

Confronting the Unexpected

On November 30, 1943, two American pilots, Robert Crozier and Harold “Mac” McCallum, eased their C-87 plane into the air carrying a load of ammunition, fuel, and supplies from an American air base in northeastern India to the southwestern Chinese city of Kunming. The U.S. Air Force had deployed these modified B-24 bombers along a 530-mile corridor since April 1942 after Japanese troops had overrun the Burma Road, the Allies’ last significant land route supplying the Nationalist Chinese forces based in western China.¹ With President Franklin D. Roosevelt’s call to transport ten thousand tons of cargo a month from India into China, hundreds of aircraft were plying this route, maintaining a desperately needed air link, known as “the Hump,” in the battle against Japanese forces occupying much of eastern China.

Both pilots were experienced, and this had been a routine trip into Kunming. After a brief respite to unload, refuel, and allow the crew to eat a hasty meal, they returned to the plane, only to be told they needed to first offload supplies in Yunnanyi, a town some 150 miles due west of Kunming. Flying at night and slightly north of their usual route to India, the Americans encountered completely different conditions from those on the flight up.

The greatest obstacle to flying the Hump came from the constantly changing weather conditions, monsoon rains in the summer and blizzards in the winter. The flight crew had few navigation tools at their disposal other than a method known as dead reckoning, whereby the navigator, knowing his point of departure and compass heading, would calculate time, air speed, and approximate distance traveled. By 1943, several radio beacons had been placed along the route to guide pilots,



Tibetan Muslim Sanaullah (third from right) next to Harold McCallum (fourth from right) posing with the American flight crew in traditional Tibetan hats and coats at the British Consulate in Lhasa, December 1943. Sanaullah would die the following year from pneumonia. Credit: Reproduced with permission from Richard Starks and Miriam Murcutt, *Lost in Tibet: The Untold Story of Five American Airmen, a Doomed Plane, and the Will to Survive*, 2004, and from the family of William Perram.

and finally they could communicate with the control towers at the bases in both India and China for updates on their positions.

As they took off from Yunnanyi, the crew encountered heavy turbulence, and frigid temperatures caused the plane to begin icing up. The pilots, looking for better conditions, took the plane up to 24,000 feet. Unable to get a reading from any of the radio beacons for several hours and running low on fuel, the pilots' anxiety grew. For reasons still unclear, when the pilots called in and asked for a compass heading to their base in Jorhat, the control tower miscalculated and told them to continue to fly along its westerly heading. Unbeknownst to the flight crew, their plane had encountered 100-mile-an-hour headwinds, causing them to fly several hundred miles north of their intended flight path. Still believing they were headed southwest toward India, they decided to drop down from their cruising altitude, expecting to break through the cloud cover and locate their air base visually. With the plane's altimeter reading 17,500 feet as they broke through the clouds, instead of another 10,000 feet of air below them, McCallum exclaimed, "Damit, that's not a cloud it's a mountain."²

Now nearly out of fuel, in the middle of the night, and with few other options, the crew decided to bail out and parachute to safety. Having all survived the much shorter than anticipated jump, the crew found themselves scattered across the side of a steep river ravine, with temperatures well below freezing.³ As the *New York Times* recounted, “When their feet touched earth they were in ‘Shangri-La’—the forbidden land of Tibet of the novel ‘Lost Horizon’—and they were starting one of the strangest adventures ever to befall United States Fliers.”⁴ Initially unable to find their entire crew, McCallum, Crozier, and the radio operator followed a small trail for some distance, when they encountered a 6-foot-tall Tibetan. Approaching the American air crew, he called out, “As salaam alaikum” (May peace be upon you). McCallum, having taken a few language and culture classes while in India, offered the appropriate reply: “Alaikum as salaam” (And with you).⁵ After this exchange, McCallum and the Tibetan began to converse in broken Hindi. Asked where they were, India or Tibet, the man replied, “Tibbat” in Hindi, confirming to the Americans that they had landed not in India but in Tibet.

The story of McCallum and his crew flying wildly off course, being forced to bail out of their airplane, and being rescued from Tibet has been retold numerous times. Yet little emphasis has been given to the fact that the first greeting the crew received was the Islamic salutation, “May peace be upon you,” and not the traditional Tibetan greeting, “Tashi delek” (lit., “Good wishes”).⁶ The incongruity of such a greeting between an American pilot and Tibetan trader perhaps explains why the *New York Times*, *Collier’s Magazine*, and *Reader’s Digest* omitted the detail in their telling of the story. That absence reflects a much larger erasure of Tibetan Muslims, or Khache, from almost all accounts of Tibet.

As the American crew would later piece together, their plane had crashed several miles outside of the Tibetan town of Tsetang, roughly 100 miles southeast of Lhasa. Sanaullah, the man who befriended the American flight crew, was a prominent member of Tsetang’s vibrant Tibetan Muslim community. His ability to communicate in Hindi with McCallum was a result of his frequent trips as a trans-Himalayan trader to Kalimpong and Calcutta. It was not until after the crash of the C-49 and in the aftermath of the 1959 March Uprising that the complex realities of the Tibetan Muslims’ role in Tibet came onto the international stage.

The account of the American pilots on one level is a standard white intermediary tale similar to many firsthand British travelers’ accounts, as well as the best-sellers *Seven Years in Tibet* by Heinrich Harrer and *Out of This World: Across the Himalayas to Forbidden Tibet* by Lowell Thomas. The danger of such an approach lies in the implication that we can only understand Tibet when the tale is told through the eyes of a white, often male, protagonist. It is included here for an entirely different reason.

Crozier and McCallum’s crash neatly exhibits that even when outsiders unexpectedly find themselves in central Tibet, the first person they encounter

could be a Tibetan Muslim. Yet there is also a deeper significance. Sanaullah's ability to recognize a white foreigner, attempt to speak to him in Hindi, and also have the wherewithal to make contact with the central Tibetan government all underscore the Khaches' sense of place within a Himalayan world. The fact that Sanaullah was able to interact with Tibetan, British, and Chinese officials in Lhasa with no complications and that his Khache status was not flagged on some level to the Americans (indeed, in most accounts his status as a Khache, aside from the opening salutation to McCallum, is rarely mentioned) alert us to the seamless integration of the Khache in Tibetan society.

The American crew members were hardly the first outsiders to encounter and rely on the Khache to navigate their way in and out of Tibetan society. Due to their multilingualism, commercial expertise, and social ease within Tibet, Khaches had since the sixteenth century served as guides for outsiders in Tibet, including the earliest Italian and Portuguese missionaries in the seventeenth century.⁷ The depth of missionary reliance on Khache assistance was so pervasive that, in the words of the French ethnographer Marc Gaborieau, Western missionaries came to see Tibet "through Muslim eyes."⁸ The ways the Tibetan Muslims both facilitated and influenced early Western accounts is rarely engaged since the presence and role of Tibetan Muslims remains a rarely examined topic. Nor is the presence of Tibetan Muslims any less surprising for first-time visitors to Tibet today when they encounter the centuries-old Grand Mosque just steps away from central Lhasa. What follows below and in the next chapters is an attempt to provide a better understanding and delineate the central place of Tibetan Muslims in Tibetan society.

