

# An Unknown Tradition of Han Chinese Conversions to Tibetan Buddhism: Han Chinese Incarnate Lamas and Parishioners of Tibetan Buddhist Monasteries in Amdo<sup>\*</sup>

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**ABSTRACT** This article examines Han Chinese who has historically practiced Tibetan Buddhism in the Qinghai-Gansu border region. The main primary sources were published in the 1990s, based on surveys by Chinese social scientists who were sent around in the 1950s to collect data on Tibetan Buddhist institutions as well as additional independent surveys from the 1980s and my own site visits in 2006. On the basis of these sources, I argue that there are at least 100,000 and probably as many as 200,000 Han Chinese on the borders of Qinghai and Gansu (part of the Amdo cultural region for Tibetans) practicing Tibetan Buddhism, following traditions that seem to have been in place for centuries. I also discuss the sixteen historic cases of Han Chinese reincarnate lamas and the over one hundred monasteries in this region affiliated with Han Chinese. Finally, I note the sectarian affiliations (*jiaopai*: Nyingma, Geluk, etc.) and religious practices of these Chinese communities practicing Tibetan Buddhism.

Tibetan Buddhists already represent a religious minority in Asia, and this article seeks to

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draw attention to just a small ethnic subset of the larger Tibetan Buddhist community: those Han Chinese who have historically practiced Tibetan Buddhism. Ethnic Tibetans are, for the most part, Tibetan Buddhist, and throughout Asia there are probably some six million Tibetans, the great majority of whom reside in the People's Republic of China. In addition to ethnic Tibetans, many Mongols, Monguors, Naxi and some Uyghurs and Manchus have historically practiced Tibetan Buddhism. We even know of some ethnic Chinese emperors and monks who practiced Tibetan Buddhism, and it seems that by the late Ming and early Qing Han Chinese monks may have regularly studied and practiced Tibetan Buddhism, though specific evidence about the individuals involved is difficult to locate. But what is even rarer until the 20<sup>th</sup> century is evidence of non-royal Han Chinese laity practicing Tibetan Buddhism.<sup>1</sup> This may just be the result of available sources not recording the practice of commoners, especially those Han Chinese living at the margins of the Han Chinese civilization or those who were marginal figures even at the imperial capital in Beijing, such as orphans given up to Tibetan Buddhist monasteries or Han Chinese monks who served Tibetan Buddhist masters.<sup>2</sup>

In recent times, remarkably, the government of China still does not collect information on religious affiliations of its citizens in its census work. As recently as the 2000 census in China, religion was not included as a variable on either the short or long questionnaire forms. Moreover, so-called statistical yearbooks on China's religions also do not actually contain hard numbers on religious affiliations.<sup>3</sup> An absence of such data in China reflects the continued distance that the Chinese Communist Party has kept from religious matters as a valid subject of social scientific inquiry, a trend which is only gradually changing in the 21<sup>st</sup> century.<sup>4</sup> This means that estimates of practitioners of various traditions have to be generated in some other way, most often based on ethnicity, such as assuming that most Tibetans practice Tibetan Buddhism, most Uyghur are Muslims, and so forth. It is only in very local materials or on-site investigations that one can discover what religion Han Chinese practice, because they are not linked only to one particular religious tradition. For instance, the published materials I used for this study only enumerate Han Chinese adherents of Tibetan Buddhism under the headings of individual monasteries. This means

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1 For details on Han Chinese Tibetan Buddhists in various periods, see: Gray Tuttle, 2005: 19-25; Hoong Teik. Toh, 2004; Natalie Köhle, 2008.

2 On the former, see Tuttle, 2011: 163-214. <http://www.thlib.org/collections/texts/jiats/#!jiats=/06/tuttle/>. One such Chinese monk who served a Tibetan Buddhist master, see Gray Tuttle's entry on Lcang skya Rol pa'i rdo rje, in Schaeffer, Kapstein, Tuttle, *Sources of Tibetan Tradition*. 2013: 641-44.

3 This information was gathered by the Chinese librarian of Columbia University's Starr East Asian Librarian, Dr. Chengzhi Wang, and relayed to me by my research assistant, Austin Barney. Personal communication, July 2008.

4 See Chen Xia, 2007.

that in the general discussions of religion or the chapter introduction to surveys of particular counties, where the numbers or percentage of Tibetan, Monguor or Mongol adherents to Tibetan Buddhism are frequently discussed, the Han Chinese adherents are never quantified in this way.<sup>5</sup> Such neglect has hidden until now the fact that probably as many as 200,000 Han Chinese on the borders of Qinghai and Gansu (part of the Amdo cultural region for Tibetans) practice Tibetan Buddhism, following traditions that seem to have been in place for centuries. If we were to add to this all the Han Chinese who has recently taken an active interest in Tibetan Buddhism, say over the last century, this would probably constitute a surprisingly large number of people, though of course it would remain only a tiny minority of all Han Chinese.<sup>6</sup>

Usually Han Chinese culture is seen uniquely as the "civilizing" one, the dominant culture that transforms its neighbors, but this was not the case in all instances of inter-ethnic contact. In the Yellow/Ma River and the Huangshui/Tsongkha Valleys of Qinghai (see map below), this trend was at least partially reversed. Han Chinese distant from elites of their own ethnicity apparently adopted the elite culture of their surroundings—a Tibetan Buddhist culture. On a tour of this region in 2006, I asked about the origins of local Han Chinese practicing Tibetan Buddhism, and one local ethnically Chinese Tibetan Buddhist monk said that they have practiced Tibetan Buddhism since the Tibetan imperial armies of Tri Songdetsen (r. 755-797) wrested the region now known as Minhe county away from the Tang Dynasty. This is possible, as the region is well known for the Tibetan imperial soldiers who settled here (Tib. *bka' ma log*, meaning "ordered [to go but] not to return"), and who dominated the Han Chinese communities here during the period of Tibetan imperial rule (which ended around 850). A scion of the Tibetan imperial family later took control of this region, including all the Chinese inhabitants as far east as Minhe county, by 1015.<sup>7</sup> The earliest dated reference to the incorporation of Han Chinese under the leadership of Tibetan Buddhists was in 1099: the remnants of the royal family of the Tibetan empire that held on to power in Qingtang (now Xining, located in Qinghai) "led all the tribal chieftains and all the various Han [Chinese] and Fan [Tibetan] groups (*buluozi*), the Uighurs, and the Khitan,

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5 The section on religion in the 1986 survey of Minhe county acknowledges that Chinese, Monguors, and Tibetans believe in Buddhism, but it distinguishes Chinese Buddhism from Tibetan Buddhism without acknowledging that many of Minhe's Han Chinese believe in or practice Tibetan Buddhism (Minhe Huizu Tuzu Zizhixian gai kuang 1986: 54-5). Pu Wencheng noted that Han Chinese believed in Tibetan Buddhism where such populations existed in the introductions to some counties (Pu, 1990:16, 47, 74, 564) but did not mention them in the introductions to three other counties (Pu, 1990: 87, 140, 162). Unless otherwise specified, all the data I discuss here can be located in Pu Wencheng's book, which is organized by counties.

