

區文力 Au Man Lik 3035689908

孫聖堯 Sun Sheng Yao 3036051500

Buddhist and modern technology in Tibet

Having seen the unorthodox hydraulic-driven praying wheel at the Zhong Dian Center, we have become interested in the intersection between modern technology and traditional Tibetan Buddhism, especially in how the former has influenced the life and practices of Buddhist monk and nuns.

We will first take We Chat as an example.

The most interesting change to monastic life brought by WeChat is that its function of We Chat Pay has revolutionized the way offerings to a monastery are collected. In the past followers of a monastery used to offer coins and banknotes, which were then collected in an offering box. Nowadays, nearly every Buddhist monastery, no matter how remote it is (like the Tai Zi Monastery in the Ming Yong Glacier), accepts online offerings --- visitors can do so by scanning the QR codes for We Chat Pay in the monastery. Interestingly, there are no such QR codes in the Ci Zhong Catholic church. We speculate that this difference lies in the fact that both believers and non-believers (e.g., tourists) would make offerings to a Buddhist monastery, as the latter might look for worldly blessings like health and wealth in return. Many visitors or tourists might not carry with them enough cash, for nowadays online payment is omnipresent in China, and unlike devoted believers, they might not have decided to offer it before their visit. Thus, QR codes enable them to make offerings as well, although they lack cash.

In contrast, usually only believers would make an offering to a Catholic Church. We have never seen any tourists making offerings to a church either in Hong Kong or Ci Zhong. As believers do not make impromptu offerings (they regularly offer every Sunday), together with the fact that offering cash might make one feel more 'solemn', a traditional offering box is already sufficient for a church. However, on the other hand, as a Buddhist monastery accepts online offerings, the monks are thus spared from the chore of manually counting the amount of offerings made. Hence, they have more time to study and preach.

Dou Yin enables monks and nuns to keep abreast of the latest news and social trends. Buddhist practitioners used to give others the impression of completely renouncing

the secular matter. This is no longer the case. A nun in the Ta Ba Lin Monastery told us that she loves browsing TikTok in her leisure time, as there is much interesting information on current affairs. She has even attempted to learn Chinese on Dou Yin! Same as a good student, she said she would turn off the smartphone while studying. We think that TikTok has done a fabulous job of connecting monks/nuns and lay believers. For it helps the former better understand what is popular among the latter and the social situation in which the latter is situated. It also helps the monks/nuns better uphold the Bodhisatva vow of helping all sentient beings. To illustrate, whenever they know about some incidents in other provinces through TikTok, they could gather to pray for the victims.

However, we also found such streaming media harmful to the future development of Buddhism as well as other religions. As was said by the nun in Ta Ba Lin nunnery, the attraction of short videos like TikTok is so strong that even experienced Buddhist practitioners will be tempted by them. Teenagers, in this sense, may become reluctant to accept the seemingly boring and regardless traditional Buddhist practices, thus leading to a gradual loss of believers in the near future.

Let's take another example.

Kora by car or helicopter best illustrates the discrepancy between the traditional and modern ways of practicing Buddhist rituals. Traditionally Tibetans used to circumambulate sacred mountains such as the Kawakharpo on bare foot during important dates on the Tibetan calendar, in the hope of reducing the times of rebirth that one needs to endure. We were told by experts in CERS that this experience simulates that of death. The experience of walking down the hill resembles that of wandering as a bardo after death, given that one feels the uncertainty and darkness lying ahead of the bumpy road. The experience of walking up the hill resembles that of approaching rebirth, given that one can now see the sunlight shining on the summit and the destination of the Kora. It is questionable whether Kora by a car/helicopter could simulate these experiences as it is supposed to be substantially more relaxing. Kora on bare foot is also a manifestation of the importance of the sacred mountains in orienting the life of Tibetans--- it shows how dedicated the Tibetans are to those mountains as they risk their life to do the kora. Kora on car/helicopter fails to manifest that.

We do not even understand the point of doing kora by car/helicopter to an educated person. It could be said that it reduces the number of rebirths more effectively than

kora by bare foot as a car has higher speed (This could be the point of doing kora to a less educated person). The problem is that many educated Tibetans (like Drolma) we met do not wholeheartedly believe in the purported merit one could accrue by performing different rituals. Otherwise, they (or Drolma) would not have done them (like spinning the prayer wheel or beads) only when they are free! However, they still do kora. Thus, to the educated, the experience of kora instead of the purported accrued merit is what matters. They do it simply for the experience of divineness, or for embracing the sacred mountains as the sources of their life.

Below are our interview results of local people:

A normal middle-aged woman from Fei Lai temple said she was no longer able to kora on foot due to her body conditions, and she knew lots of the young men also chose to kora by car because they were not as strong as their ancestors.

A lama in the Taizi temple on Mei Li Mountain said it's better to do kora on foot if possible, but all the methods should gain the same merit. Doing kora on foot will also enable you to see more details and sceneries.

A nun in the Tabalin temple holds the same point, and she wonders whether you will gain the