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## Constructing the Secular: The Changing Relationship Between Religion and Politics in the Tibetan Exile Community

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# Constructing the Secular: The Changing Relationship Between Religion and Politics in the Tibetan Exile Community

Emmi Okada

This paper investigates the construction of secularity in the Tibetan exile community by examining the unfolding process of secularization, as well as the emergence of an ideology of secularism and secular democracy. I consider secularization in the exile society to be occurring in two respects. The first is in the form of differentiation between the political and religious institutions, which culminated in the Dalai Lama's complete devolution of his political powers to the elected government in 2011. The second is in the sense of the transfer and transition of political legitimacy from the Dalai Lama, who holds traditional-charismatic authority, to the elected leadership in exile, particularly the current lay prime minister whose political authority lies more in democratic and legal-rational legitimacy. Secularism is understood here as a political-philosophical ideology to be distinguished from the socio-political process of secularization.

In the exile context, the term 'secularism' is translated as *chöluk rimé* (*chos lugs ris med*)—a neologism whose key lexical constituent *rimé* alludes to a much older Tibetan tradition of 'non-sectarianism'. This paper claims that a unique Tibetan secularism that upholds religious pluralism is under construction in order to negotiate the exigencies of political modernity, the preservation of Tibetan identity and unity, and the struggle against China. I analyze key events which occurred in exile in 2011—the Dalai Lama's political retirement and the election of a lay prime minister—and argue that a shift towards secular democracy is taking place, where the basis of political legitimacy is transitioning from the sovereignty of the Dalai Lama as a Bodhisattva-King to one grounded in popular sovereignty.

**Keywords:** Secularism, secularization, Dalai Lama, devolution, democratization, Lobsang Sangay, political legitimacy, Tibetan exile politics, Central Tibetan Administration (CTA).

## Introduction

The Dalai Lama is today a vocal and ardent advocate of secularism. As paradoxical as this may seem, coming from a foremost Tibetan lama clad in Buddhist robes, the Dalai Lama explains his position in his most recent English book *Beyond Religion: Ethics for a Whole World* (2012). Here, he develops his case for a ‘secular ethics’ that upholds cherished human values common to, but not exclusively sourced in, individual religions. This work is intended as a sequel to *Ancient Wisdom, Modern World: Ethics for the New Millennium* (1999). In *Beyond Religion*, he continues to build his argument for a universal ethics which has spiritual underpinnings but which nevertheless sheds the language of a particular religion so that the ideas can be accepted by those of different faiths and those who follow no organized religion. While a patent continuity exists between the two works, the emphasis in the Dalai Lama’s latest volume is on the ‘secular’ nature of his proposed ethics.

Apart from this latest intellectual direction by the spiritual leader, in recent years two other salient developments in the Tibetan exile-polity relating to the ‘secular’ have taken place. The first is the Dalai Lama’s decision in March 2011 to devolve his political powers completely to the elected leadership in exile. This move marked a historic break from the traditional form of Tibetan government (the Ganden Phodrang) where successive Dalai Lama incarnations have jointly held religious and temporal authority since the seventeenth century. The second is the prime-ministerial elections that occurred that same year, which saw for the first time in Tibetan history a democratically elected lay leader to the highest executive office of the Tibetan exile government. Do these political developments have anything to do with the philosophical articulation of ‘secular ethics’ by the Dalai Lama? Certainly no explicit linkage has been made. However, I argue that the intellectual and political developments described above are part of a broader process taking place in the exile society to construct the ‘secular.’

Research on non-Western secularism(s) is still an emerging area, but there is growing acknowledgement that these must be studied on their own terms and not through the theoretical prisms of Western secularity (Bubandt and Beek 2012; Bhargava 1998, 2010b; Madan 1997; van der Veer 2001; Warner, VanAntwerpen, and Calhoun 2010; McBrien and Pelkmans 2008). Talal Asad noted “although religion is regarded as alien to the secular, the latter is also seen to have generated religion” (2003: 193). That is, in configuring the secular, the religious is also reinvented as a social category. The ‘secular,’ therefore, is much more than ‘religion’s other’ (Cady and Hurd 2010: 12) and should

be seen as a ‘presence,’ rather than the totality of reality that is left behind when religion is subtracted (Taylor 2007; Calhoun, Juergensmeyer, and VanAntwerpen 2011: 5). Recent literature takes these insights as a point of departure, acknowledging the mutual borrowings, constitutions and transformations that occur between the religious and the secular (Starrett 2010: 642; Van der Veer 2011: 271; Cady and Hurd 2010: 5; Göle, 2010: 46).

This paper investigates the construction of secularity in the Tibetan exile polity and, in doing so, explores the mutual transformations of the ‘secular’ and ‘religious’ domains, especially within English-language discourse aimed for an international audience. I understand the construction of secularity—that is, both secularization and secularism—as a form of political development by Tibetan exiles. It is an initiative to achieve modernity in the political sphere through the use of their own referents, such as the reinvention of the term *chöluk rimé* (*chos lugs ris med*) discussed below. And yet this Tibetan construction of secularity is very much part of an appeal to the international community and their host country India, whom exiled Tibetans rely on for financial, moral and other kinds of support (see Frechette 2002 for a study of these dynamics in Nepal). I say this process is ‘constructed’ because, while there is a degree of historical contingency to any social phenomenon, the events mentioned above reveal a high level of agency and conscious effort by the Dalai Lama and the exile leadership to refashion the relationship between the political and the religious. I conducted the research on which this article is based from June to September 2012 in Dharamsala, India, the seat of the Tibetan exile government, in the wake of these dramatic developments.<sup>1</sup>

For my purpose, I shall employ the term ‘secularization’ in two ways. First, drawing on Casanova (1994; 2011) I adopt his definition of one type of secularization as institutional differentiation of the secular spheres (state, economy, science and so on) from religious institutions. Within this process, I place special emphasis on the differentiation between the institution of the Dalai Lama and the exile government, the culmination of which is the complete devolution in 2011 of the temporal powers that had been hitherto vested in the institution of the Dalai Lama.<sup>2</sup> The other two types of secularization identified by Casanova are the decline of religious belief and practices, and the privatization of religion, processes which I do not believe are taking place among the Tibetan exile community. Secularization in the first sense is similar to the understanding of Karmay (2008) who asserted that “separation of church and state does not imply abandoning the practices of the established religion . . . [but rather] secures freedom

of religious exercise and therefore the right of personal choice.” This form of secularization ensures the neutrality of the state as well as freedom from sectarianism and religious domination. The second sense in which I employ the term ‘secularization’ is to denote the transfer and transition of political legitimacy<sup>3</sup> from the Dalai Lama, a representative of Weberian traditional-charismatic authority, to the elected leadership in exile, especially the elected prime minister, the basis of whose political authority lies more in democratic and legal-rational legitimacy. ‘Secular’ and ‘secularity’ are employed in this article as aggregate epistemic terms referring to both secularization and secularism. I use ‘secularism’ (as opposed to ‘secularization’) to refer to the emic understanding of the political-philosophical ideology concerning the ‘secular.’ I will refrain from turning to academic definitions of secularism because I am more interested to see how the Tibetans themselves use this term and what meaning they give it.