LHASA'S MUSLIM LANDSCAPE

Despite its cosmopolitan nature, Lhasa, awash in white, with eaves, doors, and windows framed in red and gold borders, remained a relatively small town until the mid-twentieth century. Lhasa's lay population hovered between 25,000 and 30,000 permanent residents.⁹ Its location—distant from military threats and protected by a high mountain plateau—precluded the need for city walls.¹⁰ Instead, Lhasa was organized both physically and spiritually by a set of concentric pilgrimage circuits, or *koras*, emanating outward from the center of Lhasa. At the spiritual center of the city was the Nangkor, or inner kora (Tib. *nang skor*), that pilgrims traced around the Jokhang temple's main chapel. The Barkor (Tib. *bar skor*), or outer kora, encircled the numerous sacred temples and shrines clustered around the Jokhang at the heart of Lhasa. The district bound by the circuit, also called the Barkor, served as the town's central market area where for centuries merchants sold their wares. The third and outermost kora, the Lingkor (Tib. *gling skor*), ringed the entire town (prior to its post-1980s growth). Nearly 5 miles long, it cut in close to the eastern edge of Lhasa before looping out westward around the Potala Palace and other sacred sites.¹¹

If the description of Lhasa concluded here, it would suffice as a concise and quite standard summary of its sacred geography. Such a description, though typical, omits the presence of a Muslim community. The omission is surprising in that their existence is difficult to ignore. The Tibetan capital has been home to four mosques for well over a century and Tibetan Muslims have been prominent there for well over three centuries.¹² Positioned in and around Lhasa, the mosques not only were highly visible, but played an integral role in Lhasa's social life (see map 2).

Lhasa's first mosque, typically referred to by Tibetans as the Khache Lingka (Tib. *kha che gling kha*), traditionally dated to 1650, is situated in the Garden of the Far-Reaching Arrow (Tib. *rgyang mda' khan*) several miles west of Lhasa, just north of the Dalai Lama's Summer Palace (Tib. *nor bu gling kha*).¹³ This small compound was a prominent feature in Lhasa's religious and social sphere. As the Khache community grew, a second, larger mosque was erected just opposite the original mosque to accommodate the larger number of Khaches during religious holidays.¹⁴

The most prominent mosque in Lhasa is the Grand Mosque. Built no later than the beginning of the eighteenth century, it is situated at the southeastern edge of the city in the Wapaling neighborhood (Tib. *wa pa gling*).¹⁵ Over the centuries, the Grand Mosque has been known by several names. Today in Lhasa, the most common designation is Grand Mosque (Tib. *lha khang chen*) or simply the Chinese Mosque (Tib. *rgya kha che lha khang*).¹⁶ Less frequently, particularly prior to 1959, it adopted the name of the neighborhood in which it was located, the Wapaling Mosque (Tib. *wa pa gling kha che lha khang*).¹⁷

Located several miles across the valley north of Lhasa, the Dokdé Mosque (Tib. *dog sde lha khang*) lay adjacent to the Muslim cemetery.¹⁸ It is the least well-documented of the four mosques. The Jesuit missionary Ippolito Desideri, in the early eighteenth century, remarked that the Wapaling Khache previously "had a small field close to Lhasa for burying their dead," but the Tibetan government "forced [the Wapaling Khache] to vacate [their cemetery] and relocate it farther out in the uninhabited countryside."¹⁹ The Dokdé valley, more isolated and less likely to draw attention to the Muslim custom of burying bodies, also became home to a small mosque that was attached to the cemetery. Some date this mosque to 1716, the year of Desideri's arrival in Lhasa, which might explain his unusually detailed mention of the Tibetan government's request to have the Muslims build a cemetery away from the city.²⁰

In the early twentieth century, the fourth and final mosque was built in the Barkor neighborhood just within the southern edge of Lhasa's sacred Lingkor pilgrimage circuit. The mosque is most commonly referred to today in Tibetan as simply the Small Mosque (Tib. *lha khang chung*) but was also colloquially known to many Lhasa residents as the Barkor or Rapsel Alley Mosque (Tib. *rap sel lha khang*). While its exact date of construction remains debated, it likely was built in the early years of the twentieth century.²¹

Aside from Lhasa, numerous other cities contained smaller though not insignificant Khache populations. Shigatse, in many ways the only city rivaling Lhasa in terms of religious, political, and military prestige, by the early twentieth century was home to well over a hundred Khache households.²² Although some suggest the Shigatse mosque was originally constructed in 1443 (with some even suggesting as early as 1343), it seems more likely that it was built around the same time as the early Lhasa mosques and certainly no later than the late seventeenth century.²³

Outside the larger urban centers of Shigatse and Lhasa, the Khache communities tended to be composed of a handful of families. The one exception to this appears to be the Tibetan Muslims in Tsetang, the former pre-Buddhist Tibetan capital southeast of Lhasa near where the American crew crashed. Home to several dozen Khache households, the Tsetang Tibetan Muslim community remained highly active into the 1950s.²⁴ Permanent Khache communities, almost all having a mosque, existed across central Tibet, including Gyantse, Kuti, Lhatse, and Drigung.²⁵

As the widespread presence of mosques suggest, Khache communities were common, integrated, and accepted elements of Tibetan society. Their communities also buttress claims of Tibet as multicentered, multiethnic, and multilingual. Given the complexity of Tibet's political, ethnic, and linguistic makeup, it is prudent to begin by addressing exactly what we mean when we use the terms "Tibet" and "Tibetan."

THE POWER OF DISAMBIGUATION

Most scholars of Tibet distinguish between "political Tibet," the area historically controlled by the Dalai Lama's government centered in Lhasa, and "ethnographic Tibet," the broader stateless areas that fell outside the Dalai Lama's control. By definition, political Tibet tends to be Lhasa-centric, although as Hugh Richardson, Gillian Tan, and others have suggested, Tibet "operated on a far more diverse political basis than simple allegiance to the rule of Lhasa."²⁶ Acknowledging the dangers of examining political Tibet to the exclusion of ethnographic Tibet, or of conflating the two, this study uses the term "Tibet" broadly while attempting to indicate specific regions when needed. It does not employ "Tibet" at any point to narrowly mean the People's Republic of China's Tibetan Autonomous Region, which was only formally established in 1965.

