people. In 2009 a monk from Kirti monastery in Ngaba County in Amdo set himself on fire to protest China’s policies over Tibet, and his action led to the ongoing Tibetan Self-immolation protest movement that has since caused about 139 Tibetan self-immolations. Among the self-immolators, more than 60 were monks, nuns and former monks. The goals of the monks and nuns who are actively involved in the political movements are no longer purely or even primarily for religious promotion but rather for political end. This increasing politicization is promoting a politically-over a religiously-oriented Tibetan identity. This is different from the traditional politicization in Tibet, which is ultimately religious. For instance, Tibetans would have rather worked with the Chinese than the British during the early 1930s. A reason is that first and foremost, China is a Buddhist country. Second, during the early Chinese republican period, both the government and the common people showed great support for Tibetan Buddhism such as “the Panchen held Kalacakra tantric rituals with well over ten thousand Chinese in attendance each time” (Tuttle, 2005:11) in 1931 and 1934 in order to encourage Tibetans to be part of China. As every Tibetologist, who has a basic knowledge about Tibetan history, knows that after the last king Lung Darma was assassinated, Tibet was ruled by religious leaders and their politics were always religious sectarianism, which aims on promoting their religious sect above others. Therefore, those early politicizations of Tibetan religion were still intrinsically religious rather
than political. However, the contemporary politicization of religion is fundamentally focused on its political goal, which after 1959 quickly became centered on the nation’s political freedom.

Since the late 1980s, an increasing number of young intellectuals such as Dondrup Gyal, inspired by the May Fourth Movement in China, began to criticize Tibetans’ traditional culture. They criticized its lack of ability for innovation, claiming Tibetans needed innovation to prosper under the rapidly changing conditions of modern Tibet. Under the inspiration of Gyal, in 1999, Shockdong (2001:25-41) wrote an article “To Sir up Cultural Predisposition from Its Depth” and published in the Blue-Lake Tibetan Newspaper. It calls for a battle on one’s own traditional cultural internalization that is structured based on religious superstition, renunciation of the worldly values, blind faith and suppression of rational thinking. In 2001, he first published his most famous and influential book A Conscientious Crying From Afar. In the book, he argued that Tibet began to fall from its sovereign kingdom after Buddhism flourished in Tibet, because Buddhism destroyed Tibetans’ secular and political consciousness by forcing Tibetans to denounce “the world” and “self”. By the beginning of the 21st century, a new and bigger group of intellectuals became critical of Buddhist culture and its worldview while advocating an autonomous spirit of secularism and political identity for Tibetans. Therefore, secularism is mainly criticizing Buddhism or traditional religious culture for its repression of Tibetans’ political and secular consciousness. The only difference between secularization and secularism is that former one focused on socioeconomic and political promotion without necessarily criticizing religion, while secularism mainly focused on critiquing religiously oriented traditional culture in
order to promote political and secular consciousness. Therefore, keeping in mind this clarification, secularism is a part of secularization but secularization does not necessarily imply secularism.

These three examples indicate that the increase of secularization among Tibetan people is really happening and suggest that a more secular, political identity may be replacing religious identity. With this understanding about the new shift of Tibetan identity, my research examines how secularization is actually playing out on the ground in the lives of ordinary Tibetans reveals unexpected relationships between political and religious identities in the context of this secularization trend.

II. Literature review

Ashild Kolas and Monika Thowsen (2005) interpreted the modern secularism of Tibetan intellectuals as a form of resistance to the traditional culture, asserting that “secularists’ efforts to reshape Tibetan identity may gain them the support of [Chinese] authorities, who wish to promote a modern secular and preferably socialist Tibetanness” (p. 177). Other scholars agree that the reason for the emergence of cultural secularism among Tibetans is because they became rather disillusioned with the possibility of using Buddhism to strengthen Tibetan’s social and political power in the modern era, but they do not agree with Kolas and Monika’s assertion that Chinese authority would support those secularists (Shyaka 2002, Pema Bhum 2008, and Hartley 2008). Rather, they believed that the actions of the Tibetan secularists were aimed to strengthen Tibetans’ political consciousness and their ability to self-govern. Furthermore, I will assume that
the secularism of modern Tibetan intellectuals is also a form of resistance towards Chinese colonization in Tibet, because Tibetan intellectual secularists are also advocating the resurgence of Tibetans’ ancient secularized political consciousness, which Tibetans lost after Buddhism became dominant in Tibet. This kind of political awareness is something that the Chinese authority attempted to prohibit rather than support.

Warren Smith (1996) viewed that the resurgence of traditional culture during the 1980s symbolized not only one’s faith adherence to their own religious culture, but more importantly it also symbolized one’s loyalty to Tibetan national identity. Hence, he said that those non-Buddhist Tibetan nationalists also participated in the monastic cultural activities for the sake of symbolizing their national identity from Chinese rather than actually identifying themselves with religious faith. Especially, despite the fact that the self-immolation protests were led mainly by monks, the protests are considered to be political movements against the Chinese government rather than as a mere action of religion (Tsering Shakya & Charlene Makley. April, 8, 2012). As anthropologist and Tibetologist Shakya (April, 2012) stated, “self-immolation as a form of public protest, new to Tibet, demonstrates that many Tibetans have embraced the narrative of ‘self-sacrifice’ and have come to see it in the context of the resurgence of Tibetan nationalism.”

On the other hand, some scholars believe that the emerging secularization of Tibetan identity was the result of the Chinese Communist Party’s policy over Tibet. They saw it manifested through cultural assimilation programs such as the Patriotic education programs in schools and monasteries, the Han immigration in Tibet, as well as China’s policy on limiting the Tibetan
language usage in public services and educational fields (Smith, 2010; Wang Lixiong 2008).

These scholars claimed that by the end of the Cultural Revolution, most of the Tibetan religious institutions had been destroyed and both public and private religious practices had been strictly prohibited (Powers 1995:175, 179–182; Goldstein 1998:9–10; Smith 1996). More liberal policies brought about the resurgence of Tibetan culture and religion after Deng Xiaoping’s new policy called “Reform and Openness”, and Tibetans began to practice religion again and rebuild the destroyed monasteries and temples. For instance, Kolas and Thowsen’s research in Amdo Tibetan areas concluded that the CCP’s policy aimed to limit the influence of monasteries and numbers of Tulkus (reincarnated lamas) through requiring them to have governmental approval and political education. Nevertheless, eighty-two percent of the monasteries (1550 of 1886) that were destroyed during Cultural Revolution were rebuilt by the 1990s (this database is collected from four provinces; Sichuan, Qinhai, Gansu, and Yunnan.). However, many of these scholars still believe that secularization was an inevitable product of modernization (Goldstein and Kapstein 1998. Harkonen 2009:48).

Scholars like Mitra Härkönen believe that the secularization of Tibetan identity is compulsory based on her ethnographic research in the Kham and Amdo areas:

The ‘modernizing’ efforts taken by China in Tibet have meant drastic changes in the Tibetan societal structure, which was previously founded on religious institutions. Secular officials have removed religious rulers from power; monasteries have become politically and economically insignificant institutions; and the religious training given by monasteries has been largely replaced by the modern Chinese Education. (Harkonen 2009:48)
On the contrary, scholars like anthropologist Vincanne Adams (2000) believe that the secularization trend in Tibetan identity is voluntary. He noticed that in Lhasa, the capital city of Tibet, Tibetans are becoming more interested in social mobility and economic security than in their religion. Adams claims that the younger generation of Tibetans has become “less attached to the lamas and other religious figures” and more appreciative of a new education system that supports the learning of Mandarin Chinese and values compatible with the Chinese Communist Party (CCP) ideals.

However, there are few studies that primarily focus on the secularization of Tibetan identity, and even those studies that I used in the literature review above treat the Tibetans’ secularization as a secondary part of their arguments. In those secondary arguments, these studies emphasize that secularization is either a compulsory product imposed by the reinforcement of modernization by the Chinese authority or is a voluntary project of a mostly younger generation of Tibetans internalizing a foreign ideology. Almost all scholars of Tibetan studies treat the secularization of Tibetan identity as a form of cultural assimilation or deterioration of Tibetan identity. Regarding those studies, my research focuses directly on whether secularization is best understood as compulsory or voluntary, or as some sort of deterioration. I find that secularization in Tibet is best understood as none of these “black or white” arguments, but rather as something else altogether as people work out what Tibetans need to do in order to confront challenges that they are facing as a group under the contemporary social and political conditions.

III. Theory/ hypothesis
Sociological functionalist Durkheim (1912) believes that religion is a representation of a collective sentiment based on the idea of society, and he said, “moral and legal rules have been indistinguishable from ritual prescription” in a group of people “until a relatively advanced moment of evolution.” So based on Durkheim’s theory, the transformation of a group’s identity from a religiously framed collective sentiment into a politically or secularly reframed collective consciousness is an evolutionary process that is fostered by the changes of social conditions of the collective group. Furthermore, Durkheim confidently claimed that “it is seen that whatever has been done in the name of religion cannot have been done in vain: for it is necessarily the society that did it, and it is humanity that has reaped the fruits”. This inspires me to raise my theoretical questions about whether there will be a certain inevitability of secularization of identity for Tibetan society.