The Tibetan neologism coined in exile to translate ‘secularism’ is *chöluk rimé*. This is the established rendition of the English word as translated in the widely-used Monlam dictionary (see *The New English-Tibetan Dictionary* 2000) as well as the term which is in currency in political circles in exile. *Chöluk rimé*, however, carries distinct connotations to indicate how the Tibetans understand secularism, for its literal meaning is ‘non-sectarianism’ or ‘non-discrimination among religions.’ Thus, rather than a denial of religion, secularism in exile is in fact affirmative of religion and religious diversity, similar to the interpretation of secularism found in India, which has influenced this community. The very lexical rendering of secularism by the Tibetan diaspora suggests a different interpretive trajectory to its Western counterparts. I aim to shed light on the way in which both secularization and secularism are being constructed in exile in a uniquely Tibetan way so as to negotiate the exigencies of political modernity, the preservation of Tibetan identity, and the struggle against China.

The present study is by-and-large an analysis of the English language discourse on the secular that has been evolving since the commencement of democratization in exile; it is not a detailed analysis of the Tibetan-language debates. Both democratization and secularization are bound up with the exile Tibetans’ international campaign, and as the Dalai Lama’s English language publication of *Beyond Religion* suggests, these political processes occurring in Dharamsala are part of a rhetoric that intends to reach a global audience. The focus, therefore, is on the pronouncements of the political leaders and civil society organizations in exile—both of which are highly conscious of the international ramifications of their internal politics.

This paper is divided broadly into two sections, focusing on the socio-political process of secularization in the two senses indicated above. The emergence of a secular ideology in exile will be discussed in the first section and the rise of secular democracy in the second.

### Secularization as Institutional Differentiation

Although a conceptual distinction between the spiritual and the temporal existed among Tibetans prior to 1959 (see Dreyfus 1995; Ruegg 2003, 2004), it was only in exile that a deliberate effort was made to separate the ‘religious’ and ‘secular’ spheres institutionally as part of an effort to achieve—and project—political modernity. What might be described as the signs of secularization in the exile society in India is concomitant with the democratization process that has been in motion since 1959 when the Dalai Lama left Tibet for exile in India. Yet this process of differentiation between the religious and secular spheres does not necessarily equate to a decline of religious influence. In this section, I detail some of the main features of this complex project of secularization, looking in particular at the devolution of the political authority of the office of the Dalai Lama; the delineations as well as the continuing linkages between religion and politics; and Buddhist principles informing government institutions in exile.

In India, the fourteenth Dalai Lama found fertile ground on which to build the institutions and processes of political modernity, for there was an intrinsic equalizing dynamic that operated in the shared experience of exile that served to shift many old hierarchies (Roemer 2008: 69, 91-92). After the Dalai Lama’s escape to India in 1959 in the wake of the National Uprising in Tibet, some 80,000 Tibetan refugees followed him to India. That same year he established the Central Tibetan Administration (CTA)—what was to become known as the Tibetan ‘government-in-exile’—and the following year created a parliament which represented the three Tibetan provinces (Ü-Tsang, Kham, and Amdo) and four major Tibetan Buddhist schools (Sakya, Nyingma, Kagyu, Geluk). The religious representation is a unique feature of the exile parliament and a means by which the concerns of the sizeable Tibetan monastic community are voiced in a political forum. The Tibetan indigenous religion of Bön was added to the parliamentary religious representation in 1977, and regional representatives from Europe and North America were included since the 1990s to reflect the changing demographics of the Tibetan diaspora (TCHRD 2012: 23, 26).

The Dalai Lama’s devolution of his political authority in exile has taken place in three main stages. The major parliamentary restructuring in 1990-1991 represented the first

significant devolution of his temporal powers. This ended the custom of the successive Dalai Lamas' appointment of cabinet members in favor of selection by the parliament. The Tibetan leader also renounced his authority to endorse the elected parliamentary deputies. The second stage of his devolution took shape through the introduction of prime ministerial elections in 2001 and included his self-declared 'semi-retirement' in 2003. Until then, the members of the cabinet had elected one among themselves as the prime minister for a term of one year (*Tibetan Bulletin* Sept-Oct 2001: 5). The new change meant that the people would directly elect the prime minister, who would then choose his cabinet ministers subject to approval by the parliament. In 2003 the Dalai Lama decided to devolve the majority of his substantive administrative responsibilities; from this point on, he began to refer to himself as being in 'semi-retirement,' retaining only a handful of duties as the head-of-state.<sup>4</sup> This second stage of devolution involved a major transfer of responsibility from the Dalai Lama to the elected prime minister, the exile parliament and the CTA offices, including the power to appoint the justice commissioners, the heads of statutory bodies and the ambassadors of the foreign Tibet Offices (*Tibetan Review* October 2003: 13). It also took away the Dalai Lama's control over the civil service and his right to approve major government decisions (Lobsang Sangay 2010: 210).

In the third stage, a decade after the inauguration of direct prime ministerial elections, the Dalai Lama decided to completely devolve his temporal powers in March 2011, signaling the culmination of his efforts to democratize the Tibetan polity. Despite protestations and proposals of alternatives, he refused to retain even a ceremonial role as head-of-state (*Tibetan Review* June 2011b: 6). Today, the only mention of the Dalai Lama in the *Charter of the Tibetans-in-Exile* is in Article 1, which recognizes him as the 'Protector and Symbol of Tibet and Tibetan People' and assigns to him purely advisory roles, which are not binding on the elected leadership (see *Tibetan Review* July 2011c: 10).

Although the Dalai Lama's devolution had proceeded in a stepwise manner over the decades, with ten-year intervals between each major reform, his full retirement from politics in 2011 nevertheless marked a radical departure. It ended a 369-year-old practice of vesting both spiritual and temporal authority in the Dalai Lama (CTA 2011: 19; *Tibetan Review* July 2011c: 10). The fourteenth Dalai Lama has told the Tibetans that the Ganden Phodrang will still exist as his monastic estate but that its relationship with politics has come to an end.<sup>5</sup> In other words, 'Ganden Phodrang' which was the name given to the Lhasa government in 1642, where successive Dalai Lamas had reigned as

a *cakravartin*<sup>6</sup> (wheel-turner) or Bodhisattva-King, would now refer solely to the religious institution and estate of the Dalai Lama.<sup>7</sup>

In his speeches in March 2011, the Dalai Lama explained that it is in the Tibetans' interest to "establish a sound system of governance" based on democratic principles and self-reliance while he remained able and healthy and could still "help resolve problems if called upon to do so" (CTA 2011: 17). His chief concern appeared to be the avoidance of a situation of unpreparedness when the time comes for him to pass away:

So the system of one-man rule is not good. Therefore it is not at all good if the Dalai Lama keeps on holding ultimate power....The system [of the dual authority of the Dalai Lama] has brought many benefits since [the time of the fifth Dalai Lama]. But now as we are in the 21st century, sooner or later the time for change is imminent. But if the change comes under the pressure of another person then it will be a disgrace to the former Dalai Lamas... As I am the fourteenth in line of that institution, it is most appropriate if I on my own initiative, happily and with pride, end the dual authority of the Dalai Lama. Nobody except me can make this decision and I have made the final decision (CTA 2011: 20 21).

