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**Toward Understanding the Guru-disciple Relation in Contemporary Chinese Vajrayana  
Buddhism**

Bachelor's Thesis

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**Tartu 2024**

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## **Acknowledgment**

To my two advisors for the series of revisions, guidance, and comments they made to my thesis in the limited time available to them, all of which have helped shape this thesis significantly.

To my partner, Samuel, for supporting me both mentally and physically during this difficult time. I could not have completed this thesis without your help.

To all my friends who have encouraged and supported me during the writing process, your love and kindness kept me writing and moving forward.

To my mother, I hope you will always be blessed with eternal happiness under God's protection. I miss you very much.

## Introduction

In this bachelor's thesis, I analyze the Guru-disciple relationship in Vajrayana Buddhism in modern socialist China by interviewing a Vajrayana practitioner and his Guru, who is currently practicing and preaching Vajrayana Buddhism in Mainland China. Historically, Vajrayana Buddhism originated in Northern India in contact with other Tantric and Yogic traditions and reached Tibet around 700 AD. Vajrayana Buddhism has been one of the most influential religions in the Tibetan-Nepali area ever since. In the Vajrayana tradition, the practices are intended to pursue liberation from the Six Realm Wheel of Life (*bhavachakra*). To achieve this goal, selecting the right Guru to teach and guide one through proper practices is crucial. <sup>1</sup>As the most frequently used name for Vajrayana Buddhism, *Tantra* suggests, the teachings of Vajrayana Buddhism usually remain secret and can only be passed on by Gurus to disciples. This has shrouded the subject in mystery from the point of view of research and some activity and was later discovered to be quite controversial. In modern China, Vajrayana Buddhism is, to some extent, influenced by different political policies and the development of the times, as are other religions. Especially after the occupation of Tibet, the relationship between Vajrayana Buddhism and the Chinese government has become more turbulent. Currently, the Vajrayana dharma preaching and related religious activities are only legally allowed in four provinces: Qinghai, Tibet, Sichuan, and Inner Mongolia, where Vajrayana Buddhism has too deep of an influence, and it is impossible to eliminate their religious activities completely.

Therefore, in this thesis, to explore the dynamic of the Guru-disciple relationship, a microscopic portrayal of Vajrayana Buddhism pedagogy is presented through interviews and data collection. Even though the dataset is relatively limited, utilizing approaches such as one-to-one interviews, this thesis aims to provide an approximate outlook on Vajrayana Buddhism and its unique Guru-Disciple dynamic. By doing so, it also presents the multi-faceted aspects of its teaching processes, knowledge exchange history, and development in China.

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<sup>1</sup> **Rinpoche**, Kalu. 2002. *Secret Buddhism: Vajrayana practices*. Clearpoint Press.

### **Choosing a topic: explanation**

Despite growing up in an atheistic household, my interest in religion and related topics led me to choose Estonia for further studies. Back in China, I wasn't exposed to much religious education. Thus, all my religious studies knowledge comes from either life experiences or university courses and lectures.

During my first year at the University, I took a Buddhist course taught by visiting professor Dr. Bhikshuni Lozang Trinlae. I assisted her with two papers as a translator. My interest in Vajrayana Buddhism was piqued during the translation process. As I was writing my bachelor's thesis and contemplating the topic of research, I met a Vajrayana Kagyu practitioner. On the basis of initial one-to-one interviews with him, I decided to investigate and analyze the Vajrayana religion in mainland China. In addition, I planned to conduct some comparative research on the relationship between him and his Guru, which contributed to the unique Guru-disciple relationship in Vajrayana Buddhism.

### **Research topic**

#### **The following topics are covered in this thesis:**

1. Overview of Mainland Chinese Vajrayana Buddhism and its various sects, practices, and teachings
2. Combining interviews, case studies, and teaching methods in order to study Guru-disciple relationships in Vajrayana Buddhism.
3. Data collection and analysis are based on one-to-one interviews.

### **Interviews**

During the in-depth interviews with a Vajrayana Kagyu practitioner, the questions juxtapose personal life questions with those related to religion. Among other questions are the reasons for beginning Vajrayana practice, the relationship between Guru and disciple, and the general Guru-disciple relationship in Vajrayana Buddhism in China. Among the questions secular society has about Vajrayana Buddhism are the general teaching process, their specialties, and some common questions about the relationship between them. Interview questions include

freelance talks outside of the provided topics, which will be included later in the context of the interview.

An online interview was conducted using netnography methodology (Kozinet, 2015), and the whole process was recorded. As part of the thesis, there is written consent to interview in both English and Chinese languages, a verbatim transcript of the interview, and a complete English translation of the interview. Attached are two official transcripts of the interview. The first interview with disciple M<sup>2</sup> took place on January 27th, 2024, and mostly focused on his personal life, his practice journey, and his understanding of Vajrayana Buddhism and Guru-disciple relationships. An audio file from the recorded interview with M on January 27th, 2024, is missing due to a technical error.

The second interview was initially scheduled with Guru B<sup>3</sup> on March 19, 2024, but B declined due to political sensitivities. Despite multiple attempts and communications, B declined to take part in the interview or research for this thesis, but he authorized M to share some of the personal information he had about him. Consequently, these thesis interviews are narrated in a second-person perspective.

### **Linguistic explanation**

Three reasons led to my writing my bachelor's thesis in English instead of Estonian: first, my main supervisor is proficient in English, and second, I find it easier to express my ideas and opinions accurately in English. Consequently, this simplifies the process of accessing, revising, evaluating, and supervising my work. Thirdly, since the relationship between Guru and Disciple in contemporary Vajrayana Buddhism is rarely discussed or researched, I will continue my research and expand the ideas during my Master's program at New York University, USA, which I am due to apply soon. Therefore, this thesis will be easier to continue if I use English as the written language. While the thesis was written in English, most of the interviews were conducted in Chinese (Mandarin) since most informants were Chinese. There are a few proper nouns written in romanized Tibetan.

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<sup>2</sup> M is used in place of the informant's name for the reason that the informant requested anonymity.

<sup>3</sup> B is used in place of the informant's name for the reason that the informant requested anonymity.

## 1. A brief history of Vajrayana Buddhism in mainland China

Vajrayana Buddhism (ch: 金刚乘佛教), more commonly known in China as Tibetan Tantric Buddhism (ch: 藏传密宗), is a Tibetan-originated religion and the mainstream religion in Tibet, Bhutan, and Mongolia. Some scholars think that Vajrayana Buddhism is the foundation of Theravada and Mahayana Buddhism<sup>4</sup>, but more scholars argue that Vajrayana Buddhism, as one main branch of Tibetan Buddhism, originated from the combination of Chinese Mahayana, Nepali Mahayana, and indigenous Tibetan religion Bon (tib: bon, ch: 苯教).

