

Preface

This book is about relationships between international assistance organizations and local communities. It argues that relationships of international assistance involve normative dynamics that influence the way in which local communities define their collective norms and values. It focuses specifically on the Tibetan exiles in Nepal. It explores the ways in which Tibetan exiles in Nepal negotiate their norms and values as they interact with the many international organizations that assist them. It argues that their negotiations complicate the Tibetans' efforts to define themselves as a community.

The book is based on eighteen months of field research I conducted in the Kathmandu Valley of Nepal between 1989 and 1995. Supplemental research included three months in 1994 in Dharamsala India, the seat of the Dalai Lama's exile administration, and two months in 1995 in Lhasa, the capital of Tibet. The initial question I sought to answer through my research is how the Tibetan exiles were able to develop and maintain control over Nepal's largest industry, the manufacture and export of hand-made woolen carpets, given that upon their arrival in Nepal, the Tibetans were poor, landless, stateless, inexperienced in international business, and without rights to own land or register export businesses in Nepal. The answer, I found, is that international patrons helped the Tibetans to secure rights to land and business ownership and provided them with the resources they needed—including investment capital, education and training, material goods, and diplomatic connections—to develop and control the carpet industry. International patrons continue to assist the Tibetans in Nepal. The relationship between the Tibetans and their international patrons has persisted for more than forty years and is critical to the ability of the Tibetans to maintain their economic and political influence not just over the carpet industry but also over Tibetan settlement camps, monasteries, and schools in Nepal.

International assistance to the Tibetan exiles has, indeed, helped them to achieve economic and political influence in Nepal, yet it has also had broader, more far-reaching effects. It is the effects of international assistance that is the topic of this book. It analyzes the way in which international assistance

to the Tibetan exiles in Nepal affects how the Tibetans define and discuss the Tibetan identity. As the Tibetans interact with each of the many international organizations that assist them, they negotiate what it means to be Tibetan to accommodate their patrons' expectations. Sometimes their patrons' expectations are communicated clearly and unambiguously, as when they constitute conditions upon which the continuation of assistance is contingent. An example is U.S. intergovernmental assistance to the Dalai Lama's exile administration contingent upon its democratic transformation. At other times, Tibetans infer what their patrons expect of them and accommodate their expectations without explicit negotiation. The headmaster at the Tibetan school where I taught, for example, sent Christmas cards to all of the school's sponsors not because he himself celebrates Christmas (as a Buddhist, he does not), but because he thought they, as Christians, would expect to hear from him at that time of year. As the Tibetans accommodate their patrons' expectations, they take on values and behaviors that were never before part of being Tibetan. These values and behaviors complicate the Tibetans' efforts to define themselves as a community.

My argument here—that international assistance to the Tibetan exiles complicates their efforts to define themselves as a community—is intended to counterbalance the existent literature on the Tibetan exiles, most of which documents in a relatively uncritical manner the ways in which the Tibetan exiles preserve and protect what is presumed to be a traditional Tibetan identity. Such literature portrays the Tibetan exile communities as a kind of living museum—a place where Tibetan traditions can be preserved and protected, documented and observed, until they can be reintroduced into Tibet. It portrays international assistance to the Tibetan exiles, similarly, as a kind of benign philanthropy, a financial resource that serves merely to support the Tibetans' own efforts to preserve and protect their culture, values, and traditions. My argument is that international assistance to the Tibetan exiles is not value-free—a resource that serves merely to support the Tibetans' own efforts—as portrayed in the existent literature. Relationships of international assistance have their own normative dynamics. They shape the ways in which the Tibetan exiles define and discuss what it means to be Tibetan. They are one of the means through which what it means to be Tibetan is defined and transformed. The interpretation of the Tibetan exile communities that I advance here, therefore, is that of a set of interconnected and highly politicized sites where Tibetan identities are continually constructed and contested. The social actors involved include Tibetans, members of the Tibetans' host communities, and various international patrons who support the Tibetans. As they interact with each other, all of these groups negotiate what it means to be Tibetan in a manner that is no less dynamic than that which occurs in Tibet. What it means to be Tibetan is changing just as much outside Tibet—within the exile communities—as within Tibet. There is no traditional Tibetan identity in exile.