The system of the dual authority of the Dalai Lama is integral to the idea of *chösi sungdrel* (*chos srid zung 'brel*), commonly translated as the 'union of religion and politics.' It is clear from the above statement that the current Dalai Lama views this system as anachronistic and believes that he should bring about its reform as the incumbent of that position. His speeches in March 2011 were delivered in Tibetan, but they were subsequently translated into English by the CTA and published in booklets for distribution. It can be inferred that while the reform was obviously an initiative for the political development of the Tibetan exile population, it was also carried out with an eye on the broader international community, which has been supportive of the CTA's democratization efforts.

Due to the paramount moral authority the Dalai Lama holds among the Tibetans, his decision to devolve his political authority elicited a strong emotional response from the exile community. A foreign visitor who was present at the time of the Dalai Lama's announcement on 10 March 2011 (the anniversary of the 1959 Tibetan uprising against Chinese occupation of Tibet) described the reaction of the Tibetans in terms of a paroxysm of lamentation, with many Tibetans, especially of the older generation, break-



ing down in tears as they received the news.<sup>8</sup> Rejecting implorations from the exile parliament and other sections of society that he reconsider his decision, the Dalai Lama insisted that his “decision is final” (CTA 2011: 21) and he flatly declined the proposal to retain a ceremonial position as the head-of-state, similar to the position of a monarch in a constitutional monarchy (*Tibetan Review* June 2011b: 6).

Despite the initial resistance of the Tibetans to let their leader retire from politics, from my field research a year after the Dalai Lama’s historic relinquishment of his temporal powers, the general view towards his decision appeared to be one of acceptance. For example, the President of the Tibetan Women’s Association (TWA) told me that, following the March 10 announcement, her organization had asked the Dalai Lama to retain his leadership as they considered his complete retirement to be a political step too big for the Tibetan community.<sup>9</sup> Yet, with the smooth transition to the elected leadership over 2011-2012, she said that TWA now accepts the change.

The present day exile government differentiates between the spheres of religion and the secular much more than in the past. This can be viewed as a turn toward modernity according to Weber, who sees the basic feature of modernity as the delineation of various spheres of value—religion, politics, science, economy and so on (Weber 1962, 1968; also see Latour 1993). The Ganden Phodrang government in Lhasa had a sizeable ecclesiastical wing, with one half of the government officials constituted by monks (Peteck 1973: 7-8). In comparison, in exile, the administration of religious affairs is confined to the responsibility of the Department of Religion and Culture (one of the seven departments of the CTA), and the number of monks employed in the government has been reduced to a handful with the majority of the CTA employees now consisting of laypeople. Furthermore, unlike the Lhasa aristocracy, which patronized the three main Geluk monasteries (Goldstein 1968: 188), the CTA does not financially sponsor the *sangha*.<sup>10</sup>

Even so, the differentiation between politics and religion in the exile administration is by no means complete. Despite the Dalai Lama’s withdrawal of the Ganden Phodrang from the CTA, institutional linkages remain in newly configured forms, such as the Department of Religion and Culture in the CTA, reserved seats for religious representatives in Parliament, and in certain remnant traditions like the exile government’s consultation with the (unelected) state oracle several times a year.<sup>11</sup> Certainly, to the more modern-minded Tibetans, “such appeals to non-rational powers through mechanisms that would not be open to

public inspection [seem] problematic” (Lobsang Sangay 2010: 297). The influence of religion in the exile administration can also be found in other unexpected areas. For example, in a recent defamation case heard by the Supreme Justice Commission (SJC), the losing party was ordered, among other things, to make amends by offering a certain number of butter lamps at the monastery.<sup>12</sup>

Indeed the emergence of secularization in the form of institutional differentiation does not mean that religious influence is declining in the Tibetan polity. In fact, the explicit project of democratization draws on Buddhist principles. This is evident in Article 2 of the 1963 Draft Constitution,<sup>13</sup> which emphasized the principle of *chösi sung drel* by declaring Tibet to be a “unitary democratic State founded upon the principles laid down by the Lord Buddha.” It is frequently acknowledged that the monastic order in Tibet, which became mired in conservatism and ritualism, was very much bound up with the (undemocratic) Lhasa government (Jamyang Norbu 1990: 14; Boyd 2004: 33-34). It is nevertheless believed that the substance of Buddhist teachings upholds ‘equality’ as an overarching principle (Rinzin Thargyal 1997: 29). Indeed the principle that “all human beings are essentially equal” and have an “equal right to life, liberty and happiness” is what brings the Dalai Lama to assert that Buddhism and democracy are inherently compatible (Dalai Lama 1999a: 4; see also Dreyfus 2002: 47-48). Thus, while there is a greater institutional differentiation between politics and religion in exile compared to the Lhasa government, Buddhist discourse continues to permeate exile Tibetans’ interpretations of their political processes and institutions. There is no single teleology to modernity (see Escobar 2008), and the Tibetans in exile are today evolving their own distinct brand of secular modernity as an alternative to the political visions asserted by the West as well as China. They are inspired in part by the Indian model of secularism to reconcile present-day political exigencies with their long-cherished spiritual values.

### The 1991 Charter and Secularism

An ideology of Tibetan secularism is not only a product of the philosophical deliberations of the Dalai Lama in works such as *Beyond Religion* (2012) but something that has also developed through political debate among the exile leadership. The 1963 Draft Constitution enshrined the principle of the *chösi sungdrel*. Yet, this principle became discordant over time because the 1963 document was drafted with the idea of an immanent return to Tibet. The *Charter for the Tibetans-in-Exile*, promulgated in 1991, revised the Draft Constitution and was specifically designed for the exile

context. In a similar vein to its precursor, the Charter describes the exile government as a democratic welfare state that aspires to “preserve their ancient traditions of spiritual and temporal life [*chösi sungdrel*], unique to the Tibetans, based on the principles of peace and non-violence” (Tibet Justice Centre 2012). However a key difference between the Draft Constitution and the 1991 Charter is that whereas the former explicitly referred to Buddhism, the latter does not specify a particular religion as a referent for *chö* (religion/spirituality).

