What can social anthropology learn from popular Inner Mongolian Buddhism?[1]

Dr Jonathan Mair

St John's College, Cambridge

and

Mongolia and Inner Asia Studies Unit,

Department of Social Anthropology, Cambridge University

August, 2008

Between 2003 and early 2005, I carried out ethnographic field research in and around Hohhot in Inner Mongolia on the topic of popular Mongolian Buddhism. In this paper I shall briefly introduce the results of that research, but my main task will be to explain what I think social anthropologists can learn about the concepts we use to think about religion in general from contemporary Inner Mongolian religion.

Social anthropologists produce two kinds of research results. One kind is detailed information about the particular society in which the anthropologist conducted his or her research. The other kind of research outcome is an attempt to understand some widespread or universal aspect of human existence by comparing what we have learnt in one society with what we know about others in order to produce generalisations about human life as such. Like philosophers, anthropologists

[1] An earlier version of this paper was given at the China Academy of Social Science in Beijing, August, 2008. I am grateful to those who attended that seminar for their comments and suggestions. Particular thanks are due to Tsengel, who organised the seminar, and to Oyunbilig, who invited me to write a paper for QMD. The research on which this paper was based was carried out with the support of the William Wyse Fund for Social Anthropology, to which I am very grateful.

Dr Jonathan Mair, St John's College, Cambridge CB2 1TP, Great Britain
+44 7884 077924 / +44 1223 338670 / jrm35@cam.ac.uk

aim to understand the universal or widespread aspects of existence.[2] But whereas philosophers' work is based on their own intuitions and those of their readers, anthropologists attempt to transcend their own common-sense knowledge by learning to think and act in unfamiliar ways by living in a culture that is not their own.

Most ethnographic knowledge used by anthropologists is the product of long-term field research. An anthropologist will usually live in an unfamiliar environment for one or two years, observing ordinary people's activities and, as far as possible, participating in them. Anthropologists consider it an advantage that the research environment is unfamiliar because unfamiliarity allows one to see what others may take for granted. All cultures provide their members with categories and practices that seem natural and are therefore difficult to notice and difficult to question. Being an outsider, a stranger, allows the anthropologist to be naive and forces him or her to study what would otherwise usually be thought too obvious to mention.

Because of the importance of unfamiliarity for anthropological research, and because the discipline of social anthropology has mostly developed in European and American industrialised countries, anthropologists have mostly conducted their research in non-western, non-industrialised societies, or with indigenous minorities. However, anthropological work is not limited to such societies. Ethnographies based on material from western, industrialised countries and on indisputably modern topics, such as scientific method, are becoming more common and have come to be described as 'anthropology at home'.[3]

---

[2] The view that anthropology should be a form of 'empirical philosophy' was elegantly put by Rodney Needham in the inaugural lecture as Professor of Social Anthropology at Oxford (Needham 1981:28).

[3] See the volume edited by Jackson for discussion of this concept (1987). Of course calling this literature 'anthropology at home' reaffirms the distinction between home and abroad that the literature is partly aimed at overcoming. The category of the

Dr Jonathan Mair, St John's College, Cambridge CB2 1TP, Great Britain
+44 7884 077924 / +44 1223 338670 / jrm35@cam.ac.uk

Philosophers seek out general truths by testing their intuitions to breaking point in 'thought experiments'[4], imaginary scenarios that provide extreme or unfamiliar conditions for thinking about common-sense ideas. Ethnography can do this too, but it often performs the opposite function: it borrows from particular societies categories that are unfamiliar to its audience, categories through which familiar conditions or situations can be rethought – the conditions of everyday life: production and reproduction, exchange, power, knowledge and belief.

