

Societal Relevance and Place of Buddhism in France

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The principle of secularity

France was held to be the eldest daughter of the Church up until the French Revolution in 1789. The king exercised temporal authority, the Pope spiritual authority. This situation was valid up to 1789, at which point the Catholic religion became the national religion. This change however provoked a schism, with one faction submitting to Rome, the other to the state. In order to put an end to the crisis, Bonaparte signed a treaty (le Concordat) in 1801 (15th July 1801) - a compromise ensuring religious freedom and obliterating the notion of an official religion on condition public order be maintained.

The principle of secularity took shape during the French Revolution with the affirmation of universal principles, including conscientious freedom and equal rights as expressed in the Declaration of the Rights of Man. In the 19th century, the laws on secularity gradually freed the state of its historical links with the Catholic Church and created new political and social norms based on the principle of republican universalism. This process, within a wider movement towards modernity, charged the sovereign people with redefining basic political and social principles: executive, legislative and judicial powers, the organization of the state with its various components and representations, education, civil rights, the evolution of law and morality, etc., without reference to any religious dogma. The Third Republic in particular reorganized the school system, introducing public, secular and compulsory education (thanks to Jules Ferry). This process concludes with the law separating church and state in 1905, giving definitive form to explicit secularity.

Throughout the 20th century, the state has introduced legislation generalizing the notion of secularity with new rules concerning the family and the individual. With the French Constitution of 1958, secularity becomes the corner-stone of the republican pact and the guarantee of national unity.

Today, communal organization based on secularity makes it possible to envisage both the diversity of people and the necessity of unity to ensure their co-existence. This is obtained by combining conscientious freedom, by which religious options can be made without constraint, equal rights for all whatever their spiritual choice, and the definition of a common law governed by public interest, universally shared.

Jean Baubérot similarly defines contemporary secularity with a three-fold formula: the state is secular, freedom of belief and worship is guaranteed and all forms of belief have equal value. He notes however that emphasis may be put on one or the other of the three: secularization for the defender of neutrality, conscientious freedom for the believer, while adepts of minority faiths insist on the equal value of belief systems.

Secularity, promoting religious pluralism, encourages dialogue and peaceful coexistence of religious which should in turn advance peace in the nation and between nations.

The situation in Alsace-Moselle, governed for two centuries by the original Concordat in a secular society proposing a religious diversity recognized and accepted by the population in Alsace-Moselle, may seem paradoxical. The local people however are strongly attached to their local laws and have no wish to conform to the situation in the rest of France.

Sociology of religion

Religion was central, for the French founders of sociology, being at one and the same time observers and actors in the advent of modernity, the development of science, the democratization of political life, the rationalization of economic activity, the bureaucratization of society and a parallel disenchantment of the world. This is the context in which Saint-Simon, Auguste Comte, Karl Marx and Friedrich Engels, later Emil Durkheim, attempted to create new all-inclusive political and religious ideologies capable of giving meaning to human lives, just as the Catholic religion had ensured social cohesion over many centuries.

However, it is to Emil Durkheim that we owed the decisive impulse given to religious sociology with his two major works: “Suicide” in 1897 and “The elementary Forms of religious Life” in 1912. He defines religion as a “cohesive system of beliefs and practices involving the sacred, (i.e. the separate or taboo), beliefs and practices which unify a moral community, called “church”, for all those who adhere to it¹”. He sought to define religion from the study of the religious elements in so-called primitive societies. He then narrowed his definition with the distinction between the sacred and the profane, holding that to maintain a certain social cohesion, religion was the necessary representative of the moral authority of a collectivity over all its individuals. Thus, religion has a social function.

We ought now to look at the meaning of this highly polysemical word. Three etymologies are possible:

- Relate (Fr. relier = to link). Certain ancient writers such as Lactantius or Tertullian derive ‘religio’ from the verb ‘ligare’ (to bind or link). With this commonly accepted meaning, religion expresses the idea of a “relation”, both horizontally, between men, and vertically, between them and something other or superior.
- Recollect (Fr. recueillir = gather together). Cicero connects ‘religio’ with the verb ‘legere’ (to collect or pick up). This expresses the notion of gathering people together. This does not imply an organic link for gathering together does not signify binding.
- Reinvent (Fr. Ressaisir = recover). For the famous French linguist Emile Benvéniste, the noun ‘religio’ expresses the idea of “recovering by a fresh choice” of “returning to a previous demarche, of reappropriating mentally the ordinary facts and events of social life²”.

These changes of meaning cover first the attitude induced by the experience of the sacred, then the whole gamut of manifestations and beliefs linked to this attitude.

These different etymologies reveal the Western difficulty in conceiving of religion in isolation whereas in so-called traditional societies, in which the religious and social are always co-extensive, no such distinction exists. In these societies religion links individuals together, connects them to the invisible or not yet visible part of their environment and regulates the bond between the social and the sacred.

Taking etymology into account imposes on us the distinction between our modern societies and so-called traditional societies. “Religion” is a Western concept dating back to the reign of the Roman Emperor Constantine under whom Christianity became the

¹ Emile DURKHEIM, *les formes élémentaires de la vie religieuse*, Paris, PUF, Quadrige, 7^{ème} édition, 1985, p.65.

² E. BENVÉNISTE, *Le vocabulaire des institutions indo-européennes*, Paris, Ed. de minuit, t.2, 1969, pouvoir, droit, religion, p. 270 à 272.

state religion. It thus became necessary to differentiate between religion and the concept of state. Later the concept of religion came to be extended to other fields of reality giving rise to the development of the science of the sacred, then of religion, finally, human and social sciences, including the sociology of religion.

The variety of religious phenomena led to a need for classification. Max Weber's three main types is one of the better known:

- 1) Ritualistic religions, based on respect for the law and adaptation to the real state of the world
- 2) Religions aiming at salvation, based on conviction in expectation of a savior
- 3) Soteriological religions based on belief and expectation of a savior who is at the same time a redeemer.

Max Weber³ also studied the question of the relationship between religion and society from another angle. His work high-lighted the logical structure of religious systems and their consequences for the economic and social structures of society. This led him inevitably to propose ideal types of religious "specialists" (priest, magician, prophet), forms of religious socialization (churches, sects, mystical networks) and power structures (traditional, legal-bureaucratic, charismatic)⁴. This typology is still relevant today.

The sociology of religion arose out of the observed loss of preeminence of religion in modern society. With the development of science and its technological applications in all fields of activity, men came to feel they could control their own destiny. At the same time, natural resources seemed to be unlimited, leading to the modern belief that all desires could be infinitely satisfied.

