

Purity, embodiment and the immaterial body: An exploration of Buddhism at a Tibetan monastery in Karnataka, South India

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Abstract

This thesis examines the ritual worship within a monastery from the Dzogchen lineage of Tibetan Buddhism situated in Karnataka, South India. During the Cultural Revolution in Tibet, many monasteries were destroyed and the monks fled to re-establish their religious practices in exile in India. As a result, Tibetan Buddhism now has a much wider international participation group. My research looks specifically at the Dzogchen Buddhist doctrinal understanding of purity and its embodiment in the trikaya; the three pure bodies. I consider the rituals practised in the pursuit of the trikaya, and the associated social processes that are thought to enable the embodiment of purity. I explore folk notions of purity and how they shape bodily experience for the multi-national community that congregate together at the monastery. Practitioners of Dzogchen Buddhism believe that the embodiment of purity results in a dissolution of the body and leads to an “immaterial body”. The achievement of the immaterial, however, is wholly dependent on a very physical, material set of rituals. Drawing upon doctrinal and folk notions of purity, I propose a four-part analytical understanding of purity; that purity exists on a continuum, that the Dzogchen lama is both a symbolic and literally pure, that purity is able to be transmitted, and that purity is situational but dependent on the presence of the lama. I support my argument with ethnographic data from the rituals of the khatag exchange [offering of ceremonial scarves], rabnye [the sanctification of statues], and two types of embodied worship: prostrations [full length bows] and kora [circumambulation of sacred sites].

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Chapter 1 Introduction

In the South Indian countryside, close to the border between the states of Karnataka and Tamil Nadu, approximately 180km from the major city of Bangalore, is the Dhondenling Tibetan Settlement. Home to just over 4,000 Tibetan refugees¹ who were settled there by the Indian government in the late 1970s. Dhondenling lies on farmland surrounded by rolling hills, which vary between dense jungle and cleared coffee plantations. At the centre of the settlement is a small, monastic compound called Dzogchen Monastery operating in exile from Tibet and housing approximately 200 monks from Nepal, Bhutan and Tibet as well as a varying number of international students, depending on the time of year. The original home of Dzogchen Monastery is Dzogchen Valley in Kham in Eastern Tibet. Pre Cultural Revolution,² the monastery was a prestigious academic and monastic institute with thousands of monks in residence and many hundreds living in retreats in the nearby mountains.³ During the Cultural Revolution, the monastery suffered the same ill fate of most religious institutions, including a fire, which resulted in the main temple being destroyed. Many monks died and what remained post Cultural Revolution was a much-depleted version of the monastery both in the number of actual buildings and in the population. Whilst the monastery in Tibet was slowly rebuilt, it was also established in exile in Dhondenling at the request of the His Holiness⁴ the 14th Dalai Lama, Tenzin Gyatso, he himself in exile from the Chinese authorities. The monastery is under the leadership of His Eminence⁵ the 7th Dzogchen Rinpoche, Jigme Losel Wangpo, overall leader of the Dzogchen School of Buddhism, who, now 50 years old at the time of writing, was in his late teens when he was instructed by the Dalai Lama to begin the reestablishment process. Thus the religious power shifted from Tibet to the Indian base and with it the responsibility to ensure the continuation of the religious rituals and traditions.

¹ Figures taken from <http://www.centralethibetanreliefcommittee.org/settlements/india/south/dhondenling.html>

² The Cultural Revolution was a series of sweeping political and social reforms in Mainland China, led by Mao Zedong between 1966 and 1976. The revolution was intended to remove all capitalist notions and purge China's society of any impure, non-communist ideology. For further information on the Cultural Revolution in Tibet, see Clark 2008, Goldstein, Jiao and Lhundrup 2009 and Powers 2004.

³ I have only been able to source one academic book on the history of Dzogchen Monastery in Tibet, (Nyima 1992) and it is only available in Tibetan. This information is gathered from various websites such as www.dzogchen.org.in, www.dzogchen.tv, <http://www.tricycle.com/blog/treasury-lives-nyingma-founders-part-5-dzogchen>, <http://www.dzogchenlineage.org/monastery.html>

⁴ His Holiness is the highest honorific title given to reincarnate lamas and is only given to those at the very top of the spiritual hierarchy and also to older lamas.

⁵ His Eminence is an honorific title, mostly given to reincarnate lamas when they are young. As they become older, they may then be addressed as His Holiness depending on their place within the hierarchy of lamas. His Eminence Dzogchen Rinpoche is now often addressed as His Holiness by some of the monks and lamas but this has not been made official yet.

Over a period of 10 years, starting with an undergraduate work placement, I made various visits of different lengths to Dzogchen Monastery in South India, observing its rituals and those who participate within them, studying its organisation and exploring how this exiled community balances the pressures of maintaining the continuity of a monastic environment whilst welcoming new lay Buddhist students from around the world. My first visit to the monastery was in 2004 as a young undergraduate Anthropology student. I'd read Sherry Ortner's (1978) description of monastic life in Sherpa Buddhism and I was expecting a much more isolated community, a population that had little contact with their neighbours. Instead I found a vibrant space with three different groups interacting. The groups I encountered were the monks who lived there, students of Dzogchen Rinpoche from a number of European countries, Australia and the USA, and the lay Tibetan population who attended to worship or were involved in events at the monastery. These are quite general groupings and within each category there are clear differences, but broadly speaking they are grouped by their nationalities and purpose at the monastery. The monks all come from Himalayan countries: Tibet, Bhutan, Nepal and China; they live at the monastery full time and practise Buddhism. Next are the 'international students', a term used by the monks and students themselves which applies to any student of Dzogchen Rinpoche's who is not a monk. I mostly encountered students from Europe, the USA and Australia but it would apply to students from the rest of the world too. The international students visit the monastery each year to study and practise Buddhism, with visits ranging between a few weeks to a few months. The third group, the Tibetan lay community, live within the settlement and visit regularly, sometimes daily, but only for a brief duration, 30 minutes to an hour at a time.

What struck me during my initial fieldwork was that these groups, although clearly different, were able to interact and, for some of them, cohabit successfully at the monastery without major issues. The monastery is a place of stringent rules and multiple restraints are placed on behaviour, all visitors must fit in with the monastic schedule and way of life so it intrigued me to see how such distinct groups could manage to live and work together within the walls of the monastic compound. So this is not a study about Tibetans in exile per se, nor of the local Karnataka community in South India. Instead, I explore how one of the major monastic institutions of Tibetan Buddhism manages to house distinct groups from different backgrounds and how it is possible for them to coexist whilst all following, or at least respecting, the

monastic way of life. In other words, how does the monastic institute find ways of making the differences between the groups not make a difference? How are these variances managed so that there can be a harmonious existence? Of course one major differentiation is that the three groups do not have the same understanding or experience of Buddhism and have very dissimilar levels of Tibetan Buddhist ritual knowledge and experience. And, although I look at the methods deployed by the monastery to unite these disparate groups, it is always within the understanding that they are unlike in many ways.

In addition, I explore how the monastery attempts to maintain its social hierarchy and *modus operandi* within a more accessible environment (compared to Tibet which was closed to foreign visitors from the 1850s (MacGregor 1970) and again in the 1930s and 1940s (Van Schaik 2011)) and also without many of the political and social powers it enjoyed in Tibet pre Cultural Revolution. One of the most important political issues facing the community at the monastery was the identification of a rival head lama. At Dzogchen Monastery in Kham, Eastern Tibet, another Dzogchen Rinpoche has been appointed - Tenzin Longdock Nyima.⁶ During my fieldwork, many informants told me of this second Dzogchen Rinpoche who had been enthroned in Tibet and spoke of his uncle Pema Kalsang Rinpoche who is reported to have close ties with the Chinese government. In the history of the Dzogchen Rinpoches, there has never been two incarnations recognised at the same time; until now, there has only ever been one who is recognised by particular senior lamas (I will cover this process in Chapters 3 and 4). My informants unanimously did not accept Tenzin Longdock Nyima as the 7th Dzogchen Rinpoche and did not believe that there could be two incarnations of the Dzogchen Rinpoche alive at the same time. Due to the lack of factual information regarding Tenzin Longdock Nyima, I include this information merely to highlight a split within the community and to clarify which Dzogchen grouping my work refers to.

Although not a common occurrence, such a disagreement about who the ‘authentic’ lama is can happen within Tibetan Buddhism and perhaps the most prominent case is that regarding the recognition of His Holiness the 17th Karmapa, leader of another category of Tibetan Buddhism, the Kagyu School. (The divisions of Tibetan Buddhism will be explained in Chapter 3.) In this instance, the closest disciples of the 16th Karmapa who were tasked with finding his

⁶ I have not used a title of His Eminence or His Holiness for Tenzin Longdock Nyima as one is not used on the official website <http://dzogchenmonastery.cn/> at the time of writing

reincarnation disagreed and chose two different boys resulting in both verbal and physical confrontations within the school (Lehnert 2000). There has been a split in the Kagyu School ever since.

Despite having very limited, if any, direct information on Tenzin Longdock Nyima, I was able to observe the reaction of the community and the rituals, events and practices that were put in place to reinforce unity. In light of this concern, this study will describe numerous public occasions that focus on creating a strong, unified identity for the monastic organisation and explore how the ground practices of Buddhism have been modified in light of the political situation and the heightened emphasis on the public perception of the community. These include an official congregation of all the main lamas within the Dzogchen Buddhist tradition who meet for three days to discuss their collective future, an enthronement ceremony that appoints two young boys as reincarnate lamas, and an on-going temple restoration project restoring the main place of worship at the monastery to a similar status as the original Dzogchen Monastery temple in Tibet.

Importance is placed on the unification of the group at my field site. The community is not formed on an egalitarian basis and there is a clear hierarchical structure to it. In this thesis I consider how attitudes towards purity and the embodiment of purity perpetuates the social hierarchy of the monastery. Those who are believed to embody purity sit at the top of the hierarchy and, in this instance, Dzogchen Rinpoche, head of the monastery and the main lama (teacher), is believed by his students and monastic followers to be the embodiment of purity. Purity is realised through disciplines enforced on the body—both within rituals and during everyday mundane behaviour. Through analysis of these rites and encoded behaviours, I explore how limitations placed on the body and boundaries imposed on the physical relationship between lama and disciple both create purity and sustain the social hierarchy. I consider how these acts of discipline are connected to power and their role in sustaining the hierarchy at the monastery. In addition, I look at the lama's place within an historical line of pure-bodied beings (lamas) called the lineage (Tibetan. Brgyud pa, Sanskrit. Parampara). The purity within the lineage is believed by the Buddhist practitioners to have existed for centuries; this belief is continually fuelled through ritual practice. The main lama of the monastery is also believed to embody this historical line of purity. I explore how the idea of embodying centuries

of purity contributes to the overall power of the lama, both symbolic and actual, and what influence this yields over the political and social aims of the monastery.

My study reveals that there are two understandings of embodied purity present at the monastery. Firstly, the official, doctrinal presentation of the lama's pure body found in texts and devotional prayers. I will discuss this in more detail in this chapter and also in Chapter 5 by explaining the three-fold body of purity that the lama embodies. Secondly, the emic understanding of purity; the knowledge held by the monks and the lay practitioners, how they perceive the body of the lama, and how they interact with him. The two are inextricably linked; the emic understanding is shaped by exposure to the official doctrinal presentation of purity (in addition to numerous factors contained within the phenomenology of each individual). Considering both understandings of purity, the official and the 'ground' experience or practice (Tambiah 1992, Gombrich and Obeyesekere 1988), I then reflect upon how this influences and feeds into the political and social aims of the monastery's agenda in exile.

Both these understandings will also be considered through the anthropological lens of embodiment; the idea that culture changes our bodies and that the values of culture enter our bodies and alter the way we behave and move (Herriman 2012). Embodiment is the idea that cultural notions and values have become habitualised and are taken for granted. Certain behaviours have become tacit and embodied by the monastic community as a whole such as physical acts of reverence to the lama, bowing one's head, always facing forwards and never turning one's back, and various encoded behaviour around touching the possessions of the lama. These acts have become internalised and appear natural to observers, which I suggest reinforces the social hierarchy of the monastery strengthening the political and social power of the lama. They also contribute to an additional understanding and experience of the body, one that I have termed an "immaterial body". This is a non-physical state that followers of Dzogchen believe to continue once the current physical body has undergone a specific dissolution process—the dissolution transfers the body from a physical to a non-physical state. I will consider how the rituals with a very material focus and heavily reliant on physical repetitions performed by the body, such as 100,000 repetitions of a full length bow in front of a statue, contribute to this intangible and immaterial understanding of the body.

As well as exploring this alternative perception of the body, I argue that the paradigm of embodiment, specifically how purity is embodied, is an insightful paradigm for exploring how a Tibetan Buddhist community endeavours to sustain its religious practice and organisation in exile in South India and in the face of continued antagonism from the Chinese government and its supporters. As I unpack the different rituals and religious behaviours on display at the monastery, I explore how the lama and his body, through a network of pure and impure symbolism and embodied behaviours, play a pivotal role in connecting the three groups at the field site and attempts to ensure that the religious practices continue despite their diaspora.

As well as unifying the group, I consider how the encouragement of behaviours related to purity also inhibit or prevent other experiences by maintaining boundaries that ensure purity. By specifying certain rules for the relationship between the lama's body and the rest of the Buddhist community, this encoded interaction also creates separation. I look at how boundary maintenance, isolation, or practices of discipline placed on the body prevent pollution and certain social and political situations from occurring. My conclusions are drawn from fieldwork conducted between 2010 and 2013 (also drawing on fieldwork from 2009 completed as part of my Master's research). Before I proceed with my analysis of the field site, I will explain the main concepts that feature prominently in my work: purity, embodiment and ritual.

Purity

Ideas of purity and pollution have been well documented and researched within Anthropology. Early research by Frazer (1890) on practices of magic and its link with contagion focused on the misunderstanding or confusion between holiness (purity) and pollution, and, as Frazer saw it, as a marker of 'primitive thinking'. Durkheim (1912) in his studies on ritual and religion, distinguished between the sacred (pure) and the profane (mundane or polluted) and suggested that within the ritual systems of 'primitive societies', the profane often threatened the stability of the sacred. Dumont (1966) used the binary opposition of ritual purity and pollution more explicitly to explain the Indian caste system and the organisation of the Hindu Indian social hierarchy and power structure. Notably, Mary Douglas (1966) in *Purity and Danger* grouped together pollution, uncleanness and disease under 'dirt'. Douglas developed the simple binary opposition and argued that purity and pollution/dirt, although universal in existence, are actually relative concepts that should be understood through the specific social and historical context within which they are used. What is thought by one person to be clean and pure in one

situation could be thought to be dirty or impure by someone else in another. She used the phrase ‘dirt is matter out of place’ (1966: 36) to explain this idea.⁷

These classical approaches to purity are useful when beginning to think about how purity can be categorised and the link between purity and social organisation or hierarchical structure, but I found that the binary opposition of pure versus impure did not accurately capture the nuances and politics of purity that I discovered at my field site. Here I am taking a different approach and I argue that purity is conceived, experienced and practised on a continuum, or a spectrum, rather than juxtaposed against impurity or pollution. At one end of the spectrum sits purity and at the other end there is a less pure state, but not one that is impure. There is a gradient between the two and one’s state of purity can fluctuate moving along a sliding scale depending on many factors such as behaviour or ritual practice. Throughout the thesis I will explain this analytical understanding of purity by considering doctrinal and folk notions of purity and how they critique and reshape classical anthropological notions of purity.

This continuum of purity and its categorisation in such a way is not an unusual method of understanding within Buddhism. For example, gradients of individual states can be found in the doctrinal teachings on the 10 bhumi levels of enlightenment or the teachings on the stages of the path to enlightenment (Ray 1986). However, what is particular to Dzogchen Buddhism is that all human beings are innately pure, equally pure without exception. Most beings do not realise this purity and so continue to suffer within samsara, the cyclical routine of birth, death and rebirth. The realisation of purity is enlightenment; it is enlightened nature, also known as Buddha nature. Unique to Dzogchen is that this purity can be realised within a single lifetime, because it exists innately, but other Buddhist schools believe that it takes many lifetimes (Cutler & Newland 2015).

A number of folk notions regarding purity pervade everyday life at the monastery; in particular, a social organisation and a social hierarchy of purity. Lamas are considered different to ordinary beings because they have realised their own purity and so sit at the top end of the spectrum. Those who haven’t realised their own purity would be at the opposite end and would look to the lamas for guidance or support because the lamas, as a result of realising their own

⁷ This is not an original phrase by Douglas; she attributed it to “Lord Chesterfield” (Philip Dormer Stanhope, Fourth Earl of Chesterfield, 1694-1773) (Fardon 2013), but it can also be linked to Lord Palmerston (1784-1865), amongst others. In addition, there were various occasions when the phrase was used in public health discussions (Fardon 2013).

purity, now have the capacity to help others to realise theirs. This lack of realisation has meant that they may endure suffering, emotional or physical, and that they may behave in ways that are viewed as less pure. They may experience or have less pure thoughts and emotions, and they may experience illness or injuries that hinder their opportunities to realise their own purity. As a result of this suffering, they become dependent upon the purity of the lama. The lama is the very state that they endeavour to achieve and he thus plays an important role in their efforts to realise purity.

This critical role in the enablement of realisation for others cements the lamas firmly into the religious and political fabric of the monastery where they yield great influence over the lives of those who live or visit there. The lama, as a living embodiment of purity, now creates a further aspect to the experience of purity. Purity now not only exists in its doctrinal sense as a Buddhist ideal but within folk understanding, purity has become human, and so part of social relationships and experiences influencing politics and social structure. Purity has become more than a concept or idea, it becomes relational, comparative, and experiential.

What also follows alongside the humanisation of purity is that, in order to make sense of it and these new aspects of it, purity becomes more tangible and concrete as an idea, it starts to exist more solidly for the people and so what was once a quality becomes something that is very real. In order to communicate their experiences or to talk about purity, further folk notions about purity develop. People rarefy and objectify it as something that can be transmitted or held within an object. For example, we know that time isn't actually a tangible thing but we talk about it as if it is—we say we have lots of time, or no time; we describe ourselves as having a good time and attribute qualities to something that doesn't actually exist. So in a similar way, even though at a more overarching level, purity is actually only the realisation of a state that already exists; in other words, it isn't something that exists independently of oneself; it has a very lived individual and social experience with complexities and political nuances.

Let me unpack this further, step by step, using the example of the lama who was a central focus of my research. The lama is believed to be pure, both symbolically and literally. He is seen as a representation of a doctrinal explanation of purity; he symbolises purity and that it can be realised in human form. This belief was wide spread amongst my fieldwork community and the lama representing something much vaster and more powerful than the human mind is thought

to be able to comprehend. He becomes a symbolic representation of all that is pure within the universe and within existence; he is seen as the union of the three pure bodies, the trikaya, (explained on page 20), the pinnacle of purity within Dzogchen. Purity is often used interchangeably with enlightenment. Enlightened beings are pure beings and even when their behaviour may appear to be impure, as will be illustrated in Chapter 4 when I look at the concept of ‘crazy wisdom’ (Tibetan. *yeshe chölwa*), they remain enlightened because the realisation of their purity remains constant.

Then the lama is viewed as literally pure, that he embodies purity and has a pure physical body and that every aspect of his physicality is pure. Even when a lama experiences illness or injury this view does not falter, the lama and his body remain pure and the illness is viewed as an act of compassion; he has taken that illness on himself to prevent others from experiencing it. To touch the lama’s body or to be touched by the lama himself is considered good fortune because purity can be transmitted from the lama’s body to other people or other objects. The lama is able to assist in the realisation of purity because of the fluid and permeable nature of purity, and this is the third understanding of purity explored in the thesis—that it can be ‘transmitted’, from person to person, person to object and object to person. The passage of purity is dependent upon specific rites; a number of which are addressed throughout the thesis, and at the centre of all of them is the lama or a depiction/representation of the lama. This also means that purity, and this is my fourth insight into its understanding and experience at my field site, is situational; the transmission of purity from one person or object to another is dependent upon the lama and the lama’s participation in religious ceremonies. It is relational; it exists; it is created; and it is transferred back and forth within a network of people, objects, and buildings or structures.

By exploring folk and doctrinal notions of purity and how they influence and structure social life at the monastery, I endeavour to shape and rethink elements of classical understandings of purity, which I found did not adequately explain the nuances and politics of purity that I discovered at my field site. I propose an analytical understanding of purity that has four overlapping elements: 1) Purity is conceived, experienced and practised on a continuum, or a spectrum rather than juxtaposed against impurity or pollution. 2) Lamas are both literally pure, and symbolic representations of purity. 3) Purity can be transmitted from person to person,

person to object, and visa versa, and object to object. 4) Purity is situational and relational, and its transmission is dependent upon the lama.

Purity is not, however, considered the same as merit, albeit that the differences in particular situations may be very subtle. Merit constitutes one's karma and determines future rebirths; it can be acquired by three means: charity, morality and meditation (Spiro 1966: 1167). It is not fate or luck but something that is accrued through participating in a religious ceremony or offering alms (Cook 2008). The monastic community that lead the ceremonies or receive the offerings act as a 'field of merit', and form a depersonalised relationship between the monastics and laity. The 'field of merit' can be understood as fertile soil where good actions are rewarded and will bring forth a good reward (Williams 1963:149-66). So by giving to those who already have merit through their own virtuosity, merit can be created for the giver. The more virtuous and pious the monastic community that receive the offerings, the greater the merit the donor can receive (Cook 2008).

The understanding of merit at my field site is consistent with that of Spiro, Cook and Williams. However, the main purpose of accumulating merit differs. Merit is sought after to impact an individual's current life rather than future lives. Merit is accrued to deepen one's connection to the lama, either through attending more ceremonies that he resides over to receive more teachings or empowerments from him, or to have direct communication with him through personal meetings. The purpose of this connection is to receive purity from the lama and to ultimately realise one's own purity. Dzogchen practitioners believe that one can realise one's own purity in one single lifetime providing that in that lifetime they have a strong connection to the lama. Therefore, as they are able to be at the monastery with the lama, there is no better rebirth for them; what matters is this lifetime and to always be connected to the lama. Rebirth is not the primary focus. It's worth noting here that all of the students and monks during my fieldwork were in good health and were not suffering a chronic illness or facing death;⁸ so I have no data on people's thoughts and behaviours when facing death and whether the purpose of accumulating merit changes. Based on teachings given by Dzogchen Rinpoche during my fieldwork on death and the experience of the bardos and rebirth, I can speculate that the students' focus would then turn to rebirth and the aim would be to be reborn close to their lama

⁸ If the international students were ill, they would not have been able to travel to the monastery.

so that they may continue their practice. However, for the duration of my fieldwork, the intention behind accumulating merit was to deepen one's connection to the lama.

Purity and hierarchy

Within this thesis, I consider two main social effects of both doctrinal and folk notions of purity; firstly, purity and how it is understood and expressed contributes to a social hierarchy and creates social distance; secondly, the use of purity to achieve unity amongst disparate groups. The hierarchy of the monastery places the pure bodied lama at the top and under his authority monastics and lay people of different nationalities co-exist sharing the living space at the monastery for set periods of time each year. They work in partnership during the performance of rituals and in more mundane capacities in the various administrative activities involved in running the monastery and the charity that is based there. (The charity's organisation will be explained in full in Chapter 3.) Through analysis of specific rites, I will unpack how purity is embodied by the lama and how his students endeavour to experience this purity within themselves through embodied worship.

As well as establishing hierarchy and structure within a social group, ideas of purity and pollution are also often used to maintain boundaries and to separate different social groups. Judith Okley's (1983) research with the gypsy community in the UK explores how rules of cleanliness and dirt are used to maintain the boundary between the gypsies and the neighbouring settled community.⁹ Accordingly to Okely's analysis, the boundaries of the body are a symbolic representation of the social and ethnic separation that she encountered in the field (1983:78). Gypsies distinguish between the inside of the body and the outside. The outside is presented to the Gorgios, the sedentary community, and so it can encounter dirt such as scavenging as a scrap and rag collector or manual labour, but the inside must be kept ritually clean in order to keep the ethnic purity of the group (*ibid* 2013:168). For example, only food that has been prepared in ritually clean conditions can be consumed and crockery used to eat from must be washed in designated bowls not contaminated by hand washing (*ibid*).

⁹ And how this restricts the movements and lives of the women within the gypsy community.

I consider how the rituals that take place at the monastery establish boundaries and create separation between the lama and the rest of the community and consider how practices of bodily discipline are catalysts of social and political power. For example, there are a number of encoded behaviours that the attendants¹⁰ of the main lama at the monastery must adhere to whilst in service to him. Physiological behaviours such as coughing and sneezing should be controlled and on many occasions I observed the attendants working for long periods of time holding a cloth across their faces or covering their mouths with their robes to avoid contaminating the lama. By restricting certain behaviours, they are accepting their lower status within the hierarchy and recognising, and therefore reinforcing, the superiority of the lama. The very presence of attendants also demonstrates that it is not common for other monks and students to have close contact with the lama, and although the main lama at my field site was considerably more accessible than reports I have heard from other monasteries, there was still a distinct degree of separation. As I will illustrate through the various rituals described in this thesis, he was also only permitted to perform certain behaviours, and this links back to Douglas' (1970) idea that the more refinement and modification of behaviour the greater the "priestly aristocratic image" (*ibid*: 1970: 77).

Local meaning of purity

Within my study of the rituals and the embodiment of purity, I also discuss particular local meanings regarding what parts of the body are considered pure and impure and how these are connected to social organisation and behaviour. The purity categorisations that I discovered at my field site are very similar to those suggested by Douglas (1970) within her purity rule that links bodily control to social control.¹¹ Douglas sees the body as a "medium of expression...limited by controls exerted by the social system" (1970:79). This is linked to her purity rule which explains how the social system either seeks to embody forms of expression linked to purity (cleanliness) or to refrain from participating in forms associated with impurity;

¹⁰ This would also apply to the monks and international students should they be in contact with the lama, however contact is often limited to a certain number of trained individuals.

¹¹ Douglas' work is in response to Mauss (1936) and his essay, *Techniques of the Body*, where he asserted that there could be no such thing as natural behaviour, and a development of his idea that every action carries an imprint of learning (Douglas 1970:72). Douglas argues that there are natural tendencies, expressing "appropriate bodily styles", which are common across different cultures but crucially they are generated in response to a social situation and inseparable from local history and culture (*ibid*: 76). Therefore for something to be natural it must be common across cultures but at no point can be separate from local social influences. Douglas also uses this latter point, the importance of local variations and how the natural is linked to specific social situations, to counter argue the assumption made by Levi Strauss in *Mythologies* (1964) which did not focus on the cultural variations of the social controls on the body, but favoured a development of a universal theory (Douglas 1970:74).

e.g. the casting off of waste products—urination, defecation and vomiting. Both actions uphold the social system.

Douglas suggests two social dimensions for expressing social distance: the front/back dimension and the spatial. The front of the body is more pure or dignified than the back and the more distance between two bodies the more respect or formality and the less distance the more informal, or intimate the relationship (1970:80). At my field site, one of the most common social dimensions imposed on the body was the front/back dimension. Frequently encoded ritual behaviour demanded that the practitioner refrain from turning their backs on sacred beings (the main lama) or sacred objects (the shrine/altar). There were also distinctions of high and low; the head is thought to be the most pure area of the body and the feet the most impure and through the description of the rituals performed at the monastery, I consider how offering the purest parts of the body to the lama reinforces the social hierarchy and his status at the top. The significance of penetration and violation of bodily boundaries also extends to the material symbols of the body (Scheper-Hughes and Lock 1987). These boundaries can refer to the entrances and exits of the home, the doors and windows. In this thesis I also consider the very deliberate layout and construction of the monastery; in particular the temple at the centre of the monastic compound. I consider how the protective rituals linked to these buildings generate a sense of control and security (Scheper-Hughes 1979) and how the embodied rituals, in particular prostrations [full length bows] and kora [circumambulation of sacred sites], create a sense of power and stability (Makley 2003).

Embodiment

Throughout this thesis I focus on embodiment in two different ways. Firstly, I explore the emic, everyday understandings and uses of embodiment by lay Buddhists and monks at my field site. Embodiment is already a Buddhist category because practitioners strive to become the embodiment of the three pure bodies, or kayas, the trikaya (Zivkovic 2010a, 2010b, 2010c). (Explained in detail on page 20) Embodiment is used to explain how Buddhist doctrine works in practice—the processes for how one's own innate purity can be realised. Therefore embodiment is used at an official level as well as by lay Buddhist practitioners themselves as they make sense of what they are doing when they follow the doctrinal instructions. The lama, believed by his followers to have achieved the embodiment of the three pure bodies, is a physical manifestation of the embodiment doctrine. As a result of his embodiment, the lama

becomes a facilitator for others to achieve a similar embodiment. In other words, because he embodies the three pure bodies, the lama can enable his followers to realise their own purity and become the embodiment of the three pure kayas through a number of different rituals.

Secondly, embodiment is used as an analytical category to help make sense of some of the Buddhist practices and rituals I encountered at my field site and to frame the practitioners' explanations of these practices. My theoretical approach is influenced heavily by Csordas (1990, 1994, 1999) who proposed that embodiment is the existential condition of cultural life and that embodiment is not merely about the body, but from the body. Indeed, a primary focus of this thesis is how the cultural value of purity is inscribed on the body but this is just one part of an overarching exploration of how the Dzogchen monastic culture comes from the body, the body of the lama and the body of individual monks and students, and how they create and maintain social processes within the ritual environment.

I shall now explain the emic understanding of embodiment, that the lama is the embodiment of the three pure kayas (bodies), in more detail. The community at Dzogchen Monastery believe that the lama's body is literally pure; the lama is purity manifested in physical form. The lama embodies purity in a tri-fold way as the embodiment of the three kayas or the three pure bodies of Buddhahood. The three kayas, or trikaya, and how they interact is described by Zivkovic (2010a):

“*Trikaya, the Tibetan concept of embodiment relating to a Buddha, involves a system of three bodies, each marked by lines of intersection, fluidity and interconnectedness. The temporal and spatial habitations of high-lamas, reflected in the conceptual framework of trikaya, take hold in diverse forms.*” (2010a:139).

These diverse forms shape the intercorporality and intersubjectivity of subjects and within this thesis I am particularly concerned with the temporal and spatial habitations generated through the lama as the embodiment of the three kayas. I explore how this understanding shapes the behaviour and social organisation of the community at my field site and in particular the movement and rotation of bodies within the ritual space. The orientation of the monks', international students' and the laity's bodies are subject to restrictions and also provided with opportunities to perform specific bodily movements in relation to the position of their bodies

and the lama's. For example, when close to the lama, the ritual participants are not permitted to turn their backs or point their feet towards him. These actions are deemed inappropriate because the back and the feet are the least pure parts of the body and it is considered disrespectful when pointed towards a pure body. Conversely, the pure body of the lama enables certain types of embodied worship to take place such as prostrations (full length bows). These actions are thought to enable purity, which is already present but latent within the body. The actions become a means to realise one's own purity and to become the embodiment of purity just like the lama.

According to Zivkovic (2010a), the relationship between student and lama and the embodied forms of worship that are learnt through ritual and practice, shape bodily experience. Zivkovic suggests that the student lama relationship "both involves and enables intercorporeality in the sense that it is an intersubjective engagement requiring an openness to the bodies of others. A technique acquired from practice, it forms a learnt repertoire of sensory experience that shapes the way humans (and non-humans) experience their own body and the bodies of others" (2010a:120).

Through the repeated practice of these techniques, the student seeks to extend his or her own "repertoire of embodied experience" (Zivkovic 2010a:121) and aims to embody the three kayas, "to make their body like the Buddha's" (Desjarlais, 2003: 98). Embodiment in the Tibetan Buddhist sense is not restricted to one particular physical form; the three kayas extend beyond the limitations of the flesh and according to Zivkovic, the lama may "physically incarnate into another body, transmogrify into other forms or permeate the body of another" (2010a:123). This distinct understanding of the lama's body and how he can be the embodiment of the three kayas in different forms creates unique spatio-temporal embodied arrangements within the rituals I observed.

These arrangements specifically depend on the relationship between student and lama within rituals and are expressed through the practice of embodied worship. As I said earlier, within these particular religious rites, the body of ritual participants is subject to restriction but the body also participates in enabling movements such as prostrations that generate purity; I will explain these in terms of technologies of power and technologies of self (Foucault 1983) in the following section on ritual. However what I will introduce here is the processes by which the

emic understanding of embodiment can be achieved. The participants at my field site believed that repeated physical worship, when performed in relation to the pure lama, could lead to embodiment.

One understanding of embodiment explored by anthropologists such as Wacquant (2004) and Wainwright and Turner (2004) is the idea that culture changes our bodies; embodiment is the habitualisation of movements so they become natural. Bodily movement is one way to express cultural values or types of self. Through repetition of movement, behaviour becomes a habit and the ways of a culture become so internalised they become a type of muscle memory, a tacit behaviour, taken for granted by the performer. For example, Wainwright and Turner (2004) describe the ‘muscle memory’ in their study on dancers in the Royal Ballet. The rigorous training of classical ballet makes the unnatural movements of the performance become natural; the “steps are literally inscribed into the dancer’s body” (2004:103). The dancer develops a muscle memory that survives long after the performer’s career is over. Just as if one learns to ride a bike as a child and does not forget as an adult, the ballet dancer does not forget how to perform. Another example of how movement, its meaning and a way of being, is embodied can be found in Wacquant’s (2004) study of an amateur boxing club in a Chicago ghetto, which looks at how the pugilistic habitus is fabricated and deployed through the practice of recurrent body movements. Through repetitive practice, fighters learn how to execute movements without thinking; they become natural and normalised. The more adept fighters are, and the more regularised the required body movements become, the greater their social competency is thought to be. Social competency becomes embodied competency.

There are similarities within the processes used to achieve the emic understanding of embodiment at my field site and the findings of Wainwright and Turner (2004) and Wacquant (2004). For example, the Dzogchen students repeatedly perform prostrations in front of the lama, rehearsing a particular sequence of body movements 100,000 times in an effort to become the embodiment of purity. Once the prostrations are finished, their meaning is not forgotten; it permeates the movement and location of the participants’ bodies in relation to the lama through other rituals and in ordinary, mundane spaces within the monastic grounds. This memory creates a habitualisation of behaviour. Behaviour related to purity and the embodiment of the three pure kayas is not always conscious and the longer a practitioner stays at the monastery, the more natural they seem. I look at this process in depth in Chapter 8 and reflect

upon how the participants of such a physical and strenuous ritual believe that it enables the embodiment of purity and what are the social processes created and/or maintained by this ritual and I argue that it helps maintain the social hierarchy within the monastery and also has wider social impact. Embodiment, in the sense expressed here, is more than just enskillment or learning new practices. The rituals enable a becoming or a realisation of inherent purity (in Dzogchen, it is believed that all beings are inherently pure but that purity has not been realised). In the same way, this intense repetition of movement is also more than discipline; it is about capacities to achieve both an internal and physical transformation rather than just be subject to restraint either from external powers or placed upon the individuals themselves. I will develop this argument in the next section on ritual through referencing Mahmood's (2005) study of the piety movement within Egypt, which was a result of the Islamic revival that began in the 1970s. Mahmood explains that within liberal political discourse, the revival was mostly viewed as a suppressive movement but was actually understood and experienced by the participants themselves as an enabling practice within which they had agency and were able to cultivate a pious self.

Lastly, I have found the analytical category of embodiment very useful in understanding the dynamics and nuances of purity expressed through the rituals at the monastery. The embodiment approach is part of the wider anthropological discourse on the body, which takes the view that the body is a social construct (Turner 1996) influenced and shaped by the society the surrounds it. As Csordas (1990) articulates, "the body is not an *object* to be studied in relation to culture, but is to be considered as the *subject* of culture, or in other words as the existential ground of culture" (1990:5) By this, Csordas means that culture is not something that just happens to the body; cultural values are not just forced on the body but the body plays a much more influential role and is also the basis of culture; culture can be seen to come from the body as well. It is a reflexive relationship; culture, society and body are all interacting. The body also plays a significant role in creation of self-identity and can be "seen as an entity which is in the process of becoming a project that should be worked at and accomplished as part of an individual's self-identity" (Shilling 1993:5). Therefore the body cannot be reduced to playing just one role such as physical entity or biological organism or as an object of power but it can be many things at once.

One of the principal characteristics of the paradigm of embodiment is the collapse of the dualistic structure associated between mind and body, subject and object, nature and culture, instead recognising the body as a constitutive dimension of social practice. Scheper-Hughes and Lock (1987) view the body as “simultaneously a physical and a symbolic artefact, as both naturally and culturally produced, and as secured anchored in a particular historical moment” (1987:7). They also posit that it is only through the paradigm of embodiment that we can overcome the challenge of expressing the many different ways that the “mind speaks through the body and the way in which society is inscribed on the expectant canvas of human flesh” (1987:10). The manifold meanings, values and representations produced on and about the body have also been recorded and discussed by such authors as Blacking (1977), Csordas (1990), Douglas (1970,) O’neill (1985), Shilling (1993) and Turner (1984, 2000), and demonstrate a fluid interaction between embodied behaviour and the physical/natural rather than a simple dichotomy. For Csordas (1999), embodied experience is the starting point for analysing human participation in a cultural world. Csordas says:

"If embodiment is an existential condition in which the body is the subjective source or intersubjective ground of experience, then studies under the rubric of embodiment are not 'about' the body per se. Instead they are about culture and experience insofar as these can be understood from the standpoint of bodily being-in-the-world" (1999: 143).

Csordas explains embodiment as an “indeterminate methodological field defined by perceptual experience and the mode of presence and engagement in the world” (1993: 135). Embodiment is a shared physical experience because it contains “somatic modes of attention” that are “culturally elaborated ways of attending to and with one’s body in surroundings that include the embodied presence of others” (1993: 138). Csordas’ explanation incorporates intersubjectivity and how the body is not seen as separate from others but can be permeated by others. According to Csordas, the body can be “diffused with other persons and things in a unitary sociomythic domain” (Csordas, 1994: 7). The interconnected relationships between the three main groups at the monastery and then between them and the lama, creates a complex, ritual matrix of embodiment and structure. The purity embodied by the lama is able to permeate the ritual matrix and be transferred between people, between people and objects and vice versa. Csordas’ insights into the spatiotemporal nature of embodiment are a very useful starting point in the analysis of this conceptual and embodied network.

Throughout this thesis I have endeavoured to incorporate Csordas' dynamic view of embodiment and his phenomenological theory of culture and self across the different rituals practiced at Dzogchen Monastery. I have also found Mol's (2002) ethnography of atherosclerosis sufferers in a Dutch hospital and her findings of multiple bodies, enacted in different ways and different times by different agents, to be very useful in my analysis. Mol discusses the multiplicity of the disease and subsequently the reflexive and varied understandings of the body. To establish this many layered meanings of illness and the body, Mol collapses distinctions between subject and object, disease and illness, natural and social, and suggests a much more fluid reality constantly changing and enacted through practice. Mol's ontological multiplicity was helpful in conceptualising the embodiment of purity in a number of different ways, through different means, and at different times. The emic understanding of purity at the monastery was that it exists on a spectrum from pure to less pure but that all beings are fundamentally pure. Purity is not juxtaposed against impurity and so, on a spectrum, there are many different experiences, expressions and understandings of purity that are embodied. The participants at my field site are there through their own choice and although subject to a number of restrictions upon bodily movement and orientation during the rituals, the rituals also provided them with an opportunity to further inner and physical transformation in the pursuit of purity. Within the ritual space, they had agency and used it to further their quest to embody purity.

Viewing the body as more than its materiality, as a site of performance that has meaning beyond its boundaries and part of a more fluid reality, I look at the way purity is understood, practised and embodied by the Buddhist community collectively at my field site. I look at how the pure body of the lama is socially constructed and used as a tool by the monastics to strengthen their social positioning both within India and internationally amongst new audiences. As Mauss in his discussion of embodiment says, "the body is simultaneously both the original object upon which the work of culture is carried out, and the original tool with which that work is achieved" (1936:372). Throughout this thesis I consider the body of the lama as a device through which the work of the monastery is conducted. As Turner (1984) argues: "The body is both the environment we practice on and also practice with. We labour on, in and with bodies" (1984:161). I also look at how the lama's pure body contributes to a unique understanding and experience of the body beyond physical existence in the form of an immaterial body. This is a collective understanding shared in different ways by the community

at my field site and I consider how the lama's embodiment of purity shapes the perception of the immaterial.

Collins (1997) considers the body in Theravada Buddhist monasticism and, although a different type of Buddhism, there are some insightful similarities in how the laity perceives the pure bodies of the monks and the role that plays in social structure. Collins argues that as one group, the monastics practice renunciation and reject their body through a deconstructive, meditative analysis. Another group (the laity) then begins to perceive the body of the monks as an embodiment of salvation. So whilst the monk's body is consciously removed from social networks through renunciation and absenteeism, this 'de-socialised body' actually becomes an embodiment of the sacred, or of purity, as viewed by the laity (ibid 1997 200-203). Lay householders then both support the continuation of the monastery through offering alms and providing financial support, and then through their own reproductive practices. If the laity did not reproduce, there would not be any more monks.

What's interesting in Collin's analysis of Theravada Buddhist monasticism is that the monk's body and how it is perceived to embody purity is an integral part of monastic social structure and critical for the perpetuation of monastic life and the hierarchical structure between laity and monastics. By trying to remove the impurities from their bodies, and to separate themselves from the networks of desire that bind the laity to samsara, the monks paradoxically cement themselves further into society with their pure bodies as a critical social navigation point. Throughout my thesis I explore how the lama's pure body is more so than the monks because in Dzogchen Buddhism, the lama is the main focus of all rituals and meditative practices. It is critical to societal organisation and used by both the monastics and the laity as a tool in the continuation of the lineage. I also look at how the lama's pure body contributes to a unique understanding and experience of the body beyond physical existence in the form of an immaterial body. This is a collective understanding shared in different ways by the community at my field site and I consider how the lama's embodiment of purity shapes the perception of the immaterial.

Ritual

In this thesis I also document and explore a selection of tantric Buddhist rituals and ceremonies. Instead of viewing rituals as purely symbolic acts, or solely reading them as texts,

I look at the social and historical influences that affect them and the social impact that the rituals create. This approach has been championed by Asad (1993), who points out the importance of historical influences stating that both the anthropological lens through which rituals are viewed and the actors involved have been influenced by historical shifts. Asad focuses his examination of the secular and he avoids reading rituals as texts instead drawing more on a historical analysis and asserting that religious discourse depends on practices and discourses that are often not “religious” at all. When describing the religious rituals that I encountered, I position them within the context of the political situation that faces the exiled community in India. As well as a number of local political factors, this also includes on-going tensions within Tibet against the Chinese but also amongst members of their own immediate sangha (Sanskrit Buddhist term for community) and amongst the ruling elite of Tibetan Buddhism and the different schools of thought.¹² To frame my research, I draw on Tambiah’s (1992) work on Thai Buddhist practice in Sri Lanka and how it was shaped by political and historical factors such as colonialism and was not just the manifestation of scripture in practice. (See also Gombrich and Obeyesekere 1988.) The presentation of religious beliefs to the community that practices them is shaped by social and political factors and within my thesis I consider how the issues facing Dzogchen Monastery influence their ritual practices.

Anthropological discussions of Buddhism over the last 50 years have been dominated by the question of how most accurately to represent the type of Buddhism practiced in Sri Lanka, known as Sinhala Buddhism. A predominant focus of anthropologists (Spiro, Tambiah, Gombrich and Obeyesekere amongst others) since the 1950s has been to correct the oversight in the presentation of a revived and reformed Buddhism—“protestant Buddhism”—in response to the spread of Christian missionaries during the 1940 through to the 1960s. This “protestant Buddhism”, positioning Buddhism as more of a way of life based around a prominent philosopher rather than a religion, was most notably propagated by Anagarika Dharmapala (1864-1933) (McMahan (2008). The main critique was that in presenting Buddhism as a verifiable noble philosophy superior to Christianity, it under represented the rich, devotional element and multitude of merit¹³ making rituals that actually were practised.¹⁴ These “ground

¹² Of which there are four main schools and these will be described in detail in Chapter 3.

¹³ Merit is a “beneficial karma; a beneficial and protective force that extends over a long period of time and links individuals together” (Terwiel 1975:249).

¹⁴ This analysis has been challenged as having too simplistic a view of Sinhala Buddhism (see Johnson 2004 and Holt 1991). It has also been criticised by De Silva (2006) and Spencer (1990) for its highly Weberian or

practices” demonstrated that Buddhism has long centred on the worship of the Buddha, relics, stupas and icons (Lopez 1955, Spiro 1971).

The literature on Sinhala Buddhism is vast and in many ways a very different topic to Tibetan tantric Buddhism that is the concern of my research. However, what is interesting within this discussion is the focus on the ground practices of Buddhism—how Buddhism is lived and its rituals performed rather than on textual, philosophical representations. My field site, Dzogchen Monastery, was home to varied groups of practitioners during my research period; in particular, visiting international students from Europe, Australia and the USA, each with differing levels of experience and knowledge of Buddhism, and different ways of engaging with Buddhism.¹⁵ I observe how the rituals are presented or modified so that they can be performed by all members and I consider how this feeds into the main objective of the monastic committee, the sustaining of their Buddhist traditions, and the cohesion of their community outside of Tibet.

Another important factor to consider, which the Sinhala Buddhist research highlights, is the political context within which the type of Buddhism is practised and what influence it holds. The Sinhala Buddhist community faced threats from Christian missionaries, which meant that many of their practices were modified, and the public presentation of the texts altered to serve a strategic anti-colonial purpose of achieving dominance over the missionaries (Tambiah 1992). My fieldwork took place during on-going political and social instability and disharmony for the monastery. There was still general unrest in Tibet, which included more than 130 self-immolations in protest over three years,¹⁶ and many of the monks or their friends and families experienced difficulties first hand. Faced with exposure to a new environment and new community members (international students), and also with issues amongst the different divisions within Tibetan Buddhism, the monastic committee who controlled the monastic operations were also attempting to readdress the balance of power and regain the influence previously enjoyed before they were exiled. I discuss the upheaval experienced by the Tibetan Buddhist community during the Cultural Revolution in Tibet in the following chapter: this will provide the historical context to my research as I situate my field site.

functionalist view of Buddhism; in the particular, the use of binary categories such as “village” or “urban”, “worldly” or “other worldly”, “tradition” or “modern” (De Silva 2006).

¹⁵ The international students and their organisation are explained in full in Chapter 3.

¹⁶ Source <http://freetibet.org/news-media/na/full-list-self-immolations-tibet> - a full list of all Tibetans who have burnt themselves to death in protest to Chinese rule.

As well as providing a historical and social context to the rituals, I use my fieldwork to demonstrate that the paradigm of embodiment is a compatible approach to both documenting and understanding the performance of certain tantric¹⁷ Buddhist rites,¹⁸ which, to the best of my knowledge, have not previously been viewed through an anthropological lens. Such rites are paradoxical in nature in so much as the purity of the body is a central focus but at the same time it is a state of “bodilessness”, having no body or form entering parinirvana (also known as enlightenment or absolute purity in Buddhist terminology), which the performer is trying to achieve. Through obtaining purity of the body in this life, the practitioner is endeavouring to go behind the cycle of death and rebirth, known as samara, and achieve an enlightened state where they no longer need to be reborn in a physical body (Coogan 2005). This is thought to be experienced as the complete unity of “mind and body, self and other, mind and nature, being and nothingness” (Scheper-Hughes and Lock 1987: 13). Through my exploration of these different tantric rituals, I will demonstrate, in a similar vein to Geertz (1973) who said that the Western view of the individual and the body that houses it is not shared by all cultures, that this particular Buddhist community has a very distinct view of the body and its role within society.

The bodiless state that Buddhists strive to achieve can be understood as the complete liberation from samsara, the never-ending cycle of birth, death and rebirth (Kapstein 2006). According to Buddhist belief, beings are trapped in the cyclical existence of samsara, which is characterised by suffering, and through achieving a pure state of existence; they gain secure freedom from this suffering and enter parinirvana, a bodiless state. When he achieved enlightenment, the Buddha is thought to have entered parinirvana (Xue-Jun 2008). During my fieldwork, I encountered a number of rituals used to help achieve this bodiless state and throughout the thesis I will describe four of the main rituals in detail: rabnye, the transmission of purity from the lama to an object or individual; the khatag exchange, a gift offering ritual in exchange for purity; the performance of prostrations, a full length bow repeated hundreds of thousands of times to generate purity; and the embodied worship of kora, circumambulation of sacred sites dedicated to the lama. As I describe these rituals in turn, I will contextualise them against previous and current discussions of ritual performance; in particular, those that deal with tantric Tibetan Buddhism and the anthropology of Tibet as a whole (amongst others Gellner (2001)

¹⁷ “tantras, a set of esoteric scriptures... a specialised path .. for priests, monks and other virtuosi” (Gellner 2001:48).

¹⁸ In particular the rabnye ritual (Chapter 6) and the enthronement ceremony (Chapter 7).

Kvaerne (1985), Mills (2000, 2013), Samuel (1993), Schaik & Kapstein (2010)). Whilst the practitioner is performing physical bodily worship in order to achieve a bodiless state, I will further analyse how this strengthens the belief system and behaviour surrounding the body of the lama as head of the monastic body.

Ritual, Power and Self-cultivation

During my fieldwork, I encountered an on-going relationship between the body, rituals and power. For Foucault (1977), the body acts as a site of political and cultural manipulation “directly involved in a political field; power relations have an immediate hold on it; they invest in it, mark it, train it, torture it, force it to carry out tasks, to perform ceremonies, to emit signs” (1977:25). In particular circumstances where the social order is threatened, restrictions on the body intensify (those regarding self-control and social control) and, according to Scheper-Hughes and Lock, “the boundaries between the individual and political bodies become blurred” (1987:24). At such times, there is extra concern with purity, which manifests through heightened concern with bodily boundaries. When a community sees itself as being under threat, there is often an increase in social control over the body and its boundaries (Douglas 1966). The body can be viewed as a symbol of society and Turner (1984) says: “The body is a site of enormous symbolic work and symbolic production. Its deformities are stigmatic and stigmatizing, while at the same time its perfections, culturally defined, are objects of praise and admiration” (1984:151).

As a refugee community with instability continuing within Tibet and also within the Dzogchen School of Buddhism itself, with the identification of an alternative Dzogchen Rinpoche, the social order and hierarchy at the monastery was an on-going concern for the monastic authority. The interaction of the three main groups within the community (monks, international students and laity) during each ritual, under the overarching authority of the monastic committee and the main lama, offers compelling insights into the relationship between “subject” and power and the act of “subjectification” (Foucault 1982). In his essay *The Subject and Power* (1982), Foucault proposes that “subject” is not the same as an individual. An individual becomes a subject; she is transformed through external events and actions undertaken by herself. This process is subjectification (Foucault 1982).

Subject has two meanings. Firstly, being subject to someone else through control and dependence. Secondly, having influence over one's own identity by a conscience or self-knowledge (Foucault 1982: 781). Foucault describes the process of creating the subject through two main technologies "technologies of power, which determine the conduct of individuals and submit them to certain ends or domination, an objectivizing of the subject", and "technologies of the self, which permit individuals to effect by their own means or with the help of others a certain number of operations on their bodies and souls, thoughts, conduct, and the way of being, so as to transform themselves" (Foucault 1988: 18).

Technologies of power and technologies of self are particularly evident in the rituals performed at Dzogchen Monastery. The ritual participants use a number of technologies of the self and operations upon their own bodies for transformation whilst interacting with the technologies of power that reside over the rituals. The primary technology of power at the monastery is the overarching Tibetan Buddhist doctrine of embodiment that deems embodied rituals and worship necessary. These rituals are further governed by rules administered by the monastic authorities that attempt to restructure bodies and minds. However, the ritual participants are not just passive subjects and have the capacity to control their actions and to realise their own purity through technologies of the self. The repetition of 100,000 prostrations, the performance of kora (circumambulation) around centres of purity, khatag offerings and participation in empowerments and enthronements can all be viewed as technologies of self. Although technologies of self are broadly understood as how people police or monitor their own actions in order to conform with wider societal expectations, I will argue further on in this section, that the participants have greater agency than just conforming to an authority or to what other people think about them. The ritual participants have an opportunity to realise their own purity and achieve the embodiment of purity. Conversely for the monastery and their political aims, interaction with the ritual subjects enables the creation of their own power and strengthens their social positioning allowing them to extend the reach of their social and political power. So even though the monastery operates with a hierarchical structure, it is mutually beneficial; both the ritual participants and the monastery gain from the arrangement. I explore this distinct organisation throughout the thesis, particularly in Chapter 5 where I discuss the social organisation of the international students, and in Chapter 8 during the closed retreat where international students perform 100,000 prostrations.

Talal Asad's (1993) work *Genealogies of Religion* uses Foucault's theory of subject and power, and looks at body discipline in religious training and its relation to power. In his analysis of medieval Christian monastics, Asad discusses the "The Rule of Saint Benedict", the monastic system of governance, and the formation of technologies of self, particularly the willing obedience to authority (1993:165). In line with Foucault's theory, Asad's analysis reveals that body discipline creates two types of power: the power to create and control particular moral dispositions and capacities, and the power of those ruling the monastery.

Asad makes a number of key points that are particularly relevant to my field site. Firstly, he argues that it is the relationship between the Benedictine monks themselves that initially influences behaviour. As he puts it:

"Relations between the monks which define the duties of each, as well as the manner of their performance, are therefore intrinsic to the development of the ascetic technology of the self, and so to its accuracy and effectiveness (1993:113)."

The interaction between the monks and how they behave when performing their daily tasks provides individual opportunities to develop technologies of the self such as disengagement of will. These individual opportunities are, however, "dependent on the institutional resources of organised community life" (1993:112) because obedience and other similar qualities can only be learned and practised in an "organised community subject to the authority and discipline of an abbot" (1993:113). Asad then takes Foucault's description of the body, "as the arena for the continuous labour of inspecting and testing" (1993:113) and then extends this understanding to the monastic body as a whole.

"In this area, there is no longer a single point of surveillance from which the self examines itself, but an entire network of functions through which watching, testing, learning and teaching, can take place (1993:113)."

So according to Asad, the religious community did not repress the self. In fact, it did the very opposite. It provided the environment and the discipline necessary to develop a particular kind of self. The Benedictine monks were searching for their "truthful self" (1993:115); one that was not preoccupied with its own desires and sensations, but one that was cultivated through

living at the monastery under the authority and control of the abbot. The subject and its relationship with the governing authority were so dependent on each other that the “truthful self” could only be found through “the continuous work of a structured community (1993:115)”.

I will argue throughout this thesis that this organisation has a number of similarities with the organisation of the community at my field site. Dzogchen practitioners wish to realise purity but this is dependent upon the lama, the main authority at the monastery. The rituals performed at the monastery, their structure and specific instructions and requirements for bodily practice, are an essential component in achieving a pure body. Without the rituals, there is no vehicle or occasion to receive a transmission of purity from the lama. The ritual participants willingly submit themselves to the authority of the lama and the monastery because to do so is critical to the realisation of purity. Submission to authority is viewed as a positive and enabling experience because purity is not something that can be realised in isolation but it is dependent upon the network of relations within the sangha, the ritual community, and the relationship with the lama. Obedience and reverence for the religious hierarchy are considered virtuous qualities and strength of character rather than weakness.

In her book *Politics of Piety* (2005), Saba Mahmood discusses a similar relationship between the contemporary women’s piety movement in the mosques of Cairo, Egypt, and their obedience and submission to religious authority. The movement focused on the “reading of the scriptures, social practices and forms of bodily comportment considered germane to the cultivation of the ideal virtuous self” (2005:4). Mahmood considers what agency means for the women of the movement, when subordination to external authority is a prerequisite for the development of the self and explores how this understanding of agency poses some conceptual challenges to feminist theory and secular liberal thought in general.

Mahmood’s main argument is that agency does not just come through resistance to norms; it can be created through how norms are inhabited so that the women in the mosque movement might be seen as generating agency through submission to authority (God) in order to cultivate a particular type of pious self. Following Foucault through Talal Asad, Mahmood explores “the work that discursive practices perform in making possible particular kinds of subjects” (2005:188). The discursive practices, in addition to the being presented in the overarching

Islamic discourse on piety, were established in the weekly religious meetings held by the women themselves and through their own readings and analysis of the Islamic texts. Mahmood uses Foucault's work on the ethics of the self and the process of subjectification to argue that the operations of power that complete the making and the subordination of the subject are the very processes by which the subject gains agency and the capacity to act.

Mahmood argues that the pious self is not something that is formulated within and then practiced externally, but that rehearsals by the body create the conditions within the mind for the pious self. The wearing of the hijab (veil) is used as an example: "They draw, therefore, an ineluctable relationship between the norm (modesty) and the bodily form it takes (the veil) such that the veiled body becomes the necessary means through which the virtue of modesty is both created and expressed" (2005:23). So for Mahmood, bodily practices become a means to create and express an identity, or a type of self, and this idea resonates with the rehearsal of embodied worship and modes of ritual being constructed and expressed through the body at my field site. Mahmood's work focuses on the pious self and there is a similar understanding of the self within Buddhism (see Spiro (1966) and Williams (1963) for their work on the virtuous self and morality), but at Dzogchen Monastery the concern is for purity and its embodiment. Purity is understood and expressed in different ways but for comparison with the notion of self-cultivation, it can be understood as the practitioners seeking to abandon the individual self and achieve union with the three pure bodies, the three kayas. This state is understood as the realisation of their own purity. The possibility to achieve union with the three pure bodies is intensified during rituals because of the presence of the lama. As the embodiment of purity, he has the capacity to assist others to realise their own pure capacity and so the body's orientation and movement within and around the ritual space in relationship to the lama holds great significance.

Mahmood's work is particularly useful when understanding the involvement of the international students and why they commit themselves to the monastic ideals and participate in the ritual environment. The students, a mixture of nationalities, professions and Buddhist experience, all travel to a remote part of the Indian countryside to participate in the retreats. One can broadly ascertain through their choice to be at the monastery that they are willing participants and that they have positive and enabling experiences during their time there or logically they would not return annually. Mahmood remarks that the dominant thought

amongst “progressive leftists” within the West is that when people submit to religious authority, it is through lack of education or reasoning (2005: xxii), but this demographic clearly shows otherwise. All educated, financially independent and not born or raised within Buddhist countries they have made an autonomous decision (at least at the start of their ritual journey) to attend events at Dzogchen Monastery and participate in the rituals.

Due to my position as trustee for Shenpen UK and its ethical implications on my fieldwork, (discussed on page 60), I was not able to interview the international students in great depth as Mahmood did with the mosque participants, and so data on personal motivations and experiences is limited within my thesis. Shenpen, its values and organisational principles, and the student’s individual connection to it, is intertwined implicitly throughout life at the monastery for the international community. As a result, much of the ethnographic data that I gathered would not have been useable without a theoretical framework which allowed me to look at the community in more structural terms. The work of Foucault, Asad, and Mahmood outlined above, in addition to the analytical category of embodiment, provided an alternative lens; one through which I, at times a compromised researcher through my dual role as a trustee and also a student of Dzogchen Rinpoche, could view my field site and draw insights into the experience of the subject and their relationship with power and the notion of pure self.

The lama as a subject

In addition to the three main groups (monks, international students and laity) that became subjects within the subject and power relationship at the field site, there was also the central subject of the lama. Despite being born pure, there are a number of rituals that the lama must participate in whilst growing up and in everyday life and associated social processes that he must interact with. He too must become a “subject”, develop technologies of self, and interact with technologies of power. For example, rules of purity placed on the individual body of the lama cover how he can and can’t interact with people, which parts of his body may or may not be touched, where he may or may not sit or stand, and what he can or cannot eat.

