

The Cup
A Movie by Khyentse Norbu (1999)
Handout adapted from <<http://www.finelinefeatures.com/thecup/>>

Synopsis

In the 1950's, the Chinese Red Army invaded Tibet, killing more than 1.2 million out of six million Tibetans and destroying more than 10,000 monasteries. At present there are more Chinese in Tibet than Tibetans. Despite hardship and danger, many Tibetan families secretly send their children away to other countries in hope of providing them with a traditional Buddhist education.

Inspired by true events, our story follows two young Tibetan boys, Palden and Nylma, escaping Tibet and arriving at a Tibetan monastery-in-exile nestled in the picturesque foothills of the Himalayas. Here they receive their ordination and orientation into monastic life.

Once ordination formalities are completed, the boys are thrown into a whirlwind of unexpected events not usually associated with the austere atmosphere of a traditional Tibetan monastery - the World Cup Soccer Final is on and football fever is running hot throughout the hallowed hallways. Soccer slogans are seen everywhere and the chanting of young monks is not always in a traditional vein, much to the distress of Geko, the monastery's disciplinarian.

Orygen, Palden's room-mate, is a fearless and cheeky 14 year-old football-obsessed monk. Along with his faithful sidekick Lodo, he involves Palden in a midnight misadventure to see a semi-final World Cup match at a local shop. They are caught in the act by Geko, adding to his constant consternation about the young monk's non-academic pastime.

Expulsion from the monastery is looming for the boys and a solution must be found. The wise, compassionate Abbot and his faithful, but frazzled, Geko try to come to terms with the soccer-mad monks.

Abbot: "When is the fight?"

Geko: "What? What fight?"

Abbot: "You said it was two nations fighting for a ball.

Geko: "Oh, oh, that ... I think it's around one in the morning.

Abbot: *Picking up his thermos from under the table ...*

"What a strange time for a fight."

Looks around for his cup...

"What do they get out of all this?"

He finds his cup and pours hot water into it ...

Geko: "They get a cup."

Abbot: *Sipping from his steaming cup he ponders for a moment in deep thought...*

"A cup... Mmmm."

He continues to drink slowly, trying to suppress a smile.

Orygen, in a final desperate attempt to fulfil his passion to see 'The World Cup Final' brazenly suggests to Geko that the final match be seen in the monastery itself. To Orygen's, and everyone else's surprise, permission is given.

Tradition meets technology head on as Orygen and Lodo use every spare moment between their monastic duties to, against all odds, get a satellite dish and an old television set to watch the big game. After a few financial hitches, hilarious technical glitches and some mystical shadow-plays by torchlight, the midnight show goes on, with some surprising outcomes. It seems that Buddha is smiling from the sidelines.

Warm irreverent humor and Tibetan wisdom combine in *The Cup*. It reveals many insights into a culture that struggles with noble dignity to maintain its ancient traditions and identity

About the Movie

The Cup is the directorial debut for Bhutanese Khyentse Norbu, a pre-eminent lama of the Tibetan Buddhist tradition, and it marks a significant point in cinema history as the first feature-length movie made in Bhutan.

Authenticity was paramount for Khyentse Norbu and he chose Chokling Monastery, situated in a Tibetan refugee settlement nestled in the foothills of the Himalayas, as the main location for *The Cup*. The cast of *The Cup* was mainly drawn from members of the Monastery and none had any acting experience whatsoever, and most did not understand English. As Khyentse Norbu's script was written in English, no scripts were passed out in advance of the day's shoot and all actors were briefed scene-to-scene. Dialogue was prompted and memorized on the spot, and most scenes were completed within three takes or less - a testament to the actors' monastic discipline and concentration.

Turning a full time monastery into a feature film set required that all monastery activity be suspended for two months in order that the entire monastic community could join in the production. To maintain the commitment

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of their daily practices, most of the members of the community rose at 4 am every morning to complete their prayers before the days' shoot began.