This loss of ascendancy finds expression in the concept of secularization. In France, this is referred to the conflict between the Catholic Church and the state, focused on the legal separation of churches and state and the problem of secularity in the school system. In sociological terms, the notion of secularization comprises a whole process which profoundly modifies the status of religion in society. Four elements can be distinguished:

- rationalization: religion is no longer the organizing agent of society and social organization is no longer based on the parish ;
- differentiation of authority: various religious responsibilities are taken over by the state (registration, hospices and assistance, health, education) ;
- privatization: belief is pluralized and privatized. Belief and religious practice have become private affairs depending on individual conscience ;
- individualization: emphasis is put on a personal and autonomous demarche. The individual becomes the actor of his own life, capable of constructing his own significations giving meaning to his life.

The French historian and philosopher, Marcel Gauchet, prefers to speak about the "decline of religion"⁵ rather than secularization or laicization, both ecclesiastical in origin. "The decline of religion does not imply decline of religious belief but the abandonment of a world structured by religion, where religion dominates the political form of a society and defines social bonds".

³ Max WEBER, *Economie et Société*/2, Paris, Plon Pocket, rééd. 1995, chapitre 5, p. 145 à 409

⁴ Max WEBER, *Economie et Société*/1, Paris, Plon Pocket, rééd. 1995, ch. 3, § 1 à 5, p. 285 à 325.

⁵ Marcel GAUCHET, *la religion dans la démocratie*, Paris, Gallimard, 1998, p.11.

This view however is contradicted by the emergence from 1965-70 onwards of forms of religious expression outside recognized religious systems. These arose on American university campuses, involving students perfectly integrated in American society. These new religious movements are surprisingly diversified both in form and content : Oriental religions, practices aimed at developing human potential, borrowings from occultist or divinatory science, from scientific or technological fields (Christian science, Scientology, Raelisme), the wide-spread extension of sects and Evangelical or Pentecostal churches, apocalyptic prophecies, and so on. These are syncretized to form novel combinations. Almost all these new religious movements have spread from America to Europe.

These phenomena are seen as responses to the crisis in modernity, as a form of protestation or even a refusal of the process of modernization underway in the second half of the 20th century. The uprooting of people, the disruption of identity, the mingling of cultures and the ever-increasing domination of a visual culture in advanced industrialized societies, loss of faith in the certainties of both tradition and modernity, all lead to a reconstruction of what gives meaning and value to behavior.

The traditional religions resist the proliferation of new religious movements. Institutions change to adapt to the demands of modern life, revalorizing tradition or elaborating new forms of Christian life. As a result the field of religious sociology has widened to take into account the restructuring of religion within modernity. After a period of observation and inventory, a classification of the different components of the new religiosity has emerged.

In her analysis of the new religious movements, Danièle Hervieu-Léger refers back to tradition, distinguishing three major currents⁶:

- a “spiritual” current composed of mobile groups and networks, devoted to self-improvement with individuals seeking to harmonize their lives, reconcile themselves with themselves, others and their environment ;
- a “conversionist” current characterized by a brutal conversion entailing a break with earlier modes of life ;
- a “millennialist” current involving the expected advent of a new world and its preparation.

The emergence and proliferation of new religious movements result from the individualization and subjectivization of religious belief which comes with the destructuring of religious institutions. Religion becomes personal, relating to the private sphere. Denis Jeffrey emphasizes the “flexibility of this personal religion which mirrors the subject creating it⁷”. Sociologists refer to “do-it-yourself” belief and the Dalai Lama to “religious supermarkets⁸”, a wide variety of choice to help from, according to one’s needs. The Dalai Lama sees this as an advantage considering the diversity of religious sensibilities. Different people require approaches and practices which may be different, complementary or similar but approached differently. Compassion for instance is envisaged by Christians in relationship with God whereas Buddhists include it in the Bodhisattva practices. In the long run both aim at developing compassion.

⁶ G. DAVIE et Danièle HERVIEU-LÉGER, *Identités religieuses en Europe*, Paris, La Découverte, 1996, p. 277 à 280.

⁷ Denis JEFFREY, *La jouissance du sacré, Religion et postmodernité*, Paris, Armand Colin, 1988, p.15.

⁸ DALAI LAMA, expression said at a conference DALAI LAMA for the members of the European Parliament in Strasbourg in 1996.

The state of flux in modern society involves people in a constant search for the meaning of their lives, hence the “do-it-yourself” characteristic of the new religious movements. These all offer something which could not be found in the older religions. In view of their dynamism, some sociologists refer to a return of religion or of the sacred, where the theory of secularization had foreseen the imminent death of religions reduced to a merely residual state. The famous formulation attributed to the French intellectual, writer and politician, André Malraux, is often quoted: “The twenty-first century will be mystic (spiritual) or nothing”.

The contemporary return of the religious and the new forms of religiosity correspond to a loss of confidence in modernity, which no longer offers a solution to existential problems. There are two ways of analyzing the phenomenon. It may represent a momentary surge corresponding to a critical period in modernity, fated to disappear as things improve. But it could also be a product of modernity itself, not necessarily destined to eliminate religion, rather, as for other institutions, introducing profound modifications and new functions.

The phenomenon does seem to be long-standing, increasingly structured and evolving. It has been calculated that 60 % of the population in France is Christian, 25 % agnostic, 6 % Muslim, 2 % Jewish and 2 % Buddhist. Only 10 % are regular practicing Catholics. The spread of Buddhism is an excellent laboratory in which to observe the modern metamorphoses of religion in so far as it bears witness to a double movement of decomposition and recomposition of belief.

The Influence of Missionaries and Philologists

From the Middle Ages, merchants like Marco Polo and religious emissaries such as William of Rubrouck noticed the great virtue of Tibetan monks and the Singhalese people. Marco Polo fairly accurately described the life of Buddha, and from the 12th century onwards missionary scholars translated some Buddhist texts from Tibet. During the Renaissance, missionaries who knew nothing about medieval contacts became interested in Buddhism, most often describing it as an atheistic and perverted religion.

Despite a certain discontinuity in the discovery of Buddhism by Europeans, it is curious to note that it has always been interpreted in the same way, that is to say, as the myth of a magical Tibet; this can be observed in Marco Polo’s writings in the fourteenth century, those of a Portuguese Jesuit Antonio de Andrade in the seventeenth century, of a theosophist Alfred Percy Sinnett in the late nineteenth century and the cartoonist Hergé in the twentieth century. Over and above the diversity of places and times, there is therefore unity in the European view, shaped by a common culture, imagination and similar mental structures.