To the nonspecialist, emphasizing the fact that Tibet and Tibetans are not entirely coterminous may seem overly pedantic. However, given the nonalignment of political and ethnic boundaries—and the inconstancy of such an alignment across history—the presence of Tibetans does not necessarily make any region a part of "Tibet." Although previous scholarship has repeatedly noted a need to differentiate between ethnographic and political Tibet, it has soft-pedaled the

complexities of using the term “Tibetan.” The following paragraphs are designed to throw into stark relief the need to interrogate what is meant by the term “Tibetan” so as to allow a clearer definition of what we mean when we speak of Tibetan Muslims.

Böpa (Tib. *bod pa*) is often suggested as the word most closely approximating the meaning of “Tibetan” in most Western languages. Like the distinction made above between a political and an ethnographic Tibet, however, the term *böpa* more often refers to Tibetans from the Tibetan central province of Ü-Tsang rather than all ethnic Tibetans.²⁷ Outside central Tibet, most ethnic Tibetans rarely refer to themselves as “böpa” but rather “people of Kham” or “people of Amdo” (e.g., Tib. *kham pa* or *amdo ba*). Even here, these terms are not as all-inclusive as one might initially believe. One of the early pioneers of Tibetan Studies, Rolf Stein, in his classic work, *Tibetan Civilizations*, implored his readers to recall “that since at least the eleventh century ‘Tibetans’ (*böpa*) have been contrasted with ‘pasture-land people’ (Tib. ‘*brog pa*) as though the latter were foreigners.”²⁸ In this light, *böpa*, perhaps the closest literal analogue to “Tibetan” in English, conveys in Tibetan a very Lhasa-centric quality that is narrower in meaning than the broader and more flexible meaning than the term has in English.

Colloquially, the Tibetan term that is closest to the Anglophone usage “Tibetan” is *nang pa*. Translated literally, *nangpa* (Tib. *nang pa*) simply means ‘insider’; however, it has a distinctly Buddhist overtone that is more accurately rendered as “Tibetan Buddhist.” In this manner, the usage *böpa* is limited territorially, while *nangpa* carries a decidedly religious connotation. Again, speaking colloquially, if one is not *nangpa*, one would be, by definition, *chipa*, an “outsider” (Tib. *phyi pa*). Such conflicting terminology has led scholars, such as the Tibetologist Robert Ekvall, to conclude over half a century ago that to be non-Buddhist (*chipa*) would make one “no longer recognized by the Tibetans as being unequivocally Tibetan.”²⁹ And yet Khache living in Kham or Amdo might not be either *nangpa* or *böpa* and still be ethnically Tibetan. The difficulty of finding appropriate cognates in English has led an increasing number of scholars to question more directly the imperfect nature of the term “Tibetan” as it is applied to the multiple terms employed by Tibetans themselves.

The Lhasa-centric nature of *böpa* and the Buddhist bias of *nangpa* are masked by the Anglophone term “Tibetan,” as both meanings are often implicitly present in the popular conceptualizations of being Tibetan when outside of Tibet.³⁰ Sara Schneiderman, in an effort to decouple being Tibetan and being Buddhist, queries, “Just as there are Buddhists all over the world who are not Tibetan, why can there not be Tibetans who are not Buddhist?”³¹ In this way, similar to the need to differentiate between ethnographic and political Tibet, although those from central Tibet would have called themselves *böpa*, they likely would not have applied the term to Amdo Tibetans and Kham Tibetans. In an eloquent critique of this unspoken bias, Françoise Pommaret observed that “one encounters an aspect

of the culture of central Tibet which has not been addressed much so far: a certain condescending and despising attitude towards the surrounding regions which did not, in the eyes of the central Tibetans, reach what they considered to be the epitome of culture.”³²

On many levels, the obstacle lies less in the Tibetan definitions than in the English terms “Tibet” and “Tibetan.” As Tsering Shakya has bluntly pointed out, the Tibetan language has “no indigenous term which encompasses the population denoted by Western usage.”³³ Nor are there any clear alternatives. Emily Yeh, in her study of Tibetan indigeneity, accentuates this by pointing out that even today the “term *indigenous*, after all, is not widely used by Tibetans either within Tibet or in exile.”³⁴ Nor is this an either/or question. There is a growing consensus that non-Buddhist Tibetans, including Tibetan Muslims, were seen as culturally, socially, and politically part of the larger Tibetan whole, even as they remained religious outsiders. Crucial to this understanding is that in the case of many non-Buddhist groups, the designation “outsiders” (*chipa*) did not mean they were deprived of all rights and privileges as Tibetans. Nor were those labeled *chipa* collectively branded as foreigners.

Even as the deep definitional fissures that make the terms “Tibet” and “Tibetan” unstable and imprecise, the lack of practical alternatives dictates that simply discarding them is equally impractical. Much like we knowingly accept the broad linguistic and regional diversity included in the label “Indian,” the confusion unleashed by disposing of such a term hardly rectifies the situation. Instead, this brief examination cautions us to be mindful not to align the territory, the people, and the speakers of Tibetan under a single, unitary, and homogenizing umbrella of what it means to be Tibetan. More relevant to this study is the need to embrace this ambiguity in our efforts to delineate more carefully the category “Tibetan Muslim.” Simply put, if being Tibetan has no direct cognate that neatly corresponds to the English term “Tibetan,” similar regional and cultural biases have shaped the meaning of Khache and its English equivalent, “Tibetan Muslim.”

To avoid confusion and yet embrace convention, the term “Tibetan Muslim” acknowledges many of the terminological fault lines discussed above. In my usage, the term refers to all Khaches who have resided permanently in Tibet and were accepted as Tibetan. It encompasses great spatial, linguistic, and even ethnic diversity. Though beyond the scope of this study, “Tibetan Muslims” can also refer to Tibetanized Chinese Muslims of Amdo, Tibetans who converted to Islam, or simply those communities of Kashmiri who have traveled to and from Tibet for centuries. Given the highly contested range of ethnic, religious, and cultural identities bound up in the term it is difficult to neatly align this process theoretically. Certainly, many of the traits raised below could be categorized as “invented traditions” in the sense of Hobsbawm and Ranger.³⁵ Equally, the term is not meant to be employed strictly as an ethnonym suggesting Tibetan Muslims should be seen as an ethnic group, defined by Weber’s emphasis on “common

descent.”³⁶ Historically the source base in Tibetan, Chinese, or any language remains so fraught that to engage in theoretical discussions of ethnicity, race, or identity becomes highly problematic particularly given the highly fragmentary and multilingual sources. The post-1950 situation of political and ethnographic Tibet has only clouded matters.

