

Renunciation and the Householder/Renouncer Relation in the New Kadampa Tradition

by

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Abstract

Founded by the Tibetan-British monk Geshe Kelsang Gyatso in 1991, the New Kadampa Tradition – International Kadampa Buddhist Union (NKT-IKBU) is a fast-growing and controversial transnational Buddhist network that has enthusiastically embraced an expansionist business model and major monastic reform. Toward an improved understanding of the group and of Tibetan Buddhism's diasporic modernization more broadly, this dissertation examines the practice of Buddhism's traditionally monastic soteriology of renunciation (the abandonment of "worldly concerns" on the path to liberation from cyclic rebirth) by members of urban NKT meditation centres in Canada and the United States.

When China declared its sovereignty over the Tibetan cultural region in 1951, twenty-year old Kelsang Gyatso was one of over 6,000 monks residing at the Geluk monastery of Sera near Lhasa. Forty years later when he founded the NKT in northern England, Gyatso decided it would have no monasteries, only congregational teaching and meditation centers designed to spread his interpretation of Geluk Buddhism. Without monasteries to institutionally support the Buddhist praxis of renunciation, what does renunciation look like in the NKT? My ethnographic study of the North American NKT addresses this question by engaging field interviews, participant observations, publications, teachings, and media through a conceptual apparatus prominent in both Buddhism and Buddhist Studies: the householder/renouncer relation.

I argue that the NKT's market-driven expansionism not only supersedes its funding of a monastic community but replaces monasticism as the principal institutional framework for renunciation in the form of full-time subsistence missionary work on the part of ordained and lay Kadampa Buddhist virtuosos. Whereas Tibetan clerical renunciation looks like the monastic community's dual abandonment of the household activities of economic and sexual production, my analysis of NKT labour reveals that these have been bifurcated between ordained Kadampa monastics who renounce sexual reproduction but not economic production, and Kadampa missionary managers who renounce the latter but not necessarily the former. Celibate monastic ordination becomes an optional lifestyle, the suitability of which is primarily a matter of personal preference rather than ritual specialization, and the arduous and austere life of a missionary (lay or ordained) becomes the principal model of a consecrated life of renunciation.

Finally, I suggest that this hybrid business model of "missionary monasticism" has been a major factor in the NKT's external growth, producing a diverse and motivated labour force whose renunciation of economic remuneration provides the organization with the fruits of their economic production, but also in some of the movement's more visible internal fault lines: labour shortage, turnover, and disgruntled former members.

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To my Spiritual Guide and all Spiritual Guides

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“Because you have received advice, whenever you are not meditating always practise in accordance with what your Spiritual Guide says. If you practise with great devotion, results will arise immediately, without your having to wait for a long time. If from your heart you practise in accordance with Dharma, both food and resources will come naturally to hand.”

~ Atiśa Dīpaṅkara Śrījñāna ~
(Gyatso 2003a, 184)

“If I was a preacher
I tell you what I would do
I would keep on preaching
And I’d work on the building too

I’m working on a building
I’m working on a building
Hallelujah
I’m working on a building
For my Lord, for my Lord

It’s a Holy Ghost building
It’s a Holy Ghost building
Hallelujah
It’s a Holy Ghost building
For my Lord, for my Lord”

~ The Carter Family ~
(Carter 1934)

INTRODUCTION

In the decades following the American Revolution, during an explosive period of Protestant revival often called the “Second Great Awakening,” a populist new religious movement (NRM) from Britain swept through North America¹ at the hands of untrained laymen who worked to Christianize burgeoning frontier populations through planting churches and preaching salvation by faith. After just half a century, Methodism, a revival movement within the Church of England founded by dissatisfied priest John Wesley, had become the largest denomination in the United States. The new Christian movement expanded rapidly in late 18th-century America under Francis Asbury, an autocratic Englishman who oversaw an aggressive missionary campaign led by “a sort of religious military order” (Hatch 1989, 82) of itinerant preachers bound by hierarchy, asceticism, and populism, and whose “explicit goal was to use the instrument of lay preaching to wake up a slumbering world” (89). Any man was welcome to join Asbury’s apostolic order of missionaries so long as he could endure their leader’s austere example and gruelling pace: “Asbury pursued converts wherever they could be found, [and] opened leadership to all” while also “insist[ing] that a ministerial calling required that one lay aside all the trappings of a gentleman – the dress, the deportment, and the financial security” and enforcing “a circulation of preachers, to avoid partiality and popularity” (85).

The “sea of sectarian rivalries” (ix) that filled the unregulated spiritual marketplace in the years of the early American republic provided predominantly Christian NRMs with an unprecedented degree of freedom to proselytize, and to great effect. Due in part to the legacy of the Second

¹ In this dissertation, I use the designation ‘North America’ to refer primarily to the United States and Canada, which also geographically delimits my ethnographic research field.

Great Awakening, North America remains one of the most Christian cultural regions in the world. It is also, however, one of the most religiously diverse regions, a place where Buddhist-derived mindfulness meditation practices, for example, have recently “managed to reach into nearly every institution of American society – churches, schools, hospitals, law enforcement, prisons, courts, military, media, pop culture” (Wilson 2014, 6). The contemporary “mindfulness boom” owes much to the so called “Zen boom” of the 1950s and 60s, which in turn seized upon another dramatic opening up of the North American spiritual marketplace. In the decades following the Second World War NRMs derived from Asian religions such as Hinduism and Buddhism found an unprecedented degree of freedom to missionize the North American population, as “the beneficiaries of a new religious environment marked by historically unique emphasis on ‘freedom of choice’ (vs. mere ‘freedom of conscience’) and the pursuit of unconventional sources of spiritual enlightenment” (Dawson 2003, 72).

Plumb between the Zen and mindfulness crazes, at a time when North American seekers were growing particularly fascinated with all things Tibet, and just over two centuries after Asbury’s self-appointment as bishop of the new Methodist Episcopal Church, another populist, revivalist British NRM founded by a dissatisfied cleric arrived in Canada and the United States. New Kadampa Buddhism was founded in 1991 in North West England by an autocratic exiled Tibetan *lama* (‘spiritual guide’), Geshe Kelsang Gyatso, who has since watched over an energetic missionary campaign, global in scope but thus far focused in Euro-North America, which, like early Methodism, has prioritized planting new churches and preaching liberation by faith, democratized religious authority within a strict hierarchy under one leader, and expected missionaries to embrace austerity, itinerancy, and work. The NKT has not grown as fast as

Methodism in antebellum America, but not for lack of ambition – namely, “to create a temple in every city throughout the world” (NKT x).

Key to the North American expansion of Methodist Christianity and New Kadampa Buddhism, I contend, is a populist, preaching-centred missionizing campaign led by an untrained priesthood who submit to a high-demand disciplinary regime that I call *missionary monasticism*. This term does not refer simply to the phenomenon of ordained monastics who missionize (although there are many in the NKT), but to a form of missionizing which is itself ascetic, in which one need not be *a* monastic to be monastic. In the “business model” of missionary monasticism adopted by 19th-century Methodists and early 21st-century Kadampas, world-conversion is a means of world-renunciation, institutional expansion is a venue for individual self-abnegation, and business-busyness facilitates an abandonment of “worldly concerns.” In short, missions are functional substitutes for monasteries.

i. Research Question and Thesis

How is the traditionally monastic element of Buddhism, the soteriology of renunciation, being practiced by North American members of a new Buddhist movement that has enthusiastically embraced an expansionist business model and major monastic reform? Examining these innovations at urban Canadian and American meditation centres in the New Kadampa Tradition – International Kadampa Buddhist Union (NKT-IKBU), I argue that the NKT’s market-driven expansionism not only supersedes its funding of a monastic community but replaces monasticism as the principal institutional framework for renunciation in the form of full-time subsistence

missionary work. This hybrid business model of missionary monasticism has been a major factor in the NKT's external growth, producing a diverse and motivated labour force whose renunciation of economic remuneration provides the organization with the fruits of their economic production, but also in some of the movement's more visible internal fault lines: labour shortage, turnover, and disgruntled former members.

ii. Context and Overview

In the decades following China's annexation of Tibet in 1950, exiled Tibetan monks living in India and Nepal encountered non-Tibetan spiritual seekers, some of whom returned home to found Buddhist centres where they could invite their teachers. Some of these centres gradually developed into transnational networks built around the authority of individual lamas. Geoffrey Samuel identified this organizational model as the characteristic context of Tibetan Buddhism in the West (2005, 303) – a kind of diasporic manifestation of the characteristic decentralized organizational context of Buddhist lineages in Tibet, as reflected in the Tibetan saying: “Each valley a different language, each lama a different dharma system” (Lopez 1998, 197).

Examples include Chögyam Trungpa's Shambhala International, Lama Zopa's Foundation for the Preservation of the Mahayana Tradition (FPMT), and Geshe Kelsang Gyatso's New Kadampa Tradition (NKT). North Americans who encounter Tibetan Buddhism outside films or books are likely to do so at a teaching or ritual event organized by one of these groups.

Prior to 1950, Tibetan Buddhism was generally practiced in an agrarian, theocratic, and monastic context. By 1991, when the Tibetan *Geluk*² monk Geshe Kelsang Gyatso founded the NKT in Northwest England, diasporic Tibetan Buddhism consisted of a variety of lama-centric sects competing within a global religious marketplace. In 2003, Daniel Cozort described the NKT as one of the largest and fastest growing Tibetan Buddhist organizations in the world and as a “Western order that draws primarily upon the teachings of the Geluk tradition but is not subordinate to Tibetan authorities other than Geshe Gyatso himself” (231). Provoked by his quarrel with the Dalai Lama in strident defence of a controversial Tibetan ‘protector’ deity (*Dorje Shugden*), Gyatso’s break from the greater Geluk order has afforded the NKT’s founder total freedom to innovate.

Jeannine Chandler noted the NKT’s use of “successful marketing techniques, clever advertising, Buddhism study courses and the convenience of the internet” (2009, 95) to increase its membership. Today the group claims 1200 centres and branches in forty countries.

Approximately 250 of these are physical meditation centers which range in size from rural estates like the group’s mother centre, Manjushri Kadampa Meditation Centre (KMC), with its permanent residential community of about a hundred, to urban rented office spaces with memberships of about fifteen, such as Calgary’s Akshobya Kadampa Buddhist Centre (KBC). NKT “branches” often consist of a handful of committed practitioners with a fluctuating number of curious visitors and ‘Buddhist sympathizers.’ Each physical centre is led by a non-Tibetan “Resident Teacher,” most of whom are celibate monastics living under Gyatso’s highly contracted adaption of the traditional Tibetan monastic code (the *Mūlasarvāstivāda Vinaya*).

² *Geluk* (‘system of virtue’), often transliterated as *Gelug*, refers to the newest and largest school of Tibetan Buddhism, founded by the reformer scholar-monk Tsongkhapa (1357-1419).

Many of these teachers are also unordained, however, and many are women, two demographics with no religious authority in Geluk Tibetan Buddhism's patriarchal monastic hierarchy.

In part because Tibet was not colonized until the 1950s Chinese occupation, Victor Hori, John Harding, and Alexander Soucy point out that although Tibetan Buddhism may be the most global form of Buddhism it has not gone through as thorough a modernizing process as other forms of Asian Buddhism (2014, 17). The NKT's market savvy and recent growth combined with its revision of monastic structures, democratization of religious authority, and involvement in the Dorje Shugden controversy, make it a revealing case study of Tibetan Buddhism's global modernization.

This dissertation focuses on the NKT's modernization of monasticism, the central element of Buddhism's traditional socio-economic framework for the renunciatory abandonment of "worldly concerns" on the path to liberation (*nirvāṇa*) from cyclic rebirth (*samsāra*). My focus is thus both institutional (NKT) and thematic (renunciation). Within the institution of monasticism, the otherworldly religious orientation of renunciation traditionally distinguishes ordained Buddhist monks and nuns (*sangha*) from unordained Buddhist laity, most visibly as "a renunciation of the twin household processes of production and reproduction" (Mills 2003a, 74). Hans Penner concludes his structural analysis of the Pali Tipiṭaka's legends of the Buddha with the statement: "The relation 'householder \leftrightarrow renouncer' is the basic definition of Buddhism" (2009, 3). In terms more sociological and monastic: "The reciprocity between the sangha and the layperson is as rational as can be; the giving of gifts yields merit in return. And the monk is

literally dependent on the householder for his existence — a point that is as obvious as it is significant for an understanding of Buddhism” (Penner 1989, 198-199).

In the centuries following the ordination of the first Tibetan monks in the eighth century, the *Vajrayāna* (‘diamond way’)³ Buddhism of Tibet produced the most monastic society in the world. When China declared its sovereignty over the region in 1951 almost a quarter of Tibet’s male population were celibate monks (Goldstein 2010, 14).⁴ Twenty-year-old Kelsang Gyatso was one of over six thousand Geluk monks residing at the mega monastery of Sera. Forty years later when he founded his new Buddhist movement in the UK, Gyatso decided it would have no monasteries, only congregational meditation centers designed to spread his conservative interpretation of Geluk Dharma. Gyatso’s replacement of monasteries with missions and his reduction of the 253 vows of a fully ordained (Tib. *gelong*) Geluk monk to the NKT’s ten ordination vows are parallel reforms that have shaped a very different householder/renouncer relation in the global NKT than in Tibetan monasticism. Without monasteries to ritually symbolize and economically support the praxis of renunciation, what does renunciation look like in the NKT?

³ *Vajrayāna* is a term which first comes into evidence in the eighth century to denote the path of tantric Buddhism (Davidson 2003, 875). Scholars place the emergence of tantric Buddhism as a distinct path with distinct texts (e.g., the *Mahāvairocana Tantra*) around the 7th century CE. Having originated among unorthodox yogins, tantra was introduced into the great Indian Buddhist monasteries (e.g., Nālandā, Vikramaśīla) where many renowned scholar-monks from the eighth century onwards (e.g., Atiśa) produced tantric commentarial literature and independent treatises (Keown 2004a). The term *Vajrayāna* is sometimes used to denote Tibetan Buddhism specifically (e.g., Gethin 1998, 2).

⁴ According to Lopez, “Of the approximately 70,000 Tibetans who successfully followed the Dalai Lama into exile in 1959 and 1960, an estimated 5,000-7,000 were monks, a tiny fraction (perhaps 5 percent) of the monastic population of Tibet” (1995, 263-264).

The NKT's first ethnographer contrasts the group with a British *Theravāda* Buddhist organization: "While the English Sangha Trust finances a monastic community, the NKT funds buildings and centres" (Waterhouse 1997, 144). More precisely, the NKT funds missionizing centres and missionary staff rather than monasteries and monastics. Whereas Tibetan clerical renunciation traditionally looks like the monastic sangha's dual abandonment of economic production and sexual reproduction, these are bifurcated in the NKT between monastics and missionaries who are each semi-renouncers. While ordained NKT monastics renounce sexual reproduction with a formal celibacy vow, they receive no material support from the organization and are free to produce private wealth through secular employment. "Sponsored" NKT missionaries, on the other hand, have no sexual or reproductive restrictions while they informally renounce economic production by committing to full-time employment as meditation centre "managers" (Resident Teacher, Education Program Coordinator, or Administrative Director), typically working well over forty hours a week for subsistence remuneration (single-room lodging + \$475/month)⁵ and no retirement security. Though distinct, these positions are often combined in monastic managers. A significant emic ambiguity in the NKT's pseudo-monastic staff model surrounds the *de facto* ability of householders to be missionary managers, as high demand and low remuneration often render the missionary life unviable for current or prospective parents without sufficient existing wealth to support a family.

⁵ While KMC North and South (my field sites for this research) were able to provide on-site residence for their managers, many urban KMCs around the world are without associated residential facilities, in which case they typically receive sufficient income to cover the cost of a locally rented private or shared residence. I also heard cases of managers' stipendiary incomes being raised above the \$475 monthly baseline based on higher costs of living in particular locations (e.g., Manhattan).

As the next two chapters of literature review aim to demonstrate more conclusively, the North American NKT's adaptation of Tibetan Buddhist monasticism represents a significant gap in research and a profitable case study for the sociology of North American Buddhism and of North American NRMs more broadly. If the householder/renouncer relation is a basic sociological definition of Buddhism (Penner 2009, 3), its analysis in the various cultures to which Buddhism has spread in the past two millennia would seem a productive scholarly agenda. This is precisely what Martin Mills (2003) and Eve Mullen (2001) have accomplished in regard to late 20th-century Tibetan Buddhist cultures of Ladakh and New York respectively. And this is what I aim to accomplish in regard to an early 21st-century Tibetan-inspired Buddhist movement in North America.

In addition to producing the first extended case study of the householder/renouncer relation in a North American Tibetan-inspired new Buddhist movement, this dissertation is the first full-length study of the NKT. A number of other North American Tibetan Buddhist organizations are negotiating their own adjustment of renunciatory monastic tradition to contemporary consumer culture such as Shambhala and FPMT, as well as Namkhai Norbu Rinpoche's Dzogchen Community, Sogyal Rinpoche's Rigpa network, and the twin Karma Kagyu networks led by the different claimants of the throne of the 17th Karmapa. A study of renunciation in the NKT will shed light on similar dynamics of transplantation and adaptation shared by these organizations. Furthermore, similar issues exist for many non-Tibetan Buddhist formations such as the variety of North American *Theravāda* ('way of the elders') Buddhist communities with roots in South and Southeast Asia, or Chinese Buddhist organizations like Foguang Shan with its 1300 monastics in five continents.

iii. Methodology and Sources

Toward improved understandings of a fast-growing global Buddhist movement, economic relations within Buddhism in North America, and the diasporic modernization of Tibetan Buddhist monasticism, I adopt an ethnographic case study approach to the North American NKT's householder/renouncer relation.

I employed the qualitative research methods of participant observation and semi-structured interviews (see Appendix for interview guide) at Kadampa Meditation Centre (KMC) North in central Canada and KMC South in the southern United States.⁶ These communities were primarily chosen for their scale (at least fifteen years old with memberships of at least fifty), location (urban centres in different countries and regions), and capacity to accommodate my presence as a residential “working visitor” (working a set number of hours in exchange for room and board). Research was conducted over six consecutive weeks at KMC South in the Fall of 2016, and at KMC North over a series of shorter visits totaling six weeks in the Fall of 2017. Participant observation consisted of sharing regular conversation and space (residential and ritual) with Kadampa Buddhists while living, working, and practicing at each field site.

To survey their experiences of renunciation in general and its relationship to the spheres of family and finance in particular, I conducted interviews with forty-two practitioners (twenty-one

⁶ These KMC names are pseudonymous placeholders used throughout the dissertation to protect the anonymity of members.

at each centre) which averaged ninety minutes in length. My selection of interviewees aimed at demographic diversity in regard to religious identity (five ordained, one former ordained, thirty-six never ordained), institutional involvement (nine sponsored, five former sponsored, twenty-eight never sponsored, seventeen resident, eight former resident, seventeen never resident), and gender (twenty-two females and twenty males). Recruitment was primarily done through in-person requests during casual KMC encounters, and occasionally through email. To protect the identities of my research subjects, interviewees and other informants are referred to by anonymized pseudonyms throughout the dissertation.

I also collected and analyzed pertinent NKT publications such as *The Internal Rules of the NKT*, *The Ordination Handbook of the NKT*, *A Money Handbook for the NKT*, Kelsang Gyatso's collected works, a variety of official NKT internet (e.g., websites, blogs) and print media (e.g., promotional brochures), as well as unpublished oral NKT teachings (both transcribed from purchased audio recordings and from my handwritten notes). I rely so heavily in Chapters 2 through 6 on the content of these emic NKT sources that my dissertation might be more accurately categorized as a study that employs fieldwork methods than as a strict ethnography, which would delve more closely into the physical and social textures of specific sites.

I employ emic NKT teachings and media motifs not simply as data to supplement my ethnographic findings, but as important primary sources which often help to contextualize and explain sociological dynamics observed in my research and in the research of previous NKT scholars. An example is the "Kadampa heart commitment" (see Chapter 6) that New Kadampa Buddhists take within the blessing empowerment of Dorje Shugden. The "heart commitment"

consists of four sub-commitments – to cherish Kadam Dharma, to practice Kadam Dharma without mixing with other traditions, to teach Kadam Dharma, and to work to flourish Kadam Dharma – which reveal an important and heretofore unexamined ritual basis for the movement’s oft-noted doctrinal parochialism and missionary globalism (see Chapter 2). In this case and others, NKT teachings go a long way to explain NKT behaviours.⁷

Unless otherwise noted, directly cited passages from oral NKT teachings have been transcribed either from my own written notes or from audio recordings purchased at NKT teaching events that I attended in person.

iv. Positionality

I was raised in a Canadian NKT community from the age of eleven and have since attended and volunteered at a number of NKT centres in Canada and abroad. Each member of my immediate family attends and volunteers at a different Canadian NKT centre. My parents have each held sponsored manager positions at NKT centres, and my mother is presently a NKT nun and Resident Teacher. I am therefore more accurately described as a “cradle” New Kadampa Buddhist than a NKT “convert.” As a disciple of the group’s founder, I have not stopped relating to Venerable Geshe Kelsang Gyatso Rinpoche as an enlightened Buddha whilst performing (to the best of my ability) the scholarly criticism demanded by this project.

⁷ In defense of a similar approach, see Hubbard 1998 and Verchery 2015 on the potential analytical utility of emic doctrine in the study of Buddhist movements.

The sympathetic perspective emerging from my insider positionality vis-à-vis my research subjects has undoubtedly influenced my research and analysis. Readers may, for example, see evidence of apologetics in my conclusion's argument that certain culturally discontinuous religious practices which have garnered the NKT a reputation as a dangerous cult (e.g., claims of pressuring adherents to overwork and over-donate in the name of merit accumulation) stem more from its founder's efforts to rapidly democratize renunciation in order to urgently globalize his imperilled lineage than from his alleged efforts to build an empire on the backs of exploitable devotees. I have attempted to counterbalance any personal "caretaker" tendencies (McCutcheon 2001), however, by adopting a critical perspective characteristic of the anthropological (versus theological) study of religion.⁸ The experiences of former members, for example, directly contribute to my theorization of a quasi-monastic NKT missionary imperative which, while forging a "compassionate army" of "true Kadampas" whose devotional ethic of world-service is largely responsible for the movement's growth, can and has been experienced by Kadampas as deceptive, coercive, or exploitative – i.e. as *not* compassionate.

I encountered personal and professional challenges studying the NKT that I would not have encountered researching any other group (e.g., being critical enough). It is my hope that my graduate training combined with the guidance of my supervisory committee has helped to both mitigate these challenges and enable me to utilize the advantages of my insider positionality – namely, a degree of access to (and understanding of) informants and information that would likely have been greatly reduced were I not a self-identified (and relatively seasoned) Kadampa

⁸ See Russell T. McCutcheon 1999 for a broad survey of theoretical and methodological issues surrounding insider (or "emic") positionality in the academic study of religion, and McCutcheon 2001 on the analytical advantages of employing an outsider (or "etic") perspective as a means of "re-describing religion as something ordinary."

Buddhist. Further, while this dissertation keeps discussion of my own experiences to a minimum, in an effort to foreground those of my informants, I often experienced the hazy dividing line between my participant and observer roles as analytically fruitful.⁹

In the spirit of Martin S. Jaffee's suggestion that "the richest study of religion is possible only in the inter-disciplinary 'clearing house' of perspectives which the department or program of the study of religion provides" (1999, 274-275), my dissertation offers an insider's perspective on a controversial NRM. Readers should be aware that this is merely one "positioned sighting" (Tweed 2006, 27) of NKT Buddhism, which will necessarily have its blind spots (14).

v. Theoretical Framework

To chart the internal dynamics of renunciation praxis in the North American NKT and compare them with Himalayan monasticism, I critically deploy a classic typology of Buddhist religious activity in analysis of my ethnographic data: the householder/renouncer relation.

The relational distinction between non-monastic Buddhist householders and monastic Buddhist renunciators is a historically prominent emic structural feature of Buddhist scriptures and societies (see Chapter 1). It has also been employed as a sociological typology of Buddhists and Buddhist economic and religious action within the academic field of Buddhist studies for at least half a century. Theorized in detail by the anthropologist of Burmese Buddhism, Melford Spiro (1970),

⁹ See Wilson 2012 (15-16) for a helpful methodological discussion of similar "boundary-breaking experiences" which can condition insider ethnography.

the householder/renouncer relation has been refined and further developed by scholars of early Theravada (e.g., Penner 1989, 2009) and Mahayana (e.g., Schopen 1997, 2004, 2014; Clarke 2014) scriptures, and by anthropologists of contemporary Himalayan Vajrayana societies (e.g., Ortner 1989; Gellner 1992; Mills 2003a).

The householder/renouncer typology of Buddhist actors and action is thus a theoretical framework which (generally speaking) Buddhists would not reject, but which has also been productively employed in my field not simply to descriptively reproduce emic Buddhist self-understandings but to critically examine them. An influential example of the latter is the revealing contrast, foregrounded in the work of Schopen and Clarke on the *Mūlasarvāstivāda Vinaya*, between prescriptive ideals of monastic world-renunciation found in *sūtra* ('well spoken') literature and the far messier socio-economic nuts and bolts of monastic management painstakingly worked out in *vinaya* ('discipline') literature (see Chapter 1).

This dissertation extends (for the first time I believe) the use of the householder/renouncer construct in Buddhist studies to the study of a new Buddhist movement forged within British and North American host cultures, so heavily influenced by the Protestant Reformation's 500-year-old laicization of Roman Catholic Christianity's householder/renouncer relation. I demonstrate that although a conception of difference between monastics and laity is widespread among Kadampa Buddhists, it does not amount to a distinction between renunciators and non-renunciators, but between optional lifestyles deemed equally effective venues for renunciation conceived as private aspiration. And yet despite an egalitarianist New Kadampa rejection of the householder/renouncer binary (primarily for its implication that lay householders do not, or

worse, cannot, be consummate renouncers), I argue that a NKT householder/renouncer relation is discernible in *de facto* institutional practice – i.e., that a particular (and peculiar) informal form of the binary does map onto NKT lives.

The householder/renouncer relation is a hermeneutical tool which enables me to analyze patterns of religious action in the NKT principally through *cross-cultural comparison* with householder/renouncer relations in other historical and contemporary Buddhist formations, particularly those shaped by the Vajrayana traditions of the Tibetan cultural region. This leads me to an examination of NKT labour and economics which reveals the NKT's bifurcation of Geluk monastic principles in the business model of missionary monasticism, as outlined above (examined in Chapters 4 and 5). As such, in order chiefly to chart intra-lineage dis/continuities, this dissertation's most important comparison is between the NKT and more "traditional" Geluk Tibetan Buddhism.

Since the NKT is one of many Buddhist networks founded by 20th-century Buddhist teachers (Tibetan and non-Tibetan, Asian and non-Asian), however, I frequently compare my research findings with data and existing scholarship on other teachers and movements within global Buddhism more broadly: Shambhala (Chs. 2, 3, 4); FPMT (Chs. 2, 3, 4); Thai Forest Tradition (Ch. 2); Soka Gakkai International (Ch. 2); Foguang Shan (Ch. 5); Buddhist Compassion Relief Tzu Chi Foundation (Ch. 5); Dharma Realm Buddhist Association (Chs. 2, 4, 5, 6); Thich Nhat Hanh (Ch. 3); and Theravada and Theravada-inspired *vipassanā* ('insight) teachers Ledi Sayadaw (Ch. 3), S. N. Goenka (Chs. 2, 3), Jack Kornfield (Ch. 2), and Jon Kabat Zinn (Ch. 3). I also compare certain NKT dynamics with similar dynamics observed by scholars of non-

Buddhist NRMs, particularly in the guru-led Hindu groups Mata Amritanandamayi Mission (Chs. 5, 6) and Siddha Yoga (Ch. 6). Finally, in an attempt to discern the extent to which Gyatso's reformation of Geluk Buddhism compares with the Protestant reformation of Christianity, and might be thus viewed as a Protestantization of Vajrayana Buddhism, each chapter compares particular elements of NKT Buddhism with particular elements of Protestantism.

Although my primary structuring theoretical framework is the householder/renouncer relation, this dissertation is driven by data more than theory. As such, my attempt to understand the internal workings of the NKT often led me to consult other theoretical concepts and constructs when they seemed useful to elucidate my data. These include theories developed and/or employed by scholars of Buddhism (David McMahan, Wendy Cadge, David Kay, Angela Sumegi, Robert Sharf, John Harding, Victor Hori, Alexander Soucy, Carolyn Chen, Erik Braun, Karen Derris, Donald Lopez, Lina Verchery, Natalie Quli, Scott Mitchell, Jeff Wilson, Christopher Hiebert, David Gellner, Geoffrey Samuel, Jonathan Silk, Liz Wilson, Gregory Schopen, and Ryan Overbey), Christianity (Jon Butler, William Hutchison, Nathan O. Hatch, Philip Rieff, Peter Berger, Michel Foucault, and Talal Asad), and NRMs (Maya Warrior, Rodney Stark, William Bainbridge, John Lofland, James Beckford, and Thomas Robbins).

vi. Chapter Outline

The purpose of this dissertation is to examine how a new Tibetan-inspired Buddhist movement is modernizing Tibetan Buddhist monasticism. The first two chapters respectively provide

literature reviews of my thematic and institutional foci: Buddhist monasticism and the New Kadampa Tradition. Chapter 1, “Renunciation and the Householder/Renouncer Relation in Buddhism,” surveys scholarship on renunciation and lay-monastic relations in Buddhist history, and argues that although the ideal of world-renunciation has always defined the tradition’s lay/monastic distinction, the practice of this ideal has never precluded lay/monastic relations, nor required monastic household-renouncers to have different religious motivations than lay householders. Chapter 2, “The New Kadampa Tradition,” surveys scholarship on the NKT, provides an overview of the NKT’s historical development and North American demographics, and argues that the NKT’s approach to modernization combines selective strategies of neo-traditionalization (of identity and doctrine) and detraditionalization (of institutional structures), both of which set the group apart from its Tibetan source tradition.

The remaining data-driven chapters examine the NKT’s modernization of monastic renunciation in theory (Chs. 3 and 4) and in practice (Chs. 4, 5, and 6). Together, they chart a concentric course from encounter to commitment to employment in the NKT – from meeting Kadampa Buddhism in books and/or introductory meditation classes, to registering in a local study program and/or volunteering at a local KMC, to ordaining as a monastic and/or becoming a full-time “sponsored” manager. Chapters 4 and 5 chart the NKT’s householder/renouncer relation, while Chapter 6 examines its close relationship to the group’s guru/disciple relation.

Chapter 3, “Therapy and Soteriology in NKT Publicity and Doctrine,” examines the NKT’s globalist missionary efforts to propagate Gyatso’s Dharma through text (*Modern Buddhism* and *What is Meditation?*), teaching (KMC North meditation classes), and marketing (print and online

promotional materials). My findings demonstrate that North American KMCs' attraction of admission-paying non-Buddhists to drop-in meditation classes through the promotion of culturally desired, this-worldly, therapeutic benefits (e.g., stress reduction) was generally conducted in collaborative service of the promotion of *other*-worldly goals that were *new* to the audiences of NKT books and classes: the happiness of future lives and liberation from cyclic rebirth. Unlike the more typically detraditionalized, demythologized, and psychologized Buddhist modernisms of teachers like Chögyam Trungpa, Thich Nhat Hanh, and the Dalai Lama, NKT missionizing on the whole appears to emphasize Buddhism's this-worldly practical benefits less than its other-worldly soteriological benefits.

This leads me to theorize a concentric distinction between the NKT's therapeutic, "worldly," promotional face and its soteriological, "spiritual," pedagogical mission. I submit that while NKT promotional materials are modernist (i.e., more discontinuous than continuous with Geluk tradition) and therapeutic (i.e., more concerned with improving this life than with escaping cyclic rebirth), pedagogical materials in NKT texts and KMC meditation classes are generally more traditionalist (i.e., more continuous than discontinuous with Geluk tradition) and soteriological (i.e., more concerned with escaping cyclic rebirth than with improving this life). I argue that this strategic combination of "promotional modernism" and "pedagogical traditionalism" entails a synthesis of monastic and missionary imperatives: KMCs concede to "worldly" audience demands in order to spread Gyatso's Dharma to new and expanding markets whilst carrying out their primary mission to produce renouncers uninterested in "worldly concerns" (whose lived experiences are the primary focus of remaining chapters).

Chapter 4, “NKT Monastics: Sexual Renouncers, Symbolic Providers,” examines the role of the NKT missionizing strategy theorized in the previous chapter (this-worldly promotion + other-worldly pedagogy) in the constitution of KMC communities comprised of visitors, patrons, and providers. Based on interviews and participant observation, I offer a commitment-based typology of religious actors at KMC North and South who have “gone deeper” than visitor status by taking up one or more of five increasingly committed positions: member; volunteer; resident; monastic; manager. Within this typology, I argue that monastics and centre managers are the NKT’s clerical world- or household-renouncers, since they alone embrace a religious abandonment of specific “worldly pleasures” (sex and wealth, respectively) within institutionally enforced disciplinary regimes constituting their roles as providers (versus patrons) of Gyatso’s Dharma. For this reason, I contend that the Geluk monastic’s “renunciation of the twin household processes of [economic] production and [sexual] reproduction” (Mills 2003a, 74) has been bifurcated in the NKT between monastics and missionary managers.

After outlining these typologies of commitment and renunciation, the rest of Chapter 4 examines the life of ordained NKT monastics. The second section identifies psychologized generalization as the hermeneutic principle guiding Gyatso’s reform of the *Mūlasarvāstivāda Vinaya*, and the removal of rules constraining the economic activity of NKT monastics as his most impactful reform. Section three examines interview data collected from lay and ordained members of KMC North and South concerning the relationship between renunciation and ordination. I argue that Gyatso’s removal of most of the *Mūlasarvāstivāda* monk’s behavioural proscriptions dovetails with an emic critique of outer world- or household-renunciation (in favour of inner, aspirational samsara-renunciation), which, by equalizing the soteriological horizons of laity and monastics,

effectively terminates the traditional Buddhist lay/monastic merit economy and raises the problem of justifying ordination.

Chapter 5, “NKT Managers: Economic Renouncers, Practical Providers,” analyzes interviews conducted with present and former volunteers at KMC North and South to chart the nature, function, and felt experience of religious volunteer work in the North American NKT, with a particular focus on the movement’s full-time missionaries, or sponsored managers. I argue that despite its lack of formal sexual proscriptions, the life of a sponsored KMC manager is the principal model for living a “consecrated life” of renunciation in the NKT – i.e., a life committed to uninterrupted religious practice, morally and materially supported to renounce all secular interests and self-direction (Hori 2014, 177). Since managers (not monastics) are often removed from their local secular economy, and since a common condition/consequence of such economic renunciation is an informal renunciation of sexual reproduction, I contend that managers (not monastics) are the NKT’s consummate renouncers.

As such, I aim to demonstrate that the NKT’s market-driven expansionism effectively replaces a life of monastic world-renunciation as the principal institutional framework for samsara-renunciation in the form of full-time subsistence missionary work. In this way, Chapter 5 extends previous chapters’ analysis of the manifestation of monastic and missionary imperatives in the interaction between the NKT’s business model and monastic reform, each of which, I contend, fosters both institutional expansion and individual renunciation. After considering some advantageous and adverse effects of this partially laicized NKT staff model for individual practitioners and for the greater institution, the chapter concludes by identifying three constituent

elements of a “centripetal force” drawing NKT converts from self-help to self-abnegation through a path of increasing institutional involvement from visitor to patron to provider: formal teaching encouragement of voluntarism, verbal peer pressure to volunteer, and voluntarism’s non-verbal infectiousness.

Chapter 6, “The Role of Guru Devotion in NKT Missionary Monasticism,” examines a fourth, arguably more indispensable, element of this centripetal force drawing NKT adherents deeper into institutional involvement and world-renunciation: faith in Geshe Kelsang. The first section demonstrates that in ritual, teaching, and promotional media, Kadampa Buddhists are encouraged from the very beginning of their spiritual training to practice guru devotion, and argues that belief-, admiration-, and aspiration-centred attitudes of faith vis-à-vis Gyatso as an ideal renouncer-bodhisattva constitute a key motivational component of their increasing commitment.

The second section examines oral NKT teachings and volunteer testimonies which suggest that the classical Buddhist trainings in ethics, meditation, and wisdom (historically generally considered the purview of monastics) can be substituted by, or synthesized within, the practice of *guru service as NKT work*. I argue that interpreting institutional guru service in the NKT as a form of guru yoga (“uniting with the spiritual guide”) affords a productive explanation of emic teachings and experiential accounts about the mechanics and benefits of KMC work. In particular, it expands the logic of an extra-textual NKT orthopraxy which posits the liberating nature of KMC volunteer work – conceptualized as “bodhisattva activity” on behalf of all living beings and practiced as devotional service to the guru’s institutional body – by identifying such work as entailing a nexus of karma-sowing merit labour and karma-germinating blessings labour.

The chapter concludes by examining the practice of teaching, or preaching, Gyatso's Dharma as a case study of the role of guru devotion in NKT missionary monasticism. I demonstrate that faith in Geshe Kelsang is the preeminent qualification for teaching NKT Dharma, and that such an emphasis on "faith alone" dramatically democratizes Geluk monastic tradition by loosening strictures constraining clerical identity from male monastics to male and/or female monastics and/or laity. Based on oral teachings by Gyatso which construct NKT missionaries as temporary Buddhas, and the group's deployment of guru yoga as a tantric preaching rite which transvalues the guru/disciple hierarchy (and conflates faith and accomplishment), I argue that the NKT has developed a populist form of "Protestant Buddhist tantra" by producing a "priesthood of all believers."

vii. Transliteration

Pali, Sanskrit, and Tibetan words that have not yet been adopted into English are italicized and transliterated with appropriate diacritical markers. Proper personal/monastic names are non-italicized and transliterated with appropriate diacritics (unless commonly used by informants without diacritics). Common terms (e.g., *nirvana*, *samsara*) are transliterated and italicized with appropriate diacritics upon first usage and appear non-italicized without diacritics thereafter.

CHAPTER 1

Renunciation and the Householder/Renouncer Relation in Buddhism

Buddhism is often interpreted as anti-family. One reason for this is the dramatic episode in the legend of the religion's founding known as "the great renunciation" in which Prince Siddhartha commences his path to Buddhahood at the age of twenty-nine by abandoning his parents, wife, infant son, and palace. Having attained his goal of enlightenment, the Buddha goes on to form an ordained community of monk disciples: "He literally turns away from what binds him to samsara, renouncing the relationships that act like glue to eventually create a highly governed community to support individualized practice" (Scheible 2013, 430). In these events, first depicted in the Pali *Jātaka-nidāna* and later elaborated in Sanskrit poetic works of the second and first centuries BCE, "The precious ideal, renunciation, comes at an obvious cost to the family" (431).

This dissertation examines the New Kadampa Tradition's modernization of monasticism, Buddhism's traditional socio-economic framework for "the precious ideal, renunciation" (431). The purpose of this chapter is to provide an overview of existing scholarship on renunciation and lay-monastic relations in Buddhist history from the time of the Buddha (between the 6th and 4th centuries BCE) in North India to 21st-century North America. My survey of these themes in South Asian, Central Asian, and North American Buddhist formations takes as its primary focus the cadre of religious actors who have historically been constructed by these societies as elite exemplars of Buddhist renunciation: monks, lamas, and *tulkus* ('emanation bodies'). Guided by a growing body of descriptive research that resists prescriptive idealizations and isolations of these

renouncers from the “worldly matters” informing their broader socio-economic contexts, this chapter examines monastic patterns of religious action as one side of the Buddhist coin: the householder/renouncer *relation*. I therefore attempt to give ample (if not quite equal) focus to the non-monastic, lay, “householder” patterns of religious action which have always characterized the lives of the vast majority of Buddhists. In short, this chapter demonstrates that the ideal of world-renunciation has defined lay/monastic separation in Buddhist history, but that (contrary to stereotypes of cloistered monastic meditators) the practice of this ideal has never precluded lay/monastic relations, nor required monastic household-renouncers to have different religious motivations than lay householders.

i. Renunciation and the Householder/Renouncer Relation in South Asian Buddhism

Before Siddhartha was a *buddha* (‘awakened one’), he was a *śramaṇa* (‘one who strives’), practicing austerities and meditative techniques within a diverse Indian movement of wandering ascetics which by the fifth century BCE threatened the ritual authority of India’s brahmin priests while it influenced brahmanical teachings (Gethin 1998, 9-13). The renunciation of *śramaṇas* was not, however, generally understood to necessitate strict abandonment of relationships:

The only general statement which one can make concerning asceticism in the religious traditions of South Asia is that all ascetics see themselves as followers of some path which releases them from the transient world (*not* the social world) and that all ascetics distinguish themselves from non-ascetics who do not seek such release. (Burghart 1983, 643)

According to David Gellner, “The distinction between soteriology and thisworldly religion is fundamental to all traditional scriptural religions of South Asia” (1992, 345). In Buddhism, the ascetic/non-ascetic or soteriological/this-worldly distinction has generally taken the form of

householder (*grhastha*) versus homeless one (*anagārika*) or renouncer (*śramaṇa*). Structural analysis of the earliest legends of the Buddha led Hans Penner to view Siddhartha's narrated "births, deaths, and rebirths ... as a series of punctuated appearances as monarch / renouncer" (2009, 122), which in turn drew him to conclude that "[t]he relation 'householder ↔ renouncer' is the basic definition of Buddhism" (3).

Karma Lekshe Tsomo explains that the householder/renouncer distinction was also a central feature of the Buddha's discourses and their audience:

The Buddha taught a path that was accessible to all, but his primary audience consisted of celibate practitioners who followed a path of renunciation. Like many other renunciant traditions in India, the Buddha endorsed celibacy (*brahmacarya*, "the pure life"), a fairly radical step in a society that valued the family as the bedrock of society. To his renunciant disciples, the Buddha consistently reiterated that family life constitutes an impediment to Dharma practice and that a celibate lifestyle was the best working basis for achieving enlightenment. (2006, 61)

Tsomo nuances the Buddha's world-rejecting message, however, by pointing out that while "Buddha Shakyamuni ... lauded renunciation of the household life" (2006, 49), his earliest teachings defined renunciation:

not as the eschewing of food and shelter, as in previous ascetic practices, but as the renunciation of *samsara* and all the things that keep sentient beings trapped within the cycle of repeated rebirth and suffering. ... Toward this end, the renunciation of household life is viewed as a useful, but not essential, step. Householders are fully capable of practicing ethics (*sila*), meditation (*samadhi*), and wisdom (*prajna*), although their household responsibilities make finding time for contemplative practice more challenging. (52)

Thus, while individuals entangled in the responsibilities of raising children and earning a living were viewed as theoretically capable of navigating the Buddhist path to awakening, their path would almost certainly be more difficult and drawn out.

Rita Gross describes the monastic life in similar terms of soteriological pragmatism: “For the Buddhist world-renouncer, the body, wealth, family ties, or sense pleasures are not ... viewed as evil. Rather, the attachment and confusion they tend to breed must be overcome to achieve spiritual liberation” (1993, 31). She also contends that while householder life was not condemned in early Buddhism, it was deemed “not conducive to the final goal of *nirvana*, and ... therefore an *inappropriate* lifestyle for someone set on that final goal” (31). Both Tsomo and Gross thus characterize early Buddhist samsara-renunciation as a soteriological orientation aimed at accomplishing the “inner” goal of liberation (*nirvana*) from cyclic rebirth (*samsara*) by abandoning inner defilements (*klesās*); they characterize early Buddhist household-renunciation, on the other hand, as an ideal, “but not essential” (Tsomo 2006, 52) outer, material framework for the fundamentally psychological project of samsara-renunciation. This is supported by the *Milindapañha* from the Burmese Sutta Piṭaka’s final volume¹⁰ which specifies: “[B]oth the householder and the homeless wanderer are alike in that, when they progress rightly, they accomplish the right method, the Dharma, the wholesome. And nevertheless ... to be a homeless wanderer ... has infinite virtues” (Conze 1959, 94).

According to Robert Sharf, however, *within* the early Buddhist monastic sangha – the Buddha’s “primary audience” (Tsomo 2006, 61) – inner renunciation of psychological defilements was not seen as sufficient; rather, outer renunciation of “mainstream social values and cultural norms” *was* deemed essential:

¹⁰ It should be noted that the *Milindapañha* (‘Questions of Milinda’) is paracanonical text outside the Burmese recension of the Theravāda Pāli Canon (Hinüber 2000, 82-86).

For the *saṃgha*, liberation required “letting go,” and letting go did not mean to merely adopt a particular attitude or psychological frame, however important such a frame may be. Rather, it necessitated a radical change in the way one lived; one was required to opt out of family ties and worldly pursuits, and opt into an alternative, communal, celibate, and highly regulated lifestyle. (2017, 209)

Perhaps not unlike the broader community of lay and monastic Buddhists, scholars do not agree on the necessity of giving up the family in early Buddhist ideals of renunciation. Everyone does agree, however, that some form of renunciation is necessary to live a spiritual life; outer renunciation (*pravrajyā*) is usually at least affirmed, even if some emphasize inner renunciation (*niḥsaraṇa*). Most of the Asian cultures to which Buddhism spread over the next two millennia adopted some form of monasticism as the most conducive socio-economic framework for a religious elite’s renunciatory abandonment of “worldly” concerns. In such societies the ordained monk (*bhikṣu*), and to a lesser extent nun (*bhikṣuṇī*), typically came to represent the ideal religious way of life.

Although Tsomo and Gross suggest that South Asian householders in the centuries following the life of the Buddha could well have been disciplined meditators motivated by a renunciation of samsara, the theoretical possibility of advanced householder practice was likely not popularized until the first centuries of the common era when “the Mahayana Sutras were to provide the foundation for lay Buddhism” (Samuel 1993, 391) in early Mahayana schools such as Chinese Pure Land and subsequent Indian tantric formations discussed below. In addition to the paradigmatic lay practice of generosity (*dāna*), however, which typically takes the form of alms-giving to monks and nuns, lay Theravada Buddhists have also traditionally had recourse to specific practices of discipline in the form of five permanent or eight temporary precepts, as well

as contemplative practices (shared with monks and nuns) associated with deity worship (*pūjā*), such as prostrations, circumambulation, and making offerings (Gethin 1998, 104, 109-110).

The ideal of household-renunciation is alive and well in Buddhist societies throughout Asia and beyond. The events of the Buddha's "great renunciation," for example, continue to be dramatized in contemporary Theravadin cultures through ceremonies of "going forth" (*pravrajyā*) into homelessness whereby boys become 'novice' renunciators (*śrāmaṇera*):

The boy initially dresses in the white clothes of a lay person and a crown symbolic of Siddhartha's, then mounts a horse and rides away from his family toward the monastery, then eventually changes into the robes of a monk and receives the precepts, or rules of training. The movement away from family, ritually enacted by young male novices, is the foundation of Buddhist monasticism. (Tsomo 2006, 53-54)

The Buddhist sangha and monastery can even be understood as the religious analogs of the conjugal family and household:

Buddhism is a religion of renunciation and transcendental understanding. ... The path out of ... illusion and suffering requires the elimination of attachments to material objects and people (wife, children, parents, etc.). However, if individuals strive to transcend the 'normal' world of sensual and material desires, how will they interact with the environment to extract their subsistence? ... The challenge to Buddhist praxis was and is to create and perpetuate an institutional framework that is 'of-the-world' yet at the same time 'out-of-the-world.' The community of monks, the monastery, was and is the vehicle for this. (Goldstein and Tsarong, 1985: 14-15)

As such, monasteries are typically established outside the lay community but close enough to allow for interaction. Victor Hori defined a monastery as a resident community of ordained monks and/or nuns who together live a "consecrated life" — a life committed to uninterrupted religious practice in which monastics are morally and materially supported to renounce all secular interests and self-direction over their own lives (2014, 177). Jonathan Silk called it the

life of the professional or vocational Buddhist: “The essential structural fact is the existence of the monastic profession, a form of being Buddhist that was different from the default mode of tacit belonging, and the corresponding possibility for an individual to devote him- or herself to the Buddhist life as a vocation” (2008, 4).

To the extent that the monastic community is seen as a segregated, superior substitute for the family, Buddhism might justifiably be viewed as anti-family. Such a sharp renouncer-householder divide has rarely, however, been the lived experience of actual Buddhists: “The ascetic ideal may theoretically separate family from practice, but in reality such separations probably have been, and continue to be, quite rare” (Sasson 2013, 9). In an effort to correct an idealistic, text-based portrait of the Buddhist monk as “a solitary meditator, wrapped in his own world of contemplation and virtually oblivious to his material environment” (Silk 2008, 11) – an ideal perpetuated in the work of anthropologists Louis Dumont and Melford Spiro (Mills 2003a, 54-57) – a growing body of research on Asian Buddhist monasticisms documents the heterogeneity of actual monastic lives and the universal socio-economic reality of householder/renouncer relationality.

Tsomo pointed out that, “Except for exceptional individuals and periods of intensive retreat, Buddhist renunciants live in monastic communities and are in frequent contact with the lay community upon whom they depend for food and other necessities” (2006, 49). Penner is adamant about householder/renouncer interdependence: “The reciprocity between the sangha and the layperson is as rational as can be; the giving of gifts yields merit in return. And the monk is literally dependent on the householder for his existence — a point that is as obvious as it is

significant for an understanding of Buddhism” (1989, 198-199). In the language of modern political philosophy, “In accepting lay support in the form of robes, food, and lodgings, the monk enters into a kind of social contract; it becomes his responsibility to live in a certain way, namely to live the holy or spiritual life (*brahmacarya*) to the best of his ability” (Gethin 1998, 94).

As well as being the intended residential and ritual centre of the monastic individual’s journey beyond samsara, therefore, the monastery is also a site of exchange in the traditional Buddhist householder/renouncer gift economy in which monastics are materially supported by laity and laity are spiritually supported by monastics. Introducing his study of Indian Buddhist monastic administrators, Silk described the unique ritual productivity of such a division of labour:

The traditional logic for monastic distance from the laity was that, through their strict adherence to the norms of the monastic codes, monks made themselves into repositories of merit. As such, the monks, isolated from ordinary secular community life, nevertheless provided an indirect service by offering the laity an opportunity to generate merit through donations. The symbiotic relationship functioned through the logic of donation, purity, and merit. (2008, 6)

Despite the fact of lay-monastic reciprocity, the ideal of monastic distance (or world renunciation) continues to be a real source of admiration and aspiration for lay and ordained Buddhists in Asia and beyond. Indeed, the ritual logic of Buddhist monasticism relies as much on the ideal of monastic distance as it does on the socio-economic reality of lay-monastic proximity. The former is an ideal of purity enacted chiefly through “strict adherence to the norms of the monastic codes, [by which] monks made themselves into repositories of merit” (6).

Merit (*punya*) and the code of monastic discipline (*vinaya*) have thus been pivotal elements of Buddhism and Buddhist householder/renouncer relations. According to Penner, the householder/renouncer binary is made into a “coherent religious system” (2009, 202) with the

introduction of a third element, the gift: “What mediates that set of relations is ... the gift, which entails the twin transcendental doctrines of karma and merit” (219). Merit is basically good karma – the imprints of virtuous actions in one’s mental continuum which carry the potential power to ripen as positive experiences in the future. Through strict adherence to the *vinaya*, monks and nuns become powerful producers of this spiritual currency which they can then ‘give’ to laity in exchange for material gifts (*dāna*). Jeff Wilson describes this lay/monastic “merit economy” as “the classical formula of Buddhist economic relations” (2018, 3) and “the foundational basis ... of Buddhism itself, historically speaking” (5):

Merit is most easily and successfully produced by monastics. They follow codes of behavior that prevent accumulation of demerit and encourage cultivation of merit—furthermore, most Buddhist societies have believed that the act of undertaking ordination effects an ontological change, so that the resulting monk or nun is different from and holier than their previous existence as a layperson. ... It is often erroneously stated that monks and nuns do not work. But they are better conceived as a specialized class of workers within Buddhist society who create and disseminate a specific, highly valuable product: merit. Their work to produce this product can therefore be termed merit labor, and it is the chief commodity of the merit economy. Laypeople may produce merit, but have a dramatically reduced capacity to do so, since they necessarily live lives that force them into demeritorious actions, and they lack the time, training, and circumstances to perform the most meritorious Buddhist practices. ... Monastics are called a field of merit: the purity and ritual expertise of the monks and nuns are the fertile ground in which the laity sow seeds of *dana* to acquire a crop of merit. (3-4)

The production and exchange of merit is therefore one way to understand the traditional justification for world renunciation’s monastic professionalization in Buddhism.¹¹ In this sense the institution of monasticism serves the lay masses as much as a monastic elite – if not more, since laity might be said to get the better deal: “merit is the most valuable possible currency, far

¹¹ See Jason Neelis 2011 for a survey of scholarship on Buddhist economies of merit (17-19) and the commodification of merit (23-24).

more valuable than mere money, which, unlike merit, can't literally buy you love or happiness and, unlike merit, you can't take it with you when you die" (4).

The professional qualification for a monk or nun's specialized merit labour is monastic ordination itself, as defined by one of the 'three baskets' (*tripiṭaka*) of canonical Indian Buddhist scriptures, the code of monastic discipline (vinaya). Broadly speaking, the vinaya prescribes "renunciation of the twin household processes of production and reproduction" (Mills 2003a, 74) in great proscriptive detail. But it also lays out a great many other behavioural laws "primarily concerned not with ethics or morality but with the preservation of the religious institution and its public image" (Clarke 2014, 11), including financial propriety – "contracts, debts, interest, loans, money, property, rights of inheritance, and wealth" (16) – and the upkeep of optimal relations with the laity. Although adherence to the monastic codes is the very means by which monks and nuns make themselves into repositories of merit by renouncing the world, those codes actually *stipulate* worldly relationships:

If the Vinaya was intended to regulate the life of a self-sufficient community of ascetics who had no contact with society at large, it could have been structured differently. Instead it specifies that a monk should not handle money; he should not eat food that he has not received from someone else; he should not dig the ground or have it dug, and so is effectively prohibited from farming; strictly he should not store food unless sick, and then only for seven days; finally he is discouraged from cooking. If called on to preach or attend to a lay supporter in various ways, then the community of monks should provide someone. All these rules have the effect of drawing the Buddhist monk into a relationship with society, and balancing any tendency towards becoming a movement of eremitic ascetics. (Gethin 1998, 93-94)

According to Gethin, “the genius of the Vinaya is that having invited the monk to give up society it then requires him to live in dependence upon it” (93).¹² The renunciation prescribed by the vinaya is thus outer rather than inner: “Because it codifies the laws of a community rather than guides individuals, it deals only with external behaviours, not with internal mental states” (Dreyfus 2003, 34).

Introducing his study of “family matters” in the Indian *Mūlasarvāstivāda Vinaya*, one of the three living vinaya lineages and the one followed by monastics in all schools of Tibetan Buddhism, Shayne Clarke cites an early Buddhist text which “contains explicit exhortations to abandon kith and kin, forsake wealth and material gain, and go forth and wander alone like the rhinoceros.” Clarke describes this as an ideal which “arguably forms the cornerstone of modern scholarly understandings of Buddhist monasticisms” (2014, 4), and which he aims to dismantle:

[T]he image espoused by the *Rhinoceros Horn Sutra* seems to be antithetical to the religious life as envisioned by the authors/redactors of the monastic law codes. In the monastic codes, most passages dealing with Buddhist renunciation do not mention, much less require, the severance of familial ties, even though that is exactly how they have been interpreted. (17)

Clarke attributes the common scholarly misinterpretation of vinaya renunciation as anti-family in part to the fact that “To date the study of Buddhism ... has focused generally not on realia or social history but primarily on doctrine, philosophy, and ethics” – in turn stemming partly from “the privileging of one type of canonical text over another (i.e., *sutra* over *vinaya*)”¹³ but more

¹² Ilana Friedrich-Silber’s similar account of the Buddhist householder-renouncer relation emphasizes the consecrated nature of monastic dependence itself: “Theravada Buddhism[’s] ... early scriptures already provided ... a specific model of interaction between virtuosi and laymen ... rooted in a very distinct mode of coexistence, or ‘economy,’ of otherworldly and worldly orientations ... combining an extreme world-negating definition of salvation ... with a sustained concern with the social order as the inevitable and even necessary *context* of this search for salvation” (1995, 57).

¹³ Whereas, for example, the vinaya “deals only with external behaviours, not with internal mental states” (Dreyfus 2003, 34), the *Milindapañha* assures readers that “whosoever enters the Order of monks from bad *motives* ... shall

directly from “a selectivity guided by preconceived notions about what Buddhist monasticisms should look like” (17). Liz Wilson summarizes her brief overview of Clarke’s work and that of his doctoral advisor Gregory Schopen: “[G]oing forth from home to homelessness may have been more a matter of rhetoric than a matter of reality on the ground, as indicated by inscriptional evidence and evidence from extant *vinayas*” (2013, 4)

Although Indian Buddhist monastics typically remained more embedded in household affairs than isolated from them, according to Tsomo this would not necessarily have compromised their renunciation of samsara, since even householders are theoretically fully capable of escaping samsara through practicing the three “higher trainings” of ethics, meditation, and wisdom (2006, 52). Indian Buddhist monks and nuns may not have been strict *household*-renouncers, but were they *samsara*-renouncers? To what extent might the association of monastic ordination with the soteriological aspiration of *samsara*-renunciation be empirically valid beyond symbolism? In reference to Spiro’s influential threefold typology of ‘apotropaic’ (magical), ‘kammatic’ (ethical), and ‘nibbanic’ (soteriological) Buddhist aspirational orientations, Gethin cautioned:

[O]ne should avoid the conclusion that what Spiro calls apotropaic and kammatic are the strict preserve of the layman and nibbanic Buddhism the preserve of the monk. In practice many, perhaps most, monks are equally concerned with apotropaic and kammatic Buddhism and a few lay followers with nibbanic. (1998, 111)

Charting the lived specificities of monastic ‘merit labour’ (what monks and nuns actually do) is one way to substantiate such a portrait of the worldly/unworldly heterogeneity of monastic aspirations. Gethin summarizes the tradition’s emic ideals:

The aim of Buddhism is to put into practice a particular way of living the ‘holy life’ or ‘spiritual life’ (*brahma-cariya*) that involves training in ethical conduct (*śīla/sīla*)

be scorned, derided, reproached, ridiculed and mocked; ... And in his next life ... he shall cook for many hundreds of thousands of kotis of years in the great Avici hell” (Conze 1959, 95, my italics).

and meditative and contemplative techniques (*samādhi*) and which culminates in the direct realization of the very knowledge (*prajñā /paññā*) the Buddha himself reached under the tree of awakening. (36)

If the path to liberation demands rigorous trainings in ethics, meditation, and wisdom, then samsara-renouncers should be more or less identifiable by their degree of engagement with these practices. And while wisdom may be an invisible mental state, its development is taught to depend entirely upon practices which *are*, to some extent at least, outwardly visible: ethics and meditation. The first of these has been discussed: A monk or nun's identity as a renouncer depends primarily on the propriety of their practice of moral discipline as measured by their adherence to the laws of the vinaya. Violation of vinaya precepts may lead to a monastic individual's disrepute (and that of his or her monastic community), expulsion from the monastic community, or, more commonly, prescribed forms of penance (Wilson 2013, 3).

Have Buddhist monks and nuns traditionally upheld similar standards of meditative training?

While Spiro, guided by traditional Indian soteriological ideals, considered nibbanic Buddhism's primary practice to be meditation (Gethin 1998, 111), Sharf contends that "In fact, contrary to the image propagated by twentieth-century apologists, the actual practice of what we would call meditation rarely played a major role in Buddhist monastic life" (1995, 241). George Dreyfus points out that this is partly due to a lack of prescriptions regarding contemplative practices in the vinaya: "Being a good monk entails abiding diligently by the numerous rules of the Vinaya, and practicing meditation is not included in those rules. In general, to meditate is not a moral obligation, whereas to follow precepts is" (2003, 169).¹⁴ Measured against "[t]he aim of

¹⁴ There are also no vinaya proscriptions *against* meditation. Vinaya rules generally take the form of proscriptions enforcing codes of proper behaviour; they tell monks and nuns what they should not be doing rather than prescribing what they should do. The *Mūlasarvāstivāda Vinaya*, however, treats the practice of textual recitation in far more

Buddhism ... of living the ‘holy life’ or ‘spiritual life’ (*brahma-cariya*) that involves training in ... meditative and contemplative techniques (*samadhi*)” (Gethin 1998, 36), it would seem that in practice most monks and nuns have historically not been samsara-renouncing nirvana-strivers.

Although Dreyfus’s summary of the Indian justification for monastic life equates “monastic separation” with “seeking liberation,” it helps clarify the relation between monastic motives and behaviour when considered alongside his assertions concerning the vinaya cited above:

In general, monasticism attempts to create a form of life separate from the world in order that the religious ideals of a tradition can be fully expressed. From the monastic perspective, life in the world prevents the full realization of one’s religious vocation. In the Indian context, monastic separation finds its standard expression in the phenomenon of world renunciation (*samnyasa*). Renouncers seeking liberation from the cycle of birth and death enter into a separate mode of life in which they are not bound by social conventions and are free to adopt the discipline that may enable them to transcend the limits of normal existence. (2003, 33)

According to Dreyfus’s assertions that “[b]eing a good monk entails abiding diligently by the numerous rules of the Vinaya” (169), and that the vinaya “deals only with external behaviours, not with internal mental states” (34), however, it would appear that “outer” and “inner” forms of renunciation – which may correspond to the different meanings of the Sanskrit terms *saṃnyāsa* (world-renouncer) and *śramaṇa* (one who strives) – cannot be equated. The oversimplification is likely due to the fact that Dreyfus is introducing the emic logic of Buddhist monastic ideals rather than describing monastic social realities. Three essential points about Buddhist monasticism emerge: being a good vinaya-abiding monk (i) does not necessarily *entail* (even by

detail than the practice of meditation, indicating biases against meditation in the monastic code’s sources (see Schopen 2004, 15; Bass 2013, Ch. 3).

emic technical criteria) nirvana-striving, but does (ii) theoretically *support*, and (iii) exoterically *represent* nirvana-striving.

A monk or nun's social identity as a samsara-renouncing nirvana-striver depends primarily, therefore, on their disciplined *behavioural* adherence to monastic laws that do not require the monastic's *aspirational* adherence to the goal of nirvana. Talal Asad's distinction between a pre-modern understanding of religious ritual as a technical script for regulating practice and a modern Protestant-influenced conception of ritual as symbolic, secondary, ineffectual behaviour provides a helpful caution against interpreting the apparent disconnect between behavioural and psychological forms of monastic renunciation as rendering the former *merely* symbolic (and implicitly inauthentic). Asad insists that "[a]lthough most Christians in feudal society lived outside monastic organizations, the disciplined formation of the Christian self was possible only within such communities"¹⁵ (1993, 62) not because monastic life provided monks with the ideal outer conditions for introspective contemplation but because it provided them with a strict disciplinary regime of imitative behaviour modification:

The things prescribed, including liturgical services, had a place in the overall scheme of training of the Christian self. In this conception there could be no radical disjunction between outer behaviour and inner motive, between social rituals and individual sentiments, between activities that are expressive and those that are technical. ... It is precisely through the concept of a disciplinary program that "outer behaviour" and "inner motive" were connected. (63-64)

¹⁵ Elsewhere Asad supports this point with reference to Foucault's (1982) theorization of medieval Christian monastic asceticism (as articulated in the works of John Cassian) as "a technology of the self, which plays a crucial part in a distinctive production of truth" (Asad 1993, 107), particularly the monastic individual's cultivation and maintenance of "a state of constant watchfulness over himself" (108) in order to systematically "replace unlawful desires with virtuous ones" (140).

Despite this important corrective against an overly psychologized interpretation of the vinaya's "outer" behavioural proscriptions as being merely symbolic (rather than technical), aimed at forming symbolic nirvana-strivers rather than actual ones, the "inner" practices of aspiration and meditation do play a central role in the monastic formation of Buddhist selves – perhaps less as quotidian monastic practices than as elite ideals understood to be constitutive of the Buddhist tradition. The Buddha, after all, is said to have renounced the world due to his intense *wish* for liberation, which he is understood to have eventually fulfilled primarily through his practice of meditation. In the context of Tibetan monasticism:

More often than not, meditation's role is normative: it is the means through which the ultimate goals of the tradition can be realized. As such it is highly valued, for without it the whole system of religious practice is in danger of collapsing. That status as a normative practice also implies that it is important to be able to point to some people as practicing meditation. They are the virtuosi who authenticate the ultimate claims of the tradition, but their numbers are small. Meditation is a difficult practice, and not everybody will equally succeed in it or even benefit from it. Moreover, there are many other practices that are important. Why engage in meditation, unless one feels a special call and ability to do so? (Dreyfus 2003, 169)

Rather than reflecting the indolence of the Buddhist sangha, Sharf attributes the historical rarity of Buddhist monastics' intensive engagement in meditation practice to a kind of pragmatic resignation linked to a common conception of the degeneracy of the times:

The ubiquitous notion of *mappo* or the "final degenerate age of the dharma" served to reinforce the notion that "enlightenment" was not in fact a viable goal for monks living in inauspicious times. This is readily confirmed by anthropological accounts: modern monks, at least those who are not associated with "Protestant Buddhist" revival movements ... consider *nirvana* to be an impossibly distant ideal. (241)

This kind of soteriological resignation is not peculiar to “modern monks.” The Bengali monk Atiśa Dīpaṅkara Śrījñāna (982-1054) – whose foremost lay disciple Dromtönpa (1005-1064) founded the *Kadam*¹⁶ school – admonished a similar view among Tibetan monks:

[Un]der the influence of past habits that sapped your strength, you continually produced the concepts of a worldly person. Because such concepts are predominant, unless you make use of strong antidotes to them, it is useless to remain in a monastery. You would be like the birds and wild animals that live there. Do not think “It is too difficult to apply the antidotes right now.” If the wish-fulfilling jewel should happen to fall from the hands of a blind man, he may never find it again. As you practice, do not count the months and years, but continually examine the strength of your meditation and the extent of your realization. (Wangyal 1995, 91)

Geoffrey Samuel contends that lay and monastic Tibetan Buddhists commonly hold “a relatively modest view of their spiritual abilities and ambitions ... content to see the ‘real’ teachings as reserved for other more advanced practitioners, and as something one may at best be able to undertake in a future lifetime.” He contrasts this with Western practitioners of Tibetan Buddhism “few [of whom] ... have been prepared to take on such a modest role” (2005, 327-328), and who often want what they see as the highest teachings: not renunciation but tantra.

Despite the likelihood that advanced contemplative practices have only ever occupied a minority of Buddhist monastics, the rise of Mahayana Buddhism in South Asia from about the turn of the common era (CE), which then spread rapidly throughout East Asia, did dramatically (if largely theoretically) expand the soteriological horizons of lay Buddhist practice:

For the Theravadins, monastic ordination is the *sine qua non* for serious practice. In the Mahayana, the status of the lay practitioner is far higher than in the Theravada, and the difference between *bhikṣu* and layman as far as the pursuit of Enlightenment

¹⁶ Thupten Jinpa cites a 15th-century Tibetan historian to define ‘Kadam’ as “those who integrate the essence of the entire three baskets of Buddhist scripture within the framework of the path of the three scopes and for whom all the scriptures of Buddha appear as personal instructions” (2008, 7).

is concerned becomes considerably less important. The monastic life is worthy of great respect, but it is by no means essential. (Samuel 1993, 203)

Gellner attributes the Mahayana's laicization of Buddhist practice to the "extremely fertile" concept of the *bodhisattva* ('enlightenment being'), one who strives for Buddhahood for the welfare of others, which:

provided an altruistic rationale for increasing involvement in lay and worldly religious action on the part of the Buddhist clergy (whether celibate or not) and indeed accelerated the development of a married clergy (since the *bodhisattva* of the Rebirth [*Jataka*] stories is many things – including women and animals – but only rarely a monk). (1992, 111)

He contends, however, that early Mahayana Buddhism generally reserved the actual practices of the Bodhisattva path for monks, and that it was not until "the rise of the Vajrayana, ... [that] even the householder was enabled to follow this path" (112).

ii. Renunciation and the Householder/Renouncer Relation in Central Asian Buddhism¹⁷

In the centuries following the Indian monk Santarakshita's ordination of the first five Tibetan monks in 766 CE (Tsomo 2013, 375), the system of lay-monastic reciprocity became a pervasive social fact in Tibet: "Until its demise in 1959, [the Tibetan] system of mass monasticism was extremely successful, creating and sustaining the largest monasteries in the modern world and the largest proportion of full-time celibate monks" (Goldstein 2010, 14). Not only did the majority of Tibetan monks remain dependent on their family's resources throughout their lives (as described below), but the human resource that the monks themselves represented to the

¹⁷ Approximately half of this section was previously published in *Tibetan Guru, Western Disciple* (Emory-Moore 2012).

monastery were initially of course provided by those families – “almost always recruited as very young children through the agency of their parents or guardians. It was considered important to recruit monks before they had experienced sexual relations with girls, so monks were brought to the monastery as young boys, usually between the ages of 6-12” (Goldstein 2010, 4).

Meditation has not traditionally played a major role in the training of Buddhist monastics in Tibet (Dreyfus 2003, 37, 181). Memorization of scripture receives far greater emphasis (Tsomo 2013, 387; Mills 2003a, 43-44). Samuel’s account of Tibetan monastics’ “relatively modest view of their spiritual abilities and ambitions” (2005, 327) and the picture of Tibet’s mega monasteries as housing very little nibbanic meditators is consistent with the fact that the vast majority of monks were not in fact seen (and did not see themselves) as their tradition’s consummate renunciators. Tibetan Buddhism produced a proportionately larger number of monks than any other Asian Buddhist society, but equally significant was the tradition’s production of a virtuoso renouncer whose authority outshone that of the monk: the incarnate, or tulku. Before examining the nature of the Tibetan tulku’s authority and his displacement of the monk as consummate renouncer, some familiarity is required with the genus of religious specialist of which the tulku is a rather late Himalayan species – the tantric *guru* (‘spiritual guide’), or lama – which in turn requires an introduction to Buddhist tantrism.

Monks and Lamas

Ronald Davidson refers to the period during and immediately following Buddhism’s ‘second diffusion’ from India to Tibet (approx. 950-1250 CE) as the *Tibetan Renaissance*, a time when Tibetans used the literature and practices of Indian Buddhist tantrism to reorganize their own

religion and society after a century of civil unrest following the collapse of the Tibetan empire in the mid ninth century (2005, ix). During this period, “Tibetan lamas employed the new ritual and ideological forms [of Indian tantrism] to establish a narrative of the religiopolitical authority of the Buddhist monk, so that monks could eventually replace the old royal line as the legitimate rulers of Central Tibet” (3). One of the principal forms employed in this way was the Indian tantric image of the *maṇḍala* (‘circle’), “the broad metaphor of becoming the overlord of a circle of vassal states” (30). Following consecration by a *vajrācārya* (‘diamond master’), the practitioner of ‘generation stage’ tantra trains in visualizing the transformation (*not* renunciation) of the world into “a perfect cosmopolis of Buddhist deities in an impenetrable citadel, with the meditator envisioning himself as the central divinity” (36), the *yidam* (*iṣṭadevatā*). The identification of Tibetan lamas (especially, but not always, monks) with particular *yidams* was thus part of a tantric “sacralization of feudal authority” (142) which would lead ultimately to the Dalai Lama’s Tibetan bodhisattvacracy.

Despite Davidson’s account of the important role of the Buddhist monk in Tibet’s reception of Indian tantrism, Mills suggests that “The sheer variety both of types of ritual practitioner and of degrees of institutionalization within monastic orders, temple complexes, household groups and so forth, within the Tibetan ritual world, make a mockery of a simple, monk-centred portrait of religious life” (2003a, 55). He identifies a “crucial distinction within Tibetan Buddhist schools between monasticism on the one hand, and relations of spiritual and ritual tutelage on the other, a distinction which created two linked, but very different kinds of religious practitioner: the monk, or *trapa*; and the spiritual guide, or *lama*” (2003a, 53). According to Gellner, “Tantra was required for Buddhism to deny explicitly the preeminence of the monk, and replace the monk-

layman dichotomy with the guru-disciple dichotomy. It was needed to legitimize a priesthood” (1992, 325).

Prior to Buddhism’s Tibetan migration, the distinction between monastic and tantric modes of ordination- and initiation-centred religious formation was a central feature of Hindu and Buddhist tantric traditions that developed in India in the seventh and eighth centuries (Gray 2013, 49). Beyond devotion to a spiritual teacher as a condition for instruction, guru devotion as a means of attainment in itself developed in Hindu traditions of *bhakti* (‘devotion’) and tantrism, the latter being a system of esoteric ritual practice to which entrance may be gained only through initiation (*dīkṣā*) by a qualified guru. As human link to the divine, the tantric guru comes to be viewed as the incarnation of the divine:

In Tantric circles, when a master plays the fundamental role of transmitting a ritual teaching, it is believed that his or her identity as a particular human being is utterly vanquished. At that time the guru is the instrument through which the descent of the spiritual influence takes place. This is why the master is typically identified with the supreme deity itself. As the celebrated first verse of the *Guru-stotra* solemnly declares: “The *guru* is Brahmā, the *guru* is Viṣṇu, the *guru* is [Śiva] Maheśvara, the *guru* is verily the Supreme *Brahman*! Salutations to that *guru*!” (Marchetto 2007, 233)

While the guru has generally always performed both a pedagogical and a devotional role for Buddhists, the emphasis on each has varied between traditions. Previous to the influence of Hindu tantrism, the early Pali Nikāyas insist that both the foundation and fruit of spiritual practice depend upon a ‘spiritual friend’ (*kalyāṇamitta*) who both instructs and inspires (Klinger 1980, 10). The total divinization of the Buddhist guru came about from a “shift in soteriological method” (Capper 2002, 82) introduced by the tantric system, access to which required the guru’s granting the disciple initiation (*dīkṣā*) or empowerment (*abhiṣeka*) into the secret and often

highly intricate ritual practices of a particular *yidam*. In distinction with Hinduism, Buddhist Vajrayana integrated the tantric shift in soteriological method into existing Mahayana soteriological goals:

The Diamond Way is in fact a specialized, privileged, and esoteric path within the Great Way. ... These means may be frightening and dangerous, and are at least burdensome and difficult. But if successful they enable the practitioner to attain enlightenment in this life, rather than over the many thousands of lives required to attain Buddha-hood in the Great Way. (Gellner 1992, 113)

Elevated in the Vajrayana to the status of a fully divine being, “the absolute necessity of total devotion to one’s chosen teacher or master ... takes the place of all the great perfections ... taught in the Mahayana sutras” (Snellgrove 1987, 176-177).

Scholars also point to the influence of the teachings of Atiśa on the Tibetan transmission of guru devotion doctrine in Buddhism’s ‘second diffusion’ from India (Klinger 1980, 16; Donovan 1986, 31-2). Between 1042 and 1045 Atiśa composed his famous *A Lamp for the Path* (*Bodhipathapradīpa*) which both insists on the necessity of guru devotion in Mahāyāna and tantric practice (Donovan 1986, 31-2), and praises the “glorious pure conduct, / Said to be the vow of a fully ordained person” (Sonam 1997, 153). In a memorable passage from *Precepts Collected from Here and There* (*Kadam Thorbu*), Atiśa prioritizes the instructions of the guru over those of Buddha and describes reliance on the former as a practice of samsara-renunciation:

When Atiśa arrived in Tibet, his three disciples, Ku, Ngok, and Drom asked him, “For attaining the high states of liberation and omniscience, which is more important, to follow the precept of the lama or to follow the scriptures and commentaries?”

Atiśa replied, “The precept of the lama is more important than scriptures and commentaries.” ...

Again the disciples asked, “Please define the practice of the precept of the lama. Is it simply striving to do virtuous deeds in body, speech, and mind and acting in

accordance with the three vows: the vow of individual liberation, the bodhisattva vow, and the tantric vow?”

“Both of these are insufficient,” Atiśa answered. ... “Although you keep the three vows, if you do not renounce the three realms of samsara, your activities will only increase your worldliness.” (Wangyal 1995, 83-84)

The guru devotion teachings of Atiśa, and of the line of Naropa, Marpa, and Milarepa, would have been proliferated among the laity of central Tibet through “the success of the Kadampa preachers and Kagyupa poets” (Davidson 2005, 257), respectively.

Tibetan emphases on locality and charisma (Donovan 1986, 32-33) led to the formation of major schools around particular teachers and their respective lineages. While Buddhism’s lama-centric decentralization in Tibet reflects the specificities of Himalayan cultural geography, it also reflects the lineage-centric heterogeneity of the ritual system of Buddhist tantra itself, in contrast to Buddhist monasticism: “Tantric Buddhist traditions are transmitted not so much as part of a monastic curriculum, but as multiple lineages imparted by the gurus who embody them; these lineages are not necessarily restricted to any sectarian or institutional basis” (Gray 2013, 50). According to Mills, Tibetans’ addition of the lama to the traditional three-fold refuge objects of Buddha, Dharma and Sangha – with the Indian tantric understanding that the spiritual guide was the embodiment of all three (Klinger 1980, 9) – “speaks much of the shift in emphasis that is required when moving from the highly ordination-centred ecclesiastical structure of Theravadin Buddhism, to the Mahayana schools” (Mills 2003a, 53).

Significantly, both Theravadin monasticism and Tibetan tantrism contain ritual elements symbolizing the renunciation of one’s biological family through the recreation of a substitute religious family – the first of three ways that Liz Wilson suggests family can intersect (rather

than clash) with the Buddhist practice of renunciation (2013, 4-5). We have already seen how the Buddhist sangha and monastery can be understood as analogs of the conjugal family and household, where monks and nuns produce merit in lieu of (and in exchange for) subsistence materials. To contextualize descriptions of sexual practices and incest in Indian Buddhist tantric texts which became prominent in Tibet such as *Guhyasamāja*, *Cakrasamvara*, and *Hevajra*, David Gray points out that entry into the sphere of tantric ritual was also conceived in terms of reproduction and family creation:

Rather than advocating incest per se, they represent an attempt to construct a social identity, modeled on the South Asian joint family, for members of a religious community, the “family” surrounding the figure of the guru. This rhetoric drew upon the far older Buddhist tradition of conceptualizing the monastic sangha in familial terms. Tantric ritual, with its sexual symbolism and/or practices, deploys the image of biological reproduction to symbolically reconstitute the initiate as a member of a new family, the “clan” (*kula*) of the guru. (2013, 43)

The Indian treatise, *Fifty Verses of Guru Devotion (Gurupañcāśika)*, often attributed to the first or second-century philosopher-poet Aśvaghoṣa, encourages maintaining affection for fellow members of this new tantric family “as if they were your own dearest kin” (1975, 21). Beyond such familial symbolism, of course, the daily ritual practice of tantric Buddhism in Tibetan formations is generally as embedded within “family affairs” (housing, food, money, etc.) as Clarke has shown to be the case in pre-tantric Indian Buddhism.

Speaking to the “almost bewildering variety” (Mills 2003a, 55) of Himalayan *Vajrayāna* religious specialists beyond simple dichotomies of monk-layman and guru-disciple, Gellner shows that hereditary *vajrācāryas* in the Newar Buddhist societies of Nepal are *at once* monks practicing the Way of the Disciples (*Śrāvakayāna*), householders practicing the Great Way (Mahayana), and tantric priests practicing the Diamond Way (Vajrayana): “[T]his structure of

the Three Ways is built into the Newar rituals and in particular to the sequence whereby a young *Vajrācārya* passes first through Monastic Initiation, then becomes a householder, and finally undergoes the Consecration of the Vajra Master” (1992, 114).

In the Tibetan Geluk school, which traditionally insists on celibate monasticism not simply as a provisional training but as a permanent ‘pure container’ for tantric practice (Mills 2003a, 100-104), the Diamond Way is more strictly internalized as ‘secret mantra.’ The primary Geluk liturgical formulation of ‘uniting with the spiritual guide’ (*Guru yoga*, Tib. *Bla-ma’i rnal-’byor*), for example – Losang Chokyi Gyaltsan’s seventeenth-century “Offering to the Spiritual Guide” (*Guru pūjā*, Tib. *Lama Chopa*) – represents the three vehicles as three *aspects* (outer, inner, and secret) of the guru-deity’s body:

His outer aspect, Je Tsongkhapa, is that of a Hinayana monk; his inner aspect, Buddha Shakyamuni, is that of a Supreme Emanation Body endowed with the signs and indications; and his secret aspect is that of Conqueror Vajradhara. His purpose in showing these three aspects is to demonstrate to his disciples how they should behave in public, how they should be motivated internally, and what they should practice in secret. (Gyatso 1992, 85)

Lama Chopa’s visualized ‘field of merit’ (*tshogs zhing*) depicts this triune guru-deity (*lama lha*) whose telescopic body (from monk to layman) sits atop a ‘tree’ of lineage gurus: at ordained Tsongkhapa’s heart sits ordained Buddha Shakyamuni, at whose heart in turn sits unordained Buddha Vajradhara in sexual union with his consort Yingchugma. For Newars, these three aspects are not simply visualized in guru yoga *sāadhanā* (‘means of accomplishment’) but exoterically performed as discrete ritual statuses “integrated into a single hierarchical system” (260) where contradiction is eliminated through ideological hierarchy itself and diachronic fluidity of ritual performance: “[*Vajrācāryas*] are monks, albeit married, part-time ones” (58) –

i.e., for four days during monastic initiation, at annual festivals in which they beg alms door to door, and during life-cycle rituals when they shave their head.

In the Newar Buddhism of Nepal, therefore, the world-rejecting ideals of the Theravadin monk and the world-affirming ideals of the tantric yogin are ritually and ideologically synthesized in a culturally specific form of hereditary married priesthood. While married tantric monks would be anathema to Theravada and Geluk Buddhists, in greater Tibetan Buddhism “there are simultaneously many countervailing views, with which the Newars are more in agreement” (Gellner 1992, 60):

[T]he other orders of Tibetan Buddhism (the Kagyu, Sakyapa and particularly the Nyingmapa,) – by not *demanding* monasticism as a basic criterion for ecclesiastical authority – allowed for small scale communities of monks and laity surrounding a single married *lama* figure, with the institutional possibility of attaining high *lama* status within a single life-time, through sexual yoga and three-year retreats. (Mills 2003a, 312)

According to Gellner, “In Newar Buddhism celibate monasticism, while authentically Buddhist, is a first step towards higher statuses” (1992, 60). Foremost among such “higher statuses” for Newars is the tantric yogin, or *vajrācārya*, who “combine[s] apparently opposed [monastic and tantric] models of spiritual excellence into a coherent whole” (261). For Gelukpas, this figure is the incarnate lama, or tulku, whose elite ritual status at once “represents the possibility of attaining tantric consummation within the monastic context ... [through] death yoga (as an alternative to sexual yoga)” *and* the ordinary monk’s demotion to the status of semi-renouncer (Mills 2003a, 312).

Monks and Tulkus

Tibetan Buddhology is rooted in the Mahayana-Vajrayana doctrine of the three Buddha bodies: the unchanging ‘truth body’ (*dharmakāya*, Tib. *chö ku*) only perceivable by other Buddhas, the subtle ‘enjoyment body’ (*sambhogakāya*, Tib. *longku*) perceivable by advanced bodhisattvas, and the ‘emanation body’ (*nirmāṇakāya*, Tib. *tulku*) perceivable by ordinary human beings (Gyatso 2005, 117-122). Since the twelfth century in Tibet, the successive rebirths of respected lamas have been identified and exalted as divine emanation bodies (tulkus), or incarnate lamas, understood to have chosen their rebirth to benefit living beings. Pamela Logan explains the divinatory means of tulku selection:

When an old tulku dies, a committee of senior lamas convenes to find the young reincarnation. ... First, they will probably look for a letter left behind by the departed tulku indicating where he intends to be born again. ... Often, an oracle is consulted. Sometimes a prominent lama has a dream that reveals details of the child’s house, parents, or of geographical features near his home. Sometimes heaven presents a sign, perhaps a rainbow, leading the search party to the child. (2004, 15)

The tulku system did not emerge as a mode of Buddhocratic succession in Tibet until the thirteenth century when an increase in the political power of monasteries under Mongol sponsorship created the need for greater diachronic stability within celibate monastic hierarchies (Mills 2003a, 269). In the seventeenth century, with the support of the Mongol prince Gushi Khan, the Fifth Dalai Lama, the religiopolitical leader of the Geluk school, became the most powerful tulku in Tibet.

Based on nineteen months of ethnographic field study between 1993 and 1995 at the Geluk monastery of Kumbum and its surrounding Southern Ladakhi villages, Mills theorizes the complex tantric constitution of religious authority in Tibetan Buddhist monasticism supporting the tulku’s status as Tibet’s real *vajrācārya*, whose supreme ritual authority derives from his identification with the *yidam*’s tantric power to subjugate local tellurian deities. Mills’

explanation is rooted in what he calls the “core cultural dynamic” of Himalayan civilization: a “cultural construction of the social and ritual capacities of humans ... which conceives of embodied personhood as the nexus of productive and reproductive relationships with local chthonic sources” (2003a, xvii-xviii). This Tibetan conception of chthonic personhood leads Mills to a remarkable explanation of the nature of the lama’s authority, couched in the terms of the householder/renouncer relation:

[T]he incarnate lama and the fully-accomplished tantric yogin are, in Tibetan eyes, the consummate renouncers. Through the yogic transformation of the bodies and minds in which they were born ... or through the transformative reconstruction of future bodies within the death process ... they have stepped beyond the symbolic boundaries of the household and released themselves from the confinement that locality and birth hold on their spiritual progress. In this respect, the incarnate ... becomes a symbolic mediator ... between the world as an embodied matrix of worldly presence on the one hand; and as the fully subjugated paradise of the tantric Buddha on the other. (308)

Defining Tibetan Buddhist ‘clerical renunciation’ as “a renunciation of the twin household processes of [economic] production and [sexual] reproduction” (74), Mills discerns a hierarchy of renunciation in which a monk’s level of renunciation is directly proportionate to his level of socially constructed religious authority. This complex argument relies on three other theories: the ordinary monk as clerical semi-renouncer, the chthonic Tibetan conception of personhood, and the incarnate, or tulku, as yogic full renouncer.

Although the core socio-economic proscriptions of the Tibetan *Mūlasarvāstivāda Vinaya* stipulate “the monk’s physical and social removal from ... activities of *agricultural production* ... [and] *reproductive activity*” (70), the Kumbum monk remained more or less embedded in the household of his birth. His process of renunciation was marked by a “shifting away from reproductive and productive endeavour and towards reproductive and productive dependence”

(66). The monk's productive dependence was evident from the fact that he often had a designated field worked by his lay relatives for the production of his food (66), and that the upkeep of his dwelling (*shak*) on the outer perimeter of Kumbum was considered the responsibility not of the monastery but of his family: "In this sense, whilst *shak* were associated with the monastery, they were *part of* the household estates of the village" (65).

At Kumbum, *shak* (monks' quarters) and the *gompa* (temple complex) were "distinct in terms of the way they fitted into the economic support of the monks provided by the nearby laity" (63).

The communal *gompa* was supported by a combination of business income generated by the monastery and ritual sponsorship by local laity. Sources of the former were diverse:

Income consisted of revenue from rented lands and seed that belonged to the *gompa*, interest-accruing loans made to farmers, and the various acts of trading that the monastery partook in to increase its various capital reserves. The majority of such rent and interest was accrued as staple produce handed over to the *gompa* after harvest. This core income was used to feed and support the activities of the monastic assembly during its annual round of ritual activity, covering two meals and a tea throughout the year. (63-64)

Lay sponsorship of rites at the *gompa* was both instituted in rosters organized according to local household groups, and incidental according to particular ritual needs like funerals (64). Mills points out that "the financial provision of differing rites could not be pooled for convenience's sake," and concludes that "the accumulation of economic resources around *gompas* cannot, ideologically at least, be equated with the financial enrichment of monks as a class" (64-65).

Monks were therefore fed during gatherings of the monastic assembly through a combination of instituted income and instituted and incidental ritual sponsorship, and housed by their natal families. Mills summarizes the dual nature of this economic support:

As individuals, they remained within the economic domain of the household itself, even if they seem to be peripheral to its main functions as economic and social producer; as members of the monastic assembly, they constituted the sangha (*gyedunpa*) – the Third Jewel of Buddhism – and received support as such. ... It is important to note that [these two systems of exchange] are different in quality: one is a form of redistribution within household and kin groups; the other is a sacrificial form of exchange focused on a sacral centre. (68)

Incarnate lamas, or tulkus, on the other hand, “generally have separate financial and propertied estates, called *labrang* (or, more formally, *lama'i p'otang* – ‘the palace of the teacher’)” which “were historically always separate from those of their associated monasteries ... passing instead to each successive reincarnation as an inherited economic resource” (65).

Three observations lead Mills to the conclusion that ordinary Tibetan Buddhist monks “represent incomplete renunciators: beginners on a path of renunciation that is left unfinished by mere monasticism” (69). The first is that monastic renunciation is “accomplished by mutually performed divisions of sexual and agricultural labour by monks and laity” (79). The second is that monks appear to occupy a highly ambiguous position “within a complex matrix of renunciation that encompasses both laity and monks” (80). The third is that Kumbum’s *gompa*, as “the focus of ritual wealth accumulation ... appears to represent, on a ritual and ideological level, something more akin to religious household than its negation” (80). Finally, emic “discourse[s] of inadequacy” (80) surrounding the monk’s renunciation and ritual authority lead Mills to contrast him with the incarnate, “of whom ordinary monks are mere shadows” (308).

An explanation of the different levels of renunciation-based authority held by these two figures depends upon an understanding of what precisely they are understood to have authority over. Mills argues that the Tibetan ritual performer holds ritual authority not simply over other

humans, but over “a matrix of chthonic forces and sources of symbolic power, within which ‘people’ – both laity and monks – are both constituted and embedded” (243). The principal focus of authoritative ritual acts in the Tibetan community is “the very real and pragmatic concerns of everyday social life” (244): pollution, household integrity, agricultural success, illness, etc. The monastic authority to ritually address these concerns – the concerns of “supporting households and domains that acted as (productively and reproductively) fertile ‘places’” (249) – means that “Buddhism was ... practiced, not in a vacuum, but in a dynamic subduing relationship with fertile chthonic territory” (249).

This chthonic territory was understood to be inhabited by an elaborate hierarchy of household (*p'a-lha*) and local territorial (*yul-lha*) gods and spirits who exercised considerable power “over the health, welfare and fertility of those born within their domain” (249). Just as the Tibetan household and local territory was conceived in chthonic terms, so was the embodied person. In addition to the *p'alha* and *yullha* there were, depending on the astrological conditions of a person's birth, a number of ‘birth gods’ (*skyes-lha*) that existed in a person's body throughout his or her life. For Mills, the presence of these bodily numina “marks individuals as being in some way part of specific chthonic and kin groups” (256). Finally, Mills recounts how the local astrological use of prayer flags (*rlung-sta*) exhibited “the equation of the external *rlung* [wind] as a feature of the environment, and its manifestation within the body as one of the elemental constituents of bodily health” (258). Thus the Tibetan understanding of personal agency was itself intimately linked to the landscape, forming Mills' notion of “diffuse chthonic agency.”

The relationship between the Tibetan ritual performer and the matrix of chthonic agents inhabiting and presiding over the Tibetan landscape is the site of ritual authority in Tibetan society, with the level of a monk's renunciation defining the level of that authority. The renunciation of one's embeddedness in fertile household territory creates the power to influence and subjugate the local elements, gods, and spirits who normally preside over that territory – land, house, or body. But as we have seen, the ordinary monks of Kumbum remain largely dependent on the productive and reproductive processes of their natal household. As such, their “path of clerical renunciation ... was ... seen as limited in that monks remained rooted to their autochthonous nature by the iron thread of their natal bodies – bodies born within the context of local cosmologies, and under the purview of local deities” (266).

The figure of the Geluk incarnate, or tulku, is the consummate Tibetan renouncer because he is seen as the emanation body of a Buddha who has chosen his current place of rebirth through mastery of the tantric practices of death yoga – a system of ‘yogic renunciation’ understood to affect a complete transformation of ordinary embodiment polluted by local chthonic influences from birth: “[T]rue and definite religious accomplishment, and thence spiritual authority, necessitates either death or symbolic death (through sexual yoga) as a precondition, re-creating a new body which is transcendent of local embeddedness” (283). In the Geluk school, known for its monastic emphasis on clerical renunciation and the discouragement of sexual yoga, the yogic renunciation accomplished through death yoga “acts as the foundation of the ideology of the incarnate lama, or tulku” (283) – the living divine master, or *lama lha*.

