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Body, Speech and Mind: Negotiating Meaning and Experience at a Tibetan Buddhist Center

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BODY, SPEECH AND MIND:
NEGOTIATING MEANING AND EXPERIENCE
AT A TIBETAN BUDDHIST CENTER

by

AMANDA S. WOOMER

Under the Direction of Dr. Emanuela Guano

ABSTRACT

Examining an Atlanta area Tibetan Buddhist center as a symbolic and imagined borderland space, I investigate the ways that meaning is created through competing narratives of spirituality and “culture.” Drawing from theories of borderlands, cross-cultural interaction, narratives, authenticity and material culture, I analyze the ways that non-Tibetan community members of the Drepung Loseling center navigate through the interplay of culture and spirituality and how this interaction plays into larger discussions of cultural adaptation, appropriation and representation. Although this particular Tibetan Buddhist center is only a small part of Buddhism’s exis-

tence in the United States today, discourses on authenticity, representation and mediated understanding at the Drepung Loseling center provide an example of how ethnic, social, and national boundaries may be negotiated through competing – and overlapping – narratives of culture.

INDEX WORDS: Tibetan Buddhism, Borderlands, Spirituality, Cross-cultural interaction, Anthropology, Authenticity

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AMANDA S. WOOMER

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DEDICATION

For JSP, my lighthouse.

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1 INTRODUCTION

When I was about fourteen or fifteen years old, I remember riding in the back of our family's minivan. My mother and father sat unsuspectingly up front. Suddenly and without any warning, I exclaimed, "I think I want to be a Buddhist!" A small gasp was followed by silence. Having been raised in a Catholic household, my declaration came as quite a shock. Once the initial surprise subsided, my father, in his methodical way, began inquiring as to what I knew about Buddhism. He concluded that if I could prove to him that I had done my research and could demonstrate a clear understanding of the subject, then both him and my mother would support me. Eight or nine years later, I found myself standing in the atrium of the Drepung Loseling center in Atlanta, Georgia. White walls trimmed in reds, blues, and gold surrounded me. A huge altar visible in the connecting room inspired awe with its large statue of the Buddha adorned with elaborate tapestries and ritual items. Aside from reading the occasional philosophy book as a teenager, I had never really pursued my interest in Buddhism. But a chance combination of events had led me to stand in an unequivocal place where I could study what I had been waiting to learn about for years.

During my undergraduate studies, I had become enamored with the interplay of cultural differences across spatial and social boundaries. But when I stepped into the atrium of the Tibetan Buddhist center that day as a graduate student of anthropology, I became aware of my own ignorance, not only in terms of the assumptions and misconceptions I had about Tibetan Buddhism and its representations, but also in terms of how I defined "culture". As I spent more and more time at the center and at my graduate studies, I saw the ways that Drepung Loseling impacted the identities and perceptions of its members, as well as how the center itself negotiated a spiritual, social and cultural place for itself among the local community. From these interactions,

I began to question the bounded and concrete definition of “culture” that I had previously believed true and wonder how individuals who encountered this place created meaning from it.

Before leaving my home the morning of my first visit to the Drepung Loseling center, I nervously contemplated the meditation session. “Everyone will know I don’t belong,” I worried. In my mind, everyone participating would be ethnically and phenotypically Asian. I really believed that everyone there would mentally note my mistakes and criticize me for intruding in a space that was obviously not my own. But to my surprise, upon walking in to the shrine room, my mind and my judgments were blown away. Few individuals present at the meditation class were of Asian descent. Many more were white or African American. Many people were aged forty, fifty or sixty. Some sat on cushions in a more traditional manner, while others were seated on folding chairs in the back of the room. No one noticed my entrance, much less my somewhat awkward behavior as I fumbled around for a seat and the proper etiquette.

My first experience was a cultural hurdle – albeit a much smaller one than I had imagined for myself. But the wheels in my brain (like the wheel of dharma) began to turn, and I realized that this space, a space that presented a vastly different experience than what I was accustomed to, was a place where people from different backgrounds came together and found meaning from the standpoint of their divergent and fluid narratives of culture. I immediately wanted to know how this was done. I wanted to know in what ways were non-Tibetan individuals like myself finding meaning as members of this materially, spiritually, culturally and visually dissimilar space.

1.1 Buddhism in America

Buddhism began with the birth of Siddhartha Gautama in India around the fifth century BCE. After that, what I will define for the purposes of this research as a spiritual pathⁱ spread throughout much of East and Southeast Asia, acquiring new followers and accommodating many local customs (Nattier 1998). Buddhism entered what is now Tibet in the seventh century, predominantly through India, but also through pathways from China and Nepal. While the movement of Buddhism around Asia has a rich and complex history, this particular research focuses on Buddhism's initial contact with the West and particularly North America. Buddhism planted concrete roots in the United States during the 1960s and 70s, but a significant Buddhist presence can be traced all the way back to Paul Carus at the turn of the twentieth century (Verhoeven 1998). Carus's interest in Buddhism resulted from a desire to find a solution to what he perceived as inherent problems of Western society, particularly positivism and the increased reliance on science. It was Carus's goal to create an Americanized Buddhism that adapted to the needs of contemporary Western society, and he was one of the first to study the ways in which Buddhism could mesh with Western Christianity and technology. The compatibility of Buddhism with Western notions of rationality remains an important perceived characteristic of its spirituality to this day and will be discussed at length in a later chapter of this thesis.

After Carus and other individuals' initial interactions with Buddhism, interest in the Eastern spirituality did not really peak until the mid-twentieth century. Increased attention and curiosity was the result of a plethora of factors. A major contributing factor was the Chinese invasion of Tibet in 1950 that attracted international attention and was followed by the fleeing of the Dalai Lama to India and the consequent establishment of the Tibetan government in exile in 1959. In addition to these unprecedented historical events, Martin Baumann (2002) identifies what he

calls “three main trajectories” of spiritual transmission that apply to the case of Tibetan Buddhism. These trajectories include immigrants who seek to preserve their cultural heritage, intentional transmission via missionaries, and intentional importation by interested persons. The most obvious and conscious of these trajectories in the case of the Drepung Loseling center is importation by interested persons. In fact, a couple in North Georgia offered land to the Dalai Lama during one of his visits to the United States, and thus a Tibetan Buddhist community was established in the southeast United States. But even the Dalai Lama himself may be considered an “interested person,” as he has sought over the years to spread knowledge and understanding of Tibetan Buddhist spirituality and culture.

The creation of a Tibetan Buddhist community in the United States represents a historical shift in how Tibet is perceived. Originally, Tibetan Buddhism in the United States was “infused with romantic idealism” (Hughes Seager 2004). In her book *Magic and Mystery in Tibet*, Alexandra David-Néel (1971[1932]: v) describes Tibet as the “Land of Snows”, a “country of the known, the fantastic and the impossible.” As an explorer and adventurer, David-Néel opened up the Far East to many Europeans through her accounts and books and increased the general knowledge and understanding of Westerners concerning Buddhism and East Asian culture. Although her description of Tibet represents the attitudes towards Tibet prior to its dramatic and abrupt appearance on the stage of international politics, much of the psychic mystery and ideas of sorcerers and shamans has persevered to today. Tibet and its unique form of Buddhism remained shrouded in mystery until the 1990s, when Hollywood picked up the Dalai Lama’s story and Richard Gere became a serious Buddhist practitioner. Movies like *Red Corner* (1997) and *Seven Years in Tibet* (1997) made Tibetan Buddhism famous, although they continued to portray the country and its religion as mysterious and otherworldly. Only recently, perhaps within the

last two decades or so, has Tibetan Buddhism come out from the shadows, displaying to many a spirituality much more compatible with many Western values than previously thought.

One such reason for this unveiling is His Holiness the Dalai Lama. It is obvious from such titles as *Ethics for the New Millennium* (The Dalai Lama 1999), *Imagine All the People: A Conversation with The Dalai Lama on Money, Politics, and Life as it Could Be* (The Dalai Lama and Fabien Ouaki 1999), and *The Universe in a Single Atom: The Convergence of Science and Spirituality* (The Dalai Lama 2005) that His Holiness has taken a keen interest in not only Western science, but also in current events and cultural representations throughout the world. A professor at Emory University with whom I had the pleasure of speaking told me that although the mission of the Drepung Loseling center was to bring Tibetan Buddhism to the West, it was also the Dalai Lama's goal that Tibetans should become knowledgeable about Western scientific paradigms. Knowledge sharing goes both ways. Not only does His Holiness wish to learn more about Western science, but he also feels that Tibetan viewpoints and knowledge also have much to contribute to scientific study and general understanding of the world (Paine 2004: 192).

1.2 The Drepung Loseling Center

The Drepung Loseling center is only a portion of Buddhism's presence in America. Specifically, it is the North American seat of His Holiness the Dalai Lama and the *Gelug*ⁱⁱ School of Tibetan Buddhism. During the first world tour of Sacred Music Sacred Dance, during which monks from Drepung Loseling Monasteryⁱⁱⁱ traveled the world to perform traditional Tibetan Buddhist chanting and dance, a couple from north Georgia donated a tract of land to the monastery. During the years that followed, with the blessing of His Holiness the Dalai Lama, Geshe

Lobsang Tenzin Negi came to the United States to oversee the establishment of Drepung Loseling. Geshe Lobsang was also admitted to Emory University where he later obtained his PhD, in addition to the Geshe Lharampa degree he had already obtained in India.



Figure 1: Opening ceremony for Emory's Tibet Week.

In 1995, officials from Emory University approached the Dalai Lama concerning the formation of an association between the school and the newly established Drepung Loseling center. Geshe Lobsang's connection to the university in addition to His Holiness's interest in

Western science resulted in the creation of

a firm relationship with Emory University that continues to this day. One of the results of this affiliation is the Emory-Tibet partnership, which encompasses Tibetan Buddhist studies and includes two study abroad programs in Dharamsala, India. As a result of this partnership, Drepung Loseling not only teaches Tibetan Buddhism to all who are interested, but also participates in programs centered on transnational scientific learning and the preservation of Tibetan heritage.

One of the main attractions of Drepung Loseling, both for those within the educational or scientific community and those outside of it, is its emphasis on meditation. The center currently hosts weekly and monthly meditation classes along with yearly retreats and special programs that emphasize certain meditative techniques such as mindfulness meditation, compassion meditation or Vipassana meditation. As an important component of Tibetan Buddhism, meditation classes are also what draw most people to the center. During the annual Tibetan festival that is held at Drepung Loseling in the fall, I overheard a handful of visitors ask how they can learn more about

meditation and inquire about the guided family meditation class. Sarah, one of my interviewees, stated that meditation was one of the main reasons that people originally come to visit.

In addition to meditation retreats and courses, the center invites many renowned Tibetan scholars and doctors to give public talks, including Professor Geshe Yeshe Thabke and Dr. Jhampa Kalsang. Emory University also hosts a yearly Tibet week during which the institution displays many aspects of Tibetan culture and Tibetan Buddhism including chanting and *thangka* paintings. The Emory-Tibet partnership has also led to the creation of a study abroad program in Dharamsala, India and the installation of His Holiness the Dalai Lama as a Presidential Distinguished Professor. More recently, Emory University has initiated scientific studies aimed at testing the effects of meditation on health as well as a partnership between Western academics and Tibetan Buddhist monks to help teach the monks about Western science.

1.3 Structure

The purpose of this research is to present the ways in which interaction based on competing and overlapping narratives takes place in a metaphorical border setting. By borders, I mean spaces where individuals from observably different backgrounds come together to negotiate identity and meaning across various boundaries: social, ethnic, spiritual and even visual. Employing the Drepung Loseling center as my field site, I analyze the ways in which these interactions take place and what meaning those involved create. In particular, I study the interaction from the viewpoint of the non-Tibetan community members, who are both foreigners and also natives in this space and therefore must forge meaning for themselves through these overlapping, competing and fluid identities. By seeking to understand the ways in which individual narratives

and backgrounds impact the interpretation of experiences, I attempt to explore the ways in which individuals learn about and create meaning when confronted with unfamiliar and divergent cultural and spiritual activities.

In keeping with the theme of Tibetan Buddhism that is the focus of my research, I have decided to group the ethnographic portion of my thesis in accordance with a very important aspect of Buddhism: body, speech and mind^{iv}. In his book *The World of Tibetan Buddhism: An Overview of Its Philosophy and Practice*, the Dalai Lama (1995) refers to body, speech and mind as the three doors. These three doors are not merely paths through which objects, speech and thoughts come from and go to the human body. Rather, the Dalai Lama states that by paying close attention to these three doors, we can obtain greater peace and happiness. While the goal of this research is not to create world happiness, I do believe it can become a pathway, however minor, to better understanding between people of different cultural backgrounds.

The first ethnographic chapter entitled “Body” explores the processes through which Tibetan Buddhism manifests in unique forms at Drepung Loseling in Atlanta. This includes the visual representation of the spirituality and its cultural expressions, the material aspects of the experience, and the way that these experiential characteristics are perceived and interpreted. In the next chapter, titled “Speech”, I describe how individual community members have approached and interpreted their experience, the ways these individuals have changed as explained to me during our interviews, and how they have incorporated aspects of their experience into their every day life, both within the center and beyond. This chapter focuses on the individual throughout. Finally, the chapter designated “Mind” will include the themes of rationality and science, both of which I found to be of great importance during my time at the center.

1.4 Definitions

Some of the concepts utilized in this thesis deserve additional attention in terms of their definition. Abstractions such as “culture”, “cultural boundaries” and “borderlands”, and “cross-cultural interaction” are often amorphous and require contextual placement. Although these are anthropological terms, they are also often employed by my interviewees in a more quotidian or vernacular manner. Because of this, their definitions may easily become fuzzy. So that I do not confuse the reader or leave them guessing, I want to take a moment to briefly clarify and define these terms as they relate to my research.

