

Research Article

Journal of Global Buddhism 2 (2001): 92 - 109

Tibetan Buddhism in France: A Missionary Religion?

By
Lionel Obadia
Lecturer in Anthropology
Universit Charles-de-Gaulle
obadia@univ-lille3.fr

Copyright Notes

Digital copies of this work may be made and distributed provided no charge is made and no alteration is made to the content. Reproduction in any other format with the exception of a single copy for private study requires the written permission of the author.

All enquiries to jgb-general@jgb.la.psu.edu

<http://jgb.la.psu.edu>



Tibetan Buddhism in France: A Missionary Religion?

By
Lionel Obadia
Lecturer in Anthropology
Université Charles-de-Gaulle
obadia@univ-lille3.fr

Introduction

Over the past ten years, an increasing amount of research has focused on the history of Buddhism in the West. General overviews including those of Rick Fields (1992) or Stephen Batchelor (1994), while providing detailed accounts of the propagation of Buddhism in North America and Europe, remain primarily descriptive. Case studies, on the other hand, while they tend to be somewhat more analytical, are often limited to a discussion of the arrival of a single school or branch of Buddhism in a specific context. Consequently, no general theory of Buddhist diffusion has been yet formulated. In addition, most of these studies deal with the consequences rather than the causes of the settlement of Buddhist traditions. The issues of acculturation, adaptation or change within Buddhism are indeed more frequently examined than the underlying processes of Buddhist dissemination ([1](#)). On another hand some interesting theoretical accounts of the diffusion of Buddhism in recent scholarship allow us to reexamine the Westward spread of Buddhism in the light of a "missionary" hypothesis.

1. The diffusion of Buddhism in the West: reception or transmission?

The diffusion and the settlement of Buddhism in the West are usually explained by means of two theoretical approaches, actually both related to a same explicative framework. The first, as proposed by Batchelor (1994), examines two types of factors: ideological changes in the West and cultural contacts between East and West. Batchelor thus accounts for the transformations of the Western attitudes toward Buddhism and the increasing contacts between Buddhists and Westerners, as a result of which the West has shifted its perception of Buddhism from a purely intellectual vision to an active engagement. A second and complementary approach, which goes beyond Western representations of the East and localized situation of contact between East and West, focuses upon the broader sociological context and conditions that have allowed for the penetration of Buddhist ideas into the West and the adoption of Buddhist practices, that is, the rise of Orientalism, the secularization of mainstream churches, and expanding religious pluralism.

The emphasis on the reception of Buddhism in Western countries thus somewhat overlooks the key role that Asians have played in this process. Although the above-mentioned factors, as well as the active

contribution of notable Western personages, have indeed facilitated the welcoming of Buddhist ideas and practices by a Western audience, the presence of Buddhist traditions, orders, and schools results as well from Asian efforts to settle practical forms of Buddhism. In this case too, broader conditions such as political, social, and economic changes in Asian societies are of primary importance to explain the arrival of Buddhism through migration influxes. Buddhism has thus settled in the West following two different paths and progressed alongside two distinct lines of development: Charles Prebish has proposed the term "two Buddhisms" (1993) to distinguish between the Asian communities of practitioners who have brought Buddhism to the West via migration and diasporas, and the Western communities who have welcomed and adopted Buddhist ideas and practices.

Although we cannot deny the importance of the reception and importation of Buddhism by Westerners, any attempt to explain why "non-diasporic" forms of Buddhism in the West are spreading and settling more rapidly and on a wider geographic scale than "ethnic" forms of Buddhism requires a consideration of the issue of transmission. One of the keys to understanding this phenomenon lies in a somewhat unexplored dimension of the Westward spread of Buddhism: the missionary activism of Asian masters and their Western converts. In this paper, I will discuss the theoretical issues implied by this hypothesis and will illustrate its relevance in the case study of Tibetan Buddhism in France, which is one of the most recent, yet most rapidly expanding, of the Buddhist traditions to have settled in France.

2. Is Buddhism a "missionary religion"? Preliminary remarks

The progresses of Buddhism in the West are currently interpreted within the predominant theoretical framework of "reception," focusing upon factors of transformation of the religious landscape in relation to modern theories of an open "market" of religion in the Western world. Therefore, the appeal of Buddhism is interpreted in the "supply and demand" model proposed by American and French scholars.⁽²⁾ by considering the adoption of Buddhism as a choice within the modern "market" of Religions, the issue of transmission is displaced in favor of a theory of "use" and "consumption" of Buddhism. The "consumers" of Buddhists ideas and practices (or "dharma-shoppers" described by Tweed ⁽³⁾) are apparently not concerned with the diffusion and the settlement of practical and community forms of Buddhism, although converts and practitioners are. However such "consumers" are in fact as concerned as converts by the Westward spread of Buddhism, because they are influenced by the media coverage of Buddhism, and are mediating agents — or promoters — of Buddhist ideas. Tweed's recent emphasis on "consumer demand" in fact masks the very mechanisms of promotion by which these people first encountered Buddhism paradoxically, the processes he describes in his 1992 book^[4]). Thus, as a complement to the more frequently posed question of "who consumes Buddhism and how?" we should add: "Who offers Buddhism, how, and why?"

