

Cultural Fluctuations of Tibetan Culture in Dharamsala and Their Reception among the Tibetan Exilic Youth

Paulina KONIUCH

Abstract: Dharamsala is probably the most known settlement of Tibetans in exile. It is based in India and is a popular tourist destination, so it is subject to various foreign influences. This paper aims to provide an ethnographic account of selected cases encountered during field studies and their reception among young Tibetans. Some new examples of multiculturalism, global and contemporary Indian influence and commodification of the Tibetan community and their culture will be provided, as well as accounts of interviewees on those phenomena.

Keywords: Tibetan diaspora, the commodification of culture, Dharamsala, field studies, Tibetan refugees

Paulina KONIUCH, Faculty of Oriental Studies, University of Warsaw, Poland;
p.koniuch@uw.edu.pl;  0000-0003-2818-0907



This article is distributed under a Creative Commons Attribution 4.0 licence (<https://creativecommons.org/licenses/by/4.0/>).

1. Aim and methods

The main aim of this article is to provide an account of the current cultural changes in the Tibetan diasporic community, based on field studies I conducted in Dharamsala.¹ The focus of my current research is perceptions of Tibetan identity among contemporary visual artists in exile. However, during my visits in 2022 and 2023 I was struck by the widespread influence of contemporary Indian and Western culture on the Tibetan minority residing there (BLOCH 2018: 39; TIBET JUSTICE CENTER 2016: 30), which is known to try to preserve Tibetan traditions and is considered quite conservative. This sparked my interest and as a result, I chose to present and examine it in the following paper based on selected cases I encountered. Although the problem of commodification and atrophy of Tibetan culture in Dharamsala has already been the subject of many studies, this paper focuses more on modern pan-Indian influence emerging both from tourism and social media. Additionally, I argue that many of the changes are not viewed as negative by the younger generations of Tibetans².

First, I give some background about Dharamsala and its history in order to familiarise the reader with the status of Tibetans in India, the idea behind the settlements and the practices of the administrative system. This is essential in understanding some of the mechanisms that led to the commodification and modernisation of some, but not other, aspects of Tibetan culture. The main part of this study, which is an account of the changes observed by previous researchers and myself, is divided into two parts: the contemporary Indian³ and more generally foreign influence. The paper concludes with a short section, which also serves as an invitation for further discussion on this subject.

As a Tibetologist, I believe in the importance of a postcolonial perspective and reflexivity in studies regarding cultures and minorities other than my own, therefore I have based my analysis mostly on accounts from Tibetans I directly interviewed and Tibetan or Indian-based written sources. I also cite various articles from researchers in Tibetan studies, who often conducted field studies themselves. Any other statements are disclosed with full awareness of my occidental background and treated with a dose of self-reflexivity.

¹ Dharamsala is a large city with many suburbs, but in popular discourse, it functions usually in lieu of the “Upper Dharamsala”, which includes most places populated by Tibetans, such as McLeod Ganj, Dharamkot and Bhagsunag. My research was conducted mostly in McLeod Ganj, Dharamkot and the administrative district, so my use of the name Dharamsala stands for those places in particular.

² In this context the younger generation means mostly children and grandchildren of the first wave of Tibetan refugees, born in the late 1980s and 1990s.

³ The term “Indian influence” used throughout the article refers to the contemporary, pan-Indian popular culture, including clothing, films, music etc. The autochthonous Gaddi tribe will be mentioned by name whenever relevant.

The interviews used for this study were conducted during my stay in India from 18 April to 12 May 2022 and 14 July until 23 September 2023, in Dharamsala and Delhi. The interviewee group comprised around 40 people, mostly men, in various age groups, the majority of them under 35 years old. The interviews were conducted mostly in English, with some Tibetan additions. They were people of various professions, varying from coffee shop owners to researchers.

Online meetings and chats with Tibetans from the United States were conducted in 2021 and 2022.

2. Theoretical framework

The “traditional culture of Tibet” is today carefully preserved by various associations and institutions funded by the Government-in-Exile or external benefactors. We have to remember, however, that Tibet was a country of many cultures, unified in the 7th century and that to this day has strong differences in terms of dialect, written and oral literature, clothing and livelihoods. While governments have tried to create a heterogenous community, the culture of U-Tsang, the most westly of the three main regions and home to Lhasa, Shigatse⁴ and Mount Kailash⁵, is definitely dominant (MCGRANAHAN 2005: 573), as it is also the most recognisable among tourists.

Despite changes arising from the commodification processes or just new geographic contexts, traditional crafts, performances, art-making and religious rituals have survived largely intact until today. However, in contemporary culture and its modern iterations, young artists, filmmakers, musicians and writers have strived to get funding for work that does not concern protection of the traditional, Buddhist, “old-Tibet” way of life. Any indications of revisions in “Tibetanness” tend to be seen as a threat or offence by officials and older generations (LAU 2009: 84–85).⁶ As exilic Tibetans tend to perceive their

⁴ Tib. *gzhis ka rtse*, the second largest city of Tibet, home to the Tashilhunpo monastery (Tib. *bkra shis lhun po*), the monastic seat of the Panchen Lama (Tib. *pan chen bla ma*), the second most important reincarnation of the Gelug school of Tibetan Buddhism after the Dalai Lama.

⁵ Tib. *gangs rin po che*, literally “the precious jewel of snow” is a religious site for many faiths, Tibetan Buddhism included, and the goal of many pilgrimages.

⁶ As an illustration for this claim, I want to introduce a short story, passed on to me by JC, or Jigme Choedak, one of the artists I had the opportunity to talk with during my study. He was painting a new mural for the organisation Secular Ethics (secularethic.org) on a wall near the entrance to the main temple and leading down the road to the Kora, or a circumambulation way around the building complex. The polychrome presented the 14th Dalai lama surrounded by children, but drawn in a cartoonish style, and with some text, in both English and Tibetan. While finishing the work, he was scolded by an older Tibetan lady in traditional clothing, who disclosed that the spiritual leader of Tibet should not be portrayed in such a way, which was in her opinion lacking respect. He noted that such behaviour happens more often, but on the other hand, that he also meets people who commend him for creating any kind of

countrymen in China as disenabled to contribute to preservation of their original culture, they see themselves as those for whom the burden of preserving an unchanged version of old Tibet is placed, and this in turn as crucial to avoiding cultural extinction (LAU 2009: 84). Meanwhile, officials propagate a non-historical, newly created, “Tibetan refugee” heightened identity (MCGRANAHAN 2005: 573), while condemning any traces of regional distinctiveness. Many of my young interlocutors voiced their aspirations to leave India and transfer to the West, as they do not see any future in creating any form of contemporary culture in this conservative society.