The relationships the Tibetan exiles maintain with the many international organizations that assist them complicate more than just the Tibetan identity as well. They complicate the sovereignty of Nepal as a host state to Tibetans, the authority of the Dalai Lama's exile administration over the Tibetans, and the loyalty of the Tibetans to Tibetan national goals. They complicate all of these issues—sovereignty, authority, loyalty, and identity—as they create incentives for the Tibetans to identify, affiliate, and act in concert with groups alternative to their local and national communities. Relationships of international assistance constitute a type of international community through which new norms, values, and rules for interaction are negotiated. My interest is in how such relationships influence everyday interactions at the local level.

This book is not only about the effects that international assistance has in the specific case of the Tibetan exiles. It is also, on a more general level, about how to analyze the effects that international assistance has on any local community. The Tibetan case may be unusual in the number of international organizations involved and in the duration of their involvement, yet it is not unusual in the dynamics of their involvement. It is, in fact, precisely because of the intensive and long-term nature of the Tibetan case that it illustrates the dynamics of international assistance so clearly. This book therefore uses the Tibetan case to outline a framework for the analysis of international assistance that accounts for its normative dynamics and analyzes its effects on local communities. The framework, which I call the entitlement model of global-local relations, recognizes that international assistance is rarely, if ever, a free gift; it comes with the expectation that local communities will transform in some way so as to accommodate their patrons' norms and values. It asks how accommodation to their norms and values affects issues of sovereignty, authority, loyalty, and identity.

The Tibetan exiles among whom I conducted my research discussed the process of accommodating the norms and values of those who assist them in terms of the metaphor of a bat, a creature they describe as neither bird nor rat yet with the capacity to imitate both. The bat metaphor depicts the Tibetans as very much in control of the process of accommodation. It portrays them as people with a solid identity at the core who accommodate the expectations of others only on the surface, only to the extent that it helps them to pass as acceptable. When they describe themselves as bats, Tibetans assert their capacity to maintain their core identity as Tibetan (as bats) and at the same time imitate others (as birds and rats) without complication, without actual accommodation to others' norms and values. Through the bat metaphor, in other words, the Tibetans claim a high degree of agency in the process of negotiating international assistance. Tibetans talk about themselves as actively controlling the impression they make on others, so that others perceive them as similar and therefore worthy of acceptance and assistance.

What I found through my research, however, is that the bat metaphor overstates the Tibetans' capacity to control the process of accommodating the

norms and values of others. Tibetans do not merely pretend to accommodate others' expectations. They instead struggle with what they experience as conflicting expectations and conceptualizations of themselves and their goals. The efforts of the Tibetan exiles to accommodate the values of democracy provide an example. The Dalai Lama's exile administration, in response to U.S. intergovernmental assistance, developed a plan for governing the Tibetan exile communities in a democratic manner, with elected representation and a system of checks and balances among three branches of government. One could interpret the plan as mere instrumentalism, as something the Tibetan exiles put together only to insure that U.S. intergovernmental assistance continues. That interpretation accords with the Tibetans' description of themselves as bats, as people who accommodate others' expectations only on the surface while maintaining their identity as Tibetan at the core. What that interpretation does not capture, however, are all the debates that occur among Tibetan exiles about democracy and its role in Tibetan society. Some Tibetan exiles, it would seem, believe quite sincerely in the values of democracy. They argue that it is not only a good way in which to govern Tibetan society but that it also reflects values that Tibetans have always held dear. They struggle then to reconcile their commitment to democracy with their belief in the righteousness of government by the Dalai Lamas. Their efforts to reconcile the two belief systems—one of which entrusts government to the will of the people, the other of which entrusts it to a supreme enlightened being—engage the very fundamentals of the Tibetan identity. They reflect a process of accommodating the norms and values of others that is far more than skin deep.

The values of democracy are not the only values the Tibetans have been challenged to accommodate. The Tibetans' international patrons have challenged them to accommodate also the values of human rights, liberalism, humanism, multiculturalism, environmentalism, and even, ironically, self-sufficiency. As the Tibetans struggle with all of these expectations, they argue about what it means to be Tibetan, what is important to pass on to the next generation as part of the Tibetan identity. Is democracy essential to the Tibetan identity? Is Buddhism? Is commitment to the Dalai Lama? Is the Tibetan language? Is the Tibetan independence cause? What about the intent to return to Tibet? As Tibetans construct their own answers to these many questions, they challenge the efforts of the Dalai Lama's exile administration to define the content of the Tibetan identity so as to make claims to national self-determination and to educate the next generation as Tibetans. What it means to be Tibetan is a highly contested issue, as a result, both within the Tibetan exile community and between the Tibetan exiles and their compatriots in Tibet.