One solution to the dialectical issue of reception/consumption and transmission/promotion of Buddhism can be found in Jan Nattier's interesting threefold model of Dharma transmission (1998). She distinguishes between "Import," "Export," and "Baggage"(5) and draws a corresponding typology of "Elite," "Evangelical" or "Missionary," and "Ethnic" Buddhism. However, Nattier credits only the Sooka Gakkai with missionary aims, insofar as these are explicitly expressed by the Japanese organization and because the practice within Elite Buddhism is mainly identified as the meditative Zen and Tibetan traditions, as opposed to the activist attitude of Sooka Gakkai followers(6). Such a position renews the old theoretical distinction between "active" and revealed religions (Christianity and Islam) and "contemplative" and exemplary religions (Buddhism). In Max Weber's typology, Buddhism cannot be defined as a missionary religion because missionary activism is a distinctive feature of revealed religions only. Because the Buddhist message is an "exemplary prophecy" (Buddha is a model and an ideal of salvation), Buddhism is then restricted, according to this typology, to an "extra-worldly" soteriology and a contemplative asceticism, whereas the Christian message, a "missionary prophecy" associated with an "inner-worldly" soteriology, gives rise to an active attitude among its believers.(7) However, such distinctions only hold for scriptural approaches to Buddhism and have in fact been disproved historically. Tracing the developments of Buddhism outside India, Weber himself was led to an ironic refutation of his own theory when he stated, "Buddhism became one of the greatest missionary religions on earth."(8)

I. Buddhism as a Missionary Religion

1. The issue of Western transmission

Although Buddhist Studies have succeeded in placing the transmission issue at the forefront of this debate, the arrival of Buddhism in the West is examined as a singular phenomenon, distinct from Buddhism's historical spread in Asia. Although it is true, to a certain extent, that the circumstances and conditions are different, there is nonetheless empirical evidence of missionary aspects of Buddhism's spread into Asia and the West.

From its very first developments in Asia to its recent and massive propagation in the West, Buddhism in fact settled in a wide range of countries, cultures, and societies that had neither anticipated nor sought the arrival of Buddhist traditions, which were in fact brought by itinerant monks or masters. In the early years of Buddhism, "Saakyamuni himself and his disciples devoted part of their time to preaching and converting followers in India. Most scholars have recognized the missionary aspects of Buddhism's spread only within Asia, including, for instance, A"soka's efforts to send teachers to South India and Ceylon, or "pilgrims" and "traveler" monks along the Silk Road and later in the major parts of Asia where they settled the lay monk system. Asian "missionaries" in the West, on the other hand, are seen as pastors, that is, masters or monks

who have been sent to America or to Europe in order to maintain or to restore the religious customs within communities of migrants and thus to insure cultural continuity through religious practices. This function characterizes "Ethnic" Buddhism, an expression used in Buddhist Studies to refer to the "racial" composition of populations of practitioners.(9)

The term is also used in the anthropology of religion as part of a standard theoretical opposition between "ethnic" and "universal" types of religion. A "universal" religion encompasses a message of salvation potentially delivered to the whole of humankind as well as social structures and dynamics, the purposes of which are the spreading and the preservation of religious institutions; it thus transcends any social, cultural, and political boundaries. An ethnic religion is considered to be deeply tied to its cultural background and, unlike universal religions, is thus not transposable to another society. The difference between the two is, however, not a matter of "essence," but rather a matter of dynamics and depends on the role that a religion can assume in historical contexts. In the West, Buddhism assumes both an "ethnic" function and a missionary role because it is relevant both to cultural preservation within Asian diasporas and to the conversion of new individuals and groups beyond ethnic boundaries. Many examples of missionary activism can be found in the first few years of the settlement of Buddhism in Western Europe and America: Dharmapaala, Soyen Shaku, and the ordained Westerners Ananda Metteyya, Nyanatiloka, and Nyanaponika are notable examples of Buddhists' constant efforts to spread the Buddha's teachings and to settle practical forms of Buddhism in the West.

2. Conceptualizing the "Buddhist mission"

The missionary dimension of Buddhism, recently recognized by both scholars(10) and Buddhists(11), thus allows us to focus on new conceptions of its dissemination in the West. "Missionary activism" can be defined as the set of acts of religious transmission from one individual to another, or from one group to another, with the goal of spreading beliefs and practices including "missionary strategies," that is, efforts to spread and settle the Dharma (wherever and for whomever these efforts are undertaken) in an attempt to preserve and to develop Buddhist teachings and practices.

According to Erich Zürcher (1990), the term "mission" is unsuitable for conceptualizing the underlying processes of Buddhist spread in Asia and, thus far, the West. As he subtly remarks, the spread of Christianity was related to a highly organized, highly controlled, and well-prepared mission to propagate a faith in selected areas, a project that he compares to a "distant injection" of religion. Unlike Christianity, Buddhism's spread resulted from a relatively unorganized and "spontaneous" dissemination, described as a "branching" of religious communities that were established within, and, to a certain extent, acculturated to, the local grassroots community(12).

The strength of Buddhism lies precisely in these processes of branching out and acculturation. Nonetheless, these phenomena by no means entail the complete dilution of Buddhism in its host cultures and societies. Some schools, especially amongst the Tibetans, strive to transpose and maintain traditional models of religious transmission, including, for the Tibetans, the tradition of monasticism.

The major impetus of the spread of Buddhism can be explained according to the "missionary" dimension of universal religions. Nevertheless, in every context of religious settlement, the social and ideological conditions of the host societies play a key role in the reception of a "foreign" tradition, whether they can restrain it, whether they can make its settlement possible. In the West, ideological conditions favorable to the welcoming of Buddhism — a religion formerly seen as "exotic" and "strange" — allowed for Buddhism's cultural translation and acceptance, and for the successful promotional efforts of intellectual Westerners. Historical and sociological factors such as the increase of contacts between the East and the West and the pluralization of religious options in the West favored the welcoming of Eastern traditions. Western countries thus became new "lands of mission" for Buddhist missionaries, and especially for the Tibetan masters.