For example, beginning with Marcel Mauss' work in the 1920s (Mauss 1990) and later drawing extensively on Marx, a long tradition of anthropological literature on exchange, gift and value has used ethnographic comparison to question the naturalness of modern Euro-American categories of gift and commodity (e.g. Godelier 1986, 1999; Gregory 1997; Gudeman 1986; Humphrey & Hugh-Jones 1992; Laidlaw 2000; Strathern 1988). Similarly, Morgan's nineteenth century work on kin classification (1870) laid the foundations for comparative studies that have made possible the study of the category of kinship itself as a historical phenomenon, or rather, as a set of parallel phenomena (Carsten 2000; Fortes 1970; Lévi-Strauss & Needham 1969; Schneider 1968; Strathern 2005).

In conducting my research in Inner Mongolia as a social anthropologist, my aim was to contribute to this tradition by providing detailed information about a particular form of religious life and by asking what we can learn from this particular form about religious life in general.

'native anthropologist', applied to members of traditional ethnographic societies does just the same.

[4] For a discussion of the role of thought experiments in philosophy, see Brendell (2005).

Dr Jonathan Mair, St John's College, Cambridge CB2 1TP, Great Britain
+44 7884 077924 / +44 1223 338670 / jrm35@cam.ac.uk

What was the aim of the study?

I began my research on Inner Mongolian Buddhism with some general questions about the nature of belief. What does it mean to believe in a religion? What changes when one becomes a believer? What reasons cause people to adopt religious beliefs? What does it mean to believe more strongly or less strongly? What is the relation of religious beliefs to behaviour?

I decided on the questions before choosing a location or a particular religion. After consulting my teachers, I decided to study Mongolian religion, partly because there is a strong tradition of Mongolian studies in Cambridge, where I was based. Of course studying ‘Mongolian religion’ is no simple thing, because in Mongolian areas, religious practices are very diverse. They include, for example, rites to worship fire, to worship *oboos* and gods of the land and waters, and shamans who are possessed by the spirits of the dead, not to mention Mormonism and many Christian Sects that have taken root, especially in the Republic of Mongolia.

Of all these possibilities, I chose to study Buddhism because I knew that Buddhist teachings often pay close attention to states of mind, and I saw belief as a state of mind. So my research question became – what does it mean to ‘believe’ in Inner Mongolian Buddhism? And what does this teach us about belief in general? During my research I was enrolled as a visiting student at the Inner Mongolia Normal University in Hohhot. My main activities were attending temples, getting to know people who believed in Buddhism, talking to them, following them on pilgrimages

Dr Jonathan Mair, St John’s College, Cambridge CB2 1TP, Great Britain
+44 7884 077924 / +44 1223 338670 / jrm35@cam.ac.uk

and participating in their activities. I spent a total of around two years in Inner Mongolia, spread over three visits.

Mongolians established their first substantive relationship with Tibetan Buddhism under the reign of Chinggis Khaan. Under Chinggis' grandson, Khubilai, founder of the Yuan Dynasty, the Sakya Sect of Tibetan Buddhism was made the national or state religion and its leader, Pagspa Lama was given the honorary title of Imperial Preceptor. However, it was not until the conversion of Altan Khan of the Tumed and his nephew, a leader of Ordos, in the sixteenth century that Tibetan Buddhism displaced or incorporated the worship of spirits of the land, the sky and of ancestors enough to become more than a religion of the elite and to find a place in the hearts of ordinary Mongols.

Altan suppressed the indigenous religion of the Mongols, burning images of ancestor spirits (*onggod*) and persecuting shamans. Other Mongol Khans followed Altan's lead in adopting Tibetan Buddhism and promoting it among their subjects, notably, Abadai Khan, leader of the Khalkha. Monasteries were established; the first was Ih Juu (Ch. Dazhao), built in 1580 at Altan Khan's capital, present-day Hohhot. Two centuries later, Tibetan Buddhism had taken root so firmly among the Mongols that some estimate around 30-40% of the men were lamas; in some areas the figure may have been as high as 50%. At the beginning of the twentieth century, there were well over a thousand monasteries and temples in Inner Mongolia (Sneath 2000:29).