Although historical anthropological definitions of culture implied a bounded and static network of beliefs that uniformly applied to a confined group of people, these conceptions have been criticized and eventually disregarded since the mid-twentieth century. In an article published in the 1960s, Edmund Leach (1965: 27) explicitly questions the use of “culture” in a restricted and stagnant way and critiques the resultant “misleading idea that culture exists independently of those who inherit it”. Instead, anthropologists now uniformly recognize that “culture” is fluid, constantly negotiated and altered by those people who exist within it. To use the words of Anna Tsing (1993), culture is a “production”, something that is created through ongoing struggles to produce meaning in all aspects of life.

For contemporary anthropologists, defining and interpreting culture in the framework of ethnographic research is an ongoing struggle. Examination of a group of people through the structure of an amorphous idea of culture is oftentimes seen as imperative to the analysis of our world (Crotty 2003[1998]), yet it is extremely problematic. As Robert Borofsky (2001: 433)

points out, “Culture is what various people conceive it to be, and... different people perceive it in different ways for different ends.” Although it is perilous ground to tread, definitions of culture must be addressed here if we are to move any further and examine the interplay between culture and spirituality that is explicitly discussed by the members who I interviewed for this research.

While I do employ the term “culture” throughout this thesis, the word has multiple meanings. For contemporary anthropology, culture is a fluid, constantly shifting notion whereby identities and meaning are negotiated on the basis of “hybrid customs” (Aggarwal 2001). But in the quotidian settings of everyday life, “culture” remains constantly applied to somewhat essentializing vernacular descriptions of groups of customs and characteristics such as those found at the Drepung Loseling center. Paralleling the everyday use of community members by the term “culture”, “cross-cultural” is also used in the vernacular by the members with whom I spoke. The use of these two terms highlights a continuous effort by non-Tibetan members to define two separate groups: us and them (or Westerners and Tibetans). Even though anthropologists have recognized that there is not a single definition of “culture” or “cross-cultural”, cultural producers throughout the world, including those cultural consultants at my field site, continue to use this notion in order to frame the meaning and significance of their narrative (Hannerz 2002). The definition of cultural narrative is also affected in this way. Although it may appear to be a dormant and restricted identity, a person’s cultural narrative is instead a continuous discourse that constantly engages divergent narratives across boundaries.

In the context of this thesis, therefore, the term “cross-cultural” represents the ways in which groups generating different and fluid narratives of culture negotiate identities across unstructured and often-imaginary borders. In the space of the Drepung Loseling center, ethnic Tibetans are not the only individuals defining what Tibetan Buddhism means. Instead, both Tibetan

and non-Tibetans alike are continuously engaged in fashioning changing conceptions of Tibetan Buddhist identity within the space of the center. Therefore, “cross-cultural” should not be interpreted as a dichotomy between groups interacting with each other from their respective fields, but rather a multifaceted and multi-level negotiation of meaning from various and intertwining angles. Although this definition appears to indicate static and opposing homogenous groups, and is often used in this manner by my cultural consultants, and is therefore problematic, there are very few words to adequately and accurately capture the interaction and experience between individuals with divergent backgrounds and narratives of culture.

Because of this interaction, the space consequently represents a “borderland”, within and over which individuals from a variety of backgrounds collaborate to create meaning across social, ethnic, and spiritual boundaries. The use of “borderland” in this context is somewhat different from the more distinct and concrete type of borderland discussed by Daphne Berdahl (1999) in her examination of a re-unified Germany. While Berdahl investigates the ways that “cultural meanings” may complicate and occupy a place within national or geographically based borders, I use her framework in a metaphorical manner to describe the ways in which imagined “borderlands” are created through experiences and encounters. Although my use of the term implies boundaries of human constructs rather than the political or economic means described by Berdahl, her framework of borders as places to negotiate cultural identity and practices remains an important foundational aspect of this research.

2 REVIEW OF LITERATURE

My research converges on space in which people with various cultural backgrounds communicate in and across boundaries characterized by discourses of material culture and consumption, individualized notions of authenticity, and the creation of a fluid identity concerning what it means to be a Buddhist. Incorporating a theory of borderlands, cross-cultural interaction and consumption, orientalism, and discourses of authenticity, I examine the ways in which people produce meaningful experiences and shape their own personal identities. For example, how do non-Tibetans find meaning in interactions with a local Tibetan spiritual group? How do individuals who regard themselves as Western negotiate meaning through the appropriation and understanding of ideals and values that characterize their experience at a Tibetan Buddhist center?

2.1 Borderlands

At first glance, the physical and cultural separation of the Drepung Loseling center from the surrounding residential community becomes apparent. The actual building itself varies visually from the surrounding area, and upon entering the space, observing the material objects and listening to the teachings, the uniqueness of the center is perceptible. This research tackles the subject of negotiation and communication across the symbolic border that exists between the Drepung Loseling center and the surrounding Atlanta community, and the identity of Drepung Loseling as a separate space necessitates a discussion of borderlands and their various meanings. Initial studies and discussions of borderlands focused on much more formal political and economic borders that divide nation-states (Martinez 1994; Berdahl 1999; Alvarez, Jr. 1995). Cultural aspects of these borders are an influential factor in their negotiation (Berdahl 1999), and it is this social and cultural characteristic of border spaces that most informs my research. Instead

of these concrete lines, my research applies the notion of borderlands in a more metaphorical framework, an approach more akin to the borderlands that exist between immigrant or diasporic communities within a nation (Roberts 2004).

Scholars have also placed emphases on borders of a more volatile nature (Jukarained 2005; Ignatieff 2005; Gibbins 2005). Political and economic borders, it is argued, are eroding under the pressures of globalization. And while the institutional significance of geographic borders may wane, these lines can remain extremely demarcating and culturally limiting (Jukarained 2005). Oftentimes the result is conflict, as many times nation-state borders create an asymmetrical relationship that can be compared to the relationship between majorities and minorities discussed by Arjun Appadurai (2006): a relationship of anxiety and violence. Other scholars such as Ulf Hannerz (2002) have also addressed center-periphery relationships in cultural terms, insisting that cultural flows are not one way and are in fact multi-dimensional and multi-faceted. My research reflects a similar perspective whereby the notion of Tibetan Buddhist “culture” is created and manipulated at various levels and by various groups. This is a mediation of a diasporic community identity at the local level, resulting in a complicated, hybrid and ever-changing “subjectivity” (Appadurai 1996).

Despite a political institutional focus on boundaries, the discussion of borders as material divisions (Jukarained 2005; Konrad 1986) can inform my research, as one of the key distinctions separating the Drepung Loseling center from the surrounding community is its discernible physical difference. Additionally, the recognition that ethnicity, politics and religion can all influence the formation of a borderland identity (Ignatieff 2005; Berdahl 1999) stands as a useful reminder that identity along a multilevel and multifaceted borderland is always more complicated than it may first appear. It is important to remember that borders are “human constructs” (Ganster and

Lorey 2005: *xiii*), rather than simplistic, institutional structures. Borders and cross-border interaction can expose people to increasing amounts of possibilities with which they can change their situation (Roberts 2004), and that border identity is fluid and complex. As human constructs, the borders discussed in my research are related more to the creation and maintenance of boundaries through everyday practice, negotiated identity and flows of ideas and material culture rather than the historical and political process that characterize many discourses on borderlands as discussed above.

2.2 Flows and Negotiated Interaction

Continuing from a conversation about borderlands, broader theories of cross-cultural interaction play an essential role in my research as well. The interactions and encounters that take place at the Drepung Loseling center compel community members with individually distinctive yet fluid narratives of culture into close contact within a borderland setting. More than any other social science, anthropology has been traditionally characterized by a “cross-cultural” approach, one in which situations and interactions are examined from multiple angles and on multiple levels of social interaction. But recently anthropology has begun to see this interaction and negotiation as something much more fluid, characterized by transnational flows rather than discrete units of culture interacting across clearly defined national borders. Consequently, it is important to take in to account the ways in which studies of these flows have been conducted, drawing from them in an effort to understand localized interactions more completely.

Some important dimensions of cross-cultural interaction have been identified in the realm of psychology and sociology. These include elements of territory or physical space, category of

involvement, relationships of power, characteristic differences, and degree of intimacy involved in the interaction. Stephen Bochner (1982), a psychologist focusing on intercultural aspects of society, discusses an individual's situation within larger society, including groups in which the individual participates, and how these relationships play a formational role in determining the types of interaction that takes place at the individual level. Although this theory focuses on relationships of discord, Bochner's greatest contribution to my research is a discussion of what brings groups together, i.e. a sharing of a superordinate goal. In the case of Drepung Loseling, this goal may be broadly defined as peace or the discovery of individual happiness and an end to suffering^v, or perhaps something more localized such as the desire to learn about meditation or Buddhist philosophy.

Another interesting framework from which to view interaction between individuals of varying cultural backgrounds is that of narratives. These are personal discourses of identity used to make sense of the world (Schiffrin 1996). Narratives also relate to our capacity to understand others (Mattingly 2008). Influenced by divergent group narratives, interaction may be riddled by misunderstandings that are the result of our inability to place the actions of another person within the context of our own personal narrative. Narrative theories are useful in the context of the Drepung Loseling center in that they provide a means for examining how an individual views her identity in relationship to her environment and the world around her, particularly within an environment characterized by strange or at the very least unfamiliar values and notions of identity.

Buddhism's popularity in the West has itself been an enigma of interaction across divergent narratives. Scholars such as Frédéric Lenoir (1999) have recognized the conflicting nature between Buddhism's detachment from the self and the Western cult of the individual. Buddhism, he argues, has appropriated Western notions of modernity and an individual's subjectivity. In

order to understand the interaction that takes place between generalized Western norms or values, localized in my field site within Atlanta, and Tibetan Buddhism, I rely on theories of cross-cultural interaction to explain how two seemingly conflicting ideologies can in fact mesh and learn from each other.

2.3 Material Culture and Consumption

Material culture is another platform on which identities and narratives are communicated and negotiated. Not only do members of the Drepung Loseling center learn about Tibetan Buddhism through the lectures and lessons presented to them by the monks, but they also experience conceptualizations of what Tibetan Buddhism is through the ritual objects and other material pieces that form the physical environment of the center. The interaction thus occurs on a material level as well, whereby values and beliefs are embedded within objects such as mala bracelets and Buddha statues. Berta Ribeiro's (1987) study of the Kayabi Indian tribe provides an instructive discussion on the ways in which material culture contain and communicate beliefs in a visual form. These objects or "things" are actually part of the paradigm of social norms and values, and consequently shape an individual's impressions of another group (Dant 1999). At the Drepung Loseling center, these material aspects of narratives of culture are extremely important and require knowledge of theories of material culture. For example, what do these objects mean to their respective publics? What values do they embody? Throughout my research I evaluate and learn not only what these objects have to say, but also who decides what they say and how people come to understand their meanings.

Identities that are performed and constantly engaged can become problematic, especially when another group appropriates that identity's material characteristics (and often plays a part in contributing to cultural stereotypes). Museums are one such site of cultural appropriation. Exhibiting objects, Barbara Kirshenblatt-Gimblett (1998) argues, gives the objects agency to perform meaning. But these objects are fragmented and decontextualized. In a museum setting, who decides how the objects will be used in order to create knowledge? What meanings will they embody through use and practice? Tony Bennett (1988) states that museums are largely under the control of elite classes. As a result, the meaning of the objects displayed are largely removed from their original context and made to coincide with dominant social stereotypes about the group on exhibit. But cultural artifacts can be used by less privileged classes as well, manipulated in such a way as to frame identity and promote economic development (Silverman 2005), and both the appropriation of material objects by an outside group and the use of these objects as tools of power by those who created them can be seen at Drepung Loseling.

Joy Hendry (2005) has tackled the issue of indigenous self-representation in great detail. While acknowledging some of the problematic methods of displaying culture (such as museums or sites based primarily on consumption), her in-depth analysis of how self-representation in the form of material objects has empowered indigenous groups and given them a sense of responsibility in fashioning emblematic images is highly relevant to my study of the Tibetan Buddhist community. Drepung Loseling itself has engaged in a museum-like method of self-representation; the center recently created an exhibit of Tibetan dolls created by the monks. How has this Tibetan Buddhist community claimed responsibility for their own representation? In what ways do these representations incorporate stereotypical images or fashioning their culture as stagnant, ideas which are in turn passed on to the community members? By scrutinizing this

display critically, I engage some of Hendry's theories about the ways that groups portray a seemingly stagnant cultural identity and therefore form ideals of authenticity as viewed through the framework of material culture.

Interaction between individuals with varying backgrounds based on material culture and consumption of those materials provides the most fleshed out agenda with which to examine these encounters. This includes both the consumption of material objects and the oftentimes-coinciding consumption of identity as well (Hendrickson 1996; Silverman 2005). Parallel to the effects of globalization, mass consumption practices have drastically altered the way that people interact around the world, and a localized interaction between individuals with divergent backgrounds is no exception. Although consumption is not an inherent aspect of Buddhism, it is interesting in this case as it forms a "bridge" between American culture, in this case, and a form of Buddhism that has been exported to the West. Because interactions between community members at the center and Tibetan Buddhist values and ideals often take the shape of consumer activities, I examine the ways in which material culture is an important component of the way people negotiate what they regard as their own cultural values (Reynolds 1987). It is important to remember that these material objects are not "independent of the interests and tastes of those who perceive them" (Bourdieu 1984: 442), in this case the community members, but that in fact that consumers help to shape the product's and thereby the perceived "culture" of the group's identity as well.

Consumption across cultural boundaries can often be seen as the consuming of an identity. This can be accomplished by consuming household goods such as a certain style of furniture (Löfgren 1994) or a specific type of cuisine (Ho 2005). Through consumption of certain products that are associated with a stereotypical ethnic or cultural identity, consumers may attempt to

shape their own personal identity; indeed, it is understood that these commodities do have “social potential” in negotiating identity (Appadurai 1986). This concept mirrors Pierre Bourdieu’s (1984) discussion of taste as indicative of social class, but extends beyond class distinctions to ideological and ethnic boundaries. The question then becomes to what extent can we actually become a member of that group through appropriation of aspects of that group’s material culture. Because an important part of the Tibetan Buddhist experience at the Drepung Loseling Center rests on the exchange of money for Tibetan Buddhist instruction or goods, considering how this exchange may affect cultural identity formation is extremely important. Consumption of material culture also generates questions concerning how individuals participating in this interaction evaluate material goods as “authentic” pieces of “culture” that they can purchase and thus become more a part of that “culture.”