On the other hand, Marx believes that religion is the opiate of the masses (Fox, 2013:19) because religion is merely a mean of bourgeois’ exploitation and oppression by using religious ideology to distract people and enslave their consciousness in order to gain social control. For example, under the feudal economic system, Marx claimed that the transition to modern capitalism emerged in the collapse of the “religious props of bourgeois political control,” (Turner, 1991:40-42,192) “which required the development of new secular ideologies to fulfill the same function” (Fox, 2013: 19). Therefore, Marx claimed that secularization is a necessary product of modern capitalism in order to fulfill the function of social exploitation and control for the greatest good of the bourgeoisie. Marx’s insight gives me a telescope to see whether
secularization of Tibetan identity is fostered by the influence of modernization in general or if it is manipulated by the Chinese government in order to diminish Tibetan cultural identity, as many scholars claim. In other words, is secularization something that is favored and practiced by Tibetans deliberately, an ideological effort by the state, or is it a natural, inevitable development under modernization?

Political scientists Wilson (1982) and Lambert (1999) talk about the influence of urbanization, opportunity of education, and mass participation in politics. They think that since urbanization makes more people from different places come to one city, they have less chance to know each other and are thus able to avoid social norms. Since the opportunities of education are becoming more accessible, more people are able to make sense of religion by themselves rather than relying on religious elites or clergies, and they are becoming better able to access and communicate alternative perspectives. Lambert (1999), specifically, thinks that modern mass participation in politics is different from the past, so politics is no longer the mere domain of elites, but also mass people’s domain under the ideology of modern democracy. This requires me to think about the dynamics of social structure over time, such as the change in size and population of a society as well as the changes of lifestyle and opportunities. The influence of rationalism is considered as crucial by social scientists Steve Bruce (2009) and Anthony Gill (2008:34-37), because it encouraged humans’ capacity for creating and revealing knowledge without the guide of divinity of religion. With this theoretical guideline, it is important to examine the impact of rationalism on the development of secularization.
Modernization theorists Norris and Inglehart studied economic influence on secularization by measuring “GDP per capita, literacy rate, and life expectancy” (Kuru, 2009: 15). They concluded that the increase of socioeconomic welfare ensures the “existential security” of social members who thereby tend to become less reliant on religious support (Norris and Inglehart 2004). This makes me consider the relationship between ordinary Tibetan peoples and monasteries now as compared to the past. I would not assume that they are no longer relying on monasteries, but I do suspect that the level of reliance is decreasing compared to the past.

When I was an elementary student, no one had a cellphone or television in my village and there were very few motorcycles. But nowadays, most of the people have cellphones and televisions, even cars are not rare. It is key to see how these new technologies impact the process of secularization. Many scholars believe that social mobility and scientific technologies including transportation and mass communication increased mobility of people and values, thus “undermining the ability of one religion to remain [dominant]” (Fox, 2013:20-21. Bruce, 2009); knowledge about the truth becomes relative rather than universal through the social interactions between diverse cultural values (Almod, 2003:94). In addition, secular institutions gradually replace religious institutions in the public sphere for dealing with social affairs (Chaves, 1994); in order to give equal freedom to all different traditions, all religious power in the political sphere would be diminished in a plural society regulated by the secular state (Fox, 2013:101). Once multiple people with different beliefs, such as immigrants, come to the society, religion would lose its effectiveness gradually because religion is only effective to those who believe in it
Political scientist Ahmet T. Kuru (2009) distinguished passive from assertive secularism. Passive secularism means the state or people in general hold a neutral view on religious roles, particularly against religious influence on political decisions, while it allows a certain visibility of religion in the public sphere. On the other hand, assertive secularism means more restriction on religion and disallowing religious visibility in any public sphere. Secularism takes two forms because those secular countries that had a religiously focused monarchic “ancient regime” in their history are more likely to be assertive secularists as a result of historical conflict between religion (monarchy) and secularists (republic regime). On the contrary, those countries that lacked a religious monarchic ancient regime are more likely to be passive secularists as result of less hostility between religion and non-religious people. He made this conclusion by comparing the United States to France and Turkey:

In countries where there is no ancient regime, the anticlerical movement does not exist or is marginal. The existence or absence of an ancient regime has four components as seen in the preceding cases: (1) monarchy, (2) hegemonic religion, (3) an alliance between the two, and (4) a successful republican movement (Kuru, 2009: 25).

Thus, it is important to not neglect the relationship between the fact that Tibet was an ancient monarchic regime, heavily influenced by religion, and the ongoing emergence of secularism. There may have been a correlation between the two facts, but this still does not explain the politicization of religion for the purpose of preserving national identity above religious identity.

Sociologist Stuart Hall (1996) makes similar points in emphasizing the transition of cultural
identity by focusing on the influence of globalization on national identity. He argues that national identities are being eroded as a result of the growth of cultural homogenization due to globalization. At the same time, he claims that resistance to globalization also strengthens other “local” or particularistic identities. One of the very important factors for influencing one’s cultural or national identity are the “new identities of hybridity that are taking place” as a result of intermarriage. Therefore, it will be useful to apply Hall’s theory to understand whether the transformation of Tibetan identity is form of resistance to globalization in order to strengthen local identity and whether it is influenced by the new hybrid generation. This theoretical hypothesis is specifically important to look at since there is more and more Han Chinese population immigrating annually into Tibet with the Han immigration priori policy. It is important to see whether Chinese immigration and population mobilization causes a hybrid generation that erodes Tibetan identity or if it strengthens their ethnic identity by seeing them as other.

On the other hand, Samuel Phillips Huntington argues that globalization or intercultural experience made people aware of their differences, thus intensifying their group and cultural identities. As he claims:

The world is becoming a smaller place. The interactions between peoples of different civilizations are increasing; these increasing interactions intensify civilization consciousness and awareness of differences between civilizations and commonalities within civilizations (Huntington, 1993; 25)

I agree that the globalization and intercultural experience did make them aware of the cultural differences but I would argue that this difference would not be able to cause the group’s
collective solidarity until they perceive this difference in terms of political identity by emphasizing certain types of political crises that affect them as collective group.

For instance, as George De Vos (1975) argues, when an ethnic group’s social status and circumstance are being threatened by another’s domination, “religious adherence…may also become a symbol of resistance…, thereby reducing religious affiliation to simply a means of asserting ethnic identity” (13). This observation gives us insight into the Tibetan case, where even those religious activities and symbols might imply certain political meanings for the group.

However, Huntington argues that “the process of economic modernization and social change throughout the world are separating people from longstanding local identities. They weaken the nation state as source of identity. In much of the world religion has moved in to fill this gap” (Huntington, 1993: 26). His claim is that modernization decreased national identity as result of population mobility, thus religion or culture provided the basis of one’s group identity in order to have a sense of belonging. This contradicts my hypothesis, that more and more young intellectuals are becoming secularist; they are all united under the political identity regardless of their cultural identities.

In addition, many other sociologists such as Peter Berger (1996/1997) also challenged those secularization theories by arguing, “Religion is a dynamic social force that is capable of evolving. Under the pressure of modernity… religion evolved and transformed in order to revitalize itself and remain socially and politically relevant” (Fox, 2013: 21). For instance, Haynes claimed that secular modernity has failed to produce social prosperity and justice, thus governments were
perceived as corrupted and unreliable, while “this crisis of legitimacy has created a power vacuum that religion is filling. It is perceived as legitimate, uncorrupted, and indigenous” (Fox, 2013: 23). Even sociologists such as Berger and Barry Rubin never believed that religion’s force had ever vanished from the minds of the mass of people. They claimed that secularization was only accepted as an elite-based process that was never fully recognized by the masses (Berger, 1996/1997; Rubin, 1994, 20-30). I agree with those theories that religion is most often politically relevant to society, but it is important to know that the traditional form of politicization of religion in Tibet is fundamentally religious rather than political.

Political science theorist Jonathan Fox concluded three reasons for ongoing religious identity in politics. His first explanation is primordialism, which refers that “religious identity is relevant (to politics) today because it was relevant yesterday” even though no one knows when it became relevant to politics and why. Second is instrumentalism, which refers to the religious identity becoming relevant in politics more recently due to the seeking “an untapped resource that can provide an effective path to power and influence.” Third is constructivism and it refers to religious identity as a key means to create a new national or ethnical identity (Fox, 2013:38-39). These are very important perspectives, because they raise the question of whether the politicization of religion in Tibet is an evolutionary process of religion rather than a new form of secularization or it is a transition from religion to secularism in its fundamental cultural identity. However, the idea of primordialism was originally used to explain that “identity is based on race or on an essential culture or religion that reaches deep into the far recesses of
history or even prehistory. Identity is thus replete with affective meaning, bound up in blood, martyrdom, soil, and perhaps an emotionalized sense of language” (Lewellen, 2003: 163).

However, my hypothesis is that Tibetan transformation of identity is moving towards secularization rather than religionization, through developing a political nationalism rather than religious martyrdom. In addition, the language-orthography is becoming a secular and political symbol in Tibet rather than a religious symbol.

