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Tibetan Buddhism in America—A Tibetan Woman’s Insights

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Abstract: Tibetan Buddhism has moved beyond the ethnic minorities of the Himalayas and has been adopted by Westerners, thus recognizing and generating many benefits for cross-cultural understanding by many people. As such, it has now become an international, and even global, religion. Tibetan Buddhism no longer solely belongs to Tibetan/Himalayan people. It benefits all of the world’s people who study Tibetan Buddhism. Having studied and researched contemporary Tibetan Buddhism in Amdo, Kham, and in Western and Eastern Tibet for more than ten years, I received scholarships at the University of Virginia in 2008–2009 and at Harvard University in 2011–2012. During this time, I did field work concerning Tibetan Buddhism in America. My main question during my field work has been: what are the differences between traditional Tibetan Buddhism taught in America versus that taught in Tibet. In this article I will point out five differences of Tibetan Buddhism in America versus Tibet.

Key words: Tibetan Buddhism, America, A Tibetan Woman, Insight

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Background of my research

Since 1988, I have been teaching and researching Tibetan culture at South-West University for Nationalities in Chengdu, China.

Before 1999, I researched many young, contemporary Tibetan authors and noticed their literature referenced Tibetan Buddhism. This led me to understand that if I wanted to really understand Tibetan literature, I had to really know Tibetan Buddhism. When I studied and taught Tibetan culture, whether it

was classical logic, astronomy, medicine, poetry, theatre, or architecture, all were related to Buddhism and the Dharma. Additionally, when I went back to my hometown, or when I did my fieldwork in the Tibetan countryside, I was always inspired and emotionally moved by how deeply devoted Tibetan people are to Buddhism.

They regularly engage in pilgrimages, prostrations, and chanting. This encouraged me to reflect on, and look for the reasons why, Tibetan Buddhism has been practiced and passed down for over a thousand years. Basically, my search was for the significance of what Tibetan Buddhism affords to the people of the Tibetan region. Therefore, I chose Buddhism for the major of my PhD, and I wrote my dissertation on: A study on the devotional practice of Padmasambhava in Tibetan Buddhism, also covering the life of Guru Rinpoche, and the ritual dance of Guru Rinpoche. From 2008 to 2009, I received a scholarship to do postdoctoral research at the University of Virginia, and then later as a visiting scholar at Columbia University, where I started to think about Tibetan Buddhism in America. From 2011 until present, having received a scholarship at Harvard University, I chose to do field work and more research about Tibetan Buddhism in America. But I want to make clear that the research is still in the early stages, and that there are many investigations, interpretations, and analyses that I still want to do.

Before I came to America, I thought that there were many monasteries in America, like there are in the Tibetan area. I thought that I would try to understand the form/s of Tibetan Buddhism in America, but there are no monasteries, and not many monks and nuns. I remember the first time I went to a Tibetan Temple in Charlottesville, in February 2008. I asked the Khanbo "How many monks are there, and where are they?" The Khanbo told me, "there is just me in the cho tshogs." He used the word "cho tshogs" instead of "gon pa" (monastery). This is my first time I heard of "cho tshogs"—Tibetan Buddhist centers which named Tashi Choeling Buddhist Center. I went to every Saturday teaching the Khanbo gave, and found out what it was that I wanted to research and to further understand.

My process of research

After I had some understanding of the conditions surrounding Tibetan Buddhism in Virginia and Boston area, I listed the main questions that I am focusing on:

1. What are the differences between traditional Tibetan Buddhism and the version adopted by Americans?
2. What is changing, and what the features and characteristics specific to Tibetan Buddhism in America?
3. How do Americans find/come to Tibetan Buddhism?
4. Has Tibetan Buddhism influenced/changed American life, and if so, how?
5. How do Americans learn and practice Tibetan Buddhism? Have Americans had any difficulties with Tibetan Buddhism?

I went to many teachings and retreats. For example, I went to Junang Khanbo, Geshe Tudan, Kargyu Dzuche, and other Lama's teachings, as well as some retreats with Lama Soredha, Lama Willa, Kandro Renboche, and Sogyal Renboche. Those have helped me to know and understand more about the details of Westerners' practice and study of Tibetan Buddhism. One interesting and important thing that I found is some different explanations for some Buddhist words.