The agency of these young creators in the fashioning of a new Tibetan exilic culture is something that should be more widely discussed, but tends to be obscured behind the numerous studies on the commodification and fetishisation of “traditional” culture, dissatisfaction with the current economy leading to further displacement as well as cosmopolitanism and transcultural translation in the diaspora. With my contribution, I wish to invite both Tibetan and other researchers to further examine and discuss this phenomenon.

3. Dharamsala

Historically Dharamsala, previously known as Talu, was populated by Gaddi shepherds. The place underwent a series of changes, later becoming a hill station of the British colonies (hence the current name – McLeod, after a Punjab Governor) and later destroyed in an earthquake in 1905. Only in 1960 did its history as a Tibetan settlement begin. McLeod Ganj (literally “the McLeod neighbourhood”) and other suburbs in the higher parts of the city, such as Bhagsu, Dharamkot and Naddi, originally Gaddi villages, became flooded with Tibetan refugees seeking a new place to live. The climate was much closer to that of the Tibetan Plateau than the South Indian hot and moist environment which had been initially granted to Tibetans. The erasure of the Gaddi autochthonic culture by the rise of Tibetan ethno-commodification is at the core of the themes examined here. This has already been researched in-depth by Stephen CHRISTOPHER 2020. In this paper the aim is to present the topic from the point of view of young Tibetans, and this issue is not really well-known among those circles, while any notions of “Indian influence” mentioned henceforward should be understood as a pan-Indian, modern and slightly globalised blend of everyday impactful encounters with tourists and social media.

Tibetan-oriented art, even when modern and humorous. As of July 2023, the painting has been completely covered by a depiction of a child with some added text. According to some of my interlocutors from artistic circles, this mural generated a lot of negative comments and has quickly been replaced due to various protests from passers-by.

Dharamsala is commonly known as the “capital-in-exile” of the Tibetans, with the Central Tibetan Administration (CTA)⁷ and Dalai Lama’s residence. Sometimes it is called “Little Lhasa” (DIEHL 2002: 45) or “Little Lhasa of India” (BLOCH 2018: 37) and is often called *Dhasa* by the locals,⁸ from the names Dharamsala and Lhasa⁹ combined. Therefore, it comes as no surprise that it is the centre of the traditional culture of old, pre-cultural revolution Tibet. In the streets, one can see women wearing chupas¹⁰ and striped aprons¹¹, nuns and monks in red robes, and old men returning from the Kora with a prayer wheel in their hands. The Tibet Autonomous Region is facing intense modernisation, with the influence of Chinese and global culture. As of the focus is on keeping traditions alive in the diaspora, national identity is a prominent subject in local media and events discourse. March 10 marks Tibetan Uprising Day, a commemoration of the 1959 uprising in Lhasa,¹² considered a national holiday, and sees protests and peaceful marches yearly.

What seems like a success for CTA policy of conserving traditional culture is in reality mostly the result of financial unease and the need to perform a certain imagined “refugeehood” expected by foreign sponsors and tourists (PROST 2006: 237–238, 240–241). Whether it is completely staged or is perceived as an “updated” notion of exilic Tibetanness can be disputed, but the changes are undoubtedly visible.

Dharamsala became a Tibet-centric tourist destination as early as the 1970s; however, the awarding of the Nobel Peace Prize to the Dalai Lama in 1989 set in motion the real boom among Westerners. Indian tourists discovered it as an interesting travel spot in 2011, with the erection of a cricket stadium (BLOCH 2018: 40), the most loved sport in India.¹³ The rise of the city as a popular travel spot led to an increase in small businesses catering to tourists, such as restaurants with Italian or Indian (often Punjabi) cuisine, plenty of souvenir shops and individual sellers, antique shops, meditation centres combined with

⁷ Commonly known as the Tibetan Government-in-Exile, the main political organisation for Tibetans in the diaspora; see <https://tibet.net/>.

⁸ Some of my responders were using this term.

⁹ The capital of historic Tibet.

¹⁰ Tib. *phyu pa*, a traditional Tibetan robe, made from sheepskin, wool, silk or cotton.

¹¹ Tib. *pang gdan* or pangden, a woollen apron, the designs are always variations of colourful stripes. Pangdens are worn by married and adult women. For further reading, see <https://tibet.net/photo-story-pangden-rainbow-at-tibetan-womens-waist-on-this-lhakar/>.

¹² One of the key events in the forming of the Tibetan diaspora in India, as the uprising was followed by the Dalai Lama’s escape from Tibet. For further reading, see BAYER and DZIAK 2015: 615–625; SHAKYA 2000: 185–211.

¹³ See: <https://www.timesofsports.com/cricket/most-popular-sport-in-india/>; <https://www.thecitizen.in/index.php/en/NewsDetail/index/12/17789/Why-Cricket-is-so-Popular-in-India-and-the-Famous-Indian-Cricketers-->; <https://www.bcci.tv/about>.

massage parlours and so on. There is also a constant demand for hippie culture-inspired clothing and accessories,¹⁴ “healing” crystals with chakra symbols, singing bowls and tie-dyed wall hangings with images of the Hindu elephant-headed god Ganesha or the Buddha Shakyamuni.

While the mix of traditional Tibetan and contemporary foreign cultures is easily identifiable, another phenomenon has appeared collaterally – the creation of a mystified, western-derived imaginary depiction of Tibet as Shangri-La – an isolated mythical utopia inhabited by meditating monks and happy nomads with their yaks amidst golden temples sprinkled throughout green pastures. This “Tibetan hyperrealism” (KLIEMER 1997: 65–67)¹⁵ is paradoxically mostly created by Tibetans themselves, which led to and at the same time was caused by the need to commodify Tibetan tradition.

