



Universiteit  
Leiden

The Netherlands

## **Religious commodities or cultural elements? Lay Han practitioners of Tibetan Buddhism and the “living hall” (Shenghuo guan 生活馆) model**

Shmushko, K.

### **Citation**

Shmushko, K. (2022). Religious commodities or cultural elements?: Lay Han practitioners of Tibetan Buddhism and the “living hall” (Shenghuo guan 生活馆) model. *Review Of Religion And Chinese Society*, 9(1), 101-136. doi:10.1163/22143955-08020015

Version: Publisher's Version

License: [Creative Commons CC BY 4.0 license](https://creativecommons.org/licenses/by/4.0/)

Downloaded from: <https://hdl.handle.net/1887/3458384>

**Note:** To cite this publication please use the final published version (if applicable).



BRILL

REVIEW OF RELIGION AND CHINESE SOCIETY

9 (2022) 101–136

Review of Religion  
and Chinese Society

brill.com/rccs

# Religious Commodities or Cultural Elements?

## *Lay Han Practitioners of Tibetan Buddhism and the “Living Hall” (Shenghuo guan 生活馆) Model*

*Kai Shmushko*

School of Historical Studies, Tel Aviv University, Tel Aviv, Israel;

Institute for Area Studies, Leiden University, Leiden, Netherlands

*kaishmush@gmail.com*

### Abstract

This article is a case study of a lay Buddhist community that employs a business model called “living hall” (*Shenghuo guan* 生活馆) to facilitate the practice of Tibetan Buddhism among its members. The living hall model is explored in the context of the politics of religion in the People’s Republic of China (PRC) and the dynamics of Tibetan Buddhism among Han Chinese in the past decades. The author investigates the model’s origin, its implementation in a contemporary Buddhist community, and its interaction with the discourse on Buddhism in the PRC. The article joins a recent academic endeavor to illuminate the different modalities in which lay practitioners carry out Buddhist practice outside the sphere of institutionalized Buddhism. The article sheds light on the delicate dynamics between religion and state control in the PRC and the role of entrepreneurs and materiality within lay Tibetan Buddhism.

### Keywords

Tibetan Buddhism – China – lay Buddhism – religious groups – material religion – ritual economy – religious entrepreneurship

# 宗教商品还是文化元素？ 藏传佛教汉族居士群体与生活馆模式

## 文摘

本文是关于佛教居士群体的案例研究。该群体通过采用生活馆的商业模式促进了藏传佛教汉族信徒的修行。对生活馆模式的探索基于于几十年内中华人民共和国的宗教政治环境，以及藏传佛教在汉族中的动态演变。作者考察了该模式的起源、它在当代佛教居士群体的实施，以及该模式与中国佛教主流话语的互动。本文顺应近期的学术努力，旨在阐述佛教居士在制度化宗教领域之外的不同佛教实践。本文揭示了宗教和国家控制之间的微妙动态，以及在藏传佛教居士中企业家和物质性的作用。

## 关键词

藏传佛教，中国，居士群体，宗教团体，物质宗教研究，仪式经济，宗教企业家

## Introduction

The past thirty years have witnessed an upsurge of interest in Tibetan Buddhism among Han Chinese. Tibetan masters, who count hundreds or even thousands of Han Chinese devotees, instruct their adepts both in Tibetan areas and in China proper. An increasing number of Chinese people turn to such masters, referred to as lamas (Tib. *bla ma* Ch. shangshi 上师), for guidance in their individual practice and visit Tibetan Buddhist institutions or communities for practice, Buddhist festivals, and initiations (Esposito 2008; Bianchi 2004, 2017, 2018; Jones 2011; Caple 2020). This phenomenon is connected to an ongoing revival of Tantrism in China, known generally as Tantric Fever (*mijiaore* 密教热), which began at the start of the twentieth century (Bianchi 2004).<sup>1</sup>

The Chinese economic reforms, or reform and opening (*gaige kaifang* 改革开放), instituted by Deng Xiaoping 邓小平 (1904–1997)<sup>2</sup> catalyzed what is known as the Tibetan Buddhism Revival among Han Chinese. By the 1990s,

1 The histories of Tantric Buddhist traditions in China and of the role of Buddhism in the relationship between China and Tibet are rich and complex; see, for example, Esposito 2008; Kapstein 2009; Orzech, Payne, and Sorensen 2011; Tuttle 2005.

2 The reforms began in 1978 and continued throughout the 1990s. After Deng Xiaoping died in 1997, the reforms continued to be carried out by his successors, roughly until 2005.

Buddhist practices in Tibetan areas of Qinghai and Sichuan had become widespread, and Tibetan-language books, prayer manuals, music, and instructional videos had appeared in bookstores across these regions (Terrone 2012:107).<sup>3</sup> In many Tibetan areas, Buddhist monasteries that were closed or destroyed during the Cultural Revolution (1966–1976) have reopened their halls to monastic enrollment, public worship, and religious teachings and ceremonies.<sup>4</sup> Furthermore, Tibetan-style *stupas* and inscriptions of Tibetan mantras are commonly found at Chinese Buddhist pilgrimage sites.

Throughout this revival, the Chinese regime has taken an aggressive stance against monastic life and culture in areas of Greater Tibet (namely Central Tibet, Amdo, and Kham) in a bid to minimize the political strength of Buddhism (Terrone 2008:734; Cabezón 2008; Powers 2016; Oostveen 2020). The restrictions imposed in the Tibetan Autonomous Region (TAR) slowed, but did not stop, the Buddhist revival there. By the end of the twentieth century, Tibetan Buddhism within Tibetan areas of China had not only regained strength as a component of cultural identity in Tibetan areas but had also become a genuinely globalized religious movement (Shen 2020:186–187). It also took root in Han Chinese societies in mainland China, Hong Kong, and Taiwan (Chen 2008; Jones 2011; Smyer Yü 2012; Terrone 2012; Bianchi 2014; Sodargye and Smyer Yü 2017; Esler 2020; Jagou 2018, 2021). This paper focuses on one set of actors within this revitalization, namely, lay Han individuals (*fojiao jushi* 佛教居士) who practice Tibetan Buddhism in a community-based framework.<sup>5</sup> Several works engage with the lived experiences of these practitioners and the material and spiritual exchanges between different segments of this broad group (Jones 2011, 2014; Smyer Yü 2012; Esler 2020; Shmushko 2021). Also noteworthy are works of scholarship that discuss the predicament of lay Buddhism in the post-Mao era more generally (Fisher 2014, 2020; Ji and Zhang 2018).

In recent decades, we have seen that lay Buddhist believers have found it rather inconvenient to attend religious activities in temples, due to the demands of their modern daily lives. Buddhism in its lay form has become an active social movement in the country today, as seen in the range of activities, associations, and networks in which laypersons take part, both within

3 These Chinese regions are parts of Kham and Amdo, two traditional regions of Tibet over which the Communist state assumed official control in 1958.

4 The revitalization of Tibetan monastic communities has been extensively studied; see, for example, Goldstein and Kapstein 1999; Kolås and Thowsen 2005).

5 Here I use the term “laypeople” (*zajia xiuxing* 在家修行) broadly, referring to individuals who are actively devoted to Buddhist traditions but are not nuns or monks. However, throughout this article, I will follow Gareth Fisher’s example and refer to the laypeople included in this study as “practitioners,” in recognition of the fact that laypersons have committed their lives to mastering the teachings of the Buddha (Fisher 2020:35–36).



and outside of Buddhist temple space (Fisher 2020; Ji and Zhang 2018). For example, Buddhist study groups have begun to appear outside the context of a temple. Importantly, the different modalities of lay Buddhism lack a unified framework, and significant diversity in Buddhist practice is evident, a fact that makes room for flexibility and development (Smyer Yü 2012; Fisher 2020; Ji and Zhang 2018:13; Esler 2020).

In dialogue with the studies cited above, this article analyzes a particular modality of lay Tibetan Buddhism in the urban People's Republic of China (PRC). It is based on a case study of the Pure Light Valley Retreat,<sup>6</sup> a lay Buddhist community based in Shanghai that is also registered as a legal business under the same name. I explore how those who take part in this community facilitate their Buddhist cultivation, taking advantage of both the physical and financial resources of the business as well as the spiritual and social assistance of the community structure. The business is inspired by a marketing strategy called "living hall" (*Shenghuo guan* 生活馆). The main questions this article addresses are as follows: How does this model of community work? What does it teach us about the religious freedom of Buddhist groups in the PRC? Moreover, what does it reveal regarding the trajectory of Tibetan Buddhist traditions in contemporary Chinese society?<sup>7</sup>

Starting from one small studio in an alley in Shanghai's Jinshan District in 2011, members of the Pure Light Valley Retreat have gradually expanded their business activities and the size of the community itself. Since my last visit in 2018, they have purchased and renovated another property on the outskirts of the city, which serves mainly as a venue for their Buddhist practices. The community currently maintains facilities at five locations; some are used only for Buddhist gatherings and practices, while others are also open to visitors and customers. In addition to the newest property, these include two small studio shops in Jinshan, another shop in Tian Shan Tea City (*Tianshan chacheng* 天山茶城), and a larger space used for gatherings such as group practice (*gongxiu* 共修). The commodities produced and sold by the group are tea, teaware, silk and linen clothing, and handmade prayer beads (Sk. *mālā*, Ch. *fozhu* 佛珠). In this article, I aim to demonstrate how this business model works by presenting an ethnography of the community. I argue that the community manifests a specific Buddhist religious-economic structure whose

6 To maintain the anonymity of my informants, I have assigned pseudonyms to the community itself as well as to the master and all lay actors.

7 The research is based on field research conducted in the PRC, consisting of unstructured interviews with people from the community during summer 2017 and fall 2018. Both pieces of fieldwork combined interviews with participant observation. A further significant source is digital research on the group's social media accounts, conducted from 2017 to 2020, along with my continuing communication with the informants via WeChat.

development is rooted both in the predicament of lay Buddhism in the PRC and in the more general trajectory of Tibetan Buddhism. By exploring this case study, I aim to enrich our understanding of the delicate political dynamic of Tibetan Buddhist practice in the PRC.