The dominance of monastic institutions over the economy in Mongolian areas came under attack after the fall of the Qing Dynasty. Some leading Mongolian intellectuals called for reform and modernisation, or even outright abolition, of Mongolian Buddhism. From the 1930s, the Japanese imposed 'lama policies' on Manchukuo and those eastern areas of Inner Mongolia that were under occupation.

Dr Jonathan Mair, St John's College, Cambridge CB2 1TP, Great Britain
+44 7884 077924 / +44 1223 338670 / jrm35@cam.ac.uk

These measures withdrew many of the traditional privileges granted to monks, including the exemption from military conscription, and this led to a sharp decline in their numbers (Mackerras 1994). By the time the CCP founded the Inner Mongolian Autonomous Region (1947), Mongolian Buddhism had been drastically diminished by civil strife and secularist politics. Nevertheless, Buddhism remained a strong cultural, economic and political force in Inner Mongolia; in 1945, there were 1,366 monasteries and some 60,000 monks, and the monasteries were still the owners of vast swathes of land (Erhimbayar 2006).

After the 1949 revolution and for most of the 50s, Inner Mongolian Buddhism was treated moderately compared to religious movements in other areas of China. Measures were taken to limit the number of new recruits to monastic life, and the education system was hostile to the religion, but many monasteries were allowed to continue to operate (Mackerras 1994:444). This situation continued until the Great Leap Forward campaign, announced in late 1957 (Sneath 2000:77). The campaign demanded that everyone should be engaged in productive labour; an official announcement of 1958 declared that "the time spent on religion must be shortened and religious life must be conditioned by productive labour" (Welch 1961:3). Most lamas were finally expelled from their monasteries in 1958; very few temples remained open after that time, and only a handful of monks were permitted to stay on in each to run them.

Mongolian Buddhism was a focus of the Cultural Revolution in Inner Mongolia. Many monks were compelled to marry, as an old lama at Badgar told Mackerras, "monks and even the Living Buddha were abused as reactionaries, forced to marry and sent away from the monastery" (Mackerras 1994:444f). By the end of the Cultural Revolution in Inner Mongolia in general, Mongolian Buddhism was

Dr Jonathan Mair, St John's College, Cambridge CB2 1TP, Great Britain
+44 7884 077924 / +44 1223 338670 / jrm35@cam.ac.uk

"virtually eradicated" (Sneath 1994:429). In Hohhot, all but one of the ten Buddhist temples that still stood at the beginning of the Cultural Revolution were destroyed by its end (Jankowiak 1988:273).

Following a decision of the Third Plenum of the Eleventh Party Congress, the sites of former monasteries began to be returned to former use and temples were rebuilt. Monks were rehabilitated and the elderly were given a small pension. The reconstruction began slowly. Monasteries with the potential to generate revenue by attracting tourists were prioritised for governmental grants, while other sites were left to rely on donations from local people. By 1992 there were a hundred functioning monasteries in the region (Mackerras 1994:445). Many surviving lamas did not return because they had married and established households and alternative careers. Most senior monks—the lamas who would have been suited to re-establishing a monastery—had not survived the Cultural Revolution. Most monasteries were not permitted to recruit young monks to replenish the dwindling ranks until well into the 1990s.

Since that time there has clearly been an extraordinary revival. Reconstruction has continued and some monasteries have grown into large complexes. Some have developed into popular tourism-cum-pilgrimage sites, incorporating hotels, restaurants and other attractions. During my time in Hohhot, the major festivals at Ih Juu were attended by thousands. However, far from being confident about this booming religious movement, followers are pessimistic, because they say the expertise that sustained Inner Mongolian Buddhism in the past has mostly been lost and cannot be replaced.

Clearly, the practice of Buddhism by Mongolians in Inner Mongolia today is different in many respects from the Buddhist practice of their predecessors. It could

Dr Jonathan Mair, St John's College, Cambridge CB2 1TP, Great Britain
+44 7884 077924 / +44 1223 338670 / jrm35@cam.ac.uk

hardly be the same after the upheavals of the last century. This change has led many Inner Mongolian Buddhists themselves to dismiss contemporary practice as inauthentic; I was often told that contemporary religion maintains the form of Buddhism but has no substance.