Tantra not only enabled the Tibetan lama's displacement of the Theravadin Buddhist monk as consummate renouncer in Tibetan Buddhism, "Tantra provides the primary body of religious techniques by which ... local gods and spirits, and the general area of 'this-worldly' problems, are dealt with" (Samuel 1993, 31). Indeed Tibetans' syncretistic reception of Indian tantric Buddhism enabled the "fully recognized" integration of "these magical and shamanic operations" into Buddhist practice (31):

Thisworldly kinds of supernatural accomplishment ... have always been believed to accompany advanced spiritual states in South Asia. In Mahayana and Vajrayana Buddhism they are positively valued, as aids in helping other beings. ... In Theravada Buddhism, though admitted to exist, they were and are frowned upon as a distraction from the pursuit of salvation and evidence of pride on the part of the virtuoso who practices them. The *Vajrācārya*, by contrast, in performing rituals for others, is continually making use of his power to evoke the requisite deity. (Gellner 1992, 288)

Tantra is thus at once "the system of yogic processes that are held to lead to the central goal of Buddhism, the state of Buddhahood ... [and] the set of techniques through which lamas carry out rituals for the lay population ... [many of which] have only a nominal connection with the cult of Enlightenment" (Samuel 1993, 258). This dissertation explores the relationship between this-worldly and soteriological religious goals in a new Vajrayana movement.

iii. Renunciation and the Householder/Renouncer Relation in North American Buddhism

How is the traditionally monastic element of Tibetan Buddhism being practiced in North America after half a century of transmission and adaptation? From the founding of the first American Tibetan monastery in New Jersey in 1955 by the Geluk lama Geshe Wangyal, to the ordination of professor Robert Thurman as the first American Tibetan Buddhist monk in 1964, to

the hiring of Geshe Sopa as faculty in the first Buddhist Studies doctoral program at the University of Wisconsin in 1967, to the Dalai Lama's receipt of the Congressional Gold Medal from President George W. Bush in 2007, the American embrace of Tibetan Buddhism has been significantly shaped by its embrace of charismatic monks. But this list reflects only the largest, most monastic of the four Tibetan Buddhist schools. Amy Lavine insists that in addition to Geshe Wangyal, the first lamas to arrive in the United States representing the other three schools – Deshung Rinpoche (Sakya), Tarthang Tulku (Nyingma), and Chögyam Trungpa (Kagyu) – the latter two of whom were noncelibate, “provided the impetus for the development of what is now known as American Vajrayana” (1998, 103). This section describes the perception and reception of Tibetan Buddhist renunciants – monks, nuns, lamas, and tulkus – by Euro-North American sympathizers and practitioners of Tibetan Buddhism since the 1960s.

Monks, Nuns, Lamas, and Tulkus in North American Tibetan Buddhism

Buddhism has been adapting to North American culture since the establishment of the first Chinese and Japanese temples in Hawai'i and on the west coast in the late nineteenth century, and more visibly since the 1960s with increases in both Asian immigration and non-Asian American interest in Buddhism. Soon after Tibetan Buddhist culture was broken open by the Chinese invasion, the American Protestant establishment also started breaking up:

The sixties marked the demise of the Protestant epoch in American history and the loss of cultural consensus, fostering increased tolerance for plurality of religious outlook. ... Abetted by the 1965 immigration reform, numerous charismatic Asian teachers and Buddhist immigrants found new homes in the fertile American soil. (Tanaka 1998, 297)

According to Chandler, the leading factor behind Tibetan Buddhism's entry into "the American consciousness by way of the media and popular culture" was "the growing reputation and international image of the Dalai Lama" (2009, 76), whose self-help books had become popular literature by the mid-1990s.

In the opening sequence of Martin Scorsese's 1997 biopic, *Kundun*, a high lama and his companions from Lhasa arrive at a farming family's mud brick house in northern Tibet looking for the family's three-year-old son, Lhamo Dhondup. They present the boy with a walking stick, a bowl, and a ritual bell, which belonged to their recently-deceased friend, and ask him to distinguish them from similar objects. When he identifies the deceased's possessions as his own, dramatic orchestral music accompanies the enchanted faces of the visitors who send a joyful message to Lhasa, saying that they believe they have found the Dalai Lama's fourteenth tulku. Winner of the Nobel Peace Prize in 1989, the Dalai Lama is a global religious celebrity (Lopez 1998, Ch. 7) who has posed for *Vogue Paris* and Apple Computer advertisements, thrice graced the cover of *Time*, and consistently attracts stadium-sized teaching audiences around the world.

Although a few European Jesuits had the chance to observe the guru/disciple relation within Tibet as early as the seventeenth century, its religious observance did not become an option for North American seekers until the years following the Chinese occupation. It was then that Tibetan lamas began teaching their religion beyond their own breached borders:

Beginning in the 1960s ... American travellers in search of new spiritual horizons headed for India and Nepal where they encountered Tibetan Buddhist lamas exiled from their homeland ... A few retained a sufficiently serious interest in Tibetan Vajrayana Buddhism to attempt to pursue their studies back home. But they soon found that this was not possible without the guidance of experienced teachers, so by

the end of the 1960s centers were founded throughout America where Tibetan lamas were invited to teach on either a temporary or permanent basis. (Bell 1998, 55-56)

Forty years later, “hundreds of thousands of Westerners are now involved in some way with Tibetan Buddhism” (Cozort 2003, 221). In 2002, Daniel Capper estimated that there were roughly 270,000 “Euro-Americans” self-identifying as Tibetan Buddhists (2002, 3), and seven Tibetan centres in New York City alone (4).

In 2010 there were about 3.9 million Buddhists in North America, roughly 1% of the population (Pew Research Center 2012, 32).¹⁸ In 2009 Chandler estimated that North American Tibetan Buddhism had “doubled the number of its centers in the last decade. Nearly one-third of all of the Buddhist centers in North America follow some kind of Tibetan tradition” (102). The number of North Americans involved in Tibetan Buddhism while not being formally affiliated with centres or exclusively identified with the religion (Thomas Tweed’s “Buddhist sympathizers”), however, may be as much as ten times higher. This is suggested by Robert Wuthnow and Wendy Cadge (2004) who found that there were far more Americans who see themselves as having been influenced by Buddhism (approximately 25-30 million) than there were Americans calling themselves Buddhists (approximately 3 million). Since there were only about 9,000 ethnic Tibetans in the U.S. and 4,500 in Canada in 2008 (MacPherson, Bentz, & Ghoso, 2008), it would appear that the vast majority of North American practitioners of Tibetan Buddhism are non-Tibetan. Thus while a sharp theoretical divide between the “two Buddhisms” of “ethnic immigrants” and “Western converts” has its well documented problems – such as the categories’ tacit racism (Hori 2010; Harding, Hori, Soucy 2014) and post-first-generation loss of cogency

¹⁸ 1.2% of Americans self-identified as Buddhist in 2010 (Pew Research Center 2012, 50), while 1.1% of Canadians self-identified as Buddhist in 2011 (Statistics Canada 2011).

(Baumann 2002) – the Tibetan/non-Tibetan ethnicity distinction is obviously an important one to chart a preliminary demographic outline of Tibetan Buddhism in North America. Lavine found that “the interactions between American Vajrayana students and ... ethnic Tibetans generally have been minimal” (1998, 110).

Mullen’s (2001) ethnography of New York City’s 800 ethnic Tibetans found that non-Tibetan Americans’ romance with Tibetan Buddhism was excluding local lay Tibetans from many Tibetan Buddhist areas, most notably meditation centres. Elite lay American demand for the expertise of a very limited number of elite Tibetan monastics contributed to a breakdown of the traditional Tibetan lay/monastic relation for the immigrant Tibetan community. Since almost all the monastics were too busy with their wealthier convert patrons to cater to the daily ritual needs of lay Tibetans, Tibetans were effectively cut off from their own masters, thus forced to innovate their Buddhist tradition or lose it. Mullen describes an increasingly self-reliant lay Tibetan community in which volunteerism was key to organizing religious and social activities like the annual “Losar” celebration. She also harshly critiques the romantic Orientalism at play in the operation of Robert Thurman’s Tibet House in NYC, describing the exclusion of Tibetan people from Tibet House’s mission of cultural preservationism as symptomatic of a falsification of Tibetan culture as static. At the time of Mullen’s research no Tibetans were employed there.

Affirming Mullen’s observation of non-Tibetan Americans’ penchant for Tibetan lamas, Chandler points out that Dharma centres within global Tibetan Buddhist networks such as Shambhala, FPMT, and NKT generally “maintain a sense of hierarchy and organization by arranging themselves according to lineage and around gurus (almost always Tibetans)” (2009,

77). Peter Bishop's (1993) short but insightful chapter on "the New Monasticism" presents a preliminary outline of developing trends and challenges confronting non-Tibetan students of Tibetan monks. According to Bishop, the majority of Western Tibetan Buddhist communities are organized quite traditionally according to the Tibetan monastic hierarchy, and consist of four distinct groups: reincarnate lamas, Western monks and nuns, lay practitioners, and other interested lay persons (1993, 98). Lavine explains that although senior American practitioners are often given positions of administrative authority and power by the Tibetan founders of their organizations to run their particular centre – "American Vajrayana still functions under the fundamental authority of Tibet's primary religious specialists: the geshe and the tulku" (1998, 104).

In the decades following the Tibetan diaspora, the reincarnations of several high lamas have been recognized as children of non-Tibetan ethnicity. The magical possibilities of Tibetan minds in white bodies has been an alluring narrative motif in North American popular culture. Keanu Reeves starred in the 1993 film *Little Buddha* about a tulku identified as a boy living in Seattle. Vicki Mackenzie's 1995 book *Reborn in the West: The Reincarnation Masters* chronicles the lives of four white tulkus, one of whom was female. The following year, a feature story on *tulkus* in the January 25, 1996 issue of *USA Today* noted that as many as twenty had been recognized in the West. The documentary film *Tulku*, directed by Canadian tulku Gesar Mukpo and released by the Canadian National Film Board in 2009, depicts the filmmaker's struggle to reconcile his ascribed elite religious identity with his daily life as a working father in Nova Scotia.

The problem of continuity represented by the need for Western practitioners to develop meaningful relationships with the newly recognized reincarnations of their own lamas is a fascinating current issue in contemporary Tibetan Buddhism (Campbell 2002, 4). It is especially pressing as most Tibetan founders of Western Tibetan Buddhist networks have either died within the past couple decades or are presently elderly men (Lavine 1998, 109-10). Lavine suggests that locating Tibetan minds in American bodies through the identification of non-Tibetan tulkus may be aiding the religion's American acculturation: "Establishing the future charter of Tibetan Buddhism for authority in American Vajrayana in the very bodies of Westerners is perhaps the most skillful means that has been developed by Tibetan lamas" (1998, 105).

How is this pre-modern system of religious succession based in a patriarchal monastic hierarchy led by magically identified virtuosi adapting to the modern, liberal, democratic cultures of North America? Scholars who have considered the question have often concluded it is still too early to tell. Twenty years ago Lavine reflected: "It will be interesting to see over the coming decades ... what sorts of adjustments American Vajrayana as a whole will make to accommodate the radical Tibetan system of belief concerning tulku identity, authentication, and faith" (1998, 110).

Complicating Lavine's portrait of American tulku identification as a skillful means of acculturation, Canadian tulku and professor of Tibetan religious history at Ecole Pratique des Hautes Etudes in Paris, Elijah Ary, concluded his 2013 essay "The Westernization of Tulkus" with a highly ambivalent assessment:

The Dalai Lama has repeatedly said that he is not certain that the recognition of Tulkus in the West is a good thing. Most of them have chosen to leave the monasteries and therefore do not receive the full education they require. ... Perhaps by rebelling against a system that is perceived as trying to force us into a specific mold, we are actually fulfilling part of our calling as Tulkus. ... Only time will tell whether or not the paths we have chosen are the right ones. (427)

Ary's words suggest that rebelling against the tulku's traditional authority position may in fact be an emerging norm for Western tulkus, clearly affirming uncertainty about the fate of the tulku system outside Tibet. A chapter of Mackenzie's 1995 book recounts the early life story of Spanish-born Osel Hita Torres, perhaps the best known contemporary rebel tulku. Identified in 1986 as the reincarnation of Lama Thubten Yeshe, the Tibetan founder of the FPMT, "Lama Osel" was educated in an Indian monastery before abdicating his throne on his eighteenth birthday in 2003. Despite renouncing his monastic robes, education, and title, to this day Osel holds the charismatic authority of the FPMT's reincarnated founder, though his formal involvement in the organization is minimal (Falcone 2017).

Besides the ambiguous state of the tulku system's transplantation to North America, the emerging authority structures of Western-based transnational Tibetan Buddhist movements such as the FPMT, NKT, and Shambhala appear to resemble the traditional Tibetan model in some ways (e.g., centred around individual Tibetan lamas), and to differ from it in others:

In particular, modern communications and technology have enabled both a far wider spread to these networks than existed in the pre-modern period, and a greater degree of connectivity than generally existed in Tibet ... This provides the possibility for a greater degree of central control than before ... While such centralization, however, makes it possible for a single lama to maintain a network on a global scale, it has not as yet led to the integration of these various networks into some kind of super-ordinate structure. ... Networks are, in a sense, competing with each other for customers and finance. (Samuel 2005, 309)

Samuel's last point brings up an important difference between traditional and diasporic Tibetan Buddhist authority structures: the latter's participation in the economic system of late phase capitalism. While it may be true that "Western students are involved in a process of guru-shopping" (312), some lamas have recently come under fire for involving themselves in the

business of guru-selling (Chandler 2009, 94-95). It is not hard to appreciate the depth of the challenge transplanting a feudal Himalayan monastic system rooted in ideals of renunciation to an American society marked by an aesthetic of immediate gratification and an extension of market logic to all aspects of culture (Urban 2000, 296-297). The NKT's marketization of Vajrayana teachings and institutional structures is an underlying theme in subsequent chapters.

Other characteristics of Tibetan Buddhism's adaptation to North American culture directly affecting its authority structures include laicization – increased lay involvement in practice and teaching and a de-emphasis on monasticism (Chandler 2009, 104); changing gender roles – a growing community of female teachers (Prebish 1999, 75-79); and democratization – an increase in subdivision of leadership and government by consensus (69) fueled in part by “the indignation of American individualism and the shock that resulted from several guru-abuse scandals of the 1980's” (Chandler 2009, 106). Discussions of the dangers of uncritically implementing the lama's traditional level of authority in a Western context have been written by practitioners with direct experience of that authority's abuse (Campbell 2002, Butterfield 1994, Butler 1990). Nyingma lama Penor Rinpoche provides a cautionary counterpoint in his conservative dismissal of Buddhism's democratization: “There is no benefit to following the democratic spiritual path. ... They are just wasting time. ... [There must be] transmissions and blessings from a lama, the master ... [who is from] a very pure lineage” (McMahan 2008, 247).

Despite the democratizing patterns characterizing Tibetan Buddhism's North American acculturation, Bishop contends that in Western Tibetan Buddhist communities,

[A]n immense symbolic gap exists between ordained and un-ordained individuals. This gap has less to do with the rules of monastic discipline than with fantasies about

the *authenticity* and *purity* of the Tibetan teachings, as well as fantasies about the uninterrupted authority of the reincarnated lineage of lamas. (1993, 99)

The continuing fact of a householder/renouncer social distinction is not surprising in light of Penner's evidence that this binary constitutes a basic structural definition of Buddhism. Bishop's observation does, however, appear to refute James Coleman's claim that in Western "convert" Buddhism the "fundamental distinction between monk and layperson is almost wiped away" (2001, 13). So what *is* happening to the Tibetan lay/monastic hierarchy on North American soil? Although Tibetan lamas (usually, but not always, monks) generally continue to hold the highest positions of authority (e.g., in FPMT, NKT, and Shambhala), the tradition's laicization is occurring in a variety of ways, as is a more gradual shift of authority from Tibetan lamas to their non-Tibetan disciples.

Paul Numrich's (1996) study of Americanization in two Theravada communities, Sri Lankan and Thai, found laicization occurring in a few different ways. First, he notes that no adult or second-generation immigrant at either temple had taken full ordination, and that parents would often discourage their American-born children from ordaining. Second, a number of novel "lay ordination" schemes at the Sri Lankan temple in L.A. blurred the lay/monastic divide. Finally, as laity were the temples' founders and principal funders, they exerted significantly more influence over temple governance in America than in Thailand and Sri Lanka, where abbots wielded considerably more authority. The second form of laicization, the development of hybrid "lay ordination" schemes finds a parallel in a similar program instituted by Trungpa's Shambhala International at the monastery of Gampo Abbey in rural Nova Scotia. Pointing out that temporary ordination in fact has historical precedents in Tibetan and South Asian contexts, Clayton argues that:

[W]hat is unusual if not entirely unprecedented about temporary monasticism at Gampo Abbey is its intentional nature: that one takes vows that are purposefully time-limited, usually to one year, so that one can try monasticism and go back to lay life without shame or the karmic demerit associated with giving up vows. (2015, 406)

Indeed the return to lay life appears to be seen as equally important as monastic withdrawal.

Another unique feature of the intentional nature of Gampo Abbey's temporary monasticism is an ethos of world-engagement: "Monasticism is felt to support the creation of an enlightened society by offering an 'immersion experience' in the Dharma ... It is felt that this in turn will have profound ripple effects on individual relations in society" (413). World-renunciation is thus instrumental, subordinated to, and designed to support, the compassionate activism of modern bodhisattvas: "Whereas ostensibly the aim of Buddhist monasticism is to help individuals achieve an enlightenment that allows them in some way to *transcend* society, Shambhala monasticism exists to help individuals transform themselves in order to achieve an enlightened society" (414).

Shambhala's year-long monastic program at Gampo Abbey might be described as an especially disciplined, extended retreat. According to Lavine, the "nonmonastic intensive retreat" is an elite Tibetan tradition that has also become an important feature of American Vajrayana Buddhism – "[a] practice [that] arises from the character of the *yogin* or *yogini*, the noncelibate practitioner who engages in intensive tantric practices for long periods at a time" (1998, 109). Although Samuel suspects that "far more [Westerners] receive Tantric teaching and take Tantric empowerments than actually practice them at a consistent and serious level" (2005, 328), some lay North Americans are clearly engaging the Diamond Way with disciplined gusto. Before Trungpa's rise to fame, Tarthang Tulku, a Nyingma lama who moved to Berkeley, California in

1969, was the first Tibetan to model the figure of the noncelibate lama for North American students. His teaching style was:

welcomed by Americans attempting to integrate their normal working lives, complete with familial obligations and occupational constraints, with a rigorous regimen of Buddhist practices. This more or less successful integration of lay livelihood and strict practice is one of the definitional aspects of American Vajrayana. (Lavine 1998, 102)

In 1998 Lavine suggested that there were as yet insufficient numbers of non-Tibetan Americans taking monastic ordination to consider them a vital aspect of American Tibetan Buddhism (108). Chandler plainly states: “[M]onasticism has not attracted American Buddhists. Notions such as renunciation and celibacy, along with the lack of opportunity for full ordination for women as nuns in the Tibetan tradition, makes monasticism seem even less appealing” (2009, 104).

Some of the most influential non-Tibetan North Americans who *have* chosen to adopt the discipline of ordained Tibetan Buddhist monastics, however, are women: Karma Lekshe Tsomo is Professor of Theology and Religious Studies at the University of San Diego and former president of Sakyadhita International Association of Buddhist Women; Thubten Chodron is founder and abbess of Sravasti Abbey in Newport, Washington and co-author of two books with the Dalai Lama; Pema Chodron is resident teacher of Gampo Abbey and bestselling author of books purveying teachings from the Tibetan tradition to Buddhist and non-Buddhist audiences across the English-speaking world.

Lavine’s portrait of the emerging shape of American Vajrayana monasticism reflects Mullen’s finding that American patrons’ demand for the expertise of Tibetan monastics effectively displaced lay Tibetan immigrants in Tibetan Buddhism’s American lay/monastic relation: “The

general state of the Tibetan monastery in America involves Tibetan monks, living in monasteries in the United States and Canada, whose physical needs are provided for by Western laypeople” (1998, 107-108). A recent *Tricycle* article by the Australian nun, Ayya Yeshe, reveals a surprising flipside of this bifurcation of the Tibetan lay/monastic relation along ethnic lines. Yeshe contends that lay Western interest in exclusively Tibetan monastics (and not Western monastics), combined with the Tibetan monastics’ refusal to materially support Western monastics, puts the viability of Western monastics (particularly nuns), and thus the future of Tibetan Buddhism in the West, in doubt:

Approximately 30,000 ethnically Tibetan monks and nuns in India live in lavish monasteries, largely funded by foreigners’ donations. There are less than 2,000 Western monastics in the Tibetan Buddhist tradition in the world, and only a few monasteries do not charge these monastics to live there. In Australia, for example, where I’ve spent a lot of time, every Tibetan Buddhist temple charges Western monastics. The assumption seems to be that if you are Western, you must have money. But one Western nun I know had to pay so much to stay at a center that she had to look through the garbage for food. A Western monk was made to live under his center’s staircase, while the head lama slept in the spacious penthouse apartment. ... According to surveys conducted by the Kalyanamitra Foundation, a charity I founded that is devoted to supporting Western monastics in the Tibetan tradition, 75 percent of Western monastics in this tradition ultimately disrobe. Of the 15 people I ordained with, for instance, only two are left. (Yeshe 2017)

Western monastic turnover is another way that Tibetan Buddhism is undergoing laicization outside Tibet and India. Besides ideological discontinuities between Buddhist renunciation and American values such as activism and optimism (Tweed 1992), Yeshe suggests that such turnover reveals one of the main material obstacles to the development of Vajrayana monasticism among non-Tibetan North Americans: the Western renouncer’s economic vulnerability without the support structure of a functioning socio-economic lay/monastic relation. Yeshe provides a directory of seven Tibetan Buddhist monasteries around the world that do support female monastics, three of which are in North America: Pema Chodron’s Gampo

Abbey, Thubten Chodron's Sravasti Abbey, and Vajra Dakini Nunnery in Portland, Maine under the direction of Khenmo Drolma.

In his study of the ongoing appropriation of Theravada-derived meditation in the American mindfulness movement, Jeff Wilson explains that because women normally cannot be fully ordained in mainstream Theravada Buddhism, the tradition's laicization precipitates its feminization by removing monks as the sole role models. The redistribution of authority from monks to laypeople thus allows women to participate in much greater numbers and with more central roles (2014, 71-73). Mavis L. Fenn points out that Sri Lankan Buddhism's 19th-century laicizing reforms opened the door for an increase in women's religious participation (2014, 315-316). Despite the fact that Buddhism's laicization tends to favour women, the reinstatement of full ordination for Theravada and Vajrayana¹⁹ nuns is a pressing goal of Sakyadhita as an important marker of gender equity within the tradition and a respectable career path (319).

Protestant Vajrayana Buddhism

In 2002 B. Alan Wallace observed the proliferation of a number of seemingly novel patterns in Western Buddhist formations that scholars before and after him have referred to as "Protestant" or "modernist:"

It appears that a kind of Buddhist protestant reformation is in the making. The role of monks, nuns, priests, and professional contemplatives is on the decline; there is an erosion of the very distinction between laity and clerics; and the importance of the laity, including women, is on the rise. These changes are induced by individualism

¹⁹ While there is presently no option for women in the Tibetan tradition to take full *bhikṣuṇī* ordination under the *Mūlasarvāstivāda Vinaya*, full ordination is available under the vinaya of the *Dharmaguptaka* lineage, an early cousin of the Theravada still widely practice in East Asia (as well as among Western Tibetan Buddhist nuns at Thubten Chodron's Sravasti Abbey in Washington).

and nonconformism, democracy and egalitarianism, humanistic psychotherapy, feminism, modern science, and of course Christianity and Judaism. (46)

Buddhism's "protestant reformation" has in fact been in the making since the late 19th century clash of European colonial powers and Asian Buddhist cultures, emerging both as a form of resistance to colonial forces and an appropriation of Western philosophical, religious, and social forms. It was led by Asian Buddhist reformers such as Anagarika Dharmapala from Ceylon, and Soen Shaku and D.T. Suzuki from Japan, as well as Orientalists such as the Americans Henry Olcott and Paul Carus. More recently Buddhist modernism has been expounded by Alan Watts, Chögyam Trungpa, Thich Nhat Hanh, and the Dalai Lama, whom McMahan describes as Buddhism's "quintessential modernizer" (2008, 247).

Despite the Dalai Lama's enthusiastic embrace of the Protestant-influenced humanistic impulses to which Wallace attributes "the present reformation of global Buddhism" (2002, 47), post-exile Tibetan Buddhism has been modernizing for roughly half as long as Buddhist traditions such as Theravada and Zen that encountered Western colonial powers over a century ago in Asia. The state of Tibetan Buddhism's modernization therefore remains significantly more ambiguous (Harding, Hori, Soucy 2014, 17). Is North American Tibetan Buddhism undergoing a similar kind of Protestant reformation? An effective answer would require examination of the extent to which Tibetan Buddhism's traditional elite and popular patterns of religious action and identity – the hierarchies of guru/disciple and renouncer/householder – are being weakened or otherwise transformed under the influence of what Capper (2002, 230) and Chandler (2009, 106) refer to as "American individualism." According to Mills, for example, individualism and egalitarianism are at sharp odds with the hierarchical framework of Buddhist tantra rooted in the guru/disciple relation:

In tantric traditions such as Guru Yoga (*bla-ma'i rnal-'byor*), the student visualises himself 'receiving' the Body (*sku*), Speech (*sung*), and Mind (*thugs*) of the lama ... [S]uch meditations imply inherently unequal social relations ... [T]he formation of all social identities revolves around this question of hierarchy and authority, because, initially at least, we are incapable of 'authoring' ourselves ... a view which is in radical opposition to the kind of self-'re-branding' that characterises Western ideologies about modern identity. (Mills 2003a, 141-142)

In his ethnographic study of guru-disciple relations at a major Tibetan Buddhist centre in the United States, Capper argues that guru devotion and individualism are not necessarily in contradiction, but that his American interpreters *employed* the "inherently unequal social relations" of the Vajrayana guru/disciple relation as a self-help technology. He found that guru relationships were the primary attraction for the centre's non-Tibetan American residents, who were drawn into the practice of Tibetan Buddhism "because of their deep interpersonal participation with Tibetan lamas" (2002, 21).

Reflecting on the interaction between these practitioners' devotionism and individualism, Capper concludes that the latter "founds, rather than prevents, deep community participation" (233) when expressed through the choice to engage in guru devotion practice. All Capper's interpreters came to Tibetan Buddhism through "individual-expressiveness," self-consciously choosing it through an embrace of a plurality of religious options. This element of individual choice clearly differentiates the Western "convert" practice of Tibetan Buddhism from its indigenous Tibetan praxis. Speaking of modern individualistic religion generally, Capper cites Phillip Hammond: "Whereas others may regard the church as a natural extension of their social worlds, these people regard it as an avenue to some privately chosen goal" (231).

Anthony Giddens describes this reality as a general characteristic of the modern individual's experience of their social situation: "In the post-traditional order of modernity ... self-identity becomes a reflexively organized endeavour. The reflexive project of the self, which consists in the sustaining of coherent, yet continuously revised, biographical narratives, takes place in the context of multiple choice as filtered through abstract systems" (Giddens 1991, 5). This "context of multiple choice" includes a "diversity of 'authorities'" (5) guided by the project manager, the individual. In his analysis of the Western Buddhist experience, Samuel uses Foucault's notion of 'technologies of the self' to say something very similar.²⁰ Samuel suggests that the chief appeal of Tibetan Buddhism for Western followers is principally as "a transformative practice, a technology for remaking the self and in the process reconceptualising both self and the world to which the self relates" (2005, 338). Paul Heelas describes the "self-ethic" of New Age spirituality, in which "the 'individual' serves as his or her own source of guidance" (Heelas 1996, 23) – his or her own authority. Where Mills defined diffuse chthonic agency as the distinct conception of personhood of Himalayan civilization, Giddens' notion of the individual self as reflexive project can be viewed as a Euro-North American equivalent.

My master's thesis (Emory-Moore 2012) asked the question: How is the conception of "self-identity [as] ... a reflexively organized endeavour ... in the context of multiple choice" (Giddens 1991, 5) shaping Euro-North American lama/disciple relations? This dissertation asks the question: How is such a conception of personhood shaping North American Vajrayana householder/renouncer relations? How, and how much, are self-reliant North American converts

²⁰ David McMahan (2017) recently employed Foucault's "technologies of the self" in his theorization of Buddhist meditation practices as culturally mediated "modes of self-cultivation." As mentioned above, Asad (1993) relies on the same concept to theorize the unique ritual productivity Christian monastic asceticism.

to Tibetan Buddhism practicing renunciation of secular interests and self-direction (Hori 2014, 177) in service of their reflexive self-identity projects? How, and how much, are North American New Kadampa Buddhists choosing to practice self-abnegation as a means of self-cultivation?

Stephen Sharot uses Max Weber's model of religious action to explain how "the Protestant Reformation constituted a reformulation of the goals, conditions, and means of Christian religious action" (2001, 211). While the major soteriological goal of residing for eternity in paradise remained the same, this-worldly goals (nomic and thaumaturgical) traditionally addressed by the Catholic means and conditions of sacraments and saints were deemphasized in Protestantism: "laypeople could no longer ... rely on the assistance of supramundane beings and the whole apparatus of religious objects, formulas, and rituals that the Catholic Church had provided to counter evil forces and to prevent and overcome the misfortunes of everyday life" (214). The reduction of ritual and the turn to a this-worldly manifestation of God's grace in "the priesthood of all believers" functioned to weaken the hierarchical separation of clergy and laity such that "the Protestant minister could not have the Catholic priest's mystique as mediator and distributor of sacred power" (213).

Like Roman Catholicism, the Vajrayana Buddhism of Tibet is a highly ritualistic religious system which traditionally includes an elaborate hierarchy of supramundane beings with human transmitters of divine blessings at its peak in the form of tulkus. Indeed Western comparisons of the two religions has a long history. Given the heavily Protestant character of English-speaking North America, contemporary North Americans' attraction to Tibetan lamas and their highly

authoritarian, ritualistic form of Buddhism is a complex phenomenon described in all its winding Orientalist detail by Lopez (1998; 1995).

The Protestant Reformation weakened the clergy/laity binary in general, but especially so in the United States where the First Amendment of the Constitution helped to establish the separation of church and state. Sharot summarizes the democratizing effect of disestablishment on American Protestantism: “State churches and governmental support for religious regulation ... were replaced in the United States by the principle of voluntarism and a religious free market where the success of religious movements depended on their attracting and evangelizing the population” (2001, 235-6). Ann Braude identifies some of the ideological challenges encountered by Roman Catholic monastics in Protestant America:

Nuns’ vows of poverty and obedience pulled in a dramatically different direction from the constitutional values of independence and self-reliance presumably reinforced through private property. But it was nuns’ vow of chastity that was incomprehensible to Protestant America ... [s]o thoroughly had Protestant Americans embraced marriage and the family as the locus of salvation. (Braude 2011, 474)

The Decree on the Apostolate of the Laity issued by the Catholic Church at the Second Vatican Council would also elevate the sanctity of the lay “vocation” to share in the redemptive work of Christ and forward God’s worldly reign (Leckey 2006, 26).

Though Protestant anti-monasticism has not been a factor in the fairly recent American reception of Tibetan Buddhism, disestablishment has certainly required Tibetan Buddhist monastic leaders to share their power with American laity, to acquire private property, and to promote their services in a competitive religious market. Weber’s distinction between an established church

and a voluntary sect is a helpful way to understand the biggest difference between Tibetan Buddhism in Tibet and Tibetan Buddhism in the West: “the ‘church’ as a compulsory association for the administration of grace, and ... the ‘sect’ as a voluntary association of religiously qualified persons” (1946, 314) — or of sufficiently interested persons at least. Weber describes a heightening of emphasis on religious leaders’ personal charisma as an important effect of disestablishment in the Protestant reform agenda: “The domination of laymen, in part, found its expression in an opposition to a professional theologian and preacher. Only charisma, neither training nor office, should be recognized” (317).

This is a particularly relevant insight into the development of the largest Vajrayana networks in North America (e.g., Shambhala, FPMT, NKT) under the entirely charismatic authority of lamas who were previously relatively minor figures within the ritual hierarchies defining their respective Tibetan sects:

[T]he first Tibetan teachers to gain prominence in the West were young teachers, on the margins in their own native Tibetan communities. Therefore ... a teacher in the West need not be well-known or communally respected to engender a loyal following. A teacher needed only charisma, entrepreneurial skills, and a rapport with Westerners to become a highly revered teacher. (Chandler 2009, 110-11)

This diasporic heightening of charismatic over clerical religious authority affirms Samuel’s observation that contacts between Western Vajrayana networks and their traditional “higher-level [Tibetan] structures” (Samuel 2005, 307) “are significant, but they do not ... amount to very much in the way of hierarchical authority” (308). In addition to their embrace of market propagation techniques, this represents another way in which such groups have taken advantage of Tibetan Buddhism’s forced disestablishment.

Weber famously argued that modern Western capitalism arose out of a distinctly Protestant “this-worldly asceticism” which valued economic prosperity as a sign of spiritual salvation. He described this as a unique development in Euro-North American religious history “when asceticism was carried out of monastic cells into everyday life” (2003, 181). Scholars have identified an analogous pattern of laicization in Western Buddhism: “The new Buddhism takes the path of liberation that was preserved and refined by countless generations of Asian monks and offers it up to anyone who is interested” (Coleman 2001, 13). When Protestant Christianity began negotiating its changing relationship to asceticism on the North American continent, it did so as a religious majority. North American Buddhist communities navigate an analogous transformation today as minorities in a cultural environment with tangibly Protestant roots and increasing religious diversity.

This dissertation investigates whether and to what extent the goals, conditions, and means constituting the Vajrayana path of liberation are being laicized, de-emphasized, or otherwise transformed in one of the largest Tibetan-inspired Buddhist movements in North America. But the question can be posed more broadly: Is the traditionally monastic path of renunciation indeed being “offered up to anyone who is interested” in North American Buddhist formations? And if so, who is interested? Or does the blurring of the lay/monastic binary indicate that renunciation is becoming a less significant socio-religious component of Buddhist traditions adapting to the cultural logic of advanced capitalism? Is increased lay access to, and interest in, Buddhist teachings and practices traditionally considered the reserve of monastics effecting a *popularization* of the soteriological orientation of samsara-renunciation along with contemplative practices (e.g., meditation) traditionally deployed in its service? Or is Buddhism’s

laicization effecting a *renunciation* of renunciation, along with less attractive practices (e.g., moral discipline) traditionally deployed in its service?

Wilson charts the laicization of Theravada vipassana meditation practice in the American mindfulness movement from “an arduous, lifelong process attempted in a renunciatory, monastic religious context” (2014, 53) to a purportedly easy and instant cure-all for ordinary, daily *lay* life: “Lay lifestyles are not merely grudgingly accepted as not necessarily in conflict with the pursuit of mindfulness; rather, lay life is increasingly valorized as the proper or best place to carry out mindfulness practice” (52). An important cause (and effect) of this dramatic American laicization of Buddhist meditation practice is a removal of Buddhist doctrine:

What we see with the mindfulness movement in America is the gradual transfer of authority from monks to laypeople. ... As this phenomenon has grown, there has been an accompanying shift in the way that mindfulness is framed, often losing its connection to Buddhist concepts, morality, renunciation, and eventually Buddhism itself (49).

Stripped of teachings on karma, rebirth, and renunciation, the practice of vipassana meditation also loses its traditional function as a means to the Buddhist soteriological goal of liberation from samsara. Instead it “comes to be presented in a basically amoral manner, denuded of context and thus available for application to simple tasks: to eat mindfully, have mindful sex, use mindfulness to deal with depression, or play the guitar in a mindful manner” (55).

Wilson briefly reflects on the perceived stakes of the de-Buddhification of Theravada vipassana meditation supporting the practice’s remarkably successful popularization as a purveyor of “practical benefits” desired by lay Americans:

Is this the triumph of Buddhism in a non-Buddhist culture or its death knell? Most people in the mindfulness movement seem not to worry about such questions. For

them, reducing suffering (a very Buddhist motivation) appears to be the primary concern, and if that is best accomplished by transferring mindfulness out of Buddhism, a great many find that to be an acceptable price. (74)

Tweed suggests that scholars of Buddhism have a role-specific obligation not to worry about such questions, since social scientists should not be in the business of measuring the authenticity, or even “health,” of the religions they study (1999, 82). Wilson poses the question but carefully avoids answering it in favour of thick description of the cultural processes effecting Theravada meditation’s therapeutization along scientific and commercial lines as it is adapted to American desires in “an ever more diffuse chain of custody” from Buddhist monks to Buddhist laity to non-Buddhist doctors, therapists, self-help authors, and financial advisors (74).

Is a parallel demythologized therapeutization of tantric meditation traditionally practiced by elite lamas in store for the younger North American Buddhist tradition of Tibetan Vajrayana?

According to McMahan, the diasporic “privatization, deinstitutionalization, and detraditionalization” of Tibetan Buddhist meditation is well under way:

Chögyam Trungpa’s Shambhala training, for example, offers methods of mind training stripped of traditional rituals and requiring minimal doctrinal commitment. The Dalai Lama also encourages non-Buddhists to practice meditation, offering it as a Buddhist contribution to a turbulent world, one that cultivates peace of mind, compassion, and ethical responsibility in anyone, regardless of religious commitments. (2008, 187)

Like Wilson, Wallace explicitly links Buddhism’s pseudo-Protestant Western laicization to the demythologizing alteration and/or abandonment of traditional Buddhist beliefs. Unlike Wilson, and most American buyers and sellers of mindfulness, Wallace appears more concerned about the price of the religion’s Western transformation, characterizing it in terms of “declension” and “dilution.”

Buddhism makes many extraordinary claims about the capacity of human consciousness for achieving dramatic and irreversible kinds of transformation. These include the complete elimination of all mental afflictions (Skt. *klesa*); freedom from the cycle of rebirth; boundless love and compassion; ... and a wide variety of paranormal abilities (Skt. *siddhi*). Such assertions are the “currency” of the faith of traditional Buddhists, who have been encouraged to accept the validity of these claims on the basis of the gold standard of experiences of generation upon generation of accomplished Buddhist contemplatives and saints, beginning with the Buddha himself. As the role of professional contemplatives declines in the present reformation of global Buddhism, it remains to be seen whether this alleged gold standard will be maintained. (2002, 47)

Wallace also comes closer to proffering an answer to Wilson’s question about whether Buddhist meditation’s demythologized, detraditionalized popularization in North America represents the triumph of Buddhism in a non-Buddhist culture or its death knell:

It is infeasible to alter or discard Buddhist worldviews without this having a powerful influence on one’s meditative practice and way of life. If the way one views the world is out of accord with traditional Buddhist worldviews, there is no way that one’s meditation and lifestyle can be Buddhist in any manner that accords with traditional Asian forms of Buddhism. (47-48)

While affirming the interrelatedness of worldview, lifestyle, and meditation practice, Sharf’s historical description of similar laicizing strategies adopted by Buddhist movements that did *not* see meditation’s doctrinal decontextualization in terms of declension (but quite the opposite) offers a more neutral account of such innovations. Sharf argues that the promotion of non-conceptual “bare attention” in modern mindfulness meditation finds precedent in medieval Chinese Chan and Tibetan Dzogchen traditions:

These movements have several things in common. In each case the reforms were, in part, attempts to render Buddhist practice and insight accessible to laypeople unfamiliar with Buddhist philosophy and/or unwilling to adopt a renunciatory lifestyle. They also promised quick results. And finally, the innovations were met with suspicion and criticism from traditional Buddhist quarters. (2017, 198)

Further affirming Wallace's argument about the unavoidable effects of doctrinal alteration and/or abandonment on Buddhist meditation and lifestyle, Wilson (2018) suggests that there is no way a contemporary Buddhist community's *economic* activity can be Buddhist in any manner that accords with traditional Asian forms of Buddhism without the cardinal Buddhist beliefs in merit and merit labour – the monastic professional's historical *raison d'être* for lay Buddhists.

This chapter has provided an overview of Buddhist renunciation from the time of Siddhartha Gautama to Atiśa Dīpaṅkara to Chögyam Trungpa. Martin Mills described an indigenous Himalayan lay/monastic relation as a functioning religious-economic system; Eve Mullen described that system's diasporic collapse under pressures unique to Tibetans' American immigrant experience; I aim to contribute to this evolving portrait of Tibetan Buddhist renunciation's cultural migration by describing an emergent lay/monastic relation in a missionary/convert form of Tibetan Buddhism in North America. Chapter 3 examines the relationship between this-worldly desires and the soteriological doctrine of renunciation in NKT teaching, while subsequent chapters examine the ways this spectrum of religious goals is practiced in daily NKT lives. Before this, the next chapter provides a review of scholarship on this dissertation's institutional focus: the New Kadampa Tradition.

CHAPTER 2

The New Kadampa Tradition

From feudal Himalayan Buddhocracy in 1950 to globally scattered sects with competitive market relations by 1980, the diasporic disestablishment of Tibetan Buddhism has undoubtedly affected the tradition's every element, not the least of which are monastic structures. The New Kadampa Tradition is a prominent example of a contemporary global Tibetan-inspired Buddhist network that has enthusiastically embraced marketization and laicization.

Although transnational networks like the NKT, FPMT, and Shambhala can be described as new religious movements, they each self-identify as bearers of specific traditions, or lineages, of Vajrayana Buddhism. As they globalize, their respective Vajrayana traditions variably modernize. Lamas and disciples are forced to confront questions about how and how much to adapt their lineages to the global conditions of modernity (e.g., religious pluralism; capitalist economics) and to the local socio-political contexts of new mission fields. Charting these processes in the NKT's strategic adaptation of Geluk renunciation and monasticism is an important diachronic component of this dissertation's contribution to scholarship on diasporic Tibetan Buddhism.

Before a close examination of the NKT's modernization of renunciation in teaching and in practice, this chapter provides a survey of existing NKT scholarship in the form of a concise overview of the group's historical development and evolving relationship to its source tradition. Relying largely on research conducted in Britain, where the NKT was founded in 1991, I argue

that the NKT's approach to modernization combines selective strategies of neo-traditionalization and detraditionalization, both of which set the group apart from mainstream Geluk Buddhism.

i. Context, Emergence, Expansion

Born in Tibet in 1931, Kelsang Gyatso was ordained a monk at the age of eight and spent the first years of his monastic career at the village monastery of Ngamring Jampa Ling in southeast Tibet before enrolling at the mega monastery of Sera Je in 1950. Along with many other Tibetan lamas, Gyatso fled Chinese occupation in 1959. He lived in northern India until 1977 when he was invited by his Sera Je peer, FPMT founder Lama Thubten Yeshe, and asked by his own teacher Trijang Rinpoche, to teach in Britain at the FPMT's mock-gothic mansion, Manjushri Institute, as its first resident *geshe*²¹ (Cozort 2003, 226). From the time of Yeshe's death in 1984, "Manjushri Institute began to develop primarily under the guidance of Geshe Kelsang and without reference to the FPMT" (Kay 2004, 64). Gyatso and his Manjushri students officially split from the FPMT in 1991 when they took over ownership of the centre property and formed the NKT as an independent organization. Aside from Gyatso there are no other Tibetans in the NKT (Bluck 2006, 145).

²¹ *Geshe* ('spiritual friend') refers to the highest scholastic degree in Geluk monasticism and to monastic individuals who have earned the degree.



Fig. 1. Geshe Kelsang Gyatso

<http://meditationinhouston.org/geshe-kelsang-gyatso/>

Working in the limelight of the group’s infamy following a controversial 1996 protest campaign against the Dalai Lama in defence of Dorje Shugden worship, Kay aimed to describe the NKT as “a movement that is representative of certain currents *within* Tibetan Buddhism” (2004, 39) in distinction with “the media’s portrayal of the NKT at the time as a dangerous and ‘cultish’ organisation” (38) run by a fanatical leader. In particular, Kay aligned the NKT’s founder with the sectarian Geluk exclusivism of the highly influential lama, Pabongka Rinpoche (1878-1943), who aggressively promoted Shugden, in contrast to the non-sectarian approach taken up by the Dalai Lama who has aggressively condemned Shugden.

Interpreting the NKT’s emergence in 1991 as the final fruit of Gyatso’s schismatic split from the FPMT in 1984 with a circle of mostly British disciples, Kay attributes the schism largely to their

“very different positions within their indigenous Gelug context in terms of the classical division between ‘inclusive’ and ‘exclusive’ orientations” (65). Unlike Lama Yeshe who was more inclusive, Gyatso’s exclusivism hardened and intensified in the years leading up to his creation of the NKT in 1991 (57). By 1990, following a three-year retreat in Scotland:

[Gyatso] was gravely concerned that the purity of *Tsong Khapa*’s tradition was being undermined by the lingering inclusivism of his Western students, many of whom continued to seek spiritual inspiration from non-*Gelug* sources. This was something about which he had been outspoken for some years, but he now acted more forcefully in his opposition to it by discouraging his students both from receiving guidance from teachers of other traditions and from reading their books. (76)

Such exclusivist conviction about the threat posed by inclusivist eclecticism to lineage purity characterizes a historically prominent strand of clerically-oriented Gelukpa lamas such as Pabongka and Trjang Rinpoche.

Sectarian exclusivism is of course not unique to Geluk or Vajrayana Buddhist formations. Sandra Bell points out that the three largest Buddhist organizations in Britain – the NKT, Friends of the Western Buddhist Order (since renamed Triratna Buddhist Community), and Soka Gakkai International - United Kingdom – are all “closely bounded, hierarchical organizations ... with an undisguised commitment to recruitment and expansion” (2000, 398). Erik Braun recounts a response by the lay teacher of Theravada vipassana meditation, S.N. Goenka, to Jack Kornfield’s request for him to teach at Insight Meditation Society (IMS) in Barre, Massachusetts: “If you open a centre and have more than one lineage teaching there, it will be the work of Mara, and the undoing of the dharma” (2013, 164). Kornfield’s reaction captures a nonchalance about religious eclecticism that may be particularly characteristic of North American Buddhism: “However, his letter came the day after we signed the mortgage – fortunately it was too late.” According to

Kay, Gyatso's perception of North American eclecticism on his first teaching tour in 1990 cemented his resolve to break away from diasporic Geluk Buddhism. Visiting American centres of Gelukpa lamas such as Geshe Lhundup Sopa in Wisconsin, Gyatso was shocked to find "that there was a widespread tendency amongst Western students to combine the teachings and practices of different Tibetan traditions and that, following the advice of the Dalai Lama, Tibetan *Gelug lamas* themselves were tolerating and sometimes encouraging this" (2004, 77).

In diaspora, therefore, Gyatso's exclusivism grew to surpass that of his Geluk contemporaries in his perception of a need to protect the purity of his lineage from other representatives of *his own* lineage – another carryover from Pabongka who principally understood Shugden's mission as "to prevent *Geluk* practitioners from mixing traditions" (Dreyfus 1998, 250, my italics). Following his three-year retreat, in 1990, Gyatso "had come to believe by this time that he had a central role to play in the preservation of Tsong Khapa's tradition in the modern age" (Kay 2004, 76).

Although he was a highly trained *geshe*, Gyatso, unlike Lama Yeshe and his protégé Lama Zopa, was not a recognized tulku, and thus remained a minor figure in the Geluk hierarchy: "Geshe Kelsang's current authority does not come from the Gelug school but from his western followers" (Bluck 2006, 142). As such he did not have sufficient authority to accomplish his reactionary aims within the confines of the Geluk tulku-led superstructure, including the tulku's unique authority to found temples (Mills 2003a, 308-311). Gyatso thus saw the schismatic formation of a new, strictly exclusivist Buddhist movement as a necessary measure of defense to protect authentic Geluk Buddhism from inauthentic Geluk Buddhism. In time he would grow increasingly critical of the Tibetan tulku system while simultaneously fashioning himself into a tulku (emanation body) for his non-Tibetan disciples.

In 2003 Cozort described the NKT and FPMT as two of the largest and fastest-growing Western Tibetan Buddhist organizations “which like church associations, promote the establishment of new centers for study and meditation and provide links to unify those that already exist” (222). Comparing their models for growth, Kay points to the NKT’s emphasis on the establishment of new centres versus the FPMT’s emphasis on the consolidation of existing centres. The result is a need for caution when comparing numbers:

The FPMT’s rate of growth in terms of centres established around the world is thus much slower than that of the NKT. ... In terms of the numbers of individual students active ... however, the NKT still has a long way to go before it matches the size of the FPMT. In 1988 – when it had only 41 centres and 6 other projects in 14 countries – FPMT sources estimated that up to 20,000 students were connected to the network. (Kay 2004, 115)

In 1999 Chryssides estimated the NKT’s membership to be 3000 in Britain and 5000 globally (1999, 367). The NKT had 63 British groups in 1993 and 183 by 2001 (Bluck 2006, 21). In 2004 the NKT constituted 96% of all Geluk Tibetan Buddhist groups in Britain and 76% of all Tibetan Buddhist groups in Britain (Kay 2004, 28). Today the movement claims 1200 centres and branches (although less than a quarter of these are permanent centres) in forty countries from Argentina to Sweden to Taiwan, including 700 monastic practitioners. The NKT’s official publishing arm, Tharpa, currently publishes Gyatso’s books in English, Chinese, French, German, Japanese, Portuguese, and Spanish.

Published on YouTube in 2011, a narrated NKT slideshow titled “Geshe Kelsang Gyatso - New Kadampa Tradition in America”²² provides an emic historical overview of the movement’s establishment and growth in the United States:

In 1985, after having heard of the Live Aid charity concert for famine relief in Ethiopia, Geshe Kelsang promptly sold the car he had been given and donated the money to Live Aid. A local newspaper picked up the story and it was syndicated around the world. After reading about this generosity, an American in Palm Springs, California extended an invitation to Geshe Kelsang to come teach Dharma in America. Geshe Kelsang only accepted the invitation after completing his three-year retreat in Tharpaland, Scotland. Thus in 1990 Geshe Kelsang arrived in the United States for the first time. To a group of about 40 people in Seattle, Geshe Kelsang granted the Highest Yoga Tantra²³ empowerments of Heruka and Vajrayogini. A few people had driven up from San Francisco, and were instrumental in requesting Venerable Geshe-la to establish the first Kadampa Center in the U.S. In 1991, Saraha Buddhist Center opened in San Francisco. By 1993, Geshe-la began to spend part of the year in the United States. He moved to Dallas, Texas and began demonstrating the role of a Resident Teacher in America. Teaching in his own house, Geshe-la showed how to start a centre from scratch through giving basic introductory teachings, establishing a relationship with students, teaching pujas and rituals, and guiding meditations.

During this time, starting in 1994, further Buddhist centers came into being. Geshe Kelsang named the initial centers after the deities of Buddha Heruka’s mandala – Cakrasambara [New York City], Vajrayogini [Washington, D.C.], Vajradakini [Dallas], Vajralama [Seattle], Vajrarupini [San Diego], Kandakapala, Mahakankala [Santa Barbara], Parbawatiya [Tampa Bay]. Geshe-la travelled to help these fledgling centers develop through giving empowerments, teachings, advice, and encouragement.

In 1999, Venerable Geshe-la selected the land in Glen Spey, New York as the site of the future Kadampa Meditation Center and the national temple. ... As he had done in England, Geshe-la introduced international Kadampa Buddhist festivals in the United States, enabling all American practitioners to gather together as one spiritual family, along with sangha from all over the world. Geshe-la himself taught at the festivals in

²² <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=kFpssSI3O5M>

²³ Highest Yoga Tantra (*anuttara yoga tantra*) is one of the four classes of tantra as categorized by the new schools of Tibetan Buddhism (Sakya, Kagyu, and Geluk), typically involving practices of sexual yoga.

Calistoga, California, New York, and Los Angeles to an increasingly large gathering of disciples. Whereas just ten years earlier in Seattle there had been only 40 people in attendance, in 2001, when Geshe-la again gave Highest Yoga Tantra empowerments [in NY], there were now 1,500 people receiving Venerable Geshe-la's blessings.

According to official centre websites, there are presently fifty-six physical NKT centres in the United States and nineteen in Canada. KMC New York in upstate New York (est. 2006) and International Retreat Center (IRC) Grand Canyon in northern Arizona (est. 2017) are the only rural NKT centres in North America, both of which are home to custom-built temples designed according to the mandala of the tantric deity Heruka (IRC Grand Canyon is under construction). The remaining seventy-three North American centres are located in major cities, often in commercial storefronts (e.g., KMC Boston) or converted churches (e.g., KMC Hollywood).

KMC New York City (KMC NYC), formerly Chakrasambara Centre, may be the largest NKT centre in North America, with drop-in General Program classes offered every day of the week at its primary location, ten other local "branch" locations, and twenty-eight secondary volunteer teachers. Founded by Danish-American layman Morten Clausen in 1994 "in a small graffiti covered dance studio near the Bowery ... by 2001 classes were being held in a rented commercial space in Chelsea" (NKT j). In 2011 KMC NYC purchased their current storefront space nearby (NKT j). Kadam Morten²⁴ is still the KMC NYC's Resident Teacher. Such a stationary tenure is rather unusual for NKT Resident Teachers who often relocate frequently to support other fledgling centres or in response to personnel changes requested by Gyatso, which I often heard interpreted as his skillful means to prevent Resident Teachers' attachment – not unlike "hierarchy shuffles" described by Lina Verchery (2015) at Calgary's Avatamsaka Sagely

²⁴ "Kadam" is the title given to lay NKT Resident Teachers who have taught successfully for four years (NKT a, 886).

Monastery (see Chapter 5). One of the first Resident Teachers of San Francisco's Saraha Centre, for example, Kelsang Togden, has since taught at centres in New York, Argentina, Korea, Portugal, New Zealand, England, and Brazil.

Over twenty-five years Kadam Morten has slowly built a thriving urban Kadampa temple with an impressive meditation programme for lay Manhattanites. Writing for the young women's digital guide to New York City, *Refinery 29*, Cory Stieg (2018) included KMC NYC on the site's list of nine "best meditation classes around the city for beginners." For Stieg, KMC NYC's strength is its drop-in class structure: "This studio offers flexible, 30-minute lunchtime meditations, and an after-work session, which might be just what you need after a stressful day." KMC NYC also offers a "Clear Mind at Work Meditation Program" providing in-house meditation instruction "designed to decrease stress and improve effectiveness at work" to corporate clients which have included Google and DDB. Stieg's closing "good to know" blurb informs readers: "They're really into Buddha's teachings at Kadampa Meditation Center. During the class, your teacher might casually mention a few lessons about Buddha."

Future chapters demonstrate that volunteerism is the primary force behind the NKT's expansion, including its North American growth since 1991. Although not strictly volunteers, since they typically receive a subsistence stipend (unlike part-time volunteer positions ranging from Administrative Director to class assistant), Resident Teachers are the NKT's full-time proselytizers. They lead public classes, rituals, and retreats as Gyatso's representative at a local centre while offering as many branch classes as possible (often also taught by secondary

volunteer teachers registered in a study program) in temporary rented spaces in the surrounding region, each with the potential to gradually develop into a new centre.

In a pattern that continues to this day (due to the NKT's established presence in Britain), a number of Gyatso's senior students travelled from established U.K. centres to the U.S. and Canada in the 1990s to become Resident Teachers of the first North American NKT centres – e.g., Kadam Morten in New York City, American monk Kelsang Tharchin in Toronto, British laywoman Kadam Lucy James in Florida, British monk Kelsang Jangsem in Seattle, and British nun Kelsang Delek in Vancouver. These teachers in turn attracted many of North America's present-day Resident Teachers.

The teacher responsible for introducing Gyatso's Dharma to Canada in 1993, Kelsang Tharchin (born Charles Rodarmor), was particularly influential in the NKT's North American expansion more broadly. Rodarmor was a psychologist in the U.S. prior to meeting Gyatso at Manjushri Institute and serving as the Institute's Director from 1981-1983. Although the NKT's history of Manjushri (NKT k) states that Rodarmor was appointed Director by Lama Yeshe, it was during Rodarmor's tenure as Director that the Institute supported Gyatso's dissension from Yeshe and the FPMT:

The management committee at the Institute ... had since 1981 been made up principally of Geshe Kelsang's close students who were known as the 'Priory Group'. The Priory Group became dissatisfied with the FPMT's increasingly centralised organisation ... [and] became increasingly unresponsive to directives coming from Central Office. By 1983, its desire for limited autonomy had evolved – with the backing of a large section of the Institute's community – into a campaign for full-blown independence. ... Lama Yeshe's attempts to reassert his authority over the Institute in 1983 were unsuccessful, and an open conflict of authority developed between the Priory Group and the FPMT administration. Geshe Kelsang and his

students were now intent upon securing fundamental alterations in the nature of the Institute's relationship with the FPMT, and ultimately in separating the two altogether. (Kay 2004, 62-63)

According to an oral history provided to me by a Canadian Resident Teacher describing Tharchin's founding of the first Canadian NKT centre, Chandrakirti, in Toronto in 1993, he began an extensive meditation retreat (which would have overlapped with Gyatso's) soon after his time as Director of Manjushri:

Gen Tharchin²⁵ arrived in Canada in 1992, where he got an apartment. He taught General Program classes in Quaker House, and Foundation Program classes eventually within a year or so in his apartment. His two main students, who ended up living with him, were Khedrub and Togden. They subsequently, in around 1994, 1995, moved into a house in Rosedale, Toronto, where a number of people who subsequently became teachers gathered. Included were Mondrub, Choyang, Sangdrub, Suma, Thaye, Khedrub, Togden, Zopa; a year or so later Rabgye, Thekchen, Phuntsog, Yonten, Debbie and Tom. They then moved into a commercial spot on Yonge Street in about 1996. Before Gen Tharchin came he had completed six years of silent retreat, had been requested to teach a number of times, and then finally Venerable Geshe-la requested him directly, saying "If you don't go, they will not get Dharma," and he came. Venerable Geshe-la told Gen Tharchin at the time that Toronto would become bigger than Manjushri.

Between them, the students of Tharchin listed above (almost all of whom were ordained) went on to become Resident Teachers of centres in Atlanta, Seattle, San Francisco, Long Island, Toronto, Mississauga, Victoria, Vancouver, Ottawa, Barrie, Hamilton, Kingston, Calgary, and Guelph. The majority are still Resident Teachers today. Tharchin returned to the U.K. in 2000 and became the Resident Teacher at Tharpaland IRC in Scotland. One interviewee at KMC North who initially encountered Gyatso's Dharma in Toronto through Tharchin recounted:

Tharchin gave such impeccable teachings, it just gave me fuel; I was so fired up at the end of his classes. We left our [General Program] classes and we would go to a café across the street and eat French fries and drink tea 'til the wee hours of the

²⁵ "Gen" is the title given to ordained NKT Resident Teachers who have taught successfully for four years (NKT a, 886).

night; it was 1:00 and we'd all split and go our ways, they'd kick us out. And I'm going home on the subway or driving home, and just going "Oh my god, this is just amazing!" My mind was going nuts. And I got home and all I could do is think; I'd go home and sit on my pillow; I wouldn't sleep; I couldn't sleep I was so fired up. All I wanted to do was get ordained; and that's singlehandedly Tharchin's doing.

Without elaborating, this practitioner told me that Tharchin left Toronto on not very good terms, and that he was presently living in a British retirement home near Manjushri Centre. In conversation with others I learned that Gyatso had recently revoked Tharchin's Resident Teacher status for reasons purportedly related to Tharchin's tendency for teaching heterodox views.

Six years after Tharchin's departure, Patricia Q. Campbell (2011) conducted ethnographic interviews and participant observation research at Toronto's Chandrakirti Centre. Her analysis of the role of ritual in meditation instruction at introductory meditation classes provides significant data on adherents' embodied experiences of chanting, bowing, hand gestures, and meditation. It sheds little light, however, on their experiences of more advanced doctrines and practices such as renunciation, or on the relationship between individual Kadampa experiences and institutional dynamics in the NKT. Campbell's (2012) study of a public guru yoga ritual at Chandrakirti Centre does analyze (through the lens of performance theory) Canadian Kadampas' engagement with the more esoteric doctrine of Vajrayana guru devotion. While this article highlights central aspects of practitioners' immediate experiences of guru yoga prayers and meditations, Campbell does not attempt to connect these experiences of individual "meaning and enactment" to broader characteristics and functions of guru devotion ritual in the NKT (as I attempt to do in Chapter 6). I consult a number of Campbell's findings in future chapters.

During Tharchin’s time in Toronto, the NKT was emerging in Montreal by quite a different route. Québécoise dancer Christine Ares had been training under the Gelukpa lama Geshe Khenrab (who knew Gyatso personally) in Montreal until Geshe Khenrab’s death in 1993, soon after which she spent several months working as Geshe Kelsang’s personal assistant at Manjushri Centre – “a pivotal experience that made me decide to choose him as my spiritual guide. In the months I looked after him, it had become clear to me that he was an experienced guide. I therefore told his assistant that I had finished my checking, as Geshé Khenrab would say” (Peressini 2016, 350). In the summer of 1995 Gyatso requested Ares to open Kankala Buddhist Centre in Montreal where she could transmit *lamrim*²⁶ and *mahamudra*²⁷ teachings in French: “For the centre’s inauguration, we received a statue of the Sakyamuni Buddha ... all of Geshé Kelsang’s books, and five thousand dollars to cover the start-up costs. It was up to us to take it from there” (351). In 2001 at Manjushri Centre, Gyatso ordained Ares as Kelsang Drenpa alongside the father of her daughter (born two years previously). Drenpa remained Resident Teacher of Kankala Centre until 2010 when personal health problems, the duties of motherhood, and the centre’s expansion into Centre de Méditation Kadampa de Montréal – which introduced two additional sponsored staff and a more intensive teaching and ritual schedule – led her to step down (361). By this time Drenpa’s teaching activities in Montreal had produced a group of lay and ordained Québécois practitioners committed enough to found separate NKT centres in Vaudreuil, Joliette (since closed), Sherbrooke, Québec City, Trois Rivières, and Baie Comeau.

²⁶ *Lamrim* (‘stages of the path’) is a graduated formulation of Buddhist teachings introduced to Tibet by Atiśa Dīpaṅkara and further developed most extensively by Tsongkhapa in his *Great Treatise on the Stages of the Path to Enlightenment (Lamrim Chenmo)*.

²⁷ *Mahāmudrā* (‘great seal’) is a meditative instruction of Highest Yoga Tantra espoused by the Indian mahasiddhas and associated most directly in Tibetan Buddhism with the Kagyu school, the goal of which is a union of the natural luminosity of mind (*prabhāsvarā*) with the emptiness (*śūnyatā*) of all phenomena (Keown 2004b).

According to Peter Lorie and Julie Foakes' 1997 North American *Buddhist Directory*, just six years after the founding of its first North American centre in San Francisco, 40% of the region's Geluk centres belonged to the NKT. Of thirty-five North American Geluk centres listed by Lorie and Foakes, fourteen were NKT centres (ten in U.S., four in Canada), fifteen were FPMT centres (all in U.S.), and only six centres were affiliated with neither group. There are presently Canadian NKT centres in Ontario (seven), Québec (six), British Columbia (three), Alberta (two), and Manitoba (one).²⁸ In the U.S., there are presently nineteen NKT centres in the South (in Florida, Texas, North Carolina, South Carolina, Virginia, Georgia, Maryland, and D.C.), eighteen in the West (in California, Arizona, New Mexico, Colorado, Washington, and Oregon), fourteen in the Northeast (in New York, New Jersey, Pennsylvania, Massachusetts, Connecticut, and Rhode Island), and five in the Midwest (in Iowa, Wisconsin, Illinois, and Indiana). The states with the most centres are California (nine), Florida (seven), and New York (six).

Three American National Spiritual Directors presently oversee the Midwest, West, and East, respectively: Gen Kelsang Demo (a white American nun), Gen Kelsang Rigpa (a white American monk), and Kadam Morten Clausen (a white Danish-American layman). According to individual centre websites, which almost always display teacher names and photos, of the fifty Resident Teachers supporting fifty-six American NKT centres, twenty-six are female (fifteen ordained, eleven lay) and twenty-four are male (nineteen ordained, five lay); forty-eight are Euro-American and two are African-American.²⁹ Of 288 secondary, part-time volunteer teachers at these American centres, 173 are female (nine ordained, 164 lay), and 115 are male (six

²⁸ See James 2011 for a profile of a NKT centre in Kingston, and Matthews 2006 for profiles of NKT centres in Calgary, Toronto, Montreal.

²⁹ I have generated these ethnic categories (and others in the following two paragraphs) by looking at photographs of persons whose precise race/ethnicity I am unaware.

ordained, 109 lay); 259 are Euro-American, seven are African-American, four are Asian-American, two are Latinx, and sixteen are of unknown ethnicity. Two of the largest American centres, KMC NYC and KMC Long Island, each have twenty-eight secondary teachers, followed by KMC Colorado (nineteen). Six American centres list no secondary teachers besides the Resident Teacher.

The National Spiritual Director for Canada is Gen-la³⁰ Kelsang Khyenrab (a white British monk). Of the eighteen Resident Teachers supporting nineteen Canadian NKT centres, ten are female (eight ordained, two lay) and eight are male (six ordained, two lay); seventeen are Euro-Canadian and one is of unknown ethnicity. Of sixty-three secondary volunteer teachers in Canada, forty-five are female (four ordained, forty-one lay), and eighteen are male (one ordained, seventeen lay); fifty-four are Euro-Canadian, four are Asian-Canadian, and five are of unknown ethnicity. Centre de méditation kadampa Montréal is the Canadian centre with the most secondary teachers (eleven), followed by KMC Fraser Valley in Abbotsford, BC (nine). Five Canadian centres list no secondary teachers besides the Resident Teacher.

At the time of my field research, KMC South's Resident Teacher was a white nun and KMC North's Resident Teacher was a white monk. KMC South had five secondary teachers (one Euro-American female, four Euro-American male), and KMC North had eight secondary teachers (three Euro-Canadian female, two Asian-Canadian female, two Euro-Canadian male, one Latinx male). While not necessarily representative of their respective centre's gender demographics (since gender equity was an interview recruitment control), my forty-two

³⁰ "Gen-la" is the title given to the NKT General Spiritual Director and Deputy Spiritual Director (NKT a, 5§1).

interviewees at KMC South and North – forty-one of whom were either present or former centre managers or members (defined below) – did constitute a representative sampling of each centre’s core community with regard to race, age, income, and education (since these were not interview recruitment controls).

Only 12% (five of forty-two) of interviewees identified as not white: four as Chinese and one as mixed race. Ages ranged from twenty-four to seventy-four, with an average age of forty-nine. Age breakdown was: 5% below 30; 24% between 30 - 39; 26% between 40 - 49; 14% between 50 - 59; 21% between 60 - 69; 10% 70 or above. 31% of interviewees earned more than \$60,000 annually, 29% earned between \$20,000 - \$60,000, and 40% earned below \$20,000. 67% of interviewees held university degrees, almost half of whom held graduate degrees. Of the fourteen interviewees without university degrees, four held college degrees and six had attended some college or university; only three had no post-secondary education. Of the seventeen interviewees who earned below \$20,000 (the largest group), just over half (nine) held post-secondary degrees. Although almost half earned less than \$20,000, the fact that 93% of all interviewees had post-secondary educations suggests a portrait of North American NKT Buddhists’ socioeconomic status which fits that of American Buddhists more broadly as predominantly middle class (Wuthnow and Hackett 2003).

Membership at a NKT centre is constituted by enrolment in one of two structured study programs, “Foundation Program” or “Teacher Training Program,” entailing monthly fee payment and the adoption of formal program-specific commitments, or registration as a “supporting member,” entailing no commitments beyond monthly fee payment and delivering unlimited

access to a centre's "General Program" of drop-in meditation classes. At KMC North, enrollment in Foundation Program, Teacher Training Program, or supporting membership cost \$85 per month. In the spring of 2017 KMC North had sixty members: twenty-six Foundation Program students, eighteen Teacher Training Program students, and sixteen supporting members. At KMC South, enrollment in Foundation Program cost \$65 per month, while Teacher Training Program cost \$80 per month. Supporting members who did not wish to register in a structured study program were called "temple supporters" at KMC South, whose \$35 monthly fee allowed them to attend unlimited drop-in General Program classes. In the summer of 2016 KMC South had 120 members: ten Foundation Program students, twelve Teacher Training Program students, and ninety-eight temple supporters.

Averaging ninety members each, KMC North and South are certainly larger than the average North American NKT centre. I am, however, aware of roughly a dozen more North American NKT centres that are at least as big as KMC North and South, and at least a dozen more fledgling centres with memberships closer to ten. Of seventy-five total North American NKT centres, therefore, if fifteen large centres (e.g., KMC Seattle) have approximately ninety members each, twenty small centres (e.g., KMC Winnipeg) have approximately ten members each, and the remaining forty medium-sized centres average approximately thirty-five members each,³¹ I speculate the NKT's North American membership³² to be approximately 3,000 – roughly the size of the movement's U.K. membership twenty years ago (Chryssides 1999, 367) – with an estimated global membership of between 10,000 - 15,000.

³¹ This is a rough estimate of the membership of an average North American NKT centre based on the scale of centre programming, physical space, and secondary teachers of a medium-sized NKT centre such as KMC Madison.

³² I determine membership in the same way that NKT centres count members – i.e., study program registrants + "supporting members."

ii. Neo-traditionalization: Identity and Doctrine

Discussing “retraditionalization” as one of a variety of trends in “the postmodern condition of Buddhism,” David McMahan reminds us that, “In fact, we see across the globe a number of movements attempting to reappropriate tradition, to cast off some of the staples of Buddhist modernism, and to reassert more conventional views of the dharma. Such ‘returns’ are themselves products of modernity” (2008, 246).

Wendy Cadge (2005), for example, described teachers at the Cambridge Insight Meditation Centre who after years of decontextualized vipassana meditation practice have for entirely pragmatic reasons begun (re)introducing what she refers to as other supporting branches of the Theravada Buddhist tree – rituals, ceremonies, precept gatherings – recognizing that the health of a tree’s heartwood relies on its bark, that drinking tea requires a cup. Bell (1998) described the Shambala organization’s return to Tibetan tradition for legitimation and stability in the early 1990s after the death of its aggressively modernist leader, Chögyam Trungpa, and the sexual scandal surrounding his succession by an American disciple, Osel Tendzin. The prominent Nyingma lama Dilgo Khyentse Rinpoche guided Shambala through the crisis, resulting in a conservative form of hereditary succession: the appointment of Trungpa’s Tibetan son as the movement’s leader in 1990. Meanwhile, in British Columbia, Sitavana Birken Forest Monastery (part of the global Thai Forest Tradition) harkens back to a very conservative form of early Theravada Buddhist practice (Placzek 2014), and the local Thrangu Monastery advertises itself as a site of traditional Tibetan Buddhist monasticism in Richmond (Larm 2014).

The NKT is one such movement attempting to reappropriate tradition. Kay suggests that Gyatso's break from the greater Geluk order in exile had more to do with his exclusivist Geluk conservatism than with a desire for religious innovation. In particular, Gyatso's secessionism emerged from and facilitated his movement's retraditionalization – or more precisely, *neo-traditionalization* (Aldridge 2000, 138), or revivalism, since the *New Kadampa Tradition* is alleged traditionalism done in a new (i.e., not traditional) manner – of lineage identity and doctrine, parochialisms which cannot be adequately understood without understanding the NKT's role in the “Shugden affair.”

Dorje Shugden Reliance

As suggested by the British media backdrop to Kay's research, the NKT has become almost synonymous for scholars and practitioners of Tibetan Buddhism with its role in the Dorje Shugden controversy. Although the majority of scholarship on the NKT either makes it an explicit focus or a central point of context, I will provide an overview of the controversy within the broader picture of Tibetan exile, largely for a reason articulated by the NKT's first ethnographer, Helen Waterhouse: “the separation of the NKT from other western groups and in particular from mainstream Gelug tradition is highlighted by the NKT adherence to this practice” (1997, 158).

Dorje Shugden is an indigenous Tibetan deity whose propitiation as a protector of the Geluk school of Tibetan Buddhism — politically dominant in Tibet from the mid-17th century until 1959 — has obscure origins in the late 17th century.



Fig. 2. Dorje Shugden

https://www.vice.com/en_ca/article/8gdzva/big-trouble-in-little-lhasa-0000594-v22n3

According to Dreyfus, Shugden remained a minor Geluk deity until his “spectacular promotion in the pantheon of the tradition” (1998, 247) to the status of the Geluk’s principal ‘dharma protector’ by Pabongka, who had a growing concern at the end of his life for preserving the purity and superiority of the Geluk sect in the face of a growing non-sectarian (*Rimed*) movement in Eastern Tibet that attracted many Gelukpa lamas. The controversial nature of Shugden’s role as a wrathful, sectarian protector became clear during the 1940s when Geluk opposition to other schools became more aggressive and Shugden came to be seen as the deity “in charge of visiting retribution on those Ge-luk-bas tempted by the religious eclecticism of the Non-sectarian movement” (253-254).

Dharma protectors (*Dharma-pāla*, Tib. *choskyong*) are deities that have been oath-bound by a particular Buddha to protect Buddhism and are a common feature of nearly all forms of Buddhism – perhaps especially prominent in the Tibetan Buddhist pantheon. In the Tibetan traditions they can be propitiated as Buddhas in their own right or as potentially dangerous worldly gods or spirits who require diligent ritual care: “[A]lmost all monasteries maintained ritual relations with a set of Dharma Protectors which included both supra-worldly and worldly deities” (Mills 2003a, 187). In general, “*choskyong* are evoked as a means of protecting the spiritual practice of religious practitioners from deteriorating” (188). The main thing that sets Shugden apart from other protectors (such as Yamantaka and Palden Lhamo) is Shugden’s modern promotion (since the 1930s) as a protector of Geluk Buddhism against the influence of *other Buddhist sects* (particularly Nyingma), as opposed to more generalized enemies of Buddhism such as substance abuse or anti-Buddhist governments (188-189): “Shukden was re-invented during this century not just to satisfy the worldly purposes of individuals or particular institutions, but also and mostly to affirm and defend the identity of a revival movement opposed to other religious groups” (Dreyfus 1998, 268).

Pabongka’s disciple and Kelsang Gyatso’s root guru, Trijang Rinpoche (1901-1983), inherited a strong personal devotion to Shugden and passed the practice on to the mainstream Geluk establishment when he was appointed the present Dalai Lama’s junior tutor. The contemporary Shugden controversy can be traced back to the 1975 Tibetan publication of the “Yellow Book” by a student of Trijang’s, Zemey Rinpoche, and the Dalai Lama’s strong reaction against its celebration of Shugden’s sectarian violence: “The book enumerates the many Ge-luk lamas

whose lives are supposed to have been shortened by Shukden's³³ displeasure at their practicing Nying-ma teachings" (256). The Dalai Lama seems to have seen the book as an attack on his role as Tibet's spiritual and political leader, and the eclectic approach he himself was promoting as part of his struggle for Tibetan freedom. His opposition to Shugden worship increased over the coming decade—"speaking out publicly against the practice of Shugden worship in 1978 and 1980, and having a Shugden statue removed from one of the main Geluk monasteries in 1983" (Löhner 2009, 6). In the Spring of 1996, the Dalai Lama banned Shugden's propitiation in all governmental and monastic institutions under the control of the Central Tibetan Administration (CTA), declaring the deity to be "'an evil spirit' whose actions were detrimental to the 'cause of Tibet'" (Mills 2003b, 56), and requesting that individual Shugden worshippers not receive teachings and initiations from him thereafter (Lopez 1998, 192).

Following the Dalai Lama's ban in 1996, the destruction of Shugden shrines and icons in the Tibetan refugee community in India was overshadowed by "more controversial massed anti-Shugden signature campaigns that sought to identify and ostracize Shugden practitioners" (Mills 2009, 16, n.56). The Dorje Shugden Devotees Charitable and Religious Society was registered in Delhi in May 1996 and worked to reverse the ban through demonstrations and requesting audiences with the Dalai Lama, without success. In February 1997, Indian police identified the murderers of an outspoken supporter of the Shugden ban and his two students as having connections to the group. Pro- and anti-Shugden discord lingered in the diasporic monastic communities over the next decade. Although it was criticized by the Dorje Shugden Devotees Charitable and Religious Society as having a predetermined outcome, the Dalai Lama made a

³³ 'Shukden' is another transliteration of Shugden.

move towards claiming democratic legitimacy on the issue in 2008 when the CTA conducted a referendum on whether or not Shugden worshippers should be separated from non-Shugden worshippers (Löhner 2009, 16). The result saw Shugden monks given separate allotments to build their own monasteries (8).

Although Western involvement in the most religiously divisive internal Tibetan diasporic conflict to date might be imagined as a welcome democratic aid, Jeannine Chandler's (2009) analysis of post-exile conflict among Tibetan Buddhist lineages with seats in upstate New York – which, despite a restricted focus on the group's involvement in the Shugden controversy, includes the only scholarship on the American NKT containing more than mere cursory reference – shows that Westerners have in fact complicated and prolonged the centuries-old Tibetan dispute. Gyatso and his NKT disciples, for example, have been some of the most incendiary promoters of Dorje Shugden practice and critics of the Dalai Lama.

According to Kay, Gyatso's "exaggerated perception of the widespread decline of Gelug Buddhism has instilled a 'fierce conservatism' and urgency into the NKT's self-identity as an embodiment and protectorate of *Tsong Khapa's* pure tradition" (2004, 88). Kay's analysis is extended here if we consider a key element of the cultural context for the *reception* of Gyatso's conservatism by non-Tibetan newcomers to his tradition: the romantic preservationist impulse that drives much Western activity in relation to the imperiled Tibetan people and their culture (Lopez 1998). In light of these imperatives motivating both Gyatso and his non-Tibetan disciples to preserve Tibet's crowning doctrine, the NKT's resolute reliance on Dorje Shugden, the protector of Gelug purity, makes sense. Like Kay, Chandler casts Gyatso as a contemporary heir

of Pabongka's sectarianism, which hardened as the Shugden controversy intensified (2009, 227), along with Gyatso's promotion of the practice among his non-Tibetan students: "When Geshe Kelsang first arrived at Manjushri Institute, he maintained the centre's commitment to the *Dorje Shugden puja* and he did so in the customarily discreet manner of other FPMT centres, performing it in his room with only the ordained *Sangha* members" (Kay 2004, 70). Immediately following the formation of the NKT in 1991, Gyatso published his commentary to Shugden practice, *Heart Jewel*, "now promoted as the 'essential' practice of the NKT" (77). To this day *Heart Jewel* is the only public puja performed daily at KMCs around the world.

Following the Dalai Lama's ban, the NKT spearheaded sister activist organizations based in London, the Shugden Supporters Community (est. 1996) and the Western Shugden Society (est. 2008),³⁴ which led intermittent but impassioned protest campaigns at the Dalai Lama's public appearances outside Asia.

³⁴ On the relationship between the NKT and the Western Shugden Society, Chandler concluded that: "Despite their insistence to the contrary, the NKT and the WSS are seemingly one in the same" (2009, 232-233).



Fig. 3. International Shugden Community demonstration, June 11, 2015

<https://www.abc.net.au/news/2015-06-11/shugden-buddhists-protest-tibetan-dalai-lama-on-brisbane-visit/6537490>

These protests have garnered plenty of baffled media attention that has at times portrayed the NKT as fanatical – a negative public image which has become one of the biggest constraints on the NKT’s globalist missionary efforts. Madeleine Bunting’s special report in *The Guardian* one month after a Shugden Supporters Community demonstration in London in the summer of 1996, for example, described the NKT as “[a] fundamentalist sect built on the spiritual naivety of its followers [that] has harnessed Western organisational abilities and propensity for aggressive fundamentalism” (1996).

In response to the CTA-led referendum on Shugden practice in 2008, the Western Shugden Society sent letters to the Dalai Lama, the CTA, and leaders in the U.S. and U.K., demanding an end to the persecution of Shugden worshippers and the reinstatement of several Shugden-

worshipping monks into Geluk monasteries, or they would protest the Dalai Lama at each of his appearances around the world (Chandler 2009, 231).

The NKT-led protest campaigns are an example of how Westerners are transforming and exacerbating the Shugden controversy. Similarly, Chandler explains the role of the internet in expanding the conflict beyond the Tibetan community: “With the spread of the debate to the Internet, the Dorje Shugden controversy has slipped out of the hands of the Tibetans into the anonymous and inflammatory chatrooms of cyberspace” (244). Members of the NKT have been active contributors to online pro-Shugden and anti-Dalai Lama activism (Chandler 2015). Chandler also suggests that the Shugden dispute has been further intensified through the injection of Western attitudes and values, particularly in the appropriation of the politically weighted ideals of democracy and freedom by both sides in the debate, for example in Shugden activists’ protest chants demanding religious freedom.

The Dalai Lama’s Tibetan independence movement and his ability “to engender support for his interests among the Westernized segments of the international community” (Chandler 2009, 239) pose an obvious threat to China’s sovereignty over the Tibetan autonomous region. It is not surprising, therefore, that the Chinese state has been courting Shugden worshippers both as a politically safe form of Tibetan Buddhism to promote within its borders and as a means of undermining the Dalai Lama’s domestic and international authority (256). Internationally, Thierry Dodin (2014) describes the three most influential Shugden lamas as forming a spectrum of closeness with China: Lama Gangchen in Rome who “has a very close relationship with China,” Kundeling Rinpoche whose Shugden group in India and Switzerland “is coming

increasingly under the influence of China,” and Geshe Kelsang Gyatso whose NKT “are distinctly more distanced towards China.” Although NKT protestors have often been accused of being Chinese agents, by *Reuters* reporters for example (Lague, Mooney, and Kang Lim 2015), their opposition to the Dalai Lama’s ban appears to be more religious than political.

Several scholars, however, assert the inherently political nature of Shugden practice. Mills explains that “[f]ar more than a matter of mere individual faith, [protector deities] were the very glue of religious and constitutional affiliation” (2009). According to Dodin, the central issue for both sides of the conflict is group identity, which “can readily be assigned to the category of politics, if only because power issues are bound up with it” (Dodin 2014). What may be most significant is the way the NKT deploys the term “political” to accuse Geluk authorities of degenerate “worldly” motives, as we shall see. When the Dalai Lama opposes Shugden, Gyatso experiences it as a direct attack on his lineage gurus and thus on the integrity and reputation of his lineage identity. When conservative Shugden lamas like Gyatso promote Tsongkhapa’s as the highest, purest lineage of Tibetan Buddhism, the Dalai Lama experiences it as a direct attack on his work towards a unified Tibet under his modernist religious authority.³⁵ It is important to note, however, that the Dalai Lama’s modernism has never led him to sidestep the powerful presence of worldly deities and spirits, which remain an important part of mainstream Tibetan religion, government, and life in exile. McMahan points out that while western media “tended to represent the controversy as a matter of the modern, rational Dalai Lama hounded by superstitious

³⁵ I am indebted to my doctoral supervisor, Jeff Wilson, for pointing out just how comparable the concerns are of the two sides: “They are each motivated by profound anxiety about preserving the best parts of a culture and people under extreme threat of extinction, typical frictions over power, and love of the Geluk tradition. Among the seven billion+ people on Earth, there are almost none as similar to the NKT and mainstream Geluk, or Gyatso and the Dalai Lama, as they are to each other, which ironically is probably precisely why the conflict has been so nasty.”

traditionalists, ... part of his decision to discourage Shukden came on the advice of the Nechung Oracle, a benevolent spirit contacted through a shaman to advise on matters of state” (2008, 55).

As a wrathful protector of sectarian Geluk identity, Dorje Shugden is an obstruction to the Dalai Lama’s “efforts at forging a pan-Tibetan identity” (Hillman 2005, 38). A unified Tibetan nation, however, is the Dalai Lama’s post-exile project rather than a historical reality. Since the Tibetan cultural region has always consisted of a myriad of local clans and Buddhist schools, the Dalai Lama and his government have had to work to create Tibetan nationalism since 1959: “Shugden, ... having been carried into exile, thus must himself be declared obsolete and be exiled by the Dalai Lama so that Tibetans in exile may develop a national, rather than clan, identity” (Lopez 1998, 196). Gyatso has followed Shugden into this double exile, first with the NKT’s formation in 1991, and then more loudly with his first round of protests in 1996.

Buddhist Fundamentalism?

In a teaching at the 2010 international fall festival outside São Paulo, Brazil, which coincided with the inauguration of the largest NKT temple to date, Gyatso described his mission as one of lineage renewal:

Previously first Atisha founded Kadampa Buddhism and then his followers Dromtonpa, Potowa, they caused Kadampa Buddhism to flourish – a very pure Dharma. ... Gradually it degenerated and degenerated. Now there’s not one single Kadampa monastery, one single Kadampa group. There are only four traditions left – Sakya, Kagyu, Nyingma, Gelug. The Kadampa Tradition has disappeared. So I have the opportunity to renew this precious Buddhadharma and we have made successful progress. (NKT i)

In a personal blog titled “New Kadampa View, Meditation and Action: Preserving and Promoting the Ganden Oral Lineage of Wisdom Buddha Je Tsongkhapa,” a senior NKT teacher expresses his gratitude for the opportunity to participate in “a modern global revival of pure Kadampa Buddhism spearheaded by Venerable Geshe Kelsang Gyatso in a new historical and geographical context” (Kelsang Khyenrab).

McMahan points out that “The term ‘pure,’ in fact, comes up often in contemporary Tibetan teachings, no doubt in acknowledgment of the degree to which Buddhist teachings around the world have been hybridized and, in the traditionalist view, compromised” (2008, 247).

According to Waterhouse, that which is preeminently perceived to be pure within the NKT is the guru’s embodied lineage: “Fundamental to the NKT’s self-identity is the notion that Geshe Kelsang holds, and has passed on, a pure lineage which has not been mixed and has therefore neither been diluted nor corrupted” (1997, 152).

In a section of his study of the NKT titled “A Rejection of Modernity?,” Kay helpfully connects such emphasis on sectarian lineage identity with the NKT’s doctrinal conservatism:

This movement ... emerged from a perception that the ‘pure tradition’ was degenerating and dying out in the modern world. The perceived cause of this was, at least in part, precisely the kind of protean inclusivism and pluralism that modern fundamentalist groups stand in opposition against. Geshe Kelsang is believed to have re-established the pure tradition through his English-language commentarial texts and the NKT study programmes. These books present a narrow, simplified and literalised reading of the Tibetan Gelug tradition and are, in turn, relied upon literally and exclusively by many devotees out of a concern to preserve the pure lineage. (2004, 110)

This reaffirms Waterhouse’s description of NKT books as “mostly condensed versions of Tibetan texts with commentary by Geshe Kelsang” (1997, 142). A precise understanding of the

ways in which Gyatso has condensed and commented on traditional Geluk doctrine in the formation of his new movement's canon calls for an exhaustive textual comparison, which Cozort (2003) has begun. The next chapter will suggest that at least two of Gyatso's books present a simplified and literalised reading of traditional Tibetan Geluk doctrine which squarely fits the Oxford English Dictionary's definition of fundamentalism: "strict adherence to ancient or fundamental doctrines, with no concessions to modern developments in thought or customs" (2000).

According to Kay, Gyatso is a conservative Gelukpa lama "for whom the faithful transmission and continuation of the tradition as it was taught to him has been much more important than adapting the teachings or innovating new ones for westerners" (2004, 57). This description suggests traditionalism – an overriding concern for continuity. Gyatso's 2010 account of his "opportunity to renew" Atiśa's "very pure" Kadampa Buddhism, and Kelsang Khyenrab's account of Gyatso's "revival of pure Kadampa Buddhism," however, indicate neo-traditionalization.

These accounts also indicate an exclusivity of devotion to Gyatso as the sole source of qualified Dharma which we have seen Kay describe as an untraditional view within Tibetan Buddhism, "where lamas will often encourage students to study under others who have a similar orientation to themselves" (2004, 92). I would therefore characterize NKT guru devotion in the same way that I've described the NKT guru's approach to doctrine and identity: as neo-traditionalist – i.e., more traditionalist, or lineage-ist, than mainstream Geluk tradition. For Gyatso, the NKT's revival of pure Kadampa Buddhism demands secession from an impure Geluk tradition.

Geoffrey Samuel's account of the relative autonomy of lamas in global *and* traditional Tibetan societies, however, helps avoid overstating the historical rupture that Gyatso's schismatic exclusivism represents: "The operative unit, in fact, rather as it was in Tibetan societies, is not the monastic order but the individual lama ... and his centre or network of centres" (2005, 326).

Nevertheless, Kay's portrait of the threat that Gyatso and his disciples perceive to their pure lineage – "precisely the kind of protean inclusivism and pluralism that modern fundamentalist groups stand in opposition against" (2004, 110) – introduces a helpful category for interpreting the NKT's approach to the modernization of Geluk Buddhism: fundamentalism. Relying on Robert Lifton's portrait of the fundamentalist (versus protean) self, Kay concludes: "Geshe Kelsang's concern to establish a uniformity of belief and practice throughout the NKT, his emphasis on following one pure tradition exclusively and his critique of the protean inclusivism of Western practitioners are all suggestive of a response to modernity that has been characterised by Lifton as 'fundamentalist'" (2004, 220).

Beyond the obvious problem of its derisiveness in contemporary popular usage, the utility and shortcomings of 'fundamentalism' as a heuristic for understanding the NKT are evident in its broader definition as "a discernible pattern of religious militance by which self-styled 'true believers' attempt to arrest the erosion of religious identity, fortify the borders of the religious community, and create viable alternatives to secular institutions and behaviours" (Almond, Appleby, Sivan 2003, 17). Given the word's association with social or political combativeness, 'militance' may not be the best descriptor of the NKT. Unlike more typical Islamic and Protestant Christian forms of fundamentalism, New Kadampa Buddhism has been more quietist

than activist in its first twenty-five years, with little to say in support or critique of particular social or political causes. The obvious exception has been the movement's loud demonstrations on behalf of Dorje Shugden worshippers at the Dalai Lama's teaching events, a social cause which the NKT evidently sees as part of its own critique of the Geluk religio-political tradition of tulku-led Buddhocracy (NKT a, b, d, e). And besides the opening of Kadampa Primary School Derbyshire in England in 2012, which later closed its doors in October 2016 (Burton Mail 2016), the NKT has shown little interest in creating alternatives to secular institutions.

The group does, however, exhibit a pattern of religiosity by which "self-styled 'true believers' attempt to arrest the erosion of religious identity, [and] fortify the borders of the religious community" (Almond, Appleby, Sivan 2003, 17). The NKT's neo-traditionalizations of Geluk doctrine and lineage identity described above are just such fundamentalistic efforts to fortify their guru's lineage against an ominous threat on two fronts: lineage eclecticism promoted by the worldly motives of mainstream Geluk providers and their mainstream Western patrons. Kay summarizes nicely:

[Gyatso's] critique of contemporary *Gelug* practice represents a traditional position of *Gelug* exclusivism that has a long history in Tibetan Buddhism, in both the pre-modern and the modern periods. His critique of Western inclusivism also emerges from the transportation of this traditional approach to the modern West. In light of these historical and cross-cultural continuities between the NKT and exclusively oriented strands of *Gelug* Buddhism, it would be foolish to interpret the organisation simply as a late-twentieth century reaction to the vagaries of modernity. (2004, 112)

The preceding overviews of NKT history and identity have relied heavily on the most extensive analysis of the NKT to date by David Kay (2004). His focus on the NKT's schismatic British development and sectarian identity construction, however, precludes a close examination of

detraditionalization in the NKT, the primary focus of chapters to come and of the following concise overview.

iii. Detraditionalization: Institutional Structures

Samuel described two “complex constraints” under which contemporary global Tibetan-derived Buddhist networks typically operate: “the need (from the Western side) for female lamas” from Tibetan communities traditionally lacking such positions for women, and “the need (from the Tibetan and refugee side, and particularly from the Dharamsala administration) for political support for the cause of Tibetan independence” from Western Buddhists and Tibetan lamas who may have little or no interest (2005, 313). Gyatso’s schism from the Geluk hierarchy and the Tibetan government in exile has enabled his global network to cleanly avoid both these cross-cultural issues.

