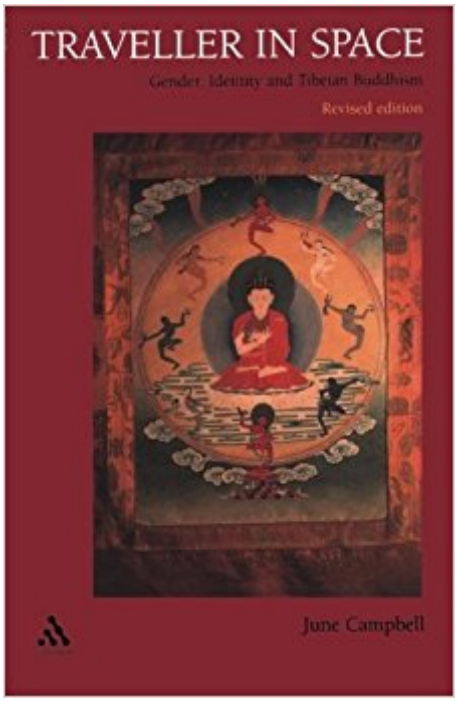
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Traveller In Space: Gender, Identity And Tibetan Buddhism



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Synopsis

In this revised edition of June Campbell’s ground-breaking and ambitious work, many of the key issues concerning gender, identity and Tibetan Buddhism, are now broadened and further clarified in order to create a better understanding of the historical importance of gender symbolisation in the very construction of religious belief and philosophy. With its cross-cultural stance, the book concerns itself with the unusual task of creating links between the symbolic representations of gender in the philosophy of Tibetan Buddhism, and contemporary western thinking in relation to identity politics and intersubjectivity. A wide range of sources are drawn upon in order to build up arguments concerning the complexities of individual gender roles in Tibetan society, alongside the symbolic spaces allocated to the male and female within its cultural forms, including its sacred institutions, its representations and in the enactment of ritual. And in the light of Tibetan Buddhisms popularity in the west, timely questions are raised concerning gender and the potential uses and abuses of power and secrecy in Tibetan Tantra, which, with its unique emphasis on guru-devotion and sexual ritual, is now being disseminated worldwide. What is made clear in this new edition, however, is that Campbell’s ultimate aim is to elucidate, through the use of a psychoanalytical perspective, something of the dynamic inter-relationship between the inner lives of individuals, their gender identities in society, and the belief systems which they create in order to provide cohesion, continuity and meaning, whether it be in the east or the west.

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Tibetan cultural chauvinism among lamas and abuse of women seekersAnyone who has followed the recent histories of Zen and Tibetan Buddhist teachers with western devotees knows that, too often, these same teachers have been criticized for both authoritarian and sexual indiscretions. It is easy to play the cynic who believes that these ostensibly celibate or married men--the teachers are almost always monks--find it hard to resist ÃƒÂ¢Ã â ¬Ã Å“sexually liberal,ÃƒÂ¢Ã â ¬Ã Â• white, westerners who dote over them. And it is easy to degrade devotees who submit ÃƒÂ¢Ã â ¬Ã Å“totallyÃƒÂ¢Ã â ¬Ã Â• to such gurus as no more than naive seekers who should have known better. In Traveller In Space, June Campbell delivers us beyond superficial cynicism into a scholarly study of the unusual patriarchal system of Tibetan Tantra and its relevance to female subjectivity.Although Campbell speaks from extensive personal experience--she was a consort of an important Tibetan lama (priest-monk) for several years and an accomplished translator of Tibetan texts--Traveller is not another ÃƒÂ¢Ã â ¬Ã Å“ex-memberÃƒÂ¢Ã â ¬Ã Â• exposÃƒÂ© for lay readers. Campbell lives in Scotland where she teaches Religious Studies. Hers is an important study that utilizes sophisticated psychoanalytic, religious, and cultural theory. She explains and criticizes how the female role, the dakini, in Tibetan Tantra (Vajrayana) has diminished the individual female integrity to comply with a male-dominated, male-defined tradition. Campbell invokes feminist scholarship, especially that of Luce Irigay, as well as religion and mythology scholars, Mircea Eliade, Joseph Campbell (no relation to the author), and Agehananda Bharati among them, to reinforce her perspectives.In certain terms, Campbell points out the vulnerabilities of Tibetan Tantra to western influence. Tibetan dakinis have been acculturated to accept their roles as unequal if revered ÃƒÂ¢Ã â ¬Ã Å“objectsÃƒÂ¢Ã â ¬Ã Â• useful to lamas in their sexual rituals. The latter, usually secret, are said to provide powerful opportunities for the lama to attain ÃƒÂ¢Ã â ¬Ã Å“enlightenment.ÃƒÂ¢Ã â ¬Ã Â• Western ethics (conditioned by a long history of Judeo-Christian influence) and feminist philosophy conflict with this secret patriarchal system. Western women have long complained about sexual exploitation by certain gurus who invoke an ÃƒÂ¢Ã â ¬Ã Å“enlightenedÃƒÂ¢Ã â ¬Ã Â• status, one that ÃƒÂ¢Ã â ¬Ã Å“entitlesÃƒÂ¢Ã â ¬Ã Â• them to have sexual contact with devotees. Campbell provides a scholarly and psychoanalytic basis for their complaints as well as a new standard for women within the Tibetan tradition. She admits that if this new standard, one that accepts women as self-determining ÃƒÂ¢Ã â ¬Ã Å“subjectsÃƒÂ¢Ã â ¬Ã Â• in their own spiritual destiny, were incorporated, Tibetan Tantra would either revolutionize or disappear.More than a cross-cultural critique, Traveller In Space is a good primer on lamaism and Tantric religious history with its roots in