In light of the recent trend in Sinophone scholarship to employ the term “Zang-Hui,” I agree with Gerald Roche that hyphenated terms, particularly those deployed along the Sino-Tibetan divide, tend to elide “local agency and marginalizes local distinctions as incomplete, failed, or hybrid byproducts of distant centers of purity.”³⁷ Tibetan Muslims maintained an identity as Tibetans through shared symbols, stories, and practices while simultaneously accentuating a highly honed sense of relational alterity by emphasizing their different religious practices.³⁸

Indeed, much of the confusion over the status of the Khache in Tibet has its roots in which process one emphasizes. Foreign travelers’ accounts tended to stress identity maintenance through alterity, portraying the Khache as foreigners based on their Muslim beliefs, whereas the Tibetan sources reveal a focus on their shared Tibetan traits to a degree that the Khache were rarely even identified as a separate community. And so it is with the Tibetan Muslims, as Frederik Barth noted in his late-life musings on ethnicity and ethnic boundaries: “In a hall of mirrors, one needs to move with considerable circumspection.”³⁹ My hope is that this study will orient future scholars with more familiarity of specific periods, areas, and groups within the Tibetan Muslim community to address the complex question of religious and ethnic identity.

TO BE KHACHE AND TIBETAN

Most narratives of Tibet’s past begin with one man, the Fifth Dalai Lama, in the early seventeenth century. With the military support of the Mongol leader Gushri Khan, the Fifth Dalai Lama not only unified Tibet, but became the irrefutable spiritual as well as a secular leader of Tibet. In the histories of Tibetan Muslims, as in the histories of their Buddhist Tibetan brethren, the “Great Fifth” Dalai Lama holds a central place in the mythos surrounding the Tibetan Muslims’ arrival and inclusion in the cosmopolitan world of seventeenth-century Tibet.⁴⁰

Tibetan Muslim foundation myths tend to be gently elaborated versions of more or less orthodox Tibetan history. A common chronicle told by Tibetan Muslims plays off the well-documented policy of the Fifth Dalai Lama to encourage foreign artisans, scholars, and traders to come to Tibet. When interviewed today, Tibetan Muslims generally all point to arriving under the reign of the Fifth Dalai Lama.⁴¹ In a common telling, nearly fifty men and boys, sometimes more according to the teller, traveled to Lhasa as merchants. Upon demonstrating their skills, they were invited by the Fifth Dalai Lama to stay in Tibet and to receive a stipend to cover their expenses.⁴²

These Khache oral histories neatly parallel the documented efforts of the Fifth Dalai Lama to recruit foreigners to come to seventeenth-century Lhasa.⁴³ All extant historical sources point to the Fifth Dalai Lama's reign as being the period when the earliest permanent Muslim settlements emerged across central Tibet. It is these Khaches who established a permanent community that has survived from that point in time in a direct line to the present who we can properly refer to as "Tibetan Muslims."

From the seventeenth until the twentieth century, the Khache consistently appear in foreign accounts of Tibet. During a multiyear sojourn in Lhasa, from 1686 to 1691, the Armenian merchant Hovhannes Joughayetsi listed numerous Khaches among his important clients.⁴⁴ In 1775, when the British emissary George Bogle arrived in the court of the Panchen Lama in Shigatse, he remarked that the Khache had "been long settled in this country" and were "mostly the offspring of Tibetans."⁴⁵ Songyun, a mid-eighteenth-century Manchu official appointed to Tibet, commented on the large Khache community, specifically pointing out that they "had taken up residence in Tibet making a living as traders many years ago."⁴⁶ Chinese gazetteers not only noted the presence of Khache but also included the Khache Garden Mosque on maps of significant landmarks in and around Lhasa.⁴⁷

Tibetan Muslims appear with less frequency in Tibetan accounts, but in part that is due to the fact that most of the extant sources are religious, or religiously oriented (e.g., written by elite Buddhists). Regardless, few Tibetans or Tibetan documents dispute their presence. The Khache's linguistic facility made them highly sought after within the lay community, and it is not surprising that one of the greatest secular Tibetan works is *Advice on the Art of Living*. Almost certainly written by an eighteenth-century Tibetan Muslim by the name of Faizullah under the sobriquet Khache Phalu, it is among the most popular and classic Tibetan texts, remaining popular even today among Tibetans.

From the sparse details known about his life, Khache Phalu worked for the Seventh Panchen Lama (1782–1853), likely as the official in charge of the lama's stable of horses (Tib. *chibs dpon*).⁴⁸ The relatively short volume, consisting of eleven short chapters and roughly fifty-five pages, emulates the philosophical aphorisms of the Buddhist "Elegant Sayings" (Tib. *legs bsha*) literary tradition. Written in nine-syllable lines, it captures a quintessentially Tibetan view of the world, yet the author never seeks to conceal his Islamic beliefs. Unrivaled in its ability to create a hybrid of Islamic and Tibetan literary culture, it reflects the unique place that the Khache held in the Lhasa community, emulating but never becoming a lesser facsimile of high Tibetan culture. In *Advice on the Art of Living*, Khache Phalu deftly adopts metaphors and language that could as easily allude to Buddhist teachings as they do Islamic ones.

Referencing central Tibetan tropes like joke telling, local gossip, and even stories of immoral monks, it quickly became one of the most popular secular works in Tibet for well over a century.⁴⁹ In several instances when the author emphasizes

his monotheism or invokes Allah, the tone of the text beautifully utilizes Tibetan patterns and allusions to make whatever might possibly be perceived as “un-Tibetan” into something undeniably Tibetan. His commentary on Buddhist ideals is often sharp, but similar in tone to denunciations that Tibetans themselves made, as when he laments at one point, “There are many who talk about the pursuit of right actions, but true followers are as scarce as gold” (Tib. *kha che pha'i sing gtam bshad yod do / nya na dang mi nyan so so'i bsam blo re*). Nor do his Islamic beliefs prevent him from exhorting his readers, by appropriating language generally understood to be Buddhist, to “pray with your body, speech and mind or to rely on the ‘Three Precious Jewels’ [the Buddha, the Dharma and the Sangha].”⁵⁰ More intriguing is when Khache Phalu seems to be defying both Buddhist and Muslim traditions. At one point he cautions against “eating the dirty food of the wicked butcher” (Tib. *las ngan shan pa'i dreg khu bza' ba la*), which could narrowly be read as only eating meat properly butchered (*halal*), but the term “wicked” (Tib. *las ngan*) here has the Buddhist connotation of “bad karma” commonly associated with being a butcher. Given that butchers were almost exclusively Khaches, most Tibetans (or Tibetan Muslims) would see this as a veiled reference to the Khache.