Vajrayana Buddhism had two periods of dissemination in Tibet, with Langdarma's Persecution of Buddhism in 838 CE as the dividing line. It can be divided into *Snga Dar* "Earlier dissemination" (7.-9. century) and *Phyi Dar* "Later dissemination" (10. century-). Vajrayana Buddhism influenced Mainland China's religion and culture during its periods of popularity, from the Mongol Yuan Dynasty (1271-1368 AD) to the Manchu Qing Dynasty (1644-1911 AD). Monasteries and temples dedicated to Vajrayana practices were established in various regions, and teachings and rituals were transmitted to Chinese practitioners.

### 1.1 Vajrayana Buddhism: the sects, the history, and the development

Starting in the middle of the 11th century, Tibetan Buddhism entered a period of formation in various sects. These sects, including Nyingma, Kadam, Sakya, Kagyu, Gelug, Shyijé, Gcod yul, Jonang, Godrag, Shalu, etc., the latter five sects have been integrated into the other sects due to the lack of political power backing.<sup>5</sup> Currently, the four most influential sects are Nyingma, Sakya, Kagyu, and Gelug. These sects are differentiated by their founders, lineage, the main dharma they practice, and even the color of their clothing and the different hats they wear. Nonetheless, it is important to note that the great achievers and religious leaders of different sects do not disown each other's accomplishments. In Vajrayana Buddhism, regardless of which sect a practitioner belongs to, every sect will give them the same recognition and respect<sup>6</sup>.

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<sup>4</sup> Phuntsho, Dorji. 2021. *Relationship between disciples and Guru in Vajrayana Buddhism: The Importance of the Master (Tib: Lama) and the Disciple (Tib: Loma) in Vajrayana Buddhism*.

<sup>5</sup> TibetOL 西藏在线. 2013. 藏传佛教简史 *A Brief History of the Tibetan Buddhism*. [https://www.tibetol.cn/html/2013/zjip\\_0703/1198.html](https://www.tibetol.cn/html/2013/zjip_0703/1198.html) (Accessed April 26, 2024)

<sup>6</sup>Interview with the author, 2024.3.19

The Chinese monarchy era, especially after the Mongols took over the Mainland China in 1271, was characterized by a supportive and positive attitude towards Vajrayana Buddhism whether it was due to political considerations or cultural exchange. This attitude endured for nearly seven hundred years across Yuan, Ming and Qing dynasties. During the Mongol Yuan Dynasty (1271-1368 AD), Tibetan Buddhism, represented by Vajrayana Buddhism, played a major role in Sino-Tibetan relations. The rulers used Tibetan Buddhism as a tool to incorporate Tibet into their empire (Slobodnik, 2006). The Mongolian Khans recognized the representatives of Vajrayana Sakya sect leaders, such as Sakya-Pandita Kunga Gyaltsen (1182-1251) and Phagpa Lodrö Gyaltsen (1235-1280) as local rulers in Tibet, while remaining a vassal relationship to the empire. The Mongolian nobles also provided financial support for Lamas and monks and built monasteries, making Vajrayana Buddhism one of the official religions in the empire. This was also marked as the foundation of the relationship between Tibet and China till 1911 (Slobodnik, 2006).

After the country was taken over by the Ming Dynasty (1368-1644 AD), the emperors kept providing similar support for Vajrayana Buddhism's development in Mainland China. The most notable emperor was the third emperor, Ming Chengzu (ch: 明成祖, ruled 1403-1425), who had a strong interest in Vajrayana Buddhism. He invited the three most influential Vajrayana leaders to the capital city, Nanjing (ch: 南京), to enlighten the citizens there with Buddhist teachings (Dharmas). He also gave lofty titles, such as "Tathāgata, great precious king of dharma, great excellent Īśvara Buddha of the western heaven [who is] fully perfected in the ten thousand actions, most victorious in the ten directions, completely enlightened, wonderfully wise, excellently all-responsive, and [who] aids the nation and expounds the doctrine" (ch: 萬行具足十方最勝圓覺妙智慧善普應佑國演教如來大寶法王西天大善自在佛)<sup>7</sup> to the leader of Kagyu sect, 5th Karmapa Lama Deshin Shekpa. This title, more commonly known as the shortened version *Great Precious King of Dharma* (ch: 大寶法王), has become the symbol of the Kagyu Karmapa lineage, and it is still used today.

During China's last imperial dynasty, the Manchurian Qing Dynasty (1644-1911 AD), Vajrayana Buddhism maintained its influence. Even though some scholars argue that the Manchu founders were using Vajrayana Buddhism as a tool to control Tibet and Vajrayana-devoted

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<sup>7</sup> Slobodnik, Martin. 2006. The Perception of Tibet in China: between Disdain and Fascination. – *Fu Jen Historical Journal*, Vol.17, No. 2, pp.82

Mongolian tribes<sup>8</sup>, however, the Manchus were followers of Vajrayana before the establishment of the Qing dynasty. It is also of note that the influence of Vajrayana Buddhism on the Qing royal family and elites was extremely profound. Many translated versions of Tibetan Buddhist scriptures, Thangkas, sculptures and portraits of Buddhas and Bodhisattvas, and Dharma vessels collected by different Qing emperors can still be found in the Forbidden City - former Royal Palace, now the National Palace Museum in Beijing. The Gelug sect, the most closely associated Vajrayana sect with the Qing imperial family, was mainly promoted and spread during this period. This influence continues to this day. In a later interview, Interviewer M mentioned that the most influential Vajrayana sect in mainland China today is the Gelug sect precisely because it was honored by the Manchu imperial family.

After the end of the Qing Dynasty in the 1900s, China entered a phase of seeking national identity through religion. During this time, Venerable Tai Hsu, an aspiring monk of Chinese Buddhism, sought to reorganize Chinese Buddhism by learning from the Vajrayana Buddhism of Tibet and other places to save the country and protect the religion. Recognizing the importance of Tibet and Tibetan Buddhism to the unification and Chinese culture, Tai Hsu has promoted Tibetan Buddhism on various public occasions and attempted to use the mutual learning and appreciation of Chinese and Tibetan Buddhism as a means of integrating ethnic relations and resolving political conflicts (Gao, 2023). However, this attempt quickly failed due to mismatched finances, corruption within Tibetan Buddhism, and civil chaos in the Tibetan region.

