

### BACKGROUND

Historians have compiled record of a rich and thriving civilization in Tibet spanning over 3,000 years. Archeological findings reveal evidence of an even more ancient civilization dating back 12,000 years. Tibet's earlier civilization was founded on its indigenous religious system of Bon. Tibet has also received civilizational and cultural influences from other countries and regions over its long history, including from Persia, Khotan, Turkey, China, and India.

In the 7th Century of the Common Era, a momentous change occurred in Tibet when Buddhism was introduced and became the State religion. This development eventually reshaped Tibet's entire civilization and domain of thought. It influenced the knowledge systems of spiritual practice, philosophy, medicine, astronomy, and art and deeply penetrated the life of everyone in the Tibetan community.

Buddhism arrived in Tibet from India. The complete system of knowledge, spirituality, and culture from the great Indian monastic universities of India (Nalanda, Odantapuri, Vikramshila, and Takshila) was transmitted to Tibet in a comprehensive manner. The learning of these great Buddhist Universities included philosophy, logic, epistemology, psychology, medicine, astronomy, metallurgy, arts, poetry, grammar, languages and literature.

It is through its long history of civilization and the transmission of the knowledge, spirituality, and culture of the Buddhist monastic universities of India that "Tibetan Culture" as described in more detail under Topic 1 below, evolved. Over time, Tibet nurtured and developed the learning and systems that came from India and transformed them in many ways to become the Tibetan Culture we know today.

In the middle of the 20th Century, Tibet and its people suffered unimaginable tragedy after the Chinese invasion and occupation of Tibet. Around 80,000 Tibetan people fled into exile in India, Nepal, and Bhutan while Chinese forces set out to destroy and eliminate Tibetan Culture and ethnic identity in Tibet itself.

After his flight to India, His Holiness the Dalai Lama recognized the imminent threat to Tibetan Culture that exile and Chinese policies in Tibet presented. As a result, he immediately began to focus on the preservation of Tibetan Culture in exile, primarily by (i) establishing Settlements in India, Nepal, and Bhutan where Tibetan refugees could live and maintain Tibetan Culture, (ii) establishing schools for Tibetan children where they could receive both modern education and learn Tibetan language and about Tibetan Culture, and (iii) re-establishing the major monasteries that had been destroyed in Tibet as important new centers for preserving Tibetan Buddhism and Tibetan Culture.

Tibetan Buddhism and Tibetan Culture are now prominent around the world. Tibetan Culture, however, is under threat as never before as Chinese efforts to eradicate Tibetan Culture in Tibet continue and the exile community of Tibetans becomes more dispersed and subject to the pressures and attractions of "modern" societies. Thus, sustaining and preserving Tibetan Culture is one of the most important challenges that now confronts the Tibetan people.

### KEY ISSUES

#### Topic 1: Defining and Sustaining Tibetan Culture

Tibetan Culture can be seen as the collection of beliefs, knowledge, values, social norms and social practices that have developed around the people who have been living in Tibet for at least the last 3,000 years. Tibetan Culture is largely derived from and shaped by Tibetan Buddhism, both as the State religion and as a set of ideas, spiritual practices, and values that have developed over more than 1,400 years. Tibetan Culture also includes Tibetan language and Tibet's unique systems of medicine, astronomy, literature, and arts. These arts include music, dance, painting, poetry, metallurgy and a variety of crafts such as statue-making, carpentry, and working with silver, gold, and other metals. Further, Tibetan clothing, jewelry, and etiquette evolved in ways that manifest and confirm the distinctive nature of Tibetan Culture.

To this day, Tibetan Culture directly and significantly influences people across the Himalayan region, from the Tibetan Plateau to Pakistan to Myanmar, but especially in Ladakh, Sikkim, Bhutan, Nepal and the other Himalayan Communities in India. In these Himalayan Communities, Tibetan Culture remains strong and vibrant. Tibetan Culture also continues to strongly influence the present-day cultures of Mongolia, the areas of Russia with large Buddhist populations, and significant parts of China itself. Moreover, Tibetan Culture has now spread around the world, largely as a result of the exile of His Holiness the Dalai Lama in 1959; the reestablishment of the Tibetan Community in exile in India, Nepal, and Bhutan; the movement of Tibetans in exile to resettle in countries in the West, Asia, and elsewhere; and the establishment of Tibetan Buddhist monasteries, temples, teaching centers and other institutions in many countries.

