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This summer I conducted pre-dissertation research in China with support awarded by the Mellon Foundation. I traveled to Hong Kong, Beijing, and Wuhan, but spent the majority of my time in the Tibetan areas of northwest China (Qinghai and Gansu provinces). Thanks to this opportunity for exploratory travel, I have specific ideas as for how my research will move forward, new access to language-learning resources, and many contacts in China whom I will be able to work with in the coming years.

For my upcoming dissertation research, I plan to consider the commercialization of Tibetan culture in China, especially as it relates to Tibetan Buddhism, and contribute to discussions on globalization, religious belief, and the changing spiritual landscape of contemporary China. There are three major angles I am currently considering: tourism in northwest China (i.e. the "Amdo" region of Outer Tibet), the commercialization of tangkas (traditional Tibetan Buddhist paintings), and multiethnic Tibetan-Buddhist communities ("outsiders" who are now practicing Tibetan Buddhism alongside "insiders"). This last interest in particular necessitates some knowledge of Chinese Buddhism as well, to understand why a Chinese person in a non-Tibetan area might choose to follow Tibetan Buddhism over their "own" historical Buddhist tradition.

A very high proportion of Buddhist groups in Hong Kong follow the Tibetan tradition. For two years I myself have participated in an international Tibetan-Buddhist organization which has a center in Hong Kong. I attended this and two other Hong Kong Tibetan-Buddhist centers, as well as Chinese-Buddhist temples. I also visited a tangka exhibition, observing that the style of tangka painting on display there was very different than the style typically displayed in Mainland China. This suggests a varied market for tangka production that is perhaps geared towards the preferences of different markets (domestic, international) if not simply different regional or historical traditions.

In Beijing I continued to visit Buddhist art galleries, centers, museum exhibitions and temples to observe the practices of tourists and worshippers and better understand the imagined place of Buddhism and/or Tibetan culture in Chinese discourse. I also spoke with Beijing-based Tibetan art dealers on the exchange between Beijing and China's western Tibetan areas. Finally, I participated in a Tibetan language class along with Han-Chinese adherents of Tibetan Buddhism.

After Beijing I traveled to northwest China, where I joined a small group of young Han tourists for a tour of the Qinghai Lake area, passing through sparsely-populated nomadic Tibetan areas that are increasingly shaped around the desires of (mostly domestic) tourists and the Han or Hui bosses that serve them. The Hui are a Muslim ethnic minority group in China. I was surprised to find that in northwestern cities, Muslims often far outnumber Buddhists, introducing a new major consideration for my project.

I visited the most famous Tibetan Buddhist monasteries in the region (Kumbum, Rongwo, and Labrang), finding each experience to differ greatly according to the number of tourists and the methods employed for managing tourists alongside other operations of monastic life. I also visited Langmusi, a town on the border of Gansu and Sichuan provinces. Langmusi is a particularly interesting tourist site; it draws both domestic and foreign tourists who typically stay for just one or two nights. Many come in hopes of

witnessing a traditional Tibetan sky burial. In sky burial, corpses are broken open by axe and left on the mountaintop as offerings to the vultures. I accompanied a group of travelling Chinese college students to the burial site one morning. There was no funeral that day, but we discussed the motivation that had compelled us to try and see the ceremony. In the afternoon, I hung around with local Tibetan tourism workers as they sold entry tickets to the monastery and waited to be hired as tour guides. Then from Langmusi, I joined a hiking tour to nomadic areas and spent the night in a nomadic settlement, providing a glimpse into nomadic life—or rather, the presentation of nomadic life for interested (here, mostly Western) tourists.

I spent the longest time in Rebgong, which is famous for its arts—especially tangka painting—as well as a ten-day long "shaman festival" held in the sixth lunar month, which I was there to witness. Here I spent most of my time with Tibetan locals, who accompanied me to the different villages participating in the festival. They offered explanations of shamanism, Buddhism, and explained how the festival (and society generally) has changed since years past. I also met local tangka painters, Chinese and foreign scholars, and tourists from around the world.

Finally, I stopped in Wuhan, a central Chinese city I first visited in 2007, then again in 2009, and lived in from 2010 to 2012. I reestablished contacts there and took note of the kinds of changes shaping this Chinese city with which I am most familiar. The culture shock I experienced moving from Rebgong to Wuhan also reiterated the huge regional variation and rural-urban divide that shapes Chinese national discourse. In Wuhan I also inquired as to the presence of a Tibetan-Buddhist community but was unable to find one.

To grasp something so nebulous, huge, and diverse as "Tibet" or "China" is at least a lifelong task. But I can truly say that this trip, made possible by the support of the Mellon Foundation, has done more to advance my understanding than any other experience I've had thus far. It has also put me in a good place to move forward with my research efficiently, both in terms of developing my topic and my language skills. Although I had studied the Lhasa dialect of Tibetan, the dialect spoken in Amdo was unintelligible to me. During this trip I bought books and discovered resources that will allow me to work on language study independently until my next travel opportunity. But the full value of this trip remains to be seen. Before I had only read about Tibetan Buddhism and culture in China to develop my ideas, but had no firsthand experience to set the scholarship against. Now I will proceed with much more clarity and the assistance of a new network of China scholars, Buddhists, and locals.