The instrumentalism is also used by Abner Cohen (1969a) to explain the “retribalization” of the Hausa quarter of Sabo in the city of Ibadan. Cohen argues that the ethnic identity of Hausa is emerged and intensified through emphasizing the development of a Moslem religious brotherhood called *Tijaniyya* for the mere purpose of maintaining privileged economic and political niches. Hence, neither ethnic identity nor religion is the fundamental purpose of a group, but rather they are the instruments of a group to maintain or manipulate either their individual or collective socioeconomic and political privilege. Because of this reason, Edwin Wilmsen (1996: 3) claimed that “the essence of ethnic existence” is their common fate in “the differential access to means of production and rights to shares in production returns” compare to the dominant group. So it is important to see whether secularization in Tibet is taking place as a result of religious instrumentalism intended for strengthening the socio-economic and political interests of Tibetans.

Through these theoretical reviews, I will take my thesis a further step: while the secularization of Tibetan identity is not only fostered by the influence of modernization in general and
manipulated by the Chinese government in order to control Tibetans, it is more about something that is practiced by younger generations of Tibet under the influence of modern secularism and the collective sense of common political threat in order to confront or accommodate the social and political challenges that they are facing as an occupied people.

IV. Method

My research field is a village called Gar Sar Ma, which is located at the border between Nyaba County and Kyung Mchu County (Chi, Hong Yuan) in Aba Tibetan and Qiang Autonomous Prefecture. I chose this village for my research field, because the Gar Sar Ma village has a very long history; it experienced the Cultural Revolution (1966-1976) entirely, and it is now facing contemporary social changes. It is a village consisting of about two thousand families, and while traditionally they had more monks than students, now they have more students than monks. There are more and more educated younger generations who have become secular or even anti-traditional. Yet importantly, the village still has many old people who experienced the whole process of historical changes. Since I was born there, this provides me with more connections to find participants. Moreover, as an ethnographer, it is extremely important to establish rapport, which I already have through strong ties with the village members.

After my IRB and Consent Form were approved, I interviewed using a semi-structured questionnaire and field observation methods. For the first, I encouraged all male village members aged between 18 - 65 to voluntarily participate in my research; all of the ones not of that age
range were excluded. I read the Consent Form to all of them to ensure their rights before anyone decided their participation, and I read it again to each individual who decided to participate in the research before conducting the individual interview with them. Then, all the participating students wrote their names on a piece of paper to be put in a bucket, and I randomly picked 10 pieces of paper among them without knowing who they were. Similarly, I selected 10 monk-participants randomly from the total population of monk-participants available in the village and the same procedure held for lay people. After I randomly selected 30 Tibetan participants as samples, I asked them to identify their Tibetan identity with my semi-structured questions. All my interviewees were Tibetan and their traditional religion was Buddhism, and all interviews were conducted in Tibetan.

In addition, I also used field observation. First, I participated in the village meeting on discussing about building a Tara Deity temple. So I gathered information through participating in the meeting. Second, my parents opened a store in the village and as Tibetan custom many shoppers often come to hang out for a while, since they all know each other very well. During that, the village’s lay people often have had conversations and they even had debates over some issues, especially, they express some of the ideas that they would not share on the public meetings. Such as the discontentment about monks’ decision about foresting during the cold January for building the Tara deity temple were only expressed during such private or within-friends conversations. Third, I also experienced some very interesting things by chance. For instance, the old grandma who I encountered sick on the street that I sent to the hospital was
totally by accident, something obviously unplanned for my field research.

I did most of my interviews at interviewees’ houses in the village, but monk-interviews were mostly held in their individual homes at Cha Li monastery. After I transcripted those interview records and began to analyze, I realized some additional clarifications and questions were needed, thus I created an app chat group by using Wechat in order to access them continually. Wechat is an app communication technology, which is very popular among Chinese and Tibetans; it is like Facebook where you can leave both verbal and written messages as well as you can have voice and video call. Each individual interview had different time lengths based on each interview’s unique character, but most were longer than fifty minutes and less than two hours. Finally, all the names that I use in the paper are pseudonyms and all the direct quotes are my translations from Tibetan language.

V. The Politicization of Tibetan Identity.

I began to interview ten representatives from each group: ten students, ten monks and ten lay people. I began to ask them about what “Tibetan identity” means for them and what makes their “Tibetan identity” different from other ethnic groups. While I interviewed each person separately, the most common answer I received from them is that they all claimed that the qualities of love and compassion are the most fundamental character of Tibetan people that makes them so different from others.

One of my monk interviewees, Pame, said to me, “Tibet is the land recognized as the domain of the Buddha called Bodhisattva Avalokiteshvara [Buddha of great compassion], thus the
people of Tibet have always been very compassionate and loving.” Guru is a lay person and is in his thirties, he told me very passionately when I asked him whether it is necessary for Tibetans to be Buddhist in order to possess Tibetans’ distinctive character. Guru said, “of course, Tibetans must have religious faith, because we are the possessors of compassion and loving-kindness and it is our religion that made us to possess them.” Even those students who consider themselves as pro-secularism also claimed that the “compassion and loving-kindness” is one of the most important characteristics of Tibetan identity. Shen Da, a student who graduated from Northwest Ethnic University last year in 2014 stated:

The inner sense of compassion and loving kindness of each individual Tibetan and their common traditional culture would characterize Tibetan identity. But this does not mean that I am religious, although I may say that I have religious faith in Buddhism, but mine is very different from theirs in terms of understanding and practicing the faith.

Why do Tibetans tend to think that compassion and loving kindness are their unique character as a group? Firstly, the most common answer they gave to me is an ancient myth about Tibetan origin, which is shared by most of old Tibetan texts. The myth tells that the first generation of Tibetan ancestors was the offspring of a marriage between a monkey and a rakshasis or ‘ogress.’ Originally, the monkey was sent by Avalokiteshvara (Ti:Chen ri zu), the Mother Buddha, for the religious cultivation on the Tibetan plateau. Thus the monkey was meditating in a mountain cave at areas of Tsetang Gongporu Mountain in Tibet. One day, a rakshasis came to the monkey and asked to marry him. At first the monkey refused without hesitation, while the ogress proceeds to say, “If you don't marry me, I will become the wife of a devil and give birth to countless sons.
and grandsons. At that time, the plateau will be plunged into a world filled with devils and thousands of people will be killed. So please do as I told you” (chinatourguide.com). Under this pressure, the monkey asked Avalokiteshvara (Buddha), he answered monkey that the marriage was destined and a good deed for the sake of wellbeing for all sentient beings. So with the permission of Avalokiteshvara, they married and had five offspring who are believed to be the ancestors of the Tibetan people. The story was popular among Tibetan people and was recorded in the ancient scriptures. You can also find the clues of the story in many wall paintings. Even Tsetang Town of Shannan Region in Tibet was named after the story (Tsetang means in Tibetan language the play place for monkeys). This is the painting about this story and it is painted on almost all the temple walls in Tibet.

(Tsetang Gongporu)
This story of origin has two functions; lay peoples and monks often take this as fact, thus believing that Tibetans are by nature compassionate and loving. Those students and others who are critical to religion and those who may have seen the story as superstitious are also attempting to believe that Tibetans are more compassionate and kind, but by nurture. Especially, this feeling became stronger after China invaded Tibet because more Chinese immigrants come to Tibet and they often carelessly killed wild animals and fish for unnecessary causes. Since the tension between Chinese and Tibetans increased and Tibetans were humiliated as “backward” by the Chinese, Tibetans’ self-description about their compassion and loving-kindness eventually became a symbol and a means of resistance by showing their higher quality of humanization, in order to uglify Chinese moral character.

In Tibet, people often use the Chinese as symbol of cruelty and heartlessness. When Tibetans scold their children who did harm to small animals or those people who show no respect for religion, they question them “are you a Chinese?” Certainly, the question is not about whether Chinese are heartless and anti-religionist or not, in reality. Rather, my point is that this kind of mythological story serves as foundation of collective identity for Tibetans (although not all believe it as fact). It serves as a symbol of resistance (De Vos 1975: 13) or instrument that strengthens their ethnic identity (Fox 2013:37). In other words, it is a way of distinguishing themselves from Chinese and resisting the challenges of racial discrimination and humiliation of their ethnic dignity that is caused by Chinese’s dominance, both directly and indirectly, based on their economic and political status. Therefore, the sense of signifying the compassion and
loving-kindness as Tibetan’s unique character is more intensified by their political struggle. In other words, this religious myth of Tibetan origin is more politicized, and this myth serves as an ideological condition for resisting Chinese superiority and domination in Tibet. Tibetan secularization is a form of politicization that focuses on secular values in order to confront their political challenges, so the religious description of their identity as loving-kindness winds up having more powerful political symbolism than religious meaning. Therefore, I see this as a sign of secularization that is fundamentally perpetuated by the group’s political reaction in the contemporary political situation.

The second most common response to the question “what is the most important character or symbol of Tibetan identity as a collective group” was spoken and written language. Six out of ten students claimed that the spoken and written language are the most important representation of Tibetan identity, four out of ten monk-interviewees and four out of ten lay people-interviewees made similar statements. But interestingly, all of those who claimed that “spoken and written language” were the most important symbol of their ethnic identity were young people under age 40.