4. The status of Tibetans in India

The last demographic survey from 2009 shows that the number of Tibetans in India was just below 95,000. These numbers have certainly changed, as mentioned by the Chief Planning Officer of CTA Kunchok Tsundue in an article for *Tibet Sun* (WANGYAL 2019). Although no numbers were actually presented, Tsundue notes that the decrease in the total, especially among young Tibetans in India, is worrying. The results of this survey seem not to have been published. The same opinions were expressed by the majority of Tibetans I had the chance to speak with about this issue. According to three men¹⁶ I had the opportunity to interview, the number of Tibetans in India as of May 2022 was around 70,000, so 25,000 less than in the 2009 Demographic Survey of Tibetans in Exile, provided by the Planning Commission of Central Tibetan Administration in 2010.¹⁷ They estimated that around 4,000 Tibetans live in McLeod Ganj, which changes with time, as members of the youngest generation leave India and move to the West, especially the United States and Canada. Among the reasons for this exodus, as posited by my respondents, were the lack of opportunities for professional development and the low level of education provided by the government. On the other hand, we have the absence of new immigrants and refugees from Tibet itself, as after 2008 the borders were closed and the administration of the

¹⁴ The first wave of hippies and people interested in (loosely understood) Tibetan Buddhism started in the 1970s, with the increased popularity of the New Age movement, which appropriated some elements of Tibetan culture, e.g. *The Tibetan Book of the Dead*, reinterpreted by Timothy Leary in *The Psychedelic Experience*.

¹⁵ For further reading, see DODIN and RÄTHER 1996; LOPEZ 1998.

¹⁶ I will not be providing the names of my interlocutors for their privacy, however, they were all people of different professions and backgrounds, as mentioned in the previous chapter.

¹⁷ Numbers based on information provided by: <https://tibet.net/about-cta/tibet-in-exile/>; <https://www.phayul.com/2010/12/04/28666/>.

Tibet Autonomous Region by the Chinese authorities became ever stricter and more oppressive.¹⁸

India does not use the same legal regulations regarding refugees as countries from the West, which mostly base their systems on the 1951 *Geneva Convention to the Status of Refugees* and the 1967 *Refugee Convention and Protocol* (BENTZ 2012: 82). The Indian principles are derived from a variety of global sources, such as the 1948 *Universal Declaration of Human Rights* or the 1966 *International Covenant on Economic, Social and Cultural Rights*, but also the *Bangkok Principles on the Status and Treatment of Refugees* compiled by the Asian-African Legal Consultative Organization in 2001, which seems more fitting for administering the refugee situation in this part of the world (for further reading see BENTZ 2012). This being said, India does not differentiate refugees from foreigners. Non-Indian citizens cannot obtain government jobs, vote or buy property. Sometimes their status makes it difficult to be admitted to universities or travel abroad (PUROHIT 2019, SEETHARAMAN 2020: 96–97).

Although Tibetans are not recognised as “refugees” but rather “foreigners” by the Indian authorities, they are subject to specific legislation. The *Order Regulation Entry of Tibetan Nationals into India* was created in 1950 as an immediate reaction to the invasion of Tibet by the People’s Liberation Army. It was not until 1959, when the biggest influx of Tibetans arrived in India, that the Indian Government had to rethink its registration system. Until 2003, when India recognised Tibet as being an integral part of the People’s Republic of China, PRC), Tibetans would receive a “Long Term Stay” status (BENTZ 2012: 84–85). The document that should be issued to all Tibetans who wish to stay in India is a “registration certificate”, which serves as a basic identity card and has to be regularly renewed. Some Tibetans can also apply for an “identity certificate”, which is in certain countries recognised as an equivalent of a passport.¹⁹ A “registration certificate” grants some fundamental rights, such as:

right to elementary education, right to lease land for 20 years through the Central Tibetan Relief Committee, right to obtain benefits such as bank loans and driving licenses (but only with the possession of a valid RC), right to promote and preserve Tibetan culture, right to reside in classified Tibetan settlements, right to travel in certain areas, and right to work in certain forms of employment (SEETHARAMAN 2020: 96).

¹⁸ For further reading about the changes after the 2008 public protests in Tibet, see <https://savetibet.org/olympics2022/>.

¹⁹ <https://www.passportindia.gov.in/AppOnlineProject/online/identityCertificate>.

Since 2017 some Tibetans born in India can apply for Indian citizenship and a passport,²⁰ though this has been disputed by the Tibetan community, as some were wary of it undermining Tibetan identity.²¹

5. “Tibetan islands” in India

Tibetan settlements are widespread in India, with the first of them situated mostly in the south, with the vast plains apt for agriculture. The idea when establishing such isolated “Tibetan islands” was to create miniature “Tibets” which would include people from Kham (Tib. *kham*s), Amdo (Tib. *a mdo*) and U-Tsang (Tib. *dbus gtsang*), the three main regions of historical Tibet, belonging to different social classes and all of the leading four lineages of Tibetan Buddhism (BENTZ 2012: 94). This was believed to be the way to preserve “indigenous” culture in an unaffected state.²² As of today, we know that the development of the existing 44 settlements²³ did not flourish in such a way.²⁴

The institutional structure in the Tibetan settlements was encouraged by Indian officials, such as the former prime minister Jawaharlal Nehru, who welcomed the Dalai Lama in 1959. This was to be created and administered directly by the Tibetan Government in Exile (BENTZ 2012: 95–96; BLOCH 2017: 79).

The Tibetan Children’s Villages (popularly known as TCV, <https://tcv.org.in/>) are Tibetan children’s main sources of schooling. They are day or boarding schools which provide lessons on the Tibetan language, culture and history alongside ones on science or arts. Such an emphasis on Tibet-oriented education serves the purpose of igniting a sense of nationalism among children, with the hope that they would carry on the preservation of a disappearing culture. During my stay, I met a few school outings in different places, such as the Library of

²⁰ For further reading see: SEETHARAMAN 2020; LOBSANG WANGYAL VS UNION OF INDIA 2016; <https://www.refworld.org/docid/592d68954.html>; <https://timesofindia.indiatimes.com/india/tibetan-refugees-to-get-indian-passports/articleshow/58231841.cms>.

²¹ For more in depth reading about the foreigner status and documentation of Tibetans in India in general, see: TIBET JUSTICE CENTER 2016.

²² For a comprehensive report on the development of Tibetan settlements in India see: THE TIBET MUSEUM 2008.

²³ According to the CTA there are: “15 agriculture-based settlements, 13 Handicraft based settlements and 16 cluster and scattered communities in India” (<https://tibet.net/department/home/>).

²⁴ On the official website of the CTA we read that: “We envision sustainable, democratic, communities in exile, engaged in dynamic, modern economies and practising organic, natural farming, in which we can live respecting our common cultural and religious heritage while unifying in preparation for an ultimate return to democratic Tibet”; and one of the objectives reads: “To create self-sufficient and vibrant communities so as to preserve and practice our distinctive culture ethos and values”. We can see that those statements are more general than before. <https://tibet.net/department/home/>.

