Being Buddhist in New Lands[1]: Mapping Buddhist Social-Cultural Identities

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Expansion of Buddhism to the West, to predominantly Christian countries, represents in many cases the adoption and practice of the Dharma as adults. Entering into this peculiar belief and practice system implies a new set of combinations in people's systems of meanings and practices.

In this paper we analyze the process of being Buddhist in a Catholic country (new land) by way of looking at the interrelation structure between the systems of meaning and of practices in a western Buddhist lay sangha. Being Buddhist is seen here as a type of balance in the duality meanings and practices on the road to happiness. This paper also attempts to see how the duality relates to happiness.

The duality of meanings and practices is an artificial construction used to code and better understand the structure and dynamics of social fields (Mohr). It is a duality without independent existences built with the purpose to comprehend and visualize the dynamic interrelation between the system of relations among meanings with the system of relations among practices.

Interrelations between the systems (or cosmologies of meanings and practices) result in identity traits (as if they were DNA combinations) which together shape what we could define as the Buddhist "identity" (being) of Sakya Tashi Ling lay-sangha. This social-cultural DNA is the combinations of the structure of the social dimensions of meanings and practices. Those "artificially independent" social dimensions are representations (maps) of the meanings and practices social cosmologies.

The map of the meanings' cosmology is the practitioners referential social space of values and visions. It represents their Buddhist way of feeling and seeing. The map of the cosmology of practices shows the form taken by their Buddhist practice, that is to say the way they do Buddhism. We could also think about Buddhism as a toolbox containing sets of meanings which are combined with practices yielding differentiated Buddhist identities.

In this paper I show and analyze the configuration of such Buddhist identity (being) and its relation to happiness in a community of western practitioners.

FROM: The theoretical framework rests on the contribution of Mohr (1994, 1997), Breiger (1974, 2000), and Bourdieu (1977, 1985) to the concept of duality. Builds upon the duality dimension approach seeing the world articulated in a world of symbols and meanings and the world of practices (Bourdieu's social and cultural fields; Breiger's duality, and Mohr's block-modeling the duality). It is based on Bourdieus's practice theory where "material world (the world of action) and the cultural world (the world of symbols) interpenetrate and are built through the immediate association of each with the

other (quoted in Mohr and Duquenne, 1997: 309). Further discussion can be found in Mohr (2008).

TO: The goal is the identification of social DNA resulting in Buddhist identities by means of maps (representations of the social-cultural DNA). The interconcection between the social structure of meanings and the social structure of practices produces social-cultural DNA.

HOW: We use data from a recent sociological survey of the lay sangha from Sakya Tashi Ling (Barcelona, Spain) Tibetan monastery. We use Wave 1[3] with a subsample of variables and a subsample of cases (those answering also in Wave 2). With the data we build a proximity matrix (in this case of significant correlations) among the variables representing meanings and practices. The proximity matrix is used to generate relational visions:

a. Dimension of meanings and visions: it represents their positioning in the Buddhist value cosmology.
b. Dimension of practices: it represents their positioning in the Buddhist practice's system.
c. Interconnection (DNA): this is the space where the identity is created as a result of combinations between the system of meanings and the system of practices.
d. The entire Buddhist social-cultural field as the addition of all the parts

Network analysis[4] enables us to treat the existence of relation among meanings and practices, derived from the proximity analysis, as channels of communication, interaction and combination among them. Relations (lines) point to links (correlations) among nodes producing a communication system that creates combinations of meanings and practices as social identities. Here the linking networks (duality networks) are channels where elements are mixed and recombined shaping something.

The duality network identified shows a system of communication coupling symbolic representations of the world with forms of practice. We understand the Buddhist identity as the results of such coupling process. The graphs used are maps of the cultural field where meanings and practices are combined creating social identity.

DATA AND DATA ANALYSIS:
In this first test run we have selected 40 variables representing meanings (ways of seeing and valuing existence and Buddhism) and practices. They are part of the Buddhist toolbox and their combinations result in differentiated ways of being and doing. In this run we have included happiness and wellbeing variables in order to analyze its crimping/interlace with the identity structure. The proximity matrix derived from the data embodies the relational structures shaping both the independent cosmologies of meaning and practices and also, as result of their interaction, a Buddhist (social-cultural) identity.

This is a story based on graphics/maps. They are the way to analyze and display (and represent) the complex system of interrelations producing the social-cultural identity of this group of practitioners.

