The long history of interactions between the Han Chinese and Tibetans has recently resulted in a considerable growth of interest in Tibetan Buddhism in Chinese communities worldwide. This has been the case not only in Chinese diaspora communities, but also in mainland China. Although Tibetan and Chinese Buddhist traditions are quite distinct, based on different histories of transmission with different linguistic bases, the traditions have nonetheless overlapped considerably, as evidenced by the presence of Tibetan-style stūpas and inscriptions of Tibetan mantras commonly found at many of the great Chinese Buddhist pilgrimage sites, such as Mt. WuTai and Mt. Emei (Tuttle 2006). However, while Tibetan lamas had been interacting with the political elites in China for centuries, it appears that prior to the fall of the Qing dynasty—and with it the collapse of the ceremonial and political ties that linked the Qing court with the Dalai Lamas—interactions between Tibetan Buddhists and the Han Chinese appear to have been largely restricted to court circles, in the eastern Han-dominated regions of China. Although there may have been grassroots interactions during the Qing that are not yet fully understood, it appears that Han interest Tibetan Buddhism came to fruition during the Republican period, after a long period of dormancy (Kapstein 2009a, 9).

Han Chinese interest in Tibetan Buddhism appears to have been motivated in part by the perception that it is a “powerful” tradition. This perception has a long history. The Mongol adoption of Tibetan Buddhism was apparently motivated, in part, by their favorable impres-

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1 This, naturally, was not the case in the Tibetan-Han ethnic border areas in the northwest and southwest regions of China, where there has been continuous interaction between Tibetans, Han Chinese, and other ethnic groups for centuries. For discussions of the impacts of these interactions in these regions see Debreczeny (2009) and Nietupski (2009), and Sperling (2009). For more on Tibetan traditions among the Han see Shen, “Tibetan Buddhism in Mongol-Yuan China 1206–1368),” and “Tantric Buddhism in Ming China,” in this volume.
sion of Tibetan magic, and, in particular, war magic (Sperling 1994). This impression is confirmed by Marco Polo. Tibetan lamas were employed by Chinese rulers during the Republican period for their services as war magicians (Tuttle 2005, 79–81). The idea that Tibetan lamas are both powerful yet potentially dangerous figures has persisted in Chinese popular culture up to the present time.

The growth of interest among the Han Chinese during the Republican period was likely stimulated by the collapse of the political barriers to movement between Tibet and China that were in place during the Qing. From the 1890s, when Qing power was in serious decline, up until the victory of the Communists in 1949, increasing numbers of Tibetan lamas traveled to China to teach, and a number of Chinese monks traveled to Tibet to study, most notably the influential monks Nenghai Lama (能海喇嘛, 1886–1967) and Master Fazun (法尊, 1902–1980), who played major roles in the spread of Tibetan Buddhism among Han Chinese communities (Tuttle 2005, 87–102).

Nenghai Lama and Master Fazun were the principle figures in the modern Chinese Tantric Buddhist Revival Movement (Mijiao fuxing yundong 密教復興運動). Both were members of the Geluk school of Buddhism, played major roles in the establishment of Tibetan Buddhism within Han Chinese communities, and were involved with serious efforts to translate the major texts of Tibetan Buddhism into Chinese. This was the first major attempt to translate Buddhist works directly from Tibetan to Chinese. Nenghai Lama and a group of disciple translated the Kālacakra tantra, several of the Yamāntaka and Vajrabhairava tantras, and numerous sādhana-s (Bianchi 2009, 304–305). Fazun translated a biography of Tsong Khapa (1357–1419 C.E.), the founder of the Geluk school, as well as his magisterial Detailed

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2 I refer to the conversation Polo reports with Khubilai Khan, regarding why the Great Khan did not convert to Christianity (Waugh 1984, 68–70). While there are numerous reasons to doubt elements of Polo’s narrative, I suspect that this observation, that the Mongols were impressed by Buddhist’s magic, was accurate. Note that I find John Larner’s 1999 critique of Frances Wood’s 1996 argument that Polo had not traveled to China far more convincing.

3 See Germano 1998, 68. With respect to popular culture, see, for example, the popular Hong Kong film Chinese Ghost Story II 倩女幽魂, 人間道 (Ching Siu-Tung, Tsui Hark 1990), which featured as its primary villain a vaguely lama-like high priest magician.

4 There apparently were earlier and much less ambitious attempts to translate Tibetan works into Chinese during the Yuan dynasty. Regarding an extra-canonical collection of works in Chinese attributed to the Tibetan lama Pakpa Lodrö Gyeltzen (‘phags pa blo gros rgyal mtshan, 1235–1280), see Beckwith 1984.