2.4 Authenticity and Consumption

We can explore this issue further by examining the various ways that people consume objects that they consider to be “native” and “authentic” (Hendrickson 1996). The concept of authenticity has shifted over the last few decades from something obtainable and genuine to something that does not exist in the ways we previously believed (Bruner 2001). While individuals may search for “authenticity” among groups of people, these notions of authenticity are often merely assemblages of Westerners (Handler 1986), used to attract tourists or co-opted to gain support for a cause (Martin 1993). Hendrickson’s (1996) discussion of Guatemalan goods for sale in mail order catalogues highlights the importance of authenticity and originality for those consuming transnationally. By scrutinizing Western consumers, she notes the extent to which advertising for these foreign products proclaims their “native” origins, the “rural” importance,

and other characteristics that place the goods outside the realm of industrializing and mass consumerism, thus making them more attractive to buyers.

Debates about authenticity play out in other interactions as well. Early colonialist encounters with the “other” mirrored those of the modern day mail-order catalogue whereby Western individuals searched for “authentic” representations of the other (Price and Price 1995). Globalization and the flows of individuals and information have contributed to a situation whereby peoples once largely isolated from Western influence must now find ways to come to terms with and perhaps exploit the situation (Appadurai 1996; Colloredo-Mansfeld 1999; Crain 1996; Hendrickson, 1996). An increase in tourism in some of these areas has created situations whereby one group trying to economically benefit from globalization has been forced to conform to Western or dominant cultural stereotypes in order to please tourists. This idea falls under what Appadurai (1998) called “ethnoscapes.” Appadurai discusses the ways that, through the effects of globalization and increased migration, “group identities” are now more difficult to define. Instead, he argues, what was previously seen as spatially bounded cultural blocks are now characterized as amorphous and interactive “cultural flows.” These flows are in turn dominated by questions of representation of identity.

For example, Mary Crain (1996) discusses the ways in which native Indians in Ecuador self-fashion or self-essentialize in order to reflect the tourist’s view of what the “other” should be. Sidney Kasfir’s (2006) look at natives on the Swahili coast follows a very similar path: although indigenous groups there may lead very “Westernized” lives, economic need and competition has led many to don more traditional dress during the day in an attempt to sell a native identity to the tourists. In this way, the indigenous groups present very static representations of a necessarily fluid culture in order to benefit economically. But we should not assume all tour-

ist/native encounters are negative or detrimental. These transnational and highly consumer-based encounters can also be empowering. By taking control of one's group's representation, tourism can become an agent for social change (Ooi 2002) or the challenging of social stereotypes (Bunten 2008). Although a certain degree of marketing one's identity may be necessary in terms of gaining political or financial support, we must also allow ourselves to see the political advantages and resistance that this allows for.

2.5 New Age Movements

The study of New Age movements often encompasses analyses of authenticity, materialism and consumption, in addition to the apparent elements of spirituality. Although Tibetan Buddhism may not fall completely or perfectly within the definition of a New Age movement, a study of literature on the subject of New Age groups and characteristics within the West can shed some light on some elements surrounding the spread, adoption and appropriation of Tibetan Buddhism in the United States.

Wouter Hanegraaff (1996) defines "New Age" as the "ideas and practices regarded as alternative *vis à vis* dominant cultural trends, especially if these ideas and practices seem to be concerned with 'spirituality'" (1). Under this definition, Tibetan Buddhism shares many characteristics with New Age movements. It is obviously not a mainstream spirituality in the West, and it most certainly concerns spirituality. But this definition on its own is misleading. Hanegraaff (1996) continues to state that New Age means different things to different people, and that the boundaries of what fits and what does not are often blurry. For example, while some scholars describe New Age movements as beginning in the 1960s and focusing on rebellion (Hanegraaf 1996), others such as Ruth Tucker (1989) argue that New Age movements consist

1996), others such as Ruth Tucker (1989) argue that New Age movements consist largely of middle-class women who have the financial means and for whom participation is seen as respectable.

In general, scholars do agree that the New Age movement is “largely a reaction to the dominant, rational and materialistic worldview of Western culture” (Kelsey 1993: 35). Oftentimes New Age groups see the world as heading towards a “deadly crisis” (Prince and Riches 2000), the only chance of survival being a rejection of materialism and the capitalistic and imperialistic paradigms that have created this state. The appropriation of Tibetan Buddhism by members of the Drepung Loseling center oftentimes appeared to mirror these definitive aspects of New Age movements. Linda, one of my interviewees, told me that she believed there was something inherently wrong with the world, and that Tibetan Buddhist “culture” appeared to her to contain certain characteristics capable of remedying the situation. In addition, many of the teachings that I encountered embraced the same “potential for world harmony, societal betterment, human happiness, self-actualization, and inner peace” that characterize almost all New Age movements defined as such (Tucker 1989: 319).

2.6 Orientalism

Tourism as well as much interchange across various political, social and ethnic boundaries has been fundamentally impacted by the contemporary debate about orientalism, and it is therefore important to address contemporary discussions of orientalism. A widespread debate on the subject began with Edward Said’s *Orientalism* (1978). Although issues of power and representation had been present long before this book, *Orientalism*’s critique of Western academic’s research on the East struck a cord across disciplines and sparked debate on the authenticity of

representation and the authority to do so. Said argued that Western academics and in fact all writers had exoticized the Orient. Rather than a truly existing place, the Orient came to represent the imagined product of Western (mostly English and French) stereotypes about the “other”. Through his book and later writings, Said (1978; 1985) questions the influence of hegemonic and colonialist power on writers during this time and implies that any discussion of the “other” in any context is tinged with relationships of power and hierarchy.

Since its publication, numerous scholars have come forward to either support or attack Said’s *Orientalism*. Some academics have accused Said of being too quick to pass judgment, asserting that we need theoretical and cultural categories in order to do research; so long as we recognize our frameworks as our own inventions, the danger in cross-cultural research is small (O’Hanlon and Washbrook 1992). Others have challenged theories of Orientalism as unfounded, highlighting Said’s dismissal of agency of Orientals and extreme use of cultural relativism (Sax 1998). While his critiques of Said’s concepts are not without merit, William Sax’s (1998) argument that it is in fact human nature, and therefore unavoidable, to focus on differences between groups of people does not adequately address the power dynamics and ramifications of discourses based on difference.

Said’s most important contribution, within the framework of this research, involve questions of power. Knowledge should be examined as a discourse of power rather than unquestionable truths (Foucault 1980). Like post-colonialist and feminist discourses, orientalism should serve as a jumping off point for a critical examination of colonial and neo-colonial hegemonic boundaries (Prakash 1995). In situations such as that at the Tibetan Buddhist center where perceived representations of “cultural” or “spiritual” oftentimes essentialize these groups, it is important for me as a researcher to acknowledge the politics of power at play. Said’s contribution

should not be to totally undermine all Western writers approaching topics involving non-Westerners, but to encourage discussions about cultural representation as contestable (Clifford and Marcus 1986) as well as debates on who has the authority to speak for the “other” (Clifford 1988).

3 METHODS

Buddhism has always aroused interest and curiosity in me. After I came across the Drepung Loseling center and began spending time there, I found myself intrigued beyond the scope of the spiritual values of Buddhism. Throughout my attendance and participation, I became increasingly aware of some of the ways in which Buddhist ideals differed greatly from my own narrative, a narrative influenced predominantly by some generalized Western beliefs and norms. A development of this interest led me to focus my graduate thesis research on interactions across deviating narratives, the same sorts of interactions that any individual would experience firsthand when and if they decided to enter in to the community at the center and seek more knowledge about Buddhism.

My anthropological gamble on the ethnographic field site turned out well. Drepung Loseling is a teaching oriented center, and as such, it provides a largely obstacle free environment for learning. Drepung Loseling is therefore not only a hub for Tibetan Buddhism in Atlanta, but also a physical borderland depicting traditional Tibetan architecture in an urban American setting. The center is surrounded by middle-class housing, forming a stark contrast between the bungalow style homes and the ornate and colorful decorations of the building. Although there are many Buddhist centers scattered around Atlanta and around the United States, each is different not only because of its unique set of teachings, but also due to the area that surrounds it. My goal is to study this unique set of interactions across contested social, cultural, spiritual and material lines.

As I previously stated, Drepung Loseling is a very open institution. Geshe Lobsang Tenzin was sent by His Holiness the Dalai Lama to study at Emory University and guide the development of the center. The goal was to educate Americans about Tibetan Buddhism, specifically

the Gelug School, of which the Dalai Lama is the head. The center cooperates with Emory University on a number of activities and programs throughout the year that inform the general public on various facets of Tibetan life and spirituality. Because of the center's academic inclinations and general openness, I had an abundance of access to the space and people, many of whom were eager to share their experiences and knowledge. In addition to openness, the physical place of the center is visually rich in that the founders and directors have attempted to make the center appear as much like the Drepung Loseling Monastery in India as possible. The result is a space conducive to many ethnographic methods. My research involved participant observation, interviews, rapport building, detailed visual observation, and reflexivity. I will discuss each these methods – their strengths, weaknesses and contributions – in detail below.

3.1 Building Rapport

In addition to being a cultural and spiritual center, the Drepung Loseling center is also a social community. Many of the long-time members know each other well, and small groups formed in the foyer of the building after talks and meditation to discuss their week or make plans to go grab a bite to eat. Because of the importance of the center as a social gathering space, I believe that building relationships with the members as I entered into their community was a method of extreme value to my research. Time spent at the field site was not only important to gathering information and knowledge, but it also contributed to forming relationships and friendships with many of the members. During the course of about five months, I established personal relationships with some of the employees at Drepung Loseling as well as the members whom I interviewed. These relationships I formed provided me with more individuals to interview and more access to knowledge about the way things happen at the center. As I came to know one

person, they oftentimes introduced me to other people in their social circle at the center, and I was therefore able to meet more members who I could interview.

The establishment of good relationships with the people I observed and learned from was obvious good ethnographic practice in addition to the associated social aspects. The design of my research necessitated fully comprehending all aspects of the individual's experience at Drepung Loseling, and this includes the formation of bonds and friendships that many members experience during their time at the center. Because I built my own relationships with other members, I gained insight into how the space operated as a social gathering spot. I was also creating a situation where I would be given more access to people and information. For example, the more often members saw me around the center, the more open they were to having discussions with me. As a member I was offered access to the center's library and other "members only" events. While I did gain greater access to information necessary for my research, I do not want to discount the personal enrichment that this process also provided. While those that I interviewed and interacted with were useful in terms of my academic understanding of the site, each of those people I talked to significantly enhanced my personal experience with Tibetan Buddhism and with Drepung Loseling.

As previously stated, this research focuses on non-Tibetan community members of Drepung Loseling rather than newcomers or staff. In my discussion of interviewees and members, I have attempted to avoid the dichotomy of "Americans" and "Tibetans" because some of the members of the center are not American (including one of my interviewees). Some are Asian, Indian or European. Although most of those attending classes, meditation and talks on a regular basis were white Americans, I do not wish to imply that the community at Drepung Loseling is a homogenous group. In fact, the community is rather ethnically diverse. But because of the man-

ner in which I met people and the “snowball” strategy I used to find potential interviewees, almost all of the people whose voices are heard in this research are in fact white Americans. Therefore, this research does not capture the total picture of the Drepung Loseling community, but rather a specific set of people who have formed their own community within a community and who opened up to me for the purposes of this research.

Many of the members of the Drepung Loseling center are older, with average ages ranging from mid-forties to late sixties. From what I learned about each individual through our discussions at the center’s library and nearby coffee shops, there are a few reasons for this particular age stratification. First of all, many of the classes and events at the center cost a modest amount of money. For a young professional or student without many resources, participating fully may be out of the question simply because of a lack of monetary ability. I know for myself, sometimes the cost of programs served as a barrier for my participation. In addition (and perhaps more importantly), the “spiritual journey” that many members briefly alluded to during our interviews appears to be the result of a lifelong search for spirituality or a way in which they dealt with the stresses of life’s professional and personal problems. Members often related a history of conflict or unhappiness with their previous personal situation, feelings that eventually led them to search for some kind of remedy. Members, therefore, often represented Tibetan Buddhism as a sort of endgame, what they “found” after half a lifetime of struggle and discord. And perhaps for this reason, when some of these members come across a younger practitioner (such as my interviewee Jason^{vi}) they jokingly call him or her a “prophet”, amazed at how mature they are to have found Buddhism at such an early age.

My focus on these longstanding community members was a practical decision. I had planned (and hoped!) to interview newcomers to the center in order to better understand a per-

son's first impressions of the space and the teachings as part of the entire experience, but approaching and talking with these individuals proved to be difficult. While longstanding members often socialized before and after the events, those who appeared unfamiliar with the center and whom I had not often seen before came and went fairly quickly. As such, there was not much of an opportunity to gain insight into a person's first impressions beyond my own. Although I asked my interviewees to share with me their story of coming to Drepung Loseling, many focused on their experience as a "spiritual journey" rather than their first impressions of the actual space or of the teachings. I had to rely largely on my own first impressions and was not able to address the issue of first encounters at length. Therefore, much of the information contained in this research centers on the continuing negotiation of meaning by the members rather than their initial interaction.

3.2 Participant Observation

As an organization that is generally open to the public, participating in and observing the various cultural and spiritual activities that took place at Drepung Loseling was a nearly effortless endeavor. For example, every Tuesday there is an evening talk on some aspect of Tibetan Buddhist philosophy such as Eight Point Mind Training. An hour-long meditation class on Sunday, which is less philosophically grounded, allows for newcomers and longtime practitioners alike to learn about meditation as a "tool." During these classes, a visiting monk or the spiritual director spends half an hour or more explaining the benefits and how to perform meditation. Fifteen minutes of guided meditation and then time for questions follows. I attended both the Tuesday night talks and the Sunday morning meditations on a regular basis. In addition, I made it a point to participate in any additional public classes or lectures. These include a beginner class on

Tibetan language, addresses on the subject of Buddhist views on depression, and discussions about Tibetan astrology and diet. At the time of writing, I have just completed a five month long foundation class, during which I learned about the history of Tibetan Buddhism as well as the many aspects of the practice.

