

**Images of Tibet  
in the 19<sup>th</sup> and 20<sup>th</sup> Centuries**

**Volume I**



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**Images of Tibet  
in the 19<sup>th</sup> and 20<sup>th</sup> Centuries**

Volume I

Edited by **Monica ESPOSITO**



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## INTRODUCTION

These two volumes were conceived as an attempt to capture various images of Tibet from Western and Eastern perspectives. How did these various images take form? What were their sources of inspiration? How do they relate to the “real Tibet”? And what do these images tell us about the people who created them?

Whilst a certain number of publications on the images of Tibet from the perspective of the West—its dreams and projections—have appeared in recent years,<sup>1</sup> a study on the image of Tibet in Far-Eastern countries during the 19<sup>th</sup> and 20<sup>th</sup> centuries was still missing. The present work represents the first attempt to explore various manifestations of the images of Tibet from a more global point of view, one that includes religious, aesthetic, and intellectual-historical dimensions. It is divided into four sections: the West, Japan, China, and Tibet. The China and Tibet sections do not strictly correspond to geographical or political entities but rather to cultural areas. While the China section includes contributions on the reception of Tibetan Buddhism in Hong Kong and Taiwan,<sup>2</sup> the Tibet section features both studies related to Tibetan areas today assimilated within People’s Republic of China (PRC) and to Tibet’s religious and cultural interaction with Mongolia, India, Himalayan regions, and the West.<sup>3</sup> Each section ends with a history of the Tibetology of the respective areas. To facilitate use of these two volumes, I added an index of proper names at the end of the second volume.

The twenty-five contributions by scholars from all over the world offer case studies spanning more than two centuries, beginning with the image of Tibet of the Western philosophers—Kant, Hegel, and Schopenhauer—and ending with the question of whether a “Tibetan Tibetology” can exist in today’s China. In between, images of Tibet from Western and Eastern travelogues, myths, religious literature and artworks offer pertinent examples of cultural intersections between Tibet, Japan, China, and the West. These studies are based on extensive original research and field-work, and analyses and translations of numerous primary sources are presented here for the first time. Instead of summarizing their content in this introduction, I decided to include an abstract in English and French at the beginning of each contribution. The case studies in these two volumes reveal not only a variety of images of Tibet but also mirror the changing world views and motivations of observers in both East and West.

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<sup>1</sup> See among the others: Peter Bishop, *Dreams of Power: Tibetan Buddhism and the Western Imagination* (London: Athlone Press, 1993); Donald S. Lopez, *Prisoners of Shangri-La, Tibetan Buddhism and the West* (Chicago: The University of Chicago Press, 1998); Thierry Dodin and Heinz Räther (eds.), *Imagining Tibet: Perceptions, Projections & Fantasies* (Boston: Wisdom Publications, 2001); and Martin Brauen, *Dreamworld Tibet: Western Illusions* (Bangkok: Orchid Press, 2004; orig. *Traumwelt Tibet – Westliche Trugbilder*, Zurich: Haupt, 2000).

<sup>2</sup> See the contributions by Henry Shiu and Yao Lixiang in the second volume.

<sup>3</sup> See the contribution by Erberto Lo Bue, “Tibetan Aesthetics versus Western Aesthetics in the Appreciation of Religious Art,” in the second volume.

At the end of the 19<sup>th</sup> century, with the opening of China to the Western world, a violent process of re-evaluation of the Chinese empire and its political and religious structures took place. The confrontation between West and East led to a clash of civilizations that shook the foundations of their respective world views. The discovery of the “other” and its different history, language, culture, and religion elicited the need to define one’s own identity. The search for origins, the race to track down the roots of civilization, language, and religion was launched. At the same time as the tradition of Noah’s Ark began to founder as Biblical authority waned in the West,<sup>4</sup> Buddhist countries experienced a movement of modernization and transformation triggered by the contact with the West’s science and its religious and philosophical systems. Through the influence of missions from and to the West, they became aware that survival in the modern world required better education and training for the spreading of their teachings and that there was a need to unite within each country and worldwide through the creation of national and international Buddhist associations. One of the aims of such associations was to promote self-awareness among believers of their religious identity and, at the same time, to join with other Buddhist countries of Asia in advocating international solidarity based on Pan-Asian Buddhism.<sup>5</sup>