Since August 2011, I have engaged in some particularly interesting fieldwork. I started to record interviews with some Western Tibetan Buddhists. I have at least 50 individual surveys and have done formal

interviews with at least 20 people. If I have more time and opportunity in America, I will improve my questionnaire and will do a more scientific survey, and more in depth interviews. For now, I have some experience and initial thoughts about Tibetan Buddhism in America, but the research needs more work, including more in depth field work and transcription.

Reflections on and findings of my initial field work

In my opinion, Tibetan Buddhism has moved beyond the ethnic minorities of the Himalayas, and has been adopted by Westerners, resulting in many benefits for cross – cultural understanding for many people. It has, in fact, become an international, and even global, religion. Tibetan Buddhism no longer belongs only to Tibetan, or Himalayan, people. It benefits all people of the world who study Tibetan Buddhism.

The differences of Tibetan Buddhism in America and Tibet, there are:

1. It exists in different forms, and has different organizational structures

There are no monasteries, and not many monks and nuns, in America. Tibetan Buddhism has centers^① with communities called “Sangha”.

I am familiar with the Rigpa and Shambhala centers in Boston and Colorado, the Drochen Center, the Kargyu center, the Dgelugs Kulukula^② center and the Natural Dharma Fellowship^③ in Boston, and the Jonang center^④ and Dgelugs Jefferson Tibetan center in Charlottesville^⑤, VA. I only met 4 monks but many lay practitioners. I think this is biggest difference for Tibetan Buddhism in the West. In Tibet, there is a large, or small, monastery in each Tibetan village. Almost every Tibetan family has at least one monk or nun who stays in a monastery, and is supported by relatives or donation. In Kham, some monasteries have more than one thousand monks and nuns. It is clear that Tibetan Buddhist centers in the West replace the monasteries.

There is a difference of culture and social systems, too. In the West, monks and nuns support themselves, and have to work and live in society. There are just a few monks who live in centers and are supported their students. Also, the organizational structures are very different. In Tibet, monks organize their monasteries, and there is a monastic management committee. In America, there is a board, which generally has at least 5 lay people to organize the Sangha or center.

2. The ways and methods of accepting Tibetan Buddhism are different

First, The Buddhist identity for Tibetan people comes from our cultural background, rooted in the Buddhist custom and the families. Tibetan people are born into the Buddhist culture.

Americans are born into a Christian heritage, and often literally baptized into their parent's, or their own chosen, religion.

According to the answers to my Questionnaire^⑥, Westerners most often come to Buddhism through: books, a relative/friends, by visiting centers, attending a public talk, through prior and un instructed practice of meditation, yoga, travel to Asia, and through seeking meditation as a form of stress relief.

Second, the ways that Americans learn and practice Tibetan Buddhism varies from teacher to teacher.

① Rick Fields, *How The Swans Came To The Lake*, (Boulder: Shambhala Publication, 1981),308 –338

② <http://www.kulukula.org/>

③ <http://www.naturaldharma.org/>

④ <http://www.tbcci.org/tibetan/>

⑤ <http://jts.avenue.org/about.htm>

⑥ The Questionnaire had been done when I was in Boston, San Diego and Denver during 2011 and 2012.

However, there are some common characteristics. The forms that are being offered include books to read, teachings to attend, retreats, audio teachings to listen to, DVDs to watch, and, one of the newest, is that of web streamed videos, and even live events. Vajra TV. Com is an example. Sogyal Rinpoche has frequently offered live streaming of events involving special lamas and important rituals. For example, the latter has included many important Teachers, a Long Life Ceremony for Sogyal Rinpoche, and memorial ceremonies for Great Masters.

3. The differences in practice

First, Tibetan practice and the learning of Dharma, is done at the monasteries^⑦. Westerners learn to practice and study at home and at centers. In the Tibetan area there are monks, nuns, and lay practitioners. In America, there are few monks and nuns, and there are mostly lay practitioners, studying with a teacher. Lay Tibetan people rely on their faith, chanting, and do pilgrimages.

American lay practitioners do discover peace, and open to compassion, through the practice of sitting and chanting. According to my questionnaire, some answers given are often like this:

I came to Buddhism because; the chanting opened my heart; it taught me to be more compassionate; or it teaches me to be more open and spacious.

Second, chanting in different languages and melodies.

