

## **Fact Sheet:**

*Mediating the Tibet Resettlement Project in Canada: An Assessment of the Impact of New Media on Religion and Diversity*

Christopher Helland and Anna Halafoff

Innovation Funding Project, 2015-2016

## **Project Description and Goals:**

This project explored two key aspects concerning the Tibetan Resettlement project in Canada. The first research question examined how the Tibetan community used various forms of media to promote the peaceful and supportive acceptance of Tibetan Buddhist refugees into Canada. The second aspect of the research examined how the Tibetan Resettlement Project used various forms of new media to socially construct “Tibetan Buddhism” and forms of “Tibetanness” for the Canadian public to consume.

## **Methodology:**

The first phase of this research provided a detailed evaluation of the media resources used to promote the resettlement project within Canada. The identified material is being coded and examined through content analysis. This includes news and television reporting, print media, internet activity, social media (Facebook and Twitter). Semi-structured in-depth interviews have been conducted with members of the Tibetan Associations in Canada that have been actively engaged in promoting the resettlement project. The interviews have examined their views concerning media use, its benefits, its reach, and also its possible negative aspects. Interviews were also conducted with Dr. Lobsang Sangay (Prime Minister of the Tibetan Government in Exile) and Dr. Thubten Samphel (former Minister of Information for the Tibetan Government in Exile).

## **Student Involvement:**

- Jennifer Yakamovich, Dalhousie University
- Rinzin Ngudup, Dalhousie University

## **Results:**

As the final interviews were completed in September of 2016, we are still developing our conclusions concerning the mediating of the Tibetan Resettlement Project in Canada. Some initial findings show the reliance of the Tibetan community of the charismatic and popular image of the Dalai Lama, the role of multi-faith and multi-cultural organizations in supporting their cause and the “homogenizing” effect of media representation in presenting a concept of “Tibetanness” to the Canadian public. Media was also used by Canadian Tibetan associations in countering negative criticisms of the Dalai Lama by Shugden Buddhists and protestors, in many ways to present a unified image of Tibetan Buddhism strongly linked with the charisma of the Dalai Lama.

## **Dissemination:**

Helland and Halafoff are co-writing an article for *The Journal of Contemporary Buddhism* on this case study. Material from the case study will also be used by Helland in a forthcoming book examining Digital Religion and the online activity of the Tibetan Diaspora Community. Helland may be presenting a paper at the upcoming ISSR Conference (2017).