



The Centre for Studies in Asian Cultures and Social Anthropology at the Austrian Academy of Sciences hereby invites to ZAS SEMINAR No 4:

Of Potency and Impotence Traditional Tibetan Medicine and Modern Quality Control

Stephan Kloos

Thursday, 25th of March 2010, 16.00 pm [s.t.]
Centre for Studies in Asian Cultures and Social Anthropology, Seminar room
A-1040 Vienna, Prinz-Eugen-Straße 8–10, 1st floor

The importance of science – both ‘traditional’ and ‘modern’ – to 20th century nationalist struggles in Asia, notably in China and India, is well known and documented (e.g. Chatterjee 1993; Prakash 2002). However, despite considerable interest in the ongoing exile-Tibetan nationalist struggle, exile-Tibetan engagements with modern science have so far received little scholarly attention. In this paper, I argue that Tibetan medicine today forms the most important domain of such engagements not only in theory, but also in practice. As such, Tibetan medicine plays a central, if often overlooked, role in exile-Tibetan nationalism.

Tibetan medicine’s power to produce a modern Tibetan nation is contingent on its medical efficacy, and consequently on its engagement with modern science. While clinical studies of Tibetan medicine’s efficacy have so far been the most discussed, but least practiced, aspect of this engagement, modern science is already becoming an integral part of Tibetan medicine in exile in the form of quality control. With Tibetan medicine’s entrance in the capitalist market, old methods of ensuring the medicines’ quality and efficacy have been rendered inadequate, necessitating the use of modern quality control technologies. At the same time, however, modern quality control is incapable of measuring the potency of Tibetan medicine, thus forcing it to rely on ‘traditional’ techniques. I argue that such a re-definition of tradition and modernity – and religion and science – as complementary practices, rather than conceptual opposites, lies at the core of ongoing exile-Tibetan efforts to produce a modern, yet ‘traditionally Tibetan’, nation.



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Research interests: Tibetan medicine in exile, medical anthropology, Tibet studies, science and governmentality studies. Conducted over 27 months of fieldwork since 1998 on the social, cultural, and political aspects – and history – of Tibetan medicine in India and the Tibetan exile. **Recent publication:** (2010) The History and Development of Tibetan Medicine in Exile. *Tibet Journal* 33(3): 15-49 (Autumn 2008).