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Boxed within the frame: Tibetan masculinities in transformation in Pema Tseden's *Jinpa*

ABSTRACT

*The Tibetan auteur Pema Tseden is renowned for using the road movie as a means of interrogating the relationship between his characters and society in the Tibetan areas of the PRC. As his protagonists travel, the natural settings become an integral part of the journey through the Tibetan lands. The amalgamation of movement and landscapes enables the emergence of a Tibetan subject whose complex and heterogenous self-representation defies the dualism of tradition and modernity. In this article, I argue that Pema Tseden's recent feature *Jinpa* (2018) marks an aesthetic and thematic departure from his earlier work. Rather than looming large over the characters, the landscapes serve as an underlying framework for a heightened emphasis on the interaction between the characters. At the heart of the film is the notion of Tibetan masculinity in crisis. Whilst portraying the ways that history, culture and tradition haunt the men in the film, Pema Tseden also turns his attention to the female characters. Proposing a new take on Tibetan masculinities who assume the previously women-only roles of carriers of culture, he offers a unique perspective on and in New Tibetan Cinema.*

KEYWORDS

Jinpa
masculinity
Tibet
Buddhism
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representation

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1. A single-film, textual-analysis approach is apt considering that the screenplay of the film is based on two short stories – ‘The Killer’ (2005) by Tsering Norbu and ‘I Killed a Sheep’ by Pema Tseden himself (Shakya and Tseden 2021). The former is also the Tibetan title of the film whilst the latter is the Chinese.
2. Tibet in this article refers to all the Tibetan areas in China – both the Tibetan Autonomous Region (TAR) and the traditional Amdo and Kham regions. Berry calls this area the ‘larger Tibetan cultural realm’ (2016: 1). On the issue of linguistic diversity in Tibet, Vanessa Frangville notes that many dialects are spoken in Amdo and are ‘often mutually unintelligible and distinct from Tibetan languages used in the regions of Kham or Central Tibet’ (2016: 115).

INTRODUCTION

The Tibetan auteur Pema Tseden is renowned for using the road movie as a means of interrogating the relationship between his characters and society in the Tibetan areas of the PRC. As his (male) protagonists travel, the natural settings become an integral part of the journey through the Tibetan lands. In *The Silent Holy Stones* (2006) and *Old Dog* (Tseden 2011), for instance, the Tibetan landscapes are ‘brought to life because they are central to the lives and stories of the films’ characters’ (Grewal 2016: 138). Emphasizing the physical landscapes which engulf characters experiencing change, Pema Tseden’s films reveal the tension between tradition and modernity, simultaneously eschewing simple oppositions between good and evil, positive and negative. Whilst Pema Tseden’s cinematic articulation of Buddhism serves as a means of investigating questions of identity, culture and alienation, it also becomes ‘the defining but endangered element of Tibetan culture’ (Yu 2014: 126), seen in the wide-shot, long take portrayals of the Tibetan landscape. Although the natural settings play an integral part in Pema Tseden’s oeuvre, in this article, I offer a close textual reading of his 2018 feature *Jinpa*, as it represents a stylistic and thematic break from his earlier work.¹ Instead of looming large over the characters in the physical sense, the landscapes serve as an underlying framework for a heightened emphasis on the interaction between the characters. Taking an in-depth look at *Jinpa*, I argue that the notion of Tibetan masculinity in crisis lies at the centre of the film’s thematics. Here, Pema Tseden positions Buddhism not as a vanishing tradition in need of resuscitation, but rather as a means of acquiring an expanded consciousness that breaks the cycle of violence which sustains vengeful masculinity. Whilst portraying the ways that history, culture and tradition haunt the male characters in the film, Pema Tseden for the first time gives leading roles to female characters, offering a renewed take on Tibetan masculinities who assume the previously women-only roles of *carriers of culture*.

