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Buddhism in Contemporary Tibet: Religious Revival and Cultural Identity.
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This book represents an important contribution to the study of religion in Tibetan areas of the People's Republic of China, with a focus on four detailed case studies of the dynamics of religious revival. The ethnographies are valuable in their own right and include some excellent black and white photographs; the researchers also add interesting theoretical insights of their own. As is now rather common in Tibetan studies, virtually all the contributors have some interdisciplinary expertise strengthening their analyses, and the book effectively tackles the sociological dimensions of contemporary religious developments, informed by thorough understandings of the Tibetan Buddhist tradition.

The Introduction by Melvyn Goldstein (pp.1-14) usefully reviews the background of Chinese government policy shifts in relation to religious practice since 1949 and Tibetan responses to them, including some consideration of the place of religion in "traditional" Tibetan society, against which it is possible to make sense of the contemporary events. While generally sound, occasionally there seems to be some attempt to play down Chinese government culpability for the cultural devastation in Tibet (pp. 8-9), and to suggest that more recent Chinese development projects are designed to benefit Tibetans and to gain their support (pp. 13-14) rather than representing rather classic colonialist strategies of increasing control over the occupied territory and more effectively integrating it into the Chinese economy, as many other researchers might view it. It is also implied that the Tibetan government-in-exile was primarily responsible for the failure to reach a diplomatic solution to the "Tibet question" in the early 1980s (p. 12), and (p. 13) that it is more interested in its own political status than in the welfare of Tibetans in Tibet. A similar point is also made in the following chapter (p. 39), that in the late 1970s the gap between the Chinese emphasis on cultural autonomy and the exiles' emphasis on political autonomy could not be bridged, although it is questionable whether the Chinese government ever envisaged offering what most Tibetans would see as genuine "cultural autonomy." Perhaps the most astonishing claim made in the Introduction (p. 13) is that economic reforms, in benefiting Tibetans and making them contented with Chinese rule, would constitute Dharamsala's "worst-case scenario"! Given that at least the public position of the Dalai Lama and the government-in-exile is to be primarily concerned with Tibetan ethnic survival, such a controversial statement needs to be substantiated and it would appear to be inappropriate in a general introductory summary of events. Furthermore, this kind of perspective, expressed at the outset of the work, is likely to irritate many Tibetan exiles and might unfortunately detract from the fine scholarship otherwise present throughout the book.

Golstein's chapter on Drepung monastery (pp. 15-52) begins with an extensive review of monastic organisation in "traditional" Tibet and in particular at Drepung. Some of this information is already available in Goldstein's previously published work, for instance in the introduction to his *A History of Modern Tibet, 1913-1951*, but its inclusion here is certainly justifiable as necessary background to his material, and it is augmented by details of events at Drepung after 1959 — the virtual destruction of monastic life and its slow reconstruction after 1981. The second part of the article presents Goldstein's extremely interesting ethnography, which not only discusses the spectrum of varied perspectives on political dissidence and the complexities of the ongoing relations between official government bodies and the monastery, but also provides a description of monastic activities and a thorough analysis of the economic organisation of Drepung in the 1990s. Goldstein shows that constraints on monastic expansion are as much economic as directly political, since the monastery has to be self-sufficient. However, the emphasis on quality rather than quantity of monks, in contrast to the "traditional" encouragement of large numbers, means that in fact the economic circumstances of today's monks — and especially the scholar monks — are rather good in comparison both with premodern Tibet and also with contemporary Tibetan lay people. Goldstein highlights the fact that all the monastery's economic enterprises, although financially significant, raise less money than general alms donations to the monastery and donations made at public teaching events (pp. 37-38). In other words, the monastery is sustained not so much through its official revenue-producing activities as through the committed support of the Tibetan lay community. This will not be a surprise to scholars of Tibetan society, but it is useful to have such carefully documented evidence provided.

