

RESEARCH ARTICLE

Competing visions: schooling the nation and the “revolt” at the Ockenden Tibetan school

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Abstract

This article examines the incident of a “revolt” in the Ockenden Tibetan refugee school in the early 1960s. By analyzing this previously unknown incident of “revolt” in the Tibetan refugee school within the broader historical context of early years in exile, this article aims to underline the contested and contingent process of nation-building in exile. I argue that the Ockenden incident, as forgotten fragments of the Tibetan past, provides us a rare glimpse into the early history of contestation over the production of national history and discourse on Tibet, where exiled Bonpos, a non-Buddhist minority, attempted to renegotiate their marginality by producing alternative history and discourse on Tibet. By focusing on the history of the Ockenden incident as a forgotten fragment from the exile Tibetan past, this article aims to decenter the teleology of Tibetan nationalism by bringing to light one of the unrealized alternative future agendas different groups of exiled Tibetans had in those early moments of discursive formation.

Key words: Alternative nationalism; Bon; exile Tibet; nation-building; Ockenden school

Introduction

In early 1960, two monks, Sangye Tenzin Jongdong and Samten Karmay traveled across India and Nepal in search of rare and lost religious texts to republish (gyung drung 2020, pp. 215–16).¹ Like many other exiled Tibetans, the two men and their families, in the wake of Mao’s “liberation” of Tibet, had left their hometown in eastern Tibet, traveling over a 1,000 miles to eventually escape into India in 1959. Their task was not unique. Many exiled Tibetans in those early years worked to preserve religious texts, scriptures, and teachings that had been transported piecemeal in their flight from the political ravages of the Chinese colonization. Sangye and Karmay’s undertaking, however, was different from these efforts. As members of the Bon religious community,² a non-Buddhist minority in Tibet, their works and beliefs historically fell outside the purview of the exiled Tibetan leadership’s order of concerns.

By a fortuitous coincidence, Sangye met David Snellgrove, a British scholar of Tibet, in the north-western Nepalese town of Dolpo. Snellgrove convinced Sangye to return with him to London to study at the School of Oriental and African Studies (SOAS) (Snellgrove 2000). At the end of his 3-year stay

¹I want to thank Dr. David Atwill for his time, patience, and invaluable guidance throughout the process of writing and publication of this paper. Numerous others have also read and commented on the previous drafts of this paper; I cannot name them all here. However, I want to express my sincere gratitude to them as well.

²Bon is widely believed to be a native Tibetan religion that preceded the introduction of Buddhism in Tibet from India in the 7th CE. Historically, according to Per Kvaerne, Bonpos, followers of Bon, constituted roughly 5% of the Tibetan population (Per Kvaerne, pers. comm., May 22, 2021). They were found all over Tibet, mostly in Khunglung in Ngari, Hor Sogu, Gyelrong, and Sharkhog in Dokham.

in London, in 1965, Sangye decided to return to India to teach at a newly established Ockenden Tibetan refugee school in Mussoorie, northern India. His choice was not purely coincidental. The school's principal, Malcolm Dexter, was a former student of David Snellgrove and Sangye's friend.

The Ockenden Tibetan refugee school, in the words of its founders, was established to create "a western-type school with strong Tibetan bias." Intended to cater to boys of admirable academic disposition, the school served as an institution whose graduates might go on to pursue higher studies in Indian and foreign institutions and eventually become leaders of the Tibetan community in exile (OI 1965a). A year into its establishment, the school quickly garnered positive responses from the Tibetan leadership in Dharamshala, including from the Dalai Lama himself (OI 1965b). At the behest of the Government of India (GOI), the following year, the school moved to Dharwar, a small college town in southern India. The move was not without incident. Within a month of arriving in Dharwar, events suddenly took a dramatic turn, resulting in what the school authorities described as a "revolt" or "mutiny" in the school. A total of thirty-three boys, along with the two Tibetan staff,³ left the school. Of the eight boys who remained behind, six were Bonpos, and two were Tibetan Buddhists unable to return to their families.

On April 30, 1966, before leaving the school, the boys wrote to Joyce Pearce, founder of the Ockenden Venture, notifying her for the first time about the trouble at the school (OI 1966a). The letter, undersigned by twenty-five boys, included a long litany of complaints: poor school facilities, overburdened with work, not enough time for study, and corporal punishment. Prominent among them was their accusation of a pro-Bonpo bias: a partiality for Bonpo boys, the propagation of Bon religion, and the plan to convert the school into "a great centre for Bonpos." Such actions, they argued, denoted an undisguised attempt to create a rift between the Ockenden school and the Tibetan leadership. The letter concluded that the "future of the school" depended upon removing both Dexter and Sangye. They expressed their hope that Ockenden would continue to aid the Tibetans since the boys did all this for "their country, people, and religion."

When T.N. Takla, the Dalai Lama's representative in Delhi, received word about the incident in early May 1966, he immediately wrote to Pearce expressing concern over the boys' expulsion from the school (OI 1966a). He acknowledged there might have been many points of disagreement; however, he argued that the boys' feelings were deeply hurt by things they were taught about Tibet and their religion at the school. Takla expressed his hope that an explanation from the teachers would be forthcoming so that an impartial consensus on what had happened at the school could emerge. Around the same time, the private office of the Dalai Lama in Dharamshala received a letter signed by Dexter, Sangye, and other staff at Ockenden school explaining their side of the story (OI 1966b). The letter accused Choden⁴ and Liushar, the two Tibetan staff appointed by the Tibetan government-in-exile, of instigating the "revolt."

The investigation by the Council of Tibetan Education (Tib: *shes rig las khungs*) of the Tibetan government-in-exile was swift, and the conclusion was unequivocal. Their report, published on May 25th, 1966, began by acknowledging that there was "much tension and vehemence on both sides" and the boys had behaved "unruly towards their school authorities" (OI 1966c). However, it continued, contrary to what Pearce had suggested in her letter, it was more than simply a matter of "resentment and discontentment at facing a new and difficult situation [in Dharwar]." Both Liushar and Choden were absolved of any misconduct. "Despite their generally conservative outlook," the report added, "they have proved over the years their unstained loyalty" to the Dalai Lama and the cause of Tibetan people (OI 1966c). The report noted many trivialities or "half-truths" in the allegations but believed the evidence conclusively demonstrated that "an almost calculated attempt was made to sow dissension amongst the Tibetans" and to "alienate the boys from their national and

³They were Gyaltzen Choden and Kelsang Liushar.

