

**G**ENE IS EAGER to make his first trip ever to Dharamsala. Jawaharlal Nehru, the first prime minister of free India, offered this area to the Dalai Lama and the eighty thousand Tibetan refugees who followed him in 1959. Dharamsala, which means “sanctuary” or “rest

stop,” is now home to the Tibetan Parliament-in-Exile. It is also where the Dalai Lama first established a library outside of Tibet. The Library of Tibetan Works and Archives is one of several key Tibetan cultural institutions located in Dharamsala.



A slice of life in one of the bustling towns at the base of Dharamsala.

Above: Farmer contemplates his sacred herd.

Facing page: Woman walks a small boy to school.

Sikh student waits for a bus.









Gene on his way to tour the Library of Tibetan Works and Archives in Dharamsala.

Left: A view of the terraced rice fields.

A beautiful hawk flies toward the Himalayas, eyeing the crew.







Samdhong Rinpoche, at this time the prime minister of the Tibetan government-in-exile, tells the story of his own escape and settling the camps in India. In front of an audience of Tibetan students, Gene presents Rinpoche with the first twelve thousand documents that have been digitized—all in one small, square white box.

About Gene, Samdhong Rinpoche says, “None of the Tibet scholars have such a comprehensive knowledge about the texts. His name will remain for all time in our history of the Tibetan canon.”



Samdhong Rinpoche, the prime minister of the Tibetan government-in-exile.

Gene and Samdhong Rinpoche talk to students about the digital drive and preserving the texts.

Left: Gene offers a drive to Geshe Lhakdor, director of the Library of Tibetan Works and Archives, at the newly remodeled library.

Next page: Samdhong Rinpoche greets Gene with a traditional *khata*.











## PL 480: Books for Peace

In the forty-five-year standoff that was the Cold War, both the United States and the Soviet Union sought to recruit Non-Aligned Nations as trading partners and allies. In 1954, President Eisenhower signed into law the Agricultural Trade Development and Assistance Act (commonly referred to as PL 480), an important strategic tool for bringing neutral countries into the Western bloc. PL 480 was the basis for the Food for Peace program, which continues to provide assistance to citizens in most countries around the world. Originally intended as a vehicle for creating secondary markets for surplus US agricultural commodities, PL 480 has expanded over the years to provide a more comprehensive basis for American food assistance to foreign nations. In the 1960s, the Kennedy and Johnson administrations recognized the potential importance of Food for Peace in supporting a broad range of diplomatic and strategic US foreign policy objectives.

In the words of Gene Smith, “When you want to do something, bureaucratic precedent is essential.” During his tenure with the Library of Congress in New Delhi in the 1960s, Gene was spending much of his time helping to recover the texts lost when the Chinese invaded Tibet in 1959 and to make the recovered books available to university libraries in the United States. A program designed to acquire Tibetan texts had begun in 1961, but Gene knew that his monumental project to reproduce all of the important texts brought out of Tibet would require a generous and continuous source of funding. He believed that finding a suitable precedent was the key to supporting the publication of recovered Tibetan texts.

A program of the size and importance of PL 480 certainly could serve as a significant precedent for something,

but what did the publication of ancient texts have to do with the distribution of food?

A central feature of PL 480 was that it enabled countries with food shortages to pay for American food imports in their own currencies instead of in US dollars. As Gene noted, “We had a Public Law 480 program in Israel. We had it in Egypt, Tunisia, Morocco, Indonesia, Brazil. We were feeding the whole world.” And, he explained, of more immediate importance to his objective of publishing the recovered texts, “Eventually we owned one rupee of every ten in circulation in India and this became a real problem.”

It was a problem because India was blocked from using its own currency to repay the debt. To do so would have necessitated India’s borrowing an additional rupee for every ten repaid, in effect perpetuating the debt indefinitely. In Gene’s words, “It was a debt that they could never pay.” Gene’s proposed solution was to capitalize on the increasing reach of PL 480 and expand Food for Peace into “food for thought”—that is, to have the Library of Congress use some of that US-owned local currency to purchase Tibetan texts.

The Library of Congress had been using rupees from the PL 480 sale of agricultural products to India to purchase regional Indian books, including some Tibetan works. Thanks to Gene, the Library of Congress expanded this program, especially its Tibetan acquisitions, because Gene succeeded in having Tibetan classified, for the purpose of this program, as a regional Indian language.

A couple of additional challenges remained, however. First, the Library of Congress was authorized to buy anything that had been recently printed in India. However, most of the texts that Gene sought to recover and



preserve were quite old—fragile heirlooms brought over the Himalayas from Tibet or belonging to people with Tibetan Buddhist roots in countries such as Bhutan and Nepal. His solution was to engineer the printing of these ancient texts using photomechanical means so that they could be made into new publications eligible for purchase. It was a primitive methodology for book production by our standards, but an undeniably brilliant solution. The new introductions and prefaces that Gene wrote for some of these ancient texts were a crucial part of the strategy to gain clearance from the Library of Congress to purchase the books for American libraries. The introductions themselves went on to become legendary essays in Tibetan studies. Kurtis Schaeffer, former chair of religious studies at the University of Virginia, has referred to them as “a literature of scholarly inspiration.”

The other challenge was finding a way to finance the printing of these copies; PL 480 covered only acquisition expenses, not printing. The core of Gene’s proposal

incentivized local printers to get involved. He would ask them to print one hundred copies of each work and would guarantee the sale of twenty-five copies of every book at an artificially inflated price—paid with PL 480 funds—that would cover the cost of their entire print run. The remaining seventy-five copies would be sold to Tibetans at cost. In effect, the purchase of the newly published books supported the reprinting of the older texts from which they were derived—Gene’s creative formula for encouraging Tibetans to publish Tibetan texts in danger of being permanently lost. His efforts resulted in the authorization of the purchase of ancient Tibetan texts that otherwise would not have qualified under PL 480.

Gene had the same kind of aha moment decades later when he realized that the internet could be the key, over the long term, to achieving the dual goals of preserving and distributing the Tibetan Buddhist canon. He led this effort to digitize the sacred texts largely through the creation of the Tibetan Buddhist Resource Center.

