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Dorjé Tarchin, the Mélong, and the Tibet Mirror Press: Negotiating Discourse on the Religious and the Secular

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Dorjé Tarchin, the *Mélong*, and the Tibet Mirror Press: Negotiating Discourse on the Religious and the Secular

Nicole Willock

Much scholarly attention has been given to the importance of the *Mélong*, the first Tibetan newspaper, in the discursive formation of Tibetan nationalism. Yet in claiming the *Mélong* as ‘secular’ and ‘modern,’ previous scholarship has also evaded the press’s Christian and colonial roots. This paper investigates the secularization of the *Mélong* and the Tibet Mirror Press as a historical project, and as a corollary demonstrates the emergence of a vernacular project of secularism that aligned pan-Tibetan national identity with religious pluralism against the threat of communism. As a Tibetan Christian intellectual, the *Mélong*’s founder Dorjé Tarchin (1890-1976) creatively responded to divergent and competing processes associated with British colonialism and missionary activity in India, which led to the birth of the newspaper in 1925. Based outside of the purview of the xenophobic Lhasa government, Tarchin’s base in the Christian Scottish Mission provided an alternative institution for cultural production outside of Buddhist ones. This contributed to the secularization of Tibetan print culture by

moving production away from the Buddhist-monastic elite, introducing a new genre into Tibetan discourse, opening up a public sphere for Tibetans, and supporting vernacular language publications. Despite or because of the press initially being situated in the Scottish Mission Church, the *Mélong* promoted literacy, religious pluralism, and fostered Tibetan national identity. Over the course of its near forty-year history, the press would undergo processes of institutional secularization with its separation from the Scottish Mission Church in 1946. Parallel to these processes, secularism emerges as a discursive terrain whereby the boundaries of religion, nation, and language are negotiated. I chart Tarchin’s role in negotiating and creating this conceptual terrain, gesturing to how the distinct boundaries between Christianity and Buddhism evident in his early career become more porous against the ‘distinct other’ of communism—the enemy of faith.

Keywords: Tibetan history, Tibetan society, secularism, literacy, print culture, Tibet, Kalimpong, religion.

Introduction

In the context of Tibet, the hydra-headed projects of secularism, modernity, and nationalism can seem particularly vexing. The case of the first ‘secular’ Tibetan press illustrates this problematic well. Many scholars have recognized the important role of the *Mélong*, the first Tibetan newspaper,¹ in the discursive formation of Tibetan nationalism; yet in claiming the *Mélong* as ‘secular’ and ‘modern,’ previous scholarship has also evaded the press’s Christian, colonial roots or countered by claiming the founder Dorjé Tarchin (Rdo rje mthar phyin, 1890-1976) as a Buddhist modernist. The recent establishment of the Tharchin Collection at Columbia University’s C.V. Starr East Asian Library (available for viewing in the Rare Books collection) provides scholars with hitherto unprecedented access to vital primary resources for the study of early 20th century Tibet and allows for the complex intertwined categories of secularism, modernity, and national identity to be explored through a new lens.

The collection was aptly named after Dorjé Tarchin (Tarchin and Tharchin refer to the same person, the spelling differences reflect variations in Tibetan transcription methods). He founded one of the first Tibetan-language newspapers, *Mirror of News from All Sides of the World* (*Yul phyogs so so’i gсар ’gyur me long*) also known as the *Mélong* or *Tibet Mirror*² in 1925 alongside a publishing house called the Kalimpong Tibet Mirror Press (Kha phug bod yig me long par khang). The newspaper ran for nearly forty years until 1963; the Tibet Mirror Press still runs limited publications through the Tibetan church in Kalimpong with a three-volume biography (with a thick Christian veneer) on Tarchin as one of its latest publications. The Tharchin Collection holds numerous epistles between the press’s founder and his contemporaries, as well as Tarchin’s previously unpublished auto/biographies, Tibet Mirror Press publications, and photographs. The Columbia University’s C.V. Starr East Asian Library also digitized the near complete collection of the *Mirror of News from All Sides of the World*, referred to here as the *Mélong*. As a chronicle of the transformative history of early 20th century Tibet and Tibetan print culture, the *Mélong* and its twin sister, the Tibet Mirror Press, hold a veritable goldmine of information. Before the establishment of this collection, topics of previous scholarship with respect to the *Mélong* have included vernacular language and literature (Shakya 2004), print culture (Sawerthal 2011), and commerce and trade routes (Harris 2013), which show the wide range of research possibilities made available by these sources, and indicate that many other research avenues remain open to explore.

I examined each item in the Tharchin Collection as well as scores of Tibet Mirror Press’s publications held at the Library of Tibetan Works and Archives (LTWA) in Dharamsala, India. One of the most striking features that stood out to me was the complex figure of Dorjé Tarchin himself, especially his deep co-commitments to Christianity and Tibetan literacy. With this observation it became apparent that any discussion on the ‘secularity’ of the *Mélong* and Tibet Mirror Press must include Dorjé Tarchin’s important role for several reasons. First, as the founder and editor of the newspaper, he made the majority of the decisions on content matter and had a deep personal investment in the newspaper. For example, in October of 1955, Tarchin ran a front-page cover story for his deceased spouse Karma Dechen in order to commemorate her life (*Mélong* 23 (3): 1-3).³ Second, if the secular and religion are considered mutually constituted categories (see van der Veer 2011), Tarchin’s devout religious beliefs as founder and editor influenced the start and the direction of the *Mélong* and the Tibet Mirror Press, even as he ultimately chose to move his paper and press away from their original location in the Scottish Mission in a process that I characterize as institutional secularization. In a seeming paradox, the *Mélong* from its very inception created a ‘secular’ space within Tibetan print culture, alongside its overt religious content, yet its character gradually changed over time by distancing itself from church oversight and opening up to religious pluralism. Yet it never embraced secularism as a statecraft principal largely due to the association of that with communism. Instead, I suggest that in secularizing the *Mélong* institutionally, removing it from church authority, Tarchin opens the *Mélong* up to religious pluralism, more in line with Indian expressions of secularism than Chinese ones (cf. van der Veer 2011), featuring Christian and Buddhist content published in tandem with secular news. Positioning the secular and religious in opposition to one another, as previous scholarship has done, misses the complex negotiations between them in the evolution of the *Mélong* and Tibet Mirror Press.

Much of the existing scholarship on the *Mélong* and the Tibet Mirror Press emphasize its ‘secularity,’ labeling the newspaper as a ‘secular’ and the press as the birthplace of ‘secular’ literature. For example, the late, eminent scholar of Tibetan Studies, Professor Dawa Norbu stated:

In the long course of his multi-faceted career, Gyegyen Tharchin [=Gégen Tarchin] was to explode several Tibetological myths. Tibetan literature has been so much associated with Buddhism that it is almost impossible for the general public to conceive of any secular Tibetan literature indepen-

dent of that religion. He exploded that myth. As a modern man of letters, he was interested primarily in non-Buddhist, yet Tibetan, areas of inquiry: secular literature, especially journalism, grammar and poetry—to which he immensely contributed; and history and politics, which since 1925 he propagated with skill in his pioneering newspaper, the *Tibet Mirror* [= *Mélong*] (Cited in Fader 2002: vol. 1: xi).

Other scholars have similarly downplayed the *Mélong*'s Christian beginnings and emphasized its contributions to fostering modernity in Tibet. Tibetan historian Tsering Shakya argued that, "In the construction of *The Tibet Mirror* [i.e. the *Mélong* newspaper], there was an attempt to appeal to the pan-Tibetan region" and that the choice of the name "was a deliberate strategy to penetrate the larger Tibetan world and to arouse the imaginations of the readers" (2004: 23–24), thereby emphasizing the important role of the newspaper in fostering Tibetan nationalism. Tibetologist Tashi Tsering recognized its Christian roots, but underscored the moral and financial support the *Mélong* received from the Thirteenth and Fourteenth Dalai Lamas and that it was a liberal press (1998: 9).