⁴Gyaltzen Choden, one of the Tibetan staff at the Ockenden school, was a former monk official (Tib: *rtse drung*) in the Dalai Lama's government in Lhasa. Immediately after coming into exile, he was employed by Thondup, along with a few others, to establish the Freedom press (chos ldan 2016, pp. 365–70).

cultural identity” after the school moved from Mussoorie to Dharwar. Therefore, for the school to continue, the report concluded, it should be run under the direct administration of the Tibetan government-in-exile or jointly with the Tibetan School Society (TSS) established by the GOI.

After initial efforts to paper over the differences, the Ockenden home office in London somewhat belatedly realized the severity of the situation and immediately decided to send Peter Woodard as their representative to India. Unaware of the content of the Council of Tibetan Education investigation report, Woodard was given explicit instructions to secure the Dalai Lama’s backing for the school, allowing Dexter and Sangye to continue in their positions, and reject any allegations of propagating the Bon religion and subverting Tibetan national unity (Woodard 1966, pp. 45–46). Upon his arrival in India, Woodard first went south to meet with the staff and remaining boys at the school. His initial impression was that “this whole business [of revolt] has been built up by a tissue of lies and Tibetan intrigue” (OI 1966d). According to him, not only were the initial troubles a deliberate attempt to take over the school, but the main instigator was the Dalai Lama’s elder brother, Gyalo Thondup, whom Woodard characterized as “the cause of a great deal of the trouble[s]” (Woodard 1966, pp. 45–46).

Nevertheless, Woodard wrote to Pearce, saying he would hold his final judgment until after meeting with the Dalai Lama. From Dharwar, Woodard traveled north to Mussoorie to meet Taring Rinchen Dolma. From the verbatim report of the conversation, Taring appeared to be sympathetic to both Sangye and Dexter, at one point saying, “we were always so sincere to each other that I am particularly sorry for Sangye and Dexter” (Woodard 1966, pp. 49–51). In the end, she maintained, her personal opinion mattered little given that the incident “has gone so deep” with the Dalai Lama himself expressing his desire to have both the heads of the school replaced. After speaking with Taring, Woodard also spoke with the two former Tibetan staff and the boys. They remained adamant and stood by the allegations they had initially raised in their letter to Pearce.

The next day, Woodard left for Dharamshala, where he met the Dalai Lama. In relating the events, Woodward maintained that both sides shared blame (Woodard 1966, pp. 56–67). The boys, he said, acted violently instead of simply reporting the matter to the school authority or the Dalai Lama himself. Dexter and Sangye, “to put it mildly,” said Woodward, “were tactless” and made certain jokes that the boys misunderstood. Regardless, he continued, “there was not the slightest trace of evidence of attempts to propagate the Bon religion” and “no reason to believe in the boys’ statements [on this matter]” since the boys, some as young as 10 years old, were in no position to differentiate between Buddhism and Bon.

According to Woodward, the entire incident appeared to be a clear case of internal political maneuvering by Gyalo Thondup, who had attempted to establish his own senior Cambridge-level school, a proposal rejected by the GOI on the ground that the Ockenden school already met the demand to educate Tibetan refugees for senior Cambridge level. Woodward concluded there were only two alternatives: the school would continue exactly as before, or it should be closed entirely. The Dalai Lama responded by thanking Woodard for his frankness and assured him that he did not take his findings personally. However, he explained that his stance remained unchanged from the views expressed in the Council of Tibetan Education’s report. The negotiation floundered. Woodard’s direct allegations against Thondup sent shock waves through Ockenden officials in London. Despite her own suspicions of Thondup’s involvement,⁵ Pearce was nevertheless unwilling to pursue the matter, fully realizing the risks of such a stance. A risk that could very well imperil the very real financial support for Ockenden projects in India and around the world. Therefore, soon after, Woodard was asked by the Ockenden headquarters to return to London.

⁵Many at Ockenden believed, and there is a larger currency to this idea among the dissident groups in exile, that the Dalai Lama was often kept uninformed about many of the political developments, especially the political activities of his elder brother (Thondup), whom they accused of exploiting the Dalai Lama’s name to his own political end. Thondup partly confirms these suspicions in his autobiography, where he maintains that he had made a strict distinction between government and intelligence officials of the Tibetan government-in-exile and never spoke to the Dalai Lama and Tibetan officials about his secretive work (Thurston & Thondup 2016, pp. 212–13).

On the 2nd of June 1966, *Tibetan Freedom* (Tib: *bod mi'i rang dbang*), the first exiled Tibetan-run Tibetan language newspaper, published a series of letters from the boys and the two former Tibetan staff from Ockenden school denouncing Sangye and Dexter. In one of these letters, Choden accused Sangye and Dexter of propagating the Bon religion, subverting the unity of the Tibetan people, and undermining the sacred tie between Tibetan people and their leader, the Dalai Lama (bod mi'i rang dbang 1966). The self-representations in these letters were unequivocal. The “revolt,” they claimed, was a “patriotic” response of the boys and the staff against the malevolent forces trying to undermine the national struggle and unity of the Tibetan people.

Around this time, Ockenden's headquarter also received the verdict of the Council of Tibetan Education. Outwardly they rejected the boys' core accusations, yet, from their internal correspondence, we know that Ockenden continued their attempt to remain in dialog with the Tibetan leadership regarding a possible compromise (OI 1966e, 1966f, 1966g). Seeking to mitigate the pro-Bonpo claims, Ockenden officials discussed the possibility of appointing either Phala,⁶ a confidant of the Dalai Lama, or a new Tibetan teacher from the Gelug school of Tibetan Buddhism. Pearce even proposed discontinuing teaching Tibetan history until such time an officially sanctioned version was approved by the Dalai Lama (OI 1966e). Despite Ockenden's conciliatory concessions, the exiled Tibetan leadership continued to insist that Sangye and Dexter be removed from the school. A demand Ockenden remained unwilling to accept, resulting in a negotiation deadlock. The school was finally and officially closed.

Why is the story of Ockenden important?

My first encounter with the story of the Ockenden incident, in its barest form, occurred in the summer of 2017 during a research trip to the Tibetan Bonpo settlement in Dolanji, northern India. Sangye, after 2 years of the incident, in 1968, was selected through the traditional Bon system of the lot (Tib: *rtags sgril*) the thirty-third Menri Trizin, the titular head of the Bon religious community, and assumed the religious name of Lungtok Tenpai Nyima. The six Bonpo boys from the Ockenden school were popularly known among the first generation of exiled Bonpos as “*Bon trug druk*” (six bonpo children). As a result, the story of the Ockenden incident, in its broader outline, is intimately familiar to the older generations of exiled Bonpo community. It informed their sense of history, identity, and belonging in exile. Outside this community, this story is virtually unknown.