Sino-Tibetan relations, as well as Vajrayana Buddhism in Mainland China, entered a new era after the Annexation of Tibet<sup>9</sup> in the 1950s when Tibet became a part of the People's Republic of China (PRC). After a long period of war, most of the people of China do not have a clear picture of this far southwestern frontier region. To justify the annexation and for the people to understand why the annexation is necessary, Tibet was portrayed as the embodiment of backwardness, cruelty, and inhumanity, a region that resembles hell and thus should be civilized according to the Sino-socialist pattern (Slobodník, 2006). Meanwhile, Tibetan Buddhism became the target of fierce criticism since it is considered one of the main causes of the backwardness of

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<sup>8</sup> Slobodník, Martin. 2006. The Perception of Tibet in China: between Disdain and Fascination. – *Fu Jen Historical Journal*, vol.17, pp.84

<sup>9</sup> “The Annexation of Tibet” have various refers based on political standpoint. The Chinese government refer it as “Peaceful Liberation of Tibet” (ch: 西藏和平解放), the Central Tibetan Administration and the Tibetan diaspora refer it as “Chinese Invasion of Tibet” (ch: 中国入侵西藏). The use of “The Annexation of Tibet” in this thesis does not imply any political meaning or position.

Tibet. Chinese scholars agree that, under the influence of feudal serfdom in pre-annexation Tibet, the belief in gurus was solidified and generalized at the socio-cultural level. Monks, especially living Buddhas, became the upper echelons of society and were excessively venerated, leading to such shortcomings as the abolition of precepts and extravagance (Gao, 2023), which has led to the oppression of the lower-class Tibetan people. However, during the annexation process, the PRC government also realized the importance and inseparability of Tibetan Buddhism to the Tibetan people. Therefore, the policy of “political unity, freedom of religion, separation of religion and politics” (ch: 政治统一、信教自由、政教分离) was implemented into Tibetan Buddhism. This religious policy was formulated based on Marxist religious theories in conjunction with the reality of Tibetan religion (Gao, 2023). Chinese scholars and Communist supporters in Tibet believe that the Annexation brought socialism into Tibetan society and is an improvement for Tibet. On the other hand, this series of policies has also been seen as an attempt at ethnocultural cleansing by the Communist Party due to the Chinese government's political interference in religious practices such as the reincarnation of living Buddhas<sup>10</sup> and the exile of Tibetan Vajrayana Buddhist leader at the time, 14th Dalai Lama Tenzin Gyatso after the annexation of Tibet<sup>11</sup>. In today's China, religious activities are under strict supervision. Interviewee M also mentioned during the interview that Tibetan Buddhism is currently allowed to be practiced in only four provinces in mainland China, all of which are autonomous minority regions (ch: 少数民族自治区). Although the official government website states that China supports freedom of religion, there have been many news reports of religious activities being halted due to government interference. Vajrayana Buddhism is also considered a politically sensitive topic in China because of its involvement with Tibet.

## 1.2 The Guru-Disciple Relationship in Vajrayana Buddhism

Guru (ch: 上师) directly translates as “superior teacher”. The word originates from the Tibetan words “gu ru” and “bla ma”. “gu ru” is the transliterate of the Sanskrit word “Guru”, meaning “heavy,” and is extended to adjectives “respected” and “honored.” It is also extended as “one who is respected and honored,” i.e., “master” or “teacher”; “bla” in Tibetan has two basic

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<sup>10</sup> **International Campaign for Tibet**, 2007, *New measures on reincarnation reveal Party's objectives of political control*. <https://savetibet.org/new-measures-on-reincarnation-reveal-partys-objectives-of-political-control/> (Accessed April 29, 2024)

<sup>11</sup> **Gyatso**, Tenzi. 1990. *Freedom in Exile*. Harper Collins Press

meanings: the first is “up, high, superior, first”, which is equivalent to the former meaning of Guru; and the second is “(religious context) a *thing* living in the human body and leave the human body at the time of death”<sup>12</sup>. In the Tibetan dictionary, "bla ma" has two meanings: one is “a term of respect for a teacher”, and the other is “a person known as an incarnation or living Buddha (tib: a lags) in Tibetan Buddhism.” This suggests that “Guru” and “living Buddha” have similar meanings in Tibetan culture (Gao, 2023), and also explains why even if it does not require a Guru to be a “living Buddha”, Chinese people naturally link “Guru” and “living Buddha” together.

The concept of Guru exists in different schools of Buddhism, but each has a different definition of what qualities a Guru should possess. This is because different schools of Buddhism have different requirements for practice and the qualities of a guru. The Dalai Lama III Sonam Gyatso gives the following explanation:

“Generally speaking, the stronger the power of the practice, the greater the need for a Guru who teaches rigorously. We must rely on a fully enlightened Buddha as our Guru in order to successfully carry out the practice of Tantra.”<sup>13</sup>

Among the many Buddhist schools, Vajrayana Buddhism has the strongest guru-disciple relationship. This is reflected in many religious texts and academic research and studies. For example, The Third Dalai Lama, Sonam Gyatso, suggests that Tibetan Tantric Buddhism relies upon and incorporates an intimate Guru-disciple relationship, and the relationship between a Guru and a disciple should be like family<sup>14</sup>. Both parties should have trust, understanding, tolerance, and devotion toward each other. Foundational Tibetan Buddhism texts, such as Patrul Rinpoche’s *The Words of My Perfect Teacher* (1998), stress how practitioners cannot successfully practice Tantra or achieve liberation without a Guru’s guidance (Ford, 2022).

This characteristic is further exemplified in the Kagyu sect. The Kagyu tradition places great importance on lineage and blessing. Therefore, the Guru-disciple relationship carries a much stronger emotional connection within this sect. The interview reflects the importance of

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<sup>12</sup> Gao, Ying. 2023. 藏传佛教中国化视野下的上师信仰 Guru Faith in the Perspective of Chineseization of Tibetan Buddhism. – *China Tibetology*, vol.2.

<sup>13</sup> Dalai Lama III, 菩提道次第教授 Guidance for the Practice of Lamrim chenmo

<sup>14</sup> Dalai Lama III, 菩提道次第教授 Guidance for the Practice of Lamrim chenmo

Vajrayana practice of avoiding even the slightest misperception of the Guru, as the Guru represents the Buddha in Vajrayana practice. The disciple needs to convert, obey, and serve the Guru with the Trini-karmani. The Trini-karmani is a reference to the three modes of activities: word (ch: 口業), thought (ch: 意業), and deed (ch: 身業)<sup>15</sup>. From the moment of conversion, one has dedicated their life to the Guru and to the Dharma lineage<sup>16</sup>, which in Buddhist terms, stands for the passing on traditions within the sect.