6 For more on Chinese Buddhists involved with Tibetan Buddhism, see Tuttle 2006: 211-45.

7 "Minhe Huizu Tuzu Zizhixian gai kuang" bian xie zu, 1986: 19.

Tangut, and Uighur princesses."<sup>8</sup> Since the rise of Mongol dominance in the region in the 12th century, Mongols who settled in this region (later called Monguors, or Tuzu in modern China) also supported Tibetan Buddhism.

We have little direct evidence of Han Chinese participating in Tibetan Buddhist tradition in this region until the Qing times, when even some of the high lamas that served the Qing court had Han Chinese heritage. Records of Han Chinese parentage of Tibetan Buddhist reincarnate lamas are unique to this area, as far as I know. When Chinese social scientists were sent around in the 1950s to collect data on Tibetan Buddhist institutions, they were to find among some of the parishioners and, again more rarely, among some of the re-incarnate lamas (Tib. *sprul sku*, Ch. *huofo*), people that they described as Han Chinese (*Hanzu*). These materials were only sorted out in the 1980s, when additional surveys were made, and published in the early 1990s.<sup>9</sup> It is not clear whether these Han Chinese Tibetan Buddhists represent a gradual cultural incorporation (since the Tibetan imperial period) of long-resident indigenous Han Chinese or whether they are the result of a more recent cultural dislocation of Ming and Qing immigrants distant from Han Chinese traditional society. In any case, by my estimate there are roughly 100,000 Han Chinese parishioners associated with some fifty Tibetan Buddhist monasteries in Qinghai alone, and at least sixteen cases of Han Chinese incarnate lamas.<sup>10</sup> The research that other scholars have done on Gansu province, discussed below, suggests that there are roughly similar numbers of Tibetan Buddhists there, maybe even more. If my estimates and the research of other scholars in Gansu are correct, there are at least 200,000 Han Chinese who are closely affiliated with Tibetan Buddhist religious practices, making this community a truly substantial one on par with other minority ethnicities in China.

In this article, I will document this unique community and speculate as to its origin. By arguing that Han Chinese adopted some Tibetan Buddhist practices, I suggest that Tibetans had their own civilizing project, which might be usefully compared to the later introduction of a Hui Muslim or Chinese state civilizing project, here on the periphery of China Proper.<sup>11</sup> However, as far as I can tell, this was a gradual development that probably relied as much on the willing adoption of Tibetan culture by the Monguor and Mongol elite. Han Chinese too adopted Tibetan liturgical culture, but few if any ever left a literary record, so it seems more likely that these were not elite Han Chinese, but rather Han Chinese commoners raised so thoroughly in a Tibetan cultural context that it became their own.

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<sup>8</sup> Ruth Dunnell, 1996: 75.

<sup>9</sup> See Pu 1990: 566, for details on contributors in the 1980s.

<sup>10</sup> I will detail these figures below, but they are based on Pu 1990; Nian Zhihai and Bai Gengdeng, eds. 1993; and my tour of the region in the summer of 2006.

<sup>11</sup> On the idea of such civilizing projects, see Stevan Harrell, 1995:3-36.



Map 1: Eastern Amdo Region: Eastern Qinghai & Southwestern Gansu<sup>12</sup>

### Locations of Han Chinese Tibetan Buddhist Temples/Monasteries<sup>13</sup>

Most (30 of 55) of the Tibetan Buddhist monasteries in Qinghai that have some evidence of Han Chinese participation are, not surprisingly, located in the easternmost three counties

<sup>12</sup> Base map source: <http://www.plateauperspectives.org/maps/prefecture/Haidong%20Prefecture.jpg>. Used with permission of Plateau Perspectives.

<sup>13</sup> In Tibetan, monasteries (*dgon pa*) are distinguished from free-standing temples (*lha khang*) or centers for lay practice (*mâni khang*) especially by the number of resident fully ordained monks (*dge slong*), which should be at least five to constitute a proper monastery. The Chinese term most often used in the sources I employed (*si* 寺) does not distinguish between monastery and temple. Since most of the sites I visited qualified as active monasteries, I generally use that term, but some of the smaller sites described as *si* are actually temples.

of the province, in Ledu, Hualong, and Minhe (Tib. Gro tshang, Ba yan and Bka' ma log, respectively), closer to the historic centers of Han Chinese culture such as Lanzhou. Of these, twenty are located in Minhe Autonomous Muslim and Monguor County, which is named in a way that clearly indicates that Tibetans are a small minority of the population in the region. In Minhe, even the combined populations that are listed as typically embracing Tibetan Buddhist practice (37,971 Monguors, 11,733 Tibetans, and 76 Mongols) amounted to only 15 % of the county's population in 1990.<sup>14</sup> Of course these numbers don't take into account the significant number of Han Chinese Tibetan Buddhists in the county.



Map 2: De'an illustrating some of the Han-Chinese monasteries (han-gompa) and mixed ethnicity monasteries (with horizontal black line through them). Base map: Karl Ryavec

Yet, historically Tibetan Buddhism was a strong influence in this region and Han

<sup>14</sup> Nian and Bai 1993: 10.

Chinese seemed to have been a minority in the region until the 20<sup>th</sup> century. William Woodville Rockhill, who traveled through Minhe in the late 1880s said of Sanchuan 三川 in what is now southern Minhe that "There are no Han Chinese living in the San-chuan area." He further noted that "These people are devout Buddhists, and have several small lamaseries."<sup>15</sup> As recently as 1958, there were 61 Tibetan Buddhist monasteries, 1,202 monks, and 46 reincarnate lamas in the county. At that point, these monasteries were also materially well endowed, with over 2,458 *mu* (410 acres) of plowed land, 108 *mu* (17.5 acres) of forests, and 692 head of various livestock. From 1978 to the early 1990s, 54 monasteries were rebuilt, but the number of monks was a quarter (301) of what it once was in 1958 and the number of reincarnate lamas has dropped to eight. One monk I asked in 2006 said that with the exception of two or three Han Chinese Buddhist monasteries, all the rest of the county's monasteries were Tibetan Buddhist. Given that the material support has not been restored to its previous level, with the monasteries holding less the 2% of the plowed fields (38 *mu*, 6.25 acres) they once owned and no forests or livestock, what is truly remarkable is that so many monasteries have been restored at all.<sup>16</sup> This is especially true given the small percentage of Tibetans, Monguors, and Mongols living in the area.