A brief reference we find to the Ockenden incident in Gyaltzen Choden's memoir, a former staff at the Ockenden school, the whole incident is characterized as students revolting against the unrestrained harsh corporal punishment by the school authorities, specifically by Dexter (chos ldan 2016, p. 366). According to this account, the Ockenden incident was an uncomplicated case of students revolting against the harsh discipline of the school. Yet, the exiled Bonpos today remembers the incident differently. Some of the first generations of Bonpos, whom I interviewed, narrate the incident as one of the early instances of the marginalization of Bonpos from the exile Tibetan (Buddhist) national order. The archive of the incident partly confirms this Bonpo's version of the story. They point us to the deep entanglement of the Ockenden story with the broader political processes of nation-building in exile. Since as we will see in the following text, at the heart of the Ockenden incident and what followed afterward was the desire of the exiled Tibetan leadership to control the production and dissemination of the “right” historical knowledge to – as it is popularly referred to among exiled Tibetans – the “future seeds” of the nation. Like in many colonized societies in the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries, with the historical emergence of the ideology of nationalism and popular sovereignty among Tibetans, especially in the post-exile years, history was enlisted by the Tibetan leadership to serve the emergent idea of the nation (see Banerjee 2014; Chatterjee 2005; Duara 1996; Winichakul 2014). This history was “the History” of the Tibetan nation that has its beginning in antiquity, and

⁶Our source doesn't give us the full name of Phala but suggests he was a confidant of the Dalai Lama. This is most likely Phala (treasurer) Dorjee Wangdu, who, in the early 1960s, served under the Council of Tibetan Education in exile as a teacher to the Kalimpong school and nursery in Dharamshala.

as history's sovereign subject, travels through time, often unconscious of its self-sameness but gradually overcoming the challenges of history to eventually realize its moral and political destiny of being a nation in the present.

Yet, the practice of writing national history has never been singular. In the early moments of discursive formation, the ideological terrain of history writing was deeply contested by different groups within the nation. Only through the historical process of contestation, co-option, and marginalization of alternative histories and nationalist visions a particular strand of nationalist thought became dominant. This nationalist thought retrospectively produced its own history, the official biography of the nation that projected the historical emergence of national consciousness as not only inevitable but morally and politically necessary. As a part of the exiled Tibetan leadership's new governmental strategies, this emergent practice of writing national history simultaneously imposed historical amnesia on exiled Tibetans about the contested and contingent history of the nation formation. The uncomfortable episodes from the past, especially stories from the early two decades in exile⁷ that do not fit into the standard meta-narrative of unity and harmonious nation-building process in exile, were excluded from the official inventory of nationalist historiography. Such hegemonic construction of linear evolutionary history and suppression of contested memories gave the contemporary dominant nationalist thought among exiled Tibetans an aura of naturalness imagined to be without history.

The scholarships on exile Tibet have, by and large, reflected this historical erasure. With a few exceptions (Dhomba 2021; Frechette 2002; McGranahan 2010; Norbu 2016; Tethong 2000), the history of the early two decades of Tibetans in exile is largely ignored. This period was a crucial formative year in the nation-building process when the official version of the history and discourse on Tibet was being standardized. Instead, the history of exile Tibet is predominantly narrated through a series of what are best characterized as "paradigmatic memorialized events" (e.g., the March 1959 Uprising, 1960 Oath of Allegiance, 1963 declaration of the future constitution of Tibet, 1970 founding of Tibetan Youth Congress, 1991 adoption of Tibetan charter by the Tibetan Parliament-in-Exile, etc.). The historical narrative that emerges from these paradigmatic memorialized events broadly aligns with the nationalist meta-historical narrative of the gradual evolution of Tibetan national consciousness in exile, where the voices of dissension, although briefly underlined, are nevertheless internal to the nation (see Avedon 1994; Bernstorff and Hubertus 2003; bod mi mang spyi 'thus lhan tshogs 2014; Brox 2016; Kharat 2003; Roemer 2008; Su'u cu hor 2009). Yet despite this gap in our knowledge of the early exile Tibetan history, the hegemonic status of the above paradigmatic memorialized events marks the "in-between phases" of our past as analytically blank. A past that is unknown yet remains firmly entrenched as unassailable truths in the depiction of Tibet's past. A past that may contain "extra" details, but its overall narrative structure is intimately familiar. The Ockenden story disrupts this hegemonic nationalist narrative in significant and fundamental ways. As a fragmentary and forgotten episode from the exile Tibetan past, Ockenden's story speaks of differential histories and worldviews. It shows us that the contemporary hegemonic discourse of "unity" among exiled Tibetans was not only a product of recent history but was historically one of the many visions of organizing the nation that became dominant after co-opting and subjugating alternative histories and future visions. In other words, in those early years of exile, the future of exiled Tibetans, as "realized" in the present, was by no means clear. Instead, as we will see in the following text, there existed among historically varied constituted groups, such as exiled Bonpos, a desire for a different future.

Schooling the nation in exile

Historically, the introduction of nation-wide schooling was part of a political project of the modern nation-state to construct right, and responsibility-bearing national citizens from the previous, at least the expectation of the ruling authority was passive subjects of the state (see Judge 1996;

⁷McGranahan has identified this period as arrested on two grounds, one detrimental to the exile cause of freedom in Tibet; and the second for fear of repercussive personal injury in either a legal or physical sense (McGranahan 2010).

Marshall 1995; Vickers and Kumar 2015; Weber 1976). This shift in the orientation of the modern state and its political elites toward their subject was part of the larger cultural and political shift that was introduced first in Europe with the emergence of new modern discourse of nationalism and national sovereignty and later in the colonies through imperial globalization of this nationalist paradigm (see Anderson 2006; Chatterjee [1986] 1993). At these state-run national schools, modernizing nationalist elites performed what appeared to them as their preordained historical pedagogical role vis-à-vis illiterate majority members of the nation, that is, teaching the masses to think and speak of themselves as an indivisible part of the “nation” (Duara 1996; Harrison 2000; Merkel-Hess 2016).