Tibetan Works and Archives²⁵ and the newly opened Tibet Museum made by and for Tibetans.²⁶ The permanent exhibition called “I am Tibetan and this is my story”, or ང་བོད་པ་ཡིན་འདི་ངའི་ལོ་རྒྱུས་ཡིན་²⁷, instructs visitors on the history, religions and culture of Tibet and Tibetans through written, oral and material sources and first-hand accounts recorded in audio and video format and available on display. I also encountered an old people’s home along the Kora²⁸ as well as many medical centres, specialising both in traditional²⁹ and conventional medicine.

Such autonomy allowed the Tibetan refugees to form enclosed communities, with minimal interactions with their autochthonic Indian neighbours (BLOCH 2017: 78–79). However, the rise of Dharamsala as a popular tourist destination in India, especially among Punjabis, introduced new waves of pan-Indian influence on the Tibetan and Gaddi communities. Since the erection of the cricket stadium in lower Dharamsala in 2005, the influx of domestic tourists rose drastically, and some suburbs like Bhagsu, Dharamkot or McLeod Ganj are flooded by Indian tourists on the weekends. Westerners, often people involved in Buddhism or other forms of spiritual activities, are now a minority among the yearly visitors. Tibetan-owned businesses develop, often putting Indians in the place of the employees. This phenomenon was the cause of some unrest in 1994.³⁰ A general rise in wealth among Tibetans is becoming more and more visible, while local Indian families tend to become more impoverished (see BLOCH 2021).

Nowadays the settlement system is largely criticised by Tibetan scholars such as Ngawang Dorjee and Bhuchung Tsering (see citations in BENTZ 2012: 102–103), who perceive it as a nationalist relic of the past, no longer attractive for young Tibetans, and not providing enough resources for a stable livelihood (BLOCH 2017: 78–79; PROST 2006: 238–239). This leads to a further expansion of the Tibetan diaspora, which will not however be discussed in this article.³¹

²⁵ The most important library of Tibetan and Tibet-oriented books outside of China and the Tibetan Autonomous Region. See <https://tibetanlibrary.org/>.

²⁶ Quote from the Tibet Museum website: <https://tibetmuseum.org/>.

²⁷ *nga bod pa yin 'di nga'i lo rgyus yin*.

²⁸ Tib. *skor ra*, a circumambulation way around an important religious place or object, such as a monastery, reliquary or statue. In McLeod Ganj the biggest Kora leads around the main temple complex.

²⁹ In Dharamsala we can visit the famous Men-Tsee-Khang or Tibetan Medical & Astro. Institute of HH the Dalai Lama (Tib. *bod kyi sman rtsis khang*); see <https://tibetanhealth.org/autonomous-bodies/>; <https://mentseekhang.org/>.

³⁰ K. Dhondup, “Dharamsala Revisited: Shangrila or Sarajevo?”, *Tibetan Review* 29(7) (1994), cited in BENTZ 2012: 97. See also BLOCH 2018: 44–45.

³¹ For further reading on this topic, see: DOLMA 2019; PUROHIT 2019.

The settlements are secluded as a strategy to separate and therefore better preserve traditional culture; however, some individual interactions will always occur. Be it through education in Indian universities or temporary jobs, Tibetans will and often want to integrate more with the local communities (BENTZ 2012: 98–100; LAU 2010: 2–3). The sense of belonging and gratitude towards the government and the people of India is a strong sentiment among Tibetan refugees (BENTZ 2012: 100–101; BLOCH 2018: 45), which is surprising if we consider the rate of refusal of Indian Citizenship among Tibetans (MCGRAHAN 2016). My respondents, when asked about their documents, all carried their “registration certificates”, which they consider a kind of badge of Tibetanness. Some of them had the possibility to apply for an Indian passport, but it is usually viewed as a renunciation of the belief that Tibet might become a sovereign country again, and generally frowned upon. Even the CTA is issuing its own alternative, The Green Book, which they deem “[...] the passport of the exiled Tibetans to claim their rights from the CTA. Also in future, it will become a base for claiming Tibetan citizenship.”³²

6. A commodified, modernised version of Tibetan culture

The general commodification of Tibetan culture is a huge process to be noted in the diaspora. Despite the efforts to continue the heritage of Tibetan arts and crafts in their traditional form, some modifications have to be made to make them more accessible to tourists, who are often the only source of income. Laura Graham describes this as “existential recognition” from outsiders, needed for the “cultural continuity” of certain peoples.³³ One such difference can be seen in the production of the Tibetan opera, *Ache Lhamo* (Tib. *a ce lha mo*) with the significantly shortened times of performances and contemporary elements added to the script (WOJAHN 2016: 540–543). While visiting a small weaving studio next to the Tibetan Handicrafts Centre on the bifurcation of Jogiwara Road and the main Temple Road in McLeod Ganj, I encountered another interesting example, which was a modernised design of carpets, where next to the traditional form of a tiger pelt or a composition of ornaments and Buddhist symbols, I found a picturesque vista of a Tibetan plain with grazing yaks and mountains in the background. In the stalls along the main road leading to the Tsuglagkhang Temple³⁴, one can find some Buddhist ritual objects such as dorjes³⁵

³² <https://tibet.net/support-tibet/pay-green-book/>.

³³ Laura Graham, “Image and Instrumentality in a Xavante Politics of Existential Recognition: The Public Outreach Work of Eténhiritipa Pimentel Barbosa”, *American Ethnologist* 32, no. 4 (2005), cited in COMAROFF and COMAROFF 2009: 25.

³⁴ Tib. *gtsug lag khang*, the main Buddhist Temple in McLeod Ganj. It is situated next to the residence of the 14th Dalai Lama.

³⁵ Tib. *rdo rje*, Skt. *vajra*, a small ritual instrument in the shape of a short, two-pronged sceptre, symbolising the indestructible nature of an enlightened mind.

or *dril-bus*³⁶, traditional Tibetan jewellery with turquoise, coral and amber encased in silver, as well as beautifully crafted figures of buddhas and various gods, but also keyrings with miniature dorjes, cheaply made bracelets with visible Indian influence, tacky magnets and T-shirts with the famous phrase “My (insert here any member of your family) went to Dharamshala³⁷ and all I got was this lousy T-shirt”.