During these occasions, I met and came to know many of the regular attendees and members of the center. My regular participation as an interested individual brought me closer to the subject matter and the people whom I studied. This regularity contributed to fairly unobstructed rapport building, which I will discuss more in-depth below. Participation also led to an ease of observation. Because the members saw me frequently around the center, my presence was more accepted. When I introduced myself to people after meditation or during some of my classes, they had already become somewhat comfortable with my presence as a participant just like themselves. Observation became less obtrusive in this way, if it ever was. In fact, so many newcomers pass through the doors on a weekly basis that community members are quite used to answering questions and sharing their knowledge. Therefore, approaching these individuals and discussing my research was not a great challenge.

Making use of participant observation techniques supplied me with an opportunity not only to observe the ways that people with varying levels of knowledge participated in and reacted to the activities, but I was also able to experience these activities and events for myself. Simply being present in the physical space exposed me to the striking visual aspects that play a part in a Drepung Loseling community member's habitual experience. Hearing the teachings and the manner in which the monk speaking to the group approached the subjects provided me with first-hand knowledge as to how cultural and spiritual ideas are conveyed to community members. For example, in hearing the teachings and the various concepts employed in their explanation, I

discovered the ways in which the teachers create implicit connections between culture and spirituality and the role of materialism. The community members easily perceive these messages, as I noticed in my discussions with them, and the concepts became a foundational aspect of their experience and knowledge of Tibetan Buddhism.

3.3 Interviews

In order to gather information from individuals involved with Drepung Loseling, I conducted a series of interviews during the length of my research. My intention was to interview a very large number of people, both on the side of the non-Tibetan community members and the Tibetan center administrators and employees. But as my interviews progressed, I realized that the amount of knowledge and insight coming from the non-Tibetan members whom I wanted to interview was extremely vast and materially rich. Each person had so much information to share with me about their beliefs and their experience, much more than they felt they could explain in the span of an hour-long interview. The more opportunities I had to speak with community members, the more I came to realize that their insight was the result of an extremely multi-faced and diverse understanding of Tibetan Buddhism and the Drepung Loseling center that incorporated aspects of individual history and included many themes concerning particular Buddhist teachings and issues. Therefore, I decided to restrict my research to the non-Tibetan community members and their experiences. Although I narrowed my research down to include only this group, my research still contributes to the understanding of interaction based on divergent narratives in that I am observing the ways that individuals are influenced by and create meaning within the realm of a minority or marginal discussion. The group of individuals I study are part of the dominant or majority group in this encounter, i.e. white, middle- to upper-middle class

Westerners. But they are searching for meaning and negotiating experiences through the framework of a minority group.

During the course of five months, I conducted nine interviews. Each usually lasted around one hour, although many were followed additional discussions or more informal conversations before or after center activities. All of the interviews were conducted as one-on-one, semi-formal interviews, either at the center's library or at a local coffee shop. More than half of those interviewed were long-standing members of the community. More often than not, these members had attended activities at Drepung Loseling for over two years. Each was very familiar with Buddhism and with the values of this center specifically. Some are involved in many ways with its day-to-day functioning. For example, one person with whom I spoke works at the center one day a week in addition to her regular job. Two others served as greeters or provided information to newcomers. The other people I interviewed were either newcomers or were ethnically Tibetan and served as administrators or leaders.

Due to the focus of my research, my interviewees were almost exclusively U.S. citizens who were not raised as Buddhists. While I oftentimes came prepared with a list of questions and topics to cover during our semi-formal discussions, most of the time the conversation was allowed to meander. Interviewees were free to speak about what issues or ideas they felt were most important. The result was that new topics of interest were generated. This technique produced results that I believe were more constructive than what the outcome may have been if formal interviews had been used. Because my interviewees felt free to discuss whatever came to mind or what they thought was important, I promptly learned that some of my original notions about what the Tibetan Buddhist experience was like at the center were erroneous.

Interviews provided me with a format for understanding how the information disseminated through the teachings and activities was interpreted through each individual's personal narrative. Through my questions, I learned how people related to the physical space of the center as well as the way that their experience had changed them, often profoundly, at a personal level. I used the opportunities to gauge reactions to certain aspects of their experience, such as the discourse on science or the ways materiality was interpreted. By participating in experiences myself and following up with individual interviews, I was able to grasp the ways in which notions of spirituality and culture were communicated across both divergent and overlapping individual narratives.

3.4 Visual Methods

Visual ethnographic methods also proved to be useful during my research as extremely useful anthropological tools (Ginsburg 1994; McLagan 2002; Sontag 1977). Due to the highly visual aspects of the Tibetan Buddhist community's environment and the resulting creation of a physically separate space, I utilized various visual observation methods to explore the meanings that are visually and physically embedded in the space of the center. Megan McLagan (1996 and 2002) for example has discussed at length the usefulness of visual material in communicating information and portraying a collective identity. The conscious construction of an identity of Tibetan-ness for the local community by the center's directors is obvious, if not underappreciated, at Drepung Loseling. By utilizing visual observation I was able to understand some of the issues of materialism and representations of spirituality in a physical space that came forward during my interviews.

Another way of utilizing visual ethnography outside of observation is an analysis of visual materials. What I include in this category are websites, handouts, newsletters, photographs, and material objects on display that relate to the Drepung Loseling center or its associated institutions such as Emory University. Visual materials such as these are a venue for material communication between social groups that may enhance, alter or diminish their level of interaction (Mahon 2000; McLagan 1996). These various objects make up what can sometimes be a very material experience of the center's members, despite the fact that those individuals did not often acknowledge these things as having any bearing on the attendee's spiritual experience. By examining some of these material objects, I confront the lack of discussion about the importance of material as well as to examine their purpose in creating an identity for the center and its members.

Additionally, visual ethnography portrays the material experience to the reader in ways that words cannot. An ethnographer can utilize film and photography in much the same way that note taking and participant observation provide a foundation for ethnographic description. Visual ethnographic methods may use images to incorporate somewhat neutral representation of circumstances into the anthropologist's work (Pink 2007). In addition, images communicate in ways words cannot, portraying objects or situations too complicated for the anthropologist to explain (Pink 2007). One such example is the intricate tapestries and ritual objects that adorn the Tibetan Buddhist altar. It is this visual exhibition of values and beliefs by the Drepung Loseling center that highlights its material difference from the community in which it resides, serving as one of the arenas where interfacing takes place (Kirshenblatt-Gimblett 1998). While it is understood that photography is inherently subjective and its characteristic as such should be acknowl-

edged, this trait does not necessitate discounting the method (Bourdieu 1991), and I will utilize images throughout to illustrate my points.

3.5 Reflexivity

Because my research focuses on the construction of social identities and meaning across imaginary borders, I consider my own feelings about and reactions to the Tibetan Buddhist community to be valuable in understanding how individuals create meaning. Therefore, a certain degree of reflexivity in my research is to be expected. Any and all ethnographic research is like the borderlands I discussed above: what is taken to be a “reality is instead a construct. Therefore, the ethnographer must examine his or her own situated position (Dippo and Simon 1986). My research in particular is about how individuals *construct* cultural meaning and significance. An awareness and critical examination of my background and how I have mediated my experience doing research at the Drepung Loseling center follows that line of thought. Ethnographers become part of their text, and it is important to understand what that part contributes and influences.

The time I have spent at Drepung Loseling, has influenced me beyond the scope of my academic pursuits. I have learned, in addition to the philosophy and history of Buddhism, a great deal about myself and the ways in which I interact with the world. For example, the things I have learned at Drepung Loseling have caused me to examine the ways that I relate to other people and how I choose to react to situations that may at one time have caused me pain or made me angry. Although not exactly the same, my experience shares some of the same qualities of the experiences of those whom I interviewed and observed. For example, I often wear a mala brace-

let now, and I have a small altar in my room. The learning process through which I have gone mirrors the learning process of those with whom I spoke. This familiarity allows me not only to better understand my subjects, but places me in a unique position to share my insight, as I do here, as valid ethnographic information concerning the nature of interactions between individuals from differing backgrounds.

Beyond a discussion of my own background and how it influences my research, the very nature of encounters across social, ethnic and spiritual borders necessitates a close examination of relationships of cultural power that may influence my interpretation of the situation (Dippo and Simon 1986; O'Reilly 2005). At the beginning of my research, I confronted many of my own personal misconceptions and incorrect presumptions about what Tibetan Buddhism is and what the experience would be like. For example, before my first time visiting Drepung Loseling, I had assumed that everyone would be ethnically Asian and that I would stand out like a sore thumb. To my surprise, upon entering the shrine room I discovered that almost everyone appeared to be an American. These experiences highlight the nature of these types of interactions as involving some level of preconceived notions or ignorance about the lives, beliefs or feelings of others. By examining my own bias I was able to analyze the way in which my cultural position impacted my research.

In addition, the fluidity of my own identity as I encountered various Tibetan Buddhist teachings and built relationships with others brings into focus the debate about the "native anthropologist." Kirin Narayan (1998) has addressed this notion of an insider anthropologist by critiquing the idea that an ethnographer's identity remains concrete and stable within the field. Rather, she argues, anthropologists experience "shifting identifications" (671) as they move between and within various groups in the field sites. This is something I certainly experienced as I

attempted to be both an ethnographer and a Buddhist practitioner and a friend to other community members. My navigation through various and changing identities in the space of the center highlights the ways in which both the ethnographer's as well as the community's that he or she is studying identities are fluid and should not be oversimplified or neglected.

4 BODY

“Peace comes from within. Do not seek it without.”

-The Buddha

4.1 The Body and Buddhism

In Buddhism, the different parts of a person’s being represent different aspects of the faith, as well as literal parts of our experience with the world. The body, as one of these parts, has many meanings. It is what grounds us in the world, yet the body has conflicting characteristics that we must struggle with, whether we are Buddhist or not. On the one hand, our body allows us to live in and participate in the world. For this reason we should take good care of it. On the other hand, our body represents the prolongation of *samsara*, which is the continuing cycle of suffering through death and rebirth. Because our bodies are constantly changing, they generate suffering.

Tibetan Buddhism itself has its own metaphorical body. The cultural aspects of the spiritual path are what tie it to the earth and its physical existence in the form of material objects, buildings and so on. Spiritual elements both address the physical characteristics and simultaneously seek to transcend them. Buddhism is founded on the idea that we can end our suffering through the end of rebirth and existence in the material world. Therefore, the spiritual path, like the body, is made up of both the tools to end suffering and the physical aspects that ground the experience to the material world that is a source of suffering. In this way I relate the whole of the Tibetan Buddhist experience, both cultural and spiritual, to the Buddhist notion of the body.

The experience of these non-Tibetan individuals with Tibetan Buddhism appears to me to share many parallels with the Buddhist conceptualization of one’s own body. In much the same way as a person finds meaning through their experience with their own bodies, its weaknesses

and the strengths, so too must the individuals I interviewed find meaning within the interplay between culture and spirituality that plays out at the Drepung Loseling center. This chapter centers on the relationship between these two aspects of Tibetan Buddhism as perceived by non-native members of the community. It examines the way that the members of the center describe how culture and spirituality play a part in their experience, how they feel about each portion, and how they find meaning from both parts despite a perceived attempt to separate them.

This chapter will also address the more physically grounded aspects of the center. Besides the obvious correlation between the body and the center as physical entities, the material aspects of the experience appear to present another form of conflict for the community member. Within Buddhism in the West, the discourse on materialism and the role of the physical world in spirituality is at times difficult to understand. Often the Western members of the center seem to reject all elements of a material experience as less meaningful or unimportant, and it appears that this rejection of all things physical may also correspond to the unease and hesitancy towards what they perceive to be Tibetan Buddhist “culture”.

4.2 The Space

Drepung Loseling is nestled between a small, single-family home on one side and a newer neighborhood filled with much larger houses on the other. The road it faces has a constant flow of traffic, but remains mostly quiet. Mature trees tower over the road and the houses in the neighborhood. There is a park with a baseball field at the end of the gravel road running parallel to the center that serves as parking for crowded events. The building in which the Drepung Loseling community now resides was once a small church. It had off-white exterior walls and a

brown roof, and its previous coloring allowed the building to blend in with the surrounding homes. Today the building has whitewashed walls. Two large, impressive double doors on either side of the façade face the street. They are painted, like the trim of the building, bright red with complex patterns of blue and gold. Tibetan prayer flags, which are attached to a pole that is situated near the sidewalk and road, wave chaotically in the wind. The concrete walkway leading from the parking lot is adorned with white outlines of various Tibetan Buddhist symbols.

The lot on which Drepung Loseling sits is void of the tall pine trees that crowd the lots that surround the center. Instead, there is a large front yard of manicured grass. It is an open space in the suburban clutter that surrounds it. The back of the lot dips down to reveal a second floor of the building. The parking lot has room for twenty cars at most, and on days when a prestigious scholar or lama visit, the SUVs and hybrid cars spill on to the field that extends past the parking lot to the back of the lot. On certain special occasions such as the annual festival or the celebration of His Holiness the Dalai Lama's birthday, this grass is used as a soccer field for a game of lay persons versus the monks or to set up a large, open, white tent under which attendees can enjoy various dumplings and stir fries that the monks have cooked.

Upon walking through the front door of the center, which is on the far side of the front of the building, away from the parking lot, one enters into a foyer that is almost always bathed in light. Skylights allow natural sunlight to pour in. The floor is natural colored tile. On the left there is a folding table covered with a maroon tablecloth on which various brochures and leaflets are laid out for visitors to pick up. There are stacks of pink or baby blue office paper with the monthly calendar printed on them. A few yellow pages have photographs of teenage boys taped above printed information on how you can sponsor a monk at the Drepung Loseling Monastery in India. Displayed on the wall opposite this table is a list of sponsors who have given varying

levels of donations in order to create a “Little Tibet” in Atlanta. These donations were used to pay for sound equipment or flooring when the center was converted from a church.