Lamas are typically chosen for their position at a young age through a system of reincarnation recognition; a young boy is recognised as an incarnation of a lama who has passed away (Mackenzie 1996, 1997, Thondup 2011). In the case of my field site, the main lama was chosen at eight years of age, and, in Chapter 7, I describe an enthronement ceremony of two young

lamas who are six years old. From the time of their official recognition and throughout their young lives, they follow a rigorous system of training which includes a strict daily schedule of study and religious practice and have various disciplines and bodily boundaries enforced on them such as stringent rules on engaging socially with others to limit bodily contact and a strong focus on hygiene and cleanliness so that the young lama does not become contaminated.¹⁹ Whilst the lamas will develop more autonomy as they grow up, there are many forms of encoded behaviour and disciplines still enforced on them during rituals and general day-to-day living. For example, the head lama at Dzogchen Monastery is married and has children (discussed in Chapter 3) but he still is expected only to sit on chairs designated only for him or that are covered with a chair carpet,²⁰ or eat from food prepared in his kitchen and from his own crockery to avoid contamination. Turner (1984) argues that body maintenance or control creates social relations and also reaffirms or denies them. Religious rituals create a social bond between their practitioners and here the bond is between the lama and the practitioner. Within the theoretical framework laid out here by Foucault (1982), Asad (1993) and Mahmood (2005), I will consider the implications of such practices and how they contribute to the belief in purity of the lama and his, and the monastery's consequential social power.

This is not the first time that an anthropological study of the body has been applied to Tibetan Buddhism and the role of the lama. As well as Zivkovic (2010a, 2010b, 2010c), the issue is discussed in depth by Bernstein (2013) in her work *Religious Bodies Politic: Rituals of Sovereignty in Buryat Buddhism*. Bernstein studied the reincarnation system within the Buryat tradition of Tibetan Buddhism and she describes how the body of the lama becomes a canvas onto which competing claims of religious and cultural beliefs are inscribed as the Buryat Buddhists attempt to develop their own unique and indigenous system of Buddhism. Bernstein argues that it is “the ability of these reincarnated bodies to cross various boundaries, both physical and metaphorical, that has given them their prominence in the current debates on authority, tradition, and religious sovereignty” (2013:66). Similarly, Moran (2004) suggests that as the pure bodies of the tulkus [incarnate lamas] have always “pointed to something beyond themselves” (in terms of the lineage (how the tradition continues over time) and the

¹⁹ For a vivid account of the common isolation and restrictions placed on young lamas, please see the story of Osel Hita Torres, a Spanish boy recognised as a lama whilst he was a toddler. "The Reluctant Lama" BBC Radio 4, or report in *The Telegraph*, <http://www.telegraph.co.uk/news/worldnews/europe/spain/9574777/Tibetan-lama-reincarnation-rediscovers-himself-in-Ibiza.html>

²⁰ His attendants will often travel ahead of time to his destination to ensure that the correct seating is available.

history, often of different geographic areas) and so have become the “allegorical bodies” of Tibet as a nation. They also have exercised significant mobility bringing and representing Tibetan Buddhism to international audiences (Moran 2004: 14-34). Building on Bernstein’s analysis, I explore how the aspirations of and the claims of authority by the monastic committee are inscribed on the body of the main lama through various embodied rituals and the responses that these rituals generate from the collective social body of the Buddhist community.

The difference in my study compared to Bernstein’s is that the politics played out upon the lama’s body are not regarding a nation as a whole, but of Dzogchen, a particular school within Tibetan Buddhism. In addition, there are contesting claims of numerous different groups inscribed on the lama’s body as the monastery re-establishes itself in exile, in a refugee settlement, and aims to extend its reach across the globe, encountering an audience of many different nationalities. I suggest that through the system of reincarnation, the lamas are presented as having transcended the borders between life and death and so become a link between the past and the present, joining disparate groups to the lineage, many of who previously would have had little or no connection to it.

Thesis Overview

I will now provide a brief synopsis of my chapters. In the following chapter entitled The Tibet Question, I provide some historical context to the present situation of the Tibetan community in exile and how this particular group of Tibetans ended up in an isolated patch of South Indian countryside miles away from their counterparts in North India. I summarise the complex relationship between Tibet and China outlining each nation’s claims to the Himalayan region. I also introduce the fatalistic attitude that many Tibetans hold about their diaspora, which is related to the prediction by the founder of Buddhism in Tibet, Padmasambhava, that the Chinese would invade Tibet and the Tibetan people would suffer a subsequent diaspora. This prediction is recorded in religious scripts and also folk tales and I comment on how this contributes to the Tibetan people’s strong faith in the authority of the lama. To conclude the chapter, I situate myself in the field, explain my methodology, how I came to secure access to this previously inaccessible community and I discuss the ethical dilemma I encountered as a researcher and a trustee for Shenpen UK, the charity associated with the monastery.

In Chapter 3, I introduce the field site of Dzogchen Monastery in depth and explain the structure of Buddhism and specifically Tibetan Buddhism and where Dzogchen Buddhism sits within it. I cover the hierarchical structure at the monastery and the details of the different groups that inhabit it during the time of my fieldwork. I conclude the chapter by introducing the reader to the specific layout and arrangement of the building explaining how the material structure of the monastery is dedicated to the principle of the pure lama. In Chapter 4, I unpack the concept of a pure lineage [brgyud pa]; the historical and living line of lamas who hold the power within the Buddhist community and look at the various perspectives of purity held at the monastery.

Chapter 5 outlines some of the boundaries and disciplines inscribed on the lama's body and how three different groups (the monks, the international students and visiting lamas) interact with the lama and their motivation for doing so. Chapter 6 explores the ritual of rabnye and I explore the boundaries of purity and analyse how purity is thought to be transmitted from the lama to people and also to objects. In Chapter 7, I focus on the khatag [ceremonial white silk scarf] exchange ritual that took place at the enthronement ceremony of two young lamas, also known as tulkus, who have been identified as reincarnate lamas. I consider whether the exchange can be viewed as a gift-giving rite as a way to generate merit, or if the role of the lama and the giver's desire to receive purity in return prevent the existence of a gift. I also consider how the khatags are both a symbol of the strength of the lineage and a literal representation of the power and growth of the Buddhist community. The following Chapter (8) then looks at how specific types of embodied worship are used to generate purity and in doing so create centres of power dedicated to the purity of the lama. I look at prostrations [full length bows] and also kora [circumambulating sacred sites], and I explore how these embodied behaviours reinforce the belief in the purity of the lama and support the agenda of the monastic committee in preserving the lineage in exile.

The penultimate chapter introduces the idea of bodilessness; a non-physical state that is thought by the community at my field site to be achieved by the dissolution of the body. Dissolution is considered the highest level of purity and I explore how it is related to the embodiment of purity and the rituals that are used to achieve the non-physical state. I consider how this idea fits with the current anthropological discussions on the body and embodiment— if the body is the ground of all experience, all perception and all culture, then how do these

ideas fit with the concept of bodilessness? I discuss how this impacts upon the position of the lama at the top of the social hierarchy—by promoting the dissolution of the physical body, does this take away the power of the lama who is revered for his pure body?

To conclude my thesis, I review how my ethnography at Dzogchen Monastery adds to the anthropological discussions on purity and embodiment. As the chapters progress, I demonstrate how purity does not remain a fixed binary concept and instead I develop a new four-part analytical notion of purity. I review each of these parts and discuss how this understanding has been drawn from folk and doctrinal notions of purity. I consider the role embodiment plays in creating an alternative understanding of the body and the immaterial body and how this contributes to an existing list of alternative bodies by earlier theorists including Scheper Hughes and Locke (1987) and Leder (1990). I also review how the rituals contribute to the temporary unification of the three groups and how it allows them to momentarily suspend their differences so that they can cohabit the monastic compound.

Chapter 2 The Tibet Question

The question of Tibetan autonomy is one that has been discussed in popular media, personal biographies, and in academic discourse for more than half a century²¹ and supporters on both the Chinese and Tibetan sides remain steadfast in their own claims to the Himalayan region at the “roof of the world”. Tibetan refugees outside Tibet now number around 128,000²² (population within Tibet is around six million²³) and the situation within Tibet continues to remain unstable as the number of Tibetans who have committed self-immolation (monks, nuns and lay people burning themselves to death in protest over the current Chinese rule) has reached a total of more than 130.²⁴ This is not foremost a historical or politically-motivated study, but the displacement of the Tibetan peoples and their attempts to recreate aspects of their religious traditions in exile is a central concern, so it is important to provide a brief overview of the historical context of the displacement in order to situate my research. In fact, the idea and identity of an independent Tibet is so interwoven within the fabric of Tibet’s religious traditions along with historical figures and significant events that maintained and propagated the independent status that is impossible to have one without the other. The first part of this chapter will detail the recent political history between Tibet and China in the build up to the current antagonised relationship; it will also consider the religious beliefs held by many Tibetans, which help fuel their resistance. In drawing the chapter to a close, I situate myself as a researcher within this broader context and describe how I gained access to the field site and look at the challenges I faced whilst in the field and during writing this thesis.

The histories of China and Tibet have been entwined through periods of shared rule, religious and cultural exchanges, diplomatic and trade agreements since the Mongol era of the 13th and 14th Centuries and there have been numerous diplomatic and military interactions ever since (Buell 2011, Davidson 2009, Van Schaik 2011, Smith 2009). The balance of the relationship throughout this period has depended on a variety of domestic conditions and external threats and the nature of these relations has repeatedly swung back and forth between conflict and

²¹ For Tibet favoured discussions, see Smith 2009 and for Chinese favoured discussions, see Ye Xiaowen 2008 and for more neutral discussions, see Powers 2004, Ardley 2002, Goldstein 1991. For a comprehensive of accounts and their bias, see Lintner 2015.

²² <http://tibet.net/about-cta/tibet-in-exile/>; <http://www.hindustantimes.com/India-news/NorthIndia/127935-Tibetans-living-outside-Tibet-Tibetan-survey/Article1-634405.aspx>

²³ <http://tibetanyouthcongress.org/facts-about-tibet/> This figure is disputed by the Chinese government who number the population at around 3 million. (<http://english.cntv.cn/20110718/105374.shtml>) Tibetan sources explain this as 2.09 million live in the “TAR” and the rest in the Tibetan areas outside the “TAR”.

²⁴ <http://www.freetibet.org/news-media/na/full-list-self-immolations-tibet>

partnership. Recent historiography, particularly those written by Tibetan scholars and sympathisers, places China as the constant aggressor, but between the 14th – 20th Century it was not unusual for China to be called on to play the role of the protectorate for Tibet, particularly when treaties or trade agreements with international powers did not go as planned (Van Schaik 2011). For example, when Great Britain, from its vantage point of colonial India, was pushing for trade and access routes further into Asia in the late nineteenth century, they signed the Anglo-Chinese Convention with China in 1890 that granted Britain access to Tibet. The Tibetans refused the agreement made in Beijing protesting at the lack of consultation, which, after a number of years, led to the frustrated British invading Tibet in 1904. The British expedition was led by Lord Curzon and was also heavily motivated by the threat of Russian advances from the North. Lord Curzon wanted to squash any potential alliance between Tibetan and Russian authorities (Marshall 2005). Realising the severity of the attack and its threatening consequences to Tibet as a whole, and also being unwilling to submit to the British aggressors, the Tibetan government again sought assistance from the Qing court in Beijing despite previously refusing their offers of military and administrative provision. This request for support from Beijing, although not particularly effective in stopping the British invasion (Lord Curzon reached Lhasa and the Anglo-Tibetan Agreement of 1904 was signed allowing the British access to trade routes), is a good example of how closely the political agendas of the two countries were intertwined during this period and the back and forth nature of their relationship (Marshall 2005).

Support, predominantly administrative, from Beijing remained in Tibet's capital city, Lhasa, until the Qing Regime collapsed in 1911 and their last officials left in 1913. At this time, Tibet severed all ties with China and whilst China was troubled with the Japanese invasion in 1937, the threat of World War 2 and then civil war between the government of Chiang Kaishek and the Chinese Communist party of Mao Zedong, Tibet enjoyed a 40-year period of independence.²⁵ It is this period that Tibetans in exile today predominantly refer to when they discuss the Tibet Question and it is ethnic Tibet as it existed in the period of 1911-50, an area totalling 2.5 million square kilometres un-inhabited by the ethnic Han Chinese comprising of the three provinces of Amdo, Kham and U-Tsang that they lay claim to in geographic terms (shown in the map below).

²⁵ Other periods of independence include 1368 to 1644 during the Ming Dynasty when China had few ties to and no authority over Tibet (van Walt 1987).



Fig. 2.1. Source: www.buddhanet.net

Ethnic Tibet as it existed in the period of 1911-50

However, it would be inaccurate to assume that this was a wholly peaceful period and in the first half of the 20th century, Lhasa's army fought many Tibetans grouped as armed guerrilla forces led by chieftains from Eastern Tibet. There were 400 to 500 major battles in Kham (Eastern Tibet) from 1911 to 1935 (Sautman 2009). "Armed guerrilla forces increasingly occupied the central Tibetan military (while) fighting intensified after the death of the 13th Dalai Lama in 1933" (McGranahan 2003; see also Leibold 2007). The main purpose of including this information is to show that although Tibet was a unified and independent nation during this period, it was not a country free from internal political issues and threats to stability. For example, from the mid-9th century, the people of Kham, under leadership of chieftains, were able to rule with a large degree of independence from both China and central Tibet (Richardson 1984).

China takes control

After two decades of civil and international war in China, Mao Zedong established The People's Republic of China (PRC) on October 1, 1949. The PRC and their communist philosophy did not accept Tibet's proclaimed independence of the last 40 years and in October 1950, the People's Liberation Army (PLA) began launching incursions into Eastern Tibet to test the strength of the Tibetan resistance (Powers 2004). Confident in the Chinese military

advantage, Radio Peking announced that the PLA would liberate Tibet from American and British imperialists on January 1st 1950 (Van Schaik 2011). Despite no Americans and only one British man living in Tibet at that time, the PRC remained adamant that Tibet's independent attitude was down to foreign influence. However, Van Schaik (2011) believes that it had become a matter of national pride as China had suffered defeat to America, Britain and Japan over the past century which also had large implications for the defence strategy of the PRC—with Tibet annexed as part of China, the PRC would be protected by the Himalayas but if not, the south western border would be along the Yangtze River, a difficult terrain to defend.

In a last bid attempt to save their sovereignty, a delegation was sent to Beijing by the Tibetan government to open a dialogue with the Chinese headed by Ngabo Ngawang Jigme, governor of Kham (Halper and Halper 2013). According to historical sources (Goldstein 1991), the delegation was not officially empowered to reach a settlement. Its main objective was to convince the Chinese leadership against continuing their invasion of Tibet. However, Beijing had very different ideas and to them it was non-negotiable and the discussions were purely based upon whether or not the PLA was to use force to annex Tibet (Van Schaik 2011). The Tibetan Government in Exile claims that the delegation was forced against their will to sign the Seventeen Point Agreement on May 23, 1951, which outlined how Tibet was officially part of China.²⁶ With the agreement signed and faced with a huge military attack should they refuse to cooperate, the Tibetan kashag [government] was forced to allow the PLA to march through Kham and onwards to the capital, Lhasa, in central Tibet (Van Schaik 2011). The PRC then began a major reform of all social, religious, economic and political aspects of Tibetan life in line with Mao Zedong's vision of the super Chinese state (Shakya 1999). Some Tibetans grouped as guerrilla forces and tried to fight back. The Khampas (people from the Kham region of Tibet) formed armed revolts as the reforms grew more severe in 1956, but they were outnumbered and quickly dispersed (Goldstein 1991).

Tibet's failure to join The United Nations (UN) when it had the opportunity to do so during its 40 years of independence (reasons for this are discussed in the next section), meant that the UN did not question China's sovereignty over Tibet and the Tibetan government did not have any international allies who would lend military support. Its neighbour India did not want to risk a full-scale war with China, but was sympathetic to Tibet's cause, and so compromised by not

²⁶ <http://www.dalailama.com/biography/from-birth-to-exile>

turning away refugees. After eight years of failed negotiations to try and salvage some control over Tibet's future, the 14th Dalai Lama, leader of the Tibetan people and its former government, fled to India in 1959 at the beginning of what was to be a mass exile of the Tibetan people across its Himalayan borders. The Dalai Lama set up the Government of Tibet in Exile (TGE)²⁷ in Dharamsala—a democratically elected government²⁸ to provide representation in exile for Tibet (the area shown in the map above). However, the PRC did not accept this classification of Tibet (Wang and Nyima 1997, Sperling 2004) and divided the land according to their historical records, which asserted that Tibet should be part of a multi-ethnic China. The U-Tsang province has been renamed the Tibet Autonomous Region (TAR); the province of Amdo is now divided into the provinces of Qinghai, Gansu and Sichuan, which in turn incorporate most of the Kham province.



Fig. 2.2 Source: www.tibet.com

Map of Tibet showing the three distinct regions

²⁷ Also known as The Central Tibetan Administration (CTA; Tibetan: Tsänjöl Bhömī Drikdzuk, lit. "Exile Tibetan People's Organisation").

²⁸ The TGE continues to operate democratically with elections and any Tibetan in exile is permitted to vote. For further information on how democracy is conceptualised and operationalised among Tibetan exiles, please see Frechette (2007).

Tibetans in Exile

Tibetans in exile are now scattered across the world. The Tibetan Demographic Survey of 2009²⁹ totals the number of exiled Tibetans as approximately 128,000,³⁰ although there are thought to be many more—up to 150,000, if non-registered Tibetans are included (Mills et Al 2005). Ethnic Tibetans who live close to Tibet are now distributed across an area as vast as Western Europe that includes India (Ladakh, Sikkim, northern Uttar Pradesh, Karnataka and Arunachal Pradesh), Nepal and Bhutan (Goldstein 1993). With on-going unrest continuing in Tibet, this number increases year on year.

For those living in exile, the experience of "Tibetan-ness" is significantly different from those within Tibet, as illustrated by the work of Yeh (2002) in "Will the Real Tibetan Please Stand Up!: Identity Politics in the Tibetan Diaspora." Yeh contrasted the views of a group of 500 Tibetans living in the Bay Area of California with those she experienced during her fieldwork inside the TAR. She noted that Tibetans within TAR were in the midst of a redefining process, distinguishing themselves from the Han ethnic group that migrated to the TAR en masse. The daily lives of Tibetans and other ethnic groups have forcibly been mixed and as a result, the defining lines between Tibetans and Chinese were more subtle than most exiled Tibetans were willing to admit. Outside of Tibet, the community drew strong boundaries between themselves and their Chinese neighbours, suggesting that the essence of being Tibetan was to be completely other than Chinese. They saw Tibet as a united whole, and in some cases, mythologised their history to authenticate their claims (Yeh 2002:251). (For other sources on Tibetans in exile and their identity see Kharat 2003, Goldstein 1975, Houston and Wright 2010.)

My fieldwork was conducted outside of Tibet within an exiled community among whom I predominantly encountered the view that Tibetans are victims at the hands of the Chinese unified in their opposition to foreign rule. It's worth noting here that, as this study deals with Tibetans in exile who consistently refer to the geographic and ethnic classification of Tibet as it stood from 1911-50, I will use their terminology and refer to Tibet in this sense rather than the Tibet Autonomous Region, unless specifically stated in academic works to which I refer. This

²⁹ The most recent demographic survey and cited by the Tibetan Government in Exile on their website as the most accurate figures for Tibetans in Exile.

³⁰ <http://tibet.net/about-cta/tibet-in-exile/>

is to avoid confusion and to provide a consistent terminology for the Tibetans that are the subject of my research. Religious teachings and mythical stories from the past also shape the Tibetans' view of the Chinese occupation. The following section will explore how these stories influence how Tibetans feel they should behave in exile to ensure what they see as the propagation of their religious traditions.

The Tibetan Prophecy

"When the iron bird flies and horses run on wheels, the Tibetan people will be scattered like ants across the face of the earth, and the dharma³¹ will come to the land of the red-faced men."

Padmasambhava, 8th Century

In the 8th Century, Padmasambhava, the Indian Saint who spread Buddhism across the Himalayas, prophesised that although the practice of the Buddha's teachings was flourishing in Tibet, the "land of the snowy peaks" would not always remain the stronghold of the religion. Daily life on the Tibetan plateau would be disrupted to such an extent that its people would be dispersed across the world along with its religious traditions (Das 1998).

This prediction was recorded and embraced as enlightened doctrine by many Tibetan people (Tsogyal 2008) and even in the early part of the 20th Century, the Tibetan government was very cautious towards the future of Tibet. Domestic policy in 1930-1940s Tibet stipulated that foreign nationals were forbidden from crossing its borders and in 1945 the government opted against joining the United Nations to avoid any interference from foreign powers (Van Schaik 2011). The rationale influencing this judgment was that by disengaging from the external political community and severing ties with other countries, Tibet would be protected and would be able to maintain its sovereignty (Van Schaik 2011). As mentioned earlier in this chapter, this decision would cost them dearly in 1950 when the Chinese government sent in its first invading troops and they received no support from India, Britain or the United States (Marshall 2005, McGranahan 2003, Wang and Shakya 2009) and also for the next decade until Chairman Mao launched a full scale Cultural Revolution from 1966 through to 1976. Hundreds of thousands of Tibetans lost their lives: thousands of monasteries and retreat centres were

destroyed and many thousands of refugees fled across the Himalayas into India (UNHCR 2008). Whilst not used to excuse the suffering created by the Chinese occupation, the prophecy by Padmasambhava is often recalled by those Tibetans who view this cultural catastrophe as their destiny, a fulfilment of their country's karma.³² It is evident on Tibetan websites, in Buddhist books and from the topic arising in a number of conversations with my informants during my fieldwork. These conversations suggest that with this belief comes a sense of duty, an obligation to maintain their precious traditions in order to please their saints whilst displaced in foreign lands. The overall aim is that one day, the Buddha's teachings may prosper once more and that the Tibetan people and all followers of the dharma³³ may live in peace.

Within this thesis, I will explore the different means by which a Tibetan monastic community undertakes this commitment to preserving the past and to maintaining the religious rituals and practices that flourished pre-Cultural Revolution. This a commitment explicitly recognised by my interlocutors. It was also stated officially at public events, on the monastery's website and was the main focus of a major meeting of different Dzogchen lamas that took place during my fieldwork as described in Chapter 5. I record how in response to this perceived urgent need to preserve their ancient culture, private Buddhist rituals previously performed in isolation are shared by the monks with an international audience. The main purpose of these rituals was historically the transmission of spiritual knowledge but now, in public, I propose that they also have a social element to them and their successful passage across cultures and nationalities and is viewed as integral to the survival of Dzogchen Buddhism.

Dzogchen Monastery

In the next part of this chapter, I will describe the political reasons for re-homing Tibetan refugees in the Dhondenling Tibetan Settlement within the Chamrajnagar district near the Karnataka and Tamil Nadu border. The settlement's positioning in relation to the nearest city, Bangalore, is illustrated on the map on the following page.

³² The concept of "action" or "deed" is understood as that which causes the entire cycle of cause and effect, samsara (Dalai Lama 2000a).

³³ The Buddha's teachings.

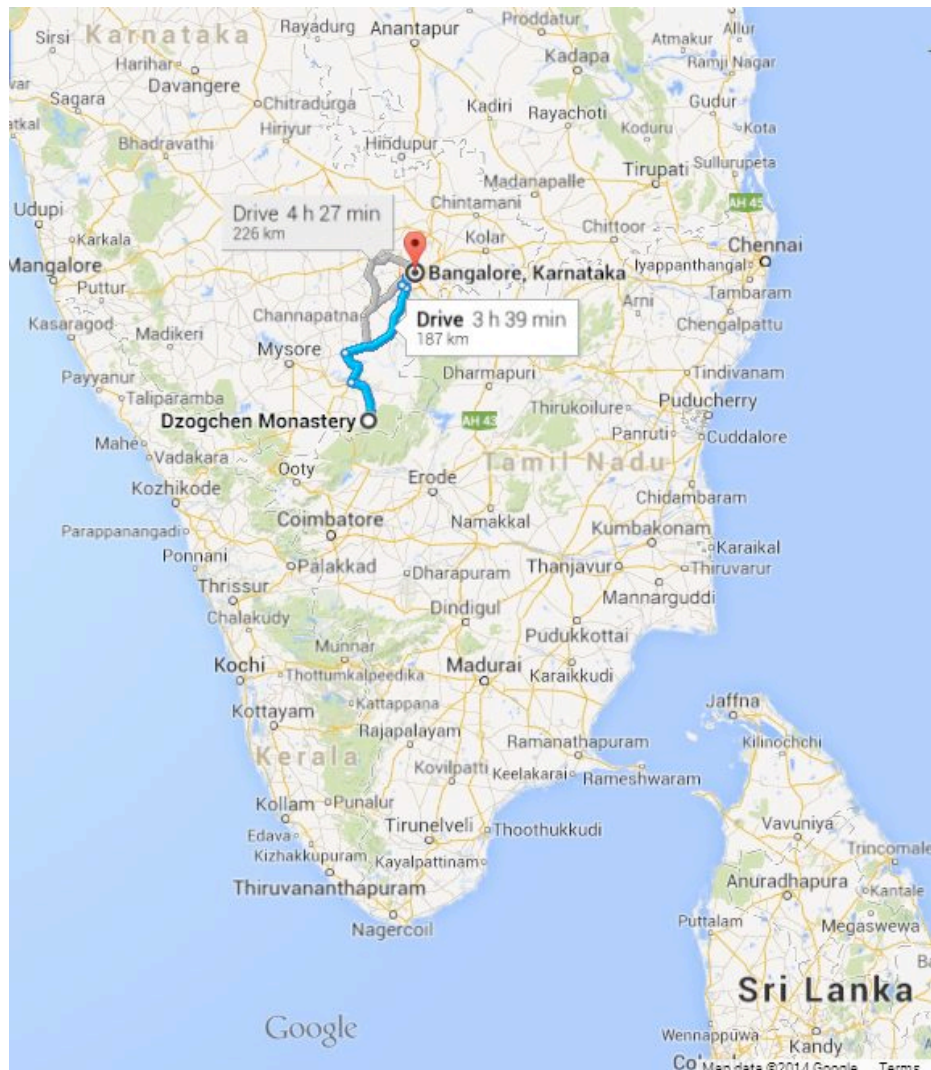


Fig. 2.3 Source: Google maps

Diving route: time and distance from Bangalore to Dzogchen Monastery



Fig. 2.4 Source: www.tibetfund.org 2002

Map of Tibetan settlements: Dhondenling Tibetan Settlement can be found on the bottom left of the map in Karnataka, in the bottom right hand corner of the state. As you can see, the settlement is a significant distance from Tibet.

The Indian government provided this relatively inaccessible piece of land of Dhondenling to the Tibetan refugees in the late 1960s as one of five areas within South India.³⁴ The settlement is around 3000 acres in size and at a height of 3345 ft. above sea level.³⁵ The first settlers in 1974 were a group of approximately 500 who had travelled south from Dharamsala, the exiled home of the Dalai Lama. They were not forced to travel to Dhondenling but for many it seemed like a good option with huge overcrowding and limited facilities in the North. When they arrived, they were faced with miles of shrub land, no buildings, no running water or electricity, and they set about the arduous and gruelling task of clearing the land, creating the beginnings of farmland. Many fell seriously ill from typhoid or tuberculosis from living in such harsh conditions but the refugees had no other option than to continue making Dhondenling their newfound home.³⁶



Fig. 2.5. Source: www.centraltibetanreliefcommittee.org
Dhondenling Tibetan Settlement from a distance.

Tibetan re-settlement by the Indian government took place in two phases (Conway 1975). At first, the government was reluctant to offend China by offering financial support to the Tibetan refugees and the majority of aid was received from international relief organisations whose

³⁴ The other four settlements are in Bylakuppe (2), Mundgod and Hunsur <http://ctrc.tibet.net/settlements-in-india.html>

³⁵ <http://ctrc.tibet.net/settlements/india/south/dhondenling.html>

³⁶ http://www.dzogchenmonastery.org/refugee_settlement.html

priority was to provide food and the general means needed for survival. Then in 1966, the Indian government stepped up the urgency of the relief effort; a large-scale re-settlement movement from temporary camps into more permanent communities began with the receipt of \$3,500,000 in funds from European Refugee Year (total funds available rose to around \$9,000,000 from other donors) (Woodcock 1970). In 1968, the Mysore Resettlement and Development Agency (MYRADA) partnered with the Board of Trustees for the Common Project of the European Refugee Campaign and a large amount of uncultivated land was made available near Mysore in Karnataka. Little else was presented and so the sole availability of the land near Mysore and its potential to be redeveloped into a sustainable way of life determined the future of the refugees. The Dhondenling settlement agreement was part of this initiative (Woodcock 1970).

As Goldstein (1975) explains the idea reached by the Dalai Lama's administration, the Government of India and MYRADA "was to resettle Tibetans then living in transit camps or working on road repair gangs and to provide them with assistance and resources so that within a period of five years they could become economically self-sufficient. This, if successful, would not only permanently take care of the refugee population, but it would also help India's food needs by bringing unused land under cultivation" (1975:398).

Over the next four decades, the development of the Dhondenling settlement continued and 22 villages (with around 25-35 families in each), four kindergartens, a high school, village halls, a small hospital and the communal shopping area of Tsundoe with a few village shops were established. The villages are each named with a letter of the English alphabet because few Tibetans had grasped Kannada, the local language, but some were able to read English after their time in Dharamsala. Each village is now home to between 250-300 people often grouped by their indigenous area within Tibet (from Kham, Amdo etc.) because of the regional dialect of Tibetan that is spoken—those who speak the same dialect were grouped together. The settlement now has approximately 4,000 inhabitants, but it remains the youngest and most remote of the five Tibetan settlements in South India.

Most of the villagers worked in agriculture during the early years of establishing the settlement. The Dhondenling terrain was tough to farm without electricity and the seasons were quite extreme. In the dry season, for instance, water was only available through certain wells,

often some miles apart. Adjustment and acclimatisation proved difficult for the Himalayan farmers and when crops failed, there was little in reserve to offer support. Some families sought additional strands of income through seasonal markets and travelled to cities in North India to sell jumpers and woollen clothes during the winter months. This type of employment separated families for large parts of the year but offered a more regular source of income. Others continued with more traditional crafts such as carpet weaving or producing egg noodles and sold them in the nearby towns of Oderyarpalaya or Kollegal.

Located within the catchment area of Bangalore, the demographic profile of Dhondenling has seen dramatic changes as a result of the increasing liberalisation of the Indian economy. Over the past two decades, Bangalore has become the silicon centre of India, a focal point for IT and electrical engineering industries. Call centres managing the service operations for multinational companies have emerged as the major employers within the city attracting young migrant workers in their thousands. (For ethnographies on call centres in India featuring Bangalore, see Friedman 2005, Varma 2007 and Clarke 2014.) Many young Dhondenling residents have migrated to Bangalore and become part of the “call centre generation”, leaving behind the more traditional occupations of farming, carpet weaving and woollen jumper trading. The numbers of residents between the ages of 18 and 30 is now fairly low in the Dhondenling settlement. However, my informants told me that young parents do often return to the villages to raise their families.³⁷

In communities from Tibet pre-Cultural Revolution, it was common amongst all social classes to send the eldest son to a monastery. According to Melvyn Goldstein (1989), during the 18th century, 13% of the population were monks, which equated to 26% of all males. In 1947, a sample survey by Chinese scholar Li Anzhai (Lixiong and Shakya 2009) recorded the percentage in the Gede area of Xikang³⁸ as having risen to 33.25%. In exile, this tradition is now in decline; many of the young monks at Dzogchen Monastery are from disadvantaged families in Nepal who have been sent to receive care and a Buddhist education. Through discussions during my fieldwork with Tibetan parents, it became apparent that they predominantly prefer that their children to receive a school education rather than monastic training. I encountered a couple of young boys who displayed a wish to enter a monastery but

³⁷ For further information about Tibetan settlements in South India, please see Bernstorff and von Welck 2003, Goldstein 1975, Bhatia, Dranyi, & Rowley 2002.

³⁸ The Gede area of Xikang is at the edge of the Plateau of Tibet, and was incorporated into Sichuan province in 1955.

their families chose to send them to larger monasteries (population of 6000+ monks) in Bylakuppe, another Tibetan settlement near Mysore, with education programmes that include kindergarten and high school diplomas alongside the monk's philosophical and ritual training. Although Dzogchen Monastery is a very significant institution within the Dzogchen tradition, as a result of its small size (200 monks instead of 2000) it does not have the same appeal as other larger monasteries at other settlements (e.g. Sera Je or Namdroling monasteries in Bylakuppe). There is also a geographic disconnection. My informants told me that most of the villagers in Dhondenling are from central Tibet where they follow a different type of Tibetan Buddhism (not Dzogchen) and therefore have allegiances with other monasteries. Dzogchen Monastery, Tibet is located within Eastern Tibet in the Kham region. This is quite a unique situation. Tibetan refugees usually settled near a monastery they had a connection to. For example, I have visited Bylakuppe and I know some of the Tibetan people who live there; they automatically have a connection to one of the monasteries within their settlement because of where their family is from in Tibet. Therefore the monastery of my field site, when compared to other main monasteries in exile, is a lot smaller, lacking a number of facilities and is also without a large lay community that lives in the surrounding area. The monastic committee tackles these issues in a variety of different ways: through rituals, through practical operations, and through a deliberate concentration on cultivating a wider international community of support. Later, I will explore the methods (predominantly rituals) deployed by the monastery to strengthen their position in exile and to ensure that their religious traditions are maintained, and, as they see it, in as pure a form as possible.

A Contemporary Ethnography

The situation encountered in Dzogchen is very different to what has been described in the ethnographic works of early anthropological studies of Tibetan Buddhist monastic communities that were approached in terms of a binary opposition between the relational and anti-relational individual (Ortner 1978, 1989). When someone is anti-relational, they sever all ties with family and community and live in isolation having renounced worldly concerns (Ortner 1978, 1989). For Ortner, whose research was conducted within Sherpa society in highland Nepal, monasteries were socially removed institutions where the highest Buddhist ideals of celibacy, renunciation and non-attachment were practised in isolation. Ortner analysed the interaction that took place within religious rituals between the monastic community and the

local Sherpa community and concluded that they reinforced an isolated anti-relational existence. This analysis assumes that an individual who removes himself from the social world is automatically anti-relational and views the relationship between the monk and the lay community as a simple dichotomy rather than a transformative, on-going process that occurs within a transient world.

The idea that monks are detached, both individualistic and renunciatory, was also developed by Spiro (1971) in his work in Burma on Theravada Buddhism and the psychological traits of the monks in his study. Spiro asserted that because monasticism required the monks to adopt world-rejecting attitudes, the number of people that could possibly become monks within any given society was actually quite small. Spiro believed that because of the unique personality characteristics mandatory for monkhood, monasticism as a mass phenomenon was highly unlikely. This idea highlights a fundamental difference between Mahayana Buddhism of Tibet and Theravada Buddhism of South East Asian as pointed out by Goldstein and Tsarong (1985). Monasticism in Tibet was organised on a giant scale and pre-1959, 10-15% of males were ordained as a life-long commitment. Compare this to Thailand where between 1966 and 1968 where 1-2% of males were ordained (Tambiah 1976).

The categorisation of monks as isolated individuals, detached and removed from the world within the context of my field site, offers an unsatisfactory description of the monastic way of life and does not adequately consider the social factors that influence community organisation and their rituals. Mill's study of a Ladakh monastery (2000), Goldstein and Tsarong's (1985) analysis of life at Kyilung Monastery, Terrone's observations of a modern day tertön [treasurer finder] in Tibet (2000),³⁹ and Ramble's analysis of the relationship between civil religion and Tibetan Buddhism in highland Nepal (2008) go some way to developing the understanding of a monk's make-up and describe more socially engaged monastic communities. However the geographical locations of the fieldwork (Himalayan countries) are not dissimilar to early works of Ortner and there is no reference to intercommunal influences that are experienced in the diasporic Tibetan communities, in particular at Dzogchen Monastery with the large international community that visit each year.

³⁹ A person who reveals religious scriptures, whether in a vision or physically finding them hidden in the ground or in rocks.

Also, at the time when Ortner (1978) conducted her fieldwork, the monastic community held a very privileged position within society. Its existence as a formal religious institution that could survive in relative isolation was made possible by financial support from the local community that believed making monetary offerings would earn them merit and improve their karmic chances in the next life (Ortner 1978). Ortner's work also perhaps reflects the idea of the Indian 'village republic' (Dewey 1972)—the idea that Indian villages existed as self-governing, relatively isolated units, economically and politically. However, subsequent scholarship (Breman 1988) has debunked this idea and demonstrated that villages have always been part of wider networks. Added to that, the forced exile of Tibetans and their subsequent social positioning as lowly refugees occupying remote, inaccessible farmland is clearly different to Ortner's analysis. The monasteries are no longer in the privileged position they once were and although they still exert some social and political powers, the influence of the lama-led governance of Tibetan communities is slowly in decline. For example, within the Dhondenling Tibetan Settlement that surrounds Dzogchen Monastery, each village has its own official representative, all of whom convene regularly as a council to discuss relevant community issues. Then on a national scale, the Tibetan Government in Exile continues to have democratic elections and in 2011, 42 year-old Harvard educated Lobsang Sangye was the first non-ordained prime minister to be elected.⁴⁰

This absence of privilege means that monastic communities can no longer afford to exist in isolation and during the early years of their exile, in the case of Dzogchen Monastery in the late 1970s and 1980s, their success in establishing themselves was heavily dependent on the cooperation of the villagers. As the decades have passed, new additional factors have also had an impact such as the influence of modern technology and the liberalisation of the Indian market from the early 1990s, which has opened many new career opportunities attracting young would-be monks away from life in the monastic order (Dickey 2010, Donner 2008, McMillin 2006, Noronha & D'Cruz 2006). In addition, educated Western students are now claiming their own place within the religious community and changing the demographic by successfully coupling religious practice with householder responsibilities. Western individuals who converted to Buddhism in the earlier years of exile are now raising their own children to follow the same spiritual tradition and so a new generation exists with Tibetan Buddhism as their religious practice.

⁴⁰ <http://www.bbc.co.uk/news/world-asia-pacific-13205481>

That said, this thesis is not an ethnographic study of a particular area within Karnataka. Local Indian people, local politics, and other influencers do not feature prominently other than when they particularly relate to life in the monastery. The monastery by no means operates in isolation but as it is located within a Tibetan settlement, contact with the rest of Karnataka is subsequently limited. Instead, this thesis shows the monastery as a transitional space where a number of visitors only stay for limited periods of time viewed through an ethnographic lens at periods particularly heavy with international visitors. Also present within this space are the local villagers—the residents of Dhondenling. Although on occasions I did interact with the villagers in their own spaces in the villages, I do not focus on them and all interactions included in this thesis are set within the monastic compound. During my fieldwork, the monastery was a real mix of cultures, languages and lifestyles but all united to varying degrees through their aspirations to study and practice Dzogchen—the particular type of Buddhism adhered to by the monastery. As one might expect, such a colourful blend of nationalities posed many challenges to the continuation of everyday life at the monastery and also provided new opportunities for international support and expansion. The negotiation between and the balance of ‘traditional’ monastic practices and contemporary global influences will be explored throughout the thesis.

My place in the research

In 2003 I met Dzogchen Rinpoche, the main lama at Dzogchen Monastery, at a public talk he was giving in Norwich, England. After learning about the charity based at Dzogchen Monastery, which not only supported the monastery but also the local Tibetan community, I asked him if I could do a six-month work placement as part of my undergraduate degree in Anthropology and Psychology at Brunel University.⁴¹ The charity is called Dzogchen Shri Senha Charitable Society (DSSCS) and is involved in education, health and welfare projects across the settlement. Previous work has included building an old people’s home, two kindergartens and a number of infrastructure projects. The charity is currently building a new health clinic at the monastery and repairing some of the monastery’s buildings. My work placement was from February to August 2004 and I was responsible for general administration

⁴¹ As my undergraduate degree was also in psychology, my dissertation had to focus more on psychology than anthropology. My research looked at the personality factor agreeableness and I endeavoured to link this to the Buddhist concept of bodhicitta, practising love and compassion for all beings. I had hoped to prove that the personality trait of agreeableness was more prominent in monks who had been at the monastery longer but as I soon realized, the questionnaire format used to measure personality traits was not transferrable cross culturally. I concluded that the research method was flawed and my main conclusions focused on calling for a less ethnocentric, Western-based model of personality.

duties and some marketing work for the monk sponsorship programme. I also taught English to the monks and ran an introductory basketball course for them.

This placement not only provided me with a rich and diverse fieldwork setting for my undergraduate research but also allowed me to connect on a deeper level with a religious tradition that had played such a large role in my childhood. My mother was Buddhist and since the age of 15, I too have been actively practising meditation and exploring Buddhism. At the end of my work placement, I decided that I had benefitted a great deal from life at the monastery both in terms of my research and on a personal level so I decided to continue volunteering for the charity.⁴² Over the past 10 years, my role within the charity has increased and I currently coordinate the publications department for both DSSCS and Shenpen, the international branch of the charity (explained in full in Chapter 3). I now write and edit copy for the website, tour publicity, and internal and external documents. My husband is the International Press Officer for Shenpen handling all media relations for the charity and we often work together on many projects. I am also head of the Board of Trustees for Shenpen UK, which has about 15 active volunteers, and together with the rest of the Board, I oversee all activities within the UK.

Playing such an active role in the international arm of DSSCS has enabled me to gain excellent access to the field site, which is a huge advantage as access for the average visitor is very difficult. The Indian government has categorised all Tibetan settlements, including Dhondenling, within India as protected areas and requires every foreign national to obtain a Protected Area Permit (PAP) to enter the settlement. A PAP can be obtained from the government through an application process similar to obtaining a tourist visa. Typically (over the past five years at the time of writing), Dzogchen Rinpoche has been in residence from November to March each year and then he tours giving public lectures in Europe, the USA and Australia for the remainder of the year. In December and January each year the monastery welcomes international visitors for a short curriculum of Buddhist courses commonly known as retreats, and this is where the majority of my research took place. As a result of my close

⁴² My mother passed away in 2001 and the monastery provided me with the space to fully come to terms with my loss and to help me move forwards when I returned to my life in the UK.

working relationship with DSSCS and Shenpen, applications to arrive before December and stay longer after the courses finished were received warmly.

In 2008 and 2009, I completed three months of fieldwork (Nov 2008 – Jan 2009), which I used to complete my Master's dissertation. This was the start of my study of Tibetan lamas, their role in the monastery's rituals and, for that particular dissertation, the reaction of the audience to these rituals. Although it took a different angle to my PhD thesis, this period of fieldwork acted as a strong foundation for my exploration of doctrinal and folk notions of purity and the embodiment of purity by the lama. It also allowed me to be present when the Dzogchen Monastery temple restoration project was announced; this is featured in Chapter 6 of this thesis where I discuss the rabnye ritual.

Between 2010 and 2013, I spent approximately six months at Dzogchen Monastery conducting fieldwork. For reasons mentioned above, it was not possible to spend an unbroken length of time in the field and therefore I had to access the site as frequently as I could during the "open" periods. This elongated period of fieldwork and the associated costs (numerous flights and other transport expenses) are the main reasons I opted for a part-time mode of study for my PhD; it was necessary to find paid work as well as fulfil my voluntary commitments to the Tibetan charity. The plus side of this has been that, to the best of my knowledge, by overcoming access issues, I have conducted a unique piece of fieldwork covering Dzogchen Buddhism, which has had very little written about it so far.⁴³ This also means that there is an obvious longitudinal nature to my research that has brought with it the benefit of allowing me to observe and record major development works at the monastery in their entirety such as the temple restoration project.

The methodology used in my research is participant observation and I fully participated in a number of rituals and ceremonies performed at the monastery. This was combined with formal interviews and informal conversations with my informants. I will introduce my informants individually as and when they are relevant within the thesis. My most reliable and insightful

⁴³ I have supplemented my fieldwork in India with a month of fieldwork conducted at a centre associated with the monastery in the south of France, The Gyalwa Dzogchenpa Institute, looking at the processes involved in creating a ritual environment from scratch within an alien environment; I also spent approximately one month per year from 2010 to 2013 participating in Dzogchen Rinpoche's UK tour and observing the ritual performances during public events and retreats. The information gathered during these periods does not feature strongly in the thesis but it was a very useful time to help me clarify my thought processes, my understanding of the different rituals and their meanings.

informants were the monks that I had first made contact with during my initial visit in 2004 when I was their English teacher or basketball coach. It is also worth noting that because of the many different nationalities amongst the international students and the monastic community (there are monks from Tibet, Bhutan, Nepal, Sikkim), English was the main language spoken at the monastery. When I first visited back in 2004 for my undergraduate research, I took a course in Tibetan and continued studying during my stay until I had developed a good basic understanding of it. However, other than having brief verbal exchanges with the monks or ordering items at the monastery shop, it didn't really come in very handy and I soon switched back to speaking English for the majority of the time. All interviews were conducted in English; if the monk or student did not speak English, I enlisted the help of a translator. There were times during the interviews that people could not find the exact English word to articulate what they were trying to explain so in those cases we reverted to the Tibetan or Sanskrit word, or, if related to emotions, a lot was expressed through physical gestures or similar. These are dealt with individually as they come up through the thesis. Due to the varied demographic of inhabitants at the monastery, the hierarchy of the community, their structure and organisation both at the monastery and internationally, is quite complex and having English as the official language is just one of the methods deployed to manage the situation.

I firmly believe that without having an active working role within the charity, this fieldwork would not have been able to take place. However, there are further problematic aspects of studying an organisation that I was so involved with. My greatest challenge has been to make something already familiar to me appear "strange" so that there is a clear distinction between my subjective experience and the experiences presented to me by my interlocutors. My personal interest in Buddhism made it more difficult to create a distance between my own experience and the experience of the people that I have observed within this study. The familiarity of the actual physical environment was not an issue. The monastery was unfamiliar to me in many ways; in particular, as a young, Western woman I was very different to its Himalayan male population. As a woman, I was quite cautious in how I attempted to form relationships with informants. I observed the strict monastery rules that women should always behave and dress modestly in front of the monks as they had taken a vow of celibacy and had also renounced many of their social ties. As a result of these restrictions, I was unable to enter the monks' rooms or social spaces, so many of our conversations would take place in public and I was careful to ensure they mostly took place in groups. My husband became a very useful

ally in my fieldwork and if he formed a friendship with any of the monks, it was so much easier for me to talk with them and for them to really open up about their lives and feelings. My husband was present during roughly 50% of my fieldwork; mostly during the significant events—the enthronement ceremony and the rabyne ritual—and I felt a lot of barriers were broken down through his presence.

My existing identity amongst the international students at the monastery based on my various working roles within the charity had an impact on my capacity to interview them about their experiences and involvement in the rituals. From an early stage in my fieldwork it became obvious that when I asked questions about their personal experiences, they felt uncomfortable relating them to me as a researcher instead of as a fellow Buddhist practitioner or charity worker (how they knew me originally). Conversely, when I participated in the retreats and was talking to them as a Buddhist and about my own feelings on meditation or similar, a number questioned which capacity I was talking to them in. They started to doubt my sincerity and motivation for the conversations we were having. I made the decision relatively early that in order to avoid misunderstandings, to maintain a positive relationship with the charity and to make sure that I was not conflicted between my roles, I would not discuss the aesthetics of the rituals with the international students individually in great detail but instead would consider the social and political role of the rituals and the lama.⁴⁴ In doing so, I hoped that there would be enough distance between the international community and I to enable me to continue with the ethnography and do my work within the charity. As a consequence, I am confident that this thesis provides a rich and detailed analysis of Tibetan Buddhist rituals through the lens of embodiment and is a valid contribution to the study of Tibetan Buddhism in a diasporic setting.

A particular ethical dilemma, which prevented me following certain lines of enquiry, was my position as head of the board of trustees for Shenpen UK. In that capacity, I had to ask myself if I would be acting in the best interest of Shenpen if I used data from research conducted specifically for the charity to help fulfil the charity's aims and objectives as the role of trustee demands. In addition, I could not be sure that in every meeting that I observed or participated in that all members were correctly informed of my agenda as a researcher. All necessary permissions had been obtained but because of the transient nature of the group changing year after year and the elongated period of my research, my position as a researcher could quite

⁴⁴ One exception to this is when I explore prostrations and embodied worship in Chapter 8. The mass accumulation of prostration as part of the three-month retreat.

easily have been forgotten. There were a large number of meetings and for practical reasons it was not appropriate to begin each one with an introduction to my research. So within the context of the charity setting, I was mostly thought of as a charity team member rather than a researcher unless I specifically reminded people during conversation.

Another issue that affected my research was the close alignment of the working schedule of Shenpen to the retreat and ritual schedule. The Shenpen meetings and organisational activities often ran alongside retreat activities and the two schedules were closely interlinked. With such an intimate working arrangement, there were areas where the two began to overlap. The inner personal space of participants during the rituals was one of these and during my initial inquiries I found that it was being influenced by the volunteer work. For example, if one attends a meeting and then a short period afterwards participates in a ritual, the experience of the former influences the latter in some way however subtle.

Where I do feel able to provide valuable original data and analysis is around how folk notions of purity are created and expressed through hierarchical structures at the monastery. I focus on the arrangement of the volunteers and international students during rituals, events in the temple, teachings, and on the external expression and cultivation of both doctrinal and folk purity rather than the internal workings of participants. So, whilst the picture that builds up is unavoidably incomplete, I feel that the access my role gave me offered a unique opportunity to observe rituals and practices that would have remained obscure to less embedded ethnographers. My objective here is to provide an ethnographically dense study intricately detailing the embodied rituals and their relationship to notions of purity and hierarchies of authority adding to a progressively dynamic discussion around the role of the Tibetan lamas amongst an increasingly global participation group. In the next chapter I will outline the field site in more detail, explaining where Dzogchen sits within Tibetan Buddhism and how the monastery is organised and how it operates.

Chapter 3 Dzogchen Monastery: The Field Site

In order to contextualise the rituals and worship used to achieve the embodiment of purity at the monastery, I will now introduce the field site in more detail; in particular, I will explain the uniqueness of the community's demographic and the peculiarities of Dzogchen Buddhism and where Dzogchen sits under the umbrella of Buddhism and Tibetan Buddhism. During the periods of my fieldwork, Dzogchen Monastery could not be described as a "typical" monastic community where the monks live in isolation separated from householders and have limited interaction with people from outside their congregation⁴⁵ (Ortner 1978,1989, Goldstein 1975, Germano 1998). My fieldwork is unusual because it took place during a holiday season⁴⁶ for the monks where, if they chose to, they can travel and pursue personal interests, and because the monastery is visited by a number of international students, men and women, of varying ages and professional backgrounds, who wish to study Dzogchen and learn its rituals. During their stay at the monastery, which can be anything from one week to three months, the students are supported by the monks to learn the rituals.

Outside of the holiday period for the monks (December to February or March each year), the monastery had a much more homogenous demographic. Visits from international students were unusual from March through to October because Dzogchen Rinpoche typically toured Europe and Australia during this time and most of the students helped organise the events. During my first placement at the monastery in 2004, as part of my undergraduate fieldwork, I stayed on until August with a handful of other international students. These included an English teacher, a nurse, a carpenter, and three students who were accumulating their practices. During that time, interaction with the monks was infrequent as the monks had full daily schedules of studying or traveling out to the villages to complete pujas and prayers (explained later in the chapter). Their focus was on completing their duties within the monastic community rather than integration with the international students. At the time, I was teaching English classes for the monks and so I would see my students in class and likewise for another English teacher who also was staying there, but at no other officially organised time.⁴⁷ The nurse in the clinic would treat the monks if they had minor ailments, but other than that, the monks and

⁴⁵ My travels to monasteries Sera Je, Sera May and Namdroling in Bylakuppe, Karnataka reaffirm this statement.

⁴⁶ After one academic year finishes in November/December and the next starts in March.

⁴⁷ I would create my own interaction with the monks to further my research aims at the time.

international students had very limited contact. Ritual occasions involving both groups that were frequent during retreat times (the main periods of my fieldwork) rarely occurred. The international students completed their own tasks and spent a lot of time in solitary practice. During the rest of my fieldwork (period from 2008 – 2013), the international students generally did not stay at the monastery for longer periods of time as they all assisted with Dzogchen Rinpoche's tour. The tour had increased in size since my first visit in 2004 with more events as Dzogchen Rinpoche's public profile within Europe and Australia grew. Senior monks took over teaching the English classes and the medical clinic was not opened to the public unless a Tibetan doctor was able to run the facility. However, the lay community of Tibetans continued to visit the monastery to make offerings in the temple or to perform kora throughout the year with little variation in their visits. So whilst Dzogchen Rinpoche was touring, the monastery had a much more homogenous community and when he returned, so did the international students. Therefore, there was a temporary but necessary need to create unity between the three main groups (monks, international students and laity) during times the lama was present at the monastery. I will explain the ways that the lama is central to maintaining a sense of unity throughout the rest of the thesis; however, my main point here is that the lama is also the reason unity is necessary. The presence of the lama means that there are different groups at the monastery and his presence is also necessary to maintain their unity whilst they interact with each other.

There are a number of reasons why this temporary interaction of different demographic groups is possible at Dzogchen Monastery. Firstly, Dzogchen has a tradition of having both monastic and lay householder practitioners who are considered equal, and within the lay community, female practitioners are equal to male⁴⁸ (Allione 2002). Secondly, the main lamas, or teachers, are allowed to marry, have children and do not have to live attached to the monastery if they don't want to. Lay practitioners are also permitted to continue with their professions and do not have to renounce a set of lifestyle behaviours (Dzogchen Rinpoche 2013). Lastly, in many of the Dzogchen doctrines, it is recorded that Dzogchen was particularly intended to be practised during the 21st century (summarised by Petit 1999, www.dzogchen.org.in/dzogchen-lineage). During my fieldwork, this was frequently the reason given by both monastic and lay practitioners as to why orthodox boundaries between these groups were determined to be blurred. Access to Tibet prior to the Cultural Revolution, and indeed afterwards, has been very

⁴⁸ Currently, there are no nuns at the monastery; there is no attached nunnery but there are many nuns within Dzogchen.

limited for foreign visitors so this situation would not have occurred at Dzogchen Monastery, Tibet; so this is an arrangement that is particular to my field site. In order to fully understand this unique situation, it is necessary to understand the historical context to the formation of Buddhism in different Asian countries and their distinctive characteristics.

After the Buddha passed away in Kushinagar, India, in 483 BC, his followers divided into three groups, each one focusing on a different aspect of his doctrine and prioritising different methods and qualities that they strived to realise (Davidson 2002). These groups are known as the three yanas, or three vehicles of dharma [Buddha's teachings] (Ray 2002). I will describe the two yanas that Tibetan Buddhism sits across and also the four different schools, groups of Tibetan Buddhism that exist and where Dzogchen Buddhism sits within them. To a reader unfamiliar with Buddhism, it can be quite a complicated structure to understand and although this is not a Buddhist theological study, it is, however, very necessary to explain the structure thoroughly because the differences between each group are significant to Buddhist followers. In particular, the differences are important to the practitioners, the monks, and the lay international students I encountered during my fieldwork at Dzogchen Monastery; the difference holds a real influence over how they identify themselves. Much of the monastery's programme to ensure that their religious practices continue in exile is dedicated to maintaining the rituals that are specific to Dzogchen and not any other type of Buddhism. For example, funded by supporters from Singapore, a new library has been built at the monastery, to house all the Dzogchen religious scholastic texts and main ritual instructions but it does not include texts from other Tibetan Buddhist denominations.⁴⁹ According to a fundraising flyer produced by the monastery, other parts of the monastic buildings are being rebuilt to provide space and facilities for monks from across different monasteries in the Himalayan region to attend courses on how to perform the specific Dzogchen rituals in the hope that they will return to their original monasteries and teach others.⁵⁰ Rituals from different Tibet Buddhism groups are not included in these courses.

⁴⁹ Dzogchen religious doctrine is described as "texts" by the monks and so I will continue to use this word. They are not books as such because they are not bound; instead they are sheets of paper printed on both sides, stacked in a pile and wrapped in cloth to protect them. This is usual within Tibetan Buddhism. I have visited other monasteries of all dominations and seen the same methods applied. To read these texts, the monks sit cross legged with a small table in front of them as they recite each page they then flip it over and read the other side, restacking them in a separate pile when complete. The texts often come with a text holder that enables the monk to rest the pages on it.

⁵⁰ I also heard Dzogchen Rinpoche speak about this during a public teaching.

This and other actions, embodied worship or behaviours which will be discussed in later chapters, are, I argue, all focused on the uniqueness and separate nature of the lineage, of the line of lamas who are thought by the Dzogchen followers to be the full embodiment of purity. To understand the significance of this, it is essential to provide the background and historical context to this distinct structure. Many readers may already have a view of Tibetan Buddhism as being a single, unified religion with one leader, the Dalai Lama, which is how Tibetan Buddhism has been presented through mainstream media and popular culture since the 1960s. However, this is not accurate and through focusing on the Dzogchen School and highlighting its particular rituals and symbolism, this thesis documents and analyses the distinct practices within Tibetan Buddhism.

I will then outline the demographic of the monastic community and their hierarchical structure at Dzogchen Monastery and their relationship with the immediate Tibetan community within the Dhondenling settlement and their neighbouring Indian villagers. I will explain the network of Dzogchen centres around the world and then introduce the network of charities known as Shenpen, (Tibetan. translates as '*helping without condition*'), which a high percentage of the international students volunteer for. By outlining the varied groups that interact within the monastic space, I bring to the forefront the challenge faced by the monastery to maintain unity despite diversity and I begin to describe the methods used to address these challenges starting with the layout of the monastery as this will also set the scene of my field site. The layout reflects the very deliberate approach taken by the monastery to its overall organisation because it is with a very specific purpose and little is built or decorated haphazardly. This scene setting section will provide the backdrop for the rituals of embodied worship described later in the thesis. At the heart of the design concept is the idea of the lama who is taught, within the Dzogchen doctrine to be the embodiment of purity and Dzogchen knowledge and this will link in to Chapter 4, which focuses on the monks' beliefs and practices associated with folk notions of purity and how they are viewed as being embodied through the lama.

Types of Buddhism

The Buddha is recorded to have given three distinct cycles of teachings, each one with a different emphasis; these have become known as the three yanas [vehicles] or categories of understanding (Drup 2013). (A diagram of the three yanas can be found on page 54.) A yana is

also known as a doctrinal method or path for attaining spiritual powers (Evans-Wentz 1954). Although the Buddha's followers first formed as a single assembly after the passing of the Buddha in 483 BC, they separated into different groups depending on which cycle of teachings each one followed and over time spread in three general directions (Reat 1994, Keown 1996).⁵¹ The group that spread to the South East around 250 BC (Cousins 1996) to Sri Lanka, Myanmar, Thailand and other South East Asian countries followed the first yana of Buddhism known as Hinayana Buddhism. Followers focus on their individual liberation from samsara⁵² through external discipline and the study of the sutra⁵³ teachings of the Buddha (Crosby 2013). The Buddhism that was around in 500 CE (Bodhi b) 2010) spread northwards to Sikkim, Bhutan, Nepal, Tibet, Mongolia and other parts of Central Asia, and also easterly into China and Japan followed the second yana of Buddhism, Mahayana where practitioners concentrate their efforts on enlightenment for the benefit of all beings (Williams 2008). This is known as the practice of bodhicitta and is characterised by the cultivation of loving kindness and compassion (Anyen 2012). Mahayana Buddhism is generally practised across Himalayan countries.

Up until a few decades ago, many of the anthropological studies of Buddhism focused on Hinayana communities in Thailand or Sri Lanka and have relatively ignored the Mahayana tradition that is dominant in the Himalayan countries of Bhutan, Nepal and Tibet (Gellner 1990). This was partly due to restricted access to Tibet and Bhutan for political reasons, but now, with the influx of refugees, Mahayana Buddhism has become firmly established in Nepal and India and is more available for anthropological studies (Araken 1998). As noted in the introduction, it is also linked to the focus by Spiro, Tambiah, Gombrich and Obeyesekere, amongst others, on rectifying what they saw as a misrepresentation of Buddhism that focused on Thailand and "protestant Buddhism" in light of anticolonial efforts against Christian missionaries during the 1940s, 1950 and 1960s.

The third yana, Vajrayana Buddhism, is primarily practised within Tibet and follows the teachings of the Indian saint Padmasambhava, "a set of esoteric scriptures, known as tantras: a

⁵¹ The Hindu revival initiated the gradual decline of Buddhism in India. The invasions of the White Huns (6th century) and the Muslims (11th century) were also significant factors behind the virtual extinction of Buddhism in India by the 13th century.

⁵² Samsara is the Sanskrit word for the never ending cycle of re-birth and death that Buddhists believe human beings are trapped within. Enlightenment is often thought of as liberation from samsara.

⁵³ Sutra—the oral canonical teachings of the Buddha.