CONFINED WITHIN THE FRAME

Jinpa begins with a Tibetan proverb – ‘It is a disgrace for Khampa clan when a revenge is not taken’ – after which we are introduced to the harsh, wind-swept landscape of the Kekexili (Hoh Xil) plateau in China’s Qinghai (Amdo) Province. Both the proverb and the wide-shot, still-camera aesthetics of Pema Tseden’s earlier work set the stage for our protagonist’s travels through the Tibetan land and his relationship with the traditions and the people who inhabit it. Whilst the reference to Kham points to the geographic, cultural and linguistic diversity of Tibet, the stylistic choice of highlighting the movement of people on the one hand and the stillness of the camera on the other, places the characters in direct relation to the natural settings.² As the truck traverses the open road, the Tibetan landscape stands as a magnificent force that shapes the material and the mental life of the characters. Several critics have noted the similarities in the cinematic techniques and stylistic practices between Pema Tseden and the Iranian auteur Abbas Kiarostami (Yu 2014; Barnett 2015; Grewal 2016). Kiarostami’s landscapes reflect and shape the movements of his characters and the stories that they tell. His poetic use of the bare, desert-like hills outside of Tehran in *Taste of Cherry* (1997) is intimately related to his protagonist’s search for a burial site. If Kiarostami’s terrain ‘has its own distinct character, almost like a constructed *mise en scène*’ (Mulvey 1975: 26), Pema Tseden’s framing of the Tibetan natural background

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works as 'an inherent part of his cinematic *foreground*. It sustains and saturates characters' inner landscape and their social acts' (Barnett 2015: 132, emphasis added). Pema Tseden has publicly acknowledged the influence Iranian cinema has had on his filmmaking (TraceFoundation 2010). The opening scenes of *The Search* (2009), for instance, are reminiscent of the wide-shot, long takes of the winding roads in *The Wind Will Carry Us* (1999). The juxtaposition of the two opening sequences highlights the similarities in style between the two filmmakers and the aesthetic qualities of the two regions' natural surroundings.

Bored and in desperate need of company, Jinpa is more than happy to initiate a conversation with a traveller who shares his name. Yet, what is conspicuous about the relationship between the landscape and the characters is the film's aspect ratio of 1.375:1. The almost-square Academy format prevents the expansive Tibetan natural setting from overwhelming and engulfing the people who inhabit it. Instead, Pema Tseden places his characters squarely within the frame, allowing their facial features and expressions to come to the fore. Despite the vastness of the landscape, the squared framing and the low-angle shots provide additional space vertically, giving the characters a prominent position on-screen. Serving as the lens through which the viewer comes into contact with the characters, the squared ratio cuts off our peripheral vision, significantly truncating the horizon and highlighting the characters' facial and physical expressions. What is significant about the encounter between the two men is that both Jinpas – despite being diametrically opposed to one another (one is timid yet vengeful, the other rough-looking yet sensitive) – serve as the other one's mirror reflection. Distinguishing between the two becomes virtually impossible. Both men are preoccupied with, indeed haunted by, performing their roles, be that of a son, a father or a good Tibetan.



Figure 1: *Boxed within the academy ratio*, Pema Tseden (dir.), *Jinpa*, 2015. © Jet Tone Films.

3. It is significant to note here that Rinchen Drolma is the first Amdo female director. Her film *The Driver and the Lama* is also the first Tibetan road movie that draws on this western filmic tradition.
4. In *Jinpa*, there is no such elder (nor younger) figure.

TIBETAN MASCULINITIES ON THE MOVE

In his chapter on contemporary digital Tibetan film production, Robert Barnett notes that the arrival of digital technologies in Tibet in the new millennium enabled an increasing number of primarily self-taught filmmakers to produce videos that would usher in a new wave of Tibetan cinematic self-representation (2015). Independent filmmakers such as Chenaktshang Dorje Tsering and Pema Tseden have created cultural archives that explore the notions of Tibetanness in its encounter with modernity without taking recourse to exoticization, nationalism or binary structuring of identity and culture. Their works investigate Tibetan selfhood, nomadic traditions, and perhaps more significantly, the uneasy state of contemporary Tibetan masculinity. Building on the variation of the story of Milarepa – an eleventh-century yogi who through Buddhist teaching chooses not to pursue vengeance against his uncle who stripped him of his inheritance – filmmakers such as Rinchen Drolma (*The Driver and the Lama*, 2009) and Sonthar Gyal (*The Sun-beaten Path*, 2010) are said to be the originators of the genre of ‘religious biography’.³ That is to say, a storyline in which ‘a wayward person finds redemption through a return to spiritual commitment’ (Barnett 2015: 142). What is significant here is that Drolma and Gyal employ the device of the road movie in their interrogation and portrayal of the protagonists’ inner transformation from vengeance and guilt to reconciliation and forgiveness. By reaching inwards, the characters go through the process of self-discovery in their search for atonement. This is only made possible by taking recourse to Buddhist teachings that often come in the form of guidance from an older male.⁴

