

A CONTROVERSY ON VEGETARIANISM*

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Amdo, the northeastern part of Tibet, has seen important changes since the launch of the “Develop the West” campaign in 2000.¹ The hasty implementation of governmental programs of sedentarisation confronted pastoralists with a new lifestyle for which they are little prepared. Everywhere in Amdo, one can see numerous new settlement villages with rows of similar houses. Deprived of their herds and pastures, unable to find their place in the Chinese-dominated economy because they lack the appropriate qualifications and language abilities, most of the pastoralists are left without any means of subsistence.

But another phenomenon is taking place at the same time: a movement launched by high clerics in Eastern Tibet which is a firm desire to affirm, in what can be described as an emergent Tibetan Buddhist fundamentalism, a strong sense of Tibetaness. This movement that started some decades ago knew a new impetus after the demonstrations of 2008 that spread all over the Tibetan Plateau. The main religious figure in this movement was Khempo Jigme Phuntsok (Mkhan po 'Jigs med phun tshogs, 1933-2004), the charismatic head of the monastic camp of Larung Gar (Bla rung sgar). Several articles have been written on his life and work.² But many other monastics have contributed to this movement which is based on a new set of Ten Virtues: 1) not to butcher and sell meat; 2) not to steal and rob; 3) not to fight with weapons; 4) not to prostitute one's body; 5) not to sell guns and opium; 6) not to smoke opium or cigarettes; 7) not to drink alcohol; 8) not to gamble; 9) not to hunt and 10) not to wear skin and fur of animals. The subject has ignited the web to the point that the website Tibet Web Digest called the new Ten Virtues “the most debated topic on Tibetan blogs last year.”³ Some researchers have already started to deal with the subject and published on it.⁴

In the following pages, I would simply like to add a small piece of work dedicated to Elliot Sperling on this topic. Elliot Sperling is, of course, well-known for his work as a historian of Tibet and Sino-Tibetan relationships, but his passion for contemporary history and his concern for the Tibetan situation are also strong, and have made him one of the few outspoken researchers

* I would like to thank Françoise Robin who brought this article to my attention, Sangye Tendar who always answered my many questions, Charlene Mackley for her useful comments on the communication I gave during the IATS, Ulan-Bator July 23th, 2013 “*Holier than thou.*’ *Amdo Nomads between the ‘hammer’ of sedentarisation and the ‘anvil’ of vegetarianism,*” on which a part of this article is based. Last but not least, I am deeply indebted to Matthew Akester who not only corrected the English but also helped me in the translation of difficult passages of the Tibetan text.

1 Among others, cf. Cook <http://perspectiveschinoises.revues.org/document179.html> (August 25th, 2014).

2 Germano 1998: 53-94; Terrone 2008: 746–779; Gayley 2011: 435–502.

3 <http://highpeakspureearth.com/2014/the-impact-of-the-so-called-ten-virtues-by-jamyang-kyi/> (July 13th, 2014).

4 On this subject, see among others Barstow 2013: 74-104; Gaerrang 2011: 31-43 and 2012; Gayley 2013: 247-284. Lafitte: <http://rukor.org/neoliberal-tibet-and-chinas-end-game/> (August 20th, 2014).

on the subject, even when expressing his views has come at the cost of his personal interest. This is why he might be curious about an article published by Jamyang Kyi ('Jam dbyangs skyid) arguing against vegetarianism, which appeared on June 24th, 2013 on the blog of the famous writer Sangdor. His blog having recently been shut down, this article is no longer accessible. My aim is thus to provide here a translation of this article and some comments.

Jamyang Kyi was born in Amdo Tsholho (Mtsho lho). She is a renowned singer, a writer, and was for many years a news editor and producer for Tibetan language programming at the State owned Qinghai Television. She is also an advocate of Tibetan women's rights. She was arrested on April 1st, 2008 and spent 21 days in jail, a detention she later related day by day in her blog. The text was translated in English and published in Dharamsala under the title *A Diary of interrogations. A Sequence of Tortures*.⁵

Jamyang Kyi published several articles on the subject of vegetarianism and the new Ten Virtues, generally under her pen name, Mindrug (Smin drug). One of these was translated for the website High Peaks Pure Earth.⁶

In the article translated below, the author bases her argumentation against the propagation of vegetarianism in Tibet by high monastics on the fact that Tibet is a high country with little oxygen and Tibetans have been used to a meat diet for thousands of years. She put emphasis on the case of Tibetan women, who have to give birth and therefore need nutrition sufficient to breastfeed and avoid vitamins and calcium deficiency.

One wonders to whom the author has directed this article, full of medical vocabulary with which few Tibetans can be familiar. Nevertheless, the appearance of 25 comments (two are identical) show that this article was read and not really well received, as we will see below.

Coerced vegetarianism and the welfare of Tibetans⁷

(notes **8** to **13** in **bold** and underline belong to Jamyang Kyi's original text)

During these [last] years, there has been a lot of fuss in Tibet about a movement to stop eating meat. While vegetarianism may be appropriate for others, in a barren land of high mountains, where oxygen is scarce, conditions for livelihood are poor, and there are no vegetables, while yak and sheep meat are considered the best, this is more harmful than beneficial for the masses of Tibetan farmers and pastoralists who have to rely on their physical strength to do their work.

This is particularly so for Tibetan mothers. The reason is that once a child is conceived, the fetus stays at least nine months and ten days in the mother's womb, and then she has to give birth in great pain. Even if the mother is able to rest for one month after the birth,⁸ she has to breast-feed the child ten times a day during

5 N.d. The text was translated by Pema Thinley and published by the Tibetan Women's Association.

6 <http://highpeakspureearth.com/2014/the-impact-of-the-so-called-ten-virtues-by-jamyang-kyi/> (August 4th, 2014).