II. A Case Study: Tibetan Buddhism in France

1. Buddhism in the West and French scholarship

Although the settlement of Buddhism in France dates back to the late 1960s-early 1970s, it received very little attention until the early 1990s, at which time the French press seized upon the issue and began increasingly to report upon the appeal of Buddhism in France. At the same time, the UBF (French Buddhist Union, founded in 1986) estimated there to be 600,000 to 650,000 Buddhists in France, including 150,000 converts. These estimated numbers have served as statistical evidence for both journalistic inquiries and scholarly research,⁽¹³⁾ although recent works have suggested their unreliability.⁽¹⁴⁾ For instance, a 1997 opinion poll revealed that about five million young people felt an intellectual affinity with Buddhism or expressed a sympathy to a Buddhist worldview⁽¹⁵⁾, and soon after, this number was quoted as statistical evidence by the French press.

The sensational treatment of Buddhism by the French press and the extraordinarily high number of estimated sympathizers and practitioners is in stark contrast with the slow and slight developments of academic studies on Buddhism in France. One cannot help but be struck by the fact that almost forty years elapsed between the publication of Henri de Lubac's pioneering work (1952) and the studies of Dennis Gira (1989), which have paved the way for empirical studies of Buddhist settlement in France. In the intervening years, a number of comprehensive and apologetic essays on Buddhism and the West were published, and they still represent the overwhelming part of French publications on Western

Buddhism. The academic interest for this phenomenon only dates back to the late 1990s, when an increasing numbers of scholarly works were published: *Etre bouddhiste en France aujourd'hui* (1997) by Bruno Etienne and Raphael Liogier, *La tentation bouddhiste* (1998) by Pierre Lequéau, *La diffusion du bouddhisme tibétain en France* (1999) by the author, and finally Frédéric Lenoir's *Le bouddhisme en France* (1999). Apart from my own publications and Louis Hourmant's research on new Japanese movements (Sooka Gakkai and Reyukai)([16](#)), French academic studies deal in only general terms with Buddhism and draw few distinctions between the traditions. In addition, although French Buddhologists have traditionally paid very little attention to the supposedly "altered" forms of Buddhism, considered as "illegitimate" objects of study,([17](#)) sociologists have taken up the study of these supposedly significant expressions of modern religious renewal. Consequently, research on Buddhism in France is primarily limited to sociological study of practitioners, focusing on the reasons and the consequences of the adoption of Buddhism by Westerners as a "new religious option." Unlike American or German scholarship, the issue of transmission is virtually absent from French studies, with the exception of brief accounts of famous masters or charismatic figures who have brought Buddhism to the West (especially the Dalai Lama).

2. Intellectual and theoretical resistance to the missionary hypothesis

In the French publishing world, Buddhism remains a "spirituality" imported by Westerners, but hardly an "Asian-exported" tradition (except for the "ethnic" forms of Buddhism). French sociology, because it emphasizes the success of Buddhism among the social strata (elite) and the "connections" between Western and Buddhist thought, cannot — and indeed does not — explain the shift from the appeal of Buddhism to a settlement of Buddhism in the West.

These theoretical limitations stem, on the one hand, from the idealized and apologetic images of Buddhism that French converts and — more surprisingly — scholars still subscribe to and, on the other hand, from the analytical approaches that both have favored to explain the success of Buddhism in the West. In addition, there is strong intellectual resistance to considering the Westward spread of Buddhism in terms of missionary expansion.([18](#)) The term "mission" refers to the unpleasant idea of a Buddhist "spiritual colonization," as exposed by Lubac.([19](#)) It also evokes the image of what is thought of as a highly institutionalized and militant religion, such as Christianity, that sympathizers, apologists, and converts have abandoned or rejected.([20](#)) Buddhism has been defined by Westerners as the very opposite of a religion in the Judeo-Christian sense of the word. Institutional features of Buddhism have been denied, as has, with even more vigor, its expansionist dimension. Buddhism is not defined as a historical tradition, but as one of the modern alternative religious movements, the characteristics of which are quite different from a coercive and deterministic definition of religion credited to the French sociologist Emile Durkheim. Hence, the idea of

being the "target" of missionary activity is hardly conceivable for converts and scholars because it contradicts the postmodern (sociological) conception of an autonomous and entirely personal choice for spiritual seekers who forge their own paths among religious traditions or join new religious movements (among them Buddhism).

Nevertheless, the spread of Buddhism in France has undergone processes and phases similar to those of other countries. Buddhism was first discovered in academic circles, which began the process of its promotion to a larger audience, and was later settled by migrants and missionaries.

3. Academic discovery and intellectual fascination

It is a well-known fact that French scholars and intellectuals have shown a profound interest in Buddhism since the early nineteenth century. The fascination with Buddhism derives in part from the French Orientalist tradition, first expressed in the eighteenth-century secular humanist philosophy of Voltaire (1694-1778) and Montesquieu (1689-1755), and later propounded, during the period of Romanticism, in the philosophical, poetic, and literary works of the nineteenth century, as well as in religious scholarship itself. French Orientalism was first applied to the cultures of Asia Minor and Africa. Jesuit missionaries initiated the study of Asian civilizations and inspired the first research on the religions and languages of India conducted by A. H. Anquetil-Duperron (1731-1805) in the late eighteenth century. Buddhist Studies started off in many European countries in the early nineteenth century, but received a particular impetus in France with the pioneer works of Eugene Burnouf (1801-1852), who inspired the foundation of a specialized academic field at a time when intellectuals and philosophers were discussing the nature of Buddhism.

