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The Singer of Tibet: Shabkar (1781-1851), the “Inescapable Nation,” and Buddhist Universalism

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The Singer of Tibet: Shabkar (1781–1851), the ‘Inescapable Nation,’ and Buddhist Universalism

Rachel H. Pang

This paper examines the concept of ‘Tibet (Tib. *bod*)’ in the spiritual autobiography of the celebrated Tibetan Buddhist author, Shabkar Tsokdruk Rangdröl (1781–1851). I use both *literal* and *literary* modes of analysis in conjunction with Steven Grosby’s and Lama Jabb’s definitions of ‘nation’ to demonstrate how Shabkar initially builds a vivid persona—the ‘Singer of Tibet’—that is rooted in the Tibetan landscape, but then shifts to a different persona—‘Shabkar’—that transcends Tibet altogether and embraces a sense of Buddhist universalism. Throughout the process, Shabkar evokes deities and historical figures that are fundamental to Tibetan historical, cultural, and religious memory and alludes to customs and tropes central to Tibetan culture, such as orality, song, and the bardic tradition. In addition to demonstrating the efficacy and potency of literary tropes in creating the sense

of an imagined nation, this essay makes a contribution to the ‘Where is Tibet?’ debate by exploring how Tibetan identity is articulated in one of the great masterpieces of classical Tibetan Buddhist literature.

Keywords: Tibet, literature, nationalism, Shabkar, bard, singer.

Introduction

'Where is Tibet?' is a highly contested issue in current affairs. Representing one end of the spectrum, the People's Republic of China (PRC) view of Tibet corresponds to the 'Tibetan Autonomous Region' (TAR) (Ch. *xizang zizhiqu*). Defining regions via geopolitical boundaries in this way is "derived from British imperial state making practices" (McGranahan 2010: 49). On the other end of the spectrum is the Central Tibetan Administration's position that Tibet refers to the three provinces of central Tibet, Amdo, and Kham, which corresponds to the TAR and areas within Qinghai, Gansu, Sichuan, and Yunnan provinces of the PRC (Central Tibetan Administration 2017). This system of organizing Tibet originates from the idea of the '*chölkha sum* (Tib. *chol kha gsum*)' that "overlays premodern Tibetan views of community onto modern forms of the state" (McGranahan 2010: 48-50).¹ Much is at stake for both sides: national stability for the PRC and genuine autonomy for the Tibetan government-in-exile.

Undergirding this debate is the prevalent notion in modern political geography "that nations and states are to be coterminous" (McGranahan 2010: 40). And yet, this rigid notion of the relationship between 'nations' and 'states' fails to capture the complexity of realities on the ground. Lama Jabb's study of modern Tibetan literature, for example, "highlights the role of culture in the perpetuation and reinforcement of Tibetan national consciousness" in the absence of a sovereign state (Jabb 2015: 236). Along the same vein, I am interested in exploring what new aspects of nationalism can be uncovered when the issue of sovereignty is bracketed. My intention is not to trivialize discussions pertaining to state and sovereignty, but rather, to explore how the Tibetan nation has been imagined through its literature prior to its incorporation into the PRC in 1959, and how this informs the 'Where is Tibet' debate. In particular, due to the relative lack of scholarly attention on how Tibetan Buddhist authors "construe their own recent history," I am interested in how Tibetan religious figures articulated their subjectivity (Gayley 2016: 17).

In this essay, I examine how the notion of 'Tibet (Tib. *bod*)' is articulated in the autobiography of Shabkar Tsokdruk Rangdröl (1781-1851), a famous Buddhist poet-saint writing on the cusp of Tibetan modernity. In order to accomplish this, I analyze Shabkar's autobiography using two modes of analysis in conjunction with two definitions of 'nation' independent of the modern geopolitical notion of the nation-state. Through the tension that arises between these two divergent, but thematically related definitions, I aim to demonstrate the efficacy and potency of literary tropes in creating a sense of an imagined nation. Lama Jabb has

observed "the overblown role attributed by modernists to the state in the formation of national identities" (Jabb 2015: 236). In the same spirit, this essay attempts to demonstrate the central and sophisticated role of a people's literature in imagining and articulating its national identity.

On the one hand, Steven Grosby defines 'nation' as "a territorial community of nativity" that "requires a relatively extensive, bounded territory or an image of such a territory, the existence of which usually involves the following: a self-designating name, a centre (with institutions), a history that both asserts and is expressive of a temporal continuity, and a relatively uniform culture that is often based on a common language, religion, and law" (2005: 23). A semantic analysis of the use of the word 'Tibet' and associated words in Shabkar's autobiography reveals a concept of Tibet that is in accord with Grosby's definition of 'nation.' On the other hand, Lama Jabb's definition of 'national identity' emphasizes the significance of the 'inescapable nation' as "a common sense of history, culture, territory, collective memories, and a will to live in a community of shared values, beliefs, myths and symbols" (Jabb 2015: 33). A literary analysis of the way in which Shabkar recounts his visionary experiences with key historical and supernatural figures in Tibetan collective memory resonates with Lama Jabb's definition of Tibetan 'national identity.' In particular, this second mode of analysis demonstrates the way in which Shabkar evokes a complex and nuanced notion of Tibet as a nation that is both rooted in the landscape but utterly transcendent as well. He does so by recounting his visions, adopting the personas of the 'Singer of Tibet' and 'Shabkar,' and using literary tropes such as allusion, metaphor, and metonymy.

Shabkar's Many Names

Shabkar was a renowned meditation master from the 'Repgong (Tib. *reb gong*)' valley of 'Amdo (Tib. *a mdo*)' province in eastern Tibet (contemporary Qinghai province, PRC). As a prolific singer, poet, and writer, he left behind a vast number of writings that total fourteen volumes.² In particular, his spiritual autobiography is considered to be one of the greatest masterpieces of 'Tibetan Buddhist life writing (Tib. *rnam thar*).'³ Believed to be an emanation of the eleventh-century poet-saint Milarepa, Shabkar was also famous for his ability to sing songs of 'spiritual realization (Tib. *mgur*)' extemporaneously. His *Collected Songs* alone contains over one thousand individual pieces that span three volumes.⁴ A writer who respected tradition while simultaneously embracing innovation, Shabkar also composed a series of nine 'emanated scriptures,' the only written example of the genre in the Tibetan Buddhist

literary corpus.⁵ In addition to these notable literary and religious accomplishments, Shabkar is also celebrated for his advocacy of vegetarianism, promotion of an ecumenical approach to religious diversity, and extensive pilgrimages across the Tibetan plateau.⁶