However, such intimacy also brings a lot of controversy. The controversy centered on the excessive worship of the guru and the possibility that this could lead to aggression due to a lack of reciprocated power (Gao, 2023). A relatively unequal relationship between Guru and disciple in Vajrayana Buddhism can increase the possibility of incidents such as sexual abuse, particularly in practices involving sexual relations such as The Yoga of Bliss (tib: las-kyi phyag-rgya), also known as Karmamudra. Many famous Vajrayana Buddhist rinpoches and leaders have been the subject of sexual abuse allegations, which has had a severe impact on the reputation of Vajrayana Buddhism worldwide.<sup>17</sup> Although Vajrayana Buddhist leaders are now generally opposed to Karmamudra practice<sup>18</sup>, such controversy still exists.

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<sup>15</sup> **Digital Dictionary of Buddhism:** *Trini-karmani* 三業.

[http://www.buddhism-dict.net/ddb/pcache/4eid\(b4e09-696d\).html](http://www.buddhism-dict.net/ddb/pcache/4eid(b4e09-696d).html). (Accessed April 29, 2023)

<sup>16</sup> Interview with the author, 2024.1.27

<sup>17</sup> See examples in **Campbell**, June. 1996. *Traveler in Space: In Search of Female Identity in Tibetan Buddhism*. George Braziller; **Lattin**, Don. 1994. *Best-selling Buddhist author accused of sexual abuse*. The San Francisco Free Press.

<sup>18</sup> See 14th Dalai Lama's statement in **Fields**, Rick. **Bogin**, Benjamin. 1981. *How the Swans Came to the Lake: A Narrative History of Buddhism in America*. Shambhala.

## 2. Case Analysis: The Guru-Disciple Relationship in Contemporary China

In this section, I conduct an in-depth interview with a Kagyu practitioner in mainland China and use the content of the interview in combination with other literature to provide a comprehensive overview of Vajrayana Buddhist practitioners in mainland China. This interview is not statistically significant. However, due to the unique nature and significance of Vajrayana Buddhism, the insights gleaned from the single sample interviewed remain of some value in understanding the spread and current status of Vajrayana Buddhism in China and the relationship between Gurus and disciples.

### 2.1 Basic Information of the Disciple and the Guru

Practitioner M, Han Chinese, was born in 1972 and raised in Yinchuan, Ningxia Hui Autonomous Region, China. Despite growing up in a Muslim region, M was not influenced by Islamic ideologies in any significant way. As a troubled child, M was repeatedly incarcerated during his teenage years and his twenties, according to his family. Having been expelled from middle school for his shenanigans, M has not pursued further education as a result of his first sentence. His prior practice of Hinayana Buddhism (ch: 小乘佛教)<sup>19</sup> preceded his conversion to Vajrayana Buddhism. As a result, he found the Hinayana teaching unsuitable for him, partially because his Hinayana Guru wasn't preaching the dogma properly. During his service time in 2010, he briefly became familiar with Vajrayana Buddhism. Moreover, side by side, he became familiar with Taoism teachings such as Fengshui and Zhuyouke (ch: 祝由科), a treatment method based on supplication.

Following his release, he claimed to have experienced enlightenment and was introduced to his Guru. He was officially converted and underwent abhiṣeka<sup>20</sup> on June 24, 2014, by his Guru B, and received Yidam abhiṣeka in 2018. M underwent several career changes. Currently, he provides supernatural services such as Fengshui adjustments for homes, fortune telling using Yijing (ch: 易经, The Book of Changes), etc.

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<sup>19</sup> During the interview M used Hinayana Buddhism as a proxy for his previous Buddhist education, which was the opposite of Tantric Buddhism, and which was dominated by Chinese Buddhism.

<sup>20</sup> Abhiṣeka (Sanskrit: अभिषेक, romanized: Abhiṣeka) is a religious rite or method of prayer in which a devotee pours a liquid offering on an image or murti of a deity.

Guru B, Tibetan, was born in 1968 in Dêgê County, Garzê Tibetan Autonomous Prefecture, China. According to B, his mother dreamt that a lama would knock on her door, telling her that she would have a son with a strong connection to Vajrayana Buddhism. In Vajrayana Buddhism, dream divination is a common trait, as Buddha himself was a result of dream divination<sup>21</sup>. B's mother later learned of her pregnancy and named B after the lama she saw in her dream. B converted to the Karma Kagyu Situpa lineage and received his abhiṣeka as well as basic education in the Kagyu tradition at Palpung Monastery at a very young age. He subsequently commenced studies at Palpung Monastery's Buddhist Academy with the objective of becoming a Khempo, which is a title given to a Nyingma, Sakya, or Kagyu monk who completed a nine-year course in Buddhist philosophy in a Buddhist monastery academy and has attained a proven level of knowledge, discipline, and benevolence.<sup>22</sup> In addition, he received Dharma transmissions and abhiṣeka from other Lamas and Rinpoches. The most recent abhiṣeka B received was from the 12th Tai Situ Rinpoche, Pema Dönyö Nyinje. B relocated to Mainland China in 2007 at the request of Gyalwa Karmapa and Tai Situ Rinpoche. Given that these Kagyu mentors both currently reside in India, numerous believers and practitioners travel to India on a regular basis to seek guidance from them. The Palpung Monastery selected B as the representative of the Kagyu sect. The monastery wrote him a letter of recommendation and a Khempo certificate issued by the Ethnic and Religious Affairs Commission of Sichuan Province. B commenced his journey in Beijing, not as a Vajrayana Guru, but as a Buddhist scholar. He was employed at the National Library of China to preserve and sort the palm-leaf manuscript collections. At a later point in time, B relocated to Xi'an, Shanxi Province, where he commenced preaching the Vajrayana Dharma. Currently, B resides in Hexigten Banner, Inner Mongolia, but he has various Bodhimaṇḍa<sup>23</sup> (ch: 道場) located in Xi'an, Hexigten Banner, and Yinchuan, and he frequently travels around the country to preach Dharma. Since 2007, B has had approximately 2,000 disciples on the mainland, but only 43 of these have followed him long enough to become qualified to receive the Yidam abhiṣeka, the highest level of the Kagyu Mahamudra practice.

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<sup>21</sup>Interview with the author, 2024.1.27; Interview with the author, 2024.3.19

<sup>22</sup>**KTD Mandala News**. 2013. *WHAT IS A KHENPO? LAMA ZOPA EXPLAINS*.

<https://ktddblog.wordpress.com/2013/01/22/what-is-a-khenpo-lama-zopa-explains/> (Accessed April 29, 2024)

<sup>23</sup> In Buddhist terms, Bodhimaṇḍa means “position of awakening”. In this context, it stands for the place B uses for Dharma preaching.