With recent developments in Tibet itself and the small number of Tibetans living in exile, sustaining Tibetan Culture has become a critical challenge. Specific and imminent concerns include:

- The declining population in exile to support and strengthen each of the different aspects of Tibetan Culture;
- The limited number of young Tibetans joining monastic institutions or interested in pursuing traditional Tibetan arts and crafts
- The rapid disappearance of “Masters” in the various arts and crafts as the older generation who learned their skills and techniques in Tibet passes away;
- The loss of many traditional values and beliefs among the youth and lay population due to the pressures of living in exile and the forces of modern society;
- The decline in the use of Tibetan language to produce Tibetan poetry and literature; and
- The declining use of Tibetan language among Tibetan families and in a broad range of social, educational, and livelihood situations while living in exile.

Along with these challenges, new and important opportunities have arisen to preserve and indeed to perhaps redefine Tibetan Culture in the current context. These opportunities include:

- Strengthening, supporting, and expanding the activities of the existing institutions in the refugee community that are focused on preserving Tibetan Culture. These include, for example, the Department of Religion and Culture, the Tibetan Institute for Performing Arts (TIPA), Tibet House, the Library of Tibetan Works and Archives, the Central Institute for Higher Tibetan Studies, the Norbulingkha Institute, Tibetan Medical and Astrological Institute (TMAI), etc.
- Expanding and extending the outreach and role of Tibetan Buddhist monastic and other institutions among the overseas Tibetan populations and among Western, Asian, and other students of Tibetan Buddhism and thereby utilizing the close relationship between Tibetan Buddhism and Tibetan Culture to enhance the breadth and depth of Tibetan Culture among new populations;
- Strengthening and broadening the support for Tibetan Buddhist monastic and other institutions as they serve more and more students from the Himalayan Communities, Mongolia, and the Tibetan Buddhist communities elsewhere in Asia that are based on and are preserving important aspects of Tibetan Culture in the places that they live
- Modifying, where appropriate, traditional Tibetan techniques in arts and crafts (such as painting, music, dance, metalwork, and carpentry) to adapt to the contemporary context while focusing on training and supporting “New Masters” with knowledge and skill encompassing traditional and more modern techniques;
- Encouraging and supporting Tibetan Youth to develop new forms of poetry, literature, music, dance, painting, crafts and other cultural artefacts that can be built upon and derived from traditional Tibetan Cultural sources; and
- Establishing collaborative relationships and partnerships with academic, arts, and other institutions around the world who are now interested in Tibetan Culture and who might be enlisted to help preserve traditional techniques and forms while also supporting efforts to evolve new ones.

Due to the broad range and integrated nature of the many activities that constitute Tibetan Culture, CTA will need to carefully consider how best to manage its efforts and resources toward sustaining Tibetan Culture with maximum impact over the long term.

### Topic 2: Strengthening Tibetan Language

Tibetan language is a unique natural language, unrelated to either Chinese or Sanskrit. Tibetan is regarded by linguists as one of roughly six hundred root languages from which many other languages have originated. Besides a few words, no influence from Chinese can be found. However, despite the fact that Tibetan language originated independently in Tibet, it has received an immense influence from Sanskrit through the vocabularies of the various disciplines brought from India: philosophy, logic, epistemology, psychology, medicine, astronomy, arts, poetry, Sanskrit grammar and literature.

The methodology that the great Tibetan translators in association with the Indian masters developed for the translation of Buddhist treatises ensured that Tibetan words represent the root as well as the prefix and suffix of Sanskrit words. This enables Tibetan translations to provide the full extent of the etymological explanation of the Sanskrit words, which is not possible in other translations. This is why Tibetan translations so efficiently transmit both the literal and the thematic meanings of the source texts of Sanskrit. Hence, it can be said that the only language that can express the complex and subtle thoughts and subjects of Sanskrit is Tibetan.

While Tibetans have been successful in maintaining their identity in exile, there is an alarming decline with respect to Tibetan language as many students and especially Tibetan Youth are unable to properly write or communicate in Tibetan. There is a shortage of language teachers and many teachers lack pedagogical competency. As schools have to follow a strict and demanding Indian curriculum, the time available for Tibetan language classes is limited. There is no uniform syllabus in all the schools. The number of textbooks, reference books and other teaching and learning materials and resources is very limited. There is also a perception among students and parents that there is no practical benefit in learning Tibetan as its usage is limited once students graduate from grade school and pursue higher education and enter the workforce.