For this reason, it is important to explain exactly what I was interested in when I was studying Inner Mongolian Buddhism. The phrase 'Inner Mongolian Buddhism' could be interpreted in various ways. Of course, Mongolian Buddhism is a distinctive branch of Tibetan Buddhism with a rich literature in Mongolian, Tibetan and Chinese that stretches back to the Yuan Dynasty. It has included great artists such as Zanabazar and great philosophers such as Mergen Gegeen. Many scholars continue to study this rich tradition and it is deserving of study. However, what I was researching is something quite different. I was interested in the practices and knowledge of the ordinary believers in *today's* Inner Mongolia. That is why I have used the term 'popular' in the title of this paper. I do not mean by 'popular religion' something that is necessarily part of a long tradition—some aspects may be completely new—I simply mean that my research concerns the religious life of ordinary people of today, not the religious knowledge of experts, or the religion of the past.

The past of Inner Mongolian Buddhism is very remote when seen from the point of view of ordinary contemporary believers and monks. The scriptures contain innumerable teachings that have been interpreted in many ways by scholar-monks and learned laypeople throughout their long history. These teachings and interpretation are part of a historical tradition, but only some of them have come down to Mongolian Buddhists in the present day. If we are really to understand something – like a religious movement – in the present, we will not get very far if we simply describe its past. On the contrary, if the influence of the past is to be incorporated into our

Dr Jonathan Mair, St John's College, Cambridge CB2 1TP, Great Britain
+44 7884 077924 / +44 1223 338670 / jrm35@cam.ac.uk

understanding of contemporary practice, we must explain how traditions are maintained and spread, transformed and preserved by the present generations.

This is the case with all traditions. Every generation must learn from its predecessors, and will preserve, transform or forget some of what went before, as well as inventing new traditions. However, the political and social transformations that Inner Mongolia underwent in the course of the twentieth century mean that we have to be even more careful than usual about historicist explanations. Of course there are some very learned monks and lay people in Inner Mongolia, who are scholars of the religious tradition. However, most religious people in Inner Mongolia, including the vast majority of the monks, have very little contact with the literature and traditions of Mongolian and Tibetan Buddhism. Most monks for instance, cannot understand the Tibetan they chant, and I only met one or two who meditate. Most monks and laypeople say that they do not know much about Buddhism at all. However, these people do have a religious life. That life is an important part of contemporary Inner Mongolia and it was that life I was interested in during my research.

It is notable and regrettable that there has been very little research on contemporary popular religion in Inner Mongolia. Exceptions include the valuable work of Delege and Wuyungowa (Delege 1998; Delege & Wuyungaowa 2004), although the work of these scholars focuses on the statistical, institutional and sociological aspects of religion and does not attempt to deal with contemporary beliefs and practices.

Inner Mongolian Buddhists and belief

Dr Jonathan Mair, St John's College, Cambridge CB2 1TP, Great Britain
+44 7884 077924 / +44 1223 338670 / jrm35@cam.ac.uk

When I went to Inner Mongolia I had certain expectations about what I would find, expectations that were based on a combination of what I had learned from the anthropology of religion and my native British common sense about the nature of religion. Specifically, what I expected was that Buddhist believers would believe in a set of teachings that they would study, learn and teach. I expected that the content of the teachings would be interpreted by experts and laypeople and that these interpretations would be the basis of believers' behaviour, at least in some aspects of their lives.