The emphasis on the *Mélong* as a secular liberal press is understandable considering the important role of language and literature as contested sites for competing visions of Tibetan modernity, especially against the backdrop of the frequent characterization of Tibetan culture as 'backward' (see Hartley and Schiaffini-Vedani 2008). In one of his last interviews before his death in 1975, Tarchin explained his discursive fight against the portrayal of Tibetan culture as 'backward':

I often used to refer to Tibetan history, and in particular to the Great Religious Kings' which prove Tibet's independence. The Chinese used to say that Tibet is 'backward' and my endeavor was to demonstrate in my writings that Tibet was far from being a 'backward' country; it was a great civilization. It had everything in it... (Norbu 1998: 11).

For these scholars, the emphasis on the *Mélong* as modern and progressive counters the discourse of 'backwardness' and Chinese superiority vis-à-vis Tibetan culture. Yet this dichotomous framework obscures the complex interactions between the religious and the secular vis-à-vis literary production, institutional frameworks, and statecraft principles.

In contrast to the emphasis on the *Mélong* as 'secular' and 'modern' by Tibetan scholars, scholarship conducted by non-Tibetans tend to respond to the 'religious' side of the *Mélong* by dismissing Tarchin's Christian identity or by pointing it out as a flaw in his otherwise nationalistic

character. For example, Engelhardt downplays Tarchin's Christian identity by claiming that "Tarchin was really a Buddhist heart" (2011: 236). She further suggests that the more overtly Christian issues of the *Mélong* were produced under the editorial direction of the fundamentalist head of the Scottish Mission, Dr. Knox, who took control over printing while Tarchin was in Tibet, arguing that, "[h] archin probably had to exert rather tactical caution, maneuvering between the missionaries of the Church of Scotland [...] and his own intention to inform the Tibetans of world affairs" (2011: 233). While Engelhardt astutely observes the different editorial message delivered under Dr. Knox's leadership; many issues of the *Mélong* under Tarchin's editorial stewardship carried explicit Christian messages even after the paper moved out of the Scottish Mission (see Sawerthal 2011: 116–117; *Mélong* 1 July 1950, 18 (8): 7; *Mélong* 12 January 1955, 23 (2): 1). Following Engelhardt's lead, another scholar highlighted "the explicit Buddhist discourse" in the *Mélong* but the evidence provided for that claim was not Buddhist at all, but actually a Tibetan translation of 2 Timothy in the New Testament (see below). While I agree that the newspaper "outlined the activities of many Buddhist figures on a regular basis" (Holmes-Tagchungdarpa 2014: 80–84), this was not because Tarchin was a Buddhist. In fact, he never wavered from his identity as a Christian even when he had difficulties with members of his Church. Rather, Tarchin's ecumenism opened up a discursive space for the category of 'religion' that would become central to Tibetan exile negotiations of the secular in contradistinction to faithless 'communism.'

Other non-Tibetan scholarship has dismissed Tarchin for being too overtly religious in his messages. An extreme example of this can be seen in Theos Bernard's biography by Paul Hackett. Bernard, an American explorer, had hired Tarchin to work with him in Tibet in the 1930s, yet also polemically critiqued him in 1937:

I even hate that aspect of Tharchin, for he is no better than the rest of them when he gets off on one of these [Christian] avenues; however being a Tibetan even tho [sic.] under Christian influence [...] he still holds the hidden beliefs in certain teachings of Buddhism... one of the most lamentable phenomena of present day human existence is a belief in any sort of religion—regardless of what the name it comes under—it is all the same—ignorance of the lowest order... (Hackett 2012: 262).

Bernard's now dated but also candid objections toward 'religion' as a category seem to reflect colonial assumptions on the telos of 'rationality' and 'secularization' of his times (for a critique thereof, see Casanova 2011; van der Veer 2011). His comments are a disturbing example of a certain

type of anti-religious rhetoric, yet his polemic can serve to remind scholars of the dangers of overly emphasizing secularization as a universal telos (cf. Asad 2003: 192-193).

While the above-mentioned scholars pioneered the *Mélong* as an object of study, they also pin the religious and the secular in opposition to one another. The original materials now available through the Tharchin Collection and theoretical insights by Asad (2003), van der Veer (2011), Casanova (2011) and Bubandt and van Beek (2012), make it possible to revisit the complex dynamics of religion and the secular in the case of the *Mélong* through a new lens. So how does the *Mélong* during its long history represent a complex blend of religious and secular elements that defy categorization as either wholly religious or wholly secular? By taking up the call to investigate secularization as a historical project (cf. van der Veer 2011) and looking at Dorjé Tarchin's complex negotiations with sources of power—the Scottish Mission, the British Raj and the Lhasa government, I argue Tarchin's *Mélong* created a secular public forum within Tibetan print culture that was initially dependent on Christian missionary support and independent of traditional Buddhist authorities. Over time, the *Mélong* and its sister, The Tibet Mirror Press, underwent processes of institutional secularization whereby the press moved gradually away from church authority, and as a corollary a secularism emerged that aligned pan-Tibetan national identity with religious pluralism against the threat of communism.

The Roots of the *Mélong* and Tibet Mirror Press

Through divergent and competing processes, British colonial encounters in India set the groundwork for the founding of this Tibetan-language newspaper, unmooring Tibetan print culture from its Buddhist foundations. The complex backdrop of British colonial rule of India paved the way for Christian missionaries to spread their vision of the world with mixed successes and varying results. Figures such as the progressive Rammohan Roy (1772-1883), the founder of the Brahmo Samaj and leader in the Hindu renaissance, were influenced by Protestant missionary reforms to advocate for social reform in newly founded vernacular language presses (Robertson 2003). The primacy given to texts by Orientalist scholars also played a role in promoting a gradual shift from the spoken authority of Brahmins to written authority of Hindu texts (van der Veer 2001: 43-45). This Orientalist emphasis on textual authority also profoundly influenced Hindu nationalist projects in their use of the *Rāmāyaṇa* and *Mahābhārata* to promote an ideal Hindu nation-state (van der Veer 2001: 126; Chatterjee 1993: 113). These are but a few of the divergent and competing processes that formed the backdrop

for Tarchin's dual commitment to Christianity and the promotion of Tibetan language literacy; the *Mélong* became a vehicle for these intertwined projects.

Christian missionaries reached the mountainous Indo-Tibetan border region of Tarchin's birthplace, the village of Poo (Kinnaur in Himachal Pradesh) after the East India Company had annexed Punjab in 1849. A Moravian missionary was established there in 1865, alongside other missions in Kyelang, Leh, and Khalatse (Bray 1998: 4). Dorjé Tarchin was born into a poor Tibetan family in April 1890, then baptized and raised by missionaries within the Moravian Church. The Moravian use of the vernacular language for teaching the Gospel had an indelible effect on Tarchin and his life-long commitments to both preaching Christianity and promoting Tibetan literacy.

The Moravians had formed in the 15th century in Hus (in the Czech Republic today), and one of their main rallying points was objection to masses held in Latin as practiced in the Roman Catholic Church. As the church expanded globally, this core-value manifested in preaching Christian doctrines in the local vernacular; in the case of the Moravian Mission in Poo/Kinnaur, its aim was to reach Tibetan speakers in their own language (Bray 1998: 4). Moravians such as Heinrich August Jaeschke and August Hermann Francke were among the first western Tibetologists and also dedicated to bringing Christian doctrines to a Tibetan speaking world.⁴

Early on in his career, Tarchin's motivations to study Tibetan-language rigorously were intertwined with his wish to missionize among Tibetans. This is evident in both his autobiographical reflections on his first attempt to reach Tibet in 1914 and in his first publications. In an unpublished autobiography, Tarchin wrote about how at age twenty-four, he and his life-long friend, Sadhu Sundar Singh, a Sikh convert to Christianity, tried to enter Tibet in order to proselytize, but they were turned away at the border:

I had an ardent desire within my heart to visit Tibet in order to witness for the Lord there. This strong desire turned into an ambition when Sadhu Sundar Singh and I were stopped from proceeding to Tibet to preach the gospel by the political authorities at Gangtok, Sikkim. Besides this I had a powerful yearning within my mind to learn more of Tibetan language and literature as I felt I lacked proficiency in the language, at least, considering the technical aspects of Philology. Apart from this I had an inborn ambition to start and edit a Tibetan newspaper of my own after returning from Tibet (Document A, Tharchin Collection: 104).