7 http://www.sangdor.com/list1_c.asp?id=11861&a=menzhu.

8 In some nomadic areas, it is not even customary for the mother to rest after birth.

that time, and to clean him as often as he defecates. If unfortunately the child has a calcium (*kal*) deficiency, or if he cries a lot, the mother has even less time to rest, like a worm wriggling in the fire. Not only that, but basically, mothers must breast-feed until the child is at least one or two years old, and have their periods every month as well, while Western medical science shows that calcium levels decrease once women reach their 30s.⁹

Anyway, as a woman and a mother too, I well know from experience that during the nine months and ten days when the child is in the womb

1. for the first three months, the child is like a fierce poison
2. in the 7th, 8th and 9th months, the body is like a heavy load to carry
3. at the time of giving birth, the pain is like having nails driven into the lower back until it is about to shatter. Then, there is all the suffering of breast-feeding, and by night the torment of being woken from peaceful sleep.

I was 38 when I gave birth to my younger daughter, and not only did I rely on an abundance of medicines and oxygen at the hospital but, terrified by the pain of delivery, I had a cesarean. During postnatal leave, I was like a carnivorous wild yak, eating and drinking everything, milk, eggs, vegetables, fruits. For a while, my husband did the shopping and I lapsed into a state of undernourishment. From the sixth or seventh month of pregnancy, my heart was not well, and because of a deficiency of oxygen I could not sleep well. Then, the caesarean operation drained my reserves, and less than a week after delivery, I ran a very high fever and, unable to recover, I fell into a coma, and went a little deaf, as had happened to my mother. Thanks to my husband, who had prepared extra food in advance, I manage to slowly recover with good nutrition (*'sho bcud*) and vitamins, and because there was no delay in medical treatment, nothing serious happened to me.¹⁰

When my mother was 40 years old, the Triple Gem gave her the only son she wanted and during most of the 9 months and 10 days [of pregnancy], she suffered as if the child was a fierce poison. Her body became very weak because of the intolerable pain of childbirth. After the birth, she was not able to eat well enough, her strength became depleted, she suffered from depression and became deaf in one ear. My mother suffered for 33 years from the humiliation of being deaf, without telling anyone. She lived and died so.

Those who advocate abstaining from meat had better take care, for there is no saying that one day someone in your family, your older sisters, younger sisters or aunts, will not become disabled.

The child in the mother's womb has even more need of varied nutrition, vitamins and calcium. Fish and pulses are especially beneficial. However, even for someone like me who has gone to school 8, 9 or 10 years, and has lived 20 years in the city, it is difficult to become accustomed to such food, never mind for Tibetan villagers [who do not eat fish]. Still, we like our own food, and our yak and mutton has a lot of nutrients.

⁹ Urban Chinese women who reach this age take calcium and vitamins (*'sho rtsi*) supplements. They compensate for the deficiency without needing so much rest. This is certainly why Chinese women look younger [than Tibetans], and the fact that pleasure-seeking young Tibetan men find Chinese women attractive can hardly be unrelated.

¹⁰ The process of giving birth to a child brings so much difficulty for the mother. After recovering from the birth of my daughter Kargyen (Dkar rgyan), my husband told me that even he could not go through it again.

Yak meat contains vitamin B12, which has an important capacity to replenish the body's cells. It has even more vitamin B6, which helps the body combat infectious diseases. Albumin (*spri dkar gyi bcud*) helps in [bodily] renewal. It also contains zinc (*ti tsha*), iron (*lcags*), calcium (*kal*), magnesium (*mag*), potassium (*pod*), and the 8 kinds of amino acid (*em gzhi skyur*) essential to the human body. Yak meat is said to be more nutritious than beef.

Sheep mutton contains most of the B vitamins, and plenty of B12, as well as albumin, zinc (*ti tsha*), folic acid (*lo ma'i skyur rgyu*), organic vitamins (*skye dngos 'tsho rtsi*) and ? (*skyur langs 'tsho rtsi*). Mutton also has important regenerative capacities, and its antibiotic properties have been demonstrated by modern medical research.¹¹

However that may be, with the policy of exterminating cattle, the sky-high market price of meat, and the system of enriching the state while impoverishing the masses, ordinary farmers and pastoralists face all kinds of hardship in making a living. For women, especially in pregnancy, this means calcium and vitamin deficiency and, after childbirth, given the lack of both the economic resources and concerned attitude needed to make up the deficiency, treatment is not given in time and children fall sick. In our village of only sixty-odd families, there are four children of this kind. On top of that, those with power in our own community are now forcing labouring farmers and pastoralists to give up eating meat, and proudly announcing this as an achievement in learned assemblies and other public gatherings. By depriving people of nutrition, what do you achieve for Tibetans other than exhausted fathers, sick mothers and handicapped children? The suitability of yak and sheep meat to the Tibetan diet can be seen just from the fact that if the mother does not eat meat and drink broth after childbirth, she will not produce milk. I found this out myself when my two daughters were born. If the mother has no milk, the newborn baby looks here and there [in discomfort] and her face and eyes turn yellow. [In that case] the child needs to be given medical attention in time, and putting her in the sun is also very beneficial. If we delay, the jaundice increases and there is a great danger of the child falling sick. Generally, mother's milk is much the best nutrition. Science has proven the necessity of breastfeeding for the first eight months.¹² Strangely, Chinese mothers are able to produce milk by eating rice soup and eggs and drinking milk. It is difficult to explain this other than as a result of the different eating habits of different peoples.