From the beginning of my research, what Inner Mongolian Buddhists told me was very different. In general – and my presentation here is necessarily brief and simplified – they told me that in Buddhism the teaching is the most important thing: the Buddha's teachings (*burhan-i surgal*) or theory (*onol*). If one wants to believe in or worship the buddhas and gods, one must do it with a sincere belief (*ünen itgel*) in the truth of the teachings. One must appreciate that the teachings are completely true and that they have a deep meaning (*gün utga*). The meaning is so deep that only enlightened people, such as living buddhas (*hubilgaan*, *gegeen*), can really understand. Ordinary people can only understand the surface meaning (*öngön utga*). To be faithful (*süjüg-tei*), or sincere (*ünen setgel-tei*), is to develop a humble character (*daruu jang*), so that one can appreciate with wonder the depth of a theory that one is incapable of understanding.

This view of belief has important practical consequences. For example, though the teachings are contained in scriptures (*sudar*), the study of scriptures by ordinary people and even by monks is not valued as a religious activity. This is because unenlightened people can only get the surface meaning by reading the scriptures. The

Dr Jonathan Mair, St John's College, Cambridge CB2 1TP, Great Britain
+44 7884 077924 / +44 1223 338670 / jrm35@cam.ac.uk

correct relationship to the scriptures is to worship them (*shüteh*), and appreciate with humility that one cannot understand their deep meaning.

The view of belief I have described also has consequences for ethics. Whereas other Buddhist groups emphasise the importance of 'right action', for example, vegetarianism, charity and social responsibility[5], for most of today's Inner Mongolian Buddhists the only action Buddhism calls on them to perform is to worship, to become more faithful, and to develop a sincere heart and humble character. The laws of cause and effect (*üil-in ur*), or *karma*, punish evil and reward good deeds, but according to Inner Mongolian Buddhists, the real meaning of cause and effect can only be understood by the enlightened. For an ordinary person to think that he can understand the consequences of his actions, and know how to act in a good way, is mistaken arrogance. Monks in Inner Mongolia today do not meditate, they drink and many of them are not celibate. This is seen as a failure, but the monks are not usually blamed for it. Celibacy and abstaining from alcohol are preparations for understanding the teaching in a deep way, part of a path that most think is simply not available to them today.

I am sure this situation will be very familiar to many readers, especially those from Inner Mongolia, than it was to me, a foreigner, and because space is limited, I shall simply sum up in this way: the answer to my research question was that for ordinary Inner Mongolian Buddhists 'believing' means learning to feel intensely and sincerely the deep truth of the teachings and to develop a humble character that enables the believer to understand more fully that he is unable to understand the true, deep content of the teachings. This kind of belief is something one can learn to do better, through practice, and something one can learn and teach to others.

---

[5] For interesting examples of the recent phenomenon of social activist movements based on Buddhist ethics, see the collection edited by Queen and King (1996).

Dr Jonathan Mair, St John's College, Cambridge CB2 1TP, Great Britain
+44 7884 077924 / +44 1223 338670 / jrm35@cam.ac.uk

These observations must seem very obvious to the Buddhists I worked with, so obvious as to be unworthy of comment. But to this outsider, they were very interesting. This kind of religious belief was different from any kind of belief I had encountered before, and it was different from what I had learnt from the work of anthropologists and other researchers of religion.

What can social anthropology learn from popular Inner Mongolian Buddhism?

Social scientific studies of religion began in the 18th century with philosophers such as David Hume.[6] From the 19th century thinkers on religion developed two main models of religion which we will call the intellectual model of religion and the practical model of religion.

The intellectual model of religion is a prominent feature of the influential studies of religion and culture produced by Tylor (1871), and later, by Frazer (1922). According to the intellectual model, religions are ideologies, or theoretical systems of belief, whose purpose is to explain the world. The main task of the researcher of religions is therefore to understand the main theories of followers of a particular religion. As Frazer writes:

> religion consists of two elements, a theoretical and a practical, namely, a belief in powers higher than man and an attempt to propitiate or please them. Of the two, belief clearly comes first, since we must believe in the existence of a divine being before we can attempt to please him (1922:Ch. IV).

