

**TIBETAN BUDDHIST MONASTICISM: SOCIAL,
PSYCHOLOGICAL AND CULTURAL IMPLICATIONS**

by

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Tibetan Buddhist Monasticism: social, psychological and cultural implications*

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Introduction

The cross-cultural literature on human social and cultural organization roots human life in an intimate and morally reciprocal matrix of primary groups such as the family. Close social relationships and emotional attachments are the warp and woof of human nature in all societies and many, if not most, anthropologists would explain this as derivative from our psychobiological nature. To the extent that this is true, Tibetan monasticism represents one of history's most radical psycho-social experiments in that it has for centuries attempted to produce and reproduce an atomistic social and cultural structure in which the foundational building block is not a family or family-equivalent but a solitary individual detached from the intense and intimate attachments inherent in the idea of family, or intimate primary group. This paper will address and explicate the nature and success of this "experiment" by presenting findings derived from a 15 month field study conducted in a Ladakhi monastery of Tibetan Buddhism located in Kyilung (pseudonym) Ladakh, India.

Although numerous tomes have been written about the teachings and philosophy of the Buddha, surprisingly little is known about the manner in which that philosophy was put into practice, that is to say, about how Buddhist monks actually live and work and how the monastic system functions. This is especially true for the Tibetan Buddhist monastic system since with only a few exceptions (Haimendorf 1964, Miller 1961, Ortner 1978, Paul 1982) virtually all of the "field" studies that even peripherally deal with monks derive from the Theravada countries of South and Southeast Asia (Bunnag 1973; Evers 1972; Gombrich 1971; Spiro 1982; Tambiah 1976;). Yet, as will be shown below, Tibetan (Mahayana) monasticism differs in fundamental ways from Theravada monasticism.

Buddhism is a religion of renunciation and transcendental understanding. It teaches that life is characterized by misery, suffering and impermanence, the roots of which are our own desires, attachment and illusory perceptions of reality. The path out of this illusion and suffering requires the elimination

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of attachments to material objects and people (wife, children, parents, etc.). However, if individuals strive to transcend the "normal" world of sensual and material desires, how will they interact with the environment to extract their subsistence? Can this interaction with the environment be socially structured so that their basic biological and social needs are met without inculcating the same set of attachments and desires intrinsic to secular life? The challenge to Buddhist praxis was and is to create and perpetuate an institutional framework that is "of-the-world" yet at the same time "out-of-the-world." The community of monks, the monastery, was and is the vehicle for this.

The contradiction inherent in monks trying to move out-of-the-world while having to subsist in-the-world is compounded by a philosophical contradiction in Mahayana teachings. Although each monk is supposed to sever his link to secular life and devote his attention to his own spiritual development, Mahayana Buddhism also teaches that it is selfish to seek only one's own salvation. Monks must also have compassion for the multitude of sentient creatures who are less spiritually advanced and who suffer in the temporal world. They must work for the welfare of other beings. Thus, while the monastery is a spiritual haven for withdrawal from the temporal world and for renunciation of its materialistic and sensual values, it is simultaneously an instrument for bringing Buddhist ideas and beliefs to that very same temporal world of the lay population.

The actual foundation of the path of Mahayana is *Boddhicitta*, the Enlightened attitude to attain the full enlightenment of Buddhahood in order to be able to liberate all other sentient beings from their sufferings (Jamyang Khyentze Rinpoche 1982: 21) ... Then, always directing the actions of our body, speech and mind towards nothing but virtue, we must always be motivated to benefit others (Ibid.: 22).

The individualist and renunciatory aspects of Buddhist teachings has led Spiro (1982), in his classic study of Theravada Buddhism in Burma, to argue that monasticism inevitably must be restricted to a select and extraordinary few.

From its inception Buddhism was conceived as a virtuoso religion (279) ... But it is not only in conception that Buddhism is a virtuoso religion. Psychologically only a small minority in any society could be expected to follow the Buddha's path. The number of persons who might be convinced by its world-rejecting attitudes is small; the number (even from among those so convinced) who might be willing to abandon the world is yet smaller; while the number among the latter who are intellectually and emotionally qualified to lead the contemplative life is smaller still ... If psychological considerations preclude the possibility of world renunciation becoming a mass phenomenon, its sociological

consequences render such a possibility absurd (283).

This eloquent statement highlights a fundamental difference between Tibetan (Mahayana) and S.E. Asian (Theravada) Buddhism for in Tibet, to the contrary, monasticism was organized precisely as a mass or large scale phenomenon of world renunciation.