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[3] Survey to the STL's followers "Buddhism, values, religiosity and spirituality" (*Budismo, valores, religiosidad y espiritualidad*) carried out at the end of 2008. Universe: 150 people of the Buddhist Philosophy Study Program. Number of responses: 93 (62% of the universe)

[4] The analysis of social networks centers on the relations between the actors, and from these relations social structures are derived where social dynamics, marginalization, power, etc. are analyzed. The Social Networks Analysis is useful for studying the processes of cohesion, creation of groups, identity and articulation of collective action. Wasserman and Faust,1994; Rodríguez, 2005).

DUALITY STORIES

The way used to look at the issue and to search for answers conveys different, although complementary, stories resulting in a powerful explanatory system. In some stories we focus on the key role played by the interlace between the meanings and practices systems/cosmologies. On another we emphasize and visualize the transition from a connected to a broken structure. And on another we identify social roles within the identitary system:

a. Analysis and visualization of the entire structure of relations depicting the Buddhist identity of this group. In the process of looking for the "heart of the system" (the subset of very strong relations) we move from a weak structure (albeit joined together) to a strong structure (although broken).
b. Focus on the structures of the meaning and practices' dimensions and on the backbone, which connects both dimensions.
c. Analysis of the social roles generated by the interrelational system, via block-modeling.

STORY A

Graph/Map1 represents the entire relational structure. The ("identity) body" is made up of two large social areas connected by bridges. The larger and more central area on the right concentrates practices (nodes in green) and the relations among themselves (lines also in green). This area is also dominated by the inter-dimensions (of meanings and practices) relations (lines in red). The center of the sub-structure turns around prominent practices (P3 mantras, P6 retreats) and meanings (M17: practicing helps inner peace and happiness).

The left smaller (and lower) area is made up of meanings (nodes in blue) connected among themselves (lines in blue) and to a single large practice (P2 meditation). The most central (larger nodes) meanings in the area evidence the appeal of the STL project as a new path (M3) that breaks with conventionalism (M2).

MAP 1 - The complete system: B's identity system
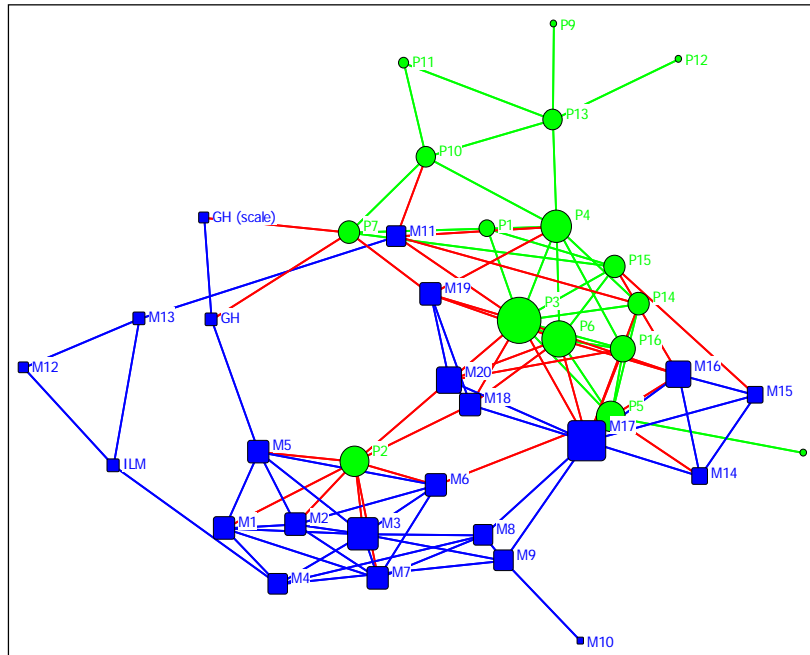
Lines in red show the very relevant connections between meanings and practices. The size of the lines indicate the strength of the relations and point to the different roles played by them. Weak relations maintain the system connected. Strong relations act as the heart of the system. The size of nodes portray the importance, centrality, prominence of meanings and practices. (See List of meanings and practices in Appendix 1)

We attempt to arrive at the heart of the system by selecting stronger relations (higher correlation levels: Larger than (GT) 40, and Larger than 50) (Map 2 and Map 3). The first result of the increase in relational strength is the rupture of the system into smaller pieces. This calls our attention to the key relevance of the so-called "weak" relations. They represent the power/might of the system to ensure its unity.

The fractioning of the structure represented in Map 2 and Map 3 point to two parts (valves) of this heart. A larger one on the right with the most central practices and meanings (P3 mantras, P6 retreats, M17: practicing helps inner peace and happiness) interconnected. The left valve is a smaller network of meanings (representing new path, breaking with conventionalism and building community) connected to a central practice (P2 meditation).