B's travel route in China and his (approximate) Bodhimaṇḍa locations  
 Administrative Map of China, Google Image

## 2.2 First Encounter

While M was doubtful about his Hinayana practice, one of his friends invited him to go on a trip to Inner Mongolia. During the excursion, he had the opportunity to visit A'gui Temple, the sole remaining Nyingma temple in Inner Mongolia. This temple is renowned for a legend that associates Padmasambhava<sup>24</sup> with its establishment, where he is said to have conducted retreats and preached the Dharma<sup>25</sup>. According to M, upon entering one of the Lotus Stone Caves located

<sup>24</sup> Padmasambhava ("Born from a Lotus"), also known as Guru Rinpoche (Precious Guru) and the Lotus from Oḍḍiyāna, was a tantric Buddhist Vajra master from medieval India who taught Vajrayana in Tibet (circa 8th – 9th centuries).

<sup>25</sup> Interview with the author, 2024.1.27

within the temple, he experienced a sudden surge of supernatural sensations: “This Lotus Stone Cave has this feeling inside when you go in...Your Baihui acupoint (top of the head) feels like something is moving in to stuff you.”<sup>26</sup> This experience is regarded by M as the catalyst for his conversion to Vajrayana Buddhism.

During his journey from Inner Mongolia to Yinchuan, B was recognized by a Vajrayana practitioner who was aboard the same train as him. Subsequently, B was invited to Yinchuan and established a Bodhimaṇḍa there. M later met B in his bedroom inside the Bodhimaṇḍa in September 2013. M recalled that day he “had a stronger feeling (at his Baihui acupoint) than the day in the Lotus Stone Cave.” He believed this was a sign of his conversion to Vajrayana and B, and he instantly told B about his wish to convert and become a disciple of him. B did not immediately accept M’s request, nor did he immediately reject it. He informed M that he “needs to wait a little longer until the right time (when the karmic destiny is fulfilled).”<sup>27</sup> Furthermore, B hoped to give M more time to consider it more seriously. In order to show B that he was committed to conversion, M frequently visited B's Bodhimaṇḍa and asked questions about Hinayana Dharma.

### **2.3 Conversion and Practice**

In early 2014, B mainly focused his preaching work in Yinchuan. He also desperately needed an ophthalmologist, and M introduced him to one. Following the treatment, B decided that it was time for M to take refuge. B informed M of his decision and later performed Kagyu Mahamudra abhiṣeka for him and officially started to preach Dharmas to him. According to M, B’s teaching has assisted him in overcoming numerous severe traumas that have occurred in his life. In 2015, M’s father was diagnosed with stomach cancer. He sought B’s counsel on whether he could utilize his Taoist knowledge to perform some rituals to “heal” his father’s cancer and whether he should engage in Taoist practices concurrently with his Vajrayana practices. B responded:

“By definition, it is against the precepts. But the intention is more important than the precepts. If the intention is good (to save all beings), then the precepts are not

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<sup>26</sup> Interview with the author, 2024.1.27

<sup>27</sup> Interview with the author, 2024.1.27

important...As long as the first intention is not for oneself, as long as it is for others, whether it is for the people around you, or for the general sentient beings, or human beings, or the realms in the Six Classes of Beings, as long as the first mind is not for oneself, it is Buddhist ideology, and there is no problem with it.”<sup>28</sup>

Following the diagnosis, M conducted a series of metaphysical consultations for his father with the consent of B, including the use of the previously mentioned Zhuyouke and Yijing divination. M was convinced of the results of his divination, which indicated that there was no cure for his father, and thus delayed the optimal time for treatment and indirectly contributed to his father's death. M acknowledged the death of his father had a profound negative impact on his attitude towards his Taoist practices, as he was certain that his predictions about his father were accurate. However, he also recognized that his practice of Vajrayana Buddhism had imparted a new understanding of the concept of life and death and had significantly contributed to his ability to accept and gradually heal the traumas that accompanied his father’s demise. M lost his mother and sister also due to cancer in 2018 and 2023. However, he admits that, following his father's death and B's teachings, he has come to accept that death is an inevitable aspect of life beyond the control of external forces. Therefore, within the complex Guru-Disciple relationship, the broader understanding of handling grief and death is portrayed through M’s and B’s relationship. During the interview, M discussed about his understanding of death after he indulged Vajrayana Buddhist philosophy:

“And now I don't have any fear of death...If you practice Yidam, it is a cycle from life to death and from death to life again. So if you're training yourself every day, you definitely won't be afraid when you die. It is actually just like we sleep at night, I know (I) will definitely wake up the next morning.”<sup>29</sup>

M and B also discussed the prevalence of "fake Living Buddhas" and "fake Rinpoches" in modern China. M mentioned in the interview that B was a genuine Dharma preaching Guru and had instructed all his disciples on how to distinguish between a genuine and a spurious Guru.

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<sup>28</sup> Interview with the author, 2024.1.27; Interview with the author, 2024.3.19

<sup>29</sup> Interview with the author, 2024.1.27

Despite M's assertion during the interview that he has only followed B and his guidance since he commenced practicing Vajrayana Buddhism, he has never followed or investigated other Gurus. He acknowledges the prevalence of fake Gurus in China, which contributes to the negative reputation of Vajrayana Buddhism.

According to B, all Gurus who are able to conduct teachings must possess a religious practitioner identity certificate issued by the government. This identification includes the Guru's name, place of origin, and monastery affiliation, among other details. After studying and retreating at Palpang Monastery, B received his Khenpo certificate from the Ethnic and Religious Affairs Commission of Sichuan Province. Additionally, since 2016, all reincarnated living Buddhas in mainland China have been required to register with the government and are available on the website.<sup>30</sup> Those living Buddhas who are not registered with the government are prohibited from conducting religious activities, including Dharma preaching. Currently, the official website of the Ethnic and Religious Affairs Commission of Sichuan Province lists approximately 400 registered living Buddhas, while the information on Khenpos is not publicly available. B also provided his interpretation of the definition of a living Buddha. He posited that the designation "living Buddha" encompasses not only the reincarnated Zhügu of eminent figures such as the Panchen and Dalai but also the reincarnations of individuals who have practiced Buddhism in their previous lives. B considers himself to be one of these. However, due to the misappropriation of the concept of "living Buddha" in recent years, B himself discouraged his disciples from self-designating as living Buddhas or Rinpoches on the grounds that this would be detrimental to their practice.<sup>31</sup>

## 2.4 Guru and Other Disciples

Since B commenced his Dharma preaching in mainland China in 2007, he has amassed over 2,000 disciples in three cities. B does not impose any strict criteria for recruiting disciples. However, the majority of his disciples have a similar experience to that of M, namely that they initially indicate to B their intention to become his disciples before B then determines whether to accept them as disciples following consideration. In determining which individuals to accept as