The Tibetan monastic system strove to recruit and support large numbers of males. Celibate monks in Tibet during the traditional period (pre-1959) never comprised a majority of the male population but their numbers were staggering. It has been variously estimated that between 10-20% of the male population were *life-long* monks and large monasteries often resembled towns (see Stein: 139-140). For example, Drepung, near Lhasa, held roughly 10,000 monks. In contrast, it has been reported that monks in all of Thailand (in 1966-68) comprised only between 1-2% of the total number of males (Tambiah 1976: 266-67).

Even more striking and illustrative of the large-scale orientation of Tibetan monasticism was the fact that virtually all monks in Tibet and Ladakh were *placed* in monasteries when they were very young children (generally between 7-10 years of age) by parents without regard to their psychological predisposition; and they were expected to remain monks for their entire life. This emphasis on a "life-long" or "permanent" monastic commitment differs markedly from Southeast Asian Buddhism where temporary monkhood and adult recruitment were typical. Moreover, it is important to also note that in most parts of Tibet and Ladakh the legal system reinforced this life-long commitment since monks lost whatever rights they had to their family patrimony (especially to arable land) when they entered the monastery. And since traditionally there were few economically viable alternatives other than farming, young monks not overly enamored by monastic life faced limited economic alternatives on the outside and thus a precarious existence if they left the monastic community.

Related to this was and is the very powerful value placed on retaining novices and monks within the Tibetan monastic system. There were no exams, etc. which monks or novices *had* to pass just to *remain* in the monastery and, to the contrary, even illiterate and worldly monks were maintained. Being a monk in and of itself was considered spiritually superior to being a laymen and the "mass" philosophy of the Tibetan system very clearly placed a high value on recruiting large numbers of monks and retaining them permanently. Goldstein witnessed, for example, an incident where a European Buddhist sent her 8 year old son through an Indian friend to a Tibetan monastery in Sikkim to become a monk. Though that child spoke no Tibetan and initially was extremely hostile, the monks thought nothing of accepting and keeping him in the monastery. He would come to learn in time, they felt, and in any case it was for his long term spiritual welfare. In actuality, the boy learned Tibetan and adjusted to his new life, although 10 years later, when he was an adult, he left Sikkim and the monastery.

Similarly, a Ladakhi monk reminisced how during his first year in the monastery he was bored and lonely and ran away to his home. His father, gave him a sound beating and dragged him back to the monastery. The monk recounted this in the context of being amused at how much he has changed since then because now when he goes to the village he can't wait to return to the quiet and serenity of the monastery. Similarly, in large monasteries in Tibet deviant "fighting" monks called *dabdo* were not expelled from the monastery (see Goldstein 1964). Barring murder and heterosexual intercourse, the breaches of monks were not punished by expulsion.

As such, Tibetan monasticism represents one of human history's most ambitious and radical social and psychological experiments precisely because it attempts to achieve on a mass scale the creation and perpetuation of a sub-culture and society in which basic ideals of non-attachment, non-desire, material renunciation, celibacy and transcendental wisdom are institutionalized. It created and sustained, and to the degree it still exists, sustains, an environment in which children are recruited in large numbers and socialized into a cultural and social structure in which they are expected to become detached from "basic" and perhaps "inherent" human attachments and desires and move toward an understanding of transcendental truth in keeping with what Tucci (1980: 113) wrote was a basic principal of Buddhism: "that truth emerged or revealed itself in accordance with the spiritual maturity of the devotee or mystic." In other words, this understanding is not an all or nothing phenomenon. There are steps or stages one goes through over hundreds or thousands of rebirths and the production and reproduction of monks advances ever increasing numbers of sentient beings on that path. Tibetan history, in fact, can be conceptualized as the "monasticization" of a society in that the primary goal of the polity became precisely the production and reproduction of as many monks as possible. Lay people existed to serve monasticism by producing sons and surplus.

Tibetan monasticism, therefore, attempts to socialize recruits into an alternative set of norms, values and standards for perceiving and evaluating the world; a cultural template in which love, desire, and wealth were renounced as the source of misery and suffering. But are they successful?

Kyilung Monastery

Although no single monastery can reflect the wide array of monastic types and sizes found in Tibetan Buddhism, and although there are differences between the monks in any single monastery, the monastery on which this paper is based, Kyilung, falls under the rubrick of one important type found throughout Tibet: the small "branch monastery" (*dgon lag*). As this name implies, such monasteries are appendages of a larger monastery or monastic sectarian system and are therefore linked to larger centers of religious learning. They are usually small in size containing less than 100 monks.