Even though the term *chösi sungdrel* was adopted in the 1991 Charter, it is widely believed among CTA functionaries that in its structure and spirit, the Charter was in fact secular in nature from its very inception<sup>14</sup> since the Charter’s earlier draft initially included the word ‘secularism’ (*chöluk rimé*) under the specific direction of the Dalai Lama and the document was formulated on that basis (Lobsang Sangay 2010: 297). When the draft came before the parliament, however, the term *chöluk rimé* was replaced by *chösi sungdrel* by majority vote. Yet, as the rest of the document’s text and structure remained unchanged, the purposive spirit of the Charter is still said to reflect the principle of secularism, which, according to Samdhong Rinpoche (the first democratically elected prime minister in exile), means there cannot be any dominant influence by any particular religion on the lawmaking process.<sup>15</sup>

Before turning to the parliamentary debate in 1991, it is worth considering the etymology and connotations of the two terms: *chöluk rimé* and *chösi sungdrel*. The former is constituted by the words *chö* and *luk* meaning ‘religious system’ and *ri mé* meaning ‘non-discrimination.’ Thus, the Tibetan neologism for ‘secularism’ literally means non-discrimination between religious systems. To fully appreciate this term, however, one must also be aware of the historical connotations of its key lexical constituent *rimé*, which denoted a non-sectarian and ecumenical movement in nineteenth-century Eastern Tibet. Some of the most influential proponents of the *rimé* tradition are the nineteenth-century monk-scholars, Jamyang Khyentse Wangpo, Jamgon Kontrul, Chokgyur Lingpa, and Mipham Gyatso, who were active in the Kingdom of Dégé in Kham. According to Smith, there were several characteristics that marked the non-sectarian tradition as developed by these scholars: a trend towards simplification, preservation of minor lineages, a rejection of labels and a reorientation to Indian classics as a way to “eliminate many controversies that arose through variant expositions of the same text by different Tibetan exegetes” (Smith 2001: 246). In this way, *rimé* carries with it associations of non-sectarianism, ecumenism, eclecticism and non-partiality (Gardner 2006:

112; Hartley 1997: 49), and thus the Tibetan term for ‘secularism’ is one that is premised in an acceptance of religious pluralism.

*Chösi zung drel*, on the other hand, is a much older term which literally means ‘religion and politics’ (*chösi*) ‘held together’ (*sungdrel*) and is rendered variously as the union, conjunction, or combination of religion and politics (see Cüppers 2004). Under the Ganden Phodrang in Lhasa, the *chö* in this term had meant *nangchö* (*nang chos*; Buddhism), and *chösi sungdrel* had in fact implied a government under the Geluk school of Tibetan Buddhism (see Ishihama 2004: 29-30). Historically speaking, therefore, *chösi sungdrel* was less inclusive of religious diversity than *rimé*; but in the Tibetan exile polity in the twenty-first century, these concepts are now being refashioned.

At the parliamentary debate in 1991 on whether the words *chösi sungdrel* or *chöluk rimé* should be upheld in the Charter, those who supported the former won by four votes, led by the monk deputy Tsering Phuntsok. The grounds of their arguments are summarized by Lobsang Sangay (2010: 297):

(1) Buddhism is an integral part of our life; whatever we do in life we consult divinations and perform religious services for its success. Even the exile government performs *trinchols* [offerings] and asks for advice from the Two Red and Black Protectoresses [state oracles] or Buddhist deities for major activities. If we have a secular system, what will happen to our official oracles? Where are we going to keep them? (2) When making any decisions, if leaders have to think about Buddhist philosophy and karma, there is less chance of corruption, unlike the practice in other countries that are solely guided by politics. Those who believe in religion will be motivated to engage in good activities because his religion tells him that he will earn merits if he does such things. Since China does not have religion, there is corruption, dishonesty, and oppression.<sup>16</sup>

In this way, the driving arguments behind those who supported *chösi sungdrel* in the parliamentary debate were the defense of religious elements within traditional Tibetan government and the perceived risk of moral corruption if the Tibetans were to exclude religion from politics in a manner similar to the brand of secularism under Chinese communism. These arguments resonate with the Tibetans’ desire to reflect their own cultural identity upon their political institutions—something that has not happened for Tibetans in China. Further, according to Samdhong Rinpoche, the deputies in this camp felt that if the term *chöluk*



*rimé* was adopted, then gradually Buddhist representation in the parliament would be done away with and there would be a decline of Tibetan ‘religious culture’ as a result of dwindling state support for religious activities.<sup>17</sup>

On the other side of the parliamentary debate were the Dalai Lama and Samdhong Rinpoche, who favored the inclusion of the outvoted term of *chöluk rimé*. Some indication of the Dalai Lama’s thinking on this issue can be discerned from his speech to the eleventh parliament on 29 May 1991:

We have used the word ‘secularism’ in our draft charter. Experts interpret this word differently. But in our charter the word is defined in Tibetan as *rimé* (it roughly means that the state will not discriminate among different religions). However, nonviolence and peace, as I said earlier, are the essence of religion. What I normally think is that the concept of re-birth and a future life, and so on, as we have in Buddhism, may not be acceptable to all religions. However, I feel that all religions do believe in the innate goodness of human beings and that different religions exist to develop and strengthen this quality. *Therefore, if our constitution is built on this principle, it, for all practical purposes, incorporates the essence of all religions, whether we give it the name of religion or not.* However, if we use the word religion, we will be narrowing the scope of this constitution. On the contrary, if we use the phrase “natural and innate spiritual qualities of human beings,” it will embrace the whole of humanity. Therefore from this point of view also, it will ensure the dovetailing of spiritual and secular values. As opposed to other democracies, our democracy will have nonviolence and peace at its roots, *which means we will have a government based on, as we often say, the combination of spiritual and temporal values. When we see this word ‘secularism’ in any constitution, it sounds very appropriate and good. In our case, also, it is something which we should seriously consider* (Dalai Lama 1991: 7, emphasis added).

In the excerpt above, the Dalai Lama refers to both *chösi sungdrel* and *rimé* favorably, which seems to confound the parliamentary debate that treated them as alternatives. Yet in this apparent paradox lies the key to understanding how the ideology of Tibetan secularism or *chöluk rimé* is being constructed and advocated.

As Samdhong Rinpoche told me, while there are many different interpretations of the English word ‘secular,’ which may mean ‘absence of religion’ or even ‘anti-religion,’ the

connotation encapsulated in *chöluk rimé* is “to give equal respect to all religions and also equal respect to nonbelievers.”<sup>18</sup> He explains that despite the insertion of *chösi sungdrel* in the Charter, institutional separation between religion and government can be ensured since the Charter does not define religion or *chö*.

In the Charter, nowhere is there any definition of *chö*: what is religion...Only the word ‘dharma’ is mentioned, but what dharma?...It cannot be interpreted as Buddhism, but as the dharma of the *chösi sungdrel*. So among the Tibetan people, we have the Christians and we have Muslims, and we have a few non-believers. So in that way if somebody asks you, what is your *chö*, what is your dharma, in the ‘combination’ [in the concept of *chösi sungdrel*] in the Charter, no one can properly, legally interpret it. It may refer to all religions. So in that way, it is not much different from *chöluk rimé*.<sup>19</sup>

It is evident from these words of the Dalai Lama and Samdhong Rinpoche that they do not advocate the identification of any one religion with a democratic government; and yet there appears to be a view that the “essence of all religions” or the “natural and innate spiritual qualities of human beings,” as the Dalai Lama puts it (1991: 7), should guide government action. Alluding to a body of values that are common to, but simultaneously transcend, individual religions, the Dalai Lama and Samdhong Rinpoche see scope for reconciling *chösi sungdrel* with *chöluk rimé* within the context of the Charter.

