ENGLISH IN TIBET, TIBET IN ENGLISH

Self-Presentation in Tibet and the Diaspora

LAURIE HOVELL McMILLIN

palgrave

ENGLISH IN TIBET, TIBET IN ENGLISH
© Laurie Hovell McMillin, 2001
Softcover reprint of the hardcover 1st edition 2001 978-0-312-23922-0
All rights reserved. No part of this book may be used or reproduced in any manner whatsoever without written permission except in the case of brief quotations embodied in critical articles or reviews.

First published 2001 by PALGRAVE™
175 Fifth Avenue, New York, N.Y. 10010 and
Houndmills, Basingstoke, Hampshire RG21 6XS.
Companies and representatives throughout the world

PALGRAVE is the new global publishing imprint of St. Martin's Press LLC Scholarly and Reference Division and Palgrave Publishers Ltd (formerly Macmillan Press Ltd).

ISBN 978-1-349-38685-7 ISBN 978-0-312-29909-5 (eBook)
DOI 10.1057/9780312299095

Library of Congress Cataloging-in-Publication Data
McMillin, Laurie Hovell, 1962-
English in Tibet, Tibet in English : self presentation in Tibet and the diaspora / by Laurie Hovell McMillin.
p. cm.
Includes bibliographical references and index.

1. Tibet (China)—In literature. 2. Travelers' writings, English—History and criticism. 3. Tibetans—Foreign countries—Biography—History and criticism. 4. Tibet (China)—Biography—History and criticism. 5. Great Britain—Relations—China—Tibet. 6. Tibet (China)—Relations—Great Britain. 7. Tibet (China)—Description and travel. 8. British—China—Tibet—History. 9. English language—China—Tibet. 10. Autobiography. I. Title.

PR129.C6 M35 2001
820.9'32515—dc21

2001036520

A catalogue record for this book is available from the British Library.

Design by Westchester Book Composition.

First edition: November 2001
10 9 8 7 6 5 4 3 2 1

Contents

ACKNOWLEDGMENTS
vii

PREFACE
ix

– PART ONE –
English in Tibet

CHAPTER 1
The Way to Epiphany
3

CHAPTER 2
The First One There: Bogle's Journey
7

CHAPTER 3
In One Ear: Turner in Tibet
39

CHAPTER 4
Manning's Sentimental Journey
55

CHAPTER 5
Barbarian Translations and Impure Forms:
Hodgson, Waddell, Blavatsky
71

CHAPTER 6
Kipling's *Kim,* Lamas, and Epiphanies
79

CHAPTER 7
Younghusband: Arrivals and Departures
89

– PART TWO –
Tibet in English

CHAPTER 1
New Age *Namtars:* Tibetan Autobiographies in English
113

CHAPTER 2
Siblings of the Dalai Lama: Jetsun Pema and Thubten Jigme Norbu
137

CHAPTER 3
Monks' Tales: Geshe Rabten and Lobsang Gyatso
153

CHAPTER 4
The Double Life of the Dalai Lama
173

CHAPTER 5
Reincarnate Lamas: Chögyam Trungpa and Chagdud Tulku
183

CHAPTER 6
Tibetan Women in the Western Buddhist Lineage:
Rinchen Dolma Taring and Dorje Yudon Yuthok
197

CHAPTER 7
Political Prisoners: Palden Gyatso and Ama Adhe
209

CHAPTER 8
Resisting Exile: Tashi Tsering
223

APPENDIX
Transliteration of Tibetan Words
233

NOTES
235

INDEX
255

For Tracy Scott McMillin
and for Liam and Jack McMillin

Acknowledgments

Many people have helped me on the long journey that led to this book. James S. Duncan gave me the encouragement to get started, and Donald S. Lopez, Jr. guided the project through to the end. Paula Richman and Len Podis responded thoughtfully to the manuscript at several stages. Jan Cooper, Michael Fisher, Wendy Kozol, Kathie Linehan, and Sandy Zagarell read portions of the manuscript: thanks go to them. The project got underway at Syracuse University; I am grateful to my teachers there: Richard Fallis, Charles H. Long, Susan Wadley, Robyn Wiegman, and the late Agehananda Bharati. Aspects of this book were conceived on the road or around kitchen tables with the help of P. Christiaan Klieger, Tashi Tsering of Dharamsala, Karl Yoder, Eleanor Zelliot, and the late Beatrice and Robert Miller. I thank Joseph Adler, Donald Rogan, and Augusta Rohrbach for their timely questions. And it is safe to say that without my teachers in Wisconsin—Mark Dintenfass, Peter Fritzell, Jack Stanley, and Herbert Tjossem of Lawrence University and Elaine Nelson in Galesville—none of this travel or writing would have happened.

