

essence, how does Shabkar's nonsectarianism accommodate non-Buddhist Tibetans, or are Bonpos relegated to the status of "uncivilized" border populations akin to the Monpas? One potential area for further investigation seems to be Shabkar's assertion of himself being an incarnation of Drenpa Namkha (88), an important religious figure in both Tibetan Buddhism and Bon from the eighth century.

Furthermore, Pang's discussion in the epilogue of concepts like early modernity and countermodernity appears misplaced. If integrated earlier, thereby weaving these broader concepts into the discussion of cultural nationalism, they might have provided valuable insight and context while enhancing their heuristic value. For example, the framework of the early modern—which emphasizes the expansion of one's world through travel and writing that connected regions across vast territories—aptly situates Shabkar and his contemporaries, such as Jamgön Kongtrül (1813–1899), within their historical milieu amid the expanding geographic and cultural dimensions of their imagined national community.

Finally, when considering the supposed "effect" of Shabkar's conceptualization of Tibetan identity and imagined Buddhist community, it remains challenging to discern clear causal connections or to determine the specific contributions of his autobiography and other writings. While Shabkar was indeed popular and his works were printed in several places, available sources offer limited information about their circulation or their direct impact on shaping Tibetan identity and national consciousness during his time or afterward. Therefore, assessing the exact influence of Shabkar's works remains speculative. There are also a number of typos, spelling errors, and transliteration inconsistencies that have slipped past editorial scrutiny.

Aside from these minor issues, *Singer of the Land of Snows* stands out as an important work of conceptual history. Pang moves beyond the conventional Westphalian conception of nation and nationalism by emphasizing myths, symbols, and historical memories that unified Tibetans into a cohesive nationhood a century before its annexation by the People's Republic of China. Pang's monograph fills a significant gap in historical research and scholarship on the relatively understudied nineteenth-century Tibet. It is highly recommended for both general readers and specialists alike, including in seminars on modern Tibetan history, the intersection of religion and politics, and cultural nationalism.

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Note

1. Sanjay Subrahmanyam, "'Connected Histories' Notes toward a Reconfiguration of Early Modern Eurasia," *Modern Asian Studies* 31, no. 3 (1997): 735–62.

Common Ground: Tibetan Buddhist Expansion and Qing China's Inner Asia. By Lan Wu. New York: Columbia University Press, 2022. xvi, 248 pp. ISBN: 9780231206174.

Scholars have debated the nature of the Qing empire for decades. Whereas some historians argue that the Qing was a sinicized regime, pioneers in the United States of an academic trend known as New Qing History, influenced by long-standing

scholarship of Europe and Japan, have shown that the Qing significantly differed from previous “Chinese” dynasties.¹ Inspired by this scholarship, in recent years a number of books on Qing and Inner Asian history have been published, forming a new trend sometimes called New Qing History 2.0.² Compared with the earlier scholarship, which mainly focused on the perspectives of the Manchu elites and the Qing court in Beijing, the younger generation of New Qing historians intends to pass beyond the dichotomous “sinicized/Manchunized” debate by paying attention to diverse ethnic groups living on the Qing Inner Asian frontiers, including Mongols, Tibetans, and Uyghurs. Moreover, within Inner Asian history, “religion” is increasingly being considered a substantial area of study indispensable for understanding the complicated nature of the Qing formation. That is to say, studies of Buddhism and Islam provide scholars new scopes to interpret the interactions between Inner Asian peoples and the Qing empire, allowing studies focused on Qing empire-building and the Tibetan Buddhist reincarnation system analytical space to move beyond the dichotomous stereotype of “politics versus religion.”³ In this context, the publication of Lan Wu’s *Common Ground: Tibetan Buddhist Expansion and Qing China’s Inner Asia* offers readers insightful observations on the making of both Qing China and Inner Asia from the perspective of Mongol and Tibetan Buddhists.