In fact, it is clear from this revival that the Han Chinese communities in Minhe must have played a large role in the rebuilding of Tibetan Buddhists monasteries in the county. Of the twelve Qinghai Tibetan Buddhist monasteries that are supported exclusively by Han Chinese families, all but one (in Ledu) are also in Minhe. In addition, seventeen of the thirty or so monasteries supported by mixed populations are located in Minhe. Almost all of the reincarnate Han Chinese lamas recognized in the twentieth century are from this county. All these factors suggest that there has been a thorough assimilation of a sizable population of Han Chinese within a Tibetan cultural context that seems to have dominated this region from around 8th century, when the Tibetan empire incorporated this territory. Of course, we have to ask ourselves, are these really Han Chinese who are practicing Tibetan Buddhism, or were they possibly "Tibetans" who have so thoroughly assimilated to Han Chinese culture that they can now be categorized as Han Chinese in the modern social science context? One scholar from this region described contemporary attitudes in Gangou village (home to several Han Chinese Tibetan Buddhist monasteries) as follows:

Most non-Hui Gangou residents believe Han are superior to non-Han. Even so, they register as Tibetan or Monguor in order to enjoy the advantages extended to non-Han, e.g., being able to enter colleges with a lower university entrance exam score, increased access

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15 William Woodville Rockhill. *The land of the lamas: notes of a journey through China, Mongolia and Tibet*. New York: Century Co., 1891: 43-44.

16 Nian and Bai 1993: 10.

to government employment, and more lenient birth control policies. Such registration is possible because marriage between Tibetans, Han, and Monguor was common in the past and usually an ancestor can be found that is of the desired ethnicity. Ironically, once they do obtain minority status, they stoutly insist, and instruct their children, that they are "really" Han and that their "real" ancestors were inland Han. Only with the advent of various benefits accorded minorities have many "Han" sought officially to change their nationality from Han to that of a minority nationality.<sup>17</sup>

This analysis of the local situation suggests that most of the people who still identify as Han Chinese are just that, and possibly that the true numbers of Han Chinese in these villages associated with Tibetan Buddhist religion are even greater than census figures indicate (for instance, if some Han Chinese falsely claim minority ethnicity ancestry and are thus categorized as non-Han).

## Demographics

A quick sketch of the findings of two late 20<sup>th</sup> century published surveys, one recent study of an area monastery, and my 2006 summer tour of the region suffice to give a sense of the numbers of people and monasteries under consideration here. At well over one hundred monasteries in Qinghai and Gansu, people identified as Han Chinese (in Chinese sources designated *Han*, in Tibetan sources *Rgya*) believed in Tibetan Buddhism or supported these Tibetan Buddhist institutions. According to the two published surveys, in about 1990 there were specific counts of nearly 3,000 Han Chinese families who believed in Tibetan Buddhism in Qinghai. The surveys also report thirteen Tibetan Buddhist monasteries that were supported exclusively by Han Chinese families—at least these are the only "believers" (*xingyangzhe*) or "supporters" (*xianghuozhuang*) listed in the entries for those monasteries.<sup>18</sup> This latter term seems to reflect what the Tibetans call *lha sde*, religious communities, which used to mean the common people who were attached to and bound to support the monasteries.<sup>19</sup>

There are at least twenty-nine other Tibetan Buddhist monasteries that are supported by communities composed of a mixture of some combination of Tibetans, Han and Monguors

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<sup>17</sup> Feng Lide & Kevin Stuart, 1992: 4.

<sup>18</sup> For more on the term *xianghuo*, see below.

<sup>19</sup> For more on this term and its use in Amdo, see Paul Nietupski, 2011.



(Tib. *Hor*, Ch. *Tu*).<sup>20</sup> Of these monasteries with mixed support communities, thirteen are composed of Tibetan and Han parishioners; ten are of Monguor and Han parishioners, and five of a mix of all three ethnicities. In several other cases, it was unclear what the ethnic composition of the support community was, but in each of these cases, there was at least one Han Chinese lama in the history of the temple, so there was probably also at least some history of Han Chinese support for these monasteries.

What can we say about the likely numbers of actual Han Chinese who support or believe in Tibetan Buddhism in this region? Based on the rare instances when both the number of households and the number of total individuals are given, each family in this area has an average of five and half people. So if we multiply times five and half the number of Han Chinese households we know were Tibetan Buddhist among the nine exclusively Chinese-supported monasteries for which we have 1,795 enumerated households of supporters, then these monasteries alone were host to 9,872 individual Han Chinese Tibetan Buddhists in the early 1990s (See Table 1). Using the same formula for the 2,100 additional Han Chinese parishioners reported to me in the summer of 2006 yields an additional 11,550, thus accounting for as many as 21,000 or more Han Chinese Tibetan Buddhists. In a week-long tour of the region, stopping at only a handful of monasteries, local informants' reports of Han Chinese parishioners more than doubled the number of Han Chinese households listed in the published materials. This seems to be due to the fact that such information was not collected (or at least not published) in the surveys of Hualong and Ledu Counties. But based on my limited survey, there certainly seems to be the potential for many more Han Chinese Buddhist parishioners in these two counties alone.

Moreover, there were seventeen other instances when the numbers of families are given in the cases of mixed ethnic support communities. But how to decide how many of these are Chinese? The total number of families in the cases of mixed ethnic support communities was 11,248 and using the average family size of five and half again, this would yield over 61,000 family members.<sup>21</sup> In the table below, I have used this average family size to estimate the total number of Han Tibetan Buddhists, based on the reported number of families who supported or believed in Tibetan Buddhism.

In the two main counties where these mixed temple communities are located (Minhe and Hualong), the Han Chinese greatly outnumber the Tibetan and Monguor populations. Reflecting this demographic, I encountered two situations in which the Han Chinese

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<sup>20</sup> One entry uses the phrase: "Tibetan and Chinese masses jointly believe" (*Zang Han qunzhong gongtong xinfeng* 藏汉群众共同信奉), see Pu 1990: 145.

<sup>21</sup> Based on oral reporting by residents of the monastery in the summer of 2006.

families made up a large majority of a monastery's parishioners.<sup>22</sup> In any case, if even half of the mixed support communities listed below are Chinese, that would add another 5,624 families or 30,932 individuals to the number of Han Chinese following Tibetan Buddhist traditions. If my estimates of the total numbers of family members of these enumerated communities were correct, this would yield over 50,000 individual Han Chinese Tibetan Buddhists.