### An Urban Buddhist Community

The Pure Light Valley Retreat community is comprised of a group of Han Chinese practitioners who base their Buddhist practice on the Great Perfection (Tib. *Dzogchen*, Ch. *Da yuanman* 大圓滿).<sup>8</sup> The group is associated with a master from the Nyingma (Tib. *nying ma pa*, Ch. *Ningma pai* 宁玛派 / *Hongjiao* 红教) lineage.<sup>9</sup> The practitioners are all followers of the same Tibetan teacher, whom they refer to in Chinese as Master Wujin (born 1957).<sup>10</sup> Their master resides some three thousand kilometers from Shanghai in Serthar (Tib. *gser rda*, Ch. *Seda* 色达) county, in the Garzê (Tib. *Kardzé*, Ch. *Ganzi* 甘孜) Tibetan Autonomous Prefecture. He was trained at the Larung Gar Five Sciences Buddhist Academy (Tib. *bla rung lnga rig nang bstan slob gling*, Ch. *Larong Wuming Fojiao xueyuan* 喇荣五明佛教学院).<sup>11</sup> There are not many Tibetan temples that offer official seminars for lay people around Shanghai. Thus, many Han devotees of the Nyingma school conduct their

8 The Great Perfection is the central philosophical and meditative teaching in the Nyingma tradition of Tibetan Buddhism (Karmay 2007: x). The practice is aimed at discovering the ultimate ground of existence. Among Nyingma practitioners, the concept of Bodhicitta (*pusaxin* 菩萨心) is prevalent; it signifies the enlightened mind that strives toward awakening, but also toward empathy and compassion for all sentient beings (gathered from interviews in August 2017). The advanced practitioner, who aspires to achieve the realization or motivation of Bodhicitta, is called a Bodhisattva, and the gradual path of practice is called the Bodhisattva path (Trungpa 2002). Importantly, the practice, despite its distinct rituals, is still based on the motivation to save all sentient beings from the cycle of suffering, but it uses more powerful practices to accomplish this aim. Thus, it is not segregated from other Buddhist traditions (Van Schaik 2004).

9 For more about Nyingma, see Palden, Tsewang, Helm, and White 2010. See also Dudjom, Gyurme, and Kapstein 2002; Terrone 2008.

10 The exact number of practitioners who see Longyou as their teacher is difficult to determine. I am currently aware of over one hundred individuals who are connected to this community.

11 Larung Gar was founded at the beginning of the 1980s by Khenpo Jikmé Püntsock (Ch. Jinmei Pengcuo 晋美彭措, 1933–2004). Conceived as an ecumenical, “non-sectarian” (*rimé*) place of practice, its study curricula and religious activities refer to the Tibetan Buddhist tradition as a whole. Nevertheless, Larung Gar teachings and practices clearly reveal a strong Nyingma affiliation, the *Dzogchen* tradition being its distinguishing feature (Bianchi 2018, 111). For more on the academy, see Smyer Yü 2012; Germano 1998.

practice at home. In this case study, the practice halls of the community serve as further spaces for practice apart from private homes. However, the community's connection with the master, and in the eyes of the practitioners also with the Nyingma lineage, is maintained through visits to Larung Gar and with the master. Approximately once a year, the community organizes a pilgrimage to visit their master and the monastery compound in Sertar, and the trip is often planned around specific Buddhist festivals organized in Larung Gar (Fig. 1).<sup>12</sup>



FIGURE 1 Members of the Pure Light Valley Retreat community on a pilgrimage to Larung Gar, heading to the house of their master, 2017

COURTESY: LIN YUXI

12 Since 2017 I have noted other pilgrimages to Wutai Mountain (*Wutai shan* 五台山) and to Putuo Mountain (*Putuo shan* 普陀山).

As for the size of the community, it is difficult to determine the actual number of people who take part in the various activities because some practitioners participate in only a few while others attend all activities and spend much of their free time together. My ethnography of the community, therefore, is layered and considers several levels of participation. The first level is what I call the “lay leaders”: a core group of four members who serve as a connecting link between Master Wujin and the rest of the group members. They are the most senior members of the community and fulfill various teaching, guiding, and administrative roles connected to the businesses. They do not hold day jobs outside the community. One of these lay leaders is Ms. Lin (born 1988), who joined the group in her early twenties, after returning from university studies in Europe. She was walking through an alley in Jinshan District when her eyes fell upon a sign displaying a rhyming couplet that piqued her curiosity. Entering the studio, she encountered a few members of the community (which was smaller at the time) sitting in the studio, drinking tea and discussing Buddhist philosophy. This incidental meeting paved her path in Buddhist cultivation. Today, serving as a linchpin in the community structure, she daily composes Buddhist couplets—not unlike the one that originally attracted her attention—that she uploads next to pictures of products in her WeChat (*weixin* 微信) feed and the community’s Weibo (微博) profile.<sup>13</sup>

The second level I describe as “active members.” Some of them play active roles in the group’s organization of meetings, and also in the various businesses. They participate in every practice meeting and take part in organizing events, often donating their personal resources to meet various needs of the practice.<sup>14</sup> The third group is comprised of “low-key participants.” These are practitioners connected to the same teacher who sporadically participate in weekly meetings and other events, group pilgrimages, and the WeChat groups for online activities related to the practice. Among these are also roughly twenty children who participate with their parents. Including the low-key participants, the community counts more than one hundred practitioners. For example, there is a WeChat group whose 113 members share the number of prostrations they have made and sutras they have recited each day.

13 Media platforms such as WeChat and Weibo are increasingly being used skillfully by Buddhist actors, including Buddhist lay practitioners and groups. These media tools are used to spread the Dharma, to create intimate connections to other practitioners, and also to conduct online practice (Lu and Yuan 2014; Travagnin 2019; Tarocco 2017; Zhang 2017; Xu and Ji 2020).

14 For example, some members offer rooms in their homes, in addition to the halls of the community, for use in community-organized retreats. Other donations to group activities or to the master are monetary; often they are made by the wealthier practitioners.





FIGURE 2 Group practice in the Pure Light Valley Retreat living hall, Shanghai 2017  
PHOTO: AUTHOR

However, the group practice gatherings that I attended throughout the summer of 2017 and the fall of 2018 were usually attended by only about forty practitioners (Fig. 2). Pilgrimage trips that I noted in past years included up to about fifty practitioners.

Group cultivation meetings take place weekly, in a spacious practice hall located in an affluent residential area in the Putuo neighborhood of Shanghai (*Putuo qu* 普陀区). (This hall is where I first encountered the term “Living Hall,” which I saw on a sign at the entrance.) The content of weekly group practice varies. The basic elements are scripture reading and guided meditation. Often the practice includes a recorded lecture from their teacher (delivered in Chinese). Texts are taken from a book entitled *Exoteric and Esoteric Lessons and Recitations Collection*, printed by the community (*Xianmi kesongji* 显密课诵集).<sup>15</sup> The book itself states that it was printed by the Pure Light Valley Retreat and is distributed to its members only after they have “taken the

15 The gradual path begins with “open/exoteric teachings” (*xianjiao* 显教), or *sūtrayāna*, which are considered preparatory to approaching the “secret/esoteric teachings” (*mijiao* 密教), or *tantrayāna*. Thus, Larung Gar masters believe that along the path to realization, practitioners should “assimilate exoteric and esoteric doctrines” (*xianmi ronghe* 显密融合). For more about the book *Larung Daily Recitation*, see Bianchi 2018.

Refuges" (*guiyi sanbao* 皈依三宝)<sup>16</sup> and demonstrated that they are "serious about their practice" (interview with Ms. Lin, 2018).<sup>17</sup> Nevertheless, the content is almost identical to the manual distributed by the Five Sciences Buddhist Academy, *Larong Daily Recitation* (*Larong rechang kesong* 喇荣日常课诵). Both manuals are collections of recitation phrases, sutras, and other worship instructions, such as illustrations showing how to set up a shrine at home. They are written in Tibetan and Chinese and also include a Chinese transliteration of the Tibetan scripture passages.<sup>18</sup> The practitioners included in this study do not read the Tibetan script or express a need to study the Tibetan language. However, they do hold that transliteration is vital because the recitations are "powerful when read in the original sounds" (personal communication with the lay leaders, July 2017). As described above, translations and transliterations of the Tibetan texts are becoming more widespread, and many lay Han Chinese use the Larung Gar version.

The group meetings are important in the eyes of the practitioners, but as a complementary practice to their individual cultivation. As one of the devotees told me, "Cultivation (*xiuxing* 修行) is done in solitude" (interview with Mr. Liu, born 1998, November 2018). He regarded this sentence as an important principle, explaining that while the group is there to provide support, the core of the process is personal at all times. Nevertheless, my impression is that the structure created by the community serves as an important support system for individual practice, given the fact that lay Buddhists (especially in Tibetan traditions) have often little or no unified framework of practice in Han Chinese urban environments (Fisher 2020; Esler 2020).

16 Taking the Refuges is a ceremony that entails commitment to the path of Buddhism. In the context of lay practitioners of Nyingma, it is often conducted by a teacher.

17 All quotes are reconstructions of handwritten interview notes translated by the author. Interviews were not tape-recorded, so some quotes are only partially direct quotes.

18 Many of the texts in this collection have been translated into Chinese by Khenpo Sönam Dargyé (*Suodaji kanbu* 索达吉堪布, born 1962) and by Khenpo Yéshé Püntso (Yixi Pengcuo kanbu 益西彭措堪布, born 1971), both renowned Buddhist monks who serve as the official teachers of the Chinese-speaking monastics in the academy. These texts form the liturgical core of the community and of many other Han Chinese practitioners. Some of them are read during group sessions, some are mantras to recite throughout the day, and others are used during retreats. The collection is compiled from over sixty liturgical texts of varying nature, such as prayer texts (*daowen* 祷文), vows composed in rhythmic verse (*leyuan wen* 乐愿文), praises addressed to different Buddhas or Bodhisattvas (*lizan* 礼赞), and mantras (*fanzhou* 梵咒). Some of these texts are for basic practices that are common to all Tibetan Buddhist traditions, while others are fundamental prayers that are specific to the Dzokchen tradition.

This ethnography of the Pure Light Valley Retreat community reflects a more general truth regarding the practice of lay Chinese people who have committed themselves to following the Buddha's teaching.<sup>19</sup> I consider a significant proportion of the lay Buddhists included in this study to be practitioners with a high level of engagement. Most of the practitioners who come to the group meeting have taken the Refuges, and many of them have accepted the five lay precepts (*wujie* 五戒) and Bodhisattva precepts (*pusa jie* 菩萨戒). My impression is that their Buddhist cultivation occupies a prominent place in their lives—not only spiritually, but also in terms of the time and sometimes the financial resources that they dedicate to it. The practice of the Great Perfection, as exemplified in this community, is one that demands dedication and persistence. The practitioner's day begins with full prostrations (*gui-bai* 跪拜); a typical number is 120, depending on the practitioner's progress. They are followed by visualization practices and meditation (*dazuo* 打坐). Practitioners chant sutras (*fanbai* 梵呗) throughout the day and keep to a strict vegetarian diet. Many practitioners carry their prayer beads or electronic ring-shaped counting devices wherever they go, reciting short verses throughout the day; they recite them on the train, on study breaks, or whenever they get a chance at work. They send reports on the number of recitations and prostrations to a WeChat group dedicated to that purpose, as mentioned above (every month, the WeChat group manager counts these records and announces the names of practitioners who have achieved high numbers).