Once we have understood the belief system of an unfamiliar religion, other aspects of that religion, and of the society as a whole, will become intelligible. The content of people's beliefs is the key to understanding their behaviour, especially ethical

[6] See Hume's *Dialogues concerning natural religion* and *The natural history of religion* (Hume & Gaskin 1993).

Dr Jonathan Mair, St John's College, Cambridge CB2 1TP, Great Britain
+44 7884 077924 / +44 1223 338670 / jrm35@cam.ac.uk

behaviour and ritual. Religious beliefs can be collected and then analysed independently of their believers, their history and their societies, and independently of the practical element of religious life, which they precede and explain.

The alternative to the intellectual model originates in the work of William Robertson Smith. In the first of his famous *Lectures on the religion of the Semites* (Robertson Smith 1927 [1889]), Robertson Smith argued that the focus on the importance of beliefs by scholars was due to the influence of Christianity:

> [T]he study of religion has meant mainly the study of Christian beliefs, and instruction in religion has habitually begun with the creed, religious duties being presented to the learner as flowing from the dogmatic truths he is taught to accept. All this seems to us so much a matter of course that, when we approach some strange or antique religion, we naturally assume that here also our first business is to search for a creed, and find in it the key to ritual and practice (1927 [1889]:16).

But other religions – his specific concern was ancient or 'antique' religions – were not based on a creed, but "consisted entirely of institutions and practices" (1927 [1889]:16). People did not need or value theories to explain the rituals; if there were explanations they were mythical (that is, they dealt with origins and precedents) rather than theoretical, these were secondary and unimportant. Members of a particular religion were expected, on pain of separation from their communities, to comply with the requirements of pious observance, but they were not required to subscribe to any particular dogma. Mythical explanations of rites were multiple and inconsistent. So, rather than starting with belief, as Frazer advised, Robertson Smith concluded that, "in the study of ancient religions we must begin, not with myth, but with ritual and traditional usage" (1927 [1889]:18).

Robertson Smith's view was developed and applied to religion and magic in general by twentieth century scholars such as the philosopher Ludwig Wittgenstein. Wittgenstein wrote a strong critique of the work of Frazer in which he accused Frazer of a malicious interpretation of religious language – an interpretation that made

Dr Jonathan Mair, St John's College, Cambridge CB2 1TP, Great Britain
+44 7884 077924 / +44 1223 338670 / jrm35@cam.ac.uk

religious people seem illogical or insensitive to evidence that contradicted their beliefs (1979). According to Wittgenstein, religion is not a set of theories that seek to explain the world, but religious practices and religious language are a kind of habit, through which humankind expresses itself; religion is a kind of emotional response.

The debate between these two traditions continued throughout the twentieth century and has not been resolved.[7] Many scholars came to view the two models as complementary, arguing that both belief and practice are important for most religious people, or that either may be more important depending on the context.

Why these do not fit the Mongolian case

These two alternative views, even when they are combined, do not provide a satisfactory way of understanding the religious lives of the Inner Mongolian Buddhists I met. The problem is that the standard social scientific view of religion sees beliefs as pure information that is held in the mind in a neutral way. The assumption is that the way of believing is universal and has no effect on the content of belief, which may or may not be related to religious practice such as ritual.
What Inner Mongolian Buddhists teach us is that one can believe in very different ways depending on the context. We believe differently in the truths of religion, science and journalism.[8] When one becomes a serious Buddhist in Inner Mongolia,

---

[7] Some important contributions to the debate are included in edited volumes by Hollis & Lukes and Wilson (Hollis & Lukes 1982; Wilson 1970).
[8] This is an issue that has been explored at length in Paul Veyne's excellent *Did the Greeks believe in their myths* (Veyne 1988), in which he compares modes of belief appropriate to myth, history (classical and early modern), and journalism. One important difference between the way Veyne talks about modes of belief and the ideas I am advancing here on the basis of the Inner Mongolian case is that Veyne's

Dr Jonathan Mair, St John's College, Cambridge CB2 1TP, Great Britain
+44 7884 077924 / +44 1223 338670 / jrm35@cam.ac.uk

one must learn from a master the proper way to believe. This takes practice and time and one's belief can always be improved. On the other hand, since the deep meaning of the teachings is not accessible to the unenlightened, it is useless to worry too much about the content of one's beliefs.