Indian philosophy. Campbell analyses how separation from the mother at a young age has certain emotional effects on ÃƒÂ¢Ã â ¬Ã Å“reincarnatedÃƒÂ¢Ã â ¬Ã Â• lamas and their ensuing needs for ÃƒÂ¢Ã â ¬Ã Å“nurtureÃƒÂ¢Ã â ¬Ã Â• from consorts. The title is a translation of the Sanskrit word dakini (Tibetan khandro) that means ÃƒÂ¢Ã â ¬Ã Å“sky-goer.ÃƒÂ¢Ã â ¬Ã Â• The implication is that the submissive dakini is unattached to any thing and functions as an empty ÃƒÂ¢Ã â ¬Ã Å“spaceÃƒÂ¢Ã â ¬Ã Â• to afford the partner-lama an experience of ÃƒÂ¢Ã â ¬Ã Å“enlightenment,ÃƒÂ¢Ã â ¬Ã Â• but, in tradition, this does not work in reverse. Campbell systematically discusses and deconstructs such male-generated notions as untenable and ÃƒÂ¢Ã â ¬Ã Å“illogicalÃƒÂ¢Ã â ¬Ã Â• within and ÃƒÂ¢Ã â ¬Ã Å“outwithÃƒÂ¢Ã â ¬Ã Â• the system if Tibetan Tantra is to incorporate status integrity for women. She also points out how lamas manipulate their consorts, or dakinis, by suggesting if they reveal the affair or rebel, the dakini will suffer ÃƒÂ¢Ã â ¬Ã Å“madness, trouble, or even death.ÃƒÂ¢Ã â ¬Ã Â•The fact that this manipulative behavior is somehow sanctioned by a centuries-long tradition, largely unchallenged by the females within Tibetan culture, demonstrates how completely the ÃƒÂ¢Ã â ¬Ã Å“feminineÃƒÂ¢Ã â ¬Ã Â• has been politically framed by both male-generated symbology and signature, according to Campbell. The effects of CampbellÃƒÂ¢Ã â ¬Ã â„¢s study may be difficult to predict, but the need for it in light of the continued attraction of western seekers, particularly women, for exotic ÃƒÂ¢Ã â ¬Ã Å“enlightenedÃƒÂ¢Ã â ¬Ã Â• teachers is inestimable.