The plot of Pema Tseden’s film bears a striking resemblance to *The Driver and the Lama*. Both films feature a protagonist who traverses the Tibetan lands in a van, and both protagonists give lifts to a stranger whose words and actions instigate self-reflection and a mental transformation of the main character. In Drolma’s film, however, it is the driver himself who is on a mission to avenge the death of his father who was killed when the driver was a young boy. On the way, he meets a monk who brings with him a Tibetan lute and offers Buddhist teachings of compassion. At the end of the film, upon seeing the murderer and his young son, the driver abandons his quest and walks away from the scene. Thus, not only does *The Driver* work as the foundation for Pema Tseden’s film. It also serves as the primary point of departure for my investigation of the Tibetan road movie featuring the theme of redemption and self-awareness through Buddhist insights. By employing Drolma’s film as a reference point, I argue that *Jinpa* in effect becomes both a homage to and a critical reworking of the early Tibetan road movie, its recourse to Buddhism and the cultural expectations of a man who is threatened by the arrival of modernity.

HAUNTED MEN

If the religious journey of the unnamed driver in Rinchen Drolma’s film is a story of self-discovery, serving as a means of reconciling tradition and modernity, it also works as a reflection of the protagonist’s gender identity. Here, the driver is a conflicted young man, a ‘wounded creature, damaged by his past, emasculated and uncertain’ (Barnett 2015: 144). Whilst his quest for redemption is rooted in his detachment from the Tibetan society at large, this ‘failed’ man’s attempt at reintegration with the rest of Tibet can be seen as

an effort to resist the fracturing between the self and the collective. Barnett contrasts this tragic figure with the lead characters in Pema Tseden's films who, 'while equally driven by troubling questions, are not tormented by them' (2015: 150). Instead, these characters appear to be at ease, despite the paucity of answers to the questions of Tibetan selfhood and the subsequent loss of cultural identity. Here, I would argue *Jinpa* problematizes this configuration of torment/contentment and failed/successful masculinity. For if the truck driver Jinpa is a man comfortable with his masculinity, how and where do we place his namesake? If the killer is tormented by the new Tibetan cultural landscape, then who in the truck is conflicted, emasculated and ridden by guilt? Furthermore, if these tragic men 'carry silent burdens of cultural destiny on their shoulders' (Barnett 2015: 144), where does that leave the female characters? I argue that Pema Tseden makes a break from the configuration of Tibetan masculinities as either tragic or successful. Instead, he positions women as catalysts of change, both in terms of their deployment but also in relation to their view of men.⁵

Jinpa, the macho-looking driver, with his relaxed look and casual demeanour, appears as the polar opposite of his taciturn passenger. Employing the aesthetics of dystopian action thrillers such as *Mad Max* or the Spaghetti Westerns of Sergio Leone, Pema Tseden places the driver in 'modern' dress, whilst his counterpart wears clothes that signify attention to tradition and local practices. As the truck continues down the windswept road, we learn that the young man plans to commit murder whilst the driver seems to be a caring single father. A 'reversal' of images takes shape as the camera zooms in on the two men. Here, both the driver and the passenger are positioned in such a way that a doubling effect occurs. Boxed in by the frame, both men's faces are cut off from their respective sides of the truck. Gone are the sweeping panoramas and massive landscapes. Instead, we are presented with close-ups of the two men as they look directly into the camera. The constricted space of the truck is the only landscape that the viewer is allowed to see. As the two men converse, the camera angle moves to the back of the truck so that we see what the dead sheep sees – namely, the back of the two characters side by side. The ghostly image of the sheep is presented in a naturalist sense as a spectre which haunts the living and acts as a reminder that the distinction between life and death is not an uncomplicated one. Whilst the driver is ridden with guilt by the accidental killing of the sheep, Khampa Jinpa is haunted by the memory of his father's murder and the Khampa tradition of avenging such a deed. Here, the positioning of the Khampa Jinpa as a man of 'tradition' feeds into the history, in and outside the Tibetan cultural realm, of stereotyping the Kham region as 'primitive' and its men as independent and warrior-like. By deploying and reversing these regional imaginaries, Pema Tseden turns the cliché inside out and simultaneously demonstrates the diversity of social identification in Tibet. For when seen through the lens of the torment/contentment vis-à-vis masculinity dyad, neither of the men appears to be at peace. Their physical co-presence in the truck only accentuates their anxiety. Rather than appearing 'comfortable with the elusiveness of answers' (Barnett 2015: 150), Pema Tseden's men are tormented by a sense of unease at the lack of answers to the questions of how to preserve family heritage or how to atone for one's past deeds. Significantly, it is during the men's encounter with the female characters that a critical distance from Tibetan masculinity comes into full view.