This is a very interesting shift in cultural identity among younger generations. Until the late 1970s, Tibetan orthography was rarely seen as a symbol of Tibetan identity by ordinary people because it was seen as important only in official or monastery domains, rather than a collective symbol. After the Cultural Revolution (1966-1976) in China, Chairman Deng Xiaoping initiated a new policy called “Openness and Economic Reform” in 1978. This policy allowed a
resurgence of traditional culture, thus Tibetans began to rebuild their monasteries and re-learn
writing characters. Furthermore, more schools have been established and a bilingual education
policy (Chinese language and ethnic minority language) has been implemented since late 1980s.
Therefore, more and more Tibetan students became educated in their own vernacular scripts and
secular literatures began to be published. Since intellectuals have more access to knowledge,
they began to realize the importance of one’s own spoken and written language for not only
learning religious doctrines but for inventing new cultures and developing Tibetan society as a
whole. Along with the increase of Chinese political and cultural influence on Tibetans, the sense
of threat of cultural assimilation and identity deterioration became stronger among Tibetan
intellectuals since late 1980s. Thus, they began to write about the dangers that Tibetans have
been facing, both implicitly and explicitly through poetry, song lyrics and critical literatures. The
irony is, then, that the more culturally and intellectually active Tibetans have become, the more
restrictive the Chinese government has become in regard to the expression of Tibetan identity
and religion. The restriction on the use of the Tibetan language in formal academic institutions as
well as in other social services such as hospitals, banks, post offices, and mobile phone services
became more evident. The Tibetan people think that they have been forced to abandon their
cultural and linguistic identity through cultural assimilation policies and policies rendering them
as minorities in their own lands.

This emotional feeling is revealed everywhere in Tibet. For instance, during a self-immolation
in 2012, Ngawang Norphel committed self-immolation with the call for protection of Tibetan
language in a videotape on June 20th in 2012 in Tridu. He said in his video, “My people have no freedom of language. Everybody is mixing Tibetan and Chinese. Be that as it may, take my wealth. I don’t need them. What has happened to my Land of Snow? [This is] for the sake of Tibet.....every nationality needs freedom, language and tradition. Without language, what would be our nationality? Should we then call ourselves Chinese or Tibetan?” (Storm in the Grasslands 17).

After his self-immolation, there were many old illiterate people who began to learn Tibetan writing characters. Similarly, Daku, one of my student-interviewees told me that each winter vacation after students returned to home from schools, those college students gathered local illiterate adults to teach them how to write and read Tibetan. He said that last year they had more than seventy adults joined their program “Overcome the Illiterate Life” in Gar Sar Ma village, which is my research field. I was informed that one of their participants in the program is even over 60. Those old grandparents were used to chanting mantras and attending religious ceremonies, but no one even could imagine that they would began to study their written language nowadays. What it shows is not that they want to be able to read books but rather that they are trying to show their loyalty to their own culture and people. Learning the Tibetan language has secular and political meaning, a sense of protection and resistance; protection of one’s own ethnic identity and culture from cultural assimilation, and resistance to the Chinese cultural and political domination in Tibet. Especially, the language became a symbol of Tibetan identity as a “means to create a new national or ethnic identity” of Tibetans that is based on secular and
political purpose (Fox, 2013:38-39). This politically and secularly based new construction of Tibetan identity has some significant political dimensions. Firstly, since secularists not only criticize the Chinese colonization in Tibet but also criticize the traditional culture of Tibet as overly submerged in religion, they have to use a non-religious material as a symbol of their Tibetan identity. Therefore, secularists use language and orthography as their main secular symbol of Tibetan identity. Secondly, since both monks and secular intellectuals are becoming educated and believe different cultural views, the most uncontroversial commonality they both agreed upon in terms of the symbol of Tibetan identity is their language and orthography. Finally, since the Chinese suppression of the Tibetan language impacts both religious and secular cultural promotion, freedom of language usage and protection of language became their common ground for political struggle. Therefore, both religious and secular intellectuals advocate the significance of one’s own language for developing ones’ ethnic group socially, culturally and politically. Consequently, during last ten years, to speak Tibetan without using any Chinese vocabulary for substitution became a symbol of nationalism or loyalty to one’s own group. For instance, Zhashi is a high school student, and he said:

Among peers or even among Tibetan teachers, we made our group rule to not use any Chinese vocabulary for substitution. Once we agreed to participate in the game, we will be imposed fines on every time we unconsciously used Chinese vocabulary for substitution. At the beginning, we got a lot of fines to pay, but eventually we got better.

Since the beginning of the century, many religious and secular intellectuals both individually and cooperatively worked on inventing new Tibetan vocabularies for new creations. Many books on
new daily vocabularies have been published, and each time I went back home to Tibet I have
amazingly witnessed that even illiterate lay people have been trying so hard to learn those new
vocabularies in order to avoid using Chinese words for substitution to show their ethnic dignity
and nationalism during the last four or five years. Therefore, language is more and more
becoming a symbol of political nationalism and resistance in order to prevent cultural
submersion and construct their own group political identity.

Furthermore, the 2008 Tibetan uprising and 2009 self-immolation protests further pushed
Tibetan identity beyond the cultural to political. During my field research, I noticed the
increasing notion of nationalism and that there are many Mani Mantra teams or basketball sports
teams of young lay people who gathered together and took vows to never fight any other
Tibetans. My own acquaintance Sang Ko is one of them.

However, this kind of political resistance and nationalism is less strong among older than
younger generations. For example, the sixty-five year old lay person, Chobi said;

Things have changed for the better compared to the 1950s and the Cultural
Revolution period (1966-1976). During that revolutionary time, we were poor
and religious practice was prohibited. It would be accused as capitalist if a family
had a hand watch and sewing machine and bicycle at the same time. But
nowadays it is rare that a family cannot afford a motorcycle. Even having car is
not enough, you must have good brand of car. Living conditions are improved
and policies are better compared to the revolutionary era during 1950s to 1970s.

Again, sixty-year-old interviewee, Kani Tulke, who is a highly respected reincarnated Lama,
expressed similar thoughts.
But this kind of satisfaction rarely could be found among younger generations, and
discontentment towards Chinese domination is highly significant among students and monks.
Firstly, it is because those older generations experienced worse situations during the
establishment of Commune production of society and the Cultural Revolution from 1950s to the
late 1970s under the Mao’s Communist regime. Therefore, they feel more contentment and less
suppression compared to the past. Younger generations have no such past experiences to
compare with nowadays, thus the younger generations can only use current Chinese rule in Tibet
compared to the Chinese regime’s rule on the Han Chinese or to their own more romanticized
idea of western democracy. These made younger generations more politically discontent with the
Chinese regime.

Secondly, it is because most of the suppressive policies of the Chinese government often
condemn the monks and intellectuals in Tibet. Monks often feel that their religious activity is
overwhelmingly restricted and regulated by authority. For instance, after the 1989 monks
uprising in the Tibetan capital city Lhasa and especially the 2008’s Tibetan uprising, which were
led by monks first, the Chinese government put more police nearby monasteries and sent
officials to the monasteries permanently to regulate religious ceremonies and activities.
Furthermore, after the 2008 Tibetan uprising, the government forcefully required all monks who
were under eighteen years old to resume secular life until age 18. Reincarnated lamas or Tulkus
were not allowed to be recognized by monasteries without getting permission from the
government. Therefore, these humiliating experiences of monasteries or monks led monks to be more active in politics, and their sense of the importance of political consciousness increased.

For students, their experience of Tibetan linguistic and intellectual suppression by Chinese authority meant it was difficult for them to find jobs after studying in Tibetan language schools. Especially, there are no courses available in Tibetan language other than majoring in Tibetan literature in colleges and universities. Additionally, the influence of modern Tibetan intellectuals’ secularist movement, which highly emphasizes the importance of political consciousness over religious ideology, is dramatically appreciated by students.

Therefore, the secular intellectuals highly engendered the Tibetan’s secularly based ethnic nationalism, and monasteries produced a culturally based ethnic nationalism. But at its very essence, both became a political struggle for the Tibetan’s group survival and development under the political pressure from the Chinese dominance. Thus, I see this as a sign of secularization that primarily focused on the political goal of Tibetan identity rather than merely religious preservation in Tibet. This is different from the traditional identity that mainly emphasized religion above ones’ own nation.

VI. Recognition of Secularization: Realizing the Importance of Socioeconomic and Political Strength of Tibet.

On the other hand, to flourish, Tibetan culture needs more than just religion, which is agreed upon among almost all younger generations regardless whether they are students, monks or lay people. To be beyond religion and spirituality does not mean to eradicate or decrease the
influence of religion, but it does strongly suggest the increase of new invention and improvement in socioeconomics and politics. Dundrup, a student who is sophomore at a college says:

For the development and welfare of Tibetan people, the most important thing is modern school education. We have had religion for more than a thousand years but it did not save our nation from falling and bankruptcy. We are from a sovereign nation, to become an ethnic minority, it is because we ignored the importance of politics, economy and secular education. This is the reason why I somehow or sometime even very strongly agree with Tibetan secularists.

However, seven out of ten student-interviewees believed that it was important to support or be against both sides (both traditional conservatives and liberal secularists) selectively and analytically. In addition, eight out of ten monk-interviewees expressed that they believed that it was important to promote secular consciousness in order to develop Tibet. They are rather supportive for developing modern Tibet; they agreed that Tibet failed to confront challenges in the past because of their marginalization from the modern world. However, they firmly believed that Tibetan Buddhism is entirely rooted in the Tibetan culture and consciousness, thus it tied Tibetan people together and makes a common sense of identity. They believed that without Buddhist religion, Tibetans will soon lose their identity and thus will never be able to be united for confronting collective challenges. A monk named Chompel, one of my interviewees, says “if secular culture becomes popular, it will bring material prosperity. That is good but it will also become as tool for undermining the value of religion and weakening of our ethnic identity, and that is bad.” He continued and said, “It is true that our religion serves our people tremendously, but it also caused some problems for the political fate of Tibet since religion and politics are contradictory in principle.” So we can see that even those monks who want religious education in
Tibetan schools are not just thinking about the religious meaning itself, but more importantly they are thinking about its political meaning: to preserve Tibetan identity in order to be united for confronting political challenges that they are facing as a group. They see that traditional understanding about the religion is contradictory to the political needs of Tibet; they are trying to balance the two by valuing the importance of secularization in terms of socio-economic and political promotion for Tibet.