The very ability of Khache Phalu to capture such a Tibetan voice caused many to doubt his Islamic identity and speculate that he was actually a highly placed official or even the Seventh Panchen Lama himself. The enduring incredulity that a Muslim could write such a quintessentially Tibetan text remained in place well into the modern era, with one commentator insinuating, as late as 1981, that the work was the product of the Seventh Panchen Lama:

The Panchen Lama had good relations with the Tibetan Muslims of Shigatse and since the Muslims had a very sweet style of speech that appealed to the masses, the Seventh Panchen Lama under the Muslim pseudonym deliberately wrote the book in their style of speech.⁵¹

The book’s persistent popularity among Tibetans unsettled the Twelfth Dalai Lama (1857–75) enough that he ordered that all lines directly invoking Islamic beliefs be expurgated.⁵² Such hearsay aside, the recognized literary prowess of Khache Phalu denotes a broader recognition of the Khaches’ literary skill.

Perhaps not unsurprisingly, even today the most common attribute ascribed to the Khache by Tibetans is their facility with the Tibetan language. The noted Tibetologist Charles Ramble elegantly alludes to the subtle ways in which Tibetan Buddhists routinely would invoke the Khaches’ Tibetan fluency as proof positive of their Tibetan identity, despite their religious differences:

Adherence to Buddhism (or Bon) is generally regarded as being an integral element of Tibetan identity, although an exception is made for the Muslim minority. (The rather touching cliché that is commonly cited, apparently as a formula of acceptance, is that the Muslims “speak the best Tibetan,” as if this linguistic excellence were satisfactory compensation for a religious deficiency.)⁵³

The formulation of the Khache as Tibetan because they “speak the best Tibetan” remains strong today, even among the Tibetan exile community. In 2014, while visiting Los Angeles, the Fourteenth Dalai Lama mildly rebuked a largely Tibetan audience for not teaching their children to speak Tibetan, noting, “When I recently visited [exiled] Tibetan Muslims in Srinagar, I discovered their young children speak excellent Tibetan with a Lhasa accent. This is not the result of any instruction they receive at school, but of their parents’ and grandparents’ training.”⁵⁴ His praise of the Khaches’ linguistic ability was not simply another manifestation of the Fourteenth Dalai Lama’s broad ecumenism but rather a subtle wink to the well-established maxim among Tibetans that Tibetan Muslims have elegant fluency. Emily Yeh similarly suggests that “given the great difficulty many young Tibetans in Lhasa today have speaking Tibetan without code-switching with Mandarin, the Barkor Khache . . . are admired for their ability to speak pure Tibetan.”⁵⁵

FROM KASHMIRI TO KHACHE

By the sixteenth century, the Kashmiris were an already established presence in the Himalayan range. From Kashmir along the Himalayan front range to Nepal, Bhutan, and Sikkim in the east, Kashmiri merchant communities dominated trading. A prominent presence in virtually every large Himalayan trading entrepôt, the Kashmiri formed the backbone of trans-Himalayan trade. George Bogle, in describing Himalayan trade networks, referred to the Kashmiri as being “like the Jews in Europe, or the Armenians in the Turkish Empire, scatter[ing] themselves over the eastern kingdoms of Asia, and carry[ing] on an extensive traffic between the distant parts of it, hav[ing] formed establishments at Lhasa and all the principal towns in this country.”⁵⁶

While it is tempting to believe the Kashmiri traveled by the shortest route between Kashmir and Lhasa, the majority of the Kashmiris almost certainly traveled to Tibet from the key trading centers to the south via Kathmandu, Patna, and even Kolkata.⁵⁷ In the minds of the trans-Himalayan peoples and cultures, the term “Kashmiri” had an ethnoreligious rather than geographic or political association. That is to say, it is almost certain that the first Kashmiris were not explicitly Kashmiri from Kashmir but rather from Kashmiri communities outside of Kashmir and across the subcontinent.

Like many immigrant communities, it is difficult to determine the precise moment when the Kashmiri became Tibetan subjects. It appears most likely that the evolution occurred over a period of several decades in the late fifteenth century, and that evolution remains discernible in the multivalent nature of the term. For the past several centuries, the Tibetan term “Khache” has three broad connotations: it is a geographic marker, it is religious designation, or a specific term to denote a Tibetan Muslim. The meaning of “Khache” followed a terminological

evolution that paralleled Tibet's own chronological interactions with Kashmir and with Islam.⁵⁸ In its earliest formulation, the Tibetan word *Khache* referred narrowly to the Himalayan region of Kashmir or to the Kashmiri people.⁵⁹ The second stage began several decades after the first permanent Kashmiri settlement with the arrival of Muslim immigrants from China who were also referred to as *Khache*. With this arrival of the Chinese Muslims, the dual meaning Kashmiri Muslim and *Khache* was quickly decoupled, and the term "Khache" evolved to mean all Muslims. The third stage occurred when the *Khache* communities settled, intermarried, and became Tibetan Muslims. In this final evolution, the term "Khache" came to refer to Tibetans rather than a foreign place or foreign religion. Tibetans have demonstrated little or no consternation over the multiple meanings of "Khache." As is common with ambiguous terminology, Tibetans had an array of terms that allowed one to distinguish between residential Tibetan Muslims and those transient Muslims from neighboring regions.

From the seventeenth century to 1959, the primary internal division among Tibetan Muslims fell along a South Asian–Chinese divide. The cultural, commercial, and linguistic specializations reflected each group's distinct geographic orientation. Since Muslims from South, Central, and East Asia all intermingled in the main cities of central Tibet, it was when Tibetan Muslims were spoken of in Tibetan that geographic prefixes were often affixed to indicate the communities' external orientation, place of residency, or ancestry (e.g., Chinese *Khache* [Tib. *rgya kha che*] or Ladakhi *Khache* [Tib. *la dwags kha che*]).⁶⁰ As explained in further detail below, these suffixes typically indicated the ancestral ties or cultural orientation, not that they were Chinese Muslim Hui or Ladakhi Muslims.

Barkor and Wapaling Khache

Within Lhasa, the *Khache* community was divided into two main communities along linguistic and cultural lines, those of South Asian heritage and those of Chinese heritage.⁶¹ This terminology eventually achieved even finer delineation within Lhasa and allowed for considerable specificity, referring to the neighborhoods in which they settled and built their mosques: the Barkor or the Wapaling.⁶² By adding these modifiers the two communities were immediately distinguished from the other *Khaches* (or Kashmiri). The Barkor (South Asian) *Khache*, predominantly involved in commerce, clustered around the central Barkor market area near the Jokhang Temple.⁶³ The Wapaling (Chinese) *Khache* lived along Lhasa's Wapaling neighborhood in the southeastern corner of Lhasa, near the Lhasa River and closer to their fields and the areas in which they were allowed to butcher animals.⁶⁴ Tsarong Yangchen Dolkar, in her memoirs, described the Wapaling *Khache* community as primarily made up of vegetable sellers and butchers but having a good reputation as selling the best quality and widest variety.⁶⁵

The striking aspect of this heterogeneity of Lhasa's two main groups was how rarely it was remarked on by outsiders. Even Xue Wenbo, a Muslim Chinese

intellectual who arrived in Tibet in 1951, noted his initial confusion in attempting to differentiate between the Barkor and the Wapaling Khache:

Just after arriving in Lhasa, I saw many Muslims on the streets, but I could not distinguish which were Wapaling Khache (Ch. *Huizu*) and which were Barkor Khache (Ch. *ka-shi-mi-er ren*). This was especially true with women who I could not even differentiate from Tibetan women. After sometime, when I concentrated, I began to see differences in their appearance and complexion, and also that some aspects of their manner of dress were different.⁶⁶

If outsiders found it hard to grapple with the internal differences between the Wapaling and Barkor Khache, most struggled to come to grips with the other Khache communities that also flourished in Lhasa and many other central Tibetan towns.