In the context of a certain colonial frustration fueled by Western imperialistic and nationalistic desires, a new generation of Buddhist monks and lay devotees dreamed of building a strong Orient to counter the dominance of the Christian world. Stimulated by Oriental studies in the West and their 19<sup>th</sup>-century obsession with Sanskrit sources, a call for Buddhist revival and a return to its primitive spirit were discussed with fervor, thanks in part to the philological investigation of its origins. This had a strong impact on the establishment of modern Buddhist studies in Japan and the Meiji movement to reform Japanese Buddhism. It was among such circles that a phenomenon known as “Tibet fever” arose as the most radical manifestation of this investigation. In the face of doubts of Western Orientalists, Japanese reformists—as representatives of Mahayana—wanted to prove that Mahayana Buddhism was an original teaching taught by the historical Buddha. The investigation of Tibetan Buddhism was supposed to help in fulfilling such a hope. The quest for acquiring the Tibetan canon and the original Sanskrit texts transmitted in Tibetan translation was set up among Japanese explorers. In 1901 Kawaguchi Ekai 河口慧海 (1866-1945) was the first Japanese to reach the Forbidden City of Lhasa with this aim in mind.<sup>6</sup>

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<sup>4</sup> The interrelation of the Western biblical world view and the discovery of Buddhism and Tibet are explored in the opening study of this volume, the one by Urs App on “The Tibet of the Philosophers: Kant, Hegel, and Schopenhauer.”

<sup>5</sup> See the contributions by Onoda Shunzō, “The Meiji Suppression of Buddhism and its Influence on the Exploration Spirit and Academicism of Buddhist Monks,” and Luo Tongbing, “The Reformist Monk Taixu and the Controversy among Exoteric and Esoteric Buddhism in Republican China.”

<sup>6</sup> On “Tibet fever” and the role of Kawaguchi Ekai in the Japanese discovery of Tibet see Okuyama Naoji, “Tibet Fever among Japanese Buddhists of the Meiji period.” For the development of Buddhist studies in today’s Japan see the contribution by Fukuda Yōichi, “The Philosophical Reception of Tibetan Buddhism in Japan.”

The renewal of Buddhism in Japan and its “Tibet fever” came also to influence China, its pedagogical activity, and the formation of Buddhist educational institutions that took the nascent Japanese Buddhist universities as model.<sup>7</sup> China also discovered Buddhist traditions and texts lost to them but still preserved in Japan. This incited a generation of Chinese monks and laymen to go study in Japan. They hoped to reestablish via the living Japanese Buddhist esoteric tradition the lost “Chinese esoteric tradition of the Tang.” By the late 1920s Chinese turned progressively to the esoteric tradition of Tibet, and Chinese monks went for the first time to study in Tibet at the feet of Tibetan lamas.<sup>8</sup> Like the first Japanese explorers they were also searching for Indian Buddhist original teachings that were reputedly preserved in the Tibetan Tripitaka. Thanks to these monks Tibetan scriptures came to be translated into Chinese, and this in turn led to a gradual assimilation and popularization of Tibetan wisdom.<sup>9</sup> At the same time, the arrival of Tibetan high-ranking lamas in China proper stimulated a stronger interest in Tibetan Buddhism as a living tradition.<sup>10</sup> The sense of mystery and secrecy embodied in Tibetan esoteric rituals and its paraphernalia not only fascinated those who were looking for new religious paths of salvation but also provoked strong debates within Chinese circles advocating the preservation of Chinese Buddhist traditional forms of practice.<sup>11</sup> In spite of this revived interest, Tibetan Buddhism had in fact remained since immemorial times a source of cultural and historical misunderstanding. Though it enjoyed great popularity among the ruling class as early as the Yuan dynasty (1206-1368) and was an important part of the cultural and religious lore of the Qing (1644-1912),<sup>12</sup> it was

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<sup>7</sup> As Onoda Shunzō (“The Meiji Suppression of Buddhism”) shows in his contribution, the Chinese monk Taixu (1890-1947) was inspired by Bukkyō University (present-day Ryūkoku University) to reform his Wuchang Buddhist Institute, and his observation of the Buddhist universities in Kyoto made him feel necessity of training Buddhist priests academically.

<sup>8</sup> More on this in the contribution of Chen Bing, “The Tantric Revival and Its Reception in Modern China.” An important source documenting the shift of interest in Chinese Buddhist circles from the esoteric tradition of Japan to Tibet is illustrated by the articles published in the monthly *Haichaoyin* or *Sound of the Tide*, a review founded and edited by the reformist monk Taixu. In 1920, a special issue was devoted to Shingon; see the contribution by Luo Tongbing, “The Reformist Monk Taixu.”