From a Western view of secularism, it would be highly counter-intuitive, even contradictory, to say that the ‘union of religion and politics’ is compatible with ‘secularism.’ However, this is made possible in the Tibetan understanding due to the essentialization of *chö* in the concept of *chösi sungdrel* and the meanings of non-sectarianism and ecumenism infused into the Tibetan notion of secularism. Nevertheless it should be noted that the interpretation of *chösi sungdrel* in the context of the Charter is qualitatively different from *chösi sungdrel* as previously institutionalized in Ganden Phodrang’s rule over central Tibet, and arguably some slippage in the meaning of *chö* has taken place. While the *chö* in *chösi sungdrel* had undoubtedly spelt ‘Buddhism’ under the Ganden Phodrang government in Lhasa, today *chö* is interpreted liberally to mean spirituality in general. In this way, even though the 1991 Charter enshrines the words *chösi sungdrel* and thereby appeases the supporters of political tradition, institutional differentiation of religion and politics, and the government’s freedom from the dominant sway of any one religion are principles that

underlie the interpretation of the Charter as asserted by the leaders who have occupied the highest echelons of government in exile.

The ideology of Tibetan secularism as expounded by the advocates of *chöluk rime* strongly bears the influence of India's model of secularism. In fact, in *Beyond Religion*, the Dalai Lama makes a grateful attribution to India for providing the preferred model of secularism for Tibetans to follow (Dalai Lama 2012: 2-3) since this model upholds "a profound respect for and tolerance toward all religions" as well as "an inclusive and impartial attitude which includes non-believers" (Dalai Lama 2012: 6-9). This understanding of secularism clearly has the merit of maintaining unity among the different religious and sectarian affiliations within the Tibetan struggle; however it also has the advantage of winning the support and approval of India, the host country for the majority of the exiled Tibetans, and the country which has had the most proximate influence on the political development of the CTA.

Secularism as an ideology that affirms religious pluralism (while accepting non-believers) is further strengthened by the concept of *rimé* in the Tibetan neologism for 'secularism,' which makes a historical allusion to Dégé where the royal court maintained relations with multiple Buddhist traditions, in contrast to Ganden Phodrang which was dominated by the Geluk sect. It might even be said that the religious policy of the exile administration that strives to give equal representation to different monastic schools through reserved seats in the parliament is in fact closer to the policy of the Dégé court than to the Ganden Phodrang in Lhasa. Even in the starkly different context of exile, *rimé* is asserted as a solution to sectarian conflict (Gardner 2006: xii), and the concept is now invoked as an ideology of solidarity that pervades both political and religious discourses, calling for unity within the diversity of Tibetan society to include those of different religious affiliation and of no religion.

### Secularization as Transfer and Transition of Political Legitimacy

The second sense in which I deem secularization to be taking place in the Tibetan exile polity is the transfer and transition of political legitimacy. Specifically, I refer to the *transfer* of the Dalai Lama's political authority to the elected leadership, and the *transition* in the very nature of political legitimacy in Tibetan society from traditional-charismatic authority to democratic and legal-rational legitimacy.<sup>20</sup> Though interlinked, I distinguish between transfer and transition, because the former suggests a shift in the holder of authority whereas the latter denotes a

qualitative change in the very basis of legitimacy. Taking Weber's theory of legitimacy as my point of departure,<sup>21</sup> I analyze secularization in terms of the occurrence of both in the exile polity. In this section, I also discuss how the two elected exile prime ministers to date have invoked traditional as well as legal-rational and democratic authority to appeal to both their Tibetan constituents and international supporters, all the while offering the model of political development achieved in exile as an alternative to Chinese rule in Tibet.

The moral authority of the institution of the Dalai Lama is situated on a traditional-charismatic continuum, the precise location of which is fluid and context-dependent. In some historical periods, the incumbent Dalai Lama's legitimacy rests more on traditional authority, characterized by an "established belief in the sanctity of immemorial traditions" (Weber 1968: 215, 241-242) and determined by time-honored rules and practices; in other periods, it is more charismatic, relying on "a certain quality of an individual personality" by virtue of which he is considered extraordinary and exceptional (Weber 1968: 215, 241-242). Weber says that even where charisma has been "routinized" and subsumed into traditional or bureaucratic forms of rule, an "extraordinary event"—which would presumably include the circumstances that led to the exile of Tibetans—can activate the dormant "revolutionary force" of charisma (Weber 1968: 245, 1132 & 1134).

Although the Dalai Lama's legitimacy is sourced in a mixture of traditional and charismatic authority, as he devolved his temporal powers to an elected leadership, gradually legitimacy in exile has come to assume more characteristics of legal-rational authority, based on a belief in the right of those elevated to authority under the legality of rules (Weber 1968: 215, 241-242). This turn towards the procedural integrity of political legitimacy is also what marks a shift towards secular democracy in the exile society. I consider secularization in this sense to be 'incipient' because despite the signs of burgeoning democratic participation and the growing importance of modern political processes, the two elected prime ministers to date have continued to invoke traditional-charismatic authority in some form given its tenacious hold on Tibetan society. The current prime minister, for instance, has explicitly claimed to have "both traditional and democratic legitimacy" (Lobsang Sangay 2011a), asserting a historical continuity of moral authority to appeal to the Tibetan populace, while simultaneously using his democratic credentials to provide a counterpoint to China. The 'transition' towards legal-rational legitimacy is thus not complete but the trend is unmistakably towards one of secular democracy.

The first elected prime minister in the Tibetan exile community was Samdhong Rinpoche, a tulku (sprul sku) or reincarnate lama who was enthroned as the reincarnation of the fourth Samdhong Rinpoche at the Geluk monastery of Gaden Dechenling (Samdhong Rinpoche and Roebert 2006: xxi). He won the first-ever direct prime ministerial elections in exile in 2001 with an overwhelming majority of 84.54 percent of the ballot and was re-elected for a second term in 2006 with 90 percent of the vote. In an interview with Nepal-based *Himal* magazine, he commented in 2002 that, “From the feedback from people who voted for me I gather they trust me not to disobey his Holiness. Therefore they have not chosen me as a great democratic leader but have chosen me as a faithful follower of His Holiness” (*Tibetan Bulletin* 2002 Jul-Sept: 22, emphasis added). These words appearing in a magazine that covers news from the South Asian region may be taken as the first elected prime minister’s way of appealing to the Tibetan diaspora in the region—particularly in Nepal where there is a large Tibetan community—in assuring this constituent that they can expect him to act in accordance with the will of the Dalai Lama.