Ladakhi Khache

Of all the Tibetan Muslim communities, the Ladakhi Khache tended to be the most frequently conflated with the local Tibetan Muslims. Although the Ladakhi certainly were prominent traders and had strong ties with the central Tibetan government, by the 1920s it appears that aside from the subsidized triennial Lapchak (Tib. *lo phyag*) relatively little trade traveled directly between Lhasa and Ladakh. Central Tibetan trade, as British India flourished, oriented itself to the geographically closer and more lucrative India market.⁶⁷ As Janet Rizvi pointed out in her study of Ladakhi trade, Ladakh was “at best a staging-post between the Punjab and Sinkiang, and Leh an entrepôt for the exchange of goods produced and consumed hundreds of miles away.”⁶⁸ The Ladakhi did retain an official representative in Lhasa, referred to as a consul in many Anglophone sources. In the eyes of the Tibetan government, those who retained their Ladakhi status were not considered Tibetan and were exempt from some taxes and obligations.⁶⁹ Twentieth-century sources suggest that the community was dwindling in size and influence from several dozen households in the early twentieth century to only a fraction of that by the early 1950s.⁷⁰

Singpa Khache

The Singpa Khache (Tib. *sing pa*; Ch. *senba*) have long existed as an identifiable subgroup of the Barkor Khache, but their name has caused considerable confusion in English, Chinese, and Tibetan.⁷¹ Often misidentified as “Sikh,” the Singpa Khache trace their origins to Muslim soldiers led by Zorawar Singh, who fought for the upstart Dogra state in the Kashmiri-Ladakhi-Jammu region. Having conquered Ladakh, the Dogra ruler in 1841 dispatched Singh to gain control over the trans-Himalayan region by invading Nepal through western Tibet. In an audacious assault, Zorawar Singh led his forces across western Tibet, running up a string of victories and controlling a broad swath of territory from Kashmir up to

the Nepalese border near Mount Kailash. But with his supply lines stretched and his campaign being overtaken by winter storms, Zorawar Singh suddenly found himself on the defensive. In a stunning reversal of fortune, Tibetan forces attacked Zorawar Singh's much larger force in early December 1841, routed the Dogra army, killed the legendary general, and captured nearly a thousand soldiers in the process (all without the support or even tacit approval of Chinese forces).⁷²

Unsure at first of what to do with such a large number of prisoners, the decision was made by the Tibetan authorities that since "it was not convenient to execute [the captured soldiers], it would be better to show mercy . . . and disperse them to various towns across Tibet."⁷³ Their continued presence is confirmed some years later, in the 1856 Nepal Tibet Treaty, where the Nepalese demanded that "the Tibetans are also to give back . . . [t]he [Singpa] prisoners of war who had been captured in 1841 in the war between Bhot [Tibet] and the Dogra ruler."⁷⁴ Exactly how many prisoners returned (or were returned) is unclear, though the Singpa Khache remained a prominent presence within the Khache community, by one estimate making up as much as 20 percent of the nearly two hundred Barkor Khache families living in Lhasa in the early 1950s.⁷⁵

Siling Khache

While the Barkor Khache likely settled in Lhasa prior to the arrival of their Wapaling counterparts, the Wapaling Khache grew demographically to be roughly as numerous as the Barkor Khache and served as key intermediaries for the Chinese officials serving in Lhasa. As the Qing brought Tibet increasingly into the Qing sphere of influence, Han and Hui Chinese, often first serving as soldiers or civil officials, settled in Lhasa, with the Hui typically marrying Wapaling Khache or Tibetan Buddhist women who converted. The primary exceptions to this were the Siling Khache, who were Tibetanized Hui from Qinghai, tracing their origins to the Amdo city of Siling (Tib. *zi ling*; Ch. *Xining*) in Qinghai province. They also tended to remain identifiable within the Lhasa Muslim communities. The Siling Khache aligned generally with the Wapaling Khache, but there were differences that allowed them to retain a separate identity from the other Wapaling Khache. By the twentieth century the Siling were a highly differentiated and identifiable group within the Wapaling Khache.⁷⁶

Gharib Khache

In addition to the above divisions, largely associated with a group's origin, a third group called "ghārib" (paupers) appears to have existed only in Lhasa.⁷⁷ The nineteenth-century account of Khwajah Gulam Muhammad describes a Muslim pauper's guild, composed exclusively of Khache, that paralleled (or perhaps was a subset) of the Ragyapa (Tib. *rags rgyab pa*).⁷⁸ The Ragyapa are a Tibetan hereditary class who carried out acts considered unclean or undesirable by Tibetans, such as disposing of corpses and animal remains, and they also served other functions like

the guarding and execution of prisoners. Given the difficulty most non-Tibetans had differentiating between Khache and Kashmiri, it is not surprising that few non-Tibetan sources suggest the presence of the Khache Ragyapa.⁷⁹ For this reason Khwajah Gulam Muhammad's description from the late nineteenth century is invaluable, as it details a highly organized association having its own leaders and police. It is significant that he suggests they were recognized by the Tibetan government and even received a monthly stipend.

The fifteenth of each month, a group of twelve to twenty or twenty-five gharib present themselves at the Potala Palace, and with all their force howl and shout, and then receive each month eighteen tanka, that is to say the equivalent of twenty mohors [gold coins]. This is a stipend that they have received since ancient times.⁸⁰

More recently, Tsarong Yangchen Dolkar has recounted that one of Lhasa's most famous beggars was a man call "Khache Powo" who used to beg by singing the lines, "happier than us is not even the gods of heaven."⁸¹ The most recent indication of Ghārib Khache comes from Gaborieau, who while interviewing Tibetan Muslim refugees to India in 1961 confirmed the existence of such a class of Muslims and was told that a dozen or so of those families had fled from Tibet to India.⁸²

The occupational definition of Gharib Khache—butchers, waste collectors, and, in general, a surveillance force—was not unique among the Khache. While rarely as strongly enforced in the manner of the hereditary tasks assigned to the Gharib Khache, each of the Khache groups tended to be defined, if only by reputation, by specific professions. The occupational orientation shaped where the various Khache communities congregated within Lhasa.