The sight of high incarnate lamas running around unceremoniously in the village (to fulfill their thespian requirements) challenged Tibetan cultural etiquette somewhat, and older Tibetans took some time to accustom themselves to this new sight.

Nevertheless, the production process itself took on all the traditional marks of an important Tibetan undertaking, with consultations taken at every stage with respected oracles, yogis and diviners. Everything was decided by the ancient Tibetan Buddhist divination system of 'mo'. From the choice of film stock, cast, film and sound editors, to the selection of an auspicious day-one for the production. Also, as is customary, Khyentse Norbu sponsored several 'pujas', traditional Buddhist rituals, to remove obstacles and generate auspicious circumstances for the production.

Since murky skies and unpredictable electrical blackouts posed serious threats to the production schedule, numerous ritual prayers were conducted to clear the skies and stabilize currents. They seemed to have worked, as the principle photography was achieved within the schedule and budget.

Geographical and logistical circumstances required that the film be shot without any viewing of daily rushes whatsoever. Sequences were shot on faith, and Khyentse and crew only viewed their first week's work when the first batch of video 'dailies' returned from processing in Australia, three weeks into production.

The following is a recent interview with the Director.

QUESTION: Why did you make a film about football?

KHYENTSE NORBU: Growing up in a monastery, I've noticed, somehow, that monks everywhere are obsessed with football. I guess there's something similar between religion and a football match. (laughs) Everyone thinks monks are pious and disciplined. But they forget that monks are human too. The monastic code is an ideal, a goal to be hit.

Q: What is the link between religion and football?

KN: Well, I'm not sure this is necessarily the point. I see *The Cup* as an insider's look at the touchstones of Tibetan culture and society, especially now, when they face the insecurities of exile and the challenges of a modern world. But this isn't just a Tibetan issue. It's something faced by traditional cultures everywhere.

That's why I identify so much with the character of Geko. He's torn isn't he? On the one hand, he knows there's no way to preserve the essence of the Buddhist teachings without some basic discipline. On the other hand, he understands just how important this business of winning a football cup is. What should he do?

Q: From where did you get the inspiration for this story?

KN: Believe it or not, this is ninety-five percent based on a true story. The characters are actual monks in a college of Buddhist philosophy, but of course they're all much older now.

Q: You were recognized in early childhood as the third incarnation of the historic Khyentse lineage, why then do you want to make films? Aren't you neglecting the responsibilities of your spiritual heritage and office?

KN: (grins) Well, it must be the misfortune of sentient beings to have gotten this wrong incarnation, but no, I don't think I'm escaping the responsibilities. There's no escape anyway. I still run all the monasteries and colleges I inherited from my lineage, and I still take time each year to do my solitary retreats. Anyway, retreats are a part of the job of living. We have to face ourselves and our minds, if nothing else.

Film has the potential of showing us who we are too. The process of illusion is similar: the seduction of sound and image and our blank willingness to be manipulated like - how do you say it 'lamb to the slaughter'? You see, it's like this Sufi story I like: One night, a man dreams a monster is on his chest, trying to choke him to death. The man awakes with fear, and actually sees the monster sitting on him. He cries aloud, 'What's going to happen to me?' So the monster says to the man, 'Don't ask me. It's your dream.' (laughs). What do you think? Isn't that what happens when you go to a thriller or horror movie?

About the Director

Bhutanese filmmaker Khyentse Norbu is one of the most important incarnate lamas in the Tibetan Buddhist tradition today. Known more widely by his ecclesiastical title, H.E. Dzongsar Jamyang Khyentse Rinpoche, he was born in 1961 and recognized at the age of seven as the incarnation of Jamyang Khyentse Wangpo (1820-1892), a great religious reformer and saint who played a pivotal role in the revitalization and preservation of Buddhism in Tibet in the 19th-century.