Nowadays, Tibetan children who come from agricultural and nomad areas [to study in urban schools] seem to be getting smaller year by year, while it is quite evident that when there is economic development and a high standard of living, as for example in Japan, young people get taller and taller. How does this come about, if not by increasing quality of life?

According to the gynaecologist Sonam Tso, rural women are increasingly suffering from high levels of salt in the body, mental anxiety and sleeplessness.

11 If we Tibetans, who live with poor conditions of hygiene and no variety of foodstuffs, are not grateful for yak and sheep meat that make us healthy and strong, what else is there?

12 The Tibetan medical system has shown that there is no benefit in breastfeeding a child for more than eight months, because the child loses appetite for more nutritious foods. By that time, the mother's milk is no longer really nutritious.

This is said to be a condition caused by psychological disorders and nerves. In my view, it is because [rural Tibetan] women do heavy work, are quite anxious, have vitamin, calcium and nutritional deficiencies; because under the family planning policy, women are forcibly sterilized, which is a crime; and nowadays, most foods are adulterated with chemicals, and many of the commercial products that we eat and drink¹³ are fake and of poor quality.

Generally speaking, due to the limited variety of foodstuffs, we have become accustomed to eating yak meat and mutton for thousands of years, and if we are suddenly forced to stop, it goes without saying that Tibetans in general, and mothers in particular, will suffer protein, vitamin and calcium deficiency, which is even more damaging for the unborn child. When the child is conceived, the semen of the father and egg of the mother will be of poor quality, and then if the mother's body is undernourished, she cannot produce the nutrients necessary for the child in the womb. Once this vicious cycle is set in motion, Tibetans will surely become physically weaker and mentally duller, [biological] inheritance will be diminished and procreation tainted, and gradually we will become more susceptible to various diseases and epidemics. We shall see.

Do the advocates of vegetarianism really and truly consider animals' lives more valuable than those of humans? Or do they consider the suffering of those prevented from eating meat as a virtue or accomplishment rendered to them? Otherwise, they are simply making a fuss over following a fad inspired by Chinese Buddhists and Western vegetarians. Whatever the case may be, this wish to overcome one's given circumstances with a single step, using authority to impose one's own whims, with no consideration for the altitude and oxygen levels of the land one inhabits, and the customs and resources of one's people, is a sign of mere foolishness. It is like the proverbial 'pauper who tries to walk alongside a rich man but ends up breaking his leg', or 'picking up a corpse from the ground and carrying it on one's shoulders',¹⁴ and this should be understood by all, chiefly those among us who think they know best.

Most of the 25 comments posted in reaction to Jamyang Kyi's article express strong disagreement with her views while four of them manifest some support or respect for her argument (comments 9-10-11-18) and four others defend the point of view of meat-eaters (comments 9-12-14-18). What is striking is the violence expressed by several of them, especially the four first. One wonders if the authors are not, in fact, the same blogger using various nicknames, since the content is quite similar. These violent comments call Jamyang Kyi "Demoness" (*'dre mo*), and advice her to eat her husband's or children's flesh, or even her own flesh, since she likes meat. Some also allege that as the owner of a restaurant, her only motivation for taking issue with vegetarianism is to maintain a profitable business (comments 4 and 22). Although Jamyang Kyi does not refer to the monastics by name, two comments are made in defence of Khempo Tsultrim Lodrö (Mkhan po Tshul grims blo gros), the heir of Jigme Phuntsok, one of the main active figures of this movement, refuting the accusation that he forces people to become vegetarian (comments 8

¹³ Analysis show that nowadays most commercial foodstuffs contain harmful ingredients.

¹⁴ These proverbs mean taking on unnecessary burdens (note by the author).

and 13). In fact, it seems that often the lamas ask those in their audience to raise an arm if they agree to stop eating meat, drinking, etc. This commitment made in front of their fellow Tibetans can create enormous pressure on those unable to keep their oath. Jamyang Kyi's medical knowledge is also questioned, as is her faith in the dharma, and two bloggers insinuate that she must be Christian since eating meat is a Christian and not a Buddhist custom (comments 16 and 20). Lastly, an anonymous blogger refers to a revealed teaching of the Nyingma master Guru Chöki Wangchuk (Gu ru Chos kyi dbang phyug, 1217-1270),¹⁵ *Mahākaruṇika Who Dredges the Pit of Saṃsāra* (*Thugs rje chen po 'khor ba dong sprug*), listing the various punishments awaiting those who eat meat or drink blood (comment 17).

One day, she herself decided to answer (comments 23) just to express her view on all these comments in a very short message: "A lot of words were said. A lot of noise was made!"¹⁶

The issue of vegetarianism has been debated for centuries among the monastic community. Some lamas such as Dolpopa Sherab Gyaltzen (Dol po pa Shes rab rgyal mtshan, 1292-1361) or Shabkar (Zhabdkar Tshogs drug rang grol 1781-1851) expressed their total opposition to eating meat. Others, like Jigme Lingpa (Jigs med gling pa, 1730-1798), had a much more moderate point of view. Although, as shown by Barstow, Jigme Lingpa "strongly critiques meat" and praise of vegetarianism, "[he] never mandates a vegetarian diet among his students" (2013: 90). Nowadays, some lamas have a much stricter position: Hungkar Rinpoche (Hūm dkar rin po che), a golok lama said to be the reincarnation of Do Khyentse Yeshe Dorje (Mdo mkhyen brtse Ye shes rdo rje, 1800-1866), himself the reincarnation of Jigme Lingpa, has an interesting position. In contrast with his own predecessor, he defends an absolute vegetarianism as the only correct path, a path described in fundamentalist terms.