An important practice for cultivation conducted by the followers is the devotional retreat (*biquan* 闭关). In terms of duration, retreats typically run for a few days for beginning practitioners to over ten days for more experienced ones. During a retreat, the practitioner isolates herself or himself in a room for the purpose of intensive reading, prostrations, and meditation conducted on a mat in front of a small shrine. On these days, practitioners leave their rooms only to go to the toilet. They refrain from washing their bodies for the length of the retreat. The rooms are empty of electronics and other disturbances. For the purpose of the retreat, each practitioner erects a small shrine, usually containing a photograph of their master or of Padmasambhava<sup>20</sup> and a Buddha statue, as well as a particular arrangement of candles and water (Fig. 3).<sup>21</sup>

19 For example, one broader definition of lay Buddhists is "lay people who have at least partly accepted Buddhist worldviews and occasionally participated in Buddhist activities" (Ji and Zhang 2018:2).

20 "The Lotus-Born One" (Ch. *lianhuasheng* 莲花生), the perceived founder of the Nyingma lineage. This figure is known more popularly in Tibet by the name of Guru Rinpoche.

21 Instructions for the arrangements also appear in the manuals described above, both the one printed by the Five Sciences Buddhist Academy and the version printed by the Pure Light Valley Retreat.



FIGURE 3 Set-up for a retreat, Shanghai, 2019  
COURTESY: LIN YUXI

Practitioners following the gradual path of the Great Perfection are at varying stages of their practice, and accordingly their retreats can vary in content and length.<sup>22</sup> Before a retreat, the teacher sends instructions to each follower

<sup>22</sup> The retreat aims for the development of the mind, ridding oneself of habitual patterns, and the cultivation of compassion.



(via the lay leaders) containing his or her own personal curriculum. These curricula are rigorous devotional practices to be performed at all waking hours of the day throughout the retreat. For example, a beginner may start with a curriculum of three thousand repetitions of the seven sentences from the Diamond Sutra (*jingang qiju* 金剛七句), three repetitions per day of the prayer for Samantabhadra (*puxian xingyuanpin* 普賢行願品), and three repetitions per day of the prayer for Padmasambhava (*lianshi qiyuansong* 蓮師祈願頌), all combined with sessions of full-body prostrations.

Given the demanding nature of these retreats, they are often conducted during Chinese holiday vacations, such as the Chinese New Year. During these days the group members reside in their various spaces throughout the city, which may include rooms in houses owned by practitioners. While the practitioners perform their retreats in solitude, a few members who are not participating in the retreat cook for and look after their fellows. Meals are served to each practitioner's room without any contact, thus maintaining the isolation of the person in retreat. The support that the group gives around this intense practice starts before the retreat, through sharing the preparation for the practice, both technically and spiritually, and continues after the practice.

After a Chinese New Year retreat in 2018, the attendees met afterwards for a vegetarian dinner, followed by a concluding gathering of all those who had been on retreat. This gathering was led by Ms. Rong (one of the lay leaders),<sup>23</sup> who explained that the meeting was meant to enable those present to process the experience of the retreat. The topic of the meeting was devotional matters, during which the notion of Bodhicitta (*putixin* 菩提心) was discussed at length.<sup>24</sup> But unlike the larger gatherings, this meeting was more personal. It was designed to help the practitioners process their experience of the rigorous practice they had just undergone, including hardships encountered and conclusions drawn. Some practitioners expressed complaints about boredom, hunger, tiredness, or discomfort during the long meditations. Others shared mostly positive emotions and thoughts regarding their time in the room during the retreat. Ms. Lu (born 1958), for example, said that during the first three days, she felt a constant urge to take out her mobile phone, and that she could think of nothing else. Although it was not her first retreat, this time the disconnection from the outside world had been difficult for her.

23 I conducted interviews with the practitioners before and after the retreat and participated in this meeting.

24 In Nyingma, there is a distinction between Relative Bodhicitta, a state of mind in which the practitioner works for the enlightenment, empathy, and the liberation of all sentient beings, and Ultimate Bodhicitta, the wisdom of emptiness (Sk. *Śūnyatā*, Ch. *Kong* 空) (Trungpa 2002:197–199).

Observing the preparations for the retreat also highlighted for me the importance of the community. The day before the retreat, the participants circulated photos of their preparations, documenting the small shrine and the offerings. This is another way in which they support one another through the retreat, and also a way to help first-timers prepare.<sup>25</sup> The practices and gatherings described here comprise the communal religious life facilitated by the Pure Light Valley Retreat. The community's physical spaces, which are used as shops, storage spaces, and studios, are also used for retreats, large-group practices, and smaller gatherings connected to the practice.

### The Living Hall Model

As discussed above, the community also conducts business activities using a model called living hall. But how is this model connected to Tibetan Buddhism? First, in a contemporary or historical Buddhist context, the term does not distinctly signify a place of worship or a congregational venue. I have not found any specific studies on the living hall model in the literature of religious studies or cultural anthropology. Nevertheless, the model has attracted some scholarly attention within the fields of economics and business, as well as interest among Chinese journalists. Firstly, it is important to note that the model is not strictly connected to Buddhism, nor to religious practices. The living hall is a business model with a specific marketing strategy that began to appear in China at the beginning of the 2000s. Generally, the aim of a living hall is to cater to a healthy lifestyle, including offering customers high-end and custom-made products. An economic analysis of living halls shows that they seek to attract their customers with personalized service, an elegant environment, and mid-range consumption (Yang 2017; Zhu 2013:15). Businesses using this model usually do so in conjunction with a theme, for example, Home Living Hall, Beauty Life Hall, Healthy Life Hall, or Lifestyle Hall.

Since the reform and opening period that followed the development of the market economy in the late 1970s, innovative market models have arisen in conformance with various social changes. One significant change in Chinese society is a greater sense of individuality, which some industries, such as the clothing industry, have tried to address with various marketing strategies (Hu 2013:4). One direction has been to emphasize a unique shopping experience and shopping environment, as well as an emphasis on lifestyle (*shenghuo*

25 The Great Perfection practice is relatively new to Han Chinese, and my interviewees stated that they did not learn about it in their homes or from elders.

*fangshi* 生活方式) and cultural elements (Hu 2013:4–5). Zhu Jieqiong has shown that living halls often attach a particular philosophy to their business approach. For example, she noted that one business inspired by the model, New Thought Living Hall (*Xingainian shenhua guan* 新概念生活馆), presents core philosophical concepts underlying its foundation—such as “Everything in the world is in constant flux” and “History is driven by positive change”—that promote notions such as “the need to surpass the ego” and a strong emphasis on “inhabitable healthy change” (Zhu 2013:16).

To understand the larger phenomenon of living halls, I also visited some living halls in Shanghai apart from the one that is the subject of this case study. Another example that I encountered is Effortless Mountain Hall (*Pushan tang* 朴山堂), in the Minhang neighborhood in Shanghai, which draws its inspiration from Daoist philosophical texts. The owner, Mr. Wang, was originally a fashion designer. After nearly twenty years in the clothing industry, he feels that “people in the clothing industry need to have a place of their own.” This was his original intention in establishing Effortless Mountain. According to Mr. Wang, the name of the hall is taken from the *Daode jing* (道德经).<sup>26</sup> Accordingly, the hall is characterized by a quiet environment with elements referring to nature. The hall also serves tea and delicious pineapple cake, as well as offering various activities such as pottery crafts, tea tasting, and zither (*guqin* 古琴) training. In a similar manner, the hall that is the subject of this study, the Pure Light Valley Retreat, also professes a philosophical inspiration behind the advertising and design of its products. The core inspiration is Buddhist philosophy and soteriology, as I will explore later in this article.

It is important to keep in mind that Buddhism and Daoism have aesthetic and philosophical elements that are diffused throughout the Chinese cultural and social sphere. Buddhist elements can be intertwined with other aspects of Chinese life without indicating a specifically religious practice or object. Furthermore, as noted above, lay Buddhists vary widely in the scale of their engagement in religious practice. These factors make it harder to classify the practices conducted in all of these halls as strictly cultural or strictly religious, certainly not without an in-depth study of each hall. It could very well be that the majority of these living spaces are merely shops with innovative marketing, using cultural elements as their marketing strategy without deeply engaging with a religious tradition. That being said, the case study examined in this article does show a connection to a specific Buddhist tradition. Furthermore, the

26 A classical Chinese text fundamental to philosophical and religious Daoism. The text emphasizes the virtues of naturalness (*ziran* 自然), non-action (*wuwei* 无为), and also simplicity/effortlessness (*pu* 朴).

study I conducted on the Pure Light Valley Retreat shows a significant emphasis on using spaces for Buddhist practices, as well as the collective orientation of the community as Buddhist and the self-identification of its members as Buddhist practitioners (personal communications and interviews, 2017–2021).

Regarding broader generalizations from this case study, it is worth mentioning the work of Gareth Fisher, which supports my conjecture that other establishments, with similar dynamics, exist throughout the PRC. During his recent observations in Beijing, Fisher (2020:56) found that private teahouses were a typical venue where groups of laypeople chose to practice. Stressing the significance of the case study presented here, I concur with Fisher and other scholars who have pointed to a certain bias in studying religion in today's urban China, which has been shaped by concepts of secularization and Weberian models of modernity (Katz 2014; Greenspan and Tarocco 2020). Looking beyond this bias, activities that could be taken as mere entertainment, philanthropy, or material exchanges may in fact constitute "rituals of modernity" (Greenspan and Tarocco 2020). In line with these works exploring religious practices in Chinese urbanity, it seems that cities tend to be particularly fertile ground for the new modalities for religious practice. Shanghai is an example of a city with a strong culture of living halls, offering a variety of services connected to leisure, calligraphy, meditation, and tea consumption (Zhu 2013).

Religious economic entrepreneurship in China is not the exclusive terrain of lay Buddhist grassroot groups. Recent studies have shown that a variety of entrepreneurship projects are connected to China's religious revival (Cao 2008, 2009; Chau 2006; Herrmann-Pillath, Feng, and Guo 2019). The reform and opening have created a change in the Chinese consumption of both goods and religion (Smyer Yü 2012:103–106; Leung 2005). Within this context, I see the practitioners included in this study as harnessing an innovative marketing strategy to their community and building a network of businesses that both serve as practice spaces for their religion and also raise resources for pilgrimage and for the financial support of their teacher. As with other cases of religious entrepreneurship in the PRC, the religious dimension is not always explicitly or officially acknowledged, as this is a sensitive topic (Herrmann-Pillath, Feng, and Guo 2019:780). The source of this sensitivity, and the political aspects of religious groups in the PRC, are important factors in understanding this case study and the overall significance of the living hall model.