This paper discusses some of our findings regarding Kyilung monastery

with respect to: (1) where the monks of Kyilung monastery come from; (2) how they are supported; (3) what activities they actually do; and (4) to what extent we can say that the intent of Tibetan monasticism has been socially, culturally and psychologically successful, i.e., to what extent has human culture been victorious over what many would argue are basic human needs or drives.

Kyilung monastery is an indigenous (i.e. non-refugee) Ladakhi Tibetan Buddhist monastery perched atop a hill overlooking the Kyilung valley and village about 15 km. west of Leh, the capital of Ladakh. Although an independent Tibetan Kingdom in the past, Ladakh is now a district in the Indian state of Jammu and Kashmir. Kyilung monastery was founded by the Lama *Kun dga' grags pa* during the reign of the Ladakh King '*Jam dbyang rnam rgyal*' in the 16th century and has, therefore, housed and trained monks for roughly 400 years. Like virtually all Tibetan monasteries, it is part of a larger religious organization, in this case the Drigung sect whose main monastery (and administrative center) was located in Central Tibet and whose heads were the two incarnate Drigung (Chetsang and Chungtsang) Lamas.

Recruitment

During the period of our study, Kyilung monastery contained 34 full-time permanent monks. Table I. presents their age distribution. It shows a skewing toward the older ages with 59% of the monks being 40 years of age or older and 74% 30+ years of age. To a large extent this "old" age distribution reflects new economic and social opportunities in Ladakh which compete with monastic life and make it difficult for the monastery to recruit and retain young monks.

The education of these Kyilung monks, however, is typical of the traditional system. For example, of the 20 monks 40 years or older, only 2 (10%) have not gone to Tibet (as youths) to undergo further training at the main monastery (Drigung) as was the established custom in the Drigung sect. And although the destruction of monasticism in Tibet prevented the younger monks from having this experience, they are all literate in Tibetan and have a basic understanding of fundamental Buddhist tenets. Nonetheless, Kyilung, as a "branch monastery," was clearly not a sophisticated center of esoteric learning or practice nor was it meant to be.

Each of the monasteries in Ladakh was formally linked to a number of villages such that any layman in these villages who wanted to become a monk was required to enter that (and only that) monastery. Ladakh monasteries generally owned land in such areas and the peasants living there were, to a degree at least, tenant or serfs of the monastery. In turn, the monastery was responsible for ministering to the spiritual needs of the lay population there. In keeping with this, all of the monks in Kyilung (with the exception of one Tibetan refugee monk) came from such affiliated village areas although the majority (56% (N=19)) came from only one of these, Kyilung,

TABLE I. Age Distribution of Monks in Kyilung Monastery in 1981.

AGE	NUMBER	PERCENT
70+	3	9
60-69	2	6
50-59	8	23
40-49	7	21
30-39	5	15
20-29	4	12
15-19	1	3
10-14	2	6
< 10	2	6
Total	34	100%

the site of the monastery itself.

Unlike some parts of Tibet where monasteries recruited monks as a corvee tax obligation placed on their "subjects" (e.g., it was common that the second of three sons *had* to be made a monk), in Kyilung, recruitment was and still is a family decision. But this does not mean that the potential monk decides his own future. To the contrary, the locus of decision-making rests almost totally in the hands of the parents not the child, who as has been indicated, is very young when first made a monk. For example, both of the current child-monks in Kyilung entered the monastery at age 7 so that the decision and preliminary planning probably began at age 6 or even earlier. Thus, while monks were not recruited as a tax in Kyilung, they were not recruited on the basis of the monk's own informed decision but rather the decision was made by his parents. As indicated above, psychological predisposition, personality compatibility and/or strong positive feelings of affinity on the part of the child were not considered in any way necessary preconditions for entering the monastic system. Whatever the initial personality and feelings of the candidate, being a monk was universally held to be inherently good in Tibetan society. From the monastic system's point of view, it was clearly an end in itself and thus more monks were an affirmation of the efficacy of monasticism itself. Similarly, from the point of view of parents, making a son a monk is an act of love and religious faith that brings merit (*dge ba*) to the parents and an opportunity for spiritual development and high rebirth to the child regardless of what the child thinks or feels.

