



Research Article

Masks and Mantras: The COVID-19 Pandemic and *Spiritual Reterritorialization* Among Tibetan Buddhist Communities in Taiwan

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This article examines how Tibetan Buddhist teachers' and communities' responses to the COVID-19 pandemic have further facilitated the global transmission of their traditions in non-heritage contexts. Based upon fifteen months of ethnographic research in Taiwan, I examine how one Taiwanese Tibetan Buddhist community, the Bhumang Nyiöling Buddhist Society, adopted practices to the deity Parṇaśavarī, a protectress against pandemic illnesses, in response to COVID-19. Drawing upon Deleuze and Guattari, I introduce the concepts of *spiritual deterritorialization* and *reterritorialization* to describe the processes whereby divinities in the Buddhist cosmos are unbound from specific geographies and expand their intercessory powers across new contexts. I argue that the Bhumang Nyiöling community's adoption of Parṇaśavarī practices during the COVID-19 pandemic serves as a vibrant example of how processes of *spiritual deterritorialization* and *reterritorialization* can play a powerful role in the broader transmission of Tibetan Buddhism globally, particularly when catalyzed by critical moments of crisis.

Keywords: Tibetan Buddhism; COVID-19; Taiwan; reterritorialization; transnational religions; religious transmission

ON a mild mid-afternoon in early December 2022, I sat in a café in Taipei's Da'an District, discussing practices devoted to the Tibetan Buddhist divinity Parṇaśavarī (རི་ཁྲོད་ལོ་མ་གྱུ་ན་མ། *Ri khrod lo ma gyon ma*; 葉衣佛母 *ye yi fomu*) with several members of the Bhumang Nyiöling Buddhist Society (善曼日光林佛學會 *puman riguang lin foxuehui*; བུ་མང་ཉི་འོ་གླིང་། *Bum mang nyid 'od gling*). The community's teacher, Bhumang Rinpoché (བུ་མང་རིན་པོ་ཅེ། *Bum mang rin po che*; 善曼仁波切 *puman renboqie* b. 1983), and head of their lineage of Tibetan Buddhism, Kyabgön Chetsang Rinpoché (པ་སྐྱབས་མགོན་ཆེན་པོ་ཅེ། *sKyabs mgon che tshang rin po che*; 直貢澈贊法王 *zhigong chezan fawang* b. 1946), introduced Parṇaśavarī to Bhumang Nyiöling's members at the beginning of the COVID-19 pandemic as a bodhisattva believed to have the ability to protect against pandemic illnesses.

A few minutes into our conversation, one community member, Ms. Lin,¹ set her latté on the table, pointed at a copy of the prayer and mantra to Parṇaśavarī that I had brought along, and said, “This had a pretty big impact after a while, you know?”² She continued, relating how, at the beginning of the pandemic, she had shared a Facebook post by Bhumang Nyiöling with Parṇaśavarī's image, prayer, and a recording of Bhumang Rinpoché reciting Parṇaśavarī's mantra. Shortly thereafter, she received a phone call from a friend, who was a devout Buddhist but did not engage with Tibetan Buddhism. Ms. Lin recalled their conversation:

About that time, her mother was sick, so she called me to ask what that [post] was? So I told her, that was for [the pandemic]. Then she asked ‘So, is that mantra effective for all types of illnesses?’

¹ Pseudonyms are used for Bhumang Nyiöling community members throughout this article.

² 後來這個影響蠻大的你知道嗎? Unless otherwise cited, all in-text English translations are the author's.

since her mom was sick at that time. I said, ‘Of course it is! But you can’t just dedicate it to your mother, you have to dedicate it to all sentient beings.’ I tried to explain like this, to teach her that all sentient beings possibly have been your mother or father in a past life, right? So, you have to dedicate it to all beings. Then she asked ‘Okay, but will doing this help my mother?’ And I said, ‘Of course it will! Isn’t your mother included in all sentient beings?’³

Ms. Lin continued, describing how her friend

recited and recited and recited [the prayer and mantra]. Then about three months later she sent me a message on Line⁴ saying thank you and that her mom had improved a lot this year. The [praying] had really helped and it was clear the power of her recitations was really strong. So, I think this was really, quite impactful. To my mind, this is one of the most special instances of averting [harm].⁵

Ms. Lin picked up her latté, leaned back and took a sip. It was a good thing, she concluded, that Bhumang Rinpoché had recorded the mantra of Parṇaśavarī and that she had shared it. That her friend’s mother’s health improved, she believed, was confirmation of Parṇaśavarī’s healing power.

