

UC SANTA BARBARA

THE **Current**

December 29, 1998

Bill Schlotter

CONFERENCE CELEBRATES TIBETAN PEOPLE AND CULTURE

Thirty years after the occupation of their country

by China, the people of Tibet -- many of them living in exile -- nonetheless hold tight to a centuries-old culture unsubverted and uniquely their own.

In its Fifth Annual Conference on Tibet, the UC Santa Barbara Department of Religious Studies will celebrate the people and customs of that mountainous Asian land Jan. 22, 23 and 24 in a series of lectures titled "Life in Traditional Tibet."

Richard Hecht,

department chair,

said Tibetans and their leader, the Dalai Lama,

are models for the rest of the world in their nonviolent pursuit of independence from Chinese rule.

"In most instances of occupied peoples, a violent liberation movement is born that is every bit as vicious as the ruling group," Hecht said.

"One of the most interesting things regarding Tibet is that His Holiness the Dalai Lama has maintained a movement of liberation ... that has consistently moved away from violence.

"That is why Tibetans are so unique and praiseworthy," Hecht said.

"Instead of turning to the rifle they turned to the teachings of the Buddha." Two of the United States' most renowned scholars of Tibetan issues will speak at the conference.

Robert Thurman, Professor of Indo-Tibetan Studies and Director for Buddhist Studies at Columbia University, will present a talk titled, "Tibet: Shangri-La Revisited," at 8 p.m. Friday,

Jan. 22, in Campbell Hall. Thurman's remarks will be preceded by a photo essay by photographer Molly McGinn titled, "Tibet: Its Land and People."

And on Saturday at 10:30 a.m. in the Girvetz Theater, Donald S. Lopez Jr., professor of Buddhist and Tibetan Studies at the University of Michigan,

will make a presentation called "Prisoners of Shangri-La."

"Dr. Thurmond and Dr. Lopez are two of our country's most gifted and senior Tibetan scholars," Hecht said.

Other talks will complement those of Thurman and Lopez. Saturday's discussions in the Girvetz Theater begin at 9 a.m. with "Status of Individuals & Property in Traditional Tibet" by Dr. Rebecca French, a professor of law at the University of Colorado.

At 1:30 p.m. Saturday,

exiled Tibetan Gelek Rinpoche will speak of his early life in his homeland in a talk titled, "Life in Traditional Tibet -- A Personal View."

At 3 p.m.,

professors Thurman, Lopez, Hecht and French will participate in a panel discussion.

Saturday's events will conclude with a biographical look at

explorer and author Alexandra David-Neel, who in 1924 at the age of 55 became the first western woman to trek to the heart of Tibet.

David-Neel's perilous journey inspired her to write 30 books on Tibet.

Her life will be chronicled by Dr. Barbara Foster, an associate professor at Hunter College and co-author with her husband Michael of "Forbidden Journey:

The Life of Alexandra David-Neel."

Foster's presentation will begin at 7 p.m. in the Hatlen Theater.

The conference will end Sunday following

Rinpoche's discussion, "Clear Light:

Teachings in Tibetan Buddhism" from 10 a.m. to 1 p.m. in the Girvetz Theater.

Conference tickets cost \$10, with \$5 discounted tickets available to students and seniors.

Tickets will be sold in advance at the UCSB Arts and Lectures ticket office (805-893-3535) and at the door if available.

Other UCSB organizations contributing to the conference are the Department of Anthropology, the Office of International Students and Scholars, the Interdisciplinary Humanities Center, the Arts and Lectures office and the Program in Law and Society.

About UC Santa Barbara

The University of California, Santa Barbara is a leading research institution that also provides a comprehensive liberal arts learning experience. Our academic community of faculty, students, and staff is characterized by a culture of interdisciplinary collaboration that is responsive to the needs of our multicultural and global society. All of this takes place within a living and learning environment like no other, as we draw inspiration from the beauty and resources of our extraordinary location at the edge of the Pacific Ocean.