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<sup>30</sup> **Xinhua Net**, 活佛查询系统上线 假活佛无处遁形 *Living Buddha Query System Goes Online, Fake Living Buddhas Have No Place to Hide*. 2016 [http://www.xinhuanet.com/politics/2016-01/19/c\\_128641631.html](http://www.xinhuanet.com/politics/2016-01/19/c_128641631.html). Accessed April 28, 2024

<sup>31</sup> Interview with the author, 2024.1.27; Interview with the author, 2024.3.19

disciples, B places the most significant emphasis on karmic destiny. He asserts that his methodology for determining which individuals should become his disciples is not readily comprehensible to those lacking Vajrayana practice and that he has developed a unique framework for this purpose. The idea of karmic destiny, which is not susceptible to theoretical or logical explanation, represents a fundamental concept in the spiritual teachings of B. M also noted in the course of the interview that numerous individuals had expressed their aspiration to become disciples of B and that B was able to make an immediate determination. He advised certain individuals that there was "no karmic connection" between him and them as guru and disciple. In other cases, he informed them that "the guru of your destiny is not me, but someone else" and thus that he was unable to accept them as disciples. Even if an individual such as M meets the criteria for discipleship as defined by B, B will not immediately agree to the conversion of the individual in question. Instead, B will allow the individual to consider the matter for a period of time.<sup>32</sup>

This is not B's original requirement for recruiting disciples. When Lamchyen Gyalpo Rinpoche explained the relationship between a guru and a disciple, he has made a similar statement:

“The relationship is based on faith, but before the mutual faith is established, the guru must test the disciple for a certain period of time...This test can be as simple as a disciple requesting that a guru teach him the Dharma. In response, the guru might indicate that they are not well-versed in the subject and suggest that the disciple seek guidance from another source. This initial test is designed to ascertain whether the disciple is genuinely motivated to learn. The relationship between the guru and the disciple is one of mutual testing. The guru tests the disciple to ascertain whether the latter is the appropriate individual to receive the Dharma, while the disciple tests the guru to determine whether the guru is genuine in his words and actions. As the guru and disciple become better acquainted, a substantial amount of pure faith will develop.”<sup>33</sup>

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<sup>32</sup> Interview with the author, 2024.1.27; Interview with the author, 2024.3.19

<sup>33</sup> Lamchyen Gyalpo Rinpoche, 2013. 择师知见：上师与弟子之关系 *Choosing a Master: The Relationship Between Guru and Disciple*.

Another crucial aspect of the guru-disciple relationship is the disciple's offerings to the guru. Due to the unique status of the Guru in Vajrayana Buddhism, the disciple is expected to make offerings to the Guru. In contemporary society, this kind of offering is primarily manifested in the form of financial or material offerings. Furthermore, numerous controversies surrounding Vajrayana Buddhism have highlighted instances of fraudulent Gurus exploiting disciples financially through the pretext of offering. During my interview with M, I inquired about his practice of offering to his guru B. M first outlined the diverse forms of offerings observed in Vajrayana practice, emphasizing that these include not only material items but also offerings made through meditation during practice.<sup>34</sup>M also holds the conviction that offerings to the Guru should be a spontaneous act of the disciple, a form of gratitude for the Guru's teachings. He mentioned that B had once expressed to his disciples that it is completely fine if they don't make offerings to him as long as they are practicing the Dharma that he preaches seriously and correctly.<sup>35</sup>

## **2.5 Political Influences and Future Development**

Given the political specificity of Vajrayana Buddhism in China, both M and B expressed a reluctance to discuss the impact of politics on the practice and on the future development of Vajrayana in mainland China in great detail. However, B implicitly suggested that there is currently a strong resistance to the promotion of Tibetan culture in mainland China and that this resistance stems mainly from political factors. This kind of influence is an obstacle to both Dharma preaching and practice. Concurrently, B instructed his disciples that regardless of the prevailing political authority, the practice of the Dharma would have a beneficial impact on one's emotional and mental well-being. It can be argued that the current practice of Vajrayana Buddhism in China exerts a more positive psychological influence on the practitioner. Through the practice of Buddhism, one can achieve the purpose of calming emotions and cultivating optimism in life, among other benefits. Alternatively, it can be described as a form of psychotherapy with a religious character.

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<sup>34</sup>Interview with the author, 2024.1.27

<sup>35</sup> Interview with the author, 2024.1.27

### **3. An Analysis: The Diversity and Individualism of Guru-Disciple Relationships and Vajrayana in Contemporary China**

In the process of writing this thesis, I attempted to identify additional individual analyses of the guru-disciple relationship in Vajrayana Buddhism with the aim of conducting a comparative study. However, the number of available individual analyses on this subject is limited, and there is a greater abundance of materials in which religious scholars discuss the characteristics that should be present in the guru-disciple relationship from a macroscopic perspective. Therefore, I am unable to provide a statistically significant analysis based on the information I have. However, after a comprehensive review of the perspectives presented by numerous Buddhist scholars, living Buddhas, Rinpoches, lamas, and other authoritative figures with deep knowledge of Vajrayana Buddhism, it can be concluded that the relationship between M and B represents a typical positive example.

Although the Chinese government's implementation of a registration system for religious figures has received some political criticism and skepticism, it is evident that in mainland China, where false gurus are prevalent, a government-intervened regulatory measure could facilitate the identification of gurus by practitioners, thereby reducing the risk of property, physical or spiritual harm. In this case, the fact that B is a member of the most orthodox monastery of the Kagyu sect, has received abhiseka and teachings from the highest leaders, and possesses an identity document issued by a government agency essentially rules out the possibility of B being a false guru. We could even say that B is a textbook-level representative of a Kagyu guru.

At the same time, B imparted to M a variety of teachings, both religious and secular, which were constructive and positive. These teachings encouraged M to adopt a more active lifestyle and a more positive understanding of questions such as death, meaning of life and emotions. B did not discriminate against M due to his criminal past, nor did he prohibit M from practicing Vajrayana Buddhism because of his transgression of the precepts. In Lamchyen Gyalpo Rinpoche's lecture, "Choosing a Master: The Relationship Between Guru and Disciple" (2013), he posits that a qualified Vajrayana disciple must fulfill four conditions: non-retrogression in faith, diligence, non-attachment to other religions, and respect for one's guru and friends. (ch: 淨信不退, 勤勉不懈, 不依他教, 敬信师友。) M was engaged in the practice of Vajrayana in conjunction with other religious activities. This is not permitted in principle.

However, B granted M permission and affirmation based on his personal circumstances, and provided guidance when M lost faith in his beliefs. From this, it can be concluded that B is not a mere repository of knowledge and doctrine, and following the teachings as they are written. Instead, B is a dynamic figure who provides guidance to his disciples in a way that is responsive to their individual needs and contexts. This is a key aspect of pedagogical effectiveness and practice.

