



Keeping It Real!: Constructing and Maintaining Traditional Authenticity in a Tibetan Buddhist Organisation in Scotland

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Abstract

Many studies on the westward transplantation of Buddhism focus on the retention of traditional authenticity. The sociological perspective provided here moves the emphasis to the social construction of such claims. The social construction of traditional authenticity will be explored through a study of the Tibetan Buddhist organisation, Rokpa Scotland (RS) and it will be demonstrated that RS constructs claims to traditional authenticity by adapting to the local culture whilst demonstrating links with an ancient practice. These claims are then reified by limiting adaptations and retaining core features associated with Buddhism. None the less adapting to the West can be seen as detraditionalization and can present a threat to claims to traditional authenticity. However, RS can claim to control the detraditionalization process by responding to the effects of reflexive modernization and controlling the flow of information. In controlling detraditionalization RS provides the plausibility structures to maintain claims to traditional authenticity.

Keywords: *Tibetan Buddhism, Scotland, Transplantation, Reflexive Modernization, Detraditionalization, Social Constructionism*

Introduction

1.1 This paper offers a sociological perspective on one example of the transplantation of Buddhism to the West. This is a significant area of study for sociologists because an eastern religion has come into contact with the West, which has become characterised by reflexive modernization. That is, Beck proposed that the West has moved beyond the first stages of modernity and into a second in which it is experiencing the unintended consequences of modernization resulting in the self-destruction of industrial society. Thus reflexive modernization has not been brought about intentionally. It is a “new stage in which one kind of modernization undercuts and changes another” (Beck 2007:2). For Giddens (2007:57), this is a new era in which “modernity has been forced to come to its senses” and “the precepts and social forms of modernity stand open to scrutiny”. This opens traditional authorities up for debate and, in consequence, these authorities are increasingly challenged. Thus traditions need to be justified and are consequently reflexively revised. In so doing social institutions are detraditionalized and Giddens (2007) further argues that such reflexivity undermines traditions. However, I agree with Heelas (1996:3) when he argues “Detraditionalization may indeed have taken place. But rather than being envisaged as leading to across-the-board eradication of all traditions, it is seen as competing, interpenetrating or interplaying with processes to do with tradition-maintenance, rejuvenation and tradition construction”. This paper will provide an empirical case study of how a Tibetan Buddhist organisation can claim to provide access to a philosophy which is traditional and authentic in the face of detraditionalization and reflexive modernization.

1.2 First the relevant literature surrounding western Buddhism will be reviewed. The development of religion, and of Rokpa, in Scotland will then be briefly documented and my research methods explained. It will then be demonstrated that Rokpa Scotland (RS)^[1] claims to ‘keep it real’ by providing access to a set of practices that are useful in the contemporary West whilst also claiming to retain links with an ancient practice. RS is a Tibetan Buddhist organisation which has its roots in the monastery Samye Ling in Eskdalemuir and now has centres and groups meeting throughout Scotland (a fuller description can be found below). To provide access to relevant practices RS has to adapt Tibetan Buddhism for a western audience and some of these adaptations of Tibetan Buddhism will be highlighted. However it will also be identified that RS limits adaptations and retains core features of Tibetan Buddhism which reify claims to

traditional authenticity. None the less it will be accepted that, in adapting to the West, RS has gone through a process of detraditionalization and has been faced with some unintended consequences of adaptation which could undermine claims to traditional authenticity. However it will then be argued that lamas within RS can claim to control the detraditionalization process by responding to the effects of reflexive modernization and limiting the flow of information to different audiences. In conclusion it will be argued that, in this case, reflexivity does not undermine tradition but allows RS to adopt reflexive strategies that promotes the maintenance of plausible claims to traditional authenticity.

Literature Review

2.1 There is growing literature surrounding the transplantation of eastern religion to the West. For example Rochford (1991) studied the spread of the Hare Krishna movement to the States whilst Barot (1999) and Nye (1995) studied the formation of Hindu communities in Bristol, England and Edinburgh, Scotland, respectively. More particularly there has been a wealth of study into the transplantation^[2] of Buddhism to the West^[3] (Mellor 1991; Baumann 1994; Wilson and Dobbelaere 1994; Baumann 1996; Gregory 2001; Cadge 2005). However little has been written about the transplantation of Tibetan Buddhism to Scotland. Therefore this paper aims to put this development on the academic map.

2.2 Many existing studies focus on strategies of adaptation. It is well established that Buddhist organisations have to adapt for a foreign environment if they are going to establish a foothold in this new environment. Kay (2004) argues that Tibetan Buddhist organisations adapt by playing down the esoteric nature of its philosophy to avoid conflict with the new environment who may view these practices as controversial. Presenting Tibetan Buddhism as a philosophy of compassion rather than a religion also allows the organization to proselytize in a non-confrontational way and avoid association with the more negatively viewed new religious movements that adopt more aggressive recruitment tactics (Kay 2004). Whilst this study does not dispute these motivations, it will be argued that such adaptations are limited and can have unintended consequences which can be seen as an example of reflexive modernization.