The idea that there could be a relationship between the various cults - Burmese, Buddhist, Chinese, Singhalese, Japanese, Tibetan, etc., was advanced only in the seventeenth century and it was only around 1880 that the word "Buddhism" appeared. This came about through the work of Joseph Deguignes, who collected different sorts of very specific information, which led to the perception of the unity of Dharma through a huge diversity of cultural expressions, and gradually to the conceptualization of Buddhism.

The scholarly discovery of Asian religions was a crucial development. In 1771 Anquetil-Duperron published the Zend-Avesta (the Holy Book of Zoroastrianism). Thus Europeans were able to understand and translate the languages of the Near East (Egyptian, Aramaic and Syrian hieroglyphs) and the Far East (Sanskrit, Pali, ancient Chinese). The Jesuit Roberto de Nobili was the first European to read Sanskrit and in 1664 Henry Roth published the first Sanskrit grammar. In 1784, William Jones, an

English orientalist and linguist founded the first English Asiatic Society in Calcutta and translated the Bhagavad Gita in 1785. He discovered the relationship between Sanskrit and ancient European languages and put forward the hypothesis of "Indo-European". This was the first real school of scholars who studied and reflected on many Hindu texts. Moreover, the Frenchman Abel Remusat translated the main treatises on Chinese Buddhism. The Hungarian Alexander Csoma Körös elaborated a grammar book and a Tibetan-English dictionary of 30,000 words which were published in 1834. He also revealed two major and sacred collections of books named Kangyur and Tangyur. A copy of the Kangyur was deposited by Körös in the Royal Library of Paris and 88 works of the Sanskrit Buddhist Canon, recuperated in Nepal, were sent to the Asiatic Society of Paris by the British diplomat Bran Hodgson. Eugene Burnouf, a founding member of the Asiatic Society in Paris, created in 1822, was a young and exceptionally gifted philologist who updated the Indian origins of Buddhism and in 1852 published "The Lotus of Good Faith", translated from Sanskrit. He is considered as the real founder of the Buddhist philology. This was the beginning of the popularity of Buddhist studies and scholarly works, and translations multiplied thanks to outstanding scholars such as Sylvain Levi, Louis de la Vallee Poussin and Jean Przyluski. The growth in documentation obliged their successors to specialize in the study of a specific geographical or linguistic area. This enabled better understanding of the different Buddhist traditions and the way in which they developed within a particular culture.

Highlighted by scholarly studies, Buddhism fascinates intellectuals, historians and journalists, who systematically need to compare Buddhism to Christianity. It highlights the convergence of Tibetan and Zen traditions: traditions from another tradition that was abolished, the idea of the unity of mankind, similarities at the level of hierarchy, rituals, pilgrimages and monastic life. As a result, the French feel close to these religious traditions and do not hesitate to speak of "Catholicism of the East".

Meanwhile, Colonel Olcott and Helena Blavatsky founded the Theosophical Society in 1875 and sought to build an "esoteric Buddhism", a third way between materialistic science and dogmatic religion. They justified their doctrine by occult teachings transmitted through enigmatic Tibetan Masters and the myth of Tibet magic. There was also in Europe at that time a revival of esotericism (interest in dialogue with the dead, white or black magic, superior psychic powers provided by disembodied spirits, magnetism...). Numerous secret societies were created and spread the idea of a universal primordial religion prior to all historical religions by claiming that they held the keys of the primordial tradition, which was transmitted only to elite through the secret initiation rituals of Tibetan Lamas. Freemasonry flourished at that time too. Finally, the French explorer Alexandra David Neel, who acquired a solid knowledge of Eastern languages and religions among Hindu sages and Tibetan Lamas after more than twenty years in Asia, enabled Buddhism to be discovered by the French and was able to transmit adequate teaching to the modern mentality. Her works were a major success and are still being published.

Scholarly controversies also grew with Henry Kern, Emile Sénart, Victor Cousin and Jules Barthelémy Saint-Hilaire. Theologians (Hippolito Desideri, Orazio della Penna, and Cosme de Torrès) were not the only ones to settle their conflicts by drawing on arguments in Buddhism in response to the virulent attacks of some theologians. The philosophers of the Enlightenment (Diderot, Voltaire) were interested in Buddhism to combat Catholicism, which claimed to hold the Unique Truth. The German Romantics (Friedrich Schlegel, Herder, and Forster) turned to the Orient in their revolt against rationalism and Western mechanization.

Nietzsche was initially won over by Buddhist philosophy after reading the book of his master Schopenhauer, who wrote that life is suffering, it can not be cured and that the only way (a rather extreme proposition) for man is to give up living. Then his book "*Humain, trop Humain*" (*Human, Too Human*) was a turning point in his thinking. Nietzsche rejected the pessimism of Schopenhauer and rejected Buddhism also, as a negation of life, even though it emphasizes the exceptional qualities of Buddhism by comparing it to Christianity. But the fact of being against life, this attraction to emptiness, is the characteristic feature of nihilism and nihilistic ethic. He acknowledges that suffering is an essential part of all existence, but he provides two different answers. He says that one can eliminate suffering by detaching oneself from the world, in renunciation and abstention, that he calls the wisdom of Buddhist nihilism, or accept the world as it is with one's share of suffering but with the desire "to be". This is called the tragic wisdom of Nietzsche. That is why, in his later works, Nietzsche continues to warn against a "new European Buddhism" as a doctrine of denial of suffering and taking into account compassion, pity, fraternity, the question of pleasure and displeasure. His criticism of Buddhism as a nihilistic religion is nevertheless unjustified because Buddha said that we could no longer suffer in the third Noble Truth, during his first teaching at Sarnath. On the other hand, with regard to the Buddhist attitude to suffering, Nietzsche's critique seems more appropriate and the predicting of the emergence of a European Buddhism is relevant. It is obvious that Buddhism offers a remedy against suffering (Nietzsche preferred the tragedy of life) and advocates compassion for all living beings (rejected by Nietzsche as a sign of weakness). In addition, Western society does not stop evolving towards hedonism (abhorred by Nietzsche) and towards hypersensitivity to pain.

Then neglected by contemporary philosophers, Buddhism, however, interested some prominent psychoanalysts (Freud, especially Carl Gustav Jung and Erich Fromm). Jung recognized Buddha as one of the greatest geniuses of mankind and emphasized the revolutionary character of his message.