The question of the mode of belief is perhaps most important in Buddhism, but it is also important in many different religions. What is special about the Inner Mongolian Buddhists I met was that they thought that *all* of the Buddha's teachings expressed a mysterious but deeply true meaning. In Christianity, some aspects of belief are also mysterious and must be accepted sincerely without understanding. For instance, the doctrine of the Trinity says that God is One but that He has three persons: God the Father, God the Son and the Holy Spirit. Obviously it is not possible to understand something simultaneously being one and three (and if one thought one understood one would have missed the point of the mystery). Christians must accept this with a sincere heart, without understanding, and this is similar in some respects to the humble acceptance of the deep meaning of the teachings by Inner Mongolian Buddhists. However, since the Reformation, most sects of Christianity have insisted that every believer, however ignorant of philosophy, must understand and accept as true a list of basic propositions. This often takes the form of a creed, a statement of belief that is recited regularly by members of a church.

Another important difference between belief in Christianity and the Mongolian Buddhist belief I studied is its relationship to time. In Christianity, the believer must develop a constant certainty. Belief is something one begins doing once – when one is converted to Christianity – and then continues to do. For the Buddhists

---

examples are all passive and usually unconscious, the attitude of believers towards the issue of truth is lethargy. In the Mongolian case, by contrast, the believer must be aware of different 'regimes of truth' and vigorously pursue the mode of belief appropriate to his devotion.

Dr Jonathan Mair, St John's College, Cambridge CB2 1TP, Great Britain
+44 7884 077924 / +44 1223 338670 / jrm35@cam.ac.uk

I worked with, belief was an action that one performed in acts of worship, an intense feeling of certainty and trust and humility that is evoked for a particular occasion.[9]

Anthropologists and other social scientists have undertaken great comparative studies of 'belief systems', that is, of the content of beliefs, of propositions. They have also studied 'practices' such as rituals, customs and habits. What they should learn from Inner Mongolian Buddhists is that modes of belief are also crucial in religious life, that they can be learnt, taught, practised and perfected.

[9] Ruel argued that the social scientific use of 'belief' is based on a Christian understanding of believing and that it is inappropriate not only when applied to non-Christian religions, but even in relation to earlier Christian periods (1982).

Dr Jonathan Mair, St John's College, Cambridge CB2 1TP, Great Britain
+44 7884 077924 / +44 1223 338670 / jrm35@cam.ac.uk