**Table 1: Monasteries/Temples with enumerated Han ethnic support**

A. Monasteries/Temples with enumerated Han Chinese support			
Tibetan name	Chinese name	County	Parishioner households/ believers/ <i>huofo</i> / date rebuilt
Draklung gön	Zhihulong si	Hualong	1,000 Han, 300 Zang (Tibetan) families*
Drotsang Trashi lhunpo	Yao caotai si	Ledu	800 Han, 1200 Zang families*
Langbao zi	Langwo si	Minhe	329 Han family believers only, 1 Han <i>huofo</i> , 1983
Tikja gön	Dejia si	Hualong	300 Han, 50 Zang families, 1 Han abbot*
Tsinphu zi	Zengfu si	Minhe	284 Han family believers only, 1984 rebuilt
Tija zi	Tiejia si	Minhe	272 Han family believers only
Menchu Dargyé ritrö	Qili si	Minhe	238 Han family believers only
Traoja zi	Zhaojia si	Minhe	198 Han family believers only, 1987 locals rebuilt
Kanja zi	Ganjia si	Minhe	187 Han family believers only, 1 Han <i>huofo</i> , 1984
Zanja zi	Sanjia si	Minhe	147 Han family believers only, 1 Han abbot
Kongci zi	Guangji si	Minhe	100 Han family believers only, 1986 rebuilt
Kongchuk zi	Guangxiu si	Minhe	40 Han family believers only, 1984 rebuilt
		TOTAL	<i>3895 Han Chinese families x 5.5 family members=21,423</i>   422
B. Monasteries/Temples with enumerated mixed ethnic support			
Bumkang tang gön	Benkangtan si	Minhe	3,000 Han & Tu (Monguor) believers; 1 Han <i>huofo</i>

<sup>22</sup> Summer tour 2006: 1) from the 350 some families that support Tikja (Dejia) Monastery in Hualong County, over 300 of the families are Chinese; 2) at the nearby Braklung (Zhihulong) Monastery the support community has 1000 Chinese households, and only 300 Tibetan.

\* Based on oral reporting by residents of the monastery in the summer of 2006.

Kangu zi/ Kamalok gön	Gangou si	Minhe	2,700 Tu & Han (14 villages); Han monks
Ushdrak gön	Wushigou si	Minhe	1,500 Tu & Han families supporters
Tangring gön	Longhe si	Minhe	900 Han & Zang families; 1 Han <i>huofo</i>
Hrangtangtsang zi	Shang shidacang si	Hualong	600 Han & Zang supporters
Dongmarna Trashi chö dzong	Dong ma'ang si	Hualong	500 Zang & Han believers
Yanja trangwa zi	Yanjia xia si	Minhe	466 families Tu & Han believers; 1 Han <i>huofo</i>
Tseten gön	Caidan si	Minhe	277 Zang, Tu, Han families of believers
Tranja gön	Zhangjia si	Ledu	267 Tu & Han believers; 1 Han <i>huofo</i>
Dowa gön	Wofo si	Minhe	230 Tu & Han families believers, 1 Han <i>huofo</i>
Jaji gön	Jiaji si	Hualong	230 supporters, 2 Han <i>huofo</i>
Samten ling	Santala si	Huangzhong	200 Zang & Han (5 villages) supporters
Mangla zi	Mangla si	Minhe	135 Han & Tu believers; 1 Han <i>huofo</i> , 1985
Peja zi	Baijia si	Minhe	90 Tu & Han believers
Baji ritrö	Huochaopo si	Minhe	60 Han, Tu & Tibetan believers
Cikphin zi	Jiufeng si	Minhe	53 Han & Zang believers
Laja zi	Lajia si	Minhe	40 Tu & Han believers
11,248 mixed families x 5.5 family members/ family= 61,864			
Estimated Total	<b><i>assuming even half of these are Chinese= 30,932</i></b>		
Estimated Grand Total (A+B)	<b><i>Enumerated Han Chinese Tibetan Buddhists= 51,804</i></b>		

Due to the lack of enumerated Han Chinese parishioners for nearly half (22) of the monasteries' support communities (see Table 2), it is impossible to know just how large the population of Han Chinese Tibetan Buddhists in this region is. But assuming the numbers are similar of between the monasteries for which can count the numbers of Han Chinese parishioners, it seems possible and even likely that the total number of Han Chinese Tibetan Buddhists in Qinghai alone was twice as large as listed in Table 1, some 100,000.

**Table 2. Monasteries/Temples with non-enumerated Han ethnic support**

Monasteries/Temples with non-enumerated mixed ethnic support			
Tibetan name	Chinese name	County	Parishioners/ believers/ <i>huofo</i> / date rebuilt
Wangho zi	Wangfo si	Ledu	3 villages Han & Tu believers
Jōja gön	Jiaojia si	Hualong	Zang & Han mixed village
Amé zhidak lhakhang	Liuqi lakang	Huangzhong	Zang & Han supporters, 1984 rebuilt
Zhindrong lhakhang	Xinzhuang lakang	Huangzhong	Zang & Han believers
Dzomo khar	Honghua si	Minhe	Tu, Zang, Han monks; 2 Han <i>huofo</i>
Martsangdrak gön	Baima si	Huzhu	Zang, Han, Tu monks; 1 Han <i>huofo</i>
Luuca nang si	Lijia'ang si	Ledu	Han & Zang 1988 repaired temple
Tongkhor gön	Dongk'eer si	Datong	Zang & Han believers; 1 Han <i>huofo</i>
Kumbum Jampa ling	Ta'er si	Huangzhong	Zang, Han & Tu believers
Trulpa dé	unknown	Tianzhu?	14th c. Han Chinese study with Tibetan lama
Tsenpo gön Gaden damchö ling	Guanghui si	Datong	17th c. Han <i>huofo</i>
Gönlung Jampa ling	Yuning si	Huzhu	17th c. Han <i>huofo</i>
Monasteries/Temples with non-enumerated Han ethnic support and/or leadership			
Pazhi ritrö	Gazhu si	Huangzhong	2 villages of Han believers
Yanphuu zi	Yanfu si	Ledu	1 village Han believers only
Wauja zi	Wujia si	Minhe	Wujia village: Han believers, 1983
Konglung zi	Guanglong si	Minhe	Han disciples (xintu) from 3 locales
Waulang zi	Wuliang si	Minhe	Han believers only, 1983 rebuilt
Lunghran zi	Longshan si	Minhe	local Han believers only
Kongjo zi	Guangjiao si	Minhe	formerly had Han abbot
Bija'i dratsang	Bijia si	Guide	Han believers mainly
Mati se gön	Mati si	Sunan, Gansu	Han believers only, 1983 rebuilt
Gaden chökhör ling	unknown	Sunan, Gansu	Han believers only

Lenhwaté gön	Lianhua tai si	Minhe	1 Han <i>huofo</i>
Lija hongtan zi	Lijia hongtan si	Minhe	1 Han <i>huofo</i>
Labrang gön	Labuleng si	Xiahe, Gansu	50 Han monks in 1928 <sup>23</sup>
Bumling gön	Bingling shan si	Yongjing, Gansu	17 <sup>th</sup> c. Han <i>huofo</i> <sup>24</sup>
unknown	Hanjia si	Linxia, Gansu	Han believers only
Hor Taklung (75 branches)	Baozang si	Jishishan, Gansu	Zang & Han believers (branches mostly Han)

