Introduction: Sprouts of Early Twentieth Century Tibetan National Consciousness

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The articles in this special issue engage with different aspects of a Tibetan national consciousness emerging in the first decade of the 20th century and the formative influence the Thirteenth Dalai Lama's diverse experiences and encounters had on it during his first period of exile in Inner Asia (1904–1909). His exposure to evolving geopolitical norms during his five-year sojourn outside Lhasa, converged with his witnessing burgeoning opposition to Manchu rule among prominent lay and ecclesiastical figures in Urga (today's Ulan Bator), planted the initial seeds for the Dalai Lama's evolving conception of the Tibetan people as a nation and Tibet as a state. The authors investigate these influences on the Thirteenth Dalai Lama and coordinate events across Greater Tibet—in Amdo, Kham, and Lhasa—impacting his evolving understanding of Tibet's place in early 20th century Inner Asia. These influences also shifted parameters in the relationship between Tibet and China marked by the transformative role of the Qing government's implementation of New Policy reforms in Tibet.

Following his coming of age in the late nineteenth century, the Dalai Lama sought to reassert temporal rule over the peoples of Tibet in addition to his acknowledged ecclesiastical rule. While his assertion highlighted the weakened authority over Tibetan affairs of the Qing Imperial Resident (Amban) posted to Lhasa, the Dalai Lama did not yet seek to transform the centuries-old priest-patron (*mchod yon*) relationship which defined the relationship between the Qing Court and the Tibetan government and Tibet's position within the Empire. However, neither the Qing Court nor the governments of Britain, Russia, or British India, among others, recognized this assertion of political authority, acknowledging the Dalai Lama as only a religious leader. Consequently, foreign governments accepted British characterization of Qing China's relationship with Tibet as 'suzerainty,' translating the role of 'patron' into the parlance of international law prevailing at the turn of the nineteenth century. Reflecting the confrontation of geopolitical norms and international legal structures within the relationship between Tibet and China evolving in the early 20th century, the Qing and later Republic of China (ROC) governments instead characterized

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their administration of Tibet as 'sovereignty,' whereas the Dalai Lama following his second period of exile in British India (1910–1912) rejected any form of China's oversight, proclaiming that sovereignty resided with him and the Tibetan government. The seeds of these concepts of governance and international law were planted during the Dalai Lama's first period of exile, when his understanding of the geopolitics surrounding and influencing the Sino-Tibetan relationship began to widen, and the roots of an emerging Tibetan national consciousness began to form.

When the Dalai Lama fled Lhasa before the arrival of British Indian soldiers in the Younghusband Expedition (1903–1904), his original objective in Mongolia was an appeal to Russia to assume the role of 'patron' by then unfulfilled by a weakened Qing China, to find a new military protector to defend his people from the encroaching British Empire. Despite discovering a deep interest in Buddhism among such Russian elites as Prince Ukhtomskii and the Sanskritist Shcherbatskoi during his exile, the Dalai Lama came to realize that the Russian Empire could offer no more than warm words, focused primarily on his religious role. Thus in Mongolia and later in Amdo, he began to seek new allies—and began to accept the advice and guidance of a wide array of global figures. The Dalai Lama's encounters and lengthy conversations with government officials, explorers, and religious leaders from Mongolia, Buryatia, Russia, Japan, England, Germany, France, the United States, and beyond all opened his eyes not only to the volatile alliances and powerful rivalries of regional and global relations, but also to new political concepts that underlay the structure and interaction of states. Introduced to a Russian world atlas and to the coalescing concept of the nation-state, the Dalai Lama encountered the importance of mutually recognized, fixed borders in international law. Through his close relationship with the Mongol Prince Khanddorj, a future leader of the movement for Mongolian independence, the Dalai Lama observed deepening anti-Qing sentiment and an emerging Mongol national consciousness.

While these interactions may have planted the seeds of a transformed conception of the Tibetan people as a 'nation' and a Tibetan polity with the Dalai Lama as political leader in the evolving geopolitics of the early 20th century, his meetings with academic Tibetologists and Buddhist adherents—Mongols, Buryats, Russians, Japanese, Americans, and others—opened his eyes to another potential role. Both Japanese and Russian Buddhists, such as Teramoto Enga and Baradin, hinted that the Dalai Lama could in the future become the preeminent Buddhist leader across Asia and beyond, several Russians and Buryats even proposing to convene a World Buddhist Convention under his auspices. Thus, even as several local Tibetan Buddhist

leaders in Amdo and Mongolia may have questioned the Dalai Lama's assertion of temporal power during his first period of exile, even grown weary of his intrusive exercise of ecclesiastical authority while in their midst, his diverse conversations may also have initiated a vision of Tibetan Buddhism's role in a wider regional and global context. The evolution of such a vision during his first period of exile paralleled the sprouting of the Dalai Lama's new understanding of Tibet as a polity, of the importance of a 'national consciousness' for Tibetans in the geopolitics to which he was exposed.