2.3 Attempts have also been made to explain the adaptation process (for fuller discussion see Tweed (2002) and Prebish (1979, 1993)). The purpose of this paper is not to fully evaluate the terminology surrounding adaptation. However the terms indigenization and localization used by Baumann (1997), Spuler (2003) and McAra (2007) suggest that the local populations take Buddhism and make it their own. Whilst this paper does not aim to dispute the use of terms in other research settings, they do not seem to apply well in RS. This kind of terminology seems to under estimate the important role played by Tibetan leaders in the transplantation process (Kay 2004). In this paper it will be demonstrated that the lamas at the head of RS try to control the adaptation process and, in so doing, begins to address the issue that there is a lack of attention given to the important roles of Asians in negotiating the transplantation process (Kay 1997; Obadia, 2001).

2.4 Several studies have also examined the implications these adaptations have for the retention of traditional authenticity. For example, Green (1989) asks whether western Buddhist groups that chant for material gain represent a cognitive surrender of the Buddhist *Weltanschauung* to that of the modern West. Indeed, Harris (1995:200) claims that traditional forms of Buddhism cannot exist in the West. However, others, such as Lopez (1998) and Paine (2004), argue that the fundamentals of Tibetan Buddhism remain intact wherever it travels. This dispute is difficult to resolve because scholars disagree about the way to judge the authenticity of adapted forms of Buddhism because the criteria used originate within the philosophy (Kay 2004:23). Waterhouse (1999) helps to move beyond such debates when she looks at how British Buddhists make decisions about whom or what can represent legitimate and authentic Buddhist authority. She argues that legitimacy is judged in relation to "how far sources of authority within Buddhism are located within continuous tradition" whilst authenticity "is a judgement about the extent to which these authority sources represent successful and meaningful Buddhist practice" (Waterhouse 1999:19). This paper will focus on how claims to traditional authenticity are socially constructed. Here traditional refers to links with an ancient past whilst authenticity refers to the relevance of the practice in the present setting.

2.5 The advantage of the social constructionist view is that it allows us to bypass debates as to whether or not Tibetan Buddhist practices within RS are "invented traditions" (Hobsbawm 1983). The literature surrounding the "invention of tradition" focuses upon the degree to which traditions are based upon fabrication "in the retrospective culturation of traditional practices and beliefs" (Thompson 1996:100). Some such as Harris (1995) argue that in adapting Buddhism for the West, it becomes little more than an invented tradition with no genuine links with the past whilst others such as Lopez (1998) claim that links with the past can be maintained. From a sociological perspective this is difficult to judge. Therefore the question here is not primarily concerned with invention but that of construction. That is, the social constructionist approach adopts the premise that most social conventions are the work of people and much of what we do arises from social influence. Within this context claims to knowledge or truth are constructed by institutions which must provide legitimation for such claims by providing plausible explanations (Berger and Luckmann 1971). Therefore this paper aims to demonstrate how RS constructs claims to traditional authenticity whilst transplanting to the West and in so doing demonstrates the utility of the social constructionist approach in understanding the continuing position of tradition in contemporary western society.

2.6 Before going on to explain the social construction of traditional authenticity this paper will first outline the history of religion in Scotland in order to illustrate the religious culture into which Tibetan Buddhism arrived and RS developed.

The Historical Development of Religion in Scotland

3.1 Since the Protestant Reformation (1500-1600) attendance at mainstream churches in Scotland has been in flux. Callum Brown (1993:7) showed that, whilst overall church attendance remained high until mid-nineteenth century, affiliations changed, with a move away from the Church of Scotland to break-away Presbyterian and other churches. However, since the 1900s figures of church attendance for Scotland show a steady decline in religious participation (Brierley 1989; Highet 1960). By 2000 fewer than ten per cent of Scots had any active church connection (Brown 2000). Accordingly, Bruce (2002) argues that Scotland is becoming increasingly secularised and religion will continue to decline to the point of insignificance. However, Davie (1994) disagrees and argues that the decline in mainstream church need not indicate a wholly secular society.

3.2 The 2002 Scottish Church census indicated that 11.2% of the Scottish population still attended church on an average Sunday (www.esds.ac.uk). In addition to active attendance, Davie (1994) argued that many people “believe without belonging”. Statistics showed that in 1991 over 75% of the population in Britain continued to believe in God (Davie 1994:78). Davie (1994) further argued that many of these on-going religious beliefs were expressed in new forms of religion. New Religious Movements (NRM) became more popular in the 1970’s whilst New Age religions have flourished since the 1980’s. Sutcliffe (2006) reports a similar rise in interest in alternative religious beliefs in Scotland. For example a Hindu community has developed in Edinburgh (Nye 1995). Sutcliffe (2006) also pointed out that many of these alternative religious beliefs borrowed ideas from other religions including Buddhism. Indeed Cush (1996) suggested that the relationship between the New Age and Buddhism allowed the latter to make a foothold in Britain.

3.3 In Britain Theravada Buddhism^[4] was first preached in 1908 (Oliver 1979:12). Twenty years later, Zen Buddhism^[5] became popular followed by a sharp rise in interest in Tibetan Buddhism (Baumann 2002). This rapid increase in interest led to a considerable rise in the number of Buddhist centres. In Britain, for example, the number of groups and centres quintupled in twenty years, from seventy-four in 1979 to four hundred in 2000 (Baumann 2002:91-93). The 2001 Census also reported that there were over 6800 Buddhist in Scotland and Buddhism was the fastest growing religious identity (Bluck 2004). Importantly, Sutcliffe (2006) argues that Buddhism in Scotland has often been overlooked and one of the aims of this paper is to begin to address this omission.