Delving into the intricate and multifaceted relationship between the Qing court in Beijing and the Geluk government in Lhasa before and after the eighteenth century, the author explores ways the Qing empire and Mongol-Tibetan Buddhists encountered, interacted, and compromised with one another. Wu argues that over time the Qing state and the Geluk regime gradually formed “common ground” and developed strategies for mutual growth and governance. The author conceptualizes the idea of “Buddhist Inner Asia,” which refers to a multiethnic and cross-cultural space that emerged within the Qing empire. This space was not a static or neatly defined administrative unit but a dynamic and fluid area shaped by religious and political interactions. This concept challenges conventional historiography that often isolates regions into distinct, bordered entities, and instead emphasizes the interconnectedness and mobility of people, ideas, and practices across Inner Asia. As such, *Common Ground* destabilizes traditional notions of fixed borders and highlights the movement and interaction of Buddhist knowledge and practices, helping to capture the transregional flow of power and influence and illustrating ways Tibetan Buddhism extended its reach eastward while the Qing empire simultaneously incorporated these religious dynamics into its strategies of governance.

It is widely known that Tibetan Buddhism played a significant role in the Qing empire. Previous scholars share different interpretations of the relationship between the Qing and Tibetan Buddhism. Based on the Proclamation on Lamas (Ch. *Lama shuo*) by the Qianlong emperor in 1792, a group of scholars have proposed an instrumentalist view suggesting that the Qing rulers worshipped Tibetan Buddhism only to appease the Mongols for the concerns of governance. In contrast, following the Tibetan Buddhist discourse of the patron-priest relationship (T. *mchod yon*), others dogmatically claim that Tibet was not subject to the Qing empire by insisting that the Dalai Lamas served as mentors rather than as subordinates of the Manchu emperors. These two contradictory explanations of instrumentalism and dogmatism

share a binary premise that sets politics and religion in opposition. More recently, scholars in Inner Asian studies have shown that Mongol-Tibetan Buddhism played a significant role in the making of China before and after the collapse of the Qing empire. That is to say, state-building and religious identity have profoundly interacted with each other and could not be fully understood separately.⁴ Wu adeptly shows that finding common ground was a fragile and contested process, requiring constant negotiation and concession. This mutual dependency was a recurring process throughout the Qing-Tibetan relationship, underscoring the delicate balance maintained between Beijing and Lhasa. In doing so, Qing rulers did not impose a monolithic administrative system but engaged in a variety of governing practices responsive to shifting geopolitical landscapes. This adaptability is exemplified in the Qing's support and regulation of Tibetan Buddhist practices, such as the institution of *trülkus* (reincarnated lamas) and the establishment and patronage of monasteries.

Moreover, *Common Ground* successfully shows the agency of Inner Asian peoples in the construction of Qing Buddhist Inner Asia by illustrating Buddhist networks that moved between Beijing, Inner Mongolia, Amdo, and Lhasa. The book's detailed exploration of religious infrastructures, including monasteries and *trülkus*, highlights their crucial role in shaping the political and religious landscape of Inner Asia. These institutions were not merely passive recipients of Qing patronage but active agents in the negotiation of power. Monasteries, as fixed structures, provided stability to otherwise fluid Buddhist Inner Asia, while the mobile *trülkus* and other Buddhist practitioners facilitated the spread and exchange of religious knowledge. In turn, the book addresses the broader implications of empire building by reflecting on the metropole-periphery discourse. Instead of viewing Inner Asia as a periphery of the Qing empire, the author contends that the incorporation of Tibetan Buddhist practices into the Qing's imperial framework was not solely a top-down process but involved significant agency on the part of Tibetan Buddhists. This perspective challenges the traditional view of the Qing empire as a hegemonic power imposing its will on subjugated regions, and instead presents a more nuanced picture of mutual influence and adaptation.