Among the first acts the Dalai Lama spearheaded after seeking asylum in 1959 was requesting provisions from the GOI for Tibetan schools (Lama 2008). Unlike in Tibet, these schools were open to all children of exiled Tibetans.⁸ In fact, the Tibetan leadership, through their network of officials across India, actively encouraged exiled Tibetans, at the behest of the Dalai Lama, to send their children to these schools for their and the nation’s future. Since the emergent nationalist paradigm required the making of former state subjects into national citizens, these schools were seen by the exiled Tibetan leadership as fundamental to producing a new generation of exile Tibetan youth with a radically different worldview from their parent’s generation. A worldview shaped and defined by the emergent ideas of the nation. With Nehru’s assent, in 1961, the TSS was created to oversee and assist in establishing schools for Tibetan refugees. In all matters of formulation of the education policy, curriculum, administration of the schools, training, and appointment of Tibetan teachers, the Dalai Lama-led government-in-exile was closely involved as the sole recognized representative of the Tibetans in exile (Narayan 1965; rgyal mtshan 2000). Therefore, in the absence of one’s own state apparatuses, Tibetan leadership in exile, through close coordination with the GOI, had considerable control over one of the primary ideological institutions in the modern world. By 1965 exiled Tibetan government had under its jurisdiction, direct and indirect, seven residential schools, eight-day schools, and many smaller transit schools with approximately 6,000 students in total (Narayan 1965).

Perhaps the most significant in this endeavor was the introduction of history into the school curriculum. In Tibet, except in the modern schools introduced by the Republic of China in the eastern Tibetan regions, history as a separate and specialized scientific field of study of the past was absent in both the state- and privately run schools. After coming into exile, perhaps primarily in response to modern Chinese historicist discourse on Tibet, Tibet’s past became a popular site of contestation, debate, and reflection among the exiled nationalist elites. Within this nationalist paradigm, the past became the new legitimate foundation for the future claim to national sovereignty. Therefore, immediately after coming into exile, as early in December 1959, the Tibetan government-in-exile had setup a textbook committee tasked to write, among others, a history curriculum that was to be taught in the exile Tibetan schools (Bureau 1969; rgyal mtshan 2000, pp. 395–96). Reflecting the new nationalist paradigm of the Tibetan government-in-exile, the textbook committee consisted of members from different schools of Tibetan Buddhism but none from the Bon religion.⁹ Consequently, the “official history” that was produced in these textbooks presented the Tibetan nation as a historically natural and discrete political unit coterminous with the contemporary national geo-body that has a continuous

⁸There were no organized secular schools in Tibetan regions before the twentieth century. The two-state “schools” in central Tibet, known as *tsé lop dra* (rtse slob gra) and *tsi khang lop dra* (rtsi khang slob gra), were “training centers” for future government officials from lay-aristocrats and monastic communities. Although from the beginning of the twentieth century, there have been some intermittent efforts to introduce modern secular schools in central Tibet, all these efforts were thwarted by the powerful monastic groups (see Dorjee and Dhondup 1977; Goldstein 1991). There were numerous private schools in central Tibet, but the curriculum was limited to training students with practical knowledge of arithmetic, calligraphy, and the Tibetan language (rdo rje 1999). In eastern parts of Tibet, the late Qing and the Republic of China had introduced several “modern” schools to inculcate a sense of “official nationalism” among the frontier population (tshe ring 1992). In certain places such as Batang in Kham, each family was compulsorily made to send one of their children to these “modern” schools (Goldstein *et al.* 2004).

⁹Although these textbooks acknowledged Bon as one of the ancient religions of Tibet and omitted any traditional derogatory references, the advent of Buddhism in Tibet, understood as replacing the Bon, is presented as the dawn of civilization.

history of indivisible sovereignty organically linked to Buddhism and, most importantly, the person of the Dalai Lamas (see shes rig 1965). The mythohistorical Buddhist narrative on imperial Tibet (7th–9th CE) was foundational to the nationalist historiography since it provided exiled nationalist leaders with the founding myth of the nation that was not only “united” and Buddhist but also was one of the most powerful empires in central Asia.

Ockenden school as anomaly in the national order of things

Ockenden school was an anomaly in the grand national scheme of things in exile. Unlike most Tibetan refugee schools of the time, the school was run exclusively by a foreign-aid organization, Ockenden Venture. Although this was done with prior approval and in coordination with the Dalai Lama’s government-in-exile, Ockenden nevertheless exercised complete oversight on the appointment of staff, selection of students, and setting of their curriculum. What was taught at school? There are no extant detailed reports regarding the school’s curriculum aside from a list of general topics to be covered: Hindi, English, general knowledge, arithmetic, geography, and lessons on Tibetan culture, religion, and history (Department of Home 1965). However, a careful reading of the complaints made by boys in their letters against Dexter and Sangye, along with the contemporary remembered accounts of the school, we can get some sense of what was taught at the school.

A boy aged eighteen claimed Dexter taught them “Sangye’s birthplace [*shar khog*, Amdo] and others like Gyelrong and many more are self-governing [political] entity because they did not pay tax to [central] Tibetan government” (OI 1966k). Another fourteen-year-old boy complained Sangye said, “there are two completely different languages in Tibet which are Kham Gyelrong’s language and Tibetan language,” and this, he continues, “I doubt if we say this to foreigners, this will give the impression that there are two countries in Tibet; therefore, Sangye must have a big reason to say this” (OI 1966k). Another boy, aged fourteen, complained, “when visitors came to the school, chopsticks and Chinese dishes were served and it was emphasized that they were in common use in Tibet and even their very names were in Chinese” (OI 1966k). Some of the other boys accused Sangye of criticizing exiled Tibetan government-produced textbooks, saying “its contents are embarrassing and incorrect.” They alleged Sangye told them, “Our history [in the textbook] is not true,” and “Lang Darma [as projected in the Buddhist historical narrative that permeates school textbooks] was not evil.” More broadly, boys complained Dexter and Sangye often inserted political commentaries, telling them that the Dharamshala officials were “reactionary,” and many dissident groups were working “completely different ways” (OI 1966k). Generally, they asserted an overriding anti-Gelugpa¹⁰ bias at the school, with one boy lamenting Dexter told them that “other religions are less [represented] than Gelugpas in the monks’ college in Mussoorie” (OI 1966k).