MAP 2 - Stronger relations: GT 40
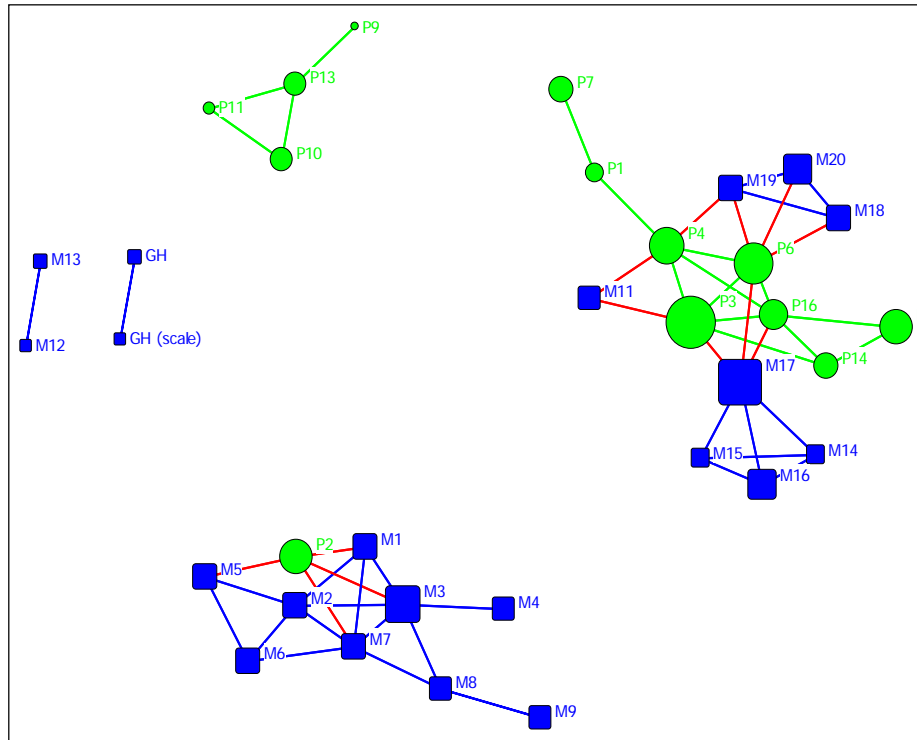
It is worth mentioning the survival of two very small structures as part of this core structure; one linking meanings of happiness and wellbeing, and another connecting practices involving the monastery (rituals, empowerments, teachings, guide).

MAP 3 - The Heart of the System: GT 50
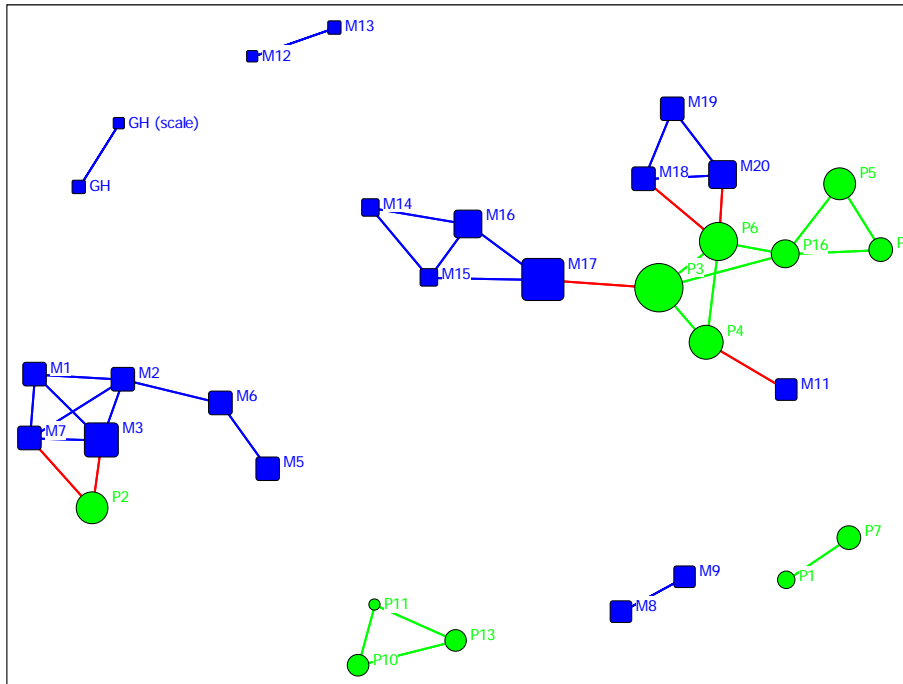
STORY B

The detailed study of structure represented in Map 4 (the connecting structure) offers several stories depending on the type of combination we focus on.