As an avowedly “faithful follower” of the Dalai Lama, and a high lama of the Geluk school of Tibetan Buddhism, Samdhong Rinpoche represents a political leader whose legitimacy rests somewhere between the traditional-charismatic authority embodied by the Dalai Lama and a modern democratic mandate yielded by the election process (see also Kauffman 2011: 149). Samdhong Rinpoche’s leadership thus occupies a space of political liminality, a stage of transition between the old and the new bases of legitimacy. Indeed, he draws on both spheres of moral authority in his speeches as illustrated by the following statement on Tibetan democracy:

The model of Tibetan democracy is fundamentally different from the modern democratic principles. Ours is based on basic principles of equality of all sentient beings on the basis of their potential of unlimited development. Such equality can be established in the day to day living only through cooperation and not through competition. Competition invariably leads to a form of confrontation or struggle. Love and equality cannot be achieved through competition... Realizing the phenomena of human behavior, the Buddha had recommended a democracy free from sense of competition (Samdhong Rinpoche 1996: 50).

These words, which were delivered in English at the Second International Conference of Tibet Support Groups in 1996, unapologetically glide across political and religious

discourses to assert a uniquely Tibetan model of democracy, and are noteworthy because they demonstrate the transition of political legitimacy in process. Further, given the nature of his audience there (Tibet support groups), it was likely that both references to democracy and to Tibetan culture and religion were well-received.

By contrast, Lobsang Sangay, who became the second elected exile prime minister in 2011 at the age of 43, represents the new generation of the Tibetan diaspora. Unlike many other exile leaders of an older generation, he was born and raised in India, and later went to the USA on a Fulbright fellowship to undertake doctoral studies at Harvard Law School. During my field research, those outside political circles (such as university students, nursing home residents, sweater-sellers,<sup>22</sup> and members of a women’s organization) frequently referred to Lobsang Sangay’s youth and vigor as reasons for supporting him in the elections. These references run parallel to a concern for the Dalai Lama’s old age and the exile community’s political future. As one woman explained why she had voted for the Harvard graduate: “We can show that we have a young leader like Lobsang Sangay to the Chinese government and that our struggle still continues.”<sup>23</sup> In this way, Lobsang Sangay came onto the exile political scene as a source of new ideas and energy, but also as a force who would reinvigorate an old struggle.

The prime ministerial elections in 2011 were the elections that attracted by far the most interest among the Tibetan diaspora to date. The elections held a special significance for the exile community in that it occurred in the same year as the Dalai Lama’s devolution of his political powers, a large share of which would flow to the newly elected prime minister. The final round of the polling occurred on 20 March 2011, just days after the Dalai Lama’s announcement of his retirement. In the end, Lobsang Sangay won with 27,051 out of 49,189 votes (55 percent of the ballot) while the other candidates Tethong Tenzin Namgyal (former appointed prime minister prior to the commencement of direct prime-ministerial elections in 2001) received 18,405 votes, and former Minister Tashi Wangdi, 3,173 votes (*Tibetan Review* May 2011a: 6).

The increased political engagement and participation of the exile community in the 2011 elections is also evident from the number of registered<sup>24</sup> and actual voters for the three prime ministerial elections since 2001 (see Table 1).<sup>25</sup> There appears to be a commonly shared view that, had the electoral rules allowed Samdhong Rinpoche to run for a third term, he would have enjoyed an easy victory.<sup>26</sup> However, because of the rule against a prime minister’s

Year	Number of registered voters	Number of actual voters	Actual voters as a percentage of registered voters
2001	67,376	35,184	52%
2006	72,000	32,205	44%
2011	82,000	49,184	60%

Table 1: Registered and Actual Voters at the Prime Ministerial Elections 2001-2011.

incumbency for a third consecutive term and the absence of an inevitable favored candidate for the 2011 elections, there was widespread interest as to who would win the elections.

This interest was fanned by the new campaign style that Lobsang Sangay introduced to the exile community. Sangay, who visited Tibetan diaspora communities in thirty countries and in remote settlements of India, acknowledged that he had approached the elections in a very different way than previous candidates (Lobsang Sangay 2011a). Until then, exile elections featured neither pre-election debate nor campaign visits and had “been dominated by cultural values which promote humility and regard self-promotion negatively” (McConnell 2011a: 4). However, the 2011 elections, which saw 17 rounds of pre-election debates (see pictures<sup>27</sup> below), proved to be very different. As the General Secretary of the Tibetan Youth Congress (TYC) recalls:

I can say that I have been in the struggle for many years, since I was 21 or 22 you know...I’ve seen things over the many years, how the elections have always been done...With the current Kalon Tripa [prime ministerial] elections, Lobsang Sangay, I think because of the way he is and the fact that he has lived abroad and went to Harvard and he has seen how things are done; he really went all out with the whole campaign thing. That was very interesting and a bit of a shocker I guess for many traditional Tibetan people... You know he actually did the campaign trail...[H]e visited settlements from north to south, east to west, and abroad. You name it, where the Tibetan communities were, he went and spoke. He did the whole nine yards really, if not more. And that really made the other candidates also move...We heard that Tenzin Namgyal la [Tethong] told [Lobsang Sangay] that “You’re making me go” because now he should be seen that he is doing the campaign, right?... And people were interested. They wanted to know the preliminary results, they wanted to know who their candidates

were, *it really rocked this community in exile*. It was such a high adrenaline kind of phase, this whole pre-election and the pre-preliminaries (interview with Tenzin Chokey, General Secretary of the TYC Central Executive Committee).<sup>28</sup>

From the account of this civil society leader, the energy and enthusiasm generated by the 2011 prime ministerial elections was novel and palpable, indicating an active engagement from below which suggests that the change in the nature of political legitimacy was not solely an initiative from above. As one of the students in my focus group<sup>29</sup> commented, these elections constituted the “biggest improvement in democracy so far.”<sup>30</sup> It is also significant that the three final prime ministerial candidates were all laymen, which, together with the political retirement of the Dalai Lama, signaled a decisive shift away from politics where monks had dominated the highest positions in the government.

Lobsang Sangay had in fact taken a course on political campaigning at Harvard Kennedy School in preparation for the elections; though he told me that he had attempted to find a middle ground between his Western training and what would be acceptable by Tibetan cultural standards, which place a premium on humility.<sup>31</sup> According to him, he had to take care not to appear “too Americanized” or “too aggressive ... which is not so appreciated in the Tibetan community” and thus resolved to “campaign without campaigning and ask for votes without saying” (Lobsang Sangay 2011a).

Lobsang Sangay has been careful not to disregard the traditional foundations of political legitimacy in Tibetan society. After winning the elections, he stated that although the Dalai Lama devolved his temporal powers, there is “continuation of the same political leadership” (Lobsang Sangay 2011c) and finds support for this claim in the following words of the Dalai Lama on August 8, 2011, the day he was inaugurated as prime minister: “When I was young, an elderly regent Takdrag Rinpoche handed over *sikyong* (political leadership) to me, and today I am handing over



Sikyong to young Lobsang Sangay . . . in doing this I have fulfilled my long-cherished goal” (Lobsang Sangay 2011b). Lobsang Sangay elaborated:

[T]hat is a very important historical statement because since 1642 till August 8th the political authority rested with the institution of the Dalai Lama, both spiritual [and] political. From the Fifth Dalai Lama onwards through the 6th, 7th, and 8th, the transition continued till 8th August. Therefore when he said I am handing over political leadership to young Lobsang Sangay *he was handing over the political authority of the institution of Dalai Lama to the Kalon Tripa [prime minister], it is the continuation of history, the continuation of the same political authority of the 369 years old institution of the Dalai Lama* (Lobsang Sangay 2011c, emphasis added).