During the interview with M, he repeatedly cited teachings and words from other practitioners of both Han Buddhism and Mahayana Buddhism. Given M's limited level of education, it can be surmised that his grasp of Buddhist teachings was largely derived from the teachings he received from his guru. This detail also indicates that in addition to teaching the tantric teachings of Vajrayana Buddhism, B provides his disciples with education in other Buddhist schools. This observation is consistent with the point previously discussed that, regardless of the sect of achievers, other sects recognize and respect their achievements.

However, based on the information I gathered throughout the interview, there were also some points that are relatively alarming. The first of these was the timing of B deciding to take M as his disciple. This happened right after M introduced him to the ophthalmologist. Even though B explained his reason with karmic destiny, the concept seems exceptionally vague, so as to excuse B profiting from this action. During the interview, B frequently refers to the idea of "karmic destiny", the first rejection I received from him regarding the interview was also due to the "lack of karmic destiny". As B explained, the karmic destiny is not something that is readily accessible by commoners. Therefore, this concept is extremely subjective and prone to misuse and manipulation. So far, I do not see an efficient way for practitioners to distinguish between situations where gurus derive profit from it, or it is objectively factual. It is also worth discussing whether this lack of distinction is the result of unconditional belief in the religious righteousness of the Guru, which is constantly reflected in Vajrayana Dharma, or is an intentional measure designed for the benefit of the Guru.

During the course of my research, I also became aware of the fact that the lack of individual case analysis from a scholarly perspective, but only content from religious texts, presents a significant challenge in maintaining an objective judgement. In order to gain a more nuanced understanding of the relationship between the guru and their disciple within the context of Vajrayana Buddhism, it is necessary to undertake a deeper analysis of a greater number of

individual case studies. This will allow for a more objective evaluation of the broader relationship.

## Conclusion

Through this thesis, the historical, cultural, and political dimensions of Vajrayana Buddhism's development in Mainland China are analyzed, emphasizing the influences that shape its practice today. The study illuminates the profound interplay between religious tradition and socio-political dynamics through the examination of historical dissemination periods, sect formation, and guru-disciple relationships inside the Vajrayana tradition. As Vajrayana Buddhism developed from its early roots in monarchical China through the Qing Dynasty, it demonstrated a pattern of religious adaptation and political incorporation. With its strategic use of Tibetan Buddhism as a tool for political integration by the Mongol Yuan Dynasty and its continued patronage by subsequent dynasties, Vajrayana Buddhism played a significant role in shaping Sino-Tibetan relations. In order to understand the layered relationship between China and Tibet as well as how Vajrayana Buddhism has been manipulated and revered in various political contexts, we must take a historical perspective.

Under the People's Republic of China, the occupation of Tibet marked a profound shift in the religious and political landscape. Despite severe restrictions from the ongoing policies, Vajrayana Buddhism has maintained a resilient and adaptive presence in Mainland China. It illustrates the complex relationship between religious freedom and control that the Chinese government has with its policies of political unity, religious freedom, and separation of religion and politics.

By examining the guru-disciple relationship, which is at the core of Vajrayana practice, a contemporary practitioner reveals both its spiritual depth and its potential vulnerabilities. The case study of practitioner M and his guru B highlights the transformations that can be achieved through such relationships, while acknowledging the challenges and controversies, such as potential abuse and commercialization of spiritual guidance.

The thesis also highlights the need for further research into individual experiences within Vajrayana practices to better understand practitioners' nuanced ways of navigating their spiritual journeys under political and cultural pressure. A comparative analysis across different regions within and beyond China would benefit future studies in further defining Vajrayana Buddhism's unique and common features.

In Mainland China, Vajrayana Buddhism is a vivid example of how deeply religion is entwined with political and historical currents. In addition to enriching our understanding of Vajrayana Buddhism, this work contributes to broader conversations about religious practice and policy in an era of rapid change. As a result of this study, scholars, practitioners, and policymakers can engage in continuous dialogue and reflection, fostering a deeper understanding of the complexity of religious life and its ability to thrive in a variety of environments.

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## **Resüme: Guru-õpilase suhte mõistmine tänapäeva Hiina Vajrayana budismis**

Käesolevas lõputöös analüüsitakse Vadžrajaana budismi ajaloolist, kultuurilist ja poliitilist arengut Mandri-Hiinas, pannes rõhku mõjutustele, mis kujundavad selle tänapäevast praktiseerimist.

Uurimus näitab religioosse traditsiooni ja sotsiaal-poliitilise dünaamika vahelist sügavat vastastikmõju, uurides ajaloolist levikut, sektide kujunemisi ja guru-õpilaste suhteid Vadžrajaana traditsiooni raames. Vadžrajaana budism on demonstreerinud religiooset kohanemist ja poliitilist inkorporeerimist alates selle varajasest arengust Hiina impeeriumis kuni Qingi dünastiani.

Mongoli Yuani dünastia ning ka järgnevad dünastiad kasutasid strateegiliselt Tiibeti budismi poliitilise integratsiooni vahendina, tänu millele mängis Vadžrajaana budism olulist rolli Hiina ja Tiibeti omavaheliste suhete kujunemisel.

Selleks et mõista Hiina ja Tiibeti mitmekülgseid suhteid ning seda, kuidas Vajrayana budismi on erinevates poliitilistes kontekstides manipuleeritud, on vaja ajaloolist perspektiivi. Hiina Rahvavabariigi ajal tõi Tiibeti okupeerimine kaasa suure muutuse religioosel ja poliitilisel maastikul. Vaatamata tänapäevani jätkuvast poliitikast tulenevatele rangetele piirangutele on Vadžrajaana budism säilitanud vastupidava ja kohanemisvõimelise oleku Mandri-Hiinas. Seeomakorda illustreerib Hiina valitsuse keerulist suhet usuvabaduse ja kontrolli vahel, mis on seotud poliitilise ühtsuse, usuvabaduse ning religiooni ja poliitika lahusolekuga.

Uurides Vadžrajaana praktika keskmes olevat guru-õpilase suhet, paljastab kaasaegne praktik nii usu vaimse sügavuse kui ka võimaliku haavatavuse. Praktiseerija M-i ja tema guru B juhtumiuuring toob esile transformatsioonid, mis on saavutatavad selliste suhetega, tunnistades samas väljakutseid ja vastuolusid, milleks on näiteks, võimalik väärkohtlemine ja vaimse juhendamise kommertsialiseerumine.