The emergence of the Novel Coronavirus in late 2019 and its swift transformation into a global pandemic precipitated diverse responses from Tibetan Buddhist teachers and other religious leaders around the world to the virus and its impacts on their communities. Some Buddhist leaders and communities recommended people ingest medicinal pills or don amulets and other purportedly protective substances (Gerke 2020; Salguero 2020; Tidwell 2020). Others urged people to take advantage of the increased time at home to deepen their personal practice (Obadia 2020: 170–72; Ortega 2021: 202–4), to follow public health guidelines (Ortega 2021: 206–8), to engage in charity (Ye 2021), or to locate alternative means of support for Buddhist institutions (Shmushko 2021). Still, others called for using ritual methods or mantra recitation to pacify the pandemic’s infectious rampage (Bhutia 2021; Salguero 2020; Shmushko 2023: 7; Tseng 2022), or led prayers for the deceased (Ashiwa and Wank 2020).

Contributing to the growing body of literature that considers COVID-19’s impacts on Buddhist communities, this study⁶ illuminates how Tibetan Buddhist responses to the pandemic have further facilitated the transmission of this tradition globally in non-heritage contexts, such as Taiwan.⁷ Specifically, I analyze how Tibetan Buddhist leaders introduced practices associated with the deity Parṇaśavarī to a Tibetan Buddhist community in Taiwan, the Bhumang Nyiöling Buddhist Society. Beginning in March 2020, prayers and mantra accumulations devoted to the pandemic-protectress Parṇaśavarī swiftly became a cornerstone of Bhumang Nyiöling members’ individual and community practices and, as the anecdote above shows, were even recommended to acquaintances outside the community. More than simply new liturgies, however, Tibetan teachers’ recommendations to propitiate Parṇaśavarī and community members’ enthusiastic adoption of

³ 當時她的媽媽生病了，她就打電話問我說這個是什麼？然後我就說這個是因為那個[疫情]。然後她說那個咒語所有生病的都有用嗎？因為那個時候她媽媽生病了。然後我就是說當然有用啊！所有咒語都有用，但是妳不要只迴向給妳媽媽妳要迴向給眾生。我就是這樣教她所有的眾生有可能前都是你的父母親嘛，所以妳要迴向給眾生。那她說像這樣對我媽會有幫助嗎？我就說當然妳媽也是一切眾生的裡面啊！

⁴ Line is a web-based communication application widely utilized across Taiwan.

⁵ 她念著念著然後大概三個月多後吧，她就Line給我，她就說謝謝你！這樣念她說她媽媽今年好轉了。就是很有用這樣，可見得她在念的時候念力很強啊。所以我覺得就是真的是有去影響到這樣子。這個是我覺得在我覺得避免最特別的一件事情。

⁶ This research occurred over fifteen months from 2021–2023 as part of a broader project examining the transmission, territorialization and localization of Tibetan Buddhism into Taiwan. My research in the Bhumang Nyiöling community combined audio-recorded semi-structured interviews with Bhumang Rinpoché and other affiliated Tibetan Buddhist monastics, as well as community members recruited through snowball sampling, participant observation at sixteen community events, as well as digital research on Bhumang Nyiöling’s social media pages.

⁷ In 2006 the Mongolian and Tibetan Affairs Commission (蒙藏委員會 *meng zang weiyuanhui*) estimated there were more than 600,000 practitioners of Tibetan Buddhism in Taiwan (Jagou 2011: 52), virtually all of which are Taiwanese. In contrast, there are only just over 300 ethnic lay Tibetans living in Taiwan (Personal communication with The Tibet Religious Foundation of His Holiness the Dalai Lama, December 14, 2023). For an overview of the history and current situation of Tibetan Buddhism in Taiwan, see Yonnetti (2024).

practices to her also facilitated processes of *detrterritorializing* this divinity from Tibetan communities and landscapes and *reterritorializing* her within Taiwan.

Through my examination of the Bhumang Nyiöling community's Parṇaśavarī practice, I make two arguments about how COVID-19 has impacted the contemporary global transmission of Tibetan Buddhism. First, I argue that periods of crisis, such as the COVID-19 pandemic, can serve as catalysts for religious change while also spurring the reinvigoration of elements already extant within a tradition. As I demonstrate, in the case of Bhumang Nyiöling, this occurred through the community's adoption of prayers and mantra recitation practices dedicated to Parṇaśavarī, a deity previously little known in Taiwan. Although these practices were novel in the Taiwanese setting, they were drawn nearly verbatim from texts composed by a twelfth to thirteenth century Tibetan Buddhist saint. Their (re)introduction during the COVID-19 pandemic, I maintain, presents both a moment of revitalization and transformation of Tibetan Buddhist religious praxis induced by this major global crisis.

Second, I argue that the COVID-19 pandemic further precipitated a reterritorialization of elements of the Tibetan Buddhist pantheon. Drawing upon Gilles Deleuze and Félix Guattari's geophilosophy (1983), I contend that the global transmission of Tibetan Buddhism involves processes I call *spiritual deterritorialization* and *reterritorialization*. *Spiritual de-* and *reterritorialization* occur as the territories where divinities are understood to possess intercessory powers expand alongside the human communities who worship them. The introduction of Parṇaśavarī practices to the Bhumang Nyiöling community during the COVID-19 pandemic serves as a particularly vibrant example of the powerful role *spiritual de-* and *reterritorialization* play in the transmission of Tibetan Buddhism globally, particularly when catalyzed by moments of collective crisis.