Parents decided to make one of their sons a monk for a variety of reasons ranging from taming wild children to true belief. Three very basic ones common in Kyilung are: (a) *The health and survival of the boy.* Parents often pledge to make a son who is especially ill a monk if he recovers. Or lamas or shamans sometimes tell parents that their ill child will recover if he is made a monk. This is the only situation where the eldest or only son would

be made a monk. In all other cases monks were inevitably the youngest or middle brother in a sibling set. (2) *Economic and social reasons*. The monastery serves as an escape valve both for families with more sons than they need or desire and for families having difficulty supporting themselves economically. For example, a family with three or more sons might decide to make one son a monk to reduce potential discord among brothers living in the same household (who would normally be married to a single wife). Or, a poor family might decide that making a son a monk would give that son the chance for a better life while easing the economic burden on themselves. (3) *Religious faith and conviction*. As indicated above, making a son a monk is a meritorious act of religious devotion for the parents and an act of love toward their son. Some families have a tradition of making a son a monk each generation. Parents also are sometimes spurred on to make a son a monk when one of their younger sons appears particularly attracted to monks and religious rituals. For example, if a child seems particularly enthralled when monks come to their house to perform religious services. In some such cases, it is common for the monks to ask the parents to make such a boy a monk if, of course, he is not the eldest son.

Once the parents decide to place the child in Kyilung monastery, a monk must be found who will look after the child in the monastery. Although this monk is called "teacher" (*dge rgan*), he is primarily a "caretaker" and may or may not actually act as the young monk's instructor. The child monk lives with this teacher and receives food and incidental expenses from him since such young monks in Kyilung do not receive regular income from the monastery at this time. In turn, the child-monk in Kyilung performs many of the more unpleasant manual labor tasks for the teacher and the monastery as a whole. The family of such monks may or may not help out financially. Normally, these "teachers" are close relatives of the child-monk, e.g., uncles (FaBr or MBr) or grand-uncles, or are linked to their monk caretaker in the sense that the child's family is an established "patron" of the monk. In Kyilung, at least 21 (62%) of the monks were related to at least one other monk in the monastery and the relationship was usually either an uncle/nephew relationship.

After a boy enters the monastery and undergoes some rudimentary training he is expected to journey to Tibet for further study. Normally this occurs by the age of 12 or 13. Kyilung monks generally go to Drigung monastery, the parent institution of Kyilung and stay there for at least a few years. Some such monks never return to Ladakh or only do so when they are old and others switch to other monasteries in Tibet. In any case, it is only when they return to Ladakh that they are given the means to support themselves by the monastery.

Life in Kyilung Monastery

The social organization of the monastery articulates and reinforces the

philosophical goal of non-attachment to material goods and human relationships by detaching monks from the warm and intimate social matrix of the family or family-type functional equivalent. The basic building block in the monastic system is not a family-type social group but rather the solitary monk compartmentalized as an autonomous social and economic unit. Unless a monk has a child-monk student currently residing with him (and in Kyilung only 2 did) each Kyilung monk lives alone in a separate apartment cell (*shag*) and is responsible for purchasing, processing and cooking his own meals. Each monk is responsible only for himself and reciprocally no one is independent on him. Monks have duties and responsibilities toward the impersonal institution (the monastery) but not toward each other. By structurally excising monks from the intimate web of kinship ties and obligations and deflecting them from the development of functionally equivalent intimate groups and relationships in the monastery, the monastery produces and reproduces an atomistic structure based on solitary human isolates. In doing this it allows each monks to pursue his own spiritual and personality development without thought of the needs of others, i.e., without the encumbrance of interlocking sets of obligations and responsibilities to others. Laymen and monks both see monks as standing alone, a single stick of incense burning slowly and steadily in a world of chaos and suffering. Tibetans have a saying that gets at this: *grwa pa'i bsam blo sdum* or 'Monks think only for the moment.' In other words, in contrast to laymen, monks are, with respect to secular matters rooted in the present. There is little need to plan and act with regard to others who are dependent on them. They do not have to worry about the future of their children and wife, or about taxes and debts. The structure of the monastery creates a nurturant medium in which these solitary free-floating monk isolates can flourish divorced from all close and intimate social obligations to others. To attempt this on a mass-scale and without taking cognizance of individual personalities is a radical experiment in human psycho-social organization, and if it is successful, adds a new dimension to our understanding of psycho-social plasticity.

Given this structure, it is not surprising that we found that while the relationships between Kyilung monks and between monks and laymen were cordial and pleasant, they were also superficial and detached. The spatial pattern of the monastery reflected this for there was no common courtyard in Kyilung where monks congregated when relaxing and monks generally either remained in their rooms during the day or sat on the roof of their quarters (which were not accessible to other monks). More often than not their doors were locked from the inside and a visitor had to call out to get the monk to come and open the door. In general, the monks manifested little ability for intimacy. And even with respect to teacher/child-monk relationships, it appeared to us that teachers were authoritarian figures rather than surrogate sources of love and affection. The exception to this is instructive. Four monks in Kyilung did have a "close relationship." They shared food, usually ate together, and spent a great deal of their free time

socializing together enjoying each other's company. But although they broke no monastic rules, e.g., they did not smoke, drink alcohol or engage in sexual intercourse with women or each other, their behavior was still negatively perceived by the other monks because of their sociability or in our terms their development of intimate social relationships that engender obligations and dependence. Kyilung monks see the ideal monk as someone who stands alone; a person concentrated and focused on his own affairs and spiritual development, albeit within an abstract depersonalized concern for the suffering of sentient creatures in general.