The seed for starting the *Mélong* arose from Tarchin's religious motivations to missionize and increase Tibetan literacy. While linking literacy in Tibetan and missionizing are expressed here as a matter of his own personal aspirations at this stage, his first publications also reflect the value of literacy as integral to Moravian Protestant identity more broadly.

Tarchin's first publication, *The Tibetan Second Book*,⁶ was a substantial revision of a Tibetan language book, *Tibetan Primer with Simple Rules of Correct Spelling*, which had been compiled by Reverend Waismaa and published through the Free Church of Finland Mission—the Finnish Department of the Scandinavian Alliance in Darjeeling in 1912. The book had been commissioned by the Secretary of the Scandinavian Alliance Mission, for the purpose of teaching students at its Protestant-Christian primary school (Fader 2004, vol. 2: 21-24). Although this book project was initially funded and supported by the church, its legacy like the *Mélong* newspaper would shift away from its use in religious institutions, and become a textbook for exiled Tibetans in refugee schools. Tarchin revised *The Tibetan Second Book* three times and published it through his own Tibet Mirror Press in 1953, 1962, and 1968.⁷ This last edition of 1968 was distributed to Tibetan refugee schools throughout India (Fader 2004, vol. 2: 23). *The Tibetan Second Book* was one of many self-instruction and language reference books published with the Tibet Mirror Press, which started as early as 1938 (Tashi Tsering 1998: 9), but few seem to survive from this early period.⁸ A few years after the initial publication of *The Tibetan Second Book*, Tarchin embarked on his first (of four) successful journeys to Tibet.

Tarchin's first trip was his lengthiest. Through personal connections he became headmaster of a primary school in Gyantse based on a British Indian model of Christian education (Fader 2004, vol. 2: 88; cf. Travers 2016: 121). The school closed in part because his overt proselytization came under the scrutiny of the xenophobic Buddhist authorities in Lhasa. Nonetheless, he established many contacts with sons of aristocrats during this two-year sojourn. He also married his first wife in Lhasa, who had converted to Christianity to marry him. Upon returning to Kalimpong, Tarchin completed the Teacher Training Program at the Scottish University Mission Institute (SUMI), partially funded by a government scholarship and a small stipend from the mission.⁹ After graduation, he was offered employment at the Scottish Mission in Kalimpong, which was under the leadership of Reverend Graham (Norbu 1998: 34-35, cf. Fader 2004, vol. 2). This is where the newspaper was born.

Tarchin's strong motivations to start a Tibetan newspaper were grounded in his Moravian Christian upbringing and also realized with the structural and financial support of the Scottish Mission in Kalimpong. He also responded creatively to haphazard events. With his love of Tibetan language, Tarchin seized upon an opportunity afforded him by the support of the head of the Scottish Mission, Reverend Graham, and the inability of his colleagues to run a Roneo duplicating machine.¹⁰ After gaining permission to use the machine from Reverend Graham, his fellow colleagues gave him the stencils, machine, and plates, because they could not figure out how to use them (Fader 2004, vol. 2: 259-261). After months of trial and error, Tarchin succeeded and published the first issue of *Yül chok sosö sargyur Mélong* (*Yul phyogs so so'i gsar 'gyur me long*) meaning "Mirror of the News of Different Places" and included the English subtitle *The Tibetan Newspaper* in October 1925 (*Mélong* 1, Box 1, LTWA). Tarchin may have been inspired to title the newspaper thus based on the Bengali newspaper *Sambad Kaumudi* or *The Mirror of the News* (Tsering Shakya 2004: 20), founded by the progressive intellectual Rammohan Roy. Similar to Rammohan Roy, Tarchin used the power of the press to reform society, and a crucial part of this project involved increasing literacy.

Fitting to its role as a mouthpiece for a Christian organization, the front page of the *Mélong* (1927, 2 (5): 1), an issue under Tarchin's editorial leadership (contra Engelhardt 2011) ran a Tibetan translation of a Bible verse from 2 Timothy 3:1.¹¹ Yet, because the Tibetan language translation of the Bible contains terminology that has Buddhist connotations, e.g. compassion (*snying rje*), one scholar claimed this was "Buddhist discourse," but did not translate the small print at the end of the article indicating this passage as a translation of 2 Timothy 3 (Holmes-Tagchungdarpa 2014: 83). Bray (1985) has demonstrated that in efforts to proselytize, Tibetan Christians used familiar Buddhist terminology to carry Christian messages. At this early stage of the paper, funded by the Church of Scotland Mission, the newspaper delivered Christian content alongside news of a 'secular' nature, such as technological developments, geographical descriptions, news of war, and the latest on British royalty (Engelhardt 2011; Sawerthal 2011; Tashi Tsering 1998).

Although the newspaper had its roots within the Scottish Church in Colonial India and carried Christian content, paradoxically the *Mélong* from its very inception created a 'secular' space within Tibetan print culture, alongside overt religious content. For this reason, Tarchin can be credited with creating a significant space for secular content, specifically the novel genre of 'news,' within Tibetan print culture.

Insiders and Outsiders: Tibetan Print Culture at the Mélong's Beginning

When Tarchin founded the *Mélong* and the Tibet Mirror Press in 1925, he made a significant contribution to the secularization of Tibetan print culture. By founding the paper with the support of the Scottish Mission, he shifted textual production away from traditional seats of power in Tibet, namely Buddhist monasteries and aristocratic houses, and introduced a new genre—the newspaper—into Tibetan print culture. I refer to this shift as ‘institutional secularization,’ adapting Casanova’s articulation of secularization as an institutional differentiation of the so-called ‘secular’ spheres (economy, science, politics, etc.) from religious institutions and norms (Casanova 1994: 19-39; 2012: 60). This institutional secularization has two phases: first, the creation of a secular space in Tibetan print culture outside the traditional purview of Buddhist institutions but within the Scottish Mission; and second, separation of the *Mélong* from the Scottish Mission Church in 1946. When the *Mélong* was founded, textual production in Tibet had become an established aspect of Buddhist life and served dual purposes: not only to propagate Buddhist teachings but also to elevate the relative authority of one teaching lineage over the other (Schaeffer 2009: 3). As aptly highlighted in the biography of the great Tibetan statesman Polané Miwang Sönam Tobgyé (1689-1747), the effect of printing the Kangyur, the Tibetan Buddhist canon, was to “pervade all the regions of the world with the holy appearance of the holy dharma” (Schaeffer 2009: 113). The dharma held the teachings, the words of the Buddha, in its physical form, a book—the source, symbol and physical manifestation of soteriological power (Schaeffer 2009). Tarchin’s *Mélong* shifted printing production away from traditional seats of power (monasteries or aristocratic houses). Coupled with the adaptation of new technology for the printing of Tibetan language texts, this made possible a functional differentiation of Tibetan print culture.

The significance of Tarchin’s innovations in terms of Tibetan print culture can perhaps best be seen when the *Mélong* and Tibet Mirror Press are compared to traditional Tibetan printeries that is printing houses using wood-blocks or xylographs (*par shing*). The Tibet Mirror Press in Kalimpong was the first to use new duplicating technology among hundreds of xylographic printeries (*par khang*) across the Tibetan plateau and the first to include ‘secular news’ content. From among three hundred xylographic Tibetan-language printeries (Tibet Buddhist Resource Center, Sheehy, January 2014),¹² the Tibet Mirror Press was the first to be housed completely out of the purview of traditional Buddhist institutions. The majority of the xylographic printeries were housed at monasteries, but

according to a 1957 survey thirteen of these institutions were held at aristocratic estates, e.g. the Doring House (*gzims shags rdo ring*) (see Ngawang Gelek Demo 1970: 239). It should be noted that far from being separate from the government, lay aristocratic families were integral to the system of Buddhist governance by providing sons to serve as lay government officials (Petech 1973: 15-21).