Due to the dominance of Christian thought over nascent French Religious Studies, Buddhism was the object of an ambiguous fascination, giving rise to reactions ranging from obvious hostility to expressions of sympathy. Buddhism was described in favorable terms only upon reaching more secularized spheres than the academic milieu, including nineteenth-century philosophers, writers, poets, artists, and travelers.⁽²¹⁾ Nevertheless, Buddhism remained a purely intellectual object, discussed and debated at length during the course of the nineteenth century. Yet Buddhism was not adopted as a faith in France before the first third of the twentieth century.

A widely neglected historical fact is that Mahaayaana Buddhism was the very first Asian tradition to which French individuals converted. Although French scholarship — like all European scholarship at the time — sought the most "authentic" form of Buddhism in the Sanskrit or Paali texts, Theosophical influences filtered into intellectual and artistic spheres and led to a shift in emphasis from a purely intellectual approach of Theravaada toward a more intimate approach of Mahaayaanist and later forms of Buddhism, especially Tibetan, which Theosophists considered as

"esoteric."

Unlike other European countries, French intellectual and academic circles did not foster the adoption of community forms of Buddhism. Only one French Buddhist Society, *La société des amis du Bouddhisme*, was founded in 1929; it was headed by the American-born Grace Constant Lounsbery. Although Lounsbery was interested in the Theravaada tradition, the Theosophist sympathizer Nelly Kauffman who succeeded her as director of the société imposed the study of Mahaayaanist and Tibetan traditions. The very first self-proclaimed French Buddhists were individuals sharing more or less theosophical ideas: Maurice Magre, whose book *Pourquoi je suis bouddhiste* ("Why I Am a Buddhist," 1928) is the first confession of a self-converted Buddhist in France, and the famous Alexandra David-Néel, who had contacts with the Theosophical Society before traveling through Tibet. Following the Theosophists, David-Néel popularized romantic and mystical images of Tibet and Tibetan Religion.⁽²²⁾ Other notable literary influences include Arnaud Desjardin's book *The Message of Tibetans* (1966) and Lobsang Rangpa's *Third Eye*, which was a best-seller in France. The fascination with Tibet also derives from the appeal of exotic and "remote" cultures, especially Tibet in the first half of the twentieth century.⁽²³⁾

4. The settling of Buddhism: migration influxes and touring masters

In the first third of the twentieth century, Asian migrants — mostly Chinese — began to settle in France. The situation changed dramatically in the 1960s and 1970s, when massive migration influxes flowed from former French colonies (Indochina). Thus, the first Buddhist traditions to settle in France were the Southeast Asian Theravaada and the Vietnamese Mahaayaanana. This "ethnic" Buddhism does not appeal to the French people, and Asian monks and followers do not make special efforts to reach an audience outside the community itself.⁽²⁴⁾ Hence, very few conversions have occurred, and they result mainly from interethnic marriages.⁽²⁵⁾

Much more appealing are the Zen and the Tibetan traditions, which settled during the period of the arrival of Buddhist masters: Zen master Taisen Deshimaru and Tibetan masters Dalai Lama, the sixteenth Gyalwa Karmapa, and Kalu Rinpoche, who had a profound impact on the flourishing of "Western Buddhism" in France. After a slow beginning in the late 1960s, Zen and Tibetan Buddhism in France have undergone tremendous expansion. These two traditions currently represent the two main trends of Buddhism in France, as judged by the increase in the number of French followers and places of worship and by their geographical distribution throughout the country.⁽²⁶⁾

The Chinese invasion of Tibet and the harsh conditions of the Tibetan diaspora received particular attention in France; a large number of pro-Tibetan associations were founded as of the 1960s. Nevertheless, the settlement of Tibetan Buddhism has no connection with the diaspora.

France has, in fact, hosted only a few Tibetan refugees — mostly assimilated individuals who are scattered throughout the country and who have not joined any religious community. Furthermore, Tibetans do not intermingle with French Buddhist followers and do not attend Tibetan Buddhist centers, except for major events such as the preaching tours of a highly ranked lama.

In France, as in many other countries, the founding of Tibetan Buddhist places of worship results from a missionary impetus and dates back to the early 1970s. After a gradual increase during the 1970s and up to the 1980s, the numbers began to increase rapidly. Starting from a single place of worship in the years 1971-1972, there were more than 140 in the late 1990s. The largest communities of converts were founded in the years following the "preaching tours" conducted by famous masters such as the sixteenth Karmapa and the Dalai Lama (in the years 1973 and 1974). The Kagyu order soon arrived in France and was prompted to spread and settle. As a result, it is better represented than the other Tibetan schools in France (more than 60 percent of the centers and monasteries in France are affiliated with the Kagyu school).