These lamas have the support of the Dalai Lama even if, affirming Jamyang Kyi's argument, he recognized, in an interview given on February 12th, 2013, that "The Tibetan high altitude environment is also not conducive for sustaining fresh crops, and as it is now, the Tibetans include meat in their diet as a means of survival. Many monasteries that opt for the vegetarian lifestyle take measures to import their foods to sustain their eating habits."¹⁷ He himself tried to stop, but after repeated health problems was advised by several doctors to resume eating meat.¹⁸ Nevertheless, at a special audience during the Kālacakra held in January 2012 in Bodhgayā,¹⁹ the hierarch expressed his appreciation of "the initiatives taken by many monasteries in Tibet of advising people to give up meat, saying that it was spiritually significant and should be adopted

15 On Guru Chöki Wangchuk, see Dudjom Rinpoche, vol. I: 760-770.

16 *Skad mang po bzhas 'dug / 'ur chen po brgyab 'dug / Smin drug.*

17 <http://samvidbeauty.com/2013/02/a-lesson-from-the-dalai-lama-on-meat-eating/> (July 5th, 2014).
<http://vegpeace.org/buddhistvegetariandalai.html>

18 Already in 2006, The Central Tibetan Administration appealed to the followers of Tibetan Buddhism to go vegetarian and stop animal slaughtering for a ceremony to be held in Bihar. http://hillpost.in/2011/10/30/go-vegan-for-ritual-tibetan-exiles/33596/news-2/hp_news_networkGo vegan for ritual: Tibetan exiles.

19 <http://www.phayul.com/news/article.aspx?id=30631&t=1> (July 12th, 2014).
<http://tibetonline.tv/videos/925/his-holiness-the-14th-dalai-lama-kalop-at-32th-kalachakra,-bodhgaya> (June 6th, 2014).

as a gradual social move.” In the same speech, he added “that it would be better if the nomads were allowed to maintain their centuries old natural habitation and stay on the grasslands,” two positions which appear rather contradictory since the pastoralists need to sell their livestock to be able to maintain their way of life on the grassland. But for researchers such as Lafitte, the calls for Tibetans to embrace vegetarianism is « a way of mobilising Tibetans to stand strong and united, in the face of the seductions and disappointments of China’s hedonic promise of neoliberal wealth accumulation.”²⁰

The appeal to vegetarianism is associated with an anti-slaughter movement, which started in the mid-1990 when Jigme Phuntsok requested followers to stop slaughtering animals. He was inspired by Buddhist compassion towards animals, which were suffering in transportation and slaughterhouses in the context of commodification of animal lives, which is totally at odds with the traditional Tibetan treatment of cattle. According to Gaerrang (2011: 36), this movement, which “contests and compromises the capitalist development,” has now spread in all Kham, Amdo and even Central Tibet. In Hongyuan where he did his fieldwork in 2006, all the villagers of one village took an oath not to sell yaks for slaughter for at least 3 years. “The majority of households in the village were able to keep their oaths for the initial three-year period,” (2011: 36) and half of them promised “to stop slaughtering livestock for their own consumption” (2011: 38) following a teaching made by Mkhan po Tshul khrims blo gros of Gser rta”. Only a small number of herders express reluctance to continue on this path because of the reduction in income, other ways of making a living being very limited by their lack of spoken and written mandarin. Some herders decided to abide by the State resettlement project and needed cash for housing construction (2011: 38).

These lamas were followed by some of the self-immolators, who asked their fellow Tibetans to stop eating meat and slaughtering animals²¹. This religiously-inspired resistance to Chinese assimilation policies is accompanied by cultural and socio-economic resistance from the herders. The construction of Chinese-run slaughterhouses in the mid 2000s led to popular protests. Not only was such industrial slaughter contrary to the Tibetans’ animal husbandry practice and Buddhist feelings, there were also numerous accusations of theft of animals by Chinese slaughterhouse owners, and of pressure on pastoralists from the local authorities to sell their animals.²²

Meat is not the only target: smoking and drinking are also strongly opposed by monastics, and also the Dalai Lama.²³ In Golok Peyul (Dpal yul), Darthang monastery has prohibited the consumption of alcohol in the whole town and in 2011 it was impossible to find even a bottle of beer in a shop. This is because of the general advocacy of temperance by many lamas in Amdo who regularly request Tibetans to refrain from drinking —and smoking also— out of respect

20 <http://rukor.org/neoliberal-tibet-and-chinas-end-game/> (August 25th, 2014).

21 http://burningtibet.blogspot.in/2013_05_01_archive.html (July 16th, 2014).

Among them, Nangdröl who self-immolated on February 19th 2012, Rikyo on May 30th, 2012.

22 <http://www.rfa.org/english/news/tibet/attack-12012011141021.html> (August 14th, 2014).

<http://www.hrw.org/fr/news/2006/03/29/china-fears-tibetan-slaughterhouse-detainees> (August 14th, 2014).

23 <http://www.phayul.com/news/article.aspx?id=30631&t=1> (August 25th, 2014).

for Buddhist precepts, but perhaps also to avoid fights. People listen to them and the habits of drinking and smoking are gradually declining. Unfortunately, a new habit is emerging, which does not seem to be any better, but shows how difficult it is for Tibetans to follow all these new rules. Yumtsho, a Tibetan writer, explained in a blog²⁴ that a lot of people have replaced drink with a Chinese medicine²⁵ nicknamed “The Chang that doesn’t violate the Ten Virtues” which contains a lot of alcohol and is said to be very dangerous for the health.

