

Comments on the paper 'Tibetan Culture Area'

(Critical Response to Arnab Anjaria's "The Tibetan Culture Area: Contours and Civilizational Linkages")

The author has a deep knowledge about the history of the discussed areas The author discusses about a historical phenomenon in a vast area. Therefore, such a relatively short paper cannot fulfil such a task in full. However, I am aware of the limitations in word limit and other conventions of publications. This paper deserves publication given that a few points are addressed or corrected Despite certain shortcomings, I recommend the publication of this paper.

- Anonymous

Deeper understanding of Buddhism: does it promote peace or is it used instrumentally?

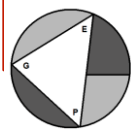
(Editorial Note to Arnab Anjaria's "The Tibetan Culture Area: Contours and Civilizational Linkages")

Tibetan or Mongolian Buddhism is a subject that deserves more attention, certainly in the context of current happenings. I believe that Buddhism deserves more in-depth study from scholars. According to my understanding Buddhism has been treated in the West more in an idealistic, romantic way, or as an Eastern philosophy and wisdom distant from society, rather than one with a real impact on a society.

Buddhism has often been regarded as a peaceful religion which commands peace and harmony. It has been the basis of many New Age and hippy alternative philosophies and lifestyles in the West. However, the conflicts in Sri Lanka and Myanmar reveal that also Buddhists can be engaged in conflicts and behave aggressively. Even though it did not have a root in the Buddhist philosophy, the genocide in Cambodia did nevertheless occur in a Buddhist cultural area.

It can be argued that this type of Buddhism has been Theravada Buddhism and that the Tibetan/Mongolian or Vajrayana Buddhism may have been peaceful. Then, how can the aggressive and expansive political behavior of the Mongolian empire under Genghis Khan and his successors be explained? It can be argued that Genghis Khan and his successors were not Buddhists and adhered to their Shamanistic traditions. One could also argue that their adherence to Buddhism or Shamanic tradition may have been irrelevant. In other words, Buddhism, like other religions, may or may not influence human political behavior. This, however, is a legitimate subject to be studied more deeply.

This paper does not discuss the impact of Buddhism in political behavior and conflict. The author never mentions that it is the scope of its paper and therefore it will not be fair to criticize the author in this way. Nevertheless, the author's initiative to frame this study in geopolitical concepts is applaudable and is a good initiative to bring Buddhist studies under the attention of the social and political sciences.



One does not necessarily have to agree with the author's delimitation of Tibetan Culture Area. However, the fact that the author dares to conceptualize and approach Buddhism from a non-Western perspective is laudable. There is an urgent need in both the humanities and the social sciences to study Buddhism from different perspectives. The political sciences in particular need a deeper understanding of Buddhism, also as a political and social phenomenon.

A relevant question is whether Buddhism promotes peace or is all too often used as a political instrument to rule a country or mobilize people for a conflict. It can also only serve at least as a denominator of identity and therefore be politically relevant. And assuming that Buddhist teachings have an impact on political behavior, one should investigate to what extent and in which contexts and circumstances they could prevent or resolve tensions and conflicts, and thus promote peace.

The subject and theme of Anjaria's paper is very relevant to the emerging field of ethnogeopolitics and we would like to invite more contributions on this subject and theme.

- Babak Rezvani, Editor-in-Chief

Author's Response

I would also assert that the article primarily deals with a certain way of life across a large geographical area and offers a historical analysis of this congenial phenomenon that is spread across two continents, namely Asia and Europe. Certainly Buddhism does emerge as a key linkage, yet the nuances of socio-political behavior and their philosophical concerns are for scholars to further look into.

The paper seeks to highlight the influence of Tibetan Buddhism beyond the contours of Tibet and also the historical role of the institution of Buddhism based in Lhasa. The present-day widespread influence and domination of the Gelug (Dalai Lama's) school in Mongolia, Buryatia, Kalmykia and Tuva is the result of a historical association of these regions with Lhasa and Tibet in particular. While other regions within the Tibetan culture area identify with different schools of Tibetan Buddhism, the general linkage that draws them together is Tibetan Buddhism.

Thus the general assumption of a single monolithic nature of Buddhism in the popular perception and certain scholarly domains stands challenged by highlighting the diversity of thought and a certain congenial coexistence which remains strongly grounded in the regional particularities of the Tibetan culture area. I appreciate the profound editorial comments and the keen reading.

- Arnav Anjaria

NB: do you have any comments on Arnav Anjaria's article and/or the Critical Response, the Editorial Note and the Author's Response to these? Please send your comments to info@ethnogeopolitics.org, or through the contact form at www.ethnogeopolitics.org. Some of the comments on this and any other contribution, we may publish as Critical Responses (maximum 3,000 words) in the next issue(s) of the journal. Extensive critical responses with own source references may be published as full-fledged, separate articles. Please supply your name, contact details, academic and/or other professional titles and affiliations, as well as your specialisms and any major publications.