Deterritorialization and Reterritorialization

The terms "deterritorialization" and "reterritorialization" were coined by Deleuze and Guattari in 1972 in their discussions of capitalism and psychoanalysis (1983). Deleuze and Guattari expanded their application of deterritorialization and reterritorialization in subsequent works analyzing state formation and power, geology, history, linguistics, and biology (1983, 1989, 1994). Although distinct processes, deterritorialization, or the "disembeddedness of cultural phenomena from their 'natural' territories" (Casanova 2001: 428), and reterritorialization, or the "process of reinscribing culture in new time-space contexts, of relocating it in specific cultural environments" (Inda and Rosaldo 2002: 12), are deeply intertwined. Deleuze and Guattari note that, "it may be all but impossible to distinguish deterritorialization from reterritorialization, since they are mutually enmeshed, or like opposite faces of one and the same process" (1989: 258).

In other words, the deterritorialization of cultural phenomena leads almost inexorably⁸ to their reterritorialization in different time-space contexts, forming what Jonathan Xavier Inda and Renato Rosaldo call "a double movement" (Inda and Rosaldo 2002: 12). Deterritorialization does not lead to a complete severing of ties that connect a cultural phenomenon to a territory. Nor does reterritorialization yield a perfect reproduction of an "original" in a new locale. Rather, the movement from deterritorialization toward reterritorialization involves the reinscribing of cultural phenomena as they move into and take root in other territories. It is for this reason that Deleuze and Guattari write that what societies "*detrterritorialize with one hand, they reterritorialize with the other*"⁹ (1983: 257).

Recently Lionel Obadia (2012a, 2012b) and Mara Lisa Arizaga (2022) have applied deterritorialization and reterritorialization in analyses of the current global movement of Tibetan religions. Advancing discussions of global Buddhism initiated by Martin Baumann (2001), Obadia and Arizaga's works are important

⁸ The primary exception to this process for Deleuze and Guattari occurs following an "absolute deterritorialization." (1989: 55–57).

⁹ Italics in original.

considerations of territoriality in the contemporary transmission of Buddhism and illuminate Tibetan religions' material reterritorializations, such as through establishing religious institutions and re-localizing Tibetan *materia sacra*. However, deterritorialization and reterritorialization are far from limited to the material alone. I contend that we must also consider other spheres or “lines of flight,” to borrow Deleuze and Guattari’s phrase, through which religions are de- and reterritorialized as they move into new temporal and geographical contexts.

While considering the current global transmission of Buddhist traditions, it is not enough to examine the founding of organizations and movement of religious material culture. We must also examine how believers, including Buddhist teachers and communities, unbind agentive, non-human forces in the Buddhist cosmos from specific locales and expand their intercessory powers into new territories. In other words, we must consider the processes of *spiritual de- and reterritorialization* in the movement or “transplantation” (Baumann 1994: 35–36; 1996: 367–68) of global Buddhist traditions today.

Bhumang Nyiöling Buddhist Society During the Pandemic

Bhumang Nyiöling Buddhist Society is a community of primarily lay Taiwanese Buddhists located in Taipei’s Da’an District and belongs to the Drikung Kagyü (འབྲི་གུང་བཀའ་བརྒྱུད། *'Bri gung bka' brgyud*; 直貢噶舉 *zhigong gaju*) sub-school of Tibetan Buddhism. Founded in 2005, about twenty years after Tibetan Buddhism started to spread widely in Taiwan (Liu 2003: 30), the Bhumang Nyiöling community has about fifty regular congregants. When their teacher is in Taiwan, the community holds weekly group practices (共修 *gongxiu*) and organizes special events on auspicious days in the Tibetan and Chinese lunar calendars. In Bhumang Rinpoché’s absence, communal practices on special occasions are sporadically held and led by lay community leaders or other Drikung Kagyü monastics.

The founder of Bhumang Nyiöling is the Fourth Bhumang Rinpoché, who became well-known in Taiwan after a media blitz in the late 1980s spotlighted his recognition as the first Tibetan Buddhist reincarnate teacher (སྤྱི་སྒྲི། *sPrul sku*; 活佛 *huofo*) born in Taiwan to Tibetan parents. He was enthroned in 1992 by Chetsang Rinpoché, co-leader of the Drikung Kagyü sub-school of Tibetan Buddhism and a prominent contemporary Tibetan Buddhist teacher with followers around the globe. After more than a decade of extensive training, Bhumang Rinpoché now divides his time between monastic communities in India and Nepal, Bhumang Nyiöling in Taipei, as well as occasionally teaching in Indonesia, Singapore, and Vietnam.