References

Brendell, E. 2005. Intuition pumps and the proper use of thought experiments. *dialectica* **58**, 89-108.
Carsten, J. 2000. *Cultures of relatedness : new approaches to the study of kinship*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.
Delege. 1998. *内蒙古喇嘛教史 [History of Inner Mongolian Lamaism]*. Hohhot: 内蒙古人民出版社 [Inner Mongolia People's Press].
Delege & Wuyungaowa. 2004. *内蒙古喇嘛教近现代史 [Modern history of Inner Mongolian Lamaism]*. Hohhot: 远方出版社 [Yuanfang Press].
Erhimbayar. 2006. Mongolian Buddhist monasteries in present-day northern China a comparative study of monasteries in Liaoning and Inner Mongolia. *Inner Asia* **8**.
Fortes, M. 1970. *Kinship and the social order: the legacy of Lewis Henry Morgan*. London,: Routledge & K. Paul.
Frazer, J.G.S. 1922. *The golden bough : a study in magic and religion*. London: Macmillan & Co.
Godelier, M. 1986. *The mental and the material : thought economy and society*. London: Verso.
—. 1999. *The enigma of the gift*. Cambridge: Polity Press.
Gregory, C.A. 1997. *Savage money : the anthropology and politics of commodity exchange*. [St. Leonards?] ; [Reading?]: Harwood Academic.
Gudeman, S. 1986. *Economics as culture : models and metaphors of livelihood*. London: Routledge & Kegan Paul.
Hollis, M. & S. Lukes. 1982. *Rationality and relativism*. Oxford: Blackwell.
Hume, D. & J.C.A. Gaskin. 1993. *Dialogues concerning natural religion ; and, The natural history of religion*. Oxford: Oxford University Press.
Humphrey, C. & S. Hugh-Jones. 1992. *Barter, exchange and value : an anthropological approach*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.
Jackson, A. 1987. *Anthropology at home*. London: Tavistock.
Jankowiak, W. 1988. The last hurrah : political protest in Inner Mongolia. *The Australian Journal of Chinese Affairs* **19/20**, 269-288.
Laidlaw, J. 2000. A free gift makes no friends. *Journal of the Royal Anthropological Institute* **6**, 617:634.
Lévi-Strauss, C. & R. Needham. 1969. *The elementary structures of kinship : (Les structures élémentaires de la parenté)*. London: Eyre & Spottiswoode.
Mackerras, C. 1994. Religion, politics and the economy in Inner Mongolia and Ningxia. In *Opuscula Altaica: Essays presented in honor of Henry Schwarz* (eds) E.H. Kaplan & D.W. Whisenhunt. Bellingham, Washington: Western Washington.
Mauss, M. 1990. *The gift : the form and reason for exchange in archaic societies*. London: Routledge Classics, 2002.
Morgan, L.H. 1870. *Systems of consanguinity and affinity of the human family*. City of Washington: Smithsonian institution.
Needham, R. 1981. *Circumstantial deliveries*. Berkeley ; London: University of California Press.

Dr Jonathan Mair, St John's College, Cambridge CB2 1TP, Great Britain
+44 7884 077924 / +44 1223 338670 / jrm35@cam.ac.uk

Queen, C.S. & S.B. King. 1996. *Engaged Buddhism : Buddhist liberation movements in Asia*. Albany, N.Y.: State University of New York Press.
Robertson Smith, W. 1927 [1889]. *Lectures on the religion of the Semites : the fundamental institutions; edited with introduction by Stanley A. Cook.* London: A.& C. Black.
Ruel, M. 1982. Christians as believers. In *Religious organization and religious experience* (ed.) J. Davis. London: Academic Press.
Schneider, D.M. 1968. *American kinship: a cultural account*. Englewood Cliffs, N.J.: Prentice-Hall.
Sneath, D. 1994. The impact of the Cultural Revolution in China on the Mongolians of Inner Mongolia. *Modern Asian Studies* **28**, 409-430.
—. 2000. *Changing Inner Mongolia : pastoral Mongolian society and the Chinese state*. Oxford: Oxford University Press.
Strathern, M. 1988. *The gender of the gift : problems with women and problems with society in Melanesia*. Berkeley: University of California Press.
—. 2005. *Kinship, law and the unexpected : relatives are always a surprise*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.
Tylor, E.B. 1871. *Primitive culture : researches into the development of mythology, philosophy, religion, art, and custom*. London: John Murray.
Veyne, P. 1988. *Did the Greeks believe in their myths? : an essay on the constitutive imagination*. Chicago: University of Chicago Press.
Welch, H. 1961. Buddhism under the Communists. *The China Quarterly*, 1-14.
Wilson, B.R. (ed.) 1970. *Rationality*. Oxford: Blackwell.
Wittgenstein, L. 1979. *Remarks on Frazer's 'Golden Bough', trans. R. Rhees*. Atlantic Highlands, NJ: Humanities Press.

Dr Jonathan Mair, St John's College, Cambridge CB2 1TP, Great Britain
+44 7884 077924 / +44 1223 338670 / jrm35@cam.ac.uk