Gyatso is more than ambivalent about the cause of Tibetan political independence. His secession from Geluk Buddhism aimed to fortify his lineage against the spiritually corrosive effects of Tibetan political concerns, namely the undermining of sectarian differences by a diasporic push for Tibetans’ religio-political unity under the Dalai Lama. Having split, Gyatso can be as apolitical and sectarian as he pleases. But his break from the Geluk and Tibetan community has not only emerged from and facilitated his theological conservatism (described by Kay in great detail), it has also afforded him total freedom to innovate, for example by amply meeting his Western students’ need for female teachers.

Consideration of the following three broad institutional reforms, cursorily mentioned by Kay (2004, 98), contributes to a more balanced portrait of the NKT than that produced by Kay's focus on the group's neo-traditionalizing fundamentalisms.

Education Reform

While the NKT has neo-traditionalized Geluk doctrine to Gyatso's selection of scriptures and his own conservative commentaries, it has simultaneously detraditionalized the means of doctrinal transmission through textual translation from Tibetan and development of a three-tiered study programme, both of which expand the traditional teaching audience from a Tibetan, male, monastic elite to non-Tibetan, gender-neutral, lay and monastic paying patrons.

A section of the group's official general pamphlet titled "What does the NKT teach?" simultaneously introduces Gyatso's detraditionalization of educational structures and yokes his two objects of neo-traditionalization, doctrine and identity:

Geshe Kelsang has designed three study programmes of Buddhist teachings, and all NKT-IKBU Centres offer one or more of these. These programmes – called the General, Foundation and Teacher Training Programmes – form the very core of the NKT-IKBU, and are what distinguishes the New Kadampa Tradition from other traditions. (NKT d, 7)

In his survey of the seven largest Buddhist organizations in Britain, Bluck noted that "The role of study is considerably more prominent in the NKT than the other six traditions" (2006, 139).

Quoted later in the same section of the aforementioned pamphlet, Gyatso's justification of his movement's emphasis on doctrinal study reflects his critique of eclecticism:

We find it difficult to integrate Dharma into our daily lives and so we cannot use it to solve our problems. Why is this? It is because we are not studying systematically

according to a specially designed programme. If we just pick at Dharma randomly we will never gain a deep and stable experience, and our wisdom will never develop to its full potential. (NKT e, 2015, 8)

Formal study of Geshe Kelsang's selective translation and interpretation of Geluk doctrine occurs at NKT centres within the context of three progressively intensive study programs. Every NKT centre offers a "General Program" of drop-in meditation classes for the general public designed to introduce "basic Buddhist view, meditation and practice suitable for beginners" (7). Most centres also offer the "Foundation Program" which aims to provide "a systematic presentation of particular subjects of Mahayana Buddhism to enable practitioners to deepen their knowledge and experience of Buddhism" (7), as well as the "Teacher Training Program."

Mainstay General Program classes are held evenings and Sunday mornings for seventy-five to ninety minutes (\$12 at KMC North), weekday lunchtime meditations for thirty minutes (\$5 at KMC North), and intermittent weekend 'workshops' for three hours (\$35 at KMC North). Most drop-in classes consist of a brief opening meditation, followed by a themed Dharma teaching, and concluded by a longer meditation on the content of the teaching. Waterhouse found that "The General Programme in Bath attracts between twenty and forty people in any week of whom some are regular attenders though others may attend for just one or two sessions" (1997, 163). At both KMC North and South I saw General Program attendance vary between five at an evening branch class or lunchtime meditation at the main centre to fifty at an evening class or weekend workshop at the main centre.³⁶

³⁶ My research visits to KMC North and South were both in the autumn, which is when NKT centres tend to be busiest both in terms of programming and attendance. Winters often commence with an emphasis on meditation retreat in January, while summers often conclude with two months of reduced programming during Resident Teachers' annual visit to Manjushri Centre for International Teacher Training Programme and Summer Festival.

According to Cozort, “The Foundation Program is meant for serious students who want a guided study at a deeper level than they can get through the series of [General Program] *lamrim* talks, usually all pitched to a beginner’s capacity, that normally constitute the fare of Western *Dharma* centres” (2003, 232). The back of a promotional card in KMC North’s main foyer titled “Go Deeper With Your Studies” bore a photo of the Resident Teacher and read:

The in-depth study programs offered at [KMC North] consist of systematic study and practice of Kadampa Buddhism and are especially suited to people of this modern world. Anyone can join and experience the great benefits of being part of a regular study program. Through this we can improve our good heart, our wisdom, and our cherishing of others by going deeper into our study and meditation. (Kadampa Meditation Centre North a)

Foundation Program and Teacher Training Program meet weekly at the Dharma centre (usually for three to five hours) for group prayer, study, and meditation under the guidance of the Resident Teacher. The option to conduct the programs by correspondence is also usually offered if in-person attendance is not possible.

Pamphlets at KMC South’s front desk explained who could enroll in each program and their respective commitments. Whereas “Anyone can enroll in Foundation Program,” the Teacher Training Program pamphlet specified: “Anyone who feels ready for this type of study and practice may enroll. ... It is also recommended to have participated in Foundation Program prior to enrolling in [Teacher Training Program]” (Kadampa Meditation Center South b). The commitments of Foundation Program are four: to attend every class, to memorize the condensed meaning of the book or section, to take the examination at the end of the book or section, and to attend at least one General Program class or puja each week (Kadampa Meditation Center South a). Teacher Training Program students are also expected to maintain these four commitments, as

well as four others: to complete the study of all the subjects without interruption, to engage in the Teacher Training Program retreats, to maintain the moral discipline of the five lay precepts on the premises, and to be personally motivated by three purposes: “to deepen their knowledge and experience of Buddhism; to train as qualified New Kadampa Tradition teachers; and to benefit living beings through the flourishing of Kadam Dharma” (Kadampa Meditation Center South b).

What does the NKT teach in these study programs? The content of a typical General Program class is explored in detail in Chapter 3 (in brief, it consists of a doctrine-free introductory meditation followed by a themed doctrinal teaching and concluded by a doctrine-informed meditation). The Foundation Program “comprises the following five subjects based on Buddha’s Sutra teachings and the corresponding commentaries by Geshe Kelsang:” The Stages of the Path to Enlightenment (Tib. *lam rim*), Training the Mind (Tib. *blo sbyong*),³⁷ The Heart Sutra (*prajñāpāramitāhṛdaya*),³⁸ Guide to the Bodhisattva’s Way of Life (*bodhicaryāvatāra*),³⁹ and Types of Mind [Tib. *blo rig*]⁴⁰ (NKT d, 7-8). The Teacher Training Program “comprises twelve subjects, based on Buddha’s Sutra and Tantra teachings and the corresponding commentaries by Geshe Kelsang. ... The first five subjects ... are the same as for the [Foundation Program], and the additional subjects are:” Guide to the Middle Way (*madhyamakāvatāra*),⁴¹ Vajrayana

³⁷ *Blo sbyong* is a contemplative practice developed by the early Kadampa geshe, Chekhawa, which aims to transform adverse conditions into the spiritual path.

³⁸ *Prajñāpāramitāhṛdaya* is the shortest and most popular of the Perfection of Wisdom (*prajñāpāramitā*) sutras, which chiefly expound the doctrine of the emptiness (*śūnyatā*) of all phenomena.

³⁹ *Bodhicaryāvatāra* is an 8th-century poem by the Indian monk Śāntideva which teaches how to develop *bodhicitta* and practice the associated six perfections (*pāramitās*) of the *bodhisattva*: patience, giving, moral discipline, effort, concentration, and wisdom.

⁴⁰ *Blo rig* is an epistemological exposition of the nature and function of minds (*citta*) and mental factors (*caitasika*) derived from the *Abidharma*’s (‘higher teaching’) psychological systematization of Buddhist sutras.

⁴¹ *Madhyamakāvatāra* is a 7th-century philosophical text by the Indian scholar-monk Candrakīrti, principally concerned with interpreting the doctrine of emptiness put forth by the founder of the Madhyamaka school of Buddhist philosophy, Nāgārjuna, in his *Mūlamadhyamakakārikā* (‘Fundamental Verses on the Middle Way’).

Mahamudra ('great seal'), The Bodhisattva's Moral Discipline, Offering to the Spiritual Guide (Tib. *bla ma mchod pa*), Vajrayoginī Tantra, Grounds (*bhūmi*) and Paths (*mārga*) of Secret Mantra, and The Practice of Heruka Body Mandala⁴² (NKT d, 8-9).

Describing the NKT and FPMT as “the two largest and fastest growing ... of a few energetic organizations, which like church associations, promote the establishment of new centers for study and meditation” (2003, 222), Cozort compared their formal teacher training programs with the traditional curriculum of the *geshe* degree at the Geluk monastery of Sera Je, where the Tibetan founders of both organizations were trained in the 1940s and 1950s. Cozort shows that Gyatso has added and omitted a number of pedagogical elements in his formulation of Foundation Program and Teacher Training Program. Besides retaining ‘Types of Mind’ (*blo rig*) in an abbreviated form, Gyatso has left out most content from the first phase of *geshe* training focused on ‘Collected Topics on Valid Cognition’ (*bsdus grwa*) and replaced its main pedagogical method of debate with paired discussion (240). He has also omitted the rules of monastic discipline (*vinaya*) and much of the *Abidharma* content (e.g., cosmologies) comprising the final phase of *geshe* training (236-237). According to Cozort, the Teacher Training Program’s most significant additions to the *geshe* curriculum are emphases on tantra and meditation, innovations also adopted by the FPMT (238). Not only do Teacher Training Program students formally commit “to complete a number of meditation retreats” (NKT e, 2015, 8), every Foundation Program and Teacher Training Program class includes “a guided meditation related to the topic of the previous class” (Cozort 2003, 233). The traditional *geshe* degree requires

⁴² Body mandala is a completion stage (Tib. *rdzogs rim*) practice of Highest Yoga Tantra in which one meditatively transforms the subtle elements (channels, winds, and drops) of one’s generated deity body (in this case of the tantric deity Heruka) into deities in order to bless the elements of one’s subtle body for successful *mahāmudrā* meditation.

“twenty to twenty-five years of study and debate” (223); the NKT’s Teacher Training Program requires approximately eight years (234) of study and meditation.

Although Kay restricts his discussion of NKT doctrine (2004, 57-61) to form rather than content, analysing Gyatso’s books chiefly for their degree of inclusivism or exclusivism, he does offer a helpful overview of the differences between NKT study programs and the traditional *geshe* degree which affirms a number of Cozort’s findings:

Unlike the traditional *geshe* degree, which was open only to male monastics, the NKT programmes are open to all, including committed lay and female practitioners. The study of the *Vinaya* has not, as a consequence, been included as a subject on the programmes, and the more technical and analytical dimensions of the *geshe* degree have also been omitted. The exclusive reliance upon commentarial materials produced by Geshe Kelsang is also unusual. The lively tradition of combative and dialectical argumentation and debate within the *Gelug* monastic system has also been eclipsed by a milder emphasis on group ‘discussion,’ the purpose of which is the mutual reinforcement of NKT doctrine and identity. (99)

The NKT’s claim that its study programs distinguish it from other traditions is challenged by Cozort’s finding that “In the end, the similarities of the [NKT and FPMT] programs are more striking than their differences” (2003, 238), and that “The lower level tracks, the Foundation Program of the NKT and the [Basic Program] of the FPMT, are particularly alike” (237).

While differences in doctrinal content may be relatively minor, the textual sources relied on for doctrinal transmission differ significantly between the two movements: “Whereas FPMT students draw upon a variety of published sources and receive teachings from a number of teachers, NKT students rely entirely upon the published works of Geshe Kelsang Gyatso” (240). Kay provides an emic NKT answer to Cozort’s question “Is the NKT training too one-sided?”:

The explicit objective of the [NKT study] programmes is the protection and preservation of Tsong Khapa's pure tradition. By focusing on one teacher and restricting the practice of Highest Yoga Tantra to that of the meditational deity Vajrayogini, the programmes counteract the dangerous tendency of Western practitioners to follow multiple teachers, mix spiritual lineages and accept more tantric commitments than they can handle. (2004, 100)

In his own assessment of the NKT study programs, Bluck aligns the NKT's uncritical "faith-based approach to teachings" with that of Soka Gakkai International-UK. He concludes by suggesting, "We may choose to view this as what [Christopher] Titmuss (1999: 91) called the 'dogmatic or superior viewpoint' of expansionist organizations, or as what [Eileen] Barker (1999: 20) described as 'the unambiguous clarity and certainty' of New Religious Movements" (Bluck 2006, 140).

Authority Reform

Reincarnate lamas, or tulkus, are the foremost religious actors in Geluk tradition (Mills 2003a); they have no leadership role in the NKT. The traditional means of tulku-selection are prohibited in the *NKT Internal Rules*: "To prevent Dharma being used for political aims or worldly achievement, no NKT-IKBU Dharma Centre shall follow any tradition of recognising and relying upon oracles, or follow any system of divination" (NKT a, 16§2). In a recent open letter Gyatso stated his belief in the illegitimacy of the tulku presently identified as the reincarnation of his own root guru, Trijang Rinpoche, in part because "the Tibetan tradition of reincarnate Lamas, or Tulkus, is very unreliable and very uncertain" (NKT b).

In lieu of divinatory tulku recognition, the NKT has already significantly routinized religious authority by adopting a democratic system of succession in which the movement's top leadership

positions of General Spiritual Director, which is Gyatso's former position, and Deputy Spiritual Director, "who shall each carry the title 'Gen-la'" (NKT a, 5§1), are elected to eight-year terms of office (5§7) by the global assembly of NKT Resident Teachers (1§4, 5§10, 5§12). National Spiritual Directors are in turn recommended by the General and Deputy Spiritual Directors and elected by their respective country's Resident Teachers (6§1) to four-year terms of office (6§4).

Laitiy and women are two demographics that have traditionally held far less clerical authority than monks in Geluk Buddhism (Mills 2003, 132). Describing the NKT as largely "democratised and laicised," Kay observes that "Except at the very highest levels of the organisation,⁴³ positions of responsibility, teaching and leadership are as likely to be filled by lay practitioners as they are by monks or nuns" (2004, 85). Such positions are also as likely to be filled by women as by men. The NKT's current General Spiritual Director, Gen-la Kelsang Dekyong, is an Irish nun, while the UK's National Spiritual Director, Kadam Bridget Hayes, is a British laywoman and mother. The above survey of North American NKT teachers indicated that a slight majority (53%) of Resident Teachers and a significant majority (62%) of secondary teachers are female, an uncommonly high degree of female leadership in Euro-North American Tibetan lineages outside the NKT. A significant majority (71%) of North American Resident Teachers are ordained while a resounding majority (94%) of secondary teachers are lay.

Initiations of the lower tantras can be given by all NKT Resident Teachers, but those of Highest Yoga Tantra can only be granted by the General or Deputy Spiritual Director (NKT a, 5§6) or by

⁴³ The two uppermost clerical positions, General Spiritual Director (GSD) and Deputy Spiritual Director (DSD), are restricted to ordained NKT monks and nuns: "Only the GSD and DSD shall have the authority to grant ordination within the NKT-IKBU. Because of this, it is necessary that the GSD and DSD themselves shall always be ordained" (NKT a, 5§5).

a National Spiritual Director “on the instruction of the [General Spiritual Director]” (6§3). Since National Spiritual Directors can be lay, this means that lay men and women can grant highest yoga tantra initiations, although their authority to do so is bestowed upon them temporarily by the ordained General Spiritual Director. Given a highest yoga tantra initiator’s charismatic status as the initiates’ ‘vajra master’ in such rituals, the extension of such power to laity and women represents a radical revision of Geluk ritual authority structures.

Monastic Reform

Most NKT Resident Teachers are monks and nuns ordained under Gyatso’s contraction of the traditional Geluk monastic code, the *Mūlasarvāstivāda Vinaya*, from 253 vows (364 for nuns) to ten. Justifying this adaptation, the NKT argues the impossibility of keeping the ancient vows purely in the present: “When you read the 253 vows of a fully ordained monk ... you can ask yourself whether, in this modern age, it is actually possible to observe them to the letter? It is arguable whether there is one single monk on this planet who is even attempting to follow them all literally” (NKT c). It is clear that the 700 monks and nuns of the global NKT, most of whom live in urban teaching centres, are attempting no such thing. The NKT’s modernization of monastic ordination is the focus of Chapter 4.

These reforms of education, authority, and monastic structures reflect the NKT’s unique modernization of Geluk tradition. They are inclusivist in the sense that they function to expand or ‘open up’ Geluk Buddhism to new demographics, both as internal authority figures and incoming audience members. The NKT has thus combined a reactionary narrowing against inclusive pluralism in matters of doctrine and identity with a remarkable enthusiasm for

institutional reform. Gyatso has ousted incarnate Tibetan monks from the highest authority positions and replaced them with a non-incarnate non-Tibetan nun who holds ten vows instead of 364 and who will be succeeded by process of election. In light of these major changes to Geluk tradition *and* the “historical and cross-cultural continuities between the NKT and exclusively oriented strands of *Geluk* Buddhism” (Kay 2004, 112), the NKT cannot be accurately described as strictly fundamentalistic.⁴⁴ So how best to interpret the group?

iv. Lineage and Adaptation

The NKT’s innovations and parochialisms have all emerged from, and continue to be sustained by, the authority of the NKT’s guru-deity (*lama lha*), Geshe Kelsang Gyatso. He alone is deemed capable of effectively adapting Geluk tradition, or lineage, because he alone is seen to embody its unpolluted contents. It is therefore worth considering the group’s own understanding of those contents. In one book’s glossary Gyatso defines ‘lineage’ as a union of instruction and experience: “A line of instruction that has been passed down from Spiritual Guide to disciple, with each Spiritual Guide in the line having gained personal experience of the instruction before passing it on to others” (2016, 265). Translating these two constituents of Vajrayana lineage as ‘learning’ (*mkhas-pa*) and ‘attainment’ (*grub-pa*), Mathew Kapstein explains that “the greatest masters were to be ‘gurus endowed with both learning and attainment’ (*mkhas-grub gnyis-ldan-gyi bla-ma*). It was this synthesis that eventually came to define Tibet’s Buddhist elite” (2000, 18). In 20th-century Ladakh, for example, Mills explains that “it is the embodiment of the

⁴⁴ The NKT’s strategic detraditionalizations of education, authority, and monastic structures combined with neo-traditionalizations of doctrine and identity might be characterized instead as a form of “hybrid fundamentalism.”

Buddhist doctrine within particular religious virtuosi – the degree to which particular monks and incarnates represent the realisation of the doctrine that is most important” (2003a, 300). This is Geshe Kelsang for New Kadampa Buddhists.

Geoffrey Samuel referred to these two concepts not as constituent elements of Vajrayana lineage but as “two polar approaches to Tibetan Buddhism: a more yogic, shamanic and experiential approach and a more philosophical-scholarly and textual approach” (2005, 326). In an effort to typologize contemporary Tibetan Buddhist organizations in the West, Samuel aligned the continuum between yogic and textual approaches with two other continua:

The first refers to the degree of structure and centralised control in the group, and varies between the relatively loose and non-hierarchical and the tightly-structured and centralised. The second refers to the orientation towards Tibetan tradition: here one can see an open, eclectic and modernist approach on one side ... and a closed and traditionalist approach on the other. (326)

Samuel’s location of the NKT in the latter group – as textual, tightly-structured, and traditionalist – certainly fits Kay’s portrait of Gyatso’s clerical exclusivism. But consideration of the NKT’s conception of lineage as Gyatso’s embodied *synthesis* of yogic experience and textual learning highlights the fact that the movement understands itself as having as much to do with the former as the latter. Indeed, I would suggest that the NKT has adopted its tightly-structured and traditionalist organizational orientations as much to protect and promote the authority of its founding lama’s yogic attainment as his textual learning. It is due to his *realization* of Tsongkhapa’s doctrine that Gyatso is seen by devotees as supremely capable of modernizing its presentation for non-Tibetan laypersons, principally through selective scriptural translation and commentary. Most individual NKT centre websites, for example, introduce their founder as “a fully accomplished meditation master and internationally renowned teacher of Buddhism.”

The Vajrayana conception of lineage thus provides a way to partially understand why the NKT has neo-traditionalized in the ways it has. The NKT's parochial orientations in doctrine and lineage identity can be viewed as protectionist neo-traditionalizations of the dual dimensions of Vajrayana lineage itself – learning and attainment – against their perceived degeneration (first by Gyatso, then by his disciples) in diasporic Tibetan Buddhism. According to Waterhouse, “the NKT is established on two things, the teacher Geshe Kelsang Gyatso and the English language texts and sadhanas which he has initiated” (1997, 178). The NKT has narrowed in identity around Gyatso's experience (*grub-pa*), and in doctrine around Gyatso's instruction (*mkhas-pa*). The justification for such neo-traditionalization is two-fold: Gyatso's reified doctrine and deified identity are seen to be essential, unalterable constituents of NKT lineage; and that lineage is seen to be threatened. On the other hand, a supporting condition for the detraditionalization of succession, monastic, gender, and educational structures is an emic perception of these institutional forms as inessential to NKT lineage, and thus alterable.

A common emic analogy for the interplay between lineage and adaptation in Buddhist history refers to the preservation of Dharma tea by reconstructing its cultural cup: “The globalization of Buddhism involves a trend toward isolating the active ingredient of enlightenment; what is the essential Dharma distinct from cultural accretions?” (Sumegi 2014, 229). While historicist, constructivist scholars of Buddhism do not generally accept the postulated existence of such a timeless, acultural Dharma, for its intellectually untenable and politically suspect essentialism (e.g., Lopez 1995, King 1999), Buddhists often do. As such, a helpful question for the study of Buddhism's global modernization is: What does the group perceive to be the essential Dharma

distinct from cultural accretions? Whatever this is will likely not be available for detraditionalization and will likely be the basis of neo-traditionalization when seen to be threatened. For New Kadampa Buddhists this is their guru-deity's "pure lineage" of instruction and experience – an immaterial spiritual essence that is seen to bear no essential relationship to Tibet.

"The NKT is Not Tibetan Buddhism"

Not only did Gyatso's "revival of pure Kadampa Buddhism" demand secession from impure Geluk tradition, but an explicit disassociation from 'Tibetan Buddhism' has become an increasingly prominent pillar of NKT identity since the group's clash with the Dalai Lama over Dorje Shugden worship. The disassociation is justified in an official promotional pamphlet titled "Modern Kadampa Buddhism: An Introduction:"

Although the lineage Gurus of the NKT from Je Tsongkhapa up to Venerable Geshe Kelsang Gyatso are Tibetan Lamas, the NKT is not Tibetan Buddhism. When the NKT became the International Kadampa Buddhist Union, which is legally registered under English law, it became a legally independent Buddhist tradition. The main reason why NKT-IKBU has chosen to become legally registered as an independent Buddhist tradition is that it was recognized that there are many political problems within Tibetan Buddhism. These problems are due to the mixing of Dharma and politics, with higher Lamas using the holy Dharma of Buddha's teachings for political aims. The NKT wants the holy Dharma to be free from these political problems. (NKT d, 5)

Echoing the aforementioned critique of the tulku system in the *NKT Internal Rules*, the NKT's pure lineage is here contrasted with greater Tibetan Buddhism's contamination by "political aims" and "political problems." This contrast is explicitly focused on the Dalai Lama in a half-page NKT advertisement published in the summer 2015 issue of *Tricycle*, the popular non-sectarian Buddhist magazine established in New York City in 1991. In a magazine typically

filled with “advertisements for expensive meditation gear, for dharmic dating services, dharmic dentists and accountants, and its implicit authorization of the entrepreneurial and commercial activities of countless dharma centers and self-styled Buddhist masters” (Sharf 2017, 210), the NKT’s 2015 advertisement stood out for its blatant prioritization of identity construction over audience attraction. Under a plain photo of KMC New York’s temple the advertisement read:

To prevent confusion between Tibetan Buddhism and Modern Kadampa Buddhism we would like to offer the following information: Since 1992 Modern Kadampa Buddhism, the New Kadampa Tradition has been a registered charity in the UK constituted as an independent Western Buddhist tradition. According to the NKT’s constitution, its spiritual practice is Buddha’s teachings of Sutra and Tantra based on the guidelines presented in both its Internal Rules and its constitution, which are known as the General Program, Foundation Program, and Teacher Training Program. Around 1,200 centers throughout the world follow these programs. There is no connection whatsoever between this spiritual tradition and the Dalai Lama. According to its constitution, because the NKT is an independent tradition it cannot follow any other tradition. This clearly shows that the NKT is not Tibetan Buddhism but Western Buddhism. (NKT e)

The claim that since its legal establishment as a British charity in 1992 the NKT has been “not Tibetan Buddhism but Western Buddhism” marks a narrative rupture from the framing of Gyatso’s first English-language book published by Penguin’s Arkana in 1984. Titled *Buddhism in the Tibetan Tradition* and containing a foreword by the Dalai Lama, the book contains an editor’s introduction which states a hope that Gyatso’s text “will provide a clear and basic introduction to Tibetan Buddhism” (xi). The book’s content, however, is continuous with Gyatso’s introductory books published by Tharpa Publications after the NKT’s formation and self-identified as no longer continuous with Tibetan Buddhism, such as *Introduction to Buddhism* (1992).

Waterhouse found that “NKT doctrine is not different from that of mainline Gelugpa” (1997, 150), but suggested that “what is perhaps remarkable is the way in which [Gyatso’s] publications are presented as containing the whole of what is necessary and also the emphasis placed within the organization on the pure lineage of the practices which Geshe Kelsang teaches” (151). She was told by a British Resident Teacher that Gyatso’s “main quality” is his ability to extract Buddhism’s essence from a Tibetan cultural context “and re-present it in a form that is suitable and accessible to us as westerners” (177). This description of Gyatso reflects a very common framing of Asian teachers by Western disciples. Followers of Chögyam Trungpa, for example, describe their teacher’s “unique ability” to carry out an effective intercultural transmission of Dharma without damaging its essence:

The ancient teachings and practical instructions that Chögyam Trungpa Rinpoche brought with him found an eager audience in the America of the 1970s, ... He became renowned for his unique ability to present the essence of the highest Buddhist teachings in a form readily understandable to Western students.
(Shambhala USA 2018)

In sharp contrast with Trungpa, who by the end of the 1970s was acting on “his long-held desire to present the path of meditation in secular terms” through the development of a program called Shambhala Training, or the American founders of the IMS (est. 1975) whose approach to extracting Buddhist meditation from South Asian “cultural baggage” involved eschewing Theravada doctrine (Braun 2013, 163), Gyatso’s strategy for leaving behind Tibetan cultural baggage involves a circumscribed *emphasis* of conservative Geluk doctrine (see Chapter 3).

Beyond cultural adaptation for the sake of accessibility, however, an important religious mission for Gyatso has been to remove his pure lineage from the spiritually compromised arena of Tibetan nationalism. This is a rescue mission supported by the divine but highly controversial

protectorship of Dorje Shugden, whose particular task for New Kadampas is to protect the purity of Je Tsongkhapa's doctrine, of whom Gyatso is seen by devotees as a modern emanation, or tulku.

A computer-generated thangka icon produced by Tharpa publications and now displayed on KMC shrines around the world depicts Dorje Shugden escorting Tsongkhapa's pure lineage from the Himalayas in the form of '*Guru Sumati Buddha Heruka*,' a newly minted NKT tulku who synthesizes Gyatso, Tsongkhapa, Buddha, and *Heruka-Vajrayoginī* in name and in image (replicating the guru-deity's outer, inner, and secret aspects visualized in Blo-bzang chos-kyi rgyal- mtshan's *Bla-ma mchod-pa*).



Fig. 4. Guru Sumati Buddha Heruka with Dorje Shugden, Manjushri KMC
<https://dorjeshugdenimagelibrary.wordpress.com/photo-gallery/#jp-carousel-583>

Riding his snow lion on the earth below Guru Sumati Buddha Heruka who descends from the clouds, and surrounded by NKT temples, Dorje Shugden watches over the globalization of Tsongkhapa's pure Dharma in the embodied form of Gyatso and his new Buddhist movement. This represents a remarkable diasporic transformation of Dharma protectors in general, "a peculiarly 'Tibetan' dimension of Tibetan Buddhism" (Kay 2004, 70), and of Shugden in particular – from "a kind of clan deity for the Geluk sect and for a region of Eastern Tibet" (Lopez 1998, 196) to a universalizing agent of one Geluk lineage's global de-ethnicization.

The NKT's desired disassociation from Tibetan Buddhism can thus be understood as exclusivist and inclusivist in turn, in light of: (a) Gyatso's exclusivist defense of Shugden worship and against the Dalai Lama's "politically motivated" inclusivism, and (b) the NKT's missionary self-conception and self-promotion as culturally universal. This is a tension reflected in Kay's description of the NKT as fundamentalist and Bluck's suggestion that it is a form of evangelical Buddhism (2006, 151). While the terms 'fundamentalism' and 'evangelicalism' often overlap in a Christian context, they connote respectively inward and outward, exclusionary and expansionary, religious orientations similar to those described by Harding, Hori, and Soucy (2014) as Buddhist parochialism and Buddhist globalism.

According to Harding, Hori, and Soucy, "Global Buddhism ... attempts to transcend the parochialism of local place and ethnic identity" (2014, 16). The attempt to transcend the parochialism of Tibet and Tibetan politico-ethnic identity is a high priority for the NKT. Considered alongside the movement's global missionary efforts, the NKT is clearly a form of global Buddhism. In matters of lineage identity and doctrine, however, the NKT is unambiguously parochialist, far more concerned with forming and maintaining boundaries than transcending them. While Harding, Hori, and Soucy are careful to point out that globalist forms of Buddhism are not necessarily modernist, it is difficult to say which of these portraits best describes the NKT: "Buddhism with modern characteristics can ... be used parochially. ... On the other hand, there are forms of Buddhism that are traditional and conservative in their characteristics yet global in intention" (16).

Carolyn Chen's analysis of Taiwanese Buddhist immigrants in southern California who "actively disavow any cultural connection with Asian Buddhism" (2008, 145) offers an insight about the parochial function of disavowing ethnic parochialism which also applies to the identity project of New Kadampa Buddhists:

Although Buddhists deny that their Buddhism is 'ethnic,' but instead modern and western, I want to suggest that even this redefinition of Buddhism in the United States plays an ethnic function. It is not ethnic in the sense that it draws from a real or imagined motherland culture. But it engages in the 'ethnic work' of drawing group identity boundaries against others. (158)

New Kadampa Buddhists self-identify as 'modern' and 'Western' in part to define themselves against Tibetan Buddhists whom Kadampas believe to be more political, or worldly, and thus less pure or authentic than they. Kay assessed the NKT's self-identification as 'Western' versus 'Tibetan' in a similar light a decade before the group's *Tricycle* ad:

[T]he NKT's claim to represent a 'Western' form of Buddhism thus reflects two aspects of its self-identity: on the one hand, it reflects the belief that Geshe Kelsang has adapted Buddhism in an accessible way for Western practitioners; on the other, it expresses his concern to preserve and conserve the pure tradition by separating from the degenerate religio-political world of 'Tibetan' Gelug Buddhism. ... The dynamic of *conservation through adaptation* is a special feature of the NKT's identity. (2004, 222-223)

Conservation through adaptation is a characteristic dynamic of fundamentalistic religious movements that perceive a need to make changes to elements conceived as inessential in order to arrest and prevent more damaging changes to elements conceived as essential. Bluck interprets the NKT's self-identification as "not Tibetan" as a narrative element of NRM-formation:

There is a genuine paradox in claiming that NKT teaching and practice are both entirely traditional yet no longer part of Tibetan Buddhism, and thus fully accessible to the West. ... The NKT's attempt to maintain the essential features of an ancient and pure lineage, while distancing itself from contemporary Gelug Buddhism, has to be seen as part of the narrative of establishing a new Buddhist movement. (2006, 142-143)

An emic perspective on this “genuine paradox” can be further contextualized by Stark and Bainbridge’s (1985) economistic account of religious decline and renewal, which, while oft critiqued as an explanatory theory of social action for its simplistic determinism, does capture key elements of NKT perceptions of, and reactions to, conventional Geluk Buddhism. They define secularization as the process whereby a religious tradition’s “initial otherworldliness is reduced and worldliness is accommodated” (429), which in turn generates the two countervailing processes of religious *revival* (associated with schismatic sect-formation), and religious *innovation* (associated with cult-formation).

There is a strong sense within the NKT that contemporary Geluk Buddhism has become too worldly. Official NKT justification for abolishing the tulku system was “[t]o prevent Dharma being used for political aims or worldly achievement” (NKT a, 16§2), while the group’s public disassociation from Tibetan Buddhism was attributed to “higher Lamas using the holy Dharma of Buddha’s teachings for political aims” (NKT d, 5). According to Kay, points of critique regularly raised by NKT practitioners to corroborate Gyatso’s 1995 assessment of contemporary Geluk Buddhism’s state of “serious degeneration” included “[t]he excessive involvement of monks in Tibetan political affairs and the preponderance of worldly and materialistic motivations” (2004, 88).

The NKT’s reaction to perceived Geluk worldliness combines revivalism and innovation in a dynamic Kay referred to as conservation *through* adaptation. According to Stark and Bainbridge, “Not only do worldly churches prompt new religious groups, which seek to revive faith, but secularization also prompts the formation of new religious traditions” (1985, 2). The NKT, I

would suggest, is a form of revivalist Geluk Buddhism which self-identifies as non-Geluk Buddhism – at once pre-Geluk (Atiśa’s ‘Kadam;’ Tsongkhapa’s ‘New Kadam’)⁴⁵ and post-Geluk (“independent Western Buddhist tradition”).

It is important to acknowledge, however, that the movement’s self-identification as “not Tibetan Buddhism” is not mere rhetoric. Counterbalancing Kay’s corrective portrait of the NKT as “a movement that is representative of certain currents *within* Tibetan Buddhism” (2004, 39), an aim of this chapter has been to show that the NKT’s selective detraditionalization of institutional structures and neo-traditionalization of identity and doctrine effectively set the group apart from its Tibetan source tradition, historically and in exile. And counterbalancing Waterhouse’s doctrine-focused conclusion that “the ‘essential Buddhism’ which Geshe Kelsang has presented to the West must be essential *Tibetan* Buddhism” (1997, 178), Bluck points out that institutionally, New Kadampa Buddhism is indeed best described as no longer Tibetan:

With no remaining Tibetan links, central control of teaching, little contact with other schools, an expanding programme of residential centres, widespread if selective publicity and overt proselytizing, the NKT as an organization is far removed from the mainstream of traditional Tibetan Buddhism. (2006, 149)

The next chapter considers two of these features, teaching and publicity, in an examination of the NKT’s globalist missionary efforts to propagate Gyatso’s conservative, otherworldly doctrine of Buddhist renunciation.

⁴⁵ Gyatso distinguishes between the ‘Old Kadampa Tradition’ spanning from the time of Atiśa up to Tsongkhapa, and the ‘New Kadampa Tradition’ since the time of Tsongkhapa (1996, 607).

CHAPTER 3

Therapy and Soteriology in NKT Publicity and Doctrine

The previous chapter argued that the NKT has circumscribed Geluk doctrine to Gyatso's selection of scriptures and his own conservative commentaries, and simultaneously broadened the teaching audience from a Tibetan, male, monastic elite to non-Tibetan, gender-neutral, lay and monastic paying patrons of the NKT's three study programs. Although Cozort's (2003) analysis of NKT study programs did not explore Foundation Program and Teacher Training Program curriculums in enough depth to chart their treatment of renunciation (beyond noting the absence of vinaya teachings), his conclusion points to the laicization of teaching as a source of major uncertainty surrounding accreditation:

What makes a person qualified to be a teacher of the *Dharma*? And who is to say? In Asia, these questions were relatively simple to answer. A qualified teacher of the *Dharma* was a senior monastic who had proved himself (or herself, far less often) worthy by excelling at monastic training under the tutelage of a recognized master.⁴⁶ But in the West, where the tradition of monasticism is weak at best, and where even the ordained are not undertaking the classic training, the answers are far less clear. (243-244)

While Cozort points to the potential messiness of clerical laicization, Ross, Silver, and Francis aptly identify it as a key factor in Gyatso's global mission: "By giving lay members educational power to teach the Dharma, NKT is able to spread the NKT interpretation of Dharma more quickly and to wider audiences" (2012, 1057).⁴⁷

⁴⁶ Chapters 5 and 6 aim to provide an emic NKT answer to Cozort's first question regarding missionary qualifications, as well as an etic assessment of their relationship to the movement's new, largely informal regime of "monastic training under the tutelage of a recognized master."

⁴⁷ Jeffrey Samuels (1999, 234) has demonstrated that a similar missionizing equality between laity and monastics (and between men and women) was in fact promoted in the early Buddhist Pali canon.

The laicization of teaching audiences is a more common feature of diasporic Geluk Buddhism than the laicization of its teachers. A Canadian NKT monk and Resident Teacher, Kelsang Thekchen, referenced both when he spoke with Campbell “about teaching objectives in terms of establishing Buddhism in the West”:

It was an interesting experiment, he said, to train western teachers who can then teach other westerners. The difficulty was trying to find a way to adapt a traditionally monastic system to make it relevant for householders. In his view, the NKT was still working on this goal. With tongue in cheek, he said: “A lot of people are just sitting back and watching to see if people like me [i.e., western monastic dharma teachers] explode or go on some weird rampage or are happy.” (2011, 196-197, square brackets in original)

The principal forum through which NKT teachers (lay and ordained) work to spread Gyatso’s Dharma to new audiences is the General Program of drop-in meditation classes offered to the general public for a fee at every NKT centre. In addition to clerical laicization, a pivotal element of the movement’s General Program missionizing is an enthusiastic embrace of self-promotion:

The NKT is very good at marketing its product. Members produce leaflets advertising the centre’s activities and these are distributed widely around the towns in which they teach ... Marketing of the NKT is assisted by the prominent place played by Geshe Kelsang’s books. ... They are distributed widely and may be seen on the shelves of popular booksellers as well as in university libraries (Waterhouse 1997, 142-143).

Toward an understanding of the role of the doctrine of world-renunciation in NKT teaching, and its relationship to the group’s missionary imperative which hinges on clerical laicization, this chapter considers each element of NKT missionizing: publicity, General Program classes, and books (one written for adults and one written for children).⁴⁸ More specifically, I examine the roles of other-worldly doctrine and this-worldly publicity in NKT missionizing, beginning with

⁴⁸ Campbell characterizes these forms of NKT missionizing strategy (publicity, General Program classes, and books) as forms of “outreach” (2011, 36-37).

the latter. I submit that while NKT promotional materials are modernist (i.e., more discontinuous than continuous with Geluk tradition) and therapeutic (i.e., more concerned with improving this life than with escaping cyclic rebirth), pedagogical materials in NKT texts and KMC General Program classes are generally more traditionalist (i.e., more continuous than discontinuous with Geluk tradition) and soteriological (i.e., more concerned with escaping cyclic rebirth than with improving this life).⁴⁹

i. The NKT's Self-Identification as "Modern Buddhism"⁵⁰

In 2006, Bluck found that Gyatso's "three most popular works – *Introduction to Buddhism*, *The New Meditation Handbook*, and *Transform Your Life* – have sold 165,000 copies between them, showing their appeal far beyond the movement itself" (138). Following Gyatso's publication and free online distribution of the book *Modern Buddhism: The Path of Compassion and Wisdom* in 2011, the NKT has worked to brand *itself* as "Modern Buddhism" through websites, official publications, and advertising, and with considerable success. In January 2018 the leading hits returned by a Google search (from Ontario and Hawai'i) for the term "Modern Buddhism" were

⁴⁹ This chapter concludes with a critical reflection on the analytical utility of the categories "modernism" and "traditionalism" in the study of North American Buddhism. My use of the categories "therapy" and "soteriology" is derived from Sharot's Weberian framework for delineating patterns of religious action of religious elites and masses, specifically his fourfold typology of religious goals (2001, 36): nomic (to maintain an existing order of nature and society); transformative (to produce a fundamental change in nature, society, and the individual) – subdivided into sacralization (to infuse worldly activities with sacredness) and soteriology (to escape worldly suffering in rebirth or paradise); thaumaturgical (to seek release from specific ills within nature and society that do not change); and extrinsic (to accomplish mundane goals such as wealth display through supramundane means). It should be noted that while the Buddhist doctrinal goal of seeking liberation from the cycle of samsara clearly falls under "soteriology" in Sharot's framework, such use of the term entails a significant dilation of its meaning beyond Christian notions of salvation through a *soter* (saviour) to include Buddhist notions of soteriology without a *soter*.

⁵⁰ This section and the next are based on a paper accepted for prospective publication in a forthcoming edited volume based on the "Buddhism in the Global Eye" conference held at the University of British Columbia in August 2016.

all official websites of the NKT. This section analyzes the NKT's construction of "Modern Buddhism" in publicity and doctrine. I argue that while the NKT's self-identification as "Modern Buddhism" supports the movement's globalization by promoting its founder's teachings as universally accessible, those teachings are more continuous with traditional Geluk doctrine than with the prevailing scholarly portrait of "Buddhist modernism."

The Modernist Brand

Attributed by Kay to the movement's "self-identity as a source of pure Buddhism in a world of decline and degeneration" (2004, 95), the NKT's translation of Geluk sources from Tibetan and development of a three-tiered study programme have both emerged from a strong missionary imperative that has produced equally innovative marketing strategies to reach new global audiences. Born at the dawn of popular internet usage in the early 1990s, the NKT has focused promotional efforts online in YouTube channels, Google ads, image galleries, festival diaries, regularly maintained Facebook, Twitter, and Instagram accounts, and chic centre websites.

A large colour photograph on a KMC Hollywood website titled "What is Modern Buddhism?" depicts a white businesswoman talking on a cell phone on a city sidewalk as she looks through a shop window displaying copies of Gyatso's book *Modern Buddhism*. Beside the image is an explanation:

Modern Buddhism is the application of the Buddhist paths of compassion and wisdom to modern daily life. It is an international movement without affiliations to any specific country or culture founded by the contemporary Buddhist master Venerable Geshe Kelsang Gyatso. Modern Buddhism brings the ancient wisdom of Buddha into the modern world free from any cultural trappings and shows how to integrate Buddhist meditation and other practices into our busy lives. You do not

have to be Buddhist to attend modern Buddhism events or to benefit from them.
(NKT f)

Gyatso's 'Modern Buddhism' is promoted here as a global self-improvement movement offering ancient but practical Buddhist instructions to busy non-Buddhists. The universal applicability of modern Buddhism's private psychological benefits is claimed through an explicit assertion of the movement's post-ethnic globalism and supported by an alignment with empirical science: "The instructions given at our classes are scientific methods for improving our inner qualities and reaching our highest potential through developing the enormous capacity of our mind" (NKT f).

From a section titled "Modern Buddhism manifesting from ancient tradition" in a "Kadampa Life" blog article from 2011, a senior NKT practitioner's account of Gyatso's intercessory relationship to tradition and modernity is worth quoting in full:

Geshe Kelsang had a very close relationship with his own Spiritual Guide, Trijang Rinpoche, who requested him to come to the West and approved of his adapting the presentation of the teachings for an entirely new audience. In this way the *New Kadampa Tradition* came into existence. Centuries-worth of authentic liberating teachings are available in a form that modern-day people can actually practice without having to abandon their modern lifestyles or retire to a mountain cave. In fact, Geshe Kelsang is showing us how to thrive in today's overwrought world by using all the circumstances we meet to advance our spiritual practice, in the Lojong tradition of those sincerest of Buddhists, the ancient Kadampas. The world has changed dramatically even in the last 30 years, especially with the technological revolution, but the Buddhist teachings are still working. Geshe Kelsang learnt our language fluently and translated everything we needed. When I started we would chant for hours in Tibetan! I kind of liked it, but it was entirely unsustainable even 30 years ago, and is inconceivable now! Most people are lucky if they have half an hour for formal meditation practice these days. So over the years Geshe-la has packed the profundity of the 84,000 teachings of Buddha into fewer and fewer words without losing their meaning; something that can only be pulled off by someone with rare experience and skill. This has culminated most recently in the masterpiece union of Sutra and Tantra, *Modern Buddhism ~ The Path of Compassion and Wisdom*. These

profound yet simple instructions are even available in the most modern of formats, the eBook! (Luna Kadampa 2011)

The author identifies the two components defining the modernization of Gyatso's Buddhism described in Chapter 2: lineage and adaptation. Crucial to their perceived synergy is the view that the NKT's founder has altered the Dharma's form without adulterating its content; he has preserved the "active ingredient of enlightenment" (Sumegi 2014, 229) by reconstructing its cultural container. KMC Hollywood's online description of modern Buddhism identifies that active ingredient as "the ancient wisdom of Buddha," while the above blog entry locates that wisdom in the founding NKT guru's "rare experience."

According to Luna Kadampa, the author of the above "Kadampa Life" blog article, Gyatso has altered the Dharma's container chiefly through textual translation (from Tibetan) and abbreviation (into *Modern Buddhism*'s 434 pages), but also selective theological emphasis (*lojong*)⁵¹ and technologization (e-book). The author's account of why Gyatso has made these changes is plain: so that "modern-day people can actually practice." Luna ascribes two key principles of Gyatso's 'modern Buddhism' to his "entirely new audience" of "modern-day people" whose overwrought "modern lifestyles" allow "half an hour for formal meditation practice" on a good day: non-Tibetan and non-monastic. The previous chapter considered the NKT's extraction of Gyatso's Buddhism from greater Tibetan Buddhism. Chapter 4 examines the NKT's efforts to extract Gyatso's Buddhism from Tibetan Buddhist monasticism.

⁵¹ '*Lojong*' is another transliteration of *blo sbyong* ('mind training'), the Tibetan contemplative practice of transforming adverse conditions into the spiritual path.

Cast in the language of problems and happiness, the themes of universalism and pragmatism reappear in a section of the NKT's official 2016 brochure titled "Modern Buddhism: Venerable Geshe-la's gift to all living beings":

Modern Buddhism, or Kadam Dharma, is a special presentation of Buddha's teachings for the modern world that offers practical advice on how to solve daily problems and maintain a peaceful and happy mind all the time. It can be practiced by anyone regardless of culture, gender, or age. (NKT g)

Following this self-definition is a small image of the book *Modern Buddhism* with the caption:

"Modern Buddhism — free ebook — download in several languages from

emodernbuddhism.com." This URL tops the hits returned by a Google search for "Modern

Buddhism." Beside the brochure's book image are four photos of Modern Kadampa Buddhism in

action: laypeople listening to a monk teaching at KMC Barcelona, patrons perusing Gyatso's

books outside a public talk in London, students discussing a particular book in a study program

at KMC Singapore, and bicyclers chatting casually on the sidewalk outside KMC Madrid. These

photos convey a Buddhism that is at home in the world, cosmopolitan, accessible, and relevant

— values imparted on a page titled "Modern Buddhism" in the 2016 brochure for "KMC New

York: International Center for Modern Buddhism":

Venerable Geshe Kelsang Gyatso's practical presentation of Buddha's 84,000 teachings has made the path to enlightenment accessible to people of the modern world. In providing three systematic study programs, qualified teachers, and Buddhist meditation centers and temples open to everyone, anyone can learn to train in wisdom and compassion and thus unify Buddha's teachings and daily life. (NKT h)

The goal of modern Buddhism's program of study and meditation is here identified not as an

escape from "the cycle of impure life," which is how Gyatso defines samsara in *Modern*

Buddhism (2011, 6, 8), but as the spiritualization of "daily life" through its unification with

Buddha's teachings. This is reflected in titles of drop-in meditation classes offered at NKT

centres like KMC New York: “Advice for Life,” “The Happiness Toolkit,” “Awakening the Heart,” “Mindfulness for Modern Living,” “New Year, New You,” “Overcoming Stress and Anxiety,” “Heal Yourself Through Meditation,” and “Stop Worrying, Start Living” (NKT h).

The accentuation of this-worldly practical benefits and de-emphasis of other-worldly renunciation in NKT “Modern Buddhism” branding bears a nuanced relation to the doctrinal content of Gyatso’s *Modern Buddhism* product. Although all scholarship on the NKT which considers Gyatso’s teachings (Chandler 2009, Bluck 2006, Kay 2004, Cozort 2003, Waterhouse 1997) has noted their generally conservative tenor, besides Bluck’s (2006, 136-137) brief summary of subjects outlined in Gyatso’s *Introduction to Buddhism* (1992) and *Transform Your Life* (2001), such scholarship does not provide close analysis of specific texts.

The Traditionalist Book

David McMahan defines “Buddhist modernism” as a “modern hybrid tradition” (2008, 5) that reinterprets traditional Asian Buddhist ideas and practices along the lines of scientific rationalism and romanticism via the modernizing processes of detraditionalization, demythologization, and psychologization. Detraditionalization entails shifts from external to internal religious authority, from transcendence to immanence, from negative to positive evaluations of human nature, and from a concern with the future to living life in the now (42-44). Demythologization leads to a reconstruction of Buddhist elements deemed nonliteral “myth” along the lines of modern worldviews, and to an internalization of traditionally ontological realities such as deities, spirits, and rebirth realms (45-47). Finally, psychologization commonly manifests as an interpretation of

Buddhism as “science of mind,” increasingly justifying a psychotherapeutic separation of meditation from Buddhist goals and values (52-57).

Toward situating New Kadampa Buddhism between parochialist Buddhist formations with modern characteristics and globalist Buddhist formations with traditional characteristics (Harding, Hori, Soucy 2014, 16), I will now use one particular book as a case to analyze McMahan’s modernizing processes of detraditionalization, demythologization, and psychologization in Gyatso’s teachings. Gyatso’s 2011 book *Modern Buddhism* is the doctrinal product behind the NKT’s “Modern Buddhism” brand. Although it is not one of Gyatso’s fourteen texts studied on Foundation Program and Teacher Training Program at NKT centres, it is one of six texts constituting the newly developed curriculum of the “Special Teacher Training Programme” offered at Manjushri Centre. A close reading of the book’s first chapter, “Preliminary Explanation,” suggests that the Geluk Buddhist teachings presented therein have been minimally reinterpreted – i.e., that the influence of detraditionalization, demythologization, and psychologization on the NKT’s *Modern Buddhism* is negligible.

Detraditionalization

Instead of shifting from an emphasis on external to internal religious authority, Gyatso’s *Modern Buddhism* strongly upholds the authority of Buddha and Buddhism. The first chapter begins by defining Buddhism not as a humanistic way of life based on natural virtues, but as a specific instructional training regime rooted in tradition:

Buddhism is the practice of Buddha’s teachings, also called ‘Dharma,’ which means ‘protection.’ By practicing Buddha’s teachings, living beings are permanently

protected from suffering. ... Buddha gave eighty-four thousand teachings, and from these precious teachings Buddhism developed in this world. (Gyatso 2011, 3)

No apprenticeship of equals, the fruitful practice of Buddha's teachings requires faith in Buddha: "For Buddhists, faith in Buddha Shakyamuni is their spiritual life; it is the root of all Dharma realizations" (7). Further, it is not only Buddhists who should rely on Buddha but anyone who wants to solve their problems: "We need to practise Buddha's teachings because there is no other real method to solve human problems" (4).

Gyatso's insistence on the need for faith in Buddha stems from his orthodox Buddhist view of humanity's pitiful samsaric situation: "Although we want to be happy all the time we do not know how to do this, and we are always destroying our own happiness by developing anger, negative views and negative intentions" (4). Any shift from negative to positive evaluations of human nature, identified by McMahan as a hallmark of Buddhist modernism, seems dismissed by Gyatso's account of living beings' total dependence on Buddha: "By themselves living beings are unable to cultivate a peaceful mind; it is only through receiving Buddha's blessings upon their mental continuum that living beings, including even animals, can experience peace of mind. ... Buddha is therefore the source of all happiness" (10). While far from humanistic, Gyatso's description of Buddha's pervasive accessibility does render the deity more immanent than transcendent. This may be less a modernist reform, however, than an interpretation of the Mahayana-Vajrayana tenet of Buddha's three Buddha bodies (*trikāya*), particularly the all-pervasive 'truth body' (*dharmakāya*).⁵²

⁵² According to Gyatso: "In the *Diamond Cutter Sutra* Buddha says that those who think that his body is a physical object and that his speech is sound are mistaken because his actual body is the Truth Body" (2005, 122), the actual nature of which is Buddha's omniscient mind (121) – the "inseparable union of bliss and emptiness" (190) which "pervades all phenomena [and] is present wherever we are" (109) as "the source of all good qualities and the sole gateway to all benefit and happiness" (122). Despite its pervasive immanence, however, a Buddha's *dharmakāya* is

Related to the intensification of divine immanentism, McMahan describes a typically modernist shift from a concern with future well-being to enjoying life in the present. The modernist Vietnamese monk Thich Nhat Hanh's description of mindfulness is representative: "Every breath we take, every step we make, can be filled with peace, joy, and serenity. We need only to be awake, alive in the present moment" (1991, 5). This contrasts sharply with Gyatso's warning not to be deceived by the peace of the present moment:

At the moment we may be free from physical suffering and mental pain, but this is only temporary. Later in this life and in our countless future lives we shall have to experience unbearable physical suffering and mental pain, again and again without end. ... Through contemplating this we shall realize that just experiencing a temporary liberation from particular sufferings is not good enough; we definitely need to attain permanent liberation from the sufferings of this life and all our countless future lives. (2011, 8)

The future-oriented call to abandon samsara and accomplish nirvana is a conservative prioritization of the cardinal Buddhist doctrine of renunciation. Gyatso's words find support in the antagonistic stance toward momentary joys articulated by the founder of Tibetan Buddhism's Geluk school, Tsongkhapa (1357-1419): "[W]ith respect to whatever worldly happiness is seen, heard of, or remembered, you must, as the Kadampa (bKa'-gdams-pa) teachers have said, generate the same feeling, thinking, 'This is the world,' 'This also is the world,' 'Everything is

too subtle for ordinary beings to perceive (117). The *dharmakāya* is rendered accessible by emanation bodies (*nirmāṇakāya*, Tib. tulku) often recognized as accomplished teachers who are viewed as living Buddhas – tantric *guru-deities* whose body, speech, and mind represent "the immanent manifestation of Buddhahood itself" (Capper 2002, 82) and the synthesis of ultimate and conventional reality: "According to Secret Mantra, the definitive Guru is ... in reality the synthesis of all phenomena, because all phenomena are manifestations of bliss and emptiness" (Gyatso 2005, 122). The rendering of Buddha as immanently accessible in *nirmāṇakāya* gurus is explicit in Vajrayana iconography, such as the NKT's deified portrait of Kelsang Gyatso as Guru Sumati Buddha Heruka (see Chapter 2), and in guru yoga *sādhana*: "The essence of Guru yoga is to develop strong conviction that our Spiritual Guide is a Buddha, to make prostrations, offerings and sincere requests to him or her, and then to receive his profound blessings" (13). Further, guru yoga's consummating visualization of absorbing the guru-deity into oneself renders the yogin's final goal of a Buddha's enlightenment (*bodhi*) immanently accessible (see Chapter 6).

suffering,’ and ‘I want nothing to do with it’” (2000, 334). Nowhere in his first chapter, or anywhere else in the book, does Gyatso encourage the development of present-moment awareness as a virtue in and of itself.

Demythologization

McMahan describes the demythologizing function of Buddhist modernism as a process of reconstructing ancient Buddhist teachings through an internalization or psychologization of traditionally ontological realities. He cites as an example the modernist Tibetan teacher Chögyam Trungpa’s interpretation of samsara’s six realms as symbols of various states of mind rather than as realms of possible rebirth (2008, 45-46). Gyatso, on the contrary, does not discuss samsara’s realms or their residents outside the context of cyclic rebirth:

Within this cycle of impure life there are various realms or impure worlds into which we can be reborn: the three lower realms – the animal, hungry ghost and hell realms – and the three higher realms – the god, demi-god and human realms. When we take rebirth as a human being we have to experience human suffering, when we take rebirth as an animal we have to experience animal suffering, and when we take rebirth as a hell being we have to experience the suffering of a hell being. (2011, 8)

This contemplation concludes with Gyatso’s exhortation to renunciation cited above. In reference to Waterhouse’s observation that NKT practitioners in Bath are taught to develop “a fear of hell realms and thereby encourage practice to ensure a good rebirth” (1997, 173), Bluck found that “Although familiar in Tibetan Buddhism, this is rarely mentioned in Britain outside the NKT” (2006, 144).

McMahan also points to the demythologization-via-psychologization of deities as a hallmark of Buddhist modernism. He identifies the psychoanalytic transmutation of Tibetan Buddhism begun

by Carl Jung in the mid-twentieth century as having “served the essential function of neutralizing the vast pantheon of Mahayana-Vajrayana deities by rendering them facets of the mind” (2008, 53). In the first paragraph of *Modern Buddhism*’s first chapter, Gyatso matter of factly introduces the Vedic gods Indra and Brahma as historical agents who requested Buddha to expound his first teachings. After depicting Buddha himself as a living deity, one of whose “main functions is to bestow mental peace upon each and every living being by giving blessings” (10), Gyatso opens a section titled “Who are the Kadampas?” with a literalist introduction to four particular Buddhas:

Kadampas sincerely rely upon Buddha Shakyamuni because Buddha is the source of Kadam Lamrim; they sincerely rely upon Avalokiteshvara, the Buddha of Compassion, and upon the Wisdom Dharma Protector, indicating that their main practice is compassion and wisdom; and they sincerely rely upon Arya Tara because she promised Atisha that she would take special care of Kadampa practitioners in the future. For this reason, these four enlightened holy beings are called the ‘Four Kadampa Guru Deities’. (2011, 10-11)

In a detailed hagiography of “the founder of the Kadampa tradition ... the great Buddhist Master and scholar, Atisha” (11), which occupies half of the first chapter, Gyatso recounts four particular interactions between Atiśa and the female Buddha *Ārya Tārā*. McMahan points to the passionate Gelukpa denunciations and defenses of Dorje Shugden, Gyatso’s “Wisdom Dharma Protector,” as evidence that the Himalayan Buddhist world is “alive not only with awakened beings but also countless ghosts, spirits, demons, and protector deities” (2008, 55). Gyatso’s active promotion of Shugden devotion to his non-Tibetan convert disciples confirms that the psychologization of Tibetan Buddhism’s pantheon is far from complete in the NKT.

Psychologization

The immense global authority of scientific discourse makes alignment with science one of the surest means for a NRM to cultivate respectability and minimize cultural discontinuity. Interpretation of Buddhism as a “science of mind” (McMahan 2008, 52) is the modernist tendency most conspicuously on display in Gyatso’s *Modern Buddhism*. The author makes this claim for the book itself in its very first sentence: “The instructions given in this book are scientific methods for improving our human nature and qualities through developing the capacity of our mind” (2011, ix). By way of concluding his first chapter’s opening section, “What is Buddhism?,” he makes the same claim for Buddhadharma more broadly: “Buddha’s teachings are scientific methods to solve the problems of all living beings permanently” (7). Interpretation of Gyatso’s Geluk instructions as scientific methods for becoming happy is a key part of the NKT’s claim to being modern, connoting “universally practical” in both “Modern Buddhism” publicity and *Modern Buddhism* teaching.

McMahan mentions Jon Kabat-Zinn’s Mindfulness-Based Stress Reduction program as the most successful of a variety of new experimental psychotherapies that are functioning to detraditionalize Buddhism via psychologization — “allowing meditation to operate in non-Buddhist therapeutic settings, often for non-Buddhist goals and without requiring commitment to explicitly Buddhist values” (2008, 57). Meditation gets far less attention in the first chapter of Gyatso’s *Modern Buddhism* than Dharma, Buddha’s teachings. In fact, the chapter’s only usage of the word ‘meditation’ occurs in a section titled “Buddhist Faith” where the practice is introduced as a means to “transform our mind into faith in Buddha and maintain it single-pointedly for as long as possible” (2011, 9). Following a brief discussion of Buddha’s emptiness teachings, by which, “we can permanently eradicate the root of all our suffering, our self-

grasping ignorance ... [and] experience the supreme permanent peace of mind, known as ‘nirvana’” (9), Gyatso continues: “Buddha is actually liberating us by revealing the wisdom path that leads us to the ultimate goal of human life. We should contemplate this point again and again until we develop deep faith in Buddha. This faith is the object of our meditation” (9). It is difficult to imagine a less modernist, more traditionalist introduction to meditation. According to Rupert Gethin, “Faith or confidence in the Buddha, his teaching (*dharma/dhamma*) and the community (*sangha*) of those who have followed and realized the teaching is the starting point of the Buddhist path that is assumed both by the earliest texts and by those brought up in traditional Buddhist cultures today” (1998, 166).

An excellent illustration of Gyatso’s conservative theological orientation emerges from an analysis of the two biggest additions to his first chapter in *Modern Buddhism*’s second edition (2013a). New discussions of the mind and meditation are framed squarely within the *lamrim*’s “stages of the path to enlightenment” leading to the Buddhist goals of higher rebirth, liberation, or enlightenment.

In the first four paragraphs of a new section titled “What is the mind?” Gyatso distinguishes the mind from the brain, defines the mind as a formless perceiver, describes the mind’s three levels (very subtle, subtle, and gross), and correlates these levels with the passages from sleep to waking and death to rebirth (2013a, 10-11). The final paragraph then reveals the significance of these tenets of Buddhist psychology: “From this explanation about the mind we can understand clearly the existence of our future lives, so that we can prepare now for the happiness and freedom of our countless future lives through practising Buddha’s teachings, Dharma” (12). For

Gyatso, the most pressing implication of Buddha's teachings on the nature and function of the mind is that future lives are more important than this one.

A concluding addition to the second edition's first chapter explains the practice of meditation in three paragraphs (25-26). In the second paragraph Gyatso insists that meditation should not be separated from Buddhist goals and values:

The objects of our meditation should be those that are meaningful objects (these will be explained extensively below), so that through training in meditation we can free ourselves permanently from all the sufferings of this life and our countless future lives, and we can attain the supreme happiness of enlightenment, as Buddha showed. This is the best example for us. However, at the beginning we can use our breathing as the object of our meditation and practise breathing meditation, which is quite simple.
(26)

In what could be read as a slender concession to seekers of de-Buddhified meditation instruction, the subsequent paragraph outlines the bare bones of a breathing meditation. The remainder of the book focuses on the "meaningful objects ... explained extensively below" (26) under a rubric of broad sections on Sutra and Tantra respectively divided into the three scopes of *lamrim* (initial, middling, great) and the two stages of Highest Yoga Tantra (generation and completion).

The textual evidence situates Gyatso's *Modern Buddhism* at the traditionalist end of McMahan's "widely variegated continuum" (2008, 59) of traditionalism and modernism. So how does Gyatso himself understand *Modern Buddhism* to be modern? He addresses the question most explicitly in a brief passage early in the first chapter, which, while confirming that he conceives his reforms to be more formal than substantive (altering the Dharma's presentation and not its content or meaning), stops short of identifying what those reforms are or how they were decided upon:

Although the instructions presented here come from Buddha Shakyamuni, and Buddhist masters such as Atisha, Je Tsongkhapa and our present Teachers, this book is called *Modern Buddhism* because its presentation of Dharma is designed especially for the people of the modern world. (2011, 4)

The same themes of pragmatism and universalism that we've seen the NKT lay claim to by marketing itself as modern in websites, brochures, and advertisements are prominent in a second account of Kadam Dharma's modernism late in the chapter:

Everyone, even non-Buddhists, can receive benefit from Kadam Dharma. This is because there is no difference between Kadam Dharma and people's everyday experiences. Even without studying or listening to Dharma, some people often come to similar conclusions as those explained in Kadam Dharma teachings through looking at newspapers or television and understanding the world situation. This is because Kadam Dharma accords with people's daily experience; it cannot be separated from daily life. (22)

Gyatso's words reflect a surprising confidence that *lamrim* teachings on the rarity and preciousness of human life (25-29), the immanence and implications of death (30-32), the dangers of lower rebirth (32-34), refuge in the three jewels (35-38), the law of karma, the sufferings of future lives (41-56), love (66-78), compassion (79-80), bodhicitta⁵³ (80-95), and the emptiness of phenomena (97-139) dovetail with the everyday experiences of Buddhists and non-Buddhists alike. Nonetheless, the possibility of these principles' seamless fusion with the ordinary daily activities of lay life is a constitutive ideal of Gyatso's vision of modern Buddhism.

Despite Gyatso's universalist confidence in the accessibility and efficacy of Kadam Dharma, the NKT's modern Buddhism does not appear to be a clear-cut or typical example of Buddhist

⁵³ *Bodhicitta* ('mind of enlightenment') is the compassionate aspiration for a Buddha's enlightenment on behalf of samsaric beings, formalized by a Mahayana Buddhist's ritual adoption of the 'bodhisattva vow' to accomplish this aim through practicing the six perfections (Gyatso 2013a, 87-88). Gyatso distinguishes between conventional bodhicitta (the nature of compassion) which aspires to enlightenment as a means to liberate all beings, and ultimate bodhicitta (the nature of wisdom) which realizes emptiness for this end (101).

modernism. In this case, the scholarly category does not describe the religious category.

Indications of the detraditionalization and demythologization of traditional Geluk Buddhist ideas are all but absent from Gyatso's *Modern Buddhism*, while evidence of psychologization is minimal.

The Traditional as Modern

Kay captures something of the NKT's ambivalent relationship to modernity when he describes the NKT as "a contemporary Buddhist movement that is rooted firmly within traditional Geluk exclusivism but which simultaneously reflects and reacts against the conditions of modernity" (2004, 81). Textual analysis of Gyatso's *Modern Buddhism* indicates that theologically, the NKT appears to react against the conditions of modernity more than reflect them. The book's first chapter alone distinctly repudiates modernist valuations of human autonomy and goodness, living in the now, philosophical naturalism, and therapeutic meditation.

Content analysis of the NKT's "Modern Buddhism" branding, on the other hand, indicates that promotionally, the NKT appears to reflect the conditions of modernity more than react against them. In KMC New York's aforementioned class titles, for example, the NKT comfortably deals in the very modernist principles that Gyatso repudiates in *Modern Buddhism*: human autonomy (e.g., "New Year, New You") and goodness (e.g., "Awakening the Heart"), living in the now (e.g., "Stop Worrying, Start Living"), philosophical naturalism (e.g., "The Happiness Toolkit"), and therapeutic meditation (e.g., "Heal Yourself Through Meditation").

Two other quintessential modernist values with an ambiguous presence in the NKT's construction of Modern Buddhism are egalitarianism and novelty. On the one hand it is the element of Gyatso's Buddhism that practitioners understand to be most innovative – i.e., his new *presentation* of the Dharma – which they also understand to be the most democratic: “Gyatso's practical presentation of Buddha's 84,000 teachings has made the path to enlightenment accessible to people of the modern world. ... open to everyone, anyone can learn to train in wisdom and compassion and thus unify Buddha's teachings and daily life” (NKT h). It is principally in expanding disciples' access to Dharma, therefore, that Gyatso is understood to have modernized Geluk Buddhism according to the principle of egalitarianism. Although Kadampa Buddhism is perceived to be newly “open to everyone” in this respect, *Modern Buddhism's* insistence that humans must *follow* Buddha to be happy (Gyatso 2011, 3-4) and the NKT's doctrinal neo-traditionalization around Gyatso's absolute authority (see Chapter 2) suggest that the interpretation of Buddha's teachings is conceived as a decidedly *undemocratic* process. Everyone is welcome, yes, but not to question authority.

Scholars and patrons alike might wonder if NKT media is misleading because the Dharma behind group's “Modern Buddhism” brand is not modernist. In reference to the “clericalism, literalism and conservatism” of Gyatso's books, Kay suggests as much: “some of the statements emerging from within the organization concerning the ‘modernised’ and ‘Westernised’ nature of his presentation – such as the claim that his books address the pace of life on the streets of New York City – seem somewhat exaggerated” (2004, 99). Rather than deliberately producing misleading marketing, however, I would suggest that Gyatso and his NKT disciples are convinced that a simplified form of conservative Geluk Dharma is entirely modern — i.e.,

pragmatic and universal; globally applicable and accessible. This conviction seems to underlie Gyatso's rather swift movement through *Modern Buddhism's* first chapter from an assertion of Buddhism's practical remedies for daily problems to the salvific demands of future lives, renunciation, faith, and Buddhist exclusivism — a logic distilled in the following passage:

[T]here is not a single problem experienced by living beings that does not come from their attachment. ...The method for controlling our attachment and other delusions is the practice of Buddha's teachings. By practising Buddha's teachings on renunciation we can solve our daily problems that arise from attachment. (2011, 5)

Gyatso's view that the *traditional* Buddhist practice of renunciation, "the strong wish to abandon the root of suffering — attachment and self-grasping ignorance" (6-7), is the most effective method for solving *modern* daily problems is the theological tissue that legitimizes teaching future lives and renunciation under the banner of "Modern Buddhism."

The fact that the most popular construction of "modern Buddhism" (according to a Google search) promotes a Dharma that is more traditionalist than modernist demonstrates that "Modern Buddhism" is a value-laden category (e.g., a brand) and not a neutral descriptor. As a floating signifier with no prescribed content, the concept itself is up for grabs. The NKT has been grabbing it since 2011 and has cornered much of the popular online discourse in that time.

Natalie Quli and Scott Mitchell reflect on the creative play of such identity production:

"Narratives of modernity have been appropriated by individuals, groups, and institutions in a variety of creative ways and integrated into the already-existing cultures underlying them, producing unique forms with their own logics and histories" (2015, 203). The NKT is one such group that has creatively appropriated and integrated the narrative of "Modern Buddhism" into its already-existing culture of "traditional Gelug exclusivism" (Kay 2004, 81). It has done so partly as a strategy for boundary demarcation, pronouncing "This Buddhism is not Tibetan" (as

seen in Chapter 3), but chiefly as a strategy for audience attraction, pronouncing “This Buddhism is universally practical.”

ii. Casting the Net and Recasting Problems in KMC Meditation Classes

In his history of the Christianization of the United States, *Awash in a Sea of Faith*, Jon Butler describes how eighteenth-century evangelical Protestant conversion ritual paralleled popular occult practice of the time:

The laity approached both cunning persons and ministers with numerous fears, doubts, and problems. Wise men and women recast complaints about birth, money, background, and disputes in astrological and occult terms capable of solution through geomancy, chiromancy, metoposcopy, horoscopes, or divination. Clergymen recast these problems in a Christian context. Their inquirers’ real problems concerned salvation. Then, in simple sermons on elemental Christian doctrine, they began dissolving listeners’ anxieties. They explained Christian faith. (1990, 92)

The “recasting of problems” (and solutions) from the pragmatic alleviation of particular sufferings to the transformation of a flawed existential condition can be an important interpretive move for adherents of religions that prescribe renunciatory means to soteriological goals (e.g., Christian salvation; Buddhist liberation) – a move from “worldly” to “unworldly” concerns.⁵⁴

The resident teacher of KMC North described this move to me as an explicit missionizing strategy: “We cast the net with publicity about improving relationships, reducing stress, etc., in order to get people in the door. And *then* I’ll teach them death, renunciation, etc. – *lamrim*.” The

⁵⁴ According to Sharot’s Weberian framework (2001, 36), the difference between these religious aspirations (which I refer to interchangeably as worldly/unworldly and therapeutic/soteriological) is that between thaumaturgy (to seek release from specific ills within nature and society that do not change) and transformative soteriology (to produce a fundamental change in nature, society, and the individual by escaping worldly suffering in rebirth or paradise).

rhetorical strategy involves (i) casting the net by promoting Buddhism's worldly benefits; then (ii) recasting problems by prescribing Buddhist renunciation – the abandonment of such worldly concerns on the path to liberation (nirvana) from cyclic rebirth (samsara). In this section I describe this *worldly* → *unworldly* missionizing strategy at KMC North and South, and then redescribe it as a rhetorical progression from *orthopraxic* → *orthodoxic* religious prescriptions supported by claims about their progressive temporal efficacy, or duration.

The NKT has grown into one of the largest Tibetan-inspired Buddhist organizations in the world largely by means of a strong missionary imperative and effective missionizing strategies that are increasingly globalist and modernist. Gyatso's missionary ambitions have forced him to accommodate his conservative interpretation of Geluk Dharma to the "local needs" of non-Buddhist audiences in expanding global markets. Beyond the 'Modern Buddhism' branding described above, how has he guided this process of religious acculturation in the NKT?

Besides Gyatso's books, the primary interface between the NKT's Buddhist product and prospective non-Buddhist audiences is every NKT centre's General Program of drop-in meditation classes. As a KMC's main missionizing opportunity, General Program classes are the preeminent site of Buddhism's modernist adaptation in the NKT. The counterintuitive relationship between the NKT's 'Modern Buddhism' brand and book was affirmed in my ethnographic experience at General Program classes: Geluk Buddhism was reinterpreted along modernist lines (e.g., psychologized or deymothologized) less in the doctrinal content of class instruction than in the descriptive content of class publicity. In other words, the local needs of North American spiritual seekers – e.g., psychotherapeutic relief from psychological ailments

such as stress, anger, depression – were more explicitly addressed (and implicitly validated) in KMC General Program publicity than pedagogy. I have referred to this missionizing strategy above as “promotional modernism.”

Promotional Modernism

In the centre’s main foyer and in a display case on the front sidewalk, KMC North distributed a colour, glossy pamphlet (40 pages, 6 x 6 inches) promoting major centre activities scheduled from September 2016 through August 2017 (Kadampa Meditation Centre North b). Under the cover title, “Meditation & Modern Buddhism,” sits a stylized graphic of Buddha Shakyamuni looking out over the city’s skyline with energy currents emanating from his heart and touching down on particular buildings. The pages are filled with original NKT computer-generated iconography depicting Indo-Tibetan deities (Vajrasattva, Prajñāpāramitā, Cakrasaṃvara, Mañjuśrī, Tsongkhapa, Dorje Shugden), photos of local and global NKT teachers and practitioners, and pithy descriptions of upcoming teachings, festivals, empowerments, and retreats.

Halfway through the pamphlet is a two-page photo of KMC North’s Resident Teacher holding one of Gyatso’s books while teaching an attentive audience in the centre’s main *gompa*.

Bordering the image is a brief description of the centre’s “weekly classes”:

Suitable for everyone, these walk-in meditation classes are part of our General Program (GP) and offer simple, practical methods to improve the quality of our lives and develop inner peace. The classes focus on using Buddhist understanding to help us solve our daily problems and find the lasting happiness we seek. (Kadampa Meditation Centre North b)

The preceding two pages display fifteen chronologically dated half-day “Saturday Courses” offering “practical solutions to everyday problems of modern living derived from the teachings of Buddha.”

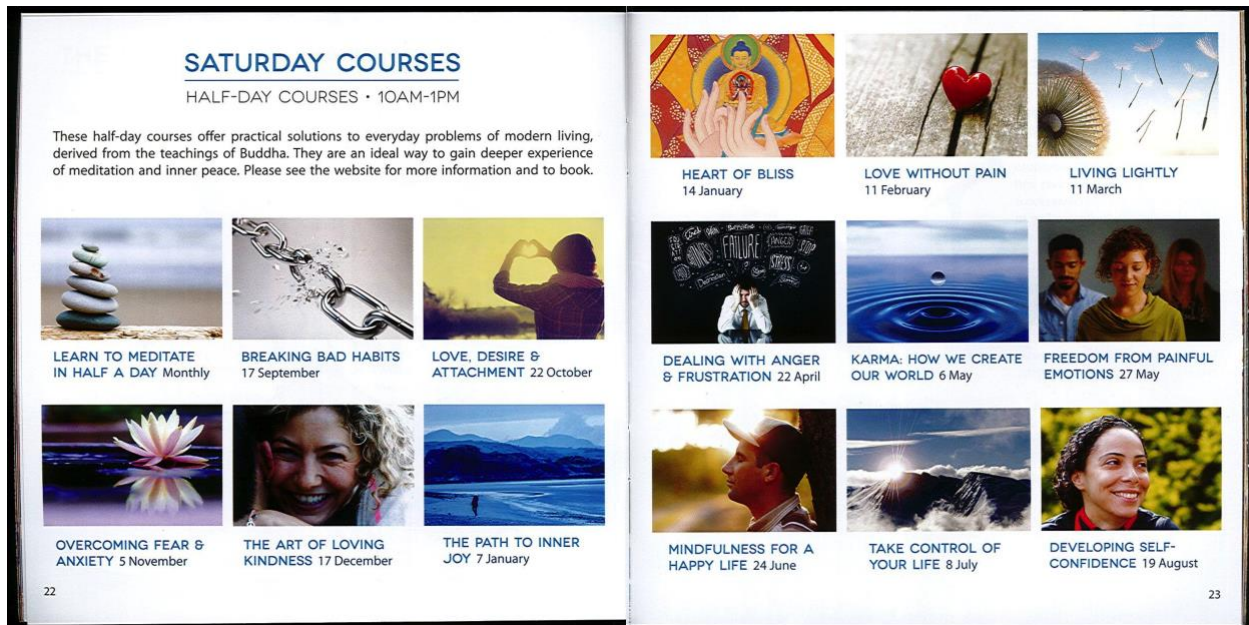


Fig. 5. KMC North pamphlet (page detail), “Meditation & Modern Buddhism: Kadampa Meditation Centre [North], September 2016 – August 2017”

Each course is listed with a specific thematic title and thumbnail photo or graphic image – e.g., “Breaking Bad Habits” under an exploding chain, “The Art of Loving Kindness” under the face of a laughing woman, “Take Control of Your Life” under a snow-capped mountain-landscape. Titled skills (love, kindness, joy, bliss, levity, confidence, mindfulness) and ills (bad habits, fear, anxiety, painful emotions, anger, frustration) are all psychological in nature. Two of the fifteen titles contain recognizably Buddhist words – “Karma: How We Create Our World” and “Mindfulness For a Happy Life,” while only two of fifteen images contain recognizably Buddhist content: three people meditating to illustrate “Freedom From Painful Emotions” and a

miniature Chakrasambara standing at Buddha Shakyamuni's heart to illustrate "Heart of Bliss" (Kadampa Meditation Centre North b).

In addition to social media and internet events listings, KMC North volunteers regularly distribute customized posters and double-sided handbill cards to promote specific upcoming events as widely as possible in local cafes, shops, and outdoor community boards. Designed as a kind of year-opening showcase for KMC North, the first major event of 2016 was a free public talk titled "Stop Worrying, Start Living," held on a Thursday evening in early September from 7:00 - 8:30pm. The handbill had a white background with the talk's title in sky-blue above the silhouette of a cross-legged meditator whose body contains nothing but clear sky with floating clouds.

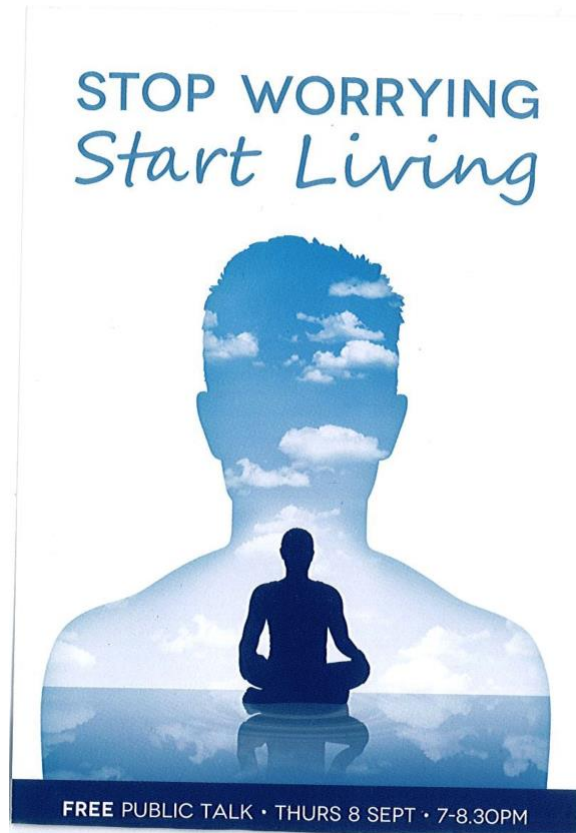


Fig. 6. KMC North handbill, “Stop Worrying, Start Living”

On the back of the card, a paragraph and photo introduce KMC North’s Resident Teacher, Kelsang Palden, followed by a description of the public talk:

There are many uncertainties in our life in the modern world. When we respond with worry, our mind becomes tight and uncomfortable and it can be difficult to think clearly or enjoy anything. During this Public Talk, we will learn to replace worry with positive, constructive attitudes so that we can enjoy life with confidence. Discover the benefits of meditation and Buddhist wisdom. This will be an inspiring and wonderful evening not to be missed. (Kadampa Meditation Centre c)

The result of concerted handbill and poster distribution and ramped up internet promotion in the weeks leading up to the talk was a capacity attendance of about 200.

Pedagogical Traditionalism

The *gompa* packed and abuzz with first-time visitors and not a few old-timers, Palden delivered a Dharma teaching that seemed to address both audiences, with an increasingly conspicuous tilt toward the latter:

I'll explain four things tonight: (1) why we need to learn correct meditation, (2) why we need to meditate on Dharma, Buddha's teachings, (3) why we need to be concerned about our future lives, (4) why we need permanent freedom from suffering.

(1) What is worry? Concentration on things we don't want. ... Meditation is concentrating on ... an object that has the power to make us happy when we focus on it. ... [fifteen-minute 'black and white breathing'] ... Black and white breathing meditation was taught by Buddha in his tantric teachings as a means to relax our body and mind.

(2) We must meditate on Dharma because we want to be happy all the time, not just some of the time. ... We need to eat, drink, swim, etc., but these are not the real source of the permanent happiness that we seek. This is just truth; it doesn't require faith. ... What is pure and everlasting happiness? We don't know! We can't find people who have it! We have to check; be scientific.

(3) The happiness of our future lives is much more important than that of this life. This life is very short in reality. ... We like to plan ahead, e.g., for retirement. We must go further, and plan/prepare for our future lives. How? By practicing basic Buddhist teachings, e.g., generosity. We can principally give love, considering others' wishes to be important. This is a meditation; and it's a method of preparing for our happiness in future lives.

(4) The temporary freedom from suffering that we currently experience is not good enough. Renunciation is "I want permanent freedom from suffering." This is a very special mind. And then we can meditate on ultimate truth. What's that? "The things I normally see do not exist at all." Reality is like a dream. ... If we spend time thinking about this we'll wake up!

The teaching's publicity, title, and the first of Palden's four points were presented in modernist, deBuddhified, and psychotherapeutic terms, while his final three points were traditionalist, Buddhological, and soteriological. Palden's teaching can thus be described as a three-step

rhetorical effort, first to recast the audience's problems (vis-à-vis duration) from this life's problems (especially worry) → future life problems → *the* problem of cyclic existence; and second to prescribe the progressively more effective antidotes (vis-à-vis duration) from meditation on the breath to find happiness in this life → meditation on the wish to karmically prepare the happiness of future lives → meditation on renunciation: the wish to accomplish permanent happiness by realizing ultimate truth.⁵⁵

A similar prescriptive progression defined Palden's response to a question at an evening General Program class about a month later: "Regarding meditation, when we've developed decent concentration, what next?" Palden replied matter of factly: "Contemplate and meditate on the rarity and preciousness of your human life. Then meditate on your own death. If you just want some mental peace, then continue forever with breathing meditation. But you can do *lamrim* meditations to make your practice more expansive, deeper."

The conservative content of Palden's public talk is fairly representative of NKT General Program classes, whose teachers are encouraged not to veer far from the content of Gyatso's books: "Although General Programme sessions are taught at an introductory level there seems to be no attempt to conceal any element of the NKT's philosophy or structure" (Waterhouse 1997, 164). The structure of this class at KMC North resembled that of *Modern Buddhism's* first chapter, and for good reason: it was the text on Palden's throne-side table from which he occasionally read aloud. Palden's concluding advice was plain: "My suggestion to you is buy or

⁵⁵ These three steps in Palden's diagnostic and prescriptive progression align nicely with Melford Spiro's (1982) *apotropaic / kammic / nibbanic* typology of Buddhist religious activity, revised and particularized to Tibetan Buddhism by Geoffrey Samuel (1993) as *pragmatic / karmic / bodhi*.

download *Modern Buddhism*. Follow the instructions, and learn to meditate. This book contains all of Buddhism. It is written for modern people.”

Strong Medicine or False Advertising

Before imagining the poles of modernism/traditionalism, worldly/unworldly, or therapy/soteriology too exclusively, it is crucial to remember that for Gyatso and his teacher disciples (e.g., Palden), the *traditional* Buddhist practice of renunciation is the best method to solve *modern* (i.e., contemporary) daily problems – to *solve* them, rather than relieve them: “[T]here is not a single problem experienced by living beings that does not come from their attachment. ... By practising Buddha’s teachings on renunciation we can solve our daily problems that arise from attachment” (Gyatso 2011, 5). Renunciation is therefore antidotal *and* therapeutic. Such a diagnosis of the root cause of daily problems negates any dissonance for NKT teachers between their centre’s promotional modernism (“stop stress”) and pedagogical traditionalism (“stop rebirth”).

But what about their customer-students? My sense was that most General Program visitors did experience a dissonance between these promotional and pedagogical orientations, a dissonance which then lay open to individual interpretive location on a scale from strong medicine to false advertising. The validity of such a veiled proselytizing progression finds firm historical backing, however, in the traditional Mahayana Buddhist missionizing tool of *upāya-kauśalya* (‘skillful means’). While often deployed polemically in Mahayana sutras to critique “inferior” teachings, the basic point is that deception is a perfectly good conventional means to an ultimate end, such as in the *Lotus Sutra*’s famous account of a father expediently rescuing his children from a

burning house by lying to them about the existence of rare toys outside. The NKT missionizing strategy of promoting Buddhism's worldly benefits before prescribing the abandonment of interest in such benefits is a particular case of *upāya-kausalya*.

Butler continues his description of American evangelical conversion ritual: "If listeners panicked when they discovered that their own salvation was in doubt, the panic only increased the clergyman's authority" (1990, 92). Butler understates the agency of the listeners here, who, as shoppers in a spiritual marketplace, always have the option to walk. Walking out was not common, but I did witness it from time to time in Palden's General Program classes at KMC North. More commonly, the majority of customers simply chose not to come back. Those who do come back are often seen by the community as ready, or up for, Palden's or Gyatso's or Buddha's strong medicine; as good candidates for developing Buddhist refuge; as having enough merit (positive karma) and wisdom to seize the real meaning of their life – not relaxation through breathing meditation but liberation through renunciation. A siphoning of commitment is hereby effected through the interaction between KMC North's broad promotional net and narrow rate of patron retention.

Just how does an interested General Program visitor go deeper into the Dharma on offer at a KMC? First they are usually encouraged to come to more events either through group announcements made before or after a class, in-house promotional handbills (often placed on each seat before a class), and/or one-on-one interactions. Waterhouse found that "[t]hose who attend meetings are also encouraged in enthusiastic terms to attend further courses," often presented as unique occasions not to miss – an approach she heard referred to by visitors and

critics as ‘evangelical’ (1997, 143). Often in the context of post-class socializing over tea, the recommended next step is typically to buy one of Gyatso’s books from the in-house bookshop, or to read one (or both) of his books available as free e-book downloads: *How to Transform Your Life* or *Modern Buddhism*. Beyond private reading, interested KMC visitors may be encouraged to consider registering in Foundation Program, the less intensive of two structured study programs. Volunteering is another way that newcomers are commonly encouraged to get more involved. A huge part of the work of both a KMC’s Administrative Director and Education Program Coordinator is coordinating volunteers to maintain the building(s) and grounds, conduct a variety of ritual tasks, distribute publicity, teach and assist classes.

A General Program visitor’s commitment to the KMC in the form of registered membership in a study program may be an ideal outcome from the community’s point of view, but patron retention is not the only goal of filling seats at General Program classes. Campbell’s Resident Teacher informant at Chandrakirti Centre expressed a laissez-faire recruitment philosophy:

When I asked Thekchen if he hoped students would move on from General Program to the Foundation Program, he ... said that the numbers were not important. ... He said, rather, that his objective was to provide a welcoming place for learning about meditation and listen to and discuss “new perspectives.” ... Thekchen said: “What seems to work is just letting people relax and take it at whatever level they want” (2011, 196-197)

Further, while the majority of attendees who choose not to return may be seen as lacking sufficient merit to commence their path to liberation at that time, they are also seen as unwitting recipients of potent karmic potentials that will ripen as experiential steps on that path in the future. After teaching a day course at another KBC, a Canadian Resident Teacher told me of her

growing sense of responsibility to plant such seeds in the minds of General Program students by exposing them to undiluted Buddhism, come what may:

I'm trying to turn up the intensity dial a bit, to really try to introduce students to future lives, renunciation, and especially emptiness in every class, because this is Buddhism. Just teaching them how to be happy in this life alone is not teaching them Buddhism; I feel like I'm not doing them justice, like I'm letting them down, not doing my job. They have the karma to come in the door, so I should at least meet that karma by teaching the path to permanent happiness, particularly emptiness, because they'll only hear that here, nowhere else. Then they'll at least get the karmic potentials planted here, even if they don't like the sound of it and don't come back. The seeds will ripen some day, and planting them is my job as a Dharma teacher. When I first heard emptiness I was offended, but look at me now! [laughs]

Nonetheless, both products/medicines are on offer in NKT General Program classes: breathing meditation for pain *relief* and renunciation meditation for pain *cessation*. But as one KMC North adherent expressed to me, it is the stronger medicine – the one most General Program visitors will find much harder to swallow – that defines the chief religious mission of the NKT's founder: “Geshe-la is all about getting you out of samsara. He definitely has the viewpoint that any little bit that you take that makes your life happier, your mind more peaceful, is good. But what he is *about* is getting people out of samsara.”

Butler's account of 18th-century American evangelical conversion ritual indicates that there is nothing new or uniquely Buddhist about religious professionals recasting newcomers' problems from particular to existential, their solutions from therapeutic to soteriological. The Christian-Buddhist comparison throws into relief another significant feature of NKT missionizing with precedent in traditional Mahayana usage of *upāya-kausalya*. According to Butler, American occult specialists performed particular religious *practices* (e.g., palmistry, horoscopes, divination) to address particular lay problems – practices which required some belief, but that

were to some degree empirically falsifiable. Christian ministers, on the other hand, prescribed *belief* (i.e., faith in Christ) as the sole cure for their listeners' "real problem" (i.e., need for salvation), of which their particular daily anxieties were mere symptoms.

In Kelsang Palden's General Program classes at KMC North, I perceived a strategic deployment of *both* these types of religious prescription (orthopraxic and orthodoxic), deployed as steps in a rhetorical progression defined by claims to their progressive temporal efficacy. Palden opened every General Program class by guiding a particular Buddhist *practice* (i.e., breathing meditation). He did so: (a) to provide his listeners with a temporary (but testable) remedy for their problems; (b) to draw them deeper into Dharma: to the liberating (but untestable) *doctrines* of karma, reincarnation, and especially renunciation – the wish for permanent freedom from their real problems of "attachment and self-grasping ignorance."

Lay popularization of Buddhist meditation divorced from Buddhist doctrine is often a characteristic of late twentieth century Western Buddhist formations that get described as modernist. The IMS in Barre, Massachusetts, for example (where Kabat-Zinn first conceived of his MBSR program), is a centre with Theravadin roots in which "practically any serious engagement with Theravada doctrine [is] eschewed" (Braun 2013, 163). McMahan captures this modernist Buddhist paradox: "while meditation is often considered the heart of Buddhism, it is also deemed the element most detachable from the tradition itself" (2008, 185).

Lay popularization of Buddhist meditation *combined with study of Buddhist doctrine* (as described above at KMC North) may be a less common trend in contemporary Euro-North

American Buddhism, but it was an important component of early twentieth century Asian anticolonial reforms, such as the laicizing work of the Burmese monk Ledi Sayadaw: “In response to [British] rule, Ledi promoted the study of abstruse doctrine ... as a way to protect Buddhism. He went on to formulate simple forms of meditation as a further line of defense. ... His ‘traditional’ view was an integral part of his vision of a modern Buddhism that included meditation” (Braun 2013, 5). Braun traces a genealogy of Theravada vipassana meditation’s detraditionalization (155-169) from Sayadaw’s initial doctrine-bound reforms to the doctrine-informed modernisms of U Ba Khin and S.N. Goenka, to the doctrine-free reforms of the American founders of IMS, to Kabat-Zinn’s fully secularized mindfulness training.

Where Sayadaw worked to laicize doctrinal study and meditation to protect Buddhism under colonialism, Gyatso appears to have adopted a similar approach to protecting Buddhism in diaspora. A century apart, the measured, doctrine-bound reforms of Sayadaw and Gyatso are both modern attempts to conserve Buddhism through adapting Buddhism (Kay 2004, 100), and to expand Buddhism’s audience without expanding beyond Buddhism. Of course Gyatso’s globalist missionary context makes his early-21st-century expansion of Buddhism a very different project from Sayadaw’s pedagogical efforts in early-20th-century predominantly Buddhist Burmese society.