The issue of fighting is also often raised by the lamas. Traditionally, inter-tribal and inter-village fights often arise among the northeastern Tibetan communities, and the literature is full of narratives of conflicts and mediation. The Chinese occupation did not put an end to these internal clashes and recent studies have shown that contemporary policies such as pasture-fencing, or the collection of yartsa gumbu (*dbyar rtsa dgun ’bu*) are contributing factors in the emergence of new conflicts.²⁶ Most recently, high clerics in Tibet made regularly appeals to lay Tibetans to stop fighting between themselves. The Dalai Lama added his voice to that of the hierarchs, following a fight over yartsa gumbu that left at least two people dead and three others wounded in Rebgong on May 30th, 2013.²⁷ But not a word was said about the origins of the conflict. The Dalai Lama expressed his opposition in Buddhist terms by explaining that “violence is contrary to the beliefs and conduct of all who believe in karma and in Buddhism”. Some self-immolators requested Tibetans to stop fighting in their final testaments, such as Nangdrol who self-immolated in Ngawa (Nga ba) Prefecture on February 19th, 2012.²⁸ Following Nangdrol’s death, some 1000-2000 people came to his family’s house and pledged before a photo of the Dalai Lama and one of Nangdrol never to engage in feuding within the community.²⁹

This movement also affects aspects of daily life other than the practice of Buddhism and the respect of the Ten Virtues. In Amdo and the Golok area, the preservation of the Tibetan language is a very sensitive issue for both the monastic and lay communities. The importance people put on language was expressed during the many demonstrations that have occurred since 2010³⁰ in Amdo. Also, several self-immolators have shouted slogans demanding respect for the language and culture of Tibet, or have left messages on the subject. In Golok Peyul, small slips of paper were left in shops in 2011 requesting Tibetans to speak a pure Tibetan.³¹ In some regions, people

24 <http://tibetwebdigest.com/?p=541>

25 “huo-xiang-zheng-qi water”

26 Among others, Pirie 2005: 1-30 and 2012: 83-107; Sulek 2009: 15-44 and 2010: 9-22; Yeh 2000: 212-226 and 2013: 318-340.

27 <http://www.rfa.org/english/news/tibet/fungus-06072013220245.html> (July 12th, 2014).

28 http://burningtibet.blogspot.in/2013_05_01_archive.html (July 26th, 2014).

29 Akester 2012: 218.

30 <http://highpeakspureearth.com/2012/abolishing-tibetan-language-education-for-the-sake-of-maintaining-stability-by-woeser/> (August 16th, 2014).

31 *Bod mi rnam pa / khyod tshos bsre skad bshad na mi rigs yar rgyas kyi ma rtsa brlag pa 'i nag nyes can du gyur bas / bod skad gtsang ma re bshad rogs zhu / pha skad myur skyob tshogs pa nas / “Tibetans! if you speak a mixed language, you are guilty of ruining the foundation of the development of your people. We request you to speak pure Tibetan- from the Association for the protection of the mother tongue.”*

have reacted strongly to the issue of mixed language (*ra ma lug*, “neither goat nor sheep”). According to some informants, every time someone at Lanzhou University use a Chinese word, he is fined one yuan and when enough money is collected, teachers go for a drink together. In Tsekho (Rtse khog), those speaking *ra ma lug* are ignored and in Chigdril (Gcig sgril), people are publicly criticized.

Another subject of contention is the issue of white tents in nomad regions: in Chigdril, the lamas oppose the modern white tents used by nomads in summer, which are lighter and much easier to carry than the black ones in yak hair. Some Golok pastoralists explained to me in 2011 that from 2012 onwards, white tents would not longer be allowed because, according to the lamas, “to live in a white tent is to be sinicized, and Tibetan traditional nomad life can only exist in the usual black yak-hair tent.” The black tent is indeed a very strong symbol of Tibetan nomad (*'brog pa*) identity.

The many reactions on the web to the question of vegetarianism and the new set of Ten Virtues are not surprising if one considers that in Amdo and Golok, pastoralists and farmers are confronted with two highly demanding discourses: on one side, certain lamas, supported by the Dalai Lama and some self-immolators, request them to become pure and perfect Buddhist practitioners, totally non-violent and vegetarian, an ideal which is more suitable for a religious community than for a lay one, and one which was never traditionally imposed on lay people and rarely on the clergy. On the other side, Chinese government policies emphasise economic development and assimilation, a “path” that contrasts with official state rhetoric about multi-cultural harmony. In other words, both agendas require from Tibetans a radical change of lifestyle. In both cases, Tibetans are being told that their way of life is wrong: one has assimilation of the local population into the modern, Han-dominated society as its aim; the second promotes a new Tibetan identity based on a purist interpretation of Buddhism that is incompatible with the herders’ traditional ways. In some sense, these lamas can be perceived as indirectly accommodating state efforts to sedentarise and marketize rural Tibetans, along with other activists (development NGOs and missionaries) who help the work of the modernising state. Of course, it is Tibetans, always eager to peacefully assert their collective identity and values, who are the agents of this process, with their incitement to a generalized vegetarianism and respect for the new set of Ten Virtues.

But to whom is the discourse of these clerics directed? To the Tibetans? To the Chinese or to the West? I would say to all: To Tibetans in order for them to be united and protect their culture in the present context. To the Chinese, to show them that Tibetans are not the backward people they suppose but on the contrary are very “civilized” and enlightened, “holier” than them. And also to the Western world—at least for the Dalai Lama—who, in his modernist presentation of Buddhism, wants to promote a global image of Tibet as a non-violent and highly spiritual society, respectful of nature, the environment and all sentient beings, and therefore a society able to benefit to all mankind.