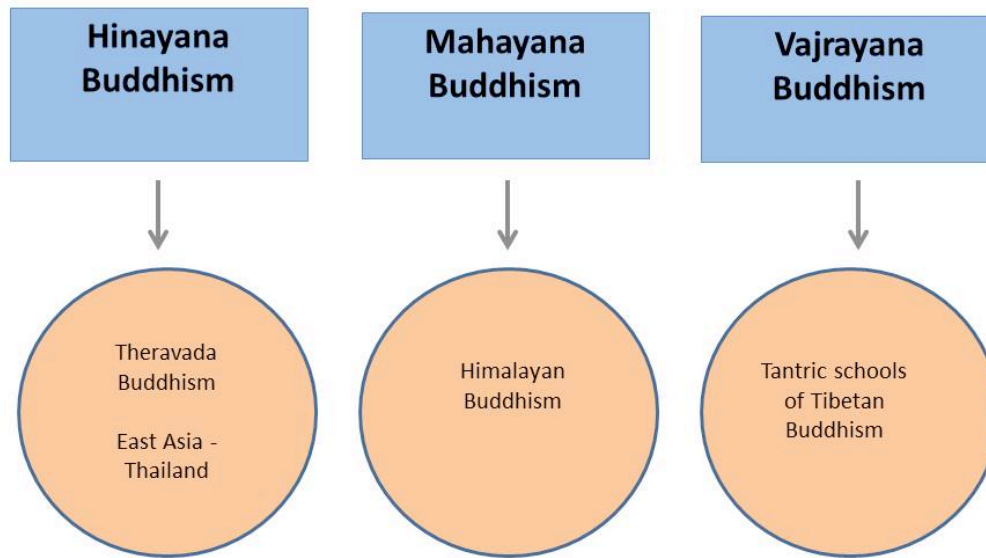
specialised path within the Mahayana, for priests, monks and other virtuosi” (Gellner 2001:48). Vajrayana began emerging around 700 CE (Samuel 2010) and involved elaborate visualisations (creating detailed visual images in one’s mind’s eye) and ceremonial rites. It can be distinguished from other forms of Buddhism by its visualisation of wrathful and peaceful tantric deities (other worldly creatures who are believed to have divine powers) (Tucci 1988). The tradition of Dzogchen, on which my research is based, is categorised as Vajrayana Buddhism and prior to the Cultural Revolution was practised in more secret conditions not open to the public—only to monks, nuns or lay practitioners on retreats in secluded locations⁵⁴ (See Khenpo (2006) for numerous biographies of historically significant figures within the Dzogchen lineage). But now, with many of the senior propagators of the religion living in exile from Tibet, the situation is very different. There is a concerted effort, which will be discussed later in this thesis, to establish Dzogchen Buddhism outside of Tibet and India and ensure that religious traditions are continued in exile. This aim is frequently expressed overtly,⁵⁵ and whilst I do consider the more functional implications on the unity of the community, I also review the specific rituals and associated social processes. Through the lens of embodiment, I consider how the actions of the monastic committee shape the phenomenological experience of the different groups that reside there and how this contributes to an understanding of the pure body explored in the final chapter as the immaterial body.

⁵⁴ When the lay practitioners complete their retreats, they can return to being householders but are still regarded as being accomplished practitioners.

⁵⁵ Displayed on the monastery’s website and also mentioned at public events.

Fig. 3.1 Source: Author's own

The three yantras and the types of Buddhism that follow them



The Structure of Tibetan Buddhism

Within Tibetan Buddhism there are four main schools; the Nyingma School, the Sakya School, the Kagyu School, and the Gelug School. These schools all originated at different times in Tibetan history for different political and geographic reasons and are all linked to prominent religious figures who founded them. The Nyingma School is the oldest of all the Tibetan schools and was founded by Padmasambhava the patron saint of Tibet in the 8th Century and is centred in Kham in Eastern Tibet (for a full history of the Nyingma School see Dudjum (2003)). The origins of the Kagyu School can be traced back to a series of Indian yogis (holy men) who orally passed religious instructions to their disciples. The most famous yogis of the Kagyu School are Tilopa (988-1089), Nāropa (1016–1100), and Marpa Chökyi Lodrö (1012–1097) who then actually brought the teachings of the Kagyu School from India to Tibet (Kusang, Pemo, and Aubele 2012). Many Kagyu monasteries are also in Kham, Eastern Tibet,

although two of the most important, Tsurphu and Ralung Monasteries, are in central Tibet.⁵⁶ The Sakya School was founded in 1073 by Khön Könchok Gyalpo and was mostly located in the Tsang region of central Tibet (Trichen 1983). The Gelug School was the last to be formed and before the Cultural Revolution in Tibet it was the most dominant school. Founded by Je Tsongkhapa (1357–1419), it was predominantly practised in central Tibet and rose to great prominence at the end of the 16th Century (Van Schaik 2011).

Gelugs do not have a history of lay practitioners; it is a monastic based school. However, in the West there are increasing numbers of lay students, many of whom become monks or nuns.⁵⁷ Lay practitioners do feature in some historical accounts of the Sakya School but it is predominantly a monastic tradition, whereas both the Kagyu School and Nyingma School have a strong record of lay practitioners. Each school has its own main leading lama and its own set of ritual practices. For example, in the Gelug School, the main lama is His Holiness the 14th Dalai Lama (Norman 2009); the head of the Kagyu School is His Holiness the 17th Karmapa (Martin 2003); the head of the Sakya School⁵⁸ is His Holiness the Sakya Trizin;⁵⁹ and the head of the Nyingma School is His Holiness Taklung Tsetrul Rinpoche.⁶⁰

Each of these four main schools then has a number of subdivisions of different major lineages within it and each subdivision follows a specific chronological line of lamas. These divisions are generally not related to political or social conflict; instead, they are based on the rise of particular lamas or monasteries at certain times with specific geographic locations. Within the Nyingma School, there are six subdivisions; Dzogchen is one of them. The other five are Khatog, Mindrolling, Sechen, Dorje Drak and Paylul. They all have strong similarities between them, e.g. Padmasambhava, the founder of the Nyingma School is revered and worshipped by all. However, the differences can be found in the core teachings and rituals of each subdivision. This can mostly be attributed to where the main lama placed their emphasis of the subdivision when they transmitted the teachings to their disciples. If one teaching emphasised a particular aspect of the teachings, that is what that monastery would focus on and gradually it would become a main concentration, whereas another monastery run by another main lama would be

⁵⁶ <http://kagyuoffice.org/>

⁵⁷ For first-hand accounts see Grozni (2009) and Schettini (2013).

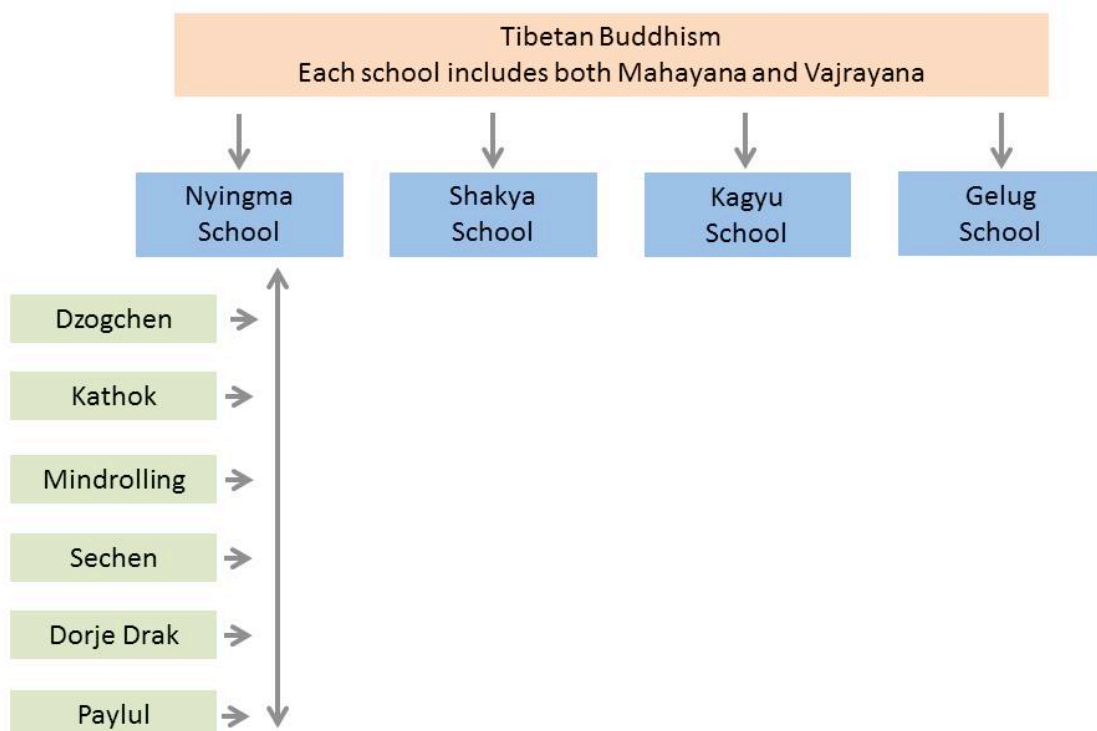
⁵⁸ The Sakya School is unbroken family lineage and every head of the lineage has been a descendant of the founder Khön Könchok Gyalpo (Trichen 1983).

⁵⁹ <http://www.hhthesakyatrizin.org/>

⁶⁰ Central Tibetan Administration, Tibet.net

different. Dzogchen follows the teachings of the Dzogchen Rinpoches, the Dzogchen lamas and is centred within Kham, in Eastern Tibet.

Fig. 3.2 Source: Author's own
The structure of Tibetan Buddhism
(Not including the subdivisions of the Sakya, Kagyu and Gelug Schools)



As mentioned in the introduction, the purpose of including this detailed explanation of the structure of Tibetan Buddhism is not to get "bogged down" in terminology and sub divisions, but to contextualise Dzogchen within the bigger picture of Tibetan Buddhism so that it is clear what the monastery is trying to differentiate itself from.

Dzogchen Monastery

The original Dzogchen Monastery was established in 1684 in what was known as the Dzogchen Valley in the Kham region of Tibet, which is now Sichuan, China. It was founded by Pema Rigdzin, the 1st Dzogchen Rinpoche (1623-97)—the first in a line of reincarnate lamas called the Dzogchen Rinpoches who are revered by many Tibetan people as the leaders of this particular type of Tibetan Buddhism and head of the monastery (Bradburn 1995). Following its foundation, the population at the monastery grew steadily and during the time of the fifth incarnation of Dzogchen Rinpoche, Thupten Chokyi Dorje, (1872-1935); up to one thousand monks were in residence and tens of thousands of monks attended the branch monasteries throughout Tibet (Thondup 1999 and Khenpo 2005). In 1936, much of the monastery, including the main temple, was destroyed by fire; it was slowly rebuilt but then was completely destroyed by the Chinese forces in 1959.⁶¹ During the conflict with the Chinese, the sixth Dzogchen Rinpoche, Jigdrel Changchub Dorje (1935–1959) who was disguised as a Chinese officer in order to escape, was stabbed by a monk and later passed away in one the caves in the surrounding hillside (Norbu 2000, Norbu 1998).

In 1964, Jigme Losel Wangpo was born in Sikkim and he was recognised at an early age as the 7th Dzogchen Rinpoche by His Holiness the 4th Dodrupchen Rinpoche,⁶² another leading lama in Dzogchen.⁶³ The recognition by Dodrupchen Rinpoche is considered very important by the monastic community⁶⁴ as the Dzogchen Rinpoches and Dodrupchen Rinpoches are viewed as the leader and deputy leader respectively of the Dzogchen category of Buddhism and have recognised the reincarnations of each other in turn. This system is widely considered the mark of authenticity by the Dzogchen monastic community.⁶⁵ Being born outside Tibet coupled with challenging political times within Tibet meant that it would be very difficult for Dzogchen Rinpoche when he was an appropriate age to return to rebuild Dzogchen Monastery in its original location. Instead, at the request of the Dalai Lama (head of the Gelug School but considered by many to be the overall leader of Tibetan Buddhism), Dzogchen Rinpoche

⁶¹ <http://www.dzogchen.org.in/dzogchen-monastery>

⁶² Information on Dodrupchen Rinpoche can be found in Thondup (1999).

⁶³ There is no published biography of Dzogchen Rinpoche available in English. This information was taken from www.dzogchenmonastery.org/dz7.html

⁶⁴ I was told this by a number of different monks when discussing the recognition of a second Dzogchen Rinpoche in Tibet.

⁶⁵ According to www.dzogchen.org.in

travelled to Dharamsala in North India to begin his education and study at the Tibetan School of Dialectics.⁶⁶

Then in the late 1980s, again at the request of the Dalai Lama, Dzogchen Rinpoche travelled south to Karnataka state and, with the help of his father who was well trained in Tibetan architecture, began to rebuild the monastery on remote rural land provided by the Indian government. This land is now known as the Dhondenling Tibetan Settlement. It is worth mentioning at this point that the rebuilding of Dzogchen Monastery in Tibet also began in the 1980s by the monastic community that remained and is now home to approximately 2000 monks.⁶⁷

Whilst volunteering at the charity based at the monastery (DSSCS) as part of my fieldwork, I conducted interviews with Dzogchen Rinpoche for the purpose of writing the copy for Dzogchen Monastery's website www.dzogchen.org; he told me that at the beginning of the re-establishment that 12 young boys from local families enrolled at the monastery. The novice monks supported the early construction by contributing to the menial labour work, building walls and clearing shrubs. The development progressed slowly as funds were limited. I also documented some of the early history of the monastery through interviews with senior monks and I was told stories of how the main attendant of Dzogchen Rinpoche, Ven Gen Rangjung, went from house to house in the settlement asking for donations to help with the build. Many of the Dhondenling residents were from central Tibet rather than Eastern Tibet, which means that they typically follow Gelugpa or other traditions within the Nyingma School, i.e. they do not have a family or geographic connection with Dzogchen Monastery.⁶⁸ This meant that they were not as fully engaged with the monastery as they might have been; their loyalties lay elsewhere and if there were families who had an inclination to send their sons into a monastic community, they would travel to monasteries in other settlements in India. This goes some way to explaining why the re-establishment was conducted with a relatively small number of monks in comparison to the thousands of monks that had lived at Dzogchen Monastery in Tibet. Over the next three decades, the monastery continued to be rebuilt and it is now home to

⁶⁶ According to www.dzogchen.org.in

⁶⁷ www.dzogchenmonastery.cn

⁶⁸ Although I could not find any official documentation for why the Dalai Lama requested that Dzogchen Monastery be rebuilt amongst people from central Tibet, perhaps because it was one of the most isolated settlements and many of the other settlements were overcrowded. Dhondenling was the most in need of support and the one that could accommodate a large, prominent monastery such as Dzogchen Monastery.

approximately 200 monks from Tibet, North India, Nepal and Bhutan, and often from other branches of Dzogchen Monastery, of which there are at least 280 across the Himalayas. The monks that come are all of different ages and their length of stay varies depending on the purpose of their visit (academic, pilgrimage and retreat), so a mixture of more long-term and more temporary communities are formed. Dzogchen Monastery is now the largest of five monasteries⁶⁹ of different Tibetan Buddhist traditions within the Dhondenling settlement.

As the monastery lies within a Tibetan settlement that does not have any Indian residents, contact with local Indian communities is limited. Indian people visit the monastery as tourists if they have been hired to conduct building or maintenance work, if they need to use the health clinic at the monastery, or if they are part of the police force doing routine visits or on other official government business.⁷⁰ Most of the food and supplies at the monastery are bought outside at the settlement either in the nearby towns of Oderyarpalaya or Kollegal, and if the monastery needs specialist equipment, it would most likely be purchased from Bangalore. The secretary of the charity based at the monastery (DSSCS) is an Indian man who is very active in supporting the monastery and assisting with the running of the charity. However, actual day-to-day contact with Indian people is not that common within the monastic compound itself.

The Monastic Community

In Tibet, pre Cultural Revolution Buddhism was more than just a religion. The monastic institutions were so prominent within Tibetan society that they had become a symbol of national identity (Goldstein 1998). In 1951, approximately 10-15% of Tibet's population was ordained as monks (115,000 monks) in roughly 2,500 monasteries—monasticism was a 'mass phenomenon' (Goldstein 1998). Some monasteries in more remote locations, those more suitable for periods of isolated retreats, often only included two or three monks and others in more central locations housed 1000s. Monasteries did not have a particular selection process; all who expressed an interest were welcomed, which led to monasteries swelling well beyond their financial and material capacity. Without a recruitment policy, the resulting monk body was a very diverse population and those unsuited to philosophical studies were deployed in a variety of roles in order to support the monastery's existence (Goldstein 1998).

⁶⁹ The other four monasteries in the settlement are Taksham Monastery, Tanak Monastery, Dhragyal Monastery and Bayoe Monastery.

⁷⁰ I have never seen an Indian visitor to the health clinic but I was told by an English nurse that there has been the occasional visitor.

In exile, the number of men entering the monasteries is drastically reduced but I found that at Dzogchen Monastery the organisation followed a similar structure to that described by Goldstein (1998). Firstly, the monk body contains a number of sub communities that are hierarchically arranged. At the top is the head lama Dzogchen Rinpoche and his family who live in a separate house a short walk down the hill away from the main monastic grounds. Lamas within the Dzogchen tradition are not required to take a vow of celibacy and are permitted to marry; this is because Dzogchen is based within the tantric,⁷¹ more esoteric teachings of Tibetan Buddhism. Dzogchen Rinpoche is supported to maintain his household by a number of people who also stay there. Over the years of my fieldwork, the support team changed both in number, personality and whether or not they were monks. The support team typically includes: a cook, kitchen assistants, staff to clean the house and take care of general maintenance, and staff who provide support to Dzogchen Rinpoche's children if required. Dzogchen Rinpoche was born into an aristocratic Tibetan family who had been very wealthy when they lived in Tibet. Much of the wealth, in the form of land and resources, was lost during the Chinese invasion. This was mainly because the families were limited in what they could carry with them when they left Tibet. Dzogchen Rinpoche's parents were instrumental in establishing the monastery and much of their remaining finances were ploughed into its development.⁷² The monastery owns a couple of shops in the villages that act as a source of income but Dzogchen Rinpoche himself, at least during my fieldwork, generated the largest income for the monastery via charitable donations raised through his teaching tours.

Next in the hierarchy are other senior lamas or tulkus [young reincarnate lamas] who live at the monastery; they mostly live on the top floor of the shedra [monastic university] and often have their own rooms. Generally, they have external sources of income such as wealthy sponsors or monetary offerings from lay practitioners who ask for blessings or prayers. The difference in their status from the other monks is evident in the quality of their clothes, particularly their top shirt often embroidered with fine designs, or their well-kept, decorated rooms that can have televisions or computers. Following the senior lamas are the monastery's managing committee; a team of four⁷³ monks who are in charge of the day-to-day running of the monastery, managing the finances, the food supplies, organising the maintenance of the monastic grounds and the organisation of the shedra. The committee is led by the main khenpo, a teacher or

⁷² The information was obtained through interviews with Dzogchen Rinpoche to produce copy for www.dzogchen.org.in

⁷³ Number correct at time of writing but can vary year to year.

lecturer, at the shedra. A khenpo is someone who has graduated from the monastic university and has completed a number of years teaching experience and because of the good qualities they displayed as a teacher, they have been awarded the title of khenpo. Before being awarded this status, a graduated monk can also be known as lopon.⁷⁴

Shedra and Dratsang

The remaining monks are divided into those who study at the shedra, the university, and those who live and practise Buddhist ritual in the dratsang, the ritual centre. In the shedra, the monks can receive an education from kindergarten standard up to the equivalent of a PhD. The novice monks study English, Mathematics and Tibetan grammar. They are also instructed in the recitation of ritual texts and learn the ritual instruments. The older monks, whilst also studying Tibetan grammar, poetry, Buddhist history and the monarchs of Tibet, concentrate on Buddhist philosophy and study classical texts and their commentaries. The commentaries act as further explanation of these often complex texts and are written by classical Buddhist scholars such as Patrul Rinpoche or the third Dzogchen Rinpoche. The remaining monks belong to the dratsang, the ritual training centre, where the monks train in the traditional rites of Dzogchen. The dratsang monks lead both the morning and evening prayers in the temple and are frequently called upon to go to the villages and perform pujas, different types of practices involving prayers and offerings to the local spirits or deities to remove difficult circumstances for harvests; for example, to bring rain and to help those who are sick, dying or have passed away. During my fieldwork at Dzogchen Monastery, the dratsang was full beyond capacity and the monks slept in overcrowded quarters with as many as eight in a room and occasionally two monks sharing a mattress. In the warmer seasons, the monks sometimes slept out on the flat roofs of the dratsang to have extra space.

Within the dratsang and shedra, there are further sub categories. For example, there are the main teachers, the discipline masters who ensure the monks maintain their monastic vows and also stick to the daily schedule of prayers, study and practice; monks who have practical roles within the monastery such as guesthouse manager, shop keeper, kitchen assistants; and the “generator monk” who is in charge of switching on the generator when the electricity supply cuts off. The demographic also varies in age, ranging from as young as four years of age up to one or two elderly monks in their late 70s. In 2006, there was an intake of approximately 50

⁷⁴ I liken this to someone who has achieved their PhD and has just been allowed to start lecturing.

young monks from Nepal; each of the older monks was assigned one or two of the new monks to care for as a type of guardian to make sure they settled in and had everything they needed. Some monks also participate in long-term retreats at the monastery's retreat centre. A typical length of retreat is three years, three months and three days as this is considered the length of time in the tantric system of Tibetan Buddhism for the practitioner to have purified any of their mental or physical obscurations⁷⁵ on the path to achieving the embodied state of Buddhahood—enlightenment.⁷⁶ However, during my fieldwork there were no monks living at the retreat centre and it was used to house the overspill of visitors from the guesthouse or international students who were about to begin a three-month closed retreat.⁷⁷

During my fieldwork, the 200 monks registered at Dzogchen Monastery were split approximately 60% in the dratsang and 40% in the shedra. This is set to change in the coming years as the monastery is launching a new programme both to increase the size of the monastic population and to train more monks in academic study and ritual. Monks will be selected from each of the 280 branch monasteries to live and study at Dzogchen Monastery. Based on the calculations of the provisional plans of this programme, the population is expected to eventually reach 500.

The numbers in each section also fluctuated depending on what was occurring within the monks' calendar because there are many big events that take the monks away from the monastery. For example, after their annual exams in December when the academic year ends, many monks use the following period until Losar (Tibetan New Year) in February to make pilgrimages to Bodhgaya in the state of Bihar, Northern India. Bodhgaya is a particularly holy site for Buddhists as it is believed to be where the Buddha attained enlightenment. As well as a place for individual pilgrimages, Bodhgaya also hosts annual school-wide prayer festivals where the monks affiliated to a particular Tibetan Buddhist schools gather on mass for a weeklong event. In addition, monks from other countries, such as Bhutan or Tibet, use this period to travel home and visit their families or previous monasteries. The journey home can be quite strenuous; travelling across the Himalayas is no mean feat and coupled with the political tensions within Tibet, many monks find it easier to stay within their native lands for long periods of time, returning to Karnataka after six months or so.

⁷⁵ An obscuration is something that prevents the individual from embodying Buddhahood.

⁷⁶ This information is taken from a discussion with one of my informants at the monastery Karma who is introduced later on page 159.

⁷⁷ This is discussed in more detail in Chapter 8.

Global Network of Dzogchen

My field site is unique because it is at the heart of a global network of Dzogchen centres associated to Dzogchen Monastery. There are approximately 280 branch monasteries of Dzogchen Monastery in Asia, predominantly in Tibet, Nepal and Bhutan, and then Dzogchen affiliated centres open to the general public in Singapore, Malaysia, Hong Kong, France and Australia. Dzogchen Monastery in Tibet is larger in size than the monastery in South India but it is no longer the principal centre of the tradition. This is because the main lama, Dzogchen Rinpoche, is based in India and has jurisdiction over the 280 branch/smaller monasteries; the South Indian monastery has become a central hub for a global Dzogchen community. It is important to reiterate here that the current global network of Dzogchen has only occurred over the past 40 years. Previously, Dzogchen practice and Dzogchen rituals could only be found within Tibet and the surrounding Himalayan regions and so this worldwide reach is a relatively new situation.⁷⁸



Fig. 3.3 Source: Dzogchen Buddhism Facebook Page
International Students on Retreat at Dzogchen Monastery

⁷⁸ The Dzogchen lama Namkhai Norbu set up his first centre in Italy in 1981 (<http://dzogchen.ro/merigar-west>). The *Rigpa* organisation, an international network of centres and groups, was founded by Sogyal Rinpoche in 1979 (<http://www.rigpa.org/>). Dzogchen Ponlop Rinpoche founded his first centres in the early 1990s (<http://dpr.info/biography.htm>).

Shenpen International

In addition to these established centres of Dzogchen, there is an international network of non-monastic students who practice Dzogchen Buddhism affiliated to Dzogchen Monastery in a more informal way across Europe, Australia and the USA. This is the group that I refer to as international students. These non-monastic students are part of Shenpen, a network of volunteer organisations that support the charitable work of Dzogchen Rinpoche. Shenpen is from the Tibetan phrase “shen la phen pa” which literally means “to bring benefit to others”.⁷⁹ As a young man and upon completion of his studies at the Buddhist School of Dialectics in Dharamsala, Dzogchen Rinpoche was asked by the Dalai Lama to travel south to the Dhondenling settlement and establish Dzogchen Monastery.⁸⁰ The Dalai Lama also asked him to take care of the Tibetan people, and in 1995, Dzogchen Rinpoche founded Dzogchen Shri Senha Charitable Society (DSSCS) to provide for the educational, welfare and healthcare needs of the local Tibetan and Indian communities near Dzogchen Monastery. In 1995, Dzogchen Rinpoche was awarded a commemorative certificate for his charitable work with the Tibetan community and a photo of this certificate is displayed on the website and a copy is placed on the information table at each public talk Dzogchen Rinpoche gives. I also heard stories that corroborated this version of events from various Shenpen members and senior monks at the monastery.

Both Shenpen and DSSCS operate under the administration umbrella of Gyalwa Dzogchenpa, which is the official name given to all the work of Dzogchen Rinpoche, be that of a religious nature involving the monasteries or charitable. Literally, Gyalwa means Victor and Dzogchenpa means the personification of the Dzogchen teachings or holder/embodiment of the teachings, so the translation is ‘Victorious holder of Dzogchen’. As well as fundraising for Shenpen and DSSCS, a number of students of Dzogchen Rinpoche volunteer their professional services to support the various projects of Shenpen and DSSCS. During my fieldwork, I met with students of Dzogchen Rinpoche who were healthcare professionals volunteering in the monastery’s health clinic, engineers helping to build schools in the villages, architects, and teachers. I should include myself in this group of professional volunteers. My husband and I run a PR agency and we volunteer our media and PR skills to Shenpen.

⁷⁹ www.dzogchen.org.in

⁸⁰ With assistance from the International Director of DSSCS.

International Teaching Tours

For the past 10 years, Dzogchen Rinpoche, an assistant monk and one or two of the main charity staff, makes an annual trip to each country where Shenpen is established to give a series of public events hosted and organised by Shenpen. The purpose of these tours is twofold: to raise awareness and funds for the projects of Shenpen and DSSCS and to provide members of the public with an opportunity to listen to the Dzogchen teachings. Dzogchen Rinpoche, as the main lama of the Dzogchen lineage, is widely considered within the Dzogchen community, and increasingly within the general public, to be the authority on the Dzogchen teachings; therefore listening to his teachings is a sought after experience for many.

Each city where a public talk is held has a team of volunteers who organise the events from booking the venue to putting up posters and staffing the event on the night. Their work is supervised by a senior charity staff member, normally one of the team members who travels with Dzogchen Rinpoche. As a result of Dzogchen Rinpoche's continual touring and charitable work, most students are united in their wish to support this activity and nearly every sangha member has a role of some sort related to the charity. This in turn has created an atmosphere for engagement and practically applying the Dzogchen teachings in everyday life. This approach is quite different to many other Buddhist organisations because often Buddhism can be associated with removing oneself from the world, giving up material possessions and spending long periods in isolated retreats attempting to obtain mastery over one's mind and its musings. This is also different to the findings of Ortner's (1978) anthropological study of a Buddhist monastery in Nepal and their interactions with the local Sherpa community; she described an anti-relational, isolated community as one that gave up their relationships with the outside world.

As well as public events, there are also what are known as "closed retreats", for which a student must submit an application form to attend. This is quite a common practice across the different denominations of Buddhism. The information gathered is name, address, experience of studying Buddhism and medical information. These retreats for lay (non-monastic) students take place at Dzogchen Monastery within each country where Shenpen is established and at the Gyalwa Dzogchenpa Institute, a Dzogchen meditation and study centre in the South of

France.⁸¹ The retreat allows the student to gain experience in most aspects of the disciplines within Dzogchen, including prayers and chanting, visualisation, receiving teachings from Dzogchen Rinpoche, and an opportunity to revise and discuss these teachings. The daily schedule normally starts around 6.30 am and continues through to 9 pm at night and retreats can last for five, seven or 10 days.

Attendants come from a range of countries including France, Germany, Holland, Switzerland, the UK, Spain, Australia and the USA. On average, over the retreats that I observed, 65% of attendees were female and 35% male. These retreatants are what are known as “lay” practitioners; householders who follow and aim to put into action the dharma—teachings of the Buddha. A small proportion of the attendees were in their late 20s and early 30s; the remainder were in their late 40s, 50s and 60s, many of who were retired. Through speaking to the attendees, it became clear that there were various reasons why there were more retired people than younger people. The main reason for this demographic divide was financial as flights to India were becoming increasingly expensive and there was a retreat fee to pay to cover accommodation and food. Students often tried to attend retreats each year, sometimes two or three times, so it was an on-going cost that not everyone could maintain. Another reason was that retired people had more time to participate in charity work and hold responsibilities within their local Shenpen and those who were more involved in the charity side of the organisation would often attend more retreats. These retreats have been taking place at the monastery for over 10 years; the first was held in 2000 and although it is not widespread, there are a few other monasteries in India that offer similar opportunities.⁸²

The significance of this mixed population within my study means that the once rigid boundaries of space and access that separated the monastic population and the lay community that were reported to exist in pre-Cultural Revolution Tibet and other Himalayan regions are now more permeable. The borders of the “them” and “us” categories are moveable and often crossed by both groups with a distinct purpose. But despite these more flexible categories, the aim of the monastery to preserve its religious practices in exile remains steadfast. The rest of this chapter will look at the monastic environment and its particularly deliberate construction as a ritual space to create unity under the leadership of the lineage lama. I will describe the

⁸¹ Another centre is being established in Australia near Geelong. At the time of writing, retreats are being held there, but not during the time of my fieldwork so I won't be including information on that centre.

⁸² For example Namdroling Monastery, also in Karnataka, holds an open one month retreat each year, although no special arrangements are made for visitors from other countries and often places for monks or nuns are prioritised.

physical elements of the field setting, the buildings and their decorations, and their focus on the principle of the pure lama.

The Layout of the Monastery

Visitors enter Dzogchen Monastery through a yellow steel gate and are immediately faced by the temple at the end of a short drive lined with grass and small trees. The driveway is decorated with religious symbols painted in white; they are so large that they stretch three quarters of the way across and create a direct path for any visitor heading towards the temple. To the left is the university, which is attached to the monastery—Dzogchen Shri Sengha Shedra, which is held in high regard by the monastic community and also houses the monks who study there. It is a two-storey building that stretches down to the start of the temple. It was officially opened in 1994 and is still painted brightly with red pillars, coloured designs and religious symbols. Many of the monastery's religious buildings are decorated in this fashion; the religious symbols each with their many layers of meaning are visible wherever you look and act as a constant reminder to the monks of the values and the Buddhist way of life that they have chosen to follow. They can be large in size or much smaller intricate items. For example, on the top floor balcony, which looks out over the driveway, there are models of two golden deer, approximately five feet high and a large wheel depicting the wheel of dharma, the Buddha's teachings. This represents the teachings of the Buddha, who is recorded to have given three prominent phases of teachings known as three turnings of the wheel of dharma, also known as the three yantras described earlier in this chapter (Das 1998). Deer are treated with great respect by Buddhists because the Buddha travelled to the Isipantana Deer Park close to Benares in India to give his first ever teaching known as the first wheel of dharma⁸³ (Phrabhavanaviryakhun 2002). For Buddhists, a deer also symbolises non-attachment because they never sleep in the same place twice (Beer 2003); or perhaps more accurately, they don't

⁸³ Dzogchen Monastery used to have a pet deer that lived at its retreat centre. When it became too large for the small grounds that surround the retreat centre, it was allowed to wander around the rest of the monastery; once, during an international retreat at which I was present, where the shedra's teaching hall was being used by Dzogchen Rinpoche to give his daily instructions, the deer climbed two staircases and joined his teaching. When the deer walked into the teaching room, most of the students looked up in surprise; its presence was unexpected as the room was on the first floor. I think the deer could sense their response and seemed to become quite nervous, dropping faeces on the floor. At this point, a German lady who was in charge of taking care of the lama's belongings whilst in the teaching room and serving the lama refreshments jumped up and clapped her hands to scare off the deer. As she did so, Dzogchen Rinpoche gestured that it was okay; the deer was welcome in the teaching room. Unfortunately it was too late and the deer was gone. Dzogchen Rinpoche explained that deer are considered protectors of the dharma and it is a good sign if they are present when Buddhist teachings are being given.

have a designated sleeping place that they regularly return to, much like the monks in the time of the Buddha who wandered from town to town without a permanent home. On the right of the drive there is a steep drop down to the basketball court,⁸⁴ which the monks use when their day's schedule is finished; they sometimes play football on it. Next to the court is the dratsang where the monks who train in the religious rituals rather than academic study live. Further down the hill, behind the dratsang, is the monastery's drubdra (the retreat centre).

The mundane buildings, the offices and guesthouse used for non-religious matters, are slightly set back from the temple. There lies the monks' kitchen and dining room and then the monastery's guesthouse where visitors and international sangha [non-monastic practitioners] attending residential retreats stay. The guesthouse is divided into two sections: a one storey building above the dining room and a three storey building with more spacious rooms next door (joined by the monks' kitchen). The rooms have concrete floors and are minimally decorated; they are easy to clean and provide cool respite in the dry season. A small shop, health clinic and a few offices are opposite the guesthouse. These buildings, in stark contrast to the religious buildings, are simple in design, white washed, square buildings with flat roofs, without religious symbolism decorating their walls.

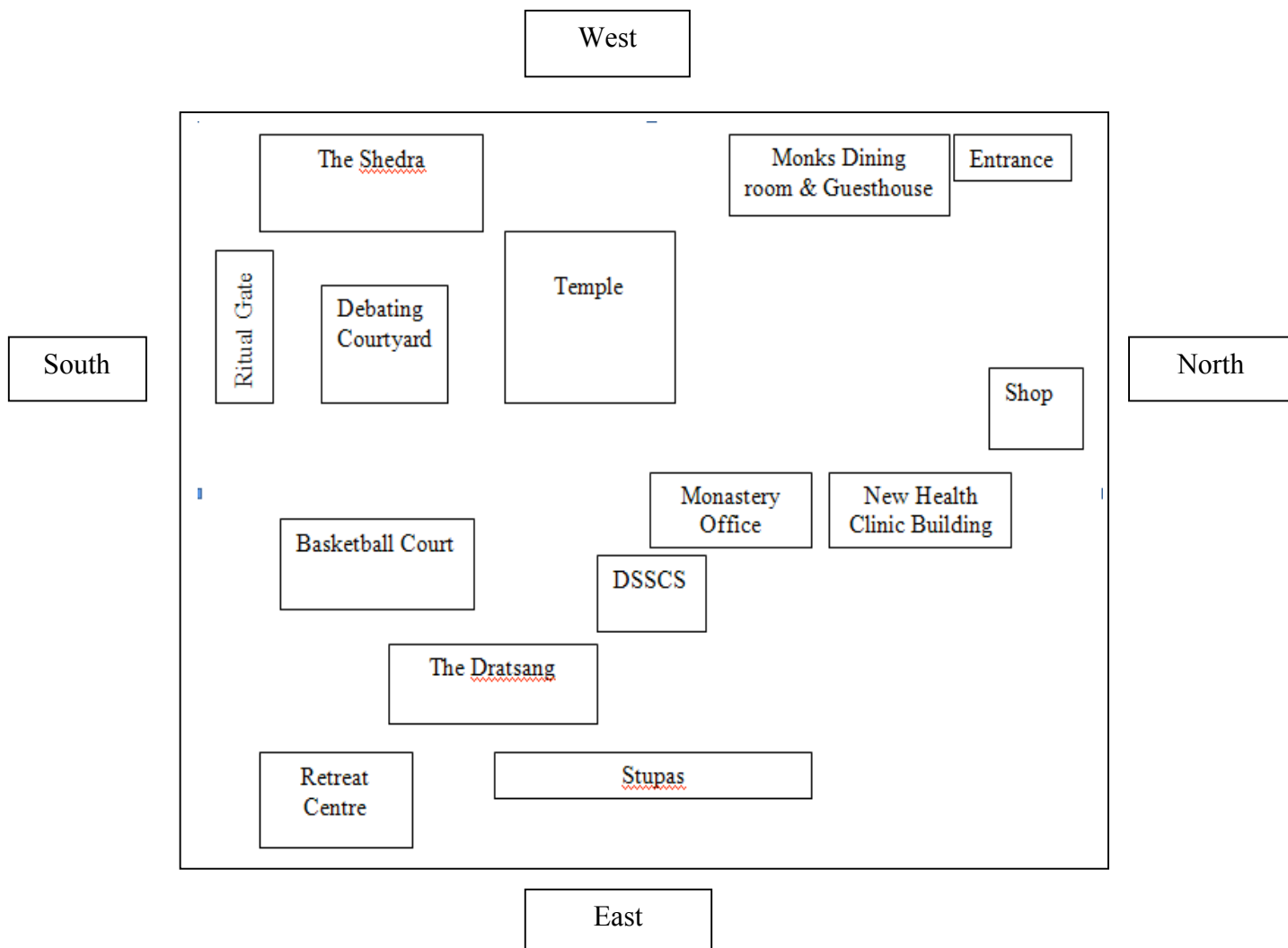
The painting of the different buildings and the colours chosen is very deliberate. Only certain colours are used and the painters undergo training and follow strict instructions about which colour to use. In general, the main colours that are used represent the five different elements: air (green), water (blue), space (white), fire (red) and earth (yellow), which Buddhists believe have combined to create human existence (Barker 2003), or they are related to the five Buddha families (Trungpa 2000) and then various sub categories of inner transformation taught within Buddhist texts (Wangyal 2002). These colours are present in prayers flags, in ribbons that decorate ritual items, within tablecloths and on the shrines within the temple. The main point I am making is that the arrangement of the monastic grounds is far from haphazard and there is a very deliberate plan both for the construction of the buildings and their decoration.

The monastery is the home and nurturing ground of the monks; it is a practical space that supports monastic operations and the material needs of the monks. But my research revealed an additional aim—supporting the hierarchy of purity within the monastery. This education takes

⁸⁴ A news report from June 2015 on www.dzogchen.org.in states that the basketball court has now been demolished and the space is being used to extend the dratsang.

place on a mental level within the university but it also has a physical aspect to it, created by the specific layout, construction and decoration of the monastic buildings. A deliberate stage for the enactment and expression of Buddhist cosmology and the specific practices of Dzogchen has been created and through this I observe that the monastery strives to be an all-encompassing ritual environment dedicated to the worship of purity embodied within the lama. I see it as a performance of Buddhist doctrine within which the monks and international students also present at the monastery are guided through various visual and embodied rituals in order to realise their own purity. Lastly, as well as being a method to achieve and embody purity, the deliberate focus on a unified material experience at the monastery ensures that the Dzogchen tradition that has been passed down for the past four centuries remains with a fully physical presence continuing to exist in exile.

Fig. 3.4 Source: Author's own
Plan of Dzogchen Monastery



Dzogchen Monastery Temple

At the centre of this ritual environment is the temple; it is the largest single building in the monastery and the largest temple within all the monasteries within the Dhondenling settlement. The temple has hosted visits from H.H the Dalai Lama leader of the Gelug School (on the top floor there is a special apartment for the Dalai Lama to stay in) and H.H the 17th Karmapa, leader of the Kaygu School of Buddhism and a high profile public figure as he is tipped to assume overall leadership of Tibetan Buddhism when the Dalai Lama passes away. The visits are organised on behalf of the entire community as, due to its size, it was considered the most suitable venue to hold all the hundreds of people that attended the event. I have spoken to some of the villagers who came to make offerings at the shrine and they believed that the temple had become more sacred through these visits and they frequently made offerings of candles, khatags [white silk ceremonial scarves] or small monetary offerings at the main shrine. So not only is the temple dedicated to the principle of the pure lama as I will continue to explain through the statues of Buddha and Padmasambhava (patron saint of Tibet) with the thrones of the Dalai Lama and Dzogchen Rinpoche and the nature of the practices that take place there, it is also a venue for lamas of other traditions to use.

The temple is a three-storey building. Tibetan flags, Buddhist flags and Dzogchen flags fly proudly from the rooftop and the first floor veranda. Again, religious symbols painted in gold decorate the brown walls that separate the different floors. The ground floor houses the main prayer hall that can be entered through a bright red double door with extra-large golden doorknobs at least a foot wide at the front of the building giving a sense of great prestige. A verandah runs around the front half of the temple on the ground floor and sometimes monks can be seen seated in the shade memorising religious texts. There is a large gong to the right side of the verandah which is rung before every prayer session informing the monks, particularly the younger monks who are often playing, distracted from their schedule, that their presence is required. To the right of the prayer hall is a small room where a group of monks can be heard continually chanting throughout the day.

The Dalai Lama's Apartment

On the left side of the temple there is a staircase that proceeds up to the first floor which is home to the Dalai Lama's apartment and then to the second floor which mainly comprises of the roof and a two small rooms in the corner which are home to the temple caretaker and the

monk who is in charge of the prayer room on the ground floor. Every Tibetan temple, if large enough, has an apartment space that is set aside for the Dalai Lama or other senior lamas to be used should they visit the monastery. The apartment has a bedroom, bathroom and private seating area with a main reception room to greet visitors and a waiting room for guests. It has a veranda that looks out down the driveway towards the ceremonial gate at the edge of the monastic grounds.

The monastic hierarchy is often reflected within the location and positioning of the buildings, ritual items, and people. The most important and most sacred items are always placed highest the apartment belonging to the Dalai Lama was built at the top of the temple above all the sacred items within the temple as he is considered by many monks and followers as the spiritual head of Tibetan Buddhism. If something or someone is considered less important than these items or people, they take a much lower position. This is also found in seating arrangements; the young monks were seated at the back and then those who hold responsibility within monastery for example the khenpos [teachers] sat next to the tulku, the reincarnate lamas, in the front line. Dzogchen Rinpoche and the Dalai Lama have their own thrones and where they are not present in the temple, large photographs of them are placed in their seats. The hierarchy is based upon purity; those who embody purity are at the top of the hierarchy and those who are still striving to achieve this are lower.

It is also found within room allocations (mentioned later in this chapter) and also mirrored within the body. The head is thought to be the most sacred part of the body and during my first few days of my initial visit to the monastery as part of a protocol debrief, I was warned by an international student never to touch a monk's head as it was "too sacred" and it is thought to be pure and would be contaminated through touch. Conversely, if you seek a blessing from a lama, you approach with your head bowed demonstrating that you are offering the purest part of your body to be blessed. The feet are considered the least pure part of the body; they are not permitted to point towards sacred items such as statues or religious paintings and this is made clear by the formal advice any person staying at the monastery would receive either verbally or through written guidelines. I will describe these body practices in more depth as the thesis unfolds and I will draw upon, amongst others, the work of Mary Douglas and her treatment of body symbolism in her book *Purity and Danger*. Douglas argues that the grand sense of social order (macrocosm) is mirrored in the physical body (microcosm) and that the boundaries and

taboos of the body can represent external boundaries particularly those that are at threat or in danger (1966:115).

Protecting the Temple

On either side of the main temple door on the ground floor are paintings of four wrathful gods; there are two on either side approximately two metres square. These gods, which have been hand painted onto the walls, are known as the Four Heavenly Kings, *rgyal chen bzhi* [Tibetan], the guardians from the four cardinal directions who are said to protect the Buddha's teachings (Vessantara 1999). The monks believe that the kings ward off evil and avert negative circumstances for the monastery. Each is dressed in armour and looks ferocious carrying a weapon or symbolic object, reportedly deterring anyone who wishes to bring harm to the temple, according to Tashi, one of my main informants at the monastery.

Tashi was a senior monk in his early 40s who led the monastery's chanting and often passed on his knowledge to international students. As previously mentioned, my husband, Alistair, often accompanied me on visits to the monastery. Alistair is also a singer. He developed a good friendship with Tashi who instructed him and corrected his errors in chanting. The connection through my husband made it much easier to speak with Tashi, who was from a nomadic family in Tibet and had first attended Dzogchen Monastery in the Kham region. He then made a pilgrimage to South India to see Dzogchen Rinpoche and study at the monastery's university.⁸⁵

One evening, during my second fieldwork visit to Dzogchen Monastery in 2011, I was standing outside the temple looking at the paintings of the kings when Tashi came past and stopped to say hello. I wanted to know whether Tashi's understanding of the kings was different to what I had read in the books⁸⁶ and so began to question him.⁸⁷ Tashi's knowledge, although not as

⁸⁵ At the time of writing, Tashi was mid-way through a trip back to Tibet for the first time in nearly 10 years to see his family again. Sadly, as his mother was getting old and he feared that it could be the last time that he would see her. Tashi has now not been granted a visa to leave Tibet and what was meant to be a three month stay has turned into nearly a year.

⁸⁶ Beer (2003) explains that the chief of the four heavenly kings is called Namthöse and has a gold face and carries an umbrella, which is a symbol of royalty and protection. He is also said to be the god of spiritual wealth—prosperity for dharma (Buddha's teachings). Each king stands on top of a defeated evil spirit or wild animal, symbolizing their power to control all threats to the dharma, such as a tiger, which depicts victory over anger and aggression. Historically, the Gods originated in India as *deva* (generals protecting Lord Indra), but were later adopted into the Buddhist pantheon in China, Tibet and Japan (Beer 2003). The monastery is also decorated with other physical reminders of protectors, within *thangkas* (paintings of Buddha, Padmasambhava or other religious deities) or as statues on the roof of the temple as previously mentioned with the deer.

refined as one would read within the Buddhist texts, still demonstrated a certain level of understanding of what the official purpose of the kings were. I found that this was quite common amongst the monks. They generally had a good knowledge of the main religious symbols at the monastery learning about them through either direct study or through their daily recitation of prayers where they are praised. When I enquired what type of negativity the monastery could face he was quite adamant that negativity could come from any direction in many different forms. He explained that negativity could come from different deities or gods who weren't positive, natural causes such as floods or sickness, or man-made disasters like fires or wars. He continued that the monastery in Tibet had suffered a lot of damage in a fire and then with destruction during the Chinese 'attacks'.⁸⁸ Tashi felt that it was very likely that these things could happen and that it was really important to be protected against them. After Tashi left, I took a walk around the temple and on every side I found there was a visual reminder that the temple and what it houses was protected from every direction and in every manner by powerful, holy beings.⁸⁹ For a visitor, such an impressive support structure gave the strong sense that whatever was housed within the building was something of great value, adding to a sense of sacredness and grandeur of the temple.

At this point I would like to introduce the idea that the temple, dedicated to the principle of the pure lama, is actually a material symbol of the lama's pure body. In doing so, I draw on the work of Scheper-Hughes and Lock (1987) who wrote that concern over penetration and violation of bodily boundaries can actually be extended to material constructions. These boundaries can refer to the entrances and exits of the home: the doors and windows. By describing the various elements of temple and its protection, I begin to demonstrate that the temple is believed to be a centre of the lama's purity and must be protected from every direction. Chapter 6 will develop this idea and explain how the ritual of rabnye enables the temple to actually house the purity of the lama's body within the statues inside it.

⁸⁷ Our conversation was in English. Tashi had started to learn English after arriving at the monastery; although not fluent, he was able to communicate well.

⁸⁸ During the Cultural Revolution.

⁸⁹ Even the main roof is decorated in each corner by water monsters, otherwise known as a makara, who are sea dragons and resemble crocodiles. This creature originates from Indian mythology and can be found in the Indian zodiac as the equivalent of Capricorn (Beer 2003). It symbolises power and tenacity and is associated with the water element.

According to Scheper-Hughes (1979), protective rituals linked to these material symbols are used to generate a sense of control and security. During my fieldwork, it became clear that the temple not only is a religious symbol but it has a very real world significance relating to the power and status of the monastery amongst its political and social audiences. The audiences are the monks who live there, the visiting international students, the Tibetan and Indian communities that live nearby, the Indian officials that visit, and, perhaps most importantly to the monastic committee, the Chinese audience, both government and the general public, who watch from afar. There have been a number of anthropological studies that explore how buildings, through the practice of embodied worship or ritual behaviour, become centres of social power. In this thesis, I will draw on the work of Makley (2003) who studied the Tibetan practice of circumambulation (kora) around a monastery temple in the town of Labrang in southwest Gansu Province, China. Makley observed that this key activity increased the centrality and power of the monastery making the temple and subsequently the monastery a key focal point for the lay community and also a declaration of strength to the observing Chinese officials.⁹⁰ In the next chapter, I lay the foundations for this analysis by unpacking the meaning of lineage: the chronological line of lamas who have held the power and authority with Dzogchen and are worshipped for their purity. I will consider lineage both as a historical and living concept looking at the role of the lama and how this has been presented thus far in anthropological studies.

⁹⁰ Chinese police or government officials.

Chapter 4 Purity: Understandings and Practices

Despite the varied groups living in the monastery and the new audiences encountered through the vast geographical reach of the international network of Dzogchen, there is one main principle that is of paramount importance to Dzogchen practitioners;⁹¹ the idea of an unbroken, authentic and pure lineage, which can broadly be described as a “religious tradition”. The Tibetan word for lineage is *brgyud pa*, which is the translation of the Sanskrit word *parampara*, referring to an unbroken line of successive teachers through whom the Buddhist or divinatory teachings are transmitted (Paul 1982). To explain further, key concepts associated with the translation of *brgyud pa* to ‘lineage’ are: that which is transmitted, that which is conducted, to continue, to pass on or to be chained together (Goldstein 2001). Activities that promote and ensure the lasting continuation of the lineage in what is believed by the practitioners to be a preserved, unpolluted state are a priority for both the monastic and lay community.⁹² The idea of preservation also holds within it a focus on reconstruction and how to recreate within the Tibetan diasporic community and when in contact with new international communities, the Dzogchen identity that existed within Tibet pre-Cultural Revolution. With the passing of time, the main lamas of the generation that brought this identity across the Himalayas and unto a new world have now passed away and the reconstruction of this identity is reliant on a strong oral and written narrative of the lineage and how successfully this can be transferred onto the new would-be propagators of Dzogchen.

In this chapter, I introduce and begin to unpack the practices and belief system surrounding the doctrinal concept of purity that I found at the monastery. This will serve as a foundation for the rest of the thesis where I describe how folk notions of purity develop from the doctrine. Such as how purity is thought to be created and transmitted through embodied acts of worship⁹³ and how purity is linked to the spatial and material arrangement of the monastery. I will show how authenticity is understood by the practitioners as something that is pure, continued, unbroken and unchanged over time. I will consider the lineage as both a present living concept but also how it is believed to exist by the inhabitants of the monastery in a non-physical capacity and how the two are intertwined through local and official meanings. Ideally, I would like to compare the attitude of the monks in exile to those of the monks in Tibet pre-Cultural

⁹¹ A practitioner is someone who practices the Dzogchen teachings and rituals. To practise is to put into action.

⁹² Lay or laity is a word commonly used to describe Dzogchen practitioners who have not taken monastic vows.

⁹³ Prostrations, *kora* and similar religious behaviours.

Revolution but unfortunately, there are no ethnographic studies that cover Dzogchen Monastery nor any other monastery during this period. In addition, there are no monks living at the monastery who also lived at Dzogchen Monastery in Tibet with whom I could discuss this. The only information that I have is a transcript of a public talk by Dzogchen Rinpoche, the current head of the Dzogchen lineage, where he recalls what he was told about the attitude of the monks at Dzogchen Monastery during the time of the 4th Dzogchen Rinpoche (1793-1870) by one of his teachers. He described the monks as being quite relaxed and confident in the status of the monastery because of the large number of monks living there and because of the high regard in which the general public held the 4th Dzogchen Rinpoche. As I covered in the previous chapter, Goldstein (1998) recorded a time of great abundance for monasteries in Tibet in 1951 with approximately 10-15% of Tibet's population ordained as monks. This is in stark contrast to the situation at Dzogchen Monastery in South India. During my fieldwork, Dzogchen Monastery had a much smaller population with just 200 monks in residence and dependent on international sponsorship rather than local Tibetan support. I observed the monastery at a very interesting point in its history where the successful continuation of the lineage was of great importance.

The latter half of the chapter will provide an ethnographic background to the role of the lama and their relationship with wider society considering the work of Ortner (1978, 1989), Goldstein and Tsarong (1985), Tuttle (2005), Amstutz (2006) and Learman (2005). This will provide the context for my attempts to add to the current discourse in anthropology around the “social isolated” or “socially engaged” Tibetan lama throughout the rest of this thesis. I will look at the power that the pure lama holds when socially active and how this is used to achieve continuation of the lineage.

Lineage—What does it mean?

At this stage in my unpacking of the term lineage or *brgyud pa*, it is worth mentioning again that during my fieldwork, Dzogchen Monastery was a multi-lingual institution. The monastics body are from a number of different Himalayan countries: China, Tibet, Nepal, Bhutan and northern Indian Himalayan regions such as Himachal Pradesh; therefore, each spoke their own language and even within those who spoke Tibetan, there were very different regional dialects.

Those from East Tibet speak dialects such as Kham⁹⁴ Tibetan and Amdo⁹⁵ Tibetan, whilst those from central Tibet speak a dialect sometimes known as Lhasa⁹⁶ Tibetan or Central Tibetan. Then there are the international students, the lay practising sangha (community of Buddhist followers); a global collective from Europe, the USA and Australia (a very small minority visited from South America or parts of Asia) for whom the “official” language of communication was English. When the monks spoke to inges (the Tibetan name for Westerners or any international student), they spoke in English or were aided by an interpreter. Inge literally translates as ‘English’ yet it is commonly used to refer to anyone with white skin regardless of which country they are from.⁹⁷ As a result of this, the focus of my analysis will be on the English term lineage rather than the Tibetan *brgyud pa*. Of course within a community with variable levels of fluency in English, there is huge potential for different understandings of lineage and shifts in translation as ideas flow back and forth. As well as posing challenges to me as the ethnographer, it poses significant challenges to Dzogchen Monastery and its aim of achieving unity and continuity of its ritual practices and religious traditions. Consequently, I believe that this is why embodied worship (prostrations, full length bows, covered in Chapter 8; kora, repeatedly walking in a circle around a sacred site, covered in Chapter 8; and offerings of khatags, white silk scarves, covered in Chapter 7) play such a large role in life at the monastery, and they are a central concern of this thesis because, to a certain extent, more commonality can be established through physical action as it is not impeded by the limitations of language understanding. The monastery emphasises learning through doing and uses an action-orientated pedagogy (Samuels 2004, 2005) to instruct the monks, international students and laity on ritual behaviour; throughout the rest of this thesis I will explore how this contributes to a temporary but necessary unity for the monastery.

⁹⁴ Kham is one of the three main traditional regions of Tibet located in the southeastern corner of the Tibetan Plateau approx. 924,000 km² and home to 2 million Tibetans (Dorje 1999). The Kham dialect itself has four different versions and is not widely understood outside of its geographic area.

⁹⁵ Amdo is one of the three main traditional regions of Tibet (the third is U-tsang). It is located in the northeast corner of the Tibetan plateau and is home to approx. 1.5million people (Dorje 1999). There are two major subdialects.

⁹⁶ Lhasa is the capital of Tibet.

⁹⁷ So far I have not been present when someone of African descent or a darker skin colour has visited the monastery and on the occasions where they have been spoken about in conversations, they would normally be just described by their skin colour. Tibetans are very direct in their communication and have no social inhibitions for saying what they see if they believe it is accurate. For example, when I returned to the monastery after a break in my fieldwork and had put on weight, I was soon told that I had gained weight without a hint of consideration for how I may receive this information. An amusing aside is that when I first visited the monastery, I had pale skin and short black hair so for a few weeks, a couple of the younger monks called me Michael Jackson and were not at all concerned that I might be offended.

The monks, as described earlier, are mostly from countries where Mahayana Buddhism, of which Tibetan Buddhism sits within, is the dominant religious practice. They are therefore familiar with the concept of lineage having grown up immersed within this conceptual framework. For the purpose of illustrating how the lineage influences life at the monastery, I will begin my description with entry to the monastery when the monks commit to the monastic way of life. Upon ordination, the monks enter into another type of social group, which, rather than prioritising the nuclear family, places great importance on the connection to the historical Buddhist family—a line of lamas, teachers that are remembered and worshipped, for their purity. This ’family tree’ of lamas outlines how the main religious teachings within a specific Buddhist vehicle and its sub category of a particular Tibetan Buddhist tradition are handed down from master to disciple over generations and hold particular information relating to that tradition.

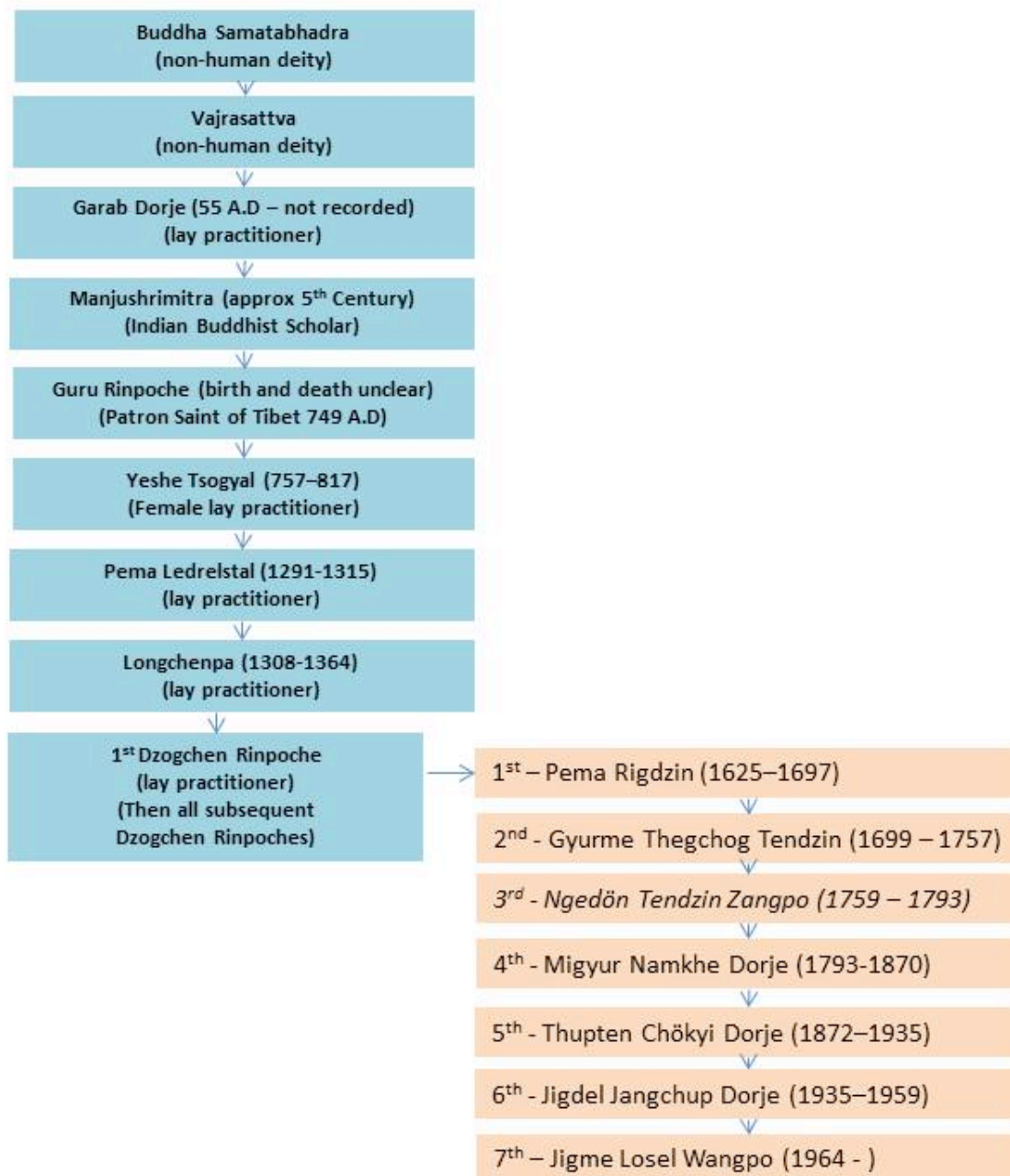
The lama is the central figure of the lineage for he is the leader and in terms of political, social, economic and religious power reigns absolute over all members of the Dzogchen community. The concept of sanctified humans as spiritual leaders with supreme power can be found frequently within Buddhist historiography and in anthropological studies has been likened to kingship or royal leadership. These kinglike leaders were instrumental in deciding the social order and the politics of the day. According to Tambiah (1984), within early Buddhism⁹⁸ there was “a certain ideological mould regarding kingship and sangha, religion and polity, which had set and acted as a persisting and perduring influence on the Buddhist polities of South and South East Asia” (1984:2). Tambiah uses this understanding and point of reference in early Buddhism as a meaningful way to study the trajectory of South East Asian Buddhist kingdoms, their tensions and their dynamics. Through his reading of canonical texts, he concluded that there is an interconnected three-way relationship between the “value statements and characterisations of ideal Buddhist kingship, the relation between dhamma (morality/duty) and the social order” (1984:2). The latter part of this chapter will consider the king-like role and how the strength of lineage narrative is critical to the success of the engagement with the world outside of the monastic community and the belief in embodied purity.