Referring to the emblems of traditional authority in Tibetan society, Lobsang Sangay points to the transference of the seal of the seventh Dalai Lama (established in 1751 in Tibet) from the former prime minister to himself and explains this as signifying that “the same political authority established by the 7th Dalai Lama continue[s] with me, the same legitimacy ... continue[s] with me” (Lobsang Sangay 2011c). Lobsang Sangay’s assertion of the continuity of traditional legitimacy is doubtlessly directed at the majority of Tibetans who remain loyal to the Dalai Lama in a bid to channel their political support to him. The English translation of this speech appearing on the website of the CTA suggests that this continuity is also something he wishes the international community to recognize, possibly in an indirect entreaty for continued assistance to the exile community despite the political retirement of the Dalai Lama who had garnered extensive support abroad.

On the other hand, Lobsang Sangay has laid great emphasis on his modern democratic mandate. He has repeatedly burnished his democratic credentials by highlighting that the government of the Tibet Autonomous Region is not elected, and that therefore he enjoys greater political legitimacy even if the prime ministerial elections in exile were not able to fully include the Tibetans inside Tibet (Lobsang Sangay 2011a; 2011b). By drawing attention to his legal-rational and democratic authority, Lobsang Sangay appeals internationally to the ‘free’ world, and simultaneously asserts a critique of, and alternative to, Chinese rule in Tibet.

Thus, the new prime minister claims to have “both traditional and democratic legitimacy” (Lobsang Sangay 2011a) and in so doing, he links his exile leadership to the Tibet-

ans inside Tibet in two ways. First, by asserting traditional legitimacy, he highlights the historical continuity of moral authority that lay with the past governments of the Dalai Lamas inside Tibet. Second, by pointing to his popular mandate (however incomplete), he directs attention to the absence of democratic legitimacy on the part of the communist authorities inside Tibet. With the Dalai Lama, who enjoys undisputed loyalty from the Tibetan people, now removed from the political scene, Lobsang Sangay has been at pains to emphasize his own legitimate standing among the Tibetans at large. For example, he points out that even though the Tibetans inside Tibet were not able to physically participate in the voting process, they demonstrated their solidarity in various ways, such as by sending him white scarves from Tibet or by praying at monasteries, lighting butter-lamps and setting off firecrackers on Election Day (Lobsang Sangay 2011a, 2011b).

Yet despite the invocations of historical continuity, it should be noted that the new prime minister’s popular appeal is premised much more in his democratic legitimacy than in a straightforward transfer of the Dalai Lama’s traditional-charismatic authority—whatever Lobsang Sangay’s claims to that authority may be. The Dalai Lama’s own foregrounding of Lobsang Sangay’s democratic credentials (as a result of the election process) in his statements of endorsement attests to this. In fact, after the Dalai Lama’s congratulatory speech at the prime ministerial inauguration on 8 August 2011 when he used the term ‘*sikyong*’ in relation to the transfer of powers to Lobsang Sangay, the exile parliament unanimously adopted a resolution on 20 September 2012 to change the official title for the prime minister from ‘*kalon tripa*’ (chief of cabinet) to ‘*sikyong*’ (political leader) (Phayul 2012). The change implies an effort to clarify and confine the nature of the authority that was conferred on the new prime minister strictly to the political sphere.

It is also worth recognizing that the new prime minister constitutes a very different object of loyalty and legitimacy to what the Tibetans have been used to. Despite Lobsang Sangay’s allusions to religious principles and symbols in his political speeches, he does not have the religious training nor bearing that his predecessors brought to their roles. Besides being a layperson, as a legal scholar trained in the United States, he has thoroughly imbibed the principles of modern secular political thought and this disposition is plain from his academic work (see for example Lobsang Sangay 2003, 2004, 2010).<sup>32</sup> His coming to power serves to accentuate as well as accelerate the emergent secularization in exile.



## Conclusion

To a large extent, the construction of Tibetan democracy and secularism has been a project imposed from above and in response to an international community of sponsors. Much of it can be traced to the efforts of the present Dalai Lama to democratize and modernize the exile polity and promote inter-sectarian unity. Yet the Dalai Lama's secular ideology has not remained arcane, and my field research revealed its internalization, to varying degrees, by different segments of the Tibetan community. I have argued in this paper that unfolding in tandem with the evolution of a Tibetan secularism is a process of secularization in exile. Tracing the history of the Dalai Lama's democratic reforms reveals that the withdrawal of his temporal powers from the government was gradual but deliberate. From the abolition of the traditional diarchic system to the incremental devolution of his own temporal authority, at every stage, the Tibetan leader displayed judiciousness as he worked to extricate the intertwinement of religion and politics that characterized traditional Tibetan governance to institutionally separate the two spheres.

I have also maintained that secularization in the form of a transfer and transition of political legitimacy has taken place with the devolution of the Dalai Lama's temporal powers to the elected leadership and the changes in the foundations of political legitimacy from traditional-charismatic authority to legal-rational authority and democratic constitutionalism. This transition is by no means complete. Social discourses in exile continue to waver between the new and the old bases of legitimacy or at times draw on both. Nevertheless, the degree of participation in and enthusiasm for the democratic process displayed by the Tibetan diaspora in the 2011 prime-ministerial elections suggests that there is a discernible shift from legitimacy based on the sovereignty of the Dalai Lama as a Bodhisattva-King to one grounded in popular sovereignty.

Democratization and secularization are not only processes to politically develop the exile society but also strategies to enhance the credibility of the Tibetans' national struggle in the eyes of the international community as well as their host country India, often described as the world's largest democracy. By evolving a secularism that looks upon religion positively (and one that is also tolerant of the non-religious), the Tibetan exiles declare that they can be modern and religious, secular and spiritual as they take their national struggle and self-understanding into the twenty-first century

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## Endnotes

1. I conducted fieldwork from 29 June to 29 September 2012 in the state of Himachal Pradesh, India. For the most part, I stayed in Dharamsala because the hill-station serves as an 'exile capital' where most Tibetan civil society and media organizations are based. However, I also spent a fortnight in Bir, a few hours away from Dharamsala, to witness life in a Tibetan settlement. During the course of my research, I conducted 53 semi-structured interviews, 21 informal interviews, 4 focus group discussions and spoke to numerous others in a conversational capacity (what I refer to as 'personal communications').
2. Some work on secularization in this first sense has been done by Brox (2012).
3. The closest to my usage of secularization in this second sense is probably the theory of Weber himself, which argues that societies become 'disenchanted' (that is, move away from their magical 'enchanted' worlds) as they modernize and transition to a system dominated by bureaucracy and legal-rational authority (Weber 1946, 1962, 1968). Yet, although I borrow from Weber the notion of secularization as involving a transition in the nature of legitimate authority, I stop short of claiming that this has brought about 'disenchantment' or a decline in religious authority (see Chaves 1994).
4. These include the right to approve bills passed by the exile parliament, promulgate acts and ordinances, and dissolve the parliament.
5. Semi-structured interview with nun from Dolma Ling Nunnery (anonymous), 27 September 2012.
6. This is a Sanskrit word (lit. 'wheel-turner') that indicates a universal Buddhist sovereign who is sometimes

presented as the temporal counterpart to the Buddha (Ruegg 2003: 366).