Nevertheless, the vegetarian discourse of these lamas faces some opposition from the Tibetan side, as Jamyang Kyi’s article shows. She speaks as a Tibetan woman and mother, of whose

predicament, she argues, these clerics have no idea and do not seem to be much concerned. Her argument based on medical considerations finds little echo in the readers' comments, and it should be noted that, curiously, none of these comments appear to have been written by a woman.

This raises the question of gender in the debate regarding vegetarianism, a point only touched upon in this short article and one which deserves further consideration.³²

Transliteration of Jamyang Kyi's Article

Dmar zas btsan gcod (Smin drug, 2013-6-24)

Dmar zas btsan gcod dang bod mi'i bde thang

Ra rdza 'Jam dbyangs skyid

lo 'di tsho'i ring la bod khams su dmar zas gcod pa'i las shig spel nas tsha tsha 'ur
'ur du gyur 'dug/dmar zas bead na gzhan rigs la ni 'os su 'tsham na thang yang/
sa brtsan ri mtho/gso rlung nyung zhing 'tsho ba'i cha rkyen zhan pa/tshal tshod
sngo ldum mang po med kyang kha zas kun las gnag lug gi sha ni mchog gras su
rtsi ba/ngal rtsol yod tshad lus shugs rkyang la brten dgos pa'i bod kyi rong 'brog
mang tshogs la mtshon na ni phan las gnod che'o//

de bzhin/des ni bod mi spyi dang sgos su bod pa'i a ma rnams la ni lhag tu nas
gnod do//rgyu mtshan gang gis zhe na/skyes ma zhig gis phru gu gcig rang bskyed
pa'i dbang du btang yang/ma mtha' yang zla dgu zhag bcu la mngal du sbrum dgos
shing/de nas gzer gzug drag po'i khrod btsa' dgos/a ma gang de zla gcig⁽¹⁾ bang la
'dug thub pa byung rung/de'i ring la/nyin zhag gcig nang phru gur nu ma thengs
bcu grangs re bsnun dgos/gcig skyag kyang lan grangs de ltar sgug pho byed dgos/
las ma bzang bar 'kal' gyis ma 'dang ba'i byis pa zhig dang yang na byis pa ngu
kha zhig skyes pa yin na/ a ma de 'bu me nang du lhung ba ltar de bas kyang sdod
long med pa bzo/ma zad / gzhi rim du a ma tshos ha lam phru gu lo gcig gnyis lhag
la son pa'i bar nu ma bsnun gyi yod la/skyes ma tshor zla ba re la zla mtshan yang
'bab kyi yod pas mi tshad/mo lo sum cu so grangs⁽²⁾ la slebs pa nas lus kyi 'kal'
sogs zad gron 'byung gi yod tshul nub lugs gso ba rig par gsal ba sogs kyis so//

De min/nga rang nyid skyes ma zhig dang lhag don a ma zhig yin tsang/byis pa
zhig zla dgu zhag bcu la mngal du chags pa'i dus kyi dang po zla ba gsum gyi
byis dug drag po dang/gnyis pa zla ba bdun brgyad dgu yi bar gyi lus kyi gdos
khur/gsum pa btsa' ba'i dus kyi mtshang ra 'gad grabs gtong ba'i gzer zug/de nas
nu zhos gso ba'i tshogs sdug dang mtshan mor skyid gnyid dkrog pa'i mnar gcod
mtha' dag nga yis dngos su myong zhing myangs nas yong ba yin pas gsal por

³² I plan to address more specifically this subject in the near future.

shes/de yang / nga rang dar lo 38 steng bu mo chung ba skye dus/ sman khang du gso sman gso rlung mod po bstén par ma zad/phru gu btsa' ba'i gzer zug la 'jigs nas gshag bcós byas te byis pa blangs pa yin/bang la sdod skabs sha gzan g.yag rgod 'dra ba gcig dang/'o ma bya sgong sngo tshal sil tog gang rigs zos shing 'thungs nas re zhig khyo gas nyo cha brgyab nas kha mi thon pa'i tshad du lung bcug na yang/phru gu mngal du chags nas zla ba drug bdun nas bzung/snying khams bde po ma byung ba dang gso rlung gis ma 'dang bas mtshan mor gnyid yag mo khugs ma thub pa dang/de nas khog pa gshags pa'i nus mtshag zad gron byung ba/de'i khar/bang nang bdun gcig ma phyin gong la lus por tsha ba drag po rgyas pa sogs kyis lus po sor chud ma thub par rlung gis khyer bas en tsam gyis a ma nang bzhin rna ba 'on/khyo gas kha zas sngar rgyas bzós pa'i drin gyis 'tsho rtsi 'tsho bcud ga ler kha gsab thub pa byung ba dang/sman bcós 'thus shor ma song bas nga la chag sgo de ma byung⁽³⁾//

yin yang/bdag gi a mas dngung lo 40 steng kun gyis dkon mchog gyis gnang bar 'dod pa'i bu kher skyes de ha lam zla dgu zhag bcu la byis dug drag pos gdung bzhin khur ba'i mod la/bzod bsran bral ba'i gzer zug khrod btsas pa'i rkyen gyis lus po nyams zhan du gyur/bang la 'dug dus zas bcud kha gsab ma thub pa sogs kyis lus zungs zad pa thal drags nas rlung nad kyis gdungs te rna ba zung gcig 'on par song/nga'i a mas mi lo 33 ring la rna 'on ma zhes pa'i dma' 'bebs bzed bzhin 'tsho ba skyel zhing tshe mjug rdzogs/dmar zas gcod pa'i las spel mkhan dag gis gzab gzab ma byas na/nyin zhig rang gi a ce sring mo sru mo gang rigs dbang po skyon can du mi gtong ba'i nges pa med do//