CTA and the Department of Education (DoE) should consider steps to strengthen Tibetan language. More language teachers should be hired, trained and provided with incentives to enter this profession. The Basic Education Policy should be more robustly implemented and expanded. More language workshops and other professional development activities should be organized for teachers. CTA and the schools should make available more materials and resources for teachers and students. A comprehensive strategy should be developed on teaching Tibetan language at the pre-primary and primary school level so that a strong foundation can be built.

### Topic 3: Tibetan Buddhism and Its Values

It is currently estimated that there are more than 500 million followers of Buddhism around the world including a sizeable population in China. It is further estimated that there are about 20 million followers of Tibetan Buddhism in Asia, largely in Tibet, Mongolia, states in Russia, Nepal, Bhutan, and India. It is also estimated that there are about 7 million followers of Buddhism outside of Asia. Significant numbers of followers of Tibetan Buddhism live in both the West and Asia. The CTA Department of Religion and Culture supervises 262 monasteries and nunneries in India, Nepal, and Bhutan and looks after the welfare of approximately 39,479 monks and nuns living in these institutions.

Thus, Tibetan Buddhism provides a growing and solid foundation for promoting and strengthening Tibetan Culture. Because so much of Tibetan Culture is derived from Tibetan Buddhism, Tibetan Buddhist monasteries, academic institutions, teaching centers, and activities provide excellent scope for preserving Tibetan Culture while also expanding and extending its reach and impact. The large Tibetan Buddhist monastic institutions in particular are important sponsors and users of traditional Tibetan religious paintings, statues, textiles and embroidery, metal work, and carpentry, among other services and products. In addition, much of Tibetan spiritual music and dance is performed in the monasteries and nunneries, and much of Tibetan literature and poetry is based on Tibetan Buddhist themes and context.

The fundamental values, beliefs, and attitudes of Tibetan Culture are derived from Tibetan Buddhism. These are taught and practiced at their highest level in the Tibetan monastic environments. These monastic communities are places of high intellectual and spiritual pursuits that focus on the teaching and practice of wisdom, compassion, kindness, sympathy, and patience, much needed in the modern world.



Tibetan Buddhism and the Tibetan Buddhist monastic and other institutions, however, face a number of critical challenges if they are to continue as a primary anchor and support for the preservation of Tibetan Culture. These challenges include:

- The growing number of monks, nuns, and other students who are from the Himalayan Community, Mongolia, and elsewhere in Asia, while the number of Tibetans entering the monasteries and nunneries is in decline;
- Movement of many Tibetan refugees overseas threatens the ability of these largely lay communities to become deeply engaged with Tibetan Buddhism due to their dispersion and the demands and pressures of their new lives; and
- The generalized emphasis in much of modern society toward secularism, materialism, and individualism, all of which conflict with fundamental values of Tibetan Buddhism and Tibetan Culture and corrode traditional Tibetan values among Tibetan lay people and Youth.

From another perspective, however, these challenges are also opportunities. Rapidly increasing global interest in Tibetan Buddhist Culture and the establishment of Tibetan temples, monasteries, nunneries, and teaching centers around the world provide an avenue for expanding and strengthening Tibetan Culture through these new channels. In particular, the global interest in meditation, mindfulness, and mind training reflect deeply rooted spiritual problems in modern life and societies, many of which can be addressed effectively through the techniques and practices of Tibetan Buddhism. Similarly, Tibetan Buddhist approaches to developing love, compassion, kindness, and patience are drawing growing attention in the global community and thus provide further potential support for Tibetan Buddhism and Tibetan Culture.

### Topic 4: Tibetan Culture Through Museums and Cultural Institutions

Museums, libraries and archives are repositories of national and cultural memory and identity. They record and collect events and cultural information from the past. But to remain relevant these institutions must also grow, adapt to new situations, and continue to actively collect historical and cultural artefacts from the present for the benefit of future generations.