Despite their contrasting approaches to the representation of meditation’s Buddhist doctrinal context (de-emphasis versus emphasis), IMS and KMCs can each be said to fit Donald Lopez’s portrait of Buddhist modernism for their shared emphases on popular meditation in general:

The strong emphasis on meditation as the central form of Buddhist practice marked one of the most extreme departures of modern Buddhism from previous forms. The

practice of meditation had been throughout history the domain of monks, and even here meditation was merely one of many vocations within the monastic institution. ... In modern Buddhism, however, meditation is a practice recommended for all, with the goal of enlightenment moved from the distant future to the immediate present. (2002: xxxviii)

We might, therefore, describe the doctrine-free meditation program at IMS and the doctrine-bound meditation program at KMCs as parallel efforts to laicize Buddhism occupying distinct positions on a scale of Buddhism's modernist adaptation: enthusiastic and measured.⁵⁶ To conclude this chapter by way of developing these categories, I extend Cozort's NKT-FPMT comparison to the training of children rather than teachers.

iii. Children's Meditation in the FPMT and NKT⁵⁷

What role has meditation traditionally played in the early lives of indigenous Tibetans? Based on forty years of experience in and around monasteries in the predominantly agricultural societies of the Himalayan cultural region, Tsomo describes children's religious and mundane tasks in both village and monastery. She cites Namgyal Lhamo Taklha's (2005) *Women of Tibet* to list the typical religious rituals performed by Tibetan children with their parents at village temples: "they recite prayers and mantras ... watch their parents make offerings at the altar ... follow them as they circumambulate Mani walls, shrines, and reliquaries ... [and] may also participate in the fasting ritual known as nyungne" (Tsomo 2013, 377). Next, Tsomo describes the Himalayan Buddhist socialization process: "Children are taught to show respect for elders (especially

⁵⁶ These categories were first suggested to me by my doctoral supervisor, Jeff Wilson.

⁵⁷ This section and the next are based on a paper accepted for publication in a forthcoming issue of *Religious Studies and Theology*.

males), sacred texts and images, and rites of propitiation to family and clan deities. An emphasis is placed on the accumulation of merit, avoidance of demerit, and observance of ritual practices to ensure the prosperity of the family and the community” (378). Nowhere does Tsomo describe lay children meditating.

More surprisingly perhaps, meditation also does not appear in Tsomo’s description of Himalayan children’s monastic education. The average young monk’s training is instead focused on reading and public ritual: “to read the scriptures and to perform rituals to ward off malevolent forces, appease the local gods (*yul lha*), and ensure the well-being of the villagers, their animals, and their crops.” An older monk is selected as teacher to guide a new monk’s “acculturation to the monastic life and to instruct him in prayers, discipline, and scriptures” (377-378). Children are expected to memorize one verse of scripture a day, their intelligence often assessed on this basis (387).

At the Ladakhi monastery of Kumbum, Mills confirms that new monks spend their first novice years learning to read and recite scriptures and that admittance to semi-ordained status is largely dependent on this skill (2003, 43-44). Not only is there is no assessment of a novice’s skill in meditation, but the subsequent ten-year training of a semi-ordained (*gyets ’ul*) monk also contains no formal meditation component, but rather “a broad training in the philosophy, discipline and debating procedures of the Gelukpa order” (45). It is safe to assume, therefore, that the founders of the FPMT and NKT, Thubten Yeshe and Kelsang Gyatso (themselves child recruits to local Tibetan monasteries), would not have received much in the way of formal meditation instruction nor perhaps even encouragement to meditate in their monastic youths.

By contrast, in recent decades contemporary Tibetan teachers and their transnational Buddhist networks have had to satisfy an increasing demand from lay convert students for practical methods to integrate meditation into their family lives. If children's religious education in Tibet is traditionally focused on ritual and occasionally on scholarship, its popular Western reception has tended to emphasize meditation. In her recent survey of "children's Buddhist storybooks ... published in English by both commercial presses and Buddhist organizations" (2013, 207), Karen Derris describes a pattern of Buddhist meditation's reinterpretation, generally appearing as a universal practice requiring no commitment to be Buddhist: "While the virtues described in broad strokes in these books could be easily defined with specifically Buddhist categories, meditation, as a contextless practice, is seen as the source for generating humanistic values" (225).

Although Derris focused her analysis on popular storybooks for the children of "night-stand Buddhists," rather than practice-oriented publications of sectarian Buddhist organizations like the FPMT and NKT, a similar de-emphasis of explicit Buddhist doctrine characterizes the FPMT's *Meditations for Children* (Smith 2011). The NKT's *What is Meditation?* (Gyatso 2013b), on the other hand, contains an even closer textual model than Gyatso's *Modern Buddhism* (from which it borrows heavily) for Palden's KMC North missionizing strategy of teaching therapeutic breathing meditation followed by soteriological renunciation meditation.

In this section I argue that while the production of children's meditation manuals is an entirely contemporary development, the texts of the FPMT and NKT reflect respectively enthusiastic and measured approaches to the adaptation of Geluk Tibetan Buddhist meditation's traditional

doctrinal context and goals for primarily non-Tibetan audiences. The result is that the children's meditation curriculum in the NKT's *What is Meditation?* is more recognizably Buddhist while the FPMT's *Meditations for Children* is more accessible to the children of non-Buddhists. Students of the FPMT's doctrine-free meditation program are trained to live more peacefully in the present, while students of the NKT's doctrine-bound program principally learn to aspire for freedom from the sufferings of future lives.

FPMT Children's Meditation Manual

Meditations for Children (Smith 2011) is a seventy-page book published by FPMT Education Services (distributor of books and practice materials by many authors from many countries) as a guidebook for parents and teachers to lead meditations with children. Compiled by Sandy Smith, an Australian FPMT practitioner, and illustrated with black and white figural line drawings, it consists of three preparatory instructions, eight meditations, and a dedication. All twelve sections contain "Teachers' Notes" with suggestions for introducing, guiding, and concluding the exercise or meditation that follows. Meditations are presented in three levels of sophistication according to age groups five to seven, eight to ten, and eleven to fifteen. Most conclude with a dedication of the "good energy" created in the meditation toward self-improvement in order to become more beneficial to others. The book includes a bibliography of seven texts, six of which are Buddhist (five by monastics in Tibetan traditions and one general Buddhist volume by an American laywoman), and one non-Buddhist work by an American transpersonal psychologist.

In her introduction, Smith discusses the context of the books' development in the FPMT, its intended mixed audience, and its secular and religious aims. It was "created in support of Lama

Yeshe's and Lama Zopa Rinpoche's vision of Universal Education" (2011, 7). Universal Education for Compassion and Wisdom (UECW) is a UK-based NGO established in 2005 under the patronage of the Dalai Lama with Thubten Zopa as Honorary President. It is envisioned as "an educational system that presents the profound wisdom of all religions in a way that transcends individual countries, philosophies and regions" (FPMT a). Smith secularizes Buddhist techniques for a diverse audience: "This booklet contains some timeless meditations from the Buddhist tradition, which have been adapted especially for use with both Buddhist and non-Buddhist children" (5). She articulates two aims of the book, the first in secular terms: "to give parents and educators some useful, accurate, and practical guidelines for meditating with children" (7). The second intention is couched in general but recognizably Buddhist terms: "May children everywhere benefit from these meditations. May they discover their true nature and attain the highest goal of enlightenment" (7).

The book opens with three sets of instructions to prepare for meditation: "Breathing and Relaxation Exercises" which includes a standing "Tai Chi Breathing Exercise," a guide to meditation posture which outlines "Seven Points to Remember" based on the traditional "seven-featured Vairochana posture" (Pabongka 1991, 149-150), and three altruistic motivations to generate before meditating.

Eight meditations range from concentration on the breath to imaginative visualizations of giving love and the luminous nature of consciousness — all based on particular Buddhist practices derived from particular Buddhist traditions (usually Tibetan), all of which go unidentified. The first is a simple breathing meditation included to "help children to develop clarity and awareness

.... [and] to feel more happiness and contentment, because the way to happiness is through a calm and peaceful mind” (26). Second is a walking meditation which appears to be an influence from non-Tibetan Buddhist traditions such as Zen or vipassana. Suggested for use “when sitting is impossible,” mindful awareness is an aim shared with the previous breathing meditation: “The slow, simple movements will help the children to get in touch with their own bodies and minds, so they can be more grounded and more in the moment” (Smith 2011, 32).

The remaining six meditations are all derived from Tibetan Buddhism: “Nine-round breathing,” “Transforming Your Body to Help Others,” “Awakening the Heart,” “We Are All Equal,” “Light Meditation,” “Purity of the Mind.” Smith concludes her book with an explanation of the traditional Buddhist practice of merit dedication in secular, economic terms for children: “as a process similar to saving up your pocket money for something special” (2011, 66).

In summary, breathing, visualization (often involving light), and a limited degree of contemplation are methods Smith utilizes in children’s meditations emphasizing the development of calm and compassion. Her book contains adaptations of non-Buddhist, non-Tibetan Buddhist, and a variety of Tibetan Buddhist meditation practices from tantra to *lamrim* to *mahāmudrā*. Decontextualization is consistent and thorough: though the contents of all eight meditations come from Buddhist traditions, there is no mention of Buddhism or Buddhist terminology in the body of the book. This stands in sharp contrast to the children’s meditation text of the NKT.

NKT Children’s Meditation Manual

What is Meditation? (Gyatso 2013b) is a thirty-two-page book published by the NKT's Tharpa Publications (exclusive publisher of books and ritual texts written or compiled by Gyatso) as an introduction to meditation for children ages ten to thirteen (Amazon). Written by Kelsang Gyatso himself, the book contains computer generated, colour illustrations of 'Confession Buddhas,' "who have special powers to purify negativities and downfalls in those who recite their names with faith" (Tharpa Publications). This is the fourth book corresponding to the fourth level in Gyatso's "Buddhism for Children" series, and the only book in the series dedicated to the subject of meditation.

Structurally, *What is Meditation?* is more simplistic than Smith's *Meditations for Children*, and significantly shorter. Intellectually, it is more demanding, even when compared solely with the material in Smith's third level, which roughly corresponds to Gyatso's fourth in terms of age. For starters, Gyatso's book is written to children, not to parents and teachers for children. There are no "teachers' notes," introduction, or bibliography. His stated aims and intended audience are summarized on the book's last page: "The Buddhism for Children series invites children to make a journey of self-discovery and self-improvement to help them realize their full potential. The purpose is not to convert them to Buddhism but simply to show how everyone, Buddhist or non-Buddhist, can learn something from the teachings of Buddha" (2013b, 32).

The first sentence of Gyatso's book answers its title by defining meditation as "an action of mind whose nature is single-pointed concentration and whose function is to make the mind peaceful and calm" (7). Following an explanation that meditation produces happiness by making the mind

peaceful, Gyatso introduces the doctrine of karma on the first page when he states that an act of meditation also creates the cause for future peace of mind (7-8).

Smith's introductory intention that her book's meditations may help children "discover their true nature and attain the highest goal of enlightenment" (Smith 2011, 7) finds Buddhist contextualization in Gyatso's next paragraph, lifted directly from *Modern Buddhism* (already quoted in discussion of psychologization in that text): "through training in meditation we can free ourselves permanently from all the sufferings of this life and our countless future lives, and we can attain the supreme happiness of enlightenment, as Buddha showed. This is the best example for us." (2013b, 9). The explicitly Buddhist goals of liberation (nirvana) and enlightenment (bodhi) are here presented as the fruits of a child's emulation of Buddha in meditation practice.

Just as in *Modern Buddhism*, Gyatso suggests "at the beginning ... we can practice breathing meditation, which is quite simple" (9). A meditation on the sensation of the breath is introduced and further elaborated in an appendix with postural guidelines and a closing determination "to keep this experience of inner peace and carry it into your daily life. ... In this way you can make yourself as well as your friends and family happy all the time" (29). Meditation's definition, benefits, general objects, and a guided breathing meditation constitute the first six pages of text. The remaining six are devoted to an exposition of one analytical meditation: renunciation.

As if to dispel the perception of antagonism between family and renunciation, Gyatso opens his discussion of renunciation for children with a statement of what it is not: "Renunciation does not mean that we abandon our friends, families and our human enjoyments. It is an inner realization

and not a physical action” (13). Save for a few omitted words, the remainder of the contemplation is lifted directly from *Modern Buddhism* (2011, 41-43, 56). He introduces the first ‘noble truth’ with a notably unmodern commentary: “when Buddha says ‘You should know sufferings’ he means that we should know the sufferings of our future lives” (2013b, 13). A graphic list of sufferings is then provided corresponding to the six potential realms of samsaric rebirth – a very traditional contemplation in Tibetan Buddhism (e.g., Pabongka 1991, 25-32).

Gyatso concludes the contemplation with a brief instruction for meditation: “Through studying and understanding the meaning of these teachings, you should make the strong determination thinking, ‘I must liberate myself permanently from the sufferings of my countless future lives.’ You should meditate on this determination, which is actual renunciation” (2013b, 19-20). The reader is then encouraged to consult *Modern Buddhism* for an explanation of the meditation on emptiness — “the actual method to free ourselves permanently from the sufferings of our countless future lives” (20).

Describing Gyatso’s “Buddhism for Children” series, it seems an understatement that “these books address the reader in a mature fashion” (32). Certainly in this fourth book of the series, the author deems his verbatim adult teachings equally suitable for mature children. Breathing meditation is presented as a preliminary practice to the analytical meditation which Gyatso deems most important for children: developing fear of the sufferings of future lives and the wish to be free of them. Breathing meditation is presented as a method to accomplish present inner peace; renunciation meditation is presented as part of a method to accomplish permanent inner

peace in future lives. Visualization and compassion are two practices that appear frequently in Smith's book which are notably absent from Gyatso's.

Texts and Contexts Compared

My comparison of the FPMT and NKT texts is guided by a question that guides Derris's analysis of children's Buddhist storybooks (2013, 208): "What does Buddhism look like in these books?" In short, we have seen that her finding about meditation's secular, universal presentation — that "the origin of meditation in Buddhist traditions is often deemphasized" (222) — describes Smith's book near perfectly and Gyatso's very poorly. The FPMT book carefully decontextualizes a range of traditional Buddhist meditation practices in line with the author's aim of adapting them for Buddhist and non-Buddhist children. The NKT book, on the other hand, explicitly introduces the Buddhist doctrines of karma, past and future lives, the six realms of samsara, and carefully expounds the Buddhist doctrine of renunciation at the expense of more meditation options and more thorough instruction on meditation technique.

Derris opens her discussion of Kerry MacLean's book *Peaceful Piggy Meditation* observing how the book's framing 'acknowledgments' and 'about the author' function "much like pre-modern colophons and opening dedications in traditional Buddhist texts." They communicate the Buddhist context of a book which otherwise "playfully describes meditation and its benefits as a self-care practice that need not be entangled with Buddhism as a religion" (2013, 222). A consideration of Smith's and Gyatso's text frames provides further evidence of their antipodal approaches to Buddhist contextualization in adapting meditation instruction for children. Both frames communicate missions that contrast markedly with the messages of the texts themselves.

Smith's book is framed by acknowledgments and two end pages explaining the intentions and activities of the FPMT and FPMT Education Services. This frame functions like MacLean's to identify the Buddhist context of a book that has been otherwise almost entirely decontextualized. Smith's acknowledgements begin: "Homage to Lama Yeshe and Lama Zopa Rinpoche" (2011, 2). The final framing page begins and ends with two unequivocally Buddhist mission sentences: "Education Services at FPMT International Office offers a vast range of Buddhist study programs, prayer books, and practice materials from the Gelugpa lineage. ... FPMT Education Services provides the materials you need to actualize the Buddhist path" (71). *Meditations for Children* is clearly one of these materials and yet makes no mention of this Buddhist mission in the body of the text beyond Smith's introductory dedication that children may use her book to "discover their true nature and attain the highest goal of enlightenment" (7).

We've already seen a similar dissonance in Gyatso's book between the frame's stated mission and the text's contents, though in the reverse. I would argue that the stated mission of Gyatso's children's series — "not to convert [children] to Buddhism but simply to show how everyone, Buddhist or non-Buddhist, can learn something from the teachings of Buddha" (2013b, 32) — is contradicted by the overt and fundamental Buddhist-ness of the content of *What is Meditation?* It is hard to accept that a children's book filled with Tibetan-style Buddha images which teaches the accomplishment of nirvana through renunciation of samsara is not clearly aimed at Buddhists or Buddhists to be. The text includes the words "Buddha advised" (13), "Buddha showed" (9), "Buddha says" (13), "Buddha encourages" (16), and a quotation attributed to the Tibetan cultural hero, "the great Yogi Milarepa" (15).

For these reasons, I suggest that the approach of the FPMT's *Meditations for Children* to the representation of the source tradition is one which treats Geluk meditation in a manner that McMahan would describe as modernist – as “the heart of Buddhism ... [and] the element most detachable from the tradition itself” (McMahan 2008, 185). By comparison, the approach to the representation of the same tradition adopted in the NKT's *What is Meditation?* reflects a greater concern for continuity, and as such can be described as more traditionalist. In addition to his repeated and explicit in-text mention of Buddha and his teachings, Gyatso's extensive emphasis on renunciation is a prioritization of the most cardinal of traditional Buddhist doctrines – a point affirmed by the nineteenth-century Gelukpa teacher Pabongka Rinpoche: “As long as we have not developed even a contrived form of renunciation, any virtue we create will usually only turn samsara's wheel” (1991, 507).

This distinction is further supported by Lopez's description of modernist Buddhist meditation as “a practice recommended for all, with the goal of enlightenment moved from the distant future to the immediate present” (2002, xxxviii). The expediting of enlightenment from the distant future to the immediate present describes Smith's book far more accurately than Gyatso's. This can be seen most obviously in their respective emphases on the goals of becoming “more grounded and more in the moment” (Smith 2011, 32) compared with “liberat[ing] myself permanently from the sufferings of my countless future lives” (Gyatso 2013b, 19-20). The temporal distinction is also evident in the authors' different descriptions of meditation's causal relationship with happiness: Smith emphasizes meditation's therapeutic benefits; Gyatso emphasizes its karmic benefits.

Despite their contrasting approaches to the representation of meditation's Buddhist context (doctrine-free versus doctrine-bound) and goals (therapeutic versus soteriological), both texts reflect religious innovation in their shared heightened emphases on popular meditation in general and in the Buddhist training of children in particular, neither of which are historical norms in Tibetan Buddhism. As such, the respectively doctrine-free and doctrine-bound children's meditation curriculums of the FPMT and NKT can be said to reflect enthusiastic and measured positions vis-a-vis Geluk Buddhism's diasporic adaptation, positions comparable to the education programs of IMS and KMCs. The FPMT's enthusiastic adaptationism effects a full-scale reform of traditional doctrines, goals, and audience; the NKT's measured adaptationism embraces a new audience while attempting to conserve traditional doctrines and goals.

While Cozort (2003) has shown that both the NKT and FPMT prioritize doctrinal study in the training of teachers, I have shown that the NKT encourages such study in the training of children while the FPMT does not. The FPMT's doctrine-free children's meditation manual reflects an enthusiasm for reform that resembles the Buddhism of IMS more than that of Sayadaw. Sayadaw combined doctrinal study with meditation in his "traditionalist" Burmese Buddhist "modernism" because this combination was already an existing ideal in Theravadin monastic practice. The combination of study and meditation has also been a historically characteristic ideal in Geluk monastic pedagogies, so important to Tsongkhapa that he devoted a whole chapter ("Refuting Misconceptions About Meditation") to reproaching "the nonsensical statement, 'Much study is not needed to travel the path'" (2000, 110).

The ambivalence of the NKT text's measured adaptationism is evident in the disconnect between the tenor of its purported secular goals and audience (2013b, 32) and the book's quite conservative Buddhist content. The FPMT text's adaptationism, on the other hand, is so confident that the text's secularized presentation of meditation and its goals is evidently deemed by FPMT Education Services as entirely in step with enabling children to "actualize the Buddhist path" (Smith 2011, 71), and with the organization's title mission of preserving the Mahayana tradition.

The manuals' measured and enthusiastic degrees of innovation are undoubtedly influenced by the biographical characteristics of their authors. Sandy Smith is a lay, female, white Australian mother who is part author, part editor of her book's materials. Kelsang Gyatso is a celibate Tibetan monk with less than perfect English who is involved in the operation of a global organization. Smith's thoughtful adaptation of adult meditation teachings for children with varying wishes and capacities makes her text more child-friendly than Gyatso's lightly edited selection of his previously published teachings for adults. Gyatso's focus on child renunciation almost surely reflects his own experience of childhood monasticism at Sera Je, where he would have received more encouragement to study than to meditate, and where any formal meditation training would likely have been firmly bound within the soteriological trajectory of Geluk *lamrim* (the stages of path to enlightenment).

The doctrine-free and doctrine-bound pedagogical strategies employed in FPMT and NKT children's meditation texts also reflect and extend central features of the "very different ideological visions propelling the two organizations" (Kay 2004, 115), such as the educational

visions of their Tibetan founders. Thubten Yeshe describes his de-Buddhified vision of universal education with remarkable enthusiasm:

In Buddhism we have an incredible arrangement, universal education from the beginning at birth up until death, as an old man. I feel these things could be put into a universal language. Give up religion, give up Buddhism. Go beyond Buddhism. Put the essential aspect of the philosophy into scientific language. This is my aim.
(FPMT a)

As suggested above, Gyatso's more cautious aim appears more consonant with the early reformist vision of Ledi Sayadaw – to expand Buddhism's practitioner base *without* going beyond Buddhism. We have already seen David Kay align Gyatso's clerical orientation with Pabongka Rinpoche's Geluk conservatism (2004, 57).

Although they may be quite traditional in content, this chapter has shown that the NKT is strategically deploying the concept of the 'modern' in its mission to globalize Gyatso's teachings. On the other hand, while the FPMT's name literally states the organization's mission to preserve a particular Buddhist tradition, FPMT media promotes its founder's stated aim to give up Buddhism by going beyond Buddhism, to the universal language of science. One group uses "modern" to promote a fairly traditionalist Dharma while the other uses "tradition" to promote an enthusiastically modernist Dharma. It seems appropriate to conclude with a brief critical reflection on the use of these categories by Buddhists and scholars of Buddhism.

iv. Conclusion

This chapter has employed two theoretical binaries to analyze NKT promotional and pedagogical materials: modernism/traditionalism and therapy/soteriology. The first theorizes Buddhist

differentiation diachronically in terms of a particular Buddhist formation's relationship to the doctrines and practices that have been historically dominant in its source tradition. The second framework theorizes Buddhist differentiation synchronically in terms of the this- versus other-worldly location of goals being sought by particular Buddhist communities through particular Buddhist practices. I have argued that the pedagogical materials in NKT texts and KMC classes are both decidedly traditionalist (i.e., more continuous than discontinuous with Geluk tradition) and soteriological (i.e., more concerned with escaping cyclic rebirth than with improving this life), while the content of their public promotional materials is both decidedly modernist (i.e., more discontinuous than continuous with Geluk tradition) and therapeutic (i.e., more concerned with improving this life than with escaping cyclic rebirth).

The diachronically-oriented question of how the NKT is changing the script of Asian Buddhist householder/renouncer relations is an important and recurring one in this dissertation. As the title of this chapter suggest, however, I will rely principally upon the therapy/soteriology framework, and not modernism/traditionalism, to chart patterns of religious action at KMC South and North in the data-driven chapters to come. This is because the former framework has greater utility for my research on the soteriology of renunciation in the NKT, but also because the modernist/traditionalist framework has recently come under sustained criticism by scholars of global Buddhism.

The success with which the NKT has branded its conservative Geluk teachings as 'Modern Buddhism' is a vivid indication of the term's contested multivalence. The fact that its most popular online usage promotes a Dharma that is more fundamentalist than modernist suggests a

need for scholars of global Buddhism to use the term ‘Modern Buddhism’ with some caution. Donald Lopez, for instance, uses the term to refer to a particular Buddhist sect (2002) identifiable by modernist traits similar to those outlined by McMahan (2008) – properties which are not very helpful in identifying or understanding the NKT’s construction of ‘Modern Buddhism.’ Given this particular disparity between religious and scholarly conceptions of the modern, should scholars be alerting the public to the deceptiveness of the NKT’s promotional *upāya-kausālya*? Should we conclude that Gyatso’s children’s meditation book is not modern or modernist because it displays few of McMahan’s modernist traits? Kay (2004) asks the question about the greater movement in a section of his study titled “A Rejection of Modernity?”

Quli and Mitchell caution against such story-telling: “The category of ‘modernity’ represents a type of discourse (a *narrative*) that is deeply colored by the cultural patterns and subjectivities of the storyteller. This is as true about scholars using the term as it is about the people scholars seek to describe and understand” (2015, 212). For this reason and others, including its tacit rhetoric of “radical rupture,” Quli and Mitchell (213) suggest abandoning “modernism” as an analytic tool for the study of Buddhism in the United States. In 2014, Victor Hori, John Harding, and Alexander Soucy made a similar suggestion with regard to Buddhism in Canada, pointing to the ethnocentric value judgments imported by an explicit or implicit conflation of the traditional/modern binary with Asian-ethnic/Western-convert and inauthentic/authentic. Twenty years ago sociologist Lorne Dawson (1998) suggested abandoning “modernist” and “anti-modernist” as categories for the study of new religious movements.

Taking up this call would mean leaving these “deeply coloured” categories to religious actors, and adopting second-order categories not so commonly used by our research subjects to describe cognate patterns of religious action and adaptation. This is part of my justification for restricting my use of the modern/traditional framework to the second and third sections of this chapter’s discussion of NKT doctrine and publicity. To chart patterns of textual detraditionalization in the fourth section, I employed the less coloured term “adaptationism,”⁵⁸ subdivided into the categories of “enthusiastic” and “measured” in an attempt to grapple more precisely with the actual complexity of such contemporary Buddhist phenomena. Remaining chapters rely primarily on the therapy/soteriology framework for analysis of ethnographic data.

⁵⁸ I use the term to connote evidence of religious innovation as well as the embrace of such innovation – the latter in a manner similar to William Hutchison’s description of the modernist impulse in American Protestantism as “a frank adaptationism based on a belief in the interpenetration of religion and culture” (1992, 6).

CHAPTER 4

NKT Monastics: Sexual Renouncers, Symbolic Providers

One of my last interviewees at KMC North was Jeff, a husband, father, and longstanding member whose response to one of my first interview questions – “When and how did you become involved with New Kadampa Buddhism?” – entailed the story of his trip to India after university and military service, “for a quest.” The day after asking a Tibetan boy in Dharamshala if he could lead him to someone he could talk to about Buddhism, Jeff’s life was changed by a conversation with a monk dwelling alone in a small log cabin on the Dalai Lama’s grounds:

I sit in front of him on the ground and we chat, and in three hours he rips me apart by stripping me completely of any philosophical position. He does a comparison of all the religions of the world, where they fit on rungs of the ladder in their ability to articulate the nature of reality. He said religions do not all lead to the same place; you buy into a conceptual worldview and that is what you end up realizing, using the methods that they provide. So after he stripped me of any position he said “look up there;” he has the four profundities⁵⁹ written on the cabin wall in big black letters, and he starts teaching me the four profundities. He kind of blows me away; I was pretty much in a shock. He told me “You’ve thrown away your wallet for a mountain of gold,” by leaving the military and leaving career and so forth – because I did say up front, “I’ve just given up everything, I’ve got to find the answers to my questions.” He said “OK before you leave let me write down some books that you should read.” The first book he puts down is Geshe-la’s *Heart of Wisdom*.⁶⁰ He said to read anything by Geshe-la; it’s good. The second book is *Meditation on Emptiness* by Jeffrey Hopkins. The third one was *Birth, Death, and Intermediate State* by Lati Rinpoche. So he told me where to buy Geshe-la’s book; I bought it and I just sat there and read it. And I just knew the book; I recognized it. I went through it cover to cover; I just cried through the whole thing. That was my deciding moment. I just got it; so there were some definite imprints at work; nothing I did in this life anyway.

⁵⁹ The four profundities are a formulaic expression of the emptiness (*śūnyatā*) of a given phenomenon. They are expounded in relation to the aggregate (*skandha*) of form in the two most famous sentences of the *Heart Sutra* (*prajñāpāramitāhṛdaya*), which also form the basis of the Mahayana doctrine of the two truths (conventional and ultimate): “Form is empty; emptiness is form. Emptiness is not other than form; form also is not other than emptiness” (Gyatso 2001, 208).

⁶⁰ *Heart of Wisdom* (2001) is Gyatso’s commentary to the *Heart Sutra*.

Soon after returning to Canada and starting a master's in theoretical physics, Jeff started attending Kadampa meditation classes and married his long-term girlfriend in the same year. Not long after the birth of his first child he developed an aspiration to ordain: "I just didn't want to do anything else but Dharma. I really didn't. I just wanted to go on retreat; I wanted to hide in a cave." He and two other married men with ordination aspirations approached their local NKT teacher who arranged for them all to meet with Geshe Kelsang at the following summer festival. Jeff paraphrased the NKT guru's message to them: "I won't refuse you ordination, but you need to understand it will look a little odd that an ordained person is walking out of a house with his children and his wife. With children it sends a funny message to people. But I'm not going to say 'no you can't get ordained.' I want you to think about it." Back in Canada after the festival Jeff consulted again with his Resident Teacher:

My teacher said "If you take the bodhisattva vow seriously, for all intents and purposes you're ordained; it's effectively the same." That's what I decided to do. That was it; there's no need to ordain. Geshe-la definitely gave me the impression that he didn't want people to go off on retreat; he didn't want people to upset their lives; he really wanted us to make it work in the world. And I took those words to heart; I think that's what I did. I really wanted to meet Geshe-la's vision; that's what I decided to do. I just decided I was going to take my bodhisattva vows really seriously.

When I asked him if he would consider ordaining in the future, Jeff told me that he *has* been ordained *in his mind* since receiving the above counsel from Gyatso and his Resident Teacher in the late 1990s, and that "ordained or not ordained I'm not going to change my life just by wearing robes."

After being guided to the NKT guru by a solitary Tibetan yogi-monk who encouraged Jeff's world-renouncing aspiration, that aspiration eventually led Jeff to ask Gyatso for ordination,

which he (and Jeff's Canadian Resident Teacher) *discouraged* in favour of a commitment to integrate the internal life of a bodhisattva with the external life of a householder. At the time of our interview Jeff's two children were about to leave the nest. He reflected on the evolution of his renunciation practice over twenty-five years:

Back in my twenties my idea was to abandon the world, like in a very physical sense. So over the years my notion of renunciation has definitely changed. I had a very ascetic, almost Hindu approach to it. ... I think the gift in our tradition (and I've seen other traditions) is that Geshe-la has very clearly spelled out that renunciation is a mindset. He clarified what renunciation actually is, as opposed to being an overt abandonment of things in a very three-dimensional, inherently existent world. It may start off like that, but when you study Geshe-la long enough you realize it is a psychological attitude; it is a mindset that one takes on board. ... Geshe-la has a dream, and that's what I'm trying to do – satisfy that dream of his. He wants us to be in the world, and he wants us to practice renunciation and bodhicitta, and do whatever we can to help people around us.

Mirroring the choice he confronted as a young father, Jeff's retrospective re-evaluation of authentic renunciation from external world-abandonment to internal samsara-abandonment appears to prioritize the mental discipline of a bodhisattva over the behavioural discipline of a monk. Not only did Gyatso's teachings gradually lead Jeff to such a psychologized, bodhicitta-informed renunciation praxis in the context of lay life; this chapter demonstrates that Gyatso's unique reformulation of Geluk ordination vows also enjoins NKT *monastics* to prioritize the internal samsara-abandonment of a bodhisattva over the external world-abandonment of *vinaya*-abiding monks and nuns – in Jeff's words, “to be in the world, and ... to practice renunciation and bodhicitta.” After charting Gyatso's Mahayana reconceptualization of pre-Mahayana monastic ordination, I describe a broader orthodoxy among my informants which affirms Jeff's view that “there's no need to ordain” by positing that since authentic renunciation is “a mindset,” lay and monastic lifeways are equally effective contexts for escaping samsara.

First, this chapter extends the previous chapter's analysis of the NKT's missionizing strategy of combining this-worldly promotion with other-worldly pedagogy to this strategy's role in the constitution of KMC communities comprised of visitors, patrons, and providers. Based on interviews and participant observation, I offer a commitment-based typology of religious actors at KMC North and South who have "gone deeper" than visitor status by taking up one or more of five increasingly committed positions.

Within this typology of NKT adherents, I argue that monastics and centre managers are the NKT's clerical world- or household-renouncers. Only monastics and managers embrace a religious abandonment of specific worldly pleasures (sex and wealth, respectively) within institutionally enforced disciplinary regimes which constitute their roles as providers (versus patrons) of Gyatso's Dharma. For this reason, I contend that the Gelukpa monastic's "renunciation of the twin household processes of [economic] production and [sexual] reproduction" (Mills 2003a, 74) has been bifurcated in the NKT between monastics (the focus of this chapter) and missionary managers (the focus of Chapter 5), who are each semi-renouncers.

After outlining these typologies of commitment and renunciation, the rest of this chapter examines the life of ordained NKT monastics. The second section identifies psychologized generalization as the hermeneutic principle guiding Gyatso's reform of the *Mūlasarvāstivāda Vinaya*, and the removal of rules constraining the economic activity of NKT monastics as his most impactful reform. Section three examines interview data collected from lay and ordained members of KMC North and South concerning the relationship between renunciation and ordination. I argue that Gyatso's removal of most of the *Mūlasarvāstivāda* monk's behavioural

proscriptions dovetails with an emic critique of outer world- or household-renunciation (*pravrajyā*) in favour of inner, aspirational samsara-renunciation (*niḥsaraṇa*), which, by equalizing the soteriological horizons of laity and monastics, effectively terminates the traditional Buddhist lay/monastic merit economy and raises the problem of justifying ordination.

i. Therapy and Soteriology in NKT Doctrine and Praxis

The previous chapter argued that while NKT promotional materials are modernist and therapeutic, pedagogical materials in NKT texts and classes are generally more traditionalist and soteriological. Charles S. Prebish and Martin Baumann suggest that similar repackaging has always been a part of Buddhism's creative adaptation to changing cultural markets: "[J]ust as in Asia, the dissemination of Buddhist concepts to a broader clientele took place when the practical and this-worldly elements (called the 'integration of Buddhism') became emphasized" (2002, 3). In his discussion of "practical benefits in Buddhist history," Jeff Wilson points out that such processes of cultural integration engender processes of religious reconfiguration: "when moving out of northern India into a large number of culturally distinct Asian regions, Buddhism was aided in its penetration of new societies by long-term processes of creative adaptation ... that allowed Buddhism to provide concrete benefits that each new culture desired" (2014, 4).

It is the Tibetan tulku's perceived mastery over world-conditioning chthonic spirits more than his perceived defeat of samsara-causing mental afflictions which has traditionally constituted the basis of his most valuable ritual services for ordinary Tibetan monks and laity: their unsubjected 'worldly desires' for alleviation of "the very real and pragmatic concerns of

everyday social life” (Mills 2003a, 244) demand the (apotropaic) practical benefits of spirit subjugation more urgently than (kammatic) merit accumulation or (nibbanic)⁶¹ samsara liberation. Troubled more by mental forces than chthonic ones, non-Tibetan patrons in North America, on the other hand, generally seek the concrete, practical benefit of stress subjugation more than spirit subjugation. And the pre-eminent means of accomplishment is meditation: “Americans on the whole are disinclined to look to Buddhist magical items and ritual services for their benefits—instead, they turn to Buddhist meditation, which more easily fits into prevailing scientific worldviews” (Wilson 2014, 5-6).

North American NKT centres could not pay the bills, let alone expand, without attracting admission-paying non-Buddhists to drop-in General Program meditation classes through the promotion of meditation’s this-worldly, therapeutic benefits. Posters distributed around a small Canadian city by a local KBC, for example, advertised “real solutions to daily problems: breathing meditations to overcome stress and anxiety; overcoming the minds of anger and frustration; developing the inner wealth of patience” (Avalokiteshvara Kadampa Buddhist Centre 2018). Three case studies in Chapter 3, however, demonstrated that the NKT’s promotion of such culturally desired benefits was generally conducted in collaborative service of the promotion of *other*-worldly goals that were *new* to the audiences of NKT books and classes: the happiness of future lives and liberation from cyclic rebirth. Unlike the more typically detraditionalized, demythologized, and psychologized Buddhist modernisms of teachers like Chögyam Trungpa, Thich Nhat Hanh, and the Dalai Lama, NKT missionizing on the whole appears to emphasize Buddhism’s this-worldly practical benefits *less than* its other-worldly

⁶¹ The categories of apotropaic, kammic, and nibbanic come from Spiro’s (1982) analysis of Burmese Buddhist goals.

soteriological benefits. Both are on offer in KMC drop-in General Program classes and Gyatso's books (e.g., *Modern Buddhism* and *What is Meditation?*), but the other-worldly benefits receive greater emphasis.

To some degree, therefore, Christopher Hiebert's theory of a "concentric institutional model" adopted by many Tibetan "export" lamas "to adapt their teachings to Western audiences while, at the same time, preserving and propagating a largely unaltered 'traditional' core of practice and teachings" provides an apt model to describe NKT missionizing. In Hiebert's model, "the 'outer' rings comprise more 'secular,' accessible, and audience-specific modes of practice and instruction, while more 'traditional' practices – requiring greater experience and commitment – form the stable 'inner' rings" (2016). In the NKT's version of this model, the outer, exoteric, more secular rings are relatively thin, and function largely to *attract* visitors who are then rather quickly introduced to the inner, more demanding, doctrine-bound teachings and practices. This entails a synthesis of monastic and missionary imperatives: KMCs concede to "worldly" audience demands in order to spread Gyatso's Dharma to new and expanding markets whilst carrying out their primary mission to produce renouncers uninterested in "worldly concerns."

Gellner's hierarchical model of soteriological and this-worldly religious action supplements Hiebert's concentric model of exoteric and esoteric teachings:

Theravada Buddhism is a soteriology which tolerates limited instrumental use of its resources on condition that the cognitively orthodox explanation is retained. Newar Buddhism is a soteriology which *positively encourages* social and instrumental ritual and belief, provided that they remain within a framework which gives salvation the highest value. (1992, 345)

In NKT texts and public teaching classes, Chapter 3 identified positive encouragement of meditation's this-worldly benefits (temporary inner peace) provided within a framework which gave the permanent inner peace of nirvana the highest value. And yet in some ways NKT missionizing seems closer to Gellner's account of Theravada than Newar Buddhism since its promotion of this-worldly benefits appears more concessionary than constitutive, more pragmatically tolerated for the purpose of audience-attraction than positively valued as meaningful spiritual activity. In a teaching on renunciation at the NKT's 2006 Fall Festival in upstate New York, Gyatso taught that a life lived out of interest in this life alone is a wasted one, and that a meaningful life is one lived out of interest in future lives:

Because we like to enjoy this life alone, so we will use our human life for just this one single short life. Therefore we waste our human life. If we understand there are future lives and the suffering of future lives then we can prepare for freedom using this present life. So we can prevent our human life from being wasted. We can use it in a meaningful way and will bring benefit to us and others for a long time.

Yet the vast majority of General Program publicity, and usually at least the preliminary content of General Program pedagogy, is explicitly aimed at accomplishing the temporary happiness of this one life. Wilson has noted that American Buddhist lineages not traditionally interested in meditation (e.g., Buddhist Churches of America) have since the mindfulness boom strategically integrated "mindfulness" rhetoric and practices into their missionizing strategies (Wilson 2014, 188-189). In a similar way, a glossy handbill advertised a Saturday workshop at KMC North titled "Mindfulness for a Happy Life" and promised "practical methods to overcome negative habits of mind and become more positive, making our daily life truly happy, satisfying and meaningful" (Kadampa Meditation Centre North d).

Gellner's contrast between Mahayana Buddhism and "the medieval English church as characterized by Keith Thomas (1978)" helpfully characterizes Buddhist and Christian institutions' instrumental acceptance of individuals' this-worldly aspirations *for the sake of the religion's popular acceptance*:

According to Thomas [the medieval English church] was basically salvation orientated, but tolerated magic in the form of miracles and holy sites on the grounds that they increased devotion and encouraged conversion. It was hostile, however, to what it categorized as superstition, which effectively meant magic not controlled by the Church (55). Mahayana Buddhism equally accepts miracles, holy sites, and magical acts in order to draw as much lay religious activity as possible into the Buddhist sphere, but it lacks the negative and condemnatory concept of superstition in the sense of 'false and heretical belief about the empirical world'. There is no religious duty to combat and suppress erroneous expectations. Rather, there is an important, ideologically central, scriptural charter for encouraging faith in the Buddha, Dharma, and Sangha, by whatever means necessary, including making promises and assumptions which are true only in that they lead to salvation. This is the doctrine of 'skill in means'. (1992, 345-346)

The NKT's deployment of this-worldly benefits in promotional and preliminary pedagogical materials can thus be interpreted as the 'skillful means' (*upāya-kauśalya*) of a prophetic religious movement striving to save as many people as possible from the swamp of samsara. In texts and teachings surveyed in Chapter 3, breathing meditation's mundane benefit of temporary inner peace is deployed as a supportive stepping stone to renunciation meditation's supramundane benefit of permanent inner peace. When I asked an American Resident Teacher whether one can be a Kadampa Buddhist without practicing renunciation, she replied:

Not for long I think, once you get into Kadampa Buddhism. Maybe you come in because you want peace, you want to meditate, it's cool, something like that; but I think if you're in it very long you want to attain liberation, or you drop out if you think that you can't possibly make progress in that; you'll drift away. Renunciation as I understand it is something that becomes more and more central. I mean I'm sure there are people who come to the General Program classes who really are not

interested in liberation, are just interested in a peaceful mind, a good experience, relaxing, and so forth. And that's where they're at; that's fine.

There is no duty in NKT missionizing to combat newcomers' worldly concerns, only a "scriptural charter" for spiritual development that leads to a soteriology which ultimately demands disinterest in such concerns. Of course this can be a thorny trajectory for visitors who initially at least have little to no belief or interest in permanent inner peace.

Chapter 1 asked whether Coleman's claim that "[t]he new Buddhism takes the path of liberation that was preserved and refined by countless generations of Asian monks and offers it up to anyone who is interested" (2001, 13) accurately describes New Kadampa Buddhism. Chapter 3 has shown this to be the case. In the NKT, increased lay access to the Buddhist practice of meditation, traditionally considered the reserve of monastics, *is* being combined with increased lay access to the traditionally monastic Buddhist teaching of renunciation. At KMC North's drop-in meditation classes I identified a siphoning of commitment effected through the interaction between a broad promotional net advertising Buddhist meditation's therapeutic, culturally desired benefits and the delivery of more soteriological, culturally discontinuous Buddhist teachings. The result is a fairly narrow rate of visitor retention in KMC General Program classes combined with a small percentage who choose to "go deeper." The remainder of this dissertation aims to describe and interpret the community of individuals at KMC North and South who *have*, to some and varying extents, chosen to "go deeper." These practitioners contrast with those content with informal membership in the diffuse and fluctuating community of Buddhist sympathizers who prefer to remain in the therapeutic foyer of NKT Buddhism, casually attending General Program classes with no wish for greater religious commitment or institutional involvement.

In Newar Buddhism, according to Gellner, “[t]he opposition [between soteriology and thisworldly religion] is expressed ‘on the ground’ as the difference between types of religious specialists” (1992, 345). Broadening the picture from religious specialists (i.e., providers) to religious actors (i.e., patrons and providers), I offer a typology of religious actors and their patterns of religious action in the North American NKT. At the time of our interview or at some point prior, each of my forty-two interviewees held at least one (and often several) of the following progressively committed positions at one or more NKT centres: member; volunteer; resident; monastic; manager.

Members have already been defined (see Chapter 2). Volunteers are practitioners who regularly offer their labour to a NKT centre, from changing water bowl shrine offerings to teaching a General Program class. Volunteers are almost always also at least supporting members. Due to their formal study program commitments alone, however, I would describe a member of Teacher Training Program who does not volunteer as more involved in their centre and more committed to NKT Buddhism than a practitioner who is not a centre member but volunteers an hour or two a week. Residents are practitioners who reside at a NKT centre, whose commitments generally include some volunteering (e.g., four hours per week at KMC North) and study program attendance. Residents either pay rent or receive accommodation as part of remuneration for full-time employment as a centre manager. Monastics are practitioners who take the vows, adopt the name (Tibetan or Sanskrit), and wear the Tibetan-style robes of an ordained person; ordination entails no membership, volunteer, or residency commitment. Managers are practitioners who work full-time for a NKT centre in exchange for a subsistence stipendiary income.

For reasons outlined below, I argue that the last two religious actors – monastics and managers – are the NKT’s clerical renouncers. As respectively symbolic and practical *providers* of Gyatso’s Dharma whose public religious praxes entail respectively sexual and economic austerities, monastics and managers can be distinguished from the other three types of practitioner. As the chief *patrons* of Gyatso’s Dharma (in the sense of committed client-supporters, not casual customers) whose public religious praxes do not entail austerities, KMC members, volunteers, and residents can be described as the NKT’s lay “householders.”

Before theorizing the NKT’s householder/renouncer relation in this way, I will survey providers’ individual paths of increasing (and sometimes decreasing) commitment, measured by institutional involvement, in order to flesh out a portrait of the concentric *visitor* → *patron* → *provider* structure of KMC communities. Of sixteen providers interviewed – ten managers (seven lay, three monastic), five former managers (four lay, one monastic), and one monastic non-manager – eight first encountered NKT Buddhism at a local General Program class, three through parents in childhood or adolescence, two via Gyatso’s books, one at a local puja, one on a working visit, and one via roadside centre signage. I will now let two of these individuals (a non-manager nun and a lay former manager) describe their journeys of commitment in their own words.

A sixty-six-year old former veterinarian who was raised “sort of” Anglican and never married, Kelsang Karuna spent her adult life on a central Canadian acreage surrounded by animals before commencing a path of increasing NKT commitment that saw her join Foundation Program

within a year of her first General Program class, ordain a year later, and eventually take up residence at KMC North where she had been living and studying on Teacher Training Program for eight years at the time of our interview. Karuna replied to my question “When and how did you become involved with Kadampa Buddhism?”

I was in a car accident in 1982 that rendered me disabled, but I didn't get a diagnosis until 2000; it's fibromyalgia, chronic fatigue, and other arthritic things. So I had sought out a lot of complementary approaches to try and improve my health that included getting involved in therapeutic touch, and I became a therapeutic touch practitioner, which has Buddhist influence in it. So I was introduced to formal meditation because of therapeutic touch, but over the years things sort of fell away and I forgot. My mom was ill and she died of cancer in 2001; and I was really upset about. I was raised by a single parent so she was it; I was becoming orphaned. And I knew I needed to get back to meditation, sort of to save myself, because I wasn't in a good place. I had taught at a college in a nearby town, little courses that I had developed on complimentary health care for animals, so in the college calendar where my course was listed there was a meditation thing that popped up for several times running. It was called “The Art of Meditation,” and it was taught by a Canadian Buddhist monk. I didn't pay it serious attention until the August after my mom died, and I thought I really need to do this. So I booked. It was a day course. It was September 15th, and just the way it worked out it was four days after 9/11, so it was a very charged time; death awareness wasn't too difficult to come by. I went to the course and as soon as I started hearing it I just knew I had to get involved in this; and I bought books. I started with General Program as well as parachuted into the quasi-Foundation Program class the teacher was leading in a nearby town; the book was *Living Meaningfully, Dying Joyfully*, which considering where I was with my mom's death was just sort of the perfect thing to get into. So it had a feeling like coming home, to me. Everything made sense. The things that I had found meaningful in the various other modalities that I'd got involved in were all in this; they were all here. So I got involved then, and two years later I ordained.

Asked to describe her path to ordination, Karuna responded:

Religion had not played much of a role in my life. My family was more intellectual. They revered scholastic achievement and self-reliance and that sort of thing, and sort of saw religion as weakness. It was actually within six weeks of my getting involved in the tradition that this thought starting appearing to my mind that I should ordain; I even had some dreams about it too; things were appearing to my mind. And I was like “Whoa not me! I'm not a candidate for that!” But it just wouldn't go away. I

didn't tell anybody for a long, long time, but it just became clear. I mean Geshe-la appeared to me in my dreams, so it was like this is what I'm supposed to do. Eventually I told my teacher. Having vows was spooky to me, like being tied down in some way; so my teacher gave precepts at the first summer festival I was at. He sort of snuck a few of us off into a corner and gave us precepts, so that we could then do it on our own, which is taking vows for a day. It's not really like being ordained for a day but it has some characteristics of what that would be like. You take vows for the day and it includes not eating after lunch, so there's sort of a fasting element to it, as well as not engaging in a number of other activities. So I did precepts monthly for a year, and I loved it. I also took the lay *pratimoksa* vows before I ordained. And my teacher at the time encouraged me to go to Highest Yoga Tantra empowerment, so in actual fact I'd taken refuge vows, bodhisattva vows, and tantric vows without fully understanding any of them, before I ordained. And I was continuing to go to classes, and I was finding it as meaningful, if not more so, than ever; so finally with my teacher's help I wrote a letter to Geshe-la about ordination, and was accepted, and went off to the next summer festival and got ordained.

To my question "Why did you move in to a Dharma centre?" Karuna replied:

Well it was *strongly* encouraged. Early on after I was ordained my teacher had the National Spiritual Director at the time come to where I was living on the farm, and she just came through the front door and took strips off of me for living that way and being a nun, and said there was absolutely no way that I should be living like that as a nun; I need to get rid of my animals and sell the farm; I need to move into a Centre.⁶² I was blindsided by it, because I had talked over all these things with my teacher before I ordained, and was told it wasn't an issue. If it was clear to me that it was an issue I probably would have put off ordination, because I had the farm and I had the animals, and my commitment was the animals were with me for life. My one mare lived to be thirty-four, which is longer than a lot of marriages. That was early on. And then I was encouraged by two different Deputy Spiritual Directors to do the same, but again I was not going to do anything as long as the horses were alive. And since it was contrary to what I was told prior to ordaining I didn't figure that – I mean it troubled me deeply that I was being pressured, but I felt, anyway. My horses died, and eventually all the goats died, because they do, because everything dies. And then we had the Dorje Shugden demos in 2008, and Geshe-la sent out a letter for the first one at Colgate University encouraging us to go. So I did; I felt compelled to go; and then there were two weeks in the summer in New York, ending up in Madison, Wisconsin. I went to the week in Wisconsin; I had a sick cat so I couldn't make it to the first week in New York. But things were happening in that time

⁶² See section iii. for a discussion of informal monastic residential expectations suggested by such admonishment.

period; people were phoning me up wanting to know if I wanted to sell the farm. ... I was in touch with my teacher and I said “as a disabled person I need a whole lot of things,” and he thought it could all be accommodated here; we went through all the things that I needed. So I stayed here for the nights before and after the Wisconsin demos, and then for ten days to try and get a feel for the place. And I just felt I was needed here, this strange feeling that I was needed here. And I went home and signed the papers. There were a lot of challenges. But it seemed – I believed the Buddhas were involved. That was in December 2008 and I’ve been here ever since.

Finally, asked whether she had ever considered holding a sponsored position at a NKT centre, Karuna told me: “Early on in being involved in the tradition my teacher was very encouraging about people progressing and becoming teachers and things, but I remember when it really hit me that because of my health I will never be able to be a Resident Teacher; and I was very sad.”

Peter, a seventy-two year old retired businessman and divorcee with a bachelor of economics and two adult children, was a lay Teacher Training Program member and volunteer at KMC South whom at the time of our interview had scaled back his voluntarism since his time as Administrative Director while the centre was being built. Raised Roman Catholic, Peter had “tried all different sorts of Protestant religions, tried atheism, tried to be agnostic; I couldn’t prove there was no god; I couldn’t prove there was a god; then I found Buddhism.” Within a year of meeting the NKT he was a KMC resident; a year later he was a sponsored manager. I asked Peter “When and how did you become involved with New Kadampa Buddhism?”

I had my petroleum distribution business, and it collapsed; I lost all my money. And I was able to scrape together the ability to buy a house with no down payment up in New York state at the end of the railroad line – I wanted to be able to commute to NYC but I wanted to be far from NYC. So I bought a small house in Glen Spey and I meditated every day on my own for many years. I used to meditate in the woods with my dog. The meditation I did was to stand near a river or a creek so I could hear the rushing water, and then I would imagine myself mixing in with nature. As time went on it got deeper and deeper until one day the flow of energy from the ground came right up through my body and almost lit me up like a light, and I got scared because I

didn't know what I was doing. This was all made up in my mind; I had no guidance. So I got in my car and I decided to drive home, and I was kind of shaken, and as I went up the road I saw a sign two miles from my house on the main road that said "Kadampa Meditation Centre - Open House - All Welcome." I made a U-Turn, went in, saw this huge temple and I just couldn't believe it. There was a nun up there who I got to know later on, and I told her that I was interested in meditation but I didn't want any of this Buddhist stuff. So for a year I started going to classes there, rejecting Buddha's teachings but just working on the meditation, and after a while the teachings started to seep in. I rejected the refuge vows many times; of course I didn't want to take refuge in Buddha because I wasn't a Buddhist. And then finally one time after starting to go to classes, I really felt that these teachings were true and pure; then I took the refuge vows. That was about twelve to fourteen months in. I first visited in about 2007. After a little over a year there I rented my house out because I didn't think I could afford it, and decided to travel. And I decided to come down here because I had a high school friend that lived down here. I was walking down Main Street looking for my friend and I ran into Jason, a Kadampa from Glen Spey. And I said "Hey, what are you doing here?" He said he was administrator of KMC South; he'd just got down here two weeks ago, and he asked me if I would help him out for two weeks. And I did, and my car broke down, and then I had to stay another two, three weeks to pay for my car, and then that happened again twice – meantime I'm living in my van with my dog in the parking lot helping him. Then the KMC books were so messed up and I had such a good accounting background from being in business, so I told him I'd help him out with the treasury work, and the car broke down again, and he just told me after a while "Why don't you just move in? Somebody's moving out." So I became the treasurer. I straightened the books up and started to fall in love with the life. It was really a great life. And then I went to the tantric empowerment in 2009 in England and Geshe-la had his secretary bring Jason and I into her office and she said that Geshe-la was giving us the Dorje Shugden statues that are on the shrine here. They're very, very special statues; they're one of a kind. Geshe-la wanted them to go into a new temple, and wanted us to find a place and build a temple here. So Jason and I started, with Gen Prajna, looking and looking, and we finally found this location to build a temple. So Gen Prajna, Jason, and I, we built this temple. I was treasurer and then I became AD. I was living in there and paying rent and being the treasurer; I wasn't sponsored at the beginning. So I didn't move in for the money. But I did after a while run out of money; when Gen Prajna saw that I was struggling then they gave me a sponsorship. But I didn't ask for it. I was doing AD, treasurer, and running the café, and I got sick. So I gave up being AD after about eight months, so I just became treasurer. And then my daughter got sick on the other side of the country, and I really wanted to be with her, so I resigned; I moved out in 2013. If my daughter wasn't sick I probably would

have stayed. Right now I don't think I could do any sponsored job with my dog. I mean if they allowed me to I probably would.

I asked Peter if (and if so how) his practice of Buddhist renunciation has affected his work and/or family life:

Well right now I'm driving for Uber. It's really fantastic because some days I'll do twenty-five rides, some days I'll do ten, but I try to connect with everybody in the car, without proselytizing. I try to find something in them that I can talk to them about. And if they can open up to me and I can give them a couple words of wisdom, or some people I actually give them the address of the Kadampa centre [laughs]; but it has to be so smooth that they don't feel like I'm pushing something. It's like they almost asked for it and I had an answer for them; that's how I approach it. It doesn't happen every day; sometimes it happens two, three times a day. But in work I try to find out some way to get a point to people that attachments are meaningless. So sometimes they'll say "Well what brought you down here? Why are you driving for Uber?" And I'll say "I lost my business. I paid the bank back the six million dollars; I gave the wife back the five-bedroom house and twenty acres and I got the best deal." "Yeah what's that?" I say "I got the van and the dog." "What'd you do with the van and the dog?" I say "I came down here, met a guy who needed help in a Buddhist centre; I ended up living in a Buddhist temple for five years." "No kidding! What was that like?" I say "If you ever lose all of your money or have any troubles, go to a Buddhist centre. They teach you that material things mean nothing." So that's a stick I give them, a story; I try to let everyone know that material things mean nothing; happiness is inside. I'd say I'm the happiest I've ever been! As far as my family, my kids, I just try to give my children a good example. They knew what I had. I raised them with money; they went to private schools; I paid for their education. They fooled around with me all over the place in my airplanes. And now they just see me living in a tiny little house and they see I'm very happy. So I'm an example saying all the big houses and all the airplanes I had, they didn't mean anything; I'm still a happy person.

For Karuna, the lack of quietude and privacy which accompanied urban residency at KMC North made it a far more demanding commitment than ordination, which aligned more naturally with her ethical principles and introverted social inclinations. For Peter, the high demands of sponsored residency at KMC South seemed part and parcel of a good life: "I found it extremely rewarding, that I had the skills that I could help the temple out. I never felt anything negative

about it. I just enjoyed every part of it.” He was confident that ordination, on the other hand, was not his path: “When I was AD here a couple people asked me ‘Are you going to get ordained? You’re working so hard.’ I said ‘There’s only one thing stopping me from ordination – the vows’ [laughs]. You know, I like sitting with my son having a beer, watching the football game. I like squeezing a woman every once in a while.” Peter assured me that he had no shortage of lay exemplars in the NKT, Kadam Morten and Kadam Lucy foremost among them, whom he described as “such sincere practitioners.”

Of sixteen providers interviewed, thirteen (81%) did not reside in the same municipality in which they first met the NKT at the time of our interview, twelve (75%) did not reside in the same region, and five (31%) did not reside in the same country (all of whom first met the NKT in Europe). Such geographical transience suggests that the movement’s North American infrastructure enables practitioners to easily move between centres in different regions (see Chapter 2), as well as that the lives of NKT missionary managers are often characterized by a high degree of mobility (see Chapter 5).

Aside from one practitioner who encountered the NKT in early childhood in the U.K. thirty years before our interview (five years before the movement’s arrival in North America), the remaining fifteen providers had been involved with the movement for periods ranging between six and twenty-one years at the time of our interview. The following table displays the ages at which my provider interviewees (identified by pseudonyms used henceforth) adopted the specific patron and provider positions listed above.

Name	Encounter	Patron Positions			Provider Positions		Encounter → Provider
		Member	Volunteer	Resident	Monastic	Manager	
Heather	0	?	?	0	n/a	26	10 years*
James	15	21	21	21	n/a	22	6 years*
Nick	16	23	23	23	n/a	38	22 years*
Prajna	16	17	17	23	22	23	6 years
Cameron	18	19	19	22	25 [to 27]	31	7 years
Justine	23	24	23	33	n/a	33 [to 35]	10 years
Leah	25	26	26	29	n/a	29 [to 40]	4 years
Loten	25	26	28	31	32	33	7 years
Sangye	27	28	28	28	30	29 [to 31]	2 years
Eva	29	31	31	41	n/a	41	12 years
Drolma	32	33	33	33	36	38	4 years
Maggie	34	35	36	38	n/a	38	4 years
Michael	48	49	50	50	n/a	54 [to 58]	6 years
Karuna	51	52	58	58	53	n/a	2 years
Sue	55	?	?	n/a	n/a	62	7 years
Peter	64	65	65	65	n/a	66 [to 67]	2 years
AVERAGE	30	32	33	33	33	38	7 years
MEDIAN	26	27	28	31	31	33	6 years

* These informants are “cradle” Kadampas who encountered the NKT in childhood or adolescence through their parents’ involvement. I have measured the length of their pathways to provider status from the age of sixteen.

Fig. 7. Interviewee age spreads from NKT encounter to NKT ordination and/or employment

These biographical statistics suggest that the North American NKT’s most committed core of practitioners met the movement fairly early in their lives and subsequently increased their institutional involvement fairly quickly. On average, they encountered NKT Buddhism at age thirty (among all providers), ordained at thirty-three (among six monastics), and began working full-time for the organization at age thirty-eight (among fifteen managers).

I suggested above that the NKT’s version of Hiebert’s concentric institutional model for the adaptation-cum-conservation of Vajrayana Buddhism entails a synthesis of missionary and monastic imperatives whereby KMCs concede to and *make use of* audience-specific “worldly

concerns” for promotion and recruitment whilst working to train converts *out of* such concerns via teachings and meditations on the need to renounce samsara and its deceptive pleasures. Chapter 3 demonstrated that this synthesis manifests in textual and ritual NKT missionizing strategies that combine this-worldly promotion and other-worldly pedagogy. This chapter and the next argue that the same synthesis of missionary and monastic imperatives also manifests institutionally in the interaction between the NKT’s expansionist business model and major monastic reform, *each of which fosters both* institutional expansion and individual renunciation. KMC managers are the focus of Chapter 5; NKT monastics are the focus of the remainder of this chapter.

ii. Mūlasarvāstivāda and Kadampa Vinayas

Mills summarizes the core socio-economic proscriptions of the Tibetan *Mūlasarvāstivāda Vinaya* code of monastic discipline as stipulating “the monk’s physical and social removal from ... activities of *agricultural production* ... [and] *reproductive activity*” (70). In the typically agrarian, non-monetary economies of the Tibetan cultural region, a monk’s removal from agricultural production placed him in a position of “productive dependence” (66) which defined the system of lay/monastic exchange described in Chapter 1. NKT monks and nuns are not discouraged from the production and accumulation of wealth in the same way. This removal of rules constraining the economic activity of NKT monastics may be the biggest difference between *Mūlasarvāstivāda* and NKT monastic codes, but many other rules have been jettisoned in Gyatso’s reduction of Geluk ordination vows from 253 (or 364 for nuns) vows to ten in his

formulation of a separate vinaya code for NKT monks and nuns, the *New Ordination Handbook of the Kadampa Tradition* (NKT o).

This twelve-page booklet – the contents of which Gyatso’s introduction encourages ordained practitioners to memorize (suggesting continuity with traditional use of the *Mūlasarvāstivāda Vinaya* in the form of a mnemonic digest) – has two main sections: “The Ordination Vow” and “The Practice of the Ordination Vow.” The first section contains a single-page ritual text recited three times in the presence of an ordained Preceptor by individuals seeking ordination. The second much longer section contains a fairly brief explanation of “ten commitments of ordination”: to abandon killing, stealing, lying or cheating, sexual activity, taking intoxicants, and engaging in meaningless activities, to practice contentment, reduce desire for worldly pleasures, maintain the commitments of refuge, and to practice the three higher trainings of moral discipline, concentration, and wisdom. This is followed by a more extensive explanation of the “four main practices of the ordination vow: (1) the practice of renunciation; (2) the practice of higher moral discipline; (3) the practice of higher concentration; and (4) the practice of higher wisdom.” In this context, Gyatso defines renunciation as the “intense fear of the unbearable suffering of the endless cycle of impure life, samsara” which should then motivate the ordained practitioner’s practice of “the actual path to liberation – the three higher trainings” (NKT o, 7).

According to an official website, “The global NKT’s 700 monks and nuns have taken Pratimoksha ordination ... [whereby they] choose to follow a life bound by moral discipline so that they can focus on their spiritual development for the benefit of others” (NKT I). Another

official website suggests that, “The way of granting ordination was designed by Geshe Kelsang following the ancient Kadampa tradition. It is very simple and very practical” (NKT m). The NKT vinaya, the *New Ordination Handbook of the Kadampa Tradition*, thus contains the *Pratimoksha* (‘personal liberation’) discipline of NKT monks and nuns, which itself consists of the “ten commitments” and “four main practices” of ordination listed above.

Another official website defending NKT ordination justifies Gyatso’s dramatic reduction of monastic vows by arguing that the vinaya itself is a method of training the mind:

The purpose of the Vinaya (Tib. *dulwa*) is “to control [the mind]” through higher moral discipline, as this is the foundation for developing pure concentration (i.e. tranquil abiding), and in turn profound wisdom (i.e. superior seeing). While the first five Kadampa vows ... are common to all Vinaya lineages, the latter five ... are taken from the Mahayana *Perfection of Wisdom Sutra* and its commentaries such as Atisha’s Lamrim text *Lamp for the Path to Enlightenment*, which references Arya Asanga’s *The Bodhisattva Stages* (Skt. *Bodhisattvabhumi*) listing the six ‘branches’ or necessary conditions for attaining tranquil abiding, including:

1. little desire
2. contentment
3. no distracting activities
4. pure moral discipline
5. no distracting conceptions

These preparatory practices are methods of training the mind—methods of moral discipline. The very purpose of becoming ordained as a Buddhist monk or nun is to practice a moral discipline that enables one to achieve tranquil abiding. With tranquil abiding, one can attain superior seeing. With these three higher trainings—moral discipline, concentration and wisdom—one will attain liberation from samsara. ...

Yet some legalists still reject the latter five Kadampa ordination vows simply because they do not appear *verbatim* in the Vinaya or Pratimoksha Sutras. For example, they would say that, even though it is more succinct, the vow “to practice contentment” just isn’t to be found in traditional ordination texts.

The insistence that Kadampas should adhere strictly to the letter rather than the spirit of the vows is a case of not seeing the forest for the trees. For example, vow #31—to not get a new mat before six years are up—is obviously a particular instance of the more general principle to practice contentment. Recognizing and observing the ‘spirit’ or meaning of the individual precepts of the Vinaya is how the Kadampa ordination vows are to be understood and practiced.

When you read the 253 vows of a fully ordained monk ... you can ask yourself whether, in this modern age, it is actually possible to observe them to the letter? It is arguable whether there is one single monk on this planet who is even attempting to follow them all literally. (NKT c, square brackets in original)

For the NKT, Gyatso’s ordination model represents a socially and economically pragmatic but spiritually uncompromised modernization of the *Mūlasarvāstivāda Vinaya*: “[T]he vows of Kadampa ordination are to be regarded as a practical condensation of the essential meaning of the ordained vows. As such, we should look to see how the 253 vows of a Gelong [fully ordained monk], for example, are subsumed under the more broadly encompassing 10 vows” (NKT c). A subsequent chart, for example, subsumes the following eight traditional vinaya vows under the single NKT vow to abandon engaging in meaningless activities: sitting down heavily upon a roof of a building owned by the Sangha, watching a war, staying in a place of war for more than three nights, tickling with the fingers, playing in water, frightening a monk, hiding a personal belonging of a monk or nun, and digging the earth (NKT n).

In the same chart correlating the *Mūlasarvāstivāda* and NKT vows, the three *gelong* proscriptions most explicitly related to money – 35. touching gold and silver; 36. undertaking various activities in money; 37. obtaining profit through business – are listed as falling under the sixth NKT ordination vow: to practice contentment (NKT n). NKT monastics are not expected to follow the three *gelong* vows restricting money use because their vow to practice contentment is understood to contain the spiritual meaning of the material proscriptions. To be a good NKT

monk or nun, therefore, does not entail a renunciation of wealth. Gyatso's modernization of the vows has removed the economic proscriptions that created and maintained the monastic individual's productive dependence in the Tibetan context.⁶³ Free to participate as private individuals in their local secular economy, NKT monastics are effectively removed from the NKT's religious economy (as monastics). Monks and nuns receive no material support from the organization as a distinct class of practitioner; in this respect they have been replaced by missionary managers.

Ordained monastic and sponsored manager positions are often combined. When I asked Drolma, a Canadian nun and Resident Teacher, if she experienced her ordination and her sponsored position as related she responded: "Not really, because you could be ordained and work, and you can be lay and have sponsorship. I think a long time ago I sort of thought all ordained people are sponsored, but now I've seen so much of both that it really doesn't matter." Of the twelve monastics I met at KMC South and North, only six were sponsored. The other six supported themselves through outside employment or pension and/or disability income. I met non-sponsored NKT monks and nuns (and laity) who lived on very low incomes in shared rental accommodation, and others with property, cars, well-paid jobs or pensions, and even monastic spouses. A 1999 article on *SFGate* (a news website affiliated with the *San Francisco Chronicle*), "Seeking Nirvana in Ingleside," pithily describes one resident at a local NKT Centre who "has one foot in each world": "On weekdays, the UC-Santa Cruz grad jumps into his red Alfa Romeo

⁶³ This feature might not be so surprising in light of the numerous "exemptions, exclusions, [and] extenuations" (*anāpattis*) that the *Mūlasarvāstivāda Vinaya* makes for specific *Prātimokṣa* rules including those surrounding private wealth, which, Schopen argues, renders them "little more than 'fatherly advice'" (2004, 13). This appears to apply to Chinese-Canadian nuns at Calgary's Avatamsaka monastery where unlike mandatory precepts such as celibacy, the vow not to handle money or have personal possessions allows for "a variety of practical exceptions to the rule" (Verchery 2015, 366) including accommodations for nuns who entered the monastic order with children or for individuals with special health conditions (374, n.4).

convertible and drives to his job as a kindergarten teaching assistant at the Nueva School in Hillsborough. After work, this nice Jewish boy from Nevada City dons his robes and becomes Kelsang Tenzin, Buddhist monk” (Gurnon 1999).

While the explicit justification of the NKT’s modernization of Geluk monasticism is simplification for the sake of pragmatism, the movement’s “practical condensation” of the vinaya, particularly in the latter five NKT vows, appears to have been guided by a principle of generalization (observing the “spirit, or meaning” of the vows rather than the letter) via psychologization (observing vows pertaining to mental rather than physical and verbal activity). An important effect of such psychologization is the vinaya’s privatization – an increase in importance of the aspects of religious life that concern the individual over those that concern his or her broader corporate existence within society at large (Hart 1987, 321). Unlike the *Mūlasarvāstivāda Vinaya*, which “[b]ecause it codifies the laws of a community rather than guides individuals, ... deals only with external behaviours, not with internal mental states” (Dreyfus 2003, 34), the above defense of NKT ordination claims that “the purpose of the Vinaya ... is ‘to control [the mind]’” (NKT c, square brackets in original) in order to finally develop concentration and wisdom.

iii. The Meaning of Ordination

Discussing outer and inner forms of renunciation, Chapter 1 identified three essential historical points about Buddhist monasticism in general: orthopraxic vinaya adherence (i) does not necessarily *entail* nirvana-striving, but does (ii) theoretically *support*, and (iii) exoterically

represent nirvana-striving. In this section's analysis of New Kadampa Buddhists' views and experiences of monastic ordination's relationship to the practice of renunciation, I suggest that NKT ordination is believed to entail, support, and represent nirvana-striving.

Ordination as Aspiration of Renunciation

Whereas being a good *Mūlasarvāstivāda* monk does not entail striving for nirvana – but rather “abiding diligently by the numerous rules of the Vinaya” (Dreyfus 2003, 169) which “deals only with external behaviours, not with internal mental states” (34) – being a good monk or nun in the NKT *does* demand nirvana-striving, at least in theory: “The prerequisite for attaining liberation or full enlightenment, or even to be ordained as a monk or a nun, is the mind of renunciation” (Gyatso 1999, 123). Besides the removal of the vast majority of the *Mūlasarvāstivāda* monk's behavioural proscriptions, the formal integration of the aspiration of samsara-renunciation into NKT ordination is perhaps the most significant of Gyatso's vinaya reforms.

Ordination itself is conceived in the NKT as a primarily psychological transformation, from a motivation of attachment to one of renunciation. In his *New Ordination Handbook* Gyatso writes:

[W]hen we took ordination ... we changed three things: our mind, our physical aspect and our name. We changed our mind from attachment to this life to renunciation, wanting to liberate ourselves permanently from the sufferings of our countless future lives. ... We changed our physical aspect by wearing the three precious robes of ordination ... which indicate that our main practice in daily life is the three higher trainings, called 'higher' because they are motivated by renunciation. (NKT o, 9)

Gyatso’s New Kadampa Tradition holds up the “old Kadampa” disciple of Dromtönpa, Geshe Potowa, as a provider of historical precedent for a system of ordination based on private aspiration rather than public behaviour or identity:

The NKT ordination follows the tradition of ordination explained by Geshe Potowa and other Kadampa Geshes. According to this system, it is the level of renunciation that determines the level of ordination, not how many vows you hold. In NKT ordination, a monk or a nun becomes ‘fully ordained’ (Gelong or Bhikshu (monk), Gelongma or Bhikshuni (nun)) by holding the ten vows of ordination and having developed the realization of renunciation, that is, having developed the spontaneous wish for liberation such that it is ever-present in the mind, day and night” (NKT m).

Former NKT monk, Michael James Weaver (Kelsang Tsondru), elaborates in an unpublished 2015 paper:

[T]he number of vows taken is no indication of one’s mental state or intention. To emphasize this point, Geshe-la’s presentation of initial, novice, and full ordination is *the same* in terms of their number of vows. In Kadampa Buddhism, monastics of all levels of Pratimoksha ordination hold the same 10 vows, with either artificial, real, or spontaneous renunciation as the true distinguishing factor.

Level of Ordination	Tibetan Buddhism (Hinayana Vinaya)	Kadampa Buddhism (Mahayana Vinaya)
Initial (Tib. <i>Rabjung</i>)	Holds 8 vows	Has artificial renunciation
Novice (Tib. <i>Getsul</i>)	Holds 36 vows	Has real renunciation
Full (Tib. <i>Gelong</i>)	Holds 253 vows	Has spontaneous renunciation

In the Hinayana commentaries to the practice of the Vinaya, the way to control non-virtuous actions ... is by holding an increasing number of vows, whereas in Kadam Lamrim practice the way to control your mind is by increasing your scope of aspiration Thus, from a practical point of view, in the NKT-IKBU the three levels of Pratimoksha ordination are interpreted differently from the Tibetan traditions which still follow the Hinayana commentaries on this point. As Geshe Kelsang says, “Vinaya is not necessarily Hinayana, although Tibetans follow this tradition of interpretation.” (29)

The NKT and Weaver thus present Gyatso's ordination schema as a Mahayana vinaya, in contrast with the "*Hīnayāna*" ('lesser way') of the *Mūlasarvāstivāda*. Early in his essay Weaver attributes the following quotation to Gyatso: "According to the Hinayana Vaibhashika school, ordination vows are subtle physical form and disappear at the time of death, but according to the Mahayana, vows are a type of mind and we do not necessarily lose our ordination when we die" (2015, 2). By such a "Mahayana" logic of locating vows in the mind (as private aspiration rather than public behaviour), NKT monastics initially receive ordination as artificial renouncers motivated by artificial renunciation, with their level of ordination subsequently advancing as their motivation becomes more qualified. Receiving ordination (vows, robes, name, haircut) is thus a public ritual transformation believed to indicate the individual's motivation of renunciation (albeit artificial), while the gradual authentication of the individual's renunciation is a private, unmarked transformation.

Combined with the fact that NKT monastics do not reside in same-sex communities characteristic of typical Asian monasteries (Hori 2014, 180), but alone or in a KMC residence with other lay and ordained, male and female practitioners, the psychologized privatization of monastic moral discipline locates the responsibility for its measurement almost entirely in the conscience of the individual monk or nun. This can have the effect of removing an important element of traditional communal monasticism – the opportunity afforded by an absence of personal space for cenobitic cultivation via "mutual polishing" (184), whereby, at Calgary's Avatamsaka Monastery, for example, "[b]eing in the constant presence of at least one other nun helps ensure that nuns maintain their decorum at all times" (Verchery 2015, 367). Although a

similar dynamic does not generally characterize the social life of ordained NKT monastics, it does often characterize the experiences of NKT managers (see Chapter 5).

Weaver cites a number of Tibetan teachers (Geluk and non-Geluk) who insist that the personal aspiration of samsara-renunciation must accompany ritual ordination for the latter to be authentic (2015, 24-26). The words of Atiśa provide a notable pre-Geluk articulation of this position in

Precepts Collected from Here and There (Kadam Thorbu):

In short, staying in a monastery will not be helpful if you do not reverse your obsession for fine things and do not renounce the activities of this life. For if you do not cut off these inclinations, thinking that you can work for the aims of both this and future lives, you will perform nothing but incidental religious practice. This type of practice is nothing but hypocritical and pretentious practice done for selfish gain. (Wangyal 1995, 92-93)

Consistent with Atiśa's mentalist position is the psychological definition of renunciation as determination (*niḥsarāṇa*, Tib. *nges 'byung*) provided by Tsongkhapa in his *Great Treatise on the Stages of the Path to Enlightenment* (2000, 327; 366) and by the Fourth Panchen Lama, Tenpe Nyima, in his commentary to Tsongkhapa's short verse text *Three Principles of the Path*: "When you no longer desire the enjoyments of samsara and are nauseated by them as a prisoner is nauseated by his prison, you will produce a strong and ceaseless longing for liberation. This is the indication that you have attained the mind of renunciation" (Wangyal 1995, 156).

Gyatso upholds this psychological interpretation in his definition of renunciation as "the strong determination thinking, 'I must liberate myself permanently from the sufferings of my countless future lives'" (2013b, 19-20), or as "the spontaneous wish to attain liberation from samsara" (2003a, 46), and in his clarification that "Renunciation does not mean that we abandon our

friends, families and our human enjoyments. It is an inner realization and not a physical action”
(13). A consonant position was affirmed by nearly all my interviewees.⁶⁴

Loten, a monk and Resident Teacher at a small centre near KMC South, for example, articulated a widely held position among my interviewees that that there are many lay practitioners in New Kadampa society who are actively but secretly renouncing samsara:

I think you find many people who are not ordained who have strong renunciation. But you wouldn't necessarily know it from looking at them or their activities or their lifestyle. Everything may seem completely normal, but in their heart they're still focused on their future lives, on finding liberation from suffering; they understand samsara, and they want it to cease.

When I asked Loten how he thinks his Foundation Program students are faring with their training in renunciation, he suggested that the most important qualification for correct understanding is an understanding of the difference between outer (inauthentic) and inner (authentic) renunciation:

It seems to be very well received when I hear people discussing. It seems like they get it. In terms of their daily practice, I couldn't tell you. You'd have to ask them directly. ... I think the main thing to get is that it's not a renunciation of any external object. It's a renunciation of suffering of future lives and the cycle of samsara. And that's the biggest confusion that there can be around renunciation. When people hear the word 'renunciation' they think it means leave your job, leave your family, give up all your possessions, and go live in a cave. So when I say they get it, it means they understand that's not what renunciation is – that renunciation is actually the wish to leave samsara. And so that requires some understanding of what samsara is.

In a particularly staunch articulation of this position, Neil, a lay resident at KMC North, took issue with the phrasing of my research question in my interview information-consent form:

⁶⁴ The one practitioner who expressed a different view was my only interviewee who had been raised Buddhist in an Asian country prior to encountering the NKT in the United States. She explained renunciation as such: “There's two types: One is personal, like a layman's renunciation, like you're working towards ending the cycle, attaining enlightenment. ... And another is something like a monk; not only inner renunciation, but also physically, like you devote yourself totally to Buddhism, not having attachments to family.” This KMC South volunteer was also my only interviewee who described the NKT ordination vows as “too loose, not enough to lead devotees.”

From what I've read I think there's a misunderstanding of what renunciation is. You say "With no monasteries to institutionally support the Buddhist practice of renunciation, what does renunciation look and feel like in the NKT?" ... There is no such thing as institutionally supporting the practice of renunciation. So what renunciation is actually is a realization – that in order to achieve liberation what you need to do is abandon attachment to worldly enjoyment; and the key there is the word 'attachment.' ... It's renouncing the attachment to worldly enjoyment. Now what that is is a false view of what worldly enjoyment is. You get rid of that view, but you still can enjoy things. That's the thing. What I'm saying is that OK even though right now there's no monastery, you can still practice renunciation. ... It's a wish, and you can still achieve that wish anywhere you are, whether you're a layperson or an ordained person. And you don't need to go to an institution to do that. If your question is if there's no monasteries now, where do people go for their practice and teaching? – the answer is we now have the Dharma centres.

The relationship between individuals' practice of renunciation and their involvement at a local Dharma centre has been introduced above and will be examined more closely in Chapter 5.

Despite Neil's insistence that renunciation cannot by its *sui generis* nature as mind be bolstered by anything that is not mind (such as a monastic institution), later in our interview he had no problem describing ordination as supportive of renunciation for reasons that were both mental (vows) and physical (robes): "From what I hear about their vows and commitments, it prevents them from doing things that would increase the strength of their delusions. Like the things they wear, the robes and stuff like that, it reminds them of the path completely."

An important implication of the separation of samsara-renunciation from world-renunciation, particularly for New Kadampa monastics given their historically novel (at least in terms of formal vinaya sanction) freedom to produce and accumulate personal wealth, is that since one can theoretically possess wealth without possessing a mind of attachment toward it, wealth (or any other "worldly pleasure") is not necessarily an obstacle to samsara-renunciation. When I asked Sean, a lay father and entrepreneur at KMC South, to explain "worldly concerns," he

expressed this very point vis-à-vis wealth (combined with sensual and sexual pleasure) through recounting a parable he had heard years ago in India, which, he suggested captures “a theme that runs pretty deep in both Hindu and Buddhist Dharma”:

It’s the example of the sadhu who left his wooden shoes outside the palace of a guy who was eating grapes surrounded by naked women and looking out over his fields. And the sadhu was saying to this extravagant guru, “How can you be representing yourself as a spiritual realized being when you’re having sex with numerous beautiful women and you’re enjoying all the silks and finery?” So with that the guru started his fields and the whole town on fire through his magical powers. And as the flames became closer and closer and closer to this palace the sadhu ran out to grab his wooden shoes. And then through his magical powers the guru stopped the fire and said “You see, with all this I was willing to let it go; but you could not even abandon your wooden shoes.” So I’m not saying that I’m an extravagant guru, but there’s a lesson there that is I think *essential*. The lesson is attachment!

While Gyatso suggests that Buddha had no qualms with activities aimed at economic production (traditionally at least theoretically restricted to laity), he insists there is something wrong with expecting such actions to end one’s suffering: “Buddha did not encourage us to abandon daily activities that provide necessary conditions for living, or that prevent poverty, environmental problems, particular diseases and so forth. However, no matter how successful we are in these activities, we shall never achieve permanent cessation of such problems” (2013a, 65)

The strict internalization of Dharma also appears clearly in the Kadampa commitment of mind training (*blo sbyong*) to “Remain natural while changing your intention” (Gyatso 2000, 138), a phrase which I commonly heard spoken among my informants as a kind of motto for skilful modern Buddhist practice.⁶⁵ I would suggest that this “old Kadampa” principle constitutes a New Kadampa conception of correct practice that conflates, or at least posits a confluence between,

⁶⁵ An official website (NKT s) dedicated to “fighting the smear” that the NKT is fundamentalist cites Gyatso’s ordination reform as an example of the flexibility encouraged by this very commitment.

the meanings of “modern” and “Kadam.” Modern Buddhism is “the application of the Buddhist paths of compassion and wisdom to modern daily life” (NKT f), and Kadam Dharma “accords with people’s daily experience ... [and] cannot be separated from daily life” (Gyatso 2011, 22). The terms “modern” and “Kadam” equally connote the mixing of seemingly mundane, “daily” (i.e., lay) actions with supramundane Dharma instructions and insight.

As we have seen, however, the world-renunciation prescribed by the traditional Tibetan vinaya is behavioural, not psychological (Dreyfus 2003, 34). The *Mūlasarvāstivāda Vinaya*’s communalist codification of external behaviours seems to be precisely the tradition which the NKT’s vinaya reform aims to reverse, toward an ordination based primarily on internal mental states rather than external behaviours. The Kadampa *blo sbyong* commitment to “remain natural while changing your intention,” for example, is directly opposed to Sharf’s account of the early Buddhist sangha, for whom “liberation required ‘letting go,’ and letting go did not mean to merely adopt a particular attitude or psychological frame, however important such a frame may be. Rather, it necessitated a radical change in the way one lived” (2017, 209).

Connected to the NKT’s psychologization of the vinaya is a critique of unfelt, “empty” ritual, analogous to Protestant Christianity’s “new pietist turn inward, which liberated the modern individual from the external, ritual, and sacramental control of the church” (Casanova 1994, 51). It is hard to say whether Gyatso’s individualistic internalization of Geluk monasticism principally reflects an embrace of Protestant-influenced modernism – in a manner similar to Buddhist reformers before him (e.g., Anagarika Dharmapala, Taixu) who appropriated other Protestant principles (e.g., rationalism, activism) to reform their own Buddhist traditions – or a

revival of old Kadampa principles. Given his ambivalent attitude toward modernist adaptation of non-vinaya Geluk doctrine (see Chapter 3), I suspect Gyatso has seized upon a perceived confluence between his Kadampa prioritization of internal, personal signs of accomplishment (including those of ‘secret mantra’) over external, social ones, and the Protestant “pietist turn inward” so influential in Euro-North American liberal religion and spirituality.

The NKT vinaya’s accommodation of the Protestant ideal of freedom of individual choice appears to challenge Verchery’s claim (which assumes a cleavage between Western and Buddhist modes of subjectivity) that Buddhist monastic discipline necessarily rejects such a principle: “Unlike much Western discourse on personhood, we find that the kind of subjectivity cultivated through Buddhist monastic discipline is not premised on the primacy of the autonomous individual agent” (2015, 367). New Kadampa Buddhist monastic discipline appears to represent a compelling counter-example to this account derived from Verchery’s findings among Chinese-Canadian nuns in Calgary:

[T]he case of the Avatamsaka Monastery challenges us to consider modes of personhood in which the individual is not superior to the group, in which autonomy cannot be understood apart from obedience, and in which the private sphere of the individual is not valued over the demands of public decorum. (367-368)

I would suggest that by and large the case of NKT monasticism *does not* challenge us (or NKT monastics) to consider such communalist, anti-liberal modes of personhood.⁶⁶

Not unlike the Protestant critique of Catholic monasticism, nor unrelated to Gyatso’s view of the greater Geluk school’s degeneration (see Chapter 2), denunciation of “corrupt” Tibetan

⁶⁶ This argument pertains only to formally ordained NKT monastics. In Chapter 5, I will argue that NKT managers (monastic or lay) *rather than* NKT monastics adhere to an informal, *pseudo*-monastic disciplinary regime which does foster more typical “monastic” modes of subjectivity similar to those observed by Verchery at Avatamsaka.

monasticism is widespread in the NKT. In reference to Gyatso's monastic reform, a Canadian Resident Teacher told me: "You have to remember the context that Geshe-la came from, which was basically corrupt monasteries; where if you were a tulku, or a tulku's tutor, or could get a Geshe degree, you'd be guaranteed to live in great material comfort." I asked another Canadian Resident Teacher if she thought practicing renunciation is different in North American cities than in Asian monasteries, to which she replied:

I think that Geshe Kelsang has done something pretty amazing by making the practice be an internal practice. When you go to Thailand, you know, you walk along the beach and you see the monks and some of them would be smoking a cigarette [laughs], and they've got the trappings; they live in a monastery, but they're having a cigarette. Whereas for our ordained persons, we don't have the trappings, you know, maybe we're walking along the beach in a jeans and a T-shirt,⁶⁷ but we're like "I'm an ordained person so I can't break the rules." Because the support is an internal one, it's actually more substantial in a way. It's more real.

After recounting the parable about the sadhu's shoes, Sean reflected: "Letting go of my attachment and understanding emptiness, I believe, is more beneficial than trying not to get caught breaking the rules in a monastery. That's my feeling." Yet another Canadian Resident Teacher suggested: "If you have a monastery of 1500 monks, 500 will be pure practitioners, 500 will be layabouts, and 500 will be businessmen."

The NKT's privatization of monastic renunciation within the mind of the monk or nun fits an emic conception of NKT ordination as Mahayana rather than "Hinayana," aimed at producing world-reformers more than world-renouncers, in which the Pratimoksha vows of personal liberation flow seamlessly into the Bodhisattva vows of full enlightenment for the sake of all

⁶⁷ There appears to be no formal requirement for NKT monks and nuns to wear their ordained robes outside teaching and ritual settings. As such, while most NKT monastics wear their robes most of the time, it is commonplace to see them in lay clothes (e.g., when they're heading off to their day job, or doing physical centre work).

living beings. According to a NKT website cited above, “monks or nuns choose to follow a life bound by moral discipline so that they can focus on their spiritual development *for the benefit of others*” (NKT 1, my italics). For a lay Teacher Training Program member at KMC North who had been practicing for fifteen years, ordination in the NKT had more to do with bodhicitta than renunciation: “I see ordination as taking a wish to benefit other beings all the time, in everything you do; to have bodhicitta, at least in our tradition; to have bodhicitta in everything you do.” Loten told me, “You make a commitment to yourself but also to your community, to all living beings, when you become ordained.” Since the Bodhisattva’s defining virtue is the compassionate aspiration of bodhicitta, his or her external actions (e.g., vis-à-vis vinaya codes) lose their function as a barometer of the individual’s virtue:

Bodhisattvas can even fight others in order to protect many sentient beings. It is very difficult to judge from someone’s outward actions alone whether or not he or she is practising Dharma purely. Perhaps if we were to live with someone for many years we would gradually come to understand his real motivation, but otherwise we cannot know a person’s motivation from his external behaviour alone. . . . Je Tsongkhapa’s tradition of outwardly remaining like an ordinary person whilst inwardly cultivating special minds is very practical and beautiful. (Gyatso 2000, 138-139)

The psychologized privatization of monastic vows is a particularly practical means of supporting the bodhisattva missionary ambitions of Gyatso and his ordained disciples. According to former NKT nun and manager, Carol McQuire:

Geshe-la said that we did not “need to receive full ordination in a separate ritual ceremony” as we would “naturally become a Gelong” (a fully ordained monk) by developing our practice He said that our moral discipline was not based on external behaviour or ‘rules’, the hundreds of vows of the “Lesser Vehicle Hinayana” practitioners that the Tibetan ordained follow, but on intention; our function was to increase others’ ‘faith,’ to enlighten everyone. Therefore we could handle money, live with ordained of the opposite sex and lay people in the NKT centers and, like myself, also live with our children if we had them. (2013, 72)

According to the NKT, the vast majority of the vows in the *Mūlasarvāstivāda Vinaya* are outmoded cultural customs that are not only inessential to Buddhism, but inimical to spreading Buddhism in the “modern West”:

NKT monks and nuns practice everything that a fully ordained monk or nun in Buddha's tradition would practice, minus the cultural rules that make benefiting others in the West in these modern times almost impossible. Nowadays, most Western monks and nuns are not living in actual monasteries but are out and about helping living beings. ... Buddha Shakyamuni himself said that the Vinaya should be practiced in accordance with what is most acceptable for society. The NKT is following this advice from Buddha. For example, according to the Vinaya, it is an offence for a monk to touch his mother out of affection. This would be completely unacceptable in Western culture and would lead people to think that Buddhism was ‘weird’ and has nothing to do with normal life. Another example is a vow that states that monks cannot handle money. This is also completely impractical when it comes to running a Dharma Center or operating in daily life! It would put many restrictions on the activities of an ordained person living in the West. Also, if Western Dharma teachers had to wait for lay people to feed them they would die of starvation! It is not part of Western culture for people to beg, but it is part of Western culture for people to work and support themselves. (NKT p)

When I asked KMC South’s Resident Teacher, Prajna, if she saw her ordination, centre residence, and manager work as supports for her renunciation practice, she described both the historical novelty of the NKT monastics’ relatively non-monastic lifestyle and her sense of its spiritual benefits:

Yeah. Definitely. And it’s interesting because what ordained people are doing in *these* times – it’s like what Geshe-la’s done is quite radical. It’s like pioneering days. You would never have ordained people pretty much out on their own [laughs] in a dominantly lay community. That just never happened in eastern countries. You were always in a community whereby you were predominantly with other ordained people, and very rarely did you spend time with lay people. But to me I feel like it’s Geshe-la’s brilliance because you don’t want a false sense of renunciation. You know it’s just like people have a false sense of peace by avoiding provocative situations. Thinking “Oh I’m so patient and peaceful now,” but they’ve built walls around everything adverse or difficult to create that peace, versus actually what I would consider to be a real peace is a peace that can withstand any hardship and

remain. So I think it's the same thing with renunciation. Real renunciation is a mind, so you can maybe get complacent about whether or not you have that mind if you're in a community that you can kind of fall into the slipstream of a routine in which there's a culture of certain behaviours or a lack of exposure to other behaviours, and then therefore have this illusion "Oh yeah I have renunciation," you know; "I'm ordained, I have renunciation." Versus I think in the way that Geshe-la has done – it's so skillful because it's integrating. I do remember him saying, maybe at one ordination ceremony some years ago, about how valuable it is to have ordained people and lay people living together, then they appreciate each other's way of life, and they can learn from each other's way of life, and be inspired by each other's way of life; and that in that way it strengthens our Dharma practice. And I just thought, you know, that's so true. It's so true. But at the same time it's unique, it's unusual [laughs]. The way that we're ordained is very unusual.