### Regulations and Discourse on Religions in the Xi Jinping Era

As the religious revival has developed rapidly from the reform era onwards, the PRC has maintained its mobilization of state apparatuses and resources

to monitor, control, and selectively suppress types of religious groups or ideologies that seem to threaten the party-state's authority. While the *Regulation on Religious Affairs* (*Zongjiao shiwu tiaoli* 宗教事务条例) of the PRC includes freedom of belief (*Zhongguo xinyang de ziyou* 中国信仰的自由), as articulated in article 2 of the regulation, all religious traditions in the PRC today are in fact subjected to a series of restrictions (2018). Regarding freedom of belief and the practice of religion, the difficulty generally begins with the practice of religion in the public and social sphere. In contrast to the constitutional protection of religion, a state-led, top-down "rectification" campaign is under way to not only sinicize religion but also to diminish its public presence (Dubois 2017:94–95; Cao 2018:3).

The regime's approach includes changing regulations and limitations on religious activities and gatherings. Relevant to Han practitioners of Tibetan Buddhism, for example, is a regulation restricting religious activity to officially registered religious sites and a ban on religious figures from outside of China teaching or proselytizing (Leung 2005, 2018; Dubois 2017). According to Jones, the regime shows particular sensitivity to Tibetan Buddhism (Jones 2011). Although Tibetan teachers are not technically from outside China, the state is uncomfortable with these teachers' attempts to gain disciples among Han Chinese (Jones 2011:541). In a conversation I had with Ms. Lu (born 2001), a young practitioner whose parents are also active members of the Pure Light Valley Retreat, she told me about a visit by the teacher that year: "My father arranged the visit in our home, I was so proud of him for being so brave and ambitious, almost a hundred people came." She was very young at the time, but I could sense that she understood that organizing such an event in a private home was a politically complex undertaking.

Since Jones's research on Tibetan Buddhism in Han China, conducted in the Hu Jintao (胡锦涛, born 1942) era, further developments in religious regulation and supervision have taken place. Despite the significant growth of Tibetan Buddhism, and the apparent legal protection of the practice of the Buddhist religion, the current regime under Xi Jinping (习近平, born 1953) has presided over a significant regression in religious freedom (Leung 2018). In recent years, the PRC has increasingly integrated its supervision of religion into the national system of state governance and party building (Cao 2018).<sup>27</sup>

27 The recent restructuring and incorporation of the SARA (State Administration of Religious Affairs or *Guojia zongjiao shiwu ju* 国家宗教事务局) into the CCP Department of United Front Work (*Zhonggong zhongyang tongzhanbu* 中共中央统战部) both attests to and is backed up by a fundamental political principle: "The party manages religion" (*dang guan zongjiao* 党管宗教).

In 2014, the government published a report on national security called *The Blue Paper on National Security* (*Zhongguo guojia anquan yanjiu baogao* 中国国家安全研究报告), in which suggestions were made to impose greater restrictions on religious matters. This paved the way for the administration to tighten control over Tibetan Buddhism (Leung 2018:374). It is still difficult to assess how the increased restrictions affect Han people's practice of Tibetan Buddhism, particularly in terms of their relationships with their monastic teachers in Tibetan areas.<sup>28</sup>

Along the same lines, more specific measures have been taken recently regarding religious groups. As of 2020, new administrative measures were established for Chinese religious groups (*Zongjiao tuanti guanli banfa* 宗教团体管理办法). These measures consist of six chapters and forty-one articles dealing with the organization, functions, offices, supervision, projects, and economical administration of communities and groups at both the national and local level. Every aspect of the life of religious communities, from formation and gatherings to annual and daily projects, is subject to approval by the government's religious affairs department, the State Administration of Religious Affairs (SARA; Leung 2018).<sup>29</sup> Both official literature and research on official policies are indicative of the state's political will and the policies it is striving to implement. But official documents cannot tell us to what extent these policies are implemented for people who self-identify as Buddhists and whom the state is targeting. In the past decades, most growth has been taking place outside the state-supervised patriotic associations and thus is not under the jurisdiction of SARA (Laliberté 2020:31–32).

We find an important theoretical approach relevant to the gap between policy and practice in Yang Fenggang's application of a triple market model to religion in China. According to Yang (2012), heavy regulation does not reduce religious participation, but rather fosters complexity in the market. Heavily regulated religious markets (such as China) can be divided into black, red, and gray. The red market for religion consists of all legal (officially permitted)

28 For example, in recent years reports on strengthening control over Larung Gar are mentioned; nevertheless, the community in this study visited there in 2017. Furthermore, as explained earlier, the relationships in the group are also mediated by social media, which helps lay practitioners of this community and beyond to maintain an ongoing relationship with the core religious authority.

29 For example, the new measures require religious groups to implement the values of socialism (article 5), and religious education (including the educational staff) needs to obtain approval from SARA. Erecting large religious statues in a religious compound also needs approval, as does holding large-scale religious activities. Applications for such activities must be filed with the Public Security office thirty days in advance.

religious organizations, believers, and religious activities. The black market, on the other hand, consists of all illegal (officially banned) religious organizations, believers, and religious activities. It refers to exchanges that are conducted underground or in secret. The third definition, the one most relevant to this study, is the gray market for religion, which consists of all religious and spiritual organizations, practitioners, and activities with an ambiguous legal status (Yang 2012:137–138). These groups, individuals, and activities fall into a gray area of religious regulation where they can be considered both legal and illegal or, alternatively, neither legal nor illegal.

Regarding the operation of the Pure Light Valley Retreat living hall, I argue that the organization conducts “religious or spiritual practices that are manifested in culture or science instead of in religion” (Yang 2012:190). The day-to-day practice of the members contains “explicitly religious activities” that take place in their own homes and are thus authorized for individuals as part of their freedom of religion, as mentioned above. Nevertheless, a substantial part of individual practice in this community takes place within community spaces.

To better grasp the ambiguous nature of lay Buddhism in this case study, we need to view the structure of the living hall as a whole. The combination of individual worship, group practice, and business structure, which together form their community, situates them in the gray sector of the religious market. As described above, while there are spaces used for “non-explicit religious activities” such as selling Buddhist-inspired goods, on weekends and after shopping hours the devotees utilize these spaces for their Buddhist practices. Therefore, the community’s structure also provides members with the physical space, financial means, and group support structure to hold activities of an “explicitly religious nature” (Yang 2012:190). In theory, these activities could have been subject to the various restrictions and regulations mentioned above, had the community presented itself and registered as a religious organization. Furthermore, the involvement of children in Buddhist educational practices, as well as the gathering of several dozen people for scripture reading, are both examples of practices restricted by the new regulations, which demand specific approvals and authorizations.<sup>30</sup> However, the community is registered not as a religious group, but as an official business. They even display their brand at exhibitions and tradeshow; in the fall of 2018, they participated in the Shanghai Expo, an annual trade show, and more recently (March 2021) the community presented their tea at an exhibition called “Drink” (He 喝). The existence of the community and its Buddhist orientation are therefore not hidden, for they conduct their activities openly, both in the social sphere and on public social

30 See n. 29 above.



media. Interviews and conversations with members convey that from an emic perspective, they are Buddhists and that they also do business. When asked about the connection between doing business and the government's restrictions, I did not get a declaration stating a causal relationship between the two facts. Nevertheless, the use of the living hall model, I maintain, can be seen as "creative assimilation," a process in which lay religious groups dodge political surveillance by presenting themselves as cultural, social, charitable, or even economic organizations (Chau 2011:6–7).<sup>31</sup>

While Xi Jinping's treatment of religion incorporates harsh restrictions overall, its strategy regarding Buddhism is more complex than merely attacking it directly as a religion. The Chinese Communist Party (CCP) has not openly opposed the expansion of Buddhism and has even initiated what it calls a "passive form of support." However, state policies are intended to control the influence of Buddhism and use it for the state's objectives (Laliberté 2011). Buddhism can also be perceived as an element of "soft power" used by the state in internal affairs, as well as a cultural resource used in external politics (Ji 2012; Ashiwa and Wank 2009, 2020a, 2020b; Laliberté 2019, 2020). The CCP's current approach is not only to use Buddhism for its means and agenda but also to give the religion a more strategic role in society. People's response to the attitude, regulations, and demands of the Buddhist Association of China (BAC, *Zhongguo fojiao xiehui* 中国佛教协会), which is monopolized by the CCP, is not necessarily rejection or disgruntled obedience (Ashiwa and Wank 2009). Different religious institutions hold different objectives, meaning that the state-religion interaction is not inherently antagonistic. This relationship may reflect characteristics such as competition, adaptation, and cooperation, as well as conflict (Ashiwa and Wank 2009:3; Laliberté 2019). One expression of the CCP's molding of religion under the current regime can be seen in the slogan "Love Country, Love Religion" (*aiguo aijiao* 爱国爱教), which places loyalty to the country and the CCP before religion. The authorities require clergy in religious organizations to teach believers this value, and the clergy often comply in order to gain legitimacy in the authorities' eyes.

31 I hold that this process does not necessarily delineate a deliberate strategy but rather a status that lay believers and groups develop within the religious ecosystem of the PRC, whether entirely intentionally or not. The members of the Pure Light Valley Retreat have not confirmed with me that they present themselves as a business to avoid surveillance or regulations. In my understanding, even if they did define their motives in that way, they would be reluctant to share that motivation with a foreign researcher. However, I also think that the community's business side holds more significance and is not just a defense tactic, as I will explore below through the framework of ritual economy.



More generally, the CCP expects religions to adapt to socialist society, which means developing religious doctrines and practices that serve the needs of society, as defined by the party (Li 2019; Fang 2005; Masláková and Satorová 2019:17). This discourse is also echoed in academic work published in Chinese universities by scholars from the United Front Work Department (*Zhonggong zhongyang tongyi zhanxian gongzuo bu* 中共中央统一战线工作部). According to John Powers (2016), a 2011 pamphlet by the United Front contained the party's official stance on how Tibetan Buddhism must adapt its teachings to Chinese socialism. This spawned dozens of articles in PRC academic journals affirming that Tibetan Buddhism must either change or issue generalizing statements about the relationship between Buddhism and socialism (Powers 2016:161).