The ability to collect and document the past, present and future is particularly difficult for Tibetans who have endured exile from Tibet, the source of their historical, religious, and social culture. Exile means that Tibetans are separated from their land, history, culture, and the most significant aspects of their national, religious, and family archives. Many cultural and historical objects and artefacts have been destroyed, while others remain and are on display only far away from the Tibetan refugee community and the people in Tibet in cultural institutions in Europe, North America and China. Furthermore, without sustainable practices of collecting and documenting the record of exile, trauma, displacement and exceptional resilience of the Tibetan people, there is a considerable risk that these important pieces of Tibetan history will be slowly being forgotten or lost.

Museums, libraries and archives are the bedrock of a nation's or a people's understanding of themselves. These institutions are critical toward establishing what the rest of the world thinks about a place and its people. They allow a nation or a people to take ownership of their history, culture, identity and memory by presenting themselves on their own terms. China is well aware of the power of museums, libraries and archives. Thus, it is of critical importance during this period of the Tibetan exile for the Tibetan refugee community and its leaders to devote considerable attention and resources toward establishing institutions that will tell the world about Tibetan history and Culture from the Tibetan perspective.

China's current program of cultural development has seen internationally recognized and respected curators and scholars spend millions of dollars on impressive research facilities, new museums, and lavish exhibitions to justify and legitimize China's occupation of Tibet. Culturally speaking, China is directing the way that the world thinks about Tibet's history, culture and identity. This raises several pressing questions regarding the future role of the CTA's museums, libraries and archives and other Tibetan institutions in promoting and sustaining Tibetan Culture. CTA (as the legitimate custodian of Tibetan Culture in exile) should thus seek to develop a long-term and comprehensive strategic plan to enhance the museums, libraries, and archives dedicated to preserving Tibetan Culture and national identity in India and around the world.

### Topic 5: Tibetan Culture Through Arts

Tibetan artists have played an important role in Tibetan life and Tibetan Culture for more than 1,000 years. Tibetan art is generally sacred art, drawing elements primarily from Tibetan Buddhism. Styles and subjects can generally be identified by their composition and use of Tibetan Buddhist symbols and motifs. Individual paintings, sculptures and ritual objects are frequently used in Tibetan monasteries, temples, and shrines, as well as for individual and family spiritual practice and worship.

Most Tibetan art was commissioned by religious institutions or wealthy sponsors or families for use in the practice of Tibetan Buddhism. Traditional Tibetan arts in this context include painting, drawing, calligraphy, sculpture, architecture, costumes, jewellery, weaving, embroidery, and various crafts. Tibetan Thangkas are painted religious scrolls, a traditional art form generally used by Tibetan Buddhist monasteries and practitioners to help them visualize and focus on a meditational deity. The earliest Thangkas date to the 7th Century when Buddhism first came to Tibet.

Tibetan sculpture dates back to before the 7th Century. References in historical documents indicate the Tibetan metal workers produced beautiful objects in gold and silver long before Buddhism came to Tibet. Tibetan metalwork includes many types of lamps, vases, bowls, bells, prayer wheels, mandalas, and decorated trumpets and horns for monasteries and temples.

In addition, Tibet has a long musical tradition reflecting its cultural heritage in the trans-Himalayan region. Tibetan music includes the complex chants and recitations of sacred texts and celebrations of religious festivals in the monasteries and nunneries as well as secular music and dance performed in community settings. Tibetan folk opera ("Ache Lhamo") is a unique and indigenous form of opera which involves a combination of music, dance, chants, and songs drawn from Buddhist stories and Tibetan history. Tibetan architecture is also a highly developed form of Tibetan artistic expression. It is generally based on a Buddhist approach to architecture and is most famously represented by the Potala Palace built in the 17th Century and the architecture of the large Tibetan monasteries.

Since fleeing from Tibet, CTA and the refugee community (following the guidance of His Holiness the Dalai Lama) have made diligent efforts to sustain each of the Tibetan arts in exile. Various schools and workshops have been established to specifically preserve painting, sculpture, metal working, textiles, weaving, embroidery, carpentry and other traditional skills. Further, institutions have been created to preserve Tibetan music, dance, and performance arts. A small but visible number of artists are also inventing a completely new and contemporary type of Tibetan visual arts.