The differences of the chanting in regards to language and melody. In America, most Buddhists chants and text are read in English, or Aphanlik Tibetan, which is very different from Tibetan letters, or Wylie. When I was in centers and read the Aphanlik Tibetan, I could not understand the meaning of the sounds, or what the Tibetan words were. This caused me to worry and to think that the irregular Tibetan writing might change the meanings of Tibetan language in western Buddhism. I really wonder, and somewhat worry, about the future of Tibetan language in western Tibetan Buddhism.

Also, the melody and tones used in western Buddhism are very different. I am not used to hearing the western style melodies, though they are quite beautiful. While I have studied that the Buddhas are beyond concepts and preferences, I still wonder about the effects of this on the practices and their effectiveness. Also, while it is said that the Buddhas and Bodhisattvas are beyond preferences, it is also said that this is not true about some of the others, particularly the protectors and local deities. I wonder if these differences have any effect on them.

Third, the differences in content of practice.

I compared the different forms of content and of practice. In Tibetan monasteries, special Tibetan Buddhist institutes, there are Bshad grwa and Grub grwa. Practitioners should study sūtra in bshad grwa for around 10 years. Then, they will go into Grub grwa to do tantric practice for at least three years. Furthermore, practitioners have to finish the ngöndro^⑧(preliminary practice) and Bodhicitta^⑨, to be able to get the highest teachings like Dzogchen, or Mahamudra. Tibetan laypeople have almost no chance or qualifications to get the whole highest teaching without finishing their ngöndro.

⑦ 多识仁波切 Doshri Renboqie,《藏传佛教常识》Zangchuan Fajiao Changshi [The Knowledge of Tibetan Buddhism],(兰州 Lanzhou:甘肃民族出版社 Gansu Minzu Chubanshe [Gansu Minorities Publishing House],2009)2-5.

⑧ Ngöndro,前行 Qianxing,《普贤上师言教释》Puxian Shangshi Yanjiao Shi['od gsal rin chen snying po, Kun lohang bla ma' i zhal lung gi xen bes],(成都 Chengdu:四川民族出版社 Sichuan Minzu Chubanshe, [Sichuan Minorities Publishing Hous,1996). 13-331.

⑨ Bodhicitta is the "enlightening attitude" of wishing to become a Buddha and liberate all beings from suffering. 菩提心 Putixin.

For Westerners, the content of the teaching is often about natural mind and awareness, about Shamatha and Vipashyana, and even about Dzogchen or Mahamudra. Americans are more conceptual and learn intellectually, often missing the experiential meaning of the teachings. This is most unfortunate, and I see this as one of the most important differences between the two cultures and their learning of Tibetan Buddhism, as Buddhist practice strives to bridge the difference between intellect and experience.

Surprisingly, many Americans don't finish the preliminary practice, ngöndro^⑧, yet they still get the highest Teachings of Dzogchen^⑨ and Mahamudra, but I think with different level of understanding. They struggle with the length and discipline involved with it, and want to just "get on to the good stuff", the highest teachings, which again they often get, but not really realizing that preliminary practice is necessary preparation for these Teachings. In the Tibetan tradition, there is a reason to ask students to finish the practice, as they need the preparation to fully understand and accomplish the higher teachings. Also, most Westerners do not seem to know that the preliminary practice actually contains some of the highest teachings hidden in it. Many Tibetan High Lamas focus on the Ngöndro, near the end of their lives, and just practice that.

Fourth, is the difference of teaching methods.

In America, there are two unique features that Tibetan tradition doesn't have. One is that of questions and discussion during teachings. Another is that of using personal experiences and people's life stories to teach Dharma. Many Americans like stories that illustrate the inner meanings, which can be very important in their study of the Dharma.

4. The differences for Buddhist women in their positions and their roles

In America, I attended female Lamas' public talks, teachings, and the giving of empowerments and the refuge vow. I also met some Tibetan Bhiksuni^⑩ nuns who are teaching or studying at universities. There are clearly more chances for practice and in education that are open to Buddhist women in the West. In the Tibetan area, I didn't see any nuns giving public talks or teachings, but the roles and educational opportunities for Jomo's has improved step - by - step since the 1980s.