3.4 Thus religious life in Scotland is one where mainstream religions have declined and religious difference is tolerated (Bruce 2002). Consequently, there is room to explore different traditions and some people became interested in eastern religions such as Buddhism (Baumann 2002). This paper then will provide a case study of how one religion can continue in a society that has seen many other religions fall into decline. The next step will be to describe the historical development of Rokpa in Scotland.

Rokpa Scotland (RS)

3.5 The origins of RS can be found in the Kagyu Samye Ling Monastery at Eskdalemuir, Scotland. Two Tibetan monks, Chogyam Trungpa Rinpoche and Dr. Akong Tulku, founded this monastery in 1967. In 1979, Oliver illustrated the establishment of Samye Ling: ‘Samye Ling, a unique feature of British Buddhism, has been with us for over 10 years - a decade in which this hitherto unknown entity has blossomed into an international Tibetan Buddhist Centre’ (Oliver 1979:105). This expansion has continued and it is now the largest monastery in the West, acting as the mother centre for its centres in Europe and Africa. Further developments took place in 1980 when Samye Ling was incorporated into Rokpa International, a charitable organisation committed to humanitarian, health and spiritual activities. Groups and centres have also blossomed throughout the cities of Scotland. Groups have met in Glasgow and Edinburgh since the 1980’s. In 1992, RS also became custodians of the Holy Island Project whilst Rokpa Dundee opened in 1999. Groups started in Aberdeen and the Highlands in 2000 (for further details see www.samye.org).

3.6 RS is now directed by the current Abbot of Samye Ling, Lama Yeshe Losal, and it provides the locations for RS to run courses. For example, in 2004, RS provided over one hundred different courses taught by over fifty teachers. Courses ranged from basic meditation to long term retreats. RS also offers a range of therapies and a variety of other activities. For example, Rokpa Dundee offers Reiki Healing and Hypnotherapy whilst courses on The Holy Island Project included Vegetarian Cookery and Dry Stone Walling. In addition RS also puts on public lectures and displays of Tibetan art and culture. For example public lectures toured Scottish cities and a demonstration of Tibetan dance took place at the Aberdeen Art Gallery.

3.7 RS attracts thousands of visitors per year. Oliver (1979:107-108) illustrated the diversity: “Japanese, American, Canadian, and yet another dozen nationalities came - some to get away from it all, some to study, some to write their theses and others to make retreat”. I encountered a similar diversity of nationalities and motivations for involvement. The next step will be to explain my methodology.

Methodology

4.1 This article is based on doctoral research which took place between June 2004 to September 2009. Initially the intended focus of my research was to look at the milieu of unorthodox forms of religious practice in Scotland and I became interested in RS after the Abbot of Samye Ling conducted a public lecture at the University of Aberdeen. It soon became clear that little had been written about the organisation and the transplantation of Tibetan Buddhism to Scotland soon became the chief focus of my doctoral thesis.

4.2 The research conducted involved a combination of ethnographic methods. Overt participant observations took place at Rokpa Aberdeen at weekly meetings; at Rokpa Dundee on two weekend courses, at Samye Ling at two weekend courses and on the Holy Island Project on a week-long retreat.

Participation involved taking part in teaching, meditation and prayer sessions and some socialising and helping with chores. In order to get a fuller understanding of the people involved I also carried out twenty formal qualitative interviews and my overt status as a non-Buddhist participant observer allowed me to conduct further informal interviews whilst participating. These interviews remained informal due to time constraints and the convenience of participants. All interviews were semi-structured because this approach allows the researcher to gather very detailed data and to retain the flexibility to respond to what emerges as significant in specific interview situations (Fielding 1993:135). In addition I carried out a comprehensive literature review and adopted an iterative inductive approach to the process of evaluating existing research and analyzing the research data. That is the argument proposed here is both developed from the research data and informed by the existing literature (O'Reilly 2005: 27).

4.3 As an outsider researching a religious group there were some problems encountered. For example getting access to the highest authorities with RS was difficult and I found myself confronted by a whole host of ethical issues (for a further discussion of these ethical issues see McKenzie (2009)). None the less this approach to the research field was useful because it allowed the research to develop within the framework of the existing discourse on western Buddhism and allowed new ideas to emerge. Furthermore the methodological triangulation gave insight into the impression management strategies adopted by RS. That is the way RS presents Tibetan Buddhism was not always representative of the depths of the philosophy and the mixed methods allowed the researcher to compare these representations with the practices of the organisation to check for congruence and impression management strategies.

4.4 RS is also an ideal site to explore the effects of reflexive modernization because Samye Ling is one of the oldest Buddhist monasteries in the West (Paine 2004) and has consequently had more time to be confronted by, and to reflect upon, the unintended consequences of adaption. Furthermore, whilst Buddhism has a long history of adaptation to different Asian cultures and Tibetan Buddhism itself is an adapted form (Baumann 1997), in coming West Buddhism had to be re-modified for a more alien environment. Adaptation to the West is particularly pertinent in relation to Tibetan Buddhism for two main reasons. First, because of the isolated geographical location of Tibet, Tibetan Buddhism remained relatively untouched by modernization forces (Gregory 2001:252). Second, Tibetan Buddhists advocate the use of *upaya*. *Upaya* are a range of practices which Tibetan Buddhists believe will provide a rapid path to enlightenment and teachers in Asia use them "to pitch their teaching according to the particular proclivities and attainment levels of their audience" (King 1999:95). However RS now has to utilise *upaya* for a culture characterised by reflexive modernization whilst maintaining plausible links with the past.