In brief, *Common Ground* is an essential read for scholars of Qing history, Inner Asian studies, and religious studies. Offering a fresh and compelling account of how the Qing empire and Tibetan Buddhism jointly shaped each other's identities, the book stands as a testament to the importance of transregional perspectives and the need to rethink traditional historical narratives of the Qing-Tibetan relationship in light of new evidence and approaches.

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Notes

1. See Joanna Waley-Cohen, "The New Qing History," *Radical History Review*, no. 88 (2004): 193–206.

2. These include Matthew W. Mosca, *From Frontier Policy to Foreign Policy: The Question of India and the Transformation of Geopolitics in Qing China* (Stanford, CA: Stanford University Press, 2013); Jonathan Schlesinger, *A World Trimmed with Fur: Wild Things, Pristine Places, and the Natural Fringes of Qing Rule* (Stanford, CA: Stanford University Press, 2017);

Eric Schluessel, *Land of Strangers: The Civilizing Project in Qing Central Asia* (New York: Columbia University Press, 2020).

3. See Peter Schwieger, *The Dalai Lama and the Emperor of China: A Political History of the Tibetan Institution of Reincarnation* (New York: Columbia University Press, 2015); Max Oidtmann, *Forging the Golden Urn: The Qing Empire and the Politics of Reincarnation in Tibet* (New York: Columbia University Press, 2018); Brenton Sullivan, *Building a Religious Empire: Tibetan Buddhism, Bureaucracy, and the Rise of the Gelukpa* (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 2021).

4. See Gray Tuttle, *Tibetan Buddhists in the Making of Modern China* (New York: Columbia University Press, 2005); Johan Elverskog, *Our Great Qing: The Mongols, Buddhism, and the State in Late Imperial China* (Honolulu: University of Hawai'i Press, 2006); Matthew King, *Ocean of Milk, Ocean of Blood: A Mongolian Monk in the Ruins of the Qing Empire* (New York: Columbia University Press, 2019).

Wuhan: How the COVID-19 Outbreak in China Spiraled out of Control. By Dali L. Yang. New York: Oxford University Press, 2024. xviii, 392 pp. ISBN: 9780197756263.

Following the 2003 SARS crisis, China developed a national disease reporting network, providing a mechanism for local hospitals to notify authorities at multiple levels of government about infectious disease cases. Yet in December 2019, the director of the Chinese Centers for Disease Control and Prevention found out about mysterious SARS-like pneumonia cases in Wuhan not through the centralized reporting system but belatedly through social media. In *Wuhan*, Dali L. Yang provides a riveting ethnography of decision-making that unveils the causes of this and many other critical failures and missteps, all of which culminated in a global pandemic that has claimed millions of lives.

Yang utilizes a wealth of Chinese media and social media sources, many of which he preserved in real time, as well as in-depth interviews with individuals who were on the frontlines of the COVID-19 disaster. In doing so, he demonstrates how pathologies within China's political system led to the suppression of information by local and central government authorities, and allowed entrenched cognitive biases to go unchallenged. In chapters 1 and 2, Yang draws on theoretical insights about organizational culture and fragmented authoritarianism to describe the political structure within which key decision-makers involved in public health policy operate. This disjointed political structure allows for local discretion and the flexible implementation of central directives, but it severely penalizes officials for failing to maintain social stability. As Yang argues, fragmented authoritarianism and the heavy emphasis on social stability often work against the imperative to respond adequately to public health emergencies and, in the case of COVID-19, repeatedly led officials to squander opportunities to control the spread of the deadly virus.

In the body of his monograph, Yang shines a spotlight on the string of official missteps, taken in December 2019 and January 2020, that the Chinese government has worked so hard to conceal. Chapter 3 provides an account of attempts, made as early as mid-December, by clinicians and commercial laboratories to alert Wuhan authorities to unusual pneumonia cases linked to the now infamous Huanan Seafood Market. Their reporting efforts gained the attention of both municipal and provincial