Ruth Amsler, Tsering Dorjee, Tsenshap Rinpoche, and Jigme Risur in Switzerland gave unselfishly of their time and knowledge. I thank Palden Gyatso, Lobsang Ngodrup, Geshe Damdul, and the monks of Drepung Loseling for their visits. The monks of Gajang Dangtse and Sera Me, Sonam of Xigatse, and Sonam Wangdu Numa were generous hosts. David Patt, David Blake of the British Library, Nick Jones, John Olmstead, Tsering Shakya, and Axel K. Ström all gave valuable assistance. I learned a great deal from my students at Kenyon College and Oberlin College, especially from Gordon Fraser, Jason Goss, Megan McDonough, and Brent Werner. Mike Stortz got me to Ladakh, and the friendship of Ellen Sayles and Daniel Gardner sustained me through the writing. Kristi Long and Donna Cherry at Palgrave have been very helpful.

This project has been driven in part by the opportunities to travel and write afforded me by a Thomas J. Watson Fellowship, a Fulbright Fellowship in Buddhist Studies for Sri Lanka, a Syracuse University graduate fellowship, a dissertation fellowship from the National Endowment for the Humanities, a curriculum development grant from Kenyon College, and a Grant-in-Aid from Oberlin College.

My mother and father, Laurena and the late Robert Hovell, have supported me in many ways during my wandering years, as have my siblings, Robert, Debra and Pamela. I am thankful to my children, Liam and Jack, for putting up with a sometimes absent-minded mother and for sustaining and gladdening me every day. And finally, I am deeply grateful to my husband, Tracy Scott McMillin, who read the manuscript at many, many stages, and who was always willing to talk through the ideas that drive and sometimes obsess me. His crazy wisdom and love have made so many things possible.

Preface

When George Bogle visited Tashilhunpo monastery in 1774, the Panchen Lama offered the young Scotsman an astonishing perspective. Peering through the lama's "Camera Obscura," Bogle saw views of London.[1]

The image is striking: Bogle is in what, to England, is a remote corner of the globe, a place widely-known for having been cut off from history. But there, in a monastery in "the land of snows," Bogle sees images of home. Even in 1774, then, Tibet was not a place cut off from the outside world; it was a place that had already encountered Europe, or at least an image of it. When I read this unpublished account of cross-cultural contact in the British Library in 1999, I was aware too that the Tibetans who once seemed confined to "the forbidden land" had now spread themselves around the world. My desk mate at the India Office was a Tibetan who once served on the staff of the library and now made his home in London; across the room was a Tibetan monk in full maroon and gold regalia, perusing the shelves.

These images of England in Tibet and Tibetans in England dramatize one of the convictions that guide this book: Tibet and the West have had a long, complex, and convoluted relationship, a relationship that can be explored, in part, through analysis of English language texts. British colonial presence in India encouraged a relationship and even at times a preoccupation with Tibet unique among Western nations; because of Britain's interest in Tibet, English-language texts have played a key role in larger Western constructions of the place, and have contributed to later American representations of Tibet. English-language texts produced in Britain and the United States have, in turn, had an impact on Tibetan self-presentations of the past 50 years; when Tibetans have opted to tell their life stories in a European language, they have most often done so in English. By focusing on the ways that both British travelers and Tibetan autobiographers have represented themselves in English-language texts, I offer a view of this long-term relationship, which considers how both Anglophone Westerners and Tibetans have been affected by the interaction.

Part One of this study, "English in Tibet," explores the writing of British travelers from George Bogle to Francis Younghusband, that is, from 1774 to 1910.[2] I place these texts within a shifting colonial context and examine how these writers imagine themselves in relation to Tibetan others. Further, by focusing on the textual nature of these accounts, I explore the development of "the myth of epiphany," the notion that travel to Tibet might transform a British traveler. Beginning my study with the manuscripts of Bogle, I consider his shifting understandings of Tibetans, of Tibet, and of himself. I see Bogle as a self-reflective subject whose ability to criticize and reflect on his own situation vis-à-vis Tibetan others is neglected in the shape that British colonialism later takes. From Bogle's texts, I move on to the travel texts of Samuel Turner and Thomas Manning, as well as to the contributions made to Western knowledge of Tibet by Brian Houghton Hodgson, L. Austine Waddell, Helena Blavatsky, and Rudyard Kipling. Finally, I look at Francis Younghusband's *India and Tibet,* the work in which epiphany is finally realized. As I see it, Younghusband's hope for an epiphany in Tibet is a dream from which the English-speaking West has not entirely awoken and has shaped many recent Anglophone accounts of Tibet and Tibetans.

In Part Two, "Tibet in English," I look at a phenomenon of the Tibetan diaspora: the writing of Tibetan autobiographies in English. Tibetan literature has a long autobiographical tradition. Traditionally, Tibetan *namtar* (biography) and *rangnam* (autobiography) focus on the lives of those who have attained "full liberation" within the Tibetan Buddhist system; departing from this formula in both subject matter and narrative forms, the recent wave of Tibetan autobiographies in English includes the life stories of lay men and women, political prisoners, monks without advanced degrees, as well as lamas and teachers of various attainments. The autobiographers whose texts I examine include the Dalai Lama, Jetsun Pema, Thubten Jigme Norbu, Lobsang Gyatso, Chagdud Tulku, Palden Gyatso, Rinchen Dolma Taring, Ama Adhe, and Tashi Tsering. In exploring the production and reception of Tibetan autobiographies, I argue that the making of Tibetan autobiographies in English is inevitably a mixed phenomenon, one that is inextricably intertwined both with Western expectations and with Tibetans' desires to represent their experience. Tibetans who write their life stories cannot keep from sometimes engaging Western representations made of Tibetans, even as they participate in a very Tibetan practice of self-presentation, however transformed and translated.