MAP 4 - The Connecting Structure
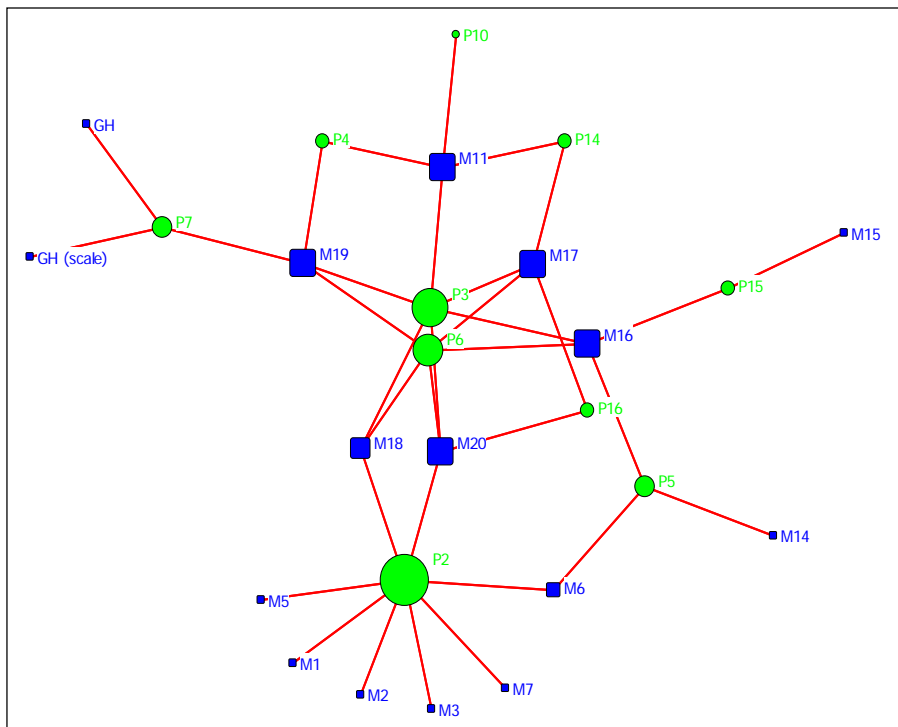
The connecting structure is the backbone/ skeleton of the entire system (the link between meanings and practices). It supports and feeds the system of relations making up the entire body.

It is a structure with a form resembling a body (skeleton) with a sort of head, body, base and arms (mind, heart, action). The structure on top, the so-called head, revolves around the importance given to the institution (the monastery: M11). It kind of denotes the guiding role played by the institution and the relevance of the institutional practices (empowerments, volunteer work) integrating the followers into the institutional project.

The largest structure in the center is composed of two large-substructures resembling the main body/trunk and the base/legs. They are connected by relational meanings (belief that practice leads to new and valuable friendships and acquaintances).

In the very center (it resembles the heart) we find mantras and retreats. Arms towards happiness, and beliefs in nirvana and in life after death emerge from it.

The base is centralized in the practice of meditation (P3). The link between meditation and meanings (such as Buddhism as a new path, as a way to solve problems, and as a way to create community) creates the base of the skeleton, the linkage to the ground through meanings.

These lines of combinations of elements are like narrative/causal lines resembling arms toward the outside (happiness, beliefs in nirvana and in life after death, and community).

Other combinations connect, through the "heart", happiness (at the end of the right arm) with the left arms (nirvana, life after death). Believing in reincarnation is key allowing for the extension of the left arms through such practices as attendance of religious services (p15) and taking refuge (P5).

Another sets of combinations would link head, body and base. From meditation as the base, through the practices of mantras and retreats, towards the head position where the importance given to the Monastery resides.

These combinations are communication roads, a type of highways full of traffic in both directions. The existence of connecting flows activate combinations of practice and meaning elements which end producing specific ways of perceiving and acting in the world.

STORY C

In the image of the complete system (Map 5) we can identify the four large blocks resulting from the application of the Concor algorithm to obtain structural equivalent social positions (White, Boorman, Breiger, 1976). Concor identifies (in two splits) four main blocks representing different combinations of Buddhist DNA (that is to say of meanings and practices) in a solution with $R^2 = 0.271$. (See Blocked matrix and cluster diagram in Appendix 2)

Block 4: Grand life value system. It is made up by happiness, satisfaction with life and values regarding the importance of Buddhism and spirituality in their lives. It represents the conceptual (meaning) reference frame embracing (partially) the main body of the social identity structure. It is the value and meaning position before life.