Another element in the CCP's redefining of Buddhism is Xi's ongoing emphasis on the aspect of "Buddhism as culture" that the CCP now considers a core element of Chinese civilization. In recent years, Xi has several times expressed the idea that Buddhism is a tradition, not a religion (Dubois 2018; Ashiwa and Wank 2020a). His speeches, writings, and media statements contain rhetoric aimed to fuse religious teachings with Chinese culture (Xi 2016, 2018). In response, prominent clerics, using variations on the theme of "Buddhism as culture," show people appropriate ways to combine a belief in Buddhism with loyalty to the CCP. Aligning themselves with the state's policy, these clerics have shifted from broadcasting Buddhism as "religion" (*zongjiao* 宗教, i.e., dharma talks, chanting) to relating to it as "culture" (*wenhua* 文化). Ashiwa and Wank have observed that large Buddhist websites, which feature global coverage of Chinese Buddhist temples and events, as well as articles on "Buddhism as culture" (focusing on architecture, music, and the tea ceremony), have turned Buddhist clerics into media stars (Ashiwa and Wank 2020a). Within this discourse about Buddhism, I believe that even religious actors who are not officially registered are also affected by this narrative of "Buddhism as culture." Therefore, while the gray market of Buddhist lay people is not directly affected by the values forced on registered Buddhist organizations, this does not mean that the state's rhetoric is absent from grassroot organizations such as the Pure Light Valley Retreat. The CCP's ongoing effort to channel Buddhist philosophy, values, and tradition into a cultural niche may well affect lay Buddhist modalities and practices. Therefore, this case study (and other studies about Buddhist lay modalities) should also be examined for its compatibility with the current discourse and the CCP's approach to Buddhism. In the following section I suggest that, to some extent, the modality of the living hall model developed in reaction to the CCP's discourse.

### Commodification, Enchantment, and Material Culture

Having discussed living halls from a social and political perspective, I will now turn to the economic aspects of this case study and situate them within Buddhism, particularly Tibetan Buddhist traditions. Before suggesting that a contemporary business model can be seen as a relevant player in the revitalization of Tibetan Buddhism among lay Chinese, it is worth briefly discussing the dynamics of Buddhist material exchange in China as a segment of Buddhist material culture. Even though Buddhism has attacked the material world with extensive intellectual rigor (Kieschnick 2003:2), the influence of Buddhism on material culture in China is not a cut-and-dry issue, explains John Kieschnick (2003:3): “Objects, ideas about objects and behaviours associated with objects came with Buddhism to China where they have continued to change and evolve in response to new environments and the demands of a dynamic society with an immense capacity to manufacture, employ, and discard material things.”

More specifically, examining the trajectory of Tibetan Buddhism in contemporary China reveals this dynamic relationship between materiality and spirituality in Buddhist practice. Tibetan Buddhism is often perceived (especially in the West) as a refined spiritual discipline, a world of subtle philosophy and powerful meditation techniques that induce insight and compassion for all. This perception is part of a general exoticization of Tibet, which has underlined the religion's appeal for both westerners and Chinese (Jones 2011:548; Smyer Yü 2012). However, this representation is also rooted in an image crafted by the religion for itself over centuries, an image that does not encompass all aspects of Tibetan Buddhism. For Tibetans, the objectives of religious life are often concrete and grounded. They undertake meritorious rites and avoid bad karma in order to be protected and rewarded, not necessarily to achieve spiritual enlightenment (Kapstein 2014:3). These concrete objectives for Tibetans, achieved through esoteric practices, have also appealed to Chinese adherents (Dodin and Räther 2001; Lopez 1998). Moreover, esoteric practices, which comprise a large part of Nyingma tradition, offer spiritual merchandise but also material prosperity. For many Chinese adherents, Tibetan Buddhism has significant efficiency and spiritual power (*ling* 灵). This spiritual power may be used to achieve spiritual progress, material blessing, or both. Thus, the provision of ritual services and their remuneration remain a key feature of Tibetan lay–specialist relations (Smyer Yü 2012; Jones 2011:547; Sihlé 2015:376).

Accordingly, in the case of Han Chinese religious consumption of Tibetan Buddhism, the presence of money is pervasive (Smyer Yü 2012:111). One element in the trajectory of money and Tibetan Buddhism in China is that material

things, namely money and gifts, are used by Han Chinese to obtain teachings, initiations, and ritual practices conducted by tantric masters. Materialism in Chinese individuals' worship is manifested in their support for monastic communities and monasteries in Tibet (Caple 2015:464). This support illustrates how important material exchange is for lay Chinese who participate in the Tibetan practice of the religion. Dan Smyer Yü (2012:111) argues that on the whole, attraction to Tibetan traditions of Buddhist practice is most prevalent among wealthy Chinese. According to him, this observation goes hand in hand with the nature of Tibetan Buddhist practice, especially Nyingma *Dzogchen*, which requires extensive time and resources (Smyer Yü 2012:121). However, as Joshua Esler (2020) observes, research shows that not all practitioners are materially wealthy. Some, for example, are artists of the lower middle class who make a modest living in rural China. In my case study, the ethnography reveals a nuanced version of the reality described by Smyer Yü. Most of the practitioners are middle- to upper-class Han Chinese, meaning that they have leisure time to devote to their practice. Some of them participate in monetary exchanges for rituals during pilgrimage trips to Tibetan areas or donate money for various group activities. Nevertheless, socioeconomic status varies within the community, particularly among different age groups.<sup>32</sup>

Another factor in the trajectory of materiality in Tibetan Buddhism is that its emergence and proliferation in the religious landscape of contemporary Han China parallels China's development into an economy characterized by the privatization of state resources and strong global economic involvement. These developments have empowered Chinese citizens to manage their resources, both material and spiritual (Leung 2005:904). Especially since the turn of the twenty-first century, Han Chinese Buddhists have been the primary financial source for interregional teaching activities (Smyer Yü 2012:100). Acknowledging this relationship between the market economy and the spread of Tibetan Buddhism, different scholars suggest different frameworks for understanding it. One approach sees this process as "creative destruction," part of a neoliberal economic and behavioral shift. In this view, market-sustained access to religious teachings and practice causes them to be transformed into objects of consumption (Harvey 2007). Another view is that the material trajectory of Tibetan Buddhism is a dynamic process, where traditional forms of the religion are dying out while the market creates new opportunities for the religion to flourish (Smyer Yü 2012:100).

32 It seems that the younger generation of core practitioners come from financially stable families, but what they contribute to the community is time and organizational assistance.

In analyzing the exchanges between Han Chinese and their Tibetan masters and communities, it is also important to keep in mind the value of gifts and giving in Buddhism. Broadly speaking, there is a causal relationship between the practice of the gift (Sk. *dāna*) and liberation (Heim 2004:39). Various forms of Buddhist religious giving are marked, at least in doctrinal formulations, by the absence of an obligation to reciprocate (Heim 2004:34; Ohnuma 2005:105). Nevertheless, the donors expect “returns” (typically in terms of merit), though not provided by the monastic recipients of their gifts (Sihlé 2015:535). In the Tibetan case, it appears that remunerations are perceived as being neither gifts nor (at least in principle) belonging simply to the domain of common market relations, for such a situation would be strongly condemned (Sihlé 2015:358).

Apart from the impact of these economic and cultural factors on Tibetan Buddhist material culture, there is an intrinsic concept that underlies the economic exchange networks of Tibetan Buddhism in Han China, namely, merit (*gongde* 功德). On top of its central role in Buddhist ethics, or merit-making, merit is the defining social mechanism of Buddhism in China (Walsh 2007:373). Historically, merit has necessitated an institutionalized paradigm, namely that from the position of both the giver and the recipient, one must expand what he has (land, harvest, money, labor, and time) in order to gain what he feels he needs (protection, a more lucrative lifestyle, social recognition, and salvation after death). This is a part of a larger view of exchange as the most essential material expression of society (Walsh 2007:374).

For Buddhist lay practitioners, material exchanges are considered an accumulation of merit. Sitting in the Shanghai tea shop of the Pure Light Valley Retreat in 2018, I recall Ms. Lin, who manages one of the shop’s daily activities, excitedly shouting every time she received a notification on her phone that an online purchase had been made. She explained, “We look at money as a great thing. There is no problem with wanting things as long as you can see through them.” Within this trajectory, the living hall model, which, as discussed above, comes out of the development of a market economy in the PRC, also serves as one of the models regulating the process of change in the Tibetan Buddhist economy. Therefore, it is possible to situate this case study in the heart of a broader contemporary religious-economic phenomenon.

Focusing on the etic perspective of the community, the Pure Light Valley Retreat can be seen as an organization that markets spiritual products. From an emic perspective, it is a community. Taking both perspectives into account, one can say that this organization offers practitioners the ability to financially support the spread of their beliefs, provide patronage to their master, and advance their own communal and individual spiritual development. Some of these exchanges deriving from the operation of the living hall are in fact

Buddhist gifts, directed to other actors in the greater *sangha*.<sup>33</sup> Encompassing both of these perspectives, I suggest that the living hall (in the context of this study) is a model used to facilitate a kind of ritual economy. According to Mayfair Yang (2020:281), a ritual economy constitutes “expenditures of wealth on ritual, religious, ethical, and social bonding practices, forms of consumption that do not directly lead to profit accumulation and often eat up profits and savings for nonutilitarian ends.” This definition can be usefully applied to this case study, as this framework of exchange diverts a segment of wealth from the material economy. But unlike the profit economy, which stresses accumulation of wealth and the intake of profit, the ethos of the ritual economy is generosity and self-abnegation and the willingness to part with one’s material wealth (Mayfair Yang 2020: 282). Indeed, material exchanges are the financial core of the Pure Light Valley Retreat, but profit-making is not the community’s exclusive aim. Most importantly, a ritual economy sees a network of exchanges, involving relationships of human and nonhuman agents.<sup>34</sup> When this case study is viewed in the framework of a ritual economy, the network includes all agents in the economic exchange: Master Wujin, the practitioners connected to the community at all levels (as described above), the customers (some Buddhist followers and some not), and even the tradition’s important figures, such as Padmasambhava.

On the general level, a merit economy is also a suitable structure to encompass the Buddhist notion of the *sangha*, which in a contemporary Tibetan Buddhist context can refer also to the community of Buddhists surrounding a teacher (Van Schaik 2016:2). More particularly, the inclusive framework of the merit economy is particularly suitable to the Nyingma practice. The religiosity of Nyingma devotees is connected to the Tantric tradition (Bianchi 2004, 2017; Jones 2011). Tantric Buddhism, as a practice, offers spiritual merchandise but also material prosperity and wealth. In this Buddhist worldview, the spiritual and the material are not separated; instead, they are interdependent and mutually nourish each other. Wealth is inherently connected with leisure and freedom for one’s Dharma practice. The Nyingma tradition incorporates rituals and recitations to bring forth leisure (Smyer Yü 2012:121–122). In sum, I argue that the living hall is not only a mirror of the social, political, and economic transformation of Buddhist practice in the PRC but also aligns with the particularities of Nyingma religiosity.