5. After being screened at various international film festivals, Pema Tseden's most recent feature *Balloon* (2019) made its theatrical release in October 2020 in the PRC. Starring Sonam Wangmo (the teahouse keeper in *Jinpa*) and Jinpa (Jinpa the driver) as a Tibetan farming couple, it deals with the ramifications of an unwanted pregnancy under China's one-child policy. Significantly, whilst the film looks at the issues of masculinity, virility and male lineage, it places heavy emphasis on the female characters and their struggles vis-à-vis tradition, faith and family roles.

Addendum: During the proofs stage of this article, the world received the sad news that Pema Tseden passed away (on 8 May 2023). At this time, there is little information about *Snow Leopard*, a film he had been working on at the time of his death.



Figure 2: *Two halves of a whole*, Pema Tseden (dir.), Jinpa, 2015. © Jet Tone Films.

6. Mulvey's seminal essay on the visual representation of women in Hollywood cinema and particularly the 'male gaze' – the term itself only appears once in the essay – has been subject to various criticisms since its publication four decades ago (e.g. lack of emphasis on race and same-sex desire). Despite its focus on classical Hollywood cinema, its significance for the studies of the 'politics of looking' elsewhere cannot be underestimated, particularly considering the impact digital technologies have had on feminist activism, intersectional feminism and female spectatorship.

HAUNTING WOMEN

Arguing that the portrayals of the natural terrains in *The Silent Holy Stones* provoke the viewer to "look again" at what is taken for granted, Grewal contends that in *Old Dog* there is a 'more radical strategy of looking at looking itself to create a realm of disjunctive and mutually incompatible ways of seeing the same thing' (2016: 140: original emphasis). Here, the disjunctive seeing problematizes symbolic associations between the Tibetan landscapes and larger processes of modernization in such a way that they are continuously left open to interpretation. In other words, the meaning of the landscapes is never fixed in any particular way, leaving them open to negotiation and further contestation. Deploying the idea of the disjunctive mode of looking not at the Tibetan landscapes but the characters themselves, I argue that Pema Tseden's cinematography complicates the notion of man as the bearer of the look and the woman as its object, and perhaps more importantly, the man's role as being the active one 'forwarding the story, making things happen' (Mulvey 1975: 12).⁶ As Jinpa the driver walks into the Khampa Teahouse, he is greeted by a curious and inspective look from the teahouse keeper who is also the proprietor of the place. If 'female roles in Pema Tseden's films are conventional, in patriarchal terms' (Berry 2016: 10), insofar as they are usually given a static position vis-à-vis male characters who are on the move, in *Jinpa*, this deployment appears to be undergoing change.

I do not want to suggest that *Jinpa* is Pema Tseden's first film to offer major roles to women. For instance, Drobe, the actor in *The Search*, attains self-understanding via her interaction with other characters during their road trip. Although she only gets the opportunity to leave her village because the film director is in need of an actor, she also becomes the deciding factor in how the search proceeds from there. Similarly, in *Tharlo* (2015), the hairdresser Yangtso is an independent woman who seizes the opportunity to leave town