As with other religious communities across Taiwan and the world, the COVID-19 pandemic caused significant disruptions to Bhumang Nyiöling’s community life. After Taiwan’s border closures in March 2020, Bhumang Rinpoché spent prolonged periods outside of Taiwan. During this period, the Bhumang Nyiöling community stopped most in-person gatherings and individual members devoted themselves mostly to personal practice, similar to other Tibetan Buddhist groups across urban East Asia (Shmushko 2021; 2023: 6–7). On the few occasions the community did meet, practices were livestreamed on their Facebook page or held in online spaces like Zoom.

Among the numerous changes to religious life caused by COVID-19, however, it is the introduction of new religious practices that makes the Bhumang Nyiöling Buddhist Society stand out among Tibetan Buddhist communities in Taiwan. Unlike Tibetans who promoted Tibetan medicine or amulets to protect against COVID-19 (Gerke 2020; McGrath 2020; Tidwell 2020), Bhumang Rinpoché largely advised his disciples to stay home, wear facial coverings, and follow public health guidelines. Additionally, he also recommended they engage in new prayers and mantra recitation practices to the deity Parnaśavari.

COVID-19 as a public health emergency requiring the divine assistance of a bodhisattva both uniquely capable of countering communicable diseases and who had a close affinity with the Drikung Kagyü.

For many members of Bhumang Nyiöling, this announcement in February 2020 marked their first encounter with Parṇaśavarī. One community member recalled that although he was familiar with the Twenty-One Tārās, this was the first time he had heard the name Parṇaśavarī and saw her image. When the pandemic began, he reflected, “We can say our minds were a little bit like white paper, we knew nothing about Parṇaśavarī.”¹³

On March 12, Bhumang Nyiöling’s leadership shared another statement by Chetsang Rinpoché’s office calling for “all Drikung Kagyü monasteries, centers, and disciples to practice the Dakini Parnashavari [sic] and recite her mantra on a daily basis” (His Holiness Drikung Kyabgon 2020b). The announcement introduced a new full-length *sādhana* or tantric liturgical practice that Chetsang Rinpoché had compiled from several works also penned by Jigten Sumgön along with a request for “this *sādhana* to be translated into as many languages as possible so it can be spread far and wide” (Bhumang Nyihudling 菩曼日光林佛學會2020b). On March 23, Bhumang Nyiöling shared a Chinese translation of the *sādhana* and reiterated Chetsang Rinpoché’s exhortation to recite this practice and Parṇaśavarī’s mantra daily (International Drikung Kagyu Council Taiwan 2020).

In the colophon to this *sādhana*, Chetsang Rinpoché notes that this longer liturgical practice is a “compilation of the quintessences from the Parnashavari [sic] *sādhana*s written by Drikung Kyobpa Jigten Sumgön” and that he arranged it while making “single-minded supplications to him” (sKyob pa ’jig rten gsum mgon ལྷོབ་པ་འཇིག་རྟེན་གསུམ་མགོན། 2020: 11). The text synthesizes verses from four different prayers to Parṇaśavarī written by Jigten Sumgön (sKyob pa ’jig rten gsum mgon ལྷོབ་པ་འཇིག་རྟེན་གསུམ་མགོན། 2001a, 2001b, 2001c, 2001d). In the colophon of one of these texts, Jigten Sumgön describes how he composed these prayers after propitiating Parṇaśavarī helped him to recover from a great sickness (sKyob pa ’jig rten gsum mgon ལྷོབ་པ་འཇིག་རྟེན་གསུམ་མགོན། 2001c: 110–11). A Bhumang Nyiöling community member who works in graphic design published both the shorter prayer and the *sādhana*, disseminating these texts via Bhumang Nyiöling’s social media page, their community Line group, and physically at the center.

Together, these two texts formed the basis for Parṇaśavarī practices among Drikung communities worldwide and were utilized extensively within Bhumang Nyiöling. Community members most commonly recited the shorter prayer and Parṇaśavarī’s mantra during their private dharma practice (功課 *gongke*). The longer *sādhana*, on the other hand, was mostly limited to group practices held online and later in-person. Through this process, the Bhumang Nyiöling community furthered Chetsang Rinpoché’s aspirations to respond to COVID-19 through propitiating Parṇaśavarī. At the same time, this community also engendered the *spiritual reterritorialization* of a uniquely Drikung Kagyü Parṇaśavarī, embodied in translated prayers from Jigten Sumgön’s works, and carried into a new linguistic, cultural, temporal, and geographic context.