Before Shabkar was known as ‘Shabkar,’ he was known by many other names. At birth, the village chief named him ‘Ngakwang Trashi’ meaning ‘Auspicious Lord of Speech (Tib. *ngag dbang bkra shis*)’ (Zhabs dkar 2003a, 1: 29). When he joined the local community of lay tantric practitioners (Tib. *sngags pa*) as a young teen, they called him ‘Tséring Trashi’ which means ‘Auspicious Long Life (Tib. *tshé ring bkra shis*)’ (Zhabs dkar [hereafter Shabkar] 2003a, 1: 33). As is customary for Buddhist ordination, Shabkar received an ordination name—‘Jampa Chödar’ meaning ‘Loving One Who Spreads the Dharma (Tib. *byams pa chos dar*)’—when he took his monk’s vows in 1801 (Shabkar 2003a, 1: 57). That same year, when he was initiated into tantric Buddhist practice, his guru Chögyel Ngakyi Wangpo (Tib. *chos rgyal ngag gi dbang po*) named him Tsokdruk Rangdröl, meaning ‘Self-Liberation of the Six Senses (Tib. *tshogs drug rang grol*).’ In addition to these official names, Shabkar refers to himself in various ways throughout his autobiography and *Collected Songs*, using epithets such as: ‘the Renunciant (Tib. *bya btang ba*),’ ‘the Yogin (Tib. *mal ‘byor ba*),’ ‘the Singer (Tib. *glu ba*),’ and so forth.

But perhaps two of his most interesting—and significant—names are ‘the Singer of Tibet’ and ‘Shabkar.’ I will discuss the origins and import of the name ‘Shabkar’ in a later section of the essay. The epithet of ‘The Singer of Tibet’ was bestowed upon him while he was in meditative retreat on the slopes of ‘Anyé Machen (Tib. *a mye rma chen*)’ in Amdo province by its resident deity in 1809. Shabkar describes the visionary experience as follows:

A white man came and called me. I followed him to a large, magnificently beautiful tent at the center of hundreds of white tents. When I went inside, there was a great king seated upon a lofty throne. In front of him, to the right, was a throne upon which he instructed me to sit. When I sat down, he stood up and gave me a long immaculate white silk scarf and a splendid hat. He said, “It is wonderful that you emulate the life stories of past masters, and sing *dharma* songs of spiritual realization. I bestow upon you the name, “Singer of Tibet, the Land of Snows” (Tib. *khangs can bod kyi glu sbyangs mkhan*). It is kind of you to leave behind your *Collected Songs* in Tibet; in the future, it will be of immense benefit to faithful disciples. Please continue to engage in the essence

of practice, and benefit the teachings and beings with your meditative accomplishments. At the same time, express the meaning of the Buddha’s teachings through song. Hereafter, I promise to assist you in all your *dharma* activities. (Shabkar 2003a, 1: 276)

Prior to receiving this epithet, Shabkar had referred to himself as ‘singer’ or by the more specific localized identity of ‘Singer of Repgong’ (Shabkar 2003b, 3: 53, 58). After receiving this epithet, Shabkar would fully embrace this new persona, using it often over the next few years (Shabkar 2003b: 402, 403, 481, 482, 484, 490; 2003c: 314). The epithet of ‘Singer of Tibet’ is significant because of how it conveys a pan-Tibetan identity in a way that ‘Singer of Repgong’ does not. It also implies that its holder, Shabkar, has a special relationship to Tibet.

Imagining the Nation: The Concept of Tibet in Shabkar’s Autobiography

Before discussing the significance of the Singer of Tibet’s pan-Tibetan identity, it is necessary to consider how the concept of ‘Tibet’ is understood in Shabkar’s autobiography. In this section, I will demonstrate how on a semantic level, the concept of Tibet in Shabkar’s autobiography is in accord with Grosby’s definition of a nation. According to Grosby, the first criterion for a nation is a “self-designating name” (2005: 23). In Shabkar’s autobiography, this self-designating name is ‘Tibet (Tib. *bod*),’ which is portrayed as a geographic entity distinct from other civilizations. This is apparent, for example, when the Tiger-Faced *Ḍākinī* appears to him in a vision and advises him to “stay in Tibet” instead of journeying to India (Shabkar 2003a: 689). Similarly, Shabkar is advised by Chankya (Tib. *lcang skya*) Rinpoche to stay in Tibet and not journey to Wutaishan in China (Shabkar 2003a, 1: 930-931). In both instances, ‘Tibet’ is unambiguously portrayed as being a geographically entity separate from ‘India’ and ‘China.’ Moreover, the metonym of ‘snow (Tib. *gangs*)’ or ‘snow mountains (Tib. *gangs ri*)’ often accompanies or acts as a substitute for the term ‘Tibet.’ Throughout the text, there are countless references to ‘the snowy realm of Tibet (Tib. *gangs can bod yul* or *bod yul gangs can ljongs*),’ ‘the realm encircled by snow mountains (Tib. *gangs ri’i ra bas bskor ba’i zhing ljongs*),’ and ‘the snow mountains [of] Tibet (*bod gangs can ri rmams*)’ (Shabkar 2003a: 752, 802; 2: 57, 37). Indeed, Tibet’s most salient geographic feature is its snow mountains, and the trope of Tibet being symbolized by snow mountains is ubiquitous throughout Tibetan literature.

Tibet is portrayed as being composed of different regions in Shabkar’s autobiography. Although he does not make direct reference to the geographic organizational principle

of the *chölka sum*, he implies it nonetheless through the tripartite division of ‘upper, middle, and lower’ in passages such as: “How wondrous! How lucky you are to be born in Tibet now/ All the faithful people of the upper, middle, and low[lands]—the three (Tib. *stod smad bar gsum*)” (Shabkar 2003a, 1: 322).⁷ The ‘upper [lands]’ would refer to Upper Tö, the ‘middle’ to Central Tibet, and the ‘lower [lands]’ to ‘Lower Tö.’ In particular, Shabkar describes ‘central Tibet (Tib. *dbus* or *dbus gtsang*)’ as a ‘pure realm (Tib. *dag zhing*)’ (Shabkar 2003a, 1: 387; 2: 128, 87). The ‘pure realm’ makes reference to the buddhahelds that are mentioned in the *Mahāyāna sūtras*. By comparing central Tibet to a ‘pure realm,’ Shabkar elevates the status of central Tibet to that of a sacred Buddhist realm. Perhaps most importantly though, for our discussion of the definition of nation, Shabkar portrays the city of Lhasa as being the “center of Tibet” (Shabkar 2003a, 1: 753). According to Grosby’s definition, a nation must have ‘a center.’