Monastic social structure and social expectations, therefore, attempt to detach each monk from the web of close attachments and relationships that universally characterize secular life; from what Fortes (1969) has called the "axiom of amity." But if the solitary monk is the foundational social unit in the monastic system, once in the monastery, how do monks subsist?

Economic Organization

From the very beginning of monasticism in Tibet in the 8th century CE, monasteries normally possessed economic resources including land, animals, and laborers from which a major portion of the monks' subsistence and monastic expenses derived (Tucci 1980 : 9). Kyilung monastery in Ladakh was no exception to this pattern although in the Drigung sect most of the land was a part of the estate (and under the control) of the succession line of Drigung Lamas rather than Kyilung monastery per se.

Individual monks in Kyilung neither beg for food nor do they engage in manual labor such as farming. Instead they obtain their subsistence needs from the sources:

1. Each monk has an agricultural field in Kyilung (called a *phog zhing* or "salary field") provided by the Drigung sect (actually the Lama). Monks have usufruct rights over this land for the duration of their lives. But since they are not permitted to farm, the monks must arrange for others to farm their land. Generally, such salary-fields are cultivated for the monk by either his own family, a "patron's" family, or by a layman to whom the land has been leased out under one of a variety of arrangements that need not be elaborated here. The yield from this field is generally sufficient to meet minimal subsistence requirements and currently yields a surplus in grain and hay depending on the amount of other income a monk receives (which he uses to buy rice, etc.). At current prices, this surplus produces approximately 300-800 rupees profit when sold. While it is very difficult to talk generally of the expenses of monks, we estimate that 1000 rupees would be adequate to enable one monk to maintain a very good diet for an entire year.

2. Monks also receive food and money gifts from laymen when they perform religious rites or services for that layman or his family. Depending on how often a monk is invited to perform such rituals, this could be an important source of food and money as well as a way to develop one or

more "patron-priest" relationships. For example, one short ritual in a village household I attended (called *sangs*) took 1/2 hours during which time the monk was given repeated cups of buttered tea and then a rather fancy meal of chapatis (unleavened flour pancakes) and eggs. He was also paid 10 rupees. Monks generally say that they receive about 500 rupees per year in cash from these activities and this was borne out by the record maintained by one monk for 4.5 months during which he averaged 53 rupees per month.

3. Monks also received a share of prestations given directly to the monastery by laymen. For example, in Kyilung, when a layman dies, many of the deceased's movable possessions are given to the monastery which auctions them and divides the proceeds among the monks. In recent years this amounted to between 500 and 1000 rupees per monk per year.

The result of this system is not only that monks must be involved in economic transactions and planning to some degree, but also that there is economic differentiation resulting from differences in the size and productivity of their "salary field" and the amount of time spent performing village rituals. The ideal of a solitary monk standing alone like a stick of incense is clearly compromised by the systems of economic subsistence in Kyilung which forces each monk to administer his field.

Although Kyilung monks do not own their "salary-fields" they do own whatever they either purchase or are given by layman (or other monks). Monks, therefore, can be thought of as having an estate consisting of all their property and wealth. Over this they have total control being able to give it away to anyone during their lives and similarly will it to anyone after their death. Thus it is perfectly feasible for a monk to accumulate surplus wealth and a critical issue is to what extent they are actually engaged in doing so. Let us first examine the kinds of activities the monks of Kyilung do.

The Activities of Monks

The image of monastic life calls to mind for most of us a quiet life of isolation and contemplation; an institutionalized withdrawal from the pressures and obligations of the temporal world. In order to examine the validity of this perception, this study collected data over a one year period on the daily activities of seven monks by means of written activity diaries kept by these monks. Although the seven monks were not randomly selected, they include both older and younger monks and both more educated and less educated monks.

Table 2 summarizes the activities of three of these monks, one (number 1) is an older (69 years of age) and more learned monk, and the other two (numbers 2 and 3) are younger (43 and 33 years old respectively) and less educated. The categories presented were abstracted from the range of activities actually reported by the monks.

“Village rites” refer to a wide range of religious rites and rituals performed by monks on behalf of householders in the village. Generally the monk walks to the villager’s house in the morning and returns to the monastery in the evening or afternoon. While in the village households, he receives one or more meals depending on how long the rite takes and usually a gift of some money. As Table 2 shows, these monks were engaged in such activities for over half of the days during the year although not necessarily for whole days.