Some of the older boys I have interviewed, now in their early seventies, confirmed being taught similar histories at the school. They remember Sangye while teaching the history of Tibet, would often interject with commentaries about Bon being the native religion of Tibet, the existence of written script in Tibet prior to Thonmi Sambhota, and Lang Darma not being evil. However, as one of the older boys pointed out, many of the “overaged” students (in their early twenties) would dispute such facts, and Sangye “would not dare to impose his thoughts on us” (Dorjee, pers. comm., May 20, 2021). Sangye and Dexter’s own intellectual predilections suggest that the boys’ allegations might not be entirely false. Both men studied with David Snellgrove at SOAS, who was among a new group of western scholars of Tibet using Bon historical literature and the newly available archival sources on the imperial Tibet known as Dunhuang manuscripts.¹¹ In fact, Snellgrove wrote to Pearce

¹⁰Gelug is one of the four schools of Tibetan Buddhism, also known as the yellow-hat sect, to which the Dalai Lamas belong. Historically, the identity of the Dalai Lama’s government in central Tibet was inextricably linked with the Gelug school.

¹¹In fact, two of the boys’ letters mentioned Sangye and Dexter cited the Dunhuang manuscript to substantiate their claim of the existence of Tibetan script before the Thonmi Sambhota.

after the incident explaining Dexter was teaching Tibetan history at the Ockenden school using more recent literature by Petech, Stein, Richardson, and himself (OI 1966j). These alternative histories, for instance, began to question the very historicity and greatness of some of the key mythohistorical figures in the Buddhist historical narrative on Tibet. It undermined the key accepted beliefs like Thonmi Sambhota was the founder of Tibetan script and the legends of “three great of kings of Tibet” as elevated dharma kings (*chos rgyel*) who brought and spread Buddhism throughout the realm of Tibet by subjugating the “evil” Bon religion. Such beliefs upended the dominant Buddhist idea of Tibet as a sacred realm of Avalokitesvara widely believed to have humanly manifested in the person of the Dalai Lamas, and the legends of the last imperial king Lang Darma as the destroyer of Buddhism.

Also, historically, most of the Tibetan regions east of *Dri chu* (Yangtze river), including Sangye’s birthplace and Gyelrong, were outside the political jurisdiction of the Dalai Lama’s government in Lhasa and its inhabitants, especially on the popular level, did not identify themselves as member of a singular Lhasa-centered political entity called Tibet. It is also not unlikely that Sangye (and Dexter) would have made commentaries about the dominance of Gelugpa in the exile Tibetan administration since, as a Bonpo, as we will see in the following text, marginalization was part of Sangye’s experience in exile. Therefore, taken as a whole, the boys’ letters, their remembered accounts today, and Sangye and Dexter’s background offer a glimpse of clarity to the pattern, rationale, and form of the knowledge being disseminated at the Ockenden school.

The historical narrative introduced at Ockenden school deviated from and challenged the “official history” produced by the exiled Tibetan leadership. In Ockenden’s alternative narrative, Tibet was historically decentralized with multiple and contesting centers of power and diverse religious traditions, cultural practices, and languages. It contested the emergent nationalist representation of Tibet as a nation-state with a singular national culture, language, and history. In Ockenden’s narrative, to be Tibetan was not to be Buddhist, nor was it to speak a singular national language. Also, Ockenden contested the demonization of Bon and Bonpos in the Buddhist mythohistorical narrative and instead presented Bon, as the native religion of Tibet, as the quintessential part of Tibetan identity. Since the “official history” was the ideological bedrock of “official nationalism” in exile, the dissenting historical knowledge produced at the Ockenden school posed a fundamental challenge to the emergent national order. The Ockenden headquarters in London realized this problem and, from the beginning, identified the issue of what history was to be taught as the most important of all matters. As mentioned above, Pearce was even willing to discontinue teaching Tibetan history until some official history was produced and approved by the Dalai Lama (OI 1966e). Yet, since the teaching of history cannot be separated from who is teaching it, Ockenden’s insistence on Sangye and Dexter continuing their role in the school was unacceptable to the exiled Tibetan leadership. Unlike Choden and Liushar, Sangye’s loyalty to the nation represented by the exiled Tibetan leadership was not seen as unconditional but was subject to suspicion. But why?

Emergent nationalist discourse in exile

Woodard’s invocation of the Dalai Lama’s elder brother in the story of the Ockenden incident may appear at first glance as insignificant, immaterial, or of only passing interest. However, read in the context of the broader political landscape of the early years in exile, Woodard’s allegation points to a deeper entanglement of Ockenden’s story with the newly emergent political formation led by Gyalo Thondup. Who was he?

Gyalo Thondup today is only a vaguely familiar figure to most third-generation exiled Tibetans. In the early decades of exile, however, Thondup was a household name assumed to wield considerable influence across the Tibetan government. Whether real, half-true, or completely imaginary, his name is intertwined with numerous stories of spies, conspiracies, revolts, and assassinations. For many first-generation exiled Tibetans, Thondup’s name invokes extreme responses. His loyalists address him with the prefix *lha sé* (son of God), while his opponents call him *ten dra* (enemy of

the faith) or *dü lhé jin* (demon Devadatta).¹² No matter how one viewed him, all agreed that Thondup established himself as the most powerful figure in the Tibetan political landscape in the early years of exile. He did not hold any elaborate official position.¹³ However, through his long-nurtured network of fervent loyalists, secretive intelligence agents, patriotic armed men (Chushi Gangdruk soldiers), and above all, as the elder brother of the Dalai Lama, he had a monopoly of access to the USA, India, and Taiwan and gained control over all aspects of reconstruction of the Tibetan government-in-exile (Norbu 2016; Yuthok 2016). The powerful aristocratic officials of the pre-colonial Ganden Phodrang government in Lhasa, whom Thondup saw as a “national tragedy” (Thurston and Thondup 2016, p. 98), were swiftly purged from their positions in the new political order in exile (Craig 1998; Surkhang 2015; Yuthok 2016).

Central to Thondup’s nation-building project in exile was the Tibetan United Association (Tib: *chol gsum bod rigs chig bsgril tshogs pa*), founded in 1964 in Darjeeling.¹⁴ The Tibetan United Association (hereafter TUA) was arguably one of the most significant pan-Tibetan nationalist organizations in the early years of exile. The leaders of the organization were Thondup’s close associates and loyalists (dar rgyas 2020; Norbu 2016; rnam rgyal 2014; Yuthok 2016). On its founding day, members of TUA called upon all the “flesh”- and “blood”-related Tibetans (Tib: *sha-khrag cig pa bod rigs*) from three regions of Tibet to unite single-mindedly under the leadership of the Dalai Lama to regain Tibet’s lost independence (chol gum 2005). The members of TUA took an oath to oppose sectarianism, regionalism, and class stratification within the exiled Tibetan community and to never go against the wishes of the Dalai Lama and the two oracles of Tibet, the transgression of which, they vowed, be violently borne by the transgressors. One of the main objectives of the organization was to oppose “both internal and external enemies” of the Tibetan nation, who, they argued, was serving as the “running dogs” of the enemies, both Communist China and Taiwan, and therefore must be weeded out (chol gsum 2005).