MAP 5 – Block-modeling The Complete System
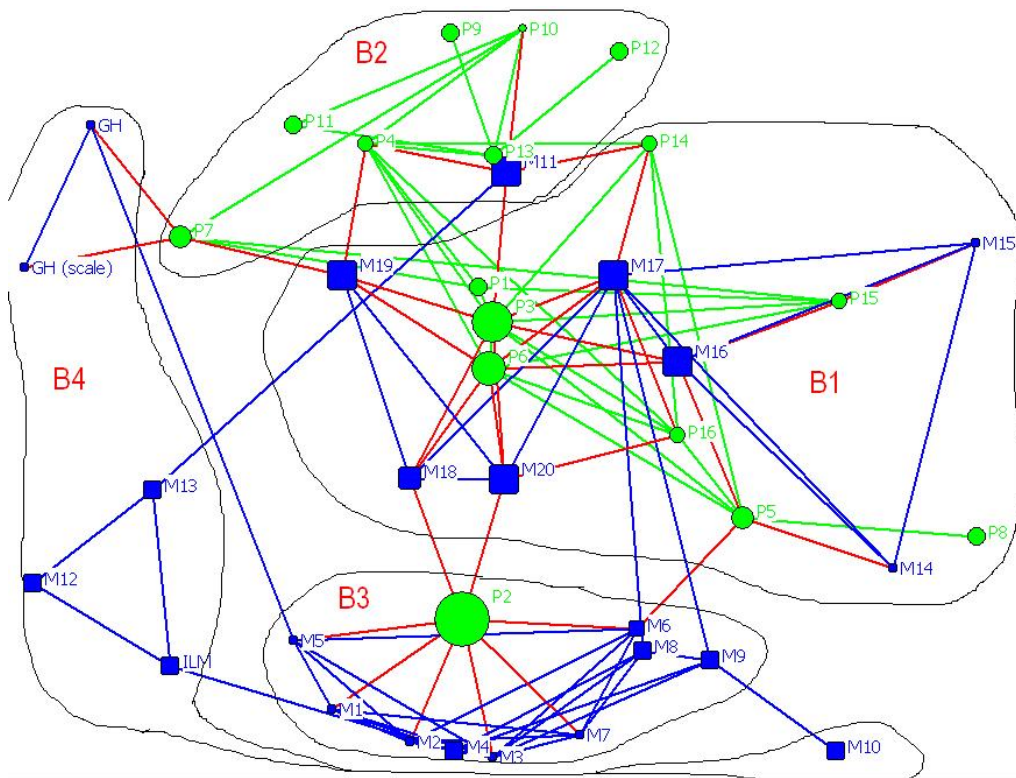
Block 3 represents the large base, as well as entrance door, to the entire system. It is formed by the assessments/reasons to be on the Buddhist path in combination with the main practice in this path: Meditation. Meditation as base practice connects those "worldly" values with Buddhism as a system of specialized (sacred/religious) meanings and practices.

STL Buddhist model appeals precisely by connecting specialized Buddhism with those "worldly" values. Along with meditation, and thank to its centrality, it facilitates the opening of a new vital road, toward happiness, which breaks with conventionality (of the dominant value system of the Catholic society surrounding them), in a spiritual approach, and by means of creating and belonging to a new community.

The Buddhist identity structure of the STL lay shanga rests upon these foundations of practices and meanings.

Block 2 represents the institutionalization of Buddhist practice through the Monastery. The monastery appears as the representation of the Buddhist practice, as the social space that facilitates the performing and being Buddhist. The social-cultural space of the monastery hosts, and is also the result of, institutional practices (rituals, empowerments), spirituality space, interrrelational space (with masters, monks, peers), and a space of creation of community. It is the linking space to the religious, sacred, spiritual spheres. Collective practice produces identification with the local sangha as well as with Buddhism as a global entity. The monastery acts as a door towards, as crimp to, Buddhism as a body of knowledge, philosophy, religion and global community of identity and practice.

Block 1 is the fundamental space of interrelation between meanings and practices. It is quite similar to the interconnector skeleton creator of social-cultural DNA seen

before. It represents the value and practice essence of their Buddhism. We can find there the ultimate essence vision composed by the belief in nirvana, in life after death and in resurrection. They represent the view of the essence of Buddhism, of the wheel of life. Along we can find the ritualistic practices used in the path: rituals, mantras, refuge, retreats, pilgrimage, and attendance of religious services. They represent the essence of Buddhist religious practice.