As touched upon earlier in Chapter 3, each monastery within Tibetan Buddhism belongs to a particular school of Buddhism and within those schools are historical lineages that are

⁹⁸ Tambiah uses Weber’s categorisation of early Buddhism as immediately before the reign of the Emperor Asoka (269 BCE to 232 BCE).

officially recorded in written historical accounts, referred to in philosophical discussions and prayers, and frequently mentioned at formal engagements in introductory speeches. The Dzogchen lineage is no exception and with the inclusion of non-human deities and its history of lay practitioners, it is one of the oldest lineages within Tibetan Buddhism despite its monastic tradition dating back only four centuries.

Fig. 4.1 Source: Author's own
The Dzogchen Lineage—Chronology of Lineage Masters



You will see that not all of the dates follow exactly and sometimes there are many years between Dzogchen masters. The Dzogchen teachings were hidden as terma, religious treasure and then revealed or discovered at a later date.

In summary, the Dzogchen lineage can be traced down from the primordial Buddha Samatradra (non-human deity) to Vajrasattva (non-human deity) and to the Dzogchen master Garab Dorje (lay practitioner), dated to have lived around 55AD (Norbu 1986). From Garab Dorje, the lineage passed through other human masters to the Pema Rigdzin a revered meditation master of Tibet and who is said to have become known as the first Dzogchen Rinpoche because of his personification of the Dzogchen teachings.⁹⁹ The third incarnation of Dzogchen Rinpoche established Dzogchen Monastery in Tibet and the head of Dzogchen Monastery in exile is the seventh incarnation of Pema Rigdzin. The main point that I wish to convey through this brief explanation of the lineage is that the lama figure is critical to the presentation of the official lineage. One of my informants, Tashi, introduced in Chapter 3, once said, “without the lama there is no lineage and without the monastery there are no lamas. The monastery is the home of the lamas.” All three are intertwined and within the prescribed narrative cannot be separated.

In addition to being a commemorative list of lamas from the past, the historical line has a living and present aspect to it. The lineage holder, often chosen as a reincarnation of a previous lama, is the head of this historical family and consequently the power holder who makes all major decisions affecting the Buddhist family at a collective group level. Each monastery is then led by a main lama under the jurisdiction of the lineage holder who then makes decisions at an individual level relating to the needs of specific monks.¹⁰⁰ As part of their ordination, the monks are expected to pledge their loyalty and offer their service to the main lama of their monastery, the main lama of the lineage, the lineage holder and then all the lamas mentioned in the historical line. This loyalty and service manifests predominantly as obedience to the monastic code of conduct and one example of this is through the dress code. All monks are required to abandon their previous style of dress and wear maroon robes, a golden/orange top shirt, and to shave their heads. They are given a new name that becomes their identity for the length of their ordination or their stay at the monastery if they leave for another. The monks now have no source of income and are dependent on the monastery for their material and physical needs.

They follow the monastery’s schedule of activity, participate in all religious rituals and undertake menial labour to help with the general maintenance of the monastic grounds. The

⁹⁹ Taken from the Lineage information page of www.dzogchen.org.in

¹⁰⁰ At Dzogchen Monastery the head of the monastery is also the head of the lineage, Dzogchen Rinpoche.

official daily schedule of the monks is dominated by activities connected to the lineage. Every morning and evening, the monks chant prayers of supplication (praise) to the lineage; they are expected to learn these prayers by heart. They study the Buddhist philosophy written by the lineage masters and they perform lineage-specific prayers and rituals at the request of the villagers. They pray for fertility, for rain to improve the harvests, to accumulate wealth, for good health and for those who have passed away. As mentioned in Chapter 3, the monastic buildings are also influenced by the lineage. The temple is decorated with paintings of the lineage protectors.¹⁰¹ The statues inside the temple are of the main lamas and the lineage flags fly from the rooftops.

The experience of the lineage for the international students is less immediate. Their first encounter with the tradition in general is usually with a teacher who provides personal instruction and translations of the Buddhist texts, and through doing so, introduces the concept of the lineage to them. Mostly this is an unfamiliar concept to the new student. For many of the people that I met at the monastery their first encounter with Dzogchen was by attending a public talk with Dzogchen Rinpoche within their hometown. Dzogchen Rinpoche travels extensively around the world giving evening lectures and weekend seminars to the public. At the start of each talk, Dzogchen Rinpoche introduces the history of the lineage which provides a context to the teachings that he will be giving and also his role of head of the lineage and the responsibility that he was given as a young child to transmit these teachings.

Those who are interested to receive further teachings from Dzogchen Rinpoche would attend teaching retreats in their own country; weekly two hour “study and practice groups” where participants take part in a combination of meditation, chanting and philosophical study (listening to and discussing the religious teachings) and then travel to the monastery for the international retreat held each New Year. Slowly, as the international students become more familiar with the Dzogchen traditions and rites, the lineage begins to take on more meaning for them. This gradual transmission was reflected in a number of fieldwork interviews that stress the initial uncertainty experienced when performing new behaviours and then gradual assimilation until the concept of the lineage begins to feel more “natural”. When an international student has become comfortable with the concept of the lineage and the worship of the lama, they begin to embody behaviours that express this. They embody folk

¹⁰¹ Non-human, wrathful deities who were subjugated by Padmasambhava, the founder of Tibetan Buddhism in Tibet, to protect the Dzogchen lineage

understandings of purity such as refraining from turning their backs (impure) and pointing their feet (less pure). These folk practices of purity become natural and happen often without thinking. When I analyse the various embodied acts of worship performed at the monastery in later chapters, I will cover this process of assimilation and then embodiment in more depth.

How are Pure Lamas Chosen?

The idea of a lineage is common within Mahayana Buddhism and Vajrayana Buddhism although it is not as common within Hinayana traditions of Buddhism in Thailand and Burma, and there are a number of widely accepted criteria within Tibetan Buddhism that determine whether a lineage is authentic and has a pure lama at its helm. Here I will draw upon those that I have observed at Dzogchen Monastery when visiting different monasteries in India and through a number of different interactions with varied Buddhist groups in the West. I will use examples from my research at Dzogchen Monastery to illustrate how these criteria are met. Firstly, a lineage should have a living lineage holder: someone who is considered the embodiment of everything sacred and pure within that particular tradition. It is customary to show reverence to the holder and also to prove their validity at every public opportunity and in a variety of different forms: verbal, pictorial and written. I encountered many examples of lineage proclamation whilst at Dzogchen Monastery in every formal speech, specific prayers in religious texts, a written description on the website, and pictures of each of the lineage holders¹⁰²— heads of the lineage.

Lineage holders are appointed through a belief in reincarnation and a system of recognition where designated representatives of the lineage officiate the search, identification and enthronement of new lineage holder (I will discuss enthronements in more detail later in Chapter 7). In the Dzogchen tradition, the 7th Dzogchen Rinpoche is the lineage holder; he was officially recognised by the 4th Dodrupchen Rinpoche and enthroned in 1972.¹⁰³ This system of recognition is common across the four schools of Tibetan Buddhism. For example, within the Gelugpa tradition, there is a system of recognition between the Dalai Lamas and the Panchen Lamas; both recognise each other in turn to ensure continuity of their particular line (Hilton 2001). The Shakya School has been led for more than 900 years by the Shakya Rinpoches. Their reincarnation system is normally held within one aristocratic Tibetan family (Trichen 1983). However, in some cases where there is a lack of agreement amongst the lamas that are

¹⁰² <http://www.dzogchen.org.in/dzogchen-lineage>

¹⁰³ <http://www.dzogchen.org.in/seventh-dzogchen-rinpoche>

tasked with finding the reincarnation as has happened within the Kagyu School in its search for the 17th Karmapa, the head of the school. A team of three main lamas, Situ Rinpoche, Gyaltsab Rinpoche and Shamar Rinpoche, hold the responsibility for identifying the correct child, but in the case of the 17th incarnation, there is a split in opinion where Shamar Rinpoche identified an alternative candidate and an on-going feud between their different supporters continues today (Lehnert 2000).¹⁰⁴ In cases like this, the legitimacy of the lineage is called into question. Due to the appointment of a second Dzogchen Rinpoche, legitimacy was a fiercely defended topic within the Dzogchen lineage during my period of fieldwork, and one viewed as critical to successful continuation of Dzogchen in years to come.

In addition to official human recognition, the purity of a lama and of the lineage are also thought to be proven by its followers witnessing supernatural incidents and signs at the birth of the lineage holder and throughout their lives. During my fieldwork, I was relayed a number of different stories regarding Dzogchen Rinpoche by both monks and the international students. A selection are: it is said that Dodrupchen Rinpoche had a vision of Dzogchen Rinpoche whilst he was still in his mother's womb; Dzogchen Rinpoche cured a young boy from epilepsy by touching him on his head with a vajra (a ritual item); and Dzogchen Rinpoche's mother is purported to have seen a young Rinpoche leave his footprint in a rock at their family home in Sikkim. I visited the home that lies on the northern hillside about the capital city of Gangtok in January 2009 and was shown around by Dzogchen Rinpoche's brother. He showed me the footprint in the rock, which is at the back of the home, and described how his mother is adamant that the footprint was left by Dzogchen Rinpoche as a young boy. He personally did not see the event but repeated that his mother firmly believed that it was the footprint of her son, Dzogchen Rinpoche.

Whilst being recognised as a reincarnation, it is not taken as a guarantee that the new holder of the lineage will stand up to the reputation of his predecessor, so the young lama is given a rigorous philosophical education as part of his spiritual training. When an incarnation is particularly successful in his studies, it is seen as a validation of their identification and they are often celebrated for their academic achievements. For example, within the written publicity that encourages international students to attend teaching retreats with Dzogchen Rinpoche at the monastery, it is noted that he gained his Rabjampa, Masters, in Tibetan Buddhism at a very

¹⁰⁴ This is also a possible reason for how new schools of Buddhism emerged.

young 19 years of age. Importance is also placed on which teachers instructed the young incarnation and their reputations, what academic qualifications and experience they have and whom they are an incarnation of if they too are Rinpoches. I encountered this first hand when I visited the monastery of Dodrupchen Rinpoche in Sikkim in 2011 and met a young monk who had been a student of one of Dzogchen Rinpoche's teachers, Khenpo Thubten. He was delighted to learn that I was connected to Dzogchen Monastery and that I was studying the community there. He extended a great deal of hospitality to my husband and I, inviting us in for tea and providing a tour of the monastery. The young monk spoke at length about the importance of Dzogchen Rinpoche having a good teacher such as his own and how beneficial this was for the lineage.

An authentic lineage holder must also, as stated in numerous religious texts (Patrul 1994), demonstrate considerable charitable doings and compassionate action that contribute to "upholding the dharma", acts that are deemed to support the propagation of the dharma such as building temples, sponsoring the printing of Buddhist texts and doing charitable and compassionate deeds.¹⁰⁵ An example from Dzogchen Rinpoche's life is that he has been involved in re-establishing Dzogchen Monastery in Karnataka since the late 1970s and is still continuing its development by extending the monks' accommodation and renovating the temple. A female student from France once told me that she had heard a story that Dzogchen Rinpoche's mother, who had helped to rebuild the monastery in the early days, said that she wanted the monastery to be as big as possible and house hundreds more monks than it currently does and that this was of utmost importance for the strength of the lineage. Also in the 1990s Dzogchen Rinpoche was recognised by the government in exile for charity work aiding the residents of the Dhondenling settlement. Dzogchen Rinpoche has built three kindergartens, an old people's home, run several medical clinics, and been involved in various infrastructure improvement projects concerning the roads and water supplies. This certificate is referred to on the monastery's website; it is mentioned in all public event introductions that are part of Dzogchen Rinpoche's teaching tours and is displayed on an information table at the event about his charity work.¹⁰⁶

Such an emphasis on establishing purity begs the question; can a lama ever be considered less pure than others? If so, what happens? Is the lama hidden away for fear that it would bring

¹⁰⁵ The Buddha's teachings.

¹⁰⁶ <http://www.dzogchen.org.in/dsscs>

shame on the lineage? Essentially, all lamas are considered pure from birth; in fact, before birth, as an incarnation of another pure lama, the purity pre-exists and continues through from one life to the next. The incarnation system establishes the purity of the lama, or his realisation of it, as greater than others (all beings are considered to be pure but have not realised it). All lamas start from the base point of purity, but there is a negotiation between the accomplishments of their past life and the present and how they operate currently. Are they particularly knowledgeable of Buddhist doctrine? Are they believed to have healing capacities due to their accomplishments in the present life? Or does their status solely rely on how they were perceived in the previous life? During my fieldwork at Dzogchen Monastery, although I did meet a number of different lamas when they gathered for an official congregation to discuss the future of the lineage, I only have significant ethnographic data concerning Dzogchen Rinpoche. His record within both the present life and the believed incarnations is presented by the monastic committee as exemplary and is confirmed through conversations with informants, available online biographies, and through watching how the community responded to him. However, that is not to say that all lamas are perceived in this way and there is one particular case of a controversial lama that is worth mentioning here.

The example is of Chogyam Trungpa—a prolific author publishing some 40 books on various aspects of Buddhism and head of the world wide network of centres that follow the Shambala series of teachings.¹⁰⁷ Chogyam Trungpa was reportedly an alcoholic who died from liver failure; he also reportedly wrapped his car around a tree after drink driving (Haywood 2008). Although married, he was also cited to have had lots of lovers (Mukpo 2010). This behaviour, whilst to many could be seen as wholly impure, has not fazed his followers who have labelled it “crazy wisdom” (Tibetan. *yeshe chölwa*), which translates literally as “wisdom gone wild” (Ardussi and Epstein 1978). Crazy wisdom refers to unconventional or socially inappropriate behaviour believed to be the manifestation of purity or religious wisdom and is designed to break down the mental constructs of followers to enable liberation. From birth, the lama is considered fundamentally pure and this purity is essential to his role as a repository of this form of Buddhism and the continuation of the lineage. I have not encountered any instances where the purity is believed to be contaminated.

¹⁰⁷ Shambala crosses both the Kagyu and Nyingma Schools.

The Transmission of Purity

A lama by definition is considered pure. All the criteria stated in the previous section add up to what the Dzogchen followers consider to be an authentically pure lama and only those who are attributed with having attained great spiritual realisation or are incarnations¹⁰⁸ of the previous notorious lamas are revered in these ways. The average monk, or even a qualified Buddhist teacher,¹⁰⁹ does not feature. For a lama to be included within the lineage list, it is imperative that they are believed to have transcended the suffering that is inflicted on all beings within samsara.¹¹⁰ They are seen to behold a superior understanding of the cyclical existence (samsara) and what binds beings to it; through this knowledge, they possess the means to free themselves and others from it.

Within folk understanding, having this knowledge is equated to purity and the monks view the lama as a pure being; they are considered the pure embodiment of this knowledge. In the following chapter, I will explore the embodied purity of the lama in detail and explore the spectrum of purity and how the student strives to realise their own purity. At this stage, I wish to introduce the idea that the monks believe that through complete psychological devotion to the lama, individual purification will be aided and this will ensure their realisation of purity. It is essential that there is a continuity of the lineage at any given time because the ability to achieve purity depends on the lama. Individuals demonstrate devotion through embodied worship and by making offerings to the lama/lineage holder. In Theravada Buddhism, these acts of devotion are presented with the wish to accumulate “merit”, a non-material substance, which, when gathered in substantial quantities, is believed to positively contribute to a person's liberation from samsara (Lindberg Falk 2007). Cabezon (2009) refers to merit as a person's store of good karma—the result of positive thoughts or actions that generate a more positive rebirth.¹¹¹ The understanding of merit held by the Dzogchen community at my field site differs from the Theravada understanding of merit. Within the Theravada understanding the end goal is a better rebirth within the six realms so that one can attain enlightenment, but a Dzogchen practitioner believes that if an individual has enough merit they will be reborn close to their

¹⁰⁸ Tibetan Buddhists believe that high lamas have the capacity to influence their next rebirth so that they can return to the monastic community once more and continue teaching the dharma.

¹⁰⁹ Monks can study Buddhist philosophy at the monastic university and become qualified teachers.

¹¹⁰ The continuous wheel of rebirth and death that Buddhists believe, that as humans, we are trapped within.

¹¹¹ Tibetan Buddhist believe in reincarnation and that each of us has had multiple lives in the past and will have multiple lives in the future until enlightenment.

lama and the lineage so they can continue their connection.¹¹² The community at my field site are already in the presence of the lama and so believe that they are in the most meritorious position possible because a practitioner does not need to live many lives. All can be achieved in this life but that is dependent on the presence and blessings of the pure, authentic lama. Therefore, the practitioners' goal is to focus on realising their own purity now, within this life. As discussed in Chapter 1, purity can be transferred from the lama or representations of the lama such as statues or physical spaces sanctified by a lama; Chapters 6, 7 and 8 of this thesis look in depth at the rituals used to enable this transmission of purity.

The immediacy to realise purity and to end suffering is unique to Dzogchen and often certain aspects of a religion appeal to a particular social group. For example, Kent (2004) explored why Sai Baba (Hindu religious figure) had been such an appealing guru to middle class Hindus and argued that his popularity was because he legitimised their interest in making profit as long as they did good work as well. In the case of my field site, I found that it was the swiftness and directness of the Dzogchen path to enlightenment (may only take one lifetime) that held certain appeal to time-poor international students. Those who worked full time or had many family responsibilities were still able to be a committed Dzogchen practitioner and were not required to enter the monastery/nunnery. With the devotional backing of such a large community, the lama, whether intentional or not (and there is much to consider for either view), now has the capacity and power to act and impact events outside of the monastery. The next section will discuss various anthropological works on the study of the Tibetan lama and their role within wider society beyond monastic boundaries to provide a contextual framework for my analysis of the embodied rituals that I observed at the monastery in the following chapters.

The Social Power of The Pure Lama

Accounts of interaction of lamas with the “outside” world have been focused around patronage. Lamas have often been recorded to seek military protection for monasteries and religious endeavours from prominent political figures. Tuttle (2005), in his work *Tibetan Buddhists in the Making of Modern China*, suggests that perhaps the most well known of these political figures were the Mongol successors of Genghis Khan who became patrons of Tibetan Buddhism for the vast area from China to the Middle East. For example, a lama known as Phagpa lama Lodrö gyal tshan (1235–1280) sought patronage in exchange for religious service

¹¹² Gods, Demi Gods, Humans, Animals, Hungry Ghosts and the Hell Realms.

and console from Qubilai Khan, the fifth leader of the Mongol Empire who reigned from 1260 to 1294 and the founder of the Yuan Dynasty in China. This patronage came in the form of a close bond between China and Tibet and aspects of this “contract”, which included military support, remained prominent in Sino-Tibetan relations into the 20th century (Tuttle 2005). This idea, that lamas were not always socially isolated and instead were engaged in significant relations, whilst being somewhat under-represented in anthropological studies is argued by Tuttle (*ibid*) to have been prevalent in nearly all strands of Buddhism. He states that “all of these lamas, past and present, have exercised an agency that elevates their roles above that of pawns in someone else’s game” (*ibid*: 201). From Tuttle’s perspective, agency is the capacity to hold influence over social, religious, economic and political events in order to continue their own agenda.

An important point to stress here is that whilst the impact of these engagements between religious lamas and political figures was lasting, it is not a direct continuity or an unbroken agreement. Each monastic body would have its own agenda and purpose for interaction that changed over time depending on their lineage orientation, geographical orientation, and social and political context. Each circumstance would require differing agreements and these engagements were more reflexive interactions that changed shape and purpose over time. The purposeful interconnected relationship between religion, culture, nationalism and politics is illustrated by Klieger (1992) when he says, “Tibetan culture (religion) provides a mechanism whereby forces and personnel from the “outside” can be utilised... to economically and ideologically support the perceived continuation of Tibetan cultural patterns” (Klieger 1992:20).

Tuttle’s work is also developed through a re-classification effort around anthropological and social studies discussions of Buddhism that aims to dispel the common notion that Buddhism is not a disengaged, non-missionary religion by revealing Asian Buddhists as active agents in the propagation of their faith. This discussion, edited together by Learman (2005) in the body of essays called *Buddhist Missionaries In The Era Of Globalization*, explores how Buddhist congregations are “influenced by diverse globalization phenomena including colonialism, economic integration, travel, and mass media” and how these create tensions between cultural survival on the one hand and opportunities for change and growth on the other (Amstutz 2006:11).

A number of these issues faced the Buddhist community in residence at Dzogchen Monastery. Globalisation was a particular concern. With members of their community spread across the globe and Dzogchen Monastery often being the meeting point for many different nationalities, the issue of how to integrate core religious beliefs, namely the purity of the lama, and the dissemination of knowledge that supports these beliefs amongst different groups of people was a priority for the monastic committee. How do the authorities at the monastery negotiate these different influences in their attempts to maintain the narrative of the lineage and the power of the lama as the figurehead of the lineage?

One way in which this becomes possible is through the emic understanding of embodiment; in particular, the different restrictions and behaviours enforced on the lama's body and its boundaries and the relationship between the lama's body and the rest of the religious community. When discussing the embodied purity of the lama and items associated with the lama in more depth in Chapter 5, I outline a number of taboos regarding cleanliness and dirt, purity and pollution and discuss how they are used to bring unity to the belief system surrounding the lama. I draw upon the thoughts of Douglas (1966) and her work on purity and impurity rituals in *Purity and Danger*. Through describing various rituals, Douglas explains how disparate elements become connected and varied experience is given a more unified meaning through the use of taboo (1966:3).

“Taboo protects the local consensus on how the world is organised. It shores up wavering certainty. It reduces intellectual and social disorder...Ambiguous things can seem very threatening. Taboo confronts the ambiguous and shunts it into the category of the sacred.”
(Douglas 1968:xi)

In general, anything associated with impurity is taboo at the monastery, particularly in relation to the lama. However, with the three main groups that interact at the monastery, there are obviously different levels and potentially incompatible understandings of purity/impurity within them. This is very common at the monastery, which, since the 1970s, has been physically located in an “alien” environment. The monastic committee are constantly encountering a hugely varied range of actors with diverse intentions, and the displaced leaders of the lineage have come across non-congruent views at every turn. However, for the lineage to continue existing, and it has done so for 400 years, there must be agreement at some level.

There may be a variety of intentions amongst the monks as to why they follow the lineage: a monk may follow the lineage so that he can live at the monastery and be clothed and fed; he may wish to achieve enlightenment for himself and believes that the lineage blessings are required for him to do so; or a monk may have committed to a short period of monastic obedience to please his family. Their beliefs may also change depending on time and place. When on a pilgrimage, the lineage may be at the forefront of their mind but if they travel to Bangalore, they may be more interested in watching Manchester United play on TV. Somehow, it is possible for all these individuals with different levels of understanding and strengths of beliefs to co-exist at the monastery under the leadership of the lama. Throughout the following chapters, I will consider the various embodied rituals performed at the monastery and the interaction of the different actors involved within their performance and the associated social processes to see how they contribute to this distinct understanding of the body. I posit that the body, the way that it is experienced and understood and how it is believed to have the capacity to embody purity, plays a key role in the relationships between the different groups.

The Reaction of China

The threat felt by Chinese authorities towards Tibetan lamas during the height of Tibet and China's antagonised relationship (1930-1950) is well documented (Goldstein 1991, 1993). As China has retained its position of power and the lamas have struggled to regain theirs, the threat is considerably less (Lixiong and Shakya 2009). However, there are some recent illustrations that China remains significantly concerned by the presence of lamas. Initially, the leaders of the PRC thought that they could persuade the lamas to sign agreements, adhere to party policy, and instruct the monastic and lay population to follow in sync. "Mao saw the lama as the pawn to control in the takeover of Tibet. If settlements were approved by the Dalai Lama, then China's claim to Tibet would be legitimised." (Lixiong and Shakya 2009:57). But the lamas refused to compromise their religious principles and did not sign the agreement. Frustrated by the resistance demonstrated by the lamas, the Chinese authorities began a methodical crack down and persecution of monasteries and systematic incarceration of many lamas across Tibet. A prominent example is the treatment of the Panchen Lama, second in line to the Dalai Lama, who was placed under house arrest in 1995. Aged only six-years-old, he became the world's youngest ever political prisoner (Hilton 2001). Then, the 17th Karmapa, one of the most prominent, young lamas tipped to fill the Dalai Lama's shoes in the future and

head of the Kagyu School, fled Tibet in 2000 citing in various newspapers that if he wished to practice Buddhism freely he must do so outside of his homeland (Terhune 2004).

So why do the Chinese authorities feel threatened by the Tibetan lamas? What power do they hold over the Tibetan people and how do they use this power? Although the flow of information from within Tibet is restricted, there are many reported cases of socially active and engaged lamas. Their cases have received international attention because they are often dealt with severely and have led to imprisonment and detention. The case of Tenzin Delek Rinpoche from Nyagchu County, Kham, illustrates this point.¹¹³ A very popular figure within the local community, Tenzin Delek Rinpoche, through his personal wealth accrued from traditional offerings by the local public, financed a school for orphans, the disabled and the poor; he also contributed to road construction and many other infrastructural developments. Nyagchu County borders a heavily populated Han area, and unlike in other areas of ethnic Tibet, the population has regular access to many of modern life's amenities and entertainment, including drugs and alcohol. Subsequently, young men turned to alcohol and gambling, and there was a significant increase in domestic abuse (Lixiong and Shakya 2009).¹¹⁴

Tenzin Delek Rinpoche was well respected for his methods of social discipline, calling on local troublemakers during his public teachings, singling them out and informing the audience of their wrong doings. The individuals in question were said to be so ashamed that the majority changed their rebellious ways. Lixiong and Shakya (2009) state that 90% of locals reverted to a more virtuous lifestyle after a public dressing down. The more social respect bestowed by the people of Nyagchu County, the more Tenzin Delek Rinpoche encountered difficulties with the local authorities. He was reprimanded for building infringements, replacing a large tent with a permanent temple, intervening in the relocation of a monastery, and increasing religious practices at his monastery. His religious title was revoked. His seat on the local consultative committee was removed, and he was denied participation in many religious events. This was just the beginning; on 3rd April 2002, Tenzin Delek Rinpoche and Lobsang Dhondup (a distant

¹¹³ There are also many website references which cover the case of Tenzin Delek Rinpoche - <http://www.savetibet.org/tag/tenzin-delek-rinpoche/>, <https://www.studentsforafreetibet.org/campaigns/human-rights-1/free-tenzin-delek>

¹¹⁴ Nyagchu County is a vast region. It is sparsely populated and violent crimes are often committed. It can sometimes take days on horseback to provide the police with information. The police then take an equal number of days to respond so many locals often don't report the crime. During the reign of Chairman Mao, civil obedience was reliant on the class struggle, serving the function of the police force in such remote areas. Before the Cultural Revolution, the spiritual hierarchy and the lamas acted as the local law enforcement and as the PRC lessened their aggressive policy on cultural control the local people returned to their original leaders.

relative) were arrested following a bomb blast in Chengdu. Neither had legal representation throughout their trial and both were found guilty of "conspiring to cause explosions" (HRWFI 2014). Lobsang Dhondup was convicted as the bomber and received the death sentence. He was executed on 26th January 2003 (Kirchner 2008). Tenzin Delek Rinpoche received a two-year suspended death sentence and following international protests, the death sentence was reviewed to life imprisonment (Lixiong, Woesser and Law 2014). The protests continue to this day asserting the innocence of Tenzin Delek Rinpoche. More than 40,000 Tibetans in his community signed petitions, many in the form of thumbprints as they could not sign their names.

Whilst the campaign for the freedom of Tenzin Delek Rinpoche continues, hundreds more monks, nuns and lamas remain imprisoned in Tibet but at the same time, equal numbers of lamas are establishing religious communities in exile within the Tibetan settlements in India and increasingly in Asia, the USA, Australia and Europe. Dzogchen Monastery is also located in Kham; Dzogchen Rinpoche's website claims that when he returned to Tibet in 1985, thousands of people came to see him and "many of them had walked for three weeks to get there knowing that if they were lucky, they might catch a glimpse of the top of his head."

Dzogchen Rinpoche has stated in many public talks that he is not interested in politics. His attention is solely focused on religious matters. A priority for him is the maintenance of the religious tradition in exile preserving the rituals and rebuilding the status of the monastery and the lineage. It is these attempts that my fieldwork observations focus on and what I have ethnographic data for; therefore, I cannot comment on actual interaction with the Chinese authorities or people. However Dzogchen Rinpoche, by his very status as head of the Dzogchen lineage, has a political role; he holds political influence and power over his supporters and whilst I explore the various rituals associated with purity performed at the monastery, the political and social implications cannot be ignored. In the next chapter, I explore how purity is embodied by the lama and how the various bodily boundaries are enforced. I will also consider the political and social impact of this behaviour and how it is used by the monastic committee as support for their endeavours to regain the power of their lineage in exile.

Chapter 5 The Embodiment of Purity—The Lama

It was party time and the monastery was celebrating the completion of a successful international retreat. All the monks and international students were invited to attend the party as well as two guests of honour from the Karnatakana local government.¹¹⁵ Throughout my fieldwork, I had observed that it was customary to end large functions with a formal dinner or a period of light entertainment, which often consisted of Tibetan folk songs or dancing. On this occasion, the guests had been invited to the forecourt of Dzogchen Rinpoche's private home where a marquee roof had been erected and long rows of tables and chairs had been set up for dinner, with a small stage less than two feet from the ground positioned at the top end of the forecourt. With Dzogchen Rinpoche, his family and the VIP guests on the top table, the international students sat together on the right and the monks took the seats on the left hand side. The more senior monks sat towards the top end of the table and the younger monks scrabbled for the seats towards the back. After enjoying an elaborate buffet, prepared by the chef and his team who had been hired to cater during the retreat, consisting of local Karnatakana dishes and Tibetan momos (meat and vegetarian dumplings which are one the national dishes of Tibet), the party crowd sat back to enjoy the evening's entertainment.

A dance group from the settlement's high school performed Tibetan folk songs.¹¹⁶ The girls sang in chorus whilst the young boys in fur boots and hats stamped out a rhythm around them. A trio of women from one of the villages dressed in their chubas [formal Tibetan dresses] sang together whilst a younger boy played a dramyin, a seven string Tibetan guitar. Then two young girls from the village walked onto the stage. They were dressed in tight jeans and fitted colourful tops. It wasn't quite what I had been expecting as their performance had been introduced as a Bollywood dance and I had been waiting for something more along the lines of barefooted dancers wearing saris with bells on their ankles to take to the stage. The girls

¹¹⁵ The government officials were treated as guests of honour by being officially welcomed by Dzogchen Rinpoche as guests for the evening. They were sat at the top table with Dzogchen Rinpoche and his family and they were taken to select their food from the buffet first.

¹¹⁶ These folk songs and dances are taught within the local school and the dance groups perform at a number of community occasions or private functions throughout the year. There is not a wide subject variance for Tibetan folk songs and there are generally three main categories: love songs, praising the lama (religious devotional songs) and patriotic songs about Tibet or important historical figures such as King Gesar—a dharma king who reigned in Tibet whose life story has become steeped in myth and religious pronouncements (Alai 2013). Whilst the Tibetan Government in Exile does emphasise the importance of teaching the younger generation Tibetan history and culture, they have set up the Norbulinka Insitute in north India dedicated to the preservation of traditional art forms. In the performances that I watched during my fieldwork, there was no overt political agenda or point being made during the songs and dances. Many of the performers were more occupied with combatting their nerves before going on stage or whether or not their costumes fitted properly.

walked to centre stage and then turned their backs to the audience, slightly bending their knees and leaning forwards so their bottoms were protruding. The music didn't start straight away. There was some confusion over which track to play and the two girls stood motionless with their backs turned to the audience waiting for the song to begin. At this point, I was genuinely surprised by what I was seeing. It was so far away from the formality that I had become accustomed to that it caught me off guard for a moment. I had been repeatedly told that it was a sign of great disrespect to turn your back to a monk and even worse to a lama so to see these girls doing so was more than a little surprising.

I had observed the delivery of these instructions about not turning one's back every time a new international retreat began. The attendees would gather in the main teaching hall at the monastery and the rules concerning appropriate behaviour would be read out. All students were specifically requested not to turn their backs to the lama and one could observe the monks obeying this rule whenever they were in the presence of Dzogchen Rinpoche. If they were called to him to pass him an item or to speak to him whilst he was teaching on his throne, they would approach with caution and when moving away, they would step backwards, careful not to turn until they were two or three steps away. The encoded behaviour also extended to the objects that were considered sacred and pure such as the statues in the temple and the throne that belonged to Dzogchen Rinpoche—even when he was not sat in it. Visiting Tibetans (adults) from the villages also followed this rule and watching them as they came to pray in the temple, their movements seemed quite natural and they moved with ease whilst they performed their worship. Turning one's back seemed to be as big a taboo as pointing ones feet at the lama, which again was taboo at the monastery. This was to be displayed later in the evening when a group of Dutch students who had formed a small choir were about to perform. One of the women involved had injured her foot and sat on a chair whilst on stage with her foot resting on another chair in such a way that the soles of her feet were pointing towards the audience. It wasn't until I saw a member of the audience, a woman from Germany, approach her and take the chair away that I realised what a reaction this had caused. As she returned, people began muttering around the table in hushed, embarrassed voices that it was a “ridiculous idea to put her foot like that”, or similar.¹¹⁷ What Douglas (1970) called the “purity rule”, which links

¹¹⁷ It wasn't just within the context of Dzogchen Monastery that I had received such an instruction. A few years before, I had attended a series of public teachings by the Dalai Lama in the Paris after undergoing an operation on my leg; I sat during the long sessions of teachings with it elevated. A man I had never seen before approached me and quite seriously told me how rude I was being despite being sat towards the back end of the stadium a few hundred metres from the main stage.

bodily control to social control is useful in understanding what is going on in this context. The purity rule explains how the organising system either seeks to embody forms of expression linked to purity, or refrains from practising behaviour associated with impurity. In this instance, turning one's back or pointing one's feet are types of behaviours associated with impurity and are to be avoided.

The Bollywood music finally began and the two young girls, still with their backs to the audience, began a repetition of bum wiggles and waist circles complemented by arm waving. A few gasps went up from the international members of the audience who exchanged nervous glances and as the performance continued, some of the monks began to fidget, look at their phones or look at the floor; some even turned away and began to whisper to each other. It was an uncomfortable few minutes and once it was over, the performance received polite applause and what seemed like a sigh of relief. Unfortunately, the two performers left before dinner had officially ended, meaning I wasn't able to speak to them to ask why they had chosen to do that type of dance or what they thought of the audience's response. I hadn't been able to leave my seat without disrupting the proceedings but I did gauge the response from a young Tibetan woman who sometimes worked in Dzogchen Rinpoche's household. Pema was in her early 20s and although she grew up in the settlement, she now spent her time split between there and Bangalore. When I asked about the dance, she smiled and then tried to hide her laughter as I explained it was not what I had been expecting from a Bollywood dance. She reported that it was a modern song from a recent movie and this particular dance had been set in a disco, which went some way to explaining the non-typical Bollywood dance moves. I joked with her asking whether this was the type of dancing that she did in the discos and she good naturedly assured me that it wasn't, saying these were just young girls who didn't really know what they were doing and they didn't mean anything by it. This also seemed to be the general consensus of those I spoke to in the audience afterwards; their performance was seen as relatively innocent, and even though their dancing displayed offensive behaviour, it was not their fault because they were only copying what they had seen in a movie and were too young to know better. However, when I asked Pema whether she would have performed such a dance in front of the monks, she was absolute in her response of "No!" and stated clearly that she could never do this. I asked Pema whether it was likely that anyone would speak to the girls about the dance and she said that it was not. I questioned how the girls would know not to do this particular dance next time; how would they learn that that type of dance was inappropriate?

Pema didn't seem to have an answer for me and looked slightly puzzled by my question. "It's just not something we do," she answered, "I don't know. We just don't do it. We don't talk about it really."

This conversation with Pema suggests that she is unable to recall how these particular behaviours are learnt. She implies that it is just a natural behaviour, "we just do it" and says it is not something that is taught. This idea was explored by Bourdieu, (1977), in his work on habitus and embodied knowledge. According to Bourdieu, when a behaviour or belief becomes so embedded within a culture, when actions are practised so much that they become habitual, they become *habitus*. Habitus is values, beliefs, dispositions held by particular social groups that guide behaviour. It is not created consciously and it is non-deliberate (Bourdieu 1984: 170). Habitus is "the way society becomes deposited in persons in the form of lasting dispositions, or trained capacities and structured propensities to think, feel and act in determinant ways which then guide them" (Wacquant 2005: 316). The body then becomes the medium onto which the habitus is inscribed upon. The knowledge of habitus is carried in the body; it is embodied. "For Bourdieu, the body is a mnemonic device upon and in which the very basics of culture, the practical taxonomies of the habitus, are imprinted and encoded in a socialising or learning process that commences in early childhood" (Jenkins, 1992 :76).

Many Tibetans operate comfortably and naturally within the habitus of purity. However, this example introduces some of the challenges that the monastic organisation faces in exile as they try to maintain certain embodied behaviours related to the purity of the lineage lama. It highlights a difference amongst the younger lay population born in India and their embodied behaviour in the presence of the lama (that is considered appropriate) and with those who were born in Tibet. Although this younger generation do regularly participate in various rituals worshipping the lama, they are also influenced by wider Indian cultural norms and encounter a variety of different global influences through the media and tourism—two major industries that were only in limited operation within Tibet pre Cultural Revolution and are still only in limited operation now. These influences are apparent in many ways—through their choice to wear Western clothes rather than Tibetan style clothes, listen to Bollywood or Western music instead of Tibetan artists and through choosing to live in Bangalore rather than in the settlement.

The monastery also encounters new challenges through its operation on a global scale and its interaction with the international students who are not familiar with the concept of a lama and so the embodied worship that surrounds them is even less well known. As I mentioned earlier, the monastic organisation deliberately communicates some of the encoded behaviour related to purity to the international students. Rules are read out at the start of functions or printed out and left within the rooms of the guesthouse. The rest is expected to be learnt through doing—through an action-orientated pedagogy that I begin to introduce in this chapter and then develop later in this thesis when the international students are expected to perform hundreds of repetitions of embodied worship and this takes the shape of prostrations, full-length bows, or kora, circumambulation of the temple.

The rest of this chapter explores the folk understandings of purity held by the different groups of Dzogchen. I particularly look at the doctrinal explanation of purity to provide the context and background for the rituals that I will describe in the coming chapters. I focus on how purity is also linked to the spiritual/religious accomplishment and the realisation of the Dzogchen teachings. Those who have the greatest realisation have the most capacity to help others and provide freedom from suffering and so are the most pure. Incarnate lamas are inherently pure at birth because of the realisations that they obtained in their last life. Purity is not necessarily synonymous with goodness or morality as it might be in Western cultures; a lama can be pure even if they are behaving socially inappropriately,¹¹⁸ as discussed in Chapter 1.¹¹⁹

I will explain the theory behind the understandings of embodiment that surrounds these behaviours and consider the religious purpose of them. For example, what is the intended benefit of physically worshipping the lama? Buddhist scholarly texts surrounding the worship of the lama and the accompanying rituals have tended to focus on the purpose of inner transformation and realisation of purity (Khentse 1994, 1999, Patrul 1994, Dorje 2001, Norbu 2006), but instead of looking at the internal benefits, this chapter will explore the social usage of the rituals and how the habitus of the lama and the individuals involved in the rituals aid the

¹¹⁸ For a good analysis of immoral behaviour exhibited by Tibetan lamas, please see Ardussi, J. & Epstein, L (1978) and their paper on *The Saintly Madman in Tibet*.

¹¹⁹ As also previously discussed, a famous case to illustrate this point is that of Chogyam Trungpa, an author of many Buddhist books (a number are used as references in this thesis) followed by a large number of international students but was an alcoholic who died from an alcoholic related illness (for a full account of Trungpa's life and work see Midal 2012, Haywood 2008, Mukpo 2006).

monastery's attempts to recreate their religious practices in exile and how this in turn creates a distinct understanding of experience of the body.

Within this chapter I look at the three main groups: the monastic community, the international students and a visiting group of senior lamas within the Dzogchen lineage. Each one exhibits a religious reason for their embodied worship of the pure lama. I argue that all of these different audiences and their contesting views are unified through practices of purity towards the lama and their reliance on him to either directly transmit this purity and subsequent freedom from samsara¹²⁰ to them or to aid them, the practitioner, or to discover it themselves.

In addition to this religious purpose, there is a very social element to the rituals and this is where the groups differ. For the monks, the social reason is linked to their families and the benefit that the monastic lifestyle and the relationship with the lama can bring to their immediate kin and the wider community. For international students, I discovered that their motivation for following encoded behaviour related to purity is based on more individualistic reasons such as overcoming personal issues like physical illness or mental stress. Lastly, for the group of senior Dzogchen lamas, the public performance of embodied rituals, such as prostrations or making material offerings to the lama, had a political purpose and was used by the monastic committee to fulfil their aims of propagating the Dzogchen lineage and to maintain their religious authority in exile. In my analysis, I also consider the variability and contextualisation of the rules of purity as to whether they are fixed and mandatory in all situations or whether their implementation is determined by the social situation and the desired outcome of the behaviour.

The Three Pure Bodies or Kayas

To fully understand the concept of a pure lama within a monastic setting, it is first necessary to explain the emic understanding of embodiment that is taught and subsequently underpins the ideas of purity. The monks all have a similar, basic understanding of purity because they study it within the university (shedra) at the monastery. Most international students have a strong knowledge of purity and its embodiment through the three kayas but are self-taught having read books on Tibetan Buddhism. The lay Tibetan community have less academic knowledge as they have not received any formal instructions and do not tend to read books on the subject.

¹²⁰ The cycle of suffering; the cycle of rebirth and death.

Their knowledge comes through ritual participation. Of course each person has their own phenomenology regarding purity but here is a brief summary of the doctrinal representation.

According to the teachings of the Vajrayana tradition¹²¹ within which Dzogchen Buddhism sits, the lama is considered the ultimate embodiment of purity. This is expressed through the three pure kayas or bodies that exist within the cosmos (Ray 2004, Hanh 1996). These three bodies can also be associated with the three purities of body, speech and mind so that the lama embodies a tri-fold purity (Ray 2000). A diagram of the three kayas can be found on page 119.

The first of the three bodies is the ultimate body: the formless aspect of Buddhahood known as the dharmakaya, which can also be called the ultimate or enlightened mind. This is a level of reality that exists beyond both the physical form and intellectual consciousness and is often depicted by Samantabhadra within religious art, the primordial Buddha (Mipham 2008). This body is associated with purity of mind. My personal understanding of the dharmakaya is similar to that associated with the Hindu concept of the syllable OM, which many Hindus believe the universe manifests from. The dharmakaya is thought to pervade everything, including the two other pure bodies and all physical materials that we can see around us (Urgyen 2006). Direct union with the dharmakaya is considered synonymous with enlightenment—the experience of the ultimate reality (Padmasambhava 2013). The lama is said to be directly connected to the dharmakaya with unbroken continuity, and that his physical form is a pure manifestation of the dharmakaya (discussed shortly in the third body the *nirmankaya*) (Padmasambhava 2013).

The second body is the sambhogakaya: the body taken by the bodhisattvas.¹²² It is the first of two form bodies (Ray 2004). In the relationship between body, speech and mind, the sambhogakaya is considered to be symbolic of speech energy (Trungpa 2004). The sambhogakaya can be described as an intermediary realm between the physical and the non-physical, which manifests from the dharmakaya (Trungpa 2013). For example, bodhisattvas may seem to have a physical appearance, but are not bound by the physical constraints of time and space.¹²³ The Goddess Tara is believed to exist as sambhogakaya, as is the God of Wisdom, Manjushri. The lama is thought to be an emanation of the Gods, or, to put it another

¹²¹ See Chapter 3 for an explanation of Vajrayana Buddhism.

¹²² Highly realised beings who forewent enlightenment in order to dedicate their existence to helping all beings and freeing them from suffering.

way, the lama is considered an incarnation of a god—Dzogchen Rinpoche is believed by his followers to be an incarnation of Manjushri.¹²⁴

The second form body and the third in total is the nirmanakaya: a state embodied as a being who enters samsara and manifests in various ways in order to free beings from suffering (Norbu and Clemente 1996). Reincarnate lamas and tulkus are believed to have the nirmanakaya form (Pelzang 2004 understood to be the ultimate, pure body in terms of the tri-fold purity of body, speech and mind. This level of reality is the physical world: a relative level of shape and form governed by rules of karma and interdependence. The Buddha based his method or instructions to attain enlightenment and freedom from a cyclical existence of death and rebirth on this realm (Ray 2002).

According to Vajrayana philosophy, a thorough understanding of the physical world accompanies the complete realisation of the nirmanakaya; the pure form body and this can allow communication with the sambhogakaya and an experience of the dharmakaya. Complete realisation of the dharmakaya is equated with enlightenment and freedom from suffering (Patrul Rinpoche 1994). So the practitioner strives to achieve the pure body in this life as this aids the development of their enlightenment. The profound difference between a Dzogchen lama and a scholar is that the scholar's status is reliant on intellectual knowledge, the memorisation of the Buddhist scriptures and scholastic understanding of their meaning whereas the lama is thought to be an embodiment of this sacred wisdom having realised it in its entirety and holding the capacity to guide others through this process (Ardussi and Epstein 1978, Larsson 1968).

The lama is not only viewed as the holder of this supreme religious knowledge, but he is also seen as the embodiment of it. By just being within his physical presence, a practitioner is thought to be able to connect to the purity that he embodies and it is possible for someone to realise the nature of reality and become enlightened and free from all suffering. As the pinnacle of the religious hierarchy, the lama is often out of reach for the majority of his followers so touching the lama or being near to the lama is believed to be a very precious opportunity. As discussed in Chapter 3, the monastery is a physical space dedicated to the lama and combining specific embodied rituals and bodily protocol allows the monks to continually create a type of

¹²⁴ Information taken from an informant, Isabelle (introduced in Chapter 5 on page 131), when discussing the Long Life Prayer for Dzogchen Rinpoche, which is recited daily by both the monks and international students.

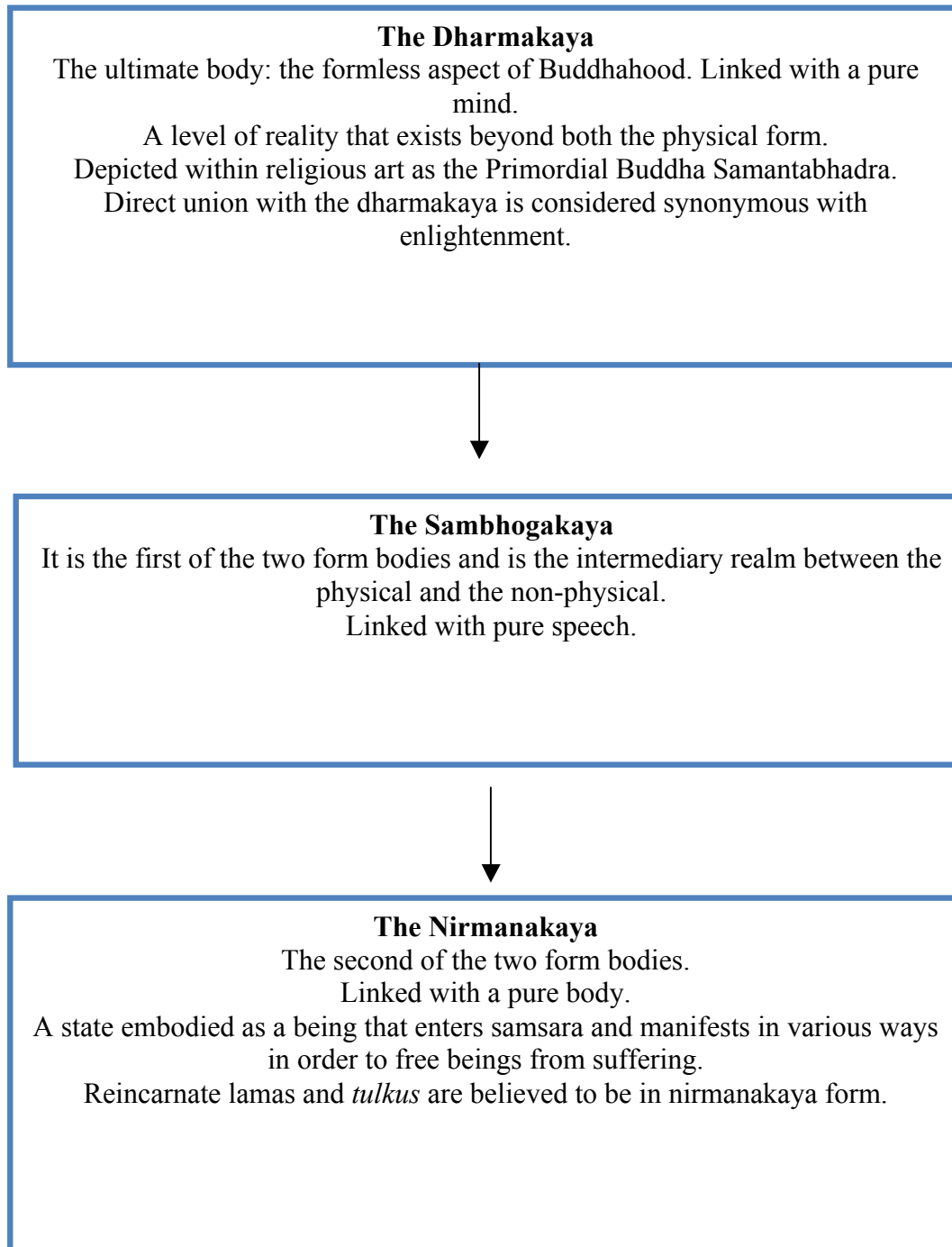
physical experience and the lama, although out of reach, holds constant influence over the monks.

The teachings on the three pure bodies found within Dzogchen and Vajrayana are one of a number of different understandings within Buddhism in general of a type of body that exists beyond the material body. Each one has been shaped by a variety of factors over time, including the school of Buddhism and the group of teachings it sits within i.e. tantric or sutra; the main lama that is responsible for teaching a particular understanding of the body; and the type of students that follow and practise those teachings. Samuel and Johnston (2013) call a body that exists beyond the physical body: the “subtle body”: an “intermediate level (or series of levels) between “mind” (spirit, consciousness) and matter” (2013:1). So rather than using the Cartesian distinction, mind and body are viewed as continuous. Samuel introduces the Tibetan Buddhist tantric understanding of the subtle body as “a visualised internal structure to the human body consisting of channels (nadi) and junction points (cakra) through which flow a substance (prana, bodhichitta) that is closely related to breathing, the mind, and sexual energy”. (2013:250) Mastery of this subtle body is achieved through specific tantric visualisation practices and once achieved, the practitioner is then able to progress towards enlightenment.

The subtle body is not the same as the three pure bodies within Dzogchen. The subtle body, as presented by Samuel and Johnston (2013), is described as being connected to the physical body, existing alongside it, continuously present although not visible or accessible to those untrained in tantric practices. The three pure bodies can be understood as states that can be achieved within the body. They can be realised by the practitioner under the guidance of the lama. However, where I find Samuel and Johnston’s work useful is that it emphasises the need for models and modes of understanding that go behind classical divisions of body and mind. Within this thesis, I explore how Dzogchen practitioners attempt to experience a tri-part understanding of a non-physical body in physical form within their own bodies. Their on-going endeavours to achieve this body both collectively and individually through repeated ritual practice creates an experience of the body and a network of social relationships that are quite unique. Traditional dualistic frameworks of analysis do not fit the understandings and experiences of the body that I encountered and so developing a discourse on the “subtle body” would help to further my research.

Fig. 5.1 Source: Author's own

The three kayas/bodies: this diagram depicts the belief system around the concept within Tibetan Buddhism of the pure, enlightened body.



Perspectives of The Monks

The belief held by the monks that the lama is the embodiment of the three kayas manifests in a number of embodied behaviours. These acts reinforce the lama's position within society and also serve as a physical reminder of his superior religious status highlighting understandings of purity, which also contribute towards the hierarchy at the monastery. Some of the most obvious and public body rituals performed in honour of the lama are those enacted by his attendants, whose charge it is to take of all the lama's daily needs ranging from cooking, cleaning, washing clothes and serving food and drinks. For a monk, the opportunity to be an attendant of a great lama is considered an honour and a great blessing. Service to the lama is an act of devotion and these mundane daily tasks become part of the monk's religious practice.¹²⁵

Some highly qualified monks, for example those who have graduated from the shedra [university], also offer periods of service to the lama. I met one of these monks during my fieldwork in 2012. I was buying some water from the monastery shop when two monks walked in to collect their supplies. I immediately recognised one of them as Dhondup, to whom I had taught English back in 2004 as part of my undergraduate fieldwork. I hadn't yet seen Dhondup on this visit and thought he had left but he explained that he was working down at Dzogchen Rinpoche's house cleaning and doing maintenance work. I enquired whether the other monk was working with him and that I thought I recognised him from the shedra. Dhondup explained that the other monk, Sonam, had just graduated from the shedra and would be appointed as a khenpo [teacher] soon, but he was helping out at the house and cleaning or doing odd jobs in the meantime. I was a little surprised that such a well-qualified monk would volunteer to sweep a courtyard or mop a floor. Dhondup explained that they considered it an honour to perform such seemingly lowly tasks and an opportunity to put their understanding of the teachings into action, and for Dhondup, that is what it meant to really practice the dharma and to really become a monk and to uphold monastic ideals.

Dzogchen monks and lay practitioners study the three kayas and their embodiment quite extensively but the focus is not to attain intellectual understanding or academic qualifications. Instead, it is to inwardly realise their meaning: to realise purity. There is still a strong retreat tradition within Dzogchen and monks frequently leave the monastery to complete extended retreats, often in isolation in caves or in the countryside in Tibet, Bhutan or Northern India in

¹²⁵ If the lama has international students, a team of them will also be trained to perform this role during his overseas visits.

pursuit of this realisation. However, when close to the lama, the most beneficial practice is thought to be to serve him and be his attendant as he is already the embodiment of purity. For the monks, lama service means putting the teachings into action; acts of cleaning become acts of worship and through performing duties, the monks have further opportunities to realise their own purity.

I found the work of Samuels (2004, 2005) useful in understanding how learning and memorising meanings of Buddhist scriptures can be developed into an action-oriented pedagogy within a monastic setting. Samuels explores how textual meaning becomes embodied during ritual activities such as chanting and everyday activities such as eating, walking, and sweeping where the focus of learning is more upon doing and action rather than learning the content of texts. The embodiment “creates ritualised monastic agents who are imbued with an understanding of what it means to be a monk and how a monk should act” (Samuels 2005:955). When relaying a young monk’s motivation, Samuel says:

“For Silananda, as well as many other young newcomers to the sangha, learning about how to be a novice did not occur through studying the content of certain texts that portray monastic life. It occurred through doing. It was by worshiping the Buddha and performing other types of ritualised activities (such as eating or sweeping in a ritually prescribed way) that novices began to understand the meaning and content of monastic life. (2005: 9).

Samuels draws on the work of Catherine Bell in her *Ritual Theory, Ritual Practice*, and how she explores the interconnected relationship between mind and body. Bell discusses how “ritual participation inscribes dominant symbols, structures, and beliefs of a particular community on a ritualised agent” (Samuels 2005:964). Bell (1992) posits that when the body is moulded within a highly structured environment, it does more than simply become an expression of internal conditions or states. The moulding becomes an “act of production” and not just a display of subjective states or values. So when the monks are sweeping or chanting in a ritualised way, they are not just expressing the values of the texts they are becoming what it means to be a monk through action. Bell argues that the act of doing, the process of ritualisation, actually restructures the bodies and minds of the actors (the monks) themselves, and in doing so enables them to absorb a certain ideal, which in this case are the monastic ideals. For Bell, ritualisation “is nothing other than the production of ritualized agents, persons

who have an instinctive knowledge of these schemes embedded in their bodies, in their sense of reality, and in their understanding of how to act ... " (1992:221).

Kevin Trainor (1996) argues "the performance of the respective rituals serves as a process of inscription through which distinctive patterns of meaningful practice become embodied in the participants, or, in other words, ritualized agents are created" (1996:140). So by embodying religious ideals, the novice monks become ritualised monastic agents and "many of them gradually became identified with their new roles by performing temple activities and monastic rituals" (2005:965). Learning about what it means to be a monastic and how a monk should behave comes not through learning what the text said but through the act of doing: moulding their bodies and restructuring their bodies and minds.

One difference between Samuels' observations and my own is that I have no way of determining whether the monks can actually embody purity, the content of the doctrines they are performing, in the emic sense whilst sweeping or cleaning. There is potential for this to occur and there are tales of attendants of lamas achieving great realisations. For example, I met a former attendant of Dzogchen Rinpoche, an elderly monk who lived at the monastery who had also been the attendant of the fifth and the sixth Dzogchen Rinpoche, who was revered amongst the sangha. What I can conclude here is that through participating in service to the lama, the embodiment of purity, the monks learn what it means to embody purity and how one should act around a being that does. In doing so, values of purity prescribed to different areas of the body, and to the lama's body as a whole, become absorbed into the movements and actions of the monks. So when the monks are sweeping or cleaning in a ritualised way, or serving the lama in a ritualised way (discussed next), they are doing more than expressing internal states; they are acting out religious ideals and in doing so, their bodies and minds become restructured.

The most striking example of this type of ritualised behaviour occurs whilst serving refreshments to the lama. The monks deliberately hold the tray or plates high above their noses and frequently cover their mouths with their robes. Lamas are only permitted to eat fresh, clean food prepared in their own kitchens and breathing on the food is thought to contaminate it. They do not breathe on what they were serving or on the lama when talking to him. The separation that occurs, preventing the attendant breathing on the food and the other ritual

actions, could be considered a reminder of the difference in perceived purity between the lama and the attendants. Often, the trays were laden with dishes full of food and so it required strength to hold them steady at such a height. On other occasions, the china used was quite fragile—tea cups with delicate lids or water glasses—and the monks needed to be quite dexterous, particularly when serving upwards to a high throne table above their heads. When performing their duties, the attendants were strikingly elegant with very controlled, deliberate movements. They also seemed to be incredibly patient, often waiting for periods of time outside meetings in case they were required for assistance at any point. When approaching the lama, the monks did so with their hands in prayer position and slightly bent from the waist to ensure that they were always lower than him. When serving, the monks refrained from pointing, preferring to hold their hands outstretched in indication of the object in question. When the task was completed, the monks were careful not to turn their backs when walking away and remain bowed. Turning one's back, or being higher than a lama, is a sign of disrespect. It is also important never to touch the lama's head as this is considered the sacred part of the body. Pointing to one's feet, the dirtiest part of the body, at a lama or any other religious symbol or artefact is also strictly prohibited.