The TUA’s discourse of “unity” among Tibetans, imagined as a biological unit, was historically a novel discourse.¹⁵ For centuries prior to modern Chinese colonization, the Tibetan political landscape was composed of a central Tibetan state centered in Lhasa and various smaller polities in the eastern parts of Tibet. These eastern polities had different and changing sets of relations with the central Tibetan state in the west and the Nationalist Government in the east (see Goldstein *et al.* 2004; Samuel 1993; Tsomu 2014; Tuttle 2007). The socio-political identities in Tibet were primarily shaped by their sense of affiliation and loyalty to a particular monastery or local religious hierarch(s), their tribal chieftain or king, and most importantly, their distinct sense of belongingness to a locality, that is, their fatherland (Tib: *pha yul*). This heterogenous Tibetan past posed a problem for the emergent nationalist elites at the turn of the twentieth century, especially in the post-exile years. The leaders of TUA anachronistically read this history as signifying a lack of national unity among Tibetans in the past that cost Tibet its independence. To regain Tibet’s lost independence, therefore, they argued, an absolute unity among exiled Tibetans under the leadership of the Dalai Lama must be maintained (chol gsum 2005). The new moral lesson from history was for the Tibetans to abandon their traditional identities and loyalties, now categorized negatively as regionalism and sectarianism, and think of themselves first (and perhaps only) as Tibetans.

By 1965, TUA, under the patronage of Thondup and with support from the Tibetan government-in-exile, had become a powerful political force to reckon with (chol gsum 2005; dar rgyas 2020, pp. 219–34). Through their grassroots network of regional chapters, they convened various

¹²Devadatta was, by tradition, a Buddhist monk, cousin, and brother-in-law of Buddha believed to have attempted to harm Buddhism.

¹³Thondup was given the portfolio of the assistant/joint director of the foreign office (Tib: *phyi ’brel las khungs gtsö ’dzin las rogs*) in the newly reorganized Tibetan government-in-exile.

¹⁴According to Juchen Thupten, TUA was established in 1962 in Dharamshala and later moved to Darjeeling (rnam rgyal 2014, p. 57).

¹⁵Although some strands of nationalist thought can be found in the Tibetan political landscape, perhaps dating back earliest to the turn of the twentieth century, however, prior to exile, these nationalist ideas were limited to a few political and modern educated elites (see Goldstein *et al.* 2004; McGranahan 2005; Stoddard 2013).

political meetings in exile Tibetan settlements, organized protests against those they identified as the “enemies” of the nation (chol gsum 2005; Yuthok 2016), and, at times, attempted to mobilize the coercive apparatus of the Indian state against the members of dissident groups declared unpatriotic, traitors, and a threat to the national unity of Tibet and security of India (rnam rgyal 2014, pp. 92–97). In these campaigns against the “internal enemies,” the TUA-run *Tibetan Freedom* newspaper served as their official mouthpiece. Around mid-June 1965, TUA passed a resolution (publicized in *Tibetan Freedom*) declaring their opposition to the Tibetan groups seeking to establish separate settlements, schools, and industries from the initiatives of the Dalai Lama-led government-in-exile (chol gsum 2005). For the leaders of TUA, any pursuits of different paths by exiled Tibetan groups from those laid down by the exiled Tibetan leadership were unpatriotic acts that threatened to subvert the national unity among Tibetans. Was the reference to separate schools in the TUA resolution (among others) for the Ockenden school? We do not know. However, a broader intersection that emerges in our archive between Ockenden school, exiled Bonpos, and TUA points us in that direction.

Exiled Bonpos’ pursuit of alternative future

In exile, Bonpo leaders saw the task of bringing together their exiled co-religionists from across the Tibetan regions as imperative to their very existence (bzang po 2013; yongs ‘dzin n.d.). Bonpos had escaped to India in small groups from different parts of Tibet. Not only did they not share their faith with most Tibetans in exile, but many also had no affiliation with the Dalai Lama government in central Tibet or had recently experienced persecution at their hand (Shakya 2014; Karmay 1998, 2013). Moreover, although the emergent nationalism among exiled Tibetans sought to incorporate other non-Gelug Buddhist schools in the new national political framework, however, the Bon and Bonpos remained outside its purview for over a decade.¹⁶ According to Karmay Samten, an exiled Bonpo and a scholar of Tibet, the Bonpos faced an enormous challenge in their attempt to resettle (as a group) in India since most of the aid for Tibetan refugees was controlled by the exiled Tibetan leadership who in turn “completely ignored the Bonpo group” (Karmay 1998, p. 534). These historical experiences of either indifference or active marginalization, along with the post-exile danger of assimilation of Bonpos, dispersed across India, within the larger Buddhist community produced among exiled Bonpo leaders such as Tenzin Namdak a desire for separate Bonpo settlement in order to preserve their faith (yongs ‘dzin n.d.). The preservation of their faith from the enemy was one of the primary reasons why Bonpos escaped into exile in the first place. Namdak was one of the two Bonpos to join Sangye to study with David Snellgrove in London. While in London, he retained his ties with other notable Bonpo religious leaders in India and Nepal and frequently exchanged letters to discuss their plans for the collective future. Namdak was eventually successful in securing financial support for his plan (yongs ‘dzin n.d.).

After returning to India, Namdak met the Dalai Lama and discussed at length his plan to establish a separate Bonpo settlement (yongs ‘dzin n.d.). Although the Dalai Lama did not seem to have objected to his plan, opposition from other quarters soon emerged. Actively led by TUA, Namdak and other Bonpo leaders were labeled as divisive sectarians opposed to the Dalai Lama and political lackeys of Taiwan.¹⁷ Amidst mounting oppositions, at times violent, from members of TUA, the exiled

¹⁶In November 1963, the council of cultural and religious affairs of exiled Tibetan government convened the first intra-religious conference, where, besides representatives from four Buddhist denominations, a representative of exiled Bonpo was also invited. However, as can be seen from the proceeding report, Bonpos were assigned a marginal position – the four-point agenda for the conference was solely concerning the preservation and propagation of Buddhist dharma and the unification of the Tibetan Buddhist sects (chos rig las khungs 2015). Also, exiled Bonpos were given equal representation in the Commission of Tibetan People’s Deputies only in 1977, almost two decades after its establishment.