Discussions I had with many Tibetans over many years in Nepal, India, Tibet, and the United States led me to the understanding that I present in this book. Research for the book consisted of life history interviews, event-based

interviews, surveys of Tibetan businesses and residential communities, day-to-day site observations in three separate Tibetan settlement camps (Jawalakhel, Boudha, and Jorpati), and archival research in a number of Tibetan exile organizations. I conducted most of the research in the Kathmandu Valley of Nepal in 1995. Throughout 1995, I lived just outside of the Tibetan settlement camp in Jawalakhel. I taught at Jawalakhel's Tibetan school and conducted a number of projects for both the Tibet Office (the representative of the Dalai Lama's exile administration in Nepal) and the Snow Lion Foundation (a non-profit organization founded by Swiss inter-governmental officials to provide assistance to Tibetans in Nepal).

I first became aware of the extent of the role that international organizations play in the lives of the Tibetan exiles in Nepal through the life history interviews I conducted. Tibetans I met in the camp, at the school, and through the survey projects I conducted agreed to be interviewed and recommended others who would be good to interview to provide me with an understanding of a variety of life experiences. I conducted more than fifty life history interviews. My interviewees were a fairly even mix of males and females. They lived in various neighborhoods dispersed throughout the Kathmandu Valley (see Map 0.2). All were in their thirties or older. They included carpet factory owners, hotel and restaurant owners, trekking company owners, shop keepers, monks, teachers, employees of the Dalai Lama's exile administration, and former guerrilla fighters living out their days in retirement. Interviews were in both Tibetan and English. I discussed all of my interviews with my Tibetan language teachers as well as with other Tibetan and Nepali people with whom I interacted on a regular basis to solicit further information and commentary on what I had learned. All of my informants were, in one way or another, influenced by international assistance organizations. Even when they did not personally interact with them, their major life choices were shaped by the resources international organizations provide.

That led to the question of why international organizations were providing assistance to the Tibetan exiles in the first place. To answer that question, I collected information on the relevant international organizations as well. In Nepal, I conducted interviews with representatives from the Swiss Development Corporation, USAID, and UNHCR; I conducted research in the Tibet Office and Snow Lion Foundation archives on the history of their assistance relationships; and I observed the day-to-day interactions between Tibetan exiles and representatives from international assistance organizations at the Tibet Office, the Tibetan settlement camp in Jawalakhel, and the reception center for newly arrived Tibetans in Nepal. In the United States, I collected U.S. government records on the Tibetan exiles, including declassified CIA documents and minutes from U.S. congressional meetings. I read the brochures, web sites, and fundraising materials published by various friends of Tibet organizations. Several recently published memoirs were

also of great assistance: Hagen's (1994) recounts his role in establishing a program for Swiss intergovernmental assistance to Tibetans in Nepal; Knaus's (1999) and McCarthy's (1997) document the role of the U.S. CIA in the Tibetan guerrilla war.

I have organized the book, in part, around the Tibetans' assistance relationships. Chapters 1 through 3 examine the Swiss-Tibetan, U.S.-Tibetan, and friends of Tibet relationships respectively. Each includes a history of the assistance relationship and a discussion of its normative dynamics. I ask how the relationship affects the Tibetans' efforts to define themselves as a community. Chapters 4 through 6 analyze the other effects of the Tibetans' assistance relationships. Chapter 4 uses the relationship between the Tibet Office, the UNHCR, and the Nepal government to analyze how international assistance to the Tibetans complicates Nepal state sovereignty. Chapter 5 uses interactions between the Dalai Lama's exile administration and other Tibetan exile organizations supported through international assistance to analyze the issue of authority. Chapter 6 uses details on Tibetan families, mutual aid societies, and other local-level organizations to analyze issues of loyalty and identity. The introduction and conclusion use the Tibetan case to outline the framework I propose for the analysis of international assistance, the entitlement model of global-local relations, and to situate it within the literature on entitlements; migrant and refugee studies; and the anthropological study of international, transnational, and global organizations.