The soteriology of samsara-renunciation practiced by NKT monks and nuns is therefore far from "monastic" in its traditional sense of world-renunciation as summarized by Dreyfus: "In general, monasticism attempts to create a form of life separate from the world in order that the religious ideals of a tradition can be fully expressed. From the monastic perspective, life in the world prevents the full realization of one's religious vocation" (2003, 33). From Prajna's perspective, life in the world can *strengthen* one's aspiration of samsara-renunciation, into a "a real peace ... that can withstand any hardship and remain," as opposed to the cloistered monastic's "false sense of peace [based on] avoiding provocative situations."

Celibacy is the only vow pertaining to external behaviour which distinguishes NKT monastics from NKT laity who maintain lay Pratimoksha vows (to abandon killing, stealing, lying or cheating, sexual misconduct, and taking intoxicants). The other distinguishing ordination vows – to abandon engaging in meaningless activities, to practice contentment, reduce desire for worldly pleasures, maintain the commitments of refuge, and to practise the three higher trainings of moral discipline, concentration, and wisdom – are either explicitly psychological or psychological in orthodox NKT teaching and interpretation.

Although the injunction to practice “moral discipline,” for example, is generally taught to be an injunction to control one’s actions of body, speech, and mind, the actual practice, according to Gyatso, is a mental one:

The definition of moral discipline is a virtuous determination to abandon non-virtuous actions and faults. To practise moral discipline we must have an intention to refrain from non-virtuous actions, otherwise we would have to say that stones and trees practise moral discipline because they never do anything wrong! (2003b, 76)

This emphasis on intention is consistent with Gyatso’s explanation of bodily and verbal actions as necessarily initiated by and accompanied by mental actions (1996, 227-228). For one lay, Canadian former manager, Justine, the non-/virtuousness of an action is determined entirely by the intention with which it is performed:

If you have a bodhicitta motivation, anything that you do is by nature virtuous. You could be doing anything with a bodhicitta motivation, and that’s creating potentialities for liberation, enlightenment, and the enlightenment of all living beings. The action itself doesn’t matter, it’s that mental motivation and intention. So mental objects like that — like having a loving mind, or a compassionate mind, or maybe contemplating renunciation, or emptiness, or any of these things while you’re doing any of those tasks. It’s just constantly having your mind mixed with those kinds of objects — if that’s what’s going on internally it doesn’t really matter what you’re doing externally.

Justine’s position is supported by Gyatso’s statement that “if we sincerely cherish all living beings there is no basis for incurring any downfalls of the Bodhisattva and Tantric vows because these downfalls are necessarily motivated by self-cherishing” (Gyatso 2007, iii), and more explicitly by his definition of virtue and non-virtue as the *mental* causes of happiness and suffering (2013c, 95-98).

An official NKT video titled “Ordination Vows”⁶⁸ published on YouTube in December 2015⁶⁹ quotes Gyatso: “In this tradition, the Vinaya – Buddha’s teachings on controlling the mind – is Lamrim, the stages of the path to enlightenment, which belongs to the Mahayana tradition.” On an official NKT website, Gyatso defines *lamrim* as a set of *meditation* instructions: “Lamrim is a special set of instructions that includes all the essential teachings of Buddha Shakyamuni arranged in such a way that all his Hinayana and Mahayana teachings can be put into practice in a single meditation session” (NKT r). Together, these statements not only confirm that Gyatso understands the vinaya (monastic discipline) to be primarily concerned with mental discipline, but that he understands such discipline to be rooted in the practice of meditation. Such a conception of vinaya as meditation contrasts sharply with Dreyfus’s general characterization of historical Asian vinaya traditions in which: “Being a good monk entails abiding diligently by the numerous rules of the Vinaya, and practicing meditation is not included in those rules. In general, to meditate is not a moral obligation, whereas to follow precepts is” (2003, 169).

For Gyatso’s disciples, the ordained proscriptions against indulging in “meaningless activities” and “worldly pleasures” generally have less to do with physical or verbal activities than with mental activity. When asked to define these terms, the majority of interviewees (lay and ordained) suggested that the factor determining whether a particular pleasurable experience is worldly or spiritual, or whether a particular activity is meaningful or meaningless, is the mind with which they are engaged. A lay resident at KMC North basically equated worldly pleasure

⁶⁸ <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=QAeCUEsqSwM>

⁶⁹ This brief NKT video, which aims “to give some clarification about ordination vows,” appears to have been produced in response to a much longer video published on YouTube one month earlier (in November 2015) featuring the Resident Teacher of the FPMT’s Jamyang Centre in London, Geshe Tashi, critiquing the NKT’s system of ordination: <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=OKZK6DAzKto>

with worldly desire, defining the former as “seeking happiness from outside the mind.” Justine suggested that mindful dishwashing could potentially be more meaningful than distractedly performing a puja:

Often we’re just not mindful enough to make every moment meaningful. But we have the capacity and the potential to do that. It doesn’t matter if you’re sitting doing a puja or washing your dishes, you can have the same mind of distraction or the same mind of attentiveness to both of those actions, that can either be positive and leading you towards liberation, or be holding you to this reality. I think even sitting in a puja, by nature, doing a puja or prayer or anything Dharma-related is considered to be a virtuous action, but your mind can be completely somewhere else, so it’s like you can be physically doing it or even saying words, but if there’s no feeling there, if you’re not actually engaged, to me it could be a meaningless activity. ... I mean you could be washing your dishes and contemplating very meaningful mental objects, and be generating as much as you would in a puja. But that really just comes down to your own mental capacity I think.

Justine’s allocation of an action’s meaning to its associated mind clarifies an important distinction between a particular action’s general potential for meaning (theoretically always limitless) and the particular actor’s personal capacity to activate that potential (actually often limited) through mindfulness of meaningful mental objects such as those of *lamrim* – which are divided into three scopes of aspirational capacity for respective seekers of the happiness of future lives, liberation, or enlightenment. Any and every physical or verbal action *can be* renunciatory (i.e., aimed out of samsara), but no physical or verbal action is *necessarily* renunciatory. Whether or not one is escaping or perpetuating samsara, therefore, is entirely up to the individual.

Renunciation is personal.

Precisely because renunciation is conceptualized in the NKT as intention rather than behaviour, as inner samsara-renunciation rather than outer world-renunciation, monastic ordination is generally not seen as a necessary step on the path to nirvana. Monastics in Gyatso’s movement

have lost the unique social status as nirvana-strivers which monastics generally occupy in more traditional Buddhist societies. Being a monk or nun in the NKT does at least theoretically entail nirvana-striving, but nirvana-striving does not demand being a monk or nun. Because world- or household-renunciation is generally not considered necessary or even advantageous, the householder/renouncer conceptual *disjuncture* is generally not an acceptable one among NKT Buddhists. A central thrust of this dissertation's argument (particularly in Chapter 5), however, is that despite its orthodox rejection, a householder/renouncer distinction has indeed emerged at the level of institutional practice as an informal structural feature of the NKT which continues to significantly shape the experiences of the movement's most active adherents.

Ordination as Support of Renunciation

If the householder/renouncer soteriological distinction is largely absent in the NKT, and the lay/monastic behavioural distinction is significantly minimized, why get ordained? Gyatso briefly explains the significance of the five behavioural vows of the NKT vinaya (to abandon killing, stealing, lying or cheating, sexual activity, and taking intoxicants) in his *New Ordination Handbook*:

Understanding that the happiness and freedom of each and every living being are equally important we should abandon performing actions that cause others to experience suffering and problems, including killing, stealing, and lying or cheating. This is the basic foundation upon which all spiritual realizations will grow. If we check carefully we shall understand through our own experience that sexual activity, taking intoxicants, and engaging in meaningless activities are serious obstacles to pure Dharma practice in general, and especially to our practice of pure moral discipline, concentration or meditation, and wisdom (NKT o, 5-6).

This passage contains Gyatso's only textual description (of which I am aware) of sexual activity in general as an obstacle to spiritual practice. This esoteric teaching in a ritual text generally only

read by NKT monastics represents one of Gyatso's most explicit textual statements *in support of* world- or household-renunciation.

As in the case of his assertion that “Renunciation does not mean that we abandon our friends, families and our human enjoyments” (Gyatso 2013b, 13), Gyatso generally discourages acts of outer renunciation in his published teachings. In another representative passage frequently referenced by my informants, Gyatso respectfully cites historical Buddhist masters such as Śāntideva who praised living in solitude before describing such eremitic monasticism as a lesser practice:

To reduce the number of objects of delusion they encounter, some Dharma practitioners retire to isolated places to practice in solitude. ... Although we may be able to avoid objects of delusion to some extent, we will not be able to avoid such objects altogether. Even if we were to live in an isolated cave there would be some parts of the cave that would appear more attractive than other parts, and some kinds of weather that would seem more pleasant than others. We would soon find ourselves preferring this sort of birdsong to that sort of birdsong, and we would still have the memories of other objects of delusion. Since we are so accustomed to finding plenty of objects of delusion wherever we go, the best way to avoid them is to practise restraining the doors of the sense powers. If we practise in this way, we will be able to prevent delusions from arising wherever we are. (2013c, 105-106)

The practice of restraining the doors of the sense powers, according to Gyatso, is a form of mind training (not reserved for monastics) which entails “prevent[ing] attachment, anger and confusion from arising within our mind by not allowing inappropriate attention to develop” whenever one's senses encounter attractive, unattractive, or neutral objects (197-198).

Gyatso's *New Ordination Handbook* does, however, offer one clear reason for NKT practitioners to get ordained: ordination provides a few unique promissory *behavioural supports* – namely celibacy, but also clothes, hair, and name – for the soteriological journey beyond samsara, a

fundamentally mental journey marked by the “four main practices of the ordination vow: (1) the practice of renunciation; (2) the practice of higher moral discipline; (3) the practice of higher concentration; and (4) the practice of higher wisdom” (NKT o, 6).

The most common view among my interviewees (lay and ordained) as to the meaning of ordination was that it provides a support for ordained individuals’ practice of samsara-renunciation, a support which may not be necessary for everyone. Drolma, for example, suggested as much after reflecting on the role of monasticism in Tibet:

Renunciation is always an internal path; but the monastic system supports that. Now I think, well what is it supporting? It’s supporting that feeling to practice contentment and to not engage in meaningless activities. So we can still practice contentment and not engage in meaningless activities to try to get the essence of our life. That continuum doesn’t have to be disrupted, if we keep that as the focus. Because you can have the problem of support – like you can have a monastic community that has a perfect support but if people have no interest in practicing contentment, then nothing, you know; support only supports it if you have that practice. So technically, I think you don’t need that support if that practice is strong.

Justine’s answer to my question whether laypeople can be consummate renouncers reflected her aforementioned isolation of mental capacity as the determining factor: “Yup. Because it’s inner. I know there are things about being ordained that help it. When somebody has a really, really strong mind, they don’t need to do that as well. That’s pretty rare though.” According to both Drolma and Justine, ordination is not necessary *if* your mind is strong enough to maintain a strong practice without it. There is a sense, therefore, that some people need, or at least benefit, from ordination, and some do not. Asked what she found most rewarding about being ordained, for instance, Drolma replied:

It’s a commitment that really works for me. It keeps me moving towards my goal. And I think that’s why I got ordained, because I work well with commitments. ... I just need to have like “OK, this is the deal” [laughs]. Some people don’t work well

with commitments, and I work better with them. Which is one reason why I got ordained. For me to practice this way I need to have a commitment. And that has worked well for me, being ordained, because that commitment has enabled me to establish a practice that's getting me out of here. ... Being ordained and having vows creates a boundary. And knowing that if I break those vows then I let down my spiritual guide, and it's not the point of my life. The point of my life is to keep the vows and be ordained. So the vows are a huge support. Although you don't need the vows to get the realization of renunciation. They are a great support when you're surrounded by a lot of distractions.

In response to the same question, Prajna described a similar sense that ordination *keeps her moving* toward liberation:

I think ultimately what I enjoy most about it is I feel a sense of peace knowing that there's a natural, kind of like a current, a spiritual current that's always moving me forward. So I don't feel any kind of "Am I practicing or am I not?" You know, there's no angst around my practice, like "Am I really a practitioner or am I not?" It's like because you're observing this lifestyle and way of life there's a current, or flow, that makes me sort of be peaceful in that knowledge, or rest in the knowledge that if I just keep going in this way I'll definitely move forward. How quickly I move forward towards enlightenment is a matter of effort and other conditions, genuine spiritual states of mind; but from the standpoint of I'm like in the train on the tracks. Whereas I think when I was lay I was very fearful of, you know, am I practicing enough? There was always a fear of losing my practice, I think; getting lost in worldly pleasure; getting lost in samsara. Because I knew what I had found in Dharma was so precious. I didn't want to lose it, but I knew how easily it could be lost as a main figurehead of my life. I knew there was a vulnerability to that disappearing.

Although the previous section described an emic conception of ordination as an expression of nirvana-striving, Prajna describes a sense of peace, or relaxation, that comes from the knowledge not that she has arrived – at the spontaneous aspiration for liberation or liberation itself – but that so as long as she maintains her ordination vows, arrival is certain. Drolma and Prajna both experience ordained identity as a support that has enabled them to establish a robust Dharma practice, but more importantly to *maintain* that practice as the main "point" or "figurehead" of their life.

Similarly, for Sangye, a formerly sponsored monk at KMC South, ordination functioned to facilitate the pursuit of the goal which he had decided was his life's purpose, and to remind him of that purpose and his decision to use his life to pursue it. When I asked him why he ordained, he likened the transformation to donning the "correct uniform" for the job of renunciation:

If you're going to go for a swim, you usually put on a bathing suit. Right? ... Is a bathing suit necessary to swim? It's not; it's not essential. You can literally swim in anything that you have on — you can wear jeans and a t-shirt and you can go for a swim. To me, ordination is choosing to put on the bathing suit. It's understanding that my ultimate goal is to stop cyclic rebirth; it's to attain enlightenment; it's to practice renunciation. Those were the things that were my long-term central goals in life. If I wanted to complete those goals, then I needed to put on the correct uniform, if you will, to achieve those goals. So for me it was like that decision of "I'm going to go for a swim; I don't need to put on a bathing suit, but it would be the most correct thing for me to do in order to achieve the goal of going for a swim." Otherwise I'll find that swim to be very difficult and uncomfortable. ... If you really believe that this lifetime you want to achieve that goal of becoming an enlightened being, then the most natural thing to do is to become an ordained person, because that's essentially setting that boundary for yourself, like this lifetime is for this purpose.

When I asked if he finds it easier to practice renunciation as an ordained person, Sangye identified ordination's mental vows (pertaining to both mental and physical actions) and physical appearance as supportive in their shared function to "promote" renunciation (both to himself and others) in otherwise ordinary daily life, and to thereby keep him focused on his goal:

Yes. Well, in certain aspects, like wearing robes is a very clear sign to people like "I'm not on the market" [laughs]. So those things, you know, it helps kind of close those doors. It also prevents you from doing certain things, like I wouldn't walk into a bar and sit down in your robes and grab a beer. So there's those sort of mundane aspects. If I'm mindful of my vows, then ordination definitely helps me to develop renunciation — it depends on how mindful I'm being of them. That's something about practicing your ordination vows, becoming more and more mindful every day. It's why we're encouraged to retake our vows every morning. ... I think as an ordained person, it limits the distractions that you may experience, and it helps you

to keep focused on the mind of renunciation. It's promoting a mind of renunciation, as opposed to just, you know, being in regular daily life and building it yourself.

Reflecting on his experience of celibacy after three years of living as a monk, Sangye described the vow as a consistent and much-needed prompt for engaging in real-time renunciation meditation (particularly contemplating the faults and limitations of sexual pleasure) to disarm inconstant desires:

At the time [of ordination] I thought was completely over wanting to be in a relationship, but since then it definitely wavers from time to time; I think there's just something about being a human being that at times you really want someone to snuggle with [laughs]. There's just ups and downs, so you have to learn to put the wish to snuggle in its correct place, like see OK snuggling is not a permanent release from suffering, you know, it's only temporary until somebody toots on you and you're over it. And anybody who's been in a relationship can attest to the fact that yeah like you may be really great snugglers at first but then, you know, OK it's sleepy time, get on your side of the bed. You know, we only want things for a certain period of time. So it's remembering those things, trying to keep them in their place, like they're sealed up — you see that mind and you go “No, no, no, we've been through this a thousand times before. I know what you're feeling, I know what you're wanting, but, logically, realistically, is it going to give you the result that you're looking for? No. Absolutely not.” So you have to go through those, reminding yourself, you know, you have to go through all those stages in the teachings, to remind yourself why you did this in the first place.

Besides celibacy and “the external change of your name and your clothes,” Loten described the differences between lay and ordained life as minimal. He explained that the celibacy vow, however, “makes a big change both internally and externally”:

Once I made the decision to become celibate, I noticed that because a boundary had been set, my mind didn't go, or doesn't go, to places where it used to go, with regards to observing other people, or thinking about others. Because that boundary is there, it's almost an inner freedom that appears. It's like I know it's off limits so I don't even go there, and so my mind relaxes around others, and I can relate to them differently without maybe a sense of craving or attachment that used to appear, for certain people, certain times. I'm not saying that doesn't still appear because of course we're human beings and it's going to; those are deeply ingrained habits over

many lifetimes. But there's something about making that commitment to yourself, and making a decision, that frees your mind a bit, or a lot actually.

In different ways, Prajna, Drolma, Sangye, and Loten all described ordination as a boundary (primarily psychological but also social) which keeps them focused on their ultimate goal (permanent freedom from suffering) by encouraging a practice of monastic moral discipline that helps keep them undistracted by lesser goals (temporary freedoms from suffering). In this sense, these Buddhists experience their monastic vows and decorum as volitional and behavioural constrictions that enhance, rather than impede, their capacities for happiness – in a manner similar to Verchery's account of Calgary's Avatamsaka nuns' shared experience of their rigid monastic schedule combined with vows against money and possessions (constrictions that NKT monks and nuns *do not* adopt): “[T]he nuns consistently describe these limitations as *liberating*. This view contradicts the mainstream notion of freedom as life *without* limitations for, in the view of these Buddhist monastics, it is precisely rules and limitations that make one free” (2015, 366-367).

Although celibacy, robes (generally more of a distinguishing factor for monks than nuns), short hair (generally more of a distinguishing factor for nuns than monks), and a new Indo-Tibetan name (always preceded by 'Kelsang') are the only publicly discernible identity markers distinguishing NKT monastics from most lay patrons, the real cultural discontinuity of these commitments within non-Buddhist North American society gives ordination a distinct personal significance for NKT monastics (beyond its doctrinal significance described above by Gyatso) which arises from their social differentiation.

While Sangye described his robes as a public marker of his sexual unavailability, and Tashi did emphasize the felt spiritual benefits of celibacy, my ordained interviewees tended to identify the visual markers of their monastic identity, particularly the robes, as one of ordination's most important supports for their practice of renunciation. The moral discipline that the physical aspects of monastic decorum encourage, often through helping the practitioner to engender a sense of shame – which “guards us against committing negative actions by appealing to our conscience and to the standards of behaviour that we feel to be appropriate” (Gyatso 2013c, 61) – is one of the main benefits of ordination for those who have chosen it. For Karuna, for example, her ordained robes were the greatest soteriological support that ordination afforded her. She suggested that the mere intention to cultivate the intention of renunciation without taking on such an ordained support can simply pose too big a challenge for many:

There is a benefit in being ordained. Because if you're ordained; if you're out wearing robes people know that you are something; you're in a spiritual tradition; and it teaches you to behave in a way. As a lay person people don't know that you're a Buddhist practitioner when you walk on the streets or go shopping or do things. So in a way it's less encouragement to maintain a spiritual life; it's easier to get drawn away, to be influenced by other laypeople who aren't necessarily involved in a tradition, to be influenced and swayed by them, than when you're ordained. It's just easier to get pulled off the path I think. You can have every intention to be a renunciate, but there's going to be a lot more challenges as a layperson. ... It makes it easier to progress on the path and to get to where you're going to go. So if you're really serious with your spiritual practice, I think you should ordain.

The social peculiarity of one's ordained identity as marked by the robes can thus be experienced as a great benefit that makes one's spiritual life easier, but also as one of ordination's greatest challenges. Sangye and Loten both described regularly receiving strange looks from onlookers. The author of the 1999 *SFGate* article cited above, Emily Gurnon, continues her portrait of Saraha Center resident and kindergarten teaching assistant, Kelsang Tenzin:

His co-workers and even his young charges know about his ‘other life,’ because he occasionally wears his robes to work, Tenzin said. “They’re pretty open about it,” said Tenzin, 27. He welcomes the questions, he said. ‘My favorite one is, “How come you’re wearing a skirt?” Still, people tend to have certain preconceptions when they see Tenzin in his Buddhist garb, he said. “One of the most difficult things is having people see that I’m still a person,” he said. “They immediately think you’re from another planet. But once you talk to anyone for a few minutes . . . then it’s not a problem.” (Gurnon 1999)

For an American former monk at KMC South, Cameron, the cultural discontinuity created by the visual aspects of his ordained identity was a factor in his decision to disrobe after just two years:

I don’t remember really having any challenges other than people not knowing what I was. . . . People would always be like “Oh what are you a Hare Krishna? Are you a kung-fu master?” Like really funny things. It’s just interesting. Even though you’re clearly one thing that doesn’t mean everybody’s going to view you in that way. I guess you could say that was definitely something that I wasn’t expecting. And then travelling in robes – because they get funny in airports. People are so afraid of people that are different. I was one of those ordained people that wear their robes everywhere; I ironed them every day, and I wore them every day everywhere I went, even sometimes when I would fly, because I’m like ‘this is my life, so I’m doing it.’ I was all for it. So in a few airport occasions I was pulled aside. Again it’s that people don’t realize – they don’t even know what you are. And to those people you’re whatever they think you are; or you’re a threat.

Later in our interview, Cameron reflected fondly on his time as a monk, and then made a joke that struck me as a powerful commentary on his experience of the social marginalization created by ordination’s visual identity markers in the southern United States: “For me it was a very special time in my life. And I’ll most likely do it again when I’m an old person. I’m going to get a face tattoo, and then I’ll get ordained again [laughs], just for fun; just to like really go for it [laughs].”

Although Drolma described the ordained robes of Thai monks as monastic trappings, the robes are key spiritual supports for Karuna, and a very mixed blessing (at once a source of religious

experience and social alienation) for Cameron. There is clearly a diversity of views and experiences within the NKT surrounding the need for public decorum in the practice of renunciation. Generally, however, ordained NKT practitioners experience the public aspects of their monastic identity as effective supports of their spiritual training. This is matched by a common belief held by NKT laity – articulated by Justine and Neil above, for example – that ordination can be an effective (but not a necessary) aid to abandon worldly concerns.

Ordination as Representation of Renunciation

Related to the question of why a Kadampa Buddhist might get ordained is the question of the unique role performed by ordained practitioners in Gyatso’s movement. If they are not the NKT’s unique nirvana-strivers, what do monks and nuns *do*, as monks and nuns? A lot less, it would appear, than monks and nuns in Central and South Asian Buddhist merit economies. Coupled with the “liberation” of NKT monastics from the external, economic control of the monastery and its lay patrons, a common emic view of the soteriological parity of lay and monastic life represents the effective termination, I would suggest, of the traditional Tibetan lay/monastic relation in the NKT. Since monastics are encouraged to produce their own wealth and laity are encouraged to produce their own merit, monastics have no need for wealth produced by laity and laity have no need for merit produced by monastics.

As detailed in Chapter 1, in Buddhist societies organized according to the lay/monastic relation, monks and nuns are “a specialized class of workers ... who create and disseminate a specific, highly valuable product: merit” (Wilson 2018, 3). Wilson identifies three forms of “merit labour”

by which monastics specialize in merit production – receiving monastic ordination, adhering to monastic codes, and performing monastic ritual:

They follow codes of behavior that prevent accumulation of demerit and encourage cultivation of merit—furthermore, most Buddhist societies have believed that the act of undertaking ordination effects an ontological change, so that the resulting monk or nun is different from and holier than their previous existence as a layperson. Monastics engage in advanced activities that are all believed to be mighty engines of merit production: meditation, scriptural chanting, use of spells (mantras, dharani, paritta), elaborate devotional services, teaching the Dharma to others, and more. (2018, 3-4)

The first form of merit labour, associated with undertaking monastic ordination itself, was occasionally mentioned as a reality for interviewees (lay more than ordained). KMC South’s Administrative Director, Eva, suggested “There’s some element of blessing that you get when you take ordination vows.” Her spouse James, KMC South’s Education Program Coordinator, told me: “It’s very meritorious, and you’re devoting yourself to others by taking those vows.” As for a more general ontological transformation, Gyatso’s claim in the *Ordination Handbook* that “when we took ordination ... we changed ... our mind from attachment to this life to renunciation” (NKT o, 9) suggests that the very act of undertaking ordination produces a renouncer – a view affirmed plainly by KMC North’s Administrative Director, Maggie: “I think the ordained are renunciates. I don’t see why you would ordain if you weren’t going to be a renunciate.”

With regards specifically to merit production, interviewees tended to emphasize the merit accrued from *living as* an ordained person more than that produced from the act of ordaining itself. The second traditional form of monastic merit labour, therefore, associated with adhering to monastic codes, appears to be alive and well in the NKT. Although the actual labour required

to adhere to the NKT vinaya may appear to be significantly less than the effort required to live by the *Mūlasarvāstivāda* (since the number of NKT vows represents 4% of the Indian code), a number of lay and ordained interviewees characterized life under the NKT ordination vows as more meritorious than life without them. When I asked Patricia, a Teacher Training Program member and volunteer at KMC North, if she thought ordination could be of spiritual benefit, her response focused on merit: “Only because Geshe-la says the merit that you acquire as a result of being ordained is great, is much greater than a layperson. So for that reason, definitely.” Sangye suggested that the vows “help catapult you in that direction, and every day that you apply effort to practicing those vows, you’re putting away huge storehouses of merit.” According to Neil, application of effort was not even required: “As long as they keep them, even when they’re not doing anything, like even when they’re sleeping – as long as they keep their vows they accumulate merit.” Without using the word, Prajna’s aforementioned attribution of a “natural ... spiritual current that’s always moving me forward” to her observance of the ordained “way of life” reflects a felt sense of ameliorative energy associated with her ordination that aligns nicely with Gyatso’s definition of merit as “the positive energy that results from virtuous actions” (2005, 115) and as “the potential power to increase our good qualities and produce happiness” (368).

The third traditional form of monastic merit labour, performing advanced monastic ritual activities, which Wilson describes as “their primary role as monastics,” *does not* apply in the NKT. NKT monastics and laity are equally seen as capable of engaging in the traditionally predominantly monastic practices of meditation, study, mantra and/or scripture recitation, elaborate devotional services, and Dharma teaching. NKT monastics and laity are therefore

equally encouraged to perform these practices, and as a result are equally likely to do so.⁷⁰ The only ritual that NKT monastics regularly perform exclusive of laity (in addition to wearing the ordained robes) is the monthly or bimonthly monastic confession ceremony *Sojong*. Besides attending *Sojong* and ordination ceremonies for new monks and nuns, there is really nothing NKT monastics can do that laity cannot. Prajna emphasized this point in her detailed response to my question about her sense of the biggest differences between lay and ordained ways of life:

This is where I feel like Geshe-la is very unique in that there's a lot of freedom in that. There's a lot of different types of ordained way of life in a sense. There's a lot of different types of lay way of life. So it's kind of not cookie-cutter, because *we're* not cookie-cutter. And Geshe-la doesn't give a lot of stipulations; he gives us these vows and then it's more like up to us to integrate them into our life and our disposition and our karma and our circumstances, than it is to say *we* have to fit into a mold. And I think that's really his wisdom, because when I look at the differences between ordained and lay, I can't really put it in those categories. Because it's the differences of just individuals, it's not really the differences in society in general, like lay society is different and ordained society is different; it's really up to the people. I've met many lay people that I think are almost more ordained than ordained people, like in a stereotypical sense of what you think of as an ordained person. I've met many lay people that in a sense have a very lay life in the stereotypical sense of it, you know – but I wouldn't say is any less dedicated or spiritual or meaningful or any less wise, or any less advanced than ordained people. There are many, many lay practitioners that I think of as very highly realized, and very well advanced, and very dedicated, and very humble. So to me it's kind of hard to answer that question because within our Kadampa sangha it feels very diverse. ... There's swinging differences and different monks and nuns that I've met, and I appreciate the different aspects of their example. Like I know many ordained people that have worked very hard for the tradition, and they have strived to develop the tradition and they've been great organizers and arranged festivals, and I have great admiration for them. There are other ordained people that are incredibly well educated in the Dharma, and they know a lot of technical points and they've put a lot of energy and time over the years into studying and remembering and deeply taking the Dharma into their hearts. And I know other ordained people who spend a lot of time meditating. And it's very much the same with lay community. ... I find that the Dharma, like Geshe-la said, it's universal, in the sense that each person when they apply it sincerely, it works. But it

⁷⁰ The next chapter surveys NKT patrons' and providers' levels of engagement with some of these traditionally monastic practices (e.g., meditation, study, teaching).

also works with respect to each person's unique disposition. It's like it doesn't turn them into some kind of cookie-cutter; it still suits their characteristics.

Prajna's individualist account of lay/monastic behavioural diversity and soteriological parity accords with a dominant emic conception (described above) of monastic ordination as an optional lifestyle, the suitability of which is primarily a matter of personal preference ("our life and our disposition and our karma and our circumstances") compared to a more historically dominant construction of monks and nuns as "a specialized class of workers within Buddhist society who create and disseminate a specific, highly valuable product: merit" (Wilson 2018, 3). In this regard, senior lay teachers perform an important role as examples of advanced lay practice, as described by Peter above, and by Brian, another seasoned but intermittent lay volunteer at KMC South: "I love in our tradition seeing that mix of ordained people and lay people, and also having teachers like Morten and Lucy *not* being ordained, and that Geshe-la has made it very clear that ordination is purely a personal choice."

Like good Protestant Buddhists, adherents of the New Kadampa Tradition (lay *and* monastic) are generally not comfortable with the notion that merit production is a specialization of an ordained monastic elite. Although receiving and upholding the ordination vows are perceived to be very meritorious actions, the idea that laypeople "have a dramatically reduced capacity to [produce merit], since they necessarily live lives that force them into demeritorious actions, and they lack the time, training, and circumstances to perform the most meritorious Buddhist practices" (Wilson 2018, 4) is at odds with a far more widespread view in the NKT that lay lives *do not* necessitate demerit, and with a pedagogical dynamic that sees NKT laity and monastics equally encouraged (in virtually all Gyatso's books, for example) to use whatever time, training, and circumstances they have to perform the most meritorious Buddhist practices as much as possible.

Chapter 5 examines one of the most potent forms of merit production recommended for busy, “modern” Kadampas (lay and ordained): volunteer work for a Dharma centre.

Another related way in which the NKT lay/monastic relation appears to be out of step with a more historically typical Buddhist construction of the lay/monastic merit economy pertains to a lack of ideological support in the NKT for the *transfer* of merit from monastics to laity. Precisely because laity are traditionally understood to have a reduced capacity to produce merit (which is not the case in the NKT), Wilson continues:

They therefore rely primarily on the monastic sangha to perform merit labor on their behalf. ... Laypeople access the fruits of monastic merit labor by donating money and goods to the monks and nuns and their representative organizations, who then dedicate their stores of merit to the donor or their designated recipient (such as the donor’s deceased ancestors). (4)

In Gyatso’s published works and in my interview and observational data, I found no evidence to support the existence of such a division of merit labour in the NKT whereby “we might say that the laypeople buy [merit] from the monastic sangha, in an economic exchange that is spoken of as *dana* (generosity)” (4).⁷¹ Although merit remains a highly valuable product in the NKT, laity do not look to monastics for its provision. Chapter 5 suggests that among centre providers, managers, more than monastics, constitute a specialized class of merit producers in New Kadampa Buddhist society; but *neither* are sought out by centre patrons to provide or disseminate merit. In line with a strong ethos of behavioural and soteriological individualism, as described by Prajna above, merit production in the NKT is a do-it-yourself endeavor for both

⁷¹ Samuels’ ethnographic examination of merit-making in contemporary Sri Lanka aimed to ameliorate such a “mechanical and perfunctory view of merit-making” (2008, 124) as generalized exchange by “[e]xploring the role of emotions, most generally defined as ‘happiness in the heart/mind,’ in this important Buddhist activity (123).” Challenging a “crass-calculus model of merit-making” (125) in scholarship on South Asian Buddhism, Samuels’ survey of monastic and lay Sri Lankan Buddhists’ understandings of the practice led him to conclude that “merit is often based on the donor’s emotional experiences that precede, accompany, and proceed acts of generosity” (136).

laity and monastics. And ever since the arduous volunteer-led renovation of Manjushri Institute's mold-ridden priory in the 1980s (presently the stuff of legend), the NKT's expanding international portfolio of centre properties needing everything from landscapers to teachers has provided ample opportunities for merit labour to virtually anyone who is game.

Returning, then, to the question of the nature of monastics' role in Gyatso's movement – if monastics do not provide merit, what *do* they provide? I would suggest that monastics are the NKT's symbolic providers (or “fields”) of faith, as opposed to merit. Monastic ordination in the NKT not only entails and supports the monastic's nirvana-striving; as in most Asian Buddhist societies it also *represents* nirvana-striving to non-monastics. The monastic decorum of name, robes, hair, and behavioural moral discipline not only support the spiritual cultivation of NKT monks and nuns on their path to liberation (as shown in the previous section); these public aspects of ordained identity also support *others'* relationship with the soteriological ideal of freedom from worldly concerns that they represent, or symbolize.

Most details of the visual ordained decorum represent specific meditation objects (e.g., the collar of the main upper body garment symbolizes death; the shaved head symbolizes renunciation), but lay practitioners are often not trained to recognize them. What the robes and shaved head represent to the average lay Kadampa, I would suggest, aligns more closely with Peter Bishop's claim that “In the West, ordination is a symbol of authentic and serious practice” (1993, 99). In the NKT, as in other Buddhist communities (Western and non-Western), monks and nuns are seen to be particularly authentic and serious dharma practitioners. Karuna stated plainly above:

“If you’re really serious with your spiritual practice, I think you should ordain.” To my question about the purpose of ordination, Peter replied:

To me, somebody who wants to dedicate themselves to Buddhism, to their teacher, to Geshe-la, and they really want to try, it’s a way of – hopefully for them – joyfully taking vows to say that I’m going to try so much harder to practice Buddhism, and I’m going to dedicate myself. ... I have the highest respect for people who take that step because wearing the robes says ‘I’m trying to do this purely. I may not be perfect; I may slip. Don’t judge me; I’m trying really hard.’ That’s the distinction.

Despite the ordained individual’s reduced capacities for uniquely monastic merit labour in the NKT, the visual comportment of monastic identity markers on the bodies of ordained Kadampa Buddhists performs an important form of “inspirational labour” within the movement (if not always outside it) – i.e., the symbolic production and proliferation of adherents’ faith⁷² vis-a-vis the soteriological ideal (perceived with faith to be a reality) of freedom from worldly concerns.

Affirming Karuna’s experience of the soteriological support afforded by a uniquely ordained sense of shame (“if you’re out wearing robes people know that you are something; you’re in a spiritual tradition; and it teaches you to behave in a way”), a Canadian monk told me that the ordained practice of *setting an example* of renunciation (rooted in adherence to the NKT ordination vows to not engage in meaningless activities, to practice contentment, and to reduce desire for worldly pleasures) effectively encompasses the Tibetan vinaya’s list of behavioural proscriptions, and will *naturally* lead NKT monastics to not work to accumulate wealth.

Gurnon’s (1999) article about San Francisco’s NKT center gives resident monk and kindergarten teacher Kelsang Tenzin the final word: “As for his car, the Alfa Romeo, Tenzin said it was a gift

⁷² Gyatso defines faith as “a naturally virtuous mind that functions mainly to oppose the perception of faults in its observed object,” and identifies three types, all of which, I would suggest, are fostered by the physical comportment of monastic identity markers vis-à-vis their symbolic referents: believing faith, admiring faith, and wishing faith (2000, 269).

from his grandfather and he considers it simply a form of transportation. ‘I’d like to get rid of it now,’ he said. ‘It’s not a good example.’”

The accounts of these Canadian and American monks suggest an extra-textual orthopraxy surrounding monastic austerity not stipulated by the NKT vinaya. Such an informal ideal surrounding monastic decorum parallels the monastic *residential* expectation unexpectedly encountered by Karuna at the disciplinary hands of her National Spiritual Director, to which it directly relates. An informal monastic residential expectation would force NKT monastics to either use their private wealth to reside in a centre (effectively then paying for monastic status tied to residency) or enter the NKT’s religious economy by adopting the consecrated productive dependence of a sponsored manager.

In addition to the aforementioned Canadian monk’s conviction that sincere NKT monastics will naturally move away from activities suggesting discontentment (such as working for private wealth accumulation), he also informed me that in oral teachings given only to monks and nuns in ordination ceremonies, Gyatso has identified the practice of example-setting as the ordained sangha’s foremost responsibility and explicitly encouraged monastic behavioural proscriptions against activities such as cinema-going and internet chatting. The latter thus represent additional esoteric, informal monastic proscriptions which suggest that Gyatso has at times deemed his largely psychologized ten-vow NKT vinaya insufficiently detailed (or simply requiring further interpretation) to comprehensively mandate his ordained sangha’s behavioural role as the movement’s formal example-setters.

This chapter has documented several indications of a problem surrounding the justification or legitimation of NKT ordination in light of the looseness of monastic renunciation. Beyond the aforementioned problem of internally justifying ordination with informal, extra-vinaya monastic expectations (of residency, austerity, and abstention from certain leisure activities), the exceptional Asian-American informant at KMC South (see fn. 64) whose view that lay and monastic Buddhist renunciation praxes were respectively inner and outer led her to describe NKT ordination as “too loose, not enough to lead devotees” suggests a possible structural problem in the system of NKT ordination. Finally, there is the issue of those ordained in other Buddhist lineages suspecting and rejecting the legitimacy of NKT ordination, such as the FPMT monk Geshe Tashi whose extensive YouTube critique of NKT ordination focused primarily on refuting the scriptural authority of Kelsang Gyatso’s vinaya reforms.

In response to my question whether he thinks renunciation has any outer signs, Loten affirmed Peter’s view of ordination as a symbol of effort and Weaver’s account of a pre-novice (*rabjung*) monastic’s “artificial renunciation” (2015, 29) when he suggested that ordination was both a symbol of renunciation as well as at least a sign of the monastic’s aspiration *for* renunciation (if not of renunciation itself):

I think wearing ordained robes is a symbol of renunciation. That doesn’t mean that every ordained person has a complete realization of renunciation. But certainly if they’re maintaining their ordination they should have a wish to gain a realization of renunciation, so that could be said to be an outer sign I would think. But of course there are always exceptions.

We have already seen Carol McQuire refer to NKT ordination’s dual function as a faith-inducing symbol/sign of inner renunciation: “Geshe-la said that ... our moral discipline was not based on external behaviour or ‘rules’ ... but on intention; our function was to increase others’ ‘faith,’ to

enlighten everyone” (2013, 72). She recounts being told that “the robes ‘tend to lend authority to ordained teachers’” (73). For Maggie, the ordained robes are a functioning sign of living renunciation (see above). According to Neil, ordained practitioners perform a kind of motivational role, “to give an example of what a person would do if he or she is practicing moral discipline.” In the words of another lay KMC North resident, “I think that when you’re near somebody who’s practicing ordination it helps your mind.”

Having lost their status as specialized providers of merit and ritual services, NKT monastics provide laity with a lot less than they do in Tibetan Buddhist communities in which the lay/monastic ritual merit economy is intact. This is partly why I have called NKT monastics symbolic providers, compared to centre managers who are more practical providers of administrative and ritual services to patrons (and who can be lay or monastic). On the other hand, NKT laity provide monastics with nothing. The potential for laity to acquire a crop of faith, or inspiration, from monastics is actualized simply by observing them, not by giving to them; no exchange is needed.

Although this section’s theorization of NKT monastics as the movement’s symbolic (versus practical) providers of Gyatso’s Dharma relies on a real distinction between the ordained monastic life and the sponsored missionary life of KMC managers, it should be noted that many NKT monks and nuns (e.g., half of those whom I met at KMC North and South) are also managers, while a significant majority (71%) of North American Resident Teachers, to take the most common manager position as an example, are ordained.⁷³ If KMC North and South are

⁷³ While monastic ordination and managerial sponsorship are technically distinct, significant overlaps contribute to a *de facto* blurriness between NKT lay and monastic communities (see Ch. 5, section iv). Samuels has argued for the

representative, however, an even greater majority of non-Resident Teacher NKT managers (e.g., Education Program Coordinator, Administrative Director) are lay (e.g., 86% between KMC North and South).

iv. Renunciation's Exoteric Privatization and Esoteric Institutionalization

This chapter has shown that there is a diversity of views and experiences within the NKT surrounding the need for and benefit of the behavioural commitments of monastic ordination in the practice of renunciation. I would suggest that there are two broad positions in the NKT vis-à-vis the need for public decorum more broadly in the practice of renunciation – positions which coexist in a manner not unlike Hiebert's concentric exo-/esoteric institutional model: a public orthodoxy that insists renunciation is entirely private, and a private orthopraxy that demands renunciation be partly public.

In the context of emic perceptions of ordination, this chapter has described a prevailing, public view that because authentic renunciation is internal samsara-renunciation, external world- or

lay-monastic distinction's *de jure* blurriness in the Theravāda Buddhist Pali canon. Alongside references in the Sutta Piṭaka “that portray household life as full of hindrances” (1999, 236) and “the laity's primary role as monastic-supporters are a plethora of references in which householders and lay disciples are portrayed as practitioners of the Buddha's *dhamma*, proceeding along on the path to enlightenment” (232). For Samuels this “complexity of views ... actually undermines, to a large degree, the absoluteness of the categories of ‘monastic’ and ‘laity’” (232). Running somewhat counter to Samuels' egalitarian portrait of lay-monastic coalescence, Friedrich-Silber insists on early canonical Buddhism's depiction of unabashed monastic-lay hierarchy: “[A]t no point is the principle of renunciation as such expected to govern laymen in worldly affairs, nor is the renouncer himself supposed to be directly involved in the supervision and management of the social order. As a result, the image of the virtuosi emerging from the canonical scriptures is that of a very special type of elite, combining ultimate superiority with a narrowly defined involvement in and lack of control of secular and collective life” (1995, 70). Friedrich-Silber is careful to point out, however, that hierarchy entails relationality – that “the [Theravada] virtuoso's spiritual and social position cannot be understood independently of the presumed existence of a laity, from which he arises and differentiates himself” (70) – insightfully identifying seven “points of linkage” between “monkish and lay ethics” governing “the virtuoso-layman relation” (64-71).

household-renunciation is not technically necessary and can even be deceptive. This exoteric NKT orthodoxy of privatized, psychologized renunciation coexists, however, with a less popular, more esoteric orthopraxy which *does* demand outer, material supports and/or signs of the practitioner's spiritual, or nirvanic (versus worldly, or samsaric) aspirations and accomplishment: ordination and centre work.⁷⁴

Such an apparently paradoxical interplay between the public signs of private soteriology parallels the “innerworldly” asceticisms of Puritan and Calvinist Christians for whom salvation was at once only accomplished in personal communion with God, but only *discerned* through public signs (of discipline and prosperity, respectively). Seemingly related to a more traditional monastic concern for orthopraxy (not just orthodoxy), renunciation is in fact tied to a behavioural disciplinary regime in the NKT, though so informally/esoterically that it often takes the form of an asterisk, or a qualifying “but,” as in Justine’s aforementioned response to my question about the possibility of lay liberation: “When somebody has a really, really strong mind, they don’t need to [ordain] as well. *That’s pretty rare though*” (my italics).

Nick, a sponsored assistant teacher at KMC North, had met NKT Buddhism as a teenager in England before acquiring well-paid employment and a series of unsatisfying relationships, the most recent of which had ended traumatically just before his arrival at KMC North. Regarding the project of renouncing samsara in the thick of such worldly “success,” he said: “That’s the thing – can you actually walk the walk? I couldn’t; I failed.” He explicitly attributed his recent entry into full-time KMC residential employment to such worldly “failure.” Again later in

⁷⁴ It should be noted that ordination and centre work are in fact often understood to demand and support both renunciation (the wish to escape samsara) and bodhicitta (the wish to free others from samsara).

discussion about the relationship between inner renunciation and the outer regimes of ordination and sponsored centre work, Nick affirmed Justine's isolation of *personal capacity* for inner renunciation as the central factor determining whether or not one needs such outer regimes:

Geshe-la does say that “You don't need to change anything external.” Palden even made the point in Foundation Program; he said, “We always say you don't have to change anything external, and I'm going to say it again at the empowerment in the fall. But the fact is, you do” [laughs]. It's almost like you don't have to change anything if you've got renunciation. But if you don't, maybe you have to change stuff in order to get it.

This important point expresses a complex logic of soteriological pragmatism which at once divorces samsara-renunciation from world-renunciation – by correlating *consummate* samsara-renunciation with externally status quo patrons (i.e., non-monastic and non-manager) and *aspiring* samsara-renunciation with world-renouncing providers (i.e., monastics and managers) – while insisting (“but the fact is”) that virtually everyone is in the latter camp (at best) and must therefore embrace a degree of instrumental world-renunciation as a means of cultivating samsara-renunciation.

As this chapter's interview data suggests, the view that ordination is necessary to progress towards enlightenment appears to be quite rare in the NKT.⁷⁵ The view that *centre work* is necessary to progress towards enlightenment, however, is more common. The latter is influential enough that I would characterize it as an informal NKT orthopraxy, or view of correct practice, which operates alongside the more explicit public orthodoxy that the path demands no specific physical actions as a centripetal force drawing adherents deeper into institutional involvement (and spitting them out). Centre work and centre workers are explored in detail in Chapter 5.

⁷⁵ Gyatso's statement in the *Ordination Handbook* that sexual activity is a serious obstacle to pure Dharma practice (NKT o, 5-6) is a notable, esoteric example of a statement that appears to support a view of ordination as necessary.

CHAPTER 5

NKT Missionaries: Economic Renouncers, Practical Providers

i. Introduction

I arrived at KMC South for a working visit on a Wednesday afternoon in November as patrons shuffled out of the *gompa* and into the café following a guided lunchtime meditation. The centre's treasurer, David, greeted me enthusiastically and led me quickly into the temple office where he gave me a number of forms and apologized for needing to make an urgent call while I read and wrote. As I perused the resident agreement – which, among many other things, stipulated that “the residents of KMC South should sincerely apply effort to cherish the Temple, each other, and everyone who visits” – I heard David speak sternly into the phone: “OK, I’m getting frustrated now. Something that was supposed to be very simple is turning out to be not simple at all.” I gradually deduced that he was trying to get confirmation that the centre’s Resident Teacher, Kelsang Prajna, was insured on a particular vehicle which she used to get to her part-time job and the centre’s various regional branch classes. The centre’s Education Program Coordinator, James, entered the office and asked David if he can have a credit card for a shopping errand. “You sure can,” said David cupping the phone, who gave James a key to a tiny secured room within the office. David eventually got the confirmation he was seeking and thanked the insurance clerk profusely before we set off together on a whirlwind tour of the temple which he concluded just in time for us to sit down in the *gompa* for *Heart Jewel* puja. My own working visit began the following Saturday.

Running thread-like through my notebook of participant observations at KMC South and North is a recurring finding: Kadampa Buddhists are busy. Busyness and business, I will suggest, are Kadampa Buddhist *practices*. Reflecting later on my first visit to KMC South, it struck me that David's customer frustration with the car insurance clerk was a kind of business assertiveness, which, because it was on KMC South's behalf and not his own, performed a productive, even soteriological (versus non-virtuous), religious function. With the clerk on the phone and with me as a newly arrived worker, David's business demeanour addressed the business at hand: his Resident Teacher needed a car to teach Dharma, his Education Program Coordinator needed a credit card to promote Dharma, and his Administrative Director had asked him to show me, a temporary Dharma worker, the lay of the land.

This chapter analyzes the nature, function, and felt experience of religious volunteer work in the North American NKT, with a particular focus on the movement's full-time workers, or "sponsored" missionary "managers." As I worked alongside Allison, a young volunteer at KMC North who had travelled across Europe and North America doing working visits at various NKT centres, she told me how much she enjoyed working and living at Dharma centres, but that she could not see it being her life profession. In explanation, she said that sponsored people all seem to be single or to have money already before becoming sponsored. After expressing amazement at how they live on so little with no future security, she concluded: "I guess they just really must maintain strong faith in karma, and to be OK with whatever comes about, happy to accumulate merit." Allison's experiences, admirations, and concerns around a life of full-time NKT service capture key characteristics of NKT employment that I aim to describe and explain in the pages to come, particularly the need for managers to be "happy to accumulate merit" instead of wealth.

Chapter 3 demonstrated that a synthesis of world-embracing and world-rejecting monastic and missionary imperatives manifests in textual and ritual NKT missionizing strategies that combine this-worldly promotion and other-worldly pedagogy. This chapter extends the analysis begun in Chapter 4 of the institutional manifestation of such monastic and missionary imperatives in the interaction between the NKT's business model and monastic reform, each of which, I suggested, fosters both institutional expansion and individual renunciation.

In particular, this chapter extends and concludes my argument that monastics and centre managers are the NKT's clerical household- or world-renouncers for the reason that their embrace of NKT Buddhism also entails embracing an abandonment of specific worldly pleasures (sex and wealth, respectively) within institutionally enforced disciplinary regimes which constitute their roles as providers (versus patrons) of Gyatso's Dharma at their respective KMCs. Chapter 4 presented a portrait of individuals who have adopted the NKT's formal renunciation regime, monastic ordination, as the movement's sexual renouncers and symbolic Dharma providers. I will now present a portrait of the individuals who have adopted an informal renunciation regime in the NKT, sponsored manager work, as the movement's economic renouncers and practical Dharma providers.

Within this typology of NKT renouncers, I argue that despite its lack of formal sexual proscriptions, the life of a sponsored KMC manager is the principal model for living a "consecrated life" in the NKT – i.e., a life committed to uninterrupted religious practice, morally and materially supported to renounce all secular interests and self-direction (Hori 2014, 177).

Since managers (not monastics) are often removed from their local secular economy, and since a common condition/consequence of such economic renunciation is an informal renunciation of sexual reproduction, I contend that managers (not monastics) are the NKT's consummate renunciators. As such, I aim to demonstrate that the NKT's market-driven expansionism not only supersedes its funding of a monastic community, but replaces it as the principal institutional framework for renunciation in the form of full-time subsistence missionary work. My analysis of interviews conducted with present and former managers at KMC North and South is organized around comparisons of NKT manager experiences with the lives of Tibetan Buddhist monks studied by Mills at the Geluk monastery of Kumbum in Ladakh and Chinese-Canadian Buddhist nuns studied by Verchery at Calgary's Avatamsaka monastery affiliated with the California-based transnational Buddhist movement Dharma Realm Buddhist Association (DRBA).

The chapter then considers some effects of this partially laicized NKT staff model (which I call "missionary monasticism") for individual practitioners and for the greater institution. I argue that it has been a major factor in the NKT's external growth, producing a labour force whose renunciation of economic remuneration provides the organization with the fruits of their economic production, but also in some of the movement's more visible internal fault lines, particularly labour shortage, turnover, and disgruntled former members. Before examining the experiences of the NKT's second cadre of renouncer-providers in this way, the first section examines the role of Dharma centre work more broadly in the movement and in the lives of its members.

ii. Dharma Work

In the previous chapter's conclusion I suggested that whereas the view that ordination is necessary to advance upon and complete the path to liberation appears to be fairly rare in the NKT, a similar belief in the necessity (or at least unmatched advantage) of centre work is more widespread, such that it forms a kind of informal NKT orthopraxy which functions to draw adherents deeper into institutional involvement and supply the movement with needed labour. I will now provide data to support this claim. This section aims to demonstrate that centre work is taught to be, and often experienced as, one of the most powerful forms of religious practice in the NKT.

Teachings

In his study of Indian Buddhist textual treatment of monastic administrative roles, Jonathan Silk identifies “three principal courses” of paradigmatic monk activity: “devotion to service, devotion to study and preaching, and devotion to meditation and personal cultivation, to the physical, the intellectual, and the contemplative, so to speak” (2008, 17). In the final session of a teaching weekend titled “How to Rely on a Spiritual Guide” at KMC North in the Fall of 2017, KMC North's Resident Teacher, Kelsang Palden, introduced the same typology, divorced from its original monastic context, as the “three wheels of Kadam Dharma,” the third of which – the first in Silk's list, and the one of most interest to me in this chapter – explicitly encourages New Kadampa Buddhists to work for the NKT:

In this last class we're going to talk a little bit about the three wheels: [1] the view of Kadam Dharma, [2] meditation of Kadam Dharma, and [3] action.

[1] Every day of our life we should put some energy into studying some Dharma; this is the point about view. ...

[2] The second one is meditation. So having studied the Dharma, we should contemplate and meditate on it. ...

[3] The third wheel is for us to work to flourish the Dharma, to spread the Dharma. So whatever we can do in our life, whatever capacity we've got to help in some way to improve our Dharma centre, whatever we can do, physically or mentally, we should do it; we should make a decision. ... There's something that we can all do to contribute to flourishing the Dharma in large or small ways. And just like studying and meditating, we should think this is a daily practice; it's not something I do on the weekends, or Monday night, or when I feel like it; I do it every day; every day. ... Every centre I live in or work in is a wish-fulfilling jewel, for me. I get tons of merit from coming to the centre every day, most days – working, studying, meditating – because everything I'm doing is for the benefit of all living beings. Not because I've decided, by the way – it's not that I've got such a pure intention – no; this is Geshe-la's beautiful method of helping us all: for us to come and cherish our Dharma centre. Our Dharma centres are dedicated – you look in our constitution ... we're legally, publicly dedicated to benefit all living beings, not just the people in this city, this country; there's an international, global intention to assist all living beings with their problems, to help them overcome their problems. ... World pollution, political problems, bombs, hatred, war – none of it can be stopped without Dharma. ... Anything you do in relation to benefitting your local centre, fantastic! For you, absolutely meaningful, for your life; so so helpful for your merit! One reason we can't fulfil our wishes is we don't have the merit; one reason we get depressed, not enough merit. All these problems coming from lack of merit. You know, when problems rain down upon us in our life, the reason is because our negativities are stronger than our positivities. That's why bad stuff goes wrong, it's bad karma ripening. So we need to change that! How are you going to change it? Get the blessings of your guru into your mind every day; sit in front of him every day in your room, receive blessings; and then with a blessed mind, study some Dharma, meditate on the Dharma, and do some Dharma work. What could be easier than that?

This extra-textual NKT orthopraxy (not enumerated in Gyatso's books) posits the sacral nature of KMCs and the salvific nature of KMC volunteer work in dependence on two related principles: the inherit social-spiritual merit (as in benefit) of KMCs and the resultant merit (as in good karma) accrued by the act of supporting KMCs. The former represents a kind of

institutionalization of virtue (most explicitly, compassion) whereby the constitutional dedication of KMCs to the benefit of all living beings transmutes volunteer actions that may be motivated by lesser, self-centred intentions into the nature of universal benefit, thereby accruing massive merit for the actor.

As with traditional monastic vinaya adherence (in Tibetan Buddhism for example), which does not require inner, intentional renunciation to accumulate the merit associated with the vinaya's outer renunciation, the merit accumulated by KMC work does not depend on the virtuousness of the worker's intention (by this logic anyway), but on the sacral nature of KMCs themselves.⁷⁶

Palden gets “tons of merit” from working for his Dharma centre not because his intention is virtuous, but because the centre is – its virtue being the public provision of Dharma teachings, the universal cause of permanent happiness. KMC visitors and patrons are regularly encouraged in teachings such as this one to reap the spiritual riches of mission labour.

In the concluding session of another teaching weekend at KMC North in the summer of 2016, Palden referred to working for the benefit of one's Dharma centre as “the easy way to practice the Bodhisattva's way of life” – easy because one need not have perfectly realized bodhicitta to perform the role of a bodhisattva, or servant of the world. During his inauguration of a NKT temple in Brazil in 2010, Gyatso explained this performative logic of bodhisattva missionary activity:

⁷⁶ Whereas the vinaya itself is the “outer” behavioural disciplinary regime that has historically trumped “inner” renunciation in Asian Buddhist formations (see Chapter 1), in the NKT that “outer” behaviour disciplinary regime which drags adherents to enlightenment by forcing them to repeatedly just show up regardless of unruly intentions is full-time sponsored missionary work (examined below). NKT monastic ordination, on the other hand, has been largely internalized, so that NKT monastic life is not as governed by such an outer disciplinary regime (see Chapter 4). This is another way, on top of the division of sexual and economic renunciatory principles, that Geluk monastic ordination is bifurcated in the NKT between monastics and managers.

Thank you for helping continually with the development in so many areas. This is wonderful. Now it is your responsibility to spread Kadam Dharma throughout your world. People of this world need Dharma. They need material conditions because they are human beings, but they need Dharma to solve their problems of anger, attachment, ignorance, self-grasping, self-cherishing, jealousy, and so forth. They need Dharma to maintain a happy mind all the time. They need Dharma to make their human life meaningful. ... So it is a wonderful opportunity we have in our Dharma centres to cherish our Dharma centres, improve our Dharma centres materially and spiritually, and increase students continuously. ... So all this is now your job. ... When you are doing this your action is Bodhisattva action. ... So I would like to request you, please care for our Dharma centres, cherish our Dharma centres. These are organised only for public benefit. (NKT i)

A video published on YouTube in December 2017⁷⁷ depicts the NKT's General Spiritual Director, Gen-la Dekyong, cutting the ribbon to a new storefront KMC in Kensington, London before summarizing Gyatso's message about the nature of NKT missionary work as selfless public service:

This centre exists so that 10 million, 12 million Londoners can meet Dharma. But why do they need to meet Dharma? Why does everyone need Dharma? Because without controlling delusions there's no real happiness. It's quite clear! Our anger is destroying our happiness. Our uncontrolled desire is destroying our happiness. And Buddha says without controlling these delusions, there's no real peace; there's no real happiness. It doesn't matter religious, non-religious – we each have to learn how to control our delusions. ... So Geshe-la says our aim is to spread Kadam Dharma throughout the world. This is our world service; Kadampa world service. We are dedicated to the people of this modern world. Our activity is the union of Dharma and peoples' lives. This is our offering, or gift, to the people of the world. And that's what our Kadampa Meditation Centres are for; they're the means by which we serve the world. So many people are going to meet Dharma in here and pour back onto the street with a peaceful, happy, positive mind.

Two interrelated reasons to work for a KMC enumerated in these oral NKT teachings reappear frequently in my interviewee data, explicitly yoking merit economy and missionary activity: I need merit, and others need Dharma. Dharma centre work is thus taught to be one of the most

⁷⁷ <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=DceDbHYTMSM>

powerful forms of NKT religious practice for the interconnected benefit of oneself and others. Centre work is also often experienced as such.

Experiences

At the time of our interview in the Fall of 2016, Nolan, a British construction worker on a working visit at KMC North, had been working for various Dharma centres around the world on and off or ten years since giving up his own construction business and a handful of employees in order to work for Dharma centres full-time. Describing himself as “a bit of a free agent at the moment,” Nolan had been invited to KMC North to renovate a wing of the residence. In discussion of the role of meditation and centre work, he confided: “The thing is I don’t meditate a lot; I’ve not done hours and hours of meditation on renunciation or karma or precious human life, but I know from working at Dharma centres that this is a precious human life, without a doubt.” When I asked him how centre work had provided him with certain knowledge of this particular *lamrim* meditation object (the preciousness of human life), he elaborated:

I just feel it’s like merit. I think if you become a worker, you’re surrounded by a lot of people; sometimes it’s difficult; sometimes there’s difficult people. And you have a choice to either practice Dharma or go. I know when I first started working for Dharma centres it was just amazing! I just wanted to work for Dharma centres. And I feel that, you know, a Dharma centre is put here for the benefit of all living beings; just like building a nuclear submarine is for destruction. If you’re working for a nuclear submarine, for me, I feel like you’re part of destruction. Where working for a Dharma centre is for the benefit of all living beings, and you’re going to get that positive energy. And I could feel it. And from that positive energy, that’s where your merit and the blessings are going to come from.

Nolan’s account of the conducive spiritual conditions provided by Dharma centre work included experiences of merit, blessings, community, and adversity. KMC North resident and Teacher

Training Program member, Leslie, affirmed the first of these, merit (already introduced in Palden's teaching above), as a felt direct result of "doing things for Geshe-la":

Once you start doing things for Geshe-la you really realize that he's not ordinary and this isn't ordinary, and you start to realize how much merit you're accumulating. ... What we're doing for Geshe-la, and Geshe-la's purpose, and the NKT's purpose, and what we're doing for migrators kind of stands for itself; it's so pure that your potentials will start to ripen really quickly.

Another lay member of KMC North, Jeff, who had been involved since the centre's founding but, like Leslie, had never become a full-time NKT worker, nevertheless plainly acknowledged:

"Centres and centre roles function as merit machines; that's all they do." When I asked Justine what she found most rewarding about her time as a manager at Manjushri Centre, she described a vivid experience of merit labour which affirmed Leslie's suggestion that NKT work ripens one's potentials for spiritual realization:

There's this whole idea of merit within Buddhism, and that you generate merit from doing positive, virtuous actions. And I'd heard people say this and I didn't believe them per se; I thought it was a way of hooking people into doing work for the centre maybe. But I think I experienced first-hand that just working that committedly for the centre full-time, there was definitely an effect that was happening on me that I wasn't even conscious of a lot of the time. There was something at work, some – yeah I don't even know how to describe it. Often I didn't have a ton of time for formal practice, but when I would go into formal practice the conditions were easier for me to actually go in. You still have your off days, your bad days, or days where you get grumpy, but overall there's just this energy, and just seeing how much you could accomplish, and just feeling really good about the work that you're doing as well. I don't know, working not for money is a very different experience than working for money.

As for blessings, Nolan's second spiritually conducive condition of centre work, KMC North Teacher Training Program member, Matt told me: "I've experienced it too, working those endless hours at these occasions and then by the end of it you get those tremendous inspirations and those blessings, you go 'where did this come from, this insight?' It didn't come out of sitting

for twelve hours.” The concluding chapter will consider the role of blessings in NKT missionary work, as well as their relation to merit, a focus of this chapter.

When I asked KMC North member, Michael, how his stint as Manjushri Centre’s building manager several years previously had affected his Dharma practice, he commented on the relationship between the two other conditions mentioned by Nolan – community and adversity:

I think when a lot of people first get into Dharma, we come in and we’re pretty naïve. We’re pretty ignorant and idealistic about what it’s all about. So living at Manjushri just rid me of all that kind of stuff. For a while I was just in awe – “look at all these powerful practitioners” – based on my idea of what powerful practitioners were. And then I started noticing some people seemed to be a little odd, doing odd things [laughs]. And then there were some people that were doing things that were really pissing me off. I was getting angry, you know. And then I started thinking “Man this place is a lunatic asylum; biggest bunch of losers.” And then the next step came that I identified myself as one – I went “Whoa. I’m an inmate too!” [laughs]. So that’s when I really realized there’s lots of work to do. In my view that’s one of the purposes of Dharma centres is to bring all this stuff up, our delusions. We ignore them, or they’re hidden from us, or we see ourselves as princes and princesses, but there’s a lot of stuff that you got to recognize and deal with. And Dharma centres provide the opportunity to do that.

While Leslie, Justine, and Matt identified merit and blessings as inner, insight-producing conditions of Dharma centre work, Nolan and Michael described the outer condition of communal life (which generally accompanies full-time NKT centre work) as productive because of its challenges – as invaluable grist for the mill of mind training (*blo sbyong*) in the ascetic manner explained by Palden at the aforementioned KMC North summer teaching weekend: “The key to making progress is *lojong*. It’s training the mind, transforming the mind through learning to transform adversity. In other words ... to see suffering as an indispensable aid to our spiritual progress.”

Unlike Nolan, Michael, and Justine, who had relatively short-term engagements with full-time NKT work, over half my interviewees, like Leslie and Matt, had never worked full-time for the NKT, but instead preferred to donate their labour on a part-time basis as patrons rather than providers of NKT Buddhism. During my stay at KMC South, more days than not I would encounter Gene, a retired Foundation Program member, chatting with residents and working on myriad manual temple tasks. During our interview he told me why:

I volunteer as much as I can. ... It's a balancing act, but I put a lot more time into the temple than sometimes I put into our house, strictly because I get so much out of it. I mean it's incredible; I come home, I feel great. And you know, everybody there truly loves you. And if you're not there they miss you. I can't tell you, the sangha there is fantastic, but it's there everywhere. We have a little RV that we bought, and we took it around the country and visited – I got one of those booklets that had all the Kadampa centres in it – and we went to New Mexico, Philadelphia, Colorado, and we spent time at the meditation centres. And no matter where we went it was like coming home. You get grounded. And I've never had that experience before.

Later when I asked him if the centre in its entirety is an institutional support for his renunciation practice, Gene too described volunteering as a potent form of merit production: “Everything. Everything about *working* there, and developing merit, and then dedicating that merit, to me is important. Because the more merit you have, the closer you are to renunciation.” During my stay at KMC North, retired Foundation Program member and resident, Colin, was equally present as a general temple helper, volunteering on average twenty hours per week. Having worked ten-hour days for thirty years while raising a family, Colin experienced KMC volunteer work as a kind of natural extension of householding:

The kids are all grown, and the wife's gone. So what are we doing now? I've got the rest of my life, maybe another 20 years; but I could die tomorrow. It's pretty cool; there's a whole shitload of work here! So let's carry on. ... I was retiring, and one of the questions of retirement is what are you going to do now? And I didn't know. I sure as hell don't want to work, because I've got enough money, but what do I do? This came along and it's the right thing to do for me. ... Meaningful retirement.

Renata, a Teacher Training Program member at KMC North, experienced her three weekly hours of volunteer work for the centre as more meaningful than her demanding corporate day job, which she had come to experience as an obstacle to her growing desire to work more for the centre:

My ideal situation would be at some point to get more involved with the temple, even working full time, or in some form, for the temple. ... I mean we say we can transform things, but I think if you're working for a Dharma centre, it by itself is already meaningful. So you don't have to make extra effort to transform it. There are ordinary things you have to do, but just think about what you're creating; that's already just very motivating if you can constantly just realize how beneficial it is.

Gene and Colin were retired family men with comfortable pensions who had transitioned from the employment duties of householding to fairly intensive but self-directed part-time KMC volunteer work. Compared to the other twenty-five interviewees who had never held full-time NKT positions, these men's level of volunteer labour was rather exceptional. Only a couple other non-managers (also retired) volunteered close to as much. Renata's volunteer commitment of three hours per week is more representative of the average KMC patron who works outside the temple. Below is a table surveying interviewed managers' (present and former), non-managers', and working visitors' average self-reported degrees of engagement with the "three wheels of Kadam Dharma" enumerated in Palden's teaching above.

KMC NORTH	Prayer + Meditation⁷⁸ (hrs/week)	Study (hrs/week)	Work (hrs/week)
Managers (6)	9.1	2.3	51.7
Non-Managers (14)	8.4	5.5	6.7
Working Visitors (1)	14	3	50

KMC SOUTH	Prayer + Meditation (hrs/week)	Study (hrs/week)	Work (hrs/week)
Managers (9)	8.4	5.3	55
Non-Managers (11)	4.9	3.2	5.7
Working Visitors (1)	0	2	35

Fig. 8. Interviewee time commitments to prayer/meditation, study, and work

While managers reported working for their KMC on average more than five times as much as they meditated and prayed, manager and non-manager informants reported both working and meditating/praying on average more than they study (a pattern which likely reflects NKT Buddhists more broadly).

Work is clearly a prominent religious practice in the NKT. This is not particularly unique, however, within Buddhism or within NRMs. At Kumbum monastery in Ladakh, for example, “almost everything that keeps a monastery going – food, clothing, offerings, even the monks themselves – is provided for by the sweat and toil of laity” (Mills 2003a, 58). And even within the monastery, “despite a significant emphasis, even a pervasive one, on the primacy of meditation and study, there is also substantial evidence in Indian Buddhist literary and other

⁷⁸ Almost all interviewees practiced prayers and meditation in conjunction in the context of ritual *sāadhanās* such as *Heart Jewel*. Although many also insisted that meditation extended beyond formal “cushion time,” the time allotments documented refer strictly to formal sitting practice.

sources of an appreciation of the vital role played by monastic service and administration” (Silk 2008, 207).

Work is also a common religious practice in new Buddhist movements such as the UK-founded Triratna Buddhist Community (formerly Friends of the Western Buddhist Order)⁷⁹ and the Buddhist Compassion Relief Tzu Chi Foundation headquartered in Taiwan, which relies heavily on volunteer labour to conduct humanitarian work around the world. At the time of my interview with KMC South Foundation Program member and volunteer, Diana, she had also been volunteer translating subtitles for one of Tzu Chi’s TV programs for five years, and had volunteered in a Tzu Chi soup kitchen in a different American city for several years before that. Not unlike the emic NKT logic of bodhisattva merit labour described above, Tzu Chi volunteer work is conceptualized more explicitly in terms of compassion than renunciation, as is clear from the movement’s title. Diana explained to me her experience of the difference between these Buddhist virtues vis-à-vis volunteer work:

I feel like renunciation is more about the individual; compassion involves others. I’m more of a doing person, so I like to volunteer. I volunteer a lot, because you feel it transcends yourself. I benefit others, I benefit myself. And I find it’s easier than just thinking of letting go – I mean when you’re thinking of others it comes automatic already, renunciation. It comes automatic because when you work and volunteer, then you see people suffering more than you, you know.

Volunteer work is also a common form of religious activity in non-Buddhist NRMs, such as the global assembly of devotees of the contemporary Indian Hindu guru Mata Amritanandamayi,

⁷⁹ Baumann’s overview of “work as Dharma practice” in the Friends of the Western Buddhist Order (FWBO) concludes comparing the group’s work ethic with Weber’s account of the Protestant “calling” as “an inner connection of achievements in the world with an extra-worldly soteriology” (Baumann 2000, 386): “Both English FWBO Buddhists and members of American Puritan sects of the seventeenth century followed *religious* goals in their professional and social activities. By way of these religious ideals, both have been motivated to work industriously” (385-386). A similar process appears to shape NKT labour.

also known as *Amma* (Mother) or *Ammachi* (Revered Mother), whose conception of the role of devotional labour combines teachings on renunciation and compassion:

Following the Mata's example, the ascetics undergoing spiritual training in the ashram too are expected to lead a life not of seclusion and meditation, but one of active *seva* [service]. Defining her conception of an ideal renouncer, the Mata explains:

A sannyasin is one who has dedicated his entire life, both external and internal, for others, for the good of the world. (Warrier 2003, 267)

When I asked KMC South's Resident Teacher, Prajna, to describe the objectives of her renunciation practice, her account of Mahayana renunciation nicely fits Amma's definition of true renunciation as world service:

For me it seems very closely tied with Mahayana Dharma. ... It's very closely connected to compassion. ... I feel like the best way to fulfill the wishes of my renunciation is to serve other people in the most meaningful way I can. Like by serving them in a deeper more profound way than just, you know, helping in temporary ways. So understanding the nature of suffering isn't just temporary, it's long-lasting, then you want to help people in a long-lasting way, and that's what I feel like giving Dharma is, or serving a Dharma community is. To me it's underpinned by renunciation.

Waterhouse (1997, 144) pointed out that the NKT's missionary imperative outshines its monastic imperative. My research demonstrates that these two aspirational orientations – to convert the world and to renounce the world – have been combined. The doctrine of *bodhicitta* in the NKT (Bluck 2006, 143; Waterhouse 1997, 143-144; Kay 2004, 96) plays a central role in this synthesis, particularly as an emic heuristic by which missionaries understand their own missionizing activity. In casual conversation with an ordained Canadian Resident Teacher, for example, she took issue with my suggestion that NKT sponsorship was primarily about renouncing worldly concerns, since for her it was primarily an expression of her compassion and aspiring *bodhicitta*.

As in the NKT, lay devotees of Amma “are encouraged to perform *seva* through their local branches of the mission” (Folk 2015, 331). Unlike the NKT, Amma teaches that “Seva should not be limited to activities that benefit only the mission. They should be extended to all of humanity and to the environment” (331). Whereas Tzu Chi and Ammachi’s mission channel funds and labour into charitable environmental projects (the Tzu Chi TV program with which Diana volunteered was about promoting recycling) and disaster relief efforts (Ammachi donated millions of dollars to victims of the 2004 South Asian tsunami), service in the NKT is generally restricted to missionizing and mission support. This aligns with Prajna’s account of *renunciation*-informed compassion that prioritizes providing “long-lasting” soteriological aid over band-aid relief efforts that don’t help people escape samsara, as well as with the General Spiritual Director’s previously cited statement that “Geshe-la says our aim is to spread Kadam Dharma throughout the world. This is our world service; Kadampa world service.” As such, engaged Buddhism’s direct application of Buddhist teachings and practices to broader social and environmental issues is not a major emphasis for the NKT.

To support my argument for the existence of an informal, esoteric orthopraxy in the NKT by which correct practice of Buddhist renunciation is associated with, and to some degree measured by, an individual’s involvement in volunteer work to support and expand NKT meditation centres, I will now examine the relationship between Dharma work and renunciation (or the abandonment of worldly concerns) in the lives of the movement’s full-time workers.

iii. NKT Missionary Managers⁸⁰

The NKT funds missionizing centres and missionary staff rather than monasteries and monastics. It is sponsored missionary staff, rather than monastics, whose *de facto* removal from their local secular economy places them in a unique position of productive dependence on the NKT's religious economy. While NKT monastics renounce sexual reproduction with a formal celibacy vow, they can continue to produce private wealth. NKT missionaries, on the other hand, renounce economic production (more specifically, economic remuneration) when they commit to full-time subsistence religious employment, typically working well over forty hours a week in exchange for single room accommodation and a modest monthly stipend.

The most common full-time sponsored position is Resident Teacher, which is supported by every NKT centre no matter how small. At larger centres, usually designated KMCs, there are two other full-time sponsored "manager" positions: Education Program Coordinator (EPC) and Administrative Director (AD). At larger KMCs, there may be additional sponsored positions such as building manager, café manager, and Tharpa manager. While many are ordained, ordination is not a requirement for any sponsored position except General Spiritual Director and Deputy Spiritual Director (see fn. 43). The movement's sponsorship policy is explained on official websites: "Many NKT members are supported with sponsorships to fulfill responsibilities such as teaching and other administrative tasks" (NKT t). "Those sponsored by NKT Dharma Centers receive a monthly allotment for accommodation, utilities and food, plus a

⁸⁰ This section and section vi. are based on a paper accepted for prospective publication in a forthcoming edited volume based on the "Buddhism and Business, Market and Merit" conference held at the University of British Columbia in June 2017.

stipend” (NKT u). There appears to be no economic differentiation between the sponsored positions comprising the NKT organizational hierarchy schematized below; Geshe Kelsang himself claims to live according to the same level of basic sponsorship (NKT v).

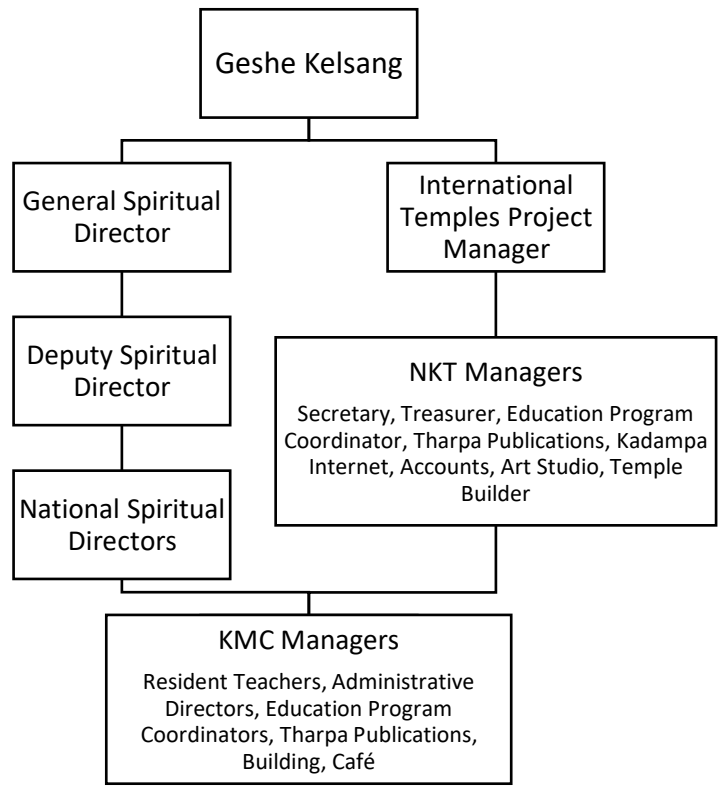


Fig. 9. NKT Organizational Hierarchy

NKT Missionaries and Geluk Monks

How is the sponsored missionary life materially supported in the NKT, and how does this system of exchange relations differ from the one that materially supported Geshe Kelsang’s early Tibetan monastic life in the 1940s at Ngamring Jampa Ling monastery (a small village monastery not unlike Kumbum)?

At KMC South and North, sponsored practitioners' received single-room on-site accommodation and a monthly stipend of \$475⁸¹ from the funding body that oversees the financing of all KMCs globally, the International Temples Project (ITP) – “whose aim is in general to introduce the Buddhist faith of the New Kadampa Tradition publicly” (NKT d, 4). Aside from private donations, the International Temples Project generates its revenue in four ways: admission fees to KMC classes; residential KMC rental income; registration fees for regional, national, and international events; and retail sales of Dharma books and practice materials (NKT d, 14-15).

KMCs hold one or two International Temples Project savings accounts and a daily running account (NKT q, 4), which are reviewed on a monthly basis by the Secretary of the NKT's General Spiritual Director (7). KMCs are sites of business revenue in the four ways mentioned above, but they are not individual sites of wealth accumulation: “The ITP Savings Accounts do not belong to the NKT or the KMCs ... they are international funds dedicated to public benefit for the development of the KMCs and Temple Projects throughout the world” (NKT q, 4). A Canadian monk who had worked at a large KMC in the UK told me that although that centre's residential rental income was generally much greater than its operating costs, all surplus went straight into the International Temples Project and was promptly sent wherever else in the world a centre needed help. According to NKT centre constitutions individual practitioners are also prohibited from profiting from any centre's income or property (NKT d, 14).

⁸¹ As mentioned in the Introduction, while KMC North and South were able to provide on-site residence for their managers, many urban KMCs around the world are without associated residential facilities, in which case the International Temples Project would typically provide the managers of such KMCs with sufficient income to cover the cost of a locally rented private or shared residence. I also heard cases of managers' stipendiary incomes being raised above the \$475 monthly baseline based on higher costs of living in particular locations (e.g., Manhattan).

KMC North and South’s sponsored missionaries received housing and food money from the International Temple Project’s globally linked savings accounts supplied by admission, rental, and retail revenues from KMCs around the world. As mentioned in Chapter 1, Gelukpa monks at the Ladakhi monastery of Kumbum received their food from an on-site storehouse supplied with staple produce by local monastic business revenue (rent, loan interest, trading) and a combination of instituted and incidental lay ritual sponsorship.

For their monastery housing Kumbum’s monks remained dependent on the support of their individual natal families – a household economic embeddedness which led Mills to conclude that “the purity of monks’ ordination is more *upheld* by the proximity of his natal household, than compromised by it” (2003a, 79). The Ladakhi monk’s dependence on family for housing is replaced for the NKT missionary by the religious institution itself, which generally provides staff with housing and food through its global business revenue. While the NKT thus appears to materially provide more for their missionaries, the Ladakhi monk retains the lifelong security of his family’s proximate moral and material support – not at all a given for sponsored NKT workers who are often asked to travel to KMCs in need.

Rather than a requisite reliance on their natal family to materially sustain their religious lives,⁸² NKT staff often rely on other members of their “spiritual family” (local or global) for incidental economic support beyond their instituted housing and stipendiary income. National and

⁸² Although not a prerequisite for NKT sponsorship, NKT managers do in fact often rely on such family support under a variety of circumstances. KMC South’s café manager Cameron regularly sought respite from the pressures of sponsored residency at his family’s nearby home. After Heather and Nick lost their sponsored positions at KMC North (almost two years after my field work), they took up stopgap residence with Heather’s mother. At the time of our interview, Drolma was sleeping on her brother’s couch until her young KBC had the means to cover her rent.

international Dharma festivals, for example, are costly annual pilgrimages that are only paid for by the NKT for KMC Resident Teachers, not for other sponsored managers. When I asked Palden about their ability to afford festival travel and registration, he described an internal NKT gift economy in the terms of a traditional Buddhist householder/renouncer economic relation:

I have never had any difficulty finding the resources to do what I wanted to do, with a good motivation, as a manager. People appear to practice giving. There's a system of giving to rely on. People in this culture, in North America for example, work so much, the result is a massive surplus of material resources. They don't need it all! Sponsored practitioners, like Nick for example, they should be relying on the kindness and generosity of others to go to international festivals, and so forth. They should be giving people the opportunity to sponsor them to travel to festivals, so that the sponsor can accumulate the merit. We're not quite beggars like in the time of Buddha, but we're not far off.

Justine, who had recently stepped down from a sponsored position at Manjushri centre in the UK, emphasized the inspirational role of Dharma work in this system of giving:

I think a lot of people do have kind benefactors, because people are inspired when they see you working and giving that much of yourself for the benefit of something greater than you. You see that money often appears for people to do various things, like going to festivals, or being able to go on holiday – which is quite inspiring as well; sometimes you don't even know where that money is coming from. ... I've seen that kind of throughout the NKT. I've experienced that. I had a benefactor that sponsored me to go and learn ... painting work in Brazil for six months, somebody I'd never met. ... the idea being that if I'm trained, then I could paint or do work in Canada, or on other projects. It was kind of like I was this tool, so he was sponsoring a tool that could then help.

Mills does not describe this kind of voluntary support of individual monks at Kumbum whereby monks' virtuous activities elicit the spontaneous sponsorship of Ladakhi laity. As individuals, Kumbum monks received "a form of redistribution within household and kin groups" (2003a, 68) that is notably absent from the NKT's market business model. The informal, voluntary sponsorship received by NKT missionaries *as individuals* seems more akin to the economic

support received by Kumbum monks *as an assembly*: “a sacrificial form of exchange focused on a sacral centre” (68).

As an assembly, full-time NKT missionaries at KMCs around the world receive the same instituted housing and stipendiary income. Toward a qualitative portrait of their lived experiences, I will now draw from a number of interviews conducted with active and former sponsored Kadampas at KMC North and South.

Manager Profiles

Maggie and Heather

KMC North’s Administrative Director and Education Program Coordinator, Maggie and Heather, worked an average of ten hours a day, six days a week in the KMC’s shared manager’s office. Maggie summarized her duties as “the daily administering of the centre,” and Heather “to support the spiritual aspect of the centre.” In exchange, they each received the \$475 monthly stipend, single-room lodging in the KMC’s communal residence, and membership in a KMC study program (Foundation Program or Teacher Training Program).

On the topic of the job’s remuneration, Maggie joked, “You’re not in it for the money.” Heather described the travel restrictions that come with the job’s low income: “It requires some faith actually, especially sometimes. Even like when I came here, the centre paid for me to come, my flight, and then I knew that if I wanted to go visit my family I’d have no means to do that, you know, which is a bit scary; if anything happens, you’ve got no security.”

They got an average of three weeks of vacation a year. As a Canadian citizen, Maggie had health coverage; Heather, a British citizen, did not: “Sometimes that is a bit of an issue, if you’re feeling slightly sick and you can’t go to the doctor. I didn’t have that problem in the UK,” where she was previously sponsored. They both described having no job security. Heather told me: “I could get sacked tomorrow, or today. ... I try and remain aware of that all the time, that it might be tomorrow that it stops; and not having that mind feeling that you’re owed anything, you’re just happy to give and not expect anything.”

Both managers used the words “crazy hours” to describe the high demand of their KMC jobs. When I asked Maggie if she experienced her job as connected to renunciation, she compared a KMC manager’s tasks to an ordinary job and ordinary remuneration:

Yeah, just being able to do it. Like we don’t get paid; it’s more like a stipend. We work crazy, crazy hours! I think mostly people would do these kind of jobs because they do get well paid. Like if this was an ordinary job it would be a big money job, the amount of stuff that’s involved with it. And I live in a house with other people [laughs].

Heather explained that the workload can be overwhelming at times: “Especially if there’s big events going on, you just have to sometimes plow through and just work crazy hours. And sometimes it’s hard not getting a break, ... when you try to have a break you’re kind of still working. Yeah I think each of the roles has a bit too much responsibility.”

Maggie moved from another Canadian province after KMC North’s Resident Teacher asked if she would take the Administrative Director position. Heather moved to KMC North from the UK after the NKT’s Administrative Director asked if she would take the Education Program

Coordinator position. Maggie had just gone through a divorce – “so because of that I was free to take on a job like this.” Heather chose to end things with her boyfriend in the UK when she got the call – “From my side I am quite happy to be sent wherever, and that can be quite challenging in relationships; ... people finding that hard to understand. ... But for me my practice stuff always comes first.”

Both Maggie and Heather described some abnegation of self-direction in relation to their work. When I asked Maggie whether she expressed any interest in the Administrative Director position to KMC North’s Resident Teacher, she laughed and replied: “Yeah, no; I wouldn’t have asked to do this job.” Heather told me: “Since I’ve become sponsored I’ve never made my own decisions in terms of what I’m doing – in a nice way.” Reflecting on how her practice of renunciation has affected her work life, Prajna expanded on her experience of a similar suspension of volition as a NKT Resident Teacher:

Generally there’s an acceptance of ... less control over your external circumstances. Like you’re basically willing to go anywhere and do anything. ... For me this is connected to renunciation because renunciation and compassion are why I’m ordained but also why I’m a teacher, so it’s all in that sense an expression of that motivation. To me it’s also related to that, or it *tests* that, in that you don’t choose what community you serve; you don’t choose where you live; you don’t choose who you live with; you don’t choose what kind of Dharma you get to teach or not teach. You’re letting go of controlling those things, in order to be of service, of best service, without any bias or without any kind of preference.

Alert to the fact that such self-abnegating service may be concerning to liberal-minded individualists, later in our interview Prajna stopped to clarify: “I’ve *chosen* not to choose. I’ve chosen to give up the choice about where I go, and I’ve chosen to be completely willing to go anywhere that my spiritual guide asks me to go. So that was my choice – to have no choice. Just to make that clear [laughs].”

Asked whether their sponsored life facilitates their practice of renunciation, both Maggie and Heather answered affirmatively by describing the lifestyle's simplicity. Heather emphasized the simplicity of mental focus: "Even if I might be really busy doing EPC stuff, it's all one thing and it feels very simple. It doesn't have that feeling of being pulled in many different directions. ... It's a bit like living off the grid, just not a lot to think about. You're not on any tax system, not going through any paperwork." Maggie attributed a reduction in her stress about finances to the material simplicity of the sponsored life: "I feel so much less stressed out about money than I did when I was working and had a husband and a house. I never need to think about whether the bills are paid. ... I have a roof over my head and I have enough food to live on. And I actually like being more simple. ... I feel more content with less."

To the question of why they chose this work, both managers identified a heightened experience of meaning, while acknowledging their lack of dependents as a contributing condition. Heather told me:

I have been in situations where I've had to choose between a well-paid job and working in a centre. But I do have this feeling like I just want to make sure my life is really meaningful. ... I am in a position where I'm not responsible for other people, so I can dedicate my time in that way. ... I think if you're in a position where you're able to, then it feels very meaningful. And that for me is more important than financial stability.

Maggie's experience was similar: "I didn't have family to take care of; I didn't want to waste my life working in an ordinary job that didn't benefit anybody. It had little meaning to it, from my side. There's more meaning in being able to give energy to work full time for Dharma."

Kelsang Sangye and Kelsang Drolma

Sponsored NKT missionaries work hard for subsistence remuneration. Their employment yields low material returns, but high spiritual returns (akin to monasticism). Both Maggie and Heather emphasized the meaning they found in sponsored life. When I asked Sangye, an ordained former Education Program Coordinator at KMC South, if he thought working for a Dharma Centre functioned as an institutional support for renunciation (akin to monasticism), his affirmative response focused on the merit generated by missionizing:

When you are helping Kadam Dharma to flourish you are laying down massive stores of virtuous karma. So maybe you don't right now have a lot of opportunity to sit in formal practice, but when you take breaks and you do sit down in formal practice, you've got a lot of merit. You've got a lot of merit that is going to catapult you through those realizations and those understandings and those meditations because you've laid down so much groundwork to other people realizing Dharma, that you're creating the causes for yourself to have those realizations. I think if you don't participate in that your progress will be slower. I think people who really work and wholeheartedly commit to their Dharma Centres and do it for the right reason, because they really want people to be free from suffering and they believe it's the right path, and they dedicate a lot to protect that merit — they're like squirrels preparing for winter. And then finally when winter comes and they sit down, they really have a powerhouse of ability and swift realizations. So I think in a way the institution of sponsorship in the NKT can really help you to put away the karmic stores necessary in order to attain enlightenment.

This experience has already been vividly affirmed above by Justine, whose sponsored position allowed little time for formal meditation but provided ideal inner conditions for successful practice when she could find the time. Revealingly, while Sangye clearly appreciated the high spiritual returns of working for the NKT, he found the austere material conditions of sponsored life unsustainable. In the winter of 2015 he had stepped down as KMC South's Education Program Coordinator after two and a half years in order to become more financially independent:

I decided to take a step away from management for a while because I had kind of gotten a little out of balance with my life as far as work and finances and things like that, working for a Dharma Centre. So I needed to kind of figure out that situation. But now I'm finishing trade school. I'll be leaving here to go to another Centre at the end of the year to start working as an EPC for that Centre, and continue to work outside of the Centre as well to maintain my own personal finances.

Later in our interview Sangye described the form of merit labour which he had temporarily stepped away from sponsorship in order to arrange as “the ultimate trifecta”: “You’re working full-time for your Centre, you’re supporting your spiritual life financially, and you’re supporting your Dharma Centre and helping other people financially support their spiritual lives. ... So you’re laying down so much merit.” He assured me that many people in the NKT do just this.

Drolma, a Canadian nun and Resident Teacher, described her increased financial independence during a hiatus from sponsored life as threatening to her renunciation. After six years working for the NKT at a monthly stipend of \$200 – “which is nothing; like your toothpaste and your *tsog*⁸³ and your laundry money; you really have to budget if you want to buy shoes or something with that” – Drolma got a job as a language teacher. I asked her if the shift outside NKT sponsorship had an effect on her renunciation practice:

When I got that first paycheque, I was like ‘This is nice,’ because I felt like I had control over how much money I got. So maybe it was actually harder. ... I just remembered that mind came up, and let’s face it, that’s not a mind of renunciation. And obviously I didn’t have an opportunity to have that mind when I was sponsored, not to say it wasn’t there.

Drolma also identified the enjoyment of being in economic control as a major factor distinguishing an ordinary career from sponsored life:

⁸³ A NKT website defines *tsog* as “an assembly of Heroes and Heroines,” and refers in this context to a food offering made by such a self-generated assembly to a deity (or deities) within a tantric puja.

I can't even imagine how anyone can think of this as a career ... Because in a career you kind of have expectations and goals and you know what's coming next, and it's the exact opposite of being a Resident Teacher ... because you don't know – you could be teaching here, you could be National Spiritual Director somewhere; you could be *General* Spiritual Director and all of a sudden you get a letter [laughs]. It's not a career, for anybody, because you can't control it.

Sponsorship facilitated Sangye's practice of renunciation by providing the opportunity to accumulate merit. Sponsorship facilitated Drolma's practice of renunciation by removing the opportunity to accumulate money.