¹⁷To this day, exiled Bonpos deny having any relation with Taiwan. In fact, one of the founding aims of the Tibetan Bonpo Foundation established in 1965 was “to foster fraternal unity of the Tibetan people” and “to endeavor to achieve their [Tibetan] aspirations under the supreme leadership of H.H. the Dalai Lama” (Memorandum of Association of the Tibetan Bonpo Foundation 1965).

Bonpos, primarily led by Namdak, joined hands with other dissident groups to form a Tibetan Welfare Association (Tib: *bod mi bde don tsogs pa*) – popularly known as *tsho khag bcu gsum* (Thirteen Groups). The Tibetan Welfare Association (TWA) was a loose-knit association of exiled Tibetan groups predominantly from Kham and Amdo that had reorganized in exile, in most cases by establishing their own separate settlements,¹⁸ along the pre-exilic monastic/sectarian and homeland affiliations. This, the members of the TWA claim, was in response to what they saw as an attack on their traditional religiopolitical identities and way of life by the newly emergent political force of TUA led by Gyalo Thondup. The members of TWA alleged that the aim of TUA was to “unite” the three regions of Tibet and different sects of Tibetan Buddhism into one; i.e., to eliminate regional identities and impose Gelug school on all exiled Tibetans (see rnam rgyal 2014).¹⁹ In my interviews with some of the first generation of exiled Bonpos, many compared the political activities of the TUA to Mao’s “cultural revolution” in Tibet and thereby framed the narrative of their opposition to TUA within the older religiopolitical idioms of defending the faith from the enemy and the new nationalist idiom of preserving the diverse cultural and religious traditions of Tibet. The TUA, in turn, saw the leaders of TWA as craven traitors, working as agents of enemies to sabotage the national liberation struggle of the Tibetan people. These contesting narratives point to the confrontation of ideals over core definitions of what was and was not good for the Tibetan nation. Such conflicts were often fought out of view, in arenas rarely visible to non-exiles, but which emerged and became ever so briefly visible in the Ockenden Incident.

Ockenden at the crossroad of nation-building in exile

Sangye was closely involved in the Bonpos’ attempt to reorganize in exile. When Namdak returned to India from London in late 1964 – just as the negotiations to establish Ockenden school got underway – he met with Sangye and Lobsang Lhalungpa²⁰ in Delhi and stayed at the latter’s residence. The three men discussed their plan for the future of Bonpos in exile (yongs ‘dzin n.d.). Sangye wrote to the Ockenden home office in London to request their support for the exiled Bonpo community (OI 1965a, 1965c). On numerous occasions, Dexter mentioned to Pearce the desperate situation of the exiled Bonpos, and the discrimination they faced, and recommended help where possible. Since the Ockenden Venture was a small aid organization dependent on outside funding, their support to exiled Bonpo was limited to modest donations, a small number of volunteers, and training of Bonpo boys. This support, although limited, was crucial for exiled Bonpos in their pursuit of an alternative future. Since, in those early years of exile, when most of the newly arrived Bonpos lacked linguistic and cultural knowledge of the world at large, the young English-educated Bonpo children were to serve as a linguistic and cultural broker of the community to negotiate the outside world of state bureaucracy and aid agencies.

Also, Woodard, Ockenden’s key negotiator, appears to have been closely involved with early plans to establish Tibetan Bonpo settlements (OI 1965a). In one of his letters to Pearce, Dexter mentioned Woodard’s involvement in the land procurement for the Bonpo settlement yet hinted at how such gestures were ill-received in India. It is difficult to speculate to which specific reactions he was alluding.

¹⁸It is important to note that almost all my respondents from TWA emphasized their settlement was established as per the wishes of the Dalai Lama, who, according to them, had encouraged each lama and traditional leader to take responsibility and look after exiled Tibetan population, including by establishing settlements. In the case of exiled Bonpos (and this is true of others as well), despite being part of TWA, popularly believed to have severed relationship with the Tibetan government-in-exile, they continued to maintain some form of affiliation with the latter by sending reports, requesting assistance, and more (Department of Home 1967–1978).

¹⁹Some of the members of TUA I interviewed emphatically deny these allegations. In fact none of their publications that I have seen calls for imposition of Gelug school on all exiled Tibetans.

²⁰Lhalungpa was an ex-monk-official in the Lhasa government who worked closely with Gyalo Thondup in Darjeeling in the 1950s but eventually fell apart for reasons unknown to me. He later became closely associated with leaders of the thirteen groups and was one of the founding members of the Tibetan Bonpo Foundation.

The land deal being discussed never materialized. The exiled Bonpos established their settlement in 1967, 2 years after the incident. Besides Bonpos, Ockenden was working with other TWA groups, one of which was the Clementown Tibetan settlement led by the Amdo Gungthang Tsultrim. Tsultrim was the *de facto* leader of the TWA and perhaps the “public enemy” number one for the TUA. Ockenden Venture appears to be aware of the political implications involved with such associations since Dexter, in one of his letters to Pearce, wrote, “met with the Dalai Lama and updated him about the Ockenden school but didn’t say anything about development in Clementown” (OI 1965d).

That said, it is essential to note that there was a visible line of difference between the Ockenden home office in London and their appointed staff in India in terms of their knowledge of the political development on the ground, their level of personal involvement, and their approach toward the Tibetan leadership. On Ockenden’s part, despite their on-the-ground agent’s sympathies and irrefutable political support for these dissident groups, throughout the process, they were clear on pursuing the policy of taking the Dalai Lama into confidence for anything related to Tibet. As an organization, Pearce wrote in one of her letters to Dexter, their policy had to support the nation-building project of the Tibetan leadership “whatever it may be” (OI 1966f). Their task was, she continued, “to train the leaders to support the regime” and not be involved in the internal politics and intrigues (OI 1966f). Ockenden incident highlights the often-unacknowledged broader policy intersection between foreign-aid agencies and the exiled Tibetan leadership’s nation-building project. An intersection that played no small part in establishing the hegemonic position of the latter and normalizing their particular historical narrative, ideas, and vision for Tibet.

Although our archival sources are largely silent on how Tibetan leadership viewed the work of the Ockenden Venture among these dissident groups, later accounts of those involved offer some significant insights. In Wangdue Dorjee’s biography, a long-serving minister of home affairs (1964–1983), we see that foreign-aid officers from the major agencies like the National Christian Councils were detested for their closeness with the leaders of the TWA and were seen as interfering in “internal” Tibetan matter (rdo rje 1999, pp. 150–84). In fact, there appears to have been a suspicion in the Dharamshala that some of these aid organizations or individuals in them, including in Ockenden, were working as Taiwanese or Chinese fronts to subvert Tibetan national unity and struggle.²¹ Today, in hindsight, we may find many of these suspicions and rumors from early exile decades unwarranted. However, in those early years of exile, when the world as the Tibetans knew it “collapsed” around them, such suspicions and rumors seemed more plausible and, perhaps, were the driving force behind everyday political practices.