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Until the age of twelve, Khyentse Norbu pursued his studies at the Palace Monastery of Gangtok, Sikkim, under the patronage of the late Maharaja. He then continued his education in Bhutan, and later in India, studying Buddhist Philosophy until the age of 23. In keeping with the non-sectarian spirit of the Khyentse lineage, Khyentse Norbu also counts among his root-teachers holders of the four main lineages of Tibetan Buddhism, including H.H. the 14th Dalai Lama.

In addition to his training in philosophy, Khyentse Norbu has also received empowerments of all major Tantras from the most accomplished masters of the last half century. He has completed several solitary retreats of profound Buddhist practices, and continues to maintain the discipline of his tradition as a way of life, spending several months each year in strict meditation retreat.

As the living heir to the Khyentse lineage, Khyentse Norbu exemplifies the non-sectarian spirit. His rigorous training in the Buddhist classical tradition, mixed with a deep interest in the film medium, makes him one of the most provocative interpreters of Tibetan Buddhism today. In keeping with his lineage, he has sought in his mixed background to bridge both old and new, and east and west.

Khyentse Norbu's interest in film began with his first experience of television, at the age of thirteen. He was to discover the joys of video film-watching much later however, at the age of nineteen. From that time on, he became fascinated with the power of cinematic art and the emotional influence of storytelling through sound and moving pictures.

Although Khyentse Norbu has never formally attended film school, he acquired his first film apprenticeship under Bernardo Bertolucci, in the making of the *Little Buddha*. Since then, his cinematic education has been derived from watching films, with his main heroes being Ozu, Andrei Tarkovsky and Satyajit Ray. While *The Cup* is his first feature film, it's not his first film. In 1995 he made *Ette Metto*, a 24-minute film of village life in Bhutan inspired by Tagore. Director of Photography was Paul Warren, who also performed the same function for *The Cup*.

"I think it's better to understand the power of this influence, than to be its victim," says Khyentse Norbu smiling. "Film has so much power because we're conditioned primarily by what we see, and what we hear. Making a good film, I suppose, is a bit like doing good Buddhist practice. It all begins with an awareness of how we're conditioned."

"I would like my stories to be moment-to-moment dramas," he explains, "Life is filled with so many dramas, but we tend to lose out the tastes and textures in our quest for speed and purpose."

As the third incarnation of the Khyentse lineage, and grandson of the late H.H. Dudjom Rinpoche -one of the most revered Buddhist visionaries of the 20th century - Khyentse Norbu's spiritual legacy has generated some resistance to his interest in film-making. Bhutanese society still views the film industry as a hotbed of sex and money, preoccupations antithetical to his ecclesiastical status and family line of Buddhist masters and poets. The thirty-seven year old lama grins, "Tibetans are always a bit disturbed when I tell them making a movie may actually touch more people than their traditional obsession with building a monastery."

Nevertheless, in his more traditional roles, Khyentse Norbu continues to serve as throne-holder of the Dzongsar Monastery in Derge, eastern Tibet, and as spiritual director of two meditation centers, in East Bhutan and in Sikkim; and two Buddhist philosophy colleges, in India and in East Bhutan. In recent years, with the increase of his teaching activities, Khyentse Norbu has set up several Buddhist centers around the world, including retreat centers in Canada and in Australia, and numerous practice communities in Southeast Asia and Europe.

Principal Characters

Geko: The Discipline Master of the Monastery

Abbot: Elderly leader of the monastery

Orgyen: Younger monk obsessed with soccer

Lodo: Older monk obsessed with soccer

Palden: Older refugee from Tibet

Nyima: Younger refugee from Tibet, Palden's nephew

Old Lama/Diviner: Makes predictions for people

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The Cup: Notes

Intro Scenes

- *Tibetan Monastery: South India 1998
- *Monks playing soccer with a can
- *Geko (Disciplinarian) comes and they break up the game

With the Abbot

- *Abbot packs to return to Tibet, wonders about two boys
- *Letter from Tibet about two boys sent to monastery in India
- *Meanwhile young monks draw graffiti on walls