33 The term *sangha* often refers to a Buddhist monastic community. In this case, the master is an actor from the *sangha*, as a recipient of Buddhist gifts.

34 Within the context of this example of merit economy, commodities such as tea are considered nonhuman agents that play an active role in the dynamic.

At this point, one may ask, “To what extent does the notion of ‘Buddhism as culture’ affect the practice and proselytizing of religion among lay Buddhists?” Might the state’s treatment of Buddhism as a culture strip it of the efficacy (*ling* 灵) it holds within the lives of practitioners? Regarding lay Buddhist actors, one may also ask, “Are practice halls, objects containing Buddhist sutras, or prayer beads and other Buddhist-inspired commodities less spiritually powerful or enchanting when rendered as aspects of culture?” The shop spaces of the Pure Light Valley Retreat offer Buddhist-related activities, as well as commodities that are in fact related to Buddhist soteriologies and Tibetan Buddhist symbols (Fig. 4). The clothing line is designed in traditional style (*chanyi* 禅衣), and one cannot ignore the items’ resemblance to monks’ robes. In the online catalog, the clothes are presented alongside Tibetan Buddhist prayer beads (*zangchuan fojiao fozhu* 藏传佛教佛珠), a product of the community. Some of



FIGURE 4 Commodities offered for sale by the Pure Light Valley Retreat. Clockwise from top left: tea cup; tea storing pot; tea; linen shirt  
PHOTOS AND COLLAGE: AUTHOR



the teaware, such as cups and pots, features prints and engravings of the eight Tibetan auspicious symbols of good fortune, such as the parasol and the treasure vase. These stand as signs of spiritual power and fulfillment of spiritual and material wishes, and they are also attributes of particular deities who are connected with wealth (Dagyab and Thurman 2016:56). Other products feature verses or phrases with connotations of Buddhist principles or philosophy, for example, “My last name is emptiness” (*woxing kong* 我姓空) or “All is illusory” (*yiqie xuhuan* 一切虚幻). These short phrases, clearly connected to Buddhist notions, are used not only as designs for the products, but also in the advertising content in the WeChat feed and Weibo profile operated by Ms. Lin.

Another essential product in the assortment of the Pure Light Valley Retreat is tea grown in Wuyi Mountain county (*Wuyi shan* 武夷山) in Fujian province. Customers at a shop are invited to sit and try the tea, and organized tea workshops are occasionally offered as well. While tea today is a commonly consumed product in many areas of the world and is also strongly associated with everyday Chinese, the habit of regular tea drinking seems to have begun in medieval China at Buddhist monasteries, later spreading to the literati and then, probably quite rapidly, to the wider population (Benn 2015:3). Initially, then, it seems that tea was closely associated with Buddhism. We know that monks saw it as a tool for self-refinement (Hinsch 2015:91). This connection between Buddhism and tea remains strong in the contemporary Chinese world, but it is now taking new turns (Li 2012:13). According to Li Wenjie (2012:13), the Buddhist “cultural sphere” is merging into the “Buddhist industry,” creating what Li refers to as a “Buddhist tea culture industry” (*fojiao cha wenhua chanye* 佛教茶文化产业) that is a prerequisite for the transformation and development of Buddhism.<sup>35</sup> Apart from the connection between tea and lay people (discussed here and by Fisher 2020), today many monasteries have spacious tea halls, and some Buddhist monasteries in the Chinese sphere still use tea as a tool for self-cultivation.<sup>36</sup>

35 Li elaborates on this term, explaining that it represents a widespread phenomenon: tea brands use images related to Buddhism, tea-drinking is promoted as a Buddhist practice on television programs, and tea in general holds a privileged place in the cultural Buddhist industry that is propagated by Buddhist leaders and state officials (Li 2012:13).

36 During one of my visits to Dharma Drum Mountain (*Fagu shan* 法鼓山) monastery in North Taiwan, I attended a tea meditation session (*chachan* 茶禪) guided by monastics who specialize in tea (*cha zhuren* 茶主人). In influential monasteries such as Dharma Drum Mountain monastery and Foguang Shan (佛光山) monastery, which have centers in various locations worldwide, tea ceremonies and meditations are offered to monastics and lay people. In 2013, Foguang Shan International Translation Center issued a short book written by Master Hsing Yun 星云 (born 1927) that presents to laypeople the relationship between Buddhism and the tea ceremony.

The practitioners in the community also treat tea not only as a tasty beverage, but as one more means to a meditative state of awareness. On many of my visits to the spaces of the community I witnessed practitioners and customers sitting and sipping tea, often reciting silently and occasionally engaging in conversation. In some cases, these gatherings between lay practitioners from the community and customers also attracted new members who were interested not only in purchasing tea or clothing, but in Buddhism as well. Thus, as we learn from monasteries and lay people, tea in contemporary times is also used in proselytizing the religion, making the world of Buddhist self-cultivation accessible to a wider audience.

The commercialization of products, lifestyles, and practices appears to be playing along with the CCP's wish to limit the spread of Buddhist ideas to a more grounded realm of cultural expression, with the ultimate aim of limiting its power within society. Nevertheless, I argue that even while molding their activities to this political reality, the community continues to be actively engaged in spreading their doctrines and Buddhist worldview. The Pure Light Valley Retreat is in fact producing an expanding economy of experiences and objects that the community believes to have the spiritual efficacy that the tradition attributes to them. According to Jane Bennett (2001:199), there is an element of enchantment in advertising that spurs people to consume the advertised product. In this case, I believe the enchantment is in the Buddhist tradition, not only in the products themselves, which underlines the commercializing efforts described here.<sup>37</sup> Marx explained the power that commodities hold in society as the idolatry of consumer goods and condemned this phenomenon as "commodity fetishism." He claimed that when commodification "animates" mere artifacts, it also enervates their producers and consumers (Marx 1990:126). Jane Bennett, among others, argues against this notion of Marx. She claims that the concept of commodity fetishism is not broad enough to account for our fascination with commercial goods. Accordingly, she seeks a phenomenology of consumption, "which focuses on the sense of vitality, the charged-up feeling often generated in human bodies by the presence or promise of commodity consumption" (Bennett 2001:204). I draw on Bennett's assertion that one should focus on the form of commodification, not the fact of it. The commodification of objects and the enchanted actors who consume them

37 In using the word enchantment, I join Bennett, and other scholars in recent decades, in challenging the Weberian disenchantment theory (Weber 2013). Works such as that of Charles Taylor describe an enchanted world where spirits and other external nonhuman agencies impact us from the outside, bringing meaning to the world (Taylor 2007). See also Josephson-Storm 2017.



can also signal a subversion of other entities within society. In this case, the enchantment in and of commodities, whether directed at customers, potential followers, or even the community members themselves, subverts the pressure of the state and the restrictions on Buddhism's manifestation as a religion.

Commodity culture both expresses and exposes a social disorder that would otherwise remain hidden (Abbas 1996:291–292). In this case study, the commodification also exposes a sensitive dynamic between the state and the people. Commodification in this context is used as a “language of invention with which radical groups can think about, refine, and ultimately advertise their ideologies” (McCracken 1988:xv). In other words, by creating a network of spaces and commodities that express their religious beliefs, it appears that lay Buddhists react to the state's attempts to control the influence of Buddhism in Chinese society. The structure enables them to avoid fully participating in Buddhism's general institutionalization process in China (Ji 2008) and to sidestep the state's religious regulations. In that sense, the enchantment of commodities works as a creative power structure that responds to the power of the state, enabling lay Buddhist to negotiate their *de facto* religious freedom.

## Conclusion

Lay Buddhists are situated at the nexus of complex power relationships between politics and religion and between *sangha* and laity (Ji and Zhang 2018:13), a position that is characterized by a diversity of practice modalities. This article has attempted to sketch a picture of how the realities of this nexus appear on the ground, at the grassroots level of lay Buddhist activities. Exploring different elements of the practice, structure, and activities of the Pure Light Valley Retreat, the article both contextualized the case study and suggested a framework for analysis. I began with positioning the community within the political sphere of religion in the PRC, arguing that the living hall model (as implemented by the community under study) is a product of restrictive policies toward religious groups. Next, I showed how the case study reflects the trajectory of Tibetan Buddhism in Han China from a religious-economic perspective, viewing the living hall in the context of the market economy and its role in the Tibetan Buddhist revival in the PRC. Within this discourse, I argued for ritual economy as an apt framework for this case study. Finally, I proposed that within this framework of ritual economy organization, practitioners are able to practice their religion, conduct Buddhist economic exchanges, and generate an income to support their master and their practices. In doing so, they are utilizing the economic model to subvert the state's control of religious

practice and discourse. I explored how, in accordance with the PRC's current agenda, Tibetan Buddhism is being fused into Chinese material culture, but also showed how this dynamic can in fact be seen as contributing to the religion's revival.

In recent decades, Tibetan religious leaders have been characterized by scholars as cultural entrepreneurs, aiming to restore or even extend Tibetan Buddhism as a cultural power center (Germano 1998; Smyer Yü 2012; Terrone 2008). Apart from Buddhist masters and their Tibetan communities, this case study points to the significance of attributes such as charisma and entrepreneurship in other participants in the revival. It demonstrates that Han Chinese practitioners of Tibetan Buddhism, away from Tibetan areas, are taking an active role in the revival of the religion in the urban PRC, despite multiple challenges. The activities of the Pure Light Valley Retreat can be seen as accepting the CCP's rhetoric of "Buddhism as culture," but this acceptance seems to enable both individual and communal Buddhist life-choices. Not every living hall in the PRC facilitates the development of a Buddhist community. As explained at the beginning of this article, they are not exclusively a Buddhist phenomenon. It appears, however, that in addition to temples, sacred mountains, and monasteries, the gray sphere of lay Buddhism can be found in hair salons, tea shops, and other places of cultural production. These venues have become essential to the study of contemporary religion in China.

### Acknowledgments

I am grateful to the anonymous reviewers of this article for all of their valuable suggestions and remarks.