'Keeping It Real': The Social Construction of Traditional Authenticity in RS

The Transplantation of Tibetan Buddhism to Scotland

5.1 Buddhism arrived in Britain in a tolerant spiritual climate and RS had to adapt Tibetan Buddhist philosophy to this culture in order to become established (Kay 2004:16). However, Harris (1995) argued that cultural adaptation to the West destroys Buddhism and traditionalists often criticise the methods of modernist organisations. Furthermore leaders of the religion monitor practice and there have been fierce debates about what represents 'true Buddhism' (Baumann 2002). Such debates can result in open conflict. For example the Dalai Lama criticised the teaching techniques of the New Kadampa Tradition^[6] and in consequence the organisation lost credibility amongst other Buddhist organisations (Kay 1994). Thus RS needs to carefully adapt Tibetan Buddhism in such a way as to avoid the allegations that the philosophy has been so adapted that meaningful links with the past have been broken.

5.2 The Tibetans practice a form of Buddhism which resembles western schools of magic with its use of mystical diagrams and magic formulas to which only initiates have access. These mystical elements of Tibetan Buddhism emerged as Buddhist teachings became combined with Bon^[7]. Within Tibetan Buddhism there are four main schools – Nyingmapa, Gelugpa, Sakyapa and Kagyupa. The Nyingmapas place emphasis on the shamanic approach and the Gelugpas the clerical. The Sakyapas and Kagyupas fall somewhere in between (for further discussion see Samuel 1993).

5.3 From the beginning both founders of Samye Ling agreed that some adaptations of Tibetan Buddhism had to be made. However some reports suggest that there was conflict between the founders of RS as to how far the tradition should be adapted (Mukpo 2006). Such disputes amongst the leaders can cause concern amongst participants regarding the traditional sources of authority and could cause disruptions within the organisation (Waterhouse 1995). However any current disputes amongst leaders remain hidden from public view and the impression one gets is that of a united organisation.

'Keeping It Real'

5.4 RS, part of the Kagyupa School, claims that its practices are both traditional and authentic. That is, RS makes claims to "*keeping it real*" – making Tibetan Buddhism relevant to a Scottish audience by adapting the philosophy and practices (the measure of authenticity), whilst still retaining fundamental links with an ancient practice (the measure of tradition). The website for Samye Ling states that Buddhism is "a spiritual tradition that was founded over 2500 years ago" and that Samye Ling "is a centre for wisdom and learning within the Karma Kagyu tradition of Tibetan Buddhism" (www.samyeling.org). Akong Tulku's biography claims that he has links with lineages: "Having been recognized as the tulku of a very holy lama... Akong Tulku... completed his formal religious training as a lama of the Karma Kagyu and Nyingma lineages at the age of nineteen". These representations are utilized to demonstrate that RS has links with an ancient past and such constructions provide traditional legitimation for Akong's position within RS. In turn, the legitimacy of Akong's status then allows him to legitimize the practice of those who follow him

(Waterhouse 1995:59).

5.5 At the same time RS also claims to be relevant to the lives of participants. One way in which RS claims relevance to westerners is by promoting the health benefits and the life skills acquired through meditation. For example the website for Rokpa Aberdeen advertised a course, "*Approaching the Mahamudra: A Course in Meditation, Relaxation, and Developing Life Management Skills*". Karma Jiga reinforced the relevance of teaching at RS to living in the contemporary West when he said "At Rokpa you can gain access to all the knowledge and techniques you need to be happy living in today's society. These are ancient practices that have helped people survive the harshest times and yet are still relevant today. Just look at me I live here and I am happy". This quote shows that RS consistently constructs claims that the durability of the practice testifies to the relevance of the practice. RS further claims that the "continuing relevance" demonstrates genuine links with an ancient past.

5.6 This clearly indicates that RS claims to be an organization with a connection to an ancient past that provides access to techniques as a means of dealing with contemporary problems of western life. This together provides the basis for RS to stake claims to being both traditional and authentic. In order to illustrate how RS 'keeps it real', I will begin by highlighting adaptation strategies adopted by RS.

Adaptation Strategies

Adaptations

6.1 RS has adapted Tibetan Buddhism for an audience in Scotland in many ways and I will provide a brief overview. Before doing so however it is important to note that these adaptations should be considered within an international context, in that, it is difficult to distinguish between adaptations to Scotland and that to the West in general (Gregory 2001). Furthermore it is also difficult to ascertain whether adaptations are a consequence of opening to a wider group of lay practitioners (Cadge 2005). However what is important is that these adaptations are intentional but can result in unintended consequences which forces RS to revise its strategies.

