

Shangri-la Wonderings

- Sunyata, 空性, Emptiness, and some thoughts on us & nature

I woke up in Balagzong (巴拉格宗), a small remote village in deep mountains of Shangri-la region,
A handful of houses huddled together at 3500m altitude, clinging to steep mountain slopes.
Life here is challenging at such heights,
Yet these material hardships have softened human conflicts.
Or perhaps, under the gaze of the Holly Balag Mountain,
The people here are especially devout and content.

A fresh scent of pine needles drifted to my nose –
it came from an elderly offering incense in the early morning.
She burns fresh pine branches, grains, and wood as offerings,
then circles the white stupa (白塔) clockwise in prayer.
The early sun gently caresses mountain tops,
echoing the golden hue of her headscarf.

In Tibetan Buddhism,
People believe in Sunyata, 空性, or emptiness.
Nothing exists independently –
A tree exists because of the seed, soil, water and sunshine.
The idea of an independent “I” is an illusion,
We exist because of a complex web of interdependent conditions.
Tibetans believe everything deserve equal respect:
Mountains, rivers, flowers, animals, human beings.

“What happens if an earthquake occurs”
I ask our local Tibetan guide.
“It’s karma,
We have offended nature and must face consequences.”

To some extent, it’s true –
Human activities can disturb ecological systems,
Building water dams, for example, can destabilize mountains,
Triggering landslides and making earthquakes more destructive.

This left me thinking,
My work is about forecasting weather events using AI,
I want to help societies better prepare for extreme weather events.
In attempting to decode nature,
I wonder if ambition and curiosity risk becoming arrogance?
Where does the quest for knowledge fit alongside reverence for the unknown?
How to cast the web of science, technology with religion and

nature?

Am I pursuing a meaningful destination, honoring Karma, 缘分
and nature.

Sunyata also teaches the impermanence –
The interdependence nature leads to ever changing conditions.
In the lifespan of the universe, mountains rise and fall.
In the gaze of the mountains, human civilizations emerge and
fade.
In the span of our fleeting lives, emotions, joy, hatred,
goals, obligations pass like clouds.
Perhaps, the destination holds neither meaning nor weight,
But merely another condition in the unfolding of my Sunyata,
Perhaps, the sunrise and sunsets we share,
Matter more than any destination.

Cynthia
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