Nick, Heather, James, and Eva

A significant ambiguity in the NKT's pseudo-monastic staff model surrounds the ability of householders to hold sponsored NKT positions. There are no restrictions on the sexual and reproductive activity of NKT missionaries, nor any formal discouragement of parents from holding sponsored positions. The high demands and subsistence remuneration of NKT missionary work, however, make the sponsored life largely unavailable to householders who do not come into their position with sufficient material means – savings, an earning spouse, or another benefactor – to provide for their families.

KMC North and South were each home to sponsored couples. When I asked Nick at KMC North if the sponsored life would complicate parenthood, he replied: “Yeah, massively. Well it would take parenthood off the menu, financially.” Nick's spouse Heather felt that the demands of the work would complicate parenthood more than the finances: “I don't think it's impossible, but I don't know how you'd have the energy to do both.”

Whereas neither Nick nor Heather expressed a wish to have children, KMC South's James and Eva felt they had to choose between living the sponsored life (as Administrative Director and Education Program Coordinator respectively) and starting a family. James told me:

The one thing that's been stopping it is do we want to stop our lifestyle? Because if we would want to have a kid, it would be next to impossible to do that and be sponsored, and work full time. ... I know it won't completely stop my Dharma practice but it may stop me from working for Dharma fully; both of us.

Eva echoed Heather's sense of the competing energy commitments that would constrain sponsored life as a householder:

My life is so focused on my sangha family. Like I'm pretty much a parent of many people here. And so it doesn't leave a lot of room in my mind to have space to have my own child. And that's something that I'm sort of trying to figure out. ... I would like to think that I'd be able to do this job if I had a child, but I don't know that I'd be able to; especially with the level of time.

The seemingly oppositional nature of the relationship between NKT work and child-rearing is explored in more detail below. Elaborating on her experience of being a parent of many people at KMC South, Eva's account of the actual experience of being the centre's Administrative Director sounded familiar themes of merit accumulation and training the mind through transforming adversity (*blo sbyong*):

I definitely feel like when you're in a sponsored position ... it's like you're in a tornado, or a class four hurricane. Either you're purifying, or you're getting so much merit. It's just waves of seeing your habits of mind, your delusions – it just keeps coming until you finally see something or recognize another layer of tendency or habit that you just need to see in order to be able to reduce it and abandon it.

Regarding the potential challenge of covering financial bases as a sponsored householder, Eva pointed out that: "The families that I've seen it work for financially, when they continue to do it and have a child; they often have a lot of resources." As a high paid medical professional who

worked part-time outside KMC South on top of her average fifty-five estimated weekly hours at the temple, Eva was in fact a shining exemplar of Sangye’s “ultimate trifecta” in practice.

iv. NKT Missionaries and DRBA Nuns

To support my argument that managers replace monastics as the NKT’s outer renouncers, I will now survey five practices of monastic cultivation observed by Verchery among DRBA nuns at Calgary’s Avatamsaka monastery which I observed among NKT managers (and not among non-manager NKT monastics), beginning with the two most conspicuous: hard work and low pay.

Busyness

Verchery details an extremely rigorous schedule structuring Avatamsaka’s nuns’ daily routine of ritual and work activities from 3:30 a.m. to 10:30 p.m. (2015, 365), which has the effect of enabling the nuns to “work tremendously long hours with great efficiency, with little rest and food” (366), and to thereby train in both mindfulness and renunciation: “This deliberate cultivation of *busyness* gradually trains the mind away from reverie and wasteful thinking ... [and] helps nuns cultivate non-attachment by undercutting their personal agency to *choose* what they want to do when” (366).

Although daily life for NKT managers may not be as formally clock-regimented as Avatamsaka nuns, it is not uncommonly just as arduous. We have already seen Maggie and Heather describe their manager workloads as entailing “crazy hours.” After describing the time she dedicates daily to the first and second of the “three wheels” (study and meditation/prayer), Prajna tried to

estimate the third: “Volunteer work [laughs], that feels like sixteen hours. Let’s see, my first text message problem was at 6:30 this morning, and my last one was last night at 11:15. So it’s kind of like from the time I wake up [laughs] until the time I go to bed.” Several formerly sponsored interviewees described similar experiences of virtually uninterrupted work hours.

Leah was an International Temples Project-sponsored artist for six years, producing NKT art such as statues and temple ornaments at various centres around the world (including the movement’s central art studio at Manjushri Centre). In the context of what she described as a commitment of 24-7 labour exclusivity under the International Temples Project manager – “exclusive like you can’t do anything else aside” – Leah, like Prajna, had difficulty estimating her *de facto* work hours:

Well officially, it was nine to five. Honestly I would say usually when there was a deadline, or from three to four months before a deadline, I would not count; you could not count. Because especially if I was leading the project, always there would be some problem arising, conditions, people don’t show up, or whatever. I am responsible for the project to be done on deadline; so whatever it takes to make it happen. Usually the average condition, it looks impossible to achieve [laughs]. . . . The average when I was at Manjushri, if I remember, for at least four to six months, it was 16 hours a day. It’s like wake up at 6 in the morning, I rush to the studio, and I come back at sometimes midnight, 1 AM. And then we’d pray that a miracle happen to make things work [laughs].

Like Leah, Michael described a major discrepancy between his official and actual work hours as Manjushri Centre’s building manager: “During the day it was nine to five or something like that, but my work hours were like 24-7, if anything went wrong, you know.” During his time as KMC South’s Administrative Director, Peter estimated that he “got six, seven hours [sleep] a night, and everything else was Dharma. That was it, seven days a week; 24 hours.”

Leah, Michael, and Peter were lay managers. As mentioned in Chapter 4, although sponsorship and ordination are unrelated NKT institutions, many managers are monastics (e.g., forty-eight of sixty-eight North American Resident Teachers) and many monastics are managers (e.g., half my monastic interviewees). Monastic managers who have chosen to adopt both positions often experience their ordination and sponsorship as coterminous. It took Sangye some time and effort to navigate their experiential separation:

When I resigned as EPC, it took me I would say a good six months to separate Sangye from the EPC, because I had always been an EPC as an ordained person; I got ordained while I was an EPC. So then all of a sudden when I wasn't EPC, I had to learn how to just be a monk, without having this job to be my identifying factor. And it was a struggle. It actually took me a while to really start to just get into my practice, to relax — to come home to puja and just sit down and relax and go to puja. You know, show up at an empowerment and not be stressed out thinking about all the ritual things that have to happen during that empowerment — just going and being a practitioner.

After responding affirmatively to my question whether NKT ordination and sponsorship (when combined) might constitute Geshe Kelsang's reformed version of a monastery, Prajna insisted that those performing both roles should understand them as distinct:

I do think it's important to split being a teacher from being ordained. Because I think those two ways of life are distinctly different, and that that's very important to know with respect to renunciation. Like I would say, for example, to be a Resident Teacher of course your heart practice has to be renunciation; there's no question; otherwise you can't guide others in the same way. But I do think it's very important for people to understand that being ordained doesn't mean you have to be a teacher — not that they aren't mutually supportive. And vice versa: if you stop being a teacher but you're ordained, you don't have to stop being ordained. It's got to be very clear, I think, in the mind of an ordained RT that those two things are separate. Their ordination and their being a teacher are two separate things. They're mutually supportive in their spiritual goals, but they're separate. Your idea of being ordained is a way of life for your whole life ideally; being a teacher may be the same, but it may not be the same. Because I see many people if they confuse those two, and they stop being a teacher, then it undermines their confidence in being ordained, which I

think there's no reason for. It's just because often we misidentify, and we think they're the same thing, when in truth they're two different things.

Despite her perceived need for monastic managers to distinguish between each identity, when I asked Prajna if her life as an ordained monastic has afforded her more free time for meditation than she had in lay life, her response focused on the increased busyness caused by her sponsorship (not ordination), suggesting that for her too their separation was not always obvious:

I would say I have a lot more outer activity now than I ever did then. I had a lot more time off when I was lay. Geshe-la keeps me busy [laughs]. I think that is such a common misnomer; I always get that. I mean it's easier to have this set schedule because obviously I have a commitment to attend puja, generally, so you do have more built in meditation time, which helps you keep your consistency of practice; but in terms of activity and responsibility, no, definitely not.

Kelsang Togden, Resident Teacher of KMC Brazil, provided a similar account of ordination-as-sponsorship (i.e., ordination-as-busyness) to an online Korean magazine during his time missionizing between Seoul and Jeonju. To the interviewer's question "What are some of the main misconceptions that people have about the way your life is like as a monk?" Togden responded:

I think the main misconception is that we don't do anything. We just sit there and contemplate and pray. And of course that's not at all the way it is. My life before being a monk was being an executive with technology and incredibly busy. 11 hour days or more! And when I became a monk, I also had the misconception that it would be quite tranquil, but I have never been busier! (Disanto 2014)

In an interview with a student from the University of Kansas, Kelsang Namdrol, Resident Teacher of a NKT centre in Wichita, suggested that the majority of NKT monastics are sponsored: "We have a lot of freedom as monks and nuns. Most serve the center, but sometimes people choose to live in their town themselves and do their practice and come to things here and there" (Namdrol and Bowman 2015). Importantly, the level of religious busyness in the NKT

which I am suggesting parallels that observed by Verchery among Canadian nuns at Avatamsaka monastery is a property of the institution of managerial sponsorship, not monastic ordination.

A conspicuous absence from Verchery's account of the spiritual rationale for monastic busyness at Avatamsaka (i.e., that it helps the nuns avoid distraction and cultivate non-attachment) is any discussion of the nuns' manifold daily activities as forms of merit production. Just as with centre work in general, as demonstrated above, merit production (merit "accumulation" was a more common term among my informants) is one of the foremost perceived benefits of NKT sponsorship. As such, although adhering to monastic vows is considered highly meritorious activity within the NKT (see Chapter 4), I would suggest that managers, rather than monastics, are the NKT's foremost merit labourers. In a 2013 account of her own taxing experience living the NKT's consecrated life, Carol McQuire, a formerly ordained Administrative Director at a British NKT centre from 1999 to 2006, critically recalls the spiritual logic of NKT busyness:

I yearned for more teachings and answers to my questions. As Dharma realizations depended on my "merit" which would increase the more I "worked for the Guru", I knew I needed to work more. ... Geshe-la would hold up the example of Christian missionaries. I felt on call 24-7, my admin, teaching, and center retreat and study schedule was relentless. (2013, 75)

Sangye's attraction to working for KMC South had roots in the religious voluntarism of his own upbringing in the Methodist church. After leaving the church at eighteen, he described finding Kadampa Buddhism at age twenty-seven as a kind of homecoming:

The church that I grew up in was something that I was always really, really involved with. We did a lot of youth mission trips as kids; we were at church probably three or four times a week. But that community of people was also the community of people that I was probably closest to, was really good friends with. So when I started to attend KMC I almost instantly found that same level of acceptance and friendship there. It was almost like a natural fit; it was like something I had been missing for a long time. So I became very involved on a volunteer basis.

After two years of involvement at KMC South, he was asked to become the centre's Education Program Coordinator; he ordained a year later. In a post-empowerment retreat commentary to Gyatso's textual teachings on the "wisdom of expounding Dharma," Sangye described NKT missionary merit labour in terms not dissimilar to McQuire's disaffected account, but with the zeal of a devotee:

Teaching Dharma is one of the most meritorious activities. We need massive stores of merit to understand emptiness. Geshe-la gives us perfect and ample conditions to collect merit. Being asked to teach Dharma is an opportunity for a merit jackpot. ... We need to relish every opportunity to teach.

He then went on to tell a story of Gen Jampa (the current NKT Deputy Spiritual Director) who recounted a conversation with Geshe Kelsang in which Jampa expressed concern about feeling stretched thin after giving six empowerments in six different locations in six weeks, to which Gyatso's only response was: "You're a very lucky boy. Do you know how much merit you accumulated?" There is no more potent form of merit production for NKT adherents than performing what Gen-la Dekyong called "Kadampa world service" by working at local KMCs for the flourishing of Gyatso's global mission. And there is no more celebrated way to perform such "Kadampa world service" than by surrendering to what McQuire referred to as the "relentless schedule" of full-time, sponsored missionary work as a KMC manager – a regime of religious busyness which is taught (and often felt) to produce merit, but which can also produce burnout (discussed below).

As the original NKT worker who has yet to burn out after “40 years of kindness,”⁸⁴ Geshe Kelsang is generally seen by his devotees as *the* exemplar of the inner realizations of renunciation and bodhicitta rolled into uninterrupted outer missionary action. I asked Patricia at KMC North if she knew anyone who had developed renunciation, to which she replied:

Geshe-la seems to be completely a renunciate, if not a Buddha, probably a Buddha. But he’s certainly modeling the behavior of a renunciate. His model is always working for Dharma; always working for his students, even though we know, we’ve heard that he wanted to be in retreat and was happy to be in retreat, and was asked by his teacher to come out of retreat and go to the west and teach unruly westerners.

I asked James at KMC South if there were signs that Gyatso had accomplished renunciation:

“Yeah: He solely works for Dharma. That’s his main goal is Dharma. He invests in nothing else. He doesn’t invest in saving the whales – but everyone! And that’s very inspiring to devote your entire life. His life is completely devoted.”

A number of patron interviewees also marveled at the level of devotion reflected in their local KMC managers’ voluntary busyness. After answering my question if he knew anyone who had developed renunciation with “No doubt in my mind that Palden has,” Matt reflected on Palden’s renouncer lifestyle: “So there’s this whole notion of renunciation that you go onto your little mountain and do your solitary thing. Well Palden is one of the busiest guys I know. I’ve seen him working and doing things, building shelves one minute, then giving teachings.”

Gene’s wife Anne was also a Foundation Program member and casual volunteer at KMC South. In response to my question whether she thought the life of a sponsored manager required a

⁸⁴ This was the theme of the 2017 NKT international summer festival at Manjushri Centre in England, in commemoration of the fortieth anniversary of Gyatso’s arrival at that centre in 1977.

certain level of renunciation, Anne identified the voluntary combination of busyness and austerity as the main indicator of her Administrative Director's renunciation:

Yes. Well a willingness to really turn their lives in dramatic ways. Let's take Eva for example. She has a thriving practice out in the real world ... My guess is she could make pretty good money if she was full-time – and she has renounced that, and chosen this life. And of all the jobs at the centre ... she gives and gives and gives, and where I think she must be at a point of exhaustion, she comes up with a smile on her face and you see her outside washing windows, you know, which is not an assigned task; she's just doing it because it makes her happy! To me she's got this pretty down pat.

For Anne's husband, this same dual regime of hard work and low pay (the design of which he attributed to Gyatso's wisdom) voluntarily adopted by KMC South's managers was proof of their pure motives, and the basis of his own awe and admiration:

I just think that they're the best. ... I mean Prajna just preparing for these teachings, and I think she does an excellent job, I can't thank her enough for it. And Eva for all the work that she does in keeping that building, keeping the budgets, keeping all the balls in the air – and then she works in order to keep her medical benefits; she rides a bike; it takes her half an hour to go each way on her bike. James in doing all the work that he does, and then getting volunteers to do what they do. It's incredible! And it's all done from the heart, because they're not making big dollars. And Geshe-la set it up this way. He said you get a stipend, but the stipend – like a couple of hundred dollars – is nothing! ... If you get paid big bucks, it's no longer – I mean you provide kindness for other people, but it is possible to no longer do it from the heart. And to me that's a huge piece, and one of the attractions that I have, versus the Jerry Falwells and people like that who are making millions of dollars as a result of getting out there and doing what they're doing. *And* they've got to work! Prajna had to make lunch today. And I've seen them all out there painting; I've seen them all out there cleaning. I mean that's all part of the process.

Gene's admiration for the unpaid “heart” labour of KMC South's managers was in turn a major inspirational basis for his own inclinations toward centre merit labour described above:

At my previous centre [in New England] I would get up in front [at General Program classes] and do some announcements, and introduce the teacher and everything else, and when I had my chance (which I usually took) I pointed out to people that our kind teachers do *not* get paid, and in most cases have to pay to go to their training! I

mean it's not only they don't get paid, but they don't get a free lunch either! It's unbelievable. So it *has* to be from the heart. It's not from the wallet. And to me that's *very* attractive; very attractive. And it's rubbed off: I go in and I spend as much time as I can at the temple doing stuff, and love doing it for nothing.

For this patron couple, KMC managers' renunciation of remuneration was an equally defining feature of NKT sponsorship as the overall busyness of sponsored managers (described in this section). Such economic austerity, which we have already seen Drolma describe as conducive for her renunciation training, is a second prominent feature of sponsored NKT manager work that parallels the religious life of nuns at Avatamsaka monastery.

Austerity

Based on their adherence to the economic regulations of the vinaya, Avatamsaka's DRBA nuns "have given up all property and financial resources, limiting their material possessions to little more than a toothbrush and a pair of shoes" (Verchery 2015, 366). Not unlike Maggie's attribution of a reduction in her stress to the material simplicity of her role as KMC North's Administrative Director, "in interviews, the nuns often said they felt privileged to live without the distraction of money" (366). Unlike DRBA monastics (and Geluk monastics), whose productive dependence is generally tied to a formal vow "not to handle money or have personal possessions" (366), NKT managers take no such vow. Rather, the productive dependence experienced by NKT managers is the result of combining a heavy workload (described above) and a formal commitment to not personally profit from their manager role, as enshrined in the NKT Internal Rules:

18§8. No NKT-IKBU Spiritual Director or Charity officer, and no Resident Teacher or manager of any NKT- IKBU Dharma Centre, shall use the name, resources or

activities of any NKT-IKBU Dharma Centre, or the position given to them by the NKT-IKBU, for their personal material benefit, either directly or indirectly. (NKT a)

This economic proscription for NKT managers can be described as an institutionalized, or constitutionalized, version of the economic precepts of the vinaya which have been internalized for NKT monastics (see Chapter 4). The NKT Internal Rules thus applies economic elements of the *Mūlasarvāstivāda Vinaya* to managers which have been removed from the formal NKT vinaya. For the reason that the traditional monastic abandonments of economic and sexual production have been bifurcated between NKT monastics and lay or monastic managers, the NKT vinaya presented in Gyatso's *New Ordination Handbook* is not sufficient data to adequately analyze his monastic reform; such analysis must extend to the code of conduct enshrined in the NKT Internal Rules, particularly as it applies to managers. Interpretation of the NKT Internal Rules as a kind of lay vinaya is supported by the document's proper title: "A Moral Discipline Guide."⁸⁵

We saw in Chapter 4 that in his published teachings Gyatso generally discourages outer world- or household-renunciation, but that his esoteric statement in the *New Ordination Handbook* that sexual activity is a "serious obstacle to pure Dharma practice" (NKT o, 5-6) is a rare explicit textual statement in support of sexual renunciation, traditionally one of the twin pillars of monastic world-renunciation. Rule 18§8 in the NKT Internal Rules (cited above), which strictly

⁸⁵ This point at once supports and challenges aspects of Friedrich-Silber's contention that "A proper understanding of the Buddhist Sangha ... must draw not so much on its own organizational and institutional features as on the specific pattern of virtuoso-layman relations that came to form a diffuse but enduring and essential axis of societal organization in Theravada countries ... [and which] is not a unique and exclusively Theravada phenomenon" (1995, 11-12). A proper understanding of the NKT's *de facto* virtuoso "sangha" (missionary managers) must draw as much on organizational and institutional features of the NKT as on the more traditional lay-monastic framework which it informally reproduces. That is, awareness of both general Buddhist lay-monastic relations and specific, non-explicitly monastic NKT organizational features (e.g., NKT Internal Rules) are necessary to properly discern and chart the former's distinctive manifestation in the NKT.

disallows NKT workers (monastic *or* lay) to derive personal profit from their full-time NKT employment, represents Gyatso's most explicit textual statement in support of the other pillar: economic renunciation. This rule does not, however, prohibit NKT managers from accumulating wealth from sources unassociated with their manager role (e.g., outside employment, savings, earning spouse). To cover the cost of things such as medical insurance and festival travel, for example, three of KMC South's four managers (Prajna, James, and Eva) held part-time jobs outside the centre on top of their KMC workloads (respectively estimated at 70+, 55, and 55 hours). The other manager, Cameron, refused to follow his colleagues' example: "There's no way that I'm going to have a regularly scheduled job and do all these hours, it's just not – I don't know how they do it. Sometimes I feel like it's too much, like some people just got to chill out."

Later in our interview Maggie expanded on her distinction (quoted above) between being paid and receiving a stipend: "It's \$475 per month. And it's not considered an income, I was told. It's more like remuneration for volunteer work. I think it's important because we don't want to get *paid* for doing Dharma work." Economic austerity stemming from unpaid busyness is a reality for many NKT managers, such as Heather, Sangye, Drolma, and Nick. After describing her experience as a NKT Resident Teacher of choosing to not choose where she lives and who she lives with, Prajna extended her discussion of accepting "less control over your external circumstances" to money:

Also obviously being content with a lifestyle in which you don't have financial security. And that, as I've gotten older and have had some serious health issues, has become much more apparent to me, *and* my family – that I have chosen something that is what most people feel to be not real responsible, in that there isn't a strategy or plan. You know, like I'm not saving for my retirement; I don't have a financial plan; I don't have an IRA [individual retirement account]. So for many normal people they look at that and they think that's insane. Even though on one level, on

the surface my life looks pretty normal and natural – I don't think people coming here are startled – but if you actually start to scratch below that surface, you see there's a willingness and a sacrifice that actually has to be quite deep, because for most people it would be a cause of great insecurity, about their wellbeing and their livelihood and their future. But for me, I thrive in that; like I really enjoy that [laughs]. Because to me it means I'm genuinely doing this for the right reasons. I'm not doing it for external reward: I'm not doing it for wealth; I'm not doing it for position or place. ... So I feel like it keeps in check what my intention really is, over the years, to see that.

As is clear from the above accounts of Gene and Anne, which reaffirm Prajna's first-hand experience of a link between outer austerity and inner authenticity, the economic renunciation of NKT managers does not go unnoticed by KMC patrons. KMC South supporting member, Martin, described it as "true renunciation" (countering the exoteric NKT orthodoxy described in Chapter 4), and as a component of Prajna's "full-on commitment" which he found profoundly attractive:

Especially as Americans in a materialist society, that insecurity about money, the fear of lacking finances, of being destitute financially, is probably the biggest fear. I can tell you my number one fear is what am I going to do about retirement. I can't get to the place where I can't be useful to sustain myself. But the costs keep coming, you know, for food and utilities and taxes and whatever else – what am I going to do? Well, if I really wasn't attached to that – we're attached to this idea of having a retirement, and that this is what we need to do; we're making that sacrifice because, blah, blah, blah. But then that perpetuates the misery. ... Prajna has clearly sold out to what she believes. And that, to me, is the most compelling thing and inspiring thing that I see in her, is that level of commitment; because so few people *are* willing to do that. That becomes very attractive. It's aromatic. It really is difficult to go that way, but I think it's the most *influential* path. You're giving up more; you're sacrificing more of self. Hard to do; not for everyone.

For Martin, Prajna's embrace of financial insecurity was particularly impressive in an American society which proliferates a particularly acute fear of austerity. As such, it was the quality that he felt most obviously marked her level of religious accomplishment as higher than his own, and American society at large.

Several students at KMC North described a similar respect for their Resident Teacher's disinterested renunciation of material wealth. I asked Patricia why she felt that Palden was a renunciate:

He just doesn't seem to have any attachments to anything. He lives quite simply. He doesn't make any money; he doesn't take a salary, even though he's entitled to one. ... He doesn't want anything special; when you try to give him something special he's reluctant to accept it; and he gives things away all the time. Whenever he's given things he gives it away.

Renata responded to the same question about Palden:

For one, look at the way his life is: he moves to wherever Geshe-la wants him to; that's hard! I just know for me if someone says "move; sell your house and move to a different country" [laughs], I don't know if I could make that decision. I have some inside information because I do the finance side, and I know he's donated his own money towards the temple. And then he goes off, he teaches, he comes back. Whatever money has been given to him as gifts comes in in the form of donation. I think that's why he's so pure; it just strengthens my faith.

In casual conversation Palden himself told me: "I don't like to use NKT money; it's very expensive money. I think everything done at a temple or Dharma residence should be volunteered, because that's where people get their merit!" An important supportive condition of Palden's strict abstention from the use of NKT funds (including his sponsored stipend) was a pension from his secular working life prior to NKT employment.

Reflecting on the high worldly costs of their "tremendous" merit production, Renata went on to marvel at the austerity of sponsored KMC manager life more broadly:

When I started working for the temple as part of the finance team, I remember asking just out of curiosity how much they were paid. When I heard the number my mouth was open; I was like "you can't possibly live on that; how do you live here?" That's why I just look at them with a lot of respect, and a lot of admiration too. It's

definitely someone that went in with such a strong faith, and strong motivation. There's a lot they give up, absolutely. ... And these really young people like Nick, Heather, you just think "wow." On the one hand you just think of the tremendous merit and good karma they're creating, but on the other hand there's also the day-in day-out side of it. I don't know their whole situation, and sometimes I just wonder, you know; it takes a very strong mind to live the life they live.

In the final few minutes of his last public teaching to date, at the 2013 NKT international Fall festival in Portugal, Gyatso himself used the word "strong" to describe his movement's spiritual directors and managers. Like Gene, Gyatso praised NKT workers' dedication as the product of a "good heart" precisely because they do not materially profit from their work:

The real job is NKT General Spiritual Director, Deputy Spiritual Director, so forth. They are doing such a wonderful job, as like me, much better than. But they act like normal person, humble. ... So they will materially receive nothing! Exactly the same like managers. Managers and the General Spiritual Director, who is a higher position, [from a] material point of view benefit the same. Everything same level; but still working very hard because they have good heart. They understand their activities are very meaningful for public benefit. So in this way everybody is working to spread Kadam Dharma almost like volunteer; such wonderful. I can definitely say people of Dharma centres, their life is bodhisattva's way of life; they are so happy, and dedication so strong.

Gyatso's account of sponsored NKT positions as "almost like volunteer" is apt: Managers receive just enough remuneration for their Dharma work to house, clothe, and feed themselves. The financial austerity (and productive dependence) that the combination of such subsistence income with full-on work duties often entails for individual managers is the feature of the NKT's staff model which most clearly supports my characterization of NKT staff as pseudo-monastic renunciators living the NKT's consecrated life of missionary monasticism.

Cenobitic Cultivation, "Hierarchy Shuffle," and Self-Abnegation

As mentioned in Chapter 4, monastic ordination in the NKT does not generally entail an abandonment of personal space toward the kind of cenobitic cultivation via “mutual polishing” (Hori 2014, 184) that Verchery observes among nuns at Calgary’s Avatamsaka Monastery – for whom “[b]eing in the constant presence of at least one other nun helps ensure that nuns maintain their decorum at all times” (2015, 367). Whereas non-sponsored NKT monastics can and do maintain as much personal privacy as they desire, the majority of sponsored NKT managers reside communally in Dharma centre residences (at both KMC North and South for example) which, beyond one’s bedroom door, are “decidedly cenobitic” (367) environments not unlike Avatamsaka. Much like Nolan and Michael who experienced the cenobitism of full-time NKT work as productive because of its challenges, and Avatamsaka nuns’ comparison of their constant mutual surveillance to the polishing effect of shaking potatoes in a bucket of water, Palden described the communal life of KMC residence as providing a raised bar that discourages spiritual laziness:

Living in a Dharma Centre can present a greater challenge to be virtuous, than outside a Centre. In an ordinary living and working context, you’re surrounded by believers in samsara. Everyone without exception is engaged in deluded samsara improvement. It’s like gross craziness, and it’s easy to notice it when you have Dharma in such an environment. It’s easy to feel different, and to feel virtuous in comparison. But in a Dharma Centre it’s more subtle, because you’re surrounded by practitioners who are working on their minds, hopefully.

Further, Palden saw an explicit connection between the lack of private property and space that came with his position as KMC South’s Resident Teacher and his practice of renunciation: “I’ve chosen to put myself in a situation now where I can’t express my worldly concerns. You don’t have much privacy in this life. You have to share everything, your kitchen, your bathroom, etc. You have to share your *life*. That’s what it’s about.”

Verchery also described an institutional DRBA “practice of frequently transferring monastics between temples” (368) as “hierarchy shuffles,” which, according to one of her nun informants “help undercut the individual’s attachment to the power and status that come with hierarchies by preventing the individual from getting used to any one particular role” (369). We have already seen Drolma allude to a similar dynamic of “displacement, often both geographic and bureaucratic” (369) in the NKT, whereby even the individual occupying the top authority position of General Spiritual Director could “all of a sudden get a letter” dispatching them to a new position and/or location. Reflecting on the renunciatory logic of hierarchy shuffles in the NKT (which function to prevent attachment in both the authority holder *and* those under them), Sangye attributed them not to an institutional monastic procedure but to the all-knowing agency of the movement’s Guru (Gyatso) and Protector (Dorje Shugden):

I remember talking to Prajna one time and she was saying she had been sent from one city in the Northwest to another where she helped build a centre; and as soon as that Centre got going she was sent to a city in the Midwest, helped get a centre going there, centre starts to flourish, centre starts to get built up, and then Geshe-la takes her, sends her to the Northeast, she starts all these centres there and then as soon as those centres get started, boom, he pulls her out and sends her down here. It’s like “why?!” ... It seems like the moment you see — this happens a lot with administrators; when administrators get too tight, and they start to get too controlling over the community, to the point that the community is no longer flourishing because everything is hinging on that one person, and that person is now imputing ‘I’ on the inherently existent Admin Director – that’s the moment Dorje Shugden comes in with the wisdom sword and cuts everything loose. ... So I think a lot of times Geshe-la recognizes when people have become too attached, when they see themselves as being the fulcrum of that Dharma Centre. ... There’s sort of an internal joke amongst the NKT managers: Anytime somebody is asked to resign from a position, people usually say, “Just get fired two or three more times, and then you’ll know you’re really going places in the NKT.” Because you see people asked to resign from positions all the time. I think it’s good, because it keeps the communities from getting too attached to particular people.

NKT managers are not only busy, broke, and beholden; they are often on the move. Since my field work at KMC South in late 2015, the centre has had two other Resident Teachers, Prajna has relocated twice to be Resident Teacher of two other fledgling American KMCs, and James has moved KMCs once as Education Program Coordinator. Asked by the same Korean magazine cited above, “Why did you choose to teach Modern Buddhism in Korea?” Kelsang Togden replied: “I received a call from the assistant to our main teacher asking if I would be interested in going to Korea. And why not? I decided in my life that I don’t need to look for people to help. ... The opportunities appear. ... I basically feel very open to following whatever appears, and it’s been very interesting” (Disanto 2014). As mentioned in Chapter 1, Togden has been Resident Teacher at NKT centres in San Francisco, New York, Argentina, Korea, Portugal, New Zealand, England, and Brazil since the mid-1990s.

Finally, Verchery suggests that the strictures of monastic life adopted by Avatamsaka’s nuns challenge observers “to consider modes of personhood in which the individual is not superior to the group, in which autonomy cannot be understood apart from obedience, and in which the private sphere of the individual is not valued over the demands of public decorum” (Verchery 2015, 368). Similar elements of self-abnegation can be discerned in the preceding practices of monastic cultivation adopted by lay and monastic NKT managers – busyness, austerity, cenobitism, and hierarchy shuffling. Together, these practices constitute what Hori refers to as the “consecrated life” of “ascetic self-discipline” (2014, 182) in which “[o]rdained monastics give up self-direction over their lives” (177) – except that the NKT’s virtuoso ascetics need not be ordained. Prajna, a monastic Resident Teacher, described a voluntary abandonment of

preferential volition in relation to where she lives and who she serves, but so did Heather and Maggie, two non-monastic managers.

According to Verchery, Avatamsaka's nuns "consistently described these limitations [of busyness and austerity] as *liberating*. This view contradicts the mainstream notion of freedom as life *without* limitations for, in the view of these Buddhist monastics, it is precisely rules and limitations that make one free" (2015, 366-367). We have seen that for Drolma and Palden, for example, the material limitations of NKT missionary work imposed an outer renunciation of private property that functioned to facilitate the growth of inner, mental renunciation (a desire for the *real* freedom of nirvana) by inhibiting the expression of their worldly desires.

v. The Reproduction Question

In Chapter 4 we saw Prajna, Drolma, Sangye, and Loten describe their monastic ordination as performing a very similar boundary-like function, which keeps them focused on their ultimate soteriological goal (permanent freedom from suffering) by encouraging a practice of monastic moral discipline that helps keep them undistracted by lesser, worldly goals (temporary freedoms from suffering). So what's the difference between ordination and sponsorship in this regard? In short, the disciplinary limitations imposed by ordination (e.g., to abandon engaging in meaningless activities, to practice contentment, and to reduce desire for worldly pleasures) are primarily mental, or internal, whereas those imposed by sponsorship (e.g., busyness, austerity, cenobitism, and hierarchy shuffling) are primarily physical, or external.

The obvious exception to this pattern of monastic inner renunciation and managerial outer renunciation is NKT monastics' practice of sexual abstinence. In the same summer 2016 KMC North teaching weekend cited above, Palden explained that "The first three perfections – generosity, moral discipline, and patience – were said by Buddha to be suitable for lay practitioners; and the second set of perfections – joyful effort, concentration, and wisdom – were said to be suitable for the ordained practitioners," before going on to explain why this no longer applies in the NKT:

But nowadays we don't make such hard and fast distinctions. All these practices are suitable for everybody. ... For modern ordained Kadampas, their lives are not much different from the lives of laypeople – except they don't have the entanglements that lay folk have with their relationships. They have some relationships but not the entanglement of relationships.

Without disagreeing with Palden's concise account of the uncommon characteristic of ordained NKT monastics (my arguments in Chapter 4 strongly support his portrait), I submit that NKT managers are often coerced out of relational entanglement (by virtue of the traditionally monastic dynamics just described) as much, if not more, than NKT monastics.

Above I cited Heather's account of the effect of NKT hierarchy shuffling on her own intimate relationships: "From my side I am quite happy to be sent wherever, and that can be quite challenging in relationships; ... people finding that hard to understand. ... But for me my practice stuff always comes first." When asked to leave the UK to become KMC North's Education Program Coordinator, Heather chose to break up with her local partner. Heather's current partner, Nick, reflected admiringly on the level of her renunciation and guru devotion:

Heather wrote to Geshe-la when she was young and said I'm giving my life to you, and thus far she has, you know – gone anywhere. She was crying about leaving [her

first centre] to go be the EPC [at another UK centre]; she didn't want to leave but she did it, set up that city centre from nothing, and then left to come here, packing her bags. She was even seeing a guy in England! And just like that, gone.

In addition to the constraints imposed on long-term personal relationships by the geographical uncertainty of sponsored life,⁸⁶ the ability of NKT managers to enter into the “entanglement” of the parent-child relationship is a major question.

While a life of full-time missionary work in the NKT demands a significant degree of economic renunciation, that life does not formally require renunciation of sexual activity and reproduction, a proscription reserved for ordained NKT monastics. This bifurcation of monastic principles represents the NKT's innovative laicization of clerical renunciation. But this is an innovation which carries with it a major ambiguity surrounding the *de facto* ability of parents to become missionaries, and of lay missionaries to become parents within the NKT's pseudo-monastic staff model. Although *de jure*, parents can be managers, we have seen that the energy and economic demands of sponsorship and childrearing render responsible reproduction unviable for many of NKT managers (e.g., Heather, Nick, Eva, and James).⁸⁷ NKT missionaries' formal renunciation

⁸⁶ Like religious busyness, the geographical uncertainty which I am suggesting parallels that observed by Verchery among Canadian nuns at Avatamsaka monastery is a property of the institution of NKT managerial sponsorship, not monastic ordination. Prajna clarified: “As an ordained person you can choose where you live. As a teacher I don't choose where I live; I go wherever Geshe-la's asked me to go. So that takes me very far away from my family – 3,000 miles away. That requires some level of acceptance, because I'm very close with my family.” On the other hand, unchosen mobility is often but not always a feature of NKT sponsorship. I know a few longstanding NKT managers (most of whom have local familial obligations) who have never been uprooted by top-down hierarchy shuffles.

⁸⁷ In this regard, NKT missionaries are not unlike early American itinerant Methodist preachers, less than a quarter of whom were married during Francis Asbury's lifetime: “The high rate of single preachers in America was directly related to the severe financial constraints of the office. From top to bottom, Methodist ministers were allowed a maximum allowance of sixty-four dollars until 1800, ... at a time when the average yearly income of a Congregationalist minister was approximately four hundred dollars” (Hatch 1989, 88). While KMC North and South managers' \$475 monthly stipend is a subsistence income to be sure, it is far more comparable to the remuneration of FPMT clerics than the pay gap between Congregationalist and Methodist ministers in 1800. In the fall of 2018 a FPMT centre in central British Columbia, for example, aspired to “host a resident teacher in the most suitable way ... [which] would involve paying a stipend of \$700- \$1000 per month and covering medical and dental expenses ... [and] having a support person to be available to our teacher for any and all needs” (FPMT b). Another FPMT centre

of economic production makes them partial clerical renunciators, but a common condition or consequence of their economic renunciation is an *informal* renunciation of sexual reproduction. This combination of respectively formal and informal abandonments of the household activities of economic and sexual production supports my argument that missionaries, rather than monastics, are the NKT's consummate renunciators.

The NKT's version of clerical renunciation as arduous, subsistence missionary work thus bears an ambiguous relationship to family. In his discussion of the NKT as an example of modern religious fundamentalism (in a section titled "A rejection of modernity?"), Kay described a common emic discourse which imagines the NKT as a family:

"The primary metaphor that is used within the organisation for describing the NKT is that of the family. ... The NKT is presented as a global family, its members are 'the sons and daughters of the same father [Geshe Kelsang]', and events such as the spring and summer festivals are 'family reunions'" (2004, 111).

While I do not disagree with Kay's characterization of the NKT as fundamentalistic – though I believe it needs refining to better account for the movement's modernist reforms surveyed in Chapter 2 – I propose that the householder/renouncer relation is an equally fruitful heuristic for interpreting *sponsored* Kadampa Buddhists' discursive construction of the NKT as family.

In the introduction to her volume *Family in Buddhism*, Liz Wilson offers a three-fold typology of ways that family can intersect, rather than clash, with the institution of renunciation (2013, 4-7):

(i) renunciation as the creation of a new family, (ii) renunciation for the sake of family, and (iii)

in the California Redwoods was hiring a Community Relations Coordinator at a monthly salary of \$2000 including cooked meals, dental and health insurance, paid time off, and a month of personal retreat (FPMT c).

renunciation together with the family. The first of these is particularly helpful in analysis of the NKT's pseudo-monastic staff model. The *de facto* ability of sponsored Kadampa missionaries to start their own family is significantly diminished by the labour commitments and financial austerity of the NKT missionary life. In this sense, family does clash with the institution of renunciation. None of my fifteen manager interviewees (present and former) had dependents at the time of their sponsorship.

KMC South's Administrative Director, Eva, however, likened her role as a NKT manager to that of a parent: "My life is so focused on my sangha family. ... I'm pretty much a parent of many people here. And so it doesn't leave a lot of room in my mind to have space to have my own child. And that's something that I'm ... trying to figure out." I would suggest that Eva was "trying to figure out" how to live the informal implications of Gyatso's laicized bifurcation of monastic renunciation – i.e., how to live the NKT's particular householder/renouncer relation. While she experienced the NKT's consecrated life as a constraint on the creation of her own family, she also experienced that very constraint as the primary condition for her creation of a new "sangha family," and of her self-identification as a sangha parent.

Justine also described her former manager position at Manjushri Centre as a pseudo-maternal role:

I think for me a big part of it was just giving love, and just cherishing people. It's like that was what that job was; I kind of felt like this mom. And that's the mind that you needed to generate to do that job. It's like I am a mother to all of these people that are here, that are living here, that are visiting here. So you just take care of them, and you give them what they need. ... That brings something more heartfelt to the experience, as opposed to it being like this job, or an employer and employee kind of dynamic.

Having been offered her Manjushri position “because the woman that was doing it before me was pregnant and couldn’t continue because of the physical demands of the job,” Justine stepped down after two years in order to take care of her ailing mother in Canada, and almost immediately learned of her own pregnancy, which she interpreted as an answer to her prayers for spiritual direction:

Before I left Manjushri I was talking internally to my guru, just asking for some clarity, you know, with coming back: Yes OK I’m helping my mom, but should I come back and also really try to help a centre here in Canada, maybe even look at doing another sponsored job? Or because my finances had dwindled so much, should I maybe go into a normal working environment, and just bring everything I’ve learned and my own peace of mind into a normal work environment, and maybe that would be of benefit to people that I’m working with? So I was just asking for some clarity or direction or help to see what it is I need to be focusing on. And two days after leaving the centre, still with these questions but making that request – boom you’re pregnant – and it’s like wow, OK [laughs]. ... It was just very obvious; How can that be any clearer? You have this little being inside of you now, so obviously your focus needs to be taking care of this little being, and whatever that entails.

For Justine, the answer to her questions about life focus that parenthood provided entailed not returning to a sponsored position anytime soon (something that she told me became clear to her right away), largely due to her sense that “starting a family within a sponsored position I could see being very challenging; it’s just too demanding.”⁸⁸

Jarrod was a Teacher Training Program member at KMC North who had done working visits at a few different NKT centres in Europe and the U.S. after his undergraduate before settling into a

⁸⁸ Justine did know two people (in separate relationships) who raised children while working as managers at Manjushri Centre (one formerly and one currently). The former female manager had an earning spouse during her centre work tenure. The current male manager had a supportive family as well as a partner with some savings and state benefits, who “was projecting that they could do it for three or four years” before she would look for part-time work outside the centre.

demanding career and getting engaged. To my question whether permanent NKT sponsorship would be of interest, he identified the financial demands of impending family life as the main obstacle: “Oh yeah, if I won the lottery that’s what I’d do. ... I’m going to have a family, so I have to make sure I look after them. But if financial got taken care of, then I would still of course look after my family, but in my own time I would work at a Dharma centre.”

The ambiguity surrounding the reproductive activity of NKT managers is an issue avoided by the global Taiwanese Buddhist organization Foguang Shan by its choice to maintain celibacy in its own partially laicized model of renunciation as subsistence missionary work: “A ‘lay-monastic’ [*shigu*] has not fully renounced but has vowed to remain celibate and to live on Foguang premises for the rest of his or her life so as to devote all his or her energy to aiding the organization in spreading the Dharma” (Chandler 2005, 182). Founded a generation before the NKT in 1967, Foguang Shan has likely encountered the need and had the time to develop a system of institutional retirement support for elderly or otherwise incapacitated missionaries. To my knowledge the NKT has not yet developed such a retirement plan, rendering the economic security of retired missionaries as ambiguous as missionary parents and children. I expect the support of managers in old age will soon become an issue the group will be forced to address.

Palden contended that ordained Kadampas “don’t have the entanglements that lay folk have with their relationships.” I have argued that NKT managers (lay and ordained) *are often* drawn out of “the entanglement of relationships” by the demands of their pseudo-monastic work regime. I would also argue that NKT monastics *are not necessarily* drawn out of such relational entanglement by their ordination.

This point is succinctly illustrated by a Canadian practitioner’s account of a middle-aged couple she knew who had recently ordained together and continued to live together. When their National Spiritual Director subsequently asked the new monastics if they would move cities to take on sponsored positions at different NKT centres, they declined in order to stay close to their children and to not lose their jobs and ripening pensions.⁸⁹ My informant reflected: “They both said no. So that’s quite interesting because they’re getting ordained but they’re not renouncing anything. So for them ordination, there is no change. It’s almost like there’s no sacrifice.”

Although Mills has shown the proximity of family to be an economic pillar of Tibetan monasticism, this couple’s ties to the very spheres of productive and reproductive activity that Buddhist monastics theoretically renounce prevented these NKT monastics from becoming NKT missionaries. In other words, the nexus of their financial and familial entanglements prevented these ordained adherents from embracing the outer renunciation demanded by sponsorship (not demanded by ordination). Although such apparently “worldly concerns” prevented them from practicing what Martin (and the vinaya) held up as “true renunciation” (i.e., of socio-economic security), according to Gyatso’s account of renunciation as “an inner realization and not a physical action” which “does not mean that we abandon our friends, families and our human enjoyments” (2013b, 13), this monastic couple’s household entanglements posed no necessary obstacle to their fully qualified practice of true renunciation – “the strong determination thinking, ‘I must liberate myself permanently from the sufferings of my countless future lives’” (19-20).

⁸⁹ A practitioner at KMC South pointed out to me that ordination in pensioned retirement is “something very common in the NKT”: “We might sometimes get criticized for this but I don’t think there’s anything wrong with it – ordination is definitely an end-of-life plan for many people. You know, ‘I’ve retired, I’ve lived my life, I’ve raised my family, I have the means to support myself, and the gift I’m giving myself is ordination.’ I’ve met many, many who have said that.” Such a pattern of retirement followed by renunciation mirrors the classical Indian *varṇāśrama-dharma* (‘duties of status and stage’) model prescribed in non-Buddhist *Dharmaśāstra* texts, which Buddhist authors such as Aśvaghōṣa deliberately reject (Olivelle 2008, xliii).

The case of this non-sponsored monastic couple not only suggests that NKT monastics are not necessarily drawn out of relational entanglement by their ordination, but that sponsorship can in fact demand relational disentanglement *more than* monastic ordination. Since only managers occupy what Mills calls a position of “productive dependence” in the NKT, only managers are “deployable agents” (Lofland and Stark 1965, 873) of the movement, whose living founder still appears to call the shots. Unlike the NKT’s popular “masses” (whom I have called patrons) and non-manager monastics (whom I have called symbolic providers), therefore, KMC managers are the NKT’s practical Dharma providers. In Gene’s appreciative words: “Anybody that works at the temple is a volunteer. ... If Eva wasn’t there, if Cameron wasn’t there, or James, or Prajna, the temple wouldn’t function. For that reason I would say they’re establishing resources for the community, or the sangha, to be able to continue practicing.”

I hope it is clear from my economic comparison of Geluk and New Kadampa systems of clerical renunciation, the experiential accounts of sponsored KMC managers (and perceptions of them by non-managers), and my comparison of KMC manager and DRBA monastic praxes, that missionaries not only replace monastics as the recipients of religious economic support in the NKT, but that missionizing has largely replaced monasticism as the principal institutional support for the renunciatory abandonment of worldly concerns. Rather than monastic ordination, a life of full-time sponsored missionary work is the principal model for living a “consecrated” life in the NKT.

vi. The Business Model of Missionary Monasticism

At a conference titled “Buddhism and Business, Market and Merit” at the University of British Columbia in the summer of 2017, Gregory Schopen delivered a keynote presentation titled “The Business Model of Buddhist Monasticism” in which he used the precise term that my informant Jeff used (above) in account of the function of NKT centres and centre roles. According to Schopen, “the buddha made monks’ huts into perpetual *merit machines*.” Based on his long-standing research on the *Mūlasarvāstivāda Vinaya*, Schopen went on to argue that “Buddhist monasticism did not survive because it was loving, but because it was extremely well managed by very smart guys who knew how to make a buck.” Crucially, he pointed out, Indian monks engaged in a variety of profit-generating business ventures (e.g., renting gifted land for shares) not (ostensibly) on behalf of individuals, but on behalf of Buddha, Dharma, and Sangha.

Not unique to ancient Indian monasticism, the emic sacralization of institutional religious revenue and denunciation of individual religious revenue has played an important structuring role in the economic logics of Buddhist institutions ever since. Contemporary examples include Kumbum monastery in Ladakh (Mills 2003a, 64-65), Avatamsaka monastery in Calgary (Verchery 2015, 366), and NKT centres around the world, where Mahayana wealth-renouncers work hard to generate, process, and accumulate wealth on behalf of their respective religious institutions conceived as sacral centres. The same distinction is a prominent economic feature of the NKT, where every centre relies on a daily flow of admission and retail revenue (and often also on residential rental fees),⁹⁰ whilst adherents are prohibited from profiting from centre

⁹⁰ As mentioned in Chapter 4, a KMC could not survive or expand without a steady flow of admission-paying visitors to drop-in General Program meditation classes – “bums in seats” in the words of one Resident Teacher. KMC North and South relied more for revenue, however, on KMC patrons (namely, members and residents) than on

income or property (NKT d, 14) and centre managers are prohibited from profiting from their NKT employment (NKT a, 18§8).

At the aforementioned 2017 conference in Vancouver, Jamie Hubbard opened his responding comments to a panel on “Market Buddhism” with the provocative statement: “religious institutions are not separate from businesses, but we desperately want them to be.” Although the NKT and each of its centres are registered as not-for-profit charitable organizations, a key component of the group’s ability to establish hundreds of centres and recruit thousands of disciples in less than thirty years has been the business practice of marketizing religious events into institutional (and *not* individual) revenue. The promotional commodification of NKT teachings, transmissions, retreats, and festivals in expanding global markets (examined in Chapter 3) is combined with diligent collection and institutional allocation of individual admission fees. While acknowledging the contentious peculiarity of this Dharma-for-money exchange policy, Brian explained how he had come to make sense of it, how his Administrative Director enforced it, and how it seemed to reconcile market and religious values:

I think people see we’re not just an open charity, we’re not out there doing a lot of charitable works, and then they go right to, “Oh it’s a business.” And people that are critical of the NKT that’s what they say, that it’s this big giant business with rich

admission-paying visitors. KMC South, for example, generated \$5,040 per month from member fees as of summer 2016: ten Foundation Program students paying \$65 per month, twelve Teacher Training Program students paying \$80 per month, and 98 temple supporters paying \$35 per month. Combined with \$3,000 per month in rental fees collected from six residents paying \$500 (four sponsored non-paying residents not included), KMC South generated \$8,040 per month from member and resident fees. On a given week in November 2016, KMC South ran approximately three lunchtime meditations attracting an average of approximately eight people per class paying \$5 each, and four evening General Program classes attracting an average of approximately twenty people per class paying \$10 each. Combined with roughly one special weekend event per month (such as a day course or retreat) attracting approximately thirty people paying \$25 each, KMC South generated roughly \$4,550 per month from admission fees – just over half the monthly income generated from member and resident fees. These numbers support my differentiation of KMC visitors and patrons, and provide economic evidence of the concentric (visitor → patron) constitution of KMC communities. KMC South generated approximately \$12,590 per month from admission, membership, and rental fees (not including shop and café sales and private donations), and paid its four sponsored staff a total of \$1,900 (roughly a seventh of total KMC revenue).

backers. But I see it like a school. If you look at it we've got classes; they're on a very specific schedule; there's different levels of classes for different people; it's like a boarding school for some people in that they live there and they live there because they want to be close to the classes. ... I think if for whatever reason Geshe-la had to cut the NKT down to its bare minimum, the educational part of it would be what we'd keep. ... So yeah we're putting money into the institution, into the buildings and things like that, and yeah we charge for classes, but just like a school would – because there's a lot of criticism over that. [...] A lot of the other traditions maybe just have a donation bowl, but we always say “this is what the class costs,” and that does get peoples' mind a little bit. They are like “why can't we just say ‘suggested donation?’” And in some cases we do, but we always lean toward at least stating all the time “this is what the class costs.” Eva's very on to this, and some people have been critical of her for it. She'll let someone into class, but she won't just let them in; she'll sponsor them; she'll make sure that there's a paper trail, and the money comes out of the fund for sponsoring people. It's a lot of work for her really, and it's like “why are you bothering?!” It's because – and I think this is a very western ideal – something's not worth anything if you're not willing to pay for it. If you're not willing to pay and work for something, what is it worth to you? And if something's just given freely, well what value does it really have to you?

In a remarkable teaching at the opening of a NKT temple near Lisbon in the fall of 2013, Gyatso went so far as to sacralise not only the volunteer labour supporting his movement's material expansion, but the commercial money-for-Dharma exchange policy that has enabled it:

We are organising the ITP. Originally it was my idea, but in reality you people are working; you did everything. But I push. You are like a drum; I am beating you like this [gestures drumming], and the sound is coming [laughs]. So how we did such wonderful development? We didn't steal money; we didn't cheat for money; we didn't ask to give donations; nothing – simply I myself and my students teach and money naturally comes, because wisdom creates it. So then every single money, even one penny, we use for the development of individual Dharma centres. Everything is meaningful, international. So through this we understand that our Kadampa Buddhist activities are no different from Bodhisattva's actions. Our way of life is Bodhisattva's way of life. Many people try to work financially, working very hard for the development of Dharma centres and temples. Everybody tries to give energy; even they encourage me. You encourage me in reality sometimes.

Gyatso's dual insistence that NKT revenue is generated from Dharma and used to flourish Dharma rejects the notion that business is necessarily worldly, as well as any moral disjunction

between religion and business. In light of his strict prohibition of individual adherents profiting from NKT revenue, Gyatso might conceivably amend Hubbard's aforementioned statement to "religious institutions are not separate from businesses, but if individuals are not personally profiting, everything is meaningful."

The NKT's expansion has been accomplished largely by means of effective missionizing strategies that enthusiastically embrace a marketization of Vajrayana religious values through the marketing and monetizing of local ritual activities. Rather than interpreting the relationship between such strategies of promotional modernism and pedagogical traditionalism as simply a form of false advertising (see Chapter 3), or the requirement of payment for teachings on non-attachment as merely a devaluation of Dharma, I would suggest that such business practices reflect a creative (albeit contentious) synthesis of pragmatic and soteriological religious concerns that is constitutive of Gyatso's vision of "Modern Buddhism." Returning to the pseudo-monastic staffing element of the NKT's business model (this chapter's focus), I will now attempt to assess how missionary monasticism is working out for the group.⁹¹

⁹¹ See Neelis 2011 (12-17) for a helpful overview of theoretical frameworks for the study of economy and religion pertinent to the study of Buddhist monasticism. The following account of the main advantage of the NKT's pseudo-monastic business model (cheap, efficient labour) briefly references Stark's controversial use of market theory to explain individuals' religious behaviours as expressions of economically rational choices. A component of this theory that attributes a religion's robustness to its degree of strictness relies on a premise that "[p]eople who have invested a certain amount of human capital (time and effort) in acquiring the beliefs of one tradition ... will be reluctant to lose that capital" (Bruce 2002, 175). While this dissertation is concerned with the high levels of "human capital" demanded by the NKT and supplied (or "invested") by a virtuosic managerial staff, unlike some of my informants I do not interpret such "strictness" as a necessary source of the NKT's growth or as a necessary sign of its stability. Steve Bruce (2002) has convincingly argued for the economic determinism of such an approach. Rather than portraying the high demand strictness of NKT labour as an unequivocal strength, this chapter offers a highly ambivalent assessment by identifying a number of associated disadvantages in greater detail (labour shortage, burnout, and disgruntled former members). R. Stephen Warner's defense of the "new paradigm" for the sociological study of American religion identifies the market principle with which this study is most concerned ("constitutive disestablishment"): "Because of disestablishment, religious groups must persuade their constituents, they cannot command them. Moreover, the religious field is open to anyone. ... When, as is true of the United States, the society is culturally and structurally pluralistic, religious organized groups can enjoy a great deal of autonomy to define themselves" (2002, 5). My economic analysis of missionary monasticism as a "business model" focuses on the NKT's revenue-generating marketization of religious teachings combined with its expenditure-reducing de-

Cheap, Efficient Labour

The NKT's partially laicized model of renunciation as arduous, subsistence missionary work – what I've called “missionary monasticism” – has undeniably been a major factor in the group's institutional growth, producing a diverse and highly motivated labour force whose renunciation of economic remuneration provides the organization with the fruits of their economic production.

The pseudo-monastic managerial component of the NKT's business model also appears to function as a support and safeguard of managers' “pure” (i.e., non-worldly) intentions. One Resident Teacher told me: “Faith is my only insurance. If I lose my faith, I'm screwed.” For Palden, the moral discipline demanded by the sponsored life – a situation in which, he told me, “I can't express my worldly concerns” – is a basis for NKT job security: “If a sponsored practitioner keeps a pure intention, then I think their position is secure. ... If their intention becomes impure, polluted by the worldly concerns, then they won't last very long – they'll start thinking ‘I need a new coat, to go to the movies, etc.,’ and more money for these things.” I asked Palden if he thought the NKT might relax the austerity of managers' work conditions, to which he replied:

marketization (or voluntarization) of religious labour as one exiled Tibetan lama's institutional response to the diasporic disestablishment of Tibetan Buddhism. Warner describes “the American religious system as an arena of chronic organizational creativity. In the absence of an established authoritative ‘church,’ American religious activists had to innovate other forms for the organizational expression of their faith” (13). Of the religious innovations spurred by the “free market” religious economy in which Gyatso is purveying his previously established, closed-market Tibetan Buddhist tradition, I am most interested in those emerging from the transition between compulsory, monastic Tibetan societies and voluntary, missionary North American assemblies. I am not interested, however, in interpreting such innovation as evidence for Stark's “general claim that monopolies are inefficient” (Bruce 2002, 173) or his assertion of “a general connection between the freedom of a religious economy and religious vitality” (167). My assessment of some apparent business advantages and disadvantages of NKT missionary monasticism does not entail theorizing a connection between “the virtues of competition” (167) and the NKT's religious “vitality” as compared to Geluk Tibetan Buddhism.

Of course at some point in the future the council could decide to change things, but ... if the change was made to pay managers a full ordinary salary so that they could be very materially secure and comfortable, then that would be a corrupt organization wouldn't it. Geshe-la once said that the reason this is working really well right now, and purely, is because it's young!

Palden's statement about purity and corruption nicely captures the NKT's self-conception as a less worldly, purer form of Geluk Buddhism – corrupted (in Gyatso's perception) by “the preponderance of worldly and materialistic motivations” (Kay 2004, 88). It also, however, expresses a sense of such degeneration's eventual likelihood, recalling Stark and Bainbridge's definition of secularization as the process whereby a religious tradition's “initial otherworldliness is reduced and worldliness is accommodated” (1985, 429). Most significant for this chapter's examination of the economics of clerical renunciation in the NKT, however, is Palden's contention that “a full ordinary salary” which made NKT clerics “very materially secure and comfortable” would be a certain sign of corrupt worldliness. Such an “ordinary,” “comfortable” staff model would not in itself clash with Gyatso's definition of renunciation as “an inner realization” which “does not mean that we abandon ... our human enjoyments” (2013b, 13). But it would (at least according to Palden's characterization of religious corruption) contravene Gyatso's prohibition of managers deriving personal profit from their religious work (NKT a, 18§8), as well as fail to provide an outer disciplinary regime (which I have argued is more “monastic” than monastic ordination in the NKT) that coerces managers like Palden into not expressing, or acting on, their worldly concerns (at least not as much).

The NKT fits a fairly typical description of first-generation NRMs as “prophetic movements ... [which] foster highly robust and strictly religious cultures that place considerable demands on their members” (Rochford 2007, 6). The group also appears to exhibit at least five of Rodney

Stark's ten economic traits of a successful NRM: sufficient strictness to screen out free riders and keep commitment high (1996, 137-138); "legitimate leaders with adequate authority to be effective," including doctrinal justification and member participation (139); ability to "generate a highly motivated, volunteer, religious labour force including many willing to proselytise" (140); competitiveness against "local conventional religious organizations within a relatively unregulated religious economy" (141); maintenance of "strong internal attachments, while remaining an open social network, able to maintain and form ties to outsiders" (142-143).⁹²

The first and third of these traits align most closely with the two pseudo-monastic dynamics I have charted among NKT managers in most detail above: high demand and low remuneration. The greatest business advantage of a staff model combining these elements is cheap, efficient labour. When I asked Peter if he saw his formerly sponsored centre work as part of his Dharma practice, he replied:

It was my Dharma practice; especially when I was AD; I didn't go to Teacher Training Program, I didn't do anything; it was just running the building. Doing the AD and the treasury were more than a full-time job. ... Geshe-la set the tone for me in Brazil when he got all the managers together of the KMCs in a meeting, and Geshe-la ran a business meeting. Geshe-la ran a phenomenal business meeting. He is a business mind, besides being a wonderful guru. And he told us that that was our practice. "Your job, whatever it is, you don't have time to do your prayers, you don't have time to do this, you don't have time to go to Teacher Training Program, whatever; your job is your practice," and to take it as your practice. And I did, I devoted it as my practice, made sure that whatever I did I did the best I could at it.

To my question whether there was a particular practice he emphasized while he worked, Peter responded: "Yeah, just keep on dedicating merit." In addition to the remarkably productive and

⁹² In time the NKT may (or may not) come to exhibit three more of Stark's traits: maintenance of "a level of fertility sufficient to at least offset member mortality" (140), maintenance of sufficient strictness over time (143), and socialisation of "the young sufficiently well as to minimise both defection and the appeal of reduced strictness" (144).

inexpensive labour force generated from the soteriological inspiration connected to such prophetic encouragement directly from the guru-deity, the NKT's renunciatory work regime has also given rise to institutional effects that are far less clearly advantageous for a movement so intent on expansion – namely, the rendering of the movement's consecrated missionary life unfeasible or unsustainable for many adherents who may otherwise get and stay on board. In this sense, I believe the NKT's missionary monasticism is closely related to some of the group's more visible internal fault lines: labour shortage, burnout, and disgruntled ex-members.

Labour Shortage

The aforementioned newly ordained couple's declination of sponsored positions due to familial and financial commitments is an exemplary case of the NKT's difficulty recruiting missionary managers. When I spoke with the Resident Teacher of the fledgling KMC to which one of the new monastics was asked to relocate, the teacher expressed a sense of puzzlement at the lack of willing workers. This chapter's opening account of Allison's enjoyment of global working visits but unwillingness to personally consider permanent sponsorship because of the financial and family restrictions such a "career" would impose provides another example of a devotee unwilling to renounce economic production for the sake of helping Kadam Dharma to flourish.

In her mid-twenties, Allison was in the active process of deciding on a career path at the time of our interview, and may well have included NKT employment as a possible option if it paid better (at least enough to potentially sustain a family). In her mid-forties at the time of our interview, Renata was actively considering leaving her well-paid corporate job in order to actualize her "ideal situation ... to get more involved with the temple, even working full time" like the

managers at KMC whom she admired so much, and whose austerity, she insisted, demanded “a very strong mind.” Even without children or a wish for children, Renata’s doubt about her own strength of mind vis-à-vis such outer renunciation was a major factor inhibiting her embrace of the NKT’s consecrated life: “I think that’s one of the reasons why it’s a bit of a struggle thinking do I want to work for the temple full time. You literally just give up your moneymaking. ... I would have to think about even living in a centre [laughs], because you give up your privacy; you give up a lot of comfort.” For two middle aged members of KMC South, Sean and David, the reduced autonomy that economic dependence on the NKT would entail ruled out even considering sponsorship. Sean told me he feels blessed “because I can enjoy the benefits of everything the NKT has to offer and I don’t have to do things I don’t want to do, which is to beg for money,” while David rejected a disjunction between his own principle of self-reliance and renunciation: “I don’t want a free lunch because then they would expect things. It wouldn’t be about renunciation. It’s about being beholden; that I could be told what to do. And I can’t be that; I’m not willing.” A similar position of admiring ambivalence vis-à-vis NKT sponsorship strikes me as fairly representative of the average KMC member, or the Kadampa Buddhist “masses.”

Sponsored individuals are not the only KMC members who navigate the NKT’s missionary-monastic work ethic. Matt’s account of his (and his wife’s) ongoing negotiation of the “endless” volunteer demands from the KMC and its workers clearly identifies NKT managers as “monastic” world-renouncers, in contrast with “lay” householders like himself whose daily financial and familial commitments pose insurmountable obstacles to living that virtuoso ideal of the deployable bodhisattva agent:

This is a monastic lineage, but now we are the first generation trying to make it work in a different context. For instance, I love Palden and I’m just taking whatever he

says as a profound kind of life experience teaching, but I'm not like him! I can't be him. He's one of those extreme cases of "give it up; there's nothing here; give it up"... It's like our wonderful people at the temple, you know – the AD, the EPC – they all gave up their lives and came here. ... They work extraordinarily! It's amazing! But there's no pressures of external life. They don't have that pull. They don't have family, mortgage, you know, whatever. This is the difference for me. ... It's very precious; it's like for us when we step out and do retreat; there's no other concerns; you can give it all you have, you don't check your mail, phone, whatever. They have nothing else to do. I'm not saying it's not stressful; I'm very aware of how stressful it is, but it's the only thing. ... I talk to my wife about it because she also has a tendency always to not feel like she's done enough. But I'm like, "Hold on a second; that's their choice; it's like people who ordain, that's their choice; I am not making this choice; I have a life; I'm in debt up to here; I have to work about fifty hours a week to make money; I have a family; you have a family; and we *can't* be at the temple all day long every day because it doesn't work. I did it before, it just creates too much imbalance!" And this is an endless path; they always ask for more; so I've learned to set the boundary. ... So finding the balance with that so that when that realization of renunciation will arise, it will be truly authentic; it will be an expression of the context of the life that I live, not somebody else's idea. That's what I'm working on. ... It's never comparing, never thinking you should – that they got it but you didn't. I totally get the aspect of relying, of reliance, and always serving from this place, from this peace place. But I also know myself that there's an extreme service; I've seen people do that. For me that's missing the point as well. You know, I'm happy whatever good karma they create, but I'm like there's a point being missed here; because I've seen them do that from places not relatable, and creating tremendous pressure on others, thinking that they should do it to this level.

Like Matt, who concluded, "It just comes down to every single person on this path finding a way into a place where you do things that matter," after years of involvement with KMC North Jeff had come to believe that honest "self-assessment" and "self-reflection" were more essential to an authentic spiritual life than the performance of any institutional role. Acknowledging that "centres and centre roles function as merit machines," after following Gyatso's personal advice to not break up his marriage in order to ordain (see Chapter 4) Jeff too settled comfortably into a householder life – which he felt was no less consecrated than NKT sponsorship:

I think it goes back to what's renouncing? And renunciation is a mind, a disposition of mind. Sponsorship I look at from a place of function. For myself I spent years

helping the NKT, being on the board;⁹³ organizer; I drove my teacher around all summer. But when my children were born I couldn't do that; my service was to another: my child. But it's how you view the child. It's a being. Our function is to serve beings. Now if your life facilitates the ability to teach, be a RT and an EPC, and you do it from a place of wanting to help the guru, and you're being honest with yourself – there are some people who want to teach because they want to be up there; I've seen this again and again over the years: people want to be part of a centre and be the EPC and when they're overlooked as EPC they're so angry! It's a huge attachment to the position; a huge, huge attachment to the title – Admin Director; I mean these are huge attachments. ... I never had the desire to be an EPC or a RT or anything like that. I like to spread the Dharma; I do it on a very personal level, not in a formal setting. ... [A former KMC North teacher] really wanted me to teach; she'd really harass me about it. ... I don't know, I just don't have this calling. But everyone tells me I should be teaching; you don't know how many times I've been told. ... Life at home, life in community, helping at a community centre, giving food to poor people on the street; those are all Dharma. They're not mutually exclusive to the bodhisattva's life; not at all. Each one of us has to do some self-reflection I think.

In Jeff's case (and Matt's too, albeit less explicitly), the NKT orthodoxy that the soteriological grounds of renunciation and bodhicitta are private minds (not public actions) provided doctrinal justification for *not* living the NKT's consecrated life. This Protestant view of soteriological progress (explored in Chapter 4) thus at once provides justification for lay (i.e., patron, non-provider) NKT practice and for opting to not pursue a life of missionary monasticism.

Finally, the abrupt closing in 2016 of Kadampa Primary School Derbyshire (Burton Mail 2016), launched in 2012 in England, is a revealing development which appears to have resulted in part from a labour shortage within the NKT's subsistence employment model. When I asked Palden if he knew why the school had recently closed, he told me: "As usual, likely a number of factors;

⁹³ Like all religious organizations in Canada and the United States, every NKT centre must have a board of directors that is representative of the community. Although this does not preclude a local Resident Teacher from wielding sufficient community power to ignore or fire others at will, this model of temple governance represents an important *de jure* democratization of Tibetan Buddhist models of clerical rule in which a monastic institution's head monk (*lopon*) decides everything.

I think they were having trouble finding staff. But the ultimate reason is that they didn't have the karma for it to continue." About a week later when I told Nick and Heather about the school's staffing shortage and closure, Nick was shocked to find out that the professionally trained teaching staff were only paid the NKT's common stipend rather than a normal schoolteacher's salary. Heather responded by pointing out that if certain NKT staff started getting paid more than others, the lines would blur and it could become a slippery slope of remunerative expectation. In this case anyway, the NKT seems to have been unable to recruit and retain a sufficient staff of professional schoolteachers willing to work for subsistence remuneration. The school's failure thus illustrates the constraints imposed upon the movement's institutional diversification by its pseudo-monastic employment model.

Burnout

Another complication related to that employment model has been staff burnout. Michael described his experience of holding down 24-7 on-call hours as Manjushri Centre's building manager in terms of burnout and karmic purification:

Spiritually I was fried, and that's what the job did for me. I just got burnt out. And I recognize now a couple of things: One is that I was still doing the job with my sort of ordinary motivation, or ordinary way that I do things, just full on. But also I think it was also a real intense spiritual ripening; all this shit just came out, like I couldn't even speak sometimes. I couldn't sleep ... I was really not in good shape. [One teacher] actually wrote me a little note telling me to take a good long rest for about a year. ... I was just totally exhausted. And I found out later, you know, it's burnout.

Michael's reply to my suggestion that NKT work seems to have a monastic flavour simultaneously captured one of the greatest institutional advantages of missionary monasticism (a guarantee of "pure," voluntary intentions) and one of its greatest institutional weaknesses (the threat of burnout and turnover): "People have to be devoted to want to do that, for one thing. I

think you also have to learn how to handle it internally. Otherwise you're going to burn out.”

Gene echoed these same offsetting points when he said of KMC South's managers and their work: “They've *got* to be doing it from the heart, because there's nothing else there! My concern is that the stress will override the heart, because there's a balance there that needs to be struck.”

KMC South's café manager, Cameron, synthesized Michael's prescriptions for physical rest and mental skillfulness in his suggestion that sponsored practitioners need to develop the mental capacity to distinguish work from rest:

I'm here pretty much all the time. Not only am I sponsored here, but we also live and we work here. So when you live and you work in the same place, it can be very hard to create that separation, and the majority of people cannot do that. And I think that's when people start to get burned out, because they're not making that separation, then they feel like they're always at work. ... And then it's like you don't feel like you get a break. So you have to learn to create that mental separation, like ‘I'm at work now.’

Cameron's insistence on the need for breaks from Dharma work raises questions about the precedent for breaks, as well as for burnout, in more traditional monastic settings where the consecrated life is, theoretically at least, one of uninterrupted religious practice in which “[t]here is no break. There is no secular activity. All activity is undertaken as a matter of religious self-discipline” (Hori 2014, 183).

Near the end of my first week at KMC South, I met Eva seated at the centre's welcome desk at 10:30 on a Sunday night, after she had led a precepts ceremony at 6:30 that morning and overseen admissions for two morning classes and two evening classes. Eva worked remarkably hard managing the daily operations of the centre, and well beyond the scope of an Administrative

Director's duties (e.g., leading rituals such as precepts). Brian's reflection on her virtuoso work ethic echoed Cameron's suggestions around establishing work-break boundaries:

Eva is the most gung ho person. She just takes on everything. ... I've made the argument that they need to get Eva out of there. I don't think that it is beneficial for the person, or the centre necessarily, to have the AD and maybe other management positions living at the centre, because it's burdensome. And it can burn you out. And I think there's also some benefit to have that break of being able to say "OK I'm done working." I think for Eva her work is her practice. But I think it can be so draining working and living in the same place because you don't get that break. ... I don't know how she does it.

Discussing the high demands attached to sponsored life, Gene also expressed a particular concern about the sustainability of Eva's virtually uninterrupted work regime:

The problem is getting burned out. ... I keep telling Eva, "Take care of yourself. When was the last time you had off?" And she's going to have a little bit off this Christmas, and she had Thanksgiving off. That was it! No time off! And I said, "It's not like you're going into teachings or into workshops. Frankly, you're doing grunt work here! You're balancing books, you're dealing with numbers, you're trying to keep the place afloat financially." I said "You haven't even reconciled your bank accounts because you haven't had time to do it!" She's trying to train somebody else to step in there and do it, but it's a long process. I worry about these people.

The NKT does seem to be increasingly aware of the need for instituted managerial rest under certain circumstances. Allison informed me about a policy recently introduced at KMCs in the UK that enables managers to take ten-day leaves at another centre to prevent or treat burnout.

Disgruntled Former Members

A Kadampa missionary may, of course, recover from burnout without recovering his or her devotional relationship to Geshe Kelsang or the consecrated mission of spreading his Dharma. As such, the high demand and low remuneration of NKT missionary work appear to have contributed to the emergence of a vocal group of disgruntled former members in the past decade,

the most outspoken of whom has been Carol McQuire, who did attempt to navigate the NKT's subsistence staff model with a dependent child. After reaping more frustration than liberation from years of arduous NKT labour, McQuire expressed a feeling of having been used by the NKT's uncaring expansionism:

The preoccupations of earning a living and saving for old age were regarded as mundane and irrelevant; we needed to become Resident Teachers of new centres to receive sponsorship. There was no other NKT support. ... I was so poor that I once had to cook the rice from my mandala kit, picking out all the precious stones before I could boil it for my daughter (2013, 71). ... I was told later by [a] Resident Teacher that I had 'needed the shock' of becoming homeless to destroy my pride (79). ... I had spent 12 years of my life dedicated to a path that led to my exhaustion and stress (80).

Leah, another former NKT worker whose sponsorship did not end well, described a parallel experience of being "dropped as a dirty rag" when her labour became dispensable. In what could be interpreted as an uninvited fulfillment of "the classic South Asian definition of the Buddhist renouncer – the *anagārika* or 'homeless one'" (Mills 2003, 69), Leah, like Carol, used the word "homeless" to describe the material result of her NKT employment: "The way you end with the NKT, whatever the way – I was homeless! ... I actually exhausted myself doing little jobs to make sure I could work; I had no time to think about what job I had to do; to start something."

Following their challenging experiences of the NKT's consecrated life, these women conceptualized that life quite differently. After leaving it, McQuire founded the online anti-cult support group "New Kadampa Survivors," which claims 1350 members and self-identifies as "a forum for the people who have left to come and openly discuss how they got the courage to leave the New Kadampa Tradition and re-do their lives." Although Leah was not an active member of KMC South when I met her there, she continued to casually visit the centre, and seemed to be

actively renegotiating her relationship to the organization: “To volunteer for the NKT is a privilege that right now I cannot afford. It is definitely a privilege I cannot afford anymore, like materially. And from a spiritual point of view I don’t know; I have to think about it – what it takes to work for the NKT, or get involved.”

What does it take to work for the NKT? According to the Canadian Resident Teacher cited above (“Faith is my only insurance”), faith alone – a pseudo Protestant job qualification that the next chapter will examine in more detail. This chapter has focused on the more informal but more restrictive NKT staff qualification of economic renunciation, evidently connected in a fairly traditional monastic manner (applied here to monastics and laity) to a renunciation of the “worldly attitudes” of being pleased when receiving resources and respect, and being displeased when not receiving resources and respect (Gyatso 1996, 147). Working for the NKT seems to demand an embrace of productive dependence and its attendant economic insecurity. According to Palden, however, sincere economic renunciation obviates any threat of economic scarcity: “You know Buddha’s promise that Dharma practitioners with a pure motivation will never starve, or Atisha’s advice to not worry about material security, but to practice Dharma purely knowing that sufficient materials will come. This is truth! This is to be practiced.”

Mills has shown that the infrastructure supporting monastic renunciation in Tibetan Buddhism is as material as it is moral. I have attempted to provide a comparative portrait of the economics of renunciation in a Tibetan-inspired new Buddhist movement. We have seen that while the global NKT’s International Temples Project provides its sponsored staff with more material resources than Kumbum monastery provides for its monks, the proximate support of the Ladakhi monk’s

natal family provides him with a lifelong economic security that is not guaranteed for NKT missionaries. Kadampa Buddhists who do not enter sponsored positions with the preexisting economic security of personal wealth or a retirement pension may actually be homeless when they get laid off or resign. KMC North resident Karuna, who had never held NKT sponsorship but resided with several sponsored managers, told me: “It is a little bit like taking a poverty vow, and giving your life over to the tradition, and having faith that you’re going to be OK as a consequence. And it may or may not work out that way you know.”

vii. Conclusion

This chapter has demonstrated that clerical employment with the NKT generally demands an embrace of high demands and subsistence remuneration, often in combination with communal dwelling and frequent job transfers, and without the traditional monastic restrictions around sexual activity. I have argued that although managers need not be ordained monastics, the lives of NKT managers are often more “monastic” than NKT monastics, particularly in light of uncertainty surrounding managers’ capacities to manage households of their own without an income. This represents a response to Leah’s reflective question about what it takes (i.e., the personal costs) to work for the NKT. I started the chapter, however, by exploring statements about what one gets (i.e., the personal benefits) from working for the NKT.

The chapter’s first section described a widespread belief in the soteriological benefits of centre work, which, I suggested, forms a kind of informal NKT orthopraxy that functions to draw adherents deeper into institutional involvement and supply the movement with needed human

resources. I introduced this phenomenon in the last chapter's conclusion as a "centripetal force drawing adherents deeper into institutional involvement (and spitting them out)." In light of data examined above, I am now in a position to theorize more precisely the nature of this "centripetal force" at KMC North and South which makes patrons of visitors and providers of patrons. Specifically, I observed three dynamics (the first two of which have already been described) operating as interrelated constituent elements of this centripetal force: formal encouragement of voluntarism in oral teachings (see section i.), verbal peer pressure to volunteer (alluded to by Matt and Jeff above), and voluntarism's non-verbal infectiousness.

In a 2006 article titled "The Story of a New Kadampa Tradition Monk or How I Got Sucked into a Cult," another disaffected former NKT resident monastic, Tenzin Peljor, affirmed McQuire's memory that "Dharma realizations depended on my 'merit' which would increase the more I 'worked for the Guru'" (2013, 75) in his account of the rhetorical role of merit (versus money) accumulation in the first two more coercive dynamics of NKT labour recruitment:

The NKT center was gradually "inspiring" me to do more and more unpaid work for them (in order to 'accumulate merit which we need for our spiritual progress') and at the same time complained that I was away too often from the NKT centre as I had a mundane job in a private school: "You are too samsaric", they said. Nonetheless I was giving them about 90% of my earnings.

Due to the gradual shift to do more and more unpaid work for the NKT and doing lesser mundane work from which I could make a living I could no longer pay the high rent the NKT centre demanded from me. Only one day after the date I should have paid my high rent they complained about my behaviour. They warned me about how much negative Karma I had created by not paying my rent on time. ...

Step by step, I was sucked into the system of NKT until I was quite brainwashed, deceiving myself and others. All of us were only worried about gaining "realizations" by being devoted to Geshe-la and doing what he says and giving our money, time and energy to the NKT to accumulate merit for ourselves (+ "inspiring"

new followers of NKT to do it likewise), because without merit there would be no spiritual progress and no realizations.

Whether one has been “inspired” or “brainwashed” to work for the NKT is clearly an interpretive question.⁹⁴ The latter interpretation appears to find support in the testimony (recently published in *Tricycle* magazine) of an American former member, Jamie Kostek, who “personally observed the dangers of blind devotion” to the movement and its founder:

“Everyone looks so happy when you come in,” says Kostek. “You have no idea of all the suffering going on behind the scenes.” She says she felt pressured to constantly convince herself she was happy in the NKT, because unhappiness is a sign of spiritual failing. “And we truly felt fortunate to have these teachings,” she says, “because we were constantly told that this is the only path that will lead to nirvana.” She believed that if she completely devoted herself to Geshe-la, she would attain enlightenment in three years, three months, and three weeks. “Then, when you’re still not enlightened, you’re convinced you did something wrong and did not dedicate enough of yourself to Geshe-la,” she explains. “So you become ordained or give away all your money to prove you’re worthy.” Kostek had no money to give, but she often volunteered 35 hours per week for the organization while holding down a job and taking care of her young son. “I felt I had to do it to gain spiritual merit,” she says, and adds that she worked herself into such exhaustion, she did not even have time to meditate. (Hertog 2018)

Just as Sangye’s devotional account of NKT missionizing as “an opportunity for a merit jackpot” provided a stark contrast to McQuire’s assessment of such work as a quick path to exhaustion and poverty, so do Gene’s enthusiastic accounts of the attractiveness of KMC managers working

⁹⁴ Sociologists of NRMs have been critiquing brainwashing theory since soon after its embrace by proponents of the anti-cult movement in the mid-1970s. Thomas Robbins, for example, acknowledged that “[t]he totalism and multifunctionality of some movements encourages a strong dependency on the part of devotees, who may be subject to *exploitation*” (1984, 243), while pointing out that “[t]he medicalized ‘mind control’ claim articulates a critique of deviant new religions which not only obviates civil libertarian objections to social control but also meets the needs of the various groups which are threatened by or antagonistic to cults” (253). Building on Robbins’ work, James Beckford argued: “Allegations of brainwashing are the modern equivalent of late medieval accusations of witchcraft and demonic possession. ... The common thread is the claim that reason has been subverted by an external agency” (2001, 15). According to Catherine Wessinger, “The word ‘cult’ dehumanizes the religion’s members and their children. It strongly implies that these people are deviants; they are seen as crazy, brainwashed, duped by their leader. ... Brainwashing is a handy excuse for the person who has defected from an unconventional religion. He or she can claim temporary loss of good judgment and free will” (2000, 4-6).

“from the heart” provide an antipodal assessment to Peljor’s and Kostek’s interpretations of such so-called merit labour as a sinister institutional system of individual exploitation.

Gene’s portrait of KMC managers’ working “from the heart” also reflects the third non-coercive dynamic of NKT labour recruitment, the infectiousness of voluntarism – the natural institutional benefits of which he expanded upon in response to my suggestion that such work appears to have a monastic flavour:

It’s very unusual; and that’s one of the attractions that I had to this practice, is the fact that we have people like [Gene’s former teacher], or [another former teacher], or any of these other of my kind teachers – they give so much of themselves to this. And as a result of that, people who start working, or who start taking their teachings, are very eager to help them and do what they can. And it kind of just keeps on – I mean for the most part you don’t have too many freeloaders there.⁹⁵ They come in – at first, you know, they don’t do too much, but then a year later, you know, they’re out there; they’ve rolled up their sleeves and they’re out there helping taking care of the temple.

Related to this laziness-inhibiting function of communal NKT voluntarism, in separate six- and four-week “working visits” at fledgling KMCs in France and the US, Jarrod described finding a rewarding culture of adventurous innovation which he attributed to the reality of raw necessity arising from funding and labour shortages:

It felt like those places were definitely understaffed, so every person there was essential. I think because the NKT is expanding and there’s no fat, you feel like you can really make a difference. ... There’s no fat: understaffed, underfunded [laughs]; but it’s functioning nonetheless. And also what’s cool is there’s no bureaucracy at all, like I don’t think anyone was properly qualified working at KMC France [laughs], but we did it; and the building today is beautiful. So it feels kind of like a simpler time. Same in New York; I was doing all sorts of landscaping. For the most part I had no idea what I was doing, but you figure it out. So in that way it’s kind of a

⁹⁵ Stark uses the term “free-rider,” and argues that “strictness makes religious groups strong by screening out free-riders and thereby increasing the average level of commitment in the group” (1996, 137). Gene’s account suggests that a religious culture of voluntarism may be as effective as religious strictness in screening out free-riders.

feeling of adventure too, like a frontier kind of thing. ... There's no complaining in Kadampa communities, because if you don't want to be there then you aren't there. And for the most part people have a general understanding that problems are coming from the mind; you don't blame external things, which I think comes from renunciation, or at least it's the basic understanding that leads to renunciation. Which is funny because outer conditions are not that good [laughs].

The extra-textual teachings given by Palden and Gyatso with which I opened the chapter enumerated two primary benefits of NKT centre work to prospective volunteers: everyone needs Dharma, and you need merit. NKT work is presented as a potent form of merit labour and world service which has the power to transmute an ordinary human life into the profoundly meaningful life of a bodhisattva. In addition to such labour-inspiring encouragement from the throne, this chapter has shown that many Kadampa Buddhists (sponsored and non-sponsored, monastic and lay) have been socialized into sincere convictions in a universal need for Dharma and a personal need for merit, providing powerful justification for the NKT's missionary imperative. In particular, merit and merit labour have been shown to be pervasive discursive realities for NKT adherents. Echoing Peter's statement about his preferred practice while working, the phrase "Don't forget to dedicate" (i.e., dedicate your merit to a worthwhile spiritual end) was an informal mantra that I often heard spoken among KMC volunteers as a kind of shorthand for "well done."

In his 1978 article "The Problem of the *Sangha* in the West," Walpola Rahula insisted that unlike the Dharma, the vinaya is a mere convention that the Buddha himself modified several times, and which is bound to be modified in different places according to particular local needs (61). Gyatso's psychologized condensation of a fully ordained Gelukpa monk's 253 vows into the ten vows of New Kadampa monks and nuns is the result of his effort to pragmatically modernize the

Mūlasarvāstivāda Vinaya. The chief “local” need behind Gyatso’s modification of monastic structures has been his perception of a global need for Tsongkhapa’s Dharma. In a global spiritual marketplace, the NKT’s missionary imperative has taken the institutional form of an expansionist business model in which the sustenance of sponsored NKT missionaries depends upon the International Temples Project’s accumulation of admission, rental, and retail income at KMCs around the world, from Argentina to Sweden to Taiwan.

Gyatso’s enthusiastic embrace of this new economic missionizing context has undoubtedly influenced his modification of the vinaya, as demonstrated in Chapter 4 and nicely captured by McQuire’s account of the role of NKT’s missionary monastics: “[Geshe-la] said that ... our function was to increase others’ ‘faith,’ to enlighten everyone. Therefore we could handle money, live with ordained of the opposite sex and lay people in the NKT centers and, like myself, also live with our children if we had them” (2013, 72). But beyond its influence on formal NKT monastic ordination, the NKT’s market-driven missionizing has itself taken on a pseudo-monastic form. The movement’s particular synthesis of monastic and missionary imperatives has significantly laicized Geluk monasticism and created a monastic-inflected form of missionizing.⁹⁶

Finally, this hybrid, or *de facto*, form of missionary monasticism (in which sponsored laity are *de facto* pseudo-monastics who embody monastic ideals more than non-sponsored ordained NKT monks and nuns) is in no way seen to conflict with the market logic of the NKT and individual

⁹⁶ While the NKT’s simplification of the *Mūlasarvāstivāda Vinaya* appears to solve Rahula’s “Problem of the *Sangha* in the West” for Kadampas, it remains a hard sell for more traditional Geluk Buddhists not convinced of its legitimacy (see Chapter 4).

NKT centres, where Gyatso's Dharma is bought and sold on a daily basis in text and in teaching. In fact, although I have argued that the householder/renouncer binary does map onto NKT lives, the NKT's consummate renouncers are typically distinguished less explicitly from householders as they are from guests, or patrons. Qualifying my casual reflection on the way a culture of busyness at Kadampa centres seems to discourage sipping tea all day, for example, Allison at once identified the functional difference between non-managers and managers and the centripetal draw of voluntarism: "Well you can do that as a customer, just not as an integral part of the centre. But I think what happens is as you get more into the Dharma, you want to help with what's going on around you. You don't want to just sit back and watch others do it." The NKT's religious virtuosi are not ordained celibate monastics or patrons of a Kadampa centre's meditation program (positions which require no missionary work, or "bodhisattva activity"). They are the managers of such centres, committed to the uninterrupted and humbly remunerated religious practice of delivering that meditation program to others.

CHAPTER 6

The Role of Guru Devotion in NKT Missionary Monasticism

In his commentary to the eleventh century Tibetan *blo sbyong* text, *Eight Verses of Training the Mind* – which principally “show us how to transform adverse conditions into the spiritual path” (Gyatso 2000, 19) – Gyatso introduces the verses’ author, Geshe Langri Tangpa, as an exemplary “old” Kadampa whose “willing acceptance of poverty and hardship” (13) bears some resemblance, I would suggest, to the exemplary “new” Kadampas examined in Chapter 5 who take up full-time stipendiary positions as Dharma providing NKT managers, of whom KMC North’s Resident Teacher, Kelsang Palden, commented: “We’re not quite beggars like in the time of Buddha, but we’re not far off.”

Besides reflecting Langri Tangpa’s practice of several of the “ten most closely guarded possessions of the Kadampas” (Pabongka 1991, 336)⁹⁷ – ethical principles which, I suspect, may also inform the NKT Internal Rules’ prohibition of personal profit (e.g., Kadampa “possessions” two and three) as well as other more unorthodox, self-abnegating NKT dynamics such as an apparent willingness to sacrifice the reputational respectability of the movement and its representatives (e.g., Kadampa “possessions” five and eight) by persistently courting public controversy in anti-Dalai Lama pro-Shugden demonstrations – Gyatso’s hagiographical portrait of Langri Tangpa also casts him as a *public renouncer*, with the outwardly detached, world-

⁹⁷ The full list is: “(1) ignoring this life and devoting oneself wholeheartedly to the Dharma; (2) being prepared to become a pauper; (3) being prepared to die a pauper; (4) being prepared to die alone with no one to take care of one’s body; (5) being determined to practise Dharma regardless of reputation; (6) being determined to keep all vows purely; (7) being determined to avoid discouragement; (8) being prepared to be an outcast; (9) accepting the lowest status; (10) attaining exalted Buddhahood as the natural result of successful practice” (Pabongka 1991, 800 n.1).

rejecting “Hinayana attitude” (Gyatso 1992, 85) of a Theravadin monk, and *private bodhisattva*, with the inwardly engaged, world-redeeming Mahayana attitude of universal compassion:⁹⁸

Completely indifferent to wealth, status, and other worldly attainments, for many years [Langri Tangpa] was very poor, living almost like a beggar. Inwardly, however, he was engaged in the practice known as ‘accepting defeat and offering the victory to others’ – happily accepting whatever difficulties and adverse conditions he encountered, and offering his happiness and good conditions to others. ... Bodhisattva Langri Tangpa’s demeanour was very different from that of most people. We tend to be overly concerned that others like us, and so make a great effort to present a cheerful aspect, no matter how we feel inside. Langri Tangpa was the opposite. He maintained such a stern, unsmiling expression that he was nicknamed ‘Grim Face’. His assistant once said to him: ‘People are calling you “Grim Face.” When they come to receive blessings from you, it would be good if you could smile sometimes and speak gently to them.’ Langri Tangpa replied: ‘What you say is true, but I find it difficult to find anything in samsara to smile about. Whenever I see someone I think of their suffering, and instead of laughing I feel like crying.’ It was due to his deep compassion for all living beings that Langri Tangpa found it difficult to smile. It is important not to misunderstand this. Langri Tangpa was not unhappy; his compassion and other spiritual realizations protected him from ever feeling depressed and caused him to experience great joy. However, he saw clearly that there is no true happiness in samsara, and that confusing worldly pleasure with real happiness serves only to bind us more tightly to samsara. His stern manner challenged people to confront their actual samsaric situation and to enter into spiritual paths. (13-14)

I encountered two framed photographs at KMC North which appeared to depict similarly distinct austere and affectionate, frowning and smiling, aspects of the NKT guru:

⁹⁸ Elsewhere Gyatso clearly distinguishes between the public ideal of “Hinayana” behaviour (measured by one’s renunciation-based adherence to the vows of individual liberation) and the private ideal of Mahayana intention (measured by the strength of one’s bodhicitta aspiration to liberate all living beings): “[E]xternally we should show the example of maintaining pure moral discipline by observing the Pratimoksha vows purely, [and] internally we should be motivated by bodhicitta and follow the Bodhisattva’s way of life” (1992, 87).