To the right, eight or nine glass display cases filled with colorful handmade dolls depict the assorted cultural groups of Tibet. Some are farmers with their animals. Other dolls are modeled after Tibetan royalty and wear elaborate and lavish clothing. Some are monks, sitting or standing in different types of saffron colored robes. At the other end of the entrance there is a small alcove with built-in wooden shelves where visitors must leave their shoes in order to enter the shrine room, which is on the left. The room is large, with vaulted ceilings and exposed wooden beams. On any given day padded folding chairs are set up in three sections facing the altar. Directly in front of the folding chairs are traditional meditation cushions with small puja



Figure 2: Altar room at the Drepung Loseling center.

tables in front of each one. The scent of incense fills the room.

At the head of the shrine room is an enormous altar with many different Buddha statues and various ritual objects. The Buddhas are seated and cross-

legged, shining bronze and detailed with different colors of paint. A framed photograph of the Dalai Lama has been placed on the left, the right side of the Buddhas. Oftentimes the butter lamps situated in front of the statues have candles in them burning brightly. There are three main Buddhas on the altar, and in front of the two smaller ones are offerings of cookies and crackers or sometimes fruit and milk. Along the top of the wall are tapestries depicting scenes

with the various Buddhas such as the Green Tara or Avalokiteshvara (the Buddha of compassion). On the sides of the shrine room, in between the large windows that let light in, is a painting of the Dalai Lama and a beautiful thangka.

As one can see from the above descriptions, the physical space of Drepung Loseling is very visually complex and remarkable. Throughout the span of my research, I had the opportunity to take some of my friends along with me to meditation. Most of the time they remained quiet, glancing around at the artwork, reading material and building details. It is only after we leave the center that they begin to tell me how striking the space was, how different it looks from what they thought and what they see in their everyday life. While the teachings of the monks explicitly elucidate the drawbacks of attachment to material objects, the material and physical space of the center contributes to the formation of a Tibetan Buddhist space and the experience, a cultural borderland. But this space is not only experienced as a material reality. Rather, it is multi-dimensional, and its meaning and identity are negotiated not only in terms of the material objects that fill it, but also by the teachings and individuals who bring more meaning.

One afternoon, I sat in the center's library after the morning meditation with Jerry, a member in his late forties who often volunteers to help direct newcomers during Sunday morning meditation. When asked about the physical space of the center, Jerry told me: "Now that I understand some of the ideas of Buddhism a little better, I understand that the symbols and pictures have meaning." This statement was characteristic of many of Jerry's responses. He appeared to be very rational and thorough in his consideration of aspects of Tibetan Buddhism. Lucy, who also joined me one day in the library, also expressed similar opinions about the physical space of the center. She explained that she has recently come "to understand that all the sounds and letters have a deep spiritual meaning and incorporate a lot of symbolism." For her, the physical space of

the center was a “way for Tibetans to express that everything can be sacred.” Although Jerry and Lucy were the only interviewees to explicitly acknowledge the importance of the center’s architecture and physical appearance, these aspects are undoubtedly important.

As groups of individuals, either ethnic, political or social, become deterritorialized, whether due to factors of globalization or war, they are often forced to create a new “homeland” for themselves (Appadurai 1996). This sort of construction occurs at the Drepung Loseling center, as both Tibetans and non-Tibetans fashion discourse on what it means to be “Tibetan”. One result is the creation of a physical space that encompasses meaning for all involved. This “meaning”, at least on the side of the ethnic Tibetans, has been captured and explained by anthropologists such as Robert Paul (1976), who describes the ways in which Buddhist temples and *sherpas* are exterior symbols of interior or inner Buddhist beliefs. Paul states that the symbols and architecture of these physical spaces are meant to pass on wisdom and make inner experiences known in the physical world. Therefore, the physical space of the center is both material culture itself as well as manifestation of inner experiences, symbols and knowledge.

4.3 Tibetan Buddhist “Culture”

Definitions of culture are subjective (Borofsky 2001), not excepting those formed by community members at my field site. Each person with which I spoke mentioned Tibetan or Tibetan Buddhist culture as a negotiated aspect of his or her experience. And although each person’s interpretation differed and appeared to mean various things, their creation of a definition of what Tibetan Buddhist culture is was essential to how they made meaning from their experience. Therefore, culture in this instance encompasses *perceived* ideas and values. For example, many

of my cultural informants discussed the warmth and friendliness they saw in the Tibetan monks whom they came across at Drepung Loseling. Jerry and myself discussed during our interview how pleased we have been to see some of the visiting monks smiling and waving at us, even if we cannot communicate through language. For the community members, these positive personality characteristics became an identifiable trait of Tibetan culture as a whole despite their interactions being mostly limited to the space of the center.

While it may be tempting to assume that any observed characteristics are representative of a “culture” as a fixed idea, I regard the Drepung Loseling center as a space where various discourses and processes create fluid and mediated identities. These identities are “the structures of meaning through which men [sic] give shape to their experience” (Geertz 1973: 312). Instead of portraying a stagnant and traditionally bounded culture, Drepung Loseling represents the ways in which a constant meshing of individuals from various backgrounds occurs: what they keep, what they dismiss, and what they change generate cultural and spiritual discourse. But defining the space from a purely objective and outsider viewpoint is counterproductive. During my time spent studying the space of the Drepung Loseling center, I was both a participant and an observer. Because my exposure to this place predated my decision to use it as my field site for my master’s thesis, I saw the same things that others do when they come to Drepung from the standpoint of an interested individual rather than an inquisitive anthropologist. As a participant, I noticed the rituals that were carried out by the monks before certain events. I scrutinized the exhibition of handmade Tibetan dolls in the gallery of the center with the same appreciation and wonderment as many of the other visitors. And so before I came to see the space from the standpoint of an interaction between different groups striving to make meaning, I instead saw it (somewhat na-

ively) as an “authentic” representation of what it meant to be Tibetan, with all its intricate tapestries, great Buddhist statues and delicate dolls.

It is this tendency to define Tibetan-ness from the extent of a limited experience based on spirituality that I experienced for myself and then began to question. The same types of encounters frame the experience of visitors and members. For example, in the same ways that Jerry and I had discussed, Doug also told me that he was struck by the ways that the monks at the center were always smiling and seemed so happy. Doug, a quiet man in his late fifties, was first drawn to Tibetan art, and further pulled in by its history. During our talk in the library of the center, he told me: “I try to get the background in to Tibetan Buddhism, and there are things that show it’s not a perfectly enlightened society. There are still problems.” Despite his critiques and his recognition that his experience with Tibetans is limited, he confessed that the “warm” and “genuine” qualities he perceived in the monks has come to characterize all Tibetans for him. These same thoughts had occurred to me during the time I spent at the center. By allowing a degree of reflexivity in this project, I was able to include my own firsthand thoughts and encounters as an acceptable ethnographic process. In doing so, I came to better understand the complexities in defining “culture” and the complicated nature of identity. This complication accentuates the complexity involved in forming ideas and notions of “culture” in a situation typified by constant and ongoing exchange and interaction.

4.4 Separating Culture and Spirituality

At the beginning of weekly or special events, a community member will often stand in front of the group that has gathered to read Drepung Loseling’s mission statement. One part of

the mission is as follows: “To help preserve the endangered Tibetan culture, which today leads a fragile existence in the exiled refugee communities of India and Nepal.” This is one of the few times that anyone discusses the conflict with the People’s Republic of China mentioned, albeit indirectly. But what is more interesting about this statement is that it brings notions of a Tibetan Buddhism “culture” to the forefront.

Throughout my interviews, one of the questions I asked was how each person felt about the cultural aspects of their experience and the promotion of Tibetan Buddhist culture at the center. Many of the responses I received highlighted a shared sentiment of not being or feeling ethnically or culturally Tibetan and not wanting to try and be so. When I asked Doug how he perceived Tibetan Buddhist “culture”, he responded that although “some aspects are easy to accommodate” and he tries to stay open minded, other things that he perceived to be part of the “culture” such as the belief in spirits produced some skepticism on his part. This discussion highlights an important debate about Tibetan Buddhism, and in fact all Buddhism, in the West: can Westerners be Buddhists? And to detail this debate at Drepung Loseling, what exactly do you have to do to truly be considered a Tibetan Buddhist?

Ann Frechette (2002) cites the confusion and frustration that some Tibetans feel towards attempts by non-Tibetans to imitate rather than venerate the practices and culture of Tibetan Buddhism. This frustration is indicative of the processes that occur at Buddhist centers in the West whereby non-Tibetans select what aspects of the culture and spirituality to adopt and which to leave behind. For some Tibetans, it appears that Westerners are “outsiders”. Rather than accepting Tibetan Buddhism in its totality, these outsiders are perceived to be corrupting the spirituality through appropriation or applying himself or herself only superficially to understanding it. But individuals on both sides feel that anxiety. Many non-native believers struggle to come to

terms with what it means for their identity to be a Tibetan Buddhist. While many Tibetans may wish to preserve what they consider to be culturally authentic aspects of their spirituality and consequently dislike what they perceive to be meddling by non-natives, Westerners must endeavor to merge their own cultural and spiritual background with one that is simply not part of the mainstream.

For many of the community members at the Drepung Loseling center, this struggle has meant embracing the spiritual aspects of Tibetan Buddhism that they perceive to be commensurate with Western ideas of science and rationality (which will be discussed in the mind chapter). What this has sometimes meant is an emphasis on the spiritual and a rejection or ignorance of the cultural aspects. For example, Doug stated that he concentrated on aspects of what he learned at Drepung Loseling that he could “get behind on a rational and emotional level.” Other than that, he had no desire to become Tibetan, simply to “decrease suffering and increase happiness.” But other members like Lucy embraced Tibetan “culture,” seeing it as a far superior alternative to the “rampant materialism” and focus on sex and drugs that she perceived as an inherent problem in her own society. She told me during our interview in the library one Sunday afternoon: “The more you know about the spiritual side [of Tibetan Buddhism], the more you care about the Tibetan side.” Lucy, a petite woman in her sixties who had also been drawn to Tibetan Buddhism through its art and chanting, had very strong opinions about Tibetan Buddhism and her own society. Having been through some challenging medical and personal situations in her life, she had become resolved to learn what she could, and practicing Buddhism had become an important part of her life after retirement. Rather than viewing Tibetan cultural beliefs and ideals as secondary to the spiritual aspects, Lucy embraced these, and therefore illustrated the various ways that

non-Tibetan members of the center find meaning in and define what they believe Tibetan Buddhist “culture” is.

Another very interesting part of the adoption of Tibetan Buddhism in the West and the attempt to separate the spiritual from the culture is the almost opposite way that Buddhism factors in to daily life throughout much of East Asia. What Jeffrey Paine (2004: 213), a Buddhist writer, calls a “new frontier not only for American practitioners but also for Buddhism itself” is the incorporation of spiritual practice in to daily life. In much of East Asia, Buddhist principles such as compassion permeate many aspects of daily life, but spiritual practice itself is largely left by the wayside. I observed this phenomenon myself during an event at Drepung Loseling to commemorate the Dalai Lama’s birthday. While the non-Tibetan attendees sat in quiet admiration of the ritual taking place, ethnic Tibetans ambled in late and chatted quietly to themselves. During a silent moment of meditation, one Tibetan woman went so far as to answer her cell phone, move to the back of the room, and carry on a conversation in whispers.

This example is another illustration of the differing ways that Tibetan Buddhism is conceived of and deciphered by a native and non-native participant. While some rituals or events may be important to non-Tibetan members who have only come to know Tibetan Buddhism later on in life, for those who were raised as such, the experiences may mean quite different things and importance may be placed on different aspects of those same experiences. At the Drepung Loseling center, I observed quite often what appeared to be misapprehension or disconnect in understanding. While the center’s mission statement clearly put forth the notion of Drepung Loseling as a cultural refuge or haven, many of the members did not consider this facet as integral or sometimes even desirable to their experience. But the misunderstanding goes both ways. Jessica, one of my interviewees with whom I became very close, is especially concerned with the

worldly aspects of her experience at the center, including its relationship to science. As a single woman in her late forties, she has gone through a lot of “soul-searching” in an attempt to find a spiritual path that she can truly believe in. During one of our discussions at a comfortable coffee shop around the corner from the center, she relayed to me that she often perceived some confusion on the part of the monks. In her opinion, sometimes the monks did not understand the things they were discussing, such as alcoholics and drug addicts. She cautioned that the Tibetan Buddhist monks and non-Tibetan community members were “not yet connected”, and that sometimes the members “don’t take that in to account” when listening to the teachings or advice.

Misconceptions and confusion do not automatically negate the influence of Tibetan Buddhist teachings, and in fact their influence may be felt beyond the walls of the Drepung Loseling center. This aspect is highlighted in a piece of the center’s mission statement that reads: “To contribute to North American culture by providing theoretical knowledge and practical training in Tibetan Buddhist scholarly traditions for Western students, scholars and the general public...” I addressed the issue of what Tibetan Buddhism can and does contribute to Western or American culture at large with those people who I interviewed.

4.5 Materiality

One of the first things I noticed during the times I attended Tuesday night talks or Sunday meditations was the pervasive discussion of the material objects that surround us as part of our existence. The teaching monk, in his broken English, often explains that a large house and a nice car will not and cannot bring you inner peace and happiness. In fact, attachment and grasping to hold on to these objects will only bring you suffering. These teachings are based on what is con-

sidered the true reality of the world, that all things, all feelings and all beings are impermanent. A flower cannot stay beautiful forever; one day it will wilt and brown. In each object's creation is carried the seeds of its own end. Simply by being born we create a situation where one day we will die.

