

PROSPECTUS FOR A COURSE ON TIBETAN BUDDHIST STUDIES

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Since 1959, for us in the West, Tibet has ceased to be a remote inaccessible *terra incognita* and has emerged on the stage of history as one of the major civilizations of Far East Asia, alongside India, China and Japan. Tibetology, long regarded as an adjunct and secondary study in relation to the Sanskrit Buddhism of Ancient India and Chinese Buddhist studies, has now become recognized as having its own proper academic domain. Indian Buddhism, as it had developed in the great monastic universities of Northern India for a thousand years, came to be established in Central Tibet in the 8th century of our era. This occurred with the founding of the first Buddhist monastery at Samye by the Tibetan king Trisong Detsan in collaboration with his two religious colleagues from India, the monk-scholar Shantirakshita and the Tantric master Padmasambhava. The former, Shantirakshita, established the Vinaya, or monastic discipline, in Tibet, ordaining the first native-born Tibetan monks at Samye. Furthermore, he introduced the study of the Mahayana Sutra system and its Shastras or commentaries written by various masters of the Indian Buddhist tradition, focusing on the eclectic school of Madhyamika philosophy. In terms of practice, this system was outlined in the treatises written by his disciple and successor Kamalashila. Following from this, the Tibetan kings over the next hundred years inaugurated a vast translation project of the Indian Buddhist Sanskrit literature into the Tibetan language. The latter, Padmasambhava, introduced the Vajrayana or the Tantric form of Buddhism into Tibet, particularly the Mahayoga Tantras, as well as the meditation practices of Dzogchen. Furthermore, parallel to the monastic system of the monks, he came to establish the tradition of married Tantric Lamas or Ngakpas, which continues in the Nyingmapa school of Tibetan Buddhism until the present day.

After the persecution of monastic Buddhism in Central Tibet for about a hundred years in the 9th and 10th centuries following the collapse of the Tibetan empire in Central Asia, in the 11th century there was a revival of monastic Buddhism beginning in Western Tibet and spreading eastward. New masters and scholars were invited from India, such as Atisha, and eager young Tibetan students, such as Marpa and Drogmi, journeyed to Nepal and India in order to learn Sanskrit and to study both at the monastic universities and with individual masters. There was a revival also of translation activities, first in Western Tibet with Rinchen Zangpo, and then with others throughout Tibet, giving rise to the Sarmapa or New Translation system. In addition, new monasteries were founded and the newer schools of Tibetan Buddhism came to be established, namely, the Kadampa, the Sakyapa, the Kagyudpa, and later the Gelugpa. However, Tibet was much more than a museum faithfully preserving the traditions of Indian Buddhism, which later disappeared from India following the destruction of its great monastic universities in the 13th century. Although preserving Indian models, scholarly procedures, and rituals, the native-born Tibetan Lamas expanded and elaborated on what they had inherited from India, developing their own hermeneutics and methodologies, introducing both innovations and material from the pre-Buddhist Bonpo tradition of Tibet. The historical development of Tibetan Buddhism, in both theory and practice, culminated in time in two great syntheses, namely, the Gelugpa synthesis in Central Tibet inspired by the scholastic writings of Tsongkhapa in the 13th century and the Rimed Movement synthesis in Eastern Tibet inspired by Jamyang Khyentse Wangpo, Jamgon Kongtrul, and Chogyur Lingpa in the 19th and 20th centuries.

However, before the coming of Indian Buddhism, whether Sutra or Tantra, to Central Tibet in the 8th century, this land possessed its own rich ancient culture known as Bon. Indeed, the practice of an indigenous shamanism survives in Tibet even until this day, among Lhapa and Pawo practitioners. However, Bon, the pre-Buddhist culture of Tibet, represents much more than mere archaic shamanism. Before the 8th century, the kingdom of Zhang-zhung in Northern and Western Tibet had close cultural contacts with the Buddhist civilizations of Central Asia, along the Silk Route. This syncretism of indigenous shamanism and Central Asian Buddhist traditions gave rise in the early period of the 8th to 11th centuries to Yungdrung Bon, which, like the Buddhist schools, such as the Nyingmapa, also possessed the higher spiritual teachings of the Buddha of Sutra, Tantra, and Dzogchen, these being organized into nine yanas or vehicles to enlightenment. After the 11th century, the Bonpo Lamas, like the Lamas of the other Tibetan schools, established for themselves a monastic system and a scholastic curriculum including the Madhyamika philosophy, parallel to the Newer Schools of Buddhism. Moreover, many old Bonpo shamanic rituals were assimilated into these Newer Schools, including even the Gelugpas. It is just this syncretism of native shamanic practice and Bonpo ritualism with Indian Tantric Buddhism that gives Tibetan Buddhism its unique and colourful character.

