



“Tashi Jong: A Traditional Tibetan Community in Exile.” Producer/
Videographer: Barbara Green; Editor: Nathaniel Dorsky; Narrator:
Dechen Bartso; Singer: Thrinlay Choden. 45 Minutes. ISBN: 0-9675021-
0-x. Available from Tibetan Video Project, 2952 Pine Avenue, Berkeley,
CA 94705. (510)540-8401, bcgreen@attglobal.net, [http://www.tibet.org/
tashijong](http://www.tibet.org/tashijong), US \$35.00 for individuals, US \$108 for institutions.

Reviewed by
Dan Cozort
Associate Professor of Religion
Dickinson College
cozort@dickinson.edu

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Tashi Jong is a vibrant Tibetan exile community four hundred strong (300 lay, 100 monks) that largely owes its existence and vitality to the Eighth Khamtrul Rinpoche of the Drukpa Kargyud lineage in Kham, who established “Auspicious Valley” and built its monastery. This beautiful video captures much of the daily life of Tashi Jong: circumambulating the temple and *stūpa*, turning a giant prayer wheel, weaving distinctive Tibetan carpets at the craft center, making a traditional scroll painting, healing (by yogis up the mountain, by doctors in the health center), and studying at the public school. Of course there are also the activities of the monks, who study, chant, practice dancing, and otherwise prepare for the annual celebration of Padmasambhava’s birthday. The monastery is clearly the center of the community’s life. The rhythms of the monastic day resound in the village; its rites are the festival days, and every family has at least one relative who is a monk.

The video has an intimate tone and contains some scenes of real beauty and feeling, such as when monks wearing Padmasambhava masks enter the courtyard and onlookers respond with genuine awe, or when members of the community load into trucks to attend a spirited march commemorating Tibetan Uprising Day. I do not think we have another comparable holistic picture of a Tibetan community in exile. Of course, it is a highly sympathetic view of the community. No mention is made of its internal tensions

or even its material problems, other than some health concerns. Perhaps this is one reason for why a Tibetan narrator, Dechen Bartso, was chosen; since the narrative voice comes, presumably, from the community itself (the script is sprinkled with “us” and “we”), we expect a sunnier view. Ms. Bartso speaks clearly, but her accented English will undoubtedly be a little difficult for some viewers.

It is also clear that the narrative has been written to inform a general Western audience. It uses very general terms to explain highly complex concepts. About half of the video shows us the rituals of Padmasambhava’s birthday, which includes several days of chanting and extraordinary dancing. No reference is made to the wrathful deities evoked and embodied; the narration glosses over these difficult images with generalities about wisdom and compassion and the world being a sacred place. Neither *tormas* in the shape of skulls nor a scene of monks being touched on the heads by ritual objects draws an explanation. I assume that there was a fear of alienating an audience that might misunderstand the shamanistic aspect of Tibetan Buddhism. The filmmaker’s dilemma is whether to explain the religious rituals fully, which would lose much of the audience, or to cut them, which would understate their importance to the members of the community. I would have preferred more explanation.