It can be seen that over the centuries, and according to the concerns and ideologies of the Westerners who discovered it, Buddhism is considered as a degenerate Catholicism (the Spanish Jesuit Francis Xavier, the Portuguese Jesuit Antonio de Andrade, and the French priest Régis-Evariste Huc, who later changed his mind and said that Buddhism is an open and very tolerant religion), a Buddhist pessimism and a hopeless nihilism (Schopenhauer, Nietzsche), a doctrine of emptiness (Alfred Vacant and Eugène Manguet), integral humanism (Edgar Quinet), rationalism, atheist mysticism (Ernest Renan, Jules Ferry and Auguste Comte), esoteric wisdom, atheistic humanism (Joseph Edkins, Max Müller, Ludwig Feuerbach), or modern humanism (Edwin Arnold).

During colonial times, despite their efforts, particularly in education, the colonial policy of France caused the great hostility of the Asian people, as much against missionaries as representatives of the Republic. The conversion of the Asians in Cochinchina and Tonkin was conducted during the 17th century by Jesuit missionaries. Alexandre de Rhodes played a major role in converting the Vietnamese to Catholicism and in the Romanization of the Vietnamese language so that it can be read by Westerners. He also wrote an Annamese Portuguese and Latin dictionary.

In this colonial context, Buddhist studies developed according to the particular relationship of European countries with their Asian colonies. Taking advantage of the French presence in Indochina, in 1889, French Orientalists founded the French School of the Far East in Hanoi, directed by Louis Finot, and including the famous Bulletin that was published in the year 1900.

But deeper divisions cross this distribution resulting from historical contingencies. We can see a certain cultural affinity between Catholic countries and Mahayana Buddhism, and between Protestant countries and Hinayana Buddhism.

We may compare this situation with the theory of Max Weber. Indeed, it starts from the observation that capitalism arose in the sixteenth century in Western countries, mainly in Protestant countries and milieux. In his book, *the Protestant Ethic and the Spirit of Capitalism*, he explains the link between Protestantism and the rise of capitalism. For Catholics, salvation comes into effect only by fidelity to the Church and not by intense activity in the terrestrial world. For Protestants, the profession becomes a vocation, a test of faith. At the beginning, this behaviour was influenced by a taste for abstinence, savings and refusal of luxury, work discipline and professional conscience. This way of life and behaviour is spreading in Europe and the United States and is becoming more substantial after two or three generations. For the Protestants, the individual has no longer to answer for his or her actions before terrestrial authority which is the Church; he or she finds himself or herself alone with God and cannot change his or her future. This is predestination. Only God knows the elect and the reprobates. According to this principle, worldly success in a professional activity is primarily a means of glorifying God. This success has value as a sign of election. Max Weber explained that work and the meaning of savings are valued among Protestants, not for themselves, but as a means of confirmation by the worldly success of a long-awaited salvation.

In line with this assertion, in Mahayana Buddhism, the practitioner is liberated in order to help all sentient beings, whereas in Theravada Buddhism, the practitioner is liberated for himself. This is an individual liberation which can come closer to predestination for the Protestants. It is therefore not surprising that most French and Italian Orientalists are more readily attracted to the study of Chinese, Japanese, or Tibetan Buddhism, whilst a majority of German, English or Dutch scholars are moving towards Singhalese Buddhism or that of the South-East Asian countries.

Buddhism: the fourth religion in France

Over its 45 years of existence in France, Buddhism has grown considerably. Today there are more than three hundred temples and centers over the whole territory. These Buddhist centers offer sessions of teachings, rituals and prayers, daily or sporadic meditation sessions, meditation retreats and initiations. Buddhism has progressed more rapidly in France than in any other Western country. The main European Zen dojo is in Touraine, one of the largest Western Tibetan temples is in Burgundy. Several hundreds of French people have accomplished the long three-year retreat; some have replaced Asian teachers or directors of centers. All the Buddhist traditions are represented: Theravada, Mahayana, Vajrayana and Zen. Cambodian, Laotian and Vietnamese refugees, forced into exile, came to France around 1975, forming a large contingent of Buddhist practitioners. French converts to Buddhism or certain aspects of it are more and more numerous. The cultural heritage with its rich architecture, statues, stupas, thankas and other colorful Oriental paintings is considerable and proudly displayed. The activities on offer are regular and varied.

According to the French Buddhist Union (U.B.F.), there are thought to be more than 800000 Buddhists in France, three quarters of whom come from Asia. It is calculated that more than 200000 indigenous French people practice Buddhism. Opinion polls, including the BVA (Brûlé, Ville et associés) poll of September 1999, show that five million French people feel close to Buddhism which is the religion most favorably viewed by young people.

The French Doctor of Sociology, Frédéric Lenoir, distinguishes three groups according to degree of involvement:

- practitioners, the most highly involved. They participate in regular seminars and teaching sessions and frequently have links with a spiritual master. They can truly be called converts or faithful followers. Their number is estimated at about 50000.
- a close, intermediary group of people with various types and degrees of involvement, practicing meditation episodically in the “do-it-yourself” context. Most of these people would call themselves atheists or agnostics. Their interest in Buddhism is mainly intellectual. They practice an “à la carte” religion, according to their evolving concerns, needs or the events impacting their lives. This group is thought to be around 150000.
- sympathizers, the least involved. These people would say they have no religion or belong to another religion. They adhere to notions of tolerance, belief in karma, concern for the environment, respect for non-violence, the idea of wisdom and meditation. More than two million people are estimated to belong to this group.

The development of Tibetan Buddhism in France was boosted by the arrival of a number of Tibetan masters fleeing Tibet after the Chinese military invasion in 1959. Among them figure:

- Phende Rinpoche of the Sakya school. He arrived in France in 1970 and founded a first center, Ngor Ewam Phende Ling at Evreux (Normandy) in 1974.
- Dagpo Rinpoche of the Gelugpa school. He arrived in France in 1978 and founded a first center, Ganden Ling at Veneux-les-Sablons, near Fontainebleau in 1978 ; Lungri Namgyel Rinpoche of the same school reached France in 1980 and founded an association Thar Dö Ling at Celles in Seine et Marne.
- Kalu Rinpoche of the Kagyu school, visited France in 1971 and founded Dashang Kagyu Ling (in Burgundy), then Kagyu Rinchen Chö Ling (Montpellier), Kagyu-Dzong in Paris and Karma Ling in Savoy. In later years many Kagyupa high lamas would visit France, including the 16th Karmapa, Pawo Rinpoche and Gendun Rinpoche.
- Gendun Rinpoche (Kagyupa) created two large centers in Dordogne and Auvergne (a study center at Dhagpo Kagyu Ling in Dordogne and the largest Western monastery in Auvergne). Many Western lamas have taken part in two three-year retreats with Gendun Rinpoche. Other smaller urban centers (Karma Teksum Chöling – French : Karma Teksoum Tcheuling = KTT) came into being in France, Spain and Germany.
- Mention can be made of Shambala, founded by Chogyam Trungpa Rinpoche, with a center in Paris and another in Limoges.
- Khenchen Sherab Gyaltzen Amipa Rinpoche, (Sakyapa). He settled in Switzerland in 1968, and founded many Sakya centers in Europe, including Sakya Tsechen Ling, near Strasbourg, in 1978, now his main European center.
- Lama Thoupten Yeshe and Lama Thoupten Zopa of the Gelugpa school created the Institute Vajra Yogini in Marzens near Toulouse in 1981.
- His Holiness the Gyalwang Drukpa created Druk Toupten Cheukor Ling, a European center of the Drukpa Lineage, in 1985, in Plouray (Brittany).
- Sogyal Rinpoche (Nyingmapa), visited France in 1980 and, in 1989, set up Lerab Ling near Lodève, Montpellier, the largest Rigpa center in Europe. Sogyal Rinpoche is active world-wide.