6.2 On a practical level, the facilities provided at centres have been westernised. Chairs are provided in centres for those who cannot sit in the lotus position on the floor. For example, whilst on a weekend course at Samye Ling I noticed that people often moved from chairs to prayer mats regularly. Karen, a solicitor from London, explained: "I like to try to sit on the prayer mats when I can but I am not very accustomed to it. That is why I have to move back onto a chair because my legs get too sore". Although it is difficult to ascertain that there were never chairs in temples in Tibet descriptions of temples would suggest that these were rare and the laity more commonly sat on the floor (Mills 2003: 49). Furthermore, when on retreat, I expected living conditions to be sparse because austere living conditions were seen as central to spiritual development in Tibet (David-Neel 1997). However, the accommodation at the retreats was similar to that found in a hotel and the meals were as much as you could eat buffets. At a lecture in Dundee, Lama Yeshe joked about the accommodation at Samye Ling: "Back in Tibet provisions are very basic but we cannot expect the Scottish people to adapt to those conditions. In Samye Ling, we have comfortable beds and food is plentiful. Otherwise we would have an empty monastery". Other practical adaptations also took place. For example, whilst on retreat on the Holy Island film nights were put on in the temple to alleviate 'boredom'. At first these films were related to Tibetan Buddhism – "An Audience with the Karmapa^[8]" and "Seven Years in Tibet". However, by the end of the retreat, the group watched Disney animations such as "Finding Nemo". Furthermore RS had to adapt to teaching in premises outside the organisation. At the Catholic Chaplaincy, for example, a temporary shrine would be constructed in preparation for the weekly meditation classes.

6.3 At an organisational level RS adapted by placing Scots in positions of authority at the various centres. For example, a Scottish-born monk, the Venerable Karma Jiga Gelong, came out of retreat to spread Tibetan Buddhism throughout Scotland. He explained: "I had been in retreat for a long time. I was at peace. I did not want to come out and work in the community but the lama said that they had found a role for me and so I had to adapt". Additionally, the running of centres seemed to be largely undertaken by long-standing, Scottish members while courses often included subsidiary teaching by lay Scots. For example two lay members ran the teashop and administration in Rokpa Dundee. Placing Scots in positions of authority may allow local participants to relate more directly with the organisation and also allows RS to appeal to the western desire for individual attainment through hard-work. This is in contrast to Tibet where authority positions are typically occupied by Tibetan clerics (Samuel 1993).

6.4 Perhaps most importantly, RS adapted teachings for different audiences and this will be discussed later. For now it is worth noting that monasteries in Tibet, whilst they may run clinics to provide free healthcare, do not appear to provide a range of therapies nor run other classes such as the vegetarian cookery offered at RS.

6.5 Significantly, these strategies of adaptation were deliberately employed in order to make Tibetan Buddhism relevant to the people in Scotland. Lama Yeshe explained, "The new temple in Scotland was constructed to help people in Scotland find the missing part in their lives. It was not built for Tibetans". This is important because there are implications when centres are created for the host nation rather than migrant believers (Matthews 2002:122). That is, those centres created for members of host nations are more likely to adapt to the new environment. None the less RS still places limitations on its willingness to adapt.

Limiting Adaptation

6.6 In practical terms it has been acknowledged that RS is willing to cater to the western lifestyle. However it is significant to note that all the food provided at the various centres is vegetarian and the more advanced participants are expected to adapt to the austere conditions associated with the practice of Tibetan Buddhism in Tibet. For example, Keith, a retired teacher from Inverness explained that “people on long term retreats sleep in Tibetan boxes which mean they have to sleep in the sitting position and endure restricted movement”.

6.7 It is also important to note that the locals placed in positions of authority within RS have been well trained in Tibetan Buddhism and remain under the guidance of Tibetan lamas. For example, Karma Jiga has completed several retreats in the last thirty years and for the last ten years has founded projects on behalf of RS, under the direction of the Abbot of Samye Ling. Therefore the impact these westerners might have on the practice of Tibetan Buddhism is closely monitored by senior members of the organisations. Furthermore, although lay members may be entrusted with the day-to-day running of groups and centres, they were not always allowed to teach. For example, in the Aberdeen group, readings from one of Lama Yeshe’s books replaced teachings when Karma Jiga could not attend classes. Kathleen, a school teacher, explained “I read from the book when Jiga is not here because that is what he has told us to do. None of us here have been trained enough to conduct a dharma. Reading from the book is the next best thing”.

6.8 In addition to limiting adaptation RS also retains some of the core features of Tibetan Buddhism. I will now go on to illustrate the organisational emphasis on the lineage, the Three Jewels and the Cardinal Precepts.

Core Features of Tibetan Buddhism in RS

1. **The Lineage** The lineage is the process by which each school claims to trace its origins back to the historical Buddha through a succession of teachers (Paine 2004). Importantly the lineage is a major source of authority for Tibetan Buddhists (Waterhouse 1995:59). Within RS the lineage is constantly referred to and presented as historical fact^[9]. In each centre images of the Buddha dominate and photographs of the head of the lineage are also displayed. Karma Jiga reinforced the importance of lineage at a public lecture: “If you want to check the authenticity of a group then all you need to do is check the lineage. Any good school should have a lineage that traces back to the Buddha himself”.
2. **The Three Jewels of Buddhism** The Three Jewels of Buddhism of the Buddha, the dharma, and the sangha – the teacher, the teaching and the community - are widely considered to be the core component of any school of Buddhism (Harvey 1990:176). Within RS these are a prominent feature within the organisation. The importance of the Buddhas is well illustrated by the sheer profusion of lineage teachers active in the organisation. Similarly, the importance of the dharma is evident in the numerous courses available at the various sites. Whilst Karma Jiga, illustrated the importance of the sangha before taking leave: “Do not use my absence as an excuse not to come to meetings. This is very important if you are serious about your practice. We all need community whether I am here or not”.
3. **The Cardinal Precepts of Buddhism** The Cardinal Precepts of Buddhism - not killing, not stealing, not lying, no intoxicants and no sexual abuse (Harvey 1990:1999) - are strictly upheld at Samye Ling and the Holy Island Project. Visitors to these centres are requested to uphold these rules and failure to do so will result in offending individuals being asked to leave. Karma Jiga illustrated the commitment to upholding these precepts on the Holy Island:

Many years ago researchers wanted to put horses on the island to see if it was possible for horses to survive in the wild in Scotland. So the horses came and survived quite happily. When the study came to an end the researchers tried to get the horses off the island but they would not go. Their solution was going to be to shoot the horses but I would not allow it. There is no killing on the Holy Island.