Moreover, there are also substantial numbers of ethnic Chinese Tibetan Buddhists in Gansu Province, as this region shares many of the features of these mixed communities in Qinghai Province: an interpenetration of Han Chinese and Tibetan culture as well as a long history of the dominance of Tibetan leadership and (monastic) educational system.<sup>25</sup> For instance, one important monastery in southern Gansu, Hor Taklung Monastery, has 75 branch monasteries in the area, and one modern researcher has compiled statistics showing that "the number of worshippers of these subordinate monasteries reached 102,800 in 13,800 households in the year 1998, among which Han [Chinese] and Tibetan were greatly in the majority..."<sup>26</sup> Since this monastery and its subordinate branches are all located in counties that only have small minorities of Tibetans (between 5% and 4% of the total population), it is clear that the vast majority of these worshippers are Han Chinese, which would add some 85,000 or more to the total of Tibetan Buddhists among the Chinese. One anthropologist who lived in this area from 1938-1941 noted that in the vicinity of Hor Taklung Monastery "there are Tibetanized Han [Chinese] people who show no features of Han people now but the memory of their kinship with the Jiu clans at Nanchuan of Linxia (formerly Hezhou), supposedly descendants of the Taoist leader Jiuzi of in the Mongol dynasty." He also described one formerly Han Chinese Buddhist monastery that had been converted to Tibetan Buddhism, noting, "[t]here are similar cases elsewhere in which Han [Chinese] Buddhist temples were changed into Tibetan or esoteric form"<sup>27</sup> Another recent survey of Tibetan Buddhist history by the Amdo Shing bza' lama Skal bzang chos kyi rgyal mtshan also noted that there are some Gansu Tibetan Buddhist communities that are entirely

<sup>23</sup> Zhang Qijun, 1970: 98, cited in Nietupski, 2011.

<sup>24</sup> Nietupski, 2011.

<sup>25</sup> For instance, Karl Ryavec reported, based on a summer 2008 trip to Tibetan Buddhist monasteries in Gansu such as Hanjia si just outside of Linxia and also Hor Taklung (Baozang si) that they seem to only have Han Chinese parishioners. Personal communication, June 2008.

<sup>26</sup> Brug thar, 2006: 70.

<sup>27</sup> Li An-che. *History of Tibetan Religion: A Study in the Field*. Beijing: New World Press. 1994: 244-5.

Han Chinese. He remarked that in the Ganzhou (now called Zhangye) region, "there are many Rgya (Han Chinese) monasteries which are all nothing other than Gelukpa [Tibetan Buddhist]," such as Mati Monastery in Sunan Uyghur Autonomous County in Gansu and another one called the "Rgya monastery" Ganden Chökor Ling.<sup>28</sup> Moreover, even outside the present Tibetan autonomous parts of Gansu, in regions once occupied by Tibetan imperial troops, there are over fifty Tibetan Buddhist temples in communities that at present are home to few Tibetans, so these are very likely supported by Han Chinese as well, just as Hor Taklung Monastery is.<sup>29</sup> Part of the reason Gansu may have such a concentration of Han Chinese worshipping in a Tibetan Buddhist manner is that the massive monastery of Labrang, one of the largest in the Tibetan cultural region (and perhaps the world), had lamas "who were actively involved with promoting Buddhism in Han Chinese communities."<sup>30</sup>

If the population of Han Chinese adherents to Tibetan Buddhism at the additional fifty-four Gansu monasteries in Kangle, Lintan (old Taozhou) and Lintao Counties, about which we have no specific information, are comparable to the population associated with fifty-one Qinghai monasteries or the 75 branches of Hor Taklung Monastery, it is quite likely that the total number of Han Chinese who have historically embraced Tibetan Buddhism might exceed 200,000 in present day population. So high a figure would be greater than the 150,000 or so Sherpa Tibetan Buddhists of Nepal, and comparable to the over 200,000 Ladakhi Tibetan Buddhists in northwest India. Moreover, it is remarkable that a distinct community of Tibetan Buddhists much larger than those in the much better known Mustang and Dolpo regions of Nepal has so long escaped the notice of western scholars.

If we compare this estimated figure to the neighboring minority nationality group of the Bao'an (保安族), who speak a Mongol dialect but mostly practice Islam, numbering less than 17,000, we might be surprised that these Han Chinese Tibetan Buddhists have not been recognized as a separate ethnicity. Another interesting comparison would be with the Mon pa (门巴族), numbering about 75,000, who live on the Tibetan Autonomous Region's border with India and Bhutan. The Mon are another recognized ethnic minority closely related to Tibetans and mostly practicing Tibetan Buddhism. But aside from the difference in size, the closest comparison might even be with the much larger minority ethnicity, the Hui (回族) numbering some 9 million, who are ethnic Chinese, speak

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28 Skal bzang chos kyi rgyal mtshan, Shing bza', 1992: 822: "gan cu zhes pa'i sa char/ ma thi se zhes pa'i dgon dga' ldan dam chos gling/ rgya dgon dga' ldan chos 'khor gling sogs rgya dgon pa du ma zhig yod pa kun gyang dge lugs las gzhen med do."

29 Gansu sheng Kangle xian zhi bianji weiyuan hui, ed., 1995: 380-381: lists some fifty monasteries in Kangle, Lintan (old Taozhou) and Lintao Counties. See also: Wang Yuanjiong; Tian Ersui, 1968 [1702], which lists 35 Tibetan Buddhist temples in this region in 1702.

30 Nietupski, 2011. See also Paul Nietupski, 2008.

Chinese, and are basically distinguished primarily by their practice of a different religion: Islam. The similarity with Han Chinese Tibetan Buddhists is clear, because in both cases, it is only religion that distinguishes these groups from other ethnic Chinese.

## Han Chinese Incarnate Lamas

In light of this substantial population, it is not so surprising that in rare instances there were ethnic Chinese recognized as reincarnate lamas. I have identified sixteen cases in which a Han Chinese man in Amdo was recognized as an incarnate lama.<sup>31</sup> Of these, only three preceded the 20<sup>th</sup> century, being unusual cases in the seventeenth century. As these early Qing instances of Han Chinese being recognized as incarnate lamas are not very comparable with the later examples, I will pass over them.<sup>32</sup> In eleven recent cases for which we have dates, incarnate Han lamas were born between 1914-1941 (mostly around 1930).<sup>33</sup> At the time of the published surveys, four of these Han Chinese incarnate lamas were still alive: Wang Tudan (Chinese surname Wang + Tib. Thub bstan, born 1935), also known as Wang Duojiechang (Tib. Rdo rje 'chang); Mi Guotai (born 1939); and Zhang Zhaxi (Chinese surname Zhang + Tib. Bkra shis, born 1926).<sup>34</sup> The fourth, and the only one I know to be still living, is the incarnation of San kyâ (Ch. Sanjia) tshang, who is associated with Tangring Monastery. This lama, whose Tibetanized name in Chinese is Kelsang tudeng

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31 I use the Tibetan cultural-regional term Amdo here because the Chinese provincial borders in this region, which divide Gansu and Qinghai, shifted in the early twentieth century. Nearly all of the temples considered in this study were part of Gansu Province's Xining prefecture during the Qing dynasty period, but were incorporated within Qinghai when it was made a province in 1929.