Towards the end of the 60s, the charismatic Japanese master Taisen Deshimaru also chose France as the center for transmission of Zen Buddhism. He was the founder and inspiration of innumerable dojos and Zen groups.

The South-East Asian communities remained fairly self-contained while the Zen and Tibetan versions developed in response to the demand of thousands of French people eager to learn about the Buddha's teachings and meditation. Nevertheless Thich Nhât Hanh, a Vietnamese Zen Buddhist master, also forced into exile, took refuge in France in 1969 and is one of the most committed personalities in the Western world. He resides now in the South-West of France in a Buddhist community called Plum-tree Village founded in 1982. The name refers to the 1250 plum trees owned by the community. Thousands are attracted to his radiant spiritual and humane personality.

Several different kinds of socio-political phenomena have contributed to this propagation of Buddhism in France and in Europe. One of the main reasons is without doubt the proselytism of certain intellectual milieux towards the beginning of the 70s; this brought in its wake a number of specialist Buddhist teachers thus ensuring a firm foundation for the new spirituality. The American billionaire, Bernard Benson, for instance, who converted in the early 70s, used his wealth and influence to invite Tibetan monks to his home in Dordogne where he encouraged them to practice and teach their religion.

Directors and film makers, such as Arnaud Desjardins, also contributed to an awareness of the Buddhist teachings. The Dalai Lama's Nobel Peace Prize in 1989 also created a media buzz. Richard Gere became the grand ambassador for Buddhism in show-biz. Super-productions, based on the drama of Tibet and the Dalai Lama's biography, were extremely popular: Bernardo Bertolucci's "Little Buddha" in 1993, Jean-Jacques Annaud's "Seven Years in Tibet" and Martin Scorsese's "Kundun" in 1998. From the beginning of the 90s on, there has been a growing number of T.V. broadcasts and articles in the press, while several books have become best-sellers. Sogyal Rinpoche's 'Tibetan Book of Living and Dying', published in France in 1993 under the title "Livre tibétain de la vie et de la mort", has sold more than a million copies world-wide and been translated into 31 languages. The brilliant scientist, Matthieu Ricard, broke off his career in the Pasteur Institute in 1972, to become the Dalai Lama's official interpreter. His radical involvement, together with his far-reaching intellectual and spiritual development, have won him the admiration of all French Buddhists. His translations are superb.

Through the media, millions of people have come into contact with Buddhism, particularly in its Zen or Tibetan guise, adopting a variety of elements: the practice of meditation, belief in karma, reincarnation, values of tolerance, notions of interdependence, responsibility and non-violence.

The great majority of Buddhist practitioners used to be professional people belonging to the more privileged levels of society. Today however, practically all layers of French society are concerned. Highly qualified managerial staff, less influential middle classes and even the working class are all attracted to the Buddhist way of thinking. Nevertheless in-depth studies have shown that teachers and medical or para-medical professionals form a predominant contingent of converts. This can be explained by the fact that the basic aim of Buddhist teaching is to eradicate all forms of pain and suffering in this world. The same studies show that most conversions are to be found in urban populations. Lastly, it is noteworthy that women form 60% of Tibetan Buddhist adepts but only 40 % practice Zen. These statistics may reflect the masculine character of Zen Buddhism compared with the profoundly feminine Tibetan counterpart. Frédéric Lenoir considers that Zen, exclusively oriented towards silent meditation under the guidance of a

master, corresponds to the predominant masculine motivation whereas Tibetan Buddhism with its accent on compassion, the charismatic figure of the lama and the belief in karma, appeals to the feminine. According to this, the more sober, rational and pragmatic Zen is more attractive to men, the more compassionate and emotional Tibetan Buddhism attracts more women. It should not be forgotten however that Tibetan Buddhism frequently puts men and women on an equal footing. There are, for example, many very popular practices of male and female Buddhas, with Avalokiteshvara and Manjushri in the masculine form and Green and White Tara representing the feminine. In addition, male and female symbolize the two aspects of Buddhist practice, respectively method and wisdom. In Tibetan Buddhism, method refers to active compassion, wisdom to transcendental knowledge. Both aspects are necessary to attain Buddhahood. Manifestations (nirmanakaya) can take numerous forms, both masculine and feminine, all working according to need to the benefit of sentient beings.

Why is Buddhism successful in France?

Several reasons can be invoked for the lightning success of Buddhism in France. Without doubt the first relates to a crisis in the monotheistic religions, and particularly in Christianity.

According to the U.B.F. (the French Buddhist Union) most practitioners and sympathizers were originally Christian. Disappointed, dissatisfied, they abandon their original religion to look for the answer to a number of their existential problems in Buddhism. "Prisoners of their institutional strait-jacket, the Christian Churches no longer correspond to the need for a tangible and living spirituality sought by the faithful and on offer in Buddhism". The analysis is open to discussion however: it is only normal in a Christian country like France to find a higher percentage of Christians than of or Hindus, Jews or Muslims. The rare Hindus, Jews, and Muslims are present in the centers in the same proportion as in the population at large. The phenomenon concerns all types of religion, though exoticism and the pleasure of change may sometimes play a part. In this case, many adepts return to their original religion after a few years. Many lamas, including the Dalai Lama, advise people not to abandon their original religion which is easier for them to practice. Naturally, one can always choose a different religion, but this should be only after long reflection.

In addition, Buddhism with its philosophy of inner peace, its practice of yoga and meditation enjoys a positive image in France. The first Sofres opinion poll on French attitudes to religion, published in 1994 by the Figaro (a newspaper similar to the Washington Post) put Buddhism in third place as regards to religious preference.