Among cultural institutions established especially to preserve Tibetan traditions, the most recognisable ones are certainly the Tibetan Institute of Performing Arts (<https://tipa.asia/>) and the Norbulingka Institute (<https://norbulingka.org/>). Named after the summer palace of the Dalai Lamas, it is a whole complex of buildings with spaces dedicated to continuing the creation of old crafts from the Tibetan Plateau. Visitors can inspect studios and observe the process of whittling wooden ornaments, weaving fabrics, forming body parts for metal sculptures of buddhas and other enlightened beings or painting *thangkas*³⁸. All the techniques are derived from textual sources and taught orally from master to student.³⁹ The objects made by the artisans are then sold in the shop situated in the middle of the complex. The boutique itself is an interesting place to visit, as it serves as a kind of gallery of the finished products we had just witnessed the making of. In the back, a separate set of rooms form an exhibition of beautiful *thangkas*, created using various techniques, as well as a traditional tiger-hide carpet and some ornate cabinets, sheltering bronze sculptures. The precedent area showcases smaller items, such as lamps, boxes, pillowcases or wooden ornaments, but also a lot of modern designs, created by the local artist Sonam Yeshe.⁴⁰ We find pencil cases, tote bags, scarves and makeup pouches with the depiction of women in traditional jewellery and headpieces, *Dzi* beads⁴¹ or nomads. There is also a whole collection of items intended for children, such as plush yak bags, cute caps or small tents.

One might find it surprising that a place so focused on conserving the traditional arts and crafts of Tibet included such modern designs in its commercial output,

³⁶ Tib. *dril bu*, Skt. *ghaṇṭā*, a bell with a handle consisting of the half of a dorje, a symbol of emptiness, which is an important concept in Buddhism. Commonly used with the dorje during prayers and rituals.

³⁷ Dharamshala is the pronunciation and English transcription used most commonly in India, however, Dharamsala is preferred by Tibetans, hence this version was chosen for the paper.

³⁸ A *thangka* (Tib. *thang ka*) is the most popular form of picture in Tibet – a scroll painted with mineral paints or created with the appliqué technique where pieces of fabric are sewn or glued onto a canvas to form a certain composition.

³⁹ Information from a respondent from Norbulingka.

⁴⁰ Although this seems to not be mentioned on the Norbulingka website, this fact is commonly known among local artists and is mentioned on Sonam Yeshe's website; see <https://www.sonamyeshi.art/>.

⁴¹ Tib. *gzi*, a large stone bead, used as a protective amulet, usually black and white.

but this is mostly a means of survival. It is a sort of essentialising and branding cultural visual cues, which can be found among various ethnic and national minorities (COMAROFF 2009: 18–21). With the rise of cheaply made, widely available printed thangkas, PRC-made t-shirts, magnets, keyrings and other souvenirs, the demand for high-quality, handmade items dropped drastically. Nowadays most of the traditional paintings, sculptures and furniture produced in Norbulingka are commissioned by monasteries, buildings of the administration or rich individuals, both Tibetans and foreigners. Most local inhabitants cannot afford products from this category of shops. The Tibetans I interviewed about this issue said that they struggle economically with acquiring any pieces of art or ritual objects from shops and choose to get them from craftsmen or via family and friends, whose relatives might work in the production of such items. Sometimes they choose cheaper alternatives, that do not represent such a high quality of production, but serve the same purpose and give a similar sense of affirmation of nurturing one's customs.

The majority of young Tibetans I interviewed do not find those modifications of “traditional” objects and performances as bad or endangering. My interlocutors, mostly artists, while inspired by the old, find enjoyment in the new, modernised diasporic Tibet. They consider it a logical evolution of culture, which occurs naturally, especially with the impact of globalism. Sonam Yeshi is highly esteemed and her items are also sold in a small shop on Bhagsu Road called Sharlho, which sells clothing, pieces of art, accessories and toys by Tibetan designers.⁴² All of the items we can find there show a strong influence of Tibetan and local (e.g. Gaddi) visual culture but recontextualised in a modern form, which, despite their high prices, is quite popular among locals. The Comaroffs point out how the commodification of ethnicity surfaces from its crucial role in the need for affirmation of identity, hence with the modernisation of Tibetan cultures comes the demand for an adapted cultural outcome (COMAROFF and COMAROFF 2009: 20).

7. Tibet and India at the crossroads of cultures

The influence of Indian culture on the Tibetan minority in McLeod Ganj was inevitable, as it is not only a very popular tourist destination but also the home of different groups of Indians. Some of them are the autochthonous Gaddis, but also others (usually rich newcomers), who decided to recently settle there, due to the overall tranquillity compared to the bigger cities in India and the closeness to nature.⁴³ One can also observe a seasonal migration co-dependant on the tourist season by people from very different backgrounds, be it political,

⁴² <https://sharlho.com/>; <https://www.facebook.com/Sharlho/>.

⁴³ Those were the motives indicated by my interlocutor, who was the owner of a residence I was living in during my stay in April and May 2022.

ethnic, religious or related to caste (BLOCH 2018: 37). They come there in search of work; e.g. most of the taxi drivers and textile sellers I met during my stay were ethnically not Tibetan, but, according to Natalia BLOCH, sequentially Gaddi and Kashmiri (BLOCH 2018: 40–41); and the owner of a small thangka-painting shop near the upper end of McLeod and Amdo village, one of the suburban areas, was from Nepal. Nepali people selling paintings, carpets and other handicraft objects derived from Tibetan culture but not conceived in line with the strict rules concerning Buddhist art are often subject to criticism from Tibetan creators, whose works are becoming less marketable (BLOCH 2018: 44).

Some aspects of Indian influence come from India's geographical placement and climate. Traditional Tibetan architecture works well in a cold and dry environment – the wood, clay and straw used to construct walls and ceilings are widely available and cheap building materials, ideal for the massive, block-style houses and temples built in Tibet. India has a completely different climate, which leads to the materials having to be replaced by more durable ones – concrete, brick and metal. That allowed for a more vertical spread on a relatively small surface. The placement of the buildings depends greatly on the surrounding terrain and infrastructure, therefore new houses were generally built along the main roads, very close together, and also had to be adjusted to the slope of the mountains. This caused the town of McLeod to have an unusually irregular structure of tightly connected, rather narrow buildings, something uncommon in traditional Tibetan architecture. One of the causes of this phenomenon was overpopulation in India, something that never existed on the vast plains of the Tibetan Plateau. Although McLeod is a small town, it is packed with people, animals and cars, swarming the narrow streets. However, what was lost in the shape of the houses was made up for in the furnishing and decorating. When given the opportunity, people would add ornaments to wooden beams, doors and columns, cover the entrances with fabrics depicting Buddhist symbols, hang thangkas and construct small altars with effigies of enlightened beings and some small offerings, like khatags⁴⁴, tormas⁴⁵, banknotes, fresh fruit and sweet drinks. An exception can be seen in the architecture of the official dwellings on the Central Tibetan Administration grounds, where buildings of various ministries, administrative offices and the Library of Tibetan Works and Archives are situated. The strong inspiration from the Tibetan style is clearly

⁴⁴ Tib. *kha btags*, a ceremonial scarf, traditionally made out of silk, now mostly polyester, used as the most common offering. Mostly in white or yellow, it is widely available due to its very low cost (usually around 150 rupees – less than 2 euros). It can be given to a person as a sign of respect, laid on an altar in front of a sacred effigy or put around a picture of an important figure, most often the 14th Dalai Lama.