Despite the widespread proliferation of xylographic printeries on the plateau in the mid-20th century, Tarchin was among the first to create a new publishing institution and to use new technology, a Roneo duplicating machine, for the publication of Tibetan language texts.¹³ It is premature to define the literary production using xylographic methods as either primarily religious or secular for many reasons including: the sheer number of texts, understanding the contents, and the shifting definitions of religion and secular in the first place. Nonetheless, it is clear that Tarchin’s endeavor wrested Tibetan print culture out of the hands of traditional Buddhist authorities.

Parallel to the process of creating a new publishing institution for Tibetan print culture and a new genre of Tibetan literature, outside the purview of traditional Buddhist authorities, Tarchin placed his Christian beliefs in opposition to Buddhist ones at this early stage of his career—a move that would be reversed later in his life. When Tarchin first went to Tibet in 1921 he reported having conversations with monks in which he played on the meaning of the colloquial term for ‘Buddhist’ or *nangpa*, which literally translates as ‘insider.’ At this point in Tarchin’s career, the boundary between ‘Buddhist’ and ‘Christian’ was clearly delineated. Tarchin claimed, as a Christian, that he was an ‘insider’ or ‘*nangpa*’ and that Buddhists were *chipa* (*phyi pa*) or ‘outsiders’ because, “I do everything from inside my heart or spirit, so I am a *nangpa*. You do everything with the help of external objects such as images or water, so you are a *chipa*” (Fader 2004, vol. 2: 114). This type of rhetoric echoes Protestant interpretations of ‘religion’ as based on private, internal belief and shows a distancing from outward ritual (cf. Taylor 2011: 35-37). Over time the boundaries between the two faiths would become more porous as they shared communism as an enemy of faith (Hackett 1998: 890-892). While the *Mélong* was rooted in a missionizing impulse, from its founding, it also created a secular and public sphere for new types of discourse.

Literacy, Nationalism, and the Vernacular Presses

The *Mélong* was a novel invention in the realm of Tibetan print culture, yet in the context of vernacular language newspapers and presses in India, the *Mélong* was one of many. Recall that Tarchin’s choice of the title for his

newspaper was similar to the Bengali reformist newspaper *Sambad Kaumudi* or *The Mirror of the News* (Shakya 2004: 20), which championed social change such as the abolition of ritualistic suicide of widows (Hindi: *sati*) (Robertson 2003: 35). A consequence of the start of local vernacular presses in India was the empowerment of local agents, who could use the presses to respond to authority [whether colonial rulers, traditional elites, or missionaries] in new and creative ways, thus participating in an emerging public sphere and promoting national identities (van der Veer 2001, 2011). Contrary to the theory that the public sphere depends on an enlightened, rational, ‘secular’ subject as put forth by Habermas (1991), van der Veer showed that religion could be a source of rational, ‘modern’ subject formation by providing many examples of religiously-based organizations in England and in India who contributed to creating public spheres of political interaction “central to the formation of national identities” (2001: 39). If one applies this theoretical insight to the case of the *Mélong* and by extension to the Tibet Mirror Press, then it should be no surprise that even though the *Mélong* began as part of the Scottish Mission, the *Mélong* and the Tibet Mirror Press still played central roles in the early discursive formation of Tibetan national identity as put forth by Tsering Shakya (2004: 22).

As we saw above, Tarchin was committed to increasing Tibetan language literacy. The value of literacy formed part of his Moravian Christian upbringing, but he adapted and applied this value in new ways that stretched far beyond the purview of the church. Early on in his career, as noted above, his commitment to literacy involved composing and publishing Tibetan language books that at first were implemented in missionary schools, but later, served as textbooks in the ‘secular’ educational curriculum for Tibetan refugee children in the 1960s. Although following a slightly more circuitous path, the *Mélong* similarly became more secularized over time. The first editorial dated to October 1925 reflects Tarchin’s ideal of increasing Tibetan literacy in an accessible register of Tibetan language. The value on increasing literacy was not tied to carrying a Christian message, but rather casted much more broadly as a matter of pride. Tarchin wrote in a register of Tibetan language that can be considered an early ‘modern literary Tibetan,’ albeit without any of the state interventions that would make this implementation of language reform possible on a large-scale. Modern literary Tibetan is considered an accessible form of written Tibetan distinct from classical literature, which is dominated by Indic-inspired conventions and requiring years of education to master (Hartley and Schiaffini-Vedani 2008: xvii-xx). The development of modern literary Tibetan is often attributed to Chinese

state-discourse on the function of national literature and the need to translate new terms into Tibetan, especially in the 1980s (Shakya 2004: 80). However, Tarchin seems highly aware of the registers of Tibetan¹⁴ and uses his own distinct style of modern literary Tibetan in his first editorial:

Introduction: Nowadays, India, China, foreign nations large and small, all publish newspapers (*kha bar ka ka si*)¹⁵ in their own respective languages. This makes it possible to listen to daily news events, both foreign and domestic, in each respective territory. This also brings great benefit by opening doors that enable the questioning of our situation to authorities (*‘bangs kyi rje*; lit. ‘lord of subjects’)¹⁶ and by opening doors to news of events, such as: epidemics, flood, or famine, and modes of disseminating information and knowledge, as well as economic news and international news on war or peace. Nowadays, I, Tarchin from Kinnaur (*khu nu*), and a few Tibetans (*bod mi*) residing in Kalimpong had the idea that there is no newspaper like this in the language of the Snowlands (*gangs ljongs kyi skad*). With the thought, ‘if a newspaper appeared in our own language, is it not possible to generate pride in the perceptions of those who speak foreign languages and benefit our Tibetan people,’ so I published the unprecedented *Yül chok sosö sargyur mélong* (*Mélong* October 1925, 1 (1): 1, Box 1, LTWA).

The *Mélong*’s first editorial thereby linked language to national pride, an evocative gesture to Tibetan nationalism that would become so central to the newspaper in its later years. It also explains the discursive function of the newspaper as a forum for Tibetan language speakers to question their leadership, thereby opening up a new public sphere. The term ‘language of the Snowlands’ for Tibetan language in the editorial, while ambivalent in terms of nation-state identity, nonetheless evokes linguistically a pan-Himalayan image, connecting Tibetans in Central Tibet to Tarchin of Kinnaur, who was residing in British-controlled India along with his Tibetan friends in Kalimpong. The ‘Snowland’ imagery, therefore, parallels Tsering Shakya’s findings that one of the enduring features of the *Mélong* was the creation of a discursive space that united Tibetans across a vast geographical space in a novel way (Shakya 2004: 20-23).¹⁷ Although outside of the scope of this article to explore this idea fully, Anderson suggested a vital link between increasing literacy and the development of ‘vernacular languages-of-state’ to arouse mass support for political change and to create “an imagined community”—a necessary attribute for the rise of the ideal of the nation (Anderson 2003: 80). Within a decade, Tarchin’s

vision attracted other intellectuals from Tibet to write for the paper and they all shared the same vision of increasing literacy as a common goal, but first Tarchin made steps to distance himself from the church with the help of a Nepali press.

Three years after the first issue, a change in leadership occurred at the Scottish Mission in Kalimpong that led Tarchin to seek a new home for the *Mélong* at the Mani Press, a Nepali press, for a nine-month period in 1931. Engelhardt draws attention to arguments over Christian content as one of the sources of contention between Reverend Knox, the newly appointed head of the Mission, and Tarchin (2011: 193-195). I also found evidence of another component of the dispute, which concerned salary discrepancies during a month's leave of absence when Tarchin went to Yatung and Gyantse as a guide-interpreter while his first wife remained at the Mission's Polhill Hall in Kalimpong (Document B: 3-4).¹⁸ Although it remains unclear if Tarchin was forced out of the mission or if he voluntarily left at this point, the first attempt to move the *Mélong* out of the purview of the Church of Scotland was made possible through the support of the Mani Press, a Nepali-language institution—again indicating the import of vernacular language presses in India and how the *Mélong* was part of a wider trend in the region. Although Tarchin's attempt eventually failed due to insufficient funding, the *Mélong* used the facilities of the Nepali press for nine months. The history of the Mani Press dovetails with that of the *Mélong* and Tibet Mirror Press in regards to dynamic processes of secularization from the Church of Scotland.