Parṇaśavarī Mantra Accumulation Practice

Similar to other digitally-adept Buddhist teachers’ use of smartphone technologies to communicate with their translocal students (Tarocco 2017: 162–68), Bhumang Rinpoché continued to share spiritual advice with his students in Taiwan during the first months of the pandemic by sending voice messages or asking a senior Taiwanese disciple to make announcements in Bhumang Nyiöling’s community Line group on his behalf. In late March 2020, he posted a recording of Parṇaśavarī’s mantra in the community Line group and urged his followers to recite her prayer and mantra daily. He exhorted them to use the difficult circumstances of the pandemic as an opportunity to further their Buddhist study and practice with the aspiration that “there might

¹³ Bhumang Nyiöling community member, personal communication with author, Taipei, December 12, 2022.



Figure 2: Images of the Parṇaśavarī prayer card and sādhana published by Bhumang Nyiöling. Photo by author.

be a swift end to this pandemic,”¹⁴ and that all sentient beings might be “separated from suffering and obtain happiness.”¹⁵

Members of the Bhumang Nyiöling community recalled that, in addition to this video message, Bhumang Rinpoché gave only general instructions for the Parṇaśavarī practices. Multiple community members recalled Bhumang Rinpoché’s advice to generate compassion (སྙིང་རྗེ། *sNying rje*; 慈悲心 *cibeixin*) and bodhicitta (བྱང་ཆུབ་ཀྱི་སེམས། *Byang chub kyi sems*; 菩提心 *putixin*) by contemplating the global suffering caused by the pandemic. No one I spoke with, however, reported hearing detailed instructions on the Parṇaśavarī prayer or *sādhana*. Rather, they were left to interpret and practice these as best as they could.

Bhumang Rinpoché did, however, express a concrete goal for the community in the form of accumulating recitations of Parṇaśavarī’s mantra. An announcement posted along with an audio recording from Bhumang Rinpoché on March 29, 2020, requested the community to collectively accumulate ten million recitations of Parṇaśavarī’s mantra. The announcement explained that everyone should keep a tally of how many recitations of Parṇaśavarī’s mantra they recited and post them in the community Line group each week. The total would then be reported to Bhumang Rinpoché. In this way, members of the community could accumulate good karma by collectively praying that the pandemic might end and everyone suffering might recover swiftly.

Mantra accumulation practices are common across Tibetan Buddhist schools and are a way contemporary teachers connect geographically disparate groups in service of generating merit toward a collective aim.¹⁶ In Taiwan, mantra accumulation practices were also initiated by other Chinese (Tseng 2022) and Tibetan

¹⁴ 這個病毒快可以解決

¹⁵ 離苦得樂

¹⁶ For a list of practices recommended for protection by various Tibetan Buddhist leaders during the pandemic, see Lotsawa House (2020).



Figure 3: Screenshot of March 29, 2020, announcement on the Bhulang Nyiöling Line group commencing the Parṇaśavarī mantra accumulation practice. (Used with permission).

Buddhist communities in response to the pandemic.¹⁷ For the Bhulang Nyiöling community, however, Parṇaśavarī’s mantra was the first they had practiced collectively. As the accumulating recitations of Parṇaśavarī’s mantra did not require physical proximity, community members could still practice together even while they were at home. Additionally, this practice connected the Taiwanese community with other disciples across Bhulang Rinpoché’s “constellative network” (Smyer Yü 2020: 42) in Vietnam and Indonesia, who also contributed their weekly totals. As a result, the mantra accumulation effort became an effort across a digitally connected “networked community” (Campbell 2012: 68) of Bhulang Rinpoché’s disciples. While mantra recitation spread and was organized via elements of contemporary “Buddhist technoculture” (Tarocco 2017: 156), such as Bhulang Nyiöling’s Line group and Facebook page, community members’ personal practices rooted Parṇaśavarī in specific locales.

During the early months of the pandemic, mantra accumulation became a focus of daily practice for community members. Beginning April 6, 2020, Bhulang Nyiöling commenced publishing weekly the number of participants and how many recitations they had collectively accumulated. The first week saw over thirty participants accumulate over 125,000 recitations, the second week more than thirty-five participants accumulated over 140,000 recitations, and during the third over forty participants accumulated over 165,000 mantra recitations. Weekly recitations continued throughout 2020, averaging approximately 126,000 recitations and thirty participants each week through year’s end. In 2021, weekly recitations and participants dropped slightly, averaging 118,514 recitations by twenty-nine participants. Unsurprisingly, spikes in local case numbers precipitated greater weekly recitation totals, with the highest of over 192,000 recitations occurring during late May 2021’s COVID-19 surge in Taiwan.

While participation in weekly accumulations waxed and waned, a core group of twenty-eight to thirty individuals remained dedicated to the practice. After fourteen months, the community met its goal of

¹⁷ For example, one center completed more than twenty-three million recitations of Green Tārā mantra in 2022 alone to quell the coronavirus pandemic. See Choskyi Jungne Buddhist Center (2022).

ten million recitations, with several individuals having personally completed several hundred thousand recitations. Rather than ending the practice, however, the community continued their mantra accumulations. As one community leader, Mr. Zhou shared, “[Bhumang] Rinpoché didn’t say stop, so we just kept going. Because COVID is not finished, so why should we stop?”¹⁸ He later speculated that Bhumang Rinpoché let them continue because he wanted his followers to “develop a habit of reciting mantras for the benefit of all sentient beings.”¹⁹ By October 2022, the community surpassed twenty million recitations, more than doubling their original goal.