Although the transmission of Tibetan teachings was initiated by monks and masters, the spread of Buddhist themes and practices to a larger audience was undertaken by lay networks.⁽²⁷⁾ In fact, Tibetan masters came to teach in France at the invitation of those lay pioneers who had come into contact with them. Lay pioneers gathered small groups on such occasions, and some of the members were converted. Back in their hometowns, these lay followers began to spread their new beliefs and practices in networks comprised of family or friends.⁽²⁸⁾ Some created meditation and teaching groups requiring training and supervision.⁽²⁹⁾ Tibetan monks assumed the religious socialization of these groups, which became designated "Buddhist centers" and, later, places of worship by means of a symbolic appropriation of space, with meditative and teaching areas gradually filled out with religious furniture and ritual objects. A quick process of institutionalization occurred in Tibetan places of worship as soon as they were established. Religious practices and teachings fell under the control of monks and were subjected to orthodox regulation. Local groups of practitioners became sanghas by official recognition of the monastic order. Hence, they were incorporated into a specific branch or lineage of the master and were given a Tibetan designation that indicates the affiliation to a Tibetan school.

5. Transposition and adaptation

In the context of long-lasting settlement and institutionalization, Buddhist beliefs, values, and practices are inherited through family transmission. On the other hand, the constitution of a congregation of Buddhist followers on new soils and in societies necessitate proselytizing and recruitment efforts, that is, the search for adherents in the indigenous population.

This is one of the reasons why Tibetan monks and lay followers managed to spread the Buddhist message as often as possible to large audiences using a wide range of channels: oral transmission, lectures, books, and specialized Buddhist editors, journals, websites, and TV shows.(30) As a result, the number of people interested in Buddhism has increased. Large influxes of "visitors" came — and still come — to Tibetan places of worship, which are "open areas" in which everyone can experience various aspects of Tibetan religion.

Nevertheless, only a small number of these people "took refuge," that is, were converted.(31) Unlike other Buddhist groups or traditions in France, the practice of Tibetan Buddhism requires a conversion process. In the late 1970s and 1980s, many more people joined the Tibetan communities. Since the 1990s, conversions have been subjected to stricter verification of the initial motivation to join and the spiritual progression into the Buddhist path. This "recoupment"(32) is a reaction to the drifts in doctrine and practice that have occurred by this time because of the dramatic increase in potential adherents. Such drifts could have been prejudicial to the accommodation of Tibetan Buddhism to the social and political backgrounds in France because they appeared "sectarians." Buddhist groups — especially Tibetans — have attempted to reduce this ambiguity, while looking for legitimacy from mainstream churches.(33)

The consolidation of Tibetan Buddhism on French soil has led to the rebuilding of traditional structures and mechanisms of practice and transmission through institutions of training, especially for monks-to-be in rebuilt monasteries. The number of French monks who received full ordination and permission to teach remained very small until the mid-1990s (a few dozen). They currently number in the hundreds. Tibetans emphasize the training of monks, which itself offers the promise of the preservation of the Dharma. Sociologically speaking, such training is also the guarantee of the reproduction of the monastic model and the continuity of Buddhist transmission. The spread of Tibetan Buddhism continues, as its networks of centers — founded by lay people, managed by monks — expand, diversify, and ramify into a wide range of branches and lineages (including the newly arrived New Kadampa tradition).

Concluding Remarks

The spread of Tibetan Buddhism is an important aspect of the global dissemination of Buddhist ideas, themes, and practices. It also contributes to the propagation of Buddhist institutions, which play key roles in the preservation of the Dharma and are the basis for the reproduction of the traditional model of religious transmission and for the structuring of religious life for both Asians and converts.

Is missionary expansion specific to Tibetan Buddhism in France? The above-mentioned phenomena and processes can be observed in other countries that have welcomed Buddhism.(34) Therefore, the "missionary

hypothesis" presents one interesting key to understanding the worldwide spread of Buddhism because it offers an explanation of diffusion processes beyond localized contexts.

However, the missionary hypothesis does not allow us to predict the future of Buddhism in the West. The scope of this article does not allow me to address the issue of transplantation and strategies of accommodation. Until now, it has been almost identical to the "processive modes" described by Baumann (1994). Despite the apparently deep rooting of Tibetan Buddhism in France, its progress and maintenance depend upon demographic factors, the tolerance of the host society, and the opportunity to become a "customary" religion for present and future followers.

Notes

(1) See, for instance, the recent publications *The Faces of Buddhism in America* edited by Charles Prebish and Kenneth Tanaka (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1998) and *American Buddhism: Methods and Findings in Recent Scholarship*, edited by Duncan Ryuken Williams and Christopher S. Queen (Richmond, UK: Curzon Press, 1999). Tanaka's "Epilogue" in *The Faces of Buddhism* and Queen's introductory chapter in *American Buddhism* illustrate this point: ethnicity, democratization, practice, engagement, and adaptation (Tanaka) or democratization, pragmatism, and engagement (Queen) are the emerging trends in Western Buddhism and are consequently considered as future orientations in research. [Return to Text](#)

(2) See Prebish's "Introduction" in *The Faces of Buddhism in America*, 2. Also see Philip Hammond and David Machacek, *Soka Gakkai in America: Accommodation and Conversion* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1999). In France, the idea of a religious "supermarket" is encountered in the philosophical works of Gilles Lipovetsky, *L'ère du vide: essais sur l'individualisme contemporain* (Paris: Gallimard, 1983) and in the sociological theories of Danièle Hervieu-Léger, *La religion pour mémoire* (Paris: le Cerf, 1993). Another image of the consumption of religious ideas and practice is to be found in the expression, taken from the domain of restaurants and catering "religion à la carte" by Jean-Louis Schlegel, *Religions à la carte* (Paris: Hachette, 1995). [Return to Text](#)