A related activity, “monastic rites,” includes a mixture of regular and special rituals performed in the monastery itself or elsewhere on behalf of the monastery. Our calculation includes both the time spent doing the ritual and that spent preparing for it. This category also includes other infrequent work done on behalf of the monastery. It does not, however, include the frequent early morning joint prayer sessions (called *tshogs* or *mang ja*) which are normally sponsored by laymen and performed in the monastery’s Assembly Hall. These prayer services usually take 1-1 and 1/2 hours during which time the monks receive tea and tsamba (roasted barley flour). On the average, these ceremonies occurred on 92% of the days during the year (i.e. 336 days).

The category “other monastery’s rites” refers to visits to rituals, religious festivals and sermons at other monasteries. Unlike the other two categories, this can be considered voluntary and optional. “Shopping in Leh” (the district capital) is self explanatory and “remain in room” refers to days when the monk had no other mandatory work obligations in the village or monastery. These were days when the monk could relax and clean up his room, do his laundry, read, etc.

TABLE 2. Proportion and Number of Days spent in Different Activities for two Kyilung monks during the period from August, 1980 to August 1981.

<i>Monk</i>	<i>Village Rites</i>	<i>Shopping in Leh</i>	<i>Remain in Room</i>	<i>Monastery Rites and work</i>	<i>Other Monastery's Rites</i>	<i>Other</i>
#1	58% (201)	4% (15)	15% (54)	15% (54)	6% (20)	2% (10)
#2	53% (192)	4% (14)	24% (89)	15% (55)	4% (14)	0% (1)
#3*	61% (203)	1% (3)	14% (48)	12% (39)	12% (41)	0% (0)

*Monk 3's diary was kept for only 11 months.

Table 2 supports our observation (and the monks' own feelings) that the life of Kyilung monks is anything but relaxed and leisurely. They work long and hard days doing religious services and rites. Having gone with monks on these village rites we can attest that sitting and reading rote from prayer books hour after hour, day after day, is difficult. And they do a lot of this. Combining village rites and monastery work and rites, monk #1 spent 73% percent of the year (255 days) monk #2 spent 68% (247 days) and monk 3 spent 73% engaged in the performance of such religious tasks. Monk 3 would probably have had even higher totals but he went on a pilgrimage to Nepal and India for over one month during this period.

These activity data tell only part of the story since monks also have a variety of other monastic jobs and duties. In Kyilung monastery there are a number of "positions" such as "trumpet blower" "steward of the diety and assembly rooms" "overseer of the dance festival" "steward of the monastic corporation," "overseer of *mang ja*," etc. which all monks must fill at some point during their monastic career and sometimes more than once and more than one at the same time. Monks also have an obligation to sponsor (i.e. organize and fund) a series of large monastic rites some of which are so substantial that the monk has to go and beg funds from a large number of villagers throughout the various Drigung areas in Ladakh.

This brief discussion of activities illustrates the very substantial involvement of monks in a variety of religious activities providing services for laymen and requiring their presence in the village. This is not surprising for it reflects the inherent contradiction in Mahayana philosophy discussed earlier, namely that it is not enough simply to pursue one's own path to enlightenment. One has an obligation to have compassion for and spiritually assist other sentient creatures, i.e., lay people. As one monk said, "It is most important to do good for others and if you do so the good will automatically come also to you"... "It is the monk's duty to think of the good of lay people and not to be selfish." Thus, at the same time that monastic institutions exist to provide an environment where monks can avoid the attachments and worldly desires of lay society and be "out-of-the-world," these same monks are morally obligated to attend to the spiritual needs of lay villagers, i.e., to be enmeshed "in-the-world."

And enmeshed in the village they were. Monks not only spent large blocs of time in the village but villagers often visited monks in the monastery. Sometimes these visits were to arrange for the monk to perform a ritual but clearly many instances were more akin to what we would call a social visit. The recently established bus connecting the village and the capital of Ladakh stopped at the foot of the hill on which the Kyilung monastery was perched and there was a tendency for shoppers to occasionally drop in on their relatives and "prients" on the way home from town. And while monks were structurally and functionally *not* part of their families, some monks attended important family events such as weddings and in fact even held receptions (parties) on such occasions.

But does this necessarily mean that, in Kyilung, the transformation of Buddhist philosophy into practise has failed?

Of-the-World or Out-of-the-World?