Another aspect of Grosby’s definition of nation is that it must possess “a history that both asserts and is expressive of a temporal continuity” (2005: 23). This criterion is present in Shabkar’s autobiography. Shabkar portrays Tibet as a civilization with a distinctive history stretching back to the Tibetan imperial period (seventh to ninth centuries). He does this by referring to the ‘Tibetan *dharma* kings (Tib. *bod chos rgyal*)’ of the imperial period as well as to the Indian Buddhist master Padmasambhava who first tamed Tibet’s indigenous deities and taught Buddhism there (Shabkar 2003a, 2: 38). Following the imperial period, there was a Dark Period when Buddhism deteriorated in central Tibet. Three key figures who were responsible for revitalizing the Buddhist teachings after the Dark Period were Tibet’s ‘Three Wise Men (Tib. *bod kyi mkhas pa mi gsum*).’ Shabkar refers to the Three Wise Men and their story in his autobiography (Shabkar 2003a, 2: 137). Atiśa was another key figure in the later transmission period to whom Shabkar refers as well (Shabkar 2003a, 2: 8). Finally, Shabkar also mentions key contributors to Buddhist culture in Tibet that span many centuries of Tibetan history, such as the ‘scholar-siddhas of India and Tibet (Tib. *rgya bod kyi mkhas grub*)’ and the great ‘Tibetan translators (Tib. *bod pa lo tsa’ ba*)’ (Shabkar 2003a, 2: 78, 117). Altogether, such references give the sense of Tibet as a civilization characterized by historical and temporal continuity.

Grosby’s final criterion for a nation is the presence of “a relatively uniform culture that is often based on a common language, religion, and law.” While Shabkar documents the diversity of Tibetan dialects through mention of ‘the dialect of the central Tibetans (Tib. *dbus gtsang phyogs kyi skad cha*)’ and ‘Amdo dialect (Tib. *a mdo’i skad*),’ he also implies the existence of a pan-Tibetan language (Shabkar 2003a,

2:133, 1:389). For example, when Chankya Rinpoche advises Shabkar against travelling on a pilgrimage to Wutaishan in China, he argues that Shabkar would not be able to help people the way he could in Tibet because he did not know Chinese or Mongolian (Shabkar 2003a, 1: 931). Within this statement is the implication that Tibetan is a language distinct from Chinese and Mongolian. Thus, although Shabkar accounts for the regional difference in Tibetan dialects, he nevertheless maintains the idea of a Tibetan language that encompasses the various dialects on the Tibetan plateau.

In addition to a shared language, there is also the sense in Shabkar’s autobiography that ‘the people of snowy Tibet (Tib. *gangs can bod kyi mi rnams*)’ are a distinct people with a shared ethnicity and history (Shabkar 2003a, 1: 337). At one point, Shabkar refers to a quotation from the seventh-century king Songsten Gampo who refers to “my Tibetan subjects (*nga yi bod ‘bangs*)” (Shabkar 2003a, 1: 387). Shabkar portrays the Tibetans as belonging to ‘the Tibetan ethnicity (Tib. *bod rigs*)’ (Shabkar 2003a, 2: 94). He also portrays the Tibetans as being distinct from other peoples, such as the Indians, Chinese, and Mongols. This is apparent in the use of phrases such as ‘Chinese, Tibetans, Mongols—the three (Tib. *rgya bod sog gsum*)’ and ‘the people of India (Tib. *rgya gar gyi mi*)’ (Shabkar 2003a, 2: 94, 2: 105). Interestingly, Shabkar does not refer to himself as a ‘Tibetan (Tib. *bod pa*),’ but rather, identifies his ‘homeland (Tib. *rang yul*)’ as being “Domé” province (Shabkar 2003a, 1: 849). This identification emphasizes the importance of regional identity in premodern Tibet while also adding nuance to the Singer of Tibet’s pan-Tibetan identity.

In Shabkar’s autobiography, Buddhism is portrayed as the unifying factor and distinguishing feature of Tibetan culture. For Shabkar, Tibet’s identity is closely aligned with Buddhism, in contrast to other civilizations. He notes that while “the sun—teachings of the Buddha—dawned in Tibet,” they withered in India (Shabkar 2003a, 2: 91, 1: 750). Tibet’s distinctiveness as a Buddhist nation lies in its distinctive status as Avalokiteśvara’s protectorate. Avalokiteśvara is the Buddhist *bodhisattva* of compassion, and Shabkar refers to him as “the deity of the snowland of Tibet” [Tib. *bod gang can lha gcig spyen ras gzigs*] and “Tibet’s destined deity, the protector of the snow mountains, the Noble and Mighty Avalokiteśvara” [Tib. *bod kyi lha skal gangs ri’i mgon po ‘phags pa spyen ras gzigs dbang phyug*] (Shabkar 2003a, 2: 275, 340). Tibet’s unity through Buddhism and its special status as Avalokiteśvara’s protectorate satisfies the criterion for ‘uniformity’ in Grosby’s definition of a nation.

In addition to his religious significance, there are political valences to Avalokiteśvara’s relationship to Tibet as well. The Dalai Lamas are believed by the Tibetans to

be emanations of Avalokiteśvara. In his autobiography, Shabkar refers to the Fifth Dalai Lama as the “human emanation of Noble Avalokiteśvara, the protector of the snow mountains” [Tib. *gangs ri'i mgon po 'phags pa spyan ras gzigs mi yi gar gyi nam rol*] and the Ninth Dalai Lama as “Mighty Avalokiteśvara, Lungtok Gyatso” [Tib. *spyan ras gzigs dbang lung rtogs rgya mtsho*] (Shabkar 2003a, 1: 808; 2: 388-389). He states unambiguously that the leaders of Tibet are the Dalai Lama and the ‘Regent King (Tib. *bod kyi rgyal po*),’ with the Dalai Lama being described as “the refuge protector of all Tibetans” [Tib. *bod yul 'gro ba yongs kyi skyabs mgon*] (Shabkar 2003a, 1: 841, 474). Thus, although Shabkar does not mention unity under law, he nevertheless conveys a sense of political unity by portraying Tibet as being under the rule of the Dalai Lamas and Regent King.⁸

Conveying the Heartbeat of a Nation: The Visions, Allusions and Metonyms of Tibet's Singer

On a semantic level, Shabkar's portrayal of Tibet is in accord with Grosby's definition of a nation. And yet, this is only apparent after a sustained semantic analysis of the autobiography. On the other hand, a strong sense of Lama Jabb's concept of the ‘inescapable nation’ is immediately obvious in episodes of Shabkar's autobiography where he describes visionary experiences of deities and historical figures fundamental to Tibetan historical, cultural, and religious memory. These deities, along with the complex web of allusions evoked by the persona of the Singer of Tibet—such as orality, song, and Tibet's rich bardic tradition—convey the powerful mythic narratives that have sustained Tibetan civilization for centuries. Shabkar was a devout Buddhist practitioner who shied away from politics throughout his life.⁹ Nevertheless, as Åshild Kolås has observed, “recollecting the past is ... a vital political tool” (1996: 63). By recollecting and making allusions to key figures in Tibetan Buddhist history, Shabkar resurrects emotionally potent “collective memories,” as well as “shared values, beliefs, myths and symbols” that are critical for Tibet as an ‘imagined community’ (Jabb 2015: 33).¹⁰ Thus, whether consciously or not, in his autobiography, Shabkar articulates a powerful notion of Tibet as a nation by evoking collective memories that play a critical role in the “formation of a sense of community in Tibet” (Dreyfus 1994: 205).