Before a monk can become an attendant for a lama, they must undergo rigorous training in which they are taught the protocol of service and its associated links to purity. This training further reiterates the doctrinal explanation of embodiment that the monks study as novices. The instructions are given by a senior attendant; and so the understanding of/about the pure body of the lama is passed from one monk to the next. A similar training structure is also in place for the international students. Those trained are responsible for serving Dzogchen Rinpoche when he travels abroad, particularly if he is not joined by a monk. An interesting point to make here is that on no occasion did I see Dzogchen Rinpoche or any other lamas that I observed at the monastery demand such behaviour of their attendants. Dzogchen Rinpoche exhibits a very hands-on approach to running the monastery, overseeing much of the development work and also the general maintenance of the monastery. His involvement in the running of the electricity generator is an example of this. The electricity supply to the area is very sporadic and it is common to be without electricity for a few hours a day. The monastery has its own generator for when this happens and a team of monks have been assigned to operate it when needed. On a number of occasions during my stay, I observed Dzogchen Rinpoche and a group of monks approaching the generator with a flashlight to solve a maintenance issue. Dzogchen

Rinpoche organised the group giving instructions in the dark; a loud cheer would always go up when the roar of the generator engine kicked in. During these occasions, there was no opportunity to observe the purity-encoded behaviour and whilst the monks remained respectful, the practicalities of fixing the electrical issues were prioritised. I saw monks handing Dzogchen Rinpoche torches or tools and if they needed to fix the generator often, their backs were forcibly turned towards the lama. In a way, the fact that Dzogchen Rinpoche is so engaged with the monks in a working capacity is almost an inversion of the concept of the “Big Man” (Mines and Gourishankar 1990): a notion of individuality that is common within South Indian politics. An individuality that is different to Western understanding, the south Indians stress “inequality of status when they value his individuality”, as opposed to the Western notion of equality amongst all individuals (*ibid*:762).

This could suggest that the context of the rules of purity is paramount for their application and that both monks and the lama can instinctively differentiate between a formal ritual context and a quotidian one, but for those who are more novice at lama service and the required encoded behaviour, there would surely be ambiguous contexts where the distinctions for appropriate behaviour are less clear. What I observed during my stay at the monastery was that the lama dictates the formality and necessity of encoded behaviour and only when the lama verbally says so or physically gestures do the rules not apply. For example, one requirement is that the lama should always sit on the highest seat in a room but during many meetings that I attended as part of my volunteer work at the charity based at the monastery (DSSCS), staff members went to sit on the carpet next to the lama but he told them to sit on the chair next to him, which was at the same level. Also, whilst travelling around India, I observed occasions where the lama preferred to drive himself rather than be driven by others and so he would drive a car full of attendants or students. One can only assume that Dzogchen Rinpoche has his own personal reasons for making such decisions as, during my fieldwork, I did not have the opportunity to ask him explicitly about them; but what I think can be concluded from this behaviour is that it is in some way related to his particular circumstances and the predicament of the lineage organisation as I found it in exile. After receiving a strict education in a monastic environment in Dharmasala, North India, Dzogchen Rinpoche travelled south at the bequest of the Dalai Lama and began to establish the monastery. As mentioned in Chapter 3, he was very “hands on” in the building and oversaw much of the development work. He also oversees the running of more than 280 branch monasteries and centres around the world and he constantly travels

between them so it would not be unusual for him to find himself in circumstances where he would prefer that the encoded behaviour of purity is suspended temporarily by his students.

So if the lama does not explicitly request this encoded behaviour, why do the monks do it? I asked a number of my informants this simple question: if the lama does not demand this of you, why do you behave in such a way? The answers would differ in the personal element of their response, “It is a great honour for me and my family back in Tibet; by just being here it benefits my family”, or, “I have travelled all the way from Bhutan and I want to be as close to Rinpoche as possible”. But everyone agreed on the main purpose: serving the lama is an opportunity to realise one’s own purity and achieve freedom from suffering. This not only benefits the individual but also their the family and sometimes even the rest of their village because any act of worship to the lama is also thought to generate merit.¹²⁶ By supporting a son or family member to become a monk, the family is also deemed meritorious because they are providing the opportunity to be close to the lama. Monks often dedicate merit to their lama members so that they may too, in this life or their next, be close to the lama and receive a transmission of purity from him.

However, there were some more mundane wishes for their families, such as to benefit from a generous harvest if they were farmers, good results for children in their school examinations or for success in business. The monks in the dratsang [ritual centre] were regularly asked to visit families who had requested prayers for such matters to be performed. So what does this mean in terms of the lama’s body? The immediate effect is that the lama has become a symbol of what the monk is trying to achieve personally: the realisation of the inherent purity that is believed to lead to liberation from the six realms of samsara—the cycle of death and rebirth. The specific embodied behaviours by the monk towards the lama situate the monk in a connected relationship with the lama physically and then symbolically with their individual aims of purity. I would argue that, to use Bernstein’s (2013) example of a canvas, the lama’s body acts as a canvas on to which the monks write their own narratives of purity; the monk is positioned between the material ritual realm of the monastery and the aspirational body of the pure lama giving them a position in time and space but also a conceptual framework by which to understand themselves. However, because the monk is able to accumulate merit on behalf of

¹²⁶ As explained in the previous chapter, merit refers to a person’s store of good karma, the result of positive thoughts or actions, which supports spiritual realization (purity) and also generates a more positive rebirth (Cabezón 2009).

his wider family, the lama represents the means to achieve social aspirations. Not only is he seen as a symbol of their religious practice being continued in exile, but the lama is also a symbol of hope for social progression.

This reminds me of work conducted by Ortner (1978) where she analysed how the various rituals in the Sherpa Buddhist practices of Nepal helped maintain societal structure and values through satisfying the inequalities felt by the lay people through their interaction with the monastic hierarchy. She explored how the inequalities felt by the villagers within their daily lives actually caused resentment towards the ruling religious elite, those whom the orthodox Buddhist view encourage to revere and worship. Ortner (*ibid*) explained that through participating in the various religious rituals, the villagers are able to process and come to terms with two of the most prevalent injustices with Sherpa society, those of social atomism (economic insecurity, personal isolation) and social hierarchy (social insecurity and resentment). Due to fieldwork restrictions, I was unable to spend much time with the villagers unless they came to the monastery. I cannot, therefore, confirm or dispute Ortner's claims in relation to my field site but I include it here to highlight the role of the lama in the wider Tibetan community and society; perhaps this is something that can be researched in further studies. The lay community within exile would, I assume, be facing many new challenges and inequalities that would not have been experienced within a Himalayan context, so such a study would provide interesting insights into their predicament. The next part of the chapter will consider how far the rules of the model of purity surrounding the lama apply to the monks themselves in relation to those who are lower in the monastic hierarchy than them.

Purity and Cleanliness

When widened out across the whole community, the application of these rules of cleanliness and codes of embodied behaviour are equally as complex and follow a relative structure about what is considered pure depending on the context of the situation. These rules are, for the most part, hierarchically applied; what is appropriate for the lama is not expected of the whole Buddhist community and the requirements lessen with a descent down from those who are believed to be of great purity to those of less. Within the monastic body the lama is at the pinnacle of the hierarchy and following him are other Rinpoches or tulkus, people recognised as lamas in their previous lives, down to the monks undergoing the various levels of their religious training, and the younger, novice monks. For example, this hierarchy of these rules is

evident in the distribution of kitchen equipment. The main lama of the lineage will have a team of attendants, a separate kitchen to prepare food, and an elaborate set of cooking and serving equipment. Tulkus or a qualified teacher may have just one attendant and a more modest set of dining and serving items. A monk in training will have his own set of bowls and mugs and the younger, novice monks will use what they been given by the older monks.

The rules of purity are also often adapted in relation to the lama and the status of items or practices that could be seen as impure in one context change meaning when involving the lama. As Douglas explains, “Holiness and unholiness after all need not always to be absolute opposites. They can be relative categories. What is clean in relation to one thing may be unclean in relation to another, and visa versa. The idiom of pollution lends itself to a complex algebra which takes into account the variables in each context.” (1966:10). This links to Douglas’ phrase “dirt is matter out of place” (1966: 36), as discussed in Chapter 1.

My thesis is concerned with variations of purity rather than pollution. However, Douglas’ example is useful when understanding the variability I discovered around purity and food sharing practices. A general rule is that every monk, even the youngest, will have their own bowl to eat from and they are not shared. I asked Tashi, one of main informants,¹²⁷ where this practice had originated from and although he was not sure of how it had come into being, he informed me that even nomads in Tibet carry their own bowl tucked in their chuba [traditional Tibetan clothing] when they are making long journeys. It is wrapped in a small cloth also used to wipe it clean. Tashi explained that the nomad may stay in villages or with other families on his journey and will always take out his own personal bowl to use and not that of his hosts. It could also be historically linked to when disciples of the Buddha would wander around the Indian countryside before the establishment of monasteries begging for their meals carrying only their alms bowls (Drup 2013).

Accompanying the practice of only using one’s own bowl is the concept of not sharing food, not taking food from another’s plate and generally only consuming what is served in to one’s own bowl. I have not heard nor read anywhere that sharing food or eating from another’s bowl is forbidden, but I have never seen it take place within the monastic community apart from in the context of food from the lama where relativity around purity beliefs can be illustrated. A

¹²⁷ Introduced in Chapter 3

small selection of food, such as nuts or dried fruits, is normally served to the lama alongside his tea or water when he gives a formal teaching to an audience. Sometimes these teachings can be two or three hours long and so nourishment is provided, but on occasions when the teachings are shorter, there is often food left over. As a result of this food having been offered to the lama, it is believed by the students of the lama (both monastic and lay) to be blessed and pure so it is deemed okay to share amongst the audience. As the food is passed round, I have heard whispers of “this is Rinpoche’s food”. It is handled carefully and members of the audience delicately take small amounts, perhaps one cashew nut or a small piece of biscuit. Once, I saw a woman from Australia hesitate before picking a piece of chocolate and she muttered to herself, “I am on a diet but as this is blessed food it is okay.” So by consuming the food of another person, which mostly is not practised,¹²⁸ one does in fact increase one’s level of purity because one receives the purity from the lama. So whilst a practitioner is not meant to eat food from another’s plate for fear of contamination, the rules vary in this context to permit eating substances from those who are considered more pure than oneself in order to receive that purity themselves. Receiving the transference of purity from a lama is thought to enable the realisation within one’s self. It is interesting to note here participating in such practices to actually achieve a more pure end state is not an unusual practice within South Asian cultures; this was also encountered by Harper (1964), who studied the Havik peoples of Mysore, the neighbouring state to Karnataka where Dzogchen Monastery is based. Harper describes how the liquid which had been used to bathe the feet of a holy woman was then placed within a special silver vessel and then it was poured into the hands of the worshippers who drank it as a holy pure liquid (1964:181-3).

Specific rules that determine the relationship between food consumption and purity are common within South Asia, in particular within India, and often relate to the caste system, its hierarchical organisation (Dumont 1966), and the Hindu “transactional thinking” (Marriott

¹²⁸ It is important to point out here that of all the purity rules, the international students were the least familiar with this rule and would generally apply the rules from their own culture outside of a ritual context. A powerful example of following the purity rule in relation to food within the international students is during the *tsok* ritual, a ritual feast where food is offered to appease local deities. Different types of meat are offered during *tsok* and as part of the ritual behaviour, whatever blessed food the practitioners are given they are expected to eat—this is very difficult for vegetarians. Some vegetarians take the meat, don’t eat it and either give it to their neighbour or re-offer it to nature (throw it in a bush) afterwards. Others become visibly distressed by such a request and I observed one woman start to cry at the thought of eating meat. Those who are more experienced in the ritual take the meat and eat it, often as quickly as possible. I am a vegetarian and I personally have experienced all of the responses described above (apart from the crying) but two years ago, feeling motivated to analyse my own beliefs around purity, I ate my first piece of ritual meat and now eat small pieces whenever offered. I don’t feel that I can claim to have viewed the meat as pure, I am not a fan of the taste or texture of meat, but there was a certain feeling of liberation that accompanied the act—a sense of accomplishment.

1976: 109). Dumont's hierarchical focus has long been developed demonstrating how caste practices in everyday life are often different to the theoretical structures and influenced by social and political factors (Appadurai 1986, Dirks 2001, Marriott 1976, amongst others). As Staples (In press) points out "The extent to which caste identity affects who might eat together in South Asia, or what they might eat, where and when, is complex, contingent and highly variable with considerable variations noted across regions, time periods, and shifting social contexts."

Food is not the only case where purity rules are contextual and shaped by political and social influences; there are certain acts of embodied worship, (prostrations full length bows or offering khatags, white silk scarves) that require the performer to place parts of their bodies in less pure situations. I cover these activities in more detail at the end of this chapter and also in later chapters but in brief, they both involve putting pure parts of the body e.g. the head, either on the ground (less pure) or in a low position. This type of behaviour is generally common within India; I observed an example of this whilst the restoration work on the temple was taking place¹²⁹ during my fieldwork in 2011. As well as employing specialist artisans and craftsmen from Nepal, the work on the temple also created employment opportunities for the local Indian community. A small number of coolies [derived from the Hindi word kuli and used for casual day labourers] who lived in Oderyarpalaya, the small town a couple of km away, found occasional work at the monastery doing manual labour work mixing cement and clearing the materials away. Their interaction with the monastic community was limited while they focused on their work, but their foreman did occasionally meet with Dzogchen Rinpoche to briefly discuss their progress.¹³⁰ One afternoon, I was sat on the steps to the dining room enjoying a tea break from the publicity work that I was completing for the charity and I saw the foreman waiting at the bottom of the steps in the main office of the monastery. Dzogchen Rinpoche came to the door and the foreman proceeded up the steps towards him. Before engaging in conversation, the foreman bent down and touched Dzogchen Rinpoche's feet with his hands and then put his hands in the prayer position bending from the waist respectfully.

This behaviour is interesting because although not Tibetan, the foreman's embodied actions recognise Dzogchen Rinpoche as a holy man and immediately empower him as a superior,

¹²⁹ The restoration work on the temple was conducted between 2008 until 2013. The temple was officially re-opened on December 31st 2012. Some restoration work continued after the official opening.

¹³⁰ I could never hear their conversations so I am not sure what was said but from their gesticulations towards the temple; it seemed like they were discussing progress and matters concerning the temple.

more pure man. The foreman was not raised within Tibetan Buddhist traditions so his choice of behaviour is, I would assume, because he is repeating a practice common to his own behaviours (I have seen many Hindus do this when in the presence of a holy man/woman at the various ashrams/temples I have visited whilst in India, or by showing respect and touching the feet of one's superiors). The foreman doesn't necessarily need to share these religious beliefs but it does show that he is accepting a hierarchical difference and displaying subordination to the lama.

It also shows a common understanding of what different body parts symbolise; the foreman touches the feet, the lowest and least pure part of the body, with his hands instead of shaking hands. Such encoded behaviour holds great significance at points of cross-cultural interaction and works to establish a common understanding between the different groups involved in the Dzogchen community. Of course, these acts are intended for religious purposes. In accepting the hierarchical difference and worshipping the purity of the lama, the practitioner strives to realise personal embodiment of purity but they also have a significant social impact. In this instance of specific communication, used as a greeting or an acknowledgement from the offset, establishes the hierarchy and implies modes of respectful behaviour reinforcing the power and prestige of the lama; this in turn is then used by the monastic organisation in their endeavour to reposition as a religious authority in exile and maintain their Dzogchen lineage. I will talk more about this in the latter part of the chapter where I look at the importance of embodied worship to the pure lama during an official event at the monastery, but before I do so, I will explore the motivation of the international students, their more individualistic aspirations and their relationship with the body of the lama.

Response of the International Students

Whilst the lay Tibetan community have some interaction with the concept of the pure lama and the rituals of the monastery from an early age (see Chapter 6 which discusses the ritual of rabnye and the transmission of purity), the international community have a lot less. Seeing a lama with a team of attendants performing elaborate rituals of service is an unfamiliar sight for the international students and I have overheard many of them express uncertainty for the necessity of the attendants the first time they encounter them. Also the emphasis placed on rituals and offerings is mostly a behaviour they are not familiar with and the multiple rules and

codes of conduct to follow whilst performing these rituals could in some cases be a stumbling block for the students discouraging further participation.

I had a number of conversations with the international students about why they participated in the embodied rituals of purity. The details of the responses were far more varied than the monks and mostly they were for particular personal reasons: “I struggled to find meaning in my life and I hope that following a lama can bring those answers”, or “I suffered a breakdown a few years ago and by being the student of an authentic lama, I want to get my life back on track”. In addition to these personal reasons, many students wanted to obtain the levels of purity embodied by the lama: “I want to get enlightened, I want to master the highest Dzogchen teachings” or “I want to achieve the peace and realisation of the lama”.¹³¹ Nearly all the responses related to some sort of inner transformation, the achievement of an internal state and were very personal. The reasons expressed by the students had much more of an individualistic focus than the monks whose motives were also connected to social reasons.

I can see various reasons why the monastery encouraged the international students to follow the rules relating to purity. Some of these reasons are officially stated and others are more subtle. Codes of conduct have always been an integral part of Buddhism. Whether it is monastic vows or practices of renunciation, these and their purpose to end attachment to the material world, have been outlined by many scholars and anthropologists (Spiro 1971 amongst others). One of the key concepts within Buddhist belief is that man is equal and all humans have the same inner potential to achieve great purity (Zopa 2009). This idea may seem at odds with the lamaist hierarchy of Tibetan Buddhism. Gellner (1990) tackles this discrepancy and explains that Buddhism is essentially founded on an egalitarian ideology but it is based over a series of lifetimes and it is believed that due to their diligence and accomplishments some practitioners are more advanced than others. As with any hierarchy or structure of inequality, there are inevitably ripples of effect that touch each layer of society in a different way.

This was true for the community of international students while they interacted within the ritual space. Elements of their organisation mirrored those of the monastics. There were teams of students who lead the chanting (the umzes), students who guided others through the prayers,

¹³¹ As I mentioned in Chapter 1, I am also a practising Buddhist and my reasons for choosing this religion are two-fold. My mother was a Buddhist; she introduced me to meditation and elements of Buddhism and Tibetan culture, which I found very interesting. My mother died when I was 20 and I used the framework set out in the Dzogchen teachings to help cope with my grief and to support me in my everyday life.

and students who orchestrated the rituals and made all the offerings at the shrine (the choepens), just as the monks would. There were additional elements concerning spatial organisation of bodies within the ritual space that were related to the structure of Shenpen, the international branches of the monastery's charitable organisation. As a trustee of Shenpen UK, it would be unethical for me to provide further details on this relationship; however, I raise it here to show that relational configurations within the monastery were also subject to international influences and were shaped by the dynamics of each national group present.

Outside of rituals and formal occasions, the social hierarchy and monastic influenced organisation was rarely duplicated. For example, in the dining room, every person queued to receive their food; no one was given preferential treatment and each person was responsible for washing their own dishes. Within the study groups where the day's retreat teaching from the lama was discussed, each person had equal opportunity to contribute; there was no hierarchy and people sat together in small groups (divided by language) in a circle on the floor. When journeying to and from the monastery, all retreatants travelled together either in taxis or on a bus. Exceptions were only made for those travelling with health problems or small children who needed car seats.

So why did an organisation that mirrored the monastics exist within rituals and what purpose did it serve? At a practical level, it provided a continuity that was not there within the community itself. The sangha of international students changed each year during my fieldwork. Despite some members being constant, the size and demographics of the community fluctuated and so rituals are organised in a particular, standardised way so that they can be duplicated regardless of who forms the retreatant body at any one time. The monastery, particularly now with its limited resources and social reach in exile, does not have the capacity to re-address and re-order the community of international students each year and so continuity of assembly is essential. Once the international sangha was structured, in a similar way to the monastics, it made interaction within the ritual space much easier; it provided a common understanding between the two. For example, the choepens who organised the shrine could work together if required as they were all following the same ritual rules, and the group as a whole could experience temporary unity. It did not matter that once the ritual was over, the hierarchies and structures were put aside because the laity lived and operated separately from the monks; it was only during the ritual space that they convened. Solidarity of behaviour strengthens the bond

between participants because they see their behaviour being repeated by others. If all participants act in the same way, it helps create temporary group unity and encourages the student to continue participating in the ritual.

So within this context, I believe that the belief in the purity of the lama has an additional purpose: to unify the ritual community for the people participating in the ritual and those watching it, and to strengthen the actual and perceived effect of the different rituals. Solidarity of behaviour strengthens the bond between participants because they see their behaviour being repeated by others, which in turn reinforces the behavioural pattern. It discourages deviance and supports the student to continue participating in the ritual.

At times, some of the international students displayed reluctance to participate in the demanding retreat schedule and some individuals would miss the early morning meditation and prostration sessions or could be found resting or staying in their rooms during these sessions. Mostly I attributed this to fatigue as a result of jet lag as most students arrive just before the retreat starts and do not have an adjustment period. A lack of time-off or holiday from work means time for retreats is limited. Resistance to the regimes of prostrations and chanting in Tibetan could also be seen amongst newer students; some would become visibly frustrated if they could not keep up with the pace of the chanting or looks of displeasure could be seen halfway through the prostrations when they became tired. However, this was a small minority of students and most students had a very positive view of the schedules and system in place at the monastery because they either had attended before or were familiar with the routine from retreats that had been held in their own country. Also, the expense and the effort required to travel to India often ensured that those who did make it to the monastery were very enthusiastic about the order of life encountered there.

In Chapter 8, I consider the work of Humphrey and Laidlaw (1994) who propose that: “ritual is [discerned] as a quality which action can come to have” (1994:64). They suggest that the intentions of the ritual participants and their motivation for taking part is of far less significance than whether they feel they are performing the ritual correctly. This understanding chimes with attitudes held by all three main groups (monastics, international students and laity) at the monastery. Completing the ritual in the right way is prioritised over its meaning. The structure of the rituals, the categorisation of the group into roles and responsibilities, mirroring

those of the monastics (for the international students), takes the focus away from internal desires and wishes and organises the body, and controls its movement and rotation in the ritual space. Through focusing on monastic norms led directly by what is prescribed in the Buddhist scriptures, the participant is taken through a process of embodying the monastic virtues. It is within the ritual space that subjectification (Foucault 1983, Asad 1993 and Mahmood 2005) takes place. The monastic structure, headed by the lama, subjects the participant to bodily controls over movement (performance of prostrations, kora, how they move in front of the shrine, the rotation of their body) so that they realise their own capacity for purity. These embodied acts of purity are both the means to achieve purity and also an expression of the state of purity. So whilst ritual participants are subject to a particular type of ritual control, it actually enables them to achieve purity and is not viewed as oppression.

Asad's (1993) reflections about Benedictine monks and their attempts to abide by "The Rule of Saint Benedict" are pertinent in his work *Genealogies of Religion*. He argues that relations between the monks themselves, and their social exchanges, are intrinsic to technologies of the self. Interactions with other monks are opportunities to develop capacities of self and moral dispositions such as disengagement of will (1993:113). For this opportunity, the monks are dependent upon the monastic organisation their resources, and community life; and so, Asad asserts that the monastic body as a whole should be considered an opportunity to develop technologies of the self.

The interaction between the monks and how they behave performing their daily tasks provides individual opportunities to develop technologies of the self such as disengagement of will. These individual opportunities are, however, "dependent on the institutional resources of organised community life" (1993:112) because obedience and other similar qualities can only be learned and practised in an "organised community subject to the authority and discipline of an abbot (1993:113)."

This is true in particular for the international students at the monastery. There are very few Buddhist monasteries within their countries of origin and none from this particular school of Dzogchen. They meet, as a lay sangha, for prayer and ritual regularly but this is not within the presence of the lama and not within a specifically designed ritual space like in a monastery. They hire out private venues for their weekly meetings. The rituals at the monastery, therefore,

provide the continuous work of a structured community under the leadership of the pure lama. So at the meeting point between expression and execution of the technologies of self and the technologies of purity, the possibility for the realisation of purity exists.

So the effects of the ritual hierarchy and structure are manifold. Firstly, unification of the community, albeit temporary and restricted to the ritual space, the groups are joined cohesively and operate successfully as a united whole. Secondly, the rituals provide an opportunity for various technologies of self, enabling the ritual participant to realise purity. Lastly, the ritual becomes a reinforcing process for the perceived and actual social power of the monastery and the lama. A governing force that has the capacity to unify a global group then has a power and strength beyond the confinement of the monastic compound.

The more time that I spent at the monastery, the more I saw that these rituals are an integral part of the organisation and hierarchical structure of the monastery and they are an important way to preserve modes of conduct and turn the ritual space into a lived space; one that both creates social relationships and expresses and strengthens them. The effect of the embodied rituals on the audience was particularly noticeable during a large gathering of prominent Dzogchen lamas at the monastery and the following part of the chapter will describe the event and how the worship of the pure lama was a central feature. I will consider how the collective worship of the head lama, Dzogchen Rinpoche, by a number of notable lamas considered pure in their own right, became a declaration of power and strength by the monastery both to its immediate audience attending the event and the wider outside world. The body of the lama became a symbol of the lineage and, again using Bernstein's (2013) analogy, a canvas onto which the survival of the lineage in exile was being painted.



Fig.5.2 Source: Informant's Facebook page
Dzogchen Rinpoche arriving for the congregation



Fig.5.3 Source: Informant's Facebook page

Long Life and mandala offering to Dzogchen Rinpoche



Fig. 5.4 Source: Informant's Facebook page
Congregation of Dzogchen Lamas and international students

The Politics of Other Lamas

In late January 2011, Dzogchen Monastery's managing committee called together all the senior lamas of the Dzogchen lineage to meet for three days. They had met previously, two years before, at Bodhgaya in North India. Bodhgaya is a pilgrimage site where the Buddha is said to have attained enlightenment under the Bodhi tree. This year the meeting was to be held at the monastery because as one lama described, Dzogchen Monastery is considered the official home of the lineage. The lamas discussed an extensive agenda on how the lineage could be maintained. The agenda had been translated into English for international guests to read and some of the points were as follows:

- how all Dzogchen branch monasteries can unite together to be more powerful;
- how all lamas of the Dzogchen lineage can have the determination and enthusiasm to be firm and stable for the lineage;
- to monitor and regulate the means of identifying tulkus by authentic masters of Dzogchen and to ensure continuous prayers for the stable and indestructible long life of His Eminence Dzogchen Rinpoche.

At the end of the three days, all members of the congregation signed what was considered by the monks to be a historic resolution pledging their support to maintain the Dzogchen lineage.

The meeting comes at an interesting point for the political discourse of Tibet. The Dalai Lama had been hinting for some time now that he would stand down from all political activity regarding the Tibetan cause; this was announced officially in 2011.¹³² There has been a democratically elected government in exile for the past 10 years with a Prime Minister but it has been the Dalai Lama who has been the main figurehead. Despite the public perception, it is actually quite misleading to present Tibet as having one single leader with a unified following. Although the Gelugpa School, headed by the Dalai Lama, was in power before the Chinese invasion, Tibetan leadership has historically been susceptible to external threats and domestic conditions with some rivalry between the different Buddhist schools (Dongyal 2008). A number of different monks at the monastery informed me that some lamas from different schools, who are equally as high as the Dalai Lama, deliberately changed their titles to a lower status in the 1960s so that they wouldn't overshadow the work of the Dalai Lama. These same

¹³² http://www.dalailama.com/news/post/655-statement-of-his-holiness-the-dalai-lama-on-the-52nd-anniversary-of-the-tibetan-national-uprising-day

monks now refer to Dzogchen Rinpoche as “His Holiness” rather than “His Eminence”. In the 1960s, it was believed that if Tibet had one leader, the message would be clearer and reach further, creating greater support for the independence movement. Now in the face of an increasingly powerful China, the dream of independence is fading fast and now that the Dalai Lama is stepping back from the limelight. There are a growing number of discussions amongst my informants about other lamas who might be moving forward to claim what they consider their rightful place.

During the congregation, there were two very public performances that reinforced the lamaist hierarchy and the pure status of the lama. The first was the very elaborate and grand official welcome for the head of the monastery, Dzogchen Rinpoche, which started the proceedings. Dzogchen Rinpoche entered the monastery grounds on foot through the ceremonial gate, the main entrance to the monastery. Ahead of him, leading the way, was a traditional possession of monks carrying eight jansen and pen [colourful ceremonial banners, which include auspicious symbols for prosperity and good fortune]; a team of monks was also playing ritual white conch shells, drums, cymbals and jan ling [Tibetan horns], and carrying an or duk [ceremonial yellow umbrella reserved for lamas of a certain status]. Also within the procession were three young monks dressed in traditional Tibetan lay outfits and they accompanied the costumed figure Ja Na Ha Shong,¹³³ an old Chinese sponsor of the dharma.

The path to the temple was lined with lamas and monks, local representatives of the Tibetan Government in Exile, international representatives from Shenpen, the global charity associated with the monastery and many villagers from Dhondenling. Each person held a white khatag in their hands, which they offered with hands outstretched and heads bowed when Dzogchen Rinpoche walked near them. The head is considered the purest part of the body so a line of lamas all sent the most sacred part of their body towards the ground (less pure); something which their own attendants and students would never touch in their lives was a very powerful sight for the audience to see. Dzogchen Rinpoche stopped periodically to greet them and return the scarves over their heads in an act of blessing and as he walked past. They followed him in a crowd towards the temple. By the time Dzogchen Rinpoche reached the temple, a mass of

¹³³ Ja Na Ha Shong welcomes high lamas to the monastery and is considered a symbol of great support and strength for the teachings of the Buddha. Ja Na Ha Shong had an enormous head, three or four times the size of his body, which I was told this is to represent his wisdom.

people were heading towards the main doors and caught up within the crowds; for a moment, I felt a real buzz of excitement amongst them as if this was the start of a really significant event.

The second occasion where there was a very public performance of reverence for the lama was on the final day of the meeting when all the lamas gathered together on the veranda of the temple to perform long life offerings to Dzogchen Rinpoche who was seated on his throne in front of the temple doors looking out onto the crowd of villagers who had gathered to watch the festivities. The offering ritual, although quite simple in form, is quite impressive when performed by some of the most influential lamas of the lineage because these are lamas to whom devotees would normally bow in respect to but here the roles were reversed. Each of the main lamas in turn performed three full prostrations—lying down in full stretch at the foot of Dzogchen Rinpoche's throne placing their pure bodies on the impure ground. Then they hold a long life mandala,¹³⁴ made from metal in this instance, in outstretched hands towards the throne with their heads bent in respect. Presenting a mandala, a representation of the universe, is considered by the monks to be one of the most complete offerings possible and is only performed for lamas of a high status. The mandala is held in position whilst a series of prayers are recited; this can sometimes take a few minutes and can cause the person's arms to ache due to its weight. Then other sacred objects are offered: a statue of the Buddha, a dharma text wrapped in cloth, a bell and dorje,¹³⁵ gift offerings from the lamas' home monasteries, and finishing with presenting khatags. The few hundred villagers who had gathered to watch the music and dance performances scheduled to follow all watched on as the offerings were performed.

One of the limitations of my study is that there was no opportunity to see whether there was a wider political impact of the statements made by the congregation and the lamas gathered or whether the speeches and public displays of lama worship would only influence those present at the congregation. As mentioned in the introduction to this thesis, fieldwork access was restricted to within the monastic compound and it was not possible to conduct research with other political sources such as the local representatives of the Tibetan Government in Exile, regional Karnataka politicians, or even to visit the other monasteries within the settlement and to elicit their response.

¹³⁴ A mandala is a symbolic depiction of the universe and will be discussed further in Chapter 9.

¹³⁵ Ritual instruments.

However, other anthropologists who have not encountered the same boundaries of my work and have been able to go into further detail suggesting that the impact of lama worship is in fact far reaching and significant. Kaplonski in his (2014) book, *The Lama Question*, explores the relationship between Buddhist lamas, monasteries and political power in early socialist Mongolia. The lama question (*lam naryn asuudal*) referred to the influence of the Buddhist lamas and monasteries in politics, economics and every day life.

In just under two decades, from 1921-1940, the newly appointed socialist government transformed Mongolia from a Buddhist autocratic country, where more than a third of men were connected to the lamas and their monasteries, to a socialist state where 18,000 lamas had been slaughtered and only 700 monasteries remained (2014:4). A repeated argument used by the Soviet government to reduce the political power of the lamas was to accuse them of not being pure and to campaign for a “purer Buddhism” (Kaplonski 2014) referring to “the original teachings of the Buddha which did not recognise property, monasteries, or all these embroideries of ceremony that the lamas have built” (Strong 1936). By dishonouring the current lifestyle arrangement of the lamas and their political activity through reference to Buddhist doctrine and positioning them as not pure, the socialist government aimed to discredit their authority. This was not an original idea; neighbouring Buryatia saw a reformation of Buddhism and a reemphasis on the renunciation of worldly affairs and on celibate practice in the 19th century (Purevjav and Dashjamts 1965). Tibetan Buddhism in the 14th century (which would have mostly been under the form of the Nyingma School at this stage in its development) also experienced an extensive reformation with the same moral criticism by the lama Tsong-kha-pa (1357-1419) and the subsequent formation of Gelugpa School of Buddhism (McKay 2003).

The Soviet government tried to undercut the influence of the lamas both politically and economically under the guise of their non-pure Buddhism propaganda. They increased taxes on the lamas, discredited the monasteries’ medical systems and healthcare provisions, and banned the practice of recognising reincarnations of lamas. With little success in decreasing the populations’ reliance on the lamas, the government began arresting, imprisoning and executing them, referring to them as “vermin” and “parasites” that need exterminating (Choibalsan 1951). The government resorted to such extreme violence because a decade and a half of trying to persuade the population that their faith and the belief in the purity of the lamas was misplaced,

had failed (Kaplonski 2014: 227). The opinion of the population could not be moved and the lamas would not make any concessions and so the government saw this as their only option.

Tension between Buddhist lamas, as leaders of monastics and practising laity and the ruling political authorities, resulting in conflict is a repeated occurrence in recent history and in particular with Tibetan Buddhism between the lamas and the Chinese authorities (see Chapter 2 for further details). Therefore we can logically assume that the politics of purity, and reactions to the congregation of the Dzogchen lamas, reach beyond the compound walls of the monastery and out into wider society. It was reported with Tibetan media and news articles were posted on Dzogchen Monastery's website and also on other associated monastery sites. It is also appropriate to assume that what is actually happening within the monastery has been generated and then reshaped by the wider political and historical context. The monastery does not operate in a vacuum and, although perhaps not the easiest aspect of my research to investigate due to fieldwork limitations, there are clear indications that the congregation was formed in response to the current political threats and instabilities. When the Dalai Lama passes away, the political power of the Tibetan Buddhists will be significantly weakened and the agenda points of the congregation show a clear desire amongst the Dzogchen lamas to regain their position of strength and operate stable, united group. Agenda point three, the accurate identification of tulku (covered in Chapter 7) by lineage-approved sources and not through political involvement, is also another sign that the congregation is responding to external pressures.

According to the hierarchy present within the Dzogchen lineage, all lamas are viewed, to differing extents, as the embodiment of purity; so when a group of pure beings all perform a public display of reverence to one particular lama, this magnifies and intensifies the impact of the rituals on the reputation of the main lama. As a symbol of power for the monastery, the lama is held in high regard in an attempt to increase the longevity of his reign and the power. The act of worship is also mutually beneficial for the participating lama because by promoting the lineage lama's high status by the very nature of their association to him, they are in turn promoting their own status and that of their native monastery. Thus, the lama's body has become a tool used by the agents of the lineage to promote their organisation and is thrust forward in the public sphere as something untouchable. The body of the lama also becomes an unquestionable authority ruling over the multi-cultural group of followers that now engages

with the Dzogchen lineage in its international network. Over the next four chapters, I will look more deeply at the specific embodied behaviours, the rituals through which knowledge of purity embodiment is passed to these different groups, and how the lama is central to them all. The immediate chapter that follows explains the ritual of rabnye, the process by which a sacred space or item is created, and explores how purity can be exchanged from a lama to a follower, statue or item, and considers the transformative nature of purity.

Chapter 6 Rabnye: The Transmission of Purity

For monks or students, having physical contact with the lama or being in close physical proximity is a rare occurrence and this scarcity of contact makes the individual achievement of embodied purity in reality quite difficult. The lama is central to the performance of all rituals and embodied worship that enables the embodiment of purity so without him the realisation of purity, although possible, is much harder. The scarcity also creates large gaps within the monks' lives without the lama, such as when Dzogchen Rinpoche is away teaching in Europe or Australia that could be filled with other concepts or ideas that, potentially, could have a disruptive impact on the unity of the Dzogchen community and the longevity of the lineage. Just as the young girls who performed the contemporary Bollywood dance at the party in the previous chapter were influenced by other cultural values, so too could the monks be. Then there is vulnerability in another way; during the three to four months each year when the monastery becomes a multinational setting, the unified but distinct monastic way of life becomes threatened as the monks become exposed to many new ways of being. The threat is lessened through many of the monks leaving to go on pilgrimage during their holiday period, and so do not interact with the international students; however, there is still a small group of monks (exact number varies each year, ranging between 40-80) that stay behind. For the monastic committee and the continuity of monastic traditions, it is important that the monastery continues to function and so a necessary, yet temporary, union must be created between all the different practitioners that reside there. One method employed by the monastic body to assist in maintaining unity is through lama worship and as touched upon in Chapter 3, many aspects of the monastery in the form of sacred spaces are dedicated to the principle of the lama. This chapter will look at how one of those particular sacred spaces is created: the statues in Dzogchen Monastery temple. It will also explore how the monastery uses very physical rituals and material objects, such as the statues, to create the experience of purity and the opportunity to generate merit.

Here I focus on the rabnye ritual used to consecrate the three large statues in the monastery's temple and I discuss the process by which purity is transmitted from the lama to humans and/or objects. The ritual of rabnye is used to transform mundane items into sanctified objects by transferring purity from the lama to the material object. It is a three-part ritual: firstly the statues are packed full of previously blessed items or items considered pure and believed to

have the capacity to transfer purity; secondly, the lama performs a specific set of prayers and is thought by his followers to act as conduit to transfer purity from the gods to the statue as well as his own purity; and, lastly, the purity generated is shared amongst the community in an empowerment ritual [Tibetan. wang, Sanskrit. abhiṣeka which literally means “to power”] where further blessed material items are created and dispersed. To add context to this ritual, I will describe what these statues look like and observe how people behave towards them and how they hold the belief that the Buddha himself (and the respective deities) or the lama is embodied within the statue. I look at how purity is passed from item to item and how the knowledge regarding these rituals is passed from generation to generation. I also consider the subsequent social implications of these practices, how they connect the monks, villagers and international students to the monastery, and how this feeds into the monastic aim of sustaining the lineage in exile.

This particular chapter draws on fieldwork conducted between 2008 and 2013. The consecration of the statues was part of a wider project restoring Dzogchen Monastery’s temple, which ran for five years. It was a large scale project, as outlined later in the chapter, and required substantial funding so it lasted a significant length of time. In 2008 (December) I was conducting my master’s research at the monastery, which coincided with the launch of the restoration effort; I was fortunate that my subsequent visits, which normally took place each year between December and March, also overlapped with periods of work on the temple. Dzogchen Rinpoche oversaw the project and he resided mostly at the monastery from November to March. From March onwards, he normally toured Europe and Australia giving public teachings and retreats. Therefore work continued when he was in residence. My visits were also permitted during those months; as explained in Chapter 3, they were not permitted outside of these dates due to government restrictions and the PAP permit. The previous chapter explored how the various groups of Dzogchen hold folk notions of purity and view the body of the lama as pure, how an action-orientated pedagogy contributes to a restructuring of bodies and minds, and how the lama is critical to one’s own realisation of purity. This chapter builds upon those ideas and explores how folk notions of purity and the belief that the purity of the lama can be transferred into material objects to such an extent that they become, in the case of the statues, an embodiment of purity.

The Temple Restoration Project

Dzogchen Rinpoche publically announced on his website (www.dzogchen.org.in) in 2008 that he wished to restore the monastery's temple with architectural methods used in Ajanta and Ellora Caves.¹³⁶ Due to a lack of funds when the temple was first built back in 1980, only a moderate version of what had existed in Tibet could be created. After more than a decade of development work, the temple was officially inaugurated by the Dalai Lama in 1992. But now, 25 years on, the temple was being renovated. Dzogchen Rinpoche stated on a number of public occasions¹³⁷ that he considers the restoration a part of his continued effort to preserve traditional Tibetan and Buddhist culture.

Whilst staying at the monastery in 2008, I attended a meeting held by the staff of Shenpen International (the global arm of the Indian charity, DSSCS, based at the monastery¹³⁸), where the restoration plans were outlined and CGI's of the envisaged completed building were shown. Upon completion, the temple was set to look considerably different to when I first visited in 2004. Plans were revealed for three large golden statues seated on elaborate throne bases erected against the posterior wall of the temple. In the centre would be the statue of the Buddha; to his left, Padmasambhava, the saint who brought Buddhism to Tibet in the 8th Century and represents the quintessential lama; to his right was planned the Goddess Tara who is regarded as a Bodhisattva¹³⁹ of compassion and action. She is the female aspect of Avalokitesvara (Chenrezig), the Buddha of Compassion, believed by Tibetans to be the "mother" of their people (Beyer 1992). The charity representatives told of plans to fill the statues with hundreds of scrolls of mantras and relics from lamas to imbue them with the blessings of the lineage. The paintings of the life story of the Buddha and the lineage of the Dzogchen Rinpoches would also be painted on the walls of the temple and each pillar would be hand carved with religious symbols and painted by craftsmen from Nepal.

The purpose of the meeting was to request fundraising ideas and support from the international students present and it was officially stated that the aim was for the temple to be the most

¹³⁶ Buddhist and Hindu cave temples that are now pilgrimage sites in Maharashtra state, India. In January 2009, I travelled with a group of international students on a pilgrimage tour of the caves. Dzogchen Rinpoche and his attendant led the pilgrimage and I observed him studying the wall designs and artwork in the caves. Dzogchen Rinpoche purchased a detailed book on the history of the caves and I observed him reading it closely.

¹³⁷ Teachings during international retreats at Dzogchen Monastery and during public events whilst on his international teaching tours.

¹³⁸ See Chapter 3 for further info.

¹³⁹ See Chapter 4 for explanation of bodhisattava.

complete offering to the lama and the lineage that was practically possible for a building. The temple would be the main centre of worship for the lineage, housing all the main scriptures and religious texts of Dzogchen. The attendees were shown a presentation of the financial commitment needed for the project that described how visitors to the temple would also share in the blessings of these great texts, statues and the sacred environment completed. Here I would like to draw attention to Ortner's (1989) study of how the first Sherpa monasteries in Nepal were founded and her conclusion that the Buddhist temple is both an expression of selfless devotion to the Buddhas and the lamas of the lineage but also an expression of political and social power. Observations during my research have led me to believe that Dzogchen Monastery's temple acts as a constant physical reminder of the current status of the monastery but also the aspirations of those who run the monastery for what they wish the monastery to be. As the monastery grows in power and influence in exile, so does the size of the temple. This influence is not focused on local Karnatakan politics but against the watching political audiences and the international audiences with the aim of recreating the monastery and the reach of the lineage as it existed within Tibet. As the *magon* (mother, meaning main) monastery of Dzogchen, the temple plays a vital role for the community in maintaining the physical presence of the lineage and so the management committee at the monastery wished to restore it to a condition worthy of its status.

The restoration project began in late 2008 and I visited the temple at the beginning of 2009. The following is an extract from my field notes describing the temple:

“The temple has been completely gutted, the floor uplifted, tables removed, thrones were absent and scaffolding covered the whole interior. At the top of the scaffolding, workmen sat, crouched over with torches shining on the pillars that they worked upon. One man smoked a cigarette (which is forbidden within the monastery's grounds¹⁴⁰) whilst another listened to a distorted radio broadcast. They carved out intricate designs of the religious symbols at the top of the pillar, including dragons and peacocks. I was amazed by the intricacy of the detail and I stood for some time watching them at work, slowly adding to the designs step by step. One of the international students of Dzogchen was standing next to me as I observed the temple for the first time since my return. Noticing the big impression it had made on me explained that the

¹⁴⁰ Followers of Padmasambhava are forbidden from smoking. In Tibetan Buddhist teachings, especially in the predictions of Padmasambhava, tobacco is regarded as a black food grown through wrongful prayer. Evil beings prayed that tobacco would disturb and harm people trying to live a good life, interfere with the development of their minds and not allow them to practise virtue, to practise meditation.

designs are in accordance with a vision had by the Buddha and to build a temple like this is said to be the greatest possible offering and those involved in it will receive great blessings”.

The temple had been thoroughly stripped of its holiness and purity and was slowly being rebuilt. Whilst progress had been made it was yet to be considered a sanctified space, hence the craftsmen were allowed to smoke and listen to music; mundane activities not normally permitted.

The Creation of a Sacred Space

In January 2010, the new statues were delivered from Nepal. For ease of transport and storage, the statues were made in segments and they were divided into the following pieces: the head, chest and upper body, the arms and the trunk of the body seated in the lotus¹⁴¹ position. The segments were each about 15 cm thick. To make them, melted copper was set within a mould and then when set, its detail was shaped with a small hammer and chisel.¹⁴² The segments were being stored on the floor of the veranda outside the temple loosely wrapped in sacking, which fell away over time and would lie alongside it. Normally, anything that depicts the Buddha or any of the Bodhisattvas,¹⁴³ the dharma, the teachings of the Buddha, or anything related to a teacher, is considered sacred and pure and not placed on the ground as it is considered to be an impure place. It must be placed in an elevated position away from where people stand or where animals inhabit and it must be clean; it is inappropriate to breathe, cough or sneeze over them, as this is believed to contaminate their purity. There are also other lesser conditions that are sometimes required to be met but in general, anything that symbolises something that the monks consider sacred must be placed in an elevated and clean position and vice versa—if an object is placed high up, it generally is viewed to have pure qualities. Also, any item of ritual importance or significance is usually locked away with no public access.¹⁴⁴ Only the choepen team, those who have been given specific responsibility to care for the ritual items, have access.

¹⁴¹ Cross-legged seated position.

¹⁴² Although this process for the statues took place in Nepal, I observed a very similar process for the throne base ornamentation which was made on site at the monastery in two small buildings down the hill behind the shop that were being used as workshops for the coppersmiths.

¹⁴³ Beings that are considered to have realized a high level of spiritual awareness and have a great capacity to help other.

¹⁴⁴ The temple is often visited by Indian tourists.

So with that in mind I was a little surprised to see the statue segments left on the veranda floor, a walkway that was quite dusty and exposed. I asked Tsering Wangchuk why it was okay to store the statues in this way. Tsering was a monk in his late 20s from Bhutan who had come to Dzogchen Monastery to study at the university. He was senior within the monastery and had a number of young monks under his supervision but had not yet finished his studies so had not qualified to be a teacher or khenpo yet. His English, as with many of the monks from Bhutan, was excellent, and he had become a very reliable source of information about life at the monastery. We had first struck up conversation in the monastery shop, as, at that time, part of his duties were to manage the running of it. I often spoke to him when there were no other customers to serve. Tsering's answer was practical. There was nowhere else suitable to store the statues as they were so big; it also included a ritual related reason: the statues had not yet been blessed and filled with zung so it was okay to store them on the floor. Zung are rolled up lengths of paper that are placed inside the statues. The paper has mantra printed on it through a wood block and ink printing method. A mantra is a set of syllables, considered pure, and by chanting or repeatedly whispering them, they are used to purify one's speech and to settle the mind so that one can experience clarity when meditating. Mantra is an integral part of the ritual process and it is rare that any practice is without them. For example, the ngondro, the preliminary purification practice that the monks complete every day, requires the monks to recite many hundreds of thousands of mantras. The monks and the lay Dzogchen community recite these mantras throughout the day, counting them on their malas.¹⁴⁵

¹⁴⁵ Strings of 108 beads. Each round of the mala counts as 100 mantras but 108 beads are used because often the recitation is completed incredibly quickly and the extra eight beads offer a margin of error.

Fig. 6.1 Source: Author's own
The statue segments being stored on the floor



Fig. 6.2, 6.3, & 6.4 Source: Author's own
The statue segments





Fig. 6.5 Source: Author's own
The workmen carving the temple columns



Fig. 6.6 Source: Author's own
The head of the Padmasambhava statue

The zung are placed with other sacred items such as relics from deceased lamas; for example, sections from their old robes, old teeth, or ringsel (relics from great lamas or the Buddha), and pearl-like relics which have been found within the ashes of a cremated lama. Ringsel are considered to have formed miraculously as a demonstration of the lama's realisation and sometimes if these relics are all found within a particular section of the ashes they are even considered as indications of where the deceased lama is to be reborn (Zivkovik 2010). Lamas with great realisation are thought to be able to determine their own rebirth and the location of where the ringsel are found within the funeral pyre in relation to the compass points is taken as a sign of where the search party designated to finding the incarnation should look; if ringsel were found in the east of the pyre, the search party would have looked within East Tibet. Incarnations of lamas are now sometimes found outside of Tibet so the search party also uses other methods such as divinations, a secret ritual used to predict the future, visions and dreams; sometimes the lama even writes a letter before he dies describing the land of his rebirth. This is true of the Karmapas, the head of the Kagyu School of Buddhism. The present 17th Karmarpa was found through a letter written by the 16th Karmapa that stated the name of his new mother and father and the place of his rebirth (Brown 2005).

In the case of the ringsel, the purity that was held within the lama's body whilst alive is partially transferred into the small balls and contained there for as long as the balls exist. If a practitioner has contact with the ringsel, the purity is believed to be transferred to them; it is even thought that just the sight of these relics is a blessing and at some level purity can be transmitted. The purity of the lama is only partially transferred to the ringsel. This is because the purity also continues into the subsequent incarnation of the lama. Having not witnessed the death or cremation of a lama, I do not have first-hand knowledge of how this process takes place, nor have I found any anthropological accounts, or even sufficient explanations within Buddhist academic texts. That which continues from one life to the next remains enigmatic as Buddhists do not have a concept of a soul; in fact, they purport to the "non-self" or a "self-less existence" (Spiro 1982) and so this chapter will explore the transferral process from a material point of view, transferring purity from one material item to another.

The next part of the process is that statues, with all these sacred items inside, are sealed. It is then that the monks implement the various requirements for placement and storage.¹⁴⁶ When the statue is sealed with the blessed objects inside, the statue itself becomes blessed; although not completely as the ritual of rabnye, the full transmission of purity, still needs to be fulfilled. This will be explored in the latter part of this chapter.

A Divine Skin

For the statues to be both a supreme offering to the lineage and a centre of power in themselves to transmit the purity of the lineage to those who came into contact with them, it was widely believed by both monks and lay sangha that their appearance must also be as holy as their insides. Once assembled, the statues will then be gold plated. Facial, costume and other intricate details will be individually hand-painted onto the statue. For example, the throne bases were to be ornamented with various Tibetan symbols, motifs, animals, flowers and figures all with important religious meanings. The throne base itself is in the shape of a lotus which symbolises purity as a lotus grows out of the muddy waters and blooms with a beautiful flower, untarnished by the mud (Powers 1995). One of my main informants within the group of international students was Isabelle, a French woman in her mid-thirties who had spent a number of years living at the monastery (during the permitted periods). Isabelle was well versed in the rituals, having learnt to speak Tibetan. She also had excellent English because when not at the monastery she lived in London with her boyfriend. During one of our conversations, I asked Isabelle about adorning the statues in sacred symbols and ornamentation and she explained that in doing so, the statues are believed by Tibetan Buddhists to become “completely holy” and that all the qualities of these symbols become present in the statue. I queried why it wasn’t enough to just have one symbol or even, in the case of the Buddha, was it necessary to have any? The Buddha lived as a simple monk with robes and a begging bowl. He had given up all his privileges so why now adorn a statue of him with them? Isabelle responded that it was not for the Buddha that the motifs were added; it was for us. We offer these statues in their purest, holiest form possible and then the Buddha or other deities will then

¹⁴⁶ That is not to say that the monks behave disrespectfully towards them prior to consecration. I never observed a monk behaving in a manner of anything other than curiosity of what the assembled statues would look like and of anticipation and mild excitement to actually having really large statues within the temple. Monks are predominately quite reserved when expressing their emotions. One of the eight instructions in the Noble Eightfold Path, considered to be one of the main teachings of the Buddha, is for “right action” and this includes cultivating non-attachment to material possessions and also of non-indulgent in one’s emotions (Bodhi 2006). However, when the monks stopped by the statues in twos and threes, on their way to the dining room, or elsewhere, they would peer intently at the segments, often inspecting and discussing them in hushed voices and these discussions would often end in satisfied smiles.

bless the statues and we can receive their blessings in the form of merit, which then allows us to achieve our own purity.

Statues such as these are also known in Sanskrit as Buddha Rupa, which can be translated as “Form of the Buddha”. According to Isabelle, devotees were meant to treat the statues exactly as if they were the living bodies of fully realised Buddhas. What I understood from my conversation with Isabelle is that although the statues start off as symbolic representations of the Buddha or the lama,¹⁴⁷ through the ritual process they actually become the embodiment of the lama and his purity. Even though the statues were yet to be assembled, as the temple restoration around them progressed, the anticipation surrounding them grew and it seemed as if in the eyes of the Dzogchen community the statues were taking on an identity or personality of their own. It reminded me of the sense of excitement that is felt when awaiting the arrival of an important guest.

Temple opening ceremony

I will now jump forwards in my description to the end of December 2012 and the official opening ceremony of the temple that was to take place during the bi-annual meeting of all the main tulkus and khenpos of the lineage. (This was the second time I had attended these meetings; the first occasion was described in the previous chapter.) One night I left my room for some fresh air as the heat had been oppressive during the day. I walked around to the front of the temple and a group of monks were sat in rows to the right hand side on the veranda chanting prayers, some of them loudly playing ritual horns. They couldn't sit inside or to the front because restoration work was hurriedly continuing so it would be completed in time for the opening ceremony in two days' time. There seemed as though there was still much to do: only half the marble floor had been laid, craftsmen were still painting, the details on the statue and the only lights were bulbs running from wires strewn haphazardly around the temple. It looked as though it would be a miracle if it were finished within the two-day deadline. The next day, amidst the bustle of the workmen, I noticed Tsering Wangchuk so I went to greet him; it had been seven months since I had seen him and had exchanged few short Facebook messages. Tsering was pleased to see me; we exchanged greetings and I told him that I was surprised to see so much activity. He told me that they would be working late into the night, maybe until 2 am or 3 am, getting ready for the ceremony. I asked about the monks who were

¹⁴⁷ I use the two terms interchangeably here because the Buddha is considered the first teacher or lama in Buddhism.

chanting and he told me that they were from Sikkim, in North India. They were from “Dodrupchen’s Monastery”¹⁴⁸ and had been chanting now for four days.

The main lama, Gundre Tulku, was sitting on the throne and another tulku, Yaksay Tulku, was on the smaller throne. They were here to attend the congregation but they had also come down from Sikkim with the specific purpose of consecrating the statues. The culmination of these prayers would be a Rinzin Tsewang ceremony the following morning. Tsewang means empowerment and it is a ritual where the lama first empowers himself with the energy of a deity and then transfers it as a blessing to the congregation. Rinzin refers to the type of deity the empowerment is based around and this particular ceremony would be for Rinzin Dupa, one of the many emanations of Padmasambhava.¹⁴⁹ Tsering told me that I should be ready from 8 am on the day of the empowerment to make sure that I could get a good seat as all the villagers would be attending.

Rabnye

It took a good few hours for me to meet up with Tsering again; a monk had broken his arm falling down the stairs and as Tsering was the most competent English speaking monk available he was required to escort the other monk to the hospital in Kollegal, the nearest town. When we did meet, I questioned him about what the monks who had been praying for the statues had been doing. He replied, “It’s the rabnye. They are doing the rabnye.” I wasn’t familiar with rabnye so I pressed him for further information.

“Oh I don’t know this word in English, rabnye, rabnye”, he repeated, thinking about its meaning. “You know when all the purity come into the statues, when the power comes. The statues are not complete without this.”

“What are they without this?” I asked.

¹⁴⁸ “Dodrupchen’s Monastery” refers to Chorten Gonpa in Gangtok, Sikkim, which is led by the lama Dodrupchen Rinpoche.

¹⁴⁹ There are eight main emanations and then different names within each eight. For his biography, see (Zangpo 2002, Tsogyal 2002, 2008).

“They are... they are just the materials. But with this they, you know, have great power; this is what makes the statue, the statue.” he emphasised. “This is what makes them special. It’s like Padmasambhava is there, the Buddha is there, Tara is there, all are there!” he laughed.

“So if I go into the temple and look at them will I be actually looking at Padmasambhava, will I see him?” I asked.

“Well that depends on you,” he responded. “Depends on the person who’s looking, what their merit is, what their realisation is. But I’m sure they are there.”

Dzogchen Buddhists believe that anyone has the potential to attain enlightenment to become a Buddha; it just depends on their realisation of their own inherent purity (ideas that are often used interchangeably). I asked Tsering if anyone could perform the rabyne ritual and he replied, “It must be a high lama; someone with realisation. They must have the connection with the Buddhas and then the blessing will come through when they say the prayers. It really takes someone very powerful to do this, not just anyone.”

I then asked Tsering to describe the relics inside the statues. “The whole body of the statue is completely filled from the top of the head to the finger tips right down to the toes; the whole body is precious.” Tsering got more excited as he spoke. “First we take a pole made from sandal wood;¹⁵⁰ this pole runs the length of the whole body and fits in the centre of the statue. We drill holes up the pole and within them then we put ringsel in the holes; we cover the holes up with paper to seal them and then paint the pole with mantras. We paint with all sorts of mantras; depends on each statue really. We push them right down into the finger tips and into the toes; the whole body is completely filled.”

Tsering described the different types of ringsel that were in the statues aside from the zung mentioned previously: Dzogchen Rinpoche donated ringsel that belonged to his personal collection including relics from the Buddha, a part of the Buddha’s tooth, a small piece of cloth from the robes of Padmasambhava and then many different objects from different lamas. The monks also donated ringsel if they possessed them and then placed around the pole were other precious objects donated by villages, which included gold, jewellery, coral or precious stones. I

¹⁵⁰ Sandal wood is a very precious commodity in Karnataka state. It is used to make a whole range of products including furniture, malas, soap, etc. It is actually illegal to cut down a sandal wood tree without permission.

asked Tsering why the villagers felt compelled to donate and he explained that they did so because they wanted to support the temple but they also received blessings and merit for them and for their families in return. This last point is particularly interesting because it illustrates the two-fold benefit from allowing the villagers to take part in the temple restoration. Firstly, by giving the villagers an opportunity to participate, it allows the monks at the monastery to practice generosity, one of the stipulated practices for a monk, by providing the villagers with a chance to accumulate blessings and merit. Secondly, by connecting the temple and the villagers' path to enlightenment (the generation of merit), the temple becomes inseparable from the local community and so further secures its place within the history of the settlement and within the wider social and cultural history of the Tibetan diaspora. By becoming the means by which the villagers can progress with religious practice through material and physical offerings, the temple and the monastery are steadfast in their place as spiritual facilitators for the local community (and beyond in the case of the international student network and the wider Dzogchen community). In doing so, this adds to the monastery's prestige, importance and power and contributes to securing the future of the lineage in exile.

Once the statues had been completely sealed, there is still one element of the rabyne ritual that should be completed: the final transference of purity by the lama. As mentioned earlier, a team of monks had been performing prayers outside the temple for the past five days to consecrate the statues. As part of the consecration ritual, a network of string had been laid out across the temple. It started at the main lama's throne and wove down through his supporting monks; from the monks it went in a loop around the four walls of the temple and then inside up to the statues. The string went around all three statues and across their hands, which rest in their laps (they are depicted as seated cross legged with their hands in their laps) and then back to the main lama at his throne. Tsering explained to me that the lama channels the pure energy from the different deities into himself and his pure body and then this purity is transmitted via the string all around the temple and into the statues. At a certain point in the ritual, the statues become the full embodiment of the purity of the lama, both in his *nirmanakaya* form¹⁵¹ (physical form) and the *sambhogakaya* (non-physical form).¹⁵² From now on, the statues are fully consecrated, as is the temple that houses them, and must be treated with the upmost respect and viewed as completely pure. To conclude the rabyne, the lama will perform a further ritual known as the *wang*: the empowerment, which means the transference of this purity unto other

¹⁵¹ See Chapter 5 page 102 for explanation of *nirmanakaya*.