Robinson and Johnson (1982-54) have described the early Buddhist monastic ideal:

The Buddhist monk owned nothing but clothes, which consisted of an undergarment, outer garment, cloak, waist-coat, and belt and buckle. The robes, donated by the laity, were red or ochre. He also wore sandals and carried a begging bowl, a razor, tweezers, nail clippers, ear and toothpicks, some gauze for filtering water, a needle, a walking stick, and a bag of medicines. He was also allowed an umbrella against the sun and a fan against the heat. Every other month the monk shaved his head without using a mirror, forbidden to him, as were adornments, cosmetics, and perfumes, along with profane music and song (54)

When measured against this ideal, the life-styles of the monks of Kyilung are found lacking. On the one hand, as indicated above, they are involved in work obligations that absorb large amounts of their time and energy. Many also appear at first glance to be, like laymen, materialistic in that they possess a variety of functionally superfluous material goods (e.g, most wear watches and some have the new digital variety). Monk's also try to have comfortable lives, particularly in terms of good food and pleasant quarters. They have, in fact, accumulated surplus wealth which has been converted into material goods. A number have radios and have no hesitation listening to news, music and other "worldly" programs. Some Kyilung monks who are skilled in artistic painting engage in petty trade by selling paintings of Tibetan dragons to Indian soldiers and in the past others lent surplus capital from their personal estates to laymen for which they received interest. This apparent materialistic bent is seen by the following partial list of the contents of one monk's quarters (2 rooms): 1 decorated iron stove, 5 aluminum pots, 4 copper pots, 1 pressure cooker, 3 copper ladels, 1 iron ladle, tea churn, 8 metal plates, 1 large copper basin, 3 flasks, 1 frying pan, 8-10 porcelin bowls, 1 big tea kettle, 1 small tea kettle, 1 kerosine stove, 1 kerosine lamp, at least two hand woven wool carpets, glass windows, 4 sitting/sleeping mattresses, 3 wood table, 1 altar, bedding, 2 jerry cans (1 for water and 1 for kerosine) and a variety of small items. Moreover, during the course of the project this monk hired carpenters to replace his solid wooden windows with glass ones. Although Kyilung monks are celibate, this is a far cry from the original ideal of the monk presented above.

But can we infer from this type of evidence that monks are like laymen; that they have worldly values and are acquisitive and attached to wealth; that they strive to maximize their acquisition of materials ends like their

lay counterparts? And even worse, as Spiro writes for Burmese monks (1982: 361), that "these men may have left the world physically, but it is by the values of the world that they assess their own worth and importance." If so, of course, monasticism has failed and monks are little more than laymen garbed in red dresses.

The findings of our study suggest that although the monastic institution is flawed by inherent structural and cultural contradictions which manifest themselves in the behavior and values of the monks, this is not the case. Over and above celibacy, monks appear significantly different from laymen in a number of important ways, and from the point of view of the monks and the goals of monasticism, the monasteries are successful. Let us first examine the issue of materialism and worldly values.

The materialism of monks appears very different from that of laymen in that the monks of Kyilung do not strive to accumulate material wealth. That is to say, they do not try to expand the size and value of their individual estates. Their economic behavior is more akin to "optimalization" rather than "maximization" in the sense that their goal is not to accumulate more and more material wealth and power but rather to attain some "optimal" level of subsistence and then no longer consume or aggrandize. Through open ended discussions and informally collected case histories it became evident that money and possessions were of little interest in themselves. Monks did not see their self-worth as tied up with material opulence. To be sure most monks preferred, or even wanted a comfortable life in terms of food and clothes, and while different monks had different thresholds of what comfort means, particularly since many of the products of modern technology have now reached Ladakh, they were markedly different from laymen in a number of significant ways listed below:

1. Monks were not actively engaged in seeking out opportunities to accumulate income and wealth. Villagers came to them to request performance of a ritual and even those able to earn income painting pictures responded to requests rather than seeking them out. Their passivity was striking. They did not utilize strategic thinking such as maximization to allocate their labor and resources and thereby improve their economic status.

2. Monks, moreover, *stop consuming* when they reach some level of wealth and begin to dispose of their surplus income. Once basic needs, (as each monk, of course, defines them) are met, and these needs in Kyilung are usually marginal compared to laymen, monks in Kyilung begin to give away their wealth either to their natal families and relatives, to the monastery (by sponsoring rituals, etc.), or to disciples by taking them on and supporting them). From the point of view of the monks in Kyilung, money (wealth) is clearly needed to subsist since they have to individually look after their own subsistence requirements, but it is not valued in and of itself nor does more of it produce prestige, respect and either self-esteem or the esteem of others.