Samuti rõhutatakse lõputöös vajadust edasiste uuringute järele, mis käsitlevad individuaalseid kogemusi Vadžrajaana praktikate raames, selleks et paremini mõista praktikute nüansirikkaid viise, kuidas vaimsetel teekondadel poliitilise ja kultuurilise surve all orienteeruda. Erinevate piirkondade võrdlev analüüs Hiinas ja väljaspool oleks kasulik tulevastele uuringutele Vadžrajaana budismi ainulaadsete ja ühiste tunnuste edasisel määratlemisel.

Mandri-Hiinas on Vadžrajaana budism elav näide sellest, kui sügavalt on religioon põimunud poliitiliste ja ajalooliste voogudega. Lisaks sellele, et käesolev lõputöö parandab meie arusaamist Vadžrajaana budismist, aitab see töö lisada laiematele aruteludele usupraktikast ja -poliitikast praegusel kiirete muutuste ajastul.

Selle uuringu tulemusena saavad teadlased, praktikud ja poliitikakujundajad olla pidevas dialoogis ja mõelda, kuidas edendada sügavamat arusaamist religioosse elu keerukusest ja selle võimest areneda erinevates keskkondades.

## Attachment 1: Written Consent to Interview (Chinese)

### 采访同意书

日期:

尊敬的被采访者[ ]:

我的名字是顿尧天,正在塔尔图大学(爱沙尼亚)就读神学与宗教研究专业,目前正在进行一项关于当代中国金刚乘佛教的师徒关系分析的学士论文研究。在这个过程中,我计划进行一些采访,以获得更深入的见解和信息。因此,我想邀请您参与我的研究,并在这份采访同意书中说明我们的合作关系。

目的:

本研究的主要目的是分析现代社会主义中国金刚乘佛教中的师徒关系。您的经验和见解对于我的研究至关重要,希望通过与您的交流能够丰富我的论文内容。

采访过程:

采访将以在线会议的形式进行,预计时长约为两小时。我将在采访中向您提出关于中国金刚乘佛教及金刚乘佛教中师徒关系的一些问题,您可以根据自己的经验和看法进行回答。采访的录音或记录将用于进一步研究,但我将确保您的个人信息得到保密并仅用于学术目的。

自愿参与:

您的参与完全是自愿的,您有权随时中止采访过程或撤回同意,而不受任何负面影响。如果您有任何疑问或担忧,我将乐意回答并解释。

隐私保护:

我将严格保护您的个人信息，只在学术研究中使用。采访结果将以匿名形式呈现，不会透露您的真实身份。

同意书确认：

请您在下方签署以确认您的自愿参与，并同意我使用采访结果于学术研究中。如果您对同意书的任何部分有疑问，也请随时联系我。

被采访者姓名：\_\_\_\_\_

签名：\_\_\_\_\_

日期：\_\_\_\_\_

感谢您的参与和支持，我期待着与您进行有意义的交流。

诚挚致意，

顿尧天

+86 13520423551

爱沙尼亚塔尔图大学(University of Tartu, Estonia)

## Attachment 2: Written Consent to Interview (English)

### Interview Consent Form

Date:

Dear Interviewee [            ]:

My name is Yaotian Dun and I am studying in The School of Theology and Religious Studies at the University of Tartu (Estonia), where I am currently conducting a Bachelor's thesis research on the topic of *The analysis of teacher-disciple relationships in contemporary Chinese Vajrayana Buddhism*. During this process, I conduct multiple one-on-one interviews with my main informant to gain deeper insights and information. Therefore, I would like to invite you to participate in my research and describe our partnership in this interview consent form.

Purpose of the Interview:

The main purpose of this study is to analyze the Guru-disciple relationship in Vajrayana Buddhism in modern socialist China. Your experience and insights are crucial to my research, and I hope that my interview with you will enrich my dissertation.

Interview Process:

The interview will be conducted in the form of an online meeting and is expected to last approximately two hours. During the interview, I will ask you some questions about Chinese Vajrayana Buddhism and the teacher-disciple relationship in Vajrayana Buddhism. The audio or transcript of the interview will be used for further research, but I will ensure that your personal information is kept confidential and used for academic purposes only.

Voluntary Participation:

Your participation is entirely voluntary and you have the right to discontinue the interview process or withdraw consent at any time without any negative repercussions. If you have any concerns or worries, I will be happy to answer and explain them.

Privacy:

I will strictly protect your personal information and use it only for academic research. The results of the interview will be presented anonymously and will not reveal your true identity.

Consent Acknowledgment:

Please sign below to confirm your voluntary participation and consent to my use of the interview results in academic research. Please also feel free to contact me if you have questions about any part of the consent form.

Name of interviewee: \_\_\_\_\_

Signature: \_\_\_\_\_

Date: \_\_\_\_\_

Thank you for your participation and support, and I look forward to a meaningful exchange with you.

Sincerely,

Yaotian Dun

+86 13520423551

University of Tartu, Estonia

### **Attachment 3: Interview Outline (2024.1.27)**

1. What are the main practices you practice in Vajrayana Buddhism?
2. How did B become a Khempo?
3. What is your background and path to Vajrayana?
4. How was your first encounter with B?
5. What are the decision factors for B's acceptance as a disciple?
6. What is the Discipleship in Vajrayana Buddhism and and Guru's Expectations for a disciple?
7. Vajrayana Practice Stages and Ceremonies.
8. How did the Vajrayana practice Influenced your personal life?

#### **Attachment 4: Interview Outline (2024.3.19)**

1. When did you realize you were a living Buddha? How did this affect your upbringing?
2. What kind of Buddhist education did you receive? What does this education mean to you?
3. Which authority did you get your Living Buddha Certificate from? How long have you been a Living Buddha?
4. In Vajrayana Buddhism, is it necessary to attain a certain level of education before one can start preaching the Dharma?
5. Do the different sects of Tibetan Buddhism recognize living Buddhas in different ways?
6. What was the origin of your coming to China?
7. After you came to China to teach, how many followers did you receive? Including those who didn't end up under your tutelage.
8. What do you think is the level of realization and understanding of Vajrayana Buddhism among Han Chinese (mainlanders)?
9. How do you choose your disciples?
10. How do you guide your disciples in their practice?
11. How do you evaluate your disciples perhaps practicing other religions along with Vajrayana Buddhism?
12. What do you think is the current status of Vajrayana Buddhism in the Han (mainland) region? What is your view on the future development of Vajrayana Buddhism?
13. How does the Chinese government recognize these living Buddhas? If so, do they get paid? If the government does not recognize them, are there threats or restrictions associated with them?

## **Lihtlitsents töö reprodutseerimiseks**

Mina, Yaotian Dun

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*Yaotian Dun*

**28.04.2024**