32 The first involved the "second" (first to be recognized) Lcang skya sprul sku, Ngag dbang chos ldan (1642-1714), who played such an important role in mediating between Tibetans, Mongols, and the Qing court under the Kangxi emperor. He is listed as Chinese in Nian and Bai 1993: 124. The second case is the fourth Stong 'khor sprul sku, Mdo rgyud rgyal mtshan (1621-1683), whose incarnational "transference" was said to have been the result of a transference of consciousness from the third Stong 'khor lama into the body of a recently deceased 19 year old Chinese boy. See Awang luosang jiacou, 1992, vol. 1: 321-2, note 19: citing the *Deb ther rgya mtsho*. This deserves more attention, as the lama's name and birthdate conflict with those given in Wang Xiangyun, 1995:179-182.

33 It is worth noting that both these times were periods of political and social transformation, though there is no clearly logical reason that examples of these cases should come during these periods of transition. Instead, it may just indicate the nature of the sources I have consulted. This deserves further study. After this article was submitted for publication, I ran across another reference to a Han Chinese (Tib. *rus rgya nag yin*) reincarnate lama, born in 1955, and recognized as the rebirth of the Mthil ba nang so by no less of an authority than the Dga' ldan khri pa, Dkon mchog bstan pa'i rgyal mthsan. Mtsho sngon zhing chen mtsho lho bod rigs rang skyong khul nang bstan mthun tshogs dang krung go'i bod brgyud nang bstan mtho rim slob gling nang bstan zhib 'jug khang. 1999: 541.

34 Pu 1990: 30; Nian and Bai 1993: 96-97, 101.

nima (Tib. Bskal bzang thub bstan nyi ma, born 1940) and whose lay name was San Yinglu, is the incarnate lama of Sanjia si (a branch monastery of Tangring Monastery) supported entirely by Han Chinese. He studied at Dhîtsa Monastery in Hualong (Tib. Dhî tsha/Lde tsha bkra shis chos sdings, Ch. Zhizha shang si, 支扎上寺).<sup>35</sup> I did not get a chance to meet him in the summer of 2006, because he was in retreat in Sunan, a Uighur Autonomous County on the Silk Road corridor of Gansu, where some Uighur and Han Chinese practice Tibetan Buddhism.

I suspect that the reason we have a record of these eleven Han Chinese Tibetan Buddhists incarnations from the early twentieth century is because this was a time when the dominance of Tibetan Buddhist culture overlapped with the introduction of ethno-national categorization. In all likelihood, there were earlier Han Chinese Tibetan Buddhist incarnations, but until the introduction of Leninist-inspired ethnic ideas to the region, older conceptions of lineage took second place to religious categorization. A more exceptional recent case is that of a Han Chinese head (*zhuren*) of temple who became so thoroughly assimilated to Tibetan culture that he seems to have dropped the use of a surname altogether: Luosang (born around 1971, Tib. Blo bzang).<sup>36</sup> When I visited his home monastery in the summer of 2006, I learned that Lousang had been sent as a child to the monastery, presumably around 1978, as soon as religious restrictions were lifted, to preserve the traditional relationship that his family had with this monastery.<sup>37</sup> In addition, three of the monasteries that had had resident Han Chinese incarnations in the 1950s were still led in the late 1980s by men who shared the same surnames as the former incarnations. Even assuming that the incarnation series were no longer formally recognized after the upheavals of the 1950s or 1960s, I suggest that this means that the previous incarnation's family members remained in charge of these temples.<sup>38</sup> These examples suggest that even if the formal recognition of Han Chinese incarnate lamas has lapsed there is still an important role of Han Chinese monks in leading these Tibetan Buddhist institutions.

## Sectarian Affiliation

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<sup>35</sup> Pu 1990: 23.

<sup>36</sup> Chinese Buddhist monks also give up their family names, taking the name of the founder of Buddhism Shâkyamuni (abbreviated in Chinese as *Shi*), but at least in the case of Chinese lamas in this region, they seem to keep their family names, possibly because they came from politically important families.

<sup>37</sup> This monastery, Tikja dgon/ Dejjia si, has a large majority of Han Chinese parishioners. Unfortunately, Luosang was away when I visited in the summer of 2006.

<sup>38</sup> Nian and Bai 1993: 96, 100-101. For instance, Mi Guotai (who is also associated with Guangxiu si) had taken over from the previous Mi Gazang (Tib. Bskal bzang?, born 1916).



By the early Ming Dynasty, the Minhe region was dominated by Tibetan Buddhist fortifications that were part of the Ming border guard.<sup>39</sup> With the support of the Ming court, the Gelukpa (Dge lugs pa) tradition dominated the Minhe area from the time of Shākya Yeshé's second visit to the Ming capital in the early 15<sup>th</sup> century.<sup>40</sup> Shākya Yeshé (1354-1435), also known by his Ming dynasty awarded title of Daci fawang 大慈法王 (Tib. Byams chen chos rje), was one of the leading disciples of the man who became known as the founder of the Gelukpa tradition: Tsongkhapa Lozang drakpa (Tsong kha pa Blo bzang grags pa, 1357-1419). Support for this tradition in the region grew progressively with the support of Tümed Mongols under Altan Khan in the 16<sup>th</sup> century and later Khoshud Mongols under Gushri Khan in the 17<sup>th</sup> century. Thus, of the fifty-five Tibetan Buddhist monasteries associated with Han Chinese adherents, the vast majority follow this Gelukpa tradition. This is hardly surprising since later the Qing court clearly favored this tradition above all others, and also because the focus on monastic discipline and leadership (as opposed to lay lamas as religious leaders) associated with this tradition would have made it closer to traditions of Buddhist monasticism that Han Chinese could recognize as legitimate.

What is more surprising is the fact that there are two monasteries in which Tibetan and Han practitioners participate together in Nyingma (Rnying ma) traditions. Both of these monasteries are located to the west of Minhe, in Hualong County, located southwest of the 12,000 foot Laji (Tib. Tsong kha ri rgyud) mountain range in territory that did not have a Chinese administrative center until the Qing dynasty (after the 1724 rebellion of Mongol leader Lubsangdanzin).<sup>41</sup> For this reason, the Ming and Qing support for Gelukpa Buddhism may not have had as strong an effect on this region, though probably Han Chinese moved to this area with the growth of Qing power in the 18<sup>th</sup> century. In any case, the religious activities at one of these Nyingma monasteries (*Jōja gön/ Jiaojia si*) are described in more detail than is common for these texts: it specifies that there are yearly Kālacakra tantric assemblies attended by the Tibetan and Han villagers associated with the temple.