<sup>9</sup> This process of popularization of Tibetan teachings is well illustrated in the contribution by Françoise Wang-Toutain, “Comment Asaṅga rencontra Maitreya: Contact entre bouddhisme chinois et tibétain au XX<sup>e</sup> siècle.”

<sup>10</sup> Tibetan esoteric traditions and practices like rDzogs chen or Great Perfection came to be transmitted and translated for the first time into Chinese; see Monica Esposito, “rDzogs chen in China: From Chan to ‘Tibetan Tantrism’ in Fahai Lama’s (1920-1991) footsteps.” For the transmission of rDzogs chen among Tibetans and Chinese by a living Tibetan master from Kham see the contribution by Sabina Ragaini, “Life and Teachings of Tashi Dorje, a Dzogchen Tulku in 20<sup>th</sup> century Kham.”

<sup>11</sup> This is exemplified by the work of the reformist monk Taixu and his changing strategy in integrating both exoteric and esoteric teachings into a new unified and modernized Chinese Buddhism. See the contribution by Luo Tongbing, “The Reformist Monk Taixu.”

<sup>12</sup> See the contribution of Ester Bianchi, “Protecting Beijing: The Tibetan Image of Yamāntaka-Vajrabhairava in Late Imperial and Republican China,” on the worship of the Tantric deity Yamāntaka-Vajrabhairava (Tib. rDo rje ’jigs byed) at the Imperial Court.

always the target of sharp criticism by Chinese literati. Negative images of Tibetan monks and their religion abound in Chinese “background books” from the 11<sup>th</sup> century until today.<sup>13</sup>

Yet Tibet was also a subject of Japanese and Western “background books” that produced countless fantastic and conflicting images as well as fascinating hypotheses and speculations. Among Western historians and philosophers of the 18<sup>th</sup> century an image of Tibet arose that identified it as “the cradle of humanity,” the place where the original human race had survived the great flood.<sup>14</sup> Ever since, Tibet has continued to haunt the imagination of academics, as well as novelists and seekers after concealed truths fascinated with the alleged powers of its Himalayan yogis and the mysteries of its hidden kingdoms of Shambhala and Agarti.<sup>15</sup>

Tibet and its image were also involved in the construction of international relations and the shaping of new political alliances and imperialistic dreams. Parallel to the creation of an image of Tibet which, as product of the British agenda, had a distinct Indo-Tibetan face, others images of Tibet emerged, for instance, as products of Far-Eastern agendas.<sup>16</sup> While the Japanese were dreaming of a political and religious cooperation between Japan and the sphere of “Lamaism” encompassing Tibet, Manchuria, and Inner Mongolia, Chinese reformers had already been working since the end of the Qing on the foundation of a new Chinese modern state that would include Tibet.

At the beginning of the republican era, as profound distress and severe famine ravaged the country, Tibetan Buddhism was called on to overcome the crisis. Massive dharma assemblies and rites for averting national calamities were organized and sponsored by Chinese lay Buddhists and political leaders alike. As the new re-

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<sup>13</sup> Through the analysis of *Emptiness* (a collection of modern short stories of Ma Jian), Shen Weirong and Wang Liping (“Background Books and a Book’s Background: Images of Tibet and Tibetan Buddhism in Chinese Literature”) trace the long history of misrepresentation of Tibetan culture rooted in Chinese “background books.” It is under the influence of these “background books”—an expression taken from the Italian writer Umberto Eco—that the traveler or explorer, irrespectively of what he discovers and sees, interprets the “other” world. In her contribution, “Uncivilized Nomads and Buddhist Clerics: Tibetan Images of the Mongols in the 19<sup>th</sup> and 20<sup>th</sup> centuries,” Karénina Kollmar-Paulenz examines instead the representations of the Mongols in Tibetan “background books.”

<sup>14</sup> Interesting cases of Japanese and Western representations of Tibet are presented in the contributions by Okuyama Naoji, “Tibet Fever,” and Urs App, “The Tibet of the Philosophers.”

<sup>15</sup> The development of popular perceptions of Tibet in the West as the land of the occult and the home of such powers is discussed in the contribution of Isrun Engelhardt, “The Nazis of Tibet: A Twentieth Century Myth.” She presents in detail the growth of myths about the occult and Nazism as exemplified by the Ernst Schäfer Tibet expedition of 1938–39. On Tibet’s representation of the Italian Tibetologist Giuseppe Tucci see Elena De Rossi Filibeck, “Tibet: The ‘Ancient Island’ of Giuseppe Tucci.”