### References

- Abbas, Ackbar. 1996. "Cultural Studies in a Postculture." In *Disciplinary and Dissent in Cultural Studies*, edited by Cary Nelson and Dilip Parameshwar Gaonkar, pp. 291–292. London: Routledge.
- Ashiwa, Yoshiko, and David L. Wank. 2009. "Making Religion, Making the State in Modern China: An Introductory Essay." In *Making Religion, Making the State*, edited by Yoshiko Ashiwa and David L. Wank, pp. 1–21. Stanford, CA: Stanford University Press.
- Ashiwa, Yoshiko, and David L. Wank. 2020a. "Special Report: COVID-19 Impacts Chinese Buddhism, State Control, and Soft Power." *Religion and Diplomacy*, April 20. <https://>

- religionanddiplomacy.org.uk/2020/04/20/special-report-impact-of-covid-19-on-chinese-buddhism-and-soft-power/ (accessed October 25, 2020).
- Ashiwa, Yoshiko, and David L. Wank. 2020b. "The Chinese State Global Promotion of Buddhism." Berkeley Center for Religion, Peace & World Affairs / Brookings Institution. November 11. <https://berkeleycenter.georgetown.edu/publications/the-chinese-state-s-global-promotion-of-buddhism> (accessed February 16, 2020).
- Benn, James. 2015. *Tea in China: A Religious and Cultural History*. Honolulu: University of Hawai'i Press.
- Bennett, Jane. 2001. *The Enchantment of Modern Life: Attachments, Crossings, and Ethics*. Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press.
- Bianchi, Ester. 2004. "The Tantric Rebirth Movement in Modern China: Esoteric Buddhism Re-Vivified by the Japanese and Tibetan Traditions." *Acta Orientalia* 57: 31–54.
- Bianchi, Ester. 2014. "A Religion-Oriented 'Tibet Fever'. Tibetan Buddhist Practices among the Han Chinese in Contemporary PRC." In *From Mediterranean to Himalaya: A Festschrift to Commemorate the 120th Birthday of the Italian Tibetologist Giuseppe Tucci*, edited by Dramdul and Francesco Sferra, pp. 347–374. Beijing: China Tibetology.
- Bianchi, Ester. 2017. "Sino-Tibetan Buddhism: Continuities and Discontinuities. The Case of Nenghai's Legacy in the Contemporary Era." In *Chinese and Tibetan Esoteric Buddhism*, edited by Yael Bentor and Meir Shahar, pp. 300–318. Leiden: Brill.
- Bianchi, Ester. 2018. "Teaching Tibetan Buddhism in Chinese on behalf of Manjusri 'Great Perfection' (*Tib. dzokchen Ch. dayuanman* 大圓滿) and Related Tantric Practices among Han Chinese and Taiwanese Believers in Sêtar and Beyond." In *The Hybridity of Buddhism: Contemporary Encounters between Tibetan and Chinese Traditions in Taiwan and the Mainland*, edited by Fabienne Jagou, pp. 109–131. Etudes thématiques 29. Paris: École française d'Extrême-Orient.
- Cabezón, José. 2008. "State Control of Tibetan Buddhist Monasticism in the People's Republic of China." In *Chinese Religiosities: Afflictions of Modernity and State Formation*, edited by Mayfair Yang, pp. 261–291. Berkeley, CA: University of California Press.
- Cao, Nanlai. 2008. "Boss Christians: The Business of Religion in the Wenzhou Model of Christian Revival." *China Journal* 59: 63–88. doi: 10.2307/20066380.
- Cao, Nanlai. 2009. "Raising the Quality of Belief: Suzhi and the Production of an Elite Protestantism." *China Perspectives* 4: 54–65. doi: 10.4000/chinaperspectives.4924.
- Cao, Nanlai. 2018. "Chinese Religions on the Edge: Shifting Religion-State Dynamics." *China Review* 18 (4): 1–10.
- Caple, Jane. 2015. "Faith, Generosity, Knowledge and the Buddhist Gift: Moral Discourses on Chinese Patronage of Tibetan Buddhist Monasteries." *Religion Compass* 9 (11): 462–482. doi: 10.1111/rec3.12181.

- Caple, Jane. 2020. "Rethinking Tibetan Buddhism in Post-Mao China, 1980–2015." *Review of Religion and Chinese Society* 7 (1): 62–91. doi: 10.1163/22143955-00701004.
- Chau, Adam Yuet. 2006. *Miraculous Response: Doing Popular Religion in Contemporary China*. Stanford, CA: Stanford University Press.
- Chau, Adam Yuet. 2011. "Introduction: Revitalizing and Innovating Religious Traditions in Contemporary China." In *Religion in Contemporary China: Revitalization and Innovation*, edited by Adam Yuet Chau, pp. 1–31. London: Routledge.
- Chen, Bing. 2008. "The Tantric Revival and its Reception in Modern China." In *Images of Tibet in the 19th and 20th Centuries*, edited by Monica Esposito, pp. 387–427. Paris: École française d'Extrême-Orient.
- Dagyab, Loden Sherap, and Robert Thurman. 2016. *Buddhist Symbols in Tibetan Culture: An Investigation of the Nine Best-Known Groups of Symbols*. Boston: Wisdom Publications.
- Dodin, Thierry, and Heinz Räther. 2001. *Imagining Tibet: Perceptions, Projections, and Fantasies*. Boston: Wisdom Publications.
- DuBois, Thomas David. 2017. "China's Religion Law and the Perils of Counting Consciousness." In *Disturbances in Heaven*, edited by Ivan Franceschini, Kevin Lin, and Nicholas Loubere, pp. 92–98. Acton ACT, Australia: ANU Press.
- DuBois, Thomas David. 2018. "Religious Freedom in East Asia: Historical Norms and the Limits of Advocacy." *Journal of Religious and Political Practice* 4 (1): 46–60.
- Dudjom Riponche, Dorje Gyurme, and Matthew Kapstein. 2002. *The Nyingma School of Tibetan Buddhism: Its Fundamentals and History*. Boston: Wisdom Publications.
- Esler, Joshua. 2020. *Tibetan Buddhism among Han Chinese: Mediation and Superscription of the Tibetan Tradition in Contemporary Chinese Society*. Lanham, MD: Lexington Books.
- Esposito, Monica. 2008. "rDzogsChen in China. From Chan to 'Tibetan Tantrism' in Fahai Lama's (1920–1991) Footsteps." In *Images of Tibet in the 19th and 20th Centuries*, edited by Monica Esposito, 2:473–548. Paris: École française d'Extrême-Orient.
- Fang Litian 方立天. 2005. *Hexie shehui de goujian yu zongjiao de zuoyong* 和谐社会的构建与宗教的作用 [The Construction of a Harmonious Society and the Role of Religion]. *Zhongguo zongjiao* 中国宗教 [Chinese Religions] 7(1): 18–19.
- Fisher, Gareth. 2014. *From Comrades to Bodhisattvas: Moral Dimensions of Lay Buddhist Practice in Contemporary China*. Honolulu: University of Hawai'i Press.
- Fisher, Gareth. 2020. "From Temples to Teahouses: Exploring the Evolution of Lay Buddhism in Post-Mao China." *Review of Religion in Chinese Society* 7(1): 34–61. doi: 10.1163/22143955-00701003.
- Germano, David. 1998. "Re-Membering the Dismembered Body of Tibet: Contemporary Tibetan Visionary Movements in the People's Republic of China." In *Buddhism in Contemporary Tibet: Religious Revival and Cultural Identity*, edited by Melvyn

- C. Goldstein and Matthew T. Kapstein, pp. 53–94. Berkeley, CA: University of California Press.
- Goldstein, Melvyn C., and Matthew T. Kapstein. 1999. *Buddhism in Contemporary Tibet: Religious Revival and Cultural Identity*. Delhi: Motilal Banarsidass Publishers.
- Greenspan, Anna, and Francesca Tarocco. 2020. "An Enchanted Modern: Urban Cultivation in Shanghai." *International Asian Forum: International Quarterly for Asian Studies* 51 (1): 223–241. doi: 10.11588/iqas.2020.1–2.10951.
- Harvey, David. 2007. "Neoliberalism as Creative Destruction." *Annals of the American Academy of Political and Social Science* 610 (1): 21–44.
- Heim, Maria. 2004. *Theories of the Gift in South Asia: Hindu, Buddhist, and Jain Reflections on Dāna*. New York: Routledge.
- Herrmann-Pillath, Carsten, Xinyuen Feng, and Man Guo. 2019. "Entrepreneurs and Ritual in China's Economic Culture." *Journal of Institutional Economics* 15 (5): 775–789.
- Hinsch, Bret. 2015. *The Rise of Tea Culture in China: The Invention of the Individual*. Lanham, MD: Rowman & Littlefield.
- Hu Jianqiu, 胡建秋. 2013. "Wo guo fuzhuang qiye jiyu shenghuo fangshi de yingxiao zhongduan celue yanjiu" 我国服装企业基于生活方式的营销终端策略研究 [Research on Marketing Terminal Strategy of Basic Lifestyle of Chinese Garment Enterprises]. Master's thesis, Fudan University, Shanghai.
- Jagou, Fabian. 2018. "Tibetan Relics in Taiwan: A Link between Past, Present, and Future." In *The Hybridity of Buddhism: Contemporary Encounters between Tibetan and Chinese Traditions in Taiwan and the Mainland*, edited by Fabian Jagou, pp. 67–90. Paris: École française d'Extrême-Orient.
- Jagou, Fabian. 2021. *Gongga Laoren (1903–1997): Her Role in the Spread of Tibetan Buddhism in Taiwan*. Leiden: Brill.
- Ji, Zhe. 2008. "Secularization as Religious Restructuring: Statist Institutionalization of Chinese Buddhism and Its Paradoxes." In *Chinese Religiosities: Afflictions of Modernity and State Formation*, edited by Mayfair Mei-hui Yang, pp. 210–233. Santa Barbara, CA: University of California Press.
- Ji, Zhe. 2012. "Chinese Buddhism as a Social Force: Reality and Potential of Thirty Years of Revival." *Chinese Sociological Review* 45 (2): 8–26. doi: 10.2753/CSA2162-0555450201.
- Ji, Zhe, and Jia Zhang. 2018. "Lay Buddhism in Contemporary China: Social Engagements and Political Regulations." *China Review* 18 (4): 11–39.
- Jones, Alison Denton. 2011. "Contemporary Han Chinese Involvement in Tibetan Buddhism: A Case Study from Nanjing." *Social Compass* 58 (4): 540–553. doi: 10.1177/0037768611421134.
- Jones, Alison Denton. 2014. "A Modern Chinese Laywoman: Dumplings, Dharani, and Dedication—Honest Auntie Li Tries to Be a Good Buddhist." In *Buddhists:*