¹⁵² See Chapter 5 page 102 for explanation of *sambhogakaya*.

people. The next part of the chapter will describe what took place during the empowerment and how objects produced during the empowerment also have the capacity to transfer purity.



Fig. 6.7 Source: Dzogchen Buddhism Facebook page
Padmasambhava statue in the temple



Fig. 6.8 Source: Dzogchen Buddhism Facebook page
Tara statue in the temple

The Wang: The Empowerment

On the morning of the ceremony, the villagers started gathering from around 7 am. I arrived after 9 am and I was able to find a seat near the front with the other international students and had a good view of both the temple and the crowd of a few hundred villagers who were seated in rows across the courtyard facing the temple. I have previously attended a handful of empowerment ceremonies at various events in the UK and when the time came for the audience to actually receive the empowerment from the lama, they approached his throne one by one. But this was the largest empowerment that I had been to and with the temple not yet opened and the monks sitting on a veranda only wide enough for a small group of people, I wondered how it would be logistically possible to complete the empowerment. The monks obviously had the same concerns and three of them gathered on the steps talking and looking out into the crowds. Two of them set about creating clear walkways amongst the people seated on the floor, shuffling them forwards or to the sides to get them in the right place. The empowerment procession then began and a line of monks began to weave their way through the crowds.

A monk holding a large bunch of incense wrapped in a white khatag led the way making sure that the pathway was filled with smoke. Next followed two monks loudly playing ritual trumpets, and then followed Gundre Tulku, the main lama who was holding a long life arrow with five silk ribbons that represent the five elements hanging from it. Gundre Tulku moved slowly making sure that every person's head was touched by the ribbon; he would deliberately stop and brush them over the audience's heads.¹⁵³ According to Tsering, at the point when the ribbon touches the head, it is believed that the purity is passed on the receiver. Next, Yaksay Tulku held a phumba, a ritual vase-like vessel that contained blessed liquid that had been on the shrine during the previous five days of prayer chanting. This liquid is believed to be the actual essence of the deities/lama's pure body¹⁵⁴ and so is considered a pure liquid. Members of the congregation were encouraged to take the liquid in their left hand and if they held out their right hand, they were corrected by the monks. Following the liquid, another monk handed out tserel—small balls of barley flour mixed with butter to make a rough dough mixture and

¹⁵³ The five silk ribbons symbolise the union of the five elements and the transmission of complete balance of the five elements: the pure body. As mentioned in the next chapter, the theory behind these ritual items is not widely known amongst the Dzogchen community and so I primarily refer to the arrow as the ritual tool used to transmit the purity from the lama.

¹⁵⁴ Khandro.net

then shaped into balls. Again, these were blessed during the ritual prior to the empowerment and this time both international and local members of the audience held out their right hands to receive the balls. The next monk held a skull cup holding liquid (I later enquired with Tsering who confirmed it was made from real skull) which was given to the left hand of the audience. Within the empowerment, each member of the crowd received four types of empowerment; empowerment of purity within their own bodies: the head, two types of liquid and one type of food. Four opportunities to be assisted in achieving a pure body and each one with a different type of body moulding associated with it. The opportunity to receive purity through the head required the receiver to make a small bow with their head, lowering their gaze, as you may observe someone doing if in prayer. The opportunity to receive purity through consuming food involves contact with the right hand and liquid with the left.

As each of these empowerments was being given, I watched the crowd closely. Everyone knew to bow their heads before being touched by the ribbon of the long life arrow. There were no differences between the actions of the varied groups present in the crowd but I was not surprised by this. Bowing one's head occurs frequently in many different aspects of rituals and life at the monastery. Most people are familiar with the circumstances when it is required. For example, praying, offering khatags, and when greeting a lama. It was different for the food and liquid though. I scanned the Tibetan crowd closest to me and each adult knew which hand to use to receive the different food and liquids. Some of the Tibetan children were prompted by their parents; however, the parent either physically held the child's hand if they were small or nudged them into moving the correct hand if they were slightly older. This suggests that as the child grows older, they require less prompting as the behaviour is learnt. For example, a group of teenagers sat on the wall at the side of the crowd knew exactly what to do independently of their parents. I looked at the international students close to me. Many of them were checking with each other which hand to use by copying the person next to them; I saw some of them whispering to another. Although I couldn't make out what they said, it seemed in reference to which hand to use. No formal instructions had been given on this occasion but at empowerments I had attended in the UK that had been open to the public, instructions about what to do had been read out. These were not known behaviours for people from a non-Buddhist background and it seemed formal learning and remembering of the protocol was required. The monks were aware of this and, as I mentioned earlier, they physically corrected any person who held out the incorrect hand. Ange, a woman in her sixties from Australia, was

sat in front of me. She turned round and saw that I was looking at everyone instead of holding out my hands. She whispered to me, “Liquid in the left hand.” and raising her left hand said, “Left is for liquid,” deliberately giving me a memory aid to help me remember which hand to use.

These different empowerments are a clear example of how embodiment takes place amongst the different groups. From an early age, Tibetans are physically prompted to perform the behaviours and as they grow older the prompts are lessened. The more rituals they attend the more they understand what they are expected to do. Eventually, when they have been fully immersed in the ritual behaviour patterns, they can act autonomously as the teenagers did within this empowerment and they become ritualised agents. This embodiment stays with them until their old age. For the international students who have had very little previous experience, this type of learning requires more formal instruction and reminding of the correct behaviour, but they still learn through copying within the ritual environment and through mimicking the actions of others, they learn appropriate ritual behaviour.

There is a clear difference between how people behaved within the ritual environment and outside of it. Just prior to the empowerment, I left to go to the bathroom; this meant walking round the back of the temple towards the guesthouse and the shop. Here, lots of children were running around playing with toys or balls or buying sweets from the shop. Adults were stood around chatting with each other. When I returned from my room, there must have been an announcement that the empowerment was beginning as the parents were hurriedly ushering their children back towards the temple. Clothes were brushed down; hands and faces of the children were quickly wiped, and the families adopted a much more sombre and formal demeanour as if adopting a ritual persona. What I saw reminded me of Samuels’ (2004, 2005) observation around the embodied ritual behaviour of young monks in a Sri Lankan monastery and how they became ritualised monastic agents through learning how to behave during rituals and prayer sessions. As Samuels explains, “By observing, mimicking, and performing, *paritta* [a type of prayer-based practice] becomes a useful device whereby images of ideal monastic behaviour and appearance are transmitted to and instilled in newcomers to the sangha” (2005: 357). One particular observation that I found useful in my analysis is Samuels’ suggestion that: by learning rituals, through copying small aspects of them, when those aspects are completely new to the sangha, can actually draw the newcomer in to wider spheres of monastic culture and

practice. Samuels draws on Lave and Wenger's (1991) idea of legitimate peripheral participation, which is based on relationships between old and new sangha members and establishes “learning communities where newcomers to the sangha are compelled to forge practice-based relationships with older, more experienced monks” (Samuels 2005:351). Through the newcomer copying what the more experienced monk is doing, a practice-based community that supports the transmission of knowledge is established and in doing so, this lessens the distance between the learner and what is learned. As Samuels explains, in some cases the distance is even collapsed and the learning communities lead the practitioner in to “full participation in the socio-cultural practices of a community” (Lave and Wenger 1991:29).

During large public rituals at Dzogchen Monastery where the ritual congregation was from a number of diverse backgrounds and different ages and levels of experience, an action-based pedagogy was used. During the empowerment, younger members copied older members, less experienced practitioners copied more senior students, those who couldn't perform the ritual correctly were physically prompted and knowledge was passed visually and physically visually. This created a temporary but unified practice-based community that not only enabled learning, but also promoted cohesion amongst the diverse ritual demographic. When members of the congregation understood that they were part of a practice-based community, their behaviour and demeanour changed so that it was in line with other members. For example, the families who joined the ritual after casually socialising by the shops changed how they were behaving to fit in with the rest of the congregation. This was not unusual and throughout the following two chapters, I describe a number of other examples of how a practice-based community is instrumental in promoting unity and cohesion. I agree with Lave and Wenger (1991) in their suggestion that these communities actually draw participants further in to wider socio-cultural practices. In the case of Dzogchen Monastery, these socio-cultural practices are lama worship and the belief in his embodiment of the three kayas because this is the central concept at the heart of all Dzogchen practice. When a participant is fully committed to lama worship, they are loyal to the lineage and then long standing cohesion will be possible.

Sacralisation of Objects

The empowerment procession continued. As I turned round to watch them weave through the crowds, I saw an old man sitting in the row behind take out a matchbox from the inside pocket of his top. He broke off a third of the tserel and put it in his mouth. He then put the remaining

two thirds into the matchbox. In my limited Tibetan, I asked him what he was doing. His friend sitting next to him interjected that he was taken it home to eat later. When I asked why, he said it was to save the blessings and make them last longer. This example illustrates the local folk notion that when something is blessed with the purity of the Buddha or deity, it never loses its value. It can be reused or exchanged again and again. Only when it loses its physical form, which in this case would mean being eaten, does it cease to hold the purity—the purity would be transformed and passed on into the body during consumption.

It was not just the tserel that were kept as valued items by the congregation. As the crowds dispersed and eagerly went to collect their free lunches from the stalls set up near the guesthouse, I saw an elderly woman walk over to where the monks had created a large fire pit as part of the smoke offering for the ceremony. Smoke offerings are very common within Tibetan Buddhist ritual and can take many different forms. At their smallest, they are single sticks of incense burnt on a personal shrine or a bowl like vessel filled with additional herbs to create more smoke. At their largest they can be free standing chimneys found outside temples and also used to mark boundaries or entrances/exits and then large scale bonfires. On this occasion, the monks had made a fire pit in front of the permanent chimney. The elderly lady held a small plastic bag, bent down and scooped up as much ash as she could into it. After tying a knot in the bag, she placed it on her head and muttered what looked like a mantra or short prayer to herself. She then placed the bag of ash inside her clothing (presumably in an inside pocket) and simultaneously took out another bag and repeated the process; again, putting the bag on her head when she'd finished.

As the head is the most sacred parts of the body within Tibetan Buddhist scripture (also true of Hinduism (Staples 2007)), by putting the ash upon her head, the elderly lady was transferring the purity held within the ash unto herself. However, the ash did not lose its value once this transmission took place. The elderly lady then took the ash home for either her personal use or to share with others to continue benefiting from the purity. I had experienced something similar within the first few months of my first stay at the monastery in 2004. Each morning, the international students would meet at 6 am in a small room in the guesthouse, known then as the Inge Gompa (temple for international students), for prayers together. I was told the students didn't practice with the monks as their chanting was too fast for most people to keep up with. Suzanne, a woman from New Zealand, was a recurrent visitor to the monastery and held a real

passion for the practices, such as learning Tibetan and learning the ritual instruments (and in my mind could chant as fast as the monks), announced that she'd used some extra special ash in the incense burner that day. It was her job to set up the shrine each morning and on that day she had put some ash taken from a large fire puja a few weeks before into the small bowl where the incense burnt. She remarked that we would be able to share in all the blessings as we burnt it during the practice.

This belief system that blessings stay within objects and their possession can aid the development of personal purity pervades the use of religious relics and their exchange at the monastery. Often, relics are distributed during ceremonies by lamas or the monastic committee and are sought after possessions by those attending. During the bi-annual meeting of all the main tulkus and khenpos of the lineage (during the period of fieldwork in question), all who attended, including myself, were given a small clay statue of Padmasambhava¹⁵⁵ that was said to be filled with the ashes of the sixth Dzogchen Rinpoche who died during the Cultural Revolution during an outbreak of violence at Dzogchen Monastery in Tibet. The 7th Dzogchen Rinpoche had announced this to the congregation and said that half the ashes had remained in Tibet, presumably at Dzogchen Monastery in Tibet, and had been used within the statues (approximately 200 were made). Upon this announcement, the congregation reacted with both gratitude for the gift and a certain amount of amazement to have such a relic in their hands.

The circulation of religious relics, the belief that they retained their sacredness and their involvement in creating a network of power connected to the central lineage, is not uncommon within other religious traditions. For example, Geary (1986), in his work *Sacred Commodities: The Circulation of Medieval Relics*, looks at the exchange of Christian relics and the power that they retain and in turn create through their exchange. Tambiah (1984) has also provided a detailed analysis of sacred items with Theravada Buddhism with his study on the arahants [saints] who live in isolation in Thailand's forests. His classification and efficacy of the amulets associated with them explores the objectification and transmission of charisma into these objects and their role in mediating social relationships. Through observing the relationship between the Thai laity and the amulets, and their attitudes and behaviour towards arahants, Tambiah explores the significance of this for a deeper understanding of Thai society, its tensions and dynamics. Tambiah's understanding of "charisma" differs significantly

¹⁵⁵ Patron saint of Tibet and main lama of the Dzogchen lineage.

from Weber's (1968) concept as a "gift of grace, as a form of authority that was spontaneous and resistant toward discipline and regulation" (Tambiah 1984:6). According to Tambiah, the "charisma" possessed by the Buddhist forest saints has been achieved by the undergoing of an aesthetic regime and when achieved, allows them to implement the sedimentation of power into talisman, which subsequently become charged with charisma.

Whilst these sacred objects are common within Buddhism, what is unusual within the circumstances of Dzogchen is that the existence of these sacred items and their perceived necessity could be considered at odds with one of the fundamental teachings of Dzogchen. The fundamental principle that separates Dzogchen from other schools of Tibetan Buddhism is that each human is believed to be fundamentally pure from the very beginning known in Sanskrit as *Zuntuzangpo* (Sogyal Rinpoche 2007). Other schools believe that practitioners must work their way through lifetimes of worship to achieve purity or enlightenment but in Dzogchen it can be achieved in one lifetime simply by recognising one's own purity (Dzogchen Rinpoche 2012). So why these are items needed or used, and why is there such an emphasis based on merit making?

In her description of the sacralisation of amulets at a meditation monastery in Northern Thailand, Joanna Cook (2010) explores the transference of protective power in Buddhist ritual. Cook also encounters a similar Buddhist anomaly between the belief that Buddhist instructions of inner discipline and training are the most complete protection against suffering, suggesting that this is all that is needed as outlined in the teachings of the Buddha such as *The Four Noble Truths* (Tsering 2005), *The Noble Eightfold Path* (Bikkhu Bodhi 2006), and the requirement to have an object that is blessed and can provide protection against suffering. Practitioners at the monastery that Cook studied subscribe to the belief that the power derived from meditation training is the most complete source of protection against negativity and danger that one can experience. Cook relays stories of how she is repeatedly informed of the power of meditation during her stay at the monastery, which is also involved in the production and commercial sale of ritual protective items at the monastery, which, by their very existence, undermine this belief in meditative power. Cook questions how the two methods of protection can co-exist in the same environment. If all a practitioner needs can be found within the meditation or rituals, why does one need a material object?

As part of her fieldwork, Cook observes a sacralisation ceremony that took place within the monastery's main temple where a team of senior monks are responsible for conducting the protective power to the laity. The main source of power originated from a previously consecrated Buddha statue: a length of string then ran from the statue through the hands of the senior monks out through nine more monks and then in a grid-like formation throughout the lay congregation who each held on to an end of the string (Cook 2010). Although not exactly the same configuration, this is very similar to the usage of string in the rabnye ritual. Through their meditative accomplishment, the monks were thought to enable the transmission of power out from the Buddha statue along the string grid and to the congregation. In the process, the string itself is also thought to become blessed and is therefore retained by the participants and worn on their wrists or around their necks as a source of protective power (Cook 2010). Again, this ceremony has very similar elements to the rabnye ritual. The statues become charged with purity that is then transmitted via the lama and his ritual tools to the congregation. In the rabnye ritual, the blessed balls tserel remain with the congregation, either eaten immediately or saved until a later time. To resolve the difference between the general belief of meditative power being the sole source of freedom from suffering and wearing amulets as a form of protection, Cook argues that the act of transferring protective power is not in fact contradictory to Buddhist practices because it is the practices themselves that create the protective power (Cook 2010: 49). Cook suggests that power is generated through "inter-relational networks of merit making and protection" (2010: 49) and that this cannot be separated from Buddhist moralistic tenets of self-development and the cultivation of qualities that are the result of meditative practices such as peace and tranquillity. My observations at Dzogchen Monastery have led me to make similar conclusions to Cook. Although the teachings of Dzogchen say that purity is inherent within all beings (Dzogchen Rinpoche 2012), this cannot be separated from folk notions of purity that involve the lama and the interconnected network of the lineage. As one senior monk at the monastery once said to me: "Without the lama, there is no Buddha." The ideas of Buddhahood, purity, the lama, and the mechanisms of merit making are intertwined and allow the realisation of the inherent purity that you possess but cannot see.

The need for the lama as a teacher, as a leader, and as an enabler is evident within nearly every aspect of life at Dzogchen Monastery. The ritual of rabnye and the creation of the sacred space of the statues and their status as the embodiment of purity is just one way in which these concepts are intertwined. The next two chapters will continue to look at this intricate network

of embodied worship and rituals connected to the lama principle. Lamas are often identified at a young age and during my fieldwork in 2010, I had the fortune to observe a rare enthronement ceremony of two young lamas. The next chapter will describe this event focusing on the exchange of khatags. It will consider the impact of the enthronement ceremony on the audience and the wider social and political significance for the monastic committee's aim of maintaining the Dzogchen lineage in exile.

Chapter 7 **Khatag Exchange: An Exchange for Purity**

In the preceding two chapters, I have explained through Buddhist doctrine and fieldwork examples of folk notions of purity, that the lama is integral to the rituals that allow a Dzogchen practitioner to generate purity and progress along the path to enlightenment, freedom from samsara, the cycle of birth, death and rebirth. The lama is perceived as the embodiment of purity and his body becomes a physical representation of that purity. Most lamas are recognised as reincarnated teachers [tulkus] at an early age and it is believed that their wisdom and purity has manifested once more in human form to help other beings become free from suffering. Through their ability to transcend the barriers of life and death, their bodies have become the “allegorical bodies” of Tibet as a nation as well as the particular Buddhist school they represent (Moran 2004). This chapter considers how the pure bodies of tulkus, young lamas, are worshipped from an early age and how this contributes to the overall strength and power of the lineage in exile. I consider both how the rituals are symbolic representations of the strength of the lineage but have also become literal representations of its growth and power.

Here I describe an enthronement ceremony of two young tulkus recently recognised by Dzogchen Rinpoche as incarnations. Enthronements are relatively rare as, although many lamas are recognised each year, it is only the more senior ones who have their own ceremonies. Through the context of the enthronement ceremony, I will explore the exchange ritual of the khatag: Firstly, how it could be used to generate the merit using the anthropological discourse on gift giving, in particular discussions on the notion of the “free gift” by Parry (1986), Laidlaw (2000) and Cook (2008) to help understand my material further. I consider how the various components of the ritual, the organisation of space and an embodied understanding of purity interact to create value within the objects that are exchanged. I will then consider how the khatag becomes an instrument through which the lama can transmit purity to the student and how the ritual exchange reaffirms social bonds and lineage connections.

The khatag exchange rituals play a significant role in building the concept of a pure bodied lama both in the two young tulkus, who are being officially recognised as lamas for the first time, and also reinforcing the status of the main lama, Dzogchen Rinpoche, as the literal pure body at the head of the lineage. An integral part of the ceremony is the recognition by the rest of the monastic community and the international students and then by the wider audience of the

villagers from the Dhondenling settlement. I focus particularly on the symbolism of the khatags as they are piled high upon the thrones of each lama acting as a symbolic representation of the growth of the lineage but also they become a physical representation. All the audience members can see the tower of khatags growing upon the thrones and they become a visible demonstration of power and authenticity of the lineage. Through my analysis, I hope to show how the ceremony is actually creating an image of the lineage for the participants in the ritual; one that increases the influence of the lamas and the lineage. As well as exploring the importance of the lama and his embodied purity this analysis will feed into one of the overarching aims of my thesis, which is to explore how ritual objects are imbued with purity and what impact they have on the effort by the monastic committee to preserve the Dzogchen religious tradition that existed in pre-Cultural Revolution Tibet. The first part of this chapter will describe the khatag and its usage in more detail and situate it within the wider anthropological discourse on gift giving.

The Meaning of Khatags

The khatags (meaning “silk” in English) are white silk scarves, approximately a metre in length. They are made from loosely woven silk; pure silk if they are of the finest quality, or raw silk if they are a cheaper version. They vary in quality depending on the price. The cheapest can be purchased for a few rupees and the most expensive for a few hundred. They used to be hand made locally but now it is cheaper for local shops or the villagers themselves to buy them in bulk from external suppliers. Each khatag has the eight auspicious symbols¹⁵⁶ (a fundamental set of Buddhist symbols) printed on them which symbolise various positive qualities such as purity and power. The eight auspicious symbols are a pair of golden fish (good fortune), the parasol (spiritual power), the right-turning conch shell (the fame of the dharma), the lotus (purity), the victory banner (victory of the dharma), the treasure vase (spiritual and material fulfilment), the wheel (the perfection of the dharma), and the endless knot (infinite wisdom of a Buddha) (Buswell and Lopez 2013).

¹⁵⁶ Previously mentioned in Chapter 2 as being painted on the pathway to the temple.



Fig.7.1 Source: Author's own
Ceremonial khatags

Ceremonial Khatags

Recently, the design of the khatags has become more elaborate.¹⁵⁷ They can now either be blue (sometimes from Mongolia) or gold, or they can remain white. If the eight symbols are printed on them, they are in the five ritual colours of blue, yellow, red, green and white respectively representing the elements of water, earth, fire, air and space (Vessantara 1999). Eight is a number that is frequently associated with sacred meaning or offerings. For example, the Buddhist wheel, the Dharmacakra, has eight spokes and is used as a symbol of the dharma [Buddha's teaching] (Beer 2003). One of the main teachings of the Buddha on how to live a spiritual life is called the Noble Eightfold Path (Dattajeevo 2002), each of its branches is

¹⁵⁷ I'm not sure of why the designs have become more colourful. Perhaps it could be attributed to, amongst other reasons, a development on printing mechanisms or a consumer demand (including international demand). These elaborate khatags are predominantly made just outside of Sikkim in north India in a town in west Bengal called Kalingpong, which has now become renowned for its khatag printing houses. I visited Kalingpong for one night, passing through on a journey from Sikkim down to Bangalore. I arrived in the evening and left early morning so did not see much of the town and wasn't aware of the khatag industry at this time. It was only a few days later when I tried to purchase this style of khatag in Bangalore that they said I needed to visit Kalingpong to buy them!

associated with one of the eight great bodhisattvas¹⁵⁸ and there are eight bumi levels [stages to enlightenment] (Kyabgon 2000). They can also now come up to 2.5 metres in length and when I have observed this type of khatag being presented to a lama, it becomes quite a feat of agility and negotiation not to trip over such a long scarf. Giving something decorated with these pictorial representations is thought to add value to their gift and also to be a display of humility, valuing spiritual qualities rather than individual achievements. Before the enthronement ceremony, I observed some of the villagers buying their khatags from the monastery shop. As they gathered outside, they worked in pairs preparing them for presentation. One person took each end of the scarf and they worked together; one folding the material in concertina style whilst the other pulled it tight. When at least two thirds of the scarf was folded, the khatag was then rolled for the remaining section. The khatag must then remain folded this way until moments before it is presented to the lama.¹⁵⁹

A German woman a few seats down from me seemed slightly distressed when folding her khatag as she noticed a series of dirty marks on her scarf and proceeded to ask her neighbours if they had a spare that she could use. Dirt and physical uncleanliness within Tibetan culture are associated with obstacles to spiritual practice and make a material item less pure. It is part of the devotional practice, explained in key Dzogchen texts (Patrul Rinpoche 2004, Dzogchen Rinpoche 2009, Dalai Lama 2000b) and as discussed in Chapter 4, that as an expression of devotion by the student, lamas must only be presented with pure offerings; clean and of the highest quality. This principle can be found throughout the whole organisation of the monastery: the seating order, the room size, lamas wearing the clothes made from the best material. Therefore the khatags must be in pristine quality and often people purchase new ones before big events.

Khatag Origins

The written records of the khatag offering practice in Tibetan culture begin around the time of Songtsan Gambo (7th Century AD).¹⁶⁰ The king celebrated amongst both the Tibetans and Chinese for officially uniting Tibet and establishing more peaceful relations between the two countries with a series of Sino-Tibetan treaties (Goldstein 1997, Ying 2003). Songtsan Gambo

¹⁵⁸ Manjusri, Vajrapani, Avalokiteśvara, Maitreya, Ksitigarbha, Nivaranavishkambhi, Akasagarbha, and Samantabhadra.

¹⁵⁹ I watched as children stumbled to unfold their khatags in time, becoming embarrassed if they became entangled. The older villagers were more rehearsed and did not encounter any problems.

¹⁶⁰ Actual dates of rule are disputed – it is generally believed that he was born in 617, he took to the throne in 629 and his reign ended in 650 upon his death.

married Princess Wencheng, niece of the powerful Emperor Taizong of China's Tang Dynasty, further sealing the alliances (Powers 2004). Princess Wencheng's dowry was extensive; amongst gifts of money, jewellery, and animal hides, in particular tiger hides, were given in abundance. Following this, various internet reports¹⁶¹ cite that tiger hide became the official award for heroes¹⁶² and where Tibetans had no access to animal hide, they used sheep's wool as a gift or award. It is also reported that sheep's wool was tied around arrows or hung in doorways for protection. Over time, sheep's wool was woven into fabric to become an early khatag until in the 12th century when the use of silk scarves as an offering was introduced by Pagba, an eminent Buddhist Lama who brought silk from China to Tibet presenting them as gifts to statues of the Buddha in major monasteries and to monastic officials (Colin and Norbu 1968).

Within Tibetan Buddhist culture, white has become both a doctrinal and folk symbol of purity, auspiciousness, and generally associated with spiritual goodness and sacredness. It is considered so in official religious doctrines, in folk law, or religious myths, and also, in a very practical sense, in how buildings are decorated. For example, dreams of white animals such as the white elephant in the story of the Buddha and the white yak in the story of the first Tibetan kings (Gyaltsen 1996), are signs of the birth of realised beings; within the Buddhist scriptures, white can frequently be found as a symbol of wisdom and enlightenment; for example, in the Mandala of the Five Buddhas, the centre of the mandala¹⁶³ is white symbolising Vairochana, the illuminator who dispels ignorance and darkness (Vessantara 1999). Other offering practices using white materials include leaving white stones on a mani stone pile¹⁶⁴ and painting all religious buildings and constructions such as stupas¹⁶⁵ white. This concept is present at nearly every level of understanding; the simplest understanding by a novice monk, or non-religious lay person would know that white means good (deleg) or pure (dag) and would perhaps associate white with White Tara, Goddess of Wisdom or similar and then as someone becomes more versed in Buddhist practice their understanding of the symbolism would become deeper and intricate. There is also a close association between Tibetan practice and the use of khatags in Mongolian customary greetings. However, because the social and political histories of two countries were so intertwined during this period (Goldstein 1997), it is very difficult to separate

¹⁶¹ <http://2007.tibetmagazine.net/en/folk2002-2.htm>, www.yeschinatour.com/chinese-culture/tibetan-khatag

¹⁶² From article 15 of the regulations promulgated by King Songtsan Gambo.

¹⁶³ Mandala is a Sanskrit word meaning circle. In Tibetan Buddhism, a mandala is a symbolic depiction of the universe.

¹⁶⁴ Cairns of stones with mantra inscribed upon them which are often found lining roadsides on pilgrimage routes.

¹⁶⁵ White mound-like structures which contain Buddhist relics.

and distinguish who influenced whom. Khatags in Mongolia are often blue, symbolising the sky (May 2008), which is often associated with spiritual realisation; the expanse of the clear blue sky, without clouds is used as a metaphor to describe a clear mind free from thoughts (Wolter 2007).

Using a Khatag

It is generally forbidden for someone to touch high lamas or temple statues unless by bowing and touching one's head to the feet of the object of worship so the offering of a khatag became a way to establish respectful contact between oneself and the sacred person or representation of the deity. It became like a gateway to a usually forbidden centre of purity. Whenever a Tibetan visits a temple on a pilgrimage or for a festival, khatags are presented to the main statue. In 2004, on an early visit to India for my undergraduate dissertation, I went to visit a monk, Gelek, in the Bylakuppe Tibetan settlement, (145 km west of Dhondenling) who my mother had previously sponsored to complete some of his studies. Gelek kindly took me on a tour of all the six monasteries and their temples (various) nearby to Bylakuppe. Before we set off, Gelek stopped at a shop and came out with a huge bag of khatags and inside every temple we visited, he proceeded to hand me khatags to place at every statue and on the main thrones for the lamas of the monastery.

As well as being a devotional offering, khatags are also used within formal Buddhist ceremonies, which use the ritual objects on the shrine, often with a lamas presiding over the ritual. The khatag is used during tsok, a ritual feast, an elaborate food offering which can often take a few hours to perform depending on how many tsok prayers are being accumulated by the congregation (this can be as many as 100,000 and can last for a few days). The choepen, the monk in charge of the shrine, will light a full packet of incense at set times and hold all the incense together like a small smoking branch. A khatag is then wrapped around the incense and draped over his hand falling elegantly to the floor. The incense is then waved in a figure of eight¹⁶⁶ in front of the shrine, which at this stage is abundant with food offerings. The incense is seen as an offering to the deities, a supplication, and in return, the deities are requested to bless the food. Khatags are also used during mandala¹⁶⁷ offerings, which I have seen performed prior to the start of a retreat; a symbolic metal representation of the mandala is presented to the

¹⁶⁶ Eight is an auspicious number in Buddhism as mentioned earlier in this chapter.

lama but it has to be presented with a khatag wrapped around it; again the khatag will drape over the outstretched hands of the devotee.

One day, over tea, I questioned Tsering, one of my closest informants (introduced in Chapter 6) about why it is necessary to use a khatag: would it not be OK without? Tsering directly responded that without a khatag, the offering would be incomplete and if any monk, or inge, [Westerner] for that matter, were to offer something without a khatag, it would show that they didn't know what they were doing. It must have a khatag. I commented that it sometimes seemed like a khatag is given with everything and to everyone, and Tsering agreed that khatags are now also given more commonly in non-religious Tibetan ceremonies. He went on to say that the practice may have originated through the "old" custom of putting clothing on statues to show respect and it then moved to giving khatags to each other to show how much one cared about someone; to show kindness and compassion. Khatags are presented at wedding ceremonies, festivals, visits to elders, and when entertaining guests. During my stay in the settlement, I frequently saw khatags being presented to guests arriving as a welcome and on their departure to wish them a safe journey and a speedy return visit. When presenting a khatag to someone younger, or if between monastics of a lower status, then the person presenting the khatag would often tie it to the receiver's neck. These observations suggest that the khatag has been appropriated for additional use while remaining structurally similar to their conventional Buddhist usage. On one occasion, I saw two men from the village exchange a khatag hand to hand and when I later enquired to Tsering why this was; he informed me that it was because they are of the same social standing or level. He said that this didn't really matter too much and it could have been put around their necks; they must just have been following the customs. Tsering then explained that it would matter if the person was more senior than you; when presenting khatags to seniors or to lamas, the two arms should be raised up above the head.

An anthropological study of the role of khatags in exchange rituals, although not in a religious context, was conducted by Miller (1956), who studied two formalised systems of mutual aid amongst Tibetan communities, the "Ganye" and the "Kidu", types of ritual brotherhood that could be called on for assistance in times of need. The alliance is formalised in both instances through the exchange of khatags. Once this presentation is complete, the partnership is considered an official bond. The first brotherhood, a "Ganye", is required at all celebrations and important events and the sum of money must be presented with a scarf (khatag). The main

goal of the “Ganye” is to cover the expenses and to gain social prestige by having a large number of people attend your event “...as counted by the number of ceremonial scarves...”(1956:160).

The second relationship studied by Miller is the “Kidu” “,designed to function as a source of aid and comfort during life crisis” (1956:160). Members pay an initiation fee which is accompanied by the presentation of a khatag and then a subsequent monthly subscription fee. Okada (1957) developed Miller’s observations further and studied ritual brotherhoods in a Nepalese community where upon completion of the initial ceremony the two men were considered as actual brothers and the same social expectations were placed on them as if they were related by blood. For example, inter-marriage between their children would be prohibited (1956:213). The Nepalese ceremony also included the exchange of money and the presentation of decorative scarves.¹⁶⁸

The Enthronement Ceremony

In January 2010, two young boys who had been recognised by both Dzogchen Rinpoche and by a number of monastic leaders as reincarnate lamas, were enthroned at an official enthronement ceremony at Dzogchen Monastery. (A diagram of teaching hall layout for the enthronement ceremony can be found on page 181.) The first boy is half Tibetan and half Australian. He lives with his family in Australia and attends his local school. He had been recognised as the reincarnation of Tulku Pegyal, a lama who had led Dzogchen Monastery retreat centre in all their ritual practices. The second is a monk from Bhutan who was ordained at an early age and then travelled to live at Dzogchen Monastery approximately a year before the enthronement ceremony took place. It has not been announced whom he is a reincarnation of but because of the level of secrecy regarding his identity. Many respondents at the monastery assume he will be of high-ranking status and that the secrecy is a method to protect

¹⁶⁸ The khatag practice has not only stayed amongst Himalayan countries but it has been adopted by some Indian communities too. A fellow PhD research student from Brunel University, Adam Connelly, conducted his research in Darjeeling (home to the town of Kalingpong) and confirmed that many top Indian schools have adopted the practice and created their own school branded khatags in school colours. These school scarves are presented to visitors and also as awards to students to mark their achievements. This is of no real surprise when you consider the flower garland offerings are wide spread across India as a Hindu custom. Flower garlands are worn around the necks of devotees during many Hindu rituals and festivals. For example, during Vasanta Panchami, which celebrates the arrival of spring and is often associated with the worship of the Goddess of Learning, Saraswati. Participants wear garlands of bright yellow flowers as a sign of respect and welcome (Storey 2008). Garlanding is not a practice that has been adopted by Buddhists at the monastery but I have included these examples to show how khatag usage has been appropriated in more secular contexts.

him as he grows up.¹⁶⁹ To protect their identities, I shall refer to the young lama from Bhutan as the “Bhutanese tulku” and the young lama from Australia as the “Australian tulku”. Also, in my description I will refer to the incarnate lamas as tulkus [Tibetan for incarnate teacher] to distinguish them from the other lamas present. The ceremony, which was led by Dzogchen Rinpoche, was a significant event for the monastery and it was attended by a number of visiting monks and nuns from monasteries associated with the previous lamas (those who had passed away) as well as the existing monastics, international students and local villagers.

Within my fieldwork, I did not have an opportunity to observe the many processes put in place to select these two tulkus; they enter my fieldwork already recognised with a high status within the monastic community. Although I was not privy to the selection of these two boys, the process that took place is likely to have been similar to the methods used to recognise other incarnate lamas. According to my informants, recognition is not thought to differ massively across the various schools of Tibetan Buddhism. So based upon a number of Buddhist studies and biographies (including Mackenzie 1996, 1997, Thondup 2011), conversations with informants and documentary/fictional films (Bertolucci 1993, Baratz 2008), here is a short overview of the identification process to set the context for the ceremony.

When a lama passes away, his students and those associated with the tradition he follows undertake the responsibility of finding his reincarnation. Often, those who had been closest to the lama form a type of search committee and organise a geographic exploration, mostly within Tibet but increasingly within surrounding Himalayan areas such as Sikkim or Bhutan where Buddhism is practised for a young child whom they believe is the new embodiment of their previous lama. Children believed to show signs of spiritual realisation, or at least the potential for this, are then subjected to a series of tests designed to check the authenticity of the reincarnation claim. These tests, although varying across Buddhist denominations, all include elements which prompt the child to remember their past life through recognising possessions

¹⁶⁹ Perhaps this assumption is linked to the case of the Panchen Lama believed to be the world’s youngest political prisoner. The Panchen Lama is second in command within the Gelugpa tradition to the Dalai Lama and when the 10th incarnation passed away in 1989, it was reported in various media platforms that the Dalai Lama was pressured into announcing his reincarnation. In 1995 Gendun Choekyi Nyima from Tibet was announced as the 11th Panchen Lama; he was then placed under permanent house arrest by the Chinese because of his association with the Dalai Lama whom they consider a dissident. Gendun Choekyi Nyima has not been seen since and many fear that he is dead. The Chinese authorities have instated their own Panchen Lama and deny any accusations that they are keeping Gendun Choekyi Nyima under house arrest, insisting that the new Panchen Lama is the same child. The Dalai Lama and his advisors were criticised by members of the Tibetan community for not anticipating this move by the Chinese and protecting the safety of the young Panchen Lama (Goldstein 1993).

that the previous lama had owned, or similar. When one of the candidates is particularly successful in the examination and the committee are in agreement that he is the best candidate, this young child is then presented to the main lama of the tradition to be confirmed as the reincarnation. Often, this main lama is the lineage holder of that tradition or, increasingly over the past three decades, the Dalai Lama in his role as the spiritual leader of Tibet. If the young child is confirmed as the reincarnation, he is enthroned, takes his place in the monastery and begins his education with the presumed aim that he will be able to continue where his predecessor left off. If the child is not confirmed (due to them not passing the tests where they recognise possessions, or if the senior lamas do not recognise enough positive signs/auspicious occurrences) then the search continues until the reincarnation is found. I begin my explanation of the enthronement by describing the demographic of the audience as a key part of my analysis with focus on the social impact of the ceremony and its rituals on the audience.

Attendees

Approximately 400 people of different backgrounds attended the enthronement ceremony. Around 40 monks and nuns from the monasteries that were run by the predecessors of these tulkus had also travelled south from Nepal. At least 40 students who were waiting for the international teaching retreat run by Dzogchen Rinpoche to start in two days' time also sat in on the ceremony. The students sat around the back west and side north walls where I joined them. A woman from Germany sat on my right and commented how fortunate she felt to be there as she couldn't recall the last time an enthronement had taken place at the monastery. These visitors were joined by the resident monks, albeit a slightly depleted community; maybe 100 in total as it was holiday season before the start of the next academic year and many had left for pilgrimage to North India or returned home to visit their families. The older lamas, khenpos [teachers] and more senior monks sat closest to the throne and the younger monks filled the hall towards the back.

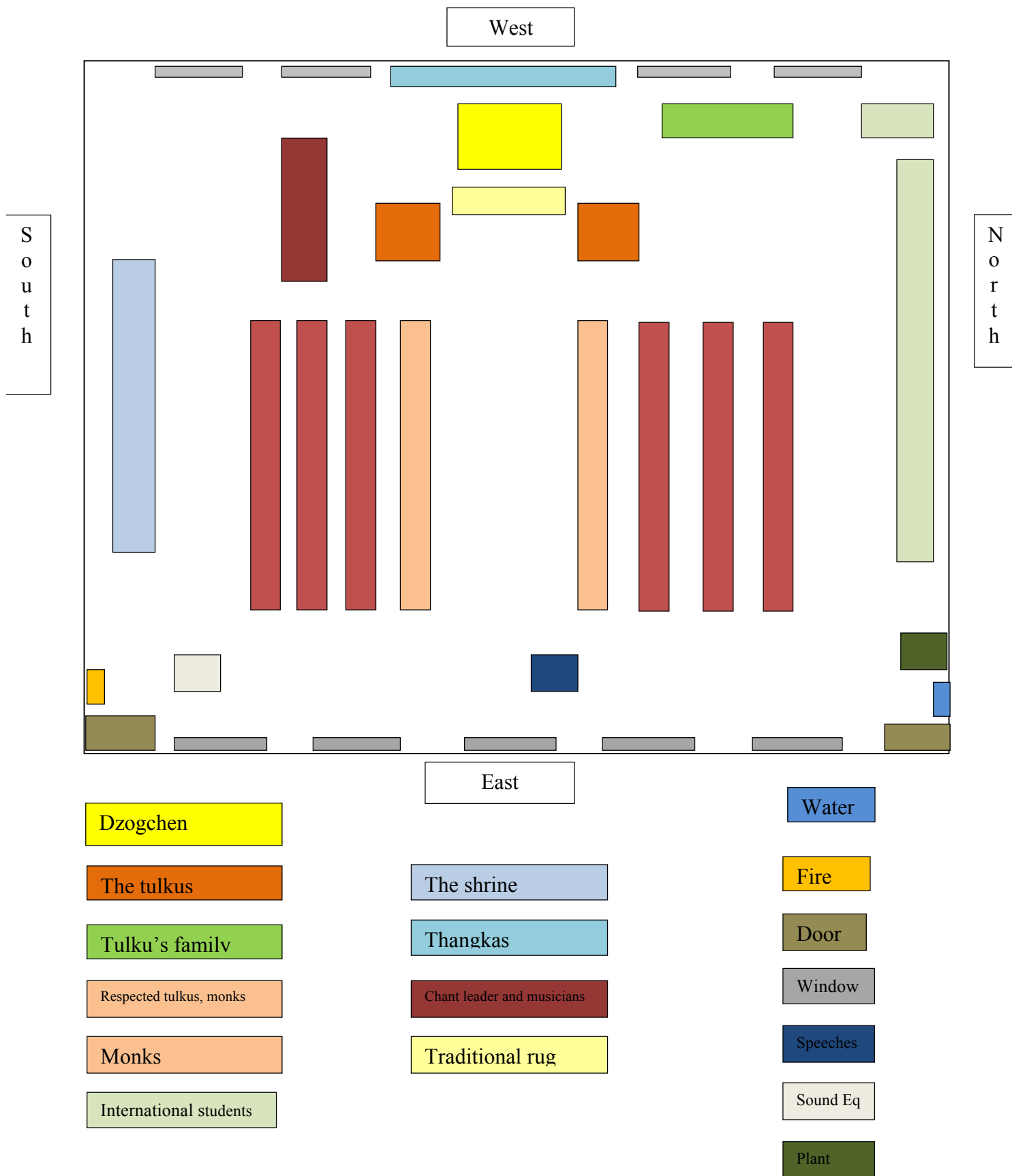
At least 200 villagers had gathered in the monastery courtyard before the ceremony started. The international students were given priority over the villagers within the hierarchy at the monastery because they were committed students of Dzogchen Rinpoche. This hierarchy was generally understood amongst all parties and during my fieldwork I had not observed it to be an issue amongst the villagers who often preferred to observe or participate in rituals at a distance so that the experience could be more relaxed and informal. Whilst waiting to enter the

teaching hall, the children played chase with each other or sat and ate sweets from the monastery shop. Many of the adults wore traditional dress but the children wore Western clothes—the girls in their fitted jeans and fashionable tops and the boys in their hip hop or basketball influenced outfits with their hair spiked and gelled, some wearing silver chains and earrings. The crowd could roughly be split into four categories. First, there were the very young children between three and seven years of age, among whom there was a balanced mixture of boys and girls; then young teenagers where the proportions were slightly more in favour of the females. There was a distinct absence of older teenagers and people in their early twenties. This was an accurate reflection of the village demographics; upon graduating high school, most young people moved into Bangalore or other Indian cities to find work or continue their education. The third group were roughly middle aged in their 40s and 50s; they were predominantly parents of the children present although there was a small number of single women¹⁷⁰ who joined the families. There were also 10-15 men present who were without families, but the group was predominantly female based. I chatted to a small group of women outside, whom I had met briefly before, and enquired where their husbands were. I was informed that they were all away on business or busy working. The fourth group were the more elderly villagers and they were roughly split fifty-fifty male and female. Most of the ladies wore traditional dress with turquoise jewellery, which is very popular within Tibet¹⁷¹ and had their hair plaited in long braids.

¹⁷⁰ Single women in traditional Tibetan dress are easily identified because they do not wear aprons, which symbolise them not yet being householders with families.

¹⁷¹ I recognised some of them from the Old People's Home (OPH) at the bottom of the hill that the monastery is on. The OPH had been initially funded by DSSCS, the charity based at the monastery. Tibetans often turn strongly to Buddhism in the later years of their life and spend many hours per day practising. When I first visited the OPH I was really surprised to see the majority of the residents sitting in the courtyard turning their prayer wheels and chanting on their rosary. The care assistant in the home told me they spent a great deal of time partaking in religious activities; she also explained that it was still a very social activity as they all sat together and would often break mid prayer to chat to each other.

Fig 7.2 Source: Author's own
 Diagram of teaching hall layout for enthronement ceremony



Start of the Ceremony

Dzogchen Rinpoche and the two young tulkus walked together into the room in a form of procession. Dzogchen Rinpoche led followed by an attendant who escorted him to his throne. The young tulkus were next, followed by their families who took a seat next to the thrones at the back of the room. The families of each tulku had travelled to India for the occasion; this included both sets of parents, sisters, uncles and aunts. The families sat on the back west wall on cushions where the parents had a clear view of their sons and I noticed them smiling encouragingly if they happened to catch their child's eye. This was probably the first time the young tulkus had been the centre of such an important ceremony and the parents' pride but also concern for their child's wellbeing was evident. When all three lamas were seated, the whole congregation performed three full-length prostrations, a full-bodied bow where someone lies on the floor in the direction of the throne/lama and touches their head to the ground. At the same moment their head touches the ground, they raise their hands in prayer position above their head.

Fig. 7.3 Source: Author's own
Illustration of a prostration



As well as offering three prostrations to a physical lama, monks spend a considerable amount of time accumulating vast numbers of prostrations at holy sites; so much so that the action plays an integral part of any pilgrimage. Offering the purest part of your body, your head, to what is known as the three jewels, the Buddha (the lama), the dharma (the Buddha's teachings) and the sangha (the community of Buddha's students) is said to generate merit and assist the practitioner on his path to enlightenment and, from a Dzogchen point of view, to assist in the realisation of purity. When first seeing people busily accumulating prostrations on the temple veranda early in the morning working up a sweat by accumulating 3 to 400 in one go, I

couldn't quite understand how this would do either of those. I asked one of my informants, Karma, why they do it. Karma was a senior monk in his late 30s from Bhutan whose job it was to look after the Bhutanese tulku and take care of his personal needs as his parents did not live at the monastery. The younger monks often played with or spoke to the international students (including myself) and I had become acquainted with Karma in this way. Karma replied very simply that by bowing down, it displays humility and you have to break the ego to realise enlightenment. When I asked what he meant by enlightenment, he explained that we could become a Buddha; we could have great wisdom but we need to go beyond our human identity and be free from samsara (the cycle of life and death). One way to do this was through physical worship that enabled the realisation of purity. I will discuss the act of prostrations in full in the next chapter but what stood out for me, and which is of significance here, is the physical offering that takes place of the head, the part of the body considered most pure. I will expand on this in more detail within a latter section on offering khatags.

When the congregation was seated, a number of long speeches were read out by the main khenpo [head of the monastic committee] and a number of other senior monks outlining the history of the Dzogchen lineage mentioning important lamas and old religious institutions of Tibet. This continued for a good 30 minutes or more. Public speaking and functions are very much a part of everyday life in India and Tibet, unlike in my own experience in the UK. It seemed that people developed a high tolerance to often lengthy speeches. The history of the lineage and its public declaration is an act that would be repeated at nearly every public occasion held at the monastery; the history is outlined at the start of every religious book including biographies of other lamas and every chanting session would start with lineage prayers. As part of my work volunteering for DSSCS, the charity based at the monastery, I have been involved with copywriting for promotional material for fundraising tours often across Europe, Australia and the USA. The official guidelines (oral not written) for such marketing emphasise that at some point in the copy, the history of lineage and the connection of the main lama to this lineage must be mentioned. The purpose is to show that any teachings given by lamas from the monastery are part of an authentic lineage and the history is proof of that. Reciting the history again at the start of the enthronement ceremony demonstrated to the congregation that this was an official and authentic ceremony and that the new status of tulkus would be confirmed as a result. Even to those who could not speak Tibetan understood that this was happening (either assumed as this is what always happens or their neighbour would most

likely inform them) and they too would accept the truth and legitimacy of the ceremony. I also believe that this repetition is also an important part of the reproduction of the Buddhist traditions and the focus placed by the monastic authorities on repetition will be covered in more depth in the following chapter on prostrations (explained on page 158) and their usage as a particular type of embodied worship.¹⁷²

Upon conclusion of the speeches, a team of monks ran round quickly handing out plastic disposable cups followed by another group with enormous tea pots serving thick Tibetan butter tea for each person. Then, the same team distributed bowls of sweet, sticky rice with raisins, sultanas and nuts called dresil. There was a short pause in proceedings whilst everyone enjoyed their snacks—apart from the international students who struggled with the saltiness of the tea, which is an acquired taste. The build-up to the enthronement had taken at least an hour now and the sense of anticipation could be felt within the congregation.

Enthronement

In contrast to the length of time spent in the build up to the enthronement, the main part of the ceremony, the actual enthronement was very short. A series of prayers led by Dzogchen Rinpoche were chanted, which culminated in the two young tulkus who were being enthroned leaving their seats and approaching the main throne of Dzogchen Rinpoche. Each tulku held a khatag and approached with his hands in the prayer position and arms slightly outstretched with the khatag draped over them. Their attendants had helped them position the khatag and then lifted them upwards, as they were so small, so they could be reached by Dzogchen Rinpoche who proceeded to touch their heads with a long life arrow.¹⁷³ I have mentioned the long life arrow in the previous chapter on the ritual of rabnye as it is used in the wang [empowerment] to transfer purity on to the heads of the audience and into their bodies. Each part of the arrow symbolises a different concept within Buddhist philosophy, as explained briefly in the footnote, but when I asked both my international and monastic informants to talk me through them, they were not really aware or clear on what they were. Therefore I will just refer to the arrow as the ritual instrument used to transmit purity from the lama to the receiver.

¹⁷² Perhaps the repetition of speeches also has to do with the roots of Dzogchen Buddhism as an oral tradition rather than a written one but at this stage I have not gathered enough ethnographic data to explore this; it is something that I would like to consider in future work.

¹⁷³ The long life arrow used in this ceremony was made of wood with an iron point. Five silk ribbons which corresponded to the five different Buddha families (Beer 2003) are attached to the top end of the arrow along with a silver mirror, which is intended to symbolise the Buddhist concept of emptiness and pure consciousness (Beer 2003).

This is what happened here. The point when the ribbons of the arrow touched the tulku's head was taken as confirmation of their enthronement.¹⁷⁴ Each tulku then offered their khatags in turn and then Dzogchen Rinpoche returned them over their heads and rested them around their necks. This short ritual pronounced the tulkus enthroned and they returned to their individual thrones ready to receive the waiting congregation.

The Congregation Offers Khatags

When the two young tulkus had returned to their seats, it was the turn of the congregation to offer their khatags. As in all Tibetan gatherings, the monastics take precedence over lay practitioners or villagers, so the monks and nuns present went forward and paid their respects to each tulku in turn, to Dzogchen Rinpoche, and to the families of the tulkus. Everyone offered khatags and some gave money or food offerings. On the many occasions I had observed the presentation of a khatag, it was mostly returned by the lama who placed it over the person's head. As of the vast number of people who came did so to pay their respects, the khatags were not returned but were left resting on the throne. I knew this was the reason because I had seen it before during big ceremonies and I had enquired as to why this was with one of the monks, Tashi (introduced in Chapter 2), who was partly in charge of organising the ceremony. His answer was very practical. He explained that it is so much quicker to just offer the khatags without having to return them. Instead, the blessing from the lama is transmitted via a brief tap with his hand on the head or with a long life arrow. I will talk about this style in further detail in a moment. As the ceremony progressed, the pile of khatags grew substantially and one of the monks who was assisting with the proceedings kept steadying them and stopping them from falling over. They were like a small tower and as each person approached with their heads bowed in reverence, the height and impressiveness of them was accentuated. The tower of khatags was symbolic of the amount of reverence held for the lamas by the participants and confirmed their status at the top of the religious hierarchy. However the tower of khatags can also be viewed as a literal representation of the lineage as each scarf is stacked upon the other and the tower grows higher; so does the impression of strength and power that is left on the participant. Its physical presence and the sheer number of scarves are an actual representation of the support for the monastic authorities and the lamas. As each scarf is laid down on the throne, it is like a seal of approval from the supporters like a signature or a mark of backing for the monastery's activities and the hierarchy of the lamas.

¹⁷⁴ This reminded me of when someone is knighted by royalty decreed through a sword being touched on each shoulder.

When all the monks and nuns were seated, it was then the turn of the Western students to offer khatags to the tulkus so I joined the line to make my own offerings. I did not see anyone offering any official instructions about what to do or what was expected of us and I was not informed of official protocol. It was just expected that I follow those in front of me, which is what I did later in the ceremony, waiting for those next to me to move first. There was only one senior monk who gestured where to go and for the congregation to keep moving so as not to delay the proceedings. This was not the first time that I have observed an assumed knowledge by the monastic community. When newcomers participate in prayers or chanting sessions, care is taken that they have the prayer books and are aware of basic protocol but they are very much thrown into the deep end and left to find their own way, which often results in them looking over the shoulder of their neighbour to find out which page they are on. At events solely attended by international students, the treatment has been very similar and only instructions that helped the flow of the ceremony and the movement of the attendees was given; not instructions that clarified behaviour particular to each participant.

There are a few possible reasons for this. Firstly, I think that many of the behaviours I observed that are connected to paying reverence to the lama for his purity are so embodied for the monks that it does not occur to them that an explanation would be necessary. For example, offering a khatag is so much a part of Tibetan culture and they have been practising the ritual since early childhood that it has become natural for them. Now that they are monks, the ritual is even more frequent for them and an integral part of their monastic habitus that they don't think twice about the instruction of it. Secondly, and as I demonstrate throughout the thesis, the monastic community places great emphasis on the performance of embodied ritual that is learned through emulation rather than instruction and being told what to do. For example, in the following chapter, I detail the preparation for a three-month retreat where each participant is expected to accumulate 100,000 prostrations. In learning how to perform a prostration correctly, they had physical practice sessions rather than taught classes. The retreatants received a few words of advice about protecting their knees or similar from the retreat coordinator and then they were encouraged to learn through performing the movements and seeing what felt comfortable for them. This example reconfirms my analysis from the previous chapter during the rabnye ritual where I observed a practice-based community (Samuels 2004, 2005 and Lave and Wenger 1991) in operation during the ritual. The monastery uses an action-orientated pedagogy to instruct newcomers on what to do during rituals; less experienced

practitioners learn from those more senior and more versed in the specific rites and this creates a community connected through learning. Individuals are reliant on other participants to complete the ritual successfully and so personal connections are formed. These relationships are then extended beyond the ritual, during meal times or free time, and the newcomer becomes involved in further social and cultural processes. For example, I frequently observed newcomers expressing thanks to those who had helped them, which would then lead to either a more in-depth discussion about rituals or became an introduction to form closer social relationships. I know that I also did this when I had been unsure of what to do during a number of rituals. I copied the person next to me, thanked them at the end of the ritual and then found myself able to chat socially to them over lunch. Lave and Wenger (1991) discuss this learning by imitation through the idea of legitimate peripheral participation. Newcomers start by learning through mimicking minor elements of the ritual and then become drawn into a wider sphere of participation. Slowly, the gap between the learner and what is being learnt is lessened and then eventually collapsed when the ideas and cultural values that are being studied become embodied by the participant. In the case of Dzogchen Monastery and its diverse ritual congregation, an action-based pedagogy is critical for creating unity as soon as a newcomer enters the ritual space; it allows immediate assimilation. For example, newcomers are expected just to follow and do as others are doing; they are generally not taken to one side and given special instructions (unless it is a large group of international students and their presence is large enough to disrupt the ritual process). This approach allows a temporary but necessary union to be created and also provides consistency each year that the monastery becomes a multinational community. It is an essential tool to manage the diversity of the community, its impermanent nature, and variations in knowledge, understanding and experience.

It was then the villagers' turn. They filed into the hall. The previously excitable children were now walking in line, one behind each other or squeezing close behind their parents as if hiding from view not wishing to be the subject of attention from the monastic community. They walked through the right hand door in front of the rows of monks and down through the central aisle approaching the two thrones of the tulkus that were positioned on either side of the main throne of Dzogchen Rinpoche. Not everyone followed the protocol seamlessly. Many of the young children were guided by their parents or older brothers and sisters. Unsure of what to do next, they followed the person in front of them and looked somewhat sheepish. The adults had a very different approach to the ceremony. They were quieter and more composed. The elder

members in particular, holding their malas and reciting mantra as they went round. Many prostrated three times as they entered the room and offered bows to the seated monastic community as they walked past them.

They walked forwards and offered their khatags to the young Bhutanese lama who was seated on the right of the main throne of Dzogchen Rinpoche. His throne was significantly lower than the main throne but it was still raised prominently from the floor. First to approach was a mother with her two sons. As they approached, they unrolled their khatags and dropped them over their hands which were held in the prayer position raised upwards in front of them. With their heads bent in reverence, each person moved forward and placed a khatag across the front of the throne so that it stretched out from side to side.

When offering the khatags, many villagers also offered money in envelopes placing them quickly but gently on each throne. Some offered their money in brightly coloured ceremonial envelopes which had mantra or sacred symbols printed on the front. These envelopes were sold in the monastery shop costing about five rupees. Periodically, the monks who steadied the khatags would gather the money together making sure it would not fall on the floor. The tulkus were allowed to keep the money and use it for their own needs. Throughout my fieldwork, I observed various different types of offerings to lamas, not just money; such as Tibetan food, cheese or yak meat, and fine cloths and incense. Many international students bought traditional food or cultural items from their countries including chocolate and sweet items or alcoholic beverages.¹⁷⁵ These offerings are made on a variety of occasions in formal ceremonies or festivals when a student has a private audience (a private meeting with a lama which are mostly used to discuss personal matters) or at Tibetan New Year.

Next, they moved left to the young Australian lama who looked slightly less sure of what he was to do but nonetheless proceeded to place his hand obediently on the top of each person's head as they bowed in front of him. If, on occasions, he got distracted by events elsewhere in the room or forgot to put his hand on some of the villagers, he was reminded and physically prompted by his attendant to do so. Some of the younger villagers gave him a quick grin as they made offerings to him. It is worth pointing out here that the blessing from the tulkus is transmitted through their hand and they do not hold the long life arrow; this is the reserve of

¹⁷⁵ Lamas who observe a certain set of religious vows that allow them to marry also allow them to drink alcohol, which is normally only in moderation.

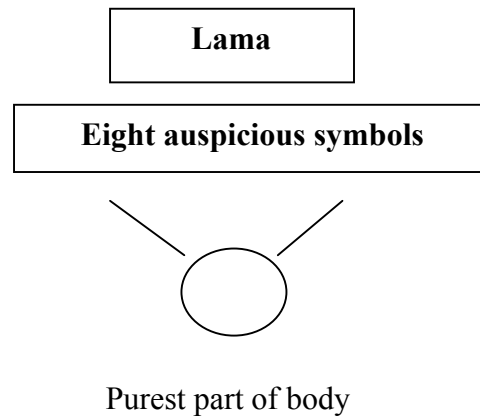
senior lamas. As villagers approached Dzogchen Rinpoche's throne, I noticed that they began to move a little quicker. This was their third "blessing" from a lama and this time he wasn't their age or younger; he was an adult looking down over them as they walked up to the throne. Many of the children hastily left the throne area and moved quickly over to the parents of the tulkus who were sat on the floor along the back wall. Each parent had the scarves placed over their necks (they were sitting on cushions on the floor not on thrones). Their appearance was becoming more and more amusing as the scarves collected around their necks. The children happily offered khatags adding to the weight; their appearance now reminded me of snake charmers who would carry the heavy body of the snake across their shoulders. I was sitting in the corner with a row of other Westerners, and as the children walked past us, some of them had a mischievous look on their faces as if they'd managed to perform their duties without being found out or without being reprimanded for not completing some tasks.

Merit Making

I will now begin to unpack the presentation of a khatag during the ceremony. Commonly, a khatag is returned over the giver's head but this particular rite is different to other exchanges (illustrated earlier in this chapter) because the khatag is not returned. It is placed on the throne and then the lama touches the student on the head with a ritual instrument. Firstly, I consider the physical arrangement of the exchange when the khatag is laid on the throne and whether that could position the khatag as a gift offered to generate merit. Then I review the second part of the exchange when the lama touches the student on the head in return. I reflect whether this has now become a reciprocal exchange; one that reconfirms the student's dependency on the lama and strengthens the lama's social status.

When the students approached the lama and presented him with the khatag, their heads were bowed in respect. The head is believed by the Dzogchen followers to be the purest part of the body. So with arms outstretched offering the eight most prized symbols (illustrated on the khatag), the head is also presented in the offering.

