

Radio Free Asia

Tibetan Culture Taught at Indiana Summer Camp



*Students perform traditional music.
Photo: Tenzin Namgyal*

WASHINGTON—Organizers of a summer camp promoting the study of Tibetan culture by U.S.-based Tibetan youths hope to make the 10-day retreat an annual event, after a first-ever program that drew young people from around the country.

The 10-day camp, which ended on July 30, was sponsored by the New York-based Office of Tibet and the Tibetan Cultural Center in Bloomington, Indiana. Twenty-three young people from Massachusetts, New York, and the Chicago area took part. Each paid \$100 to attend the camp, with room and board provided by the Tibetan Cultural Center.

If you really want to learn more about it, or if you really want to connect with the culture, I believe that you have to speak the language,

Camp participant Tenzin Chodon, a 17-year-old high school student from Massachusetts

Bloomington, Indiana, is home to a small community of about thirty Tibetans and to Indiana University, which provides graduate programs in Tibetan Studies.

Camp organizer Tenzin Namgyal—office manager and translator for the Tibetan Cultural Center in Bloomington—said that participants showed "great interest" in all programs presented at the camp.

Especially popular were talks on Buddhism given by the Center's director, Arjia Rinpoche, Namgyal said. "These were supplemented with lessons in Tibetan language, Buddhist rituals relating to making water offerings and prostrations. Likewise, there were programs of songs and dances, playing musical instruments, and so on."

Also offered was a class in Tibetan cuisine taught by the owner of a local restaurant, Little Tibet. All the coursework given at the camp has helped to strengthen the participants' "sense of Tibetan identity," Namgyal added.



*Students explore symbolism of Tibetan family altar.
Photo: Tenzin Namgyal*

'You have to speak the language'

Camp participant Tenzin Chodon, a 17-year-old high school student from Massachusetts, called the program's instruction in Tibetan language the most significant part of her experience at camp.

She added that fluency in Tibetan is fundamental to an understanding of Tibetan culture.

"If you really want to learn more about it, or if you really want to connect with the culture, I believe that you have to speak the language," said Chodon, who moved to the United States from India when she was seven.

Chodon said that she will help to staff next year's camp and then, after graduating from high school, return to India for a short time to pursue her study of Tibetan.

Though Tibetan culture is under attack inside Tibet, Chodon said, the culture can survive in other countries.

"I definitely think that we can still preserve it, as long as we stay in communities and keep in contact and keep celebrating all the things we celebrate."



Campers and Their Teachers

An ideal venue

Camp organizer Tenzin Namgyal described the 108-acre center in Bloomington—with its temple, stupas, and art exhibitions—as ideal for hosting similar programs in the future. "It is a center

with extensive space and facilities, with aspirations to promote as many varied cultural activities as possible to promote and propagate Tibetan culture."

"That was the initial hope and plan of [center founder and elder brother of the Dalai Lama] Taktser Rinpoche," Namgyal said. "And later, when Arjia Rinpoche took over, the ideals and plans remained the same."

Original reporting by Rigdhen Dolma for RFA's Tibetan service. Tibetan service director: Jigme Ngapo. Edited in English for the Web and with additional reporting by Richard Finney.