



"A Strand of Contemporary Tantra: Its Discourse and Practice in the FPMT"

Glenys Eddy - University of Sydney

In his book *Tantra: Sex, Secrecy, Politics, and Power in the Study of Religion* (University of California Press, 2003), Urban agrees with Padoux's view of Tantrism, that far from being a singular coherent entity within the history of religion, as a category it is largely the product of nineteenth century scholarship. Urban also sees it as "the ambiguous result of the representation and counter representation between India and the West". He maintains that Tantra as a religious phenomenon cannot be understood in terms of one unifying element, but must be viewed instead as a shifting category, and understood in terms of its embodied forms: specific forms of discourse, ritual acts, and its expression by historical actors, and in its specific lived, social, and historical contexts.

Drawing on fieldwork conducted at a local centre affiliated with the worldwide Gelugpa Tibetan Foundation for the Preservation of the Mahayana Tradition, the FPMT, this paper explores the approach to and practice of Tantra in a contemporary western Tantric Buddhist context. In particular, this paper highlights the seriousness with which Tantra is treated in this religious setting, challenging current notions of its western appropriation as spiritual hedonism, by outlining its relationship to the following aspects of religious activity: to sutra study and practice, ethical training and the Mahayana motivation, the role of taking refuge, and to the purpose of initiation.