Campbell provides a fresh, common sense perspective on Tibetan Buddhism, informed by her practice and her association with Kalu Rinpoche, a venerated teacher in the Kagyu tradition. Vajrayana represents a remarkable and seamless integration of Mahayana, Hinduist tantra and proto-Mongolian shamanic tradition. Since it became a state religion under Tibetan kings, the shamanic element receded into the background. As far as Campbell is concerned, this resulted in severing the connection with the feminine, earthly energy - Tibet became a theocracy ruled by men for men. Spiritual authority was handed through the "tulku" system, which consisted of taking young boys (never girls) from their mothers and putting them into monasteries under strict regimen of doctrinal studies and meditation.On the psychological level, such a system would have a tendency for creating men who are disconnected from women while having the very normal biological impulse to have sex. Unfortunately, motherless monks and tulkus would have no idea how to deal with women except from a position of cultural-spiritual authority and, Campbell would say, domination. Tulkus have been raised into cognitive dissonance: women are polluting, they are an obstacle to practice, at best women can serve others and at worst they are a nuisance - yet women are also

transformed into dakinis, female aspects of being that men must associate with in order to reach enlightenment. Part of this paradox has been sublimated through tantric practices imported from India and China that used imagined spiritual consorts. Another part, however, resulted in the tradition of real people-consorts and mistresses kept by lamas. They would rationalize this as a recapitulation of the famous union between Padmasambhava and his consort Yeshe Tsogyal that represents the bedrock of Vajrayana despite the fact that female lamas like Yeshe Tsogyal have not been seen in Tibet for hundreds of years due to suppression of female assertiveness and power by the tulku system. Subcontracting a religion to men alone is usually a bad, very bad, idea as we can clearly see in the West.The Kalachakra tantra (practiced by Kalu), for example, has frightening apocalyptic aspects that reflect the male psyche under duress including religious warfare and extreme violence against women - something that few Western bliss bunnies eager to get initiated into the practice comprehend. Nor was the pre-China Tibet a bed of roses. Critics such as Michael Parenti would say that Tibetan hierarchy had been no less venal, autocratic, power-hungry and brutal towards its serfs (peasants and herders) than the medieval Catholic Church. Serfs were taxed upon getting married, taxed for the birth of each child and for every death in the family. They were taxed for planting a tree in their yard and for keeping animals. They were taxed for religious festivals and for public dancing and drumming, for being sent to prison and upon being released. Those who could not find work were taxed for being unemployed, and if they traveled to another village in search of work, they paid a passage tax. Monasteries lent peasants at 50% interest. If the peasant could not pay, they were made into slaves. All this was an integral part of "religion".The Tibetan religio-political setup has been dismantled in a brutal if not genocidal, manner by the Chinese in what is one of the great tragedies of the XXth century. However, reverberations of old chauvinist attitudes have trickled up to this day, as can be seen by the Naropa cult around Trungpa (another tulku) who cavorted intoxicated with his female devotees ("dakinis"), and Campbell’s interaction with Kalu RInpoche. Kalu’s father was a tulku and his sons have inherited the teacher mantle, which may be relevant with respect to the scandal caused by the intergenerational and intercultural psychological drama described by June Campbell. June, acting as Kalu’s translator, was asked to become his "consort". When tantric sex is practiced between equals, energy flows in a circle to the great benefit of both partners. Practiced between unequals, the flow is in one direction, essentially a transfer of life force from the weaker less aware partner to the stronger one. Essentially a form of vampirism or to put it more mildly, a way to prolong the life of a highly respected teacher at the expense of a devotee who will no doubt accrue great merit and be rewarded in a future incarnation. While this was a clear case of cultural misunderstanding, it is just as clear that Kalu’s entourage was

aware that the situation was not kosher as they swore Campbell to secrecy (family secrets again; a trademark of any cult).If this happened within the Tibetan community, it would have been part of a cultural setup that is taken for granted. The Western psyche, however, does not work that way. It is much more individualized, and subsumed with shame, anger as well as an innate belief in inviolate human integrity. It was not until years later that the sheer anger at the disrespect she was shown and revulsion forced Campbell to speak out. This book thus that paints a historical, cultural, psychological, sexual and personal portrait of a fascinating religion that looks behind the lines of its ordinary glow. A religion which represents a pinnacle in the human ability to establish a relationship between the sacred and the profane and nudge us towards conscious evolution. As such, however, Vajrayana is also ever so human, depending on its messengers represented in this book by both Kalu Rinpoche and June Campbell. The two teach us about equally important aspects of incarnation. Blind devotion and uncritical acceptance of hierarchy is, in this context, anti-spiritual and an aspect of ignorance. In some visualizations practiced by Campbell, the Lama (spiritual teacher) was made into an authoritative diety in the mind of his students. How could you refuse to have sex with your own deity, especially in the context of increased prestige within the cult? Will Westerners groveling at the feet of ever-so-human holy men eventually learn this lesson, which is a precondition for becoming self-aware?

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