The message of these teachings is that attachment to material objects, because of the constantly changing nature of those objects, leads to suffering. Rejection of materialism, which is considered to be so omnipresent in American society by both the members and the monks, is one of the ways that lessons of Tibetan Buddhist spirituality make their way in to the personal narratives of the non-Tibetan members of Drepung Loseling. When the topic of materialism came up in my discussions with members, it was singled almost invariably as the one subject about which people had learned the most and most directly contradicted with the way they imagined and conceptualized their own cultural narrative.

One of the most noticeable and interesting results of this rejection of materialism was the way members described their experience at the center. During my interviews, I asked my subjects what they thought about the way the center looked physically, the architecture of the building and the intricacy of the altar for example. While all of the individuals acknowledged that the atmosphere was nice, each person consistently explained that the way the center looked and the objects that were here were unnecessary and not very important to their experience of Tibetan Buddhist spirituality. Sarah, for example, said that the people who came to the center were simply looking for spirituality and that "it doesn't matter what it looks like." Sarah is the volunteer coordinator for the center. While she does not attend all the weekly events, she is extremely friendly and seems to know everyone. Todd, another community member with whom I spoke at the center's library on a Tuesday evening, agreed and stated that it was the teachings that at-

tracted people, not the physical manifestations of Tibetan Buddhism. Todd, a retired physician who confessed of once having a somewhat extravagant lifestyle, was very clear in his opinion that he was not a Tibetan and did not necessary buy in to all of the ritual and hierarchy. For example, he said his only teacher was the Dalai Lama (rather than a more traditional guru). And while Jessica acknowledged that the building's appearance may entice newcomers to visit, for "long term practitioners, it is not about looks." The monk whom I interviewed echoed these sentiments. He stated that as a Tibetan, the physical appearance of the center aroused a very "close" and "familiar" feeling for him personally. But although the building design might make the experience more "real" for the community members, he agreed with the assessment that it was not necessarily important.

After analyzing these responses, I began to notice that they were separating spirituality and materialism to an extreme extent. Because of the regular teachings regarding the role of materialism in suffering, many of the members appeared to reject any and all forms of materiality, instead seemingly according the materialism of the center with the Tibetan Buddhist culture that they saw as secondary to their experience. During my discussion with one of the visiting monks, I asked him about this extreme rejection of materialism by the members with whom I had spoken. What he told me was that "materialism is not the problem. Attachment is." But he noticed that as the community members became increasingly serious practitioners, they also became increasingly uncomfortable with materialism. We cannot live in the world without relying on some objects to survive, he argued, and this differentiation was oftentimes "hard for Westerners" to understand.

Another incongruity that presented itself during the course of my research dealt with the pervasive consumption of Tibetan Buddhist objects. Although the spiritual director and visiting

monk often critiqued what they perceived as extreme materiality that characterizes “Western culture”, the attitudes described by those people whom I interviewed seemed to indicate a repudiation of material objects that was inconsistent with some of the behaviors I observed and some of the opinions expressed. For example, many of the members I talked to expressed aversion to materialism while simultaneously purchasing many ritual objects and paying for classes or seminars. Lucy, for example, during our interview exclaimed that “Western culture makes me sick,” including the “rampant materialism” involved. Yet she also mentioned the altar she had at home that was populated with ritual objects. Jessica expressed a different viewpoint, stating that you “can’t [always participate] unless you are rich, so you must choose on your own propensities.” Her comment stresses the financial burden under which some community members are placed in an effort to participate in the activities and lifestyle they associate with the center and Tibetan Buddhism.

New Age scholars have studied this unconscious contradiction as an unavoidable result of spirituality in a material world. For example, Ruth Prince and David Riches (2000) in their study of New Age communities in Glastonbury found that there to be an “uneasy marriage” between materialism and spirituality. While community members were forced to charge for their services and products in order to survive, consumers of these products often felt resentful of the associated monetary cost. As



Figure 3: Scrolls displayed during ritual ceremony at the Drepung Loseling center.

a participant in the community at Drepung Loseling, I often felt this unease myself. I found it difficult to navigate between the monetary pressures that were placed on me as a participant and the spiritual values against materialism that were espoused.

Additionally, as the members expressed to me the insignificance of the physical aspects of the center in their spiritual experience, this discussion was accompanied by a discourse of authenticity that was made possible by these same things. During my first interview with Sarah, the volunteer coordinator at Drepung Loseling, she stood up abruptly and led me to another room of the office where ten or twenty scrolls were piled up on top of a cabinet. Sarah has a spontaneous, bubbly and compulsive personality, and I came to find that these sporadic gestures or stories were not uncommon. “These are all the scrolls that will be used in the ritual,” she told me as she pointed to the rolled up papers. “The monks painted all of the Tibetan characters on these by hand using real gold leaf.” For her, this involved and painstaking process of creating the scrolls and taking them through the rituals created an air of authenticity that she believed permeated the space of the center. But this process, besides being symbolic, is also a manifestation of Tibetan Buddhist spirituality in the form of material objects. This example illustrates how community members rejected worldly materialism while inherently and automatically embracing those material aspects that made their experience more “real” for them.

5 SPEECH

“Be a light unto yourself.”

-The Buddha

5.1 Speech and Individualism

During many of the lectures and lessons at Drepung Loseling, the monk, dressed in his saffron robes and seated cross-legged in front of the prodigious altar, will discuss the ways our mental afflictions and negative emotions manifest themselves in our behavior. He will explain that no matter how many “nice colors” we put on our face or how beautiful the clothes are that we wear, all of it can become ugly if we speak in anger or from the emotions of jealousy or pride. While we may change ourselves physically to appear more pleasant, the way we interact with others more strongly determines how we are perceived than the physical aspects of our person. I have chosen individualism as the main theme to represent speech not only because I believe it is an essential aspect of the experience that is oftentimes best demonstrated through verbal communication, but also because it is highly contested in the discourse of Buddhism in the United States.

Speech is one form of our manifested emotions, both negative and positive. If we become angry with someone and use harsh words, the “nice colors” on our face can do little to persuade someone of our positive characteristics. But we can control our speech and therefore change the way we as individuals interact with and are presented to the world. Speech is not only words. It also includes “all the different signals we exchange in the form of sounds, words, gestures, and facial expressions...” (Mingyur Rinpoche 2007). All of these things are manifestations of our individuality. In addition to exemplifying our individuality, speech and all of its parts also

epitomize our distinct responsibility. According to the teachings, each person is accountable for their actions and behaviors, which are exhibited through the many aspects of speech.

For these reasons, I have chosen “speech” from the three *vajras* of body, speech and mind to represent the role of individualism and responsibility in the encounter between a community member and the Drepung Loseling center. During my interviews and even within my own experience of becoming a member, the individuality of the spiritual experience presented itself over and over again. This chapter explores the ways that non-Tibetan members of the community comprehend these notions of individuality within the Tibetan Buddhist spirituality and culture of the center. From this exploration, I infer that the perception of acceptance of a high degree of individualism at the center accounts for some of its appeal to audiences in the West and results in an increased attention to outreach and community service projects.

5.2 The Appeal

Individuality and reliance on oneself play an important part in the teachings at the Drepung Loseling center and the way the teachings are interpreted. His Holiness the Dalai Lama (1995: 153) has said, “if there is anything in my teachings that you find beneficial and useful then you should implement that in your life; if there are things that are not useful or beneficial, then just leave them aside.” This echoes what the Buddha himself told his students, that they should be “a light unto themselves” rather than simply accepting at face value all of his teachings. The resident teaching monk will often preface his advice by saying that it is up to the individual to decide what works and what doesn’t. All of these teachings connote a freedom and individuality implied in practicing Buddhism, and the member with whom I spoke did not miss this

message. For example, Doug commented that one of the reasons he attended the center so often was because of the individualism pronounced in the teachings. In fact, he said, he wouldn't attend at all if the center required people to "subjugate" themselves. Lucy also agreed, stating that the teachings often emphasized individuality and personal responsibility.

It is often recognized that Westerners, and perhaps particularly Americans, are adverse to authority and hierarchy (Novick 1999). For example, Jeffery Paine (2004: 56) identifies the guru as a major "stumbling block" for Westerners, and gives examples of successful Lamas in the West who have dismissed "guru worship" as unimportant to practice in an effort to conciliate those who are wary of an "off-putting authority figure". This aversion to rigidity and hierarchy has led to a general acceptance of what Donald Lopez (2002: *ix-x*) refers to as ancient Buddhism, a Buddhism more "compatible with the ideals of the European Enlightenment." The picture of His Holiness the Dalai Lama after he fled from Tibet in 1959 morphed in to something of a much more casual and approachable leader than he had been within the country, and is another example of the way the hierarchy in Tibetan Buddhism is changing.

This differentiation between ancient and modern Buddhism, and subsequently Western and "authentic" Tibetan Buddhism is also under debate. While the increased familiarity and decreased rigidity of the Drepung Loseling center attracted many of its members, some lamas teaching in the West have been intensely criticized for their accommodation of individuality and their individualist interpretation of Buddhism (Frechette 2002). One example of this is a story that was related to me during an interview. Jason, the youngest community member I came across (in his early thirties), decided at a young age that he wanted to become a hermit. As he grew up, he changed his mind and decided to become a monk, "the only thing" he ever wanted to be. He finally found a Buddhist center in Atlanta that regularly ordained American monks and

nuns. But when it came time to take the vows involved, “They told me I had to take only ten vows. I don’t know if you know about the process, but monks generally have to take 100 vows. I wanted the tradition, and I found that at Drepung.” In addition to a difference in vows, most of the non-Asian monks and nuns who had been ordained at the center he previously attending still worked day jobs and participated only minimally in general monastic duties. At our interview at the coffee shop down the road, Jason explained to me that he found this disconcerting, and soon after he left that center and changed his plans. Now he says he no longer wants to be a monk: “It wasn’t the right expectation. Geshe Lobsang sat me down and told me to stay connected instead.” Now Jason is an elementary school teacher. This event is an example of what roles and rituals he perceived to be “authentic.” In fact, this debate about “authenticity” and its role in legitimizing Buddhist groups remains extremely important to Tibetan practitioners (Moran 2004). Despite this critique of adaptation, scholars have largely recognized that Buddhism, in all its forms, rather than manifesting itself in strict and rigid ways, tends to adapt to and converge with the cultural environment in which the spirituality comes to reside. (Verhoeven 1998:209). If we consider the complex history of Buddhism during the journey it has taken throughout the world, adaptation has always remained a core characteristic.

But if Tibetan Buddhism is to be adapted to the cultural environments it encounters, how are issues of authenticity reconciled with necessary acclimatization for those who participate? Throughout my discussions with community members, the notion of what is authentic has come up again and again, and its apparent existence is another major contributing factor in attracting people to the Drepung Loseling center. For example, Sarah, in addition to pointing out the intricate scrolls that I discussed earlier, also explained to me the ways in which the altar was set up in order to be in exact accordance with strict Tibetan guidelines on the placement of ritual objects.

To her, this strict adherence with what she considered traditional Tibetan values was important in her spiritual practice. During our interview, Doug told me that he “likes that there is a strong lineage [at Drepung Loseling] because this contributes to the authenticity of the teachings.”

If one studies the migratory history of Tibetan Buddhism, it appears that until recently the spirituality remained outside of the “modernization” processes that characterized the transformation of Buddhism in Japan for example (Hughes Seager 1999). This description gives weight and evidence to the argument by many community members with whom I spoke that Tibetan Buddhism is one, if not the most, “authentic” form of Buddhism that they can experience, especially in the United States. But in fact there are many discourses and narratives of authenticity surrounding all forms of Buddhism (Moran 2004), and the Drepung Loseling center indeed has its own particular dynamic.

5.3 Expressions of Individuality

As I observed these various expressions of spiritual beliefs by the center and the subsequent incorporation of Tibetan Buddhist aspects into the lives of the non-Tibetan members of the center, the individuality involved in choosing how to experience Tibetan Buddhism became more and more apparent. Each person highlighted, through the experiences they shared with me, the ways in which they felt able and free to sort through the many beliefs and values that were espoused and choose those that they felt best suited their particular circumstances. These discussions led me to understand that there are varying degrees of incorporation of the many aspects of Tibetan Buddhism portrayed at this particular center. While some of the members saw fit to place Free Tibet bumper stickers on their car and use a hand dyed bag of Tibetan design as their

daily purse, others integrated the spiritual aspects and material objects of Tibetan Buddhism in to their life in a much more limited way.

This ability to adjudicate for oneself what parts of the spirituality are useful and taken in proves to be an extremely important ingredient in the appeal of Tibetan Buddhism. Many of the people I interviewed were either raised in some denomination of Christianity or had encountered many different religions and spiritual experiences during the path that had led them to Drepung Loseling. One of the reasons that they continued to search and settled upon Tibetan Buddhism was the immense amount of dogma and what was considered unreasonable aspects involved in other spiritual paths. Jessica, for example, had been exposed to Christianity earlier on in life and compared some of the “tedious” and “overwhelming” aspects of Buddhism to the overwhelming amount of rules in Catholicism. Todd expressed similar opinions. He had been raised as a Baptist and found “the dogma [associated with Christianity] to be irrational.”

Although Buddhism undoubtedly has its own plethora of rituals involved in spiritual practice (Buddhism is in fact 2500 years old), non-Tibetan members of the community with whom I spoke did not feel pressured to absorb and participate in them all. For example, Jessica equated the teachings at the center to “tools” and found them to be very “practical and useful everyday.” Although she at one point “felt pressure to do tantra, the Buddha said do not do what doesn’t work.” The result is that she views her participation in terms of “what obligations can I make?” What is interesting about this discourse is that although non-Tibetan community members felt no pressure to adopt all of the rituals and beliefs in order to participate – and in fact the resident monk occasionally stated that practitioners were too attached to tradition and culture to make the teachings useful – these same traditional rituals are on what many members based their notions of “authenticity.”