## Naming Conventions for Monasteries

One of the features that alerted me to the existence of these monasteries with Han Chinese adherents was the frequent occurrence of the Chinese word "jia" (家, meaning "family/ household") or homophone variants of the term in Chinese (as in Zhangjia si 章嘉寺 or

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<sup>39</sup> Otosaka Tomoko, 1994: 69-101.

<sup>40</sup> Otosaka 1994: 70-71.

<sup>41</sup> Bayan rongge ting.

Baijia si 白加寺) and Tibetan (most commonly *kya*, but also *rgya*, *ca*, and *skya*, as in the case of the famous incarnation series *Lcang skya*, for Ch. 张家 *Zhang jia*).<sup>42</sup> The connection between these homophones for family names and Tibetan terms for both family lineage (*rigs*) and name (*ming*) has been clearly demonstrated.<sup>43</sup> Of some six hundred Tibetan Buddhist monasteries included in one modern survey, over eighty had Tibetan homophone variants of the Chinese term, and thirty-seven had the Chinese character for family/household, which typically follows the surname of the family in question: Qi *jia* (祁家) for the famous family of Kiyad/ Chinggisid descendents in this region,<sup>44</sup> Lü *jia* (吕家) for another prominent Monguor *tusi* family,<sup>45</sup> and so forth.<sup>46</sup> But aside from these famous Monguor we know little about to whom these names could refer. One Japanese scholar also lists some of the prominent Tibetan families that took Chinese surnames in the Ming, and we have evidence of these persisting into the present day.<sup>47</sup> However, as Elliot Sperling has shown in his study of the Qi *jia*, (Tib. Chi *kya*) association with one of these family lines does not decide one's ethnicity, as Tibetans were merely the subjects of the Qi family and thus eventually took their name.<sup>48</sup> Likewise, Tibetan families that took Chinese surnames might have even forced their Han Chinese subjects to adopt their surnames in the process of submission. Such a process would be more unusual than Tibetans (who typically do not have their own surnames) adopting their lord's surname, but cannot be ruled out entirely.

Of these eighty monasteries, only fifteen are described as having Han Chinese practitioners associated with them. Twenty-two of the monasteries that have the Chinese character for family in their names were located in Minhe, but a handful were in the neighboring counties of Ledu and Hualong, or farther west in Huzhu, Datong, Ping'an, and Guide Counties, all of which historically had significant Han Chinese populations before

42 In the Amdo Tibetan language, these letter combinations are all pronounced very similarly to Chinese "jia".

43 Helmut Eimer, 1980: 97-102. Eimer noted that Heissig "has shown that the word a-kya was interpreted as a compound, the second syllable having been conceived as a rendering of Chinese [jia]," while Eimer himself also found that A *kya* or A *kyâ* occurred in 130 colophons of one A *kya* Gsang 'dzin rdo rje, while A'i rig/ a rigs occurred 60 times, and A'i ming/ a ming occurred over 30 times.

44 Sperling, Elliot, 1997: 111-124.

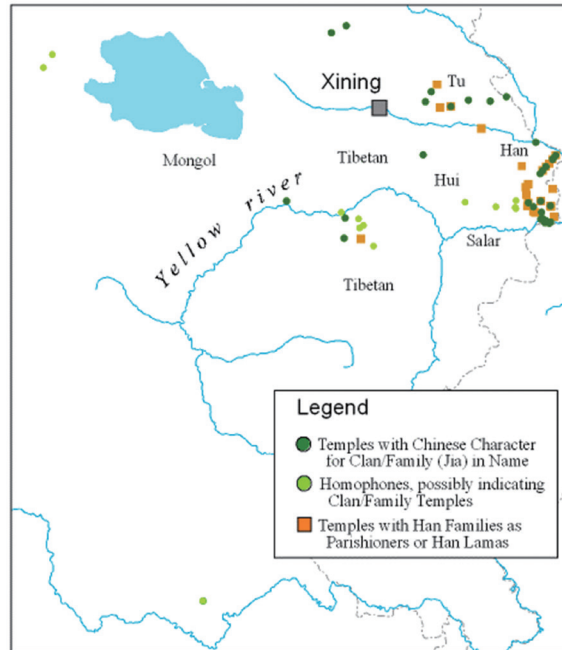
45 Louis Schram. *The Monguors of the Kansu-Tibetan frontier*, I, Transactions of the American Philosophical Society, new ser., v. 44, pt. 1, 1954; *The Monguors of the Kansu-Tibetan Frontier*, II, Transactions of the American Philosophical Society, new ser., v. 47, pt. 1, 1957; *The Monguors of the Kansu-Tibetan frontier*, III, Transactions of the American Philosophical Society, new ser., v.51, pt. 3, 1961. For the digital version of these texts, edited by Charles Kevin Stuart, see: <http://hdl.handle.net/1811/24312>.

46 Another nine monasteries with similar names (family name + *kya* + *dgon/zi*) are listed as being in the southern Domé (*mdo smad lho rgyu*, formally known as Ch. Gannan, Tib. Kan lho). See Skal bzang chos kyi rgyal mtshan 1992: 823-827.

47 Otosaka 1994; see also Yumjeap Rwa, 2011.

48 Sperling, 1997: 113-114.

### Family/Clan Monasteries



the 20<sup>th</sup> century. Another eighteen of Qinghai's Tibetan Buddhist monasteries have Chinese names that contain a homophone for Chinese *jia*, with Tibetan names that show the same range of variants (*kya*, *rgya*, *ca*). All but one (in Huangzhong county) of these monasteries are located south and west of the Laji shan range, in Hualong (10), Guide (6) or Guinan (1), where Chinese influence penetrated later than in Huangshui/Tsongkha River valley. After listing many monasteries with the phrase "*ja gön*" or "*ja se*" (Tib. *Rgya dgon*, *Rgya se*; Ch. *jia si*, meaning, "family temple") in the name, such as Hancha gön and Tracha se, one recent Tibetan lama has described these as "temples with Chinese names" (*rgya ming cen gyi lha khang*), which should dispel any doubts that Tibetan specialists may have that somehow these names can be explained away as not having a Chinese origin based on obscure Tibetan meanings of individual phrases.<sup>49</sup>

Possibly the Han Chinese who moved into this transmontane region were more assimilated to Tibetan culture and thus did not preserve the ability to write Chinese to properly record the names of their monasteries/families. These Han Chinese were described

<sup>49</sup> Skal bzang chos kyi rgyal mtshan 1992: 822: in the original Tibetan: *kya dgon*, *kya se*, Han *kya dgon*, Khra *kya se*. *Kya* is pronounced "ja" in this region of Tibet.

in the Tibetan language account *The Vast Geography of the World* of 1820 by the Tsenpo Nominhan, as being in mixed Han Chinese and Tibetan communities (in *Khri kha* = Ch. *Guide*) and in mixed communities of Chinese, Tibetans, Monguors [*Hor*], and Muslims (in Hualong).<sup>50</sup> These must be the precursors of the Han Chinese parishioners in Hualong County, such as those at Tikgya/ Dejia Monastery or Braklung/ Zhihulong Monastery, so Han Chinese support for Tibetan Buddhism in this area seems to date back almost two centuries, at a minimum.