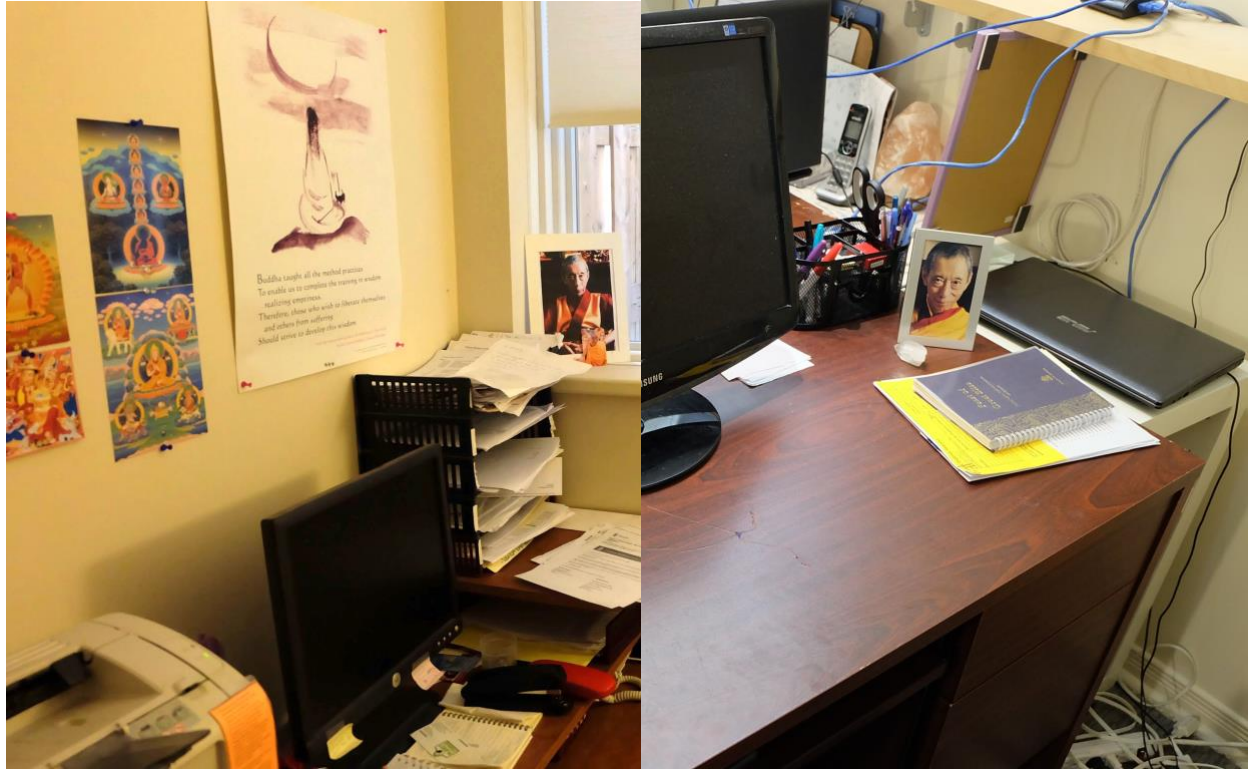


Fig. 10. Guru photos in KMC North manager and volunteer offices

The distinct material settings and media sources of these two photos, however, suggested an inverted modification of the exoteric/esoteric contexts of Langri Tangpa’s renouncer sternness and bodhisattva warmth. One of the most commonly displayed images in NKT centres and media, and available for purchase from Tharpa Publications, the photo of smiling Gyatso (on the right) sat on a desk in KMC North’s volunteer (i.e., *non-manager*) office. I found the photo of frowning Gyatso (on the left) above a *manager’s* desk in a separate office down the hall, whose occupant told me that despite its unofficial, obscure origins online, she loved the photo because in it she saw Gyatso encouraging her admonishingly: “Get out of samsara.”

Their distinct patron and provider audiences, I submit, suggest a reading of these photos of Gyatso as the two faces (smiling and frowning, doting and demanding) of a bodhisattva – a

relation which appears to invert Langri Tangpa's public austerity and private affection, and to affirm the concentric exoteric-esoteric relation examined in Chapter 3 between the NKT's therapeutic, samsara-accommodating promotional face and its soteriological, samsara-rejecting pedagogical mission. This chapter will argue that the guru himself, imagined as a living embodiment of the *Dharmakāya* who has perfectly realized renunciation and bodhicitta, is an indispensable mediator between patron and provider dimensions of NKT religiosity.

Chapters 3, 4, and 5 charted a concentric course from encounter to commitment to employment in the NKT – from meeting Kadampa Buddhism in books and/or introductory meditation classes, to registering in a local study program and/or volunteering at a local KMC, to ordaining as a monastic and/or becoming a full-time “sponsored” manager. The previous chapter identified three constituent elements of a “centripetal force” drawing adherents deeper into institutional involvement in this concentric course from visitor to patron to provider: formal teaching encouragement of voluntarism, verbal peer pressure to volunteer, and voluntarism's non-verbal infectiousness. Running through each of these is another dynamic which Waterhouse identified as “the foundation of the organization” (1997, 181): faith in Geshe Kelsang.

In Chapter 1, I suggested that an effective answer to the question of whether Tibetan Buddhism is undergoing a kind of Protestant Reformation in North America would require examination of the ways in which the tradition's elite and popular patterns of religious action and identity – the hierarchies of renouncer/householder and guru/disciple – are being transformed under the influence of “American individualism.” In the previous two chapters I have attempted to chart the first of these relations (renouncer/householder) in the NKT. I will now examine the

guru/disciple relation (thus far mentioned only sporadically), which, according to Gellner (1992, 325), effectively replaced the householder/renouncer relation in Vajrayana Buddhist formations.

It is no coincidence that Palden’s “three wheels” teaching at KMC North, in which he encouraged KMC volunteer work as a sacralised form of merit labour, concluded a weekend of teachings on guru reliance, for KMC volunteer work is often conceptualized as “doing things for Geshe-la” (in Leslie’s words) among longer standing members. Jeff, who was not volunteering much at the time of our interview, but who had helped the NKT with *sāadhanā* translation, festival publicity, and web development in the early 2000s, said plainly: “Everything was for Geshe-la, all the NKT work I did.”

After reflecting admiringly on his partner Heather’s mutually supporting practices of renunciation and guru devotion – having decided at a young age to “give her life to Geshe-la” and since prioritized subsistence work for his global mission over personal relationships and career development – Nick concluded: “That’s the thing, if you renounce all this, there has to be this other place that you arrive in. You depart here, you arrive in these new points of reference; and the guru is *the* destination.” For sponsored NKT practitioners like Heather, the guru is also a major part of the initial impetus for setting out on a path of managerial world renunciation. The first two sections respectively examine these twin functions of guru devotion: motive and mould for the performance of NKT Dharma work. The third section addresses the question of the extent to which Kelsang Gyatso’s immanent Buddhahood is transmitted to other teachers he initiates into the NKT lineage.

i. Guru Faith as Centripetal Draw from Self-Help to Self-Abnegation

It is not uncommon in Tibetan Buddhist hagiography for virtuosos to practice ascetic forms of self-abnegation in devotional service of their spiritual guide, guru devotion being the foundation of qualified tantric practice (see Chapter 1). A well-known example is found in the biography of the eleventh century yogi, Milarepa, whose connection with his guru Marpa “would become the most celebrated story of the teacher-disciple relationship in Tibetan Buddhism and an exemplar of the fundamental importance of devotion to a spiritual guide” (Quintman 2010, xxiv).

Although the hairs on Milarepa’s body “quiver[ed] with joy” when he first heard his future guru’s name, upon their actual meeting Marpa “subjected his new disciple to a continual stream of verbal and physical abuse, forcing Milarepa to endure a series of ordeals,” culminating in Marpa’s command that Milarepa “spend his life meditating in solitary caves and mountain retreats, persevering against all hardship” (xxiv).

Though nowhere near as punishing as Milarepa’s merit labour under Marpa, a number of my provider interviewees conceptualized their sponsored NKT manager labour similarly – as a result, or expression, or *form*, of guru devotion. To my query whether she saw her EPC work as part of a particular Dharma practice, for example, Heather replied:

I’d say guru yoga. That’s my main motivation; it’s what I try and think about all the time – basically being of service to my teacher, in a practical way. You know, he has all this vision, and he needs people to help him fulfil it; so just being involved in that. As well it feels like working at the centre brings you closer to him, in that way.

After describing feeling like a mother “giving love” to Manjushri Centre’s residents and visitors, Justine spoke for the centre’s volunteer community at large in describing centre work as guru service:

I think everybody that’s working there, to a degree, is trying to help fulfill Geshe-la’s vision or wishes of how a centre functions, and who that reaches and touches and effects. Keeping that in your mind, that motivation, you’re tapped into that energy as well. And there is this energy that comes, like even though you’re tired and you’ve been working a lot, something is coming to you that you maybe can’t even articulate – merit and blessings I think.

Before telling me with a laugh that “Geshe-la keeps me busy,” Prajna (who worked 70+ hours a week at KMC South on top of part-time outside employment to cover health-related costs) offered a detailed account of guru devotion’s role in her adoption of missionary monasticism, which she in turn conceptualized as a form of guru service:

I definitely feel like my teacher, Geshe-la, has renunciation. And I think that has a lot to do with my willingness to follow him. I see that example of renunciation – and also of bodhicitta, compassion, and altruism – and I feel like seeing those qualities in him has made me think it’s possible for me. But also I think that’s my reason for serving him. My guru devotion comes from that, like what I’m really serving is bodhicitta and renunciation. I know I don’t have those minds perfectly yet, so if I serve somebody who does then naturally I’m serving those goals. For example from the standpoint of bodhicitta I don’t feel that there’s anything he does that is not for the sake of others. So that means if I’m serving him I’m serving others because he’s only serving others. For me a big part of my being willing to do the things I do with my life has to do with the faith that he does have perfect renunciation, perfect bodhicitta. So I’m safe in devoting my life to his aims or his visions. And over the years, over twenty years, my experience has been very much the case: doing guru devotion has only served others. It has only led me to serve others. Serving him has only led to my developing greater renunciation, greater insight into Dharma. It has never led to any other gain – like it’s very clear *he* does not need me to do any of that personally. He has no need – he’s got a stable experience of happiness.

Faith in her guru's pure motivation of renunciation and bodhicitta was thus a basis of Prajna's motivation for setting out on (and sustaining) a life of world-renouncing NKT work, a life of guru service which "naturally" led her to serve others as he does.

The majority of NKT adherents (perhaps even of KMC managers) have not met Geshe Kelsang in person, and thus cannot use personal encounters with him as the basis of faith development. Prajna, however, described an encounter which provided her with reliable evidence of Gyatso's status as a "yogic," inner (not just clerical, outer) renouncer, and with the resultant conviction that "I'm safe in devoting my life to his aims or his visions":

I remember one time meeting with him where the whole meeting was him asking me questions about this dharma centre I was starting, and just giving the centre gifts. He was just running around the room giving me presents basically, for me for the centre. It was so sweet, so touching. And then at the end the meeting I said to him: "Is there anything I can give you?" And he just started laughing at me, like really just laughing at me. Then he just stopped and looked at me and he said: "I don't need anything! I have everything!" And it really struck me because it felt honest. Lots of people say "Oh no I don't need anything" but you don't really think that's true. Whereas when he said it I felt this person is being completely honest. They don't need anything. They *do* feel that they have everything. And I thought, "I want that; I want that experience." Because it just struck me. It was very casual, but at the same time it said a lot. My experience of him reflects that: he doesn't need anything.

The experience of Gyatso's which Prajna conversationally discerned and subsequently desired was a profound inner peace which she retrospectively interpreted as the natural result of a mind wholly uninterested in external conditions – the mind of renunciation:

He has everything. ... It's that deep fulfillment and contentment that comes from within. I could look around his room at the time and think "No, no, you don't have everything, Geshe-la. There are quite a few things missing in this room, you know like you don't even have a faucet" – he still had the individual hot and individual cold faucets; it wasn't joined. There were lots of things he didn't have in his room, you know. So it wasn't an external statement; it was clearly an internal statement. And that's what interests me, because I see lots of people that have everything and

they don't feel like they have everything. So here's this monk who says "I've got everything," and he's not referring to something external when he says that. But his experience is that he has everything, so then he does have everything. It's really that simple. And that to my mind comes from renunciation.

Prajna's experience reflects the development of a degree of faith in Geshe Kelsang which, echoing Waterhouse (1997, 181), I would suggest is the foundation of the New Kadampa Tradition, and of its religious culture of renunciatory voluntarism in particular. A practitioner's willingness to "work for the guru" depends to a large extent on a meeting of their own personal experience of the three types of faith – believing, admiring, and wishing (Gyatso 2000, 269) – vis-à-vis Gyatso as an enlightened guide with the three social factors mentioned above. Prajna's sincere *belief* in Gyatso's statement that "I don't need anything! I have everything!" led her to a degree of *admiration* for his "deep fulfillment and contentment that comes from within" which in turn led her to develop the *wish*, "I want that; I want that experience."

In his last public teaching to date (in Portugal in 2013), Gyatso espoused a dialectically productive social process involving the interpersonal interaction between these three types of faith whereby imagination can efficaciously promote mutual admiration and aspiration:

Correct imagination, believing, has a lot of great meaning. It doesn't matter which is real truth or not; the real truth is only emptiness. We cannot find truth of anything. But believing means imputation; imagine means imputation. Buddha said everything exists as mere imputation; we should be satisfied. This works very well. For example if we believe all the people surrounding us as either yogis or yoginis, or dakas or dakinis, or heroes or heroines — pure beings; if we believe all those surrounding us as pure beings, then we naturally respect them. How it is beneficial. Because we believe this, really believe, it looks like mentally — if we verbally say this people say "you are crazy," you know, we never talk verbally — but mentally it's correct, if we believe every human being who are surrounding I is like pure being, holy being, bodhisattva. We are never allowed seeing faults, only see their qualities. Through this we believe everyone is like enlightened being. It works; beneficial. Because we

believe they are a pure being we naturally respect them; if we respect them they will also respect us. So they can fulfil our wishes, correct wishes.

Gyatso then went on to explain to his assembled disciples a particular “very precious” instance of this interpersonal faith dialectic which has (wittingly or unwittingly) involved them – his own employment of believing and admiring faith (“I respect people, believing they are special”) as a method which “works very well” to grow a movement:

For example, myself, within this thirty years, I try to establish or organize the development of spiritual or material which includes Dharma centres, teaching programs, Dharma books, spreading Kadam Dharma. We know how much we developed International Kadampa Buddhist Union which we called New Kadampa Tradition, how much New Kadampa Tradition - International Kadampa Buddhist Union developed. Amazing, you know. We are just beginning, new; no one knows before; but development spiritually is amazing — not only pretending; just truth. Our own development spiritually, materially is perfect. Our situation, way of running Dharma centres, peoples’ way of life is according to society, acceptable; very special. We created a very special development. Why? How? Why this developed? Many people say “you did;” in reality myself nothing; you people did! I respect people, believing they are special; I respect society, people. But my own good thing is I have good motivation, pure motivation, which means good heart; that is, I believe, my own quality. But actual activity, development, people created. Why? Because I respect people and I also encourage people and give guidelines, so between people and me together, we created. How much we developed in this world, very special. I promise! Such development is very precious.

Gyatso hereby attributes the labour supporting the NKT’s development to his disciples’ three types of faith in him, which he in turn attributed to his own three types of faith in his disciples as “pure beings.” This suggests a kind of feedback loop of faith whereby the guru’s “correct belief” (believing faith) in his disciples as “dakas and dakinis” (in the manner of tantric self-generation meditation) has the effect of eliciting their own “respect” (admiring faith) for him, which in turn gives rise to their “correct wishes” (wishing faith) to realize *his* wish to spread Kadam Dharma

for the benefit of all beings. After laying claim to this “pure motivation” as his main spiritual qualification, Gyatso concluded the discussion by emphasizing his material dependence:

So this is also because I respect people, so people respect me, even [though] I am an old Tibetan monk who doesn't know anything in reality. I cannot write! I cannot drive. I cannot go even shopping you know. Everything depends on people who are helping me every day, you know, shopping, cooking, whatever I need, people are doing. But still people say “Geshe-la, Geshe-la” So many love, because I love. If I not love, not respect, ignore, impossible this kind. Because I believe people are important, they are very special; externally they are like ordinary but in reality not ordinary. So then always maintaining positive mind, pure mind, from my side believing people are important, so then people believe also Geshe-la is important; his wishes are important; everybody tries to fulfil my wishes. Fortunately our wishes are correct, perfect; only benefit publicly, so they've successfully developed. Clearly believing is working. Believing is working.

As intimated here by Gyatso, institutional developments in the NKT – from the organization of a weekly General Program class to an annual regional Dharma celebration to the construction of a new International Retreat Centre – are generally *attributed solely* to the kindness of the NKT's founder, whether or not he played an active “outer” role.⁹⁹ Warrier observed a similar dynamic among devotees of the Mata Amritanandamayi Mission, who “tend to attribute the phenomenal growth and spread of this organization in the course of the last two decades to the miraculous powers of their guru. In fact, however, it is the perseverance of the devotees and disciples themselves that has made this institution building possible in the first place” (2003, 256).

One KMC South manager attributed his own NKT recruitment to the guru's agency. According to Cameron, Kadampas who graduate from self-help patrons to self-abnegating, other-helping

⁹⁹ Gyatso does still appear to play an active role in the establishment of new centres, if only in granting his long-distance permission and blessing.

providers do not choose their vocation so much as discover it when their future guru ripens their renouncer karma from past monastic lives through his infrastructural wisdom puppetry:

Who knows who we were before; we were probably those monks in those Tibetan monasteries before; so that potential is in there isn't it. We obviously have practiced, or at least read about or seen the word renunciation before. And now Geshe-la with his wisdom is like, "Now I'm going to make it real easy for them," and not as extreme; he's like, "I'll just put this temple right there and these peoples' karma will just come like little ants to sugar." So he's slowly building this compassionate army of Buddhists all around the world.

Cameron's notion of a global community of previous-life Tibetan monastics whose latent renouncer karma makes them a global "army" of Kadampa missionaries in waiting is a striking example of Verchery's notion of "latent Buddhism" (2015, 372), which she defines within the context of her finding that members of the DRBA's Avatamsaka Monastery in Calgary maintained "that the Rocky Mountains were *already* a Buddhist sacred site awaiting the arrival of Master Hua to actualize its potential" (372) as "the idea that even before the historical arrival of Buddhism in Canada, Buddhism was already here but in a dormant form" (372). Cameron's interpretation of New Kadampas as previous-life monastics whose present-life, in-the-world practice of renunciation is "not as extreme" also replicates an ancient Buddhist scriptural interpretation of lay sanctity as the karmic result of previous monastic training, for example in the *Milindapañha*: "[A]ll those who as householders, living in a home and in the enjoyment of sensuous pleasures, realize the peace of Nirvana, the highest good, they have all been trained in their former lives in the thirteen Austere Practices peculiar to monks, and through them they have laid the foundations for their present sanctity" (Conze 1959, 94).

When I asked a KMC South practitioner who had previously worked for five years as a non-sponsored EPC of a smaller centre if she saw that work as part of a particular Dharma practice, she told me:

I would like to say guru devotion but I think it was more Resident Teacher devotion, because I don't think I had that strong connection yet with Geshe-la. I didn't really get it, that this is all happening because of him; it definitely grew into that. But some of his words, like being the smallest of all, like being a servant – that was my practice; that's what I wanted, to be a servant to the people, to be a servant to Geshe-la, to be a servant to my teacher.

To counterbalance tendencies for students to venerate local NKT teachers, the latter repeatedly attribute both the context and content of their teachings to Gyatso, directing student faith and clerical authority upward to the guru-deity (who is by now practically invisible).¹⁰⁰ After Nick taught a General Program class one Tuesday evening at KMC North, for example, I commented that his students seemed to really enjoy the class, which he earnestly corrected: “They're not my students; they're Geshe-la's students.”

In his teaching at the opening of a temple near Lisbon in the fall of 2013, Gyatso again insisted that his outer role was minimal, while at once attributing his disciples' hard work to Buddha's blessings and identifying his inner role as a conduit of those blessings:

Many people are helping the development of Dharma centres, and the temple project, working very hard; everybody tries to take responsibility to improve Kadam Dharma, first through their area and then gradually internationally. I myself am always in my room lying down. So you created this. Clearly you have received blessings, blessings from Wisdom Buddha Je Tsongkhapa, who specifically appeared in this world for

¹⁰⁰ According to Bluck's 2004 interview with then NKT secretary, James Belither (four years before Gyatso's official retirement as NKT General Spiritual Director, after which he retreated even further from public visibility): “Until recently Geshe Kelsang himself has ‘always been available for private consultations’ to support students with any difficulties, though he has recently moved from Manjushri to a secret retreat house in the United States to ‘regain his strength for his teaching commitments and his writing’, and to allow other teachers to take on more responsibility” (Bluck 2006, 145-146). On the living guru's strategic invisibility in another global NRM, see Karen Pechilis's study of Siddha Yoga and Gurumayi (2004, 231-232).

our purpose. The way of running Buddhadharma, how to give blessings, how to present Buddhadharma is Je Tsongkhapa's – superior than others, particularly in this modern world. So this clearly indicates we will receive his blessings. Even my teachings, my activities, successful – comes from he himself at my heart mixing with my mind; so I have confidence.

These two teaching passages from Gyatso's last public appearances describe an important *faith* → *work* dynamic in the NKT, the spiritual logic of which inheres in Gyatso's *blo rig* (awareness and knowledge) teachings which define faith as a mental factor that functions “to induce virtuous aspirations” (Gyatso 2013c, 57), aspiration as a mental factor that functions “to induce effort” (38), and effort as a mental factor that functions “to make our mind happy to engage in virtue” (74). An explanation of the role of blessings (to which Gyatso attributed his disciples' hard dharma work above) in this causal chain can be found in Gyatso's tantric commentarial teachings on the pre-eminent ritual of religious transmission in Tibetan Buddhism (whether within tantric initiation or in subsequent tantric *sādhana*), the practice of ‘uniting with the spiritual guide’ (*Guru yoga*, Tib. *Bla-ma'i rnal-'byor*):

Guru yoga is called ‘the gateway to receiving blessings.’ All Tantric realizations depend entirely upon the blessings of the Guru. Without the water of the Guru's blessings our minds are like dry seeds, incapable of spiritual growth. There is a traditional Tibetan saying that the Guru possesses the four bodies of a Buddha, which are like a large snow mountain, but if the sun of our faith does not rise, the waters of the Guru's blessings cannot melt. Considering this we should develop deep faith in our Spiritual Guide and generate a strong wish to become the Guru-Deity. Then we can lead all other sentient beings to that state, just as our Guru is presently guiding us. (Gyatso 2005, 59)

Gyatso defines ‘blessing’ in reference to its Tibetan equivalent, *byin gyis brlabs* (*adhiṣṭhāna*), which he translates as “to transform” (175): A blessing is “the transformation of our mind from a negative state to a positive state ... through the inspiration of holy beings” (360). Although defined here as an event, the language of “receiving blessings” (59) seems to emphasize the

guru's inspiration itself, more than the mental transformation – causal energy more than resultant event (Emory-Moore 2012, 40).¹⁰¹ In both *blo rig* (in the sense of effort) and guru yoga (in the sense of blessings), therefore, faith is taught to furnish a disciple with *energy*. Combined with Gyatso's account of hard Dharma work as evidence that they have received blessings of Je Tsongkhapa, the *faith* → *work* dynamic in the NKT can be formulated as such: *faith* → *blessings* (*energy input*) → *aspiration* (e.g., *renunciation, bodhicitta*) → *effort* (*energy output*).¹⁰² Work itself represents success; overwork represents greater success (i.e., greater merit and blessings).

Although explicated here in largely psychological terms, an attitude of faith vis-à-vis Gyatso as guru-deity is as socially mediated and constructed as the other centripetal factors of teaching encouragement, peer pressure, and mutual influence. In ritual, teaching, and promotional media, Kadampa Buddhists are encouraged from the very beginning of their spiritual training to generate such faith. Tsongkhapa's "Prayer of the Stages of the Path," for example, is chanted every day in every NKT centre within the guru yoga *sāadhanā* of *Heart Jewel*, the first verse of which reads: "The path begins with strong reliance / On my kind Teacher source of all good / O Bless me with this understanding / To follow him with great devotion" (Gyatso 2002a, 115). The *Heart Jewel* puja concludes with the recitation of a prayer for Gyatso's long life titled "Spontaneous Accomplishment of Wishes," the first verse of which reads: "O Protector of the Land of Bliss who bestow without effort / The immeasurable joy of immortality the moment we

¹⁰¹ Interpretation of *byin gyis brlabs* as having more to do with notions of empowerment by holy beings than psychological transformation is supported by Franklin Edgerton's definition of the Sanskrit *adhiṣṭhāna* as an authoritative assumption of control often involving magic transformation (1993, 12-13) and by Francesca Fremantle's distinction between the meanings of *byin gyis brlabs* and *adhiṣṭhāna*: "The Sanskrit word literally means 'standing over' and conveys ideas of taking possession, dwelling within, presence, protection, and sovereignty. The Tibetan literally means 'an engulfing wave or flood of splendor and power'" (2001, 48).

¹⁰² Re-Sanskritized, these steps are: *śraddhā* → *adhiṣṭhāna* → *niḥsarāṇa*, *bodhicitta* → *vīrya*. This formulation of *vīrya* as an outcome of *bodhicitta* distinguishes the former as one of the Mahāyāna perfections of a bodhisattva.

think of your breathtaking body, / Beautified by the major and minor marks, / Please send down a rain of attainments of long life and exalted wisdom” (NKT w, 3).

Before introducing basic breathing meditation in the first chapter of *Modern Buddhism*, Gyatso enjoins his readers to:

deeply appreciate the great kindness of Buddha to all living beings in giving profound methods to achieve permanent freedom from the cycle of suffering of sickness, ageing, death and rebirth. Even our mother does not have the compassion that wishes to liberate us from these sufferings; only Buddha has this compassion for all living beings without exception. Buddha is actually liberating us by revealing the wisdom path that leads us to the ultimate goal of human life. We should contemplate this point again and again until we develop deep faith in Buddha. This faith is the object of our meditation; we should transform our mind into faith in Buddha and maintain it single-pointedly for as long as possible. By continually practising this contemplation and meditation we shall maintain deep faith in Buddha day and night, throughout our life. (2011, 9)

The Guru is taught to be even kinder than Buddha Shakyamuni, since, unlike Buddha, the guru actually appears here and now to guide migrators beyond samsara (Gyatso 1996, 114; 2002b, 31-32).

Contemplating the kindness of the guru-deity is a technical contemplative methodology of faith production (itself part of a method of religious labour generation) which is not only front and centre in NKT ritual and teaching, but which pervades NKT visual media. On display at both KMC South (in front foyer) and KMC North (on back *gompa* wall), for example, were large mounted posters, respectively titled “35 Years of Supreme Accomplishments” and “A Life of Supreme Dedication,” which showcased Gyatso’s life work in captioned photos. In the background of KMC South’s poster, wavy words in faint font read “Guru Sumati Buddha Heruka.” A quote from Gyatso lined the bottom of KMC North’s poster: “My dedication is to

benefit the people of this modern world through spreading Kadam Dharma. I have dedicated my life to this purpose.”



Fig. 11. Guru posters at KMC North and South

As mentioned in the previous chapter, “40 years of kindness” was the theme of the 2017 NKT international summer festival at Manjushri Centre in England, in commemoration of the fortieth anniversary of Gyatso’s arrival in 1977. A devotional-promotional card bearing the same title was distributed at the festival which claimed that in the previous forty years, “Venerable Geshe-la has worked tirelessly to introduce modern Kadampa Buddhism into contemporary society.”

In a five-minute YouTube video titled “Transformation”¹⁰³ published in August 2017, five festival attendees recounted personal experiences of inspiration drawn from the guru’s (invisible) presence in their lives over a soundtrack of ambient electronic music. The first two interviewees reflected on a felt intimate connection with a spiritual guide they’ve never met:

I now have something to fight for. It’s not money, or reputation, or a good job, or even a good wife; it’s developing my mind to be a better human. I don’t even know Geshe-la, you know, so it was difficult for me to develop faith for someone who you only see the picture of. I really feel that I love him without even knowing him.
(Tomas)

The whole meaning of my life has just changed completely – I mean I didn’t have a meaning before I met Dharma; it was just doing the whole “What job am I going to do? What school am I going to go to?” I can’t even express how much gratitude I have for Geshe-la. Yesterday I went in front of the shrine and stood in front of the Geshe-la statue – I just got this feeling I’ve never felt before, from a statue! But it’s not a statue; it’s Geshe-la right there! And I’ve never met him personally, or been to a festival where he was teaching; it was very special. All I could do was just express my gratitude to him, standing there; that’s all I wanted to do, was just be so grateful.
(Lynn)

Between footage of Damien volunteering at an on-site café, he told the camera: “Someone after [General Program] class can go ‘Wow, that changed my life!’ And that’s massive, that even someone who may not relate to themselves as being a Buddhist or even religious, that it can have

¹⁰³ <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=VVTtF4N10y0>

a positive effect on their life. This is what I think is a truly remarkable achievement of Geshe-la.” George grew teary concluding his account of what the NKT has done for him: “I’ve had years and years of depression and this is the first two years in my whole life I’ve never had depression. And if I get talking about Geshe-la I just break down. I can’t go on that subject; because I just love the guy so much, what he’s done for us. It’s amazing.” Dana, the lone monastic, concluded the video: “I feel that without Geshe-la I wouldn’t have the faintest clue of what love is. And when I lose sight of it, I can just feel it from Geshe-la.” The message is clear: A faith relationship with Gyatso and his Dharma will transform your life into one of love and meaning.

Online media promoting the next year’s NKT international summer festival praised the guru’s kindness in even more explicitly evangelical terms. In a YouTube video titled “Make this Summer Meaningful”¹⁰⁴ (published in July 2018 a few weeks before festival), the NKT’s General Spiritual Director, Gen-la Dekyong, emulated Gyatso’s missionary dedication in a personal testament to her guru’s kindness:

These teachings have changed my life. I have dedicated my life, every minute of it, to sharing these teachings because of Venerable Geshe-la’s kindness. I can promise you, from my own small experience, every single instruction you follow will produce the results you wish for – less mental pain, less problems, more peace, more happiness, wonderful loving stable relationships, and the most meaningful life it is possible for a human being to find.

Quoted in an instalment of the 2018 online summer festival diaries titled “Tantric Technology for Modern People,”¹⁰⁵ the concluding message of Gen-la Dekyong’s last festival teaching called on attendees to enact their guru faith through missionizing: “Gen-la finished her teachings by thanking everyone and encouraging us to repay our Spiritual Guide’s kindness by practicing

¹⁰⁴ <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=nEhgmeb009s>

¹⁰⁵ <https://kadampafestivals.org/2018/08/tantric-technology-for-modern-people>

the instructions and then, with a compassionate heart, to share our understanding and experience with others understanding that everyone needs Dharma.”

Teachings, contemplations, rituals, and media such as these aim to induce in practitioners a felt sense of Gyatso’s kindness. The results are not only reflected in curated NKT media, such as the “Transformation” video’s testimonials, but in previous research on the group. According to Waterhouse, many members of Amitabha centre in Bath described Geshe Kelsang as “really sweet” (1997, 137) or “as compassionate and pure with an incredible mind” (171). One individual cited Geshe Kelsang’s selflessness as a proof of his authenticity: “There are times when I have no doubt at all that he is like a Buddha and there’s other times when I am really questioning. Like, is it really true what he says? But questions like, what if he is not genuine? doesn’t really occur because he doesn’t seem to show any sign of having any personal gain from this at all” (182). We have seen Prajna articulate a similar view above (“it’s very clear *he* does not need me to [serve him] personally”), as well as a feeling for Gyatso’s kindness (“I don’t feel that there’s anything he does that is not for the sake of others”). The latter was supported for Patricia and James (see Chapter 5) by their conviction that the guru “always” and “solely” works for Dharma.¹⁰⁶ The belief that since his arrival in the West, Gyatso “has worked tirelessly” to benefit others through missionizing is clearly an important one for practitioners who try to emulate his example as KMC providers, and whose work ethic in turn inspires patrons to become volunteers (in the manner described by Gene and Allison in Chapter 5).

¹⁰⁶ Warrior (2005, 69-70) found a similar belief in Amma’s “austerity and selflessness” to be an influential factor in her informants’ adoption of Amma as their guru.

As mentioned in Chapter 1, Samuel suggests that the chief appeal of Tibetan Buddhism for Western followers is principally as “a transformative practice, a technology for remaking the self and in the process reconceptualising both self and the world to which the self relates” (2005, 338). Having likely initially consulted NKT Buddhism as just such a Foucauldian technology of the self, rare NKT virtuosos are drawn – through faith in the guru-deity (cultivated through contemplation and socialization) combined with teaching encouragement and peer pressure to volunteer and voluntarism’s infectiousness – to adopt a self-abnegating provider regime of subsistence labour.¹⁰⁷ Importantly, the tradition prescribes (albeit esoterically, in exclusively oral teachings) the self-abnegating world renunciation entailed by managerial sponsorship (e.g., busyness, austerity, lack of privacy, geographic uncertainty) as a powerful technology of both self-help (“merit accumulation”) and other-help (“bodhisattva activity”).¹⁰⁸

Following Freud’s insistence that “coercion and the renunciation of instinct [are] indispensable elements in all culture,” Philip Rieff argued that a similar “domesticating” movement from self-help to self-abnegation via communal faith in a “soteriological character ideal” was the core dynamic in the historical organization of European Christian culture “within the mechanisms of cult” (1966, 14):

Cultic therapies of commitment never mounted a search for new opening into experience; on the contrary, new experience was not wanted. Cultic therapy domesticated the wildness of experience. By treating some novel stimulus or

¹⁰⁷ The mechanics of this centripetal passage of increasing institutional commitment from self-help to self-abnegation via guru faith are further illuminated when considered alongside the mechanics of NKT missionizing strategies examined in Chapter 3. The latter introduce this-worldly, doctrine-free breathing meditation primarily as a self-help stepping stone to other-worldly, doctrine-bound meditations inscribing *lamrim* values such as renunciation, bodhicitta, and guru devotion, the consummating embodied *expression* of which is then encouraged in the form of self-abnegating subsistence labour. The steps in the NKT’s concentric exo-to-esoteric *visitor* → *patron* → *provider* recruitment model can thus be formulated: *private orthopraxy (breathing meditation)* → *orthodoxy (renunciation, bodhicitta, guru devotion meditations)* → *public orthopraxy (centre work)*.

¹⁰⁸ According to Palden’s “three wheels” teaching, the reason KMC Dharma work is by nature such a powerful technology of self-help (i.e., merit labour) is because KMCs are dedicated to the happiness of all living beings.

ambiguity of experience in this manner, the apparently new was integrated into a restrictive and collective identity. Cultic therapies consisted, therefore, chiefly in participation mystiques severely limiting deviant initiatives. Individuals were trained, through ritual action, to express fixed wants, although they could not count thereby upon commensurate gratifications. The limitation of possibilities was the very design of salvation. To the ironic question “And, being saved, how are we to behave?” Western culture long returned a painfully simple answer: “Behave like your Savior.” Christian culture, like other organizations of moral demand, operated, however imperfectly, through the internalization of a soteriological character ideal carrying tremendous potentials for fresh intakes of communal energy; the highest level of controls and remissions (which together organized systems of moral demands) experienced an historical and individualized incarnation. Such euhemerist processes may have been indispensable to the vitality of the old culture. To adjust the expression of impulses to the controlling paragon, or character ideal, defines the primary process in the shaping of our inherited culture. (15-16)

In this conception, Christian culture was both *shaped by* the sublimating renunciatory voluntarism produced by collective faith in a soteriological character ideal (i.e., shaped by “adjust[ing] the expression of impulses to the controlling paragon, or character ideal”), as well as *a shaper of* that faith-based renunciation: “Culture is another name for a design of motives directing the self outward, toward those communal purposes¹⁰⁹ in which alone the self can be realized and satisfied” (4). We have seen that a culture of religious voluntarism in the NKT is both producer and product of practitioners’ shared faith in Gyatso as the “controlling paragon, or character ideal” of renunciation and bodhicitta in missionary action. Peter Berger captures this feature of New Kadampa *culture* in his general account of society as “a dialectical phenomenon ... that ... is a human product ... that yet continuously acts back upon its producer” (1967, 1).¹¹⁰

¹⁰⁹ In the vein of Durkheim, Rieff defines faith as a “compelling symbolic of self-integrating communal purpose” (5).

¹¹⁰ One year after Rieff’s reflections appeared in a chapter titled “Toward a Theory of Culture” Berger opened the first chapter of *The Sacred Canopy* (“Religion and World-Construction”) with this theory of society as a dialectical process consisting of externalization, objectivation, and internalization.

In the grips of early-twentieth-century secularization theory's backward-looking sense of the *old* "moral demand system" of the Christian West – which he agreed with Ernst Troeltsch was a "church civilization" and an "authoritarian and coercive culture" (19) – Rieff overlooked the significance of NRMs as alternative sources of cultus in western culture: "In what does the self now try to find salvation, if not in the breaking of corporate identities and in an acute suspicion of all normative institutions?" (19). My research suggests that the most committed New Kadampa Buddhists (i.e., missionary managers) find it in a high-demand Tibetan-inspired guru cult.

Kay's suggestion that the emic NKT discourse of the movement as a family reflects the movement's fundamentalism (2004, 111) is pertinent here, insofar as it suggests a relationship between NKT world renunciation and NKT cult; between the two *parallel* ways (Gray 2013, 43) that Vajrayana Buddhists renounce biological family and create new spiritual family (Wilson 2013, 4-5); between monastic ordination (entailing self-abnegation to a law) and tantric cult initiation (entailing self-abnegation to a guru). For Kay, the observation that "[t]he NKT is presented as a global family, its members are 'the sons and daughters of the same father [Geshe Kelsang]', and events such as the spring and summer festivals are 'family reunions'" (2004, 111) reflected the NKT's modern fundamentalism rather than an expression of traditional monastic and tantric ritual structures. Kay's analysis is ameliorated, therefore, by considering these important elements of the Vajrayana householder/renouncer relation, in light of which emic NKT-as-family discourse clearly relates to Kadampa Buddhists' adoption of a new name, new father, and new siblings in both ordination and initiation.¹¹¹

¹¹¹ Whereas a clear minority of NKT adherents have taken monastic ordination, adherents are generally encouraged to receive the Highest Yoga Tantra initiations of Heruka and Vajrayogini quite early in their training, which requires

I have already argued that the householder/renouncer is a helpful framework for interpreting such family discourse among sponsored Kadampas like Eva and Justine, who each described their manager roles in explicitly parental terms (see Chapter 5). In answering my query about her centre work hours, Prajna affirmed Justine's statement that feeling like a mother to KMC adherents is, in Justine's words, "the mind that you needed to generate to do that job":

It's like you're kind of always on. ... I just try and let go, like I don't really focus too much on the hours; it's more like it's my life. If I think of it as work then I kind of get like 'Oh, I'm tired.' It's more just it's my life, doing this thing, so then I don't really see it as a day working or a day not working. ... Because it's more like your spiritual family, so it's kind of like people with a family: they don't really think "I'm working" when they're with their family. Their family is like 'I'm hungry,' and you just do what needs to be done because you're family. I think of it like that.

In accordance with Victor Hori's account of the consecrated monastic life (2014, 183), I have argued that sponsored NKT managers' life of uninterrupted and humbly remunerated religious practice makes them pseudo-monastic *renouncers*. In this passage, however, Prajna describes the sponsored life as more akin to the life of *householders*. The household, or family, which NKT managers serve through their parent-like renouncer-bodhisattva voluntarism is their local KMC community – nominally founded by Gyatso (and dedicated to the benefit of all beings), but daily constituted "within the mechanisms of cult" (Rieff 1966, 14) by his disciples' shared devotions. NKT managers are the foremost merit labourers within the movement (something like aunts and uncles standing in for Gyatso), but devotional renouncer-bodhisattva voluntarism is celebrated among the NKT family at large as a core component (Rieff would say *the* core component) of NKT cult-ure. Alongside photos of festival attendees making crepes, washing dishes, arranging

travel and registration at an international festival. As a result, the majority of Kadampas have received these initiations.

shrine flowers, entertaining children, and meditating, another instalment of the 2018 online summer festival diaries recounts Gyatso's identification of festivals (NKT "family reunions" according to Kay) as an indispensable bonding agent for his geographically diffuse movement:

Festivals, as Gen-la Jampa reminded us in his first talk by giving us Venerable Geshe-la's special Festival message, are essential 'for maintaining the International Kadampa Buddhist Union' for future generations. There are many levels of meaning to the term Union, but one of them is clearly that at the Festival we act together as a collective, a union of practitioners from throughout the world. We meditate together, eat together, listen to Dharma and generate virtuous minds together, discuss, socialize, and work together, create virtue together. We are, through being here now, creating the International Kadampa Buddhist Union [IKBU] for now and for the future. Being at the Festival is powerful and it is creating powerful good karma. And you feel it. One woman, attending her first Festival, told me she was amazed by the friendliness of everyone, from people throughout the world! The Festival is expressing World Peace and creating World Peace all at the same time. It's a beautiful example for a world that very much needs it. ... In the morning Gen-la Jampa helps us to generate together the 'joyful mind' of renunciation (joyful because we are leaving behind the ocean of samsara and going to the bliss of perfect freedom). ... In the afternoon, Gen-la Jampa helps us to explore the faults of self-cherishing. Another jewel from Venerable Geshe-la: 'You must be tired of self-cherishing. The self-cherishing plan and activity doesn't work. Thinking my happiness and freedom are important and then looking for happiness and freedom in the ocean of suffering doesn't work!' In this way, together, we generate the determination to stop our self-cherishing and instead to cherish others. In the evening we gather in our World Peace Temple to do Wishfulfilling Jewel with a tsog offering.¹¹² An international assembly unifying their minds in prayer and aspiration. There is no doubt these prayers reverberate throughout the world and into the future.

A synthesis of collective festival action (e.g., meditate, eat, listen, discuss, socialize, work) and aspiration (e.g., renunciation, cherishing love) are here identified as a technology for the production of the IKBU itself and for the collective merit that will ensure its future survival.

¹¹² *Wishfulfilling Jewel* is a longer version of the guru yoga *sādhana*, *Heart Jewel*, with more extensive prayers and a tantric offering of *tsog* ("an assembly of Heroes and Heroines") to the Dharma Protector, Dorje Shugden.

Speaking to the need for individual gratification (balancing renunciations) within the mechanisms of cult, Rieff explained: “So long as culture maintains its vitality, whatever must be renounced disappears and is given back bettered; Freud called this process sublimation” (1966, 5). What do NKT workers get from their cultic renunciations? They get active membership in a new spiritual family (which, in bodhisattva intention and missionary ambition, includes all living beings) including an active (albeit inner/imagined) relationship with a new spiritual father (Gyatso). Service of Gyatso and his potentially limitless family provides individual practitioners with the ideal conditions for a bountiful harvest of the two causes of personal happiness: merit and blessings. The next section’s closer examination of NKT Dharma work as a form of guru-deity emulation and service will consider the relationship between these spiritual elements in NKT doctrine and practice.

ii. Guru Service as Institutional Blessings Labour

I have characterized the convert’s path from self-help to self-abnegation as one of increasing religious commitment and institutional involvement which, in the case of the NKT’s virtuoso clerical renouncers like Prajna, is consummated in a pseudo-monastic form of deployable missionary employment. The previous section argued that guru-deity admiration is a key motivational component of this centripetal path. This section will argue that *guru-deity service as NKT work* is the foremost outer disciplinary regime in the NKT – the “other place that you arrive in,” in Nick’s words, once “you renounce all this.”

Talal Asad's reflections on the "aspects of volitional power which were constructed by the Christian monastic project" shed light on the role of exemplar emulation in the volitional technology¹¹³ of self-abnegating monastic disciplinary regimes such as the NKT's staff model of missionary monasticism:

The learning of virtues according to the medieval monastic program ... took place primarily by means of imitation. ... The virtues were thus formed by developing the ability to behave in accordance with saintly exemplars. Acquiring this ability was a teleological process. Each thing to be done was not only to be done aptly in itself, but done in order to make the self approximate more and more to a predefined model of excellence. ... In this conception there could be no radical disjunction between outer behaviour and inner motive, between social rituals and individual sentiments, between activities that are expressive and those that are technical. ... It is precisely through the concept of a disciplinary program that "outer behaviour" and "inner motive" were connected. (1993, 63-64)

According to both Asad and Rieff, the foundation of Christian renunciation is imitation – of a "soteriological character ideal" (Rieff) or of "saintly exemplars" (Asad). Rieff's interest was the role of faith-based renunciation in the production of culture, whereas Asad's main concern was with the psychologically (versus socially) "creative aspect of disciplinary power" (141), whereby a monastic disciplinary regime of "outer" renunciation produced (or was at least designed to induce) "inner" virtues – "the discipline of the body that is aimed at the proper ordering of the soul" (139).

Chapter 1 pointed out that as a general rule, Buddhist clerical renouncers (i.e., vinaya-abiding monastics) have *not* historically been "yogic renouncers" (in Mill's words). Disciplined

¹¹³ According to Asad, "the rhetoric of renunciation is part of the construction of a self-policing function ... [which] should not, therefore, be seen as the rejection of a presocialized (real) self. ... The monastic program is performed primarily to replace unlawful desires with virtuous ones" (1993, 140). The NKT's pseudo-monastic subsistence employment regime can be compared to Asad's Foucauldian interpretation of the medieval Christian monastic program as a technology of the self which relies on a self-policing function to replace unlawful desires (e.g., for better pay in order to go to the movies) with virtuous ones (e.g., for freedom from self-cherishing).

behavioural adherence to monastic laws does not require the monastic's *aspirational* adherence to the goal of nirvana to perform its ideal soteriological function – i.e., to *support* and *represent* nirvana-striving. Ideally, monastics follow the rules as a technology to both develop and model renunciation. We have now seen two Kadampa managers describing a similar synthesis of outer behaviour and inner motive by means of a disciplinary program (Asad 1993, 64) in distinct but closely connected ways: working for a NKT dharma centre and working for the NKT guru.

In his “three wheels” teaching at KMC North (cited early in Chapter 5), Palden explained that by virtue of the KMC itself (and *not* individuals' intentions) KMC North adherents can accumulate “tons of merit” by adhering to a disciplinary program (i.e., by following the rules) of daily meditation, study, and work through practicing “Geshe-la's beautiful method of helping us all: for us to come and cherish our Dharma centre.” Where Palden described KMCs as sacral centres through which practitioners can engage in virtue by association,¹¹⁴ Prajna described her *guru* as a sacral centre through which she engages in a similar practice of virtue by *participation* (recalling Rieff's categorization of “cultic therapies of commitment” as “participation mystiques”) – i.e., cultivation of *her* renunciation and bodhicitta by participating in *his* renunciation and bodhicitta through guru service (*guru-sevā*) as temple work:

I definitely feel like my teacher, Geshe-la, has renunciation. ... I see that example of renunciation, and also of bodhicitta, compassion, and altruism ... My guru devotion comes from that, like what I'm really serving is bodhicitta and renunciation. I know I don't have those minds perfectly yet, so if I serve somebody who does then naturally I'm serving those goals. For example from the standpoint of bodhicitta I don't feel that there's anything he does that is not for the sake of others. So that means if I'm serving him I'm serving others because he's only serving others. ... So I'm safe in devoting my life to his aims or his visions.

¹¹⁴ This was affirmed in practice by Nolan (cited in Chapter 5): “If you're working for a nuclear submarine, for me, I feel like you're part of destruction. Where working for a Dharma centre is for the benefit of all living beings, and you're going to get that positive energy. And I could feel it.”

Following on the previous section's defense of Waterhouse's finding that faith in Geshe Kelsang is the foundation of the organization (1997, 181), I would suggest that Prajna's sacral centre (the guru-deity) is primary, while Palden's sacral centre (the temple) derives its virtue from the former. Of course, the *way* that Prajna serves her guru is by serving the KMC of which he has put her in charge.

Here, then, is the emic spiritual logic at work in "Geshe-la's beautiful method of helping us all: for us to come and cherish our Dharma centre": Practitioners who have not yet cultivated the inner, yogic intentions of renunciation and bodhicitta can – most effectively through submitting to the NKT's managerial model of outer, clerical renunciation and bodhisattva activity, but also to a lesser extent through less regimented voluntarism – participate in those intentions possessed by the movement's only publicly recognized yogic renouncer – actual Dharma jewels which are the actual *causes* of each and every NKT temple. In a video titled "Opening the door to Buddha's Pure Land in Edinburgh"¹¹⁵ posted in November 2018 to the NKT's main website, Gen-la Dekyong delivers an inaugural teaching in a newly opened KMC in central Edinburgh which succinctly captures this devotional, institutional, orthopraxic soteriology of NKT voluntarism:

Our root guru has a vision of such a place as this in every city in every country in the world. We have had the good fortune, particularly those of you who have worked very hard, to join in this most extraordinary, compassionate vision. I don't think there could be any greater good fortune for a human being anywhere than to be the students of Venerable Geshe Kelsang Rinpoche at this time. You know we're not that good at meditating, are we; and we're not really that good at studying, are we; and we are not that good at being mindful of what we've even managed to meditate on! Because we're busy; we're distracted! So then a special method appears: our Dharma centre, our Kadampa Meditation Centre Edinburgh. You just join in, and the liberating path appears in your heart; because through the power of that holy object,

¹¹⁵ <https://kadampa.org/2018/11/opening-the-door-to-buddhas-pure-land-in-edinburgh>

our dedication to that holy object overcomes our self-cherishing and gives us the mind of our guru that only cherishes others. All these things will happen naturally.

Working for the NKT guru by working for his mission is a practice of “realizing the guru’s intention” (McQuire 2013). Serving him by serving his institutional vision at once emulates and embodies his intentions of renunciation and bodhicitta.

The sacral objects of guru and KMC undergirding these disciplinary programs of guru service and KMC service (each of which synthesizes outer behaviour and inner motive) can thus be described as intentional cause and institutional effect, or, in a manner similar to the Christian conception of the church as the body of Christ, as the guru-deity’s mind and body. The invisible qualities of the guru’s mind are first discerned through faith and then emulated through serving his institutional body.¹¹⁶ Above Gyatso attributed the success of his NKT activities to Tsongkhapa “himself at my heart mixing with my mind.” In commentary to the empowerment of Tsongkhapa at the Canadian National Festival in 2017, Gen-la Dekyong quoted Gyatso’s statement “The NKT is my heart.” She explained that “He will never cease working to cause Kadam Dharma to be available to everyone; he can’t; impossible,” before suggesting that the way to repay “Guru Tsongkhapa’s inconceivable kindness” is to “spread his holy Dharma.” To work for the NKT is to work for Gyatso, and vice versa; and since each functions solely to liberate all living beings from samsara, a life of NKT voluntarism is the bodhisattva’s way of life.

¹¹⁶ Warrior’s identification of “the ethic of *sevā*, or selfless service, propagated by the Mata” as “a vital component of spiritual striving among the Mata’s devotees ... crucial to the spirit of institution building in the Mata Amritanadamayi Mission” (2003, 256) – another global guru-led NRM – provides helpful comparative context for the practice of guru-deity service as institutional mission labour in the NKT.

I have argued that KMC managers are the movement's consummate *clerical*, or outer, renouncers – that NKT managers, more than NKT monastics, resemble Geluk monastics in their *de facto* abandonment of economic production and sexual reproduction. Following Mills' account of Geluk monastics, however, this finding suggests that NKT managers are incomplete, *semi*-renouncers, falling short of the yogic renunciation which, in the Tibetan context, is a quality uniquely ascribed to incarnate lamas. The devotional, participatory soteriology described above helps to clarify how NKT managers' outer renunciation (e.g., hard work + low pay) relates to inner renunciation – namely, as an *institutional support*. NKT workers remain mere clerical renouncers, but their clerical renunciation functions to draw/drag them to the guru's yogic renunciation through guru emulation as NKT service. This is one important function of faith-based clerical renunciation in the NKT – as a means of supporting a disciple's acquisition of the guru's intentions by emulating them (through serving them).

The path of guru emulation as NKT service is optional, but there is a clear message in NKT teachings such as that delivered by Gen-la Dekyong in Edinburgh in 2018 that devotional centre work is the best way to ensure authentic spiritual progress, and that a life of solitary meditation uninvolved with a NKT centre would be far less reliable. As noted in Chapter 1, Asad insisted that “[a]lthough most Christians in feudal society lived outside monastic organizations, the disciplined formation of the Christian self was possible only within such communities” (1993, 62) not because monastic life provided monks with the ideal outer conditions for introspective contemplation but because it provided them with a strict disciplinary regime of imitative behaviour modification. A similar unpublished orthopraxy in the NKT holds that the fulfilment of samsara-renunciation (at least in this life) requires the institutional support of Dharma centre

voluntarism, which, for the movement's *full-time* volunteers also often entails a significant degree of world-renunciation.

With the help of Gethin, Sharf, and Dreyfus, I suggested in Chapter 1 that because Buddhist monastics have traditionally tended to do little meditation (one of the three requisite nirvanic trainings, along with ethics and wisdom), most monks and nuns have historically not been samsara-renouncing nirvana-strivers. By such logic, the fact that managers at KMC North and South reported, on average, working for their KMC more than five times as much as they meditated and prayed (see Chapter 5) might be interpreted as further evidence that NKT managers can also be more accurately described as outer, clerical renouncers than inner, yogic renouncers. While this may be upheld by Theravada teaching demanding extensive engagement with these “three higher trainings” (ethics, meditation, and wisdom), or by Mahayana teaching demanding extensive engagement with the “six perfections” (ethics, meditation, wisdom, patience, effort, and giving) – both of which are espoused extensively in Gyatso's texts – in Vajrayana teaching, “the absolute necessity of total devotion to one's chosen teacher or master ... takes the place of all the great perfections ... taught in the Mahayana sutras” (Snellgrove 1987, 176-177).

Similarly, esoteric Vajrayana NKT teachings appear to suggest that the classical Buddhist trainings in ethics, meditation, and wisdom can be substituted by, or synthesized within, the practice of guru service as NKT work. My argument that work is the foremost disciplinary regime in the NKT is supported when Palden's “three wheels” of centre work, meditation, and study are viewed as a reformulation of ethics, meditation, and wisdom, in which *sila* (ethics) is

substituted by *sevā* (service).¹¹⁷ Even more revealing was a Canadian practitioner’s account of having once heard a NKT Resident Teacher refer to NKT work as “work lineage” – i.e., as a distinct *lineage* in addition to those of instruction and experience (Gyatso 2016, 265), or learning and attainment (Kapstein 2000, 18), the synthesis of which Gyatso is viewed as a living embodiment (see Chapter 2).

Another Resident Teacher told me this term was an oral instruction that Gyatso had used in teachings and meetings, the meaning of which (that work perceived as guru devotion becomes a quick path) he explicates in textual references to the examples of Geshe Jayulwa and Dromtönpa who each quickly accomplished high yogic insights primarily through service to the guru. In his primary *lamrim* text, Gyatso introduces Geshe Jayulwa as the third lineage holder in one of the three *lamrim* lineages transmitted by Dromtönpa – known as Kadam Manngagpa, practitioners of which “study least extensively” (1996, 14) – and extols his example on two occasions. Gyatso’s explication of the fifth of eight “benefits of relying completely upon our spiritual guide” (97), that “our experiences and realizations of spiritual grounds and paths greatly increase,” reads:

The main obstacles to our gaining realizations are our negative actions and their imprints. By relying upon our Spiritual Guide we can purify these and gain realizations quickly and easily.

We can remember the example of Dromtonpa, who served Atisha so well that he had no time for meditation. Another disciple of Atisha’s, Amai Jangchub, meditated all the time. When Atisha let Dromtonpa and Amai Jangchub compete together to see who had the higher realizations, it was Dromtonpa who won the competition. He had gained higher realizations by completely devoting himself to Atisha and performing pure acts of service.

¹¹⁷ NKT service might alternatively be interpreted as a form of *bhakti*, which, in a Hindu context “[g]enerally ... understands *sevā* to mean service that is undertaken by an individual and directed toward a deity or guru without the expectation of reward” (Folk 2015, 330). Gyatso is viewed as the living embodiment of the lineage of Buddhas with whom devotees (*bhaktas*) seek to unite.

In a similar way, Geshe Jayulwa devoted himself to his Spiritual Guide, Geshe Chenngapa, and had no time for meditation. One day, while he was cleaning Geshe Chenngapa's room, Geshe Jayulwa went outside to empty the rubbish bin. As he was coming back inside his mind naturally developed single-pointed concentration on emptiness and, without having to exert extra effort or engage in meditation, he gained a realization of emptiness. This came as a result of his complete dedication to his Spiritual Guide. (1996, 101)

While guru service is here praised as a technology of karmic purification (like the common interpretation of Milarepa's service of Marpa), Gyatso's second reference to Geshe Jayulwa attributes his insights to the guru's *blessings*:

The opportunity we now have to gain new realizations, and the realizations we have already gained, all arise in dependence upon the blessings and inspiration of our Spiritual Guide. Sometimes the blessings of a Spiritual Guide are extraordinary, as in the case of Geshe Jayulwa who, without exerting effort in meditation, gained concentration naturally through the power of his Spiritual Guide's blessings (1996, 115).

The "extraordinary blessings" of Gyatso and his "Ganden Oral Lineage" are frequently invoked in NKT teachings.¹¹⁸ In the above passages, Gyatso extols devotional guru service, which I have argued takes the globalist missionary form of *NKT* service, as an easy way to "naturally" gain realizations "without exerting effort in meditation."¹¹⁹ We can recall Matt's experience as a testament to this method: "I've experienced it too, working those endless hours at these

¹¹⁸ According to Gyatso's presentation of the "Ganden Oral Lineage instructions of Mahamudra" (2016, 4), for example – which he claims to have "received directly from his Spiritual Guide, Vajradhara Trijang Rinpoche" (2016, back cover), "the power of the blessings of the instructions on tranquil abiding ... and the way of meditating are both superior to other methods" (34). These include a "very blessed" method of "penetrating the vajra body" by "meditating principally on the central channel at the level of the heart," rather than the navel, which enables a practitioner to "attain the Union of Buddhahood very quickly" without relying on a consort (60-61).

¹¹⁹ The missionizing strategy of presenting guru/NKT service as an easy, lay "quick path" to enlightenment might be viewed as a globalist Vajrayana parallel to Mahasi Sayadaw's reformed Theravada method of easy, lay mindfulness meditation (Sharf 2017, 198, 205-206). The "active ingredient of enlightenment" (Sumegi 2014, 229) for both Sayadaw and Gyatso is wisdom insight, accomplished quickly and easily by their respective methods of meditation (requiring little outer renunciation) and work (requiring outer renunciation but little meditation). Crucially, the NKT's populist version of a quick, easy, lay, liberating practice defies privatization – entrenching, rather than obviating, the guru-as-institution's authority over the individual adherent.

occasions and then by the end of it you get those tremendous inspirations and those blessings, you go ‘where did this come from, this insight?’ It didn’t come out of sitting for twelve hours.”

NKT work as guru-deity service, or “work lineage,” is the NKT’s institutional disciplinary regime of outer renunciation,¹²⁰ which, like traditional vinaya adherence, does not require virtuous intentions (e.g., inner renunciation), meditation, or study to perform its soteriological function; such is the power of the guru’s blessings. The NKT’s third “lineage” (or “wheel”) of NKT work is a method for disciples to functionally embody and accomplish the other two lineages of learning and attainment (or study and meditation) by serving their physical embodiment in the guru’s institutional form. Interview data surveyed in Chapter 5 confirms this emphasis on work *over* meditation and study: e.g., by Nolan (“The thing is I don’t meditate a lot ... but I know from working at Dharma centres that this is a precious human life”), Justine (“Often if I didn’t have a ton of time for formal practice, but when I would go into formal practice the conditions were easier for me to actually go in”), and Peter (“[Work] *was* my Dharma practice; especially when I was AD; I didn’t go to Teacher Training Program, I didn’t do anything; it was just running the building”).

Above, Justine attributed “this energy that comes” from working for the guru to “merit and blessings.” In the previous chapter Nolan said he could feel a positive energy from Dharma work which he described as the *basis* of “merit and blessings.” To appreciate the degree to which guru service is deemed a consummating soteriological technology in the NKT requires an understanding of the way in which guru service not only functions as a pseudo-monastic

¹²⁰ Recall Palden’s account of his NKT sponsorship as outer renunciation: “I’ve chosen to put myself in a situation now where I can’t express my worldly concerns.”

disciplinary technology of clerical guru emulation (in which outer behaviour precipitates inner realization), as described above, but also as a tantric ritual technology of *yogic participation* in the guru's realizations through the transmissive accumulation of blessings – a spiritual product of guru service which, unlike merit, depends more on channeling, or *receiving*, the guru than on emulating him. To understand the role of blessings in NKT soteriology (and their relationship to merit), I will briefly explicate the ritual which Gyatso refers to as “the gateway to receiving blessings” (2005, 59), and which Lopez characterizes as a tantric practice tailored to “this degenerate age in which buddhas do not publicly appear” by which the Geluk guru-deity “is said to be able to bestow the boon of Buddhahood ... in a single instant” (2007, 282): guru yoga.

In my structural analysis of Losang Chokyi Gyaltsan's seventeenth-century “Offering to the Spiritual Guide” (*Guru pūjā*, Tib. *Lama Chopa*) – the primary Geluk liturgical formulation of guru yoga, recited bimonthly at NKT centres¹²¹ – I argued that the Vajrayana ritual of guru yoga is an energy economy in which the disciple makes offerings to the guru, requests things from the guru, and receives things from the guru (Emory-Moore 2012, 42-44). According to Gyatso, “The essence of Guru yoga is to develop strong conviction that our Spiritual Guide is a Buddha, to make prostrations, offerings and sincere requests to him or her, and then to receive his profound blessings” (2005, 13). The things offered are praise and objects of enjoyment, both material and imagined. The things requested are the guru's blessings, principally to help the disciple gain the realizations of the stages of the path to enlightenment. Through offering, the disciple *accumulates* merit; through requesting, she *receives* blessings.

¹²¹ See Campbell 2012 for a field study of this very ritual at a NKT centre in Toronto, “the most important [element of which] is self-generation as the guru-deity ... [in which] practitioners imagine themselves embodying the presence of the spiritual guide in the form of a Buddha, thereby enacting his presence in the ritual space” (243).

Gyatso equates ‘merit’ with good fortune, defining it as “the positive energy that results from virtuous actions” (115), and as “the potential power to ... produce happiness” (368). Merit thus refers to the karmic imprints of virtuous actions left in one’s mental continuum, or simply ‘good karma.’ Seen as living Buddha, the “Spiritual Guide is a powerful field for accumulating merit, purifying negative karma, and receiving blessings” (8). Purification of demerit and accumulation of merit are functions of an important subsection of *Lama Chopra*, the seven-limbed offering, but they are not primary functions of guru yoga itself, which, according to Gyatso, is principally a means of *receiving* the guru’s blessings (1, 13). Where merit is wilfully accumulated through acting virtuously, blessings are a gift that must be requested and received from a holy being.¹²²

Above I argued for an interpretation of Gyatso’s definition of blessings – “the transformation of our mind from a negative state to a positive state ... through the inspiration of holy beings” (360) – as the energy causing the mental transformation rather than the resultant transformation itself. Referring back to Gyatso’s Himalayan agricultural analogy in which the guru’s blessings are compared to mountain water irrigating our field-like mind (59), the transformation of a blessing is the germination of merit in one’s mental continuum. In dependence on the merit field of the guru, the seeds of happiness and realization are planted by the practitioner’s virtuous actions; a necessary condition for their fruition is the water of the guru’s inspiration. Potential energy requires active energy to ripen as insight experience. According to the structural logic of the guru

¹²² These twin constituents of Vajrayana realization – accumulation of blessings through faith and merit through virtuous action – form a compelling parallel to the Christian “technique for achieving salvation [via] some combination of faith and good works” (Prothero 2010, 14). In addition to their scriptural *work* → *faith* relation as potential and active forms of energy accumulated through practices of seed-sowing and seed-germination, above I summarized Gyatso’s extra-textual account (in Portugal in 2013) of an inverse dynamic whereby “blessings from Wisdom Buddha Je Tsongkhapa” produce NKT work.

yoga energy economy, therefore, the disciple gives objects to the guru and accrues the energy potentials for their own realizations of dharma; the disciple requests the guru's energy to germinate their own energy potentials; the guru gives the disciple their energy and thereby bestows upon them insight and happiness.

Considering institutional guru service in the NKT as a form of guru yoga in this way affords a more precise explanation of emic teachings and experiential accounts of the mechanics and benefits of KMC work. In particular, it expands the logic of the extra-textual NKT orthopraxy outlined in Chapter 5 and above – which posits the liberating nature of KMC volunteer work conceptualized as “bodhisattva activity” on behalf of all living beings and practiced as devotional service to the guru's institutional body – by identifying such work as entailing a potent nexus of seed-sowing merit labour and seed-germinating *blessings labour*.

This cultic NKT technology of Dharma work as guru yoga (at once removing demerit and reaping both merit and blessings) is taught to be powerful enough to supplant the need for extended meditation retreat. Earlier in the same 2016 teaching at KMC North in which Palden described Dharma centre work as “the easy way to practice the Bodhisattva's way of life,” Palden recounted an encounter with Gyatso in which the NKT guru repudiated Palden's renouncer wish to do prolonged meditation retreat because of the urgent need for bodhisattva teachers:

It's one interesting thing, if you look at New Kadampa Tradition teachers, how many of them go away on long retreats? None. Or maybe one or two. Why is that? ... I myself asked Geshe-la twice in my life, “Can I go on long retreat please? I've worked for the Dharma for a very long time.” The first time I asked him I'd been at it for twenty-odd years. And he just laughed! He said, “But you're young!” He said, “How old are you?” I told him how old I was. He said, “Oh, I'm twenty years older

than you.” So anyway when another twenty years had passed I saw Geshe-la again. I said “Oh by the way, before you told me I was too young. Am I old enough now to go on retreat?” So he completely ignored my question, and he gave me a long teaching on bodhicitta, which I was only half listening to. But then at the end of this long lecture on the benefits of being a bodhisattva, he leaned very closely towards me and whispered – as if there was anybody else in the room; there was nobody in there – he said, “If Kadampa teachers don’t teach, the New Kadampa Tradition will quickly disappear.” I thought, “Oh yeah! Wow. I hadn’t thought about that.” Where would we be without the teachers?

While I stand by my characterization of NKT workers in general as “missionaries” – since all forms of KMC service (from scrubbing toilets to distributing publicity to granting tantric initiations) are conceptualized as “Kadampa world service” aiming at the proliferation of Buddha’s teachings (as described above) – every centre’s most visible missionaries are its teachers. As indicated by Palden, the pre-eminent form of volunteer labour in the NKT is teaching, or preaching, Gyatso’s Dharma.¹²³ I will now examine this practice as a case study of the role of guru devotion in NKT missionary monasticism.¹²⁴

iii. Guru Yoga as Means of Clerical Democratization

Faith in Geshe Kelsang has been shown to play a central role in a Kadampa Buddhist’s passage from patron to provider. For NKT teachers in particular (from full-time Resident Teachers to part-time General Program branch teachers), faith is a compulsory qualification. Although the systematic study of Gyatso’s texts is deemed an important component of NKT religious practice

¹²³ The following statement by Gyatso (2002b, 31) suggests that teaching is also the preeminent form of *guru service* in the NKT: “[I]f I have one thousand students of whom one hundred attain enlightenment and become Buddhas through studying and practicing my teachings, but one student becomes a qualified Teacher, then for me that single person is more important than all the others.”

¹²⁴ Chapter 3 examined the content of a typical GP teaching from the perspective of a KMC visitor. The following section examines the practice of teaching from the perspective of NKT teachers.

(see Chapter 3), and of teaching NKT Buddhism in particular,¹²⁵ scholars of the NKT in Britain have noted a predominant view that faith in Gyatso is a more important qualification for teaching Gyatso's texts than personal experience of their contents.

The Resident Teacher interviewed by Waterhouse in Bath, for example, all but equated students' "practice of Dharma" and their "faith in Geshe-la":

The decision to allow someone to teach is made by the centre's resident teacher who said,

I don't order people to teach. I ask people if they would like to teach. How much [study program material] they have covered would be very low on the criteria list. Mainly it would be their practice of dharma, their faith in Geshe-la. The connection that they have made with the tradition. Whether you can teach or not depends on your ability to function as a channel for Geshe-la rather than your knowledge. Some people have years of knowledge but it is still up here [taps temple] because they don't have a special connection with Geshe-la. It doesn't come over. It is not inspiring.

Although study is paramount, knowledge of the lineage of scripture does not operate as a qualification to pass on that knowledge. Good NKT teachers are said to be those who have faith in Geshe Kelsang and can therefore act as channels between Geshe Kelsang and the listener. (1997, 166-167)

In Chapter 3 I stated that this and the previous chapter would attempt to compare the NKT's answer to Cozort's question, "What makes a person qualified to be a teacher of the *Dharma*?" with clerical qualifications historically prevalent in Asian Buddhist formations, namely "excelling at monastic training under the tutelage of a recognized master" (Cozort 2003, 243-244). In the previous chapter I argued that what it means in the NKT to "excel at monastic

¹²⁵ In "Training as a Qualified Dharma Teacher" (2002b), initially published in a NKT magazine in 1992, Gyatso appears to be principally concerned with encouraging NKT students to memorize and *retain* the teachings they have studied in Foundation and Teacher Training Programs.

training under the tutelage of a recognized master” is to sign on as a full-time worker for the living master’s global mission. These pseudo-monastic, lay or ordained, sponsored Resident Teachers are the *most* qualified of NKT teachers, but the Bath Resident Teacher’s account of recruiting other non-sponsored, part-time teachers makes it clear that their primary qualification is no different: faith.

Attesting to the fact that guru faith is deemed as important a NKT teaching qualification as study, in a 2017 blog article titled “Easy Come, Easy Go: Modern Kadampa Teachers,” McQuire also offered a critical assessment of this clerical devotionism and its role in what she referred to as the “NKT system of control,” which followers will eventually need to recover from when they “‘come into [them]selves’ after being ‘out of [them]selves’ in the NKT world”:

There are no specific qualifications required to be an NKT teacher. None. To be chosen you only have to ‘have faith’ and study [Teacher Training Program] or [Foundation Program] and ‘be in the right place at the right time’ when a new teacher is needed. Resident Teachers and other ‘branch’ teachers from abroad should attend the Summer Festival [Teacher Training Program]. You don’t have to have passed any particular exams or had any particular assessments. There are very few records. There will be no recorded interviews. And you will have very little supervision from ‘NKT Central’ once you have a post as a Resident Teacher. This is why there have been so many crises and so much ‘damage limitation’ has been necessary for the NKT. It seems to me that the measurement of a successful NKT teacher is simply, loyalty. And friendships are based on that. Not friendships producing loyalty, but loyalty producing friendship. Once you are ‘disloyal’ to the NKT, your ‘friendship’ will be dropped.¹²⁶

Now, this amount of control over NKT students who are Resident (and branch) Teachers is only possible precisely because of the lack of any structure of qualifications necessary to become an NKT Resident (or branch) Teacher. Firstly, the NKT has a wider pool of people to ‘choose’ from (on the basis of loyalty, which they call ‘faith’). Secondly, as everyone is a ‘volunteer’ with no contracts, etc, and only

¹²⁶ McQuire appears to be describing a practice of shunning, or formally ceasing interaction with apostates, not uncommon in minority religious communities.

qualified by that ‘faith’, everyone fears losing their roles as NKT teachers! You keep people even closer to the NKT agenda by defining that ‘obedience to being happy to do anything the Guru wants me to do even if I don’t like it’ as the ‘Kadampa Path’, the ‘fast path, the ‘hardcore practitioner’ path! And this ‘Kadampa’ achievement – of doing what is unsavoury ‘for the Guru’ (like going on the protests against His Holiness the Dalai Lama even if you don’t agree with them) makes people into ‘heroes’ and ‘heroines’, feeding back into that language of the NKT’s Heruka and Vajrayogini tantras. NKT followers felt they were practising the ‘purest’ form of Guru Yoga at the protests.

After stating that “[t]here are no specific qualifications required to be an NKT teacher,” McQuire names two – study and faith – which were also, incidentally, core principles of the Protestant Reformation’s doctrine of salvation: *sola scriptura* (“by scripture alone”) and *sola fide* (“by faith alone”). According to McQuire, Waterhouse (1997, 162), and Cozort (2003, 231-232), therefore, scriptural study is a requirement for teaching in the NKT, while both McQuire and Waterhouse affirm an operational *sola fide* orthopraxy. According to McQuire, “We needed to become ‘qualified spiritual guides’ as soon as possible; ... Being qualified didn’t mean passing our exams, that wasn’t necessary; it meant ‘relying on the Guru’ through *Heart Jewel* and then teaching others the NKT texts” (2013, 73). Following on the Bath Resident Teacher’s near conflation of a student’s “practice of Dharma” and their “faith in Geshe-la,” as well as Waterhouse’s observation that “knowledge of the lineage of scripture does not operate as a qualification to pass on that knowledge” but that “[g]ood NKT teachers are said to be those who have faith in Geshe Kelsang and can therefore act as channels between Geshe Kelsang and the listener” (1997, 166-167), these twin preaching qualifications appear to represent a particular formulation of the twin Vajrayana lineages of instruction and experience (Gyatso 2016, 265), or

learning and attainment (Kapstein 2000, 18), in which faith is a *substitute* for experience, or attainment.¹²⁷

In his account of the relation between these elements (learning, attainment, and faith) in NKT preaching orthopraxy, Kay (like McQuire) goes beyond Waterhouse by identifying guru yoga as the movement's compulsory preparatory preaching ritual – the explicit function of which is to conflate guru faith and personal attainment, or, to *use* faith as a means of personal attainment by “achiev[ing] a transference of the guru's realizations to one's own mental continuum” (Dalai Lama 2009, 117):

If the objective of an NKT student is to become a pure container for Geshe Kelsang's teachings, the aim of an NKT teacher is to function as a pure 'channel' in transmitting the teachings to others. The ideal teacher is someone who, whilst developing a range of effective presentational techniques, faithfully passes on the content of the teachings without colouring them in any way with their own personal ideas, preconceptions or prejudices. One NKT teacher described his role as 'a talking book' in the following way: “It's a bit like a parrot in a way, teaching a parrot to talk [...] We're a telephone in a way, or loud speakers, and Geshe-la's teachings come through your mouth. We only say what we've read, so it's not as if we're doing very much really except presenting Geshe-la's ideas.” Other teachers emphasise the importance of becoming an effective 'conduit' by 'getting yourself out of the way'. The importance of faithfully transmitting Geshe Kelsang's texts helps to explain the emphasis in the Foundation and Teacher Training Programmes on thorough textual study, discussion and memorisation exercises. The NKT handbook on teaching skills states that every NKT teacher 'must give exactly the same explanation, otherwise the NKT will disintegrate'.¹²⁸

¹²⁷ As with NKT “work lineage” more generally, according to which faith can effectively stand in for scriptural learning *and* yogic attainment as a means of accomplishing personal insight into Gyatso's Dharma, faith can also evidently stand in for study and meditation as an effective qualification for accomplishing its transmission to others.

¹²⁸ The NKT's emphasis on scriptural memorisation and faithful transmission is continuous with Asian Buddhist educational practices in which study is the process of learning to replicate ancient wisdom and a knowledgeable monk is someone who can repeat the scriptures verbatim (often in order to chant them). Even in the Tibetan Geluk school, which relies so heavily on debate as a pillar of monastic education, uncoloured transmission of scripture is the highest priority: “[T]he founders, Dzong-ka-ba and his disciples, provided clear and detailed doctrinal statements leaving little room for creative writing. The only task left for later scholars is to retrieve the meaning contained in these texts, and the only inquiry allowed is the oral questioning that leads to their appropriation. When his students

Whilst personal experience of the teachings is considered important, the dominant view within the NKT is that the main qualification of a teacher is their purity of faith and discipleship. According to one NKT teacher, an individual's lack of experience or 'realisations' is not an obstacle because 'all you need to become a teacher is to have faith in Geshe Kelsang and know your Dharma a little bit'. The guru-yoga of Tsong Khapa, a practice which involves visualising and absorbing with the guru in the aspect of Tsong Khapa, is thus regarded as the core component of an NKT teacher's preparations, enabling him or her to teach in an almost oracular fashion as a mouthpiece for Geshe Kelsang. According to Gen Thubten Gyatso, 'there is only one teacher in the NKT, Geshe Kelsang; all the other NKT Teachers are his emanations'. A consequence of this view, one student explains, is that 'giving teachings is like receiving them'. (Kay 2004, 94-95)

I have already pointed out (in Chapter 2) that the *sādhanā* of *Heart Jewel*, which combines a traditional Geluk guru yoga ritual centred on Tsongkhapa (*Ganden Lhagyama*) with prayers and offerings to Dorje Shugden, has been "promoted as the 'essential' practice of the NKT" (Kay 2004, 77) since the movement's founding in 1991, and to this day remains the only public puja performed daily at KMCs around the world (affirmed by McQuire 2013, 73). In both NKT liturgical and missionizing ritual, therefore, the centrality of guru yoga cannot be overemphasized. I will now examine the latter.

As indicated by Kay, the devotional faith relationship with Gyatso as an enlightened emanation of Tsongkhapa which serves as the foundation of every NKT disciple's authority to teach must be affirmed by such disciple-teachers before every teaching in ritual performance of guru yoga. Echoing the Dalai Lama's account of guru yoga's final goal (2009, 117), Mark Donovan cites Janet Gyatso's explanation of *Bla-ma'i rnal-'byor* (guru yoga) as "a specialized form of *sādhanā*

would ask why he did not write down his ideas, Gen Nyi-ma would reply that there was no need for him to do so. Dzong-ka-ba and his disciples had said it all. What could he add?" (Dreyfus 2003, 123).

in which the practitioner meditatively assumes the knowledge and wisdom of his teacher, here equated to the Buddha” (Donovan 1986, 55). In particular, the energy economy of guru yoga is designed to fulfill the intention with which it is formally enacted – bodhicitta, the wish to attain enlightenment for the benefit of all – by culminating in “a meditative visualization of union between the guru and disciple” (40).

In the context of Losang Chokyi Gyaltsan’s guru yoga *sāadhanā* of *Lama Chopā*, for example, having received the guru’s blessings and visualized his or her dissolution into one’s mind at one’s heart, the disciple then engages in *mahāmudrā* (‘great seal’) meditation, which Gyatso describes as a quick path to enlightenment: “Many of Je Tsongkhapa’s faithful followers have reached enlightenment in three years by practicing the Vajrayana Mahamudra of the Gelugpa Tradition” (2005, 18). After conjuring the spiritual guide in an idealized form and using this visualized guru-deity to procure the positive energies of merit and blessings, the *Lama Chopā* ritual culminates in the dissolution of the guru into oneself, and of both parties in emptiness:

With delight, [our Guru] comes to the crown of our head and ... descends through our central channel to our heart. We feel that our Guru’s mind of spontaneous great bliss mixes with our subtle mind, and as a result our mind is transformed into spontaneous great bliss. With this mind of bliss we then meditate on emptiness ... We should try strongly to imagine that everything has dissolved into emptiness, and that our mind has mixed with this in a space-like equipoise. ... This is definitive Guru yoga.
(Gyatso 2005, 272)

Guru yoga’s energy economy functions finally, therefore, to accomplish the complete merging of its parties (disciple and guru) in emptiness, the disciple’s guru-gifted realization of which is the final aim and fruit of guru yoga.

As a ritual of public preaching preparation within the *sādhanā* of *Heart Jewel*, cultivation of contemplative experience of such a dissolution of guru and disciple within “the Mahamudra that is the union of bliss and emptiness, which is the very essence of Vajrayana practice” (Gyatso 2002a, 44) is emphasized less explicitly – perhaps because NKT General Program teachers have not necessarily received highest yoga tantra empowerment, and have therefore not always been initiated into this practice of “definitive guru yoga” – than development of a more general feeling of the guru deity’s living presence in one’s heart, and of his agency in one’s preparation and delivery of an upcoming Dharma teaching. An unpublished document provided to NKT teachers of General Program classes, for example, outlines “Distant and Close Preparations for a Class,” the former of which include:

We begin by doing *Heart Jewel* regarding Geshe-la and Je Tsongkhapa as inseparably one. In particular we emphasize receiving the attainment of the wisdom of expounding Dharma. We imagine that the atoms of light and nectar that dissolve into us are in the aspect of Geshe-la’s books, especially the book we are going to teach from. We should make special requests to Guru Tsongkhapa to help us to prepare our class. Then we read, study, contemplate, and meditate, and try to form the basic outline of the talk in our mind. . . . Then dissolve Guru Tsongkhapa into your heart and ask him to bless your mind so that others will receive his teachings and blessings through you. Ask Dorje Shugdan to protect the Dharma in your mind, to preserve the purity of the lineage, and to remove obstructions and create favourable conditions for your teaching.

Close preparations then specify:

Before going to the teaching hall do *Heart Jewel* puja. Ask Geshe-la to teach from your heart. Visualize Geshe-la on the teaching seat, and before you sit down, dissolve him into your heart. Think that Geshe-la is sitting in your heart, and that it is he who will give the teaching.

Above I described Gyatso’s account in his last public teaching in Portugal in 2013 of his own employment of faith *in his disciples* as a method to grow the NKT. In the same teaching’s

conclusion, Gyatso explained how faith *in his guru* works to grow the NKT via his own practice of the very guru yoga missionizing technique described above:

So you know I'm not young. After two months I will be eighty-four years old; my root guru, Trijang Rinpoche, who is living Heruka, disappeared when he was about eighty-four years. Emanations of enlightened beings appear suddenly, disappear suddenly, because they come in this world for our purpose. When our karmic connection or time ended, they will disappear; maybe another one appears as their emanation. In reality my root guru Trijang Dorjechang, himself Lama Tsongkhapa, he is Guru Sumati Buddha Heruka. But when he disappeared still his emanations appear everywhere; sometimes I can say myself his emanation. I am not saying I am enlightened being; I am Heruka; I am not saying this. I can be his emanation. How? Because through my deep faith the wisdom being of Guru Sumati Buddha Heruka enters into my body and abides at my heart inseparable from my mind. So wisdom being of Lama Tsongkhapa abides in my heart inseparable; through this my mind changed from ordinary mind into the supreme good heart of bodhicitta. Because my mind becomes pure with a good heart, my actions become pure; that makes all my activities successful. So in reality all this — that means temporarily I myself can be emanation of Je Tsongkhapa wisdom Buddha, emanation of my root guru. You can be also my emanation. Same. Emanations, emanated means anything. So through abiding wisdom being at our heart we develop special good heart; our actions become pure; we are working solely to benefit living beings spreading Buddhadharma; we are emanated by enlightened beings.

Although Gyatso does not explicitly mention guru yoga here, the dissolution of the guru-deity “into my body ... at my heart inseparable from my mind” accomplished “through my deep faith” bears an unmistakable resemblance to his aforementioned textual account of “definitive Guru Yoga” within *Lama Chopalpa's* culminating visualization (2005, 272). In the context of his final public teaching, however, Gyatso went on to encourage his disciples to employ the same practice of absorbing *him* as a method of becoming his *temporary emanation* (or tulku) in order to “do his job” of liberating sentient beings by spreading Kadam Dharma:

When wisdom being at our heart disappeared through our conditions, by developing wrong motivation, wrong view, wrong intention, delusions strong, then they disappeared, then we will not receive any blessings; so then our actions of Dharma activity not working; our practice not working. So therefore emanation can be

anyone. So the wisdom being of enlightenment, enlightened beings enter in living being's heart and they receive special blessings; so then they develop pure mind, pure motivation, good heart. Then they will benefit living beings spreading Dharma, exactly the same as enlightened beings spreading Dharma. Buddhas are spreading Dharma; we are also spreading Dharma. We are doing their job. We are doing their job. So at that time we are emanation, they emanated. Due to our strong delusion, impure motivation, developing wrong view, then wisdom beings disappeared, so stopped receiving blessings, no connection; then our mind becomes ordinary and our actions are ordinary; then our spiritual development will not be successful, and also we experience problems, you know.

Finally, Gyatso claimed that “this connection” between the presence of the guru-deity at one's heart, the resultant purity of one's bodhicitta motivation and bodhisattva missionary actions, and the resultant authenticity of one's identity as a temporary tulku was an esoteric insight revealed to him directly by Tsongkhapa:

Quite important: “emanations, emanations,” everybody say, but in this way we can say Buddhas' emanations exist everywhere. Ourselves can be — ourselves try to apply effort to become emanation of Je Tsongkhapa, so that we can do Je Tsongkhapa's job. I myself am doing Trijang Dorjechang's job. His job his whole life is spreading Kadam Dharma, instructions of Ganden Oral Lineage, which is the very, very quick path to enlightenment. Lama Tsongkhapa himself appeared as Trijang Dorjechang; his job is to receive ultimate benefit of living beings, people of this world, spreading Kadam Dharma. Now I am doing his job, so I am his emanation, he emanated. But if I develop wrong motivation, my mind not pure, actions not pure, wisdom being disappeared; then I will not receive his blessings, so my actions impure, mind impure; then I experience suffering; I cannot benefit. I understand this connection, so I am telling you. This is in reality not explained in Dharma books; this is my own understanding through receiving blessings of Lama Tsongkhapa.

In Chapter 2, I suggested that Gyatso is the only individual perceived to embody the twin Vajrayana lineages of ‘learning’ (*mkhas-pa*) and ‘attainment’ (*grub-pa*) in the NKT – the movement's only ‘guru endowed with both learning and attainment’ (*mkhas-grub gnyis-ldan-gyi bla-ma*). Despite this strictly upheld NKT orthodoxy which identifies all NKT teachers as Gyatso's *representatives*, in an important sense, the movement's extra-textual guru yoga

missionizing orthopraxy described above enables *every* NKT teacher to become the ‘guru endowed with both learning and attainment’ by temporarily becoming an *emanation* of Gyatso (as his lineage’s *Dharmakāya*) through memorizing his words via study and channelling his blessings (*adhiṣṭhāna*) via the the esoteric *sādhana* ritual of guru yoga.

Judging from the observations by Waterhouse and Kay cited above, this homiletical deployment of guru yoga appears to have been an important part of NKT missionizing strategy since the movement’s early days, even if it had not been articulated as clearly in public before Gyatso’s final 2013 teaching in Portugal. As early as 1992 Gyatso offered a public teaching, which, without explicitly referencing guru yoga, can be read as a precursor to his 2013 statement that “Buddhas are spreading Dharma; we are also spreading Dharma. We are doing their job. So at that time we are emanation, they emanated”:

When I was young, I used to wonder why Tara told Atisha to become a Spiritual Guide when he was already an enlightened being, because a Buddha is the highest Spiritual Guide. At first I found this difficult to understand, but now I understand it clearly. If we become an enlightened being like Buddha, we will be of little use to ordinary beings because it is difficult for them to communicate with a Buddha. However, if we remain as a humble practitioner and become a qualified Teacher we will be able to benefit many people. By remaining with ordinary people we can become their Spiritual Guide and help them greatly. Therefore, what Tara said was correct. Atisha followed her advice and became a very qualified Spiritual Teacher who benefitted countless people in India and Tibet. From this we can understand why our Spiritual Teacher is more important for us than the Buddhas. We can communicate directly with our humble Spiritual Guide, and he or she can act in exactly the same way as Buddha acts. Therefore, in reality, the Spiritual Guide is an emanation of Buddha. (2002b, 32)

This general explanation of the logic behind manifesting Buddhahood through publicly performing Buddha’s deeds (or becoming a practical tulku by teaching Dharma) appears to suggest that missionizing can function in a manner similar to traditional monastic vinaya

adherence: as a means of publicly manifesting (through representing and supporting) soteriological accomplishment without entailing private soteriological accomplishment.

McQuire summarized the NKT preaching method of becoming a temporary tulku through guru yoga as it was taught to her in the late 1990s:

One function of a Buddha, we were told, was to teach Dharma, the path to enlightenment. Geshe-la told us that whether a teacher “is a real Buddha or not depends upon the student’s faith and view, not on the actual qualifications of the teacher”, and this applied to any NKT teacher, including Resident Teachers, and whether we were listening or teaching. Students would “meet Geshe-la” through us. I was told we needed “to project that we are fully qualified teachers. This is not a sham because we are holding the Guru at our heart”. During the meditations of *Heart Jewel* you could “download” the “wisdom minds” of different Buddhas to your own mind at your spiritual “heart” in the center of your body. ... In the second half of Heart Jewel practice, “Wisdom Buddha Geshe-la”, “appearing as” Shugden, would reinforce those “blessings” and “protect” them. (2013, 73)

She also offered a revealing account of the felt personal highs and lows associated with the practice, from her perspective as a former General Program teacher:

For me, “downloading the guru’s blessings” worked; I loved teaching. My nerves were intense as I had suffered from memory loss in public all my life, but straight after *Heart Jewel*, which I sometimes did several times before teaching, I could become relaxed, confident, and articulate for hours; it did feel as if Geshe-la was talking “through me” as I’d often speak with beautiful phrases and make spontaneous hand gestures representing enlightened states of mind I’d seen in Tibetan paintings. (74)

For McQuire, a complicated reality seemingly connected to the *temporary* nature of such a quasi-mystical experience of transmissive self-transcendence through guru yoga preaching was the post-preaching come-down to the pre-preaching self:

I spoke Geshe-la’s words of wisdom and was told I would “receive protection, blessings, and special care continually” from Dorje Shugden. In this way I would become “extraordinary” as I had an “extraordinary goal” in which “ordinary rules

don't apply;" words from a teaching I had pinned to my bedroom wall as inspiration. However, I still searched for my "inner Guru". (75) ...

I did find "very special", "extraordinary experiences" through meditation during my first years in the NKT, but I did not find "a pure happiness that will never let you down" or feel closer to the enlightenment in this one lifetime that the NKT claimed to offer. My faith in the NKT was created through this illusion of quick results and based on my yearning to practice. My insecurities whilst in the NKT were valid; I was not a "Dharma teacher" even though I tried, with Guru Yoga and Shugden practice, to be a good one. ... Tied to the desire to "keep my vows", I feel I, and the "Dharma" I studied, were pushed into the box of an organization in expansion. (81)

McQuire's missionary "insecurities" appear to have arisen from a felt dissonance between public and private identities connected to NKT missionizing as a quasi-monastic method of publicly projecting soteriological accomplishment *without necessarily feeling*, or identifying with, such accomplishment. Despite being assured that "project[ing] that we are fully qualified teachers" was "not a sham because we are holding the Guru at our heart" (73), McQuire "spoke Geshe-la's words of wisdom ... [but] still searched for [her] 'inner Guru'" (75).

In McQuire's stated experience of guru yoga preaching, as well as in the accounts of Waterhouse, Kay, and the "Distant and Close Preparations for a Class" document cited above, Gyatso is conceived as the sacral source of NKT missionizing agency and authority. As he did in Portugal in 2013, however, in his last summer festival at Manjushri KMC in 2009, Gyatso attributed the authority behind his missionizing actions (this time with an emphasis on his religious reforms) to his own practice of the same tantric faith technology of guru yoga:

When we escaped from Tibet, during my retreat on the Nepalese border, I had the opportunity read Je Tsongkhapa's commentaries on Highest Yoga Tantra, and tantric teachings. Because of my faith, I understand that during that time I received his blessings. Because of this I achieved the opportunity to spread his teachings on Kadam Lamrim and Kadam Dharma in Western countries and throughout the world. I have gathered every necessary condition to do this. I understand that because

society is different I have to present Dharma in a different way. Tibetan students and Western students are very different, so although the Dharma itself is the same it is very necessary to present it in a different way, in a way that is acceptable, suitable, and practical according to modern people. ... When I changed the presentation, sometimes when I thought about this nothing would come. But from time to time it came naturally. Certainly all these new presentations came from Je Tsongkhapa, not from me. Probably at that time, Lama Tsongkhapa himself entered my heart and I myself was like an oracle. So I believe that you have received teachings from him. Why? It is because previously during my retreat I received his blessings and made a connection.

Bluck's citation of a 1997 version of the NKT pamphlet "Modern Day Kadampas" affirms Gyatso's view of his own teaching authority as having arisen from the same "talking book" method of guru yoga transmission that NKT disciples employ to transmit Gyatso's teachings to new audiences: "Geshe Kelsang sees [his books] as transmitted to him as if he were 'a tape recorder into which the Wisdom Buddha, the Dharma Protector Dorje Shugden, has placed the cassette of Je Tsongkhapa's teachings'" (Bluck 2006, 138). Like McQuire, Bluck highlights the role which Gyatso and his devotees ascribe to Dorje Shugden as a supramundane protector of the NKT's missionary expansion (see Chapter 2).