(3) Thomas Tweed, "Night-Stand Buddhists and Other Creatures: Sympathizers, Adherents and the Study of Religion," in *American Buddhism: Methods and Findings in Recent Scholarship*, 71-90. [Return to Text](#)

(4) Tweed, Thomas. *The American Encounter with Buddhism*, second edition, Chapel Hill (North Carolina): University of North Carolina Press, 2000 (first edited by the Indiana University Press, 1992) [Return to Text](#)

(5) Jan Nattier, "Who is a Buddhist? Charting the Landscape of Buddhist

America." In *The Faces of Buddhism in America*, 183. [Return to Text](#)

(6) This position is also expressed in Louis Hourmant, "L'attrait du bouddhisme en Occident," *Sciences Humaines* 106 (2000), 28-31. [Return to Text](#)

(7) See Max Weber, "Introduction à l'éthique économique des religions universelles," in Max Weber, *Essais de sociologie des religions* (Die: Editions A Die, 1992; originally 1915), 23, 45, 46. [Return to Text](#)

(8) Max Weber, *The Religion of India: The Sociology of Hinduism and Buddhism* (New Delhi: Munshiram Manoharlal Publishers, 1992; originally 1958), 228. [Return to Text](#)

(9) This notion has been criticized by Rick Fields in "Divided Dharma: White Buddhists, Ethnic Buddhists, and Racism," *The Faces of Buddhism in America*, 196-206. [Return to Text](#)

(10) See Martin Bauman, "*The Transplantation of Buddhism to Germany: Processive Modes and Strategies of Adaptation*," *Method & Theory in the Study of Religion* 6, no. 1 (1994), 35. Ninian Smart argues: "Buddhism was and is a remarkably successful missionary faith, without being especially aggressive" in *Buddhism and Christianity: Rivals and Allies* (Honolulu: University of Hawai'i Press, 1993), 2. [Return to Text](#)

(11) See the definition of Buddhism as a missionary religion by V. A. Gunaseka from the Buddhist Society of Queensland, Australia, in "Ethnic Buddhism and Other Obstacles to the Dhamma in the West," at <http://www.buddhanet.net/bsq14.htm> (July 1999). [Return to Text](#)

(12) Eric Zürcher, *Bouddhisme, christianisme et société chinoise* (Paris, Juillard, 1990), 14-16. [Return to Text](#)

(13) These estimations were used by the popular press in the 1990s, and especially in famous news weekly such as *Le Nouvel Observateur* and *L'événement du jeudi*. They are also found in the scholarly works of Dennis Gira, Jean Vernet, and Claire Moncelon. See *Dictionnaire des groupes religieux aujourd'hui* (Paris: Presses Universitaires de France, 1995), 57; Odon Vallet, *Les religions dans le monde* (Paris: Flammarion, 1995), 47-56, and many others. The numbers asserted by the political analysts Bruno Etienne and Raphaël Liogier are up to 700,000 Buddhists. See Bruno Etienne and Raphaël Liogier, *Etre bouddhiste en France aujourd'hui* (Paris: Albin Miche, 1997), 10. [Return to Text](#)

(14) An epistemological and methodological criticism can be found in Etienne and Liogier, *Etre bouddhiste*; Lionel Obadia, *Bouddhisme et Occident: La diffusion du bouddhisme tibétain en France* (Paris: L'harmattan, 1999); and Frédéric Lenoir, *Le bouddhisme en France* (Paris: Fayard, 1999). I have discussed the various controversial points, including the lack of reliable sources, reasons for overestimation, the

plasticity of adherence to Buddhism, the methods used for counting Buddhists, and my conclusion was that given current methodological and theoretical tools, a precise and reliable estimation is almost impossible (*Bouddhisme et Occident*, 167-72). Lenoir replied to this assertion by affirming that, on the contrary, a count is not only possible but also the essential basis for a scientific research. According to his typology of degrees of adherence to Buddhism, he provides a series of estimated numbers corresponding to each of these types, which range from 10,000 converts to 5 million "sympathizers." Lenoir's numbers are no more reliable than those provided by the UBF, because his research presents substantial defects and biases (see Eric Rommeluère, "Le bouddhisme en France: Une lecture critique de Frédéric Lenoir," *Recherches sociologiques*, 31, 3 [2000], 103-119). [Return to Text](#)

(15) Opinion poll conducted by CSA La vie RTL: "Dieu intéresse-t-il les jeunes?" published in *La vie*, no. 2691, 27 March-2 April 1997, 18-30. [Return to Text](#)

(16) See Louis Hourmant, "Une religion orientée à l'action efficace dans le monde," in *De l'émotion en religion*, ed. Danielle Hervieu-Léger and Françoise Champion (Paris: Le centurion 1990), 80-119; "Les nouveaux mouvements religieux japonais en France entre laïcisation et euphémisation du sacré," *Social Compass* 42, no. 2 (1995), 207-20; "Le Reyukai japonais en France: entre religion et mouvement de transformation personnelle," *Recherches Sociologique* 29, no. 2 (1998), 53-64; and "La Soka Gakkai: un bouddhisme 'paria' en France," in *Sectes et démocratie*, ed. Françoise Champion and Martine Cohen (Paris: Seuil, 1999), 182-204. [Return to Text](#)

(17) For instance, Alain Forest in *Bouddhismes et sociétés asiatiques: clergés, sociétés et pouvoirs*, ed. A. Forest et al (Paris: L'harmattan, 1990, 2). See also Bernard Faure, *Bouddhismes, philosophies et religions* (Paris: Flammarion, 1998), 31-35. [Return to Text](#)