Why are religion and politics contradictory in principle? We understand it by giving a concrete historical example. In the 1920s, the 13th Dalai Lama’s attempt to ‘modernize’ Tibet by introducing Western-style education and the establishment of a standing army had failed mainly due to the criticism of the conservatives (see Samuel 1993; Smith 1996; Cantwell and Kawanami 2002). Those conservatives criticized it by saying that it would destroy Buddhist culture and they viewed modern secular civilization as no more than mental distraction. Therefore, as Chompel implicitly addressed the importance of political consciousness, the recognition of political consciousness among monks nowadays symbolizes the increase of secularization among the religious community.

On the other hand, for students secularization certainly shows the influence of school education on the increase of secular or political identity. But the greater influence comes from not school textbooks but rather from extracurricular books and peer cultures. Shen Da explains his story when I asked him about what his main sources of influence are, he said:

When I was in third year of middle school, I got an annual journal titled *The Snow*
Mountain of East. It was a book composed by many new thinkers who criticized almost everything about traditional Tibetan culture. I was shocked and inspired as well. I felt cool, especially since it criticized education and teachers, and our school was very religiously oriented and teachers were very conservative. Teachers often beat students when students did misdeeds or broke rules, thus I read more books of these critics with a sense of resentment to our schoolteachers. We shared these ideas with each other among classmates, and we perceived ourselves as pioneers. In high school and college, we had more freedom and accessibility. There were more people such as teachers who advocated similar ideas; some of them were even the authors of the articles we enjoyed to read. Our Secularism mainly criticizes our own culture for its destroying Tibetans’ political and secular consciousness that emphasizes the protection of nation above protection of culture.

The sense of rebellion and the impressionable state of teenagers along with the higher chance and freedom to access different resources are the main factors for their interest in secularism. And the political nationalism of Tibetan has more propagandized among secular intellectuals.

Despite their major differences, both secularists and traditional cultural conservatives believe that there was a political crisis coming for Tibet that needed to be solved. Therefore, the sense of collective crisis is one of the most important factors for tolerating and accepting the rise of secularism among Tibetans. Especially, younger generations of monks and lay people come to accept the standpoint of secular intellectuals that “the main task facing Tibet was what they called ‘innovation’” (Shakya 2000: 77). They agree to a certain degree with the idea of secular intellectuals that argues “Tibet had suffered under the hands of the Communists not only because of the military and political might of the Chinese, but also because there was an inherent weakness in Tibetan culture: its inability to confront and integrate the forces of change” (Shakya 2000: 77). As the sense of need for change and nationalism was dramatically increased because
of the political stimulus, both the general public and members of monasteries had become more tolerant toward secularists after their active political participation in the 2008 Tibetan uprising. For instance, there is a well-known, very secular intellectual writer who is famous because of his criticism of religion and traditional culture of Tibetans. Before 2008, I heard from my friends that he got beat and had several other threats from monks for his public criticism on religion. They called him “betrayer of nation” and “tool of colonizer”. Then during 2008 after the Tibetan uprising, he was arrested for his criticism of the Chinese government and his public support for the Tibetan uprising. Many other intellectual secularists were also arrested by the Chinese authorities for their public support of the uprising and their criticism of Chinese authority; Shen Da was also arrested and jailed for three years during that time. After that, most monks were convinced that those secularists were not betrayers but honest intellectuals who were criticizing their own culture and religion for the sake of benefiting their vision for Tibet’s future.

Therefore, the tolerance towards secularists allowed the increase of the influence of secularism among younger generations. Even many monks resumed their secular life and became secularists. For instance, one of my monk interviewees is Ludol and he is in his forties. As his pen name, he took the name of King Lang Darma, who almost succeeded in eradicating Buddhism in Tibet. King Lang Darma forced monks to resume their secular life in order to promote political consciousness of nation and have more warriors for defending nation than monks for spirituality during the 840s until he was assassinated. Therefore, not only is secularization increasing but secularism is also becoming more influential among younger generation of Tibetans.
However, secularism (criticism on Buddhism or traditional culture for weakening Tibetans’ political and secular consciousness) is relatively less acceptable than secularization (promoting socioeconomic and political strength of Tibet without necessarily criticizing traditional culture) among ordinary people of Tibet. For instance, Guru, a lay person claims “I think what those secularists are saying on religion is just self-embarrassing acts.” However, it was also interesting when I organized an online group using Wechat app in which all the members were my research interviewees only. When they had different ideas they would use quotes from the 14th Dalai Lama to persuade each other; as a result both sides avoided resentment and in most cases they found common grounds by using the Dalai Lama as their model. The 14th Dalai Lama is not only the spiritual leader for Tibetans who have religious faith, but he is also the respected model of liberty and open-mindedness for intellectual secularists. This is because he promotes religious harmonies between world religions and dialogue between science and Buddhism. Furthermore, he also established a democratic form of government in the exile Tibetan community in India. In his model, more and more monks and religious followers have been cultivating a deeper respect for reasoning and rationalism. Consequently, such respect is promoting a productive dialogue between secularists and religious people that lead them to cultivate mutual respect and open-mindedness. In the dialogue, they often find their common political necessity so it engenders their ethnic nationalism that allows all Tibetan people to unite under their political identity regardless of their cultural belief.

VII. Relationship of Secularization with Rationalism and Modernization.
However, all those religiously influenced lay people and monks are convinced that their religious faith is declining, believing that the strength of their faith in religion is being weakened continually from generation to generation. On the other hand, the understanding of faith is different between older and younger generations. Older generations are worried about the decline of religious faith as result of secularization while younger generations think that some of the changes in the traditional style of faith are necessary. For instance, Chobi, in his mid-60s, told me a story about his father’s faith in order to prove his claim about the decline of religious faith:

My father was a great hunter. My family at that time was very poor so it was necessary to sustain our lives by hunting. He often said he might have killed around a thousand wild animals, therefore, “my whole body would be flooded in a sinful bloody water”. Then after he became around 50, I had been taking care of the family so my father stayed in the monastery to confess his sins. He rarely came home and he regularly prostrated and circumambulated while chanting mantras and players. His faith was extremely strong, pure, and concentrated. Thus, after 20 years, he often confidently claimed that he confessed all of his sins and he believed that there was no sin left behind anymore. But I often thought he would be miserable when he died because of the sins he had committed by hunting. However, surprisingly he predicted his death and he had no indication of any suffering when he was dying. This is the real power of faith, and my father’s best friend was a monk who had a great spiritual practice and he told me too that it was because he had a firm commitment to his faith. But now for people like us, it is very rare to possess this kind of firm faith; people are doubting and suspicious now. However, people of my age are better still compared to those younger generations. We still can keep promises and will not break our vows easily; we still hesitate before telling lies and reneging on our oaths because of our religious faith. But those younger people become less hesitant to renege on oaths; they feel free to tell lies for the interests of getting worldly things.

Similarly, one of my monk interviewees named Kani Tulke is a highly respected reincarnated Lama and he is in his 60s. When I asked him about the changes in the degree of faith, he nodded
his head slowly and replied with a sense of certainty, saying “we used to have not much 
education among ordinary people, so it was rare to have someone who was critical and analytical. 
At that time, people were very genuine and they had a strong commitment to their religious faith. 
People might say now that they were fools but actually it was very good!”

Therefore, these older people often commonly showed their admiration and vanity for the 
good character of older generations. However, things are different among the younger 
generations of monks. Eight of the ten monk interviewees said that they agree with the 
secularization of Tibetans in some degree. The most common reasons that they gave to me are 
that for them the secularization implies not only socioeconomic and political development, but 
also indicates the importance of reason over superstition. Those monks who are under 40 believe 
that their religion is based on reason rather than blind faith. They believe that only through 
critical investigation can the most precious parts of Buddhism be revealed. ChaShi Mipa, a monk 
who is in his 30s told me, “I fully support for secularists and their acts towards Buddhism 
although I disagree with their conclusions, because I am glad to see that they are investigating 
Buddhism critically rather than believing it blindly.” Another monk-interviewee called Achok 
Tsongtu whose age is also around late 30s considered himself “the twenty-first century Buddhist 
monk.” He strongly criticized the popular notion of faith among ordinary people of Tibet. When 
I asked him whether it was necessary to have faith in Buddhism in order to be an authentic 
Tibetan, he asserted:

It is totally wrong to think that one must have faith in Buddhism in order to be an
authentic Tibetan. Many people may think it is necessary since most of Tibetan cultures are so dominated by Buddhist philosophy or Buddhist culture. However, the truth is that it is very clear that there are very rare people who know the true meaning of the term “faith” that is advocated in Buddhist culture (ti:nang bstan rig gnsa). Therefore, it is a clear sign of misunderstanding about the term “faith” when Tibetan people believe that Tibetan identity must be paralleled with faith in Buddhism. All those superstitions that are popularized among general society caused oppression for Tibetan people, and people’s lack of intellectual ability to distinguish Buddhist science or philosophy from religious Buddhism causes that an oppression.