The numerous subgroups within the Khache community suggest that the Khache presence was not transient, ephemeral, or brief but that they were an integral and active element of Lhasa and Tibetan society. This historical commentary demonstrates that Tibetans across central Tibet were aware of the distinctions among the Khache and perceived them as being Tibetan. This awareness arose in part as a result of the Khache community's presence in commercial, social, and political fields pivotal to the functioning of Tibetan society. A clear definition of who the Khache are is inherently tied to a clear understanding of what it means to be Tibetan or even what we mean when we talk of Tibet.

THE KHACHE: SEPARATE BUT TIBETAN

Early twentieth-century estimates consistently identify several thousand Khache across all central Tibetan communities. In 1934, a Chinese Muslim, Zhu Xiu, estimated that the Khache numbered roughly 800 households in a total Lhasa population of 6,500 lay households.⁸³ By the 1940s, several Chinese articles on the Tibetan Muslim community, reported that the Hui, originally from Shaanxi,

Sichuan, and Yunnan, “represent two-thirds of the Muslim (Ch. *Huimin*) community, while the Indian and Tibetan Muslims (Ch. *Huimin*) represent one-third.”⁸⁴ In an article written a year later, a Muslim Chinese estimated that the Chinese Muslims “have 120 or so households,” while the Barkor Khache, or as he called them the “Indian Hui” (Ch. *yindu Huimin*), “have 70 or so households.”⁸⁵ In 1934, the Chinese envoy to Lhasa, Huang Musong, estimated the Lhasa population of “Han [Chinese] and Muslim [Chinese]” (Ch. *Han Hui renmin*) at 300 or 400 households. Almost certainly he was talking of the Wapaling Khache and the mixed Tibetan-Chinese population (Tib. *ko ko*).⁸⁶

By the 1950s, more authoritative and precise population figures began to emerge. When a Beijing Chinese Muslim, Xue Wenbo, entered Lhasa with the People’s Liberation Army in December 1951, he concluded that “the Lhasa Hui (Ch. *Huizu*) have 150 households, with a population of several thousand people.”⁸⁷ His approximation accords with official estimates from 1953 that state the Khache (Ch. *kaji*) had 141 households.⁸⁸ This suggests that the number of Muslims in Lhasa by the mid-nineteenth century exceeded 3,000 individuals.⁸⁹ The population of smaller communities in Shigatse, Tsetang, and other small towns across central Tibet outside of Lhasa approached but did not surpass that of Lhasa proper (though in total these other communities likely did not surpass Lhasa’s entire Muslim population).⁹⁰

Perhaps the only single moment in time when we are able to confirm this estimate of roughly 3,000 Muslims living in central Tibet with a high degree of precision is in 1960 during the Tibetan Muslim Incident, examined in detail in chapter 5.⁹¹ In that incident Chinese and Indian officials identified and allowed nearly 1,500 Barkor Khaches—men, women, and children—to leave China and enter India by virtue of their “Kashmiri” identity.⁹² Several dozen others were allowed to leave for Nepal largely because of marriage to a Nepalese (or half Nepalese Khatsara). The Wapaling Khache, who remained behind, numbered more than 1,000.⁹³

All later estimates are hopelessly confused with the influx of Hui from the Chinese interior (including the northwestern provinces of Gansu) and the shifts in terminology brought about by China’s ethnic classification project (Ch. *minzu shibie*). This resulted in Chinese making little differentiation between the Wapaling Khache and the in-migrating Muslim Chinese Hui. The matter was further confused by the arrival of large numbers of Muslim Chinese Hui. Due in part to this influx, the Wapaling Khache moved to the Small Mosque in the Barkor, relinquishing the Grand Mosque to the Chinese Hui.⁹⁴ According to the 1982 Chinese census for Tibet, Lhasa had 1,367 Muslim Chinese (Huizu), and given the strict residency limitations between 1960 and 1982, these were overwhelmingly the Wapaling Khache who were not allowed to emigrate to India. The 2000 census suggests that number had grown only to 1,741. This low number hints at the possibility that the Wapaling Khache might have registered themselves as

Tibetan rather than Hui in reaction to the influx of Han and Hui Chinese and the negative light in which such immigrants were perceived in Lhasa.⁹⁵

If the presence of a substantial Tibetan Muslim community is incontrovertible, the ways in which that community integrated itself in mainstream Tibetan society also demonstrates how deeply acculturated and accepted the Khache were. It is instructive to draw attention to just how different they were from other foreign communities present in central Tibet. In the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries, representatives from four foreign states were granted official status by the Tibetan government and posted to Lhasa: Nepal, Ladakh, Bhutan, and China. The Chinese Qing court appointed Ambans, or Imperial Residents, in Tibet (Ch. *zhu zang dachen*).⁹⁶ The Nepalese were accorded the right by treaty to have an envoy (N. *bhardar*) stationed in Lhasa who was authorized to settle disputes involving Nepalese citizens.⁹⁷ The Bhutanese and Ladakhis had posted representatives in Lhasa from at least the early eighteenth century. Despite Qing China's insinuations to the contrary, neither sent tribute missions to the Qing court.⁹⁸ With the fall of the Qing Empire in 1911, the status of the Nepali, Ladakhi, and Bhutanese envoys remained unaltered. However, the representation of China's central government to Lhasa remained a mixed and highly contentious issue well into the 1940s, reflecting the political unrest within China proper.⁹⁹

The only additional state accorded the right to post foreign envoys to Lhasa was Britain, which beginning in the first decades of the twentieth century and with a high degree of regularity dispatched delegations there. In 1936, Britain's informal relationship took on a more permanent status in response to the Nationalist Chinese sending a "condolence mission" to Lhasa after the death of the Thirteenth Dalai Lama. Instead of returning to China, this mission not only remained in Lhasa and installed Lhasa's first wireless radio transmitter, but then attempted to establish an official presence. Whether this office was a consulate or an office of the central government remained a point of contention. In response, the British swiftly sent their own delegation in 1936, establishing a permanent but technically unofficial mission under the leadership of Hugh Richardson, who became the first head of the British Mission in Lhasa.¹⁰⁰

My emphasis on the presence of the foreign representatives in Tibet is to highlight the difference between these foreign envoys and the Khache leadership which was often erroneously grouped together with these foreign emissaries. The presence of Khache leaders did not escape the notice of foreign observers. Often erroneously believing the Khache were themselves foreign (and thus providing an accurate model of what rights and privileges the foreign visitors might be also accorded) often described with great accuracy the nature and powers of the Khache leadership. In 1845, the French Jesuit priest Evariste Huc remarked that the Khache "in Lhasa . . . [the Khache] have a chief who oversees their immediate needs, and whose authority is recognized by the Tibetan Government."¹⁰¹ An early nineteenth-century Chinese gazetteer noted that the Wapaling (Ch. *chantou*)