There is perhaps no deity more significant to Tibet than Avalokiteśvara, the *bodhisattva* of compassion. Not only is this *bodhisattva* believed to be the father of the Tibetan people, he is also seen as Tibet's destined protector deity.¹¹ The *Mañi Kambum*, a series of treasured texts discovered in the mid-twelfth to mid-thirteenth centuries, provides the textual basis for how Avalokiteśvara, a Buddhist deity of

Indian origin, would eventually become Tibet's patron deity from the eleventh century onward:

The mythical portions of the *Mañi Kambum* develop a distinctive view of Tibet, its history, and its place in the world . . . the belief that Avalokiteśvara was the patron deity of Tibet; the legend of King Songsten Gampo and his court, in which the king represented as being the very embodiment of Avalokiteśvara, the founder of the Buddha's way in his formerly barbarian realm; and the cosmological vision of the Tibetan Avalokiteśvara cult, whereby the king's divinity, and the divinity's regard for Tibet, are seen not as matters of historic accident, but as matters grounded in the very nature of the world. (Kapstein 2000: 147)

Throughout Shabkar's life, Avalokiteśvara would appear to him twice. These visionary experiences alone would establish Shabkar as having a special relationship with the deity. However, on top of these visions, Shabkar was believed to be an emanation of Avalokiteśvara as well (Shabkar 2003a, 1: 826). This additional dimension of their relationship conflates the Singer of Tibet's identity with Tibet's patron deity, making their association with one another even deeper.

Avalokiteśvara first appeared to Shabkar in 1807, a couple years before he received the epithet, ‘Singer of Tibet,’ while he was meditating on ‘Tsonying Island (Tib. *mtsho snying*)’ in Qinghai Lake (Shabkar 2003a, 1: 206). After self-identifying as “I, the destined deity of Tibet” who “always looks upon Tibet with compassion,” Avalokiteśvara advises “the people of the realm of Tibet” (Tib. *bod khams mi rnams*) to behave in a moral manner.¹² It is notable that in this speech, Avalokiteśvara refers to both ‘Tibet’ and ‘the people of the realm of Tibet.’ With regards to the former, there is the implication that ‘Tibet’ consists of not just central Tibet, but rather, the area encompassed by the “upper, middle, and lower” regions of Tibet that Shabkar refers to throughout his autobiography (Shabkar 2003a, 1: 322). With regards to the latter, Avalokiteśvara implies that the people who live in the ‘realm of Tibet’ are unified through their devotion to him and the ritual practice of reciting his mantra. He advises them: “In particular, everyone, pray to me—/ regardless of age [you] should recite the six-syllable mantra” (Shabkar 2003a, 1: 206). His advice to Tibetans is uncannily similar to that of the *Mañi Kambum*, which propagates the idea that the worship of Avalokiteśvara and reciting his six-syllable mantra is “the most efficacious spiritual practice in this debased age, particularly for the Tibetan people” (Kapstein 2000: 151).

Shabkar's next vision of Avalokiteśvara would be over three decades later, in 1840, while in winter retreat at ‘Trashī

Nyamgé Ling (Tib. *bkra shis nyams dga'i gling*) of 'Machak Hermitage (Tib. *ma phyag ri khrod*)' on the banks of the Machu river. He describes the experience as follows:

That year, I completed the recitations for the *Sixteen Spheres of the Great Compassionate One*. Because of this, on the thirteenth day of the first month, right before dawn, I had a visionary experience. In the sky before me, within an expanse of rainbow light, were the Second Buddha Lord Atiśa and his spiritual sons. I supplicated with heartfelt faith. In an instant, the father and sons vanished into thusness, and then transformed into the *maṇḍala* of the Sixteen Spheres of the Great Compassionate One—the support and the supported. The Great Compassionate One, in the form of Gyalwa Gyatso, was clear and vivid, as if he were actually there. From his three places, white, red and dark blue nectar-light radiated in stages and simultaneously. [It] dissolved in my own three places—both in stages and simultaneously—and I attained the four empowerments of *samādhi*. And then, due to my faith and devotion, the Great Compassionate One's chest opened, and the Great Sage in the form of Namrang Gangjentso bestowed initiation as before. In the same way, the Great Sage's chest opened and the *dharmakāya* of the lama and buddha bestowed initiation. [The *dharmakāya*] opened its chest and [I] went inside. The *dharmakāya*-mind that is like the sky and my own mind—the two, became one taste and inseparable, like sky mixing with sky. I rested naturally within that state.

Then, arising from the state of *samādhi*, as before, I met Lord Atiśa and his spiritual sons. He said, "Fortunate noble son, through taming the outer and the inner secret mantra, beings will be benefited. I will always be inseparably united with you." Having said that, he went higher and higher, and having gone to Joyous Heaven, disappeared from view. Then, afterwards, a feeling of continuous joy-bliss arose. (Shabkar 2003a, 2: 176-177)

This vision is remarkable for several reasons. Firstly, Shabkar receives tantric empowerment and blessings directly from Avalokiteśvara in the form of Gyalwa Gyatso, or Red Avalokiteśvara, enforcing the direct connection between the Singer of Tibet and Tibet's patron deity. Secondly, this vision establishes the idea that Atiśa (982-1054) is inseparable from both Avalokiteśvara and Shabkar.¹⁴ This adds multiple valences to the Singer of Tibet's identity.