⁴⁵ Tib. *gtor ma*, a traditional offering, usually formed out of butter and flour, in a variety of shapes. The temperatures in India would cause the butter to melt, therefore in Dharamsala tormas are oftentimes made with an addition of wax, to help preserve the shape. The most common ones I encountered were colourful flowery ornaments.

visible in the shapes and ornamentation of the constructions, with only small changes, usually some kind of modernisation.

A very visible foreign influence is the food culture, as among Tibetan restaurants or food stalls there are plenty of Indian *dhabas* (restaurants with Punjabi cuisine) and shops selling *samosas* (deep-fried pastries with vegetables, usually potato-based filling), bread *pakor*s (piece of toast, filled with mashed potatoes, then battered and deep-fried) and *aloo paranthas* (flatbread with potato filling). Even in restaurants that sell traditional Tibetan food, the menu often combines it with Indian or Italian dishes. From my observation, these kinds of places are rather targeted towards tourists, as the Tibetans I met prefer smaller, Tibetan-owned cafes and eating spots, serving traditional food. Some of them may seem empty, but a common practice among locals is calling the owner of a Tibetan-owned restaurant and ordering the food to be delivered by one of the workers. Such services are not usually provided to tourists or outsiders, but are widespread among local Tibetans.

While wandering around Dharamsala it is hard not to notice the plethora of wild animals roaming around. Near every dumpster, we are bound to find a few monkeys or a cow rummaging through the scraps, and stray dogs sleeping on every doorstep. While Tibet is no stranger to homeless dogs, the sheer number of them in India is overwhelming. While in other cities they are often starving and considered a nuisance, the ones in Dhasa are usually quite well fed and we can find pots with leftover rice and vegetables near spots where the dogs reside. They become quickly accustomed to new people and even befriend them, especially if given treats and petted, which is not the case in Delhi.⁴⁶ Cows stopping the traffic in the incredibly narrow streets or peeking through windows are not unusual views either. There are two main types of monkeys – smaller, golden ones during the warm months, and bigger, black and white ones in the colder parts of the year. While the first ones are viewed mostly as a problem, due to their stealing and aggressive tendencies, the second type are for the most part admired for their beauty and considered a nice addition to the local landscape. Many restaurants and cafes have terraces on the back or roof of the building, where while drinking my masala chai or eating a meal I could quite often observe monkeys jumping around and feeding their younglings, something most Tibetans are also accustomed to as something natural, which is nonetheless not to be seen in the cities of Tibet.

Despite Dharamsala being considered a more conservative place, Tibetans, especially younger ones, do enjoy various aspects of Indian culture. According to Timm Lau, who conducted field research among refugees, they actually prefer local music and movies, follow Indian and global clothing trends, admire

⁴⁶ Both from my and my interviewees' experience.

the beauty of Indian women and enjoy Indian food (LAU 2010: 3, 11–13). Some of those occurrences might be caused by a distinct lack of their modern Tibetan equivalents, such as films, which are still not produced in great numbers, especially in comparison with the colossus which is Bollywood. One of Lau's respondents praises Indian movies as a trigger for applying better hygiene in the Tibetan settlements; on the other hand, he criticises them for spreading fashionable clothing, which is replacing traditional Tibetan garments (LAU 2010: 11–13).

In my experience, global pop culture is now becoming more popular, especially among young Tibetans, who watch American film series on Netflix, like to eat Domino's Pizza and dress in Adidas and Nike clothing. This change probably happened in the last few years with the rise of the popularity of social media and smartphones. The majority of my Tibetan friends and acquaintances had expensive phones with a pair of branded earbuds or wireless speakers, many had Apple iPads or new laptops. As Tibetans themselves explained, this is a reflection of their refugee status and displacement sentiment. During a series of interviews I asked a simple question: "Do you consider yourself a refugee?". The answers were univocally affirmative, even from people having been born and raised in India.

"Wherever we go we try to make it feel like home, but you know it's not your home."

"Even if I was born in India, I don't feel like India is my nation."

"Proud to say I'm a refugee. It's not my fault, they made me. I'm not ashamed."⁴⁷

The feeling of lacking a home is something that directly affects the way of life – movable objects become a way of creating a familiar environment, therefore smaller, everyday things are what Tibetans invest their resources in. The buildings in India not only do not resemble traditional homes from their homeland but can also be affected by moisture, insect infestations or even landslides, which makes them much more expendable goods than we might suspect. Interior design is therefore kept to a minimum and uses easily movable objects – paintings and prints, home textiles, fridge magnets or small figures. The ultimate goal for most Tibetans is to eventually return to Tibet, however – as the political prospects do not seem particularly preferable – other targets are Europe and North America, which seem to promise an easier life than Indian exile. This leads to a generally more minimalist lifestyle among refugees, who decide then to spend their money on modern electronics or high-quality clothing and accessories. Social media is an important part of everyday life in the

⁴⁷ Quotes from a series of interviews conducted in McLeod Ganj in August and September 2023. The respondents were mainly men, aged between 18 and 30.

diaspora, as not only does it provide recreation and snippets of a different world, but also serves as a platform of communication between Tibetans scattered all around the world. Instagram and WhatsApp are the most popular ways of broadcasting one's life events and creative output and prove very efficient in ensuring interaction with others.

During my research, I was surprised to find that Tibetans are more accepting of a modern shift in their culture and consider it a more natural flow of life than is widely assumed. Most research about ethno-commodification in Dharamsala has been conducted by Westerners and Indians, which might have led to a certain degree of involuntary exaggeration that this phenomenon is primarily negative. While discussing those issues with local Tibetans, their point of view seems to differ – they not only welcome it as a way of prolonging their traditions but see it as an organic phenomenon and gladly contribute to its development, be it by creating music, arts, handicrafts and clothing or reimagining their cuisine.