Furthermore, he explains that Buddhist science or philosophy is the true value of Buddhism and that its theories have been built on profound investigations and reason, while religious Buddhism has been founded on mythologies, rituals and other superstitious customs. Therefore, the younger generations of monks are sharing similar interest with students for advocating reason above faith. This is a sign of great change among monks compared to the older generations; the older people are valuing the faith itself while the younger generations focus on the reason behind one’s faith. Consequently, the rationalism among the younger generation of monks builds a certain agreement with secular intellectuals and they are becoming more tolerant towards secular ideology.

The secularization among lay people is less directly caused by their political consciousness and secular education compared to monks and students, but it has much to do with the increase of opportunity to access information, resources, and lifestyles. A lay person, Kang Desi says, “now we have too many options, different opinions on one subject, which has made it so difficult to make a decision. Therefore, it is hard to have a pure spiritual mind.” Another lay person interviewee, MuTse Tutu explains that people are getting more involved in doing trade and
business rather than just looking after yaks and sheep in the wild grassland as they used to.

Thus, he thinks that all this economic development stimulated people’s desire to have more. As a consequence, people need to be more sociable and rational as well as open-minded, since they are meeting with diverse people with different backgrounds for trade. A former chief of the village, Sanggye told me that each village has a certain land and the land is divided for each group of households within the village permanently. The numbers of households in each group has been growing over time but the land remains the same size. Thus, there is not enough land for feeding many animals; as a result more and more new households are changing their traditional lifestyle to settle in a town for doing business and trade. Lay people’s permanent residential lifestyle makes it easy to adapt to urbanization and modernity, which requires rational knowledge and endures diversity. Therefore, the decline of one’s faith and the increase of rational reason among younger generation are also caused by their existential conditions and lifestyles.

However, the increase of rational reason does not indicate that the relationship between Tibetan Buddhism and rational reason is contradictory; rather it indicates an evolution of religion. The development of rationalism among Tibetan religious believers by greatly emphasizing a more philosophical understanding of religion rather than rituals and mythological performances is necessary in order to function in the status quo political circumstances of Tibet. As Peter Berger (1996/1997) claimed, “Religion is a dynamic social force that is capable of evolving. Under the pressure of modernity… religion evolved and transformed in order to revitalize itself
and remain socially and politically relevant” (Fox, 2013: 21). For instance, back in the 1950s or 70s, this kind of rational aspect was not encouraged. For instance, Gedun Chompel (1903-1951) was a critical thinker who challenged and criticized the corrupted, ritualized, and superstitious Buddhism, which some Tibetologists like Francoise Robin called “popular Buddhism” or, as I prefer, “folk Buddhism.” Therefore, he faced many troubles in old Tibetan society that was more traditionally closed-minded and focused on faith rather than reason. For example, he began to argue with the philosophical textbook of the Labrang Monastery, which was written by their hierarchical teacher the third Jemyang Zhapa during the 1930s, when he was studying there. For over 100 years they had been using that textbook without any controversy and critical argument, so the conservative monks failed to accept Gedun Chompel’s critique. Because of this conflict many authorities marginalized him. Thus, he chose to leave with his truth than stay in obedience to something that he thought was false. After he left the Labrang Monastery, monks rumored that he was expelled by the Nichong deity protector. So he wrote a letter to the Labrang monks and Lopez (2009) translated as follows:

If there is a fastidious dharma-protector, 
then why does he let stay all those good-for-nothings 
Who roam about, selling tea, chang [liquor], livestock, sheep, etc.? 
They hoist up their robes [to the height of] palmyra leaves. 
They carry mean knives and wooden batons. 
Now, they are the ones you should expel. 
They have grown increasingly numerous in the last and few years.

So we can see that Gedun Chompel was a rational scholar who aimed for purifying Buddhism and reconstructing a philosophical and rational culture of Tibet. While his critique
was seen as unacceptable during that time, today Tibetan Buddhism will not be able to survive and develop without having this kind of rationalism. Firstly, the pressure of modernization demands more rationality and flexibility towards new inventions. Secondly, more Tibetans would come to see that Buddhism is useless for overcoming Tibet’s political challenges if Buddhism does not make it rational and politically relevant. Finally, under the pressure of scientific developments, Tibetan Buddhism must work with science in order to gain support from secular intellectuals. Gaining support for Tibetan Buddhism will have two results; firstly, it means more opportunity will rise for the development of Buddhism in the face of secularism. More importantly, it means more opportunity will rise for Tibetans’ political struggle since support for Tibetan political struggles are intertwined with the public affiliation to Tibetan traditional culture, which is based on Buddhism. This is why religious freedom and cultural preservation is the most significant part of propaganda in terms of Tibetans’ political struggle.

In sum, the development of rational and philosophical religion among younger generation of monks is a great transformation. The increase of rationalization among the monks provides a precondition for the development of secularization in society as they are becoming more and more politically oriented and tolerant towards diverse ideas.

However, relations between monks and secular students are not completely harmonious. When I asked “do you like to have religious education in school?” five out of ten monk-interviewees strongly think it is important to have religious education in school, three do not care and two are against. When I asked those five monks who strongly recommend religious education in school,
one most common answer is that it would help them to be good and prevent them from losing their Tibetan identity. They are afraid that it would be so easy to be assimilated into Chinese culture if they lose their religious faith. They believed that Buddhist religion is fundamental core of Tibetan cultural identity. Therefore, if they lose religious faith in Buddhism would weaken their ethnic identity since Tibetan culture is greatly overlapped with Buddhist culture. They refer to those secularists who are advocating for distance from religious influence as “childish.” The reincarnated Lama Kani said:

Increasing human communication with different culture and education decrease the degree of religious faith among people. Particularly when those students who have no deeper knowledge of our own great treasures of traditional culture once begin to study other cultures, they easily become other culture’s fan and then turn back to criticize their own traditional culture. They become the product of cultural colonization, so this is very childish!

On the other hand, the secularist students criticized Buddhist culture and monastery system as “model of dictatorship,” “conservatism” and “renouncer of existing world.”

This phenomenon is greatly depicted in one of my field observations, when I came to the village, I was told by a villager about having a village meeting. When I went there after I got my permission for participation, I realized that meeting was about discussion on building a Tara (female deity) temple. I was informed that this idea was originally suggested by the Achock Rinpoche who is the highest-ranking Lama in that region. This Achock Lama had been living in an exiled Tibetan community at Daramsala in northern India since he was thirteen years old, and he had returned to his original Monastery, Chi Li Monastery, for several months after his visa application was granted from the Chinese government. This is the fourth reincarnated lama of
Achock Rinpoche, and it was the second reincarnated Achock Rinpoche who founded a monastery in this Nangba area during early nineteenth century. This monastery has flourished for centuries to form a large patron-relationship with nomadic villages. The Gar Sar Ma village is one of these historical loyal patrons of the monastery. Consequently, the lineage of the Achock Rinpoche became their spiritual masters.

Last year the current Achock Rinpoche came to visit the village and suggested the village build a temple hall for a female deity called Tara. After the Rinpoche left, the village began to build a temple hall of deity Tara and automatically monks of the village took charge of supervising. The monks became more radical and suggested village members to donate eight hundred Yuan ($135) from each member including infants and grandparents. This is more than needed for a simple hall, but those monks wanted to build a more luxurious hall. Furthermore, the monks advised the lay people to cut lumber for making the hall soon in the cold winter. Therefore, that meeting was about discussion on making small teams of lay people for exploiting forests with certain division in duties such as one team for cutting and another for carrying. Not every village member agreed to donate that much money and go to exploiting forest in that freezing winter in January. However, these lay people remained silent and accepted those monks’ advice but I have heard many complaints among them individually, although no one is publically against monks. It is very obvious that there is a cultural and moral pressure on them if they criticize those religiously oriented events that are led by monks. However, the lay people do think that they are doing this for their own good such as cumulating good merit for next life and
blessing for current life. As the chief of the village, Puha said to me when I asked why they were building this temple, “it is important to have good education for success of doing every kind of things but it is not sufficient for success of one’s life by only having good education, one must also have blessing and support from religion. When both powers are combined, there is no doubt for success and good life.”

However, many students of the village began to criticize the monks for the lack of consideration about each household’s financial ability. Those students argued that those monks’ decision was model of dictatorship by imposing one’s own faith and will on others. But the students’ influence on the decision of village was very small in comparison with the monks. Students’ influence is showed within their own families and friends. For instance, Jako, a father of a student who is secularist, told me:

Honestly, I think most of his ideas [his son] are reasonable. But I still often would not let him to say more criticisms on religion or monks publicly [on the temple construction] because our community would call him “anti-religionist” and thus bad rumors about him would spread out soon.