Linked to the meaning and practice essence we find the existential functionality of the path. The path (their vision and practice) leads to inner peace and happiness, provides comfort against suffering, and lets people find the community with which to share the journey.

Here it is worth highlighting the importance of creating social relations (friends, like people, community) as part of the journey. STL's open and socially oriented project and model, seen through its lay sangha, rests upon, as fundamental axes, the creation and existence of a community network (formed by the lay sangha) solidified by a collective practice towards society. This model stresses the social and collective dimensions of Buddhism.

The relations among the four main blocks (derived from the density block matrix generated by Concor) is represented in Map 6. The relational structure forms a perfect square where all four blocks are connected and there is no center. Each is connected directly with its two neighbors blocks and indirectly to the other. This system or relations (combining direct and indirect relations) reflects a different pattern of influences and combinations. For example: the grand life value system (block 4) easily combines with meditation and the base of the system (Block 3) and the institutionalization of practices (Block 2) but indirectly with the core creator of identity (Block 1).

MAP 6 - Network of Blocks
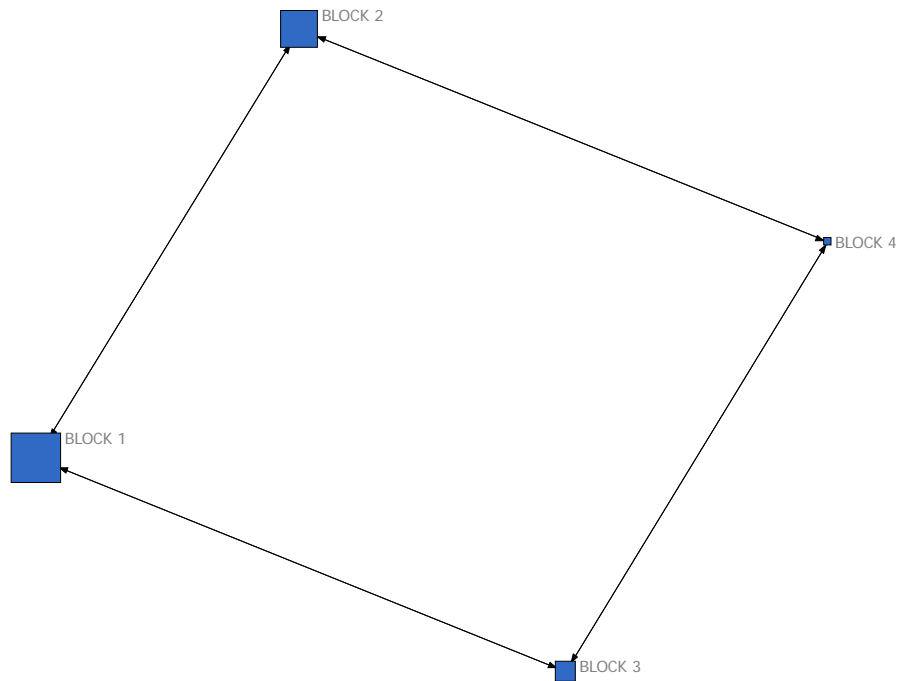
As Conclusions

The careful study of the skeleton type connecting structure (Map7) lets us identify a few very interesting narrative/causal lines combining meanings (M) and practices (P):