This idea of Avalokiteśvara's and Atiśa's inseparability is further developed in a vision that Shabkar had of

Padmasambhava a few years later in 1845. Originally from Oḍḍiyāna, Padmasambhava played a seminal role in establishing Buddhism in Tibet in the eighth century when he tamed indigenous supernatural forces antagonistic to Buddhism. In the vision, Padmasambhava tells Shabkar:

Hark! Listen, son of noble family! As the auspicious connection for you to accomplish benefit for the teachings and beings, initially, on Tsonying Island, I appeared in the form of Tsongkhapa, blessed [your] mental continuum, and bestowed the *Lamrim*. Afterwards, when you were staying at Trashi Nyamgeling, the mountain hermitage on the banks of the Machu river, I appeared in the form of Lord Atiśa, bestowed the empowerment of the *Samādhi of Sixteen Spheres* that opens the door of the mind, and gave you the *Scriptures of the Kadampa*. Now, having shown my actual face, I give you the teachings in actuality. Because of this, be glad! (Shabkar 2003a, 2: 364)

Shabkar's visionary encounter with Padmasambhava is highly significant. As Daniel Hirshberg suggests, "For Tibetans there may be no individual more central to Tibetan history and the heart of Tibetan cultural identity than Padmasambhava" (2016: 1). Moreover, Avalokiteśvara's and Padmasambhava's roles reinforce each other in various ways: both figures are emanations of Amitābha, work in Tibet, are associated with the imperial period, and their activities are revealed in epic literature beginning in the twelfth century (Kapstein 2000: 155). Finally, in this vision, Padmasambhava presents the idea that he, Atiśa and Tsongkhapa are indeed one—a statement with far-reaching ramifications.¹⁵ In Tibetan Buddhism, Padmasambhava is viewed as the founder of the Nyingma sect, while Tsongkhapa (1357-1419) is seen as the founder of the Geluk sect. By stating that Atiśa and Tsongkhapa are emanations of himself, Padmasambhava is dissolving sectarian divisions and implying that his teachings are the most ultimate form. I will return to this point about dissipating sectarian divisions in the final part of this essay.

Shabkar's visionary encounter with Tsongkhapa that Padmasambhava refers to in the above passage also has implications for Shabkar's role as the Singer of Tibet. In 1808, at Qinghai Lake, a year after his initial vision of Avalokiteśvara, Shabkar meets Tsongkhapa in a dream-vision. In the dream, Shabkar ascends a long crystal staircase on a mountain of precious stones. At the top, he meets Tsongkhapa, who is giving an oral transmission of the *Condensed Meaning of the Graded Path* to a group. Shabkar receives the transmission, and then asks if he can borrow the book. Tsongkhapa gives it to him and tells him to keep it. When he is just about to leave, Shabkar observes that

from his vantage point at the top of the staircase, he can “see the entire snowy land of Tibet” (Shabkar 2003a, 1: 232-233). Using his prayer shawl as wings, Shabkar soars back down from the heights with a bird’s-eye-view of Tibet. In addition to pointing out his spiritual connection to Tsongkhapa, this vision also demonstrates the Singer of Tibet’s privileged perspective in being able to see the entire Tibetan plateau at once.

In connection with his visions of figures associated with the Geluk Sect, Shabkar also has a vision of the Panchen Lama in 1840, shortly before his vision of Atiśa. The Panchen Lama is a key reincarnate lama in the Geluk Sect and a main teacher of the Dalai Lama. It is not clear from the vision which incarnation of the Panchen Lama Shabkar is referring to. In the dream, Shabkar arrives at Trashī Lhunpo palace where the Panchen Lama’s main monastic seat is located. The Panchen Lama says:

What you have done so far to benefit the *dharma* and teachings in Domé has been good, and I am pleased. From now on, while training in faith, devotion and pure perception towards all persons and *dharma*, be diligent in finding ways of bringing joy to all *dharma* and persons, and through that, you will benefit the teachings and beings in a vast way. Make utterly pure dedication prayers that in the future, we will meet in actuality in the western pure realm of Sukhāvātī. (Shabkar 2003a, 2: 175-176)

It is interesting that in the vision, the Panchen Lama localizes Shabkar’s religious activities to the Domé region, despite that they extended across the Tibetan plateau. Earlier in the autobiography, the (actual) Seventh Panchen Lama praises Shabkar for his religious activities all over the Tibetan plateau, and in particular for his restoration of a stupa built by Thangtong Gyalpo to avert foreign invasion of Tibet (Shabkar 2003a, 1: 803, 826). The particular stupa is also significant in the context of this supernatural network of figures because Thangtong Gyalpo is considered to be a previous incarnation of Shabkar (Shabkar 2001: 471).

In addition to visionary encounters with deities and historical figures who have played fundamental roles in Tibetan Buddhist history, Shabkar also has an intimate connection to deities rooted in the Tibetan landscape. One example is the resident deity of the sacred mountain Anyé Machen in Amdo who gave Shabkar the epithet of ‘Singer of Tibet’ discussed earlier in the essay. Another group of indigenous deities with whom Shabkar had a special relationship are the Tseringma, or ‘the Five Long Life Sisters’ (Tib. *tshe ring mched lnga*.) Described as ‘Tibet’s protectors’ (Tib. *bod khams skyong ba*), they frequently appear to

Shabkar in dreams and visionary experiences; he would ask them for assistance when he encountered obstacles in his religious activities (Shabkar 2003a, 1: 688-689). The Tseringma are particularly significant to Shabkar because he is considered to be an incarnation of Milarepa, and these deities were initially tamed by Milarepa in the eleventh century (Milarepa 1962: 296-311; Shabkar 2003a, 1: 688). Shabkar’s and Milarepa’s shared association with the Tseringma implies a sense of continuity between Milarepa and Shabkar. Finally, Shabkar also had a special connection to the resident deity of Tsonying Island in Qinghai Lake, ‘Tso men Gyelmo (Tib. *mtsho sman rgyal mo*.)’ Shabkar spent three years meditating on the island and he cites instances when she responded quickly to his requests for aid (Shabkar 2003a, 1: 198, 262). Shabkar’s intimate connection to these autochthonous deities convey the sense that the ‘Singer of Tibet’ is rooted in Tibet’s landscape. Indeed, despite a desire to go on a pilgrimage to Bodhgaya in India and Wutaishan in China, Shabkar was advised against leaving Tibet by the Tiger-Faced *Ḍākinī* in the former case and Chankya Rinpoche and Shar Rinpoche in the latter (Shabkar 2003a, 1: 689; Shabkar 2003a, 1: 931). The advice of these spiritual authority figures conveys the sense that the Singer of Tibet must remain *in* Tibet due to his special connection to its landscape, people, and history.

The Singer of Tibet’s recounting of his visionary encounters with the aforementioned deities and historical figures revives powerful mythic narratives that uphold Tibetan Buddhist collective memory. Still, the very epithet of the Singer of Tibet itself evokes a complex web of allusions that work alongside the recounting of his visions to convey a sense of an imagined Tibetan Buddhist nation. When one mentions the epithet the ‘Singer of Tibet,’ the first name that comes to mind is undoubtedly Milarepa. Milarepa was the most famous singer in Tibetan history, renowned for his ability to sing songs of spiritual realization extemporaneously.¹⁵ Indeed, if we were to consider the fame of Shabkar versus Milarepa, the latter certainly eclipses the former. At the same time, however, Shabkar is also intimately connected to his predecessor. From a young age, Shabkar emulated Milarepa’s life and made a conscious effort to meditate at many of the sites where Milarepa once practiced. Moreover, both Shabkar and his disciples believed him to be a reincarnation of Milarepa (Shabkar 2003a, 1: 19-20, 826). Shabkar even recounts that Milarepa once appeared to him in a dream-vision (Shabkar 2003a, 1: 295).