In sum, even though those secularists and traditional conservatives criticized each other, their primary goal is the same; to unite Tibet and strengthen Tibetan identity to have solidarity in political struggle. Furthermore, Tibetans’ secularism is still mainly not taking place with a primary goal on religious marginalization as its end. Rather, it is mostly taking place for the purpose of promoting the political consciousness of Tibetan people in order to confront those political crises and strengthen Tibetans’ social and political capacity. Similarly, those traditional conservatives of Tibet are also not seeking
a religious fundamentalism. They are promoting religion in a way that supports political
solidarity and socioeconomic development of Tibet. This is very supportive to the
development of secularization, and I would even argue that the politically and secularly
focused trend of religious evolution in Tibet is a form of secularization. Hence, this is a
clear sign of secularization of Tibetan identity in general. But that does not mean that
Kuru’s (2009) argument that those secular countries that had a religiously focused
monarchic “ancient regime” in their history are more likely to feature assertive secularists
as a result of historical conflict between religion (monarchy) and secularists (republic
regime) is wrong. Rather, I think his argument is more instructive for predicting Tibetan
society in the future.

VIII. The Secularization and School Education

I asked ten lay-people interviewees about whether they would send their children to school
or monastery if each of them has one or two children. Ten of them said they would send their
children to school if they had only one, and five of them said they would send one of their
children to monastery and one to school if they had two children. My interviewees informed me
that ten years ago their village had about 90 monks and total number of households of the village
was around 180. They say now they still have 101 monks but total number of households is
about 280, while the number of students at that time was about 60 and now they have 130
students. In addition, if we take into account that the monks remains as monks after ten years if
they did not break vows and students after graduated from school would no longer be counted as
students, then we can see that the average growth of the number of monks compared to the increase of households is much lower than the average growth of the number of students compared to the increase of households within the ten years.

Although most of the lay people defined themselves as heavily religious, almost all of them preferred sending their children to school than monastery. What are the social factors behind this? As people’s livelihood improved, their infrastructure is also improved. Thus, their interaction with towns and cities becomes regular. Since more and more nomads are becoming town residents their passion for economic welfare has increased radically. Consequently, the importance of school education becomes stronger on a practical level. Secondly, Chinese influence in towns and cities is dominant as a result of large number of Han immigrants through the Chinese immigration programs I described above. Chinese speakers controlled most of the public service occupations such as hospitals, banks, posit offices and so on. So the need of learning Chinese language is seen as crucial on the one hand and the resentment towards Chinese made Tibetans eager to compete with them and get control back on the other.

In order to explain why there is the necessity of learning Chinese language and increase of resentment towards Han Chinese at local towns or counties, I will use my own experience during my travels in those counties in local Tibetan towns. I saw time after time the same scenario in which Tibetans faced great difficulty even in seeing doctors in their local hospitals. So many people in my life have begged me to help them translate what their doctors were saying. One time I asked a local hospital doctor in Hong Yuan County which is the nearest city to my
research village about why the hospital did not also hire more Tibetan doctors. He replied that there were not many Tibetan doctors to be found. In response, I pressed him to then at least provide professional translators as so many of his patients were Tibetans. His reply was merely “that is none of my business.” During my research this January 2015, when I was walking on the street of Cha Li town where the local district of my research-field –village and other four villages is located, by chance I saw a grandmother, who was in her 70s, sick there. When I took her to the local hospital and asked her why she didn’t prepare to go to hospital before my help, she said, “because I don’t know Chinese language and the doctor is Han Chinese who only speaks Chinese language.” When we got there, there was only one Han Chinese nurse in her chair at medicine room. She said the doctor left for Aba County, and she refused to give us an infusion (I think it was because she didn’t even know how to make a proper infusion). Her attitude was horrible and I lost my temper. But the grandma looked very calm and she finally said in a very depressed tone “they are always like this.” I think the denial of allowing Tibetan language in higher education has led to a severe lack of Tibetan medical professionals, which in turn has led to both a disparity in health care based on language, and yet another top-down attempt to subvert the Tibetan language as a functioning language.

Similarly, on a cold, winter day in 2008 in the Hong Yuan County, when I entered a China Mobile store, or one of the countless Chinese telecommunications kiosks throughout China, I observed an elderly monk who could not speak Chinese struggling to buy airtime for his phone. I noticed that the service provider was Tibetan, and I asked her in Chinese “I know you are a
Tibetan, but why are you refusing to speak Tibetan to your own Tibetan elder when you can clearly see he is having trouble understanding Chinese? She replied, “This is requirement for this job. I have no other choice.”

Therefore, in order to confront such daily humiliations and difficulties, the desire to have school education is growing explosively among ordinary people and even among monks, as we can see that four out of ten monk-interviewees think that modern school education is more important than monastery education for Tibetan’s welfare. A fifty-three year old monk Namden encouraged me at the end of my interview:

> Now you are doing great, you know Tibetan, Chinese and English. You studied much knowledge, you guys know how politics and society work, so we need more this kind of human resources so we can help ourselves and resist oppressions from outside.

This indicates that they are not only trying to get school education in order to confront those daily challenges under Chinese cultural and political domination, but also they are hoping to get good schooling education in order to have a successful resistance to the oppression.

Thirdly, traditionally monks were viewed as not only noble but also seen as pursuing a career of self-sufficiency, even they could help family to reduce financial burden through receiving donations from patrons. But nowadays, most of nomads are economically well off, and modern education is perceived as more beneficial for self-sufficiency by earning monthly incomes as well as by doing business after they gained skills from schools.

Formal employees such as government staffs and teachers received higher expectations from ordinary people thus their social status is improved. For instance, I grew up in the Gar Sar Ma
village and when I got opportunity to study in Chengdu City, the economic and political center of Sichuan Province, my parents told me that whole village members were talking about me and their expectation on my future was higher. After I got opportunity for studying in the United States, I was the first person who got education in USA in the history of my village. Thus I was amazed by my village’s support and high expectation on me during this field research in my home village, Gar Sar Ma. After I announced my research plan and expressed my wish for villagers’ participation, no one ever refused my requests and even those elders and high-ranking reincarnated Lamas showed me great support with expressing their warmhearted greetings and wishes.

Similar experiences were represented by those students and teachers and other official employees. Dolma, she came to study in the United States last year from my village describes her experience;

In general, the admiration for knowledge is more intensified among ordinary people in Tibet now. When I heard that you were going to study in America, I was so admiring you. You know, same thing happens to me when I got opportunity to study in America. It is like I became a Buddha suddenly in the eyes of others, my opinions worth a lot to others now. I think, general students would have similar experiences compared to those uneducated people. You know, we hear a lot that those uneducated people often claims that they knew nothing because they were uneducated. So the self-underestimation of those uneducated people clearly shows their admiration for education.

Therefore, it is clear that education is widely and increasingly valued for its capability of gaining more opportunities for pursuing power in economics and politics as well as modern knowledge such as science and technology. My interviewees valued modern education not only
for promoting personal welfare but also for group welfare, they are strongly against those Tibetan intellectuals and officials who became mere tools of Chinese authority. Their higher expectation on school education indicate their acceptance of modernization and realization of the importance of political consciousness, but it also indicates the necessity of accepting modernization in terms of their existential conditions in order to promote both personal and group welfare.

The self-underestimation of uneducated lay people is indicated in two ways. Firstly, traditionally only monks were educated, which then meant studying and practicing religion for the sake of enlightenment. Thus people often believed that those people who are uneducated in religion are ignorant and have no way to get enlightenment. Therefore, their admiration for knowledge, which mainly represents religious practice, is strong because of traditionally widespread faith among the public in Tibet. Secondly, after the Chinese invasion in 1951 their (Han) ideology of the importance of education was internalized by many Tibetans. Especially, the Tibetans’ circumstances of social existence and living condition under Chinese rule requires them to have modern education for the sake of both obedience and resistance, as we have seen. Since school education which designed purposefully by themselves, the Chinese authority believed it would promote Chinese cultural ideology among Tibetans on one hand and improve Tibetans’ living conditions economically on other hand. Either way, education would weaken their national identity and thus make them easy to be ruled. On the other hand, modern Tibetans believe that school education helps them gain both economic and political strength to resist any
form of oppression in order to protect their own cultural identity and political freedom.

In sum, although those lay people are mostly very religious, they still choose to send their kids to secular schools rather than monasteries. It is because of the pressure from modernization on the one hand, and their social and political consciousness on the other that makes them aware about the need for resistance and protection; to resist Chinese cultural and political domination and protect one’s own group’s cultural and political identity.

VIII. Conclusion

The transformation of Tibetan consciousness from a spiritual domination to secularization is an undeniable reality. It is developed in a form of protection and resistance under more politically aware Tibetans, which is unseen in the past. Tibetan secularization is taking place in a form of protection of group identity and autonomy from the cultural assimilation and political invasion as well as in a form of resistance to the oppression by promoting economic and political skills and consciousness in order to confront those challenges. In addition, the sense of political crisis and insecurity to the collective group is the main factor for the development of secularization. It is not a form of obedience to the authorities, but rather it is a form of resistance to authorities. Facing the loss of their language, deterioration of their identity and the suppression of their freedom, Tibetans are becoming more politically active in order to confront what they perceive as a collective crisis. Consequently, secularization is a political tactic for promoting political consciousness and the political nationalism of Tibetan people.