Fig. 7.4 Source: Author's own
Illustration of a the khatag exchange: the gift offering ritual



Bowing one's head is considered a sign of humility. Amongst the inhabitants at the monastery, both monastic and lay, there was a saying: "To cut off one's head is like cutting off the ego." Offering one's head is like giving up one's ego, or their identity, and so in this particular part of the ritual, the student is encouraged to abandon all notions of the self. Grasping to one's self is considered an obstruction to enlightenment in Buddhism and accepting the non-self is seen as the purest possible offering (Patrul 1994).

The doctrinal reason to do this is to "please" the lama because the lama experiences joy by seeing that his students are acting selflessly through making this offering. The joy of the lama must be spontaneous without calculated thought or emotion since the lama is not permitted to have his own sense of ego and he should not feel pride that his students are behaving in such a way. This conduct is prescribed for the lama by the Buddha's teaching on the Four Immeasurables (Patrul 1994). The teaching on the Four Immeasurables is one of the most famous teachings of the Buddha so this will be well known by the monastic community and almost certainly known by a lama who has received Buddhist training. When a student generates "spontaneous joy" within the master, it is believed that the student will generate merit. This is considered a virtuous action that will create merit so that the devotee can progress on his path to enlightenment. Streveski (1983) describes this as a "model of society moving in spiralling circles of generosity and sympathetic joy" (1983:476).

If this is a depersonalised exchange, it could then be seen as a type of generalised reciprocity between sangha and laity, as discussed by Spiro (1970), Strenski (1983) and Cook (2008),

amongst others, in their work on merit making rituals. At this point, the lama could be viewed by the students as the “field of merit” (Williams 1963) rather than a pure individual. Therefore if merit making is dependent on a lack of self-interest on both the part of the student and the lama participating in the khatag exchange, this gives rise to the question can the khatag be seen as a gift if it is given without self-interest? Can a gift be given with no expectation of personal gain? According to Derrida (1992), there is a basic paradox at the heart of the gift idea, “for there to be a gift, it is necessary that the gift not even appear, that it not be perceived or received as gift.” (Derrida 1992:16). In this sense, a gift is only a gift when it is not thought of as such, otherwise reciprocity is attached to it and social relationships are affected. How, then, might this be related to the context of the khatag exchange? Is the khatag a gift given without self-interest and through a depersonalised exchange does it become a means to generate merit? Before I answer those questions, I will first outline some of the classical works on gift giving (Malinowski 1922, 1926; Mauss 1925; Firth 1929, 1967; Leach 1955) and their emphasis on reciprocity and the establishment of personal relationships through gift giving. Then I will consider the notion of a “free gift” (Parry 1986, Laidlaw 2000, Cook 2008) and how that applies to the khatag exchange.

Most anthropological theories on gift giving emphasise reciprocity and a vanguard for theories on reciprocity was the detailed ethnographic study by Boas (1920, 1922, 1966) of the Kwakiutl, an indigenous tribe of northwest coast of North America and their ritual feast of potlatch. The feasts were held on important occasions such as weddings, births and deaths but were also used to redistribute food and goods amongst the community. They were characterised by a frenzy of giving as much as could be afforded by the host and were a demonstration of wealth, reaffirming his social position. When the receiver accepted the gift, they were in turn accepting the superior status of the host. Boas’ work prompted extensive discussions amongst his counterparts (Malinowski (1922), Mauss (1954), Sahlins (1965), Geertz (1973) amongst others) who in turn developed their own theories based on equally rich ethnography. Elements of the khatag exchange fit well within their analysis. For example, Malinowski (1922) and his study of the Kula Ring, a network of exchanges between islanders in the Trobriand Islands of Papua New Guinea, explored the motives behind these exchanges. He concluded that each interaction came with a sense of obligation and that there were non-altruistic motives for giving each gift. The islands presented their elaborate necklaces and valuables with the expectation that they would receive something in return—the enhancement

of their social status. The ritual surrounding the giving of the gift cemented a relationship between the two parties of giver and receiver, often creating a life-long partnership. In the case of the khatag exchange, there is a clear expectation on the part of the student who offers the khatag to the lama. The student expects to receive a blessing from the lama in the form of the transmission of purity. When the scarf is presented, the lama will then touch the student on the head and through this contact, the student expects to receive purity into their physical body.

Mauss (1954) developed Malinowski's theory and refocused the idea away from the emphasis on the individual and their motivation and towards a more collective group. The gift becomes a representation of a kinship group or community and it holds within it, embodies, the history and the reputation of that particular group. Mauss saw gifts as "total prestation", with a much more complex meaning than simple gifts. Mauss argued that the gift held within it a spirit or *hau*, a force that binds the gift giver and receiver. I don't feel that the khatag being presented during the enthronement ceremony that I observed is a "total prestation". The khatag is thought to embody the sacredness of the eight auspicious symbols that are printed on it, and, although each emblem holds great symbolism and significance, they don't specifically symbolise the lineage, the monastery, or anything exclusively connected to the lineage. There is, as there is with most gifts, an unspoken feeling that binds the presenter and receiver together, the lama is obligated to give the student/lay Tibetan something in return. However, there was no indication during my research that either perceived this to be a spirit/force.

A common theme across all anthropological analysis of reciprocity is the sense of obligation that is generated. The ritual of gift giving binds the giver and receiver together on both a physical and personal or emotional level. Material goods are exchanged and so one is indebted to the other through the passing of actual items, but it is the non-material commitment created through the exchange that generally supercedes the material. The khatag exchange is no different for it once again reconfirms the superior status of the lama and the student's ongoing dependence on him within their pursuit for purity. It also strengthens the student's connection to the lineage and this is typical of other rituals at the monastery.

Parry (1986) argues that this focus on reciprocity overlooks the idea of a "free gift" first introduced by Malinowski (1922) in *Argonauts of the Western Pacific*, where he ranked transactions along a continuum from "pure gifts" to "real barter". In *The Gift*, Mauss (1925)

was famously dismissive of Malinowski's claim that there was any such thing as a free gift, although subsequent work (Parry 1986, Laidlaw 2000, Cook 2008) has re-engaged with the idea that there may indeed be exchanges that require no reciprocity (or which might even prohibit it).

Due to their connection to salvation and freedom from the sufferings of the ordinary world, Parry describes religious alms as offerings without any worldly expectations and argues that the practice of detachment from both oneself and the ordinary world separates the gift from social ties and profane value preventing it from generating reciprocity (Parry 1989:66). Laidlaw (2000) develops this argument through his analysis of the offering of alms to Shvetamber Jain renouncers in India who wander daily amongst households receiving food from families. Amongst other tactics to ensure detachment, the renouncers do not plan their routes and their visits are non-discriminate because, as Laidlaw explains, "accepting an invitation to accept alms from a specific household would create an obligation to then attend and so any detachment would be compromised" (2000:619). Laidlaw uses the criteria laid out by Derrida (1992) to establish the practice of the free gift. The criteria are: 1) There is no reciprocity; the gift must not be in return for something else, either past or anticipated. 2) The recipient must not recognise the gift as a gift as this would lead to reciprocity. 3) The donor must not recognise the gift as a gift. 4) The thing cannot exist as a gift; as soon as it appears as gift, it becomes part of a cycle and ceases to be a gift. Set against these stipulations, Laidlaw (2000:621-624) argues that there are a number of elements of the Jain alms giving that disables the assumed inevitable transition from gift to economic exchange.

There are elements of the khatag exchange during the enthronement ceremony that could fit into Derrida's criteria. For example, there is some resonance with point four: "The thing cannot exist as a gift". The khatags are all piled together on the throne. They are not labelled; and because of the number of khatags that are stacked on top of each other, it is difficult to identify who gave which khatag. If all the khatags were the traditional white design, it would be virtually impossible. However, there were a number of more elaborately designed and colourful khatags that were presented (as mentioned on page 172), so one or two did stand out from the rest. The speed at which students offered the khatags as they all filed past the throne, made it very difficult to identify who gave those particular khatags. Therefore I would argue that the khatag as an object; a gift in this instance is depersonalised. This applies also to the

money that is offered in the envelopes. The envelopes were quite haphazardly placed amongst the khatags and gathered up periodically by the lama's attendants to stop them toppling over onto the floor. The envelopes are anonymous. They are not marked with people's names and they are generic designs so the giver cannot be identified either by the lama or the rest of the sangha. It is rarely known who gave what amount. Of course it may be possible for an individual to deliberately watch another person fill their envelope with the money and count how much is given but I cannot recall seeing this happen. So on the whole, the material objects themselves, the khatag and the money, could be viewed as depersonalised gifts.

The second criterion, "the recipient must not recognise the gift as a gift as this would lead to reciprocity", raises an interesting point. The lama, although the recipient of the offerings, does not actually physically receive them. The khatag is placed on the throne and then gathered up by his attendants. The throne and the attendants are intermediaries and oversee all handling of the offerings. As there is a second part to the khatag exchange where the lama does interact with the student, I don't feel that the lama is completely detached from the offering but the mediation does decrease the recognition of the khatag as a gift. For example, upon completion of the ceremony, the lama will leave the room or temple without either the khatags or the money; he does not have personal contact with them. But where do the khatags and the money go? In this particular instance, the khatags were taken down to the lama's residence but I later saw them being returned to the temple for storage and then, I assume, further distribution. I do not know where the offering envelopes go but I again I assume they also go to the lama and then he has a choice of where to distribute the money. One could argue, however, that these assumptions don't actually bear too much relevance on the analysis because it is not within the ritual space or seen by the participants. Within the ritual space, the giving and receiving of the offering is mediated without personal interaction, which reaffirms the khatag exchange position as a merit making ritual based on generalised reciprocity and the field of merit.

The mediation of the attendants and even the use of the throne as a depersonalised space on which to lay the khatags are critical in the overall depersonalisation of the ritual. Mediation and its contribution to the depersonalisation of alms offering is a key theme in the work of Cook (2008) and her analysis of dana (alms offering) between the laity and a monastic community in Theravada Buddhism. The dana is mediated by the nuns, (mae chee) and Cook argues that the mediation enables the giving of a "free gift" because it depersonalises the ritual and allows the

non-reciprocal giving and receiving of alms. Amidst a monastic economy solely based on alms donations, the facilitation by the mae chee, receiving the alms from the laity and then transferring them to the monastics, means that neither the laity who perform the dana nor the monastic sangha who perform the rites, are in direct reciprocation of each other and so the offering becomes depersonalised. Free from personal identity, the gift can then be used to make merit which, according to Spiro (1970), is the primary purpose of offering alms in Theravada Buddhism and the amount of merit that one can make is proportional to the spiritual quality or piety of the monks that receive the alms (Spiro 1970:107).

Cook suggests that Buddhist alms donations, under which a khatag exchange could be classified, are understood as free gifts because “they are non-reciprocal. Renouncers are forbidden to express gratitude, and neither the gift nor the beneficiary are recognised as such (though the donor is understood to have given.)” (2000:18). She goes further to explain that because the behaviour during ritual alms donations is so prescribed, this also de-emphasises any personal relationships that may exist between individuals. This governed behaviour is based within the Buddhist idiom of selflessness and renunciation of world interests (Tambiah (1968)) and so doesn't sit within a reciprocal relationship because there is not considered to be a self that is benefitting. Strenski (1983) classifies this as system of generalised exchange because there is a firm rejection of reciprocity between particular monks and laity and the return of merit is believed to come from elsewhere, from the field of merit and not an individual. Therefore, Cook argues that the practice of Buddhist alms donation, particularly when mediated by mae chee, can be understood as the practice of generalised reciprocity and can be viewed as a “free gift”.

Another key point in Cook's (2008) work is that the mediation by the mae chee allows the social positions within the monastery to be negotiated and maintained. The monks retain the piety and social status but are able to receive financial support from the laity; and the laity retains their access to the field of merit so that they can work towards a better rebirth. The khatag exchange during the enthronement had significant social implications. The impact is greater during the second part of the exchange (which I will come to shortly) where the lama touches the students' head, but social hierarchies are still reinforced during the first part—the presentation of the khatag. For example, even if the intentions of the giver are selfless, when placing the khatag on the throne, the act of bowing and lowering one's head, the most sacred

part of the body, and displaying humility, is also a very visual and physical act of subordination. The ritual shows to any onlookers that the student, through accepting the lama's position seated on a high and elaborate throne, also accepts that he has superior spiritual realisations or purity. The offering of a khatag in this setting shows that the students accept and respect the hierarchy of the lama and their necessary role in the merit making ritual. In addition, the fact that the lama does not personally handle the khatags or the money, means that within the ritual space, he is separated from the profane and retains his pure status.

So does this understanding of a free gift as discussed by Parry (1986), Derrida (1992), Laidlaw (2000), Cook (2008) as part of a system of generalised reciprocity apply to the second part of the khatag exchange where the lama touches the heads of the students with a ritual object? I would argue that it does not because Derrida's criteria one and three cannot be met. Firstly, criterion one: "There is no reciprocity, the gift must not be in return for something else, either past or anticipated". Clearly something is given here in return and the students believe that as the lama touches their heads, they receive a transmission of purity. I'm not concerned with specific interpretations of this transmission (the form and the details (e.g. the prayers, visualisations etc.) can vary between different rituals, enthronements and empowerments). I'm simplifying this to the act of receiving something from the lama that assists within the realisation of one's own purity. I refer to this as purity and this is understood to be transferred from the lama to the student through touch.

The third criterion: "The donor must not recognise the gift as a gift" is also very difficult to establish. A clear aim of the students, the monks, the laity is for the lama to touch their head, nobody misses out on it. All members of the congregation at the enthronement received the transmission, and because of the sheer number of attendees, people needed to be in exactly the right place when it was their turn (they had given their khatags and had to move swiftly to be beneath the ritual object he was using). They had to deliberately move close to the throne; this was a very calculated movement.

In this two-part ritual, the khatag exchange is now not a ritual of generalised reciprocity, it is personal to the lama and reiterates the social bond between the monk/student/lama making the offering and the lama himself. The exchange re-emphasises the student's dependency on the lama for the realisation of purity and the achievement of enlightenment. It also reconfirms the

lama's superior status and in doing so strengthens the giver's connection to the lineage. This is also typical of other rituals at the monastery that will be discussed in the next chapter but before doing so, I will now consider what happens if the khatag was returned to the giver and how this reinforces the social position of the monastery.

Keeping the Khatag

During ceremonies where the khatag is returned over the head of the devotee, its purpose goes beyond that of merit-making and it becomes an important instrument in the transmission of purity from lama to student. By holding the khatag within his hands, purity is spontaneously transferred from the lama to the khatag and when the khatag is placed around the neck of the student the purity can then be passed to the student. The purity is not lost from the khatag and it is kept and paid special regard, and at this point, because of the value with which it is regarded, I believe that it is seen as a sacred artifact. The person who receives the khatag back from the lama often keeps it around their neck until well after the ceremony has finished. It is rarely taken off immediately. Over tea one day, I shared my frustration with Tsering about the lack of formal instructions given in ceremonies when presenting khatags. It is really hard to know what to do if you have never participated before. The first time I received a khatag back after presenting it to a lama, I quite quickly removed it from around my neck and returned to my seat. I'm not sure why I removed it; it was perhaps an unconscious action because it was hot in the room or because I don't normally wear scarves but as I sat down I realised that everyone else still had theirs on. I felt uncomfortable being the odd one out and promptly put it back on. Tsering confirmed that putting a khatag down immediately is thought to be rude. The khatag has been blessed so it should be treated with care and respect and not just discarded. However, he reassured me that it was not a problem; everyone makes mistakes.

Khatags are generally left on one's neck for a short while, maybe five or so minutes, and then slowly people start taking theirs off, carefully rolling or folding them and putting them neatly away in bags or pouches. The khatags are then kept and stored until the next ceremony or, if they are of great value, e.g. they have been blessed by a very high lama, then they are kept on a shrine or in a place of worship. Sometimes khatags can be given as gifts to others who couldn't make the ceremony due to ill health or other circumstances. I experienced this first hand when my mother was suffering ill health; Buddhist friends would give her khatags from ceremonies that they had attended so that she could share in the blessings that they had received in the hope that it would purify her illness. They believed that the purity remained in the khatag and could

then be transmitted to others. It wasn't quite the same as attending the ceremony in person, but it was thought to be the next best thing.

The khatags are then treated as a valuable object; one which retains the purity within it forever more. It is believed that once it has been blessed by the lama, the purity remains within it. The khatag may then be kept on a shrine. My fieldwork observations have led me to understand that there is a consistent belief throughout the Tibetan Buddhist community, from the monks and the international students through to the villagers, that once given by the lama, these khatags become sacred objects and maintain a purity outside of their original context. I have overheard international students in conversation saying, "Okay you can borrow my khatag this time but please return it as it is very special. H.H. Dodrupchen Rinpoche (a high lama) gave it to me." I have also encountered students who repeatedly use the same khatag to gather blessings from other lamas or ceremonies so in fact they become "super charged" with blessings. In between each ceremony, the khatags remain in pride of place on their shrine, acting as a physical reminder of the purity that lamas embody and are able to transmit. The transmission of purity from the lama to the khatag and to the student demonstrates that purity, as understood by the community at my field site, is not a fixed substance with permanent boundaries. It is fluid quality that can pass through boundaries into people and into objects.

Connection to the lineage

During the khatag exchange, the transmission of purity from the lama to the devotee also acts as a reaffirmation of this connection to the lama and the lineage is of the utmost importance to the devotee for it is believed that without the lama, enlightenment is not possible. The khatag is the enabler of the transmission of purity and there are other occasions within monastic life when connection to the lama is confirmed by a khatag exchange. Upon ordination to a monastic way of life, the monks each participate in a ceremony where they commit their life, take vows, have their head shaved and are given their robes. This ceremony is sealed with the presentation of a khatag offered by the monk to the lama and then returned around the neck of the monk. The monk commits his life to the Buddha as his ultimate teacher, the dharma, the Buddha's teaching as the truth and the sangha, the monastic community he will live with and reside amongst (Patrul 2004).

The international students also participate in a version of this ceremony known as the refuge ceremony. Every year towards the end of the international retreat held at Dzogchen Monastery,

there is an opportunity for devotees to take refuge with Dzogchen Rinpoche as their teacher representing the Buddha to his own teachings and the Buddha's teaching and with the international sangha as their spiritual community. I have observed this ceremony on a number of occasions now and also participated in it for myself. Each time, the participants kneel before Dzogchen Rinpoche's throne and repeat a prayer in Tibetan that he has recited. Upon completion, they are considered to have taken a refuge vow and are officially proclaimed a Buddhist. They are given a refuge name, a Tibetan name to mark their inclusion within the sangha and their position as a student of the lama (this name is generally not used on a day-to-day basis for international students; it is more symbolic demonstrating their connection to the lama). The refuge ceremony is also concluded with the offering of the khatag. Whilst this ceremony is taking place, all of the congregation are kneeling (remaining where they are seated) and use the opportunity to renew their refuge vow, reciting the prayer as well. They do not present a khatag; this is only done so on the first time the vow is taken.

The refuge ceremony is one of the most important rituals for a Buddhist as it confirms their identity as a follower of the dharma and is the official authorisation of their connection to the lineage and all the Dzogchen lamas. The khatag exchange during the enthronement ceremony mirrors many aspects of the refuge ceremony and reinforces the all important link to the lineage and the heritage that is so prized by the monastic establishment. This is both on a personal level for the individual taking part as their memories of the refuge ceremony are reinvoked, and on a public level as it is viewed by the congregation audience. This public aspect that individuals express their lifelong commitment to the lineage in front of many people is a physical reminder of the strength and power of the monastery and the lamas of the lineage; something that is of great importance to the establishment and its objective of preserving and maintaining the practices that existed in pre-Cultural Revolution Tibet.

The khatag exchange ritual is one of a number of embodied acts of worship that all contribute to the monastic authority's overall objective of strengthening the position of lama and the monastic tradition whilst operating in exile. In this case, a physical object is used to evoke memories of other significant rituals that bind the individual to the lineage and encourage devotion and obedience to the rule of the lama. The khatag reminds the individual of the vows they have taken and the commitment of loyalty to the monastic establishment as the home of the lama, further cementing their relationship. This ritual and others outlined in the thesis all

depend on the belief that the lama is central to obtaining religious purity and it is this prevailing concept that is enabling the monastery and the monastic community to slowly rebuild the influence that they had enjoyed in pre-Cultural Revolution Tibet. In the previous chapter, I detailed how the rabnye ritual establishes the actual body of the lama as a pure means by which the practitioner can obtain their own purity and in the following chapter, I will consider how the individual's body can achieve purity by significant repetitions of embodied worship in the form of prostrations. All three of these rituals (including the khatag exchange), combined with the physical layout of the monastery dedicated to the principle of the lama, attempt to produce a total or holistic ritual environment where the individual is submerged in symbolism and encoded behaviour that supports the propagation of the lama and the lineage. This ritual environment draws on historical references and uses material objects and formal public events, amongst other things, to generate a world-wide influence which is maintained informally through the individual practitioner as they return to their native country and formally through the various other monasteries or centres within the Dzogchen community.

In conclusion, the khatag exchange, firstly in its use in merit-making, then for the transmission of purity, plays an important part in maintaining the authenticity and legitimacy of the lineage. Its public nature, speeches and historical declarations that introduce the enthronement, the hierarchical space organisation of the lamas presiding over the ritual seated on high thrones, and the atmosphere created by the nervous yet excited villagers as they file through the room all contribute to this effect. The repeated physical act of offering hundreds of khatags piled high on thrones and weighing down on the necks of the tulku's parents is a visual symbol of how important the ceremony is. As Miller (1956) stated, "Within Tibetan culture, social prestige can be determined by how many scarves are left over at the end of the ceremony and here they needed to be carried away like small towers." The fact that only the tulkus themselves have the khatags returned to them on this occasion reinforces the preciousness and sacredness of the khatag exchange ritual and the overall occasion. The private, personal aspect of the ritual uses embodied worship to evoke memories of commitment and devotion to the lineage both through performing the action and by watching others participate in the act. What I hope to have demonstrated within this chapter is that through being positioned within an exchange of purity essential to the spiritual progress of the devotee, the khatag becomes a symbol of value for the lineage and the lamas that are at its centre, reinforcing their position and legitimacy.

Fig. 8.1 Source: Author's own
Explanation of a prostration

Start with the hands at the chest together in the prayer position and look towards the object of reverence, which is commonly a shrine, a temple or a religious artefact. At this point, a religious mantra or prayer is uttered, often whispered, under one's breath.



Position 2

With the hands still in the prayer position, touch the forehead, throat and the heart area. Drop to the knees or use the hands to guide the body down and forwards resting on the knees momentarily if necessary.



Position 3

The practitioner lies down flat on the floor on their stomachs with their arms outstretched in front, their hands coming together above their heads in the prayer position, and their forehead touching the floor.

**Position 4**

The practitioner pushes off with their hands and rises backwards and returns to the standing position.

This is one full prostration. Repeat 100,000 times.

Chapter 8 Embodied Worship: Prostrations and Kora

This chapter focuses on two forms of embodied worship performed at the monastery by both the monastic and lay community. Both are repeatedly performed on a daily basis, sometimes through intense periods of accumulation, and I study them as examples of how processes to achieve the emic understanding of embodiment takes place and explore the impact of this embodiment is on the community at my field site. How do they reinforce the social hierarchy? How do they unify the group under the leadership of the lama and is there any wider social significance outside the community?

The first type of worship is prostrations: full length bows performed in high numbers of repetition in reverence to something or somebody that is considered sacred or pure. In the previous chapter, I briefly described a prostration during the enthronement ceremony and a full pictorial description is provided prior to this chapter. A prostration is seen as a physical act of purification and it is believed by those who practise them that undergoing a certain amount of exertion and offering one's own physical body to the object/person of worship will both generate merit and also assist them in their pursuit of a pure body. Believing the body requires purification is not the same as believing that it is impure; all beings are thought to be pure with Dzogchen, however some (e.g. the lama) are closer to realising their own purity than others. Purifying one's body, speech and mind means that one becomes closer to realising their own purity rather than removing impurities. During my fieldwork, I observed a group of international students preparing for a closed retreat with no contact with the outside world they intended to accumulate 100,000 prostrations within a period of three months. This was only the second time in the history of the monastery that international students had been permitted to take part in such a retreat. It was a big event and both the monastic committee and a new organising committee formed of international students had spent at least three weeks cleaning and decorating the drubdra [retreat centre] before the event began. This chapter focuses on the preparation for the intense accumulation of prostrations, how the international students learn this particular embodied worship, the processes used to remember the sequence and the specific positions of each body part. It looks at how the students approach the practice, an embodied ritual that was previously only performed by the monks and Tibetan villagers, the students' motivation and reasons for participation and their willingness to attempt to embody purity through intense repetition of a physical action. Through interviews and observing their

preparations, I also consider how beliefs around purity are constituted through physical and sensory practices and how this reinforces the lamaist hierarchy at the monastery.

The second type of embodied worship I explore in this chapter is kora: repeated circumambulation of sacred sites or buildings in order to generate merit to achieve purity. The main sites of kora at the monastery are the temple and the stupas, mound-like structures used as a place of worship, containing ringsel, relics from great lamas or the Buddha.¹⁷⁶ In my analysis, I draw on the work of Makley (2003), who analysed the practice of kora around a monastery in China and argued that it increased the centrality and power of the monastery and made the temple, and subsequently the monastery, a key focal point for the lay community. Kora is practised by the three groups at the monastery, but instead of analysing their different approaches to the practice, I look at the social effect of mass participation, how performance unifies the community and how it strengthens the social position of the lama and the monastery. I discuss the extent to which the monastery is established as a centre of power through embodied worship and how this affects the reach of its political, social and religious influence.

As well as considering how the repetition of prostrations and kora contribute to the embodiment of purity, I look at how the specific rotation of the body, the position of the body within a particular space, reinforces the belief in purity. As Mills (2010) argues in his study of a Gelugpa monastery in Ladakh, "...spaces and bodies have much to tell us, and indeed are the very things which, by giving place and context, render people, voices and interviews meaningful" (2010:49). So the organisation of space and how the body behaves within it can give meaning to beliefs, commitments and social hierarchy. Earlier in my thesis I discussed the top/bottom, front/back models of purity and pollution put forth by Douglas (1970) and using the work of Mills, and also Makley, I develop this understanding and consider how the body's position in relation to the centrality and periphery of a space relates to purity. I explore how bodies that are positioned closer to the centre of a sacred space are more likely to receive a transmission of purity than those bodies that are further away. I review how this adds to the wider discourse on purity.

¹⁷⁶ Refer back to Chapter 6 for further information on ringsel.

What is a Prostration?

A prostration is a full-length bow where the practitioner lies down flat on the floor on their stomach with their arms outstretched in front. The hands come together above their heads in the prayer position. Their forehead touches the floor and then they return to the standing position by pushing themselves up by using their hands. A prostration is one of the main physical acts of purification performed at the monastery on a day-to-day basis and is often completed in sets of three upon entrance to a sacred space. For example, when a monk enters the temple to say his daily prayers, he would make three prostrations just after entering before he takes his seat. Alternatively, a set of three prostrations is performed as a type of greeting before a lama. I have seen them completed at the start of teachings given by Dzogchen Rinpoche or by students who are entering private meetings with him. Prostrations can also be made in front of a pictorial representation of the lama such as on a shrine or a thangka [religious art] that hangs on the wall. One of my informants¹⁷⁷ told me that in the Dzogchen lineage, prostrations are believed to enable purity to the practitioner on three levels: body, speech and mind. Before initiating the bow, practitioners will place their hands in the prayer position and touch their foreheads to represent achieving purity of their bodies. Then they touch their throats to represent obtaining purity of speech and their heart areas to represent realising purity of their minds. Mind in this context does not relate to the brain as one might instinctively think but instead to the heart as this is where it is believed one can access one's innate wisdom.¹⁷⁸ These three levels also correspond to the three bodies of Nirmanakaya, Sambhogakaya and Dharmakaya explained in Chapter 5. Whilst completing the bow, it is common for a prayer/mantra of devotion to the lama to be recited or the full refuge prayer, which pays homage to what is known as the three jewels, the Buddha, the dharma and the sangha.

As well as performing prostrations in sets of three, they can also be accumulated en masse and as part of a formal ritual practice known in Tibetan as the ngondro, which translates as the “preliminary practices”. It also means something that “goes before” or acts as the foundation. According to Tulku (1995), the ngondro is a set of prayers, visualisations and material or bodily offerings that should be repeated a certain number of times in order to purify the individual and prepare them to receive the more complex teachings from their lama. It is

¹⁷⁷ Introduced in Chapter 6 on page 131.

¹⁷⁸ This understanding is slightly different to other schools; for example, Mills (2010) records that the Gelug approach is to develop different aspects of the Buddha at the different points: the forehead represents the names of the Buddha, the throat is the teachings of the Buddha and the heart is the qualities of the Buddha.

common for a lama to ask their student to complete the ngondro before providing them with any religious instruction. There are six sections of the ngondro that need to be completed and the first of these is prostrations, which must be performed 100,000 times. The origin of the number of 100,000 is not fully known; however, I've asked a number of monks and lay practitioners and they all respond along the lines that the sheer volume and the huge amount of repetition means that the effect of each practice is heightened and the more repetition, the closer one is to their goal. Doing a small number is not enough and the effects will not be long lasting. One must repeat the action until it creates a profound change within the practitioner. It takes a long time to perform 100,000 prostrations and the most common ways of accumulating the required total is either by making a pilgrimage to a sacred site such as Bodhgaya in North India, the site of the Buddha's enlightenment, and spend time there accumulating or, more formally, by entering a closed retreat and following a structured schedule. The following section describes the retreat centre at the monastery and my observations during the preparation period for the international students who were about to enter a closed retreat to complete the prostration requirement for the ngondro.

The Retreat Centre

In one corner of the monastery grounds is a small retreat centre, the drubdra, spread over two floors and separated from the monastery with a fence and gate which can be locked to keep out unwanted visitors. The centre has a small garden area with a few shrubs and trees to provide shade. The ground floor is slightly raised and is accessed by steps that take you directly towards the shrine room/temple at its centre. This is a small room that can seat up to ten people sitting five against both side walls, leaving a walkway to the shrine at the back of the room. The shrine has three large statues made from copper; they are gold plated, and hand painted in bright colours. The statues depict Padmasambhava (the saint who took Buddhism to Tibet), King Trison Detson (the king who invited Padmasambhava to Tibet) and a main scholar of lineage. On either side of the shrine room there are single bedrooms that are each simply furnished with a single bed, a side table, a wardrobe, and a shelf where the resident can create their own personal shrine. An external staircase leads you to the first floor with more single bedrooms and the main bathroom. A small balcony area at the end of the veranda is used by the retreatants to eat their meals. There is also an external shower and toilet block.

In 2009, whilst describing the retreat centre to students during a public teaching, Dzogchen Rinpoche explained that it was organised around the three abstinences of body, speech and mind. To abstain on a physical level with the body is to remove oneself from society into a closed environment. To abstain on the level of speech is to stop engaging in conversation with others, to stop talking and remain in silence. The last abstinence is of the mind and this is to stop thinking, to rest the mind in meditation. Practically, this means that the centre is fenced off and closed to visitors but also that the retreatants cannot leave until their time commitment has expired (unless in the case of emergency and they need to go to hospital). Food is cooked in the main monastery kitchen by the guesthouse; it is delivered to the centre and left in a large post box that strides the fence. The empty pans or containers that carry the food are then returned to the post box to be collected. A team of monks not involved in the retreat is normally assigned this duty. Retreatants, should they need any personal supplies or minor medicines, can leave hand written notes in this post box and the person who oversees the running of the retreat, known as the retreat coordinator, will ensure that they get their supplies. Most retreats are completed in silence with only a short break during the day where practical information can be communicated such as if there are problems with the plumbing or more general supplies are needed. The retreatants are permitted to chant prayers and mantra out loud so it is only a “silent” retreat from the point of view of holding a conversation. Most retreatants are familiar with the practice of meditation and have a pre-existing wish to reduce the number of thoughts they have and so spend much of their time during the retreat formally practising meditation.

The retreatants are in an enforced period of liminality and marginality; they are between states as a novice practitioner, one who has not completed their accumulations, and a more advanced practitioner who has completed the required repetitions. The latter is deemed to be purer than the former. The retreat is a Rites de Passage (Van Gennep 1909) and has the three clear, successive but separate stages of the rite set out by Van Gennep. The first is separation; during the retreat the students are not permitted to have contact with their families or life in the outside world. Exceptions are made for emergencies such as a close family death or serious illness but requests to contact the students must go through the retreat coordinator. Mobile phones, computers and radios are also not permitted in the retreat. The second is the margin (limen); it is a period of uncertainty. It does not resemble the world that the participant has just left and they have not gained a new status yet. Victor Turner (1964:47) describes this second phase as “the state of the ritual subject (the passenger) is ambiguous; he passes through a realm

that has few or none of the attributes of the past of coming state...” During this liminal period, the retreatant must undergo an intense physical practice to transform their body and begin to embody purity. When they leave the retreat centre, upon completing their 100,000 prostrations, they emerge with a new status; they are now permitted to receive religious instructions from the lama that others are not and they are one step closer to the realisation of their inherent purity. This new status, according to Van Gennep would be the aggregation; the student has been consummated in their new status and social position.

Three-month Retreat

When I was in the field from late December 2009 to early February 2010, the monastery opened the retreat centre to international students for only the second time since it had been re-established in Karnataka. A three-month closed retreat was taking place. It had also been held the year before and now a second intake of retreatants were preparing to live in isolation for 90 days spending much of their time accumulating 100,000 prostrations. A three-month retreat is a common period of time for a practitioner to engage in intensive religious practice shutting themselves away from the world to solely concentrate on prayer or meditation. According to Mills (2003), the origin of this time period is said to come from the era of the Buddha where he encouraged his students to stay inside for three months during the summer, living carefully and conscientiously so as not to kill the many insects that had come out during the warmer weather. During this particular period of fieldwork, my husband was with me at the monastery. He was experiencing difficulty sleeping and had requested to stay in a quiet room. The guesthouse is situated near the kitchen both for monks and guests and quiet rooms are few and far between so we were temporarily housed in the retreat centre, something which at the time was uncommon but provided me with the perfect opportunity to watch the six international students, four women and two men, preparing for the retreat.

I had tried a few prostrations myself during the various retreats I had attended but suffering from a bad back and not having a great attitude to strenuous physical exertion at the time, I had never really managed to do more than 50 or so in one go. Here, they were aiming to accumulate 100,000. It would not be an exaggeration to say that this was going to be a real cardiac workout; realistically, the fittest people could do a maximum of six hours a day, which means that over three months the count would need to be 1111 prostrations a day. This works out at a steady rate of 185 per hour. Each prostration takes about five seconds (at full speed)

and to achieve the target one would need to consistently perform three a minute. Each person had a different way of counting their prostrations; some used stones or beads on their malas or counted in their heads.

Motivation

Undertaking a commitment of 1,000 prostrations knowing that it will be painful and hard work and potentially cause damage to the body is a big undertaking. Bearing in mind this must take place every day for 90 days in hot temperatures, sometimes 30 degrees plus, I wondered what motivated the retreatants to do so. One of the retreatants was a female doctor named Erika; she was in her fifties and from Germany. I asked Erika what motivated her. Firstly, she responded that she wanted to complete her ngondr. She had practised Buddhism for a number of years but had not progressed as far as she would like. She also said that she'd believed that this was the best way to purify any obstacles to realisation, especially within her body. Last year, just before the first retreat, Erika badly injured her back and couldn't attend. She expressed her frustration about this to me and was determined to not repeat that experience this year. I wasn't quite sure what she meant by "obstacles to realisation" and questioned her further. She responded, "Like the great Dzogchen lamas, we have to purify this physical body and then we can generate the merit which will help us realise pure wisdom." I wondered why Erika had chosen to take part in a retreat rather than go on pilgrimage and complete the prostrations at a sacred site. I thought it might be an easier option to do so in the cooler climate of North India (where more pilgrimage sites are) rather than in the hot South India. For Erika, the reason was very clear; it was because Dzogchen Rinpoche was residing over the retreat. He was in charge of all aspects of the organisation and the supervision of each retreatant. He was also offering one-to-one advice sessions half way through the retreat for the students to talk through any concerns or questions they might have. For Erika, completing intensive purification practices under the supervision of a lama meant that the purification of her body would be greater and that there was every possibility that the lama would perform an empowerment for the students. As discussed in Chapter 5, Tibetan lamas are thought to be the embodiment of purity and their physical bodies have the capacity to transmit purity to others. Erica believed that performing the prostrations was a way of enabling the realisation of purity whether by oneself or through the good will of the lama.

One evening, I stood on the veranda watching them pulling large wooden boards out into the garden area. The boards were at least six feet in length and approximately 2.5 feet wide— large enough to take a full body lying down. Each person placed their board in a half circle facing the shrine room in the middle of the building. Each person also had cloth pads, which when trying out prostrations on the board, were positioned under each palm on the board and acted as sliding aides enabling them to move quickly onto their fronts into a fully stretched out position. They were also used as a support to return to the standing position. I watched Erika as she made sure her pads moved without interruption across the board; each time checking that there was no ill-effect on the palms of her hand. The cloths also acted as protection from sores and friction burns, which could easily be caused by repetitive movement. Prostrations are hard on the body and any small assistance makes a great difference.

Embodiment Through Repetition

Over the next day or so, it became harder to speak with the new retreatants who were trying to prepare to enter a closed retreat. They were spending more time doing prostrations and less time in public spaces. When they were in areas like the dining room or courtyard, they started slowly to disengage and keep to themselves, speaking less and becoming more focused on what lay ahead. I wanted to understand more about what happened on retreat so I spoke to an English woman called Jenny about her experiences as she had completed the retreat a year before. In this transcript of our conversation, Jenny talks about the physical pain she experienced and how it was linked to purification.

“It was very painful—my knees and my legs really ached. One thing really sticks out in my memory from the advice that Rinpoche-La gave us before we went in. Footballers get injured quite a lot but nobody questions it because its football, but everyone questions the pain that you experience on a retreat because it is religious practice. He said that we must go through the pain—break the resistance. He also said that pain is a positive sign; don’t give up; go over the pain and accept it as purification.

I believe that prostrations are important purification so whatever happened then, I knew I couldn’t give up. I knew that accumulation purifies mental and physical pain so I just had to accept it and go beyond the suffering.

Another thing that inspired me and kept me going was that Rinpoche-La said that spending one day in a sacred, purified place like the retreat centre has more benefit than 100 days in a normal place. Prostrations are really powerful you know, even the space where you do them, around you as you are doing it, becomes purified so you are creating benefit for others too. It purifies your body, it purifies the space you are in and then everybody in the whole monastery benefits from this pure energy that is being generated, the monastery becomes even purer. Knowing that Rinpoche was there guiding us made it even more powerful.”

According to Jenny, any pain incurred during the 100,000 prostrations, be it a bad back, sore knees, exhaustion, or aches and pains, are thought to be a positive experience—an opportunity to be purified and to bring benefit to others by purifying the environment. If the lama is present during the accumulation, the capacity for purification is believed to be intensified, and so the dependency on the lama and the belief in his purity is increased. There are two points that I wish to pick up on here: The first is the acceptance that pain, suffering and other adaptations that the body are forced to accommodate and are all part of the physical process. The second is that the bodily experiences that lead to embodiment and to the creation of muscle memory are seen as natural; they are accepted as the necessary corporeal condition.

My findings here chime with Louis Wacquant’s (2004) ethnography of boxers in Chicago and his exploration of the pugilist’s habitus (Bourdieu 1977) and how it is created by the joining of the corporeal with certain mental characteristics. The boxers underwent rigorous physical training as well as a number of psychological adaptations to transition them from a non-fighter to a competitive pugilist. Here, the retreatants have been subjected to a similar physical and mental training. They are psychologically prepared before they enter the retreat and during the retreat to accept the pain and work through the suffering in order to complete the required number of prostrations. This is all part of the liminality that they experience. During the three months, the students live in a way that was alien to them. They subject their bodies to an unfamiliar process and the result of this is a change in how they are viewed amongst their peers. The respect that they have earned during this period is not shown overtly but it is clear that in the performance of prostrations, they have a superior status. Prostrations are performed in and around the temple every morning. Novices or less experienced students perform the repetitions more gingerly and for a shorter period of time, becoming out of breath and tired more easily. They are more cautious to the pain element; those with bad backs perform 10-20

and then sit on a chair at the side of the temple reciting mantra or meditating. Those who have completed the retreat prostrate rapidly for long periods of time.

I was curious as to how the motivation of the participants changed throughout the retreat. Once they have accepted the pain, if they do, once they have become used to the actual physical experience of repeated prostrations, how then do the participants feel? What becomes the focus? Colin, a student from New Zealand, took part in the second three-month retreat. He was unusual because it was his first time on a Buddhist retreat. He had little prior experience of Buddhism and was new to Dzogchen Monastery. One lunchtime my husband (Alistair) and I sat next to Colin in the dining room (the year after the retreat); Alistair asked him what it was like to enter a three-month commitment whilst being so new to Dzogchen. To complete such an intensive retreat was quite a feat for a novice; Alistair shared my curiosity of how Colin had fared. It seemed Colin had found it hard. He had struggled with a number of issues during the retreat but what was clear from his response was that he was satisfied with his accomplishment because he had completed his target number of prostrations and so in his mind he had “done it right.”

Colin explained: “I just focused on doing the actions and getting it right, hitting my target each day and I didn't worry too much about the mental side of it. I was having all sorts of thoughts and experiences; mostly about complete shit. At one point it was like all the TV that I had ever watched was just running through my mind; it was very boring actually. I've watched a lot of bad TV. I think it's also to do with work, you know, I'm paid to think up crazy stuff (Colin had been working at a “guerrilla marketing” firm in New Zealand and described his role as being paid to think up “out there” ideas). Being alone with your thoughts all day is pretty tough. I just wanted to hit my target. I wanted to do that right and then for me I just trusted that it was having the right effect, you know, spiritually. I was there. I was keeping my commitment and I hoped the rest would take care of itself.”

Out of the two cohorts who had completed the retreat, Colin's inexperience was quite exceptional but it seemed that his attitude of “getting it done right” was not. Fulfilling the commitment of 100,000 prostrations was a priority for the retreatments and so I asked Jenny how important the target number of prostrations was for her.

“It was very important and it was a real challenge to accept that I wasn’t going to meet the target. I only had limited time when somebody offered to look after Aubrey (Jenny took her six-month old baby on retreat) or when he was asleep. So I suppose from early on I knew I wouldn’t make the official number of prostrations, but I spoke to Rinpoche about it. He said it was okay. I could relax then because it was okay to—you know, officially.

“The targets were big for the others though. It was really hard to see when some people had to accept they couldn’t meet the target because they had hurt their knee, or something. Then those who stayed on target you could see about a third of the way through they were really struggling, but they wouldn’t give up; they had to meet the target each day. It got easier for them towards the end but there were days when it was pretty bad. They looked like they couldn’t go on. But they did. They were driven.”

In both Jenny’s and Colin’s responses, there are two shared sentiments: the first is a clear intention or commitment to completing the retreat correctly by either fulfilling their target number of prostrations or by keeping a commitment to the lama. The second is emotions and any thoughts that arise are considered less important than the ritual commitment and are either accepted or efforts are made to ignore them. Humphrey and Laidlaw (1994) describe a similar type of ritual commitment in their work, *The Archetypal Actions Of Ritual*, which is based upon their ethnography of Jain pujas where they discovered that participants expressed widely differing reasons as to why they took part in the rituals. Their research revealed that there was no consensus of the meaning of the rituals or even if the meaning mattered. What their respondents did have in common though was the wish to participate correctly in the rituals and to ensure that they followed the rules that governed the rituals.

Based on this study, and the overriding emphasis on intent by their respondents, Humphrey and Laidlaw proposed a new kind of “ritual theory”; one in which “ritual is [discerned] as a quality which action can come to have—a special way in which acts may be performed” (1994:64). This “special way” is explained as the intention of the participant to follow the rules of the ritual and pay much less regard to the meaning of the ritual or their own thoughts or feelings. When an action is performed with this intent, it becomes a ritualized action; if the rules are not kept, it cannot be considered ritualised action. “Instead of being guided and structured by the intentions of actors, ritualised action is constituted and structured by prescription, not just in

the sense that people follow rules but in the much deeper sense that a reclassification takes place so that only following the rules counts as action.” (1994:106)

According to Humphrey and Laidlaw, ritual commitment is a desire to participate in a proscribed action; to do it right and the meaning behind the ritual itself is not important. So participants ask: Did we get it right? Rather than: Did it work? If I apply this understanding to my fieldwork, it raises some interesting points. The attitudes of the retreatants towards the accumulation of the prostrations have similarities to the findings from the Jain pujas but there are also some differences. The participants’ main focus is on adhering to the rules of the retreat, performing the prostrations correctly and completing their target accumulations, but despite pushing their emotions and thoughts to one side in order to fully comply with the ritual, the ritual still holds meaning for them. I think that rather than the meaning of prostrations not holding importance for them, it is instead that the participants’ actual experience, both physically and emotionally, is so intense is that their focus is directed elsewhere, to help them reach their target.

Humphrey and Laidlaw also argue that the commitment, or “special intent” that ritualizes the action creates group solidarity because it implies that all participants share a belief in the ritual ideology even if that is not actually true. The participants all comply with the rules and so very few questions are raised around intent; therefore it is assumed that all are in agreement as to why the ritual is being performed. The performance of the ritual is uniform and this generates a type of ritual solidarity. This form of ritual solidarity is true of many of the rituals I encountered during my fieldwork but particularly true of the retreatants within the three-month silent retreat, during which discussions about motivation were not permitted. Therefore, the main form of communication between people was through gesticulation. For example, at the dinner table, the retreatants were only supposed to use gestures if they needed something passing to them. The most prominent physical gesture therefore was the performance of the prostration, repeatedly for hours on end every day by each retreatant, reinforcing the notion of ritual solidarity over and over again. As this was a closed retreat, and the audience of the prostrations was limited to those with the retreat compound; the social impact of the prostrations was also restricted. However, the performance of prostrations elsewhere, in front of the temple or at sacred pilgrimage sites, had a much wider audience and so the impression of group solidarity that it generated had the potential for much greater social impact, especially if

the lama is at the centre of the group's focus. The prostration becomes a ritual demonstration of solidarity towards the lama because every time a prostration is performed in front of him (examples of this taking place are during the congregation of lamas in Chapter 5, and the enthronement ceremony in Chapter 7), it becomes an expression of solidarity towards him and the lineage that he represents.

Social Effects

Prostrations performed outside of retreat conditions also have a significant social impact on the monastery. As well as enabling purity to be materialised so that people can see, feel and experience it in very tangible ways, they also reinforce the social hierarchy that exists at the monastery and the social power of institution as a whole. According to Mills (2003), the act of prostrating is one of the most important centres of embodied hierarchy within the monastic setting because prostrations are constitutive of social hierarchy both logically and semantically. Through his analysis of life at a Gelug monastery in Ladakh, Mills suggests that prostrations focus notions of superiority on physical space and reinforce the social hierarchy at the monastery with the lama at the pinnacle. They do so through the vertical organisation of space in a multi-dimensional way through the categorisations of higher and lower, upper and bottom, the latter being specifically related to room organisation. So in the context of the prostration—bowing down to the lama or his representation—it means that one is in a lower position. Then the second is in terms of length and the head is always bowed down towards the upper end of the room and feet towards to bottom of the room. Mills describes how the rooms at his monastery are always organised with the most sacred items or people situated at the upper end of the room and the less pure, mundane elements like the door or the younger monks at the bottom of the room (2003:50).

Mills believes that the main determinant for the up-down/vertical metaphor is the body's rotation in space and goes on to explain this through citing an example of monks watching rites from balconies at large gatherings. He notes that they felt uncomfortable being positioned higher than the rite being performed and so would hide their bodies from view and only leave their heads on show (2003:50). So the monks remain higher and just showing their heads is permissible because their bodies are not in view. Mills goes on to say that one's physical orientation towards sacred spaces becomes the determinant for cognitive disciplines towards them (2003:50). In other words, how the body is positioned and how it moves in relation to a

sacred space such as shrine or a statue shapes and influences feelings and beliefs. Certain movements that position the individual as lower than the sacred space reinforce the social hierarchy, which in the case of the monastery is the authority of the lamas and the belief in purity.

I agree with Mills and my observations of the international students preparing for the retreat and the comments from their interviews used above confirm this view. The students were positioned in a semi-circle facing the shrine room dedicated to the principle of the lama, which included a large photo of Dzogchen Rinpoche. The physical orientation of their bodies and the repeated lowering of themselves down to the ground acted as a constant reminder and reinforcement of the social hierarchy and also their dependency on the lama to achieve their own purity. I am not suggesting here that Dzogchen Rinpoche uses this dependency for his own personal gain. I have yet to see any evidence of that. What I am suggesting is that through embodied worship, the lama and the monastery and lineage that he represents become essential to the students' purification and so cement themselves in the personal landscape of each individual and therefore strengthen their own social positioning, something which they are keen to do in exile.

The ritual of prostrations is also an interesting example of the intersection between technologies of power and technologies of self (Foucault 1983). Through bowing down before the lama or depiction of the lama, the practitioner is enacting humility and reverence. These are not necessarily the internal qualities that they are developing—My conversations with Colin suggest that internal focus can often be elsewhere. Rather, bowing down before the lama is an external act believed to have the power to transform both the internal and the external. Simultaneously, the embodied worship is also an act of acceptance of the spiritual hierarchy—the higher status of the lama and the participants' current lower status. Although the students' status is currently lower than the lama's, this is acknowledged as only temporary because if the student fully realised their own purity, they would be equal to the lama. So the performance of the prostration both is a means to achieve purity and an acceptance of the hierarchy of purity.

Most of the international students who participated in the retreat were familiar with the subordinate relationship to the lama despite it not being a prominent concept within their own societies (five were from European countries and one was from New Zealand). Only Colin,

from New Zealand, was a novice; the rest were either committed students of Dzogchen Rinpoche or had previous experience of Buddhism. However, during that time, their personal contact with Dzogchen Rinpoche was intermittent when he came to give them teachings at their monastery or when they came to India. They had never been immersed in the values that perpetuated the hierarchy of the lama in such a way as they were during the retreat. This was an intense rehearsal of reverence to the lama until it became embodied—until the student's former identity became dissolved. In the next part of the chapter, I look at the second type of embodied worship, *kora*, and continue my exploration of how these types of physical purification practices reinforce the position of the lama and the social power of the monastery.

Kora

Kora, the circumambulation of sacred centres such as a temple or stupa in the belief that one who does so will receive merit and subsequently purity from the object of sacredness is one of the main embodied acts of worship within Tibetan Buddhism and often one of the first visual and physical acts encountered by newcomers to the faith. Whether that first encounter is through a TV documentary or as a tourist to a place of pilgrimage, Tibetans can be seen in their droves walking in clockwise circles around famous temples or around big monasteries using their prayer beads to count the number of prayers they recite. It is considered bad luck to walk in an anti-clockwise direction. According to Dodin (2012), Tibetans who practice Buddhism believe that sacred places, objects and persons emanate a transcendental positive force and that this force can be induced unto the devotees whilst circumambulating them. At my field site, I interpreted that force to be purity and the worshippers strove to transcend their ordinary bodies and obtain a pure body like the lama.

Examples of major pilgrimage sites where *kora* is performed are around Mount Kailash in Tibet, considered by Tibetans to be the most sacred mountain in the world where it takes at least a day to walk the full circle around its base. Bodhgaya in North India, where the Buddha attained enlightenment under the Bodhi tree and pilgrims walk in long pious processions around the shrine that has been built on the site, and in Dharamasala, the location of the Dalai Lama's personal compound and associated monastery. When I visited Dharamasala for the first time in 2004, all guide books and conversations with other travellers informed me that a walk around the compound walls was a must for any visitor. Ekvall (1960:46) and Nowak (1984) both suggest that the very physical orientation of submission, physical acts of merit

accumulation such as kora, devotion, homage and offering to Buddhist and various other supernatural authorities has become emblematic of Tibetanness in the face of threatening social change. In the rest of this chapter, I will explore the social effects of performing kora, its role in unifying the community at my field site, and strengthening the social position of Dzogchen Rinpoche and the monastery.

At Dzogchen Monastery, there were two main routes of kora. The first was around the temple and the second was around the eight stupas present at the monastery. For the monks, kora was practised in the early evening for a number of practical reasons: Firstly, the heat of the day made it uncomfortable to walk in the sun as many of the monks were used to a cooler climate in the Himalayas. Secondly, if the monks were part of the shedra, the academic section, their daily schedule was so full of philosophy or debate classes that the evening was their only free time. Kora, according to Tsering introduced in Chapter 6, was a positive way to break from studying and would also help them accumulate merit to help with their studies. If the monks were part of the dratsang, the section of the monastery dedicated to prayer rather than philosophical studies, their schedules were equally as busy but instead of being inside the monastic compound, they were out in the villages performing prayers and rituals that had been specifically requested through the village leader to the monastery. These prayers were often for the sick or dying, or for the farmers to encourage a rainfall during the dry season or to ensure a successful harvest. When the dratsang monks returned after a day of prayer, they were less inclined to continue their recitations around the temple and were more likely to be found on the basketball court or playing cricket in front of their accommodation block. However, members of both groups of monks periodically could be seen walking around the temple with the younger monks who had been assigned to their care.

Villagers would often join the kora route. A handful of villagers were present at the start of the day; some on their way after walking their children to school or before the working day began but most were present towards dusk. The biggest number of participants would come from the retired demographic—women featured more than men. Young children often accompanied the women but it was rare to see a group of teenagers or young men and women in their twenties performing kora.¹⁷⁹ It was not unsurprising that older residents participated more frequently

¹⁷⁹ I enquired to Dolma, one of the staff at the old people's home located slightly down the hill from the monastery which had been partly funded by DSSCS (the charity based at the monastery) as to why that was. She replied that

than the younger ones as they had more free time and were not required to work. International students also joined in the kora routes during their breaks from the retreat schedule or in the evening. The daily retreat schedule would normally finish at dinnertime and so the rest of the evening would be free for personal practice. Kora was a popular option as it allowed people to stretch their legs after being seated cross legged performing the various prayers and listening to religious instruction for much of the day.

the young people really weren't interested in religious practice these days. They were busy with school and were interested in music and sports. Older, retired people had a lot more time and enjoyed saying their prayers. She joked that they were closer to death and perhaps had more to worry about? This conversation took place in the courtyard of the old people's home where at least 80% of the 30 plus residents were sat either on low stools, on the wall of the pond or on cushions on the ground either spinning their prayers wheels or reciting mantra on their malas. Dolma had just shown me around the OPH and I noticed that there was a shrine within most rooms. One end of the dining room had been converted into a large shrine room and Dolma informed me that the residents gathered daily for prayer. Over the course of my fieldwork, most of the conversations that I had with the teenagers from the villages focused on popular culture: sport, music, films and the like, and where I was from and what I was doing there. It seemed to be the general assumption that religious practice was for the elderly and if someone younger did have religious inclinations then they would become a monk or a nun.

The Stupas



Fig. 8.2 Source: Author's own

International students performing kora around the stupas

There were eight stupas at the monastery, each 41 feet high, and at least 20 feet wide and deep, situated down the hill to the east of the temple. The stupas were white constructions built with a square base and a domed top; each one crowned with gold. Around the stupas was a small path approximately a metre wide that allowed the monks and villagers to walk their circular route around all eight. The sacredness of the stupas was hidden from the newcomer—there were no statues or religious icons on show as in the temple. Only in the first and last stupas were indications of their holy status as they housed giant prayer wheels (at least seven feet high and four feet wide), which could be turned as people walked past. The gold plated wheels were engraved with the “eight auspicious symbols”: pictorial representations of some of the most important items of offering to the Buddhas (a conch shell for the offering of pure sound, or a pair of golden fish to symbolise freedom from the ocean of samsara (Beer 2003). As the wheel is turned, these offerings spin round in a clockwise direction and, as one informant told me, they spin out across the world blessing everything they encounter and are a wonderful offering

to the Buddhas.¹⁸⁰ However, it was never questioned amongst anyone I met whether or not they were indeed pure structures. Every monk and resident from the settlement believed in their purity. In a 2002 edition of the monastery's magazine, Dzogchen News, I found an article on the stupas: when they were first being built explaining how the stupas became sacred structures. The process has similarities to the ritual of rabnye and I have included some extracts below to provide further detail for the reader. However, this detail was not known by everyone within the monastery. Their purity was generally assumed.

“In order to be considered suitable objects that will provide people with the means to accumulate merit, relics are placed inside each stupa. The stupas are filled with millions of mantras, magnitude of texts, images and sacred objects. The mantra (for the monastery's stupas) are printed in Bangalore and brought to the monastery.” (Dzogchen News 2002:21)

The article went on to explain how good fortune and purity could be generated by association to the stupas:

“Such objects give raise to faith and create conditions for beings to attain liberation through the four means of seeing, hearing, remembering and touching the names, qualities and forms of the Buddhas and bodhisattvas. It is said that walking round the stupas is one of the greatest ways to accumulate merit.” (Dzogchen Monastery News 2002:21)

As well as filling the stupas with sacred objects to generate the required level of sacredness, the area where the stupas was built was also subjected to various religious rites designed to remove impurities. In Dzogchen News (2002), there is a description of how Dzogchen Rinpoche, head of the monastery, performed a Salong ceremony: a specific religious ritual that involves requesting the nagas (snake like creatures that are thought to live in trees and water) and local deities (in this context, any other god-like being who resides on the local land) for permission to build in the monastery compound. It is worth mentioning at this point that Tibetan Buddhists of the Dzogchen tradition hold both the orthodox Buddhist cosmological view of the six

¹⁸⁰ It took quite an exertion to get these giant prayer wheels moving but once in motion, the wheel sounded a bell on completion of every turn. The younger monks enjoyed the challenge of building up speed and making the bell ring as loudly and as frequently as possible, which, if achieved was very noisy and sent the stray dogs who roamed the compound into a bit of a frenzy, much to the young monk's amusement.

realms¹⁸¹ of existence that all sentient beings pass through within the cycle of life and death, and also are heavily influenced by their shamanic heritage of the Bon religious system that was practised in Tibet prior to the introduction of Buddhism in the 8th Century (Ramble 2008). The Bon tradition holds a three-tier view of the world: the underworld, the earthly world, and the heavenly world. It suggests that various beings and gods live within each world and humans, if they wish to live in peace, must supplicate and placate them (Goldstein and Kapstein 1998).¹⁸² As mentioned earlier, all this detail was not widely known and so the next section considers the motivation for participating in kora.

Embodied Worship and Political Expression

During my fieldwork, I would often participate in kora. At first, I would exchange greetings when walking amongst villagers and ask them how many laps they were doing, expecting that there would be a certain amount they would have to perform. This expectation came from watching television documentaries but was reinforced by reading Makley (2003) and her study on the gendered boundaries that kora created at Labrang Monastery in southwest Gansu province in China. Here, Makley found that there was a circumambulation standard of 10,000 circuits that the villagers set out to achieve. Each circuit of the monastic compound took at least an hour to complete at an average walking pace so 10,000 of these was a serious commitment of both time and physical exertion. At Dzogchen Monastery there was no accessible path around the compound so walking around the temple was the main route for kora and the temple although substantial was not huge and one circuit could be completed in five minutes or less. After a while, I stopped asking how many times people were walking around because no one had a particular target to reach. They would often just be there for the certain amount of time that they had free that day or until it got dark and they needed to get home. This finding is not surprising as there are clear differences between Dzogchen and Labrang Monastery in Makley's research. Labrang Monastery was one of the main political centres of the region and as Makley described in her study, circumambulating the compound

¹⁸¹ The six realms are the hell realm, the hungry ghost realm, the animal realm, the human realm, the demi god realm and the god realm.

¹⁸² The magazine article also describes how Dzogchen Ganor Tulku, another prominent lama from the Dzogchen tradition, was invited by the monastery to perform the ceremony of Nen Tsek Pang Sum, a complex ritual specifically to seal away impure forces and evil spirits beneath the foundations of the stupas. Dzogchen Ganor Tulku instructed the monks to dig a triangular hole under each of the stupas foundations and then through various prayers and commandments, subjugated the impurity and evil spirits into these holes. Nen Tsek Pang Sum also included a fire ceremony where wooden planks were stacked at least six feet high and tormas, brightly painted symbolic cakes made of flour and water, offerings to the *nagas* were thrown onto the fire to be burnt.