Parts One and Two do not follow the same methodological or rhetorical strategies but are structured to accommodate the different kinds of stories I tell in each part. While the first part develops a plot line of sorts, the second part performs a variety of readings on selected texts. Nonetheless, the two parts share an interest in the ways in which shifting cultural and historical contexts both enable and limit representations of self and other. Further, some of the ideas explored in the first part inform my work in the second: How have Tibetans dealt with English-language representations of them? How has the dream of epiphany shaped Western reception of these texts? This book is informed by a kind of self-critical hopefulness; in this way I aim to contribute to ongoing discussions about cross-cultural representation as they are worked out in a number of disciplines including English studies, cultural studies, and Tibetan studies.

I come to this topic after long association with and travel among Tibetan communities in India, Nepal, Tibet, Switzerland, and the United States. My initiation into Tibetan Studies, as it were, occurred when I myself was a traveler—an English-speaker among Tibetan peoples. Having pored over Tuesday Lobsang Rampa's *The Third Eye* as a teenager and been intrigued when the Dalai Lama visited my home state of Wisconsin in 1979, I went to a college where Tibet all but fell through the cracks between academic disciplines. While traveling in India on an undergraduate program, I encountered people of Tibetan ancestry for the first time; they were selling sweaters on city streets, offering religious artifacts in exchange for Bic pens at Ladakhi monasteries, and gathering at Buddhist pilgrimage sites. I returned to India in 1984 on a Thomas J. Watson Foundation Fellowship to observe the present shape of Buddhist culture in India, which included that of the Tibetan exiles. Within this framework, I was more interested in seeing how Tibetans lived in exile than in studying texts or meditating. While some Western scholars studied at the Library of Tibetan Works and Archives in Dharamsala or with various lamas, I was more likely to be hanging out in the restaurants in McLeod Ganj, talking with children in rudimentary Tibetan, or going to discos with Tibetan cohorts at Friends' Corner.

These experiences all shaped my sense of Tibetan religion and culture, giving it its particular focus. I had no sense that there was a "pure" Tibetan culture; I was more interested in the ways that Jesus Christ was hailed as a *bodhisattva* in Kopan Monastery's Christmas *puja* near Kathmandu; I was compelled by the way that young Tibetans in Dharamsala called Western Buddhists "*dharma* crazy." I was more interested in the strange cultural phenomenon by which a matron from New York state might believe that she, along with a contingent from Boulder, was actively engaged in bringing the dharma back to Tibet. Such experiences led me to decide not to pursue a graduate degree in Buddhist Studies (where I would have been largely involved in philosophical and philological study of Buddhist texts), even as they alerted me to the ways in which the interactions between Westerners and Tibetans transformed the priorities of both sides. When I did undertake graduate study, my interest was in the history of American and British constructions of South Asia and Tibet and depended on a suspicion of what Edward Said calls the "textual attitude"[3] towards Asian religions and cultures—a skepticism about any claims to presenting and preserving "authentic" or "pure" forms of culture and religion. In recent years I have been particularly indebted to the work of Donald S. Lopez, Jr. and other innovators in the field of Tibetan and Himalayan area studies.[4] Lopez's 1998 book, *Prisoners of Shangri-La: Tibetan Buddhism and the West,* has been crucial to my conception of the project I first began in 1989; Lopez argues that the West's image of Tibet has a particular history and a peculiar trajectory, one at some distance from the lives of Tibetans—from the ways in which Tibetans have *lived out* their history, culture, and religious traditions.[5]

This book, then, is a product of my travels, values, and predilections. It explores the oft-ignored mixedness of Tibetan culture and religion, and engages in an always incomplete effort to be self-reflective. When I look into the mirror the image does not stand still but moves between traveler, writer, teacher, mother, lover, scholar, woman, former farm kid. In the writing of this book I have struggled to maintain the energy as well as the intricacy of those movements; in Part One I use "postscripts" to call special attention to my shifting relationship with the texts and ideas under consideration. In Part Two, these reflections are more integrated into the analysis; even so, I use several postscripts to consider how my travels have connected to those of Tibetan autobiographers. Overall my approach relies on close textual analysis; my strategy is to contextualize selected texts, to see how they are historically situated, to examine how they relate to other texts, and to consider how knowledge about Tibetans and Westerners is produced through cross-cultural exchanges. The limitations of my approach are, no doubt, many; nonetheless, I believe that the advantages of such work lies in its power to make us continually question what we know and how we know it. What do Westerners expect from Tibetans? What do Tibetans expect from the West? What can various self-presentations teach us about an exchange between English-speakers and Tibetans that is now over two hundred years old? By bringing such questions to light I aim not just for the endless play of unsettling conventions and stereotypes (though that's a worthwhile project, too); my hope is that through being so unsettled we might imagine different ways of approaching others and apprehending ourselves.