Thus, while the monks of Kyilung are clearly not "ascetic" and do

indeed have material desires well above the "ideal" minimum, their economic attitudes, values and behavior appear very different from that of their lay counterparts with regard to wealth and possessions. They do not seem attached to wealth.

And what of emotional attachments to people? It is the web of attachments to people that Buddhism teaches mires our thoughts in the illusions of this world, and it is the function of monasticism to provide an institutional structure where such attachments can be severed. Our study suggests that despite the frequent contacts with lay villagers, here again, monks exhibit very striking differences from their lay counterparts. We contend that the crux of this difference hinges on the general difference between what Tibetans call *brtse gdung* (love) and *snying rje* (compassion) such that whereas laymen exhibit "love", monks usually exhibit only "compassion."

Laymen maintain intimate relationships with intense feelings of positive affect we call love but these are focused only on a few specific others such as their children, parents, wife, etc. Monks, on the other hand, maintain relationships with others that are detached and superficial. They appear to lack the quality of intimacy in their relationships. This is not to say that monks are without positive affect; but rather that this affect is fundamentally different from the love or amity of laymen in that it is not focused on specific individuals but rather is universalized. Thus, the spontaneous sadness one feels from having one's loved ones suffer is characteristically absent in monks who express sadness at another's misfortune but not a spontaneously felt emotion derived from their relationship with that person. Though they have positive emotional feelings for others, this affect is universalized affect, or affect in the abstract in the sense that it is focused on classes of situations for which the particular actor is simply an exemplar. In a paradoxical way, it is *detached* affect. There is a superficiality and detached dimension to their relationships and interactions with others that closely reflects the dominant Buddhist value of non-attachment and non-dependence. For example, the famous 20th century (1896-1959) Lama Jamyang Khyentze Rinpoche wrote (1982:22): "We must generate an unbiased attitude of complete equanimity towards all, never being close to just some and repulsed by others, never being close to just some and distant from the rest." Monks are responsible for their own spiritual advancement and the ideal monk, the hermit meditator, is precisely the one with the most superficial relationships and therein the greatest detachment from social attachments. Monastic social organization isolates and atomizes monks so that they avoid the powerful and painful emotional attachments of love. Our study suggests that the monks of Kyilung have in fact succeeded in detaching themselves from feelings of love and attachment.

Conclusion

Our study found that the inherent contradictions of Mahayana philosophy

and monastic organization were reflected in the life and activity style of the monks of Kyilung who, though isolated from the village in their monastery, were at the same time closely involved in the lives of laymen and were constantly in the village performing religious ceremonies essential to the well-being of the villagers. Monks, moreover, were far more materialistic than the ideal Buddhist values prescribe.

Still, foundational monastic goals were successfully produced in the monks. Despite the manner of recruitment and the value placed on retention of monks regardless of their initial feelings and wants, monks appear to differ in terms of both their basic value orientation and their way of life. While they are not truly "otherworldly" in the ascetic sense, they have taken the first step of what their philosophical system sees as a long journey. They have started an ascent out of the web of desire and attachment that is intrinsic to secular life and to have adopted an alternative culture of renunciation that distances them from that world and provides them a different template through which to perceive and evaluate events. For the monks themselves, the function of the monastery is just that. It is a part of a long journey, extending over many many rebirths that each must make at his own pace. Since one's experiences along this path are cumulative, the monastic life, though not perfect in Kyilung, is seen by the monks to provide an incalculable step forward on the overall journey.

Like the contradictions inherent in Mahayana Buddhism itself, the monks of Kyilung are to be sure, both "of-the-world" and "out-of-the-world", but on the whole, our study found that for Kyilung monastery, the radical social and cultural experiment Tibetan monasticism represents has succeeded in that it has enabled large numbers of indiscriminately collected persons to accomplish something they could not easily do as laymen, i.e., to begin to move out of the blinding web of attachments and desires intrinsic to the secular world and onto a path that, over hundreds or thousands of rebirths, will, from their point of view, result in true enlightenment. As one monk commented during a discussion, "After one becomes a monk there are stages, like steps, to get more knowledge and wisdom. Milarepa [a famous Tibetan yogin of the 11th century CE] was the last one to get enlightenment in human life. If you are a monk in this life and then again in the next birth, the spiritual gains will be double. The collection of good merit (*dge ba*) becomes a kind of treasure and increases over time." In the perspective of a long process of continuous birth and rebirth, the goal of the monastery seems to have been achieved in that monks have been severed from many of the invidious, emotional, psychological and material attachments of secular life and, given their own assumptions, are thus well onto the path of eventual enlightenment. The radical experiment has, in Kyilung at least, to a significant degree been successful.

NOTES

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