MAP 7 - The Connecting Structure: Skeleton
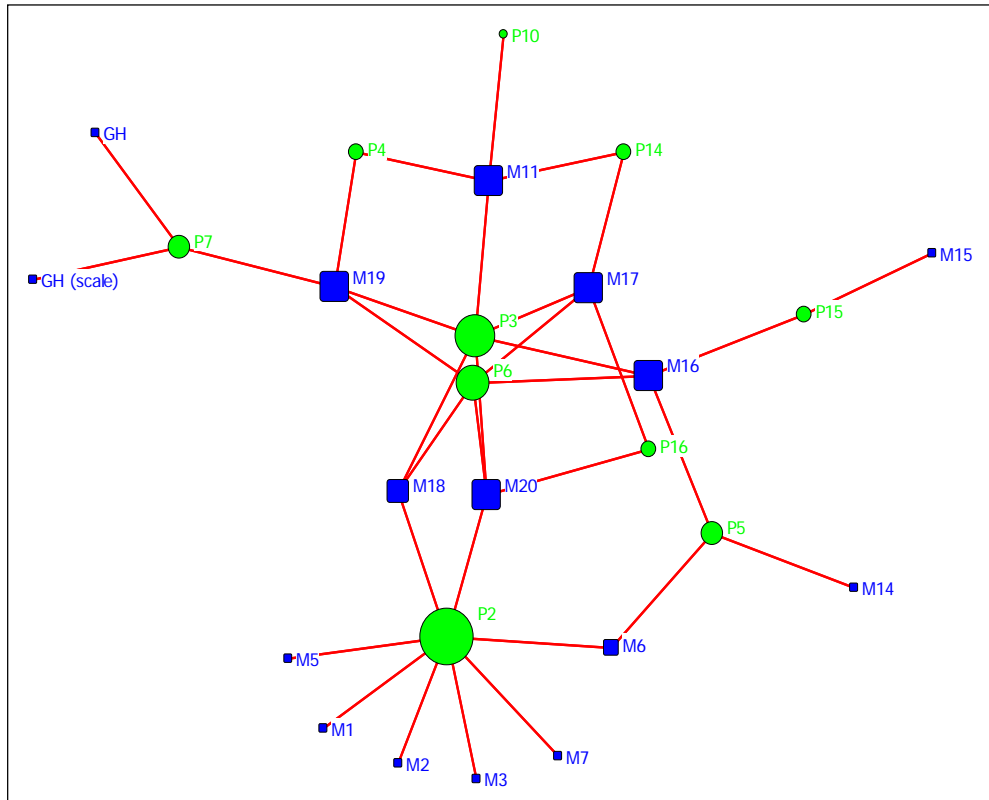
1. Happiness (and leading to happiness). Happiness (M) is one end part of the communication line formed by group practice (P) followed by comfort when suffering (M) and mantras and retreats (Ps). Leading to happiness (M) is linked to mantras and retreats (Ps) along with volunteer work (P).
2. Nirvana (M) is linked to reincarnation (M) through attendance to religious services (P). Thanks to reincarnation it (nirvana) is connected to mantras and retreats.
3. Believing in life after death (M) is linked directly to taking refuge (P) and indirectly through reincarnation (M) to mantras/retreats (Ps) and through belonging to community (M) to meditation (P).
4. Importance of the monastery (M). Mantras/retreats (Ps) along with empowerments and volunteer work (Ps) are connected to the monastery shaping it as institutional space.

In brief, this skeleton type connecting structure summarizes the power of the interconnections between visions (finalist meanings) and causal forces (practices) creating Buddhist identities, so acting as sort of DNA. This structure is the backbone forming the being Buddhist (as combination of meanings and practices). Happiness is located on the top left part of the map with indirect link to the "head" incarnating the monastery. Beliefs in nirvana and life after death emerge from the central part of the structure and from the connection between the central part (heart) and the base (action).

OM, AH, HUM.

APPENDIX 1: LIST OF MEANINGS AND PRACTICES

P1 Practice of rituals
P2 Practice of meditation
P3 Mantras
P4 Initiations
P5 Taken refuge
P6 Retreat
P7 Group of practice
P8 Pilgrimage
P9 Monastery for spirituality
P10 Monastery for initiations
P11 Monastery for meetings lamas
P12 Monastery for asking for help
P13 Monastery for rituals
P14 Monastery for volunteering
P15 attendance religious services B
P16 Volunteer participation

M1 Appeal STL: location
M2 appeal: breaking with conventionalism
M3 appeal: build new path
M4 appeal: spirituality
M5 appeal: creation community
M6 appeal: belong to community
M7 appeal: help solving problems
M8 appeal: road to happiness
M9 appeal: personal growth
M10 Importance in life: Harmony
M11 Importance in life: Monastery
M12 Importance in life: Spirituality
M13 Importance in life: Buddhism
M14 believe in: Life after death
M15 believe in: Nirvana
M16 believe in: Reincarnation
M17 practicing religion helps inner peace happiness
M18 practicing religion helps make friends
M19 practicing religion helps comfort in suffering
M20 practicing religion helps meet/find alike people
General Happiness
General Happiness (scale)
General life satisfaction (scale)
Importance in life: Money

APPENDIX 2

BLOKED MATRIX

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                    3   1       3   3 3 3 1 1 3 3     1       2 1     1 1       1 1 1 2 2 2 2 2       2 2 2 3 3 3 4
                  1 2 3 4 5 6 4 8 1 0 3 6 5 5 6     2 7 9 7 3 4 1 0       2 8 9 7 3 4 0 1 2 5       9 8 6 7 8 9 0
                  P M P P P M P M M M P P M M       P P P M P P P P       P M M M M M M M M M       M M G G G G I