7. He elaborates that the “Ganden Phodrang [is] reverting back to its role and responsibility as being the spiritual head as during the time of the second, third and fourth Dalai Lamas” (CTA 2011, 24). Accordingly, the CTA has changed its Tibetan name from *bö zhung gan den po drang chok lé nam gyel* (*Bod gzhung dga’ ldan pho brang phyogs las rnam rgyal* ‘the victorious Ganden Phodrang government’) to *ü bö mé trik dzuk* (*dbus bod me’i sprig ‘dzugs* ‘Tibetan people’s central organization’)—the implication being that, along with his political powers, the Dalai Lama has withdrawn his institution (Ganden Phodrang) from the exile administration.

8. Personal communication from foreign visitor present at the March 10 ceremony in 2011 when the Dalai Lama publicly announced the complete devolution of his political powers, 2 July 2012; also see Bhuchung Sonam 2012: 123.

9. Semi-structured interview with Tashi Dolma, President of Tibetan Women’s Association, 27 July 2012.

10. Semi-structured interview with Pema Chhinjor, Minister for Religion and Culture, 1 August 2012.

11. Semi-structured interview with Pema Chhinjor, Minister for Religion and Culture, 1 August 2012; Semi-structured interview with Nechung oracle, 10 September 2012.

12. Personal communication from employee of Supreme Justice Commission (anonymous), 20 September 2012.

13. This is a document which was designed for implementation upon the exiles’ return to Tibet with the approval of the majority of Tibetans.

14. Semi-structured interview with Pema Chhinjor, Minister for Religion and Culture, 1 August 2012; Informal interview with Jampal Chosang, Election Commissioner, 29 August 2012.

15. Semi-structured phone interview with Samdhong Rinpoche, former exile Prime Minister, 26 January 2013.

16. Note, however, that there is no proven correlation between religious influence upon a government and its lack of corruption.

17. Semi-structured phone interview with Samdhong Rinpoche, former exile Prime Minister, 26 January 2013.

18. Semi-structured phone interview with Samdhong Rinpoche, former exile Prime Minister, 26 January 2013.

19. Semi-structured phone interview with Samdhong Rinpoche, former exile Prime Minister, 26 January 2013.

20. Max Weber famously advanced his taxonomy of the three types of legitimate domination comprising *legal-rational authority* based on a belief in the legality of rules and the “right of those elevated to authority under such rules to issue commands”; *traditional authority*, which rests on an “established belief in the sanctity of immemorial traditions and the legitimacy of those exercising authority under them”; and *charismatic authority*, deriving from “a certain quality of an individual personality by virtue of which he is considered extraordinary and treated as endowed with supernatural, superhuman, or at least specifically exceptional powers or qualities” (Weber 1968: 215, 241-242). Weber maintains that these are ideal types that rarely exist in their pure form, and that in actuality, the three are combined in various ways (Weber 1968: 216).

21. I am not the first to draw on Weber to study the position of the Dalai Lama. Jane Ardley makes a brief mention of the Dalai Lama’s ‘charismatic authority’ and how its routinization through the democratization process has combined charisma with legal-rational domination (Ardley 2002: 86). Further, Lobsang Sangay (2004) has, in his previous life as an academic before he became exile prime minister, referred to Weberian theory in examining the charismatic authority of the institution of the Dalai Lama and its historical incumbents. There are also others who have applied Weber’s taxonomy of the three types of legitimate authority to the previous Dalai Lama incarnations (Smith 1996: 99; Dreyfus 1995; Michael 1982; French 1995). The ready applicability of Weber’s theory is not surprising given that Weber himself discusses the institution of the Dalai Lama numerous times in *Economy and Society* (1968) as an instance of charismatic authority. However, I propose a more extended application of Weber compared to existing works in that, rather than only focusing on the institution of the Dalai Lama, I also employ Weber’s taxonomy in relation to the Dalai Lama’s transfer of authority to the elected leadership and the transition in the very nature of legitimacy that is taking place in exile, which I link to the process of secularization.

22. This is an exile appellation for the large numbers of Tibetans who engage in ‘winter business’ where wholesale ready-made garments are bought from factories (not just sweaters) and retailed along the roadside in different towns and cities (Thilpa Tenzin Sherab 2011: 11).

23. Focus group discussions with three Regional Tibetan Women’s Association (RTWA) members (two sweater sellers and one street vendor), 4 August 2012.

24. To be eligible to vote, the Tibetans must be 18 and over and must hold a ‘Green Book’, which can be obtained only

through payment of the voluntary 'freedom tax' to the CTA (McConnell 2009a: 346-347; McConnell 2011a: 3). Further to vote, the Green Book must be registered prior to the actual voting on Election Day.

25. These figures are compiled from Lobsang (2011a) and figures received from the CTA Election Commissioner (informal interview with Jampal Chosang, Election Commissioner, 29 August 2012).

26. Semi-structured interview with Tenzin Chokey, General Secretary of the Central Executive Committee, Tibetan Youth Congress (TYC), 10 July 2012; semi-structured interview with a sweater seller (anonymous), 27 July 2012.

27. These photos have been reproduced with the kind permission of Chime Youngdung, Director of Tibet Support Office and former president of the National Democratic Party of Tibet (NDPT).

28. Semi-structured interview with Tenzin Chokey, General Secretary of the Central Executive Committee, Tibetan Youth Congress (TYC), 10 July 2012.

29. Focus groups are a type of 'group interview' requiring greater facilitation by the interviewer to manage more than one interviewee. The method is useful for eliciting multiple views and showing how participants in a group interact with one another. This focus group session, conducted on 24 July 2012, involved three Tibetan university students living in India.

30. Focus group discussion with three university students, 24 July 2012.

31. Semi-structured interview with Lobsang Sangay, exile Prime Minister, 29 August 2012.

32. With unwitting historical irony, he wrote in 2003: "[the Dalai Lama] must give way politically to a popularly elected leader and let his office become a purely spiritual one. There is no doubt that he enjoys the mandate of the Tibetan people, but if he is to lead them to full democracy must he not step aside and let a secular system flourish?" (Lobsang Sangay 2003: 126). Lobsang Sangay's own political stance is evidently one that advocates for secular leadership.

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