Conclusion

Whether there was an actual instigation to revolt, as Ockenden’s staff in India claimed, and many exiled Bonpos continue to believe today, remains an open question. What we know is that corporal punishment, which according to Choden, was the cause of revolt, was a rarity in the school. Of over a dozen Ockenden students I have interviewed, a few of the older boys, now in their early seventies, remember the extreme heat and daily chores of clearing the field area of the school in Dharwar as a major source of their discomfort. Others, especially the younger boys, have fond memories of the school and often retrospectively express regret over its sudden closure. They maintain that the “revolt” was largely an older boys’ affair. Also, according to most remembered accounts,²² the school’s daily morning prayer followed Gelug tradition and included prayers for the long life of the Dalai Lama. In fact, Sangye appears to have made an extra effort to conform to the Tibetan leadership’s dominant (Gelug) religious practice, including by personally attending the school’s daily prayer

²¹Personal communication with one of the founding members of the Tibetan Youth Congress.

²²One of the younger boys remembers Sangye making them circumambulate a stupa in the school in the anti-clockwise direction according to Bon tradition. However, all the other boys I interviewed, including the older ones, dismissed the account, saying there was no stupa in the school since it had just started in Dharwar.

sessions. However, as Bonpo monk from Amdo *Shar khog*, both religion and homeland doubly outside the pale of Buddhist religious civilization and the political jurisdiction of the Dalai Lama's government in Lhasa, in the eyes of many exiled Tibetans, Sangye appears to have been an *a priori* suspect of both perverting the boys and disloyalty to the nation represented by the Tibetan government-in-exile. Sangye's connection with the exiled Bonpo attempt to establish a separate settlement must have added to the suspicions. Perhaps, therefore, even a mundane and innocuous act of piety by Sangye to his faith, such as having a corpus of Bon text stored in a separate room and offering his daily prayers there, had become one of the oft-cited reasons for the boys' suspicion of the school's pro-Bonpo bias and Sangye and Dexter's eventual plan to convert the school into "a great centre for Bonpos" (OI 1966a).

These suspicions of Sangye's larger design to propagate Bon religion in the school and to create dissension among Tibetans by boys, some as young as fourteen, are perhaps only plausible within the context of already circulating rumors and conspiracy theories about Sangye, Dexter, and exiled Bonpos in the school or as a result of outright engineering of dissent by Choden and Liushar as Ockenden staff suspected. One of the supposed authors of the letters sent to Pearce and *Tibetan Freedom* denouncing Dexter and Sangye denies having written such letters. On the contrary, he maintained he had always liked Dexter and Sangye and remembered having written to Dexter immediately after the incident, distancing himself from the "revolt" (Karma Wangyal, pers. comm., May 24, 2021).²³

The emergent nationalist discourse of unity, equality, and democracy in the post-exile years meant that no longer was the old rationale of serving the sectarian interest of the religion sufficient to sanction political action. In the new national political order in exile, the governing rationale dictated that the legitimate justification for any public action had to be in the name of serving the "people," "nation," and its symbol in the person of the Dalai Lama. Since in those early years of exile, those who spoke for the nation either belonged to or were invested for varied reasons in the pre-colonial Ganden Phodrang government in Lhasa, reorganized in India as pan-Tibetan government-in-exile, the Tibetan nation was represented by a particular history produced at the ideological intersection of Gelugpa school²⁴ and upper-class male nationalist elites from central Tibet.

In fact, in the early years of exile, despite some of the fundamental restructuring in the Tibetan political system, including the establishment of formal equality between all religious denominations before the law (bod kyi rtsa khrim 1963), Gelugpa order of Tibetan Buddhism continued to dominate the new political order in exile.²⁵ Officials in the new pan-Tibetan exile government were mainly recruited from the pool of experienced and loyal ex-officials from the pre-colonial Ganden Phodrang government. Also, almost all the first batch of Tibetan teachers trained by the exile administration and religious instructors appointed to the schools were Gelugpa monks. Therefore, the geopolitical worldview of these Ganden Phodrang officials provided a hegemonic normative framework for the Tibetan political order in exile. This normativization of a particular group's worldview in the national political framework marked the "others," such as Bonpos, as deviants whose ideas, if unchecked, posed a threat to the very normative order of the nation. Perhaps, therefore, Bonpos' attempt to renegotiate their marginal position in this dominant (Buddhist) ordering of the nation in exile was seen by many in the exiled Tibetan leadership as subversive, attempting to create disunity among exiled Tibetans and challenging the authority of the Dalai Lama.

Today, this contingent and contested history of the nation-building process is forgotten among the second generation of exile Tibetans. Nation and its form are imagined to be natural and without

²³Wangyal suspects Choden engineered the "revolt" through some older boys.

²⁴The Gelugpa hegemony can be seen from the negotiation between the exiled Tibetan leadership and the Ockenden head-quarter, where the Ockenden's claim of having taught Gelug prayers in the Ockenden school was seen as unproblematic – a norm which none involved seem to question – however, the question of whether Bon was taught to the boys was a matter of concern that needed clarification.

²⁵In fact, in those early years of exile, many exiled Tibetans saw the Tibetan government-in-exile as the continuation of the old Gelugpa government in Lhasa.

history. This nation speaks the hegemonic language of equality, collective sacrifice, national unity, and liberation from without. However, hidden underneath such egalitarian discourse is the unequal demand for sacrifice for the nation from its varied historically constituted groups and unequal representation in the national order of things. The exiled Bonpos, although included in the nationalist imagination as part of the nation, was nevertheless assigned the role of an unequal partner in the nation-building project and, by effect, remained largely invisible in the dominant Buddhist nationalist discourse. Ockenden's story shows us that exiled Bonpos contested their assigned position of marginality in the national order of things by producing alternative history and discourse on Tibet. I would argue that alternative histories produced at the sites such as Ockenden school were not only about the past but were inextricably connected to the pursuit of different futures by those at the margins of the exile Tibetan political order. A future political order, although inescapably national by this time, however, that is more inclusive and where, in the case of Bonpos, they would occupy a different position in the national order of things.

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