As mentioned before, many aspects of everyday life still maintain a visible inspiration from Tibetan and Buddhist culture, such as the ubiquitous auspicious symbols designs on all kinds of textiles, from clothing and bags to door covers and wall hangings, the use of instruments such as the *dramyin* in contemporary music, or all kinds of *tsampa* products sold in stores and coffee shops. Tibet was a particularly secluded country, which resulted in a quite stable and unchanging culture, which means any evolution in it to become increasingly visible. We should still look at it from afar and compare it to our own reality – in opposition to most European nations Tibetans still cultivate many aspects of traditions and older beliefs and incorporate historical visual features into their modern output.

8. Some concluding remarks

As my research is centred around artistic circles, the group of people I befriended and spent my time in India with is naturally more inclined to a more creative and imaginative perception of the world around them. Nevertheless, I had the opportunity to meet and interview people from various backgrounds, holding different professions and levels of education, and therefore I believe I got a varied sample of opinions, which I strived to include in various points of this paper. The majority of interviews were not recorded, therefore my interlocutors' opinions were paraphrased, but some citations were included as well.

While I was talking with young Tibetans for my research, one point was continually brought up – whenever they create something it is always perceived through the lens of Tibetanness. They mentioned that no matter what the visual outcome, whether it be political, Tibet-oriented or completely not, it is always perceived as a product of a diasporic person.

I think sometimes, whenever we do art, it becomes a political thing. Among Tibetans, I mean. Because we are already people who are suppressed by other countries, like China. So, whenever we do something, people think, that “Ah, it’s like a political thing [...] this art is trying to say some things about politics.”⁴⁸

A statement made by not only Tibetans in India but also some of the US-based ones I had the opportunity to talk with via online channels of communication, is that being of Tibetan descent in the contemporary art world makes it hard to be recognised outside of someone’s nationality or ethnicity. The juxtaposition of Western and Tibetan visual elements in artists’ works is a result of their upbringing and entourage and does not always serve the purpose of advocating one’s identity or making a political declaration. Many artists use depictions of traditional clothing, jewellery, masks or ritual instruments because they are an object present in their everyday life or they just find it visually pleasing, which is e.g. very often the case with tattoos.

Anne Phillips acknowledges this phenomenon in her work *Multiculturalism without Culture*, stating that:

In developing this argument, I query what I see as one of the biggest problems with culture: the tendency to represent individuals from minority or non-Western groups as driven by their culture and compelled by cultural dictates to behave in particular ways. Culture is now widely employed in a discourse that denies human agency, defining individuals through their culture, and treating culture as the explanation for virtually everything they say or do.⁴⁹ (PHILLIPS 2007: 8–9)

While the preservation of small, individual minorities by the Indian government by providing them with religious and administrative latitudes might be essential to the survival of Tibetan tradition and customs, it does not provide much room for changes and modernisation. That is often the case in societies on the verge of disappearance, fixating on the survival of an old culture, while not leaving any space for revisions, for fear of losing what is already in decline. Although such rhetoric can be expected from the Tibetan Government-in-Exile or older generations, young people seem to fall victim to such beliefs, which tend to be generalised, especially in public and academic output. I hope I have managed here to showcase the reality of the transformation of Tibetan culture in Dharamsala and its, often surprisingly, positive reception among the younger generations, not only in an economic sense but also as a progressive worldview. With this statement, I would like to invite future researchers to engage more

⁴⁸ Quote by Tashi Nyima, said during an ethnographic interview I conducted on 2 May 2022 in Dharamkot, near McLeod Ganj.

⁴⁹ Underscore added by the author of the article to emphasise the main message of this citation.

with the Tibetan youth in their research which might prove revisionary in our (European) perception of marginalised communities.

Acknowledgements

I would like to express my sincere thanks to all the people who made this paper possible. To the reviewers for their valuable comments, to the editors for their infinite patience, and to all my Tibetan friends for their active engagement in my research.

Abbreviations

CTA	Central Tibetan Administration
PRC	People's Republic of China
Skt.	Sanskrit
Tib.	Tibetan

References

- BAYER, Jerzy and Waldemar J. DZIAK 2015. *Tybet. Szkice z dziejów chińsko-tybetańskich*. Warszawa: Instytut Studiów Politycznych Polskiej Akademii Nauk.
- BENTZ, Anne-Sophie 2012. "Being a Tibetan Refugee in India". *Refugee Survey Quarterly* 31(1): 80–107. <https://doi.org/10.1093/rsq/hdr016>
- BLOCH, Natalia 2017. "Beyond Integration. Tibetan Diaspora's Separation Strategy in Multicultural India". [In:] Posern-Zieliński, Aleksander, ed., *The World of Encounters. The Role of Migration and Ethnicity in the Contemporary World*. Poznań: Instytut im. Oskara Kolberga, pp. 75–96.
- BLOCH, Natalia 2018. "Making a Community Embedded in Mobility. Refugees, Migrants, and Tourists in Dharamshala (India)". *Transfers* 8(3): 36–54. <https://doi.org/10.3167/TRANS.2018.080304>
- BLOCH, Natalia 2021. "Refugees as Donors: 'Rich' Tibetan Refugees, Evicted Indian Slum Dwellers and a Smart City". *Journal of Refugee Studies* 34(2): 1840–1858. <https://doi.org/10.1093/jrs/fez106>
- CHRISTOPHER, Stephen 2020. "Divergent Refugee and Tribal Cosmopolitanism in Dharamshala". *Copenhagen Journal of Asian Studies* 38(1): 33–56. <https://doi.org/10.22439/cjas.v38i1.6058>
- COMAROFF, John L. and Jean COMAROFF 2009. *Ethnicity, Inc.* Chicago, London: University of Chicago Press. <https://doi.org/10.7208/chicago/9780226114736.001.0001>

