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Yungdrung Bön in the age of globalisation.

Anthropological analysis of the transmission of Tibetan religion and medicine contents on the example of Poland

### **Summary**

In the postmodern era in which Western civilization finds itself, profound changes are taking place at the global level. This global nature is nothing new. The processes of spreading material goods, ideas and cultures have always taken place, but now - under the influence of satellite media, mass communication and the opening of many countries to human flow - these processes have intensified, creating new multifaceted networks and compilations. The observation that cultures have never existed in isolation but have always influenced one another seems to be a basic statement. Globalisation understood in this way has been defined by K. Ekhol-Friedman and J. Friedman (2005) as a global system, which emphasizes the fact that we deal historically and nowadays with a system of cultures influencing each other within various processes. Moreover, in this work, globalization is understood in the context of the cultural process of adaptation, which means the spreading of ideas; the task is to survive given cultural elements or systems. In this case, it is illustrated by the example of the Tibetan religion Yungdrung Bön.

Such an understanding of globalisation does not contradict other approaches to this phenomenon but even complements it. Postmodernity carries the ideas of multiplicity and equivalence, which means the equality of a series of narratives and the abolition of meta-narrative as only correct and valid. This also applies to religion. The universality of such an understanding of the world has been noticed by the international community at the institutional level: the United Nations has adopted the right to freedom of every human being as an inalienable principle. The proclamation of the universality of this principle means that every person is entitled to such a right and that all people are equal, and consequently - that they have the same rights also in the field of freedom of religion. The extension of these rights to the entire globe has become one of the causes of globalisation because, in every corner of the globe, every person theoretically has the right to freedom and religion, and within this right, there is also the equality of every religion.

In this way understood and anchored in postmodernity human culture, as a set of equal, partner cultures of human groups or regions of the world, requires new research, both historical

and ethnological. Therefore, in my dissertation, I use the phenomenology in van der Leeuw's version to analyse the historical culture and Yungdrung Bön religion, as well as the semiotic definition of culture, which, combined with social constructivism, allows to capture the subtle influence that it has on research. The position of the researcher, on the other hand, always tries to grasp the position of man in the context of current events.

Using Geertz's definition of culture (2005) and Rappaport's (2007) analysis on rituals, I describe the network of meanings related to Yungdrung Bön culture and religion that arises within the global system and the globalisation process in Poland. I take the concept of a network of meanings after Geertz (2005).

Within these networks of meanings, the symbols and signs that appear (including, first of all, the interpretation of the natural state of mind as a symbol of divinity and holiness, and teachings of the religious school too) transform meanings. They have been moved from the original cultural area (Tibet) to the West. Then they have lost their uniqueness and, their original sacredness because under globalisation they have become on a par with symbols coming from other cultures. The globalisation discussed in this work under the concept of all human equality also affects symbols. This is related to the transition from single, dominant meta-narratives in the area of individual cultures to the equality of all narratives. Introduced concepts of *gemeinschaft* and *gesellschaft* indicate the differentiation of societies at the global level.

Within the Yungdrung Bön culture, medicine is understood as healing and the phenomenon of medicalisation and it occurs in the West. These two aspects - religious and medical - are used in this work to analyse various historically tangible layers of culture. They also show how this interaction of cultures - the existing and the new one - has taken place and still takes place within the global system. Reaching the network of meanings, I show how this interaction within the postmodern process of globalisation is embedded in the everyday life of an average person. This process of influencing cultures, each time related to the experiences of an ordinary person, allows us to capture the movement that takes place between cultures and how the resulting human experiences allow us to interpret specific phenomena anew.

Describing the way the transmission of the religious worldview takes place within the framework of the globalisation process (the teaching of the Buddhist Yungdrung Bön tradition is the case study here), and presentation of the transformation of this worldview into private religiosity (subjective, internal), are next goals of this work. The religious and medical perspectives adopted in it results from the role played by broadly understood therapies in the

Western world. In the case of Yungdrung Bön, we are dealing with traditional teaching, based on religious-therapeutic themes, where therapies in some situations are much more important than religion. In this way, I show how religion originating from the area of Western Tibet and the Western Himalayas, under the influence of historical processes - Western modernisation and globalisation, penetrates Poland, colliding with the world created largely under the influence of the Catholic religion as a strongly institutionalised religion. I show the process of transition from one system to another, the interpenetration of elements of both cultures and religions, their fluidity and often equivalence - depending on the current needs of a person in the situation of illness, treatment and healing. Analysing this particular cultural phenomenon from an anthropological perspective, I consider broader cultural phenomena, such as globalisation of the world, the spread of the idea of the equivalence of each culture, calling it a partnership of cultures, and the penetration of religious ideas and the healing methods, regardless of their origin.