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whilst her perspective on the main character provides the viewer with crucial insights into how he is viewed by his surroundings. The teahouse keeper in *Jinpa*, however, notwithstanding her association with a static place, is pivotal to the development of the film's storyline, as it is her narrative that pushes the action forward. Despite being associated with warm and homely places filmed in Baroque-style muted brown and red colour schemes, the figure of the teahouse keeper breaks with the conventionality of deploying female characters as immobile and housebound. Instead, I argue, her deployment suggests a movement towards more active female roles in Tibetan cinema. This is seen in her recollection of Khampa Jinpa's arrival in the teahouse, which is presented in radiating black and white, with the left half of the screen warped to indicate an unreal-like state. Here, the recollection of past events appears to be inhabited by spectres that can be seen and heard but not fully grasped. As she tells the story of Khampa Jinpa looking for Martsa, the viewer is privy to the conversations of the other guests, which are identical to the present-day appearances. The haunting memory of past events, which may or may not be taking place in the present, establishes a connection between then and now in the form of a spectre-like Khampa Jinpa. He enters the teahouse in the same manner as his namesake, sits in the same place, and seemingly has the same view of the outside world. The memory, however, is told by a female narrator who views both men at a distance. Her narrative, which contains repetitions in the dialogue, creates a critical space that questions the reliability of not only her account but the entire plotline of the film. We, as viewers, are never completely certain that what has transpired on-screen reflects the events 'in reality'. Instead, we are *looking at her looking* at the two Jinpas.

The relational distance between the viewer, the keeper and the Jinpas accentuates the disjunctive mode of looking, where Pema Tsenden's camera works as a means of re-orienting the audience's gaze between the various characters. As we attempt to grasp the storyline, we become unsure which of the Jinpas is 'really' there, who the storyteller is and how to comprehend the shifting timelines and recollections. Here, Pema Tsenden eschews easy identification with a particular character, as the cinematography oscillates between (a close) alignment with a character's perspective and that of someone looking in. The shift in perspectives introduces an in-between space of visual reflection that problematizes our perception and interpretation of all three men's actions. For whilst the driver is haunted by the death of the sheep, Khampa Jinpa by family revenge, and Martsa by his murder of Khampa Jinpa's father, what connects these men is their sense of Tibetan masculinity and its importance for preserving Tibetan cultural traditions.

If the story of Milarepa is an account of the rediscovery of a moral purpose in life through an inner journey, then Pema Tsenden's *Jinpa* simultaneously feeds into and marks a departure from this classic account of Tibetan literature. Barnett notes that whilst the Milarepa story is 'usually thought of as a vindication of the importance of Buddhist faith, it is also an account of a cultural exemplar, a figure who sacrifices everything for the sake of a lost legacy' (2015: 150). In *Jinpa*, what is on display is a testimony to the importance of Buddhist faith and a critique of violence in the name of Indigenous traditions and cultural preservation. For if Jinpa the driver, Khampa Jinpa and Martsa are cultural exemplars who carry the burden of recovering a lost culture, they are also shown to be willing to kill in order to reach that goal. In Pema Tsenden's film, atonement and recovery of one's heritage come in the form of letting go of culture and tradition as a way of vindicating the Buddhist faith. Besides,



Figure 3: Looking at the female character looking, Pema Tseden (dir.), *Jinpa*, 2015. © Jet Tone Films.

it is initially only Khampa Jinpa who successfully sets on a journey towards redemption and self-knowledge by breaking the cycle of violence and abandoning his lifelong quest for revenge. His refusal to do what is expected of him sets him in the first instance apart from the two older men who, by continuing the tradition of family revenge and asserting their masculinity, are shown to be faithful Tibetans but also murderers by tradition.

It is important to note that the killing at the end of the film is presented not as an actual event but as a dream. Dressed as his namesake, Jinpa the driver appears to exact the revenge that the former could not complete, liberating both Martsa and Khampa Jinpa (and ultimately himself). Here, he ‘mistakes’ an aeroplane for a griffon, thereby ‘choosing’ tradition over modernity. Thus, what appears to be a perpetuation of the cycle of revenge that would continue to haunt future generations of Tibetan men is presented not as a factual event but rather as that which could have happened. Jinpa’s smile and the act of taking off his sunglasses – these being a metaphor for his limited, masculine and insulated world-view – show a transformed consciousness and an altered perspective on culture, heritage and violence. Similarly, the younger, silent and seemingly ‘feminine’ Khampa Jinpa also reflects inwards and strays away from Indigenous traditions. By pursuing redemption and adopting the ‘modern’ way, both men take Tibet into the modern future. In the following section, I look at *Jinpa* as a festival film which engages in a highly nuanced politics of representation in Tibetan and world cinema.