- DIEHL, Keila 2002. *Echoes from Dharamsala. Music in the Life of a Tibetan Refugee Community*. Berkeley, Los Angeles, London: University of California Press. <https://doi.org/10.1525/california/9780520230439.001.0001>
- DODIN, Thierry and Heinz RÄTHER, eds 1996. *Imagining Tibet. Perceptions, Projections, and Fantasies*. Somerville: Wisdom Publications.
- DOLMA, Tenzin 2019. "Why are Tibetans Migrating Out of India?". *The Tibet Journal* 44(1): 27–52.
- KLIEGER, Christian P. 1997. "Shangri-La and Hyperreality: A Collision in Tibetan Refugee Expression". [In:] Korom, Frank J., ed., *Tibetan Culture in the Diaspora: Papers Presented at a Panel of the 7th Seminar of the International Association for Tibetan Studies*. Wien: Verlag der Österreichischen Akademie der Wissenschaften, pp. 59–68.
- LAU, Timm 2009. "Tibetan Fears and Indian Foes: Fears of Cultural Extinction and Antagonism as Discursive Strategy". *vis-à-vis: Explorations in Anthropology* 9(1): 81–90.
- LAU, Timm 2010. "The Hindi Film's Romance and Tibetan Notions of Harmony: Emotional Attachments and Personal Identity in the Tibetan Diaspora in India". *Journal of Ethnic and Migration Studies* 36(6): 967–987. <https://doi.org/10.1080/13691831003643389>
- LOBSANG WANGYAL VS UNION OF INDIA 2016. W.P.(C) 3539/2016 (High Court of Delhi, India), September 22, 2016; accessible online at: <https://indiankanoon.org/doc/90529177/> (accessed 15 December 2022).
- LOPEZ, Donald S., Jr. 1998. *Prisoners of Shangri-La. Tibetan Buddhism and the West*. Chicago, London: University of Chicago Press. <https://doi.org/10.7208/chicago/9780226190488.001.0001>
- MCGRANAHAN, Carole 2005. "Truth, Fear, and Lies: Exile Politics and Arrested Histories of the Tibetan Resistance". *Cultural Anthropology* 20(4): 570–600. <https://doi.org/10.1525/can.2005.20.4.570>
- MCGRANAHAN, Carole 2016. "Refusal and the Gift of Citizenship". *Cultural Anthropology* 31(3): 334–341. <https://journal.culanth.org/index.php/ca/article/view/ca31.3.03/371> (accessed 15 December 2022). <https://doi.org/10.14506/ca31.3.03>
- PHILLIPS, Anne 2007. *Multiculturalism without Culture*. Princeton, Oxford: Princeton University Press.
- PROST, Audrey 2006. "The Problem with 'Rich Refugees' Sponsorship, Capital, and the Informal Economy of Tibetan Refugees". *Modern Asian Studies* 40(1): 233–253. <https://doi.org/10.1017/S0026749X06001983>

- PUROHIT, Kunal 2019. “After 60 years in India, why are Tibetans leaving?”. <https://www.aljazeera.com/features/2019/3/21/after-60-years-in-india-why-are-tibetans-leaving> (accessed 24 September 2022).
- SEETHARAMAN, Abhinav 2020. “Tibetan Refugees in India: The Challenges of Applying for Indian Citizenship”. *Revue d’Etudes Tibétaines* 54: 95–113.
- SHAKYA, Tsering 2000. *The Dragon in the Land of Snows: A History of Modern Tibet Since 1947*. New York: Penguin Compass.
- THE TIBET MUSEUM 2008. *Tibet’s Journey in Exile*. New Delhi: The Tibet Museum.
- TIBET JUSTICE CENTER 2016. *Tibet’s Stateless Nationals III. The Status of Tibetan Refugees in India*. Oakland: Tibet Justice Center. <https://www.tibetjustice.org/?p=882> (accessed 15 December 2022).
- WANGYAL, Lobsang 2019. “Demographic survey shows exile Tibetan exodus to West”. <https://www.tibetsun.com/news/2019/12/18/demographic-survey-shows-exile-tibetan-exodus-to-west> (accessed 7 September 2022).
- WOJAHN, Daniel 2016. “Preservation and Continuity: The Ache Lhamo Tradition Inside and Outside the Tibet Autonomous Region”. *Revue d’Etudes Tibétaines* 37: 534–550.

About the Demographic Survey of 2009

- <https://tibet.net/about-cta/tibet-in-exile/> (accessed 8 September 2022).
- <https://www.phayul.com/2010/12/04/28666/> (accessed 8 September 2022).

About the issuing of Indian passports to Tibetans

- LOBSANG WANGYAL VS UNION OF INDIA 2016.
- <https://timesofindia.indiatimes.com/india/tibetan-refugees-to-get-indian-passports/articleshow/58231841.cms> (accessed 24 September 2022).
- <https://www.passportindia.gov.in/AppOnlineProject/online/identityCertificate> (accessed 24 September 2022).
- <https://www.refworld.org/docid/592d68954.html> (accessed 24 September 2022).

Websites of administrative units and official organizations

- <https://mentseekhang.org/> (accessed 8 January 2023).
- <https://norbulingka.org/> (accessed 21 September 2022).
- <https://tcv.org.in/> (accessed 28 September 2022).
- <https://tibet.net/> (accessed 22 September 2022).

<https://tibetanlibrary.org/> (accessed 22 September 2022).

<https://tibetmuseum.org/> (accessed 28 September 2022).

<https://tipa.asia/> (accessed 21 September 2022).

Other online resources

<https://savetibet.org/olympics2022/> (accessed 8 September 2022).

<https://sharlho.com/> (accessed 8 January 2023).

<https://tibet.net/department/home/> (accessed 4 January 2023).

<https://tibet.net/photo-story-pangden-rainbow-at-tibetan-womens-waist-on-this-lhakar/> (accessed 28 September 2022).

<https://tibet.net/support-tibet/pay-green-book/> (accessed 19 November 2023).

<https://tibetanhealth.org/autonomous-bodies/> (accessed 8 January 2023).

<https://www.bcci.tv/about> (accessed 8 September 2023).

<https://www.facebook.com/Sharlho/> (accessed 8 January 2023).

<https://www.sonamyeshi.art/> (accessed 27 September 2022).

<https://www.thecitizen.in/index.php/en/NewsDetail/index/12/17789/Why-Cricket-is-so-Popular-in-India-and-the-Famous-Indian-Cricketers--> (accessed 8 September 2023).

<https://www.timesofsports.com/cricket/most-popular-sport-in-india/> (accessed 8 September 2023).



Fig. 1. Dogs in front of a lecture hall in the CTA complex, 2022. © Paulina Koniuch.



Fig. 2. Street stalls with various “hippie” objects in McLeodGanj, 2022. © Paulina Koniuch.



Fig. 3. A shop selling Tibetan and African masks in McLeod Ganj, 2022. © Paulina Koniuch.



Fig. 4. Handmade items for sale in a coffee shop, such as keyrings representing monks, 2023. © Paulina Koniuch.



Fig. 5. A Rimpoche/Buddhist teacher enjoying contemporary Tibetan art at an exhibition, 2023. © Paulina Koniuch.