A ma'i lhums su gnas pa'i phru gu la ni de bas kyang 'tsho bcud 'tsho rtsi/'kal' sogs sna tshogs mkho/de dag las nya sha dang sran ma'i rigs ni mngal phrug la shin tu sman/yin yang/nya sha ni grong gseb kyí bod mi tsho phar zhog lo brgyad dgu bca' bcu la slob grwa 'grims shing grong khyer 'di ru lo ngo nyi shu rtsa grangs la 'tsho ba rol pa'i nga yang kha zas der goms lobs dka'/de lta na yang / nga tsho rang nyid za bar dga' zhing rang la yod pa'i nor sha dang lug sha'i nang du yang 'tsho bcud mang po yod pa red de/nor sha ru/'tsho rtsi B12 yod la/des ni mi yi lus po'i phra phung bskyed par nus pa gal chen 'don thub/'tsho rtsi B6 ni de bas kyang mang po 'dug/des rim nad zlog pa'i nus shugs je cher gtong la/spri dkar gyi bcud kyis rnying tshab gsar brje byed par grogs dan byed thub/de min/de dung 'ti tsha' dang 'lcags' 'kal' 'mag' 'pod' dang/mi yi lus phung la med du mi rung ba'i 'em gzhi skyur' sna kha 8 sogs yod pas na/spyir btang gi glang sha dang bsdur na nor sha la ni de bas kyang 'tsho bcud 'dzoms zhes pa dang/lug sha la/'tsho rtsi B yi ris su gtogs pa ha lam 'dzoms shing/lug sha'i nang du 'tsho rtsi B12 ni lhag tu mod po yod pa red/de min/'spri dkar' gyi bcud dang 'ti tsha' 'lo ma'i skyur rgyu' dang skye dngos 'tsho rtsi/skyur langs 'tsho rtsi sogs mang po 'dug cing/lug sha la yang rnying tshab gsar brje byed pa'i nus pa gal chen yod la/srin 'joms kyí nus pa yang yod tshul deng rabs gso ba rig pa'i zhib 'jug gi dngos 'bras⁽⁴⁾ las bstan 'dug//

ci ste de lta yin yang/phyugs zog med par gtong ba'i srid jus dang sha gong gnam la 'phar ba'i khrom than/rgyal khab phyug por gtong ba'i lam lugs dang/mang tshogs dbul bor 'gyur ba'i gnas stangs 'og rong 'brog mang tshogs 'tsho gnas thad dka' ngal 'dra min sna tshogs la 'phrad kyi yod pa red la/skyes ma la ni de bas kyang byis pa sbrum dus 'kal' dang 'tsho rtsis 'dang gis med cing/byis pa btsas rjes kha gsab rgyag pa'i dpal 'byor cha rkyen dang bsam blo'i 'du shes dben pas dus thog nad bcos ma thub pas byis pa nad pa chags pa'i gnas tshul byung dang 'byung gi yod pa red/mi tshang drug bcu re grangs las med pa'i nga tsho'i sde ba rkyang gi nang du byis pa de'i rigs bzhi yod/de'i khar/da cha/rang rigs kyi btsan po dbang yod dag gis lus shugs ngal rtsol byed mkhan gyi rong 'brog mang tshogs la btsan gyis dmar zas gcod du bcug rjes/mkhas pa'i lhan tshogs sogs mi mang 'du sa ru ngom 'dod chen pos rang gi grub 'bras shig tu brtsis nas khyab bsgrags byed kyi 'dug/blo pham che ba zhig la/khyed cag gis 'tsho bcud 'tsho rtsi 'thus shor byung du 'jug pa de ni/tag tag bod khams su a pha nyam thag dang a ma nad pa/phru gu skyon can bskyed pa las gzhan ci//

bod mi tshor nor lug gi sha ji 'dra'i 'phrod kyi yod pa/phru gu btsas rjes sha dang sha khu ma zos ma 'thungs na a ma mams la 'o ma 'bab kyi med pa las kyang gsal bor shes/nga yang bu mo gnyis ka skyes dus gnas tshul de 'drar phrad/gal te a ma la nu zho med pa yin na/phru gu dmar 'byar bltas bltas rig rig la ngo dang mig 'bras ser bor gyur 'gro/sman bcos dus thog byed pa'i dus mtshungs su phru gu nyi mar lde na yang phan thogs che/de ltar ma byas mu mthud 'gor 'gyangs btang ba yin na/mkhris ser gyi nad je thur phyin te phru gu nad pa chags pa'i nyen kha che/spyir phru gu la mtshon na/'tsho bcud ches yag shos ni a ma'i nu zho yin pa red/de bas/zla ngo brgyad⁽⁵⁾ la nges par phru gu nu bzhos gso dgos tshul tshan rig gis bden dpang byas 'dug ya mtshan pa zhig la/rgya mo bang ma tshos 'bras khu dang bya sgong 'o ma 'dra zos shing 'thungs na yang 'o ma 'bab kyi 'dug/de ni mi rigs gnyis kyi kha zas goms srol ma 'dra ba'i bskyed pa'i mjug 'bras las rgyu mtshan gzhan zhig bgrang rgyu dka'//

gzhan/deng skabs/rong 'brog phyogs nas yong gin pa'i bod phru slob ma dag lo re nas lo rer gzugs bongs je chung du 'gro gin pa'i snang ba ster/yin yang/dpal 'byor dar rgyas che zhing 'tsho ba'i 'khos ka bzang ba'i 'jar pan rgyal khab la mtshon na/deng dus na gzhon tsho'i gzugs bongs je che je dar du song yod pa mngon sum mthong chos red/de ni 'tsho ba'i chu tshad dang 'tsho ba'i spus kas bskyed pa ming na ci yin/de min/mo nad ched mkhas sman pa bsod nams 'tsho lags kyis bshad na/nye lam zhing 'brog sa khul nas skyes ma skor zhig la lus por tsha rgyas pa dang sems pa 'tsha' ge 'tshig ger khur nas mtshan mor gnyid kyang yag po khugs thub kyi med pa'i nad cig 'byung gi 'dug la/de ni gtso bo sems khams dang dbang rtsa rkyen byas byung ba'i nad rigs shig yin pa red zer/ngas bsams na/de yang/gzhi rim skyes ma tshor las ka lci ba/sems tshegs che ba/'tsho rtsi dang 'kal