In Tibetan history, there were not many nunneries having whole teachings for Jomo^⑪, who are people who take of Dge tshul ma vows. Following the Cultural Revolution, and over the past 35 years, Tibetan Buddhism has been somewhat revived, and many of the monasteries rebuilt. During the first 10 years after the Cultural Revolution, it was not easy for Jomos to get an education in nunneries, but for monks it was still easy. Basically every monk studied and practiced in the monasteries, and lots of them got the degree of

⑧ 噶玛 Gama [Gar ma], 《大圆满前行》大圆满前行引导文 *Dayuanman qiansing Dayuanman Qiansing Yindao wen* [A Guide to the Preliminaries of the Great Perfection], (马尔康 Maerkang; 马尔康昌林寺印刷 Maerkang Changli Si Yinshua [Maerkang Changli Si Press], 2004), 上下册 Shangxia Ce [Two Books].

⑨ 无垢光 Wugouguang [Yesi das 'od], 刘立千翻译 Liuliqian Fanyi [Translated by Liu Liqian], 《大圆胜慧本觉心要修证次第》 *Dayuan Shenghui Benjue Xinyao Xizheng Cidi* [Sequence of Essential Practices of the Innate Wisdom of Great Perfection] (北京 Beijing: 民族出版社 Minzu Chubanshe [Minorities Publishing House], 2006), 103 - 193.

⑩ Bhiksuni is one of the four assemblies. The "four assemblies" of a Buddhist society are bhiksus, bhiksunis, upasakas (laymen), and upasikas (laywomen).

⑪ 德吉卓玛 Deji Zhuoma [Bde skied sgröl ma], 《藏传佛教出家女性研究》 *Zangchuan Fojiao Chujia Nixing Yanjiu* [Study of Monastic Women in Tibetan Buddhism], (北京 Beijing: 社会科学文献出版社 Shehui Kexue Wenshan Chubanshe [Social Sciences Publishing House], 2003), 60, 185

Mkhanpo (Khenpo)^⑧, or Geshe, enabling them to give teachings to the monks and nuns, lead rituals, or give empowerments.

Tibetan Buddhist doctrines hold women in high esteem. As early as 2 500 years ago, the Buddha taught that women could reach enlightenment. Tantrayana practices, moreover, give women a lofty status. In tantrayana precepts, the foundation of all vows is that one cannot vilify or disrespect women. Tibetan Buddhism recognizes and promotes womens' characteristics of wisdom and compassion and teaches that "Wisdom is the mother of the Buddha." So, within Tibetan Buddhism women have come to symbolize wisdom, and the merits of women's wisdom and compassion are acknowledged.

In Tibetan Buddhism, Tara (Drolma) descended into the World of Various Lights as Princess Yeshe – Dava^⑨. Once, after making an offering, Princess Yeshe Dawa's bodhicitta was aroused for the first time. At that moment, all of the bhikkhus urged the princess, "Now that you have built such a good foundation with your offerings, you should vow and pray to be reborn as a man so that you can further spread the Dharma and benefit all beings."

After several exchanges with the bhikkhus, the princess said, "Here there is no male or female, no self or others, and even no mind or consciousness. "Man" and "woman" are but makeshift names that are ultimately meaningless, and yet deluded people in the world ignorantly make that distinction." She further said, "Many have assumed that it is easier to reach enlightenment in a man's body and that few women can benefit sentient beings, but I shall save and benefit all sentient beings in a woman's body till samsara is emptied." She was then enlightened through skillfully utilizing the five kinds of sensual pleasures and contemplating in Samadhi. Therefore the princess is respectfully called "Mother That Saves and Transports." The Tara stories in Tibetan Buddhism provided female practitioners with the precedents of enlightenment and powerfully denounce gender discrimination in society.

In contrast to how Tibetan Buddhism views women, traditional Tibetan culture views women with much societal bias^⑩. Women's status and role in the family contrasts with their status and role in society. In traditional Tibetan families, women's kindness and hard work are acknowledged and respected. As family members, they are acknowledged and respected for their diligence and endurance at work, for their raising of children and caring for the elderly, and for their virtues of being kind and compassionate towards others.

This respect for their familial role, however, is unstable and has not translated into recognition within traditional society. As such, women have no voice and no statue in traditional social circles. In the inter-familial social occasions the respect for women's diligence and kindness disappears. Tibetan men, on these occasions, authoritatively demand that women be compliant, gentle, and subservient. They furthermore presume that women are stupid and ignorant, "they don't know anything" just good for making tea and cooking meals at the stoves for the men who are engaging in loud and empty talk, but the women themselves have no chance to speak.