When I asked community members why they were so dedicated to Parṇaśavarī, their answers were unequivocal: they practiced these prayers to Parṇaśavarī because their teacher, Bhumang Rinpoché, and lineage head, Chetsang Rinpoché, encouraged this practice and stressed its benefits at this critical time for humanity. Mr. Zhou explained, “We just follow it, we don’t think too much...but we trust that the meaning [of the Parṇaśavarī practice] is positive and good for all sentient beings.” He laughed and continued, Bhumang Rinpoché is like our director and just like in a company “whatever the director says, we just do it.”²⁰ Following their spiritual teachers’ advice is of prime importance to Bhumang Nyiöling community members, so when Chetsang Rinpoché and Bhumang Rinpoché requested them to engage in practices dedicated to Parṇaśavarī, they did.

Although some community members ceased to recite Parṇaśavarī’s mantra after a time, for others Parṇaśavarī became an integral part of their spiritual life. When I interviewed Ms. Lin, for example, she told me that after more than two and a half years, Parṇaśavarī’s prayers and mantra had become a habitual part of her daily practice. She even felt that Parṇaśavarī responded to her supplications. She described how, during a spike in cases, many people at her company tested positive and one of her co-workers even had to be intubated. Ms. Lin was subject to constant PCR tests knowing that if she tested positive, she would be whisked directly into a government quarantine facility without even being able to pack a bag. This situation caused her significant stress. Simultaneously, she was diligent in her Parṇaśavarī practice and hoped that Parṇaśavarī would “be able to aid all those who were sick.”²¹ As a result, Ms. Lin recalled having repeated dreams, “Often when I would dream at that time, for example, I would dream of Parṇaśavarī. I would dream Parṇaśavarī was continuously pouring out ambrosia.”²² In this way, she felt that Parṇaśavarī was responding (有感應 *you ganying*) to her prayers by appearing in her dreams. As a result of feeling Parṇaśavarī’s presence, Ms. Lin reported feeling that “my heart was a bit calmer.”²³

On May 1, 2023, Bhumang Nyiöling’s leaders announced on the community Line page that mantra recitation totals would no longer be collected from community members “as the global pandemic situation has been easing and is close to returning to normal.”²⁴ The announcement thanked community members for their collective participation in this practice and “for doing their part [to help] all sentient beings suffering due to the infectious diseases around the world.”²⁵ While this announcement marked an end to Bhumang Nyiöling community’s organized mantra accumulations, it did not signal Parṇaśavarī’s complete disappearance. For practitioners like Ms. Lin, Mr. Zhou and others, Parṇaśavarī had grown over the course of the pandemic from a virtually unknown figure to a divinity they extensively propitiated and, in some cases, felt a special connection to. Regardless of whether they continued to regularly propitiate her, Parṇaśavarī has become

¹⁸ Mr. Zhou, interview with author, Taipei, July 29, 2022.

¹⁹ Mr. Zhou, interview with author, Taipei, December 3, 2022.

²⁰ Mr. Zhou, interview with author, Taipei, July 29, 2022.

²¹ 能夠對這個所有的生病的人有所幫助

²² 常常會做夢的時候會夢到那個比如說，那一段時間會夢到葉衣佛母。然後就夢葉衣佛母一直撒那個甘露水這樣。

²³ 我就覺得這心會稍微安定一點。Ms. Lin, interview with author, Taipei, December 3, 2022.

²⁴ 由於全球新冠疫情已趨於和緩近恢復常態

²⁵ 感恩大家共同參與修持，為全球受傳染疾病之苦的眾生盡一份心力。

part of community members' Tibetan Buddhist worldview and is a deity they feel they can seek assistance from for themselves and their loved ones. In this way, after more than three years of private and communal practices, the Bhumang Nyiöling community has expanded Parṇaśavari's sphere of intercessory influence and precipitated her *spiritual reterritorialization* within Taiwan.

葉衣佛母
臉書線上修誦共修
Mother Parnashavari FB online prayer practice

持咒總目標 10,000,000 次
Ten Million Parnashavari
mantra recitation

9月12日.星期六
Sep. 12(Sat.)

Taiwan: 7:00PM
Indonesia: 6:00PM
Vietnam: 6:00PM
India: 4:30PM
Nepal: 4:45PM

H.E. Bhumang Rinpoche
尊貴的蒼曼仁波切

Online prayer practice 線上修誦共修 <https://reurl.cc/j5GMg2>

Scripture text download 法本下載 <https://reurl.cc/VX1pEb>

Mantra recitation counted submit weekly - Mon.
持咒數每週一提交 [+886 937880584](https://wa.me/886937880584)
WhatsApp

Drikung Kagyu Bhumang Jampaling Monastery (India)
Drikung Kagyu Bhumang Nyihudling Center (Taiwan)
www.bhumang.org.tw bhumang@bhumang.org.tw

Figure 4: Announcement for September 12, 2020, online Parṇaśavari prayer practice. (Used with permission).

