

Question sheet 6a. Vajrayāna in Tibet/ Mongolia and Mahāyāna in China.

Fact and Comparison Questions to study for the exam (required)

1. Outline briefly the major characteristics of theology and praxis in Vajrayāna Buddhism in Tibet.
2. A. Situate where the Dalai Lama fits in the schools of Tibetan Buddhism. B. Today the current Dalai Lama makes a bid for both a political and spiritual role to play in Tibet. Is this political aspiration for a religious head a purely modern phenomenon? Give a brief overview of the history of Buddhism in Tibet, outlining its multiple political roles.
3. Buddhism is said to have been spread to the North and East in a second and third turning of the wheel.” In how far does that appear to be historically grounded? Back up your answer by briefly outlining the complexity of transmission of Buddhism to Tibet & Mongolia and China.
4. Outline briefly the major schools of Chinese Mahāyāna Buddhism, grouping them according to the questions they grapple with and briefly indicating the answers they provide to these questions.

Discussion questions (optional)

1. Buddhism is said to have conquered Tibet and China, but in how far can this also be said to be the other way round, i.e., did it get transformed in the process? Refer to Oxtoby 2002: 275-8)
2. Some of the Chinese Mahāyāna schools seem to have been more popular than others. Speculate as to the reasons of appealing to a Chinese public at the time. Which schools seem more attractive to you? Why (not).
3. Briefly outline the history behind the vogue of Buddhism in the West, referring to Oxtoby 2002: 303-8). Which Buddhist groups did you know of before taking this course? How does learning about the Asian “pre-history” of such movements change your evaluation and understanding of them?