



Tashi Jong: A Traditional Tibetan Community in Exile. Tibet Video Project,

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Tashi Jong (Auspicious Valley) is a 45 minute video which portrays the reestablishment of a Tibetan monastery and its accompanying village from somewhere in the Kham region (Sichuan Province) in what is now China to somewhere in northern India. Apparently, for the film is imprecise on this and much more, the move came sometime during the 1950s. The monastery and village migrated under the leadership of the 8th Khamtrul Rinpoche, who died, in exile, in 1980. This 1998 film, produced and photographed by Barbara Green, portrays the daily life of the 300 lay people and 100 monks in Tashi Jong who, together, are "[...] as one, working, living and practicing the Dharma." We witness the school, western and traditional Tibetan doctors, the local carpet enterprise, a political demonstration against Chinese rule in Tibet, people in devotion to their religion and the monks in the monastery. Especially the monks; for the film's design is to focus attention on the religious activities of these Tibetan exiles and their dedication to Tibetan Buddhism in general, and to their monastery and its leaders specifically. "For is the monastery is like the sun," intones the narrator Dechen Bartso, "the whole cycle of life revolves around it." Indeed, the film is largely an act of faith; a tribute to Tibetan Buddhism. "On seeing the tenderness of his being" says Bartso about her feelings toward the 9th Khamtrul Rinpoche, "our hearts filled with devotion." A good part of the film is devoted to the monks studying, praying,

conducting their household chores and, in the most visually striking scenes, preparing for and performing sacred religious dances. Conditions in the village appear rudimentary but not significantly different from their Indian counterparts. The people look healthy although there is mention of chronic medical problems such as dysentery which is not unusual for that part of the world. It's all very pleasant and easy to watch, not thought-provoking in the least. But, therein lies a contradiction, for its very nature is both its biggest strength and major weakness. Its strength because the film-makers are performing an act of adulation; an offering to devotees of Tibetan Buddhism and the groupies of their cause. The entire proceeds from the film go to the village and, as the film's publicist says, it's "purpose [is] as a fundraising tool." And as a "fundraising tool" it will probably succeed for the smiling faces, colorful costumes, adorable children, and the emphasis on victimization, will undoubtedly attract the sympathy and money which will help the Tibetans of Tashi Jong who, based on appearances from the film, can obviously use it. This Shangri-La view of Tibetans is meant to tug at the emotions as a direct path to the checkbooks and to that end it successfully fulfills its mission and I hope the people of Tashi Jong do well by it. However, the publicist went on to say that *Tashi Jong*, the film, "has become recognized as an excellent resource in educating both practitioners and students in world religion

and Buddhist studies." <p> If that is indeed also a goal of the film-makers then it I would venture to say, to that end, it falls far short of the mark precisely because of its superficiality. There is no serious discussion, or depiction for that matter, of religion or religious practice. For instance, the Dalai Lama is rarely referred to which, I presume, has to do with the differences amongst the various teachings of Tibetan Buddhism since this village does not belong to the Dalai Lama's Gelupga tradition. Yet there is no mention of this. In fact, no questions are asked (e.g., Did the community have difficulties in adjusting to their new surroundings? Why are sanitary conditions still so poor, even though "many have tried to help us"?); no issues are explored (e.g., What is the relation between the Tibetans and their Indian neighbors?); no history is examined. As an intellectual exercise, the film is woefully lacking. <p> In the final analysis then viewers' opinions about <cite>Tashi Jong</cite> will depend entirely on what each individual is searching for in a film on Tibetan exiles. Ultimately, what <cite>Tashi Jong</cite> resembles most is a travelogue, much like those done for the National Geographic TV series--although not as professionally slick--where beautiful pictures and a facile script leaves a viewer feeling better but not knowing much more than when it began.

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