REFLECTING SPECTATORSHIP

In his analysis of the politics of the international film festivals and the power relation between the festival circuit and a cinema auteur, Thomas Elsaesser notes that a ‘dynamic of reciprocal dependencies is implicit in [the] relationship between auteur and festival’ (2016: 25). Whilst the film festival is a venue

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for the acknowledgement and the celebration of the cinematic art form, it also relies on the independence of the auteur who in turn uses the space of the festival to exhibit their artistic vision. However, since each festival has its specific selection procedures, scheduling deadlines and competition practices, compelling the filmmaker to produce and complete their film accordingly, the power dynamics have shifted in such a way that festivals are becoming 'both portals and gatekeepers, both windows of attention and platforms for dissemination' (Elsaesser 2016: 25). In other words, the festival circuits' increase in power shifts the balance in such a way that the filmmaker has to plan and produce their film to fit both the timetable of the respective festival and its mission of promoting a particular kind of cinematic art. Significantly, Elsaesser argues that although film festivals 'pride themselves on their internationalism, of transcending the boundaries of national cinema by providing an open forum for the world's films and filmmakers', this international stage of openness and liberty 'can also be a trap: it is an open invitation to self-conscious ethnicity and re-tribalization' (2016: 25). What Elsaesser points to is world cinema's affinity with 'first world' cultural tourism, which also conceals and effaces the neo-liberal quest for optimization and outsourcing of labour in which cinema itself is complicit. This inevitably exposes it to the processes of self-exoticism exemplified by the 'tendency to present to the world (of the festivals) a picture of the self, a narrative of one's nation or community, that reproduces or anticipates what one believes the other expects to see' (Elsaesser 2016: 26).

I have argued elsewhere that Chinese auteurs such as Zhao Liang circumvent the predicament of having to 'serve two masters'; that is, being in the position of needing to satisfy the expectations of both the home nation and the international film festival circuit (Pecic 2020: 244). By balancing self-exoticization and self-critique as a means of carving a path out of this 'double occupancy' (Elsaesser 2016: 26), Zhao Liang 'performs' self-orientalism as a means of 'reflecting critically on both his audience's consumption of film as well as his status as an internationally recognized auteur of Chinese documentary cinema' (Pecic 2020: 247). In *Jinpa*, Pema Tsenden performs a similar tactic in his critique of Tibetan masculinities vis-à-vis Indigenous traditions. His deployment of male characters as ostensibly devoutly Buddhist yet burdened by 'culture', speaks not to the issues of failed/successful manhood but rather to the questions of masculinity itself and its representation in both Tibetan and world cinema.

Jinpa opens with the logo for the 75th Venice International Film Festival, where the film made its world premiere, featuring in the official selection and winning the Best Screenplay Award in the Horizons section. Whilst this recognition only adds to Pema Tsenden's reputation as an auteur of world cinema, it also exposes him to the risk of self-exoticization vis-à-vis foreign viewership. Yet, even before the appearance of the winged lion, another logo, this time the Golden Dragon seal issued by SAPPREFT (now NRTA), is revealed on screen. Berry notes that despite being 'made in Tibetan, signifying a primary target audience of Tibetans [...] [Pema Tsenden's] films have gone through the Chinese censorship process, maximizing their possibilities of finding Han Chinese and foreign as well as Tibetan audiences' (2016: 14). Indeed, it is perhaps the ambiguity of his films – the fact that cultural crisis vis-à-vis the encounter with modernity is not attributed to the PRC as one would likely expect – that has garnered him much critical acclaim both in the PRC and abroad. If ambiguity is one of the hallmarks of Pema Tsenden's oeuvre, then *Jinpa* cannot easily be said to be self-exoticizing or attempting to present a version of Tibet that a

foreign audience would expect to see. And unlike Zhao Liang's work, whose distribution and exhibition are banned in the PRC, Pema Tsenden's films enjoy unrestricted circulation in the country. As a consequence, the question of representation and representability in *Jinpa* is highly nuanced – the film eschews exoticizing images of 'traditional' Tibet and positions its 'modern' version as steeped in the Buddhist faith.