David Germano's article (pp. 53-94) on the activities of Khenpo Jikphun of Golok Serta illustrates the creative dynamism to be found in some expressions of Tibetan Buddhism today, rare instances of a vibrant tradition successfully negotiating the treacherous paths of what is allowable under Chinese policy. Since the exodus of refugees, the centre of gravity of Tibetan religion has largely moved to the lamas and reconstructed monasteries in exile, but Khenpo Jikphun, who survived the Cultural Revolution while, according to the contemporary hagiography, never ceasing in his religious observances, has strikingly reasserted the primacy of the Tibetan environment, reaffirming sacred features of its landscape and recovering "Treasures" (*gter ma*). The content of the "rediscovered" textual heritage unearthed by Khenpo Jikphun would appear to be very much along "traditional" lines (p. 94), with an emphasis on its link to the glorious Ti-

betan past (pp. 56-57), while the Khenpo has introduced his own individual and in some respects controversial innovations in its teaching context and organisational structure. Treasure Revealers (*gTer stons*) are expected to become lay tantric practitioners, taking consorts as part of their religious practice. The hagiography of Khenpo Jikphun has it that he deliberately turned his back on this aspect of his destiny as a young man, choosing to instead exemplify the upright moral conduct of a monk, despite the temporarily adverse effect this decision had on his ability to recover “Treasures” (pp. 68-69). His teachings represent the Great Perfection (*rdzogs chen*) meditation tradition, *rNying-ma-pa* tantric deity cycles and, in line with the *Ris-med* non-sectarian approach, various practices deriving from other lineages, as well as an emphasis on sound traditional scholastic training. The flavour of this religious orientation — highly “shamanic” in Geoffrey Samuel’s words — is nonetheless combined with a stress on pure monastic discipline. Thus, although Khenpo Jikphun has avoided the hazards of official recognition of his main monastic centre as a “monastery” — and this centre has indeed developed in a rather haphazard manner typical of the spontaneous expansion of *ri-khrod* hermitages growing up around individual charismatic lamas (pp. 62-65) — yet its ethos is fundamentally “monastic” and most of the residents are monks, with nuns also residing in a nearby nunnery. Those who seriously infringed their Buddhist vows during the Cultural Revolution are not even allowed to stay (p. 65). Harsh as this may sound, Khenpo Jikphun’s explicit plan to rejuvenate Buddhist monasticism requires the reinstatement of traditional reciprocity between the monastic and lay communities, and in the modern context there is an overriding need for the laity to be able to perceive the reconstructed religious institutions as “fields of merit,” genuinely worthy recipients of offerings (p. 70). Not only has Khenpo Jikphun’s work had a considerable regional impact, but he has travelled internationally, taught Tibetan masters in exile including the Dalai Lama (pp. 87-88), and drawn Chinese Buddhist students into his orbit, creating relationships reminiscent of those which past Tibetan lamas had with their politically more powerful neighbours. As part of this strategy of converting the conquerors — or at least mediating between Tibetan and Chinese culture to find a common meeting place in which Tibetans have the greater expertise — Khenpo Jikphun made a pilgrimage to a Chinese Buddhist site (the Five Peak Mountains, Wutai), reinterpreting its landscape, revealing Treasures, and even concealing new Treasures for future Buddhist masters to uncover (pp. 84-85). Germano describes all these developments in detail, basing his account both on fieldwork and written sources. He reflects on the use of landscape in reconstructing mythic history, and he compares and contrasts

the religious and sociological significance of Khenpo Jikphun's *gter ma* discoveries with those of the early Tibetan *gter* tradition (p. 89ff).

Matthew Kapstein's contribution (pp. 95-119) is a similarly fascinating account of religious practice in the area of Terdrom in Drigung District, northeast of Lhasa. The chapter focuses on the religious festival traditionally held every twelve years and reinstated in 1992 for the first time since 1956, considering its historical background and its contemporary performance. The festival entailed a program of Buddhist teachings at the Drongur monastery, much of which was of principal appeal to Drigungpa (*'Bri-gung-pa*) monks and nuns, but it culminated in a "Phowa" (*'pho ba*, transference of consciousness after death) transmission special to the tradition, which attracted large numbers of local lay people and visitors. During the earlier part of the festival, the most popular activity was pilgrimage to the sites of religious significance in the vicinity. Kapstein describes the pilgrimage circuit, the religious activities he witnessed en route, and the spectacle of the mass transmission of the Phowa teachings to a quiet attentive audience, some of whom softly wept — an event which Kapstein calls "Turnerian" in its impact (after Victor Turner's work on ritual), combining its symbolic introduction to the after-death state with the *communitas* of a shared pilgrimage experience (p. 112).