During my time spent at the Drepung Loseling center, I noticed the ways in which people exhibited their spirituality, both from within the physical space of the center and indeed throughout their personal lives. Some attended every single event that was offered, from Tuesday night talks to Sunday morning meditations to each and every seminar and series. A few people volunteered to help as greeters or with more involved tasks such as planning upcoming events. Most of the people I interviewed participated in a study group outside of the center where they could discuss the *lamrim*^{vii}. Some shared their personal daily rituals of spirituality with me, including different meditations they practiced at home such as guru yoga.^{viii} Each person appeared to have a very personalized manner of expressing and practicing their distinct spirituality.

Individual spirituality was embodied in other, more material based ways as well. Some community members employed mantra malas during the recitation of certain mantras at the beginning of the Tuesday night talks. Indeed, I often wear a mala bracelet made from sandalwood myself in order to try and remember the aspects of Tibetan Buddhist that are relevant to my daily life. Other forms of the physical manifestation of practice were t-shirts that said “Free Tibet” or “My Religion is Loving Kindness” (the official volunteer shirt for the center). Colorful passport bags or hand-woven shoulder bags frequently carried notebooks used to take notes during the teachings. Outside of the walls of the center, many of the people I spoke with about their practice kept complex and ornate altars they had set-up in their homes.

5.4 Individual Agency and the Results

As a consequence of the changing nature of the world and a growing awareness of problems, be they environmental, social or political, Buddhism has become increasingly engaged.

The idea of engaged Buddhism appears to have originated in the teachings of the Vietnamese Buddhist Thich Nhat Hanh, who is widely read among the Tibetan Buddhist practitioners with whom I spoke, and is often considered part of a “new” or “modern” form of Buddhism (Freeman Yarnall 2003:287). Christopher Queen (2000: 1) defines engaged Buddhism as the utilization of Buddhist philosophy and systems of belief in order to act in the part of social betterment. While this movement is by no means limited to the West, it appears to be a much greater part of the spiritual path among Western practitioners. One example of engaged Buddhism is the Buddhist Peace Fellowship^{ix}, whose goal is to bring awareness to various social, environmental and humanitarian problems and promote initiatives for peace.

One possible explanation for this is the lack of Westerners participating in monastic life. Rather than becoming monks or nuns, many are trying to find ways to bring the lessons of the dharma to everyday life (Rothberg 1998). The emphasis placed on individual responsibility and choice throughout the teachings and the desire to incorporate Buddhism into daily life appears to have resulted in an increased interest in community service and outreach among the members of the center. Although Drepung Loseling has financial difficulties, members constantly discuss ways to provide for their community. During my time spent at the center, there was a canned food drive for the Atlanta Community Food Bank. The Drepung Loseling Educational Fund is another form of outreach whereby one can sponsor an individual monk in training at the Drepung Loseling Monastery. For many of the community members with whom I spoke with, these programs represent their spirituality’s active engagement with the world around them. Doug, an older gentleman whom I interviewed, told me that learning about Buddhism had made him “more and better concerned for other people” and for all life in general. Julia, another community member, felt the same way. She stated that “the world has a lot to gain” for Tibetan Bud-

dhism, and that “giving back is necessary.” During my research at the center, she invited me to participate in outside outreach programs that she was also a part of.

Outreach and volunteer projects also relate to the interconnectedness of the world and the similarities among people. Although the teachings emphasize the role of the individual, they also discuss at length the similarities among people and the mental sufferings they share. Relating better to others is a main message of the teachings. For me, learning how to put myself in another person’s shoes was eye-opening and had a significant impact on my personal life. What is interesting about engaged Buddhism is the connection drawn between spiritual life and social or cultural life. As was previously discussed in the “Body” portion of this thesis, many members of the Drepung Loseling center have attempted to dissect Tibetan Buddhism into the spiritual and cultural, choosing to relate much more to the spiritual aspects. For members like Jason, it was “a struggle to know which [aspects of Tibetan culture] to pick up.” In the end he “does not consider so much culturally” and “is not trying to be Tibetan.” But as some scholars have argued, in order to fully engage in the spiritual aspects of Buddhism, one must also engage in the social and humanitarian aspects of the world in which they live (Freeman Yarnall 2003:286). For Lucy, this belief that “all sentient beings need compassion” has led her to take a “different view of humanity,” believing that “everyone needs prayers.”

In order to elucidate the gift of being born a human being, the Buddha used a metaphor: a blind turtle swims under the ocean, surfacing only once every one hundred years for a breath of air. On the ocean there drifts a wooden yoke. The turtle, coming to the surface for air, pokes his head out of the water in the exact place that is the hole in the yoke. This infinitely small possibility of events was used to represent the chances of being born human, an opportunity that is as great as it is rare. As a human, equipped with the brain that we are all given, we can do great

things. This story was told to me by Lucy, who believed that one of the great qualities of the center was that it encouraged people “to reach out to sentient beings.”

MIND

“Believe nothing, no matter where you read it, or who said it, no matter if I have said it, unless it agrees with your own reason and your own common sense.”

-The Buddha

5.5 The Buddhist Mind, Science and Rationality

In his book *The Universe in a Single Atom: The Convergence of Science and Spirituality*, the Dalai Lama (2005) states that his interest in science, although he has had no formal training, concerns its ability to explain the nature of existence and to impact the lives of all living things. Remarkably, this interest has even led him to study subatomic physics and neuroscience. While these subjects may appear to be fields completely outside the realm of a spirituality or religion, the Buddhist emphasis on rationality and its continued engagement with the world makes understanding and keeping abreast of developments in modern science not only useful, but also essential. This engagement in science, among other things, also bears on the stereotype of the East as spiritual and the West as rational and scientific (and these discourses on modernity). Increased Buddhist presence in scientific experiments and discussions of current health issues demonstrate the ways in which this dichotomy is neither accurate nor appropriate.

The partnership between Buddhism and modern science is apparent even at the local level. Visitors to the Drepung Loseling center can observe the partnership in events, teachings and information they come across. For example, I have seen the surprised look on some visitors' faces when someone mentions that the center is affiliated with Emory University. In fact, Emory often-times recruits spiritual practitioners who regularly meditate for some of their scientific experiments. Emory professors also teach Tibetan Buddhist monks and nuns in India about biology and

chemistry. These collaborative efforts bridge the gap between the once accepted perception that the East is spiritual and mystical and the West is modern and rational.

But professors and monks are not the only people embracing the increased attention on science; non-Tibetan community members react positively to the partnership as well. During my interview with Doug, he told me that the scientific alliance between Drepung Loseling and Emory University was “great” and “real exciting.” He saw it not only as a form of knowledge sharing across transnational boundaries, but also as a particular process whereby the local community plays a part in “creating Western Buddhism.” Lucy agreed, telling me that scientific collaboration was “going to expand the possibilities of young Tibetans and expand their vision of the world.” While these responses indicate a belief that gap between science and spirituality continues to exist, Jessica’s discussion with me on the subject of science and Buddhism took an alternative approach. She believes that scientific truths and Buddhism are closer aligned than people may know, insisting, “I am Buddhist because of what I learned in science class. My college physics and theology classes actually pointed me in this direction.” These connections and the resulting Emory-Tibet partnership, according to Jessica, “can deepen the faith of a monk or nun and make them more effective” as well.

Drepung Loseling, as a borderland space where local discourses on science and technology and Tibetan Buddhist manifestations of values and beliefs are constantly in contact, represents a localized and marginalized space where new definitions of science, rationality and spirituality are created and consumed daily. By emphasizing rationality and actively participating in various scientific events, the Drepung Loseling center has opened up the forum of debate on all aspects of Tibetan Buddhism, especially for its members, and left the future of its identity and relationship to the American conceptions of science and rationality as fluid and unbounded.

On the subject of rationality, the messages taught here are spoken in a way that leaves decisions about incorporation of Tibetan Buddhist values up to the listener, and therefore appeal to many of the non-Tibetan member's positivistic notions of rationality. During the Sunday morning meditations, the teaching monk will often say that a person must choose their own way, be responsible for themselves, and only do those things that will eventually lead them to peace and happiness. Members like Lucy, Doug and Todd found these messages reassuring and attractive, appreciating the level of individual agency and room for freedom. Doug used the example of the Dalai Lama, stating that "he has said things that go against other or earlier people in the tradition," citing this as an example of the freedom of the individual. Lucy often interjected notions of "personal responsibility." Todd valued the ways in which he was free to "not incorporate the Tibetan part." He spoke at length about the freedom "to pick and choose," and the "very open environment where members are encouraged to do what works." Notions of rationality, such as those expressed here, and science are not only two important pieces of their experience, but they also go hand in hand.

5.6 Engaging Western Science

Recently, perhaps within the last decade or so, there appears to have been an explosion of cooperation between the East and West in the areas of science and philosophy. Having much to do with the Dalai Lama's interest in Western science and his wish to spread knowledge of Buddhist philosophy, many programs have sprung up that attempt to combine transnational approaches in the production of better science. Many of these sorts of programs have occurred at or in conjunction with the Drepung Loseling center, and they generally highlight the ways that

Western scientists and academics increasingly accept Buddhist meditation practices and theoretical notions of the mind.

One result of this explosion is Drepung Loseling's collaboration with Emory University, named the Emory-Tibet Science Initiative (ETSI). The program has led to comprehensive science education for monks and nuns, along with other meditation-focused experimental research, which I will discuss below. In a recent New York Times article, the author describes how, for one month in the spring, monks and nuns in Dharamsala, India participate in a "crash course" on subjects in science and math (Yee 2009). While the image of monks in saffron robes learning about the Big Bang theory and examining organisms through microscopes may seem atypical, this transnational collaboration is nothing new for either the Dalai Lama, nor for New Age movements in general.

In the 1930s or 1940s, Gendün Chöpel, a Tibetan historian and philosopher, began encouraging fellow Tibetan scholars to learn about and engage with "modern science" (Jinpa 2003: 71). His expressed opinion represents a rationality that exists in Tibetan Buddhist philosophy and also a debate that has dominated New Age discourse since its popularity began to rise in the West. Wouter Hanegraaf (1998) argues that New Age groups have always had a positive opinion of "modern science", but that because of their stance on materialism, the movement has had difficulty reconciling this affinity with spiritual beliefs. Perhaps because of the recent infusion of Buddhism in the West accompanied with teachings on rationality, the Drepung Loseling center has adapted to the dichotomy of Eastern spirituality and Western science by embracing cooperation and engaging in a dialogue among people with divergent backgrounds.

Non-Tibetan community members have also embraced the increasing collaboration between the center and the scientific world. For example, during our interview Jerry told me that the Emory-Tibet science initiative was “very important to both sides.” In his opinion, the program presented a great opportunity for Tibetans to learn and “let go of mythologies,” in addition to the “unique set of knowledge” that the partnership presented to Western scientists. Lucy echoed this opinion. She stated that any science collaboration would “expand the possibilities of young Tibetans” and perhaps even bring the world together. These expressed opinions imply that some aspects of orientalism remain in the minds of non-Tibetan community members concerning Tibetan beliefs, but also stress the ways in which these same members recognize the important contributions that the Tibetan study of the mind can make to science.

Another way that the Drepung Loseling community has engaged the discourse of science is by using scientific metaphors in order to explain Buddhist philosophy. Commonly, when speaking about the three jewels (the Buddha, dharma and *sangha*) specifically, the monk or spiritual teacher will relate the teachings in terms of pieces of the Western medical system. For example, the Buddha, who in Tibetan Buddhism relays all the important teachings to the practitioners, is considered to be like a Western doctor. He, having knowledge of the causes of your ailments (i.e., suffering) has prescribed something to end these causes. This medicine that the Buddha “prescribes” is the dharma, or the essential teachings of the Buddha that encapsulate the path to enlightenment. The last of the three jewels is the *sangha*, and the teacher often compares this jewel to nurses. These nurses, or fellow community members who are also interested in obtaining enlightenment, may not have as much knowledge of your ailments and the dharma as the Buddha or doctor, but they remain useful as a support system during your journey and practice.

While these comparisons would have appeared to me to be odd or “unauthentic” in accordance with my pre-anthropological judgments of culture, their place in discussions of Buddhist philosophy and spirituality are in fact characteristics of a spirituality that has adapted to the needs of its audience. As there is no single “authentic” Tibetan Buddhism, the spirituality manifested at the Drepung Loseling center has co-opted typically accepted American norms of medicine and science in order to make messages such as that of the three jewels more relatable and understandable, and in doing so still remains a valid expression of the spirituality in terms of what is perceived to be “authentic” or not.

5.7 Meditation and Western Science

In an interview with Asia Society, Geshe Lobsang Tenzin, the director of the Drepung Loseling Institute pointed out that meditation had “become so popular in the US, even within the scientific communities” (Cindy Yoon and Geshe Lobsang Tenzin, September 9th 2003, Asia Society Website). As previously stated, visitors to the center and persons interested in Buddhism in general are often first attracted by the perceived benefits and allure of meditation. Todd, one of my interviewees, went so far as to say that “Buddhism’s gift is meditation.” Although this interest began in the 1960s, meditation has remained until recently outside of the mainstream and perceived as somewhat in opposition to Western conceptions of science.

During one of the Foundation Series classes that I attended through the course of my research, Geshe Lobsang, the spiritual director of the center and also a professor at Emory University, shared with the attendees the results of an experiment conducted in 2005 at Emory that examined the ways in which compassion meditation affects depression. The experiment is de-

scribed on Emory University's website (<http://www.tibet.emory.edu/research/index.html>), and the description states "the study showed an unequivocal correlation between the practice of compassion meditation and the prevention and reduction of depression levels in students." This example is just one of many that highlight the ways in which scientists in the West are beginning to incorporate meditation into a broader, more holistic approach to medicine and the workings of the human body.

At the Drepung Loseling center, the results of this incorporation are increased popularity, and perhaps even increased acceptance of Tibetan Buddhist practices as less mystical and more practical. Geshe Lobsang often discusses the scientific benefits of meditation, especially in relation to a society that he describes as "moving faster and faster." And visiting scholars speaking about health precautions and ailments in the Tibetan medical system are receiving more and more attention. During one lecture on wind disorders that I attended, Drepung Loseling was so crowded that I had to park far down the street in the neighborhood. This increased popularity and attendance underscores the ways in which more and more non-Tibetans are accepting and in fact embracing Tibetan Buddhism in areas that were previously dominated by modern science.

