Much research has been focused upon certain aspects of the Tibetan religion. Through a combination of historical and linguistic factors, a greater amount of Buddhist lore and teaching has been preserved in the Tibetan religious writings than in any other collection of records. To fill in their knowledge of Buddhism, scholars have been led to an intensive study of those records and have exploited Tibetan religious writings in the interest of a more comprehensive knowledge of Buddhist doctrine and philosophy.

The psychic phenomena aspect of Tibetan religious activity, distorted and exaggerated out of all proportion to the actual importance assigned to it by Tibetan religious leaders, has also attracted much interest, though little objective investigation and analysis. This has led to the telling of tall tales.

On another level, observers have described in some detail various religious ceremonies and spectacles, and have dwelt on the dramatic and colourful aspects of such celebrations as the miss-named “devil dance” and similar rituals.

The Tibetan religion, though studied as a means whereby lost Buddhist doctrines may be recovered, tapped as a source of wild tales of phychic phenomena, or described in its manifestations of pageantry and drama, has yet been neglected as a religion per se, and little serious effort has been made to arrive at a clear understanding both of the content of  

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1 The material presented in this paper has been developed, with one or two exceptions which are indicated in the text, from the following original sources: 1) personal observation during extended residence among the Tibetans. 2) Opinions expressed by Tibetan informants. 3) Recent and careful check by cross examination of high Tibetan and Mongolian religious leaders, and 4) Tibetan texts previously untranslated.

There is a considerable amount of incidental information scattered throughout various books on Tibet which confirms some of the details set down. But these references have not been used as source material. Indeed, the reading of over 30 books has in general only a negative value, for it reveals that little or no attention or study has been given to the real subject matter of this paper.
lamaist doctrine and practice as commonly accepted by the Tibetans, and of its functional aspect in their culture.

Tibetan society, uniquely organized as a church state with its distinct and religious basis, makes any purely secular study of this society somewhat beside the point. Social phenomena and organization have their origins in religion. The converse of this is also true: observances stemming from religion produce farreaching secular effects. These effects are quite apart from, or in addition to the primary intent of the participants. The efficacy ascribed to such observances may be a strictly religious one, but the actual results and contribution made to Tibetan culture may be quite secular and present-worldly. Thus a knowledge of the actual accepted content of Tibetan religion, with an appreciation of the true functional role of religious acceptance and observance, becomes fundamental to an investigation of Tibetan society.

For the Tibetan, religious fundamentals are summed up in five universals that are binding on all: clergy and laity alike. These attitudes and practices are based in the philosophy and teachings of Buddhism as preserved in religious tradition and history, but they are also of functional value in the culture of Tibet. They constitute the cement of that society. They underlie and give meaning to the observable phenomena of religious practice, and exhibit the doctrines of Buddha in a functional role in the integration of Tibetan society. They stem from doctrine, but they constitute the facts, not the theory, of the religion of Tibet. They are:

1. The attitude of Dad-pa (faith).
2. The practice of Chos aDon (entoning religion).
3. The making of mChod-pa (offerings).
4. The making of P’yag (salutations).
5. The performance of sKor-ba (encirclement).

Any formulation of categories is a controversial matter, but the writer is convinced this one will stand up under continuing research and analysis. It is the result of extended personal acquaintance with the Tibetans, intensive study, and has been submitted to the consideration and criticism of high Tibetan and Mongolian ecclesiastics and has won their endorsement.

It should be understood, however, that these five universals do not summarize all the theory, or even all the practice, of lamaism. The lamaist clergy exercise themselves in the apprehension of knowledge to vanquish ignorance. Such enlightenment is the essence of Buddhism, but this apprehension belongs to a few. It is not shared by all. Certain psychic practices are attributed to the initiates and, presumably, they