Conclusion: Religious Responses to Crisis and *Spiritual De- & Reterritorialization*

Having considered the role of Parṇaśavari in the Bhumang Nyiöling community's response to COVID-19, I offer two conclusions about the global transmission of Buddhist traditions and responses to crises that can be drawn from this case. First, this example illustrates how moments of crisis can further facilitate the transmission of religious practices, narratives, and teachings. Communal or even global crises, such as the COVID-19 pandemic, can provide unique junctures for rapid religious change as spiritual leaders and communities creatively respond to shifting circumstances and needs. Crises often require leaders to respond swiftly, offering advice or practices to aide followers who are eager for a means to cope and find agency within difficult situations. Given the speed at which impacted individuals might demand action, however, it is not surprising that crisis responses often involve religious leaders delving into their own traditions for elements that might be re-enlivened to address the current moment. In this way, religious responses to crisis can both precipitate changes to lived religious praxis and reinvigorate components already extant within these traditions.

The spread of COVID-19 initiated an obvious period of crisis that engulfed Bhumang Nyiöling and other communities around the world. As an unprecedented event in lived memory, the pandemic prompted a variety of creative and rapid responses, such as Chetsang Rinpoché's compiling new ritual practices to Parṇaśavarī. Bhumang Rinpoché promoted these practices along with mantra accumulation as responses to the pandemic among his students. As Parṇaśavarī practices became an important part of their religious lives, many Bhumang Nyiöling community members went a step further and continued to propitiate Parṇaśavarī even after meeting their teacher's goal.

These prayers to Parṇaśavarī are not entirely novel, however, but repurpose elements already present within the Drikung tradition. As mentioned above, both the short Parṇaśavarī prayer and longer *sādhana* were drawn from the collected works of the founder of the Drikung Kagyü, Jigten Sumgön, who wrote them nearly 800 years ago. Although these practices are from a source of great reverence within the Drikung Kagyü, most Drikung monastics I spoke with freely admitted to Parṇaśavarī's relative obscurity prior to the pandemic. Indeed, several confirmed that, before the pandemic, Parṇaśavarī had not been regularly worshipped in their home monasteries and none could identify the specific texts in Jigten Sumgön's *Collected Works* these practices were drawn from. Similarly, prior to February 2020, virtually no members of the Bhumang Nyiöling community had heard of Parṇaśavarī.

And yet, several little-known texts devoted to a relatively obscure deity were elevated during the pandemic into new prominence by Drikung Kagyü teachers. As the Bhumang Nyiöling community and other Drikung Kagyü communities globally engaged in Parṇaśavarī's practice, this deity became part of their current mantric and liturgical repertoire. Indeed, when I asked if community members might revive Parṇaśavarī practices in the future, they answered strongly in the affirmative. Mr. Zhou, for example, stated,

If, in the future, there is another communicable disease like this, such as Bird Flu or SARS, or some other illness that impacts the health [of people] in the whole world, then I think that since His Holiness [Chetsang Rinpoché] already promoted this dharma practice, we will automatically return to it. I think so, I think so, because now we already have a method here, so we will use it.²⁶

In other words, Parṇaśavarī has become a deity that community members feel they can rely on not only during the coronavirus pandemic, but also should other communicable diseases arise in the future. In this way, COVID-19 has engendered Parṇaśavarī's reemergence within the Drikung Kagyü and helped her to establish roots within new communities.

This brings me to my second point, namely that the transmission of Tibetan Buddhism is not only a process of conveying practices and teachings, erecting religious structures, and transferring artistic traditions. It is also about “both the movement and the fixity of sacred geography, both the dissolution of territories and their reconstruction” (Obadia 2012b: 186), dual movements I call *spiritual deterritorialization* and *reterritorialization*. The Tibetan “ritual cosmos” (Samuel 1993: 157) is understood by believers to be an active and inter-subjective (Smyer Yü 2014: 232) universe co-inhabited by myriad non-human agents able to influence human wellbeing. Within this moral universe grounded in the “interrelationship between the land and the beings who live on it” (Terrone 2014: 470), humans are believed to be entangled in “binding relationships” (Huber and Pedersen 1997: 585) with non-human occupants of the same locale, subject to the capriciousness of these sentient forces but also able to rouse them through ritual acts of making offerings, requesting that obstacles be cleared or supplicating for blessings.