6.9 It is also important to note that these core elements are a persistent feature in the literature produced by RS. Additionally, RS also consistently displays symbols which have become associated with Tibetan Buddhism via the popular media. This is visible at the centres - monks have shaved heads and wear traditional saffron robes; prayers are chanted in Tibetan and centres are decorated in Tibetan art. It has been argued that these surface features could be abandoned and the philosophy still remain traditional and authentic (Trungpa 1984). However, the overt display of Tibetan Buddhist symbols provide a recognisable link between RS members and a historical practice and reifies ^[10]RS’s claims to traditional authenticity.

6.10 Thus RS can construct claims to traditional authenticity by adapting Tibetan Buddhism for a western audience whilst retaining links with the past by limiting adaptation and retaining core features of Tibetan Buddhism. However in order to maintain these claims RS also has to demonstrate that it controls the process of detraditionalization by reflexively responding to the negative effects of reflexive modernization and controlling the flow of information to the western audience.

Controlling Detraditionalization

Responding to the Effects of Reflexive Modernization

7.1 Since Samye Ling opened there is evidence to suggest that RS has applied increasing controls to adaptation on reflecting upon the effects of reflexive modernization. In the early years any adult interested in becoming a monk could ordain. This is in contrast to Tibetan practice whereby most monks are ordained by their family at a comparatively young age (Mills 2003). However this open to all-comers policy caused

problems. Some of the newly ordained monks did not uphold the cardinal precepts and there were a series of scandals in the newspapers. During a visit to Samye Ling, Dave, a lay resident, explained: "When Samye Ling opened almost anyone turning up could be ordained. Some of the first monks were experimenting with drugs and having relationships with visitors and there were a few media scandals about drug fuelled parties and sexual exploitation". The bad press could be seen as an unintended consequence of adaptation and on reflection RS has now implemented a stricter recruitment procedure. It now takes three years to ordain. Such restrictions now allow RS to monitor recruits and weed out any participants who do not uphold the cardinal precepts.

7.2 It was not however only the new monks that were causing controversy. The behaviours of co-founder, Trungpa, also attracted negative media attention. Diana Mukpo (2006) reported that Trungpa's meat-eating, drinking and marriage to her, a sixteen year old girl, were subjects for media scandal and caused dispute with co-founder, Akong. She also suggested that Akong may have felt that Trungpa adapted teachings too far and placed the fundamentals of Tibetan Buddhism in danger. It was for this reason that Trungpa moved to the United States (Mukpo, 2006). The adverse media attention was a negative consequence of adaptation and there have consequently been increasing limitations placed on adaptations. In practical terms, intoxicants were banned from the centres and centres only supplied vegetarian food.

7.3 Importantly, RS also needs to protect Tibetan Buddhism, from reflexive practices out with the control of the lineage authorities. In order to insulate the philosophy from such practices RS controls the flow of knowledge to audiences with different levels of commitment and training and in so doing limits the changes westerners can make to Tibetan Buddhism.

Controlling the Flow of Knowledge

7.4 According to the traditional authority Tibetan Buddhism should be taught on three levels or *yanas*: Hinayana, Mahayana, and Vajrayana. The first two *yanas* serve as a foundation to the Vajrayana. This three-tier approach is somewhat peculiar to the Tibetan method of teaching (Paine 2004) and provides a useful mechanism for RS to control the flow of information to the western audience. However one can also recognise additional levels of teaching within RS.

7.5 Lectures in public places tend to focus on the history of Samye Ling and the relationship with the local community. For example, at a public lecture in Aberdeen, Lama Yeshe said: "At first the locals were very un-accepting of Samye Ling. That has changed and now Samye Ling enjoys a good relationship with the locals". In saying this, it seemed that the lama was keen to demonstrate the acceptability of the organisation to the wider culture. Importantly there were no religious rituals at these gatherings. Speakers also played down the authority of the teachers and located the ultimate authority within the individual. At a lecture in Dundee, Lama Yeshe advised "I am not here to tell people what to believe and what to do. That is your responsibility". Any discussion of Tibetan Buddhism tended to focus on compassionate nature of the philosophy, mindfulness and the usefulness of techniques such as meditation for coping with modern society. However these techniques were not explicitly taught. For example, at a public lecture in Dundee, entitled *Opening Hearts and Minds*, the Lama Yeshe said:

Opening Hearts and Minds, what am I going to do – perform an operation? No the heart and mind are inseparable because everything stems from the mind. How to open this is to execute right speech, right thought and right action. This can be achieved through mental and physical dharma. If you want to learn about these things and help you cope with life you need to find a good teacher.

After the lecture representatives handed out details of a corresponding course at Rokpa Dundee. This course involved chanting prayers and meditation. However those who only went to the public lecture did not get exposed to these practices or taught the techniques.

