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The Cup

An Interdisciplinary Guide for Teachers



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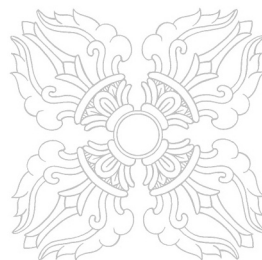


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Introduction to *The Cup*

Khyentze Norbu, chosen at age 7 as the reincarnation of a 19th century Lama, has the distinguished title of "Rinpoche" which means "Precious One" in English. He also holds the distinction of being the highly acclaimed writer and director of the award-winning film *The Cup*, the first film ever made in the Tibetan language. Educated in a monastery-in-exile himself, Norbu continued his education in London, where his passion for movies developed and grew. Norbu credits his film education to watching many movies, both good and bad. He claims that he learned a lot from watching bad films because their mistakes were obvious. In 1994 he worked as a consultant on *Little Buddha* for director Bernardo Bertolucci.

The Cup is the story of a group of young Tibetan boys living as monks in a remote monastery at the foot of the Himalayas in Northern India. Many of the boys in the film play characters that closely model their real identities. Jamyang Lodro plays one of these boys, Orgyen (pronounced ORG-yen), a tenacious and rebellious fourteen-year-old who is obsessed with the World Cup football (soccer) series and goes to great lengths to follow the games. He even resorts to sneaking out of the monastery at night and attempts to raise money to rent satellite television equipment to watch the World Cup in the monastery itself. The monastery's disciplinarian, Geko (Orgyen Tobgyal) and the Abbott (Lama Chonjor, who is in fact the real-life abbot of this monastery!), must decide how to deal with the introduction of modern Western influences into their traditional monastic lifestyle. *The Cup* is a semi-autobiographical account of a time when the World Cup came to Norbu's remote village via satellite dish.

Norbu feels that film is an important new way to share Tibet's stories and culture. Buddhism has always encouraged expression through traditional arts such as painting and literature. But Norbu is concerned that creative expression as a form of communication has not kept up with the times. Becoming more accepting of emergent technology will help to give Tibetans a voice in the global community. This notion is very clear in *The Cup* through Norbu's use of Coca Cola and the World Cup broadcast to symbolize the influence of Western culture, globalization and modernization. He contrasts this with the ultra-traditional backdrop of a remote monastery representing Tibetan Buddhist life.

On one level the story is about youth defying the rules of their elders (What else is new??) but on a deeper level it is a story of the breaking down of old traditions in the face of new technology as popular media create universal events to be shared around the globe. Geko, the disciplinarian in the film, like Norbu the filmmaker, sees himself as the bridge between the old and the new. This film allows us to stand back and look at the disruption new technologies cause when they are first introduced. In the monastery culture, as in our own, the young are the early adopters, while the elders, with more to lose, accept innovation more slowly. This film itself bridges the gap between old and new, as Norbu uses modern film as an art form to convey ancient Buddhist wisdom.

Norbu selected this film as his directorial debut in part because of his unique access to monasteries as sets and monks as actors. Even so, there were several technical difficulties and expenses in producing the film: hauling cameras and heavy equipment up footpaths, generating enough power for lighting, and sending the film out to

Australia for processing. The original script was written in English, so Norbu met each day with the monks to discuss the daily events that were to be filmed. This film was shot quickly and efficiently. In order to accommodate this monumental production without disrupting their daily Buddhist rituals, the monks woke up at 4 am to do their chanting and meditation and then began their production duties.

This model of filmmaking is a good one for any students who are drawn to writing or production: Norbu's film education came from watching and analyzing many movies, he writes about what he knows, he uses friends and colleagues to help with production, and he is adaptable enough to solve production problems which result from budget constraints and isolated shooting locations.

BHUTAN / AUSTRALIA, 1999 – Running Length: 1 hour and 23 minutes

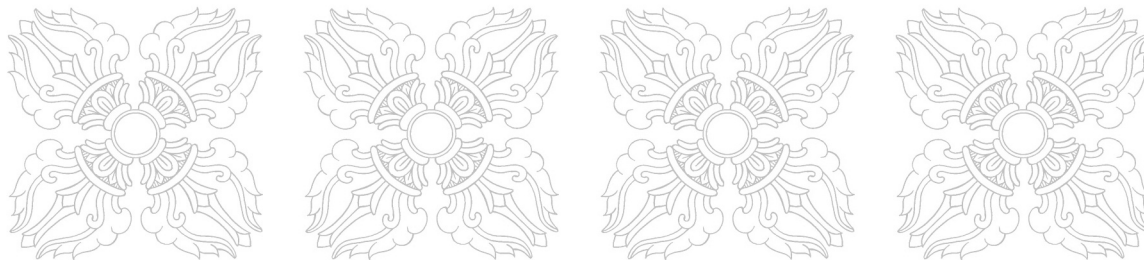
DIRECTOR: Khyentze Norbu

PRODUCTION COMPANIES: Coffee Stain Productions, Palm Pictures

SCREENPLAY: Khyentze Norbu

CINEMATOGRAPHY: Paul Warren

The Cup has won recognition at the Pusan, Munich and Toronto film festivals



Tibet Country Profile

Because Tibet is not recognized as a country by the U.S. Department of State, the Fact Sheet we provide in other units of this series is not available. Instead, we have included data on Tibet from the Panchen Lama Resource Center. The website of this advocacy group is at http://www.tibet.ca/panchenlama/resource_fact.html.

Area: 2.5 million square kilometers

Capital: Lhasa

Population: 6 million Tibetans
7.5 million Chinese through population transfer

Average Altitude: 13,000 feet above sea level

Provinces: Amdo (now split by China and renamed Qinghai & Gansu provinces); Kham (now added to Chinese provinces of Sichuan, Gansu and Yunnan); U-Tsang (now called by China as TAR - Tibetan Autonomous Region)

Language: Tibetan but the official language is Chinese

Main crop/food: Tsampa (roasted barley flour)

National drink: Po-cha (salted butter tea)

Animals: Wild Yak, Bharal (blue) sheep, Musk deer, Snow Leopard, Tibetan antelope, Tibetan gazelle

Birds: Black necked crane, Lammergeier, Great Crested grebe, Bar-headed goose, Ibis bill

Highest Mountain: Mount Everest 29,028 feet (called Chomo-Langma in Tibetan)

Average Rainfall: In the west it is 1 mm in Jan to 25 mm in July

In the east it is 25-50 mm in Jan and 800 mm in July

Average Temperature: July 58F, Jan 24F

Mineral Deposits: Borax, uranium, iron, chromite, gold

Major Rivers: Yangtse, Tsango, Mekong, Salween, Yellow

Economy: Tibetans: agriculture

Chinese: government, commerce and service sector

Bordering Countries: India, Nepal, Bhutan, Burma, China

National Flag: Snow Lions with red and blue rays

Political and Religious Leader: #1 14th Dalai Lama
#2 Panchen Lama

Government in Tibet: Communist

Environmental Damage: Deforestation, Nuclear testing, uranium mining, dumping of hazardous waste

of Tibetans dead because of Chinese occupation between 1951 and 1979: 1.2 million Tibetans

of Tibetans who left Tibet: 80,000

of monasteries and temples before 1959 invasion: 6,259

of monasteries not touched by destruction and vandalism after invasion: 8