## Religious Practices

From the published surveys I used it was difficult to assess the nature of religious commitment to these Tibetan Buddhist monasteries on the part of the Han Chinese described as being associated with them. But from a tour of the area I made in 2006, the continued adherence to the traditions of support and belief seem consistent with the information recorded in the survey. Han Chinese were monks in Tibetan Buddhist monasteries. Han Chinese families were seen as equal members of the support communities, and they availed themselves of ritual and medicinal benefits offered by the monasteries. In one case in Ledu County, we know that Tibetan and Han Chinese jointly repaired a temple in 1988.<sup>51</sup> In most cases (thirty-three of fifty-five) the associated communities described in published surveys were described as "believers" (*xinyangzhe*).<sup>52</sup> In other cases, they are described as belonging to *xianghuo zhuang*, which literally means "villages or estates [which provide] incense and lamps" to the monastery in a sense that suggests that these families were once bound (by oath or servitude) to support these monasteries.<sup>53</sup> This term is derived from the allocation of land resources to generate the income necessary to support the monasteries.<sup>54</sup> The people who cultivated this land eventually became known by this term. In any case, in the current context it is clear that no one is being forced to support Tibetan Buddhist monasteries, but

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<sup>50</sup> Hualong is described in the Tibetan account as near Bya khyung Monastery on the north bank of the Yellow [Tib. Ma] River. Turrell Wylie, 1962: 107-109. Rockhill, William Woodville, 1894: 363: Rockhill mentioned that in 1891 there were some 300 Chinese families in the valley of Guide.

<sup>51</sup> Nian & Bai 1993: 115.

<sup>52</sup> Other, similar but rarer terms, include *xingfengzhe* 信奉者 and *xintu* 信徒.

<sup>53</sup> The terms are *xianghuo zhuang* 香火庄 or *xianghuo gongyang* 香火供养 or *xianghuo qunzhong* 香火群众, which all seem to indicate something like the Tibetan *lha sde*, meaning supporters of the monastery.

<sup>54</sup> "Minhe Huizu Tuzu Zizhixian gai kuang" bian xie zu (1986: 56) lists two earlier references to Ming imperial land allocation for this purpose. For a discussion of migrants (presumably Han Chinese) coming to work the land of a Tibetan Buddhist monastery in this area to escape tax burdens during the Ming and early Qing dynasties, see also Otasaka Tomoko 1994.

rather, that they continue to do so of their own free will.

As for the religious activities these communities engage in, our knowledge is likewise limited. For most of these monasteries, the most important religious festivities are listed. Sometimes this is just a date, but in other cases, the survey reports that (prayer) assemblies, recitations, offerings of incense, and/or dances take place on the designated date(s). In the summer of 2006, I just missed two of these ritual dance festivals at Gangou/Kamalok Monastery and at Benkangtan (Ch. 本康滩寺, Benkangtan si)/Bumkangtang Monastery. At the first, residents said that some 10,000 people attended, and from all the trash left behind, it is certainly easy to imagine that at least a thousand people attended. At both these monasteries, when I first arrived, all the monks (mostly Han Chinese) were out reciting scripture in the community. When involved in such ritual activity, they wore "lama" clothing (that is to say, Tibetan Buddhist color and style robes, which are different than those Han Chinese Buddhist monks wear), but at least in the case of Gangou/Kamalok they were otherwise dressed as laymen, which is unusual in Han or Tibetan Buddhist monasteries. They also eat meat, which is typical of Tibetan Buddhist monks, but prohibited for Chinese Buddhist monks. Although they usually only knew the basics of the spoken Amdo Tibetan dialect, they can and do recite the scriptures in Tibetan language. By contrast, the lay people associated with Bumkangtang Monastery were using Chinese scriptures in their practice on the day I visited. The monks at Gangou/Kamalok Monastery were typical of those in other monasteries in this area in having studied with a wide variety of prominent teachers from a range of important monasteries from around Amdo. The list of teachers who had taught there included: Alak Yongdzin (from Lâ mo Bde chen Monastery), Khaso Lama (from Rong bo Monastery), Tseten Zhadprung (from the local Tshe tan Monastery and the Northwest Minority Nationalities University), Akyâ and Yangkyâ Lamas (from Sku 'bum Monastery). One eighteen year old lama from the monastery is studying at Kumbum (Sku 'bum) Monastery as well. They described the practices and texts they studied as the rites performed for the deceased (*kun rig*), and those associated with the Medicine Buddha (*sman bla*) and the five-fold protectors of religion (*mgon chos nam lnga*). They also said they had a connection to Se ra Monastery in Lhasa, which may be explained by the proximity of the local monastery Dzomokhar (Mdzo mo mkhar), where Se ra Monastery's founder died. Another of the monasteries with Han Chinese parishioners specifies that the Kâlacakra Tantra is central to one of its assembly dates. Yet another entry notes that an Assembly to Rescue All [Beings] (*Pudu hui*) is part of its New Year ritual. Many of the festival dates are around the lunar New Year, but others occur in the spring or fall. Only one temple specifically mentions a period of study, so for most of these monasteries, the main activities seem to be oriented to fairly simple lay practice, probably for purposes of blessing the New Year and the spring planting, and at a time of bounty in the fall. One temple in Ledu county also hosts a horse race in the summer.

## Conclusion

The mere fact that probably over two hundred thousand Han Chinese at over one hundred monasteries have been believing in and financially supporting Tibetan Buddhism for at least a century and probably much longer demonstrates the importance of this border region for the future of Han Chinese and Tibetan relations. From my casual observation and reports of the ethnic Chinese interest in Tibetan Buddhism in eastern mainland China, across the straits (in Taiwan) and overseas in Malaysia, Singapore, and in the United States), these communities are pioneers of a growing trend.<sup>55</sup> It may be that this exceptional, but understudied, community will prove a useful example of the fruitful possibilities of a growing body of Han Chinese believers and practitioners of Tibetan Buddhist traditions. Moreover, given the unfortunate ethnic violence in recent disturbances in Tibetan areas of the PRC during the spring of 2008, these mixed ethnic communities of Tibetan Buddhists, especially those in Muslim autonomous counties like Minhe and Hualong, may have much to teach about better ways to mutually co-exist.

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<sup>55</sup> Abraham Zablocki, 2005.

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