The Mani Press was founded by Sri Parasmani Pradhan and his brothers Sankhamani, Pushpamani and Seshmani Pradhan in Kalimpong in 1928, with the aim of spreading and enhancing Nepali language and literature (Pradhan 1997: 36). The Mani Press was financially independent from the church, but its founder Parasmani Pradhan had been a teacher with the Scottish University Mission Institute (SUMI), where he wrote the first Nepali textbooks and even his own play, which was performed at SUMI in 1917. Dr. Sutherland, the Principle of the Scottish University Missions Institute, had invited Parasmani Pradhan to teach Nepali at the SUMI through the recommendation of K.D. Pradhan (Pradhan 1997: 18). K.D. Pradhan is the person who had hired Tarchin for his first publication, *Tibetan Second Book*, and they were close friends (Fader 2004, vol. 2: 23). Although nowhere is this explicitly stated, it seems reasonable that this Mani Press in Kalimpong with connections to the Scottish Mission must be the same Mani Press that Tarchin went to for the use of their small lithographic press. Five issues of the *Mélong* were printed there (see Sawerthal 2011: 78-79). At the end of the day, this

cost twice as much as printing with the Scottish Mission (Document B: 5) and seems to have caused the newspaper to struggle even more financially. By July 1932, Tarchin reconciled with his superiors at the mission and continued to use their lithographic press for several more years. Shortly thereafter, the *Mélong* would enter one of its most innovative phases, although still under the purview of the Scottish Mission.

Championing Literacy and the Emergence of Secularism

After the death of the 13th Dalai Lama in 1933, the *Mélong* became a progressive forum in which to advocate social change when the Tibetan government fell into a state of political instability. By 1938, the consolidation of power under the conservative regent Reting Rinpoche blocked any earlier attempts at modernization initiated under the rule of the progressive 13th Dalai Lama (Goldstein 1989: 816-817). Situated outside of the control of the conservative Ganden Podrang government in Lhasa, the *Mélong* featured some of the most important Tibetan voices for political and social reform at this period in modern Tibetan history. Among the most significant articles were Rapga Pandatsang's (Rab dga Spang mda'/spom mda' tshang, 1902-1974)¹⁹ version of his role in a popular uprising in Kham in December of 1936 (Stoddard 2013: 591-592; *Mélong* 1936, 8 (9): 8) and Gendün Chöpel's (Dge 'dun chos 'phel, 1903-1951) polemical essay *The World is Round* in the *Mélong* of June 1938 (Lopez 2006: 15-17; Engelhardt 2011: 223; *Mélong* 10 (1): 11). Gendün Chöpel's piece directly confronted the ignorance of some Buddhist conservatives on basic astronomy, i.e. the earth's rotation around the sun. Especially between 1933 and the mid-1940s—and paradoxically due to the *Mélong*'s positioning outside of the purview of Buddhist conservatives and under the Church of Scotland in British controlled India—the newspaper became a vehicle for the emergence of Tibetan secularism, whereby new conceptual terrains were explored in Tibetan discourse, including politics, religion, cartoons, technological advancements and important personalities (see Engelhardt 2011; Sawerthal 2011).

While the three intellectuals writing for the paper, Rapga, Gendün Chöpel, and Tarchin, all shared the common goal of increasing literacy in Tibetan society, they seem to have diverged on how this goal should be realized politically. This gestures toward the emergence of secularism as a conceptual terrain in which discursive categories such as 'religion,' 'politics,' and 'nation' are negotiated following Bubandt and van Beek (2012). Rapga viewed literacy as intertwined with the political project of the separation of the church and state—what Casanova termed as secularism as a state-craft principle (cf. Casanova 2011). Rapga,

one of the most forward thinking intellectuals of his time, viewed “literacy as an essential aspect in the development of Tibetan nationalism” (McGranahan 2001: 208). Publicly, Rapga proposed the creation of a vernacular language to supplement the scriptural Tibetan used in all written forms, as he wrote, “[I] thought about what could be done for the ignorant and powerless Tibetan brothers and sisters” (ibid.). Inspired by social changes in China, anti-colonial sentiment in British India, and the rise of Indian nationalism, Rapga established a short-lived political alternative to the Ganden Podrang Government called the Tibet Improvement Party (*nub legs bcos skyid sdug*), whereby he adapted Sun Yatsen’s Three Principles of the People to model a new political vision of Tibet (McGranahan 2005: 270; see also Lin 2011: 95). By forming a secular political party, Rapga was perhaps the only Tibetan intellectual to offer a ‘secularist’ alternative to the traditionalist notion of Buddhist governance at this time. Sadly Gendün Chöpel, one of the most brilliant scholars in modern Tibetan history, was tragically scapegoated for his role in Rapga’s Tibet Improvement Party after he left India. Although minimal, his role was perceived as heinous by the Lhasa government, and his internment in a Tibetan prison left him a broken man (Lopez 2006); he passed away within weeks of Chinese troops entering Lhasa. Rapga was extradited back to China in 1946 on trumped-up charges of counterfeiting (McGranahan 2001; 2005; Stoddard 2013) only to return again after 1949, where he would live out the rest of his life as a friend of Tarchin’s, but under much scrutiny by the exile community because of the common misperception that he was a Chinese Communist sympathizer (McGranahan 2005).

As for Tarchin, he worked unceasingly to increase literacy. This is evident in the *Mélong*’s reportage of global and local news in a relatively accessible register of literary Tibetan, and also in his numerous publications on Tibetan language and literature. Explanations of Tibetan grammar (in both English and Tibetan) are found in the *Mélong* (1947, 15 (4-5): 6); eighty-six different language and literary texts published by the Tibet Mirror Press are advertised in the same issue (*Mélong* 1947, 15 (4-5): 16). Yet the *Mélong* would never champion the cause of ‘secularist’ political change, such as that advocated by Rapga’s Tibet Improvement Party or Chinese intellectuals writing in literary journals, including the literary magazine *New Youth* (Chinese: *Xin Qingnian*; print run 1915-1926). This journal, associated with the New Culture Movement in China, aligned language reforms with political change especially by promoting baihua, written vernacular Chinese, alongside science (Mr. S) and democracy (Mr. D) (Bianco 1971: 32-33; Barmé and Jaivin 1992; *China Quarterly Heritage* 17). This represented a move towards secularism as a state-craft principle

(Casanova 2011) that never seems to have been taken up in the *Mélong*. Rather, Tarchin promoted religious pluralism as a key aspect of Tibetan national identity.

‘Religion’ and Religious Pluralism

Although the *Mélong* and the Tibet Mirror Press became independent from the Church of Scotland in 1946 (Fader 2004 vol. 3: 175-179), it did not abandon reporting on religious content in seeming contradiction to ‘the really real’ commonly associated with newspapers as a genre. In fact, one of the great contributions of the *Mélong* (and the Tibet Mirror Press) was its role in the emergence of a pluralistic approach to religion in line with Indian secularism (van der Veer 2001, 2011). Recall that secularism is viewed here as a conceptual terrain in which particular ways of defining ‘religion,’ ‘politics,’ ‘the self,’ ‘the nation,’ and other projects of modernity are negotiated by historical agents (Asad 2006: 522; van der Veer 2011; Bubandt and van Beek 2012). With this in mind, it is possible to make some observations on how Tarchin carved out a discursive space for religion through the *Mélong* and Tibet Mirror Press. This space for religion arises in mutual interaction with its role in the discursive formation of Tibetan nationalism (Shakya 2004) and its coverage of a diverse range of ‘secular’ content (Engelhardt 2011; Sawerthal 2011) including: a photo of the young Dalai Lama followed by a who’s who of Tibetan officials (*Mélong* 1936, (10) 11.2: 1, Box 2, LTWA); the Tibetan Trade Association pictured in front of Rapga’s family residence (*Mélong* 1945 (13) 6: 4-5, Box 3, LTWA); and coverage of Indian independence (*Mélong* 1947, (15) 11:1).