(much of which is being rebuilt after being destroyed during the Cultural Revolution) was also an act of social and political significance reinforcing old borders and creating new political boundaries and spaces. The villagers who walked around the monastic compound were being watched and monitored constantly by Chinese police, so kora became a physical act of defiance.

The specific political tensions observed by Makley were not present at Dzogchen Monastery. The kora performed by the villagers took place within the grounds rather than around the outside the monastery, so the audience of this act of worship was limited to those already connected to the monastery and inside the grounds rather than lots of political figures or armed forces. That said, the monastery is located in Karnataka, South India, so it exists within a predominantly Hindu space and because of its exile status, there are still political tensions between the Tibetan community and the local Indian population. However, there were only occasional visits to the monastery by Indians and I rarely observed interactions between Indians and the community. Therefore, the main consideration for this chapter is how kora reinforces the notions of authority and purity at the monastery and unites the community under the leadership of the lama. A point that particularly interests me is the rotation of the body in space and how this is linked to notions of purity as introduced through Mills (2010) in the first half of this chapter. So far in my research I have discussed the body's relationship to the material items within the space, the centres of sacredness, such as the shrine or statues, how they are constructed socially, and the part they play in the social processes that create embodiment. I have provided examples of spatial orientation that contribute to the hierarchy of purity. A high position equals pure; a low position equals impurity. This is a hierarchy that was also found in Mary Douglas' (1970) research and her spatial organisations of front/back, high/low. I will now add a further dimension to this analysis and look at the relationship between the centre of the space in question and the periphery. According to Makley (2003), in places of worship, the centre of the space is considered the most pure and therefore is prioritised. The impure periphery is considered to be much lower in the order of importance and purity. Makley (*ibid*) suggests that the first reason for completing kora is the personal benefit received by the person performing the movement.

“Kora is the practice par excellence for bringing the body into sustained and close contact with a sacred centre, thereby absorbing oneself some of the physically manifest benefits of the centre’s power” (Makley 2003:601).

By repeatedly walking around a sacred centre as close as is possible, the person becomes the recipient of the centre’s power or, as I propose, its purity. The second reason is that mass participation and repetition of kora actually increase the centricity and power of the monastery. Makely’s work demonstrates how the monastery becomes a key focal point for the lay community and also a declaration of strength to the observing Chinese officials.¹⁸³ There have been a number of other studies that demonstrate how kora is used by the Tibetan community to express themselves politically and publically. Schwartz (1994) observed how kora around the Bhakor Market around the Jokhang Temple in Lhasa, one of the most sacred sites in the capital city of Tibet, was transformed into a political protest. He argued that not only was kora a way to gain merit for the individual when joined with political protest, it also became a merit making initiative for the Tibetan nation in general.

Marvin (2013), during his fieldwork in Lhasa, observed how ethnic Tibetans use kora to fight back against Han colonialism by “grounding a Tibetan spacial imagery within a Han controlled public space” (2013:1468). Han Chinese now dominate the Tibetan capital city through decades of redevelopment; the Tibetan area with Tibetan style buildings and temples now only makes up 2% of the city. By repeatedly performing kora around the last remaining holy sites within the city, the Tibetans renew the city’s stance as a centre of Tibetan sacredness and purity on a daily basis counteracting the influence of the Han migrants and reclaiming their own space within the landscape (Marvin 2013:1468).

At Dzogchen Monastery, the performance of kora re-empowers and reanimates the image of the pure lama within the wider community. At other monasteries, villagers are often prevented from entering the monastic grounds or made to walk around the exterior of the compound but Dzogchen Monastery has a more open policy where the villagers and international students are regularly permitted to visit. This enables wider engagement and any interaction with the centres of sacredness will be of much closer proximity. The closer one is to the temple, stupa

¹⁸³ Chinese police or government officials.

or statue, the more the transmission of purity is increased. This proximity also acts as a reminder of the authority of the lama and reinforces the dependency of the individual upon the lama for purity. This plays an important role in maintaining the power of the monastery, particularly as Dzogchen Rinpoche is absent from the monastery on his teaching tours for much of the year. If villagers or monks were kept at a distance from these centres of sacredness, there is a possibility that the power of the lama would wane because they only have contact with the impure periphery. If, however, they are allowed regular access to the pure space at the heart of the monastery, they are continually reminded of the lama's purity and his status at the top of the religious hierarchy and are given the opportunity to embody purity themselves.

What I hope to have demonstrated in this chapter is that the relationship between the body's spatial rotation and purity, i.e. the proximity to a pure centre or an impure periphery, is created through the specific embodied worship of kora and prostrations which both enables the individual to become a step closer to achieving their own purity and also reinforces notions of purity and authority at the monastery. This additional aspect reconfirms a recurring theme in my work that purity is not defined simply in opposition to impurity—as structuralist accounts might have had it (Durkheim (1912), Levi-Strauss (1978), Durmont (1966) Douglas (1970))—but more fluidly in relation to shifting relationships between people and between people and objects.

Chapter 9 The Immaterial Body

Throughout this thesis, I have illustrated the rituals performed at Dzogchen Monastery used to generate purity and its subsequent embodiment. The ritual of rabnye is used to sanctify statues within the temple and purity is believed to be passed from the lama into the statues and consequently to the congregation. The khatag exchange ritual performed during the enthronement of two young lamas allows the transmission of purity from lama to disciple. The embodied worship of prostrations and kora around the temple and stupas creates centres of sacredness and power and reinforces the social hierarchy at the monastery. In addition to the ritual focus, the social organisation of the monastery is dependent upon the embodiment of purity: those who are deemed to embody purity sit at the top of the hierarchy and reside over those who don't. Purity and the encoded behaviour associated with it hold influence over all aspects of life at the monastery. The embodiment of purity and the worship of the lama, who is deemed to be the purest of all, are the central focus for the monks, the international students and the lay villagers who all interact together within the monastic compound.

In this penultimate chapter, I will introduce a further element of the embodiment of the three kayas: a non-physical condition that occurs through dissolution of the body and the mind. What I understand it to mean, in terms of how my informants perceived it and how I observed the community approach it, is a “bodiless state” or “bodilessness”. I name this the “immaterial body”. The idea of bodilessness is firmly rooted in Buddhist academia and philosophy. Countless books have been written on the processes by which to achieve the full embodiment of three kayas and, in particular to the Dzogchen tradition, the dissolution (Norbu 1999, Depraz 2003). (For further information see Allione 2000, Blackman 1997, Norbu 2010, Tulku Urgyen 1995.) My analysis is focused on the expression of this religious idea within the rituals performed at the monastery and how this affects the monastic hierarchy—How this dissolution affects the hierarchy of purity, how it affects the agency and authority of the lama, and how it shapes his social and political influence.

Bodilessness is only possible through the dissolution of the physical realm and one's own body. Dissolution is a fundamental practice within Dzogchen Buddhism and acts as the conclusion to all rituals, all prayers and all ceremonies. In this chapter, I look at the mandala offering ritual, a merit making ceremony that assists in the realisation of purity but has the dissolving of the universe and oneself as a primary focus. A mandala is a set of three bowls,

made from copper, bronze or silver. The bowls are filled with rice and jewels and symbolise the universe, according to the Buddhist cosmological view. The mandala offering is made to the lama and the three pure bodies. The word mandala can be broken into two parts: manda means the “essence”, and la means “taking hold of”. Combined, this means to take hold of, to accomplish the very essence of dharma (Brauen 1997).



Figure 9.1. Source: <http://www.abqktc.org/>
Mandala Offering Set

In addition to the ritual of the mandala offering, I explore how dissolution is present in other rituals and other aspects of life at the monastery; for example, the chanting of the prayers, ritual food offerings known as tsok (food feasts) and even in the decoration of the monastic buildings. All of these are very tangible, physical objects, buildings or processes. I consider why bodilessness, something that is intangible, an idea that is wholly non-physical, is expressed in physical, material form. What is the purpose? What are the social and political effects? I also discuss why the monastic community place so much emphasis on embodying purity if the ultimate aim is for everything to be dissolved. Why go to such great lengths, through elaborate ceremonies, through hugely painful repetitions of embodied worship, if the universe and one’s own body are to be dissolved? Why not just dissolve it straight away? In the

next section, I look at the importance of the mandala offering and include ethnographic description of the mandalas being created pre-the three-month retreat for international students.

Mandala Offering

It was January 2010 and a particularly busy time for the monastery. The temple restoration was well under way and labourers, craftsmen and painters worked all day and late into the night. The three-month retreat discussed in the previous chapter was also about to take place and preparations at the retreat centre were in full swing. As well as preparing the accommodation, the retreat team were ensuring that each retreatant had the correct equipment; for example, the board to do the prostrations on. Each person was also going to be given their own copper mandala offering set: three bowls that would be filled with rice and precious stones used as a merit-making offering. A mandala symbolises the universe (Leidy 1997); the practitioner performs the offering ritual as a demonstration of non-attachment offering the universe and everything in it, including oneself, to the lama. This is part of the generation phase of the ritual is also known as the visualisation phase (in Tibetan Kyerim and in Sanskrit utpattikrama) (Harding 2002). The mandala would be set up at the start of the retreat and then taken apart at the end upon completion of the three months. The taking apart is called the dissolution, also known as the completion phase (in Tibetan Dzogrim and Sanskrit sampannakrama) (Harding 2002). At this point, the whole universe, including one's own body, is visualised as being dissolved. A practitioner who has been striving to achieve a pure body through the very physical means of conducting 100,000 prostrations during the three-month retreat is then aspiring to dissolve their own body. So the ultimate pure body that the practitioner is aiming for is actually a bodiless state, a non-physical condition. This adds a new purpose to the rituals that I have described so far in this thesis, which have all been focused on purifying the physical body and on the transference of purity into material items that assist in the pursuit of a pure body. The concentration on the material and physical shifts to the ethereal and to the attainment of a non-bodily existence—to be bodiless.

The bowls for the mandala set were being made in the makeshift workshops set up in the monastery grounds, which were also being used to create the throne and statue ornamentation for the temple. The workshops, two double-roomed buildings, were located slightly down the hillside behind the shop and the soon to be constructed health clinic. The workmen were all from Nepal and had travelled down to the monastery specifically to complete this project. They

slept, ate and worked there and their mattresses for their beds doubled up as seats from which they would work throughout the day.

The buildings had previously been used as storage space by a small group of carpet weavers, but as carpet production had decreased considerably that year, they were no longer required.¹⁸⁴ The first building had a veranda outside where two or three coppersmiths sat on their folded mattresses during the day, working and listening to their personal stereos. The left hand room was part storage space, part living space. As you walked through the door, there was a gas stove just to the right by the front window; there was a table with crockery stacked upon it and more mattresses folded and placed to one side. The back of the room was full of copper ornamentations stacked against the back wall. The second room was mostly for storage and another workman used it to sit in whilst he moulded the copper. The second building housed the copper melting machine.

¹⁸⁴ According to Tsering, a couple of the women were unavailable this year due to family illness and they hadn't found anyone to replace them.

Fig. 9.2, 9.3, 9.4, 9.5 (left to right) Source: Author's own
The Copper Smiths' Workshop—Veranda



Fig. 9.6, 9.7, 9.8 (left to right) Source: Author's own
The Copper Smiths' Workshop—Room



Much of the segments for the statues (discussed in Chapter 6) were treated as mundane items whilst in production, so too were the mandalas. They were created on the floor, moulded and shaped in a non-sanctimonious fashion and stored piled on top of each other. The behaviour rules associated with the high/low, front/back dimensions of purity, seen so often throughout my fieldwork and within rituals, were yet to apply. I wondered whether a special ceremony, like rabnye for the statues, would be conducted in order to purify the offering sets before use and so I enquired with Tsering.

“Not for the mandala, no; nothing as big. But Rinpoche-La will bless them...he will say some mantra or some prayers and bless them. You know, with the rice.”

At this point, Tsering gesticulated grabbing a handful of rice and throwing it in the air. Similar types of “rice throwing” had been performed in many of the rituals that I had observed. The lama would throw rice onto the shrine, onto a tangka (religious art) and even on to the congregation seated in front of his throne. I tried to clarify with Tsering what the significance of the rice was. If an object needed to be purified, why didn’t the lama just touch it (I felt it would be easier as I had seen the monks painstakingly sweeping up the rice after the ritual had ended)? Or was the rice symbolic of something? He thought for a while and then responded:

“Actually the rice is pure. It comes from the lama so the rice is pure. When it touches the mandala, then the mandala is pure. So if you see Rinpoche-La throwing some rice, yeah? Then you should try and get your head under it!”

He laughed and moved as if he was heading a football and laughed even more. He went on to say, “If the rice touches your head, then this is really good, you get pure.”

The Dzogchen community believe that the head is the most sacred part of the body (as seen in the last three chapters in the rabnye and the khatag exchange rituals and prostrations) and so if the pure rice from the pure lama touches the head, it is thought to increase the purity of the person even more. As seen in the rabnye ritual, purity is thought to be passed from both person to person and person to object. Here, Tsering describes how the purity is passed from the lama into objects demonstrating how purity is believed to permeate boundaries and to be a transferable and durable quality. The lama does not lose any purity by transmitting it. In the

eyes of his followers, he remains just as pure as before. I wondered why rice was chosen to perform this task and also whether it was a particular kind of rice. My questions seemed a bit too obvious for Tsering but he humoured me:

“We have rice so we use rice; lots of rice in India! But we used it back in Bhutan too. It’s quite good to throw; it goes quite far. But actually, we don’t eat this rice because it is soaked in saffron, ...precious spice and also in the mandala, when you make it up, you can put some precious stones, some jewels, so it’s not just ordinary rice.”

There are also formal instructions for how to set up the mandala offering and the cleaning that is required beforehand to ensure that it is a pure offering. The mandala base is sprinkled with perfumed water and cleaned with the underside of the wrist. Frequently followed instructions can be found in “The Words of My Perfect Teacher” (Patrul 1994) and an extract from them is below:

“Holding the offering mandala base with your left hand, slowly wipe it with the underside of your right wrist whilst you recite the ...prayers without ever being distracted from what you are visualising. This wiping of the base is not only to clean away any dirt on the mandala base; it is also a way of using the effort we put into this task to rid ourselves of ...obscurations... The story goes that the great Kadampas of old (Eastern Tibet) cleaned their mandalas with the undersides of their wrists until the skin was worked through and sores started to form. They still carried on, using the edge of their wrists instead. So when you clean the mandala base, do not use a woollen or cotton cloth but only your wrist like the great Kadampas of the past.”
(Patrul 1994:286)

Undergoing physical hardships to realise one’s own purity within oneself or establish purity within an object is a recurrent action within the rituals that I observed at Dzogchen Monastery. The accumulation of prostrations, the full-length bow described in the previous chapter, is just one example of this. Repeated movements are part of an action-orientated pedagogy and are used to enable the embodiment of purity and create ritualised agents (Samuels 2004, 2005). In a similar way to the ballet dancers of Wainwright and Turner’s (2004) study, the boxers in Wacquant’s (2004) study of an amateur club in a Chicago ghetto and the ultimate fighters of Spencer’s (2013) ethnography in the mixed martial arts clubs in Ontario, Quebec, and in

Florida, USA, recurrent body movements create a habitus (Bourdieu 1977); the movements are learnt through repeated doing becoming automatic and contribute to the embodiment of cultural values and ideals. However, the purpose of the mandala offering is that this must all become undone; the body must be dissolved and the physical experience that was so painstakingly created must be let go.

Mandala offering Mudra

If a mandala offering set is not available to the practitioner, it is possible to use a symbolic hand gesture known as a mudra to represent the offering. Mudra is Sanskrit and in Tibetan they are called chakgya. The community at the monastery used the Sanskrit term rather than the Tibetan. Mudras are found in both Hindu and Buddhist rituals and also in Indian classical dance or Japanese tea ceremonies. For the mandala offering mudra, the fingers of both hands are crossed together to form a central point and four additional points around the centre. This symbolises the centre of the universe, Mount Meru, and the four compass directions (Leidy 1997). This is illustrated in the diagram below.



Fig. 9.9 Source: <http://www.berzinarchives.com/>
The Mandala Offering Mudra

This is one of the most basic mudras. Students are taught this as soon as they start reciting the morning prayers, or ngondro (explained on page 176). This is taught as part of the action-based pedagogy. The new student will watch those seated next to them during the prayers and copy or ask for further advice afterwards.¹⁸⁵ When it is taught in this way, detail about the symbolism of the mudra is overlooked. However, there are occasions when the instructions are taken more seriously and in early January 2013, a workshop led by the Umze was being held in

¹⁸⁵ I was taught the mandala mudra by my mother when I first became interested in Buddhism and so already knew it when I went to the monastery to conduct my fieldwork.

the shedra [university] teaching hall. A small group of new students were sat in front of the Umze watching him perform the mudra a number of times. I joined them and sat at the back of the group. He spent time with each one, ensuring that their fingers were in the right position, and explained how each point symbolised part of the universe. He then came to describe the end of the mudra offering, the dissolution part. Here is a summary of his instructions:

To dissolve the mandala, turn both your hands towards you. Let them drop down and let go of the fingers. Turn your hands in a full circle so that you finish with your palms open in front of you, facing away from you. As your fingers let go of each other, this is when you visualise that the universe dissolves. So you made the universe by bringing your fingers together and now as they pull apart then you visualise the universe dissolving. As you complete the mudra and your hands are outstretched this is when everything is completely dissolved including yourself and your body.

So just as in the instructions for using the mandala offering set, the dissolution is of both the universe and oneself. One's own body is dissolved. Although the instruction to visualise the dissolution of the universe implies that the dissolution is figurative rather than actual, there is also a perceived breakdown of the boundaries between literal and metaphysical realities. So what is being visualised becomes actual and one's own body dissolves. As the workshop ended, I spoke to my friend Molly who had been in attendance. Molly and I had worked together for the UK branch of the monastery's charity so knew each other well. I asked her about the dissolution; in particular, dissolving her own body and how she found visualising it. She responded that she did find all the detail of the visualisations in general quite hard to remember whilst staying relaxed, and when combined with having to perform a mudra, the detail sometimes became lost. She explained that her main focus was imagining that everything turned into lots of coloured light, a bit like a rainbow, so not solid and then faded away into total light. I asked her what she thought the dissolution of the body meant, how it made her feel and, whether she thought she could attain it.

If I'm completely honest, I'm not sure I know exactly, but that doesn't bother me too much because I don't think that it is something that you can understand. It's beyond the mind. Your mind will dissolve along with your body. I don't know whether it's something that I can

achieve in this life. Perhaps you need to dedicate more time than I do. I don't always do my practices. Life gets in the way. It isn't as easy to do them back home as it is in the monastery.

I asked her what kept her motivated. Why pursue something that she didn't understand fully?

Rinpoche is a great motivation. He has accomplished so much and he will be the example of how to dissolve, you know, when he passes away... Plus, the little that I do do, it helps me. I feel more peaceful and happier. So it can't be a bad thing.

The main opportunity for dissolution will come at death. The lamas, monks, villagers and international students believe that they will have the opportunity to attain bodilessness when they pass away. Life is spent pursuing the embodiment of purity; and then at death, bodilessness. According to the Buddhist religious teachings there is an opportunity in life to achieve bodilessness but I could not find anyone who could testify to its possibility, i.e. if it had been witnessed. In January 2012, Dzogchen Rinpoche gave a public teaching on the different types of bardos (states of being) that humans experience and he spoke of the possibility of dissolving one's body whilst still alive and in the Kyenay bardo. Tibetan Buddhism cites six bardos (Fremantle 2001) that a human passes through in their journey through life, death and rebirth; the kyenay bardo is from birth until death. In all bardos, in life and in death, the lama remains a central focus. The embodiment of purity in life and then bodilessness in death. At the time of writing, Dzogchen Rinpoche was 50 years old and in good health. He may or may not achieve bodilessness, my research will not extend that long, but the belief that he will is dominant amongst his followers. It is this belief that unifies the three main groups at the monastery and supports the lama's place at the top of the social hierarchy.

The All-encompassing Mandala

In addition to the three-month retreat, mandala offerings are also made during the start of teaching retreats and empowerments conducted by Dzogchen Rinpoche and then "dissolved" at the end of the events. The offering was made before the enthronement ceremony described in Chapter 7, before the congregation of lamas described in Chapter 5 and it is part of the morning prayers of all the monks and international students. The mandala offering can also be made of sand, probably the most well known type of mandala, as various monastic groups around the world often complete the mandala in public. The monks will spend up to a week carefully

placing sand in a complex, colourful design of the mandala, symbolic of the Buddhist view of the universe, which will then be brushed together into the centre of the design, gathered up and thrown into a nearby river or lake. This disposal of the sand, after painstakingly creating the image, symbolises the impermanence of life in samsara (the circle of life, death and rebirth) and how everything that comes together will ultimately dissolve (Bryant 2003).



Fig. 9.10 Source: <http://www.bbc.co.uk/news/uk-england-wiltshire-24383615>
Monks Creating Sand Mandala

The Buddhist view of universe, as depicted by the mandala, is particularly detailed and each aspect of it is steeped in symbolism. For example, the colours correspond to compass points; realms of being are connected to the Buddha and his different emanations, which are positioned against elements (Bryant 2003). However, unless the practitioner is particularly well educated in Buddhist philosophy and cosmology, which at my field site was only true of the more senior monks, they have a much simpler view of the universe whilst performing a mandala offering. Of course each person's visualisation of the universe would differ during the ritual but after speaking with a number of the international students, it was clear that the majority held a broad sense of something that symbolised the universe, rather than the finer details.

This type of understanding, the knowledge that a complex organised system of Buddhist symbols and rules existed (but instead of a broader sense, a simplified awareness of the greater picture was used), was common across most of the rituals I observed. It was also the case

regarding the layout of monastery, which, as I described in Chapter 3, followed certain positional rules according to the Indian architectural system of *Vas Tu* and the Buddhist practice of dedicating all aspects of the building to the lama. The overall effect of the monastic compound's organisation was that the monastery itself was similar to a mandala. The temple acted as the centre of the inhabitant's universe. The decoration of buildings and the associated symbolism was all encompassing. The rituals that consecrated the buildings and sanctified their contents (statues, thrones and shrines) strengthened the position of the lama at the top of the social hierarchy and the establishment of *kora* routes around the sacred centres reinforced the social importance of the monastery as whole. However, this in-depth understanding of the organisation was not referred to on a daily basis, neither by the monks nor by the international students. Instead, it remained an idea that was accepted. The monastery was a sacred environment because of a number of ritual and philosophical based reasons but it was not scrutinised explicitly by those who lived there.¹⁸⁶

The overall effect of this type of knowledge was that questions were seldom asked and the ideology was more likely to be believed. This is one of the reasons why I think the bodiless state was so readily accepted as a target for practitioners. A bodiless state is not tangible and although it is believed to be achievable, it cannot really be understood with the intellectual mind. It relies on faith and on belief, which of course is not unusual for a religious group. However, for the three distinct groups at the monastery, the monks, the international students and the lay villagers to experience any degree of cohesion, this faith or belief must have expression in something other than the mind to bring them together physically. The out of reach must become tangible in some way, and in the case of Dzogchen Monastery, it was broken down into physical actions, into rituals of creation and dissolution, of embodiment and then the bodiless. Esoteric ideas and concepts were given physical form, which in turn enables the practitioner to accept the bodiless state and the possibility of its achievement. Purity related rituals also act as signposts on the journey of getting to bodilessness; they break up that journey into manageable stages so that one can see progress being made along the way.

The various ritual behaviours outlined in this thesis demonstrate how the diverse community at my field site achieved enough temporary unity during the rituals that it allowed their obvious

¹⁸⁶ I note that each person would have their own way of understanding of this concept and that there would also be cultural differences between the groups. For example, for some it might be faith based. However, as discussed in Chapter 1, I have deliberately not followed this line of enquiry into the feelings and emotions of the students because of my position within the charity and my concern for bias. See page 48 for further details.

differences to be suspended on a day-to-day basis. It allowed householders to mix with monastics, men to integrate with women, Tibetans living in exile in India to cohabit with different nationalities from around the world.

I am cautious here that there is a danger that my analysis could appear to be far too functionalist and that I seem to be over simplifying the many different reasons why each person at the monastery participates in these rituals. I am aware that simplification is reductionist and can ignore historical, social and political factors that continuously have an impact on the rituals, the performers and the audiences, shaping their experiences and the results. However, political and social factors are not ignored here; they are ever present and represented by the form of the lama. The cyclical existence of embodiment to achieve bodilessness and then rebirth into the physical realm if not successful is entirely dependent upon the lama.

Amongst other factors discussed earlier in the thesis, the political tensions between the monastery in Tibet and the rest of the lineage, the threat by the Chinese authorities impressed on the monks, the social influences of operating the monastery in exile in Karnataka, and of course the international network of Dzogchen, all contribute to a highly social and political situation within which the lama is a central focus. Although monasticism within Tibet pre-Cultural Revolution was practised in a more secluded environment, this is not something that can be duplicated within exile. If the monastery wishes to regain the social and political influence that it held within Tibet and to rebuild the monastery to the size of the original Dzogchen Monastery, which it has publically stated that it does, then it must fully engage socially and politically.

Other dissolution rituals

The act of dissolution is also found within a number of other rituals at the monastery; in particular, within the tsok ritual. Tsok is a purification practice when food, drink and tormas [ritual cake] are offered in abundance to appease local land spirits and purify the environment. It is also used to make offerings to the lineage lamas and accumulate merit. The full title of the ritual is tsok kyi khorlo. Tsok translates as “an accumulation” or “a gathering, an assembly or group”, and the word khorlo means “wheel”, so the full title literally translates as “wheel of accumulation.” (Kontrul 1998). The Sanskrit word for tsok practice is ganachakra (*ibid* 1998).

The tsok ritual is part of the Vajrayana tradition of Tibetan Buddhism (see page 67 for a full explanation of Vajrayana). Local spirits or deities are believed to hold influence over the success of the monastery's activities and those of individuals. Tibetans perform tsok regularly on the 10th and 25th days of the Tibetan month to ensure impurities are removed and negative spirits are pacified to allow the generation of purity. Tibetans follow a lunar calendar and tsok days are on lunar significant days (when the energy of the moon is considered to be the most auspicious or powerful): the 10th day corresponds to the waxing moon and the 25th day corresponds to the waning moon.¹⁸⁷

Tsok is also performed at the completion of a teaching or retreat to signify one's gratitude in receiving a teaching or the blessings of the practice (Kyentse 1984). Buddhist ritual practices are either categorised as a method for accumulating merit and wisdom or for purification of the body and mind. The two methods are thought to work together; if the practitioner accumulates merit and wisdom, then impurities automatically decrease. By offering food and drink within the tsok, the practitioner is believed to accumulate merit and in doing so enables self-purification (Kyentse 1984).

During tsok, specific offerings in the form of tormas are made to the peaceful and wrathful deities believed to inhabit the land. Tormas are sacrificial cakes made from dough, coloured using food dye and decorated with symbolic emblems. According to Beer (2003), the concept of the torma derives from the ancient Indian sacrificial offering known as the bali. The word torma actually comes from the root Tibetan word of tor-ba, meaning to cast away or scatter; it symbolises giving without attachment. Each day, the tormas are offered to the local spirits and then must be recreated each evening by the choepen and his assistants. This can take several hours depending on the complexity and size of the tormas. Once the torma has been offered, the practitioners will perform the main visualisation and dissolution. The following is a short outline of the visualisation that makes up the dissolution part of the tsok and enables the student to achieve union with the three kayas and the bodiless state. The following points have been gathered from informal discussions with international students (predominantly Isabelle, Jenny and Suzanne) and by listening to public teachings by Dzogchen Rinpoche.

The physical image of the lama is visualised above the crown of the head, seated on a lotus.

The mind of the lama represents the dharmakaya, the ultimate mind. The lama's speech is

¹⁸⁷ The tsok is also performed on days associated with Padmasambhava and the Dakini's [female wisdom holders].

symbolic of the sambhogakaya, the ultimate energy level, and his form is the nirmanakaya, the purest physical form (the three kayas are explained in Chapter 5). The symbolic parts of the body that represent the kayas (the forehead for body, the throat for speech and the heart for the mind) are also lit up with the sacred syllables that represent purity. These syllables transmit the purity of the three kayas unto the person visualising and then the visualisation is dissolved into the crown of the head. The body and the whole universe are then dissolved into light.

The monastery holds a festival Every year called Tsok Boom where tsok is performed 100,000 times. The monks are joined by villagers and monks from other monasteries in the settlement. Unfortunately, the festival always fell earlier in the year, outside of the time I was permitted to conduct research. Instead, I observed smaller scale tsoks performed as part of the retreats for the international students; these lasted two-three hours. I also observed a tsok for the opening of the temple, which was accompanied by a mountain of food, at least two metres high, that was divided up amongst all of the attendees.

In addition to tsok, the practice of dissolution can also be found with the performance of prayers and chanting. Typically, prayers at the monastery are recited out loud and accompanied by music from drums, cymbals and horns. One person is in charge of the chanting, the Umze, starting every prayer. The rest of the congregation join in with the chanting about three syllables later. They also finish every prayer and hold the last note considerably longer than every else. This didn't strike me as particularly unusual or something to investigate further as it seemed necessary for someone to lead the chanting and hold the group together. My husband, a musician who often joined me on my fieldwork, underwent training to become an Umze,¹⁸⁸ he explained that it was the Umze's role to create and then dissolve the prayer.

“When you start the prayer, you hold the first note and the first syllable for a minimum of three beats, or as long as you can. The better the chanter you are, the longer you hold it. It's difficult because you don't breathe before you chant the following syllable, so you have to make a really strong sound to start with otherwise it won't be a good foundation for the prayer. You'll wobble between them. You need to set it off in the right way, an auspicious way. Then at the end of the prayer you need to hold the last syllable for as long as possible, much longer than

¹⁸⁸ My husband was trained by Tashi, as mentioned on page 73.

everyone else because you have to dissolve the prayer. You need to fade out slowly as if the prayer is dissolving as the sound gets quieter. The prayers compliment the visualisations; as everyone dissolves, the visualisation that goes with the prayer the sound is also dissolving. It's really complete; you sort of feel that everything is dissolving, including yourself.”

Like me, other international students that I asked were not aware of the purpose behind the chanting. It was only explained to those who received the training to lead the prayers and become Umze's. As I explain later within this chapter, the knowledge regarding the rituals is ordered from low to high. The majority of those who perform them only have a broad understanding of what is involved rather than the finer details. Mostly it was the more senior or more educated monks who possessed this knowledge and because of this, those with lesser knowledge performed a number of embodied actions towards them. For example, when the Umze walks in to the temple, the congregation stand and bow respectfully from the waist; they turn as he walks to his seat, always facing him so as to avoid showing their backs to him. As shown through the earlier analysis of rituals in this thesis, this action is associated with purity and is performed towards those who are thought to embody it. There is a hierarchy of purity at the monastery and although the Umzes are not at the top of the hierarchy, they are very well respected and so are subject to such behaviours.

Is Dissolution Possible?

The first question I'm often asked when I discuss the bodiless state is: “Does anyone ever achieve the dissolution?” In the 10 years over which I conducted my fieldwork, I did not hear any reports of it being achieved. I repeatedly heard stories about the 25 disciples of Padmasambhava who achieved it (Thondup 1986, Tsogyal 2008) and also tales of there being rainbows seen in a cloudless sky when a master died (a sign of great realisation), but not a full dissolution. However, this did not temper anyone's belief in its possibility or that this should not be their own personal goal. So my answer in response to that question is that it is not necessary for anyone to actually achieve bodiless; it, as an idea, naturally complements a rigorous physical regime of rituals to achieve embodiment of purity and the two exist side by side. Central to both is the lama. He is the example that they follow in life and death. He is believed to be the full embodiment of purity in life and then to be the one who will dissolve that pure body at death. The groups are unified in this belief and tend not to question it. The unity reinforces the lama's position at the top of the social hierarchy and as the recipient of

unquestionable support, his influence over the community and the wider audience of the rest of the lineage is increased. The solid faith in his leadership is important as the unity of the lineage is in a critical situation. The identification of a rival Dzogchen Rinpoche in Tibet is creating a divide within the lineage and much of the monastic committee's activities are dedicated to promoting harmony and unity. Whilst the root of the practices that promote the embodiment of purity and prepare the practitioner for the dissolution of their body are religious, the impact of them at my field site was significantly social and political.

My findings add to the discussion around the phenomenological assumption that everything begins in—and is grounded in—the body. Phenomenology is the study of the experience and how meaning is attributed to things within that such as events, other people, objects and, of course, ourselves (Smith 2007). It was championed by Merleau-Ponty (1962, 1969), who, influenced by Heidegger (1927) and Husserl (1900), amongst others, argued that Cartesian dualism was inadequate to explain human experience, which, he posited, was grounded in the body. He attempted to collapse Descartes' subject-object dichotomy suggesting that the body is a necessary and permanent condition of perception or experience. For the process of dissolution that I observed at my field site, even though it is a pursuit that ends with trying to get away from body to escape the material with the achievement of immateriality, it actually relies on a very physical set of processes reliant on material structures (shrines, temples, stupas) that act as aids in the progression. The experience of the practitioner is grounded in the body; purity and its embodiment that are the prerequisites of dissolution, and the process of achieving bodilessness is, seemingly paradoxically, experienced viscerally within the body. However, despite the usefulness of Merleau-Ponty's phenomenology for understanding the processes I have described, one cannot ignore the fact that the ideas of dissolution and bodilessness are also slightly at odds with his notion of embodiment. Bodilessness is, in theory, about existing *without* the physical body. So what, then, is being experienced and what is experience or perception without the body? It is not my intention here to consider the spiritual or philosophical question of whether or not bodilessness is literally achievable at an individual level. Rather, it is to understand how this idea is understood, articulated and shared among Buddhist practitioners at Dzogchen Monastery.

Perhaps it is possible to mediate these apparent contradictions by proposing a notion of “body” without a body—which might be termed “an immaterial body”, and which might join an

existing list of “bodies” delineated by previous theorists. These bodies include, amongst others, Bourdieu’s (1977) socially informed body and his theory of practice and habitus, and Csordas (1990) who posits that culture is firmly grounded in the body; it is the basis of culture. Scheper Hughes and Locke (1987) proposed three different bodies based on the “assumption of the body as simultaneously a physical and symbolic artefact, as both are naturally and culturally produced, and as securely anchored in a particular historical moment” (*ibid*:7). Firstly, the phenomenally experienced body-self; then the social body where the body is viewed as a natural symbol which “can be used to think about relationships between nature, society and culture” (*ibid*:7). Lastly, the body politic; where the body and how it is experienced is subjected to and controlled by political and social restraints.

In his book *The Absent Body*, Leder (1990), discussed ways in which the body is absent during experience; where it is forgotten or has seemingly disappeared and how this influences perception. Leder calls for a different understanding of the body; one which views the body as "a complex harmony of different regions, each operating according to indigenous principles and incorporating different parts of the world into its space" (*ibid*: 2). There are times when the body is present during experience and there are times where it is hidden and, according to Leder, most understanding about perception can be gained during the times when it is absent. Leder considers three types of bodies: the first is the ecstatic body or surface body—the sensory body including all sensorimotor experience; second is the recessive body—a visceral body lying beneath the ecstatic body, which includes functions such as sleep, metabolism, birth and death; the third body he refers to the dys-appearing body, which is a corrective function of the previous disappearances of the body, so dysfunctions of the body which bring us back to the physical experience and make us conscious of our body once more. So pain, disease and death are all classed as the dysfunctions that actually bring the body back into view.

In concluding, Leder accepts that some experiences of the body lead us to believe there is a separation between body and mind; some body events can provide evidence to the Cartesian opposition, but in fact there is back and forth between the presence and absence of the body that creates experience. Experience is not just from the mind, but neither is it solely a material phenomenon. There is a constant inter-play between the two. According to Leder, the dominance of the dualistic model of understanding within Western thinking is a result of a lack of exploration into an alternative understanding. Instead, he proposes his own model of

“mentalised embodiment with an accent on transcendence or immanence, on self-forgetfulness or self-consciousness, on projectivity or limitation” (ibid: 149).

Leder’s model is useful in helping to understand the embodiment of purity and the bodiless state sought after by the community at my field site. His model enables us to move from the question of whether bodilessness is literally to be “without the body”—a question which is anyway beyond the scope of anthropological enquiry—and to consider whether the body might be absent or hidden and reflect upon the practitioner’s experience not ruled by the body’s physical limitations. While the disappearance Leder describes is due to ignoring the body—not calling it into consciousness—in the instances that I describe, people are doing almost the opposite of that; they make the body dissolve by bringing it very much into consciousness in order to lose it. For example, the retreatant transcends the physical experience of pain by first intensifying their experience of pain by performing 100,000 prostrations to purify the body; as do the pilgrims who repeatedly walk around sacred sites. So pain is not a corrective function to bring the body back into experience but instead used as a tool by which to further become “absent” or, in their language, to dissolve the body. This is not just the case for the different forms of embodied worship performed at the monastery; it is also true for the object-based rituals such as the khatag exchange. The khatags are offered to the lama to assist the student in becoming absent from their body through accumulating merit and achieving the embodiment of purity.

It is also useful here to draw again on Mahmood’s (2005) work on self-cultivation and how new ways of being are cultivated through technologies of self. So the pain of the prostrations, the strenuous physical efforts deployed in kora, and the many physical restrictions placed on the practitioner’s body whilst serving the lama, to name but a few, are all part of the embodiment and bodiless process and are all ways of self-cultivation and developing new ways of being. As Mahmood explains, instead of being restrictive and oppressive measures where one is merely subjugated to authority, these technologies of self are actually empowering. In the case of her fieldwork within the piety movement of Egypt’s mosques, the technologies of self actually create agency for the participants. Within my fieldwork, agency is developed for the participants individually as they strive towards the embodiment of purity because they are pursuing their own personal realisation of purity as well as for the monastery as a whole. The monastery provides the ritual space and the opportunity for the monks and the laity to

participate within embodied worship. It maintains the lineage of lamas and enables connections to the lama as the living embodiment of purity. In doing all this, the monastery is integral to the lives of all ritual participants and therefore perpetuates its own necessity as a place of worship and consequent social significance.

For Dzogchen practitioners, all rituals, whether embodied worship, the sacrament of statues, places of worship or the offering of ritual items to achieve merit, are all conducted in pursuit of an “immaterial body”. The material is a prerequisite of the immaterial; the immaterial is dependent on the material. One cannot exist or be experienced without the other and it is this understanding that underpins my proposed addition to the anthropological discourse on the body. The physical and non-physical, the body and bodiless are co-dependent on each other to create an “immaterial body” and I hope this can be a useful extension of how anthropologists think about the body and that it contributes to further theoretical development.

Chapter 10 Conclusion

When I first embarked upon fieldwork for my PhD at Dzogchen Monastery, I knew that I wanted to explore how the Dzogchen lineage of Tibetan Buddhism has managed to continue its ritual-based traditions in a non-native environment and with participation from different social groups. From my Master's research, I understood the centrality of the lama in monastic worship and the expectations placed upon him by the monastic organisation and his followers to be the main propagator of the religion. I also discovered that the lama is believed by followers to be the embodiment of purity and that Dzogchen Buddhism has its own unique doctrinal understanding and expression of both purity and its embodiment, which is referred to as the trikaya. Within this thesis, I developed these insights looking at the uses of both concepts (purity and embodiment) and how they shape and structure life and ways of being for the community at the monastery. I realised that my informants used a folk notion of purity, and considering both doctrinal and folk concepts, I have drawn out a further analytical understanding of purity that I hope will be of use within anthropological research. The doctrinal understanding of purity, the three pure Buddhist bodies, the trikaya, has been written about elsewhere (Zivkovic 2010a, 2010b, 2010c) but this is, as far as I am aware, the first study that explores how the understanding of the trikaya, and the focus on purity is interpreted by a monastic community, and how it pervades monastic life as folk concept influencing social hierarchy and the cultivation of self. This folk understanding has arisen from the community's interpretation of the Dzogchen doctrine and how they act upon that understanding in everyday life.

In other words, in addition to the official, doctrinal representation of purity that is taught to monks and lay students. There is also a more quotidian, folk understanding that permeates life at the monastery present in all social experiences ranging from complex rites to social gatherings and from official meetings to the layout of the monastery. I used classical anthropological concepts as a starting point to explore both doctrinal and folk notions of purity and through analysis of the rituals and social processes linked to the trikaya, I have drawn out a further analytical notion of purity. The analytical understanding of purity that I now propose has four main aspects: 1) Purity is conceived, experienced and practised on a continuum or a spectrum rather than opposed to impurity or pollution. 2) Lamas are understood by the community at my field site to be both literally pure *and* symbolic representations of purity. 3)

Purity can be transmitted from person to person, person to object and vice versa, and object to object. 4) Purity is situational and relational, and its transmission is dependent upon the lama. In this conclusion, I will summarise each of these aspects in turn and will then consider how this understanding of purity shapes social life at the monastery, the monastic hierarchy and the power of lama.

My research also adds to the growing volume of literature that views the body as a social body; one that is influenced by and contributes to society. My research at Dzogchen Monastery demonstrates that the Dzogchen understanding of embodiment and the processes that enable this embodiment to take place have significant social implications. Embodiment, when pursued by a community collectively, generates power and social agency and when embodied worship is directed towards a single figure, in this case the lama, it empowers that individual and strengthens their social and political influence. I also review my idea, proposed in the previous chapter, that the process of embodiment is used as way to achieve a bodiless state: a state that transcends the physical body. For the community at my field site, the full embodiment of purity equates to the achievement of the three pure Buddhist bodies (full explanation on page 102) and results in a non-physical, non-material body—an enlightened body. I conclude that the social processes, the behaviours and rituals performed in aspiration of this state, and the pure items created during these, materialise the non-tangible and negotiate the tensions in the social hierarchy. They also empower the ritual participants and through technologies of self (Foucault, Mahmood 2005), the ritual subjects create the possibility of realising their own purity and their own embodiment of purity. In this instance, technologies of self are more than just monitoring actions to ensure they conform to wider societal expectations (technologies of power). Instead, they generate agency and contribute towards the creation of a purer self. The interplay between technologies of power, technologies of self, distinct understandings of embodiment and purity, rituals and embodied worship, all allow the group to suspend their differences temporarily and to co-exist at the monastery. First, I will look at purity in more detail.

Purity

Purity has been a prominent discussion in Anthropology since the early works of Robertson Smith (1889), Frazer (1890), and Durkheim (1912), amongst others. The discussion is vast and my research contributes to and develops a number of aspects of the existing corpus. My first

analytical proposal is that purity is conceived, experienced and practised on a continuum, rather than opposed to impurity or pollution. I found that the classical binary opposition of pure versus impure could not accommodate the variety of ways in which purity was understood and experienced at my field site. The doctrinal understanding of purity is that all beings were considered inherently pure. The folk understanding of this is that individual's realisations of purity varied and this understanding was expressed on a continuum with absolute and total purity at one end and then on a sliding scale to a less pure state, but not one that is impure. The hierarchy at Dzogchen Monastery was organised through this understanding with the pure lama at the top of the hierarchy. This introduces the second point within my analytical notion of purity: that lamas are believed by the community at Dzogchen Monastery to be both literally pure and symbolic representations of purity.

At surface level, there are elements of the hierarchy at Dzogchen Monastery (described in Chapter 3) that are comparable to Dumont's (1966) analysis of how the hierarchical opposition between pure and impure relates to society and power structure. Dumont describes the structure of Indian society with the ritually purest Brahman at the top and the Untouchable at the bottom. According to Dumont, this order is fixed with no movement between the different castes.¹⁸⁹ My research shows a social organisation that is organised in through purity but one that has much more flexibility. Purity can be created and there are permeable boundaries through which purity can move, so people can progress upwards in the social hierarchy. I observed an on-going movement between the doctrinal understandings of purity being a state that people are born as, that is to say inherent within them, and the folk notion of purity as a condition that can be realised through repetition of embodied worship (prostrations and kora). Also, the folk understanding that purity could also become manifest with the assistance of material items: ones made pure by contact with a lama. In short, the notions of purity that exist are two fold: in some ways it is seen as unconditional, spontaneously existing in beings (doctrinal); but it can also be manufactured through ritual (folk). Objects and people can shift along the spectrum of purity and purity can be passed between inanimate and animate things. This is my third main

¹⁸⁹ The binary nature of Dumont's work has inevitably been developed. A wider study of Indian society by a number of anthropologists, including McKim Marriott (1976), has shown that there is a more reflexive relationship between the two concepts, including how objects move through different states of purity, are influenced by the concepts of auspicious and inauspicious (Khare 1976; Carman and Marglin 1985) and that purity can also be circumstantial. The work of Appadurai (1984), Berreman (1973) and Mencher (1974), amongst others, also offers an alternative view that the understanding of purity and the caste system that has developed from that has been heavily influenced by economic and social factors used to pit one caste against another as a form of dominance and control.

analytical finding concerning purity: purity can be transmitted from people to people, people to object and vice versa, and object to object. The ritual of rabnye, discussed in Chapter 6, in which the lama is thought to transmit purity to inanimate statues, which then have the capacity to pass purity on the attendees at the ritual, is a good example of this. Here, purity is transmitted through cord or string, through ritual instruments such as long life arrows or through food substances.

The processes used to generate this purity are constantly being adapted as the monastery operates in exile and with new international audiences and political and social factors influence each ritual as they take place. The folk understanding of the need to realise purity—or to protect it—also constrains social action in the monastery and, as discussed throughout the thesis, shapes the ways in which people move around the space and act in relation to one another. For example, movement by both Tibetan and international students around people deemed purer than themselves, such as teachers or reincarnate lamas, is shaped by this need. Amongst other behaviours, it is not permitted for a back to be turned towards the lama, mouths are covered for fear of breathing over them, and care is taken to ensure that the student always remains physically lower than the teacher. Movement around pure spaces is also influenced in a similar way and, as with the lama, this is intensified the closer the person stands to the pure space and relaxed the further away the person stands. The primary focus of all ritual behaviour is the lama or a representation of the lama because he is believed to have the capacity to transmit purity onto the ritual community. This illustrates the fourth element of my analytical notion of purity: that purity is situational and relational and its transmission is dependent upon the lama.

Purity and Boundaries

Next I want to expand upon the idea that specific folk understandings of purity promoted cohesion and unity between the different groups living at Dzogchen Monastery, as well as offering an opportunity for social mobility. The social processes used to generate purity also bring groups closer together because purity is able to move through boundaries. The ritual of rabnye is an illustration of this. Performed at the monastery upon completion of the temple restoration, rabnye is the process by which the three new, large statues of the Buddha, Padmasambhava (saint who took Buddhism to Tibet) and Tara (female bodhisattva) within the temple were consecrated and transformed from mundane structures into sanctified, pure bodies.

It is a three-part ritual and each part involves the transmission of purity between object and human and vice versa. Firstly, already sanctified objects (ringsel), such as relics and printed mantras (prayers), are placed within the statues and are believed to transmit purity into the statues. Secondly, the lama undergoes a ceremonial process lasting for five days, which involves a combination of prayers and visualisation practices culminating in him acting as a conduit to transmit purity into the statues. Lastly, the purity generated by the lama is then passed to the watching congregation through a number of sanctified ritual items and food.

There are two elements of this ritual that I want to discuss further here as they illustrate important aspects of my analytical understanding of purity. First is the fluid nature of purity, how it makes boundaries permeable and can be passed between objects to objects, person to objects and object to person. As described above, purity is passed in four separate ways during the ritual of rabnye: item to item (ringsel to statue); person to material item (lama to statue); material to person (blessed item to member of the congregation); and person to person (lama to congregation). Purity within a ritual context exists in a moveable, malleable form. However, purity is not lost when it moves; so whilst being able to be passed, it can also remain within a person or object. For example, the lama who transmits the purity does not become less pure and the ringsel when they pass purity to the statues still retain their pure status. This, of course, is also there in the literature on caste and purity (see footnote 189 on page 249). Cooked food, for example, is seen as embodying the relative purity of the cook, which is passed on through its consumption. In Nepal, uncooked rice, *chamal*, is seen as a neutral substance but once cooked, it becomes *bhat* and is no longer neutral (Cameron 1998) and takes on the purity of the person who prepared it. As well as transgressing physical boundaries, purity, and the ritualistic generation of it, it temporarily suspends social boundaries and unifies the three main groups at my field site: the monks, the international students and the lay Tibetans. These sets of people are very different in their demographics but achieve a cohesion during these rituals that overlooks their differences. Normally, the monks, lay Tibetans and international students are not permitted to be in close proximity to the lama but within the ritual setting they come into contact with him and believe that his purity is transmitted to them. Despite the hierarchical arrangement of the community continuing during the ritual, such as the senior monks sitting closer to the front or on higher seats, each person participating in the ritual, be they monk, international student or lay practitioner, has an opportunity to realise their own purity. Through numerous technologies of self, particularly embodied worship, the ritual participants have

continued opportunities to realise purity within themselves. The rituals allow the participant to generate agency and develop their pure self. As covered earlier in the thesis, the effects of similar technologies of self are discussed by Mahmood (2005) in her study of the piety movement within Egypt's mosques. Rather than being passive subjects in an oppressive movement, Mahmood argued that the technologies of self deployed by the women of the movement to create a pious self actually created agency and empowered them. In the same way as ritual participants practice technologies of self, they take one step further on the path to their individual goals of the embodiment of purity, the group is unified, and technologies of power laid down by the monastery are accepted. It is a mutually beneficial relationship.

The second point that I wish to discuss here is the folk notion that purity is durable; it continues after the ritual has ended which creates power for the lama and the monastery as an institution. Although it is believed by my informants that purity can be passed from item to item, it does not mean that the existing purity is lessened or lost by this process. Pure items hold their value. They continue to be worshiped and if small enough, kept as treasured items by those who own them. I believe that because the pure items were created by the lama, their purity is dependent on him; their lasting existence re-confirms his purity and in doing so contributes to his overall value and that of the monastery. Statues, relics, amulets and the like, if blessed by the lama, act as physical and constant reminders of his purity. By valuing them, it is the lama himself who is ultimately being praised. In turn, the lama's social position is strengthened, yielding him and the monastery more influence over the different groups within the monastic compound and anyone who comes into contact with the pure items. Socially, this gives the lama, as a representative of the monastery, more power and more agency to act on a political scale either amongst the different schools of Tibetan Buddhism or within the Dzogchen lineage itself. For example, the statues, after the ritual of rabnye, will now be a focal point for the temple because of their purity. The temple and the monastery's standing as a centre of worship are strengthened. The number of villagers who worship there has increased and it is also now becoming a tourist destination for Indian nationals. Some monks also judge the quality of a monastery by the size and prestige of the temple. During the ceremony of rabnye, I spoke to a group of younger monks who said that they felt increased pride for Dzogchen Monastery because of the temple. As a result of the refurbished temple, I anticipate that the monastery will now attract more monks to come and study there (once the new dratsang extension project is complete and the accommodation is built). Another example is the lay Tibetans who took items

from the ritual to either keep or give to another person such as the old woman gathering ashes from the fire or the man in the crowd who kept food that had been blessed in the ritual to take home with him. In a similar way to the statues, these items will act as a constant reminder of the lama's purity because he has blessed them and even if the lay people have no regular access to the lama, they remain connected because of the pure relics from the rabnye. Then, if those items are then shared with others, or at the very least shown to or spoken about to others, this extends the reach of influence further.

Purity and the Spatial Rotation of the Body

In Chapter 7 of this thesis, I describe an enthronement ceremony of two young lamas and explore how the service is used to construct the identity of the lama and his position at the top of the social hierarchy from an early age. The khatag exchange, a ritual used to transfer purity, is a central part of the ceremony. The ritual is a clear example of the social processes used to reinforce the power and the pure status of the lama but it also offers further insight as to how a pure body can be gradually created built through repetition of material and physical offerings. As I mentioned at the start of this chapter, purity is understood on a continuum. It exists as an innate condition. From birth, all beings are pure but realisations of purity differ. The young lamas are thought to have been born pure as in the doctrinal understanding of purity. However, folk understandings of purity ensure careful attention is still paid by their teachers and the monastic community as a whole to ensure that they develop and grow up into the purest being possible. Pure in the religious sense of their capacity to reside over rituals and govern the esoteric, as understood within the Buddhist cosmology, and also in terms of complying with the many rules and encoded behaviours prescribed for a lama. These rules ensure that the lama is the appropriate embodiment of purity; even though the lama's purity is believed to be innate, he too must make embodiment his practice and physically become a pure bodied being. In a different way, he joins the rest of the community at the monastery in pursuit of the embodiment of purity and in this learning process becomes a living example to them as to how they should behave.

The rituals and embodied worship I observed during my fieldwork also provided further detail on local understandings of purity and which parts of the body are considered pure and impure. Local understandings of purity within anthropological discourse were championed by Mary Douglas (1970) and her work *Natural Symbols* where she discussed the image of the body in

society. Douglas looked at the front/back dimensions of purity; the front of the body being the purest and the back viewed as impure. Her work builds on Durkheim's (1912) discussion of the sacred and the profane and then the binary ordering of Levi-Strauss and structuralism: ordering society in terms of pure/impure and high/low. Despite the obvious difference between Douglas' binary opposition between purity and pollution and my proposal of purity existing on a continuum, my research shows that within folk notions of purity expressed at the monastery, some of this social ordering is present: pure and less pure corresponds with front/back and high/low. The head is the most pure part of the body with the feet being the least pure. I've also cited a number of examples where it is considered rude to turn one's back to the lama and explained how attendants for the lama go to great lengths to ensure that they are always facing the lama. However, my research also adds a more flexible analysis to the proposals of Douglas (1970) and I consider how spatial arrangements of the body and the performance of embodied worship allows the different social groups to embody purity whilst benefiting the monastery at the same time.

Using the work of Mills (2010) and Makley (2003), who consider how the body's rotation in space contributes to the generation of purity and power as inspiration, my research looks at how embodied worship creates centres of purity and social power. For Makley (2003), the performance of kora around a monastery in China increased the centricity and power of the monastery making it a key focal point for the lay community and increasing its significance in the power struggles between Tibetans and the Chinese authorities. For Mills (2010) and his study at a Gelugpa monastery in Ladakh, a body's location in relation to the centre or periphery of a sacred site determined purity. The closer to the centre of the space the position of the body was, the more purity was established as a sacred centre and then received back to the body. The effect was the opposite the further away the body was. Both these findings are true of my research and my analysis of the performance of kora and prostrations shows that the body both creates these centres and then benefits from them in the transmission of purity.

The Body and Embodiment

My research adds to the already quite extensive literature on the body and embodiment and shows how values and beliefs surrounding purity become embodied through particular social processes. My research describes a social body with a reflexive and circumstantial relationship with society. It shows how the body and society interact on a multitude of levels and in a

multitude of different ways, each producing the other and vice versa. This production depends on circumstances, political and social, historical and current, each influencing the others. The body of the Tibetan lama described in this work is a product of political and social aspirations of a religious community in exile keen to improve their situation in South India. He is also a man raised in a monastic environment away from his family who received a disciplined and rigorous monastic training and now is a husband and a father with a family of his own. Then, as a leader of hundreds of monasteries and a teacher to thousands of students, each one striving to embody purity, his own pure body becomes a producer of other social bodies embodying the cultural and religious values that he himself has experienced. The lama's followers and those who interact at the monastery, the three distinct groups of monks, international students and lay Tibetans, also seek to embody these values, although each with their own internal variations. The social processes that enable this embodiment are different for each group but, and this is what inspired my initial intrigue for this research, they all exhibit similar embodied behaviours. This similarity is enough to override the differences between the groups and allows them successfully to cohabit in a very compact and regulated living space, albeit for a short period of time. Ritual, and the technologies of self present within them, allowed the distinct groups that co-existed at the monastery to pursue the embodiment of purity together and experience temporary unity. For the duration of the rituals, their differences were set aside and replaced with shared experiences as a collective.

The Immaterial Body

Most of my thesis is spent conveying how purity as a doctrinal notion is sought by the monks, international students and Tibetans to be achieved or embodied creating a complex and nuanced folk understanding of purity. I have detailed the Buddhist cosmology that supports this doctrine and in explaining the folk concept of purity by outlining the social processes and rituals through which the community tries to realise purity. In the last chapter, I introduced the idea that, ultimately, the community at my field site wish to be free from their physical bodies and that the full embodiment of purity actually results in a bodiless state, a non-physical existence free from social boundaries and restrictions, unable to be placed in a social hierarchy. This idea is seemingly at odds with the rest of my argument: how can physical acts of worship and the materialisation of purity through embodiment and transmission into objects be part of a process to achieve a non-physical existence, an immaterial body? And yet it is.

Just as purity is both an innate state existing within everyone from birth (doctrinal understanding) and then something that can be transmitted or realised through repeated embodied worship and rituals (folk understanding), so too does the ultimate goal of embodiment change to becoming bodiless. Embodiment of purity in its final form is believed to be beyond all physical manifestations and all intellectual comprehension. This bodiless state is understood in Buddhist terms as enlightenment or parinirvana (Xue-Jun 2008). Such an embodied approach makes the intangible become manifest and makes the esoteric seem attainable, thus enabling a relationship between text and practice.

As described in Chapter 9, the main ritual used to negotiate these tensions is the mandala offering and the practice of dissolution: dissolving the universe into emptiness and offering it to the lama. One's self is included in this dissolution and so the student repeatedly visualises their own body being dissolved and entering a bodiless state. The folk understanding of dissolution manifests in a number of different ways. For example, the entire environment at the monastery, whilst dedicated to the lama as explained in Chapter 3, is also deliberately positioned to act as a support to the dissolution process. The arrangement of buildings in accordance with the principles of Vas Tu, the creation of sacred centres inside the compound and the symbolic decoration of the buildings all contribute to the habitus of the embodiment of purity and its subsequent dissolution. Transcending one's own body through rituals and social processes that rely heavily on physical actions might seem contradictory, but a focus on material processes to achieve the immaterial exists side by side at my field site. An absolute concept, an idea that isn't tangible and cannot be understood or known through the human body, is actually expressed and experienced through physical rituals. This goes some way to explain why the environment at the monastery is so controlled and why so many rules and encoded behaviours relating to purity are enforced.

Conclusion

My research clearly shows that purity is understood and expressed in different ways at my field site. The official doctrinal explanation of purity is trifold manifested in three pure bodies known as the trikaya. Followers of Dzogchen Buddhism then have their own conceptualisation of purity, a folk notion, expressed through rituals and every day events; this is then different again from purity as the analytical concept that I have drawn to be used within anthropology. The varied rituals described in this thesis demonstrate that notions of purity are also dependent

on social, religious, historical and physical/material influences all impacting at different times and in different ways. For the community at Dzogchen Monastery, the embodiment of purity takes time. It requires multiple repetitions of physical worship and crucially, the presence of the lama. Then after many years of practice, the student plans to dissolve the physical. The body that embodies purity is wished away, let go of, and the student aims to experience a bodiless state—an immaterial body—viewing this as the full embodiment of purity. Whilst this happens, the lama remains residing over the monastic community. His social power and influence are maintained, perpetuating the existence of the lineage and ensuring that it survives for another 400 years.

Glossary

Sanskrit/Tibetan terms frequently used within the thesis.

dharmā	the Buddha's teachings.
dharmakāya	the ultimate body, the formless aspect of Buddhahood. The first of the three pure bodies.
dratsang	ritual department of monastery.
gelug	founded by Je Tsongkhapa (1357-1419). Rose to prominence towards the end of the 16 th Century, and one of the four schools of Tibetan Buddhism.
kagyū	second oldest school in Tibetan Buddhism. Main lamas include Tilopa (988-1089), Naropa (1016-1100) and Marpa Chokyi Lodro (1012-1097), and one of the four schools of Tibetan Buddhism.
khatag	ceremonial white silk scarf.
kora	repeated circumambulation of sacred sites.
mandala	a representation of the universe, either as a physical offering set, a hand mudra (gesture), or made of sand.
nirmanakāya	the third pure body, vehicle. The second of the two form bodies.
nyingma	oldest school of Tibetan Buddhism, founded by Padmasambha in the 8 th Century; one of the four schools of Tibetan Buddhism.
rabnye	sanctification ritual, mostly used for statues.
sambogakāya	the second pure body, vehicle. The first of the two form bodies.
samsara	the cyclical existence of life, death and rebirth.
sangha	community of followers of the Buddha.
shakya	founded in 1073 by Khon Konchok Gyalpo, and one of the four schools of Tibetan Buddhism.
shedra	university/academic centre associated with monastery.

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