Soon after Palden introduced the "three wheels of Kadam Dharma" in the last session of his teaching weekend on guru reliance at KMC North in the Fall of 2017 (see Chapter 5. i.), he introduced another practice taught by Gyatso (also not found in his books) which explicitly encourages adherents to work, *and proselytize*, for the NKT – the Kadampa "heart commitment":

A lot of you have taken the empowerment of our Wisdom Protector. And when we take that empowerment, we're given a commitment by the guru, by the empowering teacher, to keep the heart commitment – and we say often in our daily [Heart Jewel] prayer, "May I keep the heart commitments." ... We have four heart commitments as Kadampas. [1] The first one is to cherish Kadam Dharma; it means to consider our Dharma to be precious and important; what we've received from our teachers is so, so precious; cherish it. [2] The second is to practice it; to actually put Kadam

Dharma into practice. [3] The third commitment is to teach it, in whatever way we can; some of you are not capable – “I can’t teach, I can’t teach;” you can; everyone can teach. In fact, I’ll put it this way around: you’re all teaching all the time actually. What does teaching mean? It’s not doing what I’m doing; this is one aspect of teaching. Teaching means showing people how to do things that they don’t know how to do. Or, you can say, drawing out of people the good qualities that they already have; helping them, encouraging them to develop those good qualities. We’re all teachers. [...] In our lives we’re all teachers, so take some responsibility for teaching Kadam Dharma in whatever way you can. [4] And then the fourth commitment of the Kadampas is to work to flourish the Dharma; I already explained about that. Whatever we can do we should try to help and flourish this tradition for the benefit of all living beings. So that is what I try to do anyway. I try.

After giving a Dorje Shugden empowerment at Manjushri Centre in the spring of 1995 (one year prior to launching protests against the Dalai Lama’s Shugden interdiction), Gyatso gave commentary to the *Heart Jewel* verse, “May I fulfil the heart commitment and restore my broken commitments,” in which he described the heart commitment to Dorje Shugden as a practice of giving and receiving – a “heart commitment of cherishing others” through giving them “a pure Dharma which is unmixed with any other tradition” (1995, 64) and “the best method for receiving Dorje Shugdan’s protection, blessings, and special care continually” (61-62):

Sincere practitioners of the Kadampa Buddhism of Je Tsongkhapa’s doctrine should undertake as their heart commitment to cherish the Kadam Dharma, the doctrine of Je Tsongkhapa, and to practise and teach this to others without mixing it with other traditions. We must take some responsibility to enable pure Buddhadharma to flourish throughout the world. ... These commitments should be kept freely from the practitioner’s own side and not insisted upon by the Teacher. ... We want Kadam Dharma to flourish because we cherish people. We understand that people need this Dharma to establish pure happiness, to become free from suffering, and to solve their human problems. But what people need is a pure Dharma which is unmixed with any other tradition. ... Maybe some people criticise me, but I understand that those who criticise me do not understand how to develop pure Dharma realizations. ... We are keeping Kadam Dharma purely, practising it purely, and teaching it purely without mixing it with other traditions because we cherish people. ... Encouraging the mixing of Dharma with other traditions, in reality, indirectly destroys pure Dharma. NKT Dharma centres are working to guard against this danger. (61-65)

Heretofore unexamined by scholars of the NKT – aside from brief mention by McQuire (2013, 73) – the “heart commitment” is a ritual innovation which helpfully grounds key NKT adaptive strategies examined in this dissertation in the emic terms of the movement itself. In particular, the heart commitment’s proscriptive and prescriptive imperatives *to not mix* and *to propagate* Kadam Dharma reflect the movement’s exclusivist, neo-traditionalizing circumspection of Gyatso’s interpretation of Geluk doctrine and expansionist, detraditionalizing development of sophisticated new missionizing techniques examined in Chapter 3. Formulated within a personal commitment to Dorje Shugden, these imperatives ritually inscribe “the explicit constitutional aim of the organization ... *to preserve* and *promote* this pure lineage as it has been handed on by Geshe Kelsang via the organisation’s three-tier study program” (Kay 2004, 86, my italics) within the motivations and identities of individual practitioners. Like Gen-la Dekyong’s recent inaugurating teaching at KMC Edinburgh (see above), this 1995 teaching of Gyatso assures NKT disciples that sectarian missionary activity is the highest practice of universal compassion.

Under the heading “Generating aspiring bodhichitta,” Gyatso translates the second verse of Losang Chokyi Gyaltsan’s *Lama Chopa* as follows: “For the sake of all mother sentient beings,¹²⁹ / I shall become the Guru-Deity, / And then lead every sentient being / To the Guru-Deity’s supreme state” (2005, 57). In textual commentary to this verse, Gyatso explains that the aspiration to be generated through recitation of these words is “to become a Buddha to free all mother sentient beings from the sufferings of samsara and lead them to the supreme happiness of

¹²⁹ The term “mother sentient beings” reflects an ethical implication of the Buddhist belief in countless previous lives – namely, that every sentient being has been every other sentient being’s kind mother in a previous life. Learning to recognize others in this way is the first stage of a prominent Tibetan Buddhist contemplative method for cultivating the mind of bodhicitta known as “the sevenfold cause and effect instruction” (Gyatso 1994, 22-23).

Buddhahood” (57). In light of the unpublished NKT *missionizing* orthopraxy described above, however, this verse takes on a plausible subsidiary meaning from a motivation to practice guru yoga as a gradualist means of eventually accomplishing permanent Buddhahood in order to lead others to the guru’s state, to a missionizing motivation to practice guru yoga as a subitist means of spontaneously accomplishing temporary Buddhahood in order to lead sentient beings to the guru’s state *while preaching*; in other words, to *perform* (the function of) Buddhahood for the benefit of others.¹³⁰

The historical uniqueness of the NKT’s deployment of guru yoga as a preaching ritual requires qualification and further examination. Since the ritual knowledge from which a tantric Buddhist guru’s authority derives has always been understood as “not his own invention, but [to have come] to him via the lineage of gurus that preceded him” (Gray 2013, 50), and since “it is reasonable that the practice [of guru yoga] existed in India” before its Tibetan elaboration (Wayman 1987, 209-210), it is entirely possible that Atiśa and his “Kadampa preachers” (Davidson 2005, 257) practiced absorbing their guru-deity as a preparatory preaching ritual during the Tibetan Renaissance.¹³¹ Outside the Tibetan context, Ryan Overbey argues that while “ideas and practices [about] ... the ritual imitation of Buddhas ... recur throughout a surprisingly wide variety of Buddhist texts” (2010, 25), one early Mahayana Chinese text, *Great Lamp of the*

¹³⁰ It should be noted that Geluk ritual recitation of guru yoga also has an important performative dimension. Losang Chokyi Gyaltsan’s *Lama Chopa*, for example, is traditionally chanted daily or bi-monthly by all Gelukpa monks (Barker 1975, 80). While the text is often recited silently and the activities it prescribes are primarily mental (82), the puja becomes a major event in public performance: “When the ritual is performed in large assemblies with complex chanting and hand gestures by participants dressed in magnificent ceremonial clothing, with elaborate butter sculptures and distinctive music, it represents perhaps the most complex expression of Tibetan religious culture” (Sparham 1999, 26).

¹³¹ As anecdotal evidence of the missionizing practice of guru yoga in the contemporary diasporic Tibetan context, I watched a Geluk lama perform a brief guru yoga ritual as a public preface to his keynote lecture at the 2011 Pacific Northwest regional meeting of the American Academy of Religion at Gonzaga University in Spokane, Washington.

Dharma Dhāraṇī Scripture by the sixth-century Gandhāran monk Jñānagupta, “provides the clearest and most detailed picture of the Buddhist preacher [*dharmabhāṇaka*] yet discovered” (iii). As will be explored more closely in the Conclusion, a number of preaching motifs in this “prototanic” (247) “homiletical manual” (135) appear to resemble aforementioned features of NKT preaching, foremost among them its “command to approach the event of preaching ... as a ritual evocation of the Buddha” (227) by means of the preacher’s meditational employment of *dhāraṇī*, a “Buddhist mnemonic spell” (iii).

Continuing his tantric account of “generating aspiring bodhichitta” within the context of *Lama Chopa*, Gyatso differentiates between two levels of self-generation as the deity accomplishable through guru yoga – through “correct imagination” (which, in the form his own imagination of disciples as “dakas and dakinis,” we have already seen Gyatso insist “works very well” to spread Kadam Dharma) and through “training in completion stage practices” – which, I would suggest, inversely align with these two temporally defined degrees (permanent and temporary) of Buddhahood:

The only way to become a Deity is to rely upon a Spiritual Guide whom we regard as being the same nature of that Deity. For example, if we are striving to become Heruka, we regard our root Guru as by nature inseparable from Heruka. With this recognition we perform either an extensive or a brief Guru yoga and dissolve our Guru into our heart. We feel as if our root mind and our Guru’s mind have become inseparable, the nature of Guru Heruka. With this special feeling we then generate ourself as Heruka and maintain divine pride of being the Guru-Deity.

To begin with, this is accomplished through correct imagination but eventually, through training in completion stage practices, we will generate a subtle body called the illusory body, which is an actual body of a Deity. Once we have attained the illusory body we have a pure mind and a pure body. Through continuing to improve our experience with the yogas of completion stage, our pure illusory body will become the actual body of a Buddha and our pure mind will become the actual mind

of a Buddha. Then we shall have become the actual Guru-Deity, Guru Heruka.
(2005, 57-58)

In other words, “eventually,” through training in guru yoga’s consummating completion stage tantric meditations of *mahāmudrā*, you will become an *actual* (i.e., permanent) Buddha. “To begin with,” however, you must effectively *perform* (or project, in McQuire’s words) Buddhahood through correct imagination – through which you can *also*, according to Gyatso’s 2013 teachings in Portugal, effectively spread Dharma, just as he has done.

If “[i]t is precisely through the concept of a disciplinary program that ‘outer behaviour’ and ‘inner motive’ were connected” (Asad 1993, 64) in the medieval Christian monastic context, it is precisely through the disciplinary program of “uniting with the spiritual guide” (guru yoga) through doing his work (particularly preaching) that outer behaviour (e.g., “bodhisattva activity”) and inner motive (e.g., bodhicitta) are connected – nay, conflated – in the NKT’s Vajrayana Buddhist *missionary monastic* context.¹³² Again in Gyatso’s words: “Buddhas are spreading Dharma; we are also spreading Dharma. We are doing their job. So at that time we are emanation, they emanated.”

The NKT has thus deployed the Foucauldian self-transformation technology (Samuel 2005, 338) of tantric self-*generation* (as a temporary tulku via guru yoga) as a missionizing strategy to rapidly globalize Gyatso’s lineage. An important factor in this technology’s effectiveness is its depersonalization of the preacher-disciple’s clerical authority without decreasing his or her

¹³² While the tantric guru/disciple hierarchy replaces the classical South Asian renouncer/householder monastic hierarchy in Vajrayana formations (Gellner 1992, 325), there is an obvious anti-liberal, self-abnegating parallel between the tantrika’s practice of obedience to a living guru and the monk or nun’s practice of obedience to monastic law (typically enforced through the supervision of senior monastic peers).

clerical charisma, effected in part by guru yoga's attribution of all religious insight and authority to the living guru deity inside each devotee's heart.¹³³ This is not only practiced in formal guru yoga meditation within *Heart Jewel* or *Lama Chopa sādhanās* (as described above), but in prescribed mindfulness practice during daily activities: "During the meditation break we should always remain mindful of Guru Tsongkhapa, who is inseparable from our root mind at our heart. ... if people make offerings, prostrations, or other gestures of respect to us, we should immediately offer these mentally to Guru Tsongkhapa at our heart" (Gyatso 2002a, 44). In light of this, Nick's post-class statement that "They're not my students; they're Geshe-la's students" can be interpreted quite literally, as can the words of Gyatso's former successor, Gen Thubten Gyatso, cited by Kay: "[T]here is only one teacher in the NKT, Geshe Kelsang; all the other NKT Teachers are his emanations" (2004, 95).

The other, perhaps more important, aspect of clerical authority's depersonalization within the ritual missionizing context of guru yoga – particularly in relation to the NKT's ability to "generate a highly motivated, volunteer, religious labour force including many willing to proselytise" (Stark 1996, 140) – is the emphasis such a ritual framing of proselytizing places on the clerical qualification of guru faith over other more individual-specific merits, such as birth status (e.g., tulku), religious training (e.g., *geshe*), or clerical identity (e.g., monk/nun). Although Gyatso has officially banned tulku selection in the NKT (see Chapter 2), he appears to have replaced the traditionally elite system of permanent tulku qualification by birth with a populist

¹³³ Such deferral of authority to one's own guru is a key feature of the charismatic performance of Vajrayana lineage – evidently practiced by Gyatso (Bluck 2006, 138) and his disciples (Kay 2004, 95) – whereby the lineage holder self-identifies and -represents as an agent of a "chain [that] is more important than any link" (Bishop 1993, 101).

system of temporary tulku qualification by faith – a pseudo-Protestant reliance on “faith alone” which, arguably, democratizes Geluk clerical authority under the NKT’s sole guru deity.¹³⁴

What seems key in the NKT’s Protestantization of tantra – i.e., in its popularization of tantric authority via guru yoga – is that there is only one guru-deity, under whom all are equal in their shared potential to act as temporary, participatory prophets. This *interactive* hierarchical binary of *guru-deity* \leftrightarrow *disciples* parallels that of Protestant Christianity in which a “priesthood of all believers” is possible only under Christ’s authority and (at least in evangelical Protestant traditions like Pentecostalism) only when those believers are filled with Christ’s faith-channelled “holy spirit.” It contrasts with Roman Catholicism’s elite hierarchy of permanent intercessors between Christ and disciples (e.g., pope, cardinals, bishops, priests), and with Tibetan Buddhism’s elite cadre of permanent guru-deity tulkus whose authority disciples cannot generally hope to share.

Gyatso’s critique of the Tibetan *tulku* system (NKT a, b, d, e) appears to have partly motivated his Protestantization of Vajrayana Buddhism. Gyatso’s revivalist efforts to return to the purity of pre-Geluk *Kadampa* Buddhism prior to its contamination by politically motivated tulkus (see Chapter 2) frames a reform agenda with parallels to the primitivist conviction shared by founding

¹³⁴ Although the NKT has instituted a democratic system of electoral succession (see Chapter 2), the democratization of Geluk Buddhism referred to here is closer to Hatch’s account of Christianity’s early American democratization as having “less to do with the specifics of polity and governance and more with the incarnation of the church into popular culture” (1989, 9). Gyatso’s democratization of Geluk clerical authority in the NKT is matched, of course, by his own authoritarianism, an odd pairing that was also characteristic of early American Protestant NRMs such as Methodism led by “populist religious ... outsiders who used democratic persuasions to reconstruct the foundations of religious authority”: “This upsurge of democratic hope, this passion for equality, led to a welter of diverse and competing forms, many of them structured in highly undemocratic ways. ... Mormons used a virtual religious dictatorship as the means to return power to illiterate men. Yet despite these authoritarian structures, the fundamental impetus of these movements was to make Christianity a liberating force” (11).

fathers of the United States, John Adams and Thomas Jefferson – “that Jesus’ ‘pure principles’ had been muffled by priests’ ... [and that] One must ... return to the ‘simple evangelists ... and the Christians of the 1st. century’” (Smith 1990, 7). In this respect, Gyatso might endorse nineteenth-century Protestant theologian Philip Schaff’s dismissal of Papist “Lamaism”: “A tricky priesthood, playing upon the superstitions of the mass, had taken the place of the heart’s conversion and the severe practice of self-training” (Schaff, Jackson, and Schaff 1891, 1270).¹³⁵

Although Buddhist tantra is rooted in the hierarchy of guru/disciple (see Chapter 1), the NKT has developed a democratized, even populist, form of “Protestant Buddhist tantra” through strict reliance on the tantric ritual of guru yoga as a means of authorizing preachers by temporarily transvaluing guru and disciple through conflating faith and accomplishment. Gyatso’s deployment of guru yoga as a means of producing temporary tulku lineage-holders in order to spread his movement through public preaching (the frontier of which is General Program missionizing examined in Chapter 3) is thus the lynchpin of clerical democratization under him. The productivity of guru yoga as a globalist missionizing ritual technology lies in its simultaneous affirmation and negation of the guru/disciple hierarchy, at once keeping spiritually deprived disciples strictly in step with the neo-traditionalizing constraints around doctrine and identity imposed by the movement’s sole lineage holder while providing those same disciples with a detraditionalized, democratic method to rapidly (albeit temporarily) rise to the same spiritually elevated lineage holder status.

¹³⁵ European Protestant scholars of the late eighteenth century coined the term ‘Lamaism’ to describe “the state to which the original teachings of the Buddha had sunk” (Lopez 1998, 17) in the hands of the superstitious Tibetans. Protestant publications aligning Tibetan Buddhism with Papist ritualism can be found as early as 1745 (29) and as late as 1992 (16).

When I asked Nick if he thought he would be a Resident Teacher some day, he replied: “Well we’re all going to have be Resident Teachers some day aren’t we.” A missionary orthopraxy reflected in Palden’s statement (cited above) that “everyone can teach” is that each and every Kadampa Buddhist *can* and *should* be clergy. The democratization of Geluk monastic tradition effected by the NKT’s emphasis on *sola fide* as the basis of religious authority (whereby the movement produces a “priesthood of all believers”) certainly represents a loosening of strictures constraining clerical identity (most notably from male monastic tulkus to male and/or female monastics and/or laity). As I hope to have demonstrated in Chapter 5, however, this democratization of clerical authority also entails – for the NKT’s new, informal, elite cadre of full-time, pseudo-monastic bodhisattva managers – a democratization of economic renunciation which, in practice, is highly restrictive, namely against lower and middle class householders.

CONCLUSION

I opened this dissertation comparing specific clerical dynamics in the New Kadampa Tradition with similar practices of a newly transplanted NRM in nineteenth-century North America: Methodist Christianity. By way of summarizing my findings about monastic and missionary imperatives, policies, and lived experiences in the North American NKT, I will open this Conclusion by comparing specific NKT clergy characteristics with those of a young transplanted religious movement in sixth-century China: Mahayana Buddhism.

Foremost among a number of motifs in Jñānagupta's sixth-century Chinese "homiletical manual," *Great Lamp of the Dharma Dhāraṇī Scripture*, which appear to resemble features of NKT preaching is the text's "command to approach the event of preaching ... as a ritual evocation of the Buddha" (Overbey 2010, 227) by means of the Dharma preacher's (*dharmabhāṇaka*'s) meditational employment of a "Buddhist mnemonic spell" (iii). Not unlike the directive in the NKT's homiletic instructional document, "Distant and Close Preparations for a Class," to "[v]isualize Geshe-la on the teaching seat, and before you sit down, dissolve him into your heart," the *Great Lamp* "encourages the preacher to look at his chair and imagine it to be the very Lion Throne of the Tathagata, the exalted place from which the Buddha propounds his teachings" (223). This encouragement to imaginatively evoke the Buddha is part of Jñānagupta's greater construction of "the scene of preaching as a ritual event ... which makes the Buddha present in the person of the teacher" (24), whom the text views "as a type of living Buddha, an embodied link in the chain of transmission of the Buddha's teachings" (224), and who is in turn encouraged to envision himself as a stand-in for Buddha (222).

Whereas the NKT's contemporary homiletic performance of Buddhahood is ritually authenticated through the preacher's preparatory practice of guru yoga, through which he or she imaginatively embodies the guru's lineage and realizations, particularly emptiness, Jñānagupta's sixth-century account of performing Buddhahood through preaching is ritually authenticated by the preacher's "prototanic" contemplation of a Gāndhārī syllabary (Arapacana) and recitation of the *Great Lamp's dhāraṇī*, which "functions as a token of the productive power of emptiness itself, authorizing the utterance of new Buddhist sermons" (iii). According to Overbey, "[i]t is this process of authentication which is most important for understanding how the supposedly mnemonic functions of *dhāraṇī* could be made immediately relevant for even non-elite, non-monastic Buddhist communities" (24). Chapter 6 demonstrated how in a similar manner, the supposedly yogic functions of guru yoga – namely, to procure the blessings required for successful *mahāmudrā* meditation – are made immediately relevant for the non-elite, non-monastic communities of NKT preachers and their patrons as an authenticating technology of religious transmission.

Overbey points out that ever since the Buddha's *parinirvāṇa*, the reproduction of his presence has been a pressing ritual project for his followers: "The problem of how to re-instantiate the Buddha ritually was a persistent issue throughout the history of Buddhism, and the *Great Lamp* can be seen in this light as merely one elaboration of this longstanding problematic" (243). In a globally diffuse and expanding Vajrayana NRM like the NKT, no less than in Jñānagupta's early medieval Buddhist context, the problem of how to re-instantiate the sole *Guru*-Buddha in his increasing physical absence is pressing indeed. In Chapter 6 I argued that Gyatso's movement

addresses this problem by ritually democratizing and diffusing the guru's charisma through encouraging individual adherents to engage in daily practice of guru yoga (whereby they personally encounter Gyatso through absorbing his enlightened body into their body), and by requiring individual teachers to practice guru yoga as a preparation for teaching (whereby they enable others to personally encounter Gyatso through transmitting his enlightened speech with their speech).

While the Chinese text's Gandhāran author worked hard to convey an idealized construction of a model preacher, Overbey insists that "the *Great Lamp*'s image of the preacher reveals a tension between his ideal status as a great *bodhisattva* and the constant potential for failure" (24) – a missionary insecurity which recalls Carol McQuire's "insecurities whilst in the NKT" (2013, 81) around performing Buddhahood as a Dharma teacher (see Chapter 6). McQuire's struggle to reconcile the relaxed, articulate confidence she experienced after "downloading the guru's blessings" (2013, 74) before preaching with her nagging sense outside the scene of preaching that "I was not a 'Dharma teacher' even though I tried, with Guru Yoga and Shugden practice, to be a good one" (81) reveals a lived underside of the proto-/tantric "preaching scenario in which the preacher is identified with the Tathagata" (Overbey 2010, 244) advocated by both Jñānagupta and Gyatso. Following Overbey's scholarly appraisal of the tension between idealized and imperfect preachers in the *Great Lamp*, McQuire's testament, more so than formal NKT instructions, "allow[s] us to understand the lived context of Buddhist preaching in rich intellectual and even emotional detail" (24).¹³⁶

¹³⁶ Campbell's survey of NKT adherents' diverse experiences of *Lama Chopal* at a Toronto KMC provides a similarly rich portrait of the lived context of guru yoga ritual in the NKT (unconnected to preaching): "On a personal level participants negotiate ways to balance their existing worldviews with their understanding of the rite and the

i. Summary of Findings

In addition to the ritual construction and projection of Dharma preachers as Buddha bodies, this dissertation has documented a number of other NKT missionizing practices with historical antecedents in homiletic practices promoted by Jñānagupta's manual for Dharma preachers. I will survey five: preaching as religion preservation, preaching as merit production, preaching as money production, preaching as asceticism, and preaching as lay-monastic equality.

Preaching as Religion Preservation

According to Overbey, the *Great Lamp* constructs “its image of the *dharma* master¹³⁷ as a preserver of the *dharma*, a field of immense merit, and a living embodiment of the Tathagata” (215) in service of the text's “primary goal”: “to preserve the Buddhist religion through the training of the *dharma* master” (217). Whether driven by a “simple missionary spirit” (31) or by a more urgent threat of Gandhāran Buddhism's advancing decline (30), Jñānagupta's authorial intention was to *preserve* Buddhism by *promoting* Buddhism through preaching. In the case of Gyatso and the NKT, the “explicit constitutional aim of the organization ... to preserve and promote [Gyatso's] pure lineage ... via the organisation's three-tier study program” (2004, 86) is motivated less by a simple missionary spirit than by what David Kay describes as Gyatso's “exaggerated perception of the widespread decline of Gelug Buddhism” (88). Chapter 6 cited

guru-deity. Chandrakirti members expect that participants will, with practice, come to understand the significance of the relationship to the guru-deity and be able to participate fully in embodying his presence” (2012, 252).

¹³⁷ “Dharma master” is Overbey's translation of *dharmabhāṇaka*, a figure whom I refer to as “Dharma preacher.”

Gyatso's repudiation of Palden's wish to do prolonged meditation retreat because of the urgent need for NKT teachers, culminating in the guru's statement: "If Kadampa teachers don't teach, the New Kadampa Tradition will quickly disappear." For Gyatso, greater Geluk Buddhism's degeneration in exile under an unqualified Dalai Lama poses an urgent threat to the survival of Tsongkhapa's pure doctrine, against which the best defense is offense – namely, the training of new, qualified, post-Geluk teachers. Just one year after founding the NKT, Gyatso stated that he was already "waiting for qualified Teachers" (2002b, 33):

[I]t is very important to train qualified Spiritual Guides. The New Kadampa Tradition can buy houses, open new Dharma centres, and do many other things to facilitate the study and practice of Dharma, but we cannot easily find qualified Teachers. ... [W]e cannot buy them, we cannot borrow them, and we cannot invite them from elsewhere. They have to come from within our tradition, from our students. Therefore it is very important that every month, every year, you try to improve your qualifications as Spiritual Teachers. While you are doing this, you are laying the foundation for benefiting others. (Gyatso 2002b, 32-33)

Like Jñānagupta's primary textual mission "to preserve the Buddhist religion through the training of the *dharma* master" (Overbey 2010, 217) in a new and expansive cultural mission field, Gyatso's encouragement of disciples to train as qualified Dharma teachers is largely driven by a missionary imperative that is at once preservationist and expansionist, parochialist and globalist (Harding, Hori, and Soucy 2014, 16).

Preaching as Merit Production

As a means of encouraging *dharmabanakas* in their vocation and of encouraging their patron disciples to support them in that vocation, Jñānagupta emphasized the merit produced from both:

By making the *dharma* master a vector of transmission (a role often given to Buddhas and celestial *bodhisattvas*, as well as to particularly potent Mahayana texts like the *Lotus Sutra*), the *Great Lamp* elevates the preacher to an exalted status. This

is confirmed by the merit attributed to the *dharma* master, and the merit gained from service to him. (Overbey 2010, 217)

While Gyatso insists above that training as a qualified Dharma teacher is “laying the foundation for benefiting others,” this dissertation has shown that teaching Kadam Dharma (as well as working for its propagation more broadly) is also valued as a highly beneficial practice for the teacher, particularly as a powerful form of merit production, or “merit labour” (Wilson 2018, 3). In a KMC South teaching cited in Chapter 5, Sangye came very close to suggesting that due to its nature as an unsurpassed method of merit accumulation, Kadampas must practice proselytization in order to get liberated from samsara: “We need massive stores of merit to understand emptiness. Geshe-la gives us perfect and ample conditions to collect merit. Being asked to teach Dharma is an opportunity for a merit jackpot. ... We need to relish every opportunity to teach.”

This teaching was not delivered to a group of ordained monastics. An important feature of the practice of accumulating merit through Dharma preaching in the NKT (discussed in Chapters 4, 5, and 6) is its populism. The “merit jackpot” of Dharma preaching is not restricted to highly trained monastics, as has typically been the case in Asian contexts (Cozort 2003, 243). Rather, as reflected in Nick’s casual statement that “we’re all going to have be Resident Teachers some day,” everyone (lay, monastic, male, female, sponsored, non-sponsored) *can* (because faith alone is required) and *should* (because everyone needs Dharma and you need merit) “relish every opportunity to teach.” As discussed in Chapter 4, this democratization of the Dharma preacher’s vocation – particularly the laicization of the monastic individual’s uniquely virtuosic capacity for merit production – effectively terminates the historical Buddhist lay/monastic merit economy. In contrast with a traditionally typical division of merit and material labour in which “laypeople buy

[merit] from the monastic sangha, in an economic exchange that is spoken of as dana (generosity)” (Wilson 2018, 4), NKT laity do not generally look to monastics for the provision of merit, but produce it themselves by actively missionizing and/or materially supporting missions.

Despite this laicization of merit labour, Chapter 5 argued that there is in fact an elite cadre of virtuosic merit labourers in the NKT – not monastics, but pseudo-monastic managers (e.g., Resident Teachers) who perform the highest “Kadampa world service” by surrendering to what McQuire referred to as the “relentless schedule” of full-time, sponsored missionary work. Chapter 4 also pointed out that although KMC managers, more than monastics, constitute a specialized class of virtuosic merit producers in New Kadampa Buddhist society, neither are sought out by centre patrons to provide or disseminate merit. Precisely because others need Dharma and you need merit (see Chapter 5), NKT work is presented as a potent form of merit labour and world service which has the power to transmute *any* ordinary human life – be it lay, monastic, male, female, sponsored, non-sponsored – into the profoundly meaningful life of a bodhisattva.

Thus while Overbey’s aforementioned first point of evidence for the *Great Lamp*’s elevation of the preacher to an exalted status – that the text attributes great merit to the preacher and his actions – also clearly applies to the New Kadampa construction of preachers and preaching, Overbey’s second point of evidence – that the medieval text details the merit gained from service to the preacher – does not. With the notable exception of the movement’s founder, service of individual teachers is generally not encouraged as a form of merit accumulation in the NKT. Physical service of Gyatso, however (of whose *Dharmakāya* there can only be temporary

emanations as long as he is alive), *is* an important NKT orthopraxy (see Chapter 6), rooted in a conception of preaching itself as the highest form of guru service (and world service) – not of Gyatso’s physical body but of his institutional body, the NKT itself. Unlike Jñānagupta’s encouragement of Chinese readers to generate merit by serving the Dharma preacher (Overbey 2010, 217-221), New Kadampas are not encouraged to generate merit by serving their local Dharma teacher so much as to serve their global guru by becoming a Dharma teacher themselves.

This distinction is clearly reflected in the difference between Jñānagupta’s portrait of the *person* of the preacher as “an extraordinary field of incalculable merit” (220) compared with Sangye’s account of the *act* of preaching as “an opportunity for a merit jackpot” potentially available to any KMC member in the form of a Resident Teacher’s request. In Overbey’s account of the Gandhāran monk’s homiletic manual, the Dharma preacher is portrayed both as a personal sacral *centre* (deserving of service, donation, and devotion in his own right), and as an impersonal sacral *channel* whose authority derives entirely from his evocation of the person of the Buddha:

Many scriptures advocate worship of the texts themselves, or praise the merit gained from devotion to particular celestial *bodhisattvas*. But the *Great Lamp* organizes itself around the proposition that the person of the *dharma* master, the wielder of the *dhāraṇī* and preserver of the Buddhist teaching, is the true focus of service, donation, and devotion. . . . [I]n a world without a Buddha, the *dharma* master serves a unique role. Not only does he transmit the teachings of the religion; he also evokes the very presence of the Tathagata (221-222).

An important effect of the NKT’s deployment of guru yoga as a preparatory preaching ritual – which, “within the mechanisms of cult” (Rieff 1966, 14), performs the simultaneously autocratic and democratic functions of *enshrining and diffusing* Gyatso’s charismatic authority by producing temporary emanations of himself – is a divorce of these personal and impersonal

dimensions of the authority of the *Great Lamp*'s preacher. While the *person* of the Kadampa preacher (besides Gyatso) is decidedly not (at least on the level of institutional orthopraxy) "the true focus of service, donation, and devotion," he or she does *perform* the exemplary and highly meritorious function of preserving the Buddhist teaching by evoking Buddha's presence.

Finally, as prescriptive efforts to proliferate ideals surrounding the act of preaching, Jñānagupta's and Sangye's cited accounts of the merit produced by preaching are overly simplistic as sources of anthropological data about the act of preaching in their respective missionary contexts. Just as McQuire's account of a felt underside of homiletic identification with the guru-deity fleshed out "the lived context of Buddhist preaching in rich intellectual and even emotional detail" (Overbey 2010, 24), Sangye's simple prescriptive portrait of NKT preaching as a perfect guru-given condition for the collection of sufficient merit to understand emptiness is helpfully supplemented by Justine's initial skepticism about such a notion: "I'd heard people say this and I didn't believe them per se; I thought it was a way of hooking people into doing work for the centre maybe" (see Chapter 5). Justine's subsequent stint as a sponsored KMC manager helped her develop a felt sense of the benefits of merit labour which empirically validated the prescriptive ideal in her own experience. Tenzin Peljor's experience as a NKT resident monk, on the other hand, convinced him of the deceptiveness of the NKT's merit labour hook, identifying his old worry "about gaining 'realizations' by being devoted to Geshe-la and doing what he says and giving our money, time and energy to the NKT to accumulate merit" as conclusive evidence that "I was sucked into the system of NKT until I was quite brainwashed" (see Chapter 5).

Preaching as Asceticism

The previous chapter's discussion of "guru faith as centripetal draw from self-help to self-abnegation" cited Marpa's eleventh-century directive to his Tibetan disciple Milarepa to practice asceticism, "persevering against all hardship" (Quintman 2010, xxiv), for the sake of successful meditation. In a similar directive (which also nicely captures the theme of preaching as religion preservation), Jñānagupta "continually emphasizes the command" that his Dharma preacher readers embrace asceticism in "embrac[ing] the task of preaching as [their] governing obligation, and ... to preach to any audience, no matter how difficult the task" (Overbey 2010, 216):

Manavas, the master who preaches the *dharma* ... should always expound, and never relax. Why? Because if he always expounds the *dharma*, it will abide and expand and benefit men and gods. This will cause their good roots to ripen, and will eliminate evil. But if he does not expound the *dharma*, it will decay. This will cause the evil religions to flourish, and will harm men and gods. (216)

Jñānagupta's words ring remarkably close to Palden's 2016 account of Gyatso's statement to him: "If Kadampa teachers don't teach, the New Kadampa Tradition will quickly disappear" (see Chapter 6). It is not hard to imagine particularly zealous devotees of the NKT guru interpreting such a statement – or others, such as "I am waiting for qualified Teachers" (Gyatso 2002b, 33) – as an urgent personal call/ing to "always expound, and never relax." My research indicates the existence of a cadre of practitioners who aspire to live up to just such an ideal: Resident Teachers (and KMC managers more broadly with respect to non-teaching administrative labour).

The relationship between merit and effort as respectively potential and active forms of volitional energy which in turn elicit and execute the human resources required to build and sustain the NKT's global infrastructure is fraught with a tension between the limitless demands for expansionist institutional merit labour and the variable but inevitable limits of individuals'

interest in and capacities for such labour. Chapter 5 pointed out that the “crazy hours” (in the words of KMC North managers Heather and Maggie) and “relentless schedule” (in the words of McQuire) characteristic of full-time, sponsored missionary work as a KMC manager is a regime of religious busyness which is taught (and often felt) to produce merit, but which can also produce burnout, turnover, and highly critical former members like Peljor and McQuire.

The tension between limitless labour demand and limited labour supply can burn people out and turn them off, but it can also, I contend, be a highly productive means for the NKT and its adherents to ensure both institutional economic efficiency (by ensuring no wasted money and labour) and individual religious efficiency (by ensuring no wasted merit). The cases of Kelsang Sangye and Kelsang Drolma (see Chapter 5) are exemplary. Sangye’s managerial sponsorship at KMC South facilitated his practice of renunciation by providing the opportunity to “lay down massive stores of virtuous karma” which he identified as the internal causes of future realizations. For Canadian Resident Teacher Drolma, the material austerity and uncertainty of sponsored life facilitated her practice of renunciation by removing the opportunity to develop a deceptive sense of control over external conditions. The staffing combination of high external demand and low external remuneration thus provided both individuals with ideal outer conditions for spiritual cultivation (for as long as they could withstand it; Sangye eventually stepped away) while simultaneously providing their religious institution with ideal conditions for material development – namely cheap and efficient labour. Clerical asceticism, or missionary monasticism, hereby *works* in these two interdependent (often seen as oppositional) ways: to materially build up an institution and spiritually build up individual members.

As Judith Hertog pointed out in her 2018 *Tricycle* article, however, “the NKT’s modus operandi” – i.e., devotion to Gyatso as the only living Buddha whose high demand, building-centred expansionism is viewed as his skillful means of personally guiding devotees to enlightenment – “has led to several real-life consequences for its members.” I have considered negative consequences in the experiences of four former members – Leah (from KMC South), McQuire, Peljor, and Kostek – each of whom described feeling exploited by the NKT for their labour and/or finances (see Chapter 5). In a section of a 2017 blog article titled “How the NKT is Unkind to its own Teachers,” McQuire, who elsewhere describes feeling “pushed into the box of an organization in expansion” (2013, 81), identifies a callous underbelly of the NKT’s clerical disciplinary regime of guru service as NKT missionary work:

NKT teachers suffer greatly in the NKT. They make big sacrifices. This is why they feel it is so unfair that they come under criticism from outsiders. They do not see the need to ‘redo’ the NKT ethos; they have promised to ‘abide by the Internal Rules’ as part of their teacher’s commitment. They feel that the NKT justification for this lack of support – that if anything else is given to them by the NKT (better stipends, contracts, pensions, etc.) that this is a personal risk of ‘bad karma’ if they ‘misuse’ funds – making it a ‘karmic risk’ to protest for more. ... The longer they have been committed to the NKT life the less likely it is that they will be able, economically, spiritually and psychologically, to leave. They are trapped within this unkind world of the NKT that appears, on the surface to be so kind.

McQuire’s words raise a question posed in my introduction and again in Chapter 5: Are NKT managers (e.g., Resident Teachers) systematically exploited by an organization bent on expansion, or provided with a set of highly demanding but highly productive outer conditions – i.e., hard work, low pay, lack of privacy, geographic and bureaucratic uncertainty – which constitute the movement’s informal quasi-monastic labour regime (or “work lineage”) of samsara-renunciation via world-renunciation?

In one respect, I have argued that the answer is both: New Kadampa Buddhism's institutional expansion *facilitates* New Kadampa Buddhists' individual renunciation. NKT missions are functional substitutes for Geluk monasteries. As in Buddhist monasteries, however, where, for example, sexual abuse of young monastics is all too common, it seems clear that some committed members of NKT meditation centres – particularly vulnerable individuals such as those for whom self-abnegating doctrines like renunciation and guru devotion may play into pre-existing complexes, or “structurally available” youth “who are lonely, depressed, alienated, or drifting away from social moorings” (Robbins 1984, 248)¹³⁸ – have been wittingly or unwittingly exploited for their labour and/or finances. The NKT certainly seems to fit Robbins' description of “some movements” whose “totalism and multifunctionality ... encourages a strong dependency on the part of devotees, who may be subject to *exploitation*” (243).

The important question of whether the operative mechanism in the NKT's disciplinary labour regime of missionary monasticism is self-abnegation (a Buddhist virtue) or other-abnegation (a Buddhist non-virtue) concerns the volitional freedom of its religious subjects. Not unlike McQuire's account of being “pushed into” and “trapped within” the “unkind world of the NKT,” Peljor's account of being “sucked into the system of NKT until I was quite brainwashed” (2006) suggests a coercive, manipulative, and even sinister institution. KMC North and South Resident Teachers, Palden and Prajna, however, explicitly emphasized their own free volition in taking on sponsored NKT positions. Palden told me, “I've chosen to put myself in a situation now where I

¹³⁸ While Thomas Robbins concurs with Richard Delgado's (1977) claim that “[c]ultist mind control is ... to be differentiated from respectable, innocuous monasticism by the reluctance of the latter to ‘concentrate, as do religious cults, on the weak, the depressed, or the psychologically vulnerable’” (1984, 248), Robbins argues that “it seems arbitrary to view the ‘targeting’ of such persons as illegitimate or as indications of the involuntary or irrational quality of involvement” (249-250).

can't express my worldly concerns," while Prajna made sure I did not misinterpret her lack of control over external circumstances as coercive: "I've *chosen* not to choose. I've chosen to give up the choice about where I go, and I've chosen to be completely willing to go anywhere that my spiritual guide asks me to go. So that was my choice – to have no choice." Locating NKT managers on a continuum between individually exploitative institutional coercion and institutionally supported individual renunciation is clearly a matter of interpretation:

Any social process can be evaluated from two perspectives: an empathic internal or actors' phenomenological perspective or an external critical observer's perspective. ... [E]vocations of sin and guilt, repetitive chanting, and "obsessive prayer" are interpreted as "coercive processes" which destroy free will, although the application of an alternative perspective would yield different interpretations. (Robbins 1984, 244)

Somewhere between the retrospective passivity of McQuire and Peljor and the embedded engagement of Palden and Prajna are a number of voices more representative of Kadampa "laity" (see Chapter 5): Sean and David who expressed seasoned contentment with a relatively light level of KMC South participation; Matt and Jeff who recounted having to personally negotiate KMC North's peer pressure and high demands in order to find a quiet non-virtuosic nook in their guru's mandala; Sangye who hoped to return to sponsored life after sorting out his personal finances; Renata who loved the idea of sponsorship but was held back from acting on it by the worrisome prospect of economic dependence; Jarrod who also loved the idea of working full-time for a KMC but saw it as financially unviable in light of his hope to have children; Michael who had tried sponsored life but found the energy demands unsustainable; Justine, Nolan, Brian, and Allison who regularly took on semi-sponsored "working visitor" positions in a manner somewhat akin to Shambhala International's temporary monastic ordination.

It is hard not to agree with KMC South member Martin's conclusion about Prajna's virtuosic embrace of economic austerity: "It really is difficult to go that way ... You're giving up more; you're sacrificing more of self. Hard to do; not for everyone." This simple but insightful statement reveals, I believe, a likely source of the productive but flammable tension between the NKT's limitless labour demand and limited labour supply: despite the fact that the NKT's consecrated life of virtuosic merit labour (like traditional Buddhist monastic merit labour) is *not for everyone*, under the prophetic pressure of the monastery-reared guru-founder's urgent preservationist missionary imperative, the vocation is *prescribed for everyone*. For non-Kadampas need Dharma and Kadampas need merit. I suspect that until (and for as long as) individual Kadampas learn to survive and thrive within such an ascetically demanding vocation (e.g., Prajna, Palden) or get comfortably confident saying "no" to their guru-cum-church's endless demands (e.g., Matt, Jeff), the NKT's guru-inspired, missionary-driven democratization of renunciation may continue to burn out and turn off as many people as it retains.

Should the movement wish to slow the revolving doors of KMC congregations,¹³⁹ it may have some work to do implementing a more staid and sustainable patron-provider relation, which, while rejecting a strict householder/renouncer division of labour (see Chapter 4), may benefit from adopting some of the old typology's pragmatic acknowledgment and acceptance of the masses' "worldly" concerns and "spiritual" limitations. Without some accommodation to such concerns and limitations, the attribution of NKT workers' difficulties to personal delusions (e.g., self-cherishing, attachment), while theologically correct, may handily allow the NKT to

¹³⁹ This is not a given. Stark argues that a high rate of turnover actually benefits a NRM by contributing to at least two of his ten economic traits of a successful NRM: sufficient strictness to screen out free riders and keep commitment high (1996, 137-138), and an ability to "generate a highly motivated, volunteer, religious labour force including many willing to proselytise" (140).

sometimes overlook its role as a condition in the ripening of workers' negative karma, and to evade responsibility for their after-care.

Jñānagupta's command that Dharma preachers "should always expound, and never relax" accords nicely with Hori's account of the consecrated monastic life as one of uninterrupted religious practice in which "[t]here is no break. There is no secular activity. All activity is undertaken as a matter of religious self-discipline" (2014, 183). In actual practice, however – as insisted upon by KMC South's Cameron, for example (see Chapter 5) – NKT missionaries, no doubt like medieval Chinese Dharma preachers, benefit(ed) from breaks. As mentioned in Chapter 5, a recently developed policy enabling KMC managers in the UK to take ten-day leaves at another KMC to prevent or treat burnout suggests that the NKT is in fact becoming aware of a need for instituted managerial rest under certain circumstances.

Preaching as Money Production

In addition to implementing an innovative guru-inspired, missionary-driven democratization of renunciatory merit labour, the NKT has strategically – and quite successfully in light of an impressive repertoire of properties in the world's priciest real estate markets (e.g., Tokyo, Hong Kong, Taipei, Singapore, Oslo, Copenhagen, Vienna, Rome, Paris, Berlin, Zurich, London, New York City, Toronto, Sydney) – worked to cultivate another essential element of institutional expansion: money.

In both the *Great Lamp* and NKT preaching scenarios, members of the preacher's audience pay for the Dharma which he (or she, in the case of the NKT) provides them. The *Great Lamp*'s

“vision of a charismatic, itinerant preacher” (Overbey 2010, 25) suggests early Mahayana antecedents to NKT missionizing policies on teachings-for-money fundraising (notwithstanding an important distinction between Dharma preacher “donations” and NKT admission fees). According to Overbey, the *Great Lamp* “constructs an image of an itinerant monk ... not necessarily tied down to any specific monastic institution. Rather than partaking in the communal round of begging, the *dharma* master goes to the city and preaches, and collects donations directly from the pious audience” (220).

Although NKT preachers are often also itinerant money collectors, the clearest distinction between Dharma preacher fundraising according to the *Great Lamp* and NKT teacher fundraising is Jñānagupta’s account of his preacher as a personal sacral centre untethered to a greater religious institution who collects donations from Dharma patrons *for himself*. This stands in sharp contrast to the meticulously institutionalized economics of NKT preaching detailed in Chapter 5. In casual conversation at KMC North, Palden once told me what he thinks of the former model:

If I wanted to I could amass a personal following of students here, who would buy me things, and I could get very comfortable. That’s how it is in the East: people give prominent teachers loads of gifts so that they become wealthy. I’m honestly worried about the comfort that I’ll have when my en-suite renovation is finished. I won’t ever have to leave! I’ll be so comfortable in my own little bubble, never having to interact with others. I’m worried about the effect that will have on my mind.

In one respect Palden’s self-proclaimed commitment to austerity remains just that, a self-umpired discipline. His *sponsored* role as KMC North’s Resident Teacher, however, entails strict adherence to an economic arrangement designed to support that very discipline.

The NKT is a not-for-profit charitable organization whose expansion has relied on embracing a marketization of Vajrayana religious values through the marketing and monetizing of local ritual events into institutional, and *not individual*, sources of revenue. Besides pujas, every Dharma class at a North American KMC (with the exception of a free Sunday morning service called “Prayers for World Peace”) generally costs between \$10 and \$35. While KMC South, for example, generated roughly \$4,550 per month from General Program admission fees, \$5,040 per month from study program member fees, and \$3,000 per month from residents’ rental fees, the centre’s managers (including its Resident Teacher) received none of this revenue beyond their instituted monthly NKT stipend of \$475. KMC managers who are prohibited from profiting from centre income, property (NKT d, 14), or employment (NKT a, 18§8) thus work hard to generate, process, and accumulate admission and retail (and often also rental) revenue on behalf of their KMC conceived as a sacral centre – wealth which in turn gets globally allocated to fledgling KMCs or the creation of new ones via the NKT’s primary funding body, the International Temples Project. This is yet another respect in which NKT missionizing resembles that of American Methodism under Asbury, who “worked tirelessly to ... transfer resources from the center to the periphery of the movement” (Hatch 1989, 85) while exerting a “persistent pressure to expand the organization from the center to the periphery and to do so, in Asbury’s words, ‘like a well disciplined army’” (86-87).

Preaching as Lay-Monastic Equality

Although the *Great Lamp*’s aforementioned “vision of a charismatic, itinerant preacher” (Overbey 2010, 25) is restricted to “an itinerant *monk* ... not necessarily tied down to any specific monastic institution” (220, my italics), Jñānagupta’s portrait of the ideal Dharma

preacher also suggests early Mahayana antecedents to NKT missionizing policies on lay-monastic equality examined in Chapters 4 and 5. Specifically, Overbey clarifies that “the text ... gives explicit instructions to the audience ... to disregard the ordination status of the preacher, and to focus on the merit required to utter the *dharma*” (224). He concludes that “[t]he *Great Lamp* makes clear that the religious vocation of *dharma* master is open to laity and to monks, and it urges the audience to see no distinction between the two” (225).

My foregoing discussion of preaching as merit production distinguished between Jñānagupta’s portrait of the *person* of the preacher as “an extraordinary field of incalculable merit” (220) and Sangye’s account at KMC South of the *act* of preaching as “an opportunity for a merit jackpot” available to any KMC member, lay or monastic. Jñānagupta’s audience encouragement “to disregard the ordination status of the preacher, and to focus on the merit required to utter the *dharma*” (224), however, clearly prioritizes the meritorious act of preaching over the monastic or lay identity of the preacher. While this represents a laicization of the traditionally monastic qualifications of Buddhist preachers (Cozort 2003, 243), Jñānagupta does not go so far as the NKT’s encouragement of lay members to become preachers themselves.

The NKT’s laicization of the traditionally monastic Dharma preacher’s uniquely virtuosic capacity for merit production emerges from two other important doctrinal and institutional NKT reforms of Geluk Buddhism: proliferation in text and teaching of a view that lay and monastic lifeways are equally effective contexts for samsara-renunciation, and constitutional bifurcation of monastic principles of world-renunciation between ordained NKT monastics who renounce

sexual reproduction but not economic production, and sponsored NKT managers who renounce the latter but not the former.

Together, these innovations not only effectively terminate the historical Buddhist lay/monastic merit economy (as described above and in Chapter 4), but give rise to two new and complex classes of practitioner: non-virtuoso monastics (see Chapter 4) and virtuoso missionary managers (see Chapter 5). On the one hand, celibate monastic ordination becomes an optional lifestyle, the suitability of which is primarily a matter of personal preference rather than ritual specialization, and the sustenance of which requires secular employment. On the other hand, the arduous and austere life of a sponsored manager, lay *or* ordained, becomes the principal model of a “consecrated life” of renunciation in the NKT – committed to uninterrupted religious practice, morally and materially supported to renounce all secular interests and self-direction (Hori 2014, 177) – the sustainability of which often requires not having children.

Herein lies the heart of my research findings. In the NKT’s hybrid business model of missionary monasticism, NKT missions and missionary ritual regimes functionally substitute Geluk monasteries and monastic ritual regimes as institutional venues for individuals’ outer world-renunciation, a practice which in both cases is conceived as an ideal outer support for inner samsara-renunciation. In other words, preaching-centred missionizing as a revenue-generating method of building-centred expansionism not only supplants the NKT’s funding of a monastic community but replaces monasticism as the principal institutional framework for renunciation in the form of full-time subsistence missionary work on the part of ordained *and* lay Kadampa Buddhist virtuosos.

ii. Implications and Significance

The primary significance of this dissertation is its theorization of key features of a controversial, new, diasporic Tibetan Buddhist movement as sites of confluence between its Tibetan source tradition (Geluk Buddhism) and Euro-North American host tradition (Protestant Christianity). Following Kay's insight that "[t]he dynamic of *conservation through adaptation* is a special feature of the NKT's identity" (2004, 222-223), I have aimed to chart the New Kadampa Tradition's efforts to conserve Geluk Buddhism's essential religious content (the tea) by adapting its culturally conditioned container (the teacup) to accommodate new Protestant-influenced Euro-North American audiences.

Kay's study of the British NKT aimed in part to demonstrate that the NKT is "a movement that is representative of certain currents *within* Tibetan Buddhism" (2004, 39). Like my introduction's brief comparison of New Kadampa Buddhism with early American Methodism, the foregoing comparison of New Kadampa Buddhism with a Mahayana lineage of medieval Chinese Buddhism sought to characterize the former as a movement that reflects certain currents not only within Tibetan Buddhism but within transplanted missionary movements more broadly – namely a number of preaching-based missionizing strategies constitutive of a religious business model that I have called missionary monasticism: proselytization as a means of religion preservation, merit production, money production, ascetic self-abnegation, and clerical democratization.

I have primarily theorized the phenomenon of missionary monasticism, however, through a more fine toothed comparison of New Kadampa Buddhism with Geluk Buddhism than that provided by Kay. I have thus aimed to build upon Kay's contextualizing-explanatory portrait of continuities and discontinuities between the NKT and its source tradition by providing thicker description and deeper analysis of key NKT innovations which he treats rather cursorily (2004, 98) – namely detraditionalizing reformations of Geluk education, authority, and monastic structures. The descriptive component of this project has emerged from engagement with field interviews and ethnographic observations (gathered by myself and previous scholars) supplemented by NKT publications, teachings, and media. The analytical component has primarily emerged from engagement with this data through a conceptual apparatus prominent in both Buddhism and Buddhist Studies: the householder/renouncer relation.

It was not Kay but Waterhouse who identified the NKT innovation with which this dissertation is most explicitly concerned, the implications of which I have employed the householder/renouncer theoretical framework to draw out: “While the English Sangha Trust finances a monastic community, the NKT funds buildings and centres” (1997, 144). This key observation of the NKT's reallocation of resources from a monastic community to a missionary institution leads directly to this dissertation's main argument, as articulated above: that a *quasi*-monastic regime of preaching-centred missionizing replaces Geluk monasticism as the principal institutional support for virtuosic samsara-renunciation in the NKT. In other words, the substitution of Geluk monasteries with Kadampa Meditation Centres has led to a reallocation of money from monastery to mission, but also of renunciation and renunciatory merit labour – two essential

ingredients of monastic Geluk Buddhism which the NKT has striven to democratize rather than deemphasize in its modernization of the former.

In Chapter 1, I cited Alan Wallace's observation of a number of seemingly novel patterns in Western Buddhist formations that scholars before and after him have referred to as "Protestant" or "modernist": "It appears that a kind of Buddhist protestant reformation is in the making. The role of monks, nuns, priests, and professional contemplatives is on the decline; there is an erosion of the very distinction between laity and clerics; and the importance of the laity, including women, is on the rise" (2002, 46). Since Tibetan Buddhism has been modernizing for roughly half as long as South and East Asian Buddhisms such as Theravada and Zen, however, the state of Tibetan Buddhism's "Protestantization" is more ambiguous (Harding, Hori, Soucy 2014, 17). McMahan points out that "some strains of Tibetan Buddhism have not been as quick to embrace the world-affirming, egalitarian, and democratic reinterpretations of the path as have other forms of Buddhism catering to western converts" (2008, 247). This highlights another way to frame this dissertation's significance: as a pioneering attempt to theorize the emerging character of Protestant Vajrayana Buddhism through a case study of the modernization of one diasporic Tibetan lineage. The result is my theorization of NKT labour as a *quasi*-monastic site of confluence between a monastic Buddhist tradition and a non-monastic Christian tradition.

I have attempted to chart the Protestantization of Geluk Tibetan Buddhism chiefly by examining the NKT's adaptation of the Geluk ritual hierarchies of renouncer/householder (Chapter 4 and 5) and guru/disciple (Chapter 6). In short, I have shown that the renouncer/householder binary is exoterically negated (through formal rejection of monastics' economic dependence on laity and

of laity's soteriological dependence on monastics) and esoterically affirmed (through informal creation of a new elite cadre of economically dependent quasi-monastic missionaries), while the guru/disciple binary is exoterically affirmed (through formal construction of Gyatso as the only actual guru-deity) and esoterically negated (through informal construction of missionaries as a new elite cadre of temporary quasi-guru-deities).

Part of the significance of this dissertation's extension of Kay's effort to chart NKT continuities with "certain currents *within* Tibetan Buddhism" (2004, 39) is to also extend his effort to thereby nuance "the media's portrayal of the NKT ... as a dangerous and 'cultish' organisation" run by a fanatical leader (2004, 38) – an image recently reaffirmed in Hertog's 2018 *Tricycle* article by Tenzin Peljor's account of the NKT as a narcissistic "personality cult" and Georges Dreyfus's statement that, "I knew Trijang Rinpoche very well, and I know that he would be positively horrified by the NKT if he were alive now." There are, it seems to me, two particularly controversial aspects of the NKT: its sectarian supremacism (consider the title of Hertog's article: "The One Pure Dharma: The New Kadampa Tradition is controversial – and growing. Why?") and its high demand, low remuneration model of marketized missionizing. The first has been a basis of the movement's incendiary involvement in the Shugden controversy (a break with orthodoxy and orthopraxis which has generated a lot of blowback, especially given the great respect in which the Dalai Lama is held both within the Tibetan community and internationally), which has in turn attracted criticism from a number of scholars.¹⁴⁰ The second has occasioned

¹⁴⁰ Dreyfus's (Hertog 2018) criticism of the NKT is cited in this chapter. Ben Joffe (2015) characterized NKT Buddhists as angry Orientalists who "have have made their quarantine into something of a virtue." John Makransky (2000) described NKT protesters as "lacking any critical awareness of [Shugden's] sectarian functions in Tibet" whose campaign against the Dalai Lama, "[i]f it were not so harmful to persons and traditions, ... would surely be one of the funniest examples of the cross-cultural confusion that lack of critical reflection continues to create." Robert Thurman (Newsweek Staff 1997) referred to Shugden worshippers as "the Taliban of Tibetan Buddhism" – a denigration by way of comparison to Islam that the NKT-associated Western Shugden Society (see Chapter 2) also

harsh grievances from a vocal group of former members (a “problem” that most NRMs have to deal with) like Kostek, McQuire, and Peljor who identify as “NKT survivors.”

The NKT’s sectarian supremacism, crystallized in its anti-Dalai Lama Shugden campaign, has been a focus of previous scholarship on the NKT, including the excellent work of Kay (2004, 1997) and Chandler (2015, 2009).¹⁴¹ I have not made it mine.¹⁴² The NKT’s sacralised work regime of arduous subsistence missionary labour, crystallized in its rapid infrastructural expansion combined with a sizable group of “NKT survivors,” has not been a focus of previous scholarship on the NKT. I have made it mine. I have attempted to demonstrate that this controversial NKT dynamic stems less from a radical disjuncture with Geluk Buddhism – despite NKT rhetoric supporting such an interpretation (see Chapter 2) – as from the NKT guru’s preservationist efforts to selectively and *measuredly* modernize Geluk Buddhism (see Chapter 3). In particular, NKT missionary monasticism is the result of Gyatso’s replacement of monasteries with marketized missions, and of trained monastic ritual specialists with untrained quasi-monastic missionaries.

In Chapter 6 I noted Philip Rieff’s characterization of the pre-modern Christian West as a “church civilization” and an “authoritarian and coercive culture” (Rieff 1966, 19). In the American spiritual marketplace of the 1960s, by contrast, he observed a society of individualistic seekers increasingly averse to coercive religious institutions: “In what does the self now try to

used ten years later in a polemical pamphlet distributed during demonstrations against the Dalai Lama which cast the Tibetan leader as a “Saffron-Robed Muslim” (Chandler 2015, 84).

¹⁴¹ Campbell also provides a brief but insightful discussion of the mixed effects of NKT exclusivism on member retention and commitment (2011, 194-196).

¹⁴² My decision to not focus on the NKT’s involvement in the Shugden controversy thus takes up one of Christopher Bell’s six recommended directions for future Shugden research: to “[e]xamine the NKT as an organization separate from Dorje Shugden’s history; Kay’s book is a fair start, but more work needs to be done” (2010).

find salvation, if not in the breaking of corporate identities and in an acute suspicion of all normative institutions?” (19). Challenging Rieff’s reactionary portrait of ferally individualistic Euro-North American seekers, I have argued that the most committed Euro-North American Kadampa Buddhists (i.e., missionary managers) seek liberation in a high demand, world-renouncing form of guru discipleship. My findings at KMC North and South generally support Capper’s (2002) finding at another American Tibetan Buddhist centre that his American interpreters *voluntarily employed* the self-abnegation entailed by Vajrayana guru discipleship as a technology of self-help.

In a similar manner, I would suggest that the NKT *can be* a coercive institution for an elite quasi-monastic cadre of NKT Dharma providers (e.g., Prajna, Palden) who consent to a disciplinary regime of arduous, subsistence NKT work as guru service – predictably entailing hard work and low pay and unpredictably entailing geographically and/or bureaucratically displacing NKT-cum-guru requests or directives. This is the NKT guru’s stern renouncer face (see Chapter 6). For KMC *visitors*, NKT promotion and pedagogy more closely resemble the guru’s affectionate bodhisattva face – more solicitous than admonitory or coercive, and more therapeutic than soteriological (see Chapter 3). The NKT’s core membership of committed KMC *patrons*, however, inevitably encounter a guru-inspired, peer-driven “centripetal force” which works “within the mechanisms of cult” (Rieff 1966, 14) to draw them deeper into institutional involvement from casual self-help voluntarism to regimented self-abnegating voluntarism (see Chapters 5 and 6). As expressed by Matt at KMC North, patrons who wish to remain mere patrons must learn to *negotiate* this centripetal force by, for example, learning to say “no” to its endless demands: “We *can’t* be at the temple all day long every day because it doesn’t work. I

did it before, it just creates too much imbalance! And this is an endless path; they always ask for more; so I've learned to set the boundary.” The demands of NKT voluntarism may be endless, but the path of increasing commitment to their fulfilment typically culminates in a committed patron's acceptance of a KMC manager's request (sometimes coming directly from Gyatso, though this is increasingly rare) that they too consider becoming a manager. This final step generally entails embracing the quasi-monastic, potentially coercive disciplinary regime of a *provider* of Gyatso's Dharma – an elite cadre of practitioner whose ranks (like those of Francis Asbury's circuit riders) are open to anyone with sufficient mettle (or perhaps vulnerability), and whose members I sometimes heard referred to as “true Kadampas.” This passage from KMC visitor to patron to provider reflects a spectrum of congregational commitment historically foreign to monastic Geluk Buddhism, defined by a market-conditioned interaction between the movement's exoteric world-converting missionary imperative and esoteric world-renouncing monastic imperative.

The fact that religious demands grow as one becomes more involved in the NKT reflects a “concentric institutional model” (see Chapter 4) by which many Tibetan “export” lamas “adapt their teachings to Western audiences while, at the same time, preserving and propagating a largely unaltered ‘traditional’ core of practice and teachings ... requiring greater experience and commitment” (Hiebert 2016). In Chapter 4 I identified five steps of increasing commitment and institutional involvement (beyond visitor) in the NKT, the first three of which I designated Dharma patrons, the last two Dharma providers (respectively symbolic and practical): member; volunteer; resident; monastic; manager. The accounts of Kelsang Karuna (see Chapter 4), Kostek, McQuire, and Peljor (see Chapter 5), however, suggest that adherents may not always be

aware of what they're getting into when they take such successive steps,¹⁴³ and may not freely wish to embrace the associated obligations once they have. Each reported being persuaded into *working more* and *giving more* than they freely volunteered as a result of their community's solicitous dangling of the carrot of requisite merit and coercive wielding of the stick of moralistic missionary peer pressure.

I demonstrated in Chapters 3 and 4 that the NKT's version of Hiebert's concentric institutional model for the adaptation-cum-conservation of Geluk Buddhism entails a synthesis of missionary and monastic imperatives whereby KMCs concede to and *make use of* audience-specific "worldly concerns" for solicitous promotion and recruitment, whilst working to train converts *out of* such concerns via teachings and meditations on the need to renounce samsara and its deceptive pleasures. I suspect that when serially combined with the social-doctrinal centripetal force described above, this foot-in-the-door recruitment dynamic of "casting the net and recasting problems" (see Chapter 3) – which stems as much from Geluk Buddhism's marketization as from its democratization – is responsible for a highly persuasive, at times exploitative, missionizing strategy which can be retrospectively perceived as deceptive¹⁴⁴ or manipulative by apostates such as Mexican former monk Renato Barajas, for whom the guru's two faces signified that "while NKT seems to newcomers like an open, welcoming organization, it becomes increasingly restrictive and controlling once practitioners are drawn inside" (Hertog 2018).

¹⁴³ While Robbins suggests that claims of cultic deception are often exaggerated, and cannot generally be blamed for an individual's initial NRM involvement or toleration of "otherwise objectionable conditions," he denounces NRM recruitment tactics employing deception as reprehensible (1984, 252).

¹⁴⁴ See Chapter 3 for a brief discussion of deceptiveness in KMC North recruitment tactics. I suggested that while most General Program visitors likely experienced a dissonance between KMC North's "promotional modernism" and "pedagogical traditionalism," this dissonance lay open to visitors' personal interpretive location on a scale from strong medicine to false advertising.

The NKT may become increasingly “restrictive and controlling” for adherents who advance from member to volunteer to resident to monastic, but my interviews and observations suggest that the path of NKT commitment does not generally entail coercion (granted the line between strong suggestion and coercion is not always clear) until the final step is taken to managerial sponsorship, which, crucially, generally entails economic dependence on the movement.¹⁴⁵ My data also indicates that this step (unlike recruitment to the economically dependent life of a monastic in many Asian contexts which can be closer to filial conscription) is typically a voluntary one in the NKT.¹⁴⁶ Robbins helpfully contextualizes my finding that KMC North and South’s Resident Teachers voluntarily submit to a self-abnegating form of guru service as quasi-monastic labour (or NKT missionary monasticism), as well as common criticism of this devotional labour regime by “NKT survivors”:

There is a paradox to freedom: one cannot be truly free unless one is free to surrender freedom. However, this consideration, and civil libertarian objections to action against cults, can be obviated if it is established that in fact the involvement of converts in offending movements is involuntary by virtue of ‘coercive’ tactics of

¹⁴⁵ While the hierarchical pressure exerted on Karuna to change her living situation in order to be a good nun (see Chapter 4) suggests that coercive dynamics may extend beyond sponsorship to ordination and residency, in each scenario the authority held by hierarchical requests-cum-directives over individual adherents generally comes down to personal interpretation and preference. Although Karuna felt deeply conflicted about being “pressured” by her National Spiritual Director – who “said there was absolutely no way that I should be living like that as a nun; I need to get rid of my animals and sell the farm; I need to move into a Centre” – she opted to prioritize her older personal commitment to her animals for the duration of their life, and to follow her National Spiritual Director’s quasi-coercive counsel only after that commitment had been fulfilled. Having previously been assured by her Resident Teacher that her solitary farm life would not pose an issue to ordination, however, Karuna’s account of being “blindsided” by her National Spiritual Director’s admonishment suggests a degree of deception in recruitment tactics (here surrounding ordination) which appears to affirm “NKT survivor” claims that adherents are not always made aware of behavioural expectations associated with successive steps of commitment which they may be “*strongly encouraged*” (in Karuna’s words) to undertake.

¹⁴⁶ Further, NKT sponsorship does not *always* entail quasi-coercive institutional disciplinary practices of poverty and bureaucratic and/or geographic displacement. As mentioned in Chapter 5, I know a few longstanding NKT managers (most of whom have local familial obligations) who enjoy comfortable pensions and have never been uprooted by top-down hierarchy shuffles. Such practitioners’ possession of personal wealth undoubtedly gives them a personal confidence in choice making that poor people do not enjoy.

recruitment and indoctrination plus consequent psychopathology and converts' diminished rational capacity. (1984, 243)

The contentious aspects of the NKT's recruitment and peer pressure tactics discussed above are partly, and perhaps largely, the result of Gyatso's replacement of monasteries (where methods of recruitment and retention rely to some extent on coercion) with marketized missions, and the resultant largely informal *carryover* of high-demand monastic dynamics – namely hard work, low pay, lack of privacy, and geographic and bureaucratic uncertainty – into a Euro-North American spiritual marketplace where such anti-liberal dynamics can clash with seekers' "self-ethic" in which "the 'individual' serves as his or her own source of guidance" (Heelas 1996, 23). As mentioned in my foregoing discussion of NKT work as a form of asceticism, despite the fact that the NKT's consecrated life of virtuosic merit labour (like traditional Buddhist monastic merit labour) is clearly *not for everyone*, it is generally *prescribed for everyone* under the monastic guru's urgent, and insurgent, missionary imperative.

Dreyfus recently told *Tricycle* magazine: "The whole thing is bizarre. Kelsang Gyatso's books are good. He is smart. He is learned, he is a good practitioner. ... Many Tibetans who knew him told me they don't understand. They thought they knew him, but now they have no idea what he is doing" (Hertog 2018). Kay has done a fine job of explaining what Gyatso is trying to do: create and proliferate an independent "Western" revival of proto-Geluk Buddhism which, "on the one hand ... adapt[s] Buddhism in an accessible way for Western practitioners ... [and] on the other ... preserve[s] and conserve[s] the pure tradition by separating from the degenerate religio-political world of 'Tibetan' Gelug Buddhism" (2004, 222-223).¹⁴⁷ This dissertation has

¹⁴⁷ Analogous perceptions of mainstream religion's corrupt worldliness have, of course, been the historical *modus operandi* of Protestant Christianity, from Puritans and Methodists (concerned with purifying an apostatical Church of England) to Mormons and Moonies (concerned with proliferating newly necessary Christian revelations). Given

attempted to augment this analysis by elucidating important components of *how* and *why* Gyatso is executing this parochialist project – namely by autocratically marketizing, globalizing, and democratizing Geluk Buddhism in order to give as many people as possible the opportunity to climb out of samsara in one short life. I have argued that his controversial approach to this modernizing project entails aggressive missionary efforts to popularize not only the traditionally monastic samsara-renouncing aspiration to abandon all interest in samsara’s deceptive pleasures (see Chapter 3), but also the traditionally monastic consecrated life of world-renouncing merit labour (see Chapter 5).

The NKT is a prophetic Buddhist revival movement bent on attracting new non-Buddhists to the soteriological project of samsara-renunciation – a project which, in light of the NKT guru’s sectarian supremacism, is deemed most viable within the NKT. Like most NRMs, the NKT “tend[s] to foster highly robust and strict religious cultures that place considerable demands on their members” (Rochford 2007, 6). The group’s mission is material expansion for the spiritual benefit of sentient beings – to “wake up a slumbering world” (Hatch 1989, 89) by “realizing the guru’s intention” (McQuire 2013) to build (and *volunteer staff*) “a temple in every city throughout the world” (NKT x). The NKT is an expansionist institution, which, for committed members who have been socialized into deep faith in the movement-cum-guru (see Chapter 6), can also be exploitative. As such, affiliation with the NKT, which necessarily entails a devotional relationship to its founding guru, should doubtless be preceded by a degree of

the historical normalcy (within many religions) of such patterns of schismatic revivalism and cultic innovation as generators of NRMs (Stark and Bainbridge 1985, 429), Dreyfus’s characterization of the NKT as bewilderingly “bizarre” seems less representative of the historical, cross-cultural academic study of religion than of a popular (outside China) conception of the Dalai Lama’s modernist vision of Tibetans’ diasporic ethno-religious unity as Tibetan Buddhist orthodoxy, and of conflicting positions (such as Gyatso’s schismatic revivalism) as “bad Tibetan Buddhism.”

analytical reconnaissance commensurate to that which Tibetan Buddhist sources traditionally advise as an important preliminary to guru selection. Such skepticism is often not, however, explicitly encouraged in introductory NKT missionizing strategies which, according to Peljor, tend instead to “keep telling you that you have special karma to have become part of this exceptionally pure tradition” (Hertog 2018).

Gellner offers a helpful emic assessment of the risks and benefits associated with “Diamond Way” Buddhism as “a specialized, privileged, and esoteric path within the Great Way”: “These means may be frightening and dangerous, and are at least burdensome and difficult. But if successful they enable the practitioner to attain enlightenment in this life, rather than over the many thousands of lives required to attain Buddha-hood in the Great Way” (1992, 113). I have argued that the NKT’s popularization of the traditionally monastic consecrated life of virtuosic merit labour is one significant and heretofore unexamined source of apostates’ aggrieved contention, but the movement’s efforts to popularize a traditionally “specialized, privileged, and esoteric path” of dangerous and burdensome but powerfully salvific tantric blessings labour (without necessarily taking into account minimal felt needs of modern lay converts) is surely another.

Indeed, Chapter 6 provided compelling evidence for the implication of tantric NKT ritual in the high demand asceticism of NKT labour. In his last public teaching in Portugal in 2013, the NKT guru claimed to hold the belief that his adherents are all “either yogis or yoginis, or dakas or dakinis, or heroes or heroines – pure beings” (see Chapter 6). For as long as Gyatso is the movement’s living architect, whose tantric “correct imagination” of his New Kadampa family as

deities of Heruka's mandala purposefully overlooks their supposed limitations while holding fast to the reality of their limitless Buddha potential, the chances of the NKT acculturating to adherents' limitations may remain quite low:

[M]entally it's correct, if we believe every human being who are surrounding I is like pure being, holy being, bodhisattva. We are never allowed seeing faults, only see their qualities. Through this we believe everyone is like enlightened being. It works; beneficial. Because we believe they are a pure being we naturally respect them; if we respect them they will also respect us. So they can fulfil our wishes, correct wishes. For example, myself, within this thirty years, I try to establish or organize the development of spiritual or material which includes Dharma centres, teaching programs, Dharma books, spreading Kadam Dharma. ... We created a very special development. Why? How? Why this developed? ... Because I believe people are important, they are very special; externally they are like ordinary but in reality not ordinary. ... Clearly believing is working.

This feedback loop of faith – whereby the guru's “correct belief” (believing faith) in his disciples as holy beings elicits their own “respect” (admiring faith) for him, which in turn gives rise to their “correct wishes” (wishing faith) to spread Dharma (see Chapter 6) – is another example, in addition to the guru yoga preaching method described above, of the NKT guru's use of a specific tantric meditation to expand his movement: self-generation of disciples as *tsog* (an assembly of Heroes and Heroines). And not unlike McQuire's unsettling difficulties integrating her elevated experiences of guru yoga preaching into ordinary life, Kadampas' tantric self-generation practice of “bringing the result into the path”¹⁴⁸ – i.e., “strongly imagining that we have already attained ... full enlightenment and an enlightened being's ability to help others attain the same state” (Gyatso 1996, 61) – may directly relate to the movement's high rates of burnout.

¹⁴⁸ A senior NKT practitioner blogging under the alias Luna Kadampa (2018) recently claimed that “[b]ringing the result into the path is the hallmark of our tradition,” particularly the contemplative practice of test driving the ultimate goal of mahamudra: “to deliberately manifest our very subtle mind of great bliss and use it to realize its perceived object, the emptiness of all phenomena.” For Luna, a particularly practical implication of the latter is that “the limited self we normally see and relate to doesn't even exist; so there is really not much point in practicing Dharma, or meditation, in the context of that self, while *believing* in that self and buying into its limitations.”

Theorizing such a connection between the guru's tantric construction of disciples as bodhisattva deities and his movement's tendency for a lack of sensitivity to the plight of vulnerable members who may be dropping from exhaustion posits a relationship between Gyatso's labour-generating "respect" for his deity-generated disciples and a form of institutional asceticism that the NKT shares with the Methodists under Francis Asbury: the use of "authoritarian means to build a church that would not be a respecter of persons" (Hatch 1989, 11). McQuire's account of being told by a Resident Teacher "that I had 'needed the shock' of becoming homeless to destroy my pride" (2013, 79) suggests that the NKT's particular "authoritarian means" of ascetic expansion combines tantric *and* monastic modes of high demand, anti-liberal missionary discipline: self-generation's employment of "divine pride" (Gyatso 2013c, 121) to identify as an inexhaustible beneficiary of all living beings (a qualified guru) and self-abnegation's repudiation of "deluded pride" (Gyatso 2013c, 120) to identify as a helpless samsaric migrator (a qualified disciple). Hatch points out that although "[s]cholars know surprisingly little about the Methodist circuit rider, ... [e]arly diaries refer repeatedly to the reality of 'worn-out' circuit riders," nearly half of whom "died before they were thirty years old, almost two hundred of them in the first five years of service" (1989, 87). This led another scholar to conclude that "the American Methodist ministry was really a militarily organized mission, largely composed of short-service agents who were not pastorally related to the flock" (87-88). Although I am not aware of any New Kadampa Buddhists whose missionary labours led to premature death,¹⁴⁹ I have discussed several whose commitment to NKT work led to poverty, exhaustion, and defection.

¹⁴⁹ This dissertation has highlighted a number of compelling parallels between 19th-century Methodist Christianity and 21st-century New Kadampa Buddhism, but the contrasts are marked and many. Whereas Asbury's circuit-riding American preachers were all male, for example, a majority of North American NKT preachers are female (see Chapter 2). Another contrast pertains to class: Whereas Asbury's recruits were predominantly uneducated and

It is revealing that a number of my Kadampa informants casually compared their movement to secular coercive institutions generally considered (perhaps due to their perceived secularity) far more respectable than a guru cult, at least in North America. Cameron characterized the global community of Kadampas as a “compassionate army,” while Brian described KMC South as “like a school.” McQuire’s published account of being “pushed into” (2013) and “trapped within” the “unkind world of the NKT” (2017) implicitly compares the NKT to a punitive (versus martial or educational) coercive institution: a prison. Following observed emic discourse, Kay’s discussion of the NKT as a form of modern religious fundamentalism (2004, 111) compared the movement to another coercive institution: the family. My interview data strongly supports this comparison. Three female informants in particular (two lay and one ordained) described their KMC manager roles in explicitly maternal terms. Eva told me, “My life is so focused on my sangha family. I’m pretty much a parent of many people here.” Justine related, “I kind of felt like this mom. And that’s the mind that you needed to generate to do that job.” Prajna reflected, “It’s like you’re kind of always on. ... I don’t really focus too much on the hours; it’s more like it’s my life. ... It’s like people with a family: they don’t really think ‘I’m working’ when they’re with their family. ... You just do what needs to be done because you’re family. I think of it like that.” Self-generation as a mother, with a mother’s capacity for childrearing (impossible to characterize as strictly voluntary or coercive), thus provided these KMC managers with “the mind that you

working class, my informants KMC North and South were predominantly middle class with a high rate of postsecondary education (see Chapter 2). Finally, the North American frontiers confronted by each group across two centuries contrast sharply: Asbury’s frontier was rural while Gyatso’s is urban; Asbury’s unchurched targets were culturally Christian while Gyatso’s unchurched are not culturally Buddhist; and Asbury’s circuit riders were far more itinerant than Gyatso’s managers (who, even if they may be frequently shuffled between sites, are comparatively settled).

needed” to sustainably interpret the arduousness and austerity of the NKT’s consecrated sponsored life as spiritually productive rather than materially exploitative.

Kay’s comparison of the NKT with the institution of the natal family is thus an astute one which he failed to fully utilize for explanatory analysis of the movement. I have engaged this comparison (see Chapter 5) primarily through comparing the NKT to a coercive institution which has often in Buddhist history and scholarship been conceptualized as the family’s antipode, but which has in fact generally functioned as the family’s surrogate (see Chapters 1 and 6): the monastery. The guru cult (the focus of Kay’s NKT-family comparison) and the monastery (the focus of my NKT-family comparison) are two productively coercive religious institutions which profoundly shaped Geshe Kelsang’s Tibetan source tradition. While entrance may be voluntary, each aims to effect self-cultivation by means of self-abnegating “outer” disciplinary regimes respectively emphasizing austerity and devotion that place immense pressure on the individual to not view “outer” conditions as the causes of one’s suffering, but initially as opportunities for karmic purification and merit accumulation, and eventually as figments of one’s own self-grasping ignorance.¹⁵⁰ This dissertation theorizes the NKT’s synthesis of these monastic householder/renouncer and tantric guru/disciple relations in a populist religious labour regime taught to produce merit (traditionally restricted to advanced monastics) and blessings (traditionally restricted to advanced meditators). My Kadampa informants have referred to this as

¹⁵⁰ Within the Tibetan tradition the imperative to interpret outer adversities as inner opportunities is developed most systematically in the practice of *blo sbyong* (mind training), the karma-purifying and ignorance-purifying functions of which are summarized nicely in the following verses from Losang Chokyi Gyaltzan’s *Lama Chopa*: “Though the world and its beings, filled with the effects of evil, / Pour down unwanted suffering like rain, / This is a chance to exhaust the effects of negative actions; / Seeing this, I seek your blessings to transform adverse conditions into the path. / In short, whether favourable or unfavourable conditions arise, / I seek your blessings to transform them into the path of improving the two bodhichittas” (Gyatso 2005, 306-307).

“work lineage” or “Geshe-la’s beautiful method of helping us all: for us to come and cherish our Dharma centre.” I have called it missionary monasticism.

My account of this theoretical object suggests that closer examination of the lives of *partial* or *informal* Buddhist renunciators (e.g., NKT managers) may serve to helpfully nuance a prevalent scholarly portrait of “convert” North American Tibetan Buddhism as conspicuously non-monastic (e.g., Lavine 1998, 108; Chandler 2009, 104). The foregoing investigation of NKT Buddhism has also, however, generated a number of other conceptual categories which may prove helpful for scholars of contemporary Buddhism and NRMs more broadly. These include “hybrid fundamentalism” (see Chapter 2), “enthusiastic” versus “measured adaptationism” (see Chapter 3), “promotional modernism” versus “pedagogical traditionalism” (see Chapter 3), monastic “inspirational labour” (see Chapter 4), guru *sevā* as “blessings labour” (see Chapter 6), and a concentric exo-to-esoteric model of religious recruitment marked by a path of increasing individual commitment from *private orthopraxy* → *orthodoxy* → *public orthopraxy* (see Chapter 6).

iii. Limitations and Future Scholarship

This dissertation’s biggest limitation may also stem from one of its strengths: my status as a religious insider vis-à-vis the institutional object of my research, the New Kadampa Tradition. As mentioned in my introduction, while this positionality has certainly helped me gain both access to and trust of my North American Kadampa informants, and likely facilitated retrieval of textual and media sources with which a quarter century in this movement has made me quite

familiar, it has also undoubtedly influenced my work in ways that preclude analytical benefits of a more neutral research perspective. Before our interview at KMC South, an American monk told me that he hopes my research will shed a rare positive light on “us,” so as to counter a prevailing public image of the NKT as “bad Buddhism.” Such an apologetic imperative not only evidently motivated some of my interviewees to participate in my study (including perhaps NKT head office’s granting me permission to conduct this research), but I would be remiss to not acknowledge its influence on my own work.

Small studies have limitations. A limitation of my historical and cross-cultural comparative analysis of NKT Buddhism with Geluk Buddhism pertains to my lack of Tibetan language proficiency and resultant lack of original ethnographic research among diasporic Tibetan Geluk communities in India and/or in North America – factors which have forced me to rely on the work of other anthropologists of Tibetan Buddhism such as Mills and Gellner. Related to this limitation on my contextualization of the NKT was the geographic delimitation of my field research to NKT centres in the United States and Canada. While this project expands the body of existing NKT scholarship from Britain to North America, Kadampa Buddhist communities in non-English-speaking countries remain as yet unstudied. Existing NKT centres in Australia, New Zealand, Mexico, South America (Colombia, Peru, Chile, Brazil, Argentina), continental Europe (Spain, Portugal, France, Italy, Switzerland, Netherlands, Belgium, Germany, Poland, Austria, Hungary, Croatia, Romania, Slovenia), Scandinavia (Denmark, Norway, Sweden, Finland), and Asia (Singapore, Malaysia, Philippines, Taiwan, Hong Kong) all represent potential sites of future NKT research, studies which would cross-culturally corroborate, contradict, or simply

variegate previous scholars' findings on the movement in Britain or my findings in North America.

The dissertation could have been more synchronically comparative within contemporary global Buddhism. Although I do compare NKT missionary monasticism with similar staffing dynamics at DRBA's Avatamsaka monastery in Calgary (see Chapter 5), a more thorough comparison of the former with staffing models of other global Buddhist NRMs, particularly Tibetan-inspired groups such as FPMT and Shambhala, would certainly have been fruitful. It is my hope that my internal NKT findings will prove useful for scholars to take up such comparative projects in the future.

My examination of Gyatso's textual corpus, "the NKT's unique canon" (Hertog 2018), is rather sporadic and superficial. As mentioned in Chapter 2, Cozort (2003) began the analysis of Gyatso's texts by outlining their general subject matter in comparison with the traditional *geshe* curriculum, but a systematic study of the NKT canon's form, content, editorial evolution,¹⁵¹ and relation to canonical Geluk materials would be a significant contribution to future scholarship on this doctrinally fundamentalistic new Buddhist movement.

Finally, the NKT's development post-Gyatso will be fascinating to watch. In the wake of its founding guru's high demand prophetic vision, the NKT may very well (like many second-generation insurgent NRMs) commence a gradual process of world-accommodation increasingly influenced by the "inevitable allure of respectability" (Hatch 1989, 89), which, "by mid-[19th-]

¹⁵¹ Gyatso frequently revises and republishes his texts. His shortest lamrim text, *The New Meditation Handbook* (originally titled *A Meditation Handbook*), for example, has been revised and republished four times since 1990.

century, [saw] the early [American] republic's populist religious movements ... undergoing a metamorphosis from alienation to influence" (193). Like the "rugged and fiery" American preacher Peter Cartwright who lamented this slide in Methodism post-Asbury and "reminded 'downy doctors and learned presidents and professors' that their own values contrasted sharply with the commitments that had fueled Methodism as a popular movement" (193), senior NKT clerics may come to represent a shrinking conservative faction who condemn such a process of domestication as corrosive of Gyatso's fiery power to lead disciples beyond samsara's deceptive pleasures.

The NKT's capacity to resist the "allure of respectability" by, for example, maintaining sufficient strictness over time (Stark 1996, 143) and socializing "the young sufficiently well as to minimise both defection and the appeal of reduced strictness" (144), will likely hinge in large part on the duration and degree of the education council's determination to uphold the statutes of the NKT Internal Rules,¹⁵² such as those concerning managerial austerity. The fact that adherents generally understand these statutes to have been composed by Gyatso himself may help to sustain clerical consensus on their immutable authority after his passing. On the other hand, New Kadampa clerics may eventually come to view such rules as antiquated, having been designed by a celibate Tibetan monastic with little understanding of lay life or labour laws.

This question and many others surrounding the future of the movement post-Gyatso (e.g., its perseverance upholding electoral succession and prohibition of tulku identification in the

¹⁵² My sense is that advanced practitioners are well aware of this. I heard a Resident Teacher refer to the Internal Rules as "Geshe-la's most important text."

absence of a living guru-deity; rates and regions of future institutional expansion; etc.) call for further ethnographic research on the NKT before 2050.

APPENDIX

Semi-Structured Interview Guide

Name:

Email address:

Age:

Gender:

Ethnicity:

Citizenship:

Religious background:

Education:

Occupation:

Income:

Marital status:

Children:

Dependents:

When and how did you become involved with New Kadampa Buddhism?

What is the nature of your involvement with New Kadampa Buddhism?

What does your daily Buddhist practice consist of?

How many hours do you meditate per week? — Does this feel sufficient? — If not, what prevents more?

How many hours do you pray per week? — Does this feel sufficient? — If not, what prevents more?

How many hours do you study Dharma per week? — Does this feel sufficient? — If not, what prevents more?

How many hours do you volunteer at the Dharma Centre per week? — Does this feel sufficient? — If not, what prevents more?

What is renunciation in your understanding?

How central is renunciation to your Buddhist practice?

How do you practice renunciation?

Do you hope to develop spontaneous renunciation in this life?

What are the objects of your renunciation practice? (i.e., What do you renounce?)

What are the objectives of your renunciation practice?

What do you consider your biggest obstacles/challenges to practicing renunciation?

How does your Dharma practice (esp. renunciation) affect (e.g., facilitate/impede/alter) your work/financial life? — your family life? — other aspects of your personal life?

Do you experience any conflict between financial/family/personal life and your Dharma practice (esp. renunciation)?

Does one need to be concerned about the suffering of future lives to practice renunciation?

How concerned are you about the happiness/suffering of future lives?

Do you think one can be a Kadampa Buddhist without practicing renunciation?

Do you think one can attain liberation/enlightenment without developing renunciation?

Do you think renunciation has outer signs or indications?

Do you know anyone who has developed renunciation?

What do you think are the biggest differences between lay and ordained life?

How do you understand the relationship between renunciation and ordination?

Do you think the development of renunciation (sometimes/usually/always) leads to ordination?

Do you think laity can develop and practice renunciation?

Three of the ten NKT ordination vows are to “practice contentment, reduce desire for worldly pleasures, abandon engaging in meaningless activities” — Do you practice in these ways? — If so, what do these practices look like for you? — How successful have you been in these practices? — What are “worldly pleasures”? — What are “meaningless activities”?

Have your views on renunciation, “worldly pleasures,” and “meaningless activities” changed over time?

Do you think the situation of practicing renunciation is different in North America than it is/was in Asia? — How do you think North American culture affects (e.g., facilitates/impedes/alters) the practice of renunciation?

How would you answer my research question: With no monasteries to institutionally support the Buddhist practice of renunciation, what does renunciation look and feel like in the NKT?

Do you have any thoughts about the working hypothesis that (i) ordination, (ii) Centre sponsorship, and (iii) Centre residency function as three institutional supports for renunciation practice in the NKT?

Have you been ordained as a NKT monk/nun?

(a) NO:

What Buddhist vows have you taken?

What vows are the easiest to live by? — What vows are the most difficult to live by?

Have you ever considered ordaining?

Do you think you might ordain in the future?

Do you think it is easier for ordained sangha to practice renunciation?

Do you think ordained sangha tend to practice renunciation more than laity?

How do you think ordination might facilitate/enhance one’s Dharma practice?

Do you think ordination could impede/challenge one’s Dharma practice?

(b) YES, PRESENTLY:

What Buddhist vows have you taken?
What Buddhist vows had you taken prior to ordination?
What vows are the easiest to live by? — What vows are the most difficult to live by?
What is the biggest difference in your experience b/w the Pratimoksha and ordination vows?
How long have you been ordained?
How would you describe your path to ordination?
Why did you ordain?
Was choosing to ordain an expression of renunciation for you?
Is it easier for you to practice renunciation as an ordained person than as a lay person?
How does ordination affect (e.g., facilitate/impede/alter) your Dharma practice? (esp. renunciation) — your work/financial life? — your family life? — other aspects of your personal life?
Do you experience any conflict between financial/family/personal life and your ordination?
What do you find most rewarding about being ordained?
What do you find most challenging about being ordained? — How do you navigate such challenges?
What are the biggest differences in your experience b/w lay and ordained life?
Have you legally changed your name? — Why/not? — If not, is it difficult to use both lay and ordained identifiers?

(c) YES, FORMERLY:

[(b) in past tense, +]

Have your understandings of renunciation, “worldly pleasures,” and “meaningless activities” changed since disrobing?
When and why did you disrobe?
How did disrobing affect (e.g., facilitate/impede/alter) your Dharma practice? (esp. renunciation) — your work/financial life? — your family life? — other aspects of your personal life?
Do you think you might ordain again in the future?

Have you held a sponsored position at a NKT Centre (e.g., RT, EPC, AD)?

a) NO:

Have you ever considered holding a sponsored position at a NKT Centre? Why/not?
Do you think you might in the future?

LAY:

What would be a bigger leap for you: ordination or sponsorship? Why/not?

ORDAINED:

Do you wear your ordained robes at work?

Do you go by your ordained name at work?

b) YES, PRESENTLY:

Position title:

Work duties:

Work hours:

Work remuneration:

Work vacation:

Work benefits:

Work security:

When, how, and why did you become sponsored?

Do you have other income besides your Centre sponsorship?

What does your average work day look like?

What do you find most rewarding about being sponsored?

What do you find most challenging about being sponsored?

How long would you like to hold this position?

Do you see your Centre work as part of your Dharma practice? — What practice(s) principally?

How does sponsorship affect (e.g., facilitate/impede/alter) your Dharma practice? (esp. renunciation) — your work/financial life? — your family life? — other aspects of your personal life?

Do you experience any conflict between financial/family/personal life and Centre sponsorship?

LAY:

Does the sponsored life preclude/complicate parenthood? — marriage?

ORDAINED:

Do you experience your ordination and sponsorship as related? — Do they support each other? — Do they ever clash?

RESIDENT TEACHERS:

How do you typically introduce renunciation in General Program (GP) classes?

How does that differ from the way you teach renunciation in Foundation Program (FP) or Teacher Training Program (TTP)?

How do you sense renunciation is received in GP versus FP/TTP? (e.g., samsara, liberation, future lives, worldly concerns ...)

How do you feel your FP/TTP students are faring with their renunciation training?

c) YES, FORMERLY:

[(b) in past tense, +]

When and why did you resign from your sponsored position?

How did resigning from your sponsored position affect (e.g. facilitate/impede/alter) your Dharma practice? (esp. renunciation) — your work/financial life? — your family life? — other aspects of your personal life?

Do you think you might hold a sponsored position again in the future?

Have you lived in a NKT Dharma Centre?

a) NO:

Have you ever considered living in a Dharma Centre? Why/not?

Do you think you might live in a Dharma Centre in the future?

b) YES, PRESENTLY:

Why did you move in?

How does Centre residency affect (e.g. facilitate/impede/alter) your Dharma practice? (esp. renunciation) — your work/financial life? — your family life? — other aspects of your personal life?

Do you experience any conflict between financial/family/personal life and Centre residency?

How long do you see yourself living in the Centre?

LAY:

Does Centre residency preclude/complicate parenthood? — marriage?

ORDAINED:

Do you experience ordination and Centre residency as related? — Do they support each other? — Do they ever clash?

STAFF:

Do you experience sponsorship and Centre residency as related? — Do they support each other? — Do they ever clash?

c) YES, FORMERLY:

[(b) in past tense, +]

When and why did you move out?

How did moving out of the Centre affect (e.g. facilitate/impede/alter) your Dharma practice? (esp. renunciation) — your work/financial life? — your family life? — other aspects of your personal life?

Do you think you might live in a Dharma Centre again in the future?

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