This work consists of nine chapters and eight appendixes constituting the main part of the work. Chapter I provides a framework outline of the area of work, introducing general considerations on postmodernity in the context of philosophy and anthropology.

Chapter II shows the methodological framework of this work. The usage of phenomenology and performance is intended to help in obtaining a description of norms and directives, but also attitudes and behaviours, and the emerging network of meanings. Phenomenology allows for a deeper analysis of both social phenomena and individual experiences at the level of consciousness. The reduction applied in this aspect in the form of bracketing the world of natural beliefs can be distinguished as characteristic moments of change in perception of the world by participants of the Yungdrung Bön meetings. In turn, performance allows for a subtle and deep analysis of the processes taking place within the described community. In this way, both descriptions complement each other, giving the possibility of a broader and more precise understanding of the described phenomena in the fields of medicine and religion.

Phenomenology and hermeneutics, on the other hand, make it possible to consider religion as one of the meaning-creating human activities. Religion justifies its existence by invoking the "Final Sacred Assumptions" and by using canonical and self-referential messages. It, therefore, moves in a closed circle. Using the hermeneutic concept of understanding, I show its character, limitations and creative possibilities in achieving self-awareness.

The following chapter III is dedicated to Communicative Anthropology and the Concept of Culture. Subjective religiosity and networks of meanings show the importance of the semiotic concept of culture for this work. Following Geertz, taking culture as a network of meanings in which man is suspended, I pay attention to the interactivity of culture situated in the space of references between its members. Culture conceived in this way allows for its examination through manifestations in the form of subjective religiosity. When I talk about globalisation as a transcultural space, in the case of the Yungdrung Bön religion, I indicate its characteristic elements. These elements, apart from the uniform style and content of teaching by competent persons, are based on their network of meanings. Separating them is necessary to achieve the goal of this work: to show how Yungdrung Bön manifests itself in the era of globalisation, what is globalisation in this case, and what an anthropologist studies in connection with the transmission of the content of this religion and medicine. Finding the basis of this transmission, subjective religiosity will also be in the centre of interest of this work because it is this type of religiosity that these contents are transferred to. So in this chapter, I discuss what religiosity is and how it manifests itself. Since signs are the main carrier of religiosity, I discuss the meanings of this concept.

In chapter IV, Globalization in the postmodern world, I analyse different approaches to this phenomenon, focusing in particular on the notion of a global system and the legal dimension of globalisation. In this part, I define globalisation as the process of creating new networks of meanings within transcultural phenomena conducive to the formation of *gesellschaft* communities, also with the phenomena of contestation or New Age as preceding and supporting the religious content transmission. I also discuss globalisation in the context of phenomenology, I try to use phenomenology to look at globalisation in a new way.

In Chapter V, Religion - Understanding and Self-Awareness, based on constructivism and Rappaport's remarks, I show religion as construction on a subjective level. By avoiding a rigid definition of what religion is, I show how networks of meanings are formed. In the chapters that follow, I show the essential diversity of what is termed "Tibetan Buddhism." The specific identity of Yungdrung Bön is derived from the teachings of Buddha Tonpa Shenrab, distinct from the Tibetan Buddhism of Buddha Sakyamuni, codified in the canon of teachings called "Nine Paths". This school also refers to the culture from the land of Shang Shung in Western Tibet. An important factor in defining own identity is highlighting the periods of the so-called persecution that this religious school suffered from other schools of Tibetan Buddhism. Moreover, considering the religion of Yungdrung Bön from the phenomenological

perspective, I distinguish its layers, regarding this transmission as a process of its adaptation. The description of the subsequent layers ends with the description of the last, contemporary layer, also being formed in Poland. Analysing the analogies between the religious content of this school and the transpersonal experiences annotated by Grof, I also indicate the elements linking the Yungdrung Bön religion with subjective religiosity.