Buddhism is also felt to be modern, representing the principle values of modernity: freedom to follow one's own spiritual path, a religion based more on experience and individual reasoning than on a dogmatic theology, efficiency of a practice which has a direct impact on daily life, tolerance and the absence of a normative moral discourse. One becomes Buddhist on taking refuge, the only official sign of belonging to the Buddhist Sangha. This is conceived and experienced by the faithful as a personal commitment to the path of the Buddha. One can take refuge at any age.

At the same time, Buddhism offers the guarantee of an authentic spiritual tradition with accomplished masters attached to unbroken and clearly identified lineages.

And lastly, based as it is on the idea of a reduction maybe even the elimination of suffering and human dissatisfaction, Buddhism proves attractive in a society tormented by the ills of consumerism (unemployment, anxiety, depression). Here again, specialists of religions questions in the CNRS (Centre National de Recherches Scientifiques = the National Centre for Scientific Research) have shown that a large proportion of

practitioners of the “new religions” were experiencing psychological or professional difficulties before adopting their new spirituality. The rush towards Buddhist religious philosophy also owes much to rising discontent with former political norms (socialism and capitalism).

A philosophy for some, a religion for others, all adepts agree that the Buddhist path gives access to wisdom. The philosophy is of interest even divorced from practice. An extremely supple and rich spiritual path, it is open to all sorts of interpretations, arrangements and identificatory combinations according to individual need. It can be variously defined with regard to one’s degree of involvement: a religion, a philosophy, an ‘art de vivre’, a spiritual path or a practice. Buddhism comprises all of these but each may be taken separately. Its success also seems to correspond to three major repressions in Western modernity:

1. repression of the imaginary and the irrational aspect of the mind,
2. repression of the individual quest for meaningfulness, and
3. abandonment in the West of the intimate exploration of the inner world of conscience in favor of the exploration of the universe and external phenomena.

A rising interest over the last decade or more in the accompaniment of the sick and dying or the dead and palliative care have also contributed. The dharma offers the hope of a certain serenity through a process of distancing. Loving-kindness and compassion play a part, together with wisdom as a path to knowledge. Westerners are often perplexed by sickness and death, nor knowing what attitude to adopt or how to behave towards people who are sick. They turn to Buddhists to help in their approach to suffering and death. The rituals performed by lamas are appreciated and requested, both before and after death. And one has to admit that they are often beneficial.

Institutionally, the U.B.F. (French Buddhist Union) was founded in 1986 and represents an important step in the process of recognition of Buddhism by the civil authorities. Then, in 1990, the prison authorities gave permission for the appointment of two Buddhist chaplains in the penitentiary system. Over the last few years, Buddhism has been de facto acknowledged by public authority as the fourth religion in France and since 1997, Buddhists have a right to a weekly broadcast every Sunday morning in the framework of the religious programs produced for the public T.V. Channel (A 2). The state also concedes certain legal advantages to Buddhist religious associations.

Buddhists are nowadays invited to take part in meetings and public debate on an equal footing with representatives of the major religious traditions and attract the attention of politicians and press. Personalities such as the 1989 Nobel Peace Prize winner, the Dalai Lama, or Thich Nhât Hanh, proposed for the Nobel Peace Prize in 1967 by Martin Luther King, have also contributed to the popularity of Buddhism. The national public authorities have now taken cognizance of the undeniable sociological fact represented by the presence of Buddhism in France. Since the year 2009, the President of the U.B.F. has been included in the invitations to the French President’s New Year Ceremony for religious authorities. Meetings between the different religious communities are held regularly. In January 2011, the C.B.A. (Alsatian Buddhist Community) was created in Strasbourg uniting the Japanese, Laotian, Tibetan and Vietnamese Buddhist communities. In June they collaborated in the organization of the Buddha Day festivities during which the relics of the Buddha presented to France by Thailand were put on show. Recognized by the public authorities and by other religions, Buddhism can be said to have passed the first stage in its acculturation in France.

Is Buddhism an “opportunity” for spirituality in the larger sense and for other religions?

Definition of a religion

All religions can be defined as entities determined by beliefs and dogmas that define the relationship between man and the sacred, but also an ensemble of specific practices and rites belonging to each of these beliefs. A religion creates a link with a continuation of life and those who practice a religion prepare for it. In the three largest monotheist religions, there is a God creator. In Buddhism however, there is nothing of the sort and death is only a stage on the path that leads to enlightenment. This calls traditional ways of belief into question and in consequence, the manner of living one's life.

Inter-religious dialogue and the influence of the great masters

Inter-religious dialogue is a source of enrichment for all spiritual traditions and can also help people learn from each other. It is enough to evoke the names of Fathers Henry Le Saux, Raimon Panikkar, Thomas Merton or Christian de Chergé. Their contribution to the dialogue was decisive. Henri Le Saux (who adopted the Indian name of Abhishiktananda, 1910-1973) was a French Benedictine monk and a mystical figure of Indian Christianity, who greatly contributed to the dialogue between Christianity and Hinduism. Raimon Panikkar, (1918-2010), priest and Professor of Oriental Philosophy in the United States, was one of the instigators of Hindu-Christian inter-religious dialogue. Thomas Merton, (1915-1968), born in France, was a writer, a Trappist monk and American social activist. He was also a great partisan of inter-religious dialogue, and known for his dialogues with the Dalai Lama and Thich Nhat Hanh. He was also a renowned specialist of Zen Daisetz Teitaro Suzuki. Father Christian de Chergé (1937-1996), a French Trappist monk of the Cistercian order of strict observance, was one of the seven Tibhirine monks living in Algeria and taken hostage and then assassinated in 1996. These monks did not only want to get to know another religion, but to welcome it into their spiritual life. Others subsequently followed their example. Bernard Rérolle is a Belgian Marist priest, who was initiated into Zen in the eighties and who has been teaching the practice of Zazen for the last twenty years in a Christian framework. Pierre de Béthune, a Belgian Benedictine monk and Prior of the Monastery of Clerlande in Belgium, has been practicing Zen meditation for many years. He is responsible for the monastic inter-religious dialogue (DIM), which encourages spiritual contacts and exchanges between Catholic and Buddhist monks. They privilege inter-religious meetings that benefit from a spiritual exchange. Everyone concerned appreciates this unique chance to learn a little more of the potentialities of our own Western traditions. The association of the Gospels with spiritual techniques and other values that originated in Asia finally seem to lead to this full and transcendental liberty that can be found above and beyond all cultural differences, purely exterior.