Khache were governed by a council composed of four people: “three community leaders” (Ch. *datou ren*) representing those Khaches from in and around Lhasa (Ch. *qianzang*) and a “single community leader” (Ch. *datou ren*) for those Muslims in and around Shigatse.¹⁰² The Barkor Khache had a single community leader (*datou ren*).¹⁰³

A century later, George Sandberg explained correctly that the Khache “governor, who is chosen by the Tibetan Gye-po from among the [Khache] residents of Lhasa, decides all disputes between his own countrymen,” but then he, incorrectly, attempted to suggest this is the same as “the Nepalese governor [who] exercises the same powers over the Nepalese inhabitants.”¹⁰⁴ In 1916, Charles Bell also noted that “the Kashmiris at Lhasa are under the jurisdiction of their own headmen, these being appointed by the Tibetan Government.”¹⁰⁵ Gaborieau, in his summary of the Khache *pöpo*, or community leaders (Tib. *dpon po*), summarizes the status precisely: “In effect, the kha-che ‘go-pa was not a consul: he was not responsible to any foreign government, but rather to the za’idah [Tibetan-born Khaches] who constituted the majority of [Khaches] in Tibet, and retained ties neither to Kashmir, nor to any other region of India.”¹⁰⁶ The significance of differentiating the status of the Khache headmen from the foreign consuls might appear minor, but it highlights an important distinction. The Khache headmen functioned as administrators entirely within the framework of the Tibetan bureaucracy. Instead of being seen as representatives of foreign missions from neighboring states, they served as representatives of community associations formally recognized by the Tibetan government and served at the behest of the Tibetan state at the lowest level of government.

Rebecca French describes, insightfully and more broadly, both the function and the force that such community associations wielded within Lhasa and central Tibet:

Perhaps the most important interstitial and interconnecting networks of individuals in Tibet were the associations, *kyiduk dang tsokpa* (*skyid sdug dang tshogs pa*). As the fourth level [of the Tibetan bureaucracy], they constituted bounded social units that played an essential role in solving the disputes of their members and acted on behalf of their members in disputes with outsiders. Associations could be based on ethnic, religious, occupational or social similarities or formed around mutual-aid and special-purpose commonalities.¹⁰⁷

Whether out of ignorance or unacknowledged bias, European accounts repeatedly grouped the Khache leadership with other foreign representatives.¹⁰⁸ Regardless, the administrative structure of the Lhasa municipal associations demonstrates a responsive and nuanced awareness of the complex subgroups within the Khache community and how they functioned within the central government.

Despite sharing many commonalities, often praying at the same mosque and frequently inter-marrying, the Khache were distinguished legally, culturally and

socially by the Tibetan state. The distinct division between the communities is most apparent in the Tibetan government's treatment of them as separate communities, governed by discrete councils who reported to different ministries within the government. Each of the five Khache communities, including the Gharib and Singpa, had their own separate headmen (Tib. *mgo pa*).¹⁰⁹ In the case of the Barkor Tibetan Muslims, their self-selected leader reported to the Finance Ministry (Tib. *rtsis khang*) since they were engaged primarily in trade and commerce.¹¹⁰ The Wapaling Tibetan Muslims' leader (Tib. *wapaling ponpo*) reported directly to the Agriculture Ministry (Tib. *so nam las khungs*).¹¹¹ While it is often assumed that the Wapaling Khache were assigned to the Agriculture Ministry because they were agriculturalists, Könchok Samden, an official in the Tibetan government, ascribed this to the fact that "people who came from other places such as from Kham, Amdo or from central Tibet and who did not thane a specific lord, in other words, who were people just roaming around, they all belonged to the Agriculture Office so it collected the *mibo* [Tib. *mi bogs*, "head tax"] from them. . . . [A]nd they also had a *gembo* [headman; Tib. *rgan po*] who was also appointed by the Agriculture Office itself."¹¹² Tibetan archival documents from 1938 describe the Barkor Khache committee as constituted of a leader, a primary assistant, a secondary assistant, and two members. Sometimes, though, there was an alternative description, specifying joint leadership by the Barkor and the Singpa *pönpo* plus three assistants.¹¹³

The precise powers and legal authority of the councils tended to be directed inward to the members of their own community. Abū Bakr Amīruddīn Tibbatī Nadvī's study of Tibetan Muslims described the powers of this five-member committee as "adjudicat[ing] all issues pertaining to Muslims, and the Tibetan government never interfered with its functions."¹¹⁴ Khwajah Ghulam Muhammad describes the nature and powers such councils had during his visit in 1895:

The verdict, in the majority of cases, is pronounced conforming to the injunctions of Islamic law. Though the sanctions for adultery and theft is neither stoning nor the amputation of the hand [as traditionally dictated by Islamic law], but other punishments are given. If the dispute is between a Muslim and a Tibetan, the case is heard by a mixed tribunal [of Khache and Tibetans].¹¹⁵

Even when a Muslim was found to be involved in theft or in a quarrel among Khaches, he was invariably handed over to this committee.¹¹⁶

Mirroring the Barkor Khache *pönpo*, the Wapaling also had a selected leader who served as the administrative head for their community. Perhaps because their community was not as diverse as the Barkor Khache, the Wapaling council had a more streamlined multimember committee. Both committees reported, paid their taxes, and confirmed the election of their head to the administrative ministries that were responsible for them.

The dilemma of trying to speak monolithically of “Tibetan Muslims” lies largely in the geographic positioning of Tibet. Almost all of the Tibetan Muslim communities that thrived within Tibet originally emigrated from non-Tibetan lands, most often as traders. As a result, unlike the Ladakhi, the Nepalese, and even the Chinese, the Khache considered themselves, and were treated as, fully Tibetan within decades after their arrival in central Tibet. In certain circles, many today seek to position the Muslim Tibetans as vital indicators of Tibet’s internal and external relations. The Fourteenth Dalai Lama, for example, often cites the centuries-long cordial relationship between Tibetan Buddhists and Tibetan Muslims as a model for interreligious understanding.¹¹⁷ Conversely, an emerging number of scholars are suggesting that the friction between “Tibetans and Muslims,” said to have existed for centuries, is rarely historically accurate. More appropriate would be to note that the interethnic violence occurred in very specific periods of time and geographically delimited places, namely, in the eastern Tibetan Amdo region and during the violent warlord period.¹¹⁸ Yet as the world began to increasingly encroach on Tibet’s autonomy, it would challenge the multiple identities that the outside world read into the Tibetan Muslim communities.