<sup>16</sup> On the British construction of the Indo-Tibetan image see the study by Alex C. McKay, “‘Truth’ Perception and Politics: The British Construction of an Image of Tibet,” in *Imagining Tibet*, 67–89.

publican politicians became increasingly aware of the advantages of using Tibetan Buddhism for solving the Sino-Tibetan conflict, they followed their Qing imperial predecessors' steps in promoting the performance of Tibetan "state-protecting rites" and conferring prestigious titles, like "protectors of the country," on Tibetan lamas. As a result, first the Chinese republicans and later the communists came to form an image of Tibet linked with China and to promote a distinct Sino-Tibetan identity. This identity gradually gained a profile by the use of Tibetan religion as a fundamental link between China and Tibet.<sup>17</sup>

Whereas a whole generation of Tibetologists studied Tibet primarily in connection with India and its culture because of political restrictions from the foundation of the PRC in 1949 until the end of the Cultural Revolution, they could not enter Tibet but were instead obliged to study in the Himalayan regions and Tibetan refugee communities of South Asia, it has more recently become possible for a new generation of scholars to pursue their Tibetan studies in Tibet itself and turn their attention also to Tibeto-Chinese relations. In the 1980s, Tibetological research in China gradually began to emerge and the term *zangxue* or Tibetology also came into use. This produced a dramatic increase in publications on Tibetan studies and the opening of two important establishments: the Tibetan Academy of Social Sciences in Lhasa (1980) and China's Tibetology Center in Beijing (1986).<sup>18</sup> Riding the wave of the religious revival and reenergized religious research in academia that occurred after the Cultural Revolution years (1966-1976), there was a constant flow of publications on Chinese and Tibetan religions and their esoteric techniques, modern Buddhism, and religious texts.<sup>19</sup> Among them were reprints of materials on Tibetan Buddhism from the republican period, local histories and biographies, studies on Tibeto-Chinese and Tibeto-Japanese relations, works of Chinese monks who went for the first time to study in Tibet, etc. Thanks to the availability of such materials and under these new circumstances it became possible to consider, for instance, how a Sino-Tibetan identity could be built in those eastern Tibetan areas which, while aspiring to autonomy, seemed to accept closer ties with China. Important figures like the Panchen Lama (1883-1937), who had served in diplomatic relations

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<sup>17</sup> See the contributions by Chen Bing, "The Tantric Revival," Luo Tongbing, "The Reformist Monk Taixu," and Gray Tuttle, "Tibet as the Source of Messianic Teachings to Save Republican China: The Ninth Panchen, Shambhala and the *Kālacakra* Tantra." Tuttle, in particular focuses on the Panchen Lama's religious and political role in linking Tibet to China.

<sup>18</sup> See the contribution by Chen Qingying and Wang Xiangyun, "Tibetology in China: A Survey."

<sup>19</sup> Antonio Terrone's contribution, "Tibetan Buddhism beyond Monastery: Revelation and Identity in rNying ma Communities of Present-day Kham," emphasizes how and why the relative freedom that was inaugurated after the Cultural Revolution by the new religious policy of Deng Xiaoping had an impact on the revitalization of Tibetan Buddhist practices in today's Kham. As shown in the contributions by Chen Bing, "The Tantric Revival," and Monica Esposito, "rDzogs chen in China," Tibetan Buddhism also gained new momentum in the wave of religious revival and increase in publications fueled by the so-called "qigong fever" phenomenon in China during the 1980s and 1990s.

between China and Tibet since the Qing Empire, came to be at the center of this new construct.<sup>20</sup> Presenting such phenomena from a Far-Eastern perspective and in its religious, cultural, and political terms through case studies is one of the purposes of the present book.