An international magazine, *Dilatato Corde*, had its origin in the “Inter-religious Monastic Dialogue” (IMD) and was put on line in January 2011 as a means of information and reflection on the dialogue of spiritual or religious experience, a dialogue where “people, entrenched in their religious traditions share their spiritual riches for seeking God or the Absolute”. The founders of this magazine therefore wish to collaborate in the development of theology through the meeting up of religions. Theology has greatly developed since the Vatican II Council, but nevertheless it still encounters great difficulties and obstacles. Their conviction is that in order to go forward it is indispensable to have even more spiritual experiences, because it is only by using such experiences as a base that subsequent reflections can be fecund.

The Dalai Lama often speaks about exemplary Christian charity, which Buddhists should also practice. On many occasions he has underlined that Buddhists should implicate themselves further at the social level, as do their Christian brothers and sisters.

Moreover, every practicing Buddhist firmly insists on the importance of the Master, and his (or her) personality and role as an agent of the cohesion of the community. A Buddhist community makes no sense without its relationship with a spiritual Master, who assembles a certain number of disciples around him (or her). It is a true guide for interior life and illuminates the disciples through teaching and practical advice. The Master has already gone further along the way and lived through the experience before the disciples. Because of this the Master is like a mirror for them. The spiritual influence of the great Masters, as well as the example of their charisma, has also played an important role in the propagation of the teaching of the Buddha. The transmission of the Master to the disciple ensures that the teaching is authentic, living and topical through the testimony of those who express it. Inscription in a line of belief, in a line of believers who have received this fundamental experience of enlightenment, is a characteristic of Buddhism. Each Bonze (Buddhist monk) Tibetan Lama or Zen Master begins his teaching by referring to his own Masters, and by showing the line of descent that links him (or her) to the far-off founders of the lines, and indicates that everything goes back, from Master to disciple, to the Buddha himself. It is a transmission of life. Each time there is a transmission from continent to continent it is centered on the foundation experience of a school or a structure. Each time, it is the attitude of the awakening of the historic Buddha that is being lived through.

A real master should therefore talk about his belonging to a line, his inscription in it. Institutional power depends entirely on the legitimate recognition of the authenticity of a line or that of a transmission, as in the reincarnation of a great Lama in Tibetan Buddhism. This is what the Chinese perfectly understood when trying to weaken the religious authority of the Dalai Lama by creating divisions in the heart of the Tibetan monastic community centered on the recognition of the reincarnation of the most important heads of lineages, such as the Panchen Lama.

The Role of Buddhism faced with the understanding of the nature of the mind

Every practicing Buddhist tries to understand the nature of his or her mind. The development of the mind is the result of training the mind, which itself breaks down into two stages:

- The mental concentration or pacification that gradually calms interior agitation and mental opacity. This preliminary phase prepares the ground for more advanced practices;
- The superior vision that leads to the uprooting of the egocentric hold which is the basis of the cycle of existences. It concerns the perception of the unreality of appearances, like a reflection in a mirror, of the sounds and thoughts of the ego. This does not signify the cessation of the manifestation but rather comprehension that the manifestation is devoid of intrinsic or autonomous reality.

Furthermore, the accumulation of virtues is fundamental for all practicing Buddhists because it facilitates meditation and enables better practice. The absence of accumulation of virtues makes spiritual elevation difficult and the ego constitutes the greatest obstacle. When the ego is reduced, it becomes easier to concentrate because one is protected from interior disturbances that lead at the same time to dispersing exterior disturbances. The exercise of compassion is naturally facilitated and procures the

necessary calm for concentration. When one is not fixed on oneself, on the “me” as an independent and privileged entity, the mind opens up and can probe more easily to discover its proper nature, which is above and beyond words and concepts. This nature, specific to each living being, whoever and whatever it is, can then suddenly materialize and be real.

Moreover, the accumulation of virtues is double; there is that which is ordinary, of ordinary people, and that which is not ordinary, of people having accomplished realizations. The effects of actions carried out by beings having great qualities are different by nature and infinitely vaster. Progress becomes rapid and colossal. The acts of a being perfectly realized, who becomes Buddha, are without limit as much in quality as in quantity.

In order to reach awakening, a gradual way is proposed. Thus, compassion engenders calm and a form of patience can be practiced in a very useful way in daily life. It also becomes possible to learn a deeper form of patience, which makes it possible to no longer be affected by those who hurt us or do bad things to us. This is an excellent basis for meditation.

To pass from concentration to meditation, it is again necessary to possess memory and vigilance. By assuring continuity, the memory enables the mind not to wander about from right to left and at the same preserves us from the non-virtues outside of the meditation period. Vigilance is like a soldier posted on guard, who protects us from torpor and agitation. At this point, the mind can start to enter into Samadhi. Conjointly, the practice of morality renders the mind firmer and more stable. This morality is a kind of protection. Perseverance and regularity lead to the progressive development of calm and stability. Force and habit finally enable access to the final stages of mental calm.

This mental calm is extremely powerful and procures physical and mental fluidity that leads to delight and the capacity to become absorbed on an object in perfect concentration. No disturbance, nor even the effort of remaining concentrated, which consists of a simple application at the beginning of the session, can suddenly arise. It is then time to direct the mind towards the practice of penetrating vision, towards the development of interior wisdom. Wisdom is necessary all along the way, as much as for the accumulation of ordinary virtues as well as non-ordinary virtues. For the first, it is burgeoning wisdom that encourages the accumulation of ordinary virtues, which themselves enable the development of a more and more profound and powerful wisdom. Progressively, actions are improved.

The deepening of our experience of the true nature of the mind has the effect of the world losing its influence, and becoming unable to harm us. The ultimate result is the gaining of perfect awakening. One is then totally freed of the cycle of conditioned existences, as well as the associated suffering. At the same time, one acquires the power, to help others because compassion, which is the desire to succeed in liberating others from their suffering through one’s actions, has been engendered beforehand.

A being liberated from his or her suffering does not become reborn in the Samara, nor goes through reincarnation, and can no longer be affected by suffering. A being who becomes a Buddha, becomes capable of eliminating the suffering of others in the same way as removing a thorn from one’s foot. Compassion and wisdom are thus the two wings that enable each living being to reach complete awakening.