The processes of institutional secularization occurred in two main phases, first the creation of a novel public sphere for Tibetan speakers independent of Buddhist authorities, and second, a move away from its initial roots in the Scottish Mission. Parallel to these developments were strong gestures indicating the emergence of a ‘vernacular project of secularism’ that aligned pan-Tibetan national identity with religious pluralism against the threat of communism. Today it is natural to consider ‘religion’ (*chos lugs*) as a core characteristic of Tibetan identity (Brox 2012), even though Tibetan intellectuals such as Jamyang Norbu contest this (*Shadow Tibet*, 2013). In an article on pan-Tibetan identity, Dawa Norbu aptly summarized what he considered the importance of religion in contemporary Tibetan society, especially Buddhism or, in his terms ‘lamaist culture,’ by stating, “But to the soul searching sections of the Tibetan populace, the defining characteristic and the core of Tibetan identity appears to be the Lamaist culture which is radically different from the culture of the ‘dominant generalized other’—the Chinese” (*Himal* 1992 (3): 10). The question here is not why did religion come to be accepted

as ‘natural’ to Tibetan identity, but how? Although the implications of this question go far beyond the reach of this article, I argue that Tarchin and his press played a role in a “vernacular project of secularism” (Bubandt and van Beek 2012: 12) that aligned pan-Tibetan identity with an ecumenical religious orientation that defined itself in contradistinction to the distinct other—communism.

This alignment of ecumenism and pan-Tibetan identity becomes more pronounced after the *Mélong* became an independent press in 1946, but the progression toward religious pluralism is indicated even prior to its secularization from the Church of Scotland. The December 1945 issue of the *Mélong* ran a cover story that explained the significance of Christmas below a drawing of the letter V decorated with the Buddhist eight auspicious symbols alongside Christmas and New Year greetings in Tibetan, English, Mongolian and Chinese (Engelhardt 2011: *Mélong* 14 (3): 1). A more striking example of this type of ecumenism can be found in a feature story comparing Jesus and the Buddha. Against the backdrop of a world map, a drawing of Jesus on the cross, followed by a description of Easter as the resurrection of Christ, was featured next to a sketch of the Buddha with explanations of Saga Dawa celebrations commemorating the Buddha’s birth, enlightenment, and death in the fourth Tibetan lunar month (July 1950, 18 (8): 7). Soon after the founding of the People’s Republic of China in October 1949, Mao Zedong announced ambitions to claim Tibet as part of the motherland. Within a year, Tarchin wrote a short history on the importance of the “mutually beneficial” patron-priest relationship (*mchod yon*) in ‘Lamaism’ (*bla ma chos*) (*Mélong* September 1950, 18 (10): 3). This topic later became a lightning rod for debates on Sino-Tibetan relations. Tibetan exiles formulated a uniquely ‘religious’ interpretation of their historical relationship to China in the 1990s that obscured Yuan and Qing political domination of Tibet (Sperling 2004: 30-31). Yet, through all of this, the *Mélong* still printed translations and summaries from the Bible. In 1955, the front page contained a partial translation of Luke 1 and 2 on the annunciation and birth of Jesus (*Mélong* 1955, 23 (2): 1). As Hackett points out, “Tarchin now placed Buddhism on par with Christianity” (2008: 892). This treatment of religion was no longer a positioning of Christian versus Buddhist, but rather a religious pluralism that became increasingly important in contradistinction to communism, which was associated with the Chinese occupation of Tibet.

As the People’s Liberation Army took over more and more Tibetan territory, anti-Communist rhetoric became central to the *Mélong* (Engelhardt 2013; Hackett 2008: 892-894). Tarchin’s paper was among the first to report on dem -

ocratic reforms introduced into Tibetan areas of China in the late 1950s, including the destruction of monasteries that went along with these campaigns (Hackett 2008: 894; *Mélong* July 1957, 25 (3): 5). These sweeping reforms gained the Chinese the new name of *tendra* (*brtan dgra*) or ‘enemy of the faith’ (McGranahan 2001: 218). Up until its last issue in 1963, the *Mélong* staunchly opposed communism (Engelhardt 2013: 188-189). Russel Spur of the Singapore Free Press wrote an article in 1950, titled ‘A Lone Battle with Mao’ in which he described Tarchin as “a small Tibetan with a sharp tongue, a ready smile and a love of freedom [...] fighting a one-man war with Communism” (Engelhardt 2013: 210).

‘Religion’ emerges as a category in Tibetan discourse (often with the term ‘*chöluk*,’ see below) here in a mutually constituted fashion, with the forced secularization by Chinese communists. Tibetan nationalism begins to be aligned with a concept of religion that is ecumenical, referring to all Tibetan Buddhist traditions and Protestant Christianity in clear contradistinction to communism. This is particularly striking in a letter dated to 13 July 1958. Addressed to Marco Pallis, a British author and mountaineer, Tarchin asked for prayers for the ‘religion’ of Tibet and claimed that Tibet will become a ‘religiously’ free nation. I share an excerpt of this hand-written letter here, keeping the capitalization as found in the original:

Please do pray for Tibet and for all who are giving their lives for the sake of their beloved country and Doctrine. We are grateful to you for all your good will and helps for the cause of Tibet and its people and religion. Our Government is very kind to the Tibetans and by publications they are guiding as how India fought with the great power without any weapons but peacefully. It is a great example to Tibetans but I think with the Communists it cannot apply to fight peacefully without arms. Because they are not like the power who follows Law. But Communists has [sic] no law and justice. If the British followed the communist ways I am sure all the great leaders of the today in India are long before gone to other world. Any how still we have the confidence that Tibet may rise up again and became a free religion [sic.] country much better and stronger than ever before. Also please pray for all the Tibetan leaders and officials that they all might unite together and work for their country... (Tarchin Collection, C.V. Starr Library).

In this letter, the notion of religion remains crucial to Tibetan identity and ‘religion’ is used in contradistinction to ‘the lawlessness’ of communism.

In the June 1959 issue of the *Mélong*, Tarchin ran a cover story of the Dalai Lama's first speech in exile *Mélong* 25 (1):1). This issue appeared just months after his escape from Tibet. The Dalai Lama's rhetoric on 'religion' is similar to that found in Tarchin's letter. The concept emerges in a mutually constituted fashion, in contradistinction to the forced secularization by Chinese communists. In this speech, the Dalai Lama stressed that the Chinese violated the 17-Point Agreement of 1951,²⁰ because it had guaranteed that, "Tibet's Religion (*bod gyi chos lug*) and customs and the affairs of the internal government will not be interfered with...." (*Mélong* 25 (1): 1). The forced secularization by Chinese communists made them, by implication, lawless. Similar rhetoric appeared on the third page of the same issue whereby the number of 'red deaths' (*dmarsad*) in 1957 is estimated at twenty million. The term 'red deaths' refers to killings at the hands of the communists (*Mélong* 25 (1): 3). This rhetoric on the first page of the *Mélong* indicates the important role of religion in Tibetan political identity vis-à-vis 'faithless' communists.