This humble service may well be one of the virtues of Tibetan women. However, the manifestation of

⑧ 堪布 Kanbu [khenpo] is often interpreted to mean "abbot." In the Kagyu and Nyingma schools, it is also used to denote a recognized level of knowledge and authorization to teach, especially to monks and nuns. Here the term is used in the latter sense.

⑨ 金刚寺文印 Jingang Si Wenyin [Droji Monastery Press], 《二十一度母文》Ershiyi Damu Wen [Twen one Dara Pray], 5-9

⑩ 仓央卓玛 Changyang Zhusoma [Jam dbyangs agrol ma], 《西藏妇女研究综述》Xizang Funu Yanjiu Zongshu [General Introduction to the Study of Tibetan Women], (拉萨 Lasa: 《西藏研究》Xizang Yanjiu [Tibetan Studies] 1, 2008), 116

their value in society, their individual capability as social agents, and their awakening to their own intelligence and confidence, are all frozen due to the lack of participation in social activities and the lack of voice.

To sum up, looking at women's status from the angle of Tibetan culture, there are three characteristics. First, women are held in high esteem by Tibetan Buddhism. Second, inside a traditional family, women's diligence and good-heartedness are respected. Third, women have little voice in traditional society and have an inferior position.

This means that although on the conceptual level, Tibetan Buddhism gives women much room to develop, within the confinement of a social framework, not many have awakened to their own value and not many are aware of the merit that they have and the contributions that they make to the development of society. So, in reality, very few Tibetan women can really roam freely in the sunny space provided by the Buddha Dharma.

Under the masculinization of societal voice, most Tibetan women lose the awareness of their own values, together with confidence and agency. This is reflected and reinforced in the way the history is written. In the history of Tibetan culture, almost all of the authors and commentators have been men, and the official history has rarely ever recorded women's achievements or biographies. There are biographies of Yeshe Togyel and Machig Lapdron, but there are no serious commentaries on their lives. The lack of accounts about women in Tibetan history has left people with the impression that "women are but part of the process of men achieving Buddhahood." This view falls under the philistine "mind of distinction" and betrays the idea of "inequality." It leads to the associate status of female practitioners, which further results in the notion that women should be subordinate to men.

The contradictions found between the ideas that women have the potential to be fully enlightened, the values of selfless service and humility and the limitations on the roles that they have within society, are also reflected within the monastic institution. I will look at the lives, Buddhist education, and Dharma practice of the nuns at the Larung and Yachen Temple, based on my first-hand experiences and interviews. I think for contemporary nuns in the Tibetan Buddhist monasteries, their status and opportunities improved in the new education system. Through my fieldwork, I could see these opportunities increasing and slowly growing, due to the changes in the educational system.

When Larung Khar set up at 1980, Khan po Jeg Med Phun tsho gave Jomos the chance to study and practice Buddhism. So, in the early years, a few Jomos, such as Men tsho mkha' droma, came to Larung khar and studied with the Mkhanpos. After a few years, lots of Jomo came and stayed there to learn Buddhism.

Around the mid 1980's, there were 4 Jomo who studied very hard and were exceptional practitioners. In recognition, Kham po Jeg med Phun tsho gave them the title of Khanmo after they passed an exam. This means that a female Buddhist teacher, just as Khanpo does, can give a teaching to nuns. So, a new education system for Jomos was created by khambo Jemed Phutsho around the mid 1980's.

At this time, the new word, "Mkhan mo" came out, meaning a female Buddhist teacher, like a male Khempo. However, in Hanna Havnevik's classic work about Tibetan Buddhist nuns, "Tibetan Buddhist nuns: history, cultural norms, and social reality", 1989, the new word unfortunately did not appear. In 2003 when I was at the Larung Buddhist Institute, there was one Mkhanpo who gave the teaching of Kun bzang la ma'i zhan klong in the Jomos' large hall. While in 2003 there were 8 Mkhanmos, who tutored and

guided the nuns in their review and study after the khan po taught, in 2010, there were 25 Mkhanmos and 55 tutors (in Larung).

In Yachen in 2007, there was one main Khanmo who could individually guide Jomos, and then in 2010 there were 3 Khanmo who could give teachings, along with 30 Mkhanmos' assistants. We can clearly see that the Tibetan nun's position in the monastery has been improving, step-by-step. In fact, the new education system gives Tibetan Jomos the opportunity, or chance, to obtain a higher standing in the monastery, along with giving them more things that they can learn and practice. This is a very favorable trend.