(18) See, for instance, Serge-Christophe Kolm, *Le bonheur-liberté, bouddhisme profond et modernité* (Paris: Presses Universitaires de France, 1982); Etienne and Liogier, *Etre bouddhiste*; and Lenoir, *Le bouddhisme en France*. Exceptions to this view of a passive Buddhism are voiced by theologian Henri de Lubac, philosopher Roger-Pol Droit, and Bernard Faure. The concept of "missionary activism" serves as the theoretical basis of my own work. This view was vigorously criticized by Buddhist sympathizers and sociologists, and especially by Lenoir, *Le bouddhisme en France*, 243. [Return to Text](#)

(19) See Henri de Lubac, *La rencontre du bouddhisme et de l'Occident* (Paris: Aubier, 1952), 274. [Return to Text](#)

(20) See especially Jean-Louis Schlegel, "Du christianisme au bouddhisme: les pratiques religieuses aujourd'hui," *Esprit* 233 (June 1997), pp. 20-30, and Lenoir, *Le bouddhisme en France*, who asserts

that the main reason for the appeal of Buddhism is the desertion from Roman Catholicism. [Return to Text](#)

(21) Lubac, *La rencontre du bouddhisme*, made an inventory of these reactions. Roger-Pol Droit's *Culte du Néant: les philosophes et le bouddhisme* (Paris: Editions le Seuil, 1997) provides a much more up-to-date, detailed, and complete survey of nineteenth-century philosophers' and intellectuals' reactions toward Buddhism. [Return to Text](#)

(22) See Donald S. Lopez, *Prisoners of Shangri-La: Tibetan Buddhism and the West* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1998). [Return to Text](#)

(23) As related by Claude Lévi-Strauss, *Tristes tropiques* (Paris: Plon, 1995), 10ff. [Return to Text](#)

(24) The situation is about to change because of the recent arrival of missionary forms of Theravaada, such as the Linsson school. [Return to Text](#)

(25) See Catherine Choron-Baix, "De forêts en banlieues: La transplantation du bouddhisme lao en France," *Archives de sciences sociales des religions* 36/73 (1991), 17-33. [Return to Text](#)

(26) See Dennis Gira, *Comprendre le Bouddhisme* (Paris: Le centurion, 1989); Obadia, *Bouddhisme et Occident*. [Return to Text](#)

(27) As underlined by Baumann as well in "*The Transplantation of Buddhism to Germany*," 35. [Return to Text](#)

(28) Thus, the Buddhist recruitment can be compared to the recruitment to other modern cults, as described by Stark and Bainbridge: "Networks of Faith: Interpersonal Bonds and Recruitment to Cults and Sects," in *The Future of Religion*, ed. Rodney Stark and William Sims Bainbridge (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1985), 307-324. [Return to Text](#)

(29) See details in Obadia, *Bouddhisme et Occident*, 146-147. [Return to Text](#)

(30) Since 1997, there has been a thirty-minute show on Buddhism alongside other French TV religious programs, including Roman Catholicism, Reformed church, Judaism, and Islam. For further discussion of the consequences of this point, see Dennis Gira, "Les bouddhistes en France," *Esprit* 233 (June 1997). [Return to Text](#)

(31) This process is a "crystallization" of the influxes of religious seekers, for example, unchurched or apostate laymen who experience cumulative and temporary spiritual practices and who represent the social grassroots of Tibetan Buddhism followers and converts. [Return to](#)

[Text](#)

(32) This is similar to the process described by Baumann in "*The Transplantation of Buddhism to Germany*," 44ff. [Return to Text](#)

(33) As a "foreign" religion, Buddhism is affected by the debates about religious tolerance in France. France remains closely tied to its Roman Catholic roots and indeed is considered to be "la fille ainée de l'Eglise" (the eldest daughter of the Church). The issue of religious tolerance brings about passionate debates in political, public, and even academic spheres. Officials have published official reports on the dangers of sects, while trials concerning the Scientology organization have been covered extensively by the media. A large number of New Age movements inspired by Eastern traditions are now suspected of sect-like "brainwashing." Paradoxically, such movements are quickly developing, receiving a growing interest, and reaching an ever greater audience. Like several non-affiliated and self-denominated Buddhist groups, two Tibetan-affiliated groups are listed along with the Sooka Gakkai and the Reyukai movements in the parliamentary French report of 1996 (conducted by deputy Alain Gest). Massimo Introvigne and other sociologists (including famous researchers like Karel Dobbelaere) edited a "counter-report" the same year. See Massimo Introvigne, and J. Gordon Melton (eds.), *Pour en finir avec les sectes, le débat sur le rapport de la commission parlementaire* (Turin, Paris: CESNUR, 1996). [Return to Text](#)

(34) See, for instance, Alison Smith, "The Role of Buddhist Groups in South Africa," in *Buddhism and Africa*, ed. Michel Clasquin and J. S. Krüger (Pretoria: University of South Africa Press, 1999), 77-84. [Return to Text](#)

Bibliography

Batchelor, Stephen. *The Awakening of the West. The Encounter of Buddhism and Western Culture*. London: Aquarian, Harper Collins and Berkeley, Cal.: Parallax Press, 1994.

Baumann, Martin. "Creating a European Path to Nirvana. Historical and Contemporary Developments of Buddhism in Europe." *Journal of Contemporary Religion*, 10/1 (1995), pp. 55-70.

Baumann, Martin. "*The Transplantation of Buddhism to Germany: Processive Modes and Strategies of Adaptation.*" *Method & Theory in the Study of Religion*, 6/1 (1994), pp. 35-61.