Suggested sessions:

The History of Tibet and Its Importance

This first session surveys the development of Tibetan culture from the earliest times, the Zhang-zhung kingdom in West Tibet, and then the conversion of Tibet to Indian Buddhism in the period of the monarchy and empire (7-9th cen.) and the making of the Old Translations. Then there will be considered the revival of monastic Buddhism and the making of the New Translations in the 11th century, the rise of the Buddhist sects, the rise of Yungdrung Bon, the flowering of art and scholarship in the medieval period, the appearance of Termas, or hidden treasure texts, the periods of Mongol and Manchu domination, the Gelugpa establishment and the Dalai Lamas, and the encounter of Tibetans with foreign influences—Muslims, Christian missionaries, and political entanglements with China and British India.

Introduction to Sutra, Tantra, and Dzogchen.

This session provides an introductory survey of the three levels of teachings of the Buddha as understood by the Tibetans, including within the Nyingmapa and Bonpo schools, and as compared with the Sarmapa, or New Translation schools. An explanation of the practice of Guru Yoga and its importance in the social and cultural role of the Lama is also included.

Monastic Education in Tibet

The monastic discipline and education of the monks is examined in this session, as well as the practice of debating, Buddhist logic, and the teaching of the Sutras and the Shastras in the monastic colleges..

Buddhist Philosophy in Tibet--Abhidharma.

This session will review the psychological insights and approach of early Buddhist teaching and meditation practice and look at how this relates to and is embodied within the practice of meditation. In particular, Dzogchen will be compared with the Abhidharma philosophy of Early Buddhism as understood in Tibet and represented by the Abhidharmakosha.

Buddhist Philosophy in Tibet—Madhyamaka and Chittamatra

Madhyamaka and Chittamatra represent the two philosophical systems of Mahayana Buddhism. Since the 11th century, Prasanghika Madhyamaka has become the official philosophy of all Tibetan schools in contrast to the earlier Svatantrika Madhyamaka of Shantirakshita and Kamalashila. Here also Dzogchen will be compared with Madhyamika in terms of the

understanding of Shunyata as the nature of the ultimate reality and with Chittamatra in terms of Svasamvedana, or self-awareness, in relation to conscious experience.

Practices of the Lower and the Higher Tantras in Tibet.

The methods of Buddhist Tantra are primarily concerned with the human dimension of energy and the transformations of this energy achieved through sadhana meditation practice. This session will review the different methods of approach and practice found within the various classifications of Buddhist Tantra in both the Old and the Newer Schools, including Kriya Tantra, Charya Tantra, Yoga Tantra, and Anuttara Tantra.

Dakini Practices in Tibetan Buddhism.

The Dakini is the name for the feminine principal in Tibetan Buddhism. She represents both the initiatrix of the yogi into the esoteric practices of the Higher Tantras and the dimensions of the feminine that lie beyond control by patriarchal society and the rational male ego consciousness. The practices of Dakini Yoga will be discussed and illustrated.

Tantric and Shamanic Practices in Tibet.

Tibetan Buddhism draws its methods of healing and ritual from both indigenous Tibetan shamanism and Indian Buddhist Tantra. Here in this session, these methods will be compared both in theory and in practice.

Tibetan Shamanic Rituals and Guardian Practices.

In especially in the Nyingmapa tradition, Padmasambhava came to be regarded as the archetypal shaman who subdued the local gods and spirits of Tibet, and converting them into guardians and protectors of the Buddhist teachings. These Guardian spirits, or Sungma, who were very often old indigenous mountain gods, are now invoked in every Tibetan monastery at evening time. This session will examine the Rites of the Guardians and other shamanic rituals assimilated into Tibetan Buddhism.

Dzogchen and Mahamudra

In both the Nyingmapa and the Bonpo schools, Dzogchen evolved into an independent vehicle to enlightenment, which is regarded as the highest teaching of the Buddha by many Tibetans. Here Dzogchen will be compared with Buddhist methods of meditation found in both Sutra and Tantra, as well as comparing it the Mahamudra and the Siddha Tradition of the New Translation schools.

Dzogchen and Direct Introduction to the Nature of Mind.

This session will survey Dzogchen in terms of the three series of teachings: Semde, Longde, and Mangagde, emphasizing the practice of Semdzin, or fixating the mind on a visualized object of meditation, and pointing out the distinction made between mind and the Nature of Mind in meditation practice. This session will also focus on the Rushan exercises as a means to relaxing one's body, energy, and mind.

Tibetan Buddhism and the Contemporary World

This session considers the fate of Tibet and its religious culture since 1959 and its encounter with the secular and religious cultures of the West. Also considered is the coming of Tibetan Buddhism and its Lamas to the West and the perspectives for future developments in relation to inter-cultural contacts, including the Christian-Buddhist dialogue.