Tibetan Buddhism gives Tibetan women a lofty status and a sunny space on a conceptual level. The challenge that Tibetan women in general, and Tibetan nuns in particular, are facing in the twenty - first century is how to put into effect the conceptual recognition with the reality of life, so that more women can be more aware, confident, and self - reliant in playing their social roles, studying, contemplating, and practicing the Dharma, and in realizing compassion and wisdom, so that they may continue to make progress and gain recognition and affirmation by both religion and society.

As Western society has been involved with the equalization of men and women for several decades now, it is hoped that women may have an easier time advancing and begin recognized in Tibetan Buddhism in America.

5. The different explanations of some Buddhist words

There are some Buddhist conception and words in Tibetan daily religion life. Those conception and words express the content of Dharma in Tibetan daily life. How believers understand and explain those words reflects how they comprehend the meaning of Tibetan Buddhism, and reflects what the sight of their faith. While doing interviews I found some Buddhist words have very different interpretations, and are understood quite differently.

According to my questionnaire^⑤ results, there are four Buddhist words that are understood very differently between Tibetan people and westerners.

(1) Sangha

The meaning of Sangha in Tibetan Buddhist in China is the community of ordained monks and nuns. As the third of the Three Gems or Jewels and the Three Refuges - Buddha, Dharma and Sangha, it applies to the ariya - sangha, the community of the saints of Buddhist monks or Lama which Tibetan people consider when they chat the Three Refuges. According to my questionnaires, I found American Buddhist regard sangha as Buddhist center community members; people on the path; mutually supportive persons engaged together in spiritual pursuits; support; friendship; lineage of past and present Buddhist practitioners; a group that sees each other in a 'sacred' way; community with the goal of benefitting others; challenge; a container.

In the Tibetan area, we think about Dge 'dun is ordained Bhikhu who has Accomplishment and don't have a lot of "defilements or afflictions". Sangha is very sacred and holy, and doesn't relate with laypeople as ordinary people.

(2) Blessing

Blessing is very common word in Tibetan area. When Tibetan people or Tibetan Buddhist make a

^⑤ The Questionnaire had been done when I was in Boston, San Diego and Denver during 2011 and 2012.

pilgrimage to a holy place and monasteries, or visit a high lama and master, they think they get some blessing from there or him. They think the blessing is a sense of pure spiritual and couldn't use a word to explain. Some of them said that was a secret power that came from a Buddha, Budhisattva, Yidam, or a Lama. American Tibetan Buddhists confirm Blessing is as mind becoming positive under the influence of teachings; Mind becoming positive under the influence of teachers; Mind becoming positive under the influence of practice; Mind becoming positive under the influence of holy beings; transfer of positive energy; openings to deepen practice; empowerments of one's practice; giving and receiving of love and compassion; wishes and intentions.

(3) Retreat

Retreat is one main practice of Tibetan Buddhism and means a period of intensive meditation practice. In Tibetan Buddhism retreat means the three or more years practice at the retreat house or in a monastery. In Tibet, retreat, we say tsham, is mostly for monks and nuns who stay at tsham kham, or go to a cave to practice. Different schools have their own practice during the three years retreat. In America Buddhism retreat, as some Tibetan Buddhists answered, is to enhance the teachings; ground and open the heart; support practice; focus and not be distracted; invoke deities; surrender myself to ritual/to let go of myself; express compassion and gratefulness; practice in a group; and separate from daily social life and work.

(4) Ritual

Tibetan Buddhism has the main content of Mahayana and Vajrayana. There are many rituals in Tibetan Buddhism. For Tibetans, when we say ritual it means the monastic Cho ka. For America Tibetan Buddhists, they think ritual is puja, like guru puja, medicine buddha puja, Tara puja, or they said refuge, offering incense, reciting prayers and prostration are rituals. Some of them think Tibetan Buddhist visualization, or cleaning the prayer room is ritual. Of particular note is that some of them said they made up their own rituals.

Also, I found significantly different concepts about the relationship between Teacher/s and student/s. Some people told me their teacher is their friend and role model, while some of them said the teacher is an enlightened being. The answers by westerners, in regards to their relationship with their teacher, are: trusting; safe; open; friendly; totally supportive; guide and pupil; warm; inspirational; learn from teacher; compatible. An American Buddhist told me: "my teacher fulfills some aspects of the role normally filled by mental health professionals." For Tibetan, Lamas have very high place in peoples' minds, and people will follow whatever their Lama requests.