There are some parallels with Germano's study: here too is a community in Tibet shifting the focus of religious revival back from exile to Tibet itself, although in this case there was an awareness that the lamas who were presiding over the teachings could not fully replace the two Drigung hierarchs, both of whom were in India (p. 103). We also find charismatic religious leadership. One of those who acted as an impetus for religious reconstruction in the area (p. 102) was a female hermit who had established herself as a Buddhist teacher, became known as "Drigung Khandro" and as an emanation of Yeshe Tsogyel (famed as Guru Rinpoche's principal disciple in the mythical histories of the establishment of Buddhism in Tibet). Kapstein also discusses the political implications of the revival (p. 113ff); while it was clearly vital to secure the support of the Chinese administration and to avoid provoking any renewed suppression of religion, there was an underlying sense that the event represented a triumph of Tibetan resistance to Chinese ideology and there was some small — albeit muted and secretive — expression of Tibetan nationalist aspirations.

Lawrence Epstein and Peng Wengbin (pp. 120-138) deal with a rather different aspect of Tibetan religion, a regional ritual tradition invoking local deities and primarily directed to pragmatic purposes — increased fertility, health, and good fortune. Here we have a case which would not even theoretically be included in official toleration of religion since it fits more

closely into the Chinese state category of “superstition,” which remains illegal. The authors explain that there have been great variations in practice in how such rituals are officially dealt with, falling as they do into a grey area since they cannot be construed to be financially exploitative (pp. 120, 136-137). The Tibetans in this area of Repgong, Qinghai, have actively reestablished their annual ritual festival although concern about official reactions did seem to influence some of its features. The village where the authors did their main study was located close to the town and the fact that the villagers did not have a “real” shaman to lead the proceedings appears to be related to their involvement in the local government (pp. 126-128). Yet shamans from *other* villages did attend, went into trances, and gave interpretations of events. Epstein and Wengbin give a full account of the ritual activities, the varied explanations of informants, and some of their own exegesis, which is interesting although possibly a little speculative in parts. They convincingly suggest (pp. 133-134) that people deny the associations of fairly clear imagery relating to sexuality and fertility due to their worries about their ethnic image. Yet it is not entirely clear whether there is even implicit recognition that, as Epstein and Wengbin argue, women are symbolically receiving fertility from the god which the god has acquired from the potency transmitted through the ritual bloodshed of the senior men. The authors end with a thoughtful discussion of generational differences in attitude, and in particular on the ambivalence expressed by young people, caught between commitment to their ethnic heritage and modernist values encouraged by their education and integration into contemporary China.

Matthew Kapstein’s “Concluding Reflections” (pp. 139-149) consider the implications of developments discussed in the articles. One strand of Kapstein’s argument is brought out by Orville Schell in the Foreword (p. x), giving the impression that the crux of the apparent contradictions in the contemporary practice of Buddhism in Tibet lies in the distinction between national religious identity — in principle unobjectionable — and nationalism — which provokes repression. In itself, such a perspective might be misleading; nationalist sentiment has been fuelled by the restraints within which religious activities can take place. While Tibetans do not have the option of reviving religious practices in any kind of “traditional” institutional framework, and thus *cannot* recover or express many aspects of their “national religious identity,” the Chinese authorities clearly have their own agendas, such as attempting to use religion to reinforce control and to gain legitimisation, which belie their supposed policy of separating religion and politics. However, Kapstein’s own analysis in the final chapter is in fact far more nuanced than Schell’s selective quotation of it might suggest:

here, we have a sensitive discussion of the part played by religion in the construction of Tibetan identity and “nationalism” and of the tensions and conflict of loyalties generated by the difficult conditions under which Tibetans are rebuilding their religious heritage. Following Kubik’s discussion of Polish resistance to Soviet control, Kapstein speaks (pp. 143-144) of a “dimorphism of values” in which there is variance between public and private belief. While also mentioning other non-religious responses to the ensuing dilemmas, Kapstein briefly summarises the wider political context for the religious revivals, and how the changing attitudes of the Chinese authorities as the 1990s have progressed, including a rather grim reminder of the recent more stringent limits to the Chinese state toleration of Tibetan religion.

This book is essential reading for those interested in contemporary Tibetan religion and society.