While much has been done to sustain Tibetan Culture through arts in exile, many significant issues now challenge the future of these efforts. Only a handful of arts-related institutions have

been established in the refugee community. Unfortunately, in recent years the community of traditional Tibetan artists has shrunk considerably as many of the “Master” artists who fled from Tibet have passed away. In addition, increasing levels of education in the exile community, the pressures to obtain work and appropriate livelihoods in the modern society, and the continuing migration of Tibetans to urban areas and overseas, discourage Young Tibetans from learning the skills or seeking livelihoods associated with traditional Tibetan arts. As a result, the community has recently been unable to produce enough new artisans to maintain the artistic traditions associated with Tibetan Culture.

Much of the religious art that is now purchased by the large monasteries and nunneries in exile is now produced in Nepal, India, or China. Similarly, tourist and other secular markets for Tibetan arts and crafts are filled with poor imitations of Tibetan art produced by Nepalese, Indian, Chinese and other producers who are not skilled or trained as Tibetan artisans. This is largely due to the ability of these producers to make and sell their products at cheap prices. Production and sale of these unauthentic Tibetan materials creates a negative impact on the quality of Tibetan art and negative impression of Tibetan Culture in general.

CTA will therefore need to carefully consider what can be done to help sustain Tibetan Culture through each of the traditional Tibetan arts. CTA and other Tibetan institutions will need to play a key role in helping to establish institutions of traditional Tibetan arts where Tibetan Youth can be properly trained and where authentic Tibetan art and artefacts can be produced. For Tibetan arts to be sustained in exile, attractive livelihood and income generation opportunities will need to be available for Tibetan artists and a vibrant community of Tibetan artists will need to be encouraged and supported.

### QUESTIONS AND ISSUES TO BE CONSIDERED FOR SUSTAINING TIBETAN CULTURE THEME

#### Questions for Topic 1: Defining and Sustaining Tibetan Culture

1. How can CTA play a more significant leadership role in sustaining Tibetan Culture? Would it be beneficial to consider having a separate Department or Office in CTA fully dedicated to “Cultural Preservation” issues and with a broad and multi-faceted mandate? If so, how might this be done? Would it be beneficial to consider “Cultural Preservation” as a specific cross-cutting issue and priority for all of the existing CTA Departments?
2. How can CTA strengthen and better support the current institutions working to preserve Tibetan Culture? These institutions include the Department of Religion and Culture, TIPAs, Tibet House, the Library of Tibetan Works and Archives, the Central Institute for Higher Tibetan Studies, the Norbulingkha Institute, TMAI, and Manjushree Center of Tibetan Culture, among others. What new programs, activities, or groups might CTA consider for supplementing and complementing the work of the existing institutions?
3. How might CTA encourage and support the development of “New Masters” and dedicated students and professionals in each of the areas of arts and crafts that comprise Tibetan Culture? What steps need to be taken to assure that traditional knowledge and techniques in each of these areas is preserved and documented for future generations?
4. How can CTA and the community generally encourage “new expressions” or adaptations of Tibetan Culture? How can Youth and social media be utilized for this purpose? What roles

can community institutions play that are seeking to preserve Tibetan Culture, as mentioned above?

5. What collaborative partnerships and relationships might be established with academic and other institutions in India, the West, and Asia to help preserve Tibetan Culture over the long term? Which institutions might CTA approach and what would be the subjects to explore with each institution?

### Questions for Topic 2: Sustaining and Growing Tibetan Language

1. Is there a need for a common Tibetan language curriculum in all the schools in the refugee community? If so, how best can the DoE bring together all the various Tibetan schools,
2. language experts and others and develop such a curriculum?
3. How can the teaching and learning of Tibetan be made more accessible and readily available? What role can technology play?
4. Over the last several decades in exile, significant effort and resources has gone into translating a large number of Buddhist texts from Tibetan into other languages, including English. However, there has been very little effort in the other direction – translating world literature and vocabularies of modern subjects into Tibetan. How should CTA address this issue? What should be translated? What kind of books and materials are needed in Tibetan? How could CTA best initiate such a large-scale translation project and related effort to develop Tibetan vocabularies and interesting and relevant materials in various modern disciplines?
5. A large number of young Tibetans are growing up with no regular access to Tibetan culture and language. How can CTA reach and engage them to learn and maintain their interest in Tibetan Culture and language?
6. How can the growing number of weekend language and cultural schools in the Tibetan diaspora community in the West contribute to the goal of sustaining Tibetan culture and language? How can CTA support these schools?
7. How can the Tibetan community collectively - CTA, school leadership, civil society and parents - work together in promoting the use and recognizing the importance of Tibetan language?