7.6 Adapting teachings for different audiences allows RS to appeal to the individualistic culture of the West and gives that impression that Tibetan Buddhism is democratic and without dogma. This implies that people can interact with the organisation in the way they wish. However it is a mistake to think that Buddhism is without dogma (Green 1989:277). None the less the hierarchical and dogmatic nature of Tibetan Buddhism is played down in public addresses in order to gain acceptance from the wider society.

7.7 The themes discussed at lectures were also present at the more basic teachings in the centres. However, teachers at the centres also focused on teaching techniques such as meditation for spiritual development. For example, there were two guided meditations at the weekly meetings in Aberdeen and every class began and ended with Tibetan prayers.

7.8 Furthermore one can begin to see that RS needs to balance the freedom of individual participants with a need for regular attendance at the centres. The need for regular attendance is well illustrated in an email sent out by Karma Jiga: "It has been brought to my attention that Rokpa Dundee lost £4000 last year... You need to make a commitment to the classes as they are the foundation for the future." Therefore, participants are encouraged into regular attendance. The coercion of those participants with higher degrees of involvement is important because the more involved a person gets the more the authority becomes located in the organisation and the greater the expectation that those involved will obey that authority.

7.9 Therefore those participants who extend their involvement with RS may soon find that many of the adaptations for the wider audience at public lectures were only at the surface of the organisation. The deep ideology is explicitly religious and it becomes clear that RS advocates that their teachers represent the ultimate authority. The location of authority within the teacher leads many practitioners to be devoted to

their teachers. For example, many of the more committed participants followed Lama Yeshe's lecture tours. This is well illustrated by Arlene, a retired woman living in Aberdeen, when she said 'I love spending time with Lama Yeshe and I will travel down to Dundee if he is doing a lecture and go and see him do the same lecture when he comes to Aberdeen. It's a great opportunity to be in his presence'. Indeed many of the participants thought it a great privilege to serve visiting lamas food and drink during their stay. This struck me as the master and servant kind found in Tibet (David-Neel 1997). Furthermore the emphasis on guidance ensures that there is "a systematic diffusion of certain values throughout the entire organisation" (Wilson and Dobbelaere 1994:225).

7.10 Moreover, those who do not accept the authority of the lama may find their involvement limited. Ewan, a retired headmaster from Dundee, explains, "I do not particularly like the aspect of the lama being the one that you look to for guidance. I think individuals are able to decide for themselves. So I am not going to put my spiritual life in the hands of any guru. For that reason, however, I do not feel that I fully belong". Here again the dogmatic nature of the philosophy and hierarchical nature of the organisation becomes more prominent. However it must also be noted that at this level of teaching the organisation still attempts to appear non-dogmatic and greater emphasis is placed on the pragmatism of the techniques rather than upon the religious and authoritarian nature of the philosophy.

7.11 It is not until the workshops and retreats that the teachings become more deeply esoteric. On the Holy Island Project retreat the leader taught participants prolonged meditation and to visualise deities. The teachings on longer retreats become increasingly advanced. However, the more advanced rituals and practices were closed access. To gain access participants had to show commitment and complete different levels of teaching to the satisfaction of their teacher. Access is controlled through empowerment ceremonies^[11] conducted by lamas. For example, those participants wishing to access the Chod^[12] meditation retreat in Samye Ling must have gone through specific empowerment ceremonies and have the authorization of the lama (www.samyeling.org). Thus the lineage teachers act as guardians of the tradition (Giddens 1996) by controlling access to the depths of the philosophy and practice

7.12 When access to advanced teachings is denied it is typically justified on the basis that the excluded participants do not have the knowledge to understand the techniques or that employing the advanced techniques would represent a danger to the naive practitioner. At a weekly meeting in Aberdeen Alan, a visiting Buddhist from the Friends of the Western Order, asked the teacher why he instructed participants to breathe from the diaphragm – basic level – rather than from the belly – more advanced level. Karma Jiga replied "That will come later. The way you breathe effects the way you think and many people would not be ready for the changes in thinking caused by belly breathing. To do this too soon could cause mental health problems". Whilst it may be true that access is denied for the protection of naive participants, limiting access also allows RS to uphold that the fundamentals of Tibetan Buddhism is insulated from unregulated reflexive tendencies. This paper is not suggesting that the more advanced practitioners do not reflect on their practice. However, when they do so, they tend to do so under the instruction of their lineage teachers and are reluctant to discuss their practice in public. For example, more advanced practitioners often kept private diaries documenting their practice and experience and when I asked Stewart about his private practice, he said 'That is between me and Jiga. I do not discuss this with anyone else. He does not like it when I do that'. Furthermore participants rarely discussed Tibetan Buddhist philosophy out with the teaching sessions. This stands in contrast to the public debates in Tibet (Perdue 1992).

7.13 Thus the heads of RS have learnt that in order to reject potential allegations that they have lost links with the past they need to control the detraditionalization process by responding to the negative effects of reflexive modernization and limiting the flow of knowledge through different and increasingly restricted levels of teaching. These limitations demonstrate the control the lineage exercises over the detraditionalization process and help to maintain a certain orthopraxy. In turn the maintenance of orthopraxy provides the plausibility structures for RS to maintain that it retains links with a historical practice (Berger and Luckmann 1971).