²⁶ 如果是未來再有類似這樣的傳染病，這樣Bird Flu, SARS,或者是會影響到全世界的健康，因為法王已經promote這個法門，我想我們自動會回到這個法上面。應該會，應該會，因為我們現在已經有一個方法在這邊，那我們會用。Mr. Zhou, interview with author, Taipei, December 3, 2022.

As Geoffrey Samuel noted thirty years ago, this Tibetan sacred geography is neither static nor fixed to lands in the Himalayas and Tibetan plateau but has spread into new landscapes as they have been “gradually sacralized by exiled Tibetans” (1993: 159). As Tibetans fled the Tibetan plateau and established exile communities starting in the early 1950s, they brought with them a cosmological world replete with divinities and non-human agents. This occurred not only in South Asia, but as Sienna Craig’s work demonstrates, similar processes have occurred as Tibetan and Himalayan Buddhists immigrated across the globe (2020). Prior to the COVID-19 pandemic, members of the Bhumang Nyiöling community were already active in this process through their regular propitiation of numerous Tibetan Buddhist divinities, such as Tārā, Guru Rinpoché (ལུ་རུ་རིན་པོ་ཆེ། *Gu ru rin po che*; 蓮花生大師 *lianhua sheng dashi*), and the Drikung Kagyü protectress Achi Chökyi Drölma (ལཱི་ཚེ་སྒྲོལ་མ། *A phyi chos kyi sgrol ma*; 阿企佛母 *Aqi fomu*). In this way, processes of deterritorializing the Tibetan Buddhist ritual universe from the Land of Snows and reterritorializing this sacred geography across new contexts has been occurring throughout the global transmission of this tradition.

Several works on Buddhist modernism(s) have emphasized twentieth and twenty-first century Buddhist teachers’ presentations of divinities and the six realms of the Buddhist cosmos as being metaphorical. They describe the transformation of a host of agentive non-human beings into symbols and metaphors through processes of demythologization and psychologization as hallmarks of Buddhist modernity and the transmission of Buddhist traditions among non-heritage (largely Western) populations (Bechert 1994: 254–55; McMahan 2008: 50–59). As an urban, voluntary religious community without shared local ancestral ties, Bhumang Nyiöling does indeed exhibit features of religious modernity identified by scholars of Chinese religions (Goossaert and Palmer 2011: 304; Madsen 2007: 1–4; Nadeau and Chang 2003: 293–94). However, as the case of their Parṇaśavarī practice shows, the presentation of Tibetan Buddhism within newly converted communities is not necessarily demythologized or psychologized. Rather, Chetsang Rinpoché, Bhumang Rinpoché, and other contemporary teachers still instruct their followers to pray to and recite the mantras of deities understood to possess very tangible apotropaic and protective powers. In doing so, these Tibetan teachers and their disciples open new territories to become part of the spheres of influence of these Tibetan Buddhist divinities.

Today, I would argue that processes of *spiritual deterritorialization* and *reterritorialization* continue in geographies where Tibetan Buddhist teachers are encouraging their non-Tibetan or Himalayan followers to propitiate previously unfamiliar deities like Parṇaśavarī. As practitioners pray and seek these divinities’ superhuman assistance, they enact an expansion of the agentive Tibetan Buddhist universe and localize these divinities’ intercessory potential in novel contexts. In the case of Parṇaśavarī, she was *deterritorialized* as Chetsang Rinpoché and other Tibetan Buddhist teachers left the Tibetan plateau and carried ritual practices and texts by Jigten Sumgön and other Buddhist masters with them. Although she received little attention among global Tibetan Buddhist communities for much of the last fifty years, the COVID-19 pandemic precipitated Parṇaśavarī’s re-emergence and *reterritorialization* as Tibetan Buddhist teachers compiled and disseminated prayers and *sādhana*s to her across their global networks of students.

Bhumang Nyiöling community members’ prayers to Parṇaśavarī for protection from the COVID-19 pandemic have localized her intercessory potential in their immediate context. Individuals like Ms. Lin and Mr. Zhou have contributed to reterritorializing Parṇaśavarī by worshipping her and pleading for her intercessory power in their immediate lives. This process of *spiritual reterritorialization* has moved Parṇaśavarī across mountains and oceans and into new geographies. Now her protection is being sought to help community members and other sentient beings in Taipei, New Taipei City, and beyond.

These processes of *spiritual de-* and *reterritorialization* do not necessarily occur via a one-time movement where a new territory is wholly brought under the power of an entire pantheon. Rather, *spiritual reterritorialization* can occur unevenly as specific deities might be introduced according to how they appear within a particular community's liturgical or educational program. Alternatively, as the case I have considered here illustrates, reterritorialization can also occur rapidly when the felt need for a divinity's propitiation arises. Bhumang Nyiöling's Parṇasavarī practice provides one example of *spiritual deterritorialization* and *reterritorialization*, of how a Tibetan Buddhist deity has been transplanted, put down new roots, and, in the process, established her power within a new religious landscape.

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