Choron-Baix, Catherine. "*De forêts en banlieues. La transplantation du bouddhisme lao en France.*" *Archives de sciences sociales des religions* (France), 36/73 (1991), pp. 17-33.

Droit, Roger-Pol. *Le culte du néant: les philosophes et le bouddhisme*. Paris: Editions le Seuil, 1997.

Etienne, Bruno, and Raphaël Liogier. *Etre bouddhiste en France aujourd'hui*. Paris: Albin Michel, 1997.

Faure, Bernard. *Bouddhismes, philosophies et religions*. Paris: Flammarion, 1998.

----- . *Le bouddhisme*. Paris: Flammarion, 1996.

Fields, Rick. *How the Swans Came to the Lake: A Narrative History of Buddhism in America*. Third edition, revised and updated. Boston, London: Shambala, 1992.

Gira, Dennis. "Les bouddhistes français." *Esprit* (France), 233 (June 1997), pp.130-148.

Gira, Dennis. *Comprendre le Bouddhisme*. Paris: Le Centurion, 1989.

Hammond, Philip and David Machacek. *Soka Gakkai in America: Accommodation and Conversion*. New York: Oxford University Press, 1999.

Hourmant, Louis. "L'attrait du bouddhisme en Occident." *Sciences Humaines (France)*, 106 (2000), pp. 28-31.

Hourmant, Louis. "La Soka Gakkai: un bouddhisme 'paria' en France?" In *Sectes et démocratie*. Françoise Champion and Martine Cohen, eds. Paris: Seuil, 1999, pp. 182-204.

Hourmant, Louis. "Le Reyukaï japonais en France: entre religion et mouvement de transformation personnelle." *Recherches Sociologiques (Belgium)*, XXIX/2 (1998), pp. 53-64.

Hourmant, Louis. "Les nouveaux mouvements religieux japonais en France entre laïcisation et euphémisation du sacré." *Social Compass*, 42/2 (1995), pp. 207-220.

Hourmant, Louis. "Une religion orientée à l'action efficace dans le monde." In *De l'émotion en religion*. Danielle Hervieu-Léger and Françoise Champion, eds. Paris: Le centurion, 1990, pp. 80-119.

Kolm, Serge-Christophe. *Le bonheur-liberté, bouddhisme profond et modernité*. Paris: Presses Universitaires de France, 1982.

Lenoir, Frédéric. *Le bouddhisme en France*. Paris: Fayard, 1999.

Lequéau, Pierre. *La tentation bouddhiste*. Paris: Desclée de Brouwer, 1998.

Lopez, Donald S., *Prisoners of Shangri-La: Tibetan Buddhism and the West*, Chicago & London: University of Chicago Press, 1998.

Lubac, Henri de. *La rencontre du bouddhisme et de l'Occident*, Paris: Aubier, 1952.

Nattier, Jan. "Who is a Buddhist? Charting the Landscape of Buddhist America." In *The Faces of Buddhism in America*. Charles Prebish and Kenneth K. Tanaka, eds. Berkeley, Los Angeles, London: University of California Press, 1998. 183-195.

Obadia, Lionel. *Bouddhisme et Occident. La diffusion du bouddhisme tibétain en France*. Paris: L'harmattan, 1999.

Prebish, Charles, and Kenneth K. Tanaka, eds. *The Faces of Buddhism in America*. Berkeley, Los Angeles, London: University of California Press, 1998.

Prebish, Charles. "Introduction." In *The Faces of Buddhism in America*. Charles Prebish and Kenneth K. Tanaka, eds., Berkeley, Los Angeles, London: University of California Press, 1998. 1-10.

Prebish, Charles. "Two Buddhisms Reconsidered." *Buddhist Studies Review*, 10/2 (1993), pp. 187-206.

Rommelure, Eric, "Le bouddhisme en France: Une lecture critique de Frédéric Lenoir." *Recherches sociologiques* (Belgium), 2000/3 (Oct./Nov.), pp. 103-119.

Schlegel, Jean-Louis. "Du christianisme au bouddhisme: les pratiques religieuses aujourd'hui." *Esprit* (France), 233 (June 1997), pp.20-30.

Smart, Ninian. *Buddhism and Christianity: Rivals and Allies*. Honolulu: University of Hawaii Press, 1993.

Smith, Alison. "The Role of Buddhist Groups in South Africa." In *Buddhism and Africa*. Michel Clasquin and J. S. Krüger, eds., Pretoria: Unisa, 1999. 77-84.

Tweed, Thomas. "Night-Stand Buddhists and Other Creatures: Sympathizers, Adherents and the Study of Religion." In *American Buddhism. Methods and Findings in Recent Scholarship*. Duncan Ryuken Williams and Christopher S. Queen, eds. Richmond: Curzon Press, 1999. 71-90.

Tweed, Thomas. *The American Encounter with Buddhism*, second edition, Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 2000 (first edition, Indiana University Press, 1992).

Weber, Max. *The Religion of India: The Sociology of Hinduism and*

Buddhism. New Delhi: Munshiram Manoharlal Publishers, 1992 (first edition, New York: Free Press, 1958).

Williams, Duncan Ryuken and Christopher S. Queen, eds. *American Buddhism. Methods and Findings in Recent Scholarship*. Richmond: Curzon Press, 1999.

Zürcher, Eric, *Bouddhisme, christianisme et société chinoise*. Paris: Juillard, 1990.