The oral and national dimensions of the epithet ‘Singer of Tibet’ reverberates with the bards who have occupied a central place in Tibetan culture, politics, and religion since the beginnings of the Tibetan empire. In pre-Buddhist and

pre-literate times, bardic figures upheld Tibetan cultural, religious and social structure through daily rituals and the oral recitation of origin myths, royal genealogies, historic myths, and “power-affirming tales” (Sørensen 1994: 1-2). Similarly, each time audiences read about Shabkar’s encounters with important Tibetan historical and supernatural figures, it serves to revive these figures in Tibetan collective memory. Beginning in the twelfth century, the tradition of the Gesar bards began in Tibet. Like the Gesar bards, Shabkar was able to recite songs and poems extemporaneously. Shabkar’s relationship with Avalokiteśvara also further associates him with the Gesar tradition because the Gesar tradition was believed to be initiated by Avalokiteśvara in the twelfth century when he witnessed the Tibetans in perpetual war (Kornman and Chonam 2015: xxviii-xxix). Finally, especially due to his strong Nyingma affiliation and itinerant lifestyle, Shabkar also harkens to the tradition of the wandering ‘Lama Manipa (Tib. *bla ma manipa*)’ who went from village to village singing Buddhist stories and recounting tales from imperial Tibetan history (Dreyfus 1994: 213). In fact, the Bhutanese Legal Code of 1729 saw these wandering orators as a potentially subversive threat due to the sense of proto-national identity that they spread (Dreyfus 1994: 214).

Furthermore, Shabkar, Milarepa, and the bards all tap into the primacy of orality in Tibetan culture. As Alexandru Anton-Luca states, “The value of a spoken contract outweighs that of a written one even nowadays” in the Amdo region; “[a] leader’s most appealing quality remains oratory ability, even at the expense of other, more practical skills. The smooth-talking icon (*kha bde lce bde can*—literally “possessing a quick tongue and pleasant speech”) pervades Tibetan society at every level” (2002: 174-5). Oral genres—and songs in particular—pervade every aspect of Tibetan culture: there are love songs for courtship, harvesting songs for the harvest, work songs for the laborers, folk songs sung at social gatherings and festivals, liturgies chanted in the monasteries, proverbs, oral banter, riddling, and call and response. By styling himself as the ‘Singer of Tibet,’ Shabkar taps into the power of orality in Tibetan society, which contributes to the authority of his persona and the potency of his message.

Thus, as the ‘Singer of Tibet,’ Shabkar recounts his interactions with deities and historical figures fundamental to Buddhist history in Tibet, all the while tapping into the primacy of the oral in Tibetan culture by evoking Tibet’s rich oral heritage of singers and bards. In this way, he weaves together a complex network of potent cultural valences that articulate a Tibetan identity far more three-dimensional than on the semantic level that I analyzed

in the first part of the essay. The concept of ‘Tibet’ that Shabkar articulates through the persona of the ‘Singer of Tibet’ is a civilization with a shared history, religion, literature, myths, and beliefs. There is also a sense that the Singer of Tibet’s role is to preserve Tibet’s rich religious and cultural tradition for posterity. As the deity of Mount Machen says to Shabkar: “It is kind of you to leave behind your *Collected Songs* in Tibet; in the future, it will be of immense benefit to faithful disciples” (Shabkar 2003a, 1: 276). Shabkar is the custodian of Tibetan Buddhist heritage, and each time his autobiography is read, it revives Tibetan history, literature, and culture in Tibet’s collective memory. Significantly, the Singer of Tibet’s voice comes from Amdo, further making the implicit argument that the Amdo region matters just as much as the central Tibetan region does.¹⁶

As Per K. Sørensen has noted in the context of the Tibetan empire, “The very act of recounting the historical past and feats of mythical significance doubtlessly became a crucial ritual act of confirmation and legitimation” (1994: 2). If we ask, who else in Tibetan history recounted visionary encounters of Avalokiteśvara and Padmasambhava? The answer is none other than the Fifth Dalai Lama, one of the greatest religio-political figures in Tibetan history. However, in addition to visionary encounters with Avalokiteśvara and Padmasambhava, the Fifth Dalai Lama also describes visions of King Songsten Gampo from Tibet’s imperial period as well (Maher 2010: 77-90). Like Shabkar, the Fifth Dalai Lama was believed to be an emanation of Avalokiteśvara (Maher 2010: 87). However, unlike the Great Fifth, Shabkar was adamant in emphasizing that he was solely a religious figure who avoided politics. And yet, one could argue that Shabkar’s act of recounting his visionary encounters with key historical and supernatural figures in Tibetan history through the persona of the Singer of Tibet has an inadvertent political dimension as well. That is, by evoking constellations of shared history, beliefs, myths and literature, one could argue that Shabkar conveys the idea that Tibet is more than merely a geographic location on a map, but also a ‘nation’ with a strong set of collective memories, according to the definitions of Grosby and Jabb. He is clearly not articulating the idea of a sovereign political community or nation state, but it is undeniable that there is the sense of Tibet as an imagined community with a shared history, purpose, and destiny as Avalokiteśvara’s protectorate.

Transcending the Nation: ‘White Foot’ and Buddhist Universalism

After embracing the persona of the Singer of Tibet for five years, Shabkar shifted to identifying himself by his tantric name Tsokdruk Rangdröl instead. Approximately five years

after that, he would switch personas once again, referring to himself as ‘Shabkar (Tib. *zhabs dkar pa*),’ which means ‘White Foot’ in Tibetan.¹⁷ It is clear that Shabkar wanted to be known to posterity by that name as the title of his autobiography uses ‘Shabkar’ instead of his other epithets. Indeed, ‘Shabkar’ is the identity that remains to this day in the Repgong valley and beyond. Why did Shabkar move away from identifying himself as ‘the Singer of Tibet’? And why did he prefer ‘Shabkar’ over his many other names?