Conclusion:

Tibetan Buddhism in the Tibetan area is deeply understood and integrated into everyday life, with the entire population "in on it". In America, many knowledgeable students say that they are "just finally beginning to understand it". The American culture is based on Christianity, and not on Tibetan Buddhism. Also, Tibetan Buddhism is a very large "Vehicle", so there is a lot to learn. Finally, there are many American practitioners have spend enough time with their Teachers, and are finally showing some real "signs" in their practice, and are beginning to understand what it is all about.

In traditional Tibetan Buddhism, the ngondro is readily accepted as a preliminary and necessary part of the training and path. Americans really struggle with the length and discipline involved with it, and want to just "get on with the good stuff", not realizing that it is necessary preparation for the main part, the "good stuff", and in many ways is and includes the "good stuff".

The emphasis on the Teacher, or Lama, as central to traditional Tibetan Buddhism, and faith in and surrender to, is key to one's spiritual success. In America, they often have problems with this. For one thing, Western religion teaches that there was only one enlightened being, or master, ever, and he died over two thousand years ago. Furthermore, if you believe in someone else, you will be damned and go to hell. This is supported by the frequently quoted Bible scripture, "For no man (woman) shall come unto the Father but by me". The belief system is strong and is held in place by fear of eternal damnation. That is a lot to overcome.

Americans are very intelligent and very sincere. They also have the capacity to work very hard and develop strong devotion. If shown that something works, they tend to do whatever works and are able to drop their old ideas about things, perhaps more easily than many Tibetans. This is being supported and bolstered by the scientific research that is coming out about the effects of Tibetan Buddhist meditation by several monks and Teachers, and especially the recent book, *The Joy of Living*, by Mingyur Rinpoche. Americans are interested in what works, and what helps them to be better people, even without understanding the entire path and the stages involved. The form that is being offered includes books to read, teachings to attend, retreat, audios to listen to, DVDs to watch, and, one of the newest but increasingly used, is that of web streamed videos and even live events.

Tibetan Buddhism now has more than a thousand years of history. Because it has greatly benefited the Tibetan people in numerous ways, it is now a subject in the Tibetan cultural system and considered to be an inheritance. According to my questionnaire, for Westerners, Tibetan Buddhism has affected/influenced their life because Tibetan Buddhism has given them a sense of purpose, taught them to be more compassionate, and has helped them to be good persons. Many Westerners said that Tibetan Buddhism had changed them by teaching them to work with their mind, seeing how thoughts affect their life, teaching them to be more open and aware, preparing them to face illness and other difficulties, healing mental illness and preserving mental health, and allowing them to inquire deeply into the nature of experience. With the exploration of Tibetan Buddhism by both Tibetans and Westerners, there are some common characteristics emerging. As a Tibetan scholar, I look forward to doing more research to understand what these commonalities are, as well as noting the differences.

中文题目:

藏传佛教在美国

——一个藏族女性的视野

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中国四川成都西南民族大学藏学院从事藏学和藏传佛教文化的教学和科研工作。已出版了专著《藏文化中连花生信仰研究》(中国藏学出版社,2008),以及参著3部等,发表了如“可持续发展寺院旅游”(Asian Highlands Perspectives, 2010)等30多篇论文。威廉·麦克·史密斯,博士,美国卡罗拉多一位临床心理学家,藏传佛教学者及修行者,此文英语帮助者。中国四川成都西南民族大学藏学院;电话:+86-159-8283-8631。电子邮件;Email: padmatsh@gmail.com

摘要:藏传佛教随着时代的变化,其信仰群也发生着变化。从青藏高原传到了太平洋彼岸,从纯藏族群体演化为多民族信仰群。如今藏传佛教已不再仅仅属于藏民族,也不仅仅与藏族文化为载体,它被传到了西方,成为国际性的宗教。本人利用了2008-2009年在佛吉尼亚博后访学,以及2011-2012年哈弗大学访学阶段,做了藏传佛教在美国的田野调查。田野的主要问题是“藏传佛教究竟在美国和在传统藏区相比主要有什么不同”,此文^③我将阐述五个不同的方面。

关键词:藏传佛教、美国、一个藏族女性、视野

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