- Understanding Buddhism through the Lives of Believers*, edited by Todd Lewis, pp. 305–316. Malden, MA: Wiley-Blackwell.
- Josephson-Storm, Jason A. 2017. *The Myth of Disenchantment: Magic, Modernity, and the Birth of the Human Sciences*. Chicago: University of Chicago Press.
- Kapstein, Mathew. 2009. *Buddhism between Tibet and China*. Boston: Wisdom Publications.
- Kapstein, Mathew. 2014. *Tibetan Buddhism: A Very Short Introduction*. New York: Oxford University Press.
- Karmay, Samten Gyaltsen. 2007. *The Great Perfection (rDzogs Chen): A Philosophical and Meditative Teaching of Tibetan Buddhism*. 2nd ed. Leiden: Brill.
- Katz, Paul. 2014. "Secular Yet Sacred: The Religious Lives of Modern Chinese Elites." In *Religion in China and its Modern Fate*, edited by Paul Katz and Meir Shahar, pp. 109–154. Waltham, MA: Brandeis University Press.
- Kieschnick, John. 2003. *The Impact of Buddhism on Chinese Material Culture*. Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press.
- Kolås, Åshild, and Monika Thowsen. 2005. *On the Margins of Tibet: Cultural Survival on the Sino-Tibetan Frontier*. Seattle: University of Washington Press.
- Laliberté, André. 2011. "Buddhist Revival Under State Watch." *Journal of Current Chinese Affairs* 40 (2): 107–134.
- Laliberté, André. 2019. "Buddhism under Jiang, Hu, and Xi: The Politics of Incorporation." In *Buddhism after Mao: Negotiations, Continuities, and Reinventions*, edited by Ji Zhe, Gareth Fisher, and André Laliberté, pp. 290–311. Honolulu: University of Hawai'i Press.
- Laliberté, André. 2020. "The Legal-Formal Status of Religions in China." In *Political and Religious Communities—Partners, Competitors, Or Aliens?*, edited by Dirk Ehlers and Henning Glase, pp. 477–505. Baden-Baden, Germany: Nomos.
- Leung, Beatrice. 2005. "China's Religious Freedom Policy: The Art of Managing Religious Activity." *China Quarterly* 184: 894–913.
- Leung, Beatrice. 2018. "Xi Jinping's Religious Freedom Policy vs. Human Rights." *Contemporary Chinese Political Economy and Strategic Relations: An International Journal* 4 (2): 369–392.
- Li Wenjie 李文杰. 2012. *Lun fojiao cha wenhua chanye* 论佛教茶文化产业 [On Buddhism and Tea Culture Industry]. *Nanning zhiye jishu xueyuan xuebao* 南宁职业技术学院学报 [Journal of Nanning Vocational and Technical College] 17 (3): 13–16.
- Li Zhiyi 李志义. 2019. *Tianzhujiao xingyang yu shehuizhuyi hexin jiazhi guan de jianxing* 天主教信仰与社会主义核心价值观的践行 [The Catholic Dogma and the Core Socialist Values]. *Zhongguozhuyi* 中国天主教 [China Catholicism] (1): 18–19.
- Lopez, Donald S. 1998. *Religions of Tibet in Practice*. New Delhi: Munshiram Manoharlal Publishers.

- Lu Yunfeng 卢云峰 and He Yuan 和园. 2014. "Shanqiao fangbian: Dangdai fojiao tuanti zai zhongguo chengshi de fazhan" 善巧方便: 当代佛教团体在中国城市的发展 [Skillful Means: The Development of Contemporary Buddhist Groups in Chinese Cities]. *Xuehai* 学海 [Sea of Learning] 2: 26–34.
- Marx, Karl. 1990. *Capital*. Translated by Ben Fowkes. London: Penguin Classics.
- Masláková, Magdaléna, and Anežka Satorová. 2019. "The Catholic Church in Contemporary China: How Does the New Regulation on Religious Affairs Influence the Catholic Church?" *Religions* 10 (7): 446. doi: 10.3390/rel10070446.
- McCracken, Grant. 1988. *Culture and Consumption*. Bloomington, IN: Indiana University Press.
- Ohnuma, Reiko. 2005. "Gift." In *Critical Terms for the Study of Buddhism*, edited by Donald S. Lopez, pp. 102–123. Chicago: University of Chicago Press.
- Oostveen, Daan F. 2020. "Rhizomatic Religion and Material Destruction in Kham Tibet: The Case of Yachen Gar." *Religions* 11 (10): 533. <https://doi.org/10.3390/rel11100533>.
- Orzech, Charles D., Richard K. Payne, and Henrik H. Sørensen. 2011. "Introduction: Esoteric Buddhism and the Tantras in East Asia: Some Methodological Considerations." In *Esoteric Buddhism and the Tantras in East Asia*, edited by Stephen F. Teiser, Martin Kern, and Timothy Brook, pp. 19–26. Leiden: Brill.
- Palden, Sherab, Tsewang Dongyal, Ann Helm, and Michael White. 2010. *The Buddhist Path: A Practical Guide from the Nyingma Tradition of Tibetan Buddhism*. Ithaca, NY: Snow Lion Publications.
- Powers, John. 2016. *The Buddha Party: How the People's Republic of China Works to Define and Control Tibetan Buddhism*. New York: Oxford University Press.
- Regulation on Religious Affairs. *Zongjiao shiwu tiaoli* 宗教事务条例. 2018. *Zhonghua renmin gongheguo zhongyang renmin zhengfu* 中华人民共和国中央人民政府 [The Central Government of the PRC]. [http://www.gov.cn/zhengce/content/2017-09/07/content\\_5223282.htm](http://www.gov.cn/zhengce/content/2017-09/07/content_5223282.htm) (accessed June 8, 2020).
- Shen Weirong 沈卫荣. 2020. *Shijie fojiao shiye zhong zangchuan fojiao de duochong rentong* 世界佛教视野中藏传佛教的多重认同 [Multiple Identities of Tibetan Buddhism from the Perspective of World Buddhism]. *Zhongyang shehuizhuyi xueyuan xuebao* 中央社会主义学院学报 [Journal of the Central Institute of Socialism] 4: 186–204.
- Shmushko, Kai. 2021. "On Face Masks as Buddhist Merit: Buddhist Responses to COVID-19. A Case Study of Tibetan Buddhism in Shanghai." *Journal of Global Buddhism* 22. doi: 10.5281/zenodo.4727565.
- Sihlé, Nicolas. 2015. "Towards a Comparative Anthropology of the Buddhist Gift (and Other Transfers)." *Religion Compass* 9 (11): 352–385.
- Smyer Yü, Dan S. 2012. *The Spread of Tibetan Buddhism in China: Charisma, Money, Enlightenment*. London: Routledge.



- Sodargye, Khenpo, and Dan Smyer Yü. 2017. "Revisioning Buddhism as a Science of the Mind in a Secularized China: A Tibetan Perspective." *Journal of Global Buddhism* 18: 91–111. doi: 10.5281/zenodo.1248043.
- Tarocco, Francesca. 2017. "Technologies of Salvation: (Re)Locating Chinese Buddhism in the Digital Age." *Journal of Global Buddhism* 18: 155–175. doi: 10.5281/zenodo.1284254.
- Taylor, Charles. 2007. *A Secular Age*. Cambridge, MA: Belknap Press of Harvard University Press.
- Terrone, Antonio. 2008. "Tibetan Buddhism Beyond the Monastery: Revelation and Identity in rNying ma Communities of Present-day Kham." In *Images of Tibet in the 19th and 20th Centuries*, edited by Monica Esposito, 2:746–779. Etudes thématiques 29. Paris: École française d'Extrême-Orient.
- Terrone, Antonio. 2012. "Messengers from Tibet's Past: The Role of Buddhist Charismatic Leaders in the Spread of Tibetan Buddhism in Contemporary China." *Asiatica Ambrosiana* (4): 103–121.
- Travagnin, Stefania. 2019. "Cyberactivities and Civilized Worship in Buddhism after Mao: Negotiations, Continuities, and Reinventions." In *Buddhism after Mao: Negotiations, Continuities, and Reinventions*, edited by Ji Zhe, Gareth Fisher, and André Laliberté, pp. 290–311. Honolulu: University of Hawaii Press.
- Trungpa, Chogyam. 2002. *Cutting through Spiritual Material Materialism*. Boston: Shambhala.
- Tuttle, Gray. 2005. *Tibetan Buddhists in the Making of Modern China*. New York: Columbia University Press.
- Van Schaik, Sam. 2004. *Approaching the Great Perfection: Simultaneous and Gradual Methods of Dzogchen Practice in the Longchen Nyintig*. Somerville, MA: Wisdom Publications.
- Van Schaik, Sam. 2016. *The Spirit of Tibetan Buddhism*. New Haven, CT: Yale University Press.
- Walsh, Michael J. 2007. "The Economics of Salvation: Toward a Theory of Exchange in Chinese Buddhism." *Journal of the American Academy of Religion* 75 (2): 353–382.
- Weber, Max. 2013. *From Max Weber: Essays in Sociology*. Translated and edited by H. H. Gerth and C. Wright Mills. London: Routledge.
- Xi Jinping 习近平. 2016. *Quanmian tigao xin xingshi xia zongjiao gongzuo shuiping* 全面提高新形势下宗教工作水平 [Comprehensively Improving the Level of Religious Work according to the New Situation]. April 23. [http://www.xinhuanet.com/politics/2016-04/23/c\\_1118716540.htm](http://www.xinhuanet.com/politics/2016-04/23/c_1118716540.htm) (accessed April 17, 2019).
- Xi Jinping. 2018. *Xi Jinping: The Governance of China 2*. Shanghai: Shanghai Press.
- Xu Shengju 徐生菊 and Ji Minquan 吉敏全. 2020. *Hulianwang zongjiao zai zhongguo de fazhang yu chuanbo—yi xibei diqu minzu zongjiao weili* 互联网宗教在中国的发展与传播—以西北地区民族宗教为例 [Development and Dissemination of Religions on the Internet in China—A Perspective of Minorities Religions]



- in Northwest China]. *Xinxi anquan yu tongxin baomi* 信息安全与通信保密 [Information Security and Communication Confidentiality]:104–114.
- Yang, Fenggang. 2012. *Religion in China: Survival and Revival under Communist Rule*. Oxford: Oxford University Press.
- Yang, Mayfair Mei-hui. 2020. *Re-enchanting Modernity: Ritual Economy and Society in Wenzhou*. Durham, NC: Duke University Press.
- Yang Sidiao 杨丝调. 2017. *Gupo que bu houzhong, yazhi dan bu shuli* 古朴却不厚重，雅致但不疏离 [Simple But Not Heavy, Elegant But Not Alienated]. <http://xiaorizi.me/page-200268.html> (accessed October 3, 2020).
- Zhang, Yanshuang. 2017. “Digital Religion in China: A Comparative Perspective on Buddhism and Christianity’s Online Publics in Sina Weibo.” *Journal of Religion, Media and Digital Culture* 6 (1): 44–67. doi: 10.1163/21659214-90000095.
- Zhu Jieqiong 朱洁琼. 2013. “Xin gainian shenghuoguan liansuo jingying moshi yanjiu” 新概念生活馆连锁经营模式研究 [Research on Chain Operation Model of New Concept Life Hall]. Master’s thesis, Hunan University of Commerce, Hunan.