Pema Tsenden's visual references to the strong and silent masculine archetypes found in Sergio Leone Westerns invite the viewer to reflect on both the 'authenticity' of a Tibetan/Chinese Western and its reliance on the Hollywood Western for a type of masculinity that sees the (few) female characters as ancillary to the individualism of its male protagonists. Similarly, if 'tradition' is that which prevents Tibet's entry into the 'modern' world, then Khampa Jinpa's refusal to execute the plan to redeem family honour breaks the cycle of revenge that designates these very practices as non-modern. In both cases, that which is deemed 'traditional', 'Indigenous' or 'Tibetan' is shown to be ever-reliant on familiar images of masculinity that are not fixed in the Tibetan cultural landscape but are reworked continuously in a cinematic language that makes a vital part of world cinema. Breaking with the notion of men as protectors of Tibetan culture, in *Jinpa*, Pema Tsenden presents a female teahouse keeper who acts as a catalyst for further action; her narrative, however (un)reliable it may be, enables both the protagonist and the viewer to learn more about the mental state of both Martsa and Khampa Jinpa. Significantly, her view of the male characters, and simultaneously, our view of her, facilitates a view-within-a-view perspective, creating a double alienation effect where the act of looking itself is problematized.

The distancing between what we see and what the characters see can be regarded as Pema Tsenden's means of reflecting critically on both his own work as well as other Tibetan filmmakers' reliance on men and their sense of masculinity to portray the changing cultural landscapes of Tibet. The role of women has yet to be explored by filmmakers in Tibet', notes Barnett (2015: 152–53). If in *The Search*, women are seen as 'the carriers of the culture, if not the culture itself, as of greatest value and at greatest risk' (Barnett 2015: 153), in *Jinpa*, women are gaining a more active role. Here, they act as mirrors that reflect how cinematic representations of a changing Tibet are closely tied to changing notions of Tibetan masculinity. Grewal argues that the contested landscapes in Pema Tsenden's *The Silent Holy Stones* and *Old Dog* point to 'a politics of the image that renders Tibetan landscapes mobile and multiple and that gives a heterogeneous, if at times precarious, agency to Tibetan subjects as the inhabitants/viewers/makers of these landscapes' (2016: 146). I have since argued that Pema Tsenden eschews the heightened emphasis on the natural environment (despite being omnipresent they are stripped to their bare minimum) and focuses on the internalized and mental states of his (male) characters. Thus, if in *Old Dog*, 'the camera/filmmaker and audience viewers are not given complete access to the interpretations, emotional constructions or responses of the Tibetan subjects' (Grewal 2016: 146), in *Jinpa*, this act of cultural self-representation is replaced by a heightened emphasis on the emotive sensibility of the driver, Khampa Jinpa and Martsa. Here, we are witness to their transformation from silent *protectors of culture* to emotionally charged *carriers of culture*. This change works as Pema Tsenden's means of reflecting critically on both his own dependence on men for his investigations of Tibetan culture, and on his viewers' expectations of watching and questioning 'what values a Tibetan man should have under modernity and how he should respond to it'

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(Berry 2016: 15). In *Jimpa*, this question is posed not as merely related to men but rather as a means of investigating issues of gender, violence and tradition within the Tibetan cultural landscape and the concomitant Tibetan cinematic self-representation.

CONCLUSION

In her essay on *The Search*, Venessa Frangville employs Deleuze and Guattari's notion of 'minor movement' – a tactic of appropriating hegemonic narratives in order to create a space of resistance from 'within' – to argue that Pema Tsenden's film should be seen as a 'part of an effort to regain control over cinematic constructions of Tibet in and outside China' (2016: 107). Challenging both the Han-Chinese categorization of Tibet-related films as 'ethnic minority films' and the romanticizing and exoticizing representations of Tibet in Hollywood cinema, *The Search* hints at a 'fragmentation, the missing collective consciousness, the delusion of a homogeneous and unified Tibet' as the film crew's search for actors 'symbolises the pointless search for a fixed Tibetan identity' (Frangville 2016: 111). Correspondingly, Pema Tsenden's deployment of haunted masculinities and his emphasis on female characters is an exercise in creative self-reflection *within* a minor movement. Whilst women, children and animals in Pema Tsenden's films 'may serve as objects of gaze and scrutiny for the hegemonic masculinized national subjectivity' (Lo 2016: 163), his minor-within-minor tactic challenges orientalizing depictions of Tibet (whether in the PRC or abroad) and the existing masculinist narratives of a failed manhood in a changing Tibet. Diffusing the distinction between tradition/modernity, individual/community and national/transnational, Pema Tsenden ushers a renewed take on the road movie genre. By positioning himself as a Tibetan auteur who feeds into Tibetan cinematic traditions, Pema Tsenden signals new directions in New Tibetan Cinema.

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