Discussion

8.1 Throughout the literature on western Buddhism arguments surround the traditional authenticity of Buddhist organisations which adapt the philosophy and practices for a western audience. Within sociology there is also a debate surrounding the implications detraditionalization has for the continuation of traditions in a contemporary society characterised by reflexive modernization. Within such a context traditions, if they are to continue, need to justify themselves and to adapt to the contemporary environment. Such negotiations can have unintended consequences which can undermine claims to traditional authenticity. This can be seen as an example of reflexive modernization. Existing studies have focused on the retention of traditional authenticity. However assessing the validity of claims to retain traditional authenticity are difficult, if not impossible, to judge from a sociological perspective. The social constructionist approach then becomes useful because it allows us to bypass the problematic nature of assessing validity and moves the focus onto how such claims are constructed and maintained.

8.2 This paper then demonstrated how Rokpa Scotland (RS) constructs claims to traditional authenticity whilst adapting Tibetan Buddhism for a modern West characterised by reflexive modernization. Firstly I argued that RS needed to adopt various practical and organisational adaptations strategies in order to make a foothold in Scotland. These adaptations were deliberate strategies to increase the appeal of Tibetan Buddhism to a western audience and in the process of adapting Tibetan Buddhism, the organisation has gone through the process of detraditionalization. However, in adapting to the West, RS has been confronted by the effects of reflexive modernization. That is some of these adaptations have had unintended consequences which could potentially undermine claims to traditional authenticity.

8.3 Indeed some argue that such adaptations dilute Buddhism and opens up the potential for allegations

that any credible links with the past have been broken. However, I argued that RS needs to “keep it real” by making Tibetan Buddhism relevant for a Scottish audience whilst constructing plausible claims to traditional authenticity. This paper then demonstrated that RS constructs such claims by limiting adaptations and retaining core features associated with Tibetan Buddhism. Furthermore RS also has to control the detraditionalization process by responding to the negative effects of reflexive modernization and limiting the flow of information to participants via different levels of teaching. In adapting Tibetan Buddhism for a western audience and controlling the detraditionalization process RS provides the plausibility structures to maintain claims to traditional authenticity.

8.4 At public lectures, Tibetan Buddhism is adapted for a western audience and presented more as a philosophy of compassion than a religion and the authority being located within the individual. Such representations give the impression that Tibetan Buddhism is not a dogmatic religion and allows RS to appeal to western individualism. However the more involved one gets with the organisation the more one becomes exposed to the esoteric nature of Tibetan Buddhism and that the authority is located within the lineage which is embodied by the lamas. However participants can only reach the higher levels of teaching with the approval of a lama and access is controlled via empowerment ceremonies. Restricting access to the higher teachings demonstrates the important role played by Tibetans as guardians of the tradition in transplanting Tibetan Buddhism to the West. Furthermore the restricted access to the monastic role and a tightening of regulations represents a reflexive response to the effects of reflexive modernization. Limiting access to the higher teachings and responding to the unintended consequences of reflexive modernization allows RS to make plausible claims to controlling the process of detraditionalization. Controlling detraditionalization and adapting to the West allow RS to ‘keep it real’. That is to provide relevant teachings to a western audience whilst claiming links with an ancient past.

8.5 In demonstrating how RS ‘keeps it real’ this paper has highlighted the utility of the social constructionist approach for understanding how a tradition can persist in the contemporary West. In so doing attention has been brought to the rising popularity of Buddhism in Scotland, and has placed the development of Tibetan Buddhism in Scotland on the academic map. Furthermore this paper provides an empirical case study of how traditions can negotiate the processes of detraditionalization and respond to the negative effects of reflexive modernization. That is RS adopts deliberate and limited strategies of adaptation to the West and responds to the effects of reflexive modernization and in so doing RS can claim to control the process of detraditionalization. In this case, reflexivity does not destroy tradition but instead allows RS to develop intentional strategies to maintain plausible claims to traditional authenticity. That is, detraditionalization creates a situation where different responses become possible, because rather than being determined by traditional authorities, the outcomes of actions are considered when negotiating the transplantation process.

Notes

¹For simplicity, I will refer to the branches of Rokpa in Scotland as Rokpa Scotland (RS).

²Neumaier-Dargyay (1995) disputed the use of the transplantation metaphor arguing that Buddhism changes in moving to the West and is therefore not transplanted like a ‘tomato plant’. However, within this paper, the transplantation metaphor remains useful at least in terms of understanding the intentions of the organisation (in that in moving, RS claims to keep Tibetan Buddhism essentially the same).

³For a fuller survey of studies see Baumann (1997).

⁴Theravada Buddhism, the dominant tradition in South East Asia, is characterised by its fidelity to early Buddhist scriptures.

⁵Zen is a form of Buddhism that originates in Japan and emphasises the importance of sitting meditation.

⁶The New Kadampa Tradition, with its’ headquarter in London, is a contemporary Tibetan Buddhist organisation which claims that other Tibetan Buddhist schools have departed from the tenets of the original teachings.

⁷ Bon is the indigenous religion of Tibet.

⁸ The Karmapa is the head of the Lineage.

⁹It must be noted that lineage histories often gloss over disputes as to the ancestral links with the Buddha (Waterhouse 1999).

¹⁰Reification is “the apprehension of the products of human activity as if they were something other than human products such as facts of nature, results of cosmic laws or manifestation of divine will” (Berger and Luckmann 1971:106).

¹¹An empowerment is a ceremony wherein a lama will confer the blessings of a particular Buddhist deity (Paine 2004).

¹²Chod meditation is a ritual in which “the practitioner fervently offers up his body as a feast to imaginary demons” (Paine 2004)

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