In his autobiography, the name ‘Shabkar’ first occurs in a scene where he is travelling to Kyirong in southwestern Tibet in 1818. At this point, Shabkar was thirty-seven years old and had spent the last decade of his life on an extended pilgrimage stretching from Amdo to western Tibet. Travelling on foot, he had visited and meditated at great sacred sites such as Tsari and Kailash, and had gained a large following of disciples and patrons from all over the Tibetan plateau. His fame would peak a couple of years later, when word of “the *siddha* Shabkar” would spread all the way to India (Shabkar 2003a, 1: 750-51). Explaining his new identity to a group of curious passersby, Shabkar sings:

Neither Nyingma nor Geluk,
I am a yogin arising from their union
In these parts, they call me Shabkar
Unlike no other, but in harmony with all—how
wondrous! (Zhabs dkar 2003a, 1: 623)

I suggest that the non-sectarian identity of ‘neither Nyingma nor Geluk’ that he espouses in this stanza is key to understanding why Shabkar preferred this name over all other epithets. To have a non-sectarian attitude towards religious diversity is an extension of the Buddhist principles of ‘equanimity (Tib. *btang snyom*)’ and ‘unbiasedness (Tib. *ris med*).’ Throughout his life, Shabkar embodied and zealously advocated the principle of unbiasedness.¹⁸ While a compelling epithet, the ‘Singer of Tibet’ is localized in its import and does not convey the same connotations of universality and unbiasedness associated with ‘White Foot.’

In Tibetan Buddhism, the color white often represents virtue. ‘White [deeds] (Tib. *nam dkar*),’ for example, denote virtuous deeds. In his exegesis of his own name, Shabkar explains that he is called ‘White Foot because “wherever he sets foot, that land becomes white with virtue” (Shabkar 2003a, 1: 750). Throughout his autobiography, Shabkar documents in great detail how he encouraged Buddhist beliefs, values, and practices wherever he went. He notes how he gave spiritual advice and sang spiritual songs (Shabkar 2003a, 2: 72); gave empowerments, transmissions,

and teachings of Buddhist texts and practices (Shabkar 2003a, 2: 77); built temples and meditative retreat huts in the wilderness (Shabkar 2003a, 2: 239, 357); meditated in the wilderness (Shabkar 2003a, 2: 134); made house visits to villages (Shabkar 2003a, 2: 154); encouraged people to build Buddhist statues and to be generous towards the poor (Shabkar 2003a, 2: 133, 152, 154, 158). Shabkar also described his important role in pacifying the frequent feuds that plagued communities in the Amdo region. Describing the effect of his religious activities in Amdo in general, Shabkar writes, “the entire region was rendered utterly white with *dharma*” (Shabkar 2003a, 1: 943). In fact, Shabkar’s transition from the persona of ‘Singer of Tibet’ to ‘White Foot’ is not as far-fetched as at first glance; a ‘white mind’ was already part of his persona as the Singer of Tibet. At ‘White Rock Monkey Fortress (Tib. *brag dkar sprel rdzong*),’ he sings: “I, the Singer of the Land of Snows, / sing this song with a mind as white as the snow mountains” (Shabkar 2003a, 1: 323).

The ‘foot’ portion of the name ‘White Foot’ serve as a metonym for pilgrimage—a religious practice at the very bedrock of Tibetan Buddhist culture, and one which Shabkar practiced fervently. Matthew Kapstein and others have noted the important sociological role of pilgrimage in engendering cultural unity amongst communities on the Tibetan plateau in spite of the tremendous environmental, cultural, linguistic and political barriers that constantly acted as centrifugal forces in the region (Kapstein 1998: 117). Shabkar was highly aware of the powerful ability for pilgrimage to act as a coalescing force amongst peoples of different regions, cultures, and ethnicities. Similar to Victor Turner’s idea of ‘*communitas*’ (1967: 94), Shabkar represents the practice of pilgrimage as being able to dissolve all sorts of conventional distinctions—social, ethnic, and sectarian. At Mount Lapchi, for example, Shabkar has a dream-vision that in the future, diverse people including Tibetans, Nepalese, and Indians would flourish at this great pilgrimage site (Shabkar 2003a, 1: 689). During his pilgrimage-circumambulation of Tsari, Shabkar notes the way in which individuals from all over the Tibetan plateau developed strong bonds with fellow pilgrims, assisting each other by carrying loads or providing support to their ailing friends on the arduous trek (Shabkar 2003a, 1: 420). Camaraderie and mutual assistance also characterize Shabkar’s portrayal of his pilgrimage from Amdo to central Tibet. Travelling with a group of approximately fifty travelers and merchants from various locations, Shabkar describes the trip as a merry one full of song, mutual assistance, and moral behavior according to the rules of Buddhist ethics (Shabkar 2003a, 1: 372-386). Thus, like Turner and Kapstein, Shabkar sees pilgrimage as a powerful practice that brings people together.

Hence, Shabkar's identity as 'White Foot' symbolizes the virtue that he spread across the Tibetan plateau through his extensive pilgrimages. Whereas the 'Singer of Tibet' is characterized by individuality, locality, and particularity, 'White Foot' conveys a sense of generality and universalism. Throughout his life, Shabkar sought to embody the Buddhist value of unbiasedness, which is reflected in the generality and universalism of the persona of 'White Foot.' Although it is fitting that his initial identity of 'Singer of Tibet' is rooted in the Tibetan landscape, the epithet 'White Foot' is more appropriate for an individual who has perfected the Buddhist path and embodies the Mahāyāna Buddhist value of equanimity and the Vajrayana principle of 'pure perception (Tib. *dag snang*).' In other words, after his spiritual enlightenment, the name 'Shabkar' is a more apt description of his qualities. Shabkar's shift from an identity rooted in individuality, locality, and particularity to one that embraces generality and universalism mirrors Tibetan Buddhism's transformation into a global religion post-1959.

Conclusion

The goal of this essay was to explore how Tibetan identity is articulated in pre-1959 Tibetan literature through a case study of Shabkar's autobiography, and to see how the findings would inform the contemporary 'Where is Tibet?' conversation. I have demonstrated how Shabkar initially builds a vivid persona that is rooted in the Tibetan landscape—'Singer of Tibet'—but then shifts to a different persona—'Shabkar'—who transcends Tibet altogether and embraces a sense of Buddhist universalism. Throughout the process, Shabkar evokes deities and historical figures fundamental to Tibetan historical, cultural, and religious memory and alludes to customs and tropes at the bedrock of Tibetan culture, such as orality, song, and the bardic tradition. One might even argue that these collective memories contribute to forming the 'heartbeat' of the Tibetan nation.¹⁹

Marjorie Garber has observed how the distinguishing feature of a literary approach to reading texts is to ask "how the story means, rather than what it means" (2011: 103). The first and second sections of the essay demonstrate the difference between *literal* and *literary* readings of Tibetan literature. In the first section of the essay, I focused on *what* Shabkar said about term 'Tibet' in his autobiography. Through the process, I demonstrated how his articulation of Tibet was in accord with Grosby's definition of 'nation.' In the second section of the essay, I focused on *how* Shabkar conveyed a sense of the Tibetan nation by recounting visions and using literary tropes such as allusion, metaphor, and metonym. While the first method is valuable in that

it demonstrates how Shabkar's notion of Tibet resonates with a contemporary American theorist's definition of nation, the second method is more helpful for teasing out the richness, nuance, and potency of Shabkar's notion of identity in his autobiography. In other words, the second method of analysis reveals how Shabkar articulates an identity that is Tibetan, but at the same time transcends it to embrace a sense of Buddhist universalism. Not only does this demonstrate how restricting one's analysis to issues of state and sovereignty limit one's ability to uncover the rich complexity of the identity that Shabkar articulates, but that his identity itself cannot be restricted to the concept of nationalism. Through this 'literary' approach to reading, we are able to appreciate this rich and nuanced identity that Shabkar articulates in his autobiography.