Studies of the emergence of nations in the nineteenth and 20th centuries often focus on social constructs either derived or crafted from a people's shared cultural practices, shared vernacular language, and shared socio-cultural institutions. While these may have roots in earlier or even ancient societies which inhabited a similar geographic space as the coalescing nation, both Ernest Gellner and Benedict Anderson emphasize the impact of the social and economic transformation wrought by modernity in distinguishing a 'nation' from its potential ethnic origins.[1] Whereas Gellner places the elites of a society in the central role employing cultural and linguistic markers, among others, to define social boundaries encircling the coalescing nation, Anderson somewhat displaces their centrality, emphasizing the role of societal elites as both the architects and the shepherds of 'imagined communities,' also guiding a people to recognize their affinity. Anderson emphasizes the formation of institutions by elites that highlight and utilize socio-cultural aspects of that affinity which both demonstrate and establish the intrinsic existence of the nation. From the products of print capitalism, which could standardize both the language and subjects of interest in a coalescing nation, to the employment of history and geography through museums and national maps, elites could foster a natural—if not inevitable—emergence of the nation from its socio-cultural or ethnic predecessors.[2] It was these forces of nationalism transforming geopolitics, diplomatic interaction, and both state and global institutions at the turn of the nineteenth century with which the Dalai Lama came into contact in his diverse conversations and encounters with peoples from Asia, Europe, and America during his first period of exile.

Although the Thirteenth Dalai Lama's emphasis on asserting temporal authority over Tibetans alongside his ecclesiastical rule predated these consequential interactions with foreigners in Mongolia, Amdo, and Qing China, their introducing concepts of nation and state

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1 See Gellner 1983 and Anderson [1983] 2006.

2 Winichakul (1994) explores the use of museums and the national map, which unique shape forms a geobody that becomes an essential visual representation of the nation and focus of national identity and pride.

provided him with the conceptual understanding eventually to articulate and realize this goal in the complex geopolitics of Inner Asia and the world. During the first decade of the 20th century, as the Dalai Lama and other Tibetan elites came to perceive the people of Tibet not as Qing imperial subjects, rather as a Tibetan "nation" and a "state" distinct from the Qing Empire, they began to implement policies and establish institutions to instill a 'national consciousness' internally—especially after the Dalai Lama returned to Lhasa from his second period of exile in British India. Similarly influenced by the transformation of diplomacy and geopolitics across Asia and the world, the Qing Court also sought to change the relationship with Tibet in this decade, first supporting Sichuan Province officials in their implementation of New Policy reforms in the eastern part of Kham under provincial administration, then directing their implementation by newly appointed Ambans in Lhasa.

While the initial purpose of implementing the New Policies in Kham was focused internally on strengthening Sichuan authority in the region, their introduction in Lhasa was focused externally on countering British characterization of Qing rule in Tibet as mere suzerainty by demonstrating conformance with globally recognized principles of sovereignty. In Kham, implementation began as early as 1903, ultimately engendering armed resistance that revealed sprouts of a Khampa consciousness linked with a deeper Tibetan identity, that then prompted a sometimes violent expansion and intensification of the policies by Sichuan soldiers and officials until the collapse of Qing rule at the end of 1911. In Lhasa, where implementation began in 1906 during the Dalai Lama's first period of exile, there was little local reaction since existing Tibetan institutions remained largely untouched, which was not the case in Kham. Through these actions, the Qing Court gradually demonstrated effective sovereignty to such an extent that they regained control over Tibet's external relations, a stark contrast from the nineteenth century when the Tibetan government had signed international treaties with such foreign countries as Nepal in 1856 and Sikkim in 1888. The Qing further hoped to demonstrate their sovereignty—not suzerainty—in Tibet by paying the Tibetan indemnity owed the British in the Treaty of Lhasa concluded when the Younghusband Expedition had reached Lhasa. Perhaps recognizing that the violence in Kham could spread to central Tibet and concerned for his safety within China proper, the Dalai Lama sought to return to Lhasa in 1909, still maintaining some hope of Russian support and expecting the protection of a Buryat escort.

Inspired by his growing understanding Tibet's evolving status as a political entity derived from concepts encountered during his first period of exile, on returning to Lhasa, the Dalai Lama began to counter

the effects of the New Policies and more confidently assert the temporal dimension of his authority, only to flee into exile again—this time to British India—when a Sichuan army reached Lhasa in February 1910 under the pretext of protecting the trade marts opened on the British Indian border. This marked a turning point in Qing policy in central Tibet, and his second period of exile provided an opportunity for the geopolitical concepts and the burgeoning notion of a Tibetan 'national consciousness' to germinate in the Dalai Lama's understanding of Tibet's status in Inner Asia and the broader world. The Qing goal of strengthening its imperial borders and demonstrating its unequivocal sovereignty in Tibet bolstered by implementation of the New Policies ultimately failed when resistance against the Qing army, organized by the Dalai Lama during his second period of exile, succeeded in 1912. The Qing Court, once perceived as the patron and protector of Tibet, by 1910 was characterized by the Dalai Lama and Tibetan elites as both invader and colonizer, as a dangerous neighboring polity in opposition to which a Tibetan national consciousness could coalesce and be formed. The Dalai Lama's understanding of the concepts initially inculcated during his first period of exile further deepened during his time in British India. Exposure to similar influences and experiences in conversations with British, Japanese, Russians, and others thus strengthened his notion of Tibet as a state and Tibetans as a nation in the geopolitical world apparent to the Dalai Lama, prompting a strong assertion of both ecclesiastical and temporal authority on his return to Lhasa in 1912.

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