'tsho bcud kyis ma 'dang ba dang/'char ldan bu skye srid jus kyis skyes ma skor zhid la btsan shugs kyis srid gcod gshag bcos byas pa'i byas nyes/de'i khar/deng skabs kyi kha zas gang mang zhid la rdzas 'gyur gyi lhad 'dres yod pas dang/gzhi rim tshong khang du bza' bca' btung⁽⁶⁾ gsum gyi rigs spus zher brdzus ma mang ba bcas kyi los yin 'dod//

spyir nga tshor kha zas sna kha nyung ba'i khar/de ni/lo ngo khri stong mang por za goms su song ba'i nor sha dang lug sha de glo bur thol rgyag tu btsan gyis gcod du bcug pa yin na/ bod mi spyi dang khyad par a ma tsho'i lus steng du spru dkar gyi bcud dang 'tsho rtsi/'kal' la sogs pa mi 'dang ba bzhir bzhag thog mngal du yod pa'i phru gu la ni gnod tshabs de bas che ba lta ci smos/de yang/thog mar phru gu bskyed dus a pha'i khams dkar dang a ma'i khams dmar gnyis ka'i spus tshad zhan po yin pa dang/de rjes a ma'i lus steng du 'tsho bcud ma 'dang bas mngal gyi phru gu la 'tsho bcud mkho 'don mi thub pa/de ltar ngan rdzob 'khor rgyug byas nas re zhid 'das pa na/bod mi'i lus shugs je zhan dang rig stobs je rtul/mi rgyud je chung dang skye sgo je btsog tu 'gro bar gdon mi za zhid/ rims nad dang bcas pa'i nad rigs 'dra ming sna tshogs 'byung nges pa nga tsho tshang mas ga ler mthong yong rgyu red//

dmar zas gcod pa'i las spel mkhan tshos dngos gnas drang gnas dang lhad bsam nam dag gis/dud 'gro'i tshes srog ni mi yi rin thang las kyang rtsis chen por lta yi yod pa yin nam/yang na/gzhan gyi sha bcad pa'i sdug bsngal gyi rin dod de rang gi dge ba dang grub 'bras su rtsi ched dang/de min/rgya nag gi chos pa tsho dang phyi gling gi dkar zas ring lugs pa tsho la g.yam rgyug gis a gsar 'ur 'drogs byed kyi yod/gang zhid yin yang rung/rang re'i 'tsho sdod kyi sa bab mtho dma' dang gso rlung mang nyung/rang mi'i zas rigs kyi yul goms gshis lugs dang 'tsho ba'i cha rkyen gang la yang ma bltos par/btsan po dbang yod rang snang gang shar gyis bskal pa'i khugs pa gom thengs gcig gis brgal 'dod pa de ni glen rtags nyid las gnas lugs gang/der ma zad/las de ni/rgyu chen gyi 'gro ya byas na rgyu med kyi nywa rkang gcog pa'i dpe ltar 'gyur nyen che la/nyen tshabs de yang nga tsho rang gis sdug sa na yod pa thod la len pa/ro thang na yod pa phrag tu len pa yin tshul/rang re'i chen po drag por khas 'che mkhan nam kyis gtsos/mtho dman drag zhan bar ma kun gyis snga sa nas shes dgos so//

Notes

1 'brog phyogs skor zhid tu a mar phru gu skyes rjes bang la 'dug pa'i srol yang med pa red//

2 lo tshod der slebs pa'i grong khyer gyi rgya rigs skyes ma tshos/'kal' dang 'tsho rtsi zos te 'tshor gyin pa dang ma 'dang ba kha gsab brgyab ste khom long med par gyur 'dug/rgya mo tshor de 'dra'i rgas mdog shar gyi med pa rkyen gcig de los yin/kha yang spyod yang gi bod pa pho gsar skor zhid rgya mor dga' ba yang de dag 'brel ba med pa zhid ga la yin//

3 a mas phru gu zhig bskyed pa'i go rim ni ji 'dra'i dka' khag che ba/ngas bu mo dkar rgyan skyes nas bang kha gang rjes shig la/khyo gas go rim 'di da rung thengs gcig brgyud dgos na dngos gnas nus sa ma red ces pa de las kyang mtshon//

4 nga tsho bod par 'phrod bsten gyi cha rkyen zhan zhing kha zas sna rkyang yin na yang/ltos bcas su lus po thang zhing lus stobs rgyas pa gtso bo nor lug sha'i drin min na gzhan ci//

5 zla ba brgyad kyi yan la nu zhos gsos na phan pa med tshul gso ba rig pas bstan 'dug/rgyu mtshan/phru gu'i yi ga bkag ste 'tsho bcud gzhan za ba'i gegs su 'gyur la/yang skabs der a ma'i na zho la bcud kyang chen po med pa sogs kiyis so//

6 deng dus kyi btung bca' mang che shos las mi'i lus por mi phan pa'i grub cha mang po yod pa brtags 'bras las thon 'dug//

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