How does this inform the 'Where is Tibet' conversation? I would suggest that this essay demonstrates the critical role of literature in articulating nationalism. Lama Jabb has observed:

Finally, my findings also negate the modernist state-centric conception of the nation. A nation may desire a state but it can still be a nation without a sovereign political power of its own. Many Tibetans aspire for a state of their own but their nation is not defined by it. On the contrary, as has been shown in this research, Tibetan national identity flourishes in spite of the absence of a centralized state. (2015: 236)

This essay builds on this idea by demonstrating how 'Tibetan national identity flourishes' in the autobiography of a nineteenth-century writer before the introduction of the modern notion of nation state into Tibet. Moreover, I have demonstrated that the notion of Tibetan identity in Shabkar's autobiography is complex and nuanced, and transcends contemporary notions of nationalism. Euro-American readership has long-cherished pre-modern Tibetan literature as a treasure trove of spiritual wisdom, but this essay has demonstrated how it is a critical source of a people's collective memory as well. In this way, the heartbeat of the Tibetan nation lives on in its literature—each time Tibetan literature is read, it "perpetuate[s]" and "reinforce[s]" the "Tibetan national consciousness" (Jabb 2015: 236).

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Endnotes

1. The Central Tibetan Administration (CTA) does not use the term 'the Greater Tibet (Ch. *daxizangqu*, Tib. *bod chen po*)' to describe the culturally Tibetan areas in the PRC (Central Tibetan Administration 2017). Rather, it maintains that "the People's Republic of China has intentionally formulated the word 'Greater Tibet' to mislead the international community into believing that Tibetans are seeking separation or demarcation of Tibetan areas (Central Tibetan Administration 2014). Instead, they state that "The Central Tibetan Administration is committed to the Middle Way Approach, which neither seeks "Greater Tibet" nor a "high degree of autonomy," but genuine autonomy for all Tibetan people under a single administration" (Central Tibetan Administration 2014).
2. A catalogue of Shabkar's Collected Works has been compiled by Matthieu Ricard (2005).
3. The first volume of Shabkar's autobiography is available in English translation by Matthieu Ricard et al. (Shabkar 2001). For the seminal work in Tibetan and Buddhist studies on life writing in Tibet, see Gyatso (1998).
4. A selection of Shabkar's songs have been translated by Matthieu Ricard (2002) and Victoria Sujata (2012). For more on the genre of songs of spiritual realization see Cabezon and Jackson (1996) and Jabb (2015). The Tibetan genre of songs of spiritual realization is an extension of the Indian *mahāsiddha* tradition of tantric *dohā*, but with marked influence from Tibetan folk song. Shabkar conceived of himself as belonging to a long lineage of tantric Buddhist singers beginning with Saraha, and extending to the Tibetan *siddhas* of the imperial period, Marpa, Milarepa, Longchenpa, Kalden Gyatso and others (Zhabs dkar 2003b, 3: 7-9).
5. For more on the *Nine Emanated Scriptures*, see Pang 2017.
6. Shabkar was a zealous advocate of vegetarianism. *Food for Bodhisattvas* (2004) contains translated excerpts from his Collected Works on vegetarianism. For Shabkar's promotion of 'non-sectarianism (Tib. *ris med*),' see Pang (2014, 2015).
7. *Chölka sum* refers to 'Upper Tö/western Tibet (Tib. *mdo stod*),' 'Lower Tö/Amdo and Kham (Tib. *mdo smad*),' and 'Ü Tsang/Central Tibet (Tib. *dbus gtsang*).' For more on this concept, see Yang (2017) and McGranahan (2011:48).
8. This is highly idealistic, as it is well known that many of the regions in Amdo and Kham were only nominally under central Tibet's rule (Tuttle 2011: 141).
9. In his autobiography, the Qing emperor describes Shabkar as a "Dharma practitioner who does not know worldly customs" (Shabkar 2001: 429; Zhabs dkar 2003a, 1: 743).
10. I borrow the term 'imagined community' from Benedict Anderson who defines the 'nation' as "an imagined political community—and imagined as both inherently limited and sovereign" (2016: 6). However, while I am using his sense of the nation as *imagined* community, I bracket the issue of sovereignty in the second half of his definition.
11. For the legend of Avalokiteśvara as the father of the Tibetan people, see the story of the monkey and the rock ogress (Gyaltzen 1996: 75).
12. It is interesting that he uses the term 'the people of the realm of Tibet (Tib. *bod khams mi rnams*)' rather than the term 'Tibetans (Tib. *bod pa*)' used in contemporary parlance.
13. Shabkar provides scriptural support for this idea in his *Emanated Scripture of Orgyen* (Zhabs dkar 2003d, 9:441-443).
14. Atiśa is a Buddhist master from Bengal who played a seminal role in re-transmitting Buddhism to Tibet in the eleventh century, after the Dark Period.
15. For an English translation of Milarepa's autobiography see Heruka (2010).
16. Shabkar's autobiography as a whole makes a case for the significance of the Amdo region as two-thirds of the text takes place there. This is not apparent to readers of Ricard's translation of his autobiography, as it includes only a translation of the first volume of the autobiography.

17. Following Ricard's precedent, I have phonetically transliterated Shabkar's name as such, but according to THL phonetics, it should be rendered as "Zhapkarpa" (Zhabs dkar 2003a, 2:131).

18. Gene Smith first brought the *rimé* (Tib. *ris med*) masters of nineteenth-century Kham to the attention of western scholarship in the late 1960s (Smith 2001). Since then, other scholars have built on his work, clarifying the nature of *rimé*, and especially calling into question whether or not the activities of these nineteenth century masters is best characterized as a movement. See Gardner (2006), Gayley and Schapiro (2017), Tulku (2001), Holmes-Tagchungdarpa (2014), Oldmeadow (2012), and Pang (2014, 2015).

19. I am borrowing the term 'heartbeat' from Pema Bhum's article, "Heartbeat of a New Generation." Bhum writes, "When we read contemporary Tibetan poetry, the first thing we sense is the heartbeat of the Tibetan people" (2008: 131).

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