While observing the progress of Tibetological research in these two last centuries,<sup>21</sup> this study wants to provide a moment of reflection about past and present ways of seeing Tibet in order to gain a better understanding of outlooks colored by historical misunderstandings and of current tensions. Although these two volumes document some little-known trends of modern Tibetan studies, particularly in Tibetological research in China and Japan, they also show that the examination of Tibet's cultural and historical image is only at its beginning.<sup>22</sup> Difficulties in evaluating Tibetan society and its history critically, in particular when it comes to religious issues, persist for all parties. Nonetheless, they become more pressing for ethnic Tibetans and Han Chinese involved in the Tibet-China conflict.<sup>23</sup> In this volume this is illustrated by the study of Chen Bing and his Sino-centric and nationalistic way of reviewing the assimilation of Tibetan Buddhism in the PRC<sup>24</sup> and, above all, by this book's lack of contributions by ethnic Tibetan scholars or Tibetan religious figures living in today's PRC. Without any doubt the Tibet section should

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<sup>20</sup> This is well illustrated by Tuttle's discussion in "Tibet as the Source of Messianic Tea-chings," of the role of the Panchen Lama and his *Kalacakra Tantra* transmission in republican China. The Chinese Communist government is continuing to work on this construction in order to shape Tibetan Buddhism to suit its political requirements. An image of the dilemma facing Chinese religious policy in contemporary Tibet is captured by the contribution of Patricia Berger ("Reincarnation in an Age of Mechanical Reproduction: The Career of the Narthang Panchen Lama Portraits") on the controversy over the selection of the 11<sup>th</sup> Panchen Lama.

<sup>21</sup> While Lionel Obadia presents the assimilation of Tibetan Buddhism in France ("Esprit(s) du Tibet—Le bouddhisme tibétain en France: territorialisation et économie de l'imaginaire tibétophile"), Harmut Walravens ("Some Notes on Tibetan Studies in Europe"), and Donald S. Lopez ("Tibetology in the United States of America: A Brief History") offer an overview on the development of Tibetan studies in Europe and America.

<sup>22</sup> See the first introduction in a Western language to the status of Tibetan studies in China by Chen Qingying and Wang Xiangyun, "Tibetology in China," as well as the contributions by Fukuda Yōichi, "The Philosophical Reception" on Tibetan studies in Japan, and by Matthew T. Kapstein, "'Tibetan Tibetology'? Sketches of an Emerging Discipline."

<sup>23</sup> On this issue see, for instance, the study by Elliot Sperling, "The Tibet-China Conflict: History and Polemics," *Policy Studies* 7 (East-West Center Washington, 2004): 1-48, and Melvyn C. Goldstein, "Tibet and China in the Twentieth Century," in *Governing China's Multiethnic Frontiers*, ed. Morris Rossabi (Seattle: University of Washington Press, 2004): 186-229. See also the volume edited by Anne-Marie Blondeau and Katia Buffetrille, *Le Tibet est-il chinois?* (Paris: Albin Michel, 2002) and its English edition: *Authenticating Tibet. Answers to China's "100 Questions"* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2008).

<sup>24</sup> See in particular the section entitled "Difficulties and Problems of the Reception of Tantrism in the PRC" where Chen Bing presents naïve and simplistic views on Tibetan Buddhism emphasizing the lack of a critical evaluation of Tibetan religion that still persists in certain Han Chinese academies and Chinese Buddhist circles.

have included contributions by ethnic Tibetans who, as “men on the spot,” could have reflected on their own self-image; but the present situation in the PRC has not allowed the realization of such a project.<sup>25</sup> We cannot but hope that this new century may fulfill this expectation.



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<sup>25</sup> This does not mean that ethnic Tibetans are not involved in critical debates about this issue; but due to restrictions in the PRC, available studies on this topic are often confined to specialist circles of Tibetologists or intellectuals living abroad (for example the well-known studies of Tsering Shakya or Jamyang Norbu, or of religious figures and members from the Tibetan community-in-exile). However, as Toni Huber has noted, the publications from the Tibetan exile community are not necessarily free from propaganda and censorship. See Toni Huber, “Shangri-la in Exile: Representations of Tibetan Identity and Transnational Culture,” in *Imagining Tibet*, 357-371.

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<sup>26</sup> The base map is available at <http://www.fas.harvard.edu/~chgis/>. Please note that it includes territory disputed by the Tibetan-government-in-exile and the India government (territory on the northwest frontiers). The boundaries for the Tibetan cultural world (and autonomous political units under the PRC) are drawn from the county boundaries in 1990 on the CHGIS version 2, *China in Time and Space*, August 2003, DEM.

<sup>27</sup> The base image for the book cover is from Peter Simon Pallas, *Sammlungen historischer Nachrichten über die mongolischen Völkerschaften* (St. Petersburg: Kaiserliche Akademie der Wissenschaften, 1801): vol. 2, pl. 15.