Contribution to the Development of Citizens’ Responsibility

The notion of Karma is fundamental in Buddhism. It is thought to be the most important teaching of the Buddha. In actual fact, acts lead to results. Thus, all action produces a result, agreeable or disagreeable. If acts are contaminated, the results are

painful. This life is not the result of chance because every phenomenon has its own causes and conditions. This life is not without causes and neither does it have causes exterior to itself. Our sufferings are not due to others, just as happiness is not offered as a gift. It is the Karma created in a continuity of existences that produces what is experienced in this life. It is why the Buddha taught it is necessary to keep away from non-virtuous actions. And all bad actions are due to a lack of wisdom or to ignorance.

The absence of correct view leads to the creation of the ego and to the link to it. It is why ignorance is the root fault and the fundamental blemish: ignorance produces ego and engenders the duality of oneself and others – this prolongs itself through attachment to oneself and hostility towards others. All actions become contaminated and the cycle of uncontrolled rebirth of Samsara is experienced. Suffering is omnipresent and can become extreme according to the degree of ignorance and contaminated actions.

When Karma becomes mature, there is no possibility of escape. It is like being reborn on the human plane; after our birth, we must all experience the human form, where it pleases us or not, whether we are man or woman. We had better get used to it. It is in thinking of the transitory character of this existence that we can avoid a too strong attachment to it. In actual fact, being reborn as a man in one life, and then as a woman in another, places us in the perspective of equality in the long term. This can certainly avoid our having to consider the superiority of one category over another.

The study of Karma is certainly one of the fields that necessitate a thorough study. Three types of teaching are given on the consequences of acts in the Lamdré (the way and its results, principal teaching of the Sakya tradition, one of the four principal schools of Tibetan Buddhism:

- 1) effects arriving at maturity,
- 2) (i) the effect similar to the cause and (ii) the consequence of habits and
- 3) the effect that affects the environment in which beings are reborn.

This approach is a powerful means of making individuals responsible, because they feel responsible for their acts. At the same time, a possibility of salvation appears: it is the same for every one of living beings, which firmly places them again in equality in the long term. A noble common ideal is born! The perspective of a happy future begins to emerge.

The meditative experience and its observable beneficial effects recognized on those who meditate

We can observe through our own experience that the state of our mind plays a predominant role in our everyday life, for our moral and physical well-being. If we maintain our mind in a state of calm and peace, disturbances caused by exterior conditions are limited. On the other hand, it is very difficult for someone whose mental state is agitated to stay calm. This signifies that our mental attitude is a determining factor of our experience of happiness and good health or even suffering.

In everyday life, we can observe, above all at a crude level, that our mind is strictly linked to the physiological state of our body, and that it depends on it. In the same way that our state of mind, according to whether it is depressed or joyous, influences our physical health, our physical state influences our mind. The Tantras deal with the mind and the awareness in various degrees of subtlety, as well as the centers of specific energy in the interior of the body (the Chakras). These energetic centers play an extremely important role in the growth or the decrease of the different emotional states of our mind. Because of the close relationship between the body and the mind, and the existence of the

physiological centers in our body, the physical exercise of yoga and the application of specific meditative mind training techniques can have beneficial effects on health. Thus, doctors and scientists have undertaken significant research on the relationship body/mind and on applications in the comprehension of the nature of our physical and mental well-being. These research projects on Tibetan Buddhists practicing meditation have been pursued over several years. They have revealed a lowering of blood pressure, of respiratory and cardiac rhythm, of consumption of oxygen, and a relaxing effect induced by meditation. Thanks to our knowledge of the body and the mind, there is no doubt that our mental and physical health is enhanced. Certain scientists consider Buddhism more as a science of the mind rather than a religion and this is not without justification.

Buddhism should take note of this responsibility, as it is the only tradition in the world to have studied and reflected so much on the nature of the mind, and above all accumulated an incomparable experience of meditation, the effects of which on those who meditate are undeniable and recognized.

Is the acculturation of Buddhism in the West perennial?

We can distinguish five great factors of acculturation in a religious tradition in a new cultural area:

- Recognition by public authorities and other religions;
- The foundation of venues of transmission of tradition;
- The training of native Masters;
- Translations and adaptation of worship and rituals;
- The assimilation of teaching in the mental, philosophic and religious universe of the new cultural area contacted.

We can verify that the three first factors have been fulfilled. As for the fourth factor, translators are confronted with the difficulty of the language and above all the difficulty of transposing the teachings of one conceptual universe into another. A word apparently similar in one language often hides another philosophic connotation. It should be noted that the acculturation of Buddhism in Tibet was possible because a script was invented in the 7th century of our era by Tibetans, with the aim of translating the teaching of the Buddha from Sanskrit.

As for the fifth factor, the mental universe and the philosophical and religious culture common to Asians are different from the mental and conceptual universe of the West. Only silent meditation carries few risks of cultural misunderstanding. However, if we are speaking of the Master/disciple relationship, of devotion towards the Master or obedience towards the Master, cultural misunderstandings and problems of interpretation spring up.

Problems of reciprocal seduction then arise and of disciples who follow to the letter the prescriptions of Masters who are not always very competent, or even refuse to obey the Master, being impregnated with the modern cult of the individual and the development of self.

One of the most marked examples is probably prostration, that even in Asia is not always practiced everywhere in the same way. For example, in India or in Tibet, it has always been a current use to mark respect and greeting. But in countries like China or Thailand, this practice hardly ever occurs. In Tibet, the practice of prostration has even become a Yoga practice, very complete and profound. It seems possible that in France and in Europe these practices do not enjoy the success that they have elsewhere. Worse,

such practices could, perhaps, be detrimental to the acculturation of Buddhism in the West. It is probable that they will disappear of their own accord, in total indifference.

In the East, only an elite in the monasteries studied in depth the teachings of the Buddha and were in search of Nirvana. This esoteric Buddhism probably also concerns an elite in France and in Europe. However, its philosophy, its moral and universal values, its techniques of meditation to pacify the mind, these religious rituals will continue to lighten the way of numerous individuals, whether from the West or the East.

Buddhism not only advocates a wisdom of happiness but also offers the concrete means to achieve it, techniques and methods claiming to enable individuals to explore their own interior universe, to carry out work on themselves and to heal emotional distress. In short, it proposes a spiritual revolution. The world would change if each individual started by improving him- or herself. The lack of comprehension and mastering of mental and emotional phenomena is one of the shortcomings of the West, which is much more attached to the understanding and mastering of phenomena exterior to mankind. Conversely, Buddhism is a veritable science of the intimate, a science of the mind, a technique that enables men or women without fail to surpass themselves well beyond their wildest imagination.

The mental construct of what constitutes humanity, the junction between materialism and spirituality, both material and spiritual wealth, and the balance of productivism and sobriety, all constitute a major challenge for the hope of mankind yet to be born.

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