The alliance of ecumenical secularism with Tibetan national identity is also evident in Tibet Mirror Press publications, especially after its institutional secularization from the Scottish Mission. The Tibet Mirror Press was founded at the same time as the *Mélong*, but it took on a new life a year before the end of British colonial rule in India. At that time, Tarchin secured a loan from the British government to invest in the machinery necessary to be independent (Sawerthal 2011: 75-77; Fader 2004, vol. 2: 26). After the purchase of this new equipment in 1948, the press printed a wide variety of texts. The LTWA in Dharamsala holds numerous Tibet Mirror Press publications. This archive attests to the fact that this press did not favor one Buddhist tradition over another, but rather printed prayers and texts from all teaching lineages: Nyingma, Geluk, Sakya and Kagyu. This approach to textual production also indicates an inclusive religious pluralism that became central to the formation of the Tibetan government-in-exile with representation coming from each of these different traditions as well as Bön. As early as 1944, the Tibet Mirror Press published Buddhist liturgies and prayers, such as a long life prayer for the Tenth Panchen Lama (1938-1989). In 1958, the press printed one of the oral teachings of the second Jamgön Kongtrul, Dege Jamyang Khyentsé Özer (Sde dge 'jam dbyangs mkhyen brtse'i 'od zer, 1904-1953). In the wake of His Holiness the Dalai Lama's exile to India, the printing of Buddhist texts increased. In 1961, a long life Prayer to Dudjom Rinpoche ('Jigs bral ye shes rdo rje, 1904-1987) was published; a year later, the press printed a *Sādhana* to *Yamāntaka*. The Library of Tibetan Works and Archives also has a copy of an undated, unbound (*dpe*

cha) long life prayer to the Sakya Throne-holder (b. 1945). While none of these above mentioned *sādhana* or prayers are duplicated at the Columbia collection, the Tharchin Collection has other Buddhist religious texts. Although I have not seen many Christian texts from this period, the Tibet Mirror Press's most recent publication is a Christian-oriented biography of Tarchin, indicating its current ties to the Tibetan church in Kalimpong.

Alongside the publishing of Buddhist texts, the Tibet Mirror Press published 'secular' political tracts as well, including a Tibetan translation of The First Five Year Plan of India (October 1957), a bilingual Tibetan and Hindi Memorial to Gandhi dating to February 1958 (Tharchin Collection at Columbia University), and a short pamphlet in Tibetan, which can be translated as *Think About the Preparations for Achieving Independence of Our Tibet* [Rang re bod rang btsan 'byung che gra bgrigs gngang rgyu'i bsam shog]. The Tibet Mirror Press also published literary texts, many of which still need to be catalogued. Examples of didactic folk literature include: *The Story of Birds and Monkeys* (1960); *A Moral Advice of an Old Woman to Two Women Regarding Mortal Decay* written by one of the founding members of Rapga's Tibet Improvement Party;²¹ *The Dispute between Tea Goddess and Chang Goddess*, among many others. In 1960, the Tibet Mirror Press also supplemented the educational activities of the newly established Publications Division of the Tibetan exile government set up in Lower Dharamsala (Fader 2004, vol. 3).²²

Both the *Mélong* and the Tibet Mirror Press published on a wide range of secular and religious topics even after becoming an institutionally 'secular' organization. As a corollary, we can see the emergence of a vernacular project of secularism in which a pan-Tibetan identity is tied to an ecumenical notion of religion that is defined against the 'other' of communism. The emergence of this type of secularism seems strongly linked to Tarchin's work at the *Mélong* and the Tibet Mirror Press as well as his co-commitments to Christianity and Tibetan language and identity. The *Mélong* ran its last issue in 1963, and with Tarchin's death in 1976, the leadership of the Tibet Mirror Press shifted to the Tibetan church in Kalimpong. But that is another story.

Conclusion

By viewing religion and the secular as mutually constitutive categories, this essay has looked at the secularization of the *Mélong* and Tibet Mirror Press as an historical project. With its beginning as a missionizing impulse, Dorjé Tarchin creatively adapted Moravian Christian values on the importance of the vernacular to found a Tibetan

language newspaper. At this early stage, the paper was independent of traditional Buddhist authorities but initially dependent on Christian ones. Based outside of the purview of the Lhasa government, Tarchin's home in the Christian Scottish Mission provided an alternative institution for cultural production outside of Buddhist institutions. This contributed to the secularization of Tibetan print culture by moving production away from the Buddhist-monastic elite, introducing a new genre into Tibetan discourse, opening up a public sphere for Tibetans, and supporting vernacular language publications. Especially between 1933 and 1946, the *Mélong* was an important voice of dissension against conservative factions of the Lhasa government and included the work of other intellectuals interested in reforming Tibetan society, most notably Rabga Pandatsang and Gendun Chöphel.

Over the course of its forty year history, the *Mélong* would undergo a dynamic process of institutional secularization, first with the creation of secular news outside the purview of traditional Buddhist institutions and finally with separation from the Scottish Mission Church in 1946. While Tarchin's Christian identity can be seen in sharp contrast to Buddhism early on in his career, over time the boundaries between the two faiths would become more porous as they shared a common enemy of faith: communism. As a corollary, Tarchin engaged in a vernacular project of secularism that aligned pan-Tibetan national identity with religious pluralism against communism.

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Endnotes

1. Due to its content and long print run, the *Mélong* is commonly credited with being the ‘first’ newspaper in the Tibetan language. However, an earlier newspaper was founded by August Hermann Francke (1870-1930) who used a lithographic press to publish a Tibetan-language monthly newspaper, *Ladakh News (La dvags kyi ag bar)* in 1904, which contained local and national news as well as Christian expositions (Bray 1998: 6); an endeavor which seems to have certainly inspired Tarchin (Sawerthal 2011: 44-50). According to a report in *Tibet Studies* [A Chinese publication] the first newspaper in Central Tibet was initiated by the Manchu Amban Lian Yu in Lhasa in 1907 (Samphel 2003: 171). Van Manen mentions that a third paper, a bi-lingual Chinese-Tibetan newspaper (*Bod yig phal skad kyi gsang ’gyur*), ran from 1913-1916 in Beijing (1926: xxxii-xxxiii). Another newspaper, a trilingual Mongolian, Chinese, Tibetan newspaper (*Mengzang zhoubao*), was published by the Mongolian and Tibetan Affairs Commission in 1929, a few years after the *Mélong* started (thanks to Professor Elliot Sperling for bringing this to my attention).
2. Anna Sawerthal’s pioneering study of the *Mélong* charts its different names over the course of its near forty-year history (2011: 18-19). Her MA Thesis (University of Vienna) is the most comprehensive analysis of the subject matter in the *Mélong* to date. Her PhD on this topic is anticipated.
3. The majority of the *Mélong* issues cited here are available via the digital collection on the Columbia University C.V. Starr East Asian Library website. The issues that are not on the website and held in the collection at the Library of Tibetan Works and Archives [LTWA] are noted with reference to LTWA.
4. Moravians Heinrich August Jaeschke (1817-1883) and August Hermann Francke (1870-1930), contributed immensely to Euro-American linguistic understandings of Tibetan. Jaeschke completed a Tibetan-English dictionary that had remained the standard in Tibetology for at least fifty years. This project was a by-product of his life’s work to translate the New Testament into Classical Tibetan, which was completed two years after his death in Germany. On Franke, see note 1 above. Another famous Moravian was Dorjé Tarchin’s close friend, Joseph Gergan (1880?-1946) of Ladakh, who, with Francke’s collaboration, completed the first Tibetan translation of the Old Testament; the complete Tibetan-language Bible was published in 1948.
5. Document A is a biography of Dorjé Tarchin, who is referred to as Rev. Gergan Tharchin. Document A covers Chap. 1-16 of this biography held in the Tharchin Collection, Columbia University’s C. V. Starr East Asian Library, Rare Books Collection, in the Tharchin Finding Aid this is listed as 5.1 under APPENDIX 1: INTAKE LISTS. This document, in Typeset format, is the first part of Gergan Tharchin’s (GT) two-part Typeset/Typewritten so-called memoirs of his life and career. These materials previously belonged to the Tharchin Estate and were donated by Herbert Fader, July 2010. In Fader’s biography, this is referred to as GT Unpublished “Memoirs” Typeset Manuscript (GTUM TsMs). Fader clearly explains its dating and its providence (2004, vol.1: xxiii-xxviii, xxxx).
6. I am not certain of the original Tibetan title of this work because it seems that the 1917 edition is no longer extant, but it is referred to in the English language biography by Fader and his source, the unpublished biography Document A held at the Tharchin Collection, C.V. Starr Library Columbia University. The 1962 edition is titled in Tibetan *Bod skad kyi sgrog dpe gnyis pa yon tan nyer ’phel*.
7. Columbia University’s Tharchin Collection holds the 1962 print in original and as a photocopy. Research in June 2012.
8. Other instruction books found in the Library of Tibetan Works and Archives [LTWA] include *Rgya bod skad gnyis shan sbyang kun phan me long zhes bya ba bzhugs so* [*The Tibetan Hindi self-taught*] dated to 1942 and *Bbu chen dbu med shan sbyang gyi ka dpe byis pa dga’ ba mgrin rgyan zhes* [*A manual on handwriting*] dated to August 1954 (see Tharchin Collection Finding Aid Series I.3. 1).
9. The Mission paid him Rs. 10/month and the government scholarship Rs. 7/month (Fader 2004, vol. 2: 20).
10. This is an inexpensive mimeograph machine that works by forcing ink through a stencil onto paper.
11. Chapter three of 2 Timothy in *The Holman Christian Standard Bible* reads, “But know this: Difficult times will come in the last days. For people will be lovers of self, lovers of money, boastful, proud, blasphemers, disobedient to parents, ungrateful, unholy, unloving, irreconcilable, slanderers, without self-control, brutal, without love for what is good traitors, reckless, conceited, lovers of pleasure rather than lovers of God. Holding to the form of godliness, but denying its power. Avoid these people!” (see <http://www.hcsb.org/> as of 12 June 2015). Holmes-Tagchungdarpa’s translation (2014: 83) omits the first sentence and reads: “Recently, people have become attached to useless things and have become boastful and talkative like magpies. They have no respect for others, and instead only curse them. They are ungrateful to their parents and seem incapable of discipline, disregarding good advice. Even the most natural emotion of loving kindness is absent. They engage in slander, are intemperate and do not like [to perform] virtuous deeds. They only outwardly appear to engage in spiritual