### Questions for Topic 3: Promoting and Strengthening Tibetan Buddhism and its Values

1. How can CTA provide additional encouragement and support to Tibetan monastic and other institutions in India, Nepal, Bhutan and overseas so that they can better help to preserve Tibetan Culture through their activities and programs and serve as dynamic centers of knowledge and wisdom? How can more Tibetan Youth be attracted into the monastic and other institutions?
2. How can CTA and the monastic and other institutions encourage and support the movement of Tibetan Buddhism and Tibetan Culture to the West, Asia, and other parts of the world? What specific roles can the diaspora community and the monastic institutions and teaching centers established in the West, Asia and other parts of the world play in this movement?
3. How can CTA and the monastic and other institutions promote and support the development



of wisdom, compassion, loving kindness, altruism, nonviolence and other Buddhist values? How should these values be connected to Tibetan Buddhism and Tibetan Culture so as to assist in the preservation of Tibetan Culture? Similarly, how can the growing global interest in meditation, mind training and the management of afflictive emotions be presented and practiced so as to relate them to Tibetan Buddhism and Tibetan Culture under appropriate circumstances? How would efforts along these lines be related to HHDL's teachings and programs around "secular ethics?"

4. How can CTA and the monastic and other institutions with many monks, nuns, and students from the Himalayan Communities, Mongolia, and elsewhere in Asia work with and support these individuals and their sponsoring institutions to promote and preserve Tibetan Culture when they return to their communities?
5. How can CTA and the monastic and other institutions promote and support the values and attitudes of Tibetan Buddhism and Tibetan Culture among Tibet Youth and the Tibetan lay communities? What might be done in India, Nepal, and Bhutan? What might be done in the diaspora communities?

### Questions for Topic 4: Preserving Tibetan Culture through Museums, Libraries and Archives

1. Should CTA consider the establishment of additional museums, libraries, or archives to help focus on and preserve Tibetan Culture? If so, what might the missions and roles be for these new institutions?
2. How can CTA improve the international standing and quality of its museums, libraries and archives? What collaborations or partnerships might be established to assist with this undertaking?
3. How can CTA assure the broadest global audience and support for its museums, libraries and archives? How can CTA assure access to and enhanced interest in these institutions within the Tibetan community itself?
4. How can CTA develop a long-term and comprehensive strategic plan to assure the quality and economic viability and sustainability of its museums, libraries, and archives?
5. What specific aspects of Tibet's history and Culture should Tibetan museums, libraries, and archives promote? What should be the relative emphasis on the recent history of the Tibetan exile and the ongoing situation in Tibet? How can Tibetan museums, libraries and archives in exile become a credible challenge to their counterparts in China?

### Questions for Topic 5: Sustaining Tibetan Culture Through Arts

1. How can the CTA better support and encourage existing institutions and centres that seek to teach and train Young Tibetans in the traditional Tibetan arts? How might this be done for workshops and programs that involve training in traditional painting, wood craft, sculpture, metalwork and design, carpentry, textiles, embroidery, and other arts and crafts? How might this be done for programs teaching music, drama, and performing arts?
2. How can CTA encourage and support Tibetan youth to become more interested in Tibetan arts and in becoming professional artists? What programs and incentives might CTA create to encourage training and apprenticeships for young Tibetan artists?



3. How might CTA help to assure that Tibetan youth who participate in training and apprenticeship programs to learn traditional Tibetan arts are able to generate sufficient income to support themselves and their families after the finish their programs? What support systems and business development or other services would be required to establish a successful community artists and craftspeople making Tibetan arts?
4. How can CTA and the community generally encourage “new expressions” of Tibetan arts? This would include all forms of Tibetan arts, as discussed above. How can Youth and social media be utilized for this purpose?
5. Should CTA consider establishing any new institutions to help support and sustain Tibetan arts? If so, what type of institutions would these be and how and by whom should they be established?

*Selected References: Wikipedia on “Tibetan Art,” Metropolitan Museum of Art on “Tibetan Buddhist Art,” and New World Encyclopedia on “Tibetan Art.”*