Pro-Tibetan scholars, in general, believe that secularization is also another new instrument of
(Chinese) authority for making their control easier. It might be true that Chinese authorities have tried to submerge Tibetan identity within Chinese cultural hegemony through promoting school education and economic development, if not directly through episodes of direct coercive suppression of political protests. However, as my data shows, I would argue that Tibetans are using secularization as a way to resist and confront those challenges and they succeeded in many ways, such as promoting their political consciousness by studying political knowledge since they got language skills in school. However, as Wilson and Lambert realized, the secularization of Tibetan identity is not merely caused by this sense of political crisis, but also results from the influences of commercialization and urbanization. As I found in my field research, the establishment of permanent residence resulted from the community reaching the limits of enough grassland for maintaining nomadic lifestyles. This consequently created development of urbanization and commercialization. The improvement of infrastructure and the urbanization through constructing permanent resident communities increased social communication and economic trade. Thus, somewhat predictable trends were emerging as locals’ involvement in the modernization process stimulated their material desire and intensified the need of school education along with their involvement in the industrial society. However, their involvement in modern society also increased their Tibetan sociopolitical identity, since more and more politically based communication among Tibetans increased as they get more accessibility to modern communication technology such as the Wechat app on cell phones, which allows communication between people from both inside and outside Tibet. The Chinese government is
unable to block it since it is so popular among all Chinese citizens and using it only requires wifi.

One of the most important features for promoting secularization among Tibetans is the development of rationalism. Rationalism among the Tibetans is not only advocated among secular intellectuals such as students but more importantly it is advocated by younger generations of monks who emphasize the importance of philosophy and logical aspects of Buddhism over the importance of faith and commitment. Therefore, rationalism among younger generations of monks encourages the analytical criticism and investigations of Buddhism. And this leads to a certain tolerance towards the development of secularism. As I described in my interview section those younger generation of monks often do not agree with secularists’ argument about Buddhism being responsible for Tibetans’ fall from a powerful sovereign kingdom to an occupied nation or a minority in China. However, they still tolerate secularists and promote secularization for three reasons. Firstly, monks are more and more convinced that those secularists are genuine patriots of the Tibetan nation and thus monks or conservatives began to appreciate the secularists’ nationalism compared to past. Secondly, more and more younger generations of monk who were born after 1970s and 1980s believe that as more people critically investigate Buddhism, the more they will be impressed by it. They valued the critical dialogue and conversation between Buddhism and secularists based on reason – a movement I will call the rationalism movement among monks in Tibet. Finally, they also promote secularization because they see the importance of sociopolitical development of Tibet in order to strengthen it and have a successful resistance against Chinese’s hegemonic imposition of their
cultural and political domination over their nation. Hence, rationalism has great impact for promoting secularization.

Furthermore, as I mentioned in my introduction, the secularist movement that started in the late 1980s among Tibetan intellectuals is the main inspiration of this unique form of Tibetan secularization. As we can see in my description of field observation on the temple construction project, those students holding the secularist viewpoint are often against the Buddhist culture of Tibet, since they see it as the source of enslaving Tibetans’ consciousness in which people are only allowed to act passively and behave in a prescribed manner. However, Tibetans’ secularism is not taking place with a primary goal on religious marginalization. Rather, it is taking place for the purpose of promoting political consciousness of Tibetan people in order to confront political crises and strengthen Tibet’s social and political capacity.

The development of secularization does not directly imply the decrease of religious influence, but it does imply certain pressures on religion to lead its evolution into rationalization and tolerance of secularization. Furthermore, it implies the transformation of religious influence from its purpose of religious promotion to political promotion of Tibetans through its function as providing common ground for political solidarity and resistance both consciously and unconsciously. However, secularization implies an unconscious force for decreasing the influence of religion in the long run. For instance, when the lay persons who described themselves as religious sent their children to schools rather than monasteries would eventually lead the decline of religious influence and increase of secularization.
In sum, the sense of political crisis is more intense among monks and students than lay people for two reasons. Firstly, monks and students constitute the core intellectual group in Tibet and they are more aware about the political situation and are therefore more politically active. Secondly, since the Cultural Revolution, the main target of suppression under Chinese authority has been monks and intellectuals who are seen as the source of Tibetan nationalism. Comparatively speaking, lay people are less resentful toward Chinese rule in Tibet because they are less politically aware and are more focused on the cares of daily life. The nomadic lay people are less educated, and their activity is more marginalized from the larger society. Their lack of education limits their political consciousness although they are very religious and loyal to their Tibetan identity, and their relative marginalization in living far away from the larger society gives them a sense of freedom because they are less restricted by the government. However, the accessibility of communication technology and infrastructure of younger generations of lay people increases their involvement in the modern society and motivates their emphasis on the development of socioeconomic capacity. Furthermore, the older generations’ political discontentment toward Chinese rule in Tibet is relatively less than that of younger generations, because the older generation had worse experiences during Cultural Revolution of early Communist regime era. The younger generations had no such experiences, but they compare their current experience under Chinese rule to their own imagined western countries. In addition, those younger generations have more access to knowledge and political communication than older generations. As we can see, the older generations of lay people and monks tend to
worry about the decline of faith among younger generations, and the younger generation of monks and students tends to appreciate reason above blind faith.

Secularization is therefore increasingly accepted by Tibetans for several reasons. It is unconsciously growing among lay people as they become more involved in the commercial society under the influence of commercial modernization as well as the limits of pasture for nomads. It is growing among monks through their emphasis on rationalism and encouragement of studying in modern schools in order to promote Tibetan society and create a counter hegemonic power for Chinese domination. Students and secular intellectuals are consciously trying to promote secularization in order to strengthen Tibetans’ political consciousness of freedom, democracy and human rights. Therefore, there is wide agreement among Tibetans that secularization somehow should be practiced in order to promote socioeconomic and political strength of Tibet.

There are thus three significant results of this research. Firstly, Tibetan scholars often tend to think that the older generations of Tibetan people are more resentful toward Chinese domination than the younger generations. But this case study shows the opposite; younger generations’ political nationalism of Tibet against Chinese rule in Tibet is greater than that of older generations. Secondly, in general pro-Tibetan scholars tend to argue that secularization of Tibetan identity is a form of cultural submersion into Chinese culture and a form of obedience to Chinese rule in Tibet. My research shows that secularization of Tibetan identity is a form of resistance to Chinese hegemonic rule in Tibet and a form of protecting Tibetan identity through
promoting political and socioeconomic strength. Therefore, the more secularly conscious Tibetans become, the more politically active they are in promoting Tibetan political solidarity.

Thirdly, both pro-Tibetan scholars and pro-Chinese scholars tend to think that the more religious faith Tibetans have, the more politically resistant to secularization and Chinese rule they would be. My research shows that the more rational they are in their religious faith, the more aware of the importance of socioeconomic and political strength of Tibet they become.
Reference


Chompel, G. Translated by Donald S. Lopez Jr. (2009). In the forest of faded wisdom. Chicago:


https://muse.jhu.edu/journals/manoa/v012/12.2tsering_shakya.pdf


Tibetan language references


Figure

Tsetang Gongporu. www.chinatourguide.com
Open-ended Questionnaires for Interview

1. What is your ethnicity?
   བཅད་འི་བ་པ་བཅུ་གཞན་ནས་ཅིག་ཡོད་མས་སོ།

2. What do you do?
   བཅད་འི་ཐུབ་དཀར་བུ་ཅིག་ཡོད་མས་སོ།

3. Highest educational degree?
   བཅད་འི་ཆུས་གསོ་དུ་བུ་ཅིག་ཡོད་མས་སོ།

4. What do you think is the most important for identifying yourself as Tibetan?
   བཅད་ལ་མཚན་ན་ཐེིས་སུ་བཅད་ལ་མཚན་ན་ཐེིས་སུ་བོད་མཚན་ན་ཐེིས་སུ་བོད་མཚན་ན་ཚོས་ཆེས་ཆེན་པོ་དེ་རེད་དམ་།

5. Do you have a religious belief? Why?
   བཅད་ལ་ཆོས་གས་དད་པ་ཡོད་དམ་།་མཚན་ཅི་།

6. Do you think Tibetan Buddhism or religion is Tibetan cultural identity in your understanding? How other people think this according to your own social experiences?
   བཅད་ལ་ཆོས་གས་དད་པ་ཡོད་དམ་།་མཚན་ཅི་།

7. Is it necessary to be Buddhist or religious in order to be Tibetan in your understanding?
   བཅད་ལ་ཆོས་ལ་དད་མཁན་ཡོད་མཁན་ཞིག་དང་3ད་པར་སངས་4ས་ཆོས་ལ་དད་མཁན་ཞིག་ཡིན་དམ་།་མཚན་ཅི་།

8. Do you more like modern school education or monastic education?
   What kind of education is more important for the prosperity or good life of Tibetans?
9. Do you like to have a religious education in school?

10. Do you often talk, judge and act according to a religious doctrine or guide of Lamas? Do you think most of Tibetans would act or value according to religious instruction?

11. Are most of your good friends religious or secularists?

12. Do you care whether your friends are religious or secularists?

13. Which side do you stand for between religious criticisms on secularism or secularists’ criticism on religion? Why?

14. Are there any social changes that fundamentally influenced your identity and cultural values?

15. What are the most crucial factors, you think, for the emergence of secularization or secularism among Tibetans?

16. Do you think secularism is influential for Tibetans and what would be some of the pros and cons of the secularism?

17. What would be the some of the pros and cons of religious influence to Tibetan history and present situation?

18. Who are most likely to be influenced by secularism and why?