        P1  |         1                   1         1       1         |                         |                   |
        M16 |         1     1 1       1 1 1   1     |                 |                         |                   |
        P3  | 1 1     1 1 1 1         1 1 1 1 1     |     1   1       |                         |                   |
        P14 |     1   1               1 1           |     1 1         |                         |                   |
        P5  |   1 1 1     1   1     1   1           |                 |                 1       |                   |
        P6  |   1 1       1           1 1 1 1       |     1           |                         |                   |
        M18 |     1     1             1       1 1   |                 | 1                       |                   |
        P8  |           1                           |                 |                         |                   |
        M15 |   1             1 1     1             |                 |                         |                   |
        M14 |   1             1   1 1               |                 |                         |                   |
        M17 |   1 1 1     1 1       1 1   1     1   |                 |                 1       1 |                   |
        P16 |     1 1 1 1             1         1   |         1       |                         |                   |
        P15 | 1 1 1         1     1                 |   1             |                         |                   |
        M19 |   1         1 1               1       |   1             |                         |                   |
        M20 |   1         1 1           1 1   1     |       1         | 1                       |                   |
        ---------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------
        P12 |                         1             |             1   |                         |                   |
        P7  | 1                     1 1             |             1   |                         |       1 1         |
        P9  |                                       |             1   |                         |                   |
        M11 |   1 1                                 |             1 1 |                 1       |                   |
        P13 |                                       | 1   1     1 1 1 |                         |                   |
        P4  | 1   1 1     1               1   1     |         1 1   1 |                         |                   |
        P11 |                                       |             1   |                         |                  ||
        P10 |                                       | 1     1 1 1 1   |                         |                   |
        ---------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------
        P2  |             1               1         |                 | 1 1 1 1     1 1         |                   |
        M2  |                                       |                 | 1   1 1 1   1 1         |                   |
        M3  |                                       |                 | 1 1   1 1 1 1 1 1 1     |                   |
        M1  |                                       |                 | 1 1 1   1   1 1         |                   |
        M7  |                                       |                 | 1 1 1 1         1       |                   |
        M8  |                 1                     |                 |         1   1 1       1 |                   |
        M4  |                                       |                 |         1 1   1       1 |                 1 |
        M5  |                                       |                 | 1 1 1 1       1         |             1     |
        M6  |           1                           |                 | 1 1 1   1   1           |                   |
        M9  |                       1               |                 |         1   1 1         |           1       |
        ---------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------
        M13 |                                       |             1   |                         | 1           1     |
        M12 |                                       |                 |                         | 1           1     |
        M10 |                                       |                 |               1         |                   |
        GH  |                                       | 1               |                 1       | 1       1         |
        GH (scale)  |                               | 1               |                         |         1         |
        GLS (scale) |                               |                 |                 1       | 1 1               |
        ILM |                                       |                 |                         |                   |
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CLUSTER DIAGRAM

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P1 rituals ------------------------------------ 1
M16 believe in: Reincarnation ----------------- 32
P3 Mantras ------------------------------------ 3
P14 Monastery for volunteering ---------------- 14
P5 refuge ------------------------------------- 5
P6 retreat ------------------------------------ 6
M18 practicing religion helps Make Friends ---- 34
P8 pilgrimage --------------------------------- 8
M15 believe in: Nirvana ----------------------- 31
M14 believe in: Life after death -------------- 30
M17 practicing religion helps Inner Peace Happiness -- 33
P16 Volunteer participation ------------------- 16
P15 attendance religious services B ----------- 15
M19 practicing religion helps comfort in suffering -- 35
M20 practicing religion helps Meet/find adequate peo -- 36
P12 Monastery for asking for help ------------- 12
P7 Group of Practice -------------------------- 7
P9 Monastery for spirituality ----------------- 9
M11 Importance in life: Monastery ------------- 27
P13 Monastery for Rituals --------------------- 13
P4 Initiations -------------------------------- 4
P11 Monastery for meetings Lamas -------------- 11
P10 Monastery for initiations ----------------- 10
P2 meditation --------------------------------- 2
M2 appeal: breaking with conventionalism ------ 18
M3 appeal: build new path --------------------- 19
M1 appeal STL: location ----------------------- 17
M7 appeal: help solving problems -------------- 23
M8 appeal: road to Happiness ------------------ 24
M4 appeal: spirituality ----------------------- 20
M5 appeal: creation community ----------------- 21
M6 appeal: belong to community ---------------- 22
M9 appeal: personal growth -------------------- 25
M13 Importance in life: Buddhism -------------- 29
M12 Importance in life: Spirituality ---------- 28
M10 Importance in life: Harmony --------------- 26
General Happiness ----------------------------- 37
General Happiness (scale) --------------------- 38
General life satisfaction (scale) ------------- 39
Importance in life: Money --------------------- 40
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