In turn, Chapter VI Medicine - Healing and Self-Healing - is dedicated to Yungdrung Bön medicine. The introduced distinctions between Traditional Tibetan Medicine (TMT), Tibetan folk medicine and Tibetan tantric-yogic-shamanic medicine are to show this unknown medicine as equal to other varieties. An interesting issue is also the way this medicine has come to the West, including, of course, Poland. I also present here the differences that exist between the traditional Tibetan medicine of the Yungdrung Bön school of other schools of Tibetan Buddhism because the issues we are interested in are specifically intertwined with religious and medical threads. This chapter also deals with two important issues in this matter: treatment and diagnosis from a religious perspective, here Buddhist, but I also raise issues related to subjective religiosity based on divination and signs that are manifestations of this type of religiosity. This analysis also includes issues related to the treatment method that we deal with in the case of the Tibetan ritual-yogic medicine of the Yungdrung Bön school. Undoubtedly, it is a medicine with very ancient roots, based on canonical texts. The terms "to heal ..." are intended to emphasize the variety of issues discussed, and they break the stereotype of thinking about "treatment" as a task assigned only to biomedical doctors. The comparative analyses presented in this chapter are intended to show the essence of the achievements of anthropology and sociology in the field of understanding the concepts of disease and health. Relating them to Tibetan concepts shows us the importance of these concepts in understanding disease, our own and others. The limited biological understanding of disease introduced by biomedicine has resulted in very little or no understanding of the disease where it exists. Thus, the very concept of disease has been identified with the biological processes taking place with the body. Meanwhile, for example, social, professional, family relations, or the very perception of the disease by the patient, in the opinion of the respondents and depositors of the Tibetan culture, play an extremely important role, often fundamental for the biological processes taking place in the body. A very important part of this chapter is subsection VI. 10 Semantic illness network - medical anthropology and five elements. The network of meanings specified therein is intertwined with the network of religious meanings discussed in chapters VIII and IX. Just as religion is an individual construct, so it is the same with the network of medical meanings.

Chapter VII, The Philosophy of the Five Elements, is of great importance for the analyses that follow. I describe links between medicine and Dzogchen. Given the importance of this doctrine in Tibetan religion and medicine, Yungdrung Bön is fundamental to understanding many of the issues covered in the remaining chapters. The specificity of teaching by competent persons, healing and self-healing techniques, Tibetan medicine, but also the creation of a network of meanings of the transcultural community, is based on, among others, the idea of the Five Elements. The distinctive meanings derived from the intersection of the concepts of meditation and medicine, to a large extent, would not exist without this theory. It consists of perceiving the world as made of five elements. In this religion, the belief in the fundamental importance of this theory is also contained in the "Final Holy Assumptions" (this is shown in the analyses in Chapter VIII). The chapter mentioned above should be inserted before discussing religion and medicine, but it would disrupt the discourse of these phenomena in the context of globalisation. Not wishing to violate the flow of the argument related to the essential purpose of this work, and taking into account the fact that it would likewise violate the considerations contained in the following sections, I have included it here.

Chapters VIII and IX contain selected examples of field description, autobiographies, interviews, and analysis of retreat teachings. Reaching for various methods of description and analysis is to help in obtaining a "condensed description" and a more detailed definition of the network of meanings. This, in turn, shows how the specifically separate Yungdrung Bön medicine passed on within the emerging transcultural community influences the formation of a network of meanings within it. The analyses contained in these chapters will allow a clearer and deeper understanding of the described cases of diagnosis and treatment, as well as the networks of meanings presented in this book, which are formed in the studied group of participants of Yungdrung Bön retreats and meditation. The term "participates in Yungdrung Bön retreats" was chosen by me on purpose, because the group does not form a coherent and strict structure, despite the existence of at least three associations of this school of Buddhism in Poland. Yes, there is a strict group in the community, but it, like the whole group, undergoes strong personnel changes. In addition, the specificity of Buddhism, in which the master plays the main role (several masters come to Poland every year and each of them has their strict group of students, while the rest of the group shows a high degree of variability) and which is treated as a philosophy rather than a religion that we are dealing with a large diversity among participants of retreats and meditation.

Appendixes 1, 2, 3, 4 at the end of this book show the transcultural nature of Yungdrung Bön, its global reach and its spread. It is a very dynamic process, although stopped as a result of the SARS-COV-2 pandemic. Appendixes 5 and 6 contain legal and quantitative analyses in the context of globalisation. As they did not fit into the book but contain information relevant to this work, I decided to include it at the end of the book. Similarly, Appendixes 7 and 8 indicate common concepts of the Tibetan religion and Greek philosophy, as well as Tibetan ancient and medieval Western medicine. These short analyses may become the subject of many investigations and, in a way, strengthen the thesis about the global nature of the cultural phenomena discussed.