Members with whom I spoke, such as Todd, stated that meditation was in fact one of, if not the main reason, that they came to the Drepung Loseling center in the first place. This acceptance and embrace of meditation somewhat mirrors the movement of yoga from India. Joseph Adler's (2004) consideration of yoga as a framework from which to see India's relationship with modernity and science sheds light on adoption of meditation practices by non-Tibetans. Adler discusses the ways in which "Modern Science" and the "West" were historically seen to be one in the same, a hegemonic system of modernity and rationality. But thanks to Swami Kuvalaya-

nanda's yoga experiments, Adler states, his hegemonic and colonialistic framework was challenged, both rejecting it and legitimizing yoga as a part of the "modern" world.

Some of the same aspects described by Adler are at play in the discussions of meditation occurring at the Drepung Loseling center. While previously shrouded in mysticism, meditation's increasing acceptance by scientists has allowed Tibetan Buddhism to become more accepted within the framework of rationality in which many of the community members with whom I spoke believed. It is no surprise that Todd, a doctor, was the interviewee most concerned with meditation and most opposed to what he perceived as "cultural" aspects of Tibetan Buddhism. Meditation has therefore become a jumping-off point from which Tibetan Buddhism can challenge Western orientalism and thus become accepted as legitimate.

5.8 Modernization

One problematic aspect of the interaction with Tibetan Buddhism, especially with science, is the notion that Buddhism has become "modernized" with its introduction to the West. Richard Hughes Seager (2004: 114), a religious historian, suggests that, since Tibetan Buddhism had remained outside the reach of the West prior to its introduction to the United States, it remained "traditional or pre-modern". As an anthropologist, I find this discourse extremely problematic. Although the depiction of Tibetan Buddhism as largely untouched by Western religious paradigms may not be fully accurate, and is in fact reflected by some of the members whom I interviewed, describing Tibetan Buddhism as pre-modern wrongly implies that Buddhism has only evolved or progressed through contact with the West.

This characterization of Tibet has shown itself in many ways through various depictions and representations in movies, books and tales. The notion of Tibet and its form of Buddhism as characteristically backwards also appears at some events and in interactions at the Drepung Loseling center. Although none of the people I interviewed ever openly described Tibetans as backwards or inferior, they did cautiously question traditional methods of healing, authority and rituals (for example, gender relations) that they saw as conflicting with Western knowledge. For example, Jessica stated that she found some Tibetan Buddhist ideas about fertility and reproduction to be disconcerting. Lucy also said that scientific knowledge would encourage Tibetans to do away with some of their “mythologies,” thus showing how the imaginary juxtaposition of the “scientific West” and the “premodern East” may be at play in the local Buddhist community as well.

The relationship that is currently being developed between Buddhist monks and nuns and Western scientific institutions also plays into a debate about Tibetan Buddhism and modernization. The Dalai Lama himself has called for Tibetan Buddhists to learn more about Western science in order to be better able to relate to the rest of the world. Discussions concerning the situation of “modern world” can also be heard during the teachings at Drepung Loseling. During one Tuesday night talk, for example, the resident monk discussed the ways in which our “modern world” continuously presents people with new dangers and sources of suffering to overcome. To address this, he suggested applying “real compassion.” Dialogues such as this often place the “modern” world and Tibetan Buddhism in opposition to one another. Buddhism is thus seen as not only a “cure” or “remedy” for the “modern” world, but also in opposition to it, producing discourses such as Jason’s whereby Buddhism cannot be excepted unless it is “traditional”, or essentially non-modern.

6 CONCLUSION

“Thousands of candles can be lit from a single candle, and the life of the candle will not be shortened. Happiness never decreases by being shared.”

- *The Buddha*

In conclusion, the physical, spiritual and culturally fluid space of the Drepung Loseling center highlights the ways in which borderland spaces, particularly at a localized level, are dominated by discourses of authenticity, materiality and consumption, and finally definitions of culture. As a spiritual and cultural borderland space, the community members of the center must grapple with ways to make sense of this multi-faceted involvement that influences and shapes individual experiences and narratives. One of the ways in which they attempt to do this appears to be by drawing imaginary “lines” in order to create a more absorbable encounter.

Throughout the various aspects of Tibetan Buddhism – body, speech and mind – discussed in this research, the members’ attempts to divide Tibetan Buddhism into distinct categories of “spiritual” and “cultural” constantly influenced the ways in which they discussed each topic. By dividing what they learned at Drepung Loseling in this way, members created for themselves a situation characterized by picking and choosing, embracing those characteristics that they found easily appropriated and rejecting those things of which they were skeptical. Jason agreed with this evaluation, stating that the “West is a spiritual supermarket.” From my interviewees, it appears that what they were mostly skeptical of were characteristics that they deemed as “cultural”, such as the belief in spirits discussed by Doug. The implications of this selection of values and beliefs by members and the negotiation between competing frameworks that is constantly occurring at the Drepung Loseling center is the formation of a somewhat separate or different form of Tibetan Buddhism, one that is predominantly associated with the West.

The division of the center into pieces that are more easily received and the resulting de-contextualization of Tibetan Buddhism's representation result in the creation of other "lines" beyond that dividing "culture" and "spirituality." Members are also constantly involved in shaping the way that materialism is viewed in relation to spirituality as well. As discussed throughout this research, "Western materialism" has been a main focus of contention for the non-Tibetan community members, and a main topic of discussion for teachers as well. One result of this has been the explicit rejection of materialism by members to the extent that material ritual objects or the physical space of the center are ignored in favor of more abstract philosophical points.

But at the Drepung Loseling center, the monks' attempts to support themselves financially entail selling items, services and classes to the local community, and specifically to the center's members. And in fact, many members do buy a large amount of ritual objects and reading material. Because there is an explicit rejection of materialism associated with aspects of ritual and material consumption, the result is a complicated spiritual navigation by the non-Tibetan community members between materialism and spirituality. Each individual must decide for themselves what is appropriate and what is not within the framework of their fluid and contentious identity as a Buddhist. They must also decide in what ways they will view the benefits of Tibetan Buddhism for their own lives.

Many of those community members at the Drepung Loseling center with whom I spoke conveyed to me the idea that their choices and interaction with Tibetan Buddhism in this space was somehow important for their own future as well as that of Tibetans. Almost everyone agreed that Tibetan Buddhist culture had much to offer the world, and that its loss would be tragic. Lucy went so far as to say that she did not see "how the egotistical culture of the West can survive." She characterized this culture as "empty and materialistic," believing that Tibetan Buddhist val-

ues could make an “impact on our survival as a species.” This sentiment was also echoed by one of the resident monks with whom I spoke. He told me that Tibetan Buddhist “culture is not only for Tibetan people. The whole world can benefit.” The Drepung Loseling center helps, he also believed, and the main purpose of Tibetan Buddhist “culture and religion is to be helpful all over the world.” Other members also reasoned that the extensive ailments of our own society could be dramatically improved with the help of Buddhist notions of compassion and loving kindness. They perceived Tibetan Buddhism as somewhat of a remedy to these attitudes and behaviors that seemed to be having a negative impact on the health and well being of those around them.

The opinion of Tibetan Buddhism as a cure for the ailments of Western society and culture has many interesting implications. For one, it calls in to question the superiority of Western identity that is somewhat apparent in the discourse on Eastern society and culture. While colonial ideologies may have portrayed Tibetans as backwards mystical and frozen in time, the growing trend in Western society to view Tibetan Buddhism – and in fact many Eastern spiritualities – as fashionable and having the ability to remedy our problems has created an interesting dynamic between cultures centering on debates about modernity and superiority.

As Stephen Berkwitz (2006) points out, the “linear narrative” of Buddhist – and particularly Tibetan Buddhist – history neglects the complexity and diversity involved in country-to-country adjustment. In addition, it may be said that much of what Tibet is has become a stereotype (Lopez 1998: 10). Descriptions of Tibet’s history as linear and the resulting stereotyping has led many non-Tibetans to assume authenticity in what they suppose or imagine is a “real” and generalizable Tibetan Buddhist space. But what is authentic? Who decides if the Tibetan Buddhism practiced in the United States is authentic or real Tibetan Buddhism? Since “authenticity” is a constructed category, the negotiation of its identity at the local level (in this case at the Dre-

pung Loseling center) must be accepted as a valid and ongoing process in which new forms of Buddhism will undoubtedly be shaped.

Many people whom I interviewed at the center had no doubt that a new form of Tibetan Buddhism was emerging. Jerry emphasized this when he spoke to me at length about the ways in which the monks at the center had to be “skillful” about how the teachings were presented. He said that “teachers try to be absolutely true to the way teachings are passed down in order to not break the lineage, but the teachings must be palpable to the Western mind” as well. Another interviewee, Jason, went so far as to explicitly state that the community at Drepung Loseling was in fact in the process of creating a “new and Western form of Buddhism.” Doug also agreed, explaining that “we are shaping Tibetan Buddhism and creating a form of Western Buddhism. In just having it here, we will pick up some stuff and drop others.”

Doug and Jason’s comments regarding the picking and choosing of aspects of Tibetan Buddhism draw attention to an overarching theme present in the experiences of non-Tibetan members at the Drepung Loseling center, which is the creation of imaginary lines. In an effort to create and negotiate meaning for themselves spiritually, members are engaged in constructing borders within their experience. These are not only borders between what is “spiritual” (and potentially the most desirable) and “cultural”, but also between what they perceive to be “authentic” and the ways in which they are involved in shaping Tibetan Buddhism in this localized space. Dividing their experiences in this way, the community members are unconsciously involved in creating dichotomies: dichotomies between East and West, as well as dichotomies between rational and irrational, and spiritual and cultural. What results from this is a multifaceted experience dominated by border spaces. Within these spaces, especially, members are involved in a search for “authenticity.” While searching out a “true” representation of Tibetan Buddhism,

members are simultaneously forming a separate and similarly complex form of Buddhism that is in the process of adapting to many of the members' beliefs and ideals, even as it draws from them.

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APPENDICES

Appendix A: Sample Interview Questions

1. Please describe the history behind you coming to the center.
2. What do you think about the physical space of the center? How does it feel to be here? What impact does it have on you?
3. What are the most important characteristics or aspects of Tibetan Buddhism to you? What do you find most appealing?
4. How do you feel about Tibetan culture? Do you encounter it during your spiritual practice often?
5. What do you think your role is as an individual within the *sangha*?
6. What parts of Buddhism do you find hard to reconcile with your own cultural background? What parts are hard to understand?
7. How do you feel about community outreach programs at the center?
8. How do you feel about the center's cooperation with Emory on various science initiatives?
9. Do you feel that some of the teachings are adapted for the audience here? Do you think some aspects of the spiritual process have changed in this environment? Do you consider the teachings to be authentic?

NOTES

ⁱ Buddhism is a world religion; however, non-Tibetans encountering Buddhism from the background of a society dominated by Christianity frequently see it as a spiritual path or way of looking at things. Indeed, some people utilize Buddhist aspects such as meditation in conjunction with their faith.

ⁱⁱ The *Gelug* School, also referred to as *Gelugpa*, came to dominate Tibetan Buddhism in the late sixteenth century when the head of the *Gelug* was recognized as the third Dalai Lama. During this time, the Mongols ruled over the area, and they displayed preference for this School. Traditionally, the *Gelug* School has emphasized the monastic lifestyle and a combination of Tantric practice (which often conjures up interesting images in the minds of many Westerners) and studies of the Lamrim. For more, please see Rebecca McClen Novick's (1999) book, *Fundamentals of Tibetan Buddhism*.

ⁱⁱⁱ Drepung Loseling Monastery in Tibet, established in 1416 just outside of Lhasa, was the largest of all the Tibetan Buddhist monasteries, housing around 10,000 monks at its peak. After the Chinese invasion of Tibet in 1959, the Drepung Loseling Monastery was re-established ten years later in South India in the Karnataka state. Today, this monastery has about 2,500 monks and monks in training.

^{iv} Body, speech and mind are defined differently throughout Buddhism. They are sometimes referred to the three *vajras*, the three states of being (*tribhavasvaikata*), or simply the three components of any sentient being. For a more detailed explanation of the importance of body, speech and mind in Tibetan Buddhism, I suggest reading *The Joy of Living: Unlocking the Secret & Science of Happiness* by Yongey Mingyur Rinpoche (2007).

^v This notion of a discoverable peace or the end of suffering are indicative, at least in the context of my field site, of a larger trend in the Western appropriation of Buddhism as a cure or remedy for the ills of Western society. For more in this subject please see Michael Toms's (1998) book *Buddhism in the West: Spiritual Wisdom for the 21st Century*.

^{vi} In order to protect the privacy of my interviewees, I have changed the names of all of those mentioned in this research. Geshe Lobsang Tenzin is an exception. I unfortunately did not have the pleasure of interviewing him, but I do include many of his words from his teachings in my analysis. I did not believe it necessary to change his name, as his teachings are always open and available to anyone who wishes to listen.

^{vii} The *lamrim* is a group of Tibetan manuals that condense all of the Buddhadharma. These teachings help practitioners to understand the Buddha's teachings and proceed along the path to

enlightenment. For more information, I suggest reading *Practicing the Path: A Commentary on the Lamrim Chenmo* by Yangsi Rinpoche (2003).

^{viii} Guru yoga is a meditation practice during which “one meditates upon one’s spiritual mentor as a living Buddha” (Novick 1999:162). This is an extremely important practice, and it allows the practitioner to deepen the teacher-pupil relationship and relate more to the teacher’s enlightened qualities. At the Drepung Loseling center, an individual learns about guru yoga during the Intermediate Series, which can only be taken after the completion of the Foundation Series. For more information about guru yoga, I suggest reading Bruce Newman’s (2004) book entitled *A Beginner’s Guide to Tibetan Buddhism: Notes from a Practitioner’s Journey*.

^{ix} For more information on the Buddhist Peace Fellowship, please visit www.bpf.org.