activities, whereas inwardly they are arrogant. [Readers], you should do away with this behavior.” The Tibetan text is as follows: da 'di rtogs par gyis shig| mtha' ma'i nyin mo rnam| dus drag po 'ong bar 'gyur de ci yi phyir zhe na| mi rnam ra la chags pa dang| nor mi rtag par chags pa dang| kha tsho che thabs chen po dang| gzhan la smad pa gtong ba dang| pha ma'i bka' la mi nyan pa| drin gzo mi byed mi rigs byed| rang bzhin gyi byams pa med pa| kha bead mi srung phra ma byed| tshod mi shes snying rje med la| dge ba la mi dga' ba dang| nga log khrel med nga rgyal dang| dkon mchog la chags pa las ni 'dod chags la lhag par chags pa| chos kyi byed tshul la rten kyang| de yi nus pa rnam spangs so| de dag rnam khyed kyi spong zhi| lam thignis [=thig gnyis] le'u 3 las (*Mélong* 1927, 2 (5): 1). Thanks goes to Professor Dorji Wangchuk for assisting in deciphering the last phrase, which is difficult to read and indicates that this passage is a translation of 2 Timothy 3.

12. This project was first initiated by the late E. Gene Smith and continued by the TBRC Literary Research department. It involved the mapping of wood-block printeries based on information gleaned from the colophons of TBRC Library holdings of xylographs. The TBRC survey was completed by adding their data to a previously published survey of printeries that had been commissioned by Takdrak Regent Ngawang Sungrab Tutob (Stag brag Ngag dbang gsung rab mthu stobs, 1874-1952) in the 1950s and completed in 1957, a work that Gene Smith had published through the PL480 program under the title *Three Karchaks* (Ngawang Gelek Demo 1970). While the TBRC team cautions that this survey of printeries is not yet complete, it yields impressive results (Tibet Buddhist Resource Center, Sheehy, January 2014).

13. A moveable Tibetan type from metal was first made in St. Petersburg at the Russian Academy of Social Sciences in the late 1830s. The first book printed was the *Sutra of the Wise and the Foolish* ('Dzangs blun dpe sna tshogs btsan pa'i mdo bzhugs so), which had an introduction in German by Isaak Jacob Schmidt. These endeavors seem to not have spread elsewhere (Uspensky 2010: 431-432).

14. This awareness might also stem from the attention given to the registers of Tibetan language in translating the Bible into Tibetan. Tarchin's friend Joseph Gergan completed the Old Testament using an accessible literary style (see Bray 1991; Fader 2004; and note 4 above).

15. Engelhardt has previously translated this important passage. I have retranslated it in order to highlight the discursive importance of the term 'language of the Snowland' (*gangs ljongs kyi skad*), which could be translated as 'Tibetan'. Engelhardt correctly identifies the term 'akhbar' as 'newspaper' (2011: 207). However, I read this full Tibetan phrase 'kha bar ka ka si' as a transcription of Hindi into Tibetan for 'news' (Tibetan: *kha bar* < Hindi: *khabar*)

'paper' (Tibetan: *ka ka si* < Hindi: *kagaz*), rather than 'ka ka si' as a corruption of "'kaya' 'si' i.e. 'what is'" as stated by Engelhardt (2011: 207 n.4). I am grateful to Dorji Wangchuk and Rebecca Manring for assisting in this translation.

16. This might refer indirectly to 'letters to the editors' as suggested by Engelhardt's translation, but I read this as a much more general theoretical statement, that the newspaper enables people to question their superiors, 'the lord(s) of subjects.'

17. The common term for Tibetan language 'bö ké (*bod skad*)' was only included in the subtitles of two issues (*Mélong* 2 (11) and 2 (12)), as far as I can tell it was never in the masthead of the *Mélong* (see Sawerthal 2011: 19), whereas "Tibet" in English appears in the masthead of nearly every issue. The term 'bö yik' (*bod yig*) for 'Tibetan-language' was used for the publishing house—'Kha puk bö yik mé long par khang (Kha phug bod yig me long par khang),' which translates as 'Kalimpong's Tibetan-language Mirror Publishing House.' The lack of the term 'Tibetan' in the Tibetan-language in the masthead for the paper and the consistent use of 'Tibet' or 'Tibetan' in English corresponds with Tsering Shakya's (1993) insights, that, "There is no indigenous term which encompasses the population denoted by the Western usage [of 'Tibet']" in the imagining of Tibet as a nation. Tarchin seems to use both the English term 'Tibet' in the masthead and 'the language of the Snowlands' in his editorial to indicate his vision of a united Tibet within a global public sphere. The earliest extant usage of this name for a Tibet Mirror Press publication is in a 1930 edition of a Tibetan-language book called in English *Treatise of the Dream-Goddess [Indrani]: Question and Answers for Young Monks (Rmi lam lha mo'i bstan bcos dge slong gzhon nu rab gsal gyi dris lan)*, a copy of which is held at both C.V. Starr Library and the Library of Tibetan Works and Archives in Dharamsala. This is a folk tale on the goddess Indrani, a wife of Shiva, that Tarchin had heard during his stay in Lhasa and decided to write down because there was no xylographic print extant (1930: cover page, 2). I referred to the copy held at the Library of Tibetan Works and Archives in Dharamsala.

18. Document B refers to a second unpublished memoir that serves as the basis for Fader's biography of Tarchin. In Fader's biography it is referred to as "GTUM TwMs (=Gergan Tharchin's Unpublished Memoirs Typewritten Manuscript," and it covers chapters 17-28. Mr. Fader gifted this important document along with Document A to be part of the Tarchin Collection now held at Columbia University's C.V. Starr Library (see Fader 2004, vol. 1: xxxv).

19. McGranahan lists the variations on the spellings of Rapga's family name (2005: 259).

20. The agreement signed in 1951 by Chinese and Tibetan representatives recognized Tibet as part of China (cf. Goldstein 1989).

21. The author Changlo Chen Gung Sönam Gyalpo (Lcang lo can gung bsod nams rgyal po) was a progressive aristocrat from Lhasa and one of the first members of the Tibet Improvement Party (cf. Stoddard 2013: 587).

22. Tarchin's Tibet Mirror Press publications also include rare texts and pamphlets that are difficult to classify, e.g. 'Sealed Teachings: Heart Advice of Compassion'. One would assume to be a Buddhist teaching, but it seems to be a political tract warning against communism in the lyrics to the song of 'freedom.' This tract echoes poetic themes on 'rang dbang' (freedom) and/or 'rang btsan' (independence) that were found in the *Mélong* (Engelhardt 2013: 191).

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