With the diviner

- *Geko and Abbot decide to have a divination done about boys
- *Geko says diviner's a loony, his place stinks
- *Diviner says Geko just wants a good result

A Group Ritual

- *Geko makes offering, symbolic mountain of rice, in group ritual
- *Young monks make paper airplanes, sleep, during ritual

Young Tibetan refugees arrive

- *Problems at the border, had to elude Nepalese border guards
- *Two Tibetans very shy
- *Prostrations to the Abbot
- *Abbot greets them warmly, wants to know about Tibet
- *Refugee tells story: Young Tibetan woman died in uprising against Chinese, parents donate her earrings to monastery
- *Young refugees' poor parents want them to become monks

Ordination of the refugees

- *Whole sangha is present for monastic ordination
- *Abbot cuts a lock of their hair, presents them robes, give them Buddhist name
- *Meanwhile monks pass notes about upcoming World Cup soccer finals
- *Geko scolds them
- *Refugees are paired with the soccer monks

Shaving heads and washing robes

- *"Why do we shave our heads? So the girls think we're ugly."
- *Discuss Tibet, France, politics, and soccer
- *Young monks as diviner to say a prayer for France in soccer match

In Orgyan's Room

- *Orgyan's "shrine" is soccer posters
- *Palden's new bed: planks
- *Abbot writes to new monk's parents: Boys are already beginning their "studies" (soccer and scripture)

Morning at the Monastery

- *Orgyan sleeps late after sneaking out to watch soccer match on tv, now must carry the incense for morning rituals
- *Monks make tea, eat breakfast, talk of soccer
- *Orgyan and another monk make bet over France/Italy game
- *Graffiti all about soccer
- *Orgyan and Lodo get a prediction about the game

Sneaking to the Game

- *Geko is not asleep, monks have trouble getting to the game
- *Palden wonders if this is a good idea
- *Watching the game at the store, b/w tv, with Tibetan and Indian laymen
- *Ogyen explains soccer to Palden
- *Monks get kicked out for fighting

Geko finds out

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- *Geko catches them trying to sneak back in the monastery, scolds them for corrupting *Palden, the new monk
- *Geko tells Abbot, discusses problems in disciplining monks, and soccer
- *Some violence in soccer, but no sex
- *Abbot asks Geko how he knows so much about soccer himself
- *Geko delivers harsh scolding, puts them on cleaning duty

In the Kitchen

- *Orgyen decides that they must watch the final in the monastery
- *Meanwhile young refugees learn spelling from Geko, but Geko reads about soccer himself?
- *Orgyen asks Geko if they can watch the game, Geko asks the Abbot
- *Abbot dreams of return to Tibet
- *Geko agrees

Getting the Television

- *Orgyen and Lodo collect money for the television
- Take money from sleeping monk: "Monks shouldn't have so much money!"
- *Orgyen extorts money out of diviner
- *Give money to Indian storekeep, but not enough
- *They get Nyima the refugee to pawn his watch
- *Bring TV back on tractor
- *The Abbot reflects: "Things aren't like the old days...."

Watching the Cup

- *Setting up the satellite dish at night
- *The power goes out in the middle of the game
- *Geko and Abbot come to watch the game
- *Orgyen feels guilty about pawning Nyima's watch, leaves game to search for money
- *Abbot agrees to pay money for watch, tells Orgyen:

After the Cup

- *Abbot gives teaching: "overcoming hatred is equal to overcoming all enemies"
- *Abbot: "All suffering has been created by clinging to a sense of "I".
- *Orgyen gives gift to Nyima
- *Nyima and Palden walk, happier in their new land.
- *Palden asks rhetorically: "What's all this fuss about an ending?"

Final Lines

- *"The Abbot has finally fulfilled his dream and has since returned to Tibet"
- *"Orgyen still dreams about forming the first national Tibetan football team